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Building an Antislavery House: Political Abolitionists and the U.S. Congress

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Political Abolitionists and the U.S. Congress

By

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Committee in Charge:

Professor Robin L. Einhorn, Chair
Professor David M. Henkin
Professor Eric Schickler

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Abstract

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This dissertation reintegrates abolitionism into the main currents of U.S. political history. Because of a bifurcation between studies of the American antislavery movement and political histories of the sectional conflict, modern scholars have drastically underestimated the significance of abolitionist political activism. Historians often characterize political abolitionists as naïve idealists or separatist moral purists, but I recast them as practical, effective politicians, who capitalized on rare openings in American political institutions to achieve outsized influence in the face of a robust two-party system. Third-party abolitionists shaped national debate far beyond their numbers and played central roles in the emergence of the Republican Party.

Over the second half of the 1830s, political abolitionists devised the Slave Power concept, claiming that slaveholder control of the federal government endangered American democracy; this would later become the Republicans' most important appeal. Integrating this argument with an institutional analysis of the Second Party System, antislavery activists assailed the Whigs and Democrats—cross-sectional parties that incorporated antislavery voices while supporting proslavery policies—as beholden to the Slave Power. This analysis thus provided the rationale for creation of the abolitionist Liberty Party and then became its chief rhetorical tool.

Liberty partisans cast all elections as contests against the Slave Power and repeatedly forced slavery into political debate by controlling balances of power in many northern locales. Meanwhile, they developed a sophisticated lobbying strategy to exploit Congress as a public forum that could be made to magnify and widely disseminate the Slave Power argument. As northern Whigs and Democrats faced new antislavery electoral pressures and chafed under the Slave Power's increasing exactions, Liberty leaders redoubled their efforts to pry antislavery dissidents from the major parties. In the process Liberty men paved the way for a broader anti-Slave Power coalition and helped found the Free Soil Party in 1848. A small but dedicated Free Soil congressional bloc then built on Liberty tactics to further harness congressional debate as a platform for dramatizing the Slave Power's control of national policymaking. When the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act roused northern voters and deranged once-stable party allegiances, Free Soil leaders in and out of Congress seized on the opportunity to spearhead a party uniting all opponents of the Slave Power. In helping propel this new Republican Party to northern

preeminence by 1856, erstwhile Liberty men and Free Soilers finally foresaw the end of the Slave Power's national supremacy, and, ultimately, of slavery itself.

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Acknowledgements

As I conclude my graduate education and embark on a new chapter in my life—a professorship, marriage, and soon enough a book manuscript—I am overcome with many emotions. Pride and relief rank high among them, but mostly I feel gratitude—deep, deep gratitude for the many people who have helped me reach this point.

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List of Abbreviations Used in Notes

AAP	Amos A. Phelps
AS	Alvan Stewart
BDW	*Boston Daily Whig*
BFB	Benjamin F. Butler (of New York)
BPL	Boston Public Library
CFA	Charles Francis Adams
CG	*Congressional Globe*
CG Appendix	*Appendix to the Congressional Globe*
CGE	Charles G. Eastman
CS	Charles Sumner
DTD	Cleveland *Daily True Democrat*
E&R	Boston *Emancipator and Republican*
EWJ	Elizur Wright, Jr.
GB	Gamaliel Bailey
GMF	Montpelier *Green Mountain Freeman*
GS	Gerrit Smith
GW	Gideon Welles
GWJ	George W. Julian
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania
JCC	John C. Calhoun
JG	Joshua Giddings
JGP	John G. Palfrey
JGW	John Greenleaf Whittier
Jn Jay	John Jay
JL	Joshua Leavitt
JPH	John P. Hale
JQA	John Quincy Adams
JVB	John Van Buren
LC	Library of Congress
LMG	Lura Maria Giddings
LT	Lewis Tappan
MVB	Martin Van Buren
NHHS	New Hampshire Historical Society
NST	Norton Strange Townshend
NYHS	New York Historical Society
NYPL	New York Public Library
SGH	Samuel Gridley Howe
SPC	Salmon P. Chase
TDW	Theodore Dwight Weld
VHS	Vermont Historical Society
WHS	William H. Seward
WLG	William Lloyd Garrison
Wm Jay	William Jay
Wm Slade	William Slade

Introduction

In the midst of the American Civil War, President Lincoln reputedly quipped to abolitionist novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!" Though likely apocryphal, the tale reminds us of something very basic about the crisis of the Union. It *was* about slavery and the abolitionist movement played a profound role in the developments that led to civil war. It seemed impossible for antislavery moderates like Lincoln to understand the sectional crisis without reserving a large share of responsibility for abolitionists like Stowe, whose best-selling *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had first been serialized in an abolitionist Free Soil Party newspaper, the *National Era*. While the "Great Emancipator" of course was joking when (if) he credited Stowe with starting the Civil War, he sensed, as many contemporary Americans must have, that abolitionists had played a crucial role in making sectional conflict irrepressible.[1]

Most modern historians have failed to see this so clearly. Historians agree that the emergence of the moderately antislavery Republicans as one of the nation's major political parties accelerated sectional conflict and precipitated a confrontation over slavery's future in the American republic. The degree to which Lincoln's Republican Party evolved out of the strategies, arguments, and labors of more radical antislavery political activists has been far less fully appreciated. This dissertation argues that the northern antislavery consensus embodied in the emergence and then the victory of the Republican Party owed much to those who had been contesting for decades against American slaveholders' political power. Abolitionist political activism laid the groundwork for broader antislavery political coalitions that became the Free Soil Party and then the Republican Party. Though faced with an entrenched two-party system designed to deter antislavery policymaking, abolitionists shrewdly developed strategies that helped them ensure continued national political attention to slavery.

Abolitionists' key contribution to the politics of sectional conflict was their effort to elaborate and disseminate the critical rhetorical device of the Slave Power. Within the racist polity of the antebellum North, no other antislavery rhetoric was as compelling as the claim that slaveholders wielded disproportionate political power and threatened the liberties of northern whites. Political abolitionists recognized that this argument offered a winning political strategy that would help them secure allies in their struggle against slavery. Not merely reproaching slaveholders, political abolitionists shaped the Slave Power concept into a condemnation of the Second Party System as the crucial political bulwark protecting slavery. Because both the Democratic and Whig Parties relied on cross-sectional support and routinely nominated slaveholders and their apologists for the nation's highest offices, abolitionists condemned even the most ardently antislavery members of those parties as beholden to the Slave Power. This analysis became the justification and then the most compelling argument for the abolitionist Liberty Party founded in 1840. Abolitionist political activism successfully thrust this Slave Power idea into the northern political mainstream in hopes of promoting a national reorganization of political debate that would array the Slave Power against the friends of freedom. But because historians often trace this Slave Power rhetoric to either amoral anti-southernism or radical Jacksonian anti-monopolism, we have missed its abolitionist pedigree.

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[1] The alleged Lincoln quote can, for example, be found in James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 90.

As a result, we have also missed the fundamental role of abolitionism as a force within, rather than outside, the partisan order.

Abolitionists' political influence went far beyond rhetoric though. Antislavery third parties skillfully capitalized on institutional openings created by the contours of the Second Party System. Abolitionists recognized the value of Congress as a public forum and pushed congressional politicians to take more advanced antislavery stands. As abolitionists lobbied and sometimes collaborated with (primarily Whig) antislavery congressmen, they provoked aggressive proslavery responses. Then, they celebrated the ensuing fireworks that dramatized Slave Power control of the federal government.

In electoral politics, Liberty partisans worked to generate political pressure that would expose the major parties' commitments to the Slave Power and compel northern politicians to assume increasingly antislavery positions. Through their congressional and electoral tactics, political abolitionists forced slavery and the Slave Power ever more into national political debate. By the mid-1840s, Congress could no longer hope to avoid antislavery polemics. In the face of the Mexican-American War, Northerners from across the political spectrum delivered anti-Slave Power diatribes, and divisive disputes over slavery came to dominate congressional debate. After helping create this growing anti-Slave Power tide, political abolitionists strove to channel it into ever broader antislavery political action. In the process political abolitionists became vital, if sometimes ambivalent, architects of the Free Soil Party and then the Republican Party.

For decades though, political historians and scholars of the antislavery movement have together underestimated the outsized national political influence exercised by abolitionists and the antislavery Liberty and Free Soil Parties. The most important exception is Richard Sewell's *Ballots for Freedom* (1976), which remains the only *national* story of abolitionism's direct role in the growth of popular political antislavery on a section-wide scale. Far too few scholars since, though, have followed Sewell in viewing political abolitionism as central to national political history. As a result, abolitionist studies and national political history rarely seem to be in dialogue. James B. Stewart pointedly identified this disconnect, explaining that "to read in" both fields "simultaneously is to slip back and forth between alternate universes." A growing interest in abolitionist political agency can be seen in such recent works as Bruce Laurie's *Beyond Garrison* (2005), Frederick Blue's *No Taint of Compromise* (2005), and Reinhard Johnson's *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848* (2009). Nonetheless, we still lack a clear understanding of the political abolitionist agitation that repeatedly directed national attention to the Slave Power and established a foundation for the erection of the Republican Party.[2]

My research explicates how third-party activists shaped the rise of broad-based antislavery politics by highlighting the Slave Power argument as the most important weapon in political abolitionists' rhetorical arsenal and their jurisdictional and strategic emphasis on Congress. Building on Sewell's general narrative of antislavery politics, my work argues for a new focus on Congress and provides new analyses of political abolitionists' crucial relationships with major-party political figures. Furthermore, by concentrating on political abolitionists' use of the Slave Power argument to challenge the two-party system of Whigs and Democrats, we can

[2] Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); James B. Stewart, "Reconsidering the Abolitionists in an Age of Fundamentalist Politics," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Spring 2006), 1-24, quote from 5; Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Frederick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2009).

better understand how they conceived of national political reorganization and then strove, with significant (if not total) success, to make their vision a reality.

Notwithstanding the seemingly reviving interest in antislavery politics, a long line of influential abolitionist scholarship has either obscured those who pursued political strategies or cast them as ineffectual. Some scholars of the Liberty Party have attributed this supposed ineffectiveness to political abolitionists' purported interest only in achieving moral purity and not in winning political influence.[3] Concentration on William Lloyd Garrison and his vocal inner circle has done even more to shroud the influence and accomplishments of the much larger group of political abolitionists. Still more recent scholarship has focused largely on uncovering the important abolitionist contributions of women and radical black reformers. As a byproduct of both this overdue attention to groups marginalized by nineteenth-century politics and the older focus on Garrisonians, who opposed political action, we have lost sight of political abolitionism.

Abolitionist historiography's first major renaissance in the 1960s and 70s still casts a long shadow over the field. Spurred in part by the ongoing black freedom struggle and the emergence of the New Left, many historians concentrated on uncovering antebellum interracial cooperation and ascertaining abolitionism's "movement culture." This spate of abolitionist scholarship produced many of the first important works on black abolitionists and put new emphasis on radical Garrisonian abolitionism. Important new studies showed the contributions of black northerners to the abolitionist movement and examined the often ambivalent racial thought of white abolitionists.[4] As importantly, with several biographies of Garrison and an enlarged role for the Boston editor in new syntheses of the movement, Garrison emerged as the central figure in accounts of American abolitionism. By the late 1830s, Garrison contended that direct political action would morally compromise the abolitionist movement. Condemning the entire political system as fundamentally corrupt, Garrison bitterly opposed the Liberty Party. Civil Rights-era authors found much to admire in Garrison's militancy, and consequently their scholarship often underemphasized or misinterpreted the significance of political abolitionism.[5]

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[3] See Alan Kraut, "Partisanship and Principles: The Liberty Party in Antebellum Political Culture," in *Crusaders and Compromisers*, ed. Kraut (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 71-100; Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1990); and Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

[4] Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Ch. 7, argues for a greater appreciation of black abolitionists and emphasizes the prevalence of racism, in various degrees, among white abolitionists; This period's leading analysts of black abolitionism were Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease. See their "Antislavery Ambivalence: Immediatism, Expediency, Race," *American Quarterly* 17 (Winter, 1965), 682-695; "Negro Conventions and the Problem of Black Leadership," *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (Sept., 1971), 29-44, and *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), which includes a chapter, Ch. 9, discussing free black political strategies; Also, Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), provides a valuable overview of black abolitionist activity, including a discussion of black approaches to antislavery politics; Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), also addresses African-Americans' role in the abolitionist movement, arguing that fugitive slaves' and free blacks' individual acts of daring explain the success of far more slave escapes than any imagined underground railroad network orchestrated by white abolitionists. Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003), 73-74, challenges Gara by describing sustained biracial collaboration that facilitated slave escapes from the national capital and surrounding regions.

[5] Two 1963 biographies illustrated the spurt of interest in reevaluating Garrison's role in the antislavery movement. Walter Merill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), portrays Garrison as a flawed hero at the center of antislavery reform. John L. Thomas, *The Liberator:*

Epitomizing this trend, Aileen Kraditor's 1969 book, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism,* denigrated political abolitionists as betraying the antislavery movement's principles and lauded Garrison and his adherents for not implicating themselves in a pernicious political order. Garrison, Kraditor argues, sought to promote a moral revolution in American society and believed that only a politically independent agitator could articulate uncompromised moral demands. Such analyses presenting Garrison as *the* hero of the antislavery struggle remain deeply influential in the historiography of American abolitionism.[6]

Since the 1990s, the abolitionist movement has experienced another efflorescence of scholarly interest that has moved beyond these Garrison-centered interpretations. This new burst of abolitionist studies includes several important analyses of women's abolitionist activism, providing new insights on the many women who eschewed Garrisonian ultraism and worked instead with the movement's more numerous evangelical and political wings.[7] Other recent scholarship has effectively reevaluated antislavery activists' racial thought and the role of black abolitionists in radicalizing antislavery discourse.[8] Through this literature we have come to a

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William Lloyd Garrison, A Biography, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), focuses on the 1830s as the years of Garrison's primary influence, recognizing the subsequent ascendancy of political abolitionism over moral reform. Still, Thomas, 4, concludes: "More than any other American of his time he was responsible for the atmosphere of moral absolutism which caused the Civil War and freed the slave"; New narrative syntheses in this period also focused on Garrisonians. Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper, 1960), for example, sees Garrisonians as upholding a moral standard that political abolitionists largely surrendered. Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), views Garrisonians as the movement's leaders, at least until the 1840s; James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), reproduces this focus on Garrison in the early years of the immediatist movement, but also offers a perceptive discussion of abolitionist political influence; Much of this literature directly challenged earlier histories that eulogized evangelical abolitionism and deprecated Garrisionians as either irrelevant, or downright harmful, to the antislavery movement. See Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1933); Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1939); and also Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961). .

[6] An important general contribution of Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), is the assertion that slavery was inextricably bound up in American power structures. Thus, much of abolitionists' apparent anti-institutionalism could be construed as part of a practical moral opposition to deeply flawed institutions. For this argument, see especially page 20; Also treating Garrisonian anti-institutionalism, Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), explores anarchistic thought in American abolitionism and thus emphasizes Garrisonian non-resistance; In an earlier, less responsible version of Perry's argument, Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), describes abolitionism as driven by anti-institutionalism. In a book that has generated controversy primarily for its assertion that slavery "infantilized" slaves, Elkins also mischaracterizes abolitionists, in part because his interpretation of the antislavery movement relies largely on observations about the small, eccentric Massachusetts transcendentalist community; Henry Mayer's sympathetic biography of Garrison echoes Kraditor in downplaying the influence of the Liberty Party *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

[7] On women and gender in American antislavery activism, see Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of American Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC press, 1998); Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of these Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); and Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery &Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003).

[8] For criticisms of antislavery whites' racial thought, see (in addition to the older work of Litwack cited above) Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca:

much clearer understanding of the long overlooked but absolutely vital contributions of abolitionist women and radical black reformers. These new works have provided a richer sense of the diversity of abolitionist activism in antebellum America, but few have fully reintegrated abolitionism into the national political history of sectional conflict.[9]

In part because abolitionist studies understate the significance of antislavery third-party politics, political historians have understandably found it easy to downplay abolitionists' role in the political conflicts that ultimately precipitated the Civil War and emancipation. After all, as late as 1860, few Americans considered themselves abolitionists, many northern voters detested abolitionists as self-righteous fanatics, and even most Republicans seemed interested only in limiting the expansion of slavery into federal territories.

As histories of Garrisonian and black abolitionists established the ideological gulf between the northern mainstream and the most high-minded critics of American slavery, political historians studying sectional conflict and the rise of the Republicans sought explanatory factors beyond antislavery. Eric Foner's pathbreaking *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (1970), emphasized the significance of "free labor ideology" in the emergence and growth of the Republican Party in the 1850s. Foner argued that Republicans unified around an idealization of free labor that owed as much to northern Jacksonian Democrats as to abolitionist agitators.[10]

In contrast, historians practicing "new political history" (using social science methodologies) concluded that "ethnocultural" issues exerted decisive influence on political allegiances, as voters divided based on reference groups dictated by religion and ethnicity. Slavery and antislavery, and sectionalism in general, play diminished roles in their analyses of

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Cornell University Press, 1998) and James D. Bilotta, *Race and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1848-1865* (New York: P. Lang, 1992); For a defense of abolitionists' racial liberalism see Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Goodman's assessment, however, does not address the period after the 1830s, when organized political antislavery threatened to compromise many abolitionists' willingness to publicly advocate for racial equality; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), explores the racial and political thought and the evolving relationships of abolitionist radicals, Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith (both black) and Gerrit Smith and John Brown (both white); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), describes the protest strategies of northern black elites who integrated ideas of racial unity and pride with middle-class ideals of uplift and respectability as they sought to define an African-American identity; Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), demonstrates that northern urban free blacks' social activism helped spur the immediatist mass movement in the 1830s.

[9] An important exception is the work of Stanley Harrold, who has deftly integrated religious, political, and social history to offer compelling accounts of politically influential subversive activity often organized through radical biracial abolitionist networks, particularly in the border South. See especially, *Subversives*, as well as *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995) and *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); His earlier biography *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1986), adeptly chronicles Bailey's career as one of the most important political abolitionist figures and a leader in efforts to expand the appeal of antislavery politics; Also, Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), by exploring shifting antislavery gender ideals, seeks to integrate women activists into the history of antislavery partisan politics.

[10] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995); Applying Foner's conclusions to the abolitionist movement specifically, Louis S. Gerteis, *Morality and Utility in American Antislavery Reform* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1987), argues that antislavery reform also focused on free labor republicanism, and ultimately led to the Liberal Republican movement of the early 1870s. Gerteis, includes a good discussion of the Slave Power idea but concludes that free labor ideology had eclipsed the anti-Slave Power platform by the 1850s.

northern politics, while other issues receive top billing in explaining the collapse of the Second Party System. William Gienapp, for example, argues that moral opposition to slavery was not a primary motive for most Republican voters and thus concludes that abolitionist influences on the party were insignificant.[11]

Among the ethnoculturalists, Michael Holt has offered especially provocative explanations for the collapse of the Second Party System by emphasizing the major parties' failures by the 1850s to continue offering meaningful competing issue stances. The antebellum party system had been designed to suppress conflict over slavery by creating trans-sectional alliances and focusing political conflict on other economic issues. Once the existing parties ceased to offer competing stances, the old parties began to crumble. This opened the door for new parties that drew on popular fears of threats to republicanism—notably, in the North, political nativism, and only after that fizzled, Holt argues, the anti-Slave Power Republican Party. The ethnocultural school generally and Holt specifically make far less room for abolitionist influence than Foner's work. Though parts of Holt's analysis resemble political abolitionists' critiques of the Second Party System, Holt seems mostly uninterested in their aggressive efforts to draw attention to the party system's defects.[12]

Because abolitionist scholarship has so often abdicated the history of sectional conflict to historians of the major political parties, other actors sometimes receive undue credit for politicizing slavery in the North. One recent trend has been an upsurge of interest in Democratic sources of antislavery politics. Jonathan Earle has refurbished Arthur Schlesinger's argument that the Democratic Party's libertarian ideology provided the source of the most effective critiques of both economic *and* racial privilege. Earle asserts that the free soil and anti-Slave Power views that transformed American politics "grew straight from the roots of the Democracy's long-standing commitment to egalitarianism" and "the rank and file's ingrained hostility to centralized power and its perceived tendency to promote social and economic inequalities." By distancing the Slave Power argument from immediatist abolitionism, interpretations like Earle's particularly threaten to marginalize political abolitionists, since developing the Slave Power argument as a strategy to transform national politics was one of political abolitionists' most important achievements.[13]

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[11] New political histories led by Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), attempted to analyze antebellum politics through ecological regression analyses of various demographic groups' voting preferences; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) argues that the old party system was already disintegrating in many northern states prior to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, because of state-level conflicts over nativism, anti-Catholicism, and temperance (traditional "ethnocultural" concerns) and not over slavery; See also Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[12] Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978) and *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). Both seem to blame shortsighted politicians for allowing sectional conflict to escalate. Holt's view of the sectional conflict as pivoting around competing republicanisms followed in a train of work reevaluating American political history through the lens of republican ideology. For a discussion of this development see, Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (Jun., 1992), 11-38. Of particular interest, Daniel J. McInerney, *The Fortunate Heirs of Freedom: Abolition & Republican Thought* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), addresses the role of republicanism in numerous facets of abolitionist thought.

[13] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945). Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), quotes from 7;

It might seem surprising that so many modern historians, especially abolitionist historians who have valorized the radicalism of those willing to challenge slavery in antebellum America, have given political abolitionists short shrift in the political history of sectional conflict. This long historiographical development can perhaps be understood as part of a backlash against older scholarly traditions that put abolitionism at the center of national political history in quite troubling ways. Foremost among these were the triumphal antislavery histories of the post-Civil War era and the Civil War "Revisionist" school of the 1930s and 40s.[14]

The first "historians" of the sectional conflict were politicians who had participated in it. In an effort to give meaning to the Civil War's unprecedented carnage, many of its first chroniclers uncritically cast the war as a crusade against slavery, eliding the prevalence and intensity of racism and anti-abolitionism in the Civil War-era North. Notable early chroniclers of the sectional conflict included longtime Ohio antislavery congressman Joshua Giddings and Henry Wilson, a crafty Massachusetts antislavery politician and U.S. Senator and later Vice President. Both Giddings and Wilson presented American political history as a moral drama with antebellum proslavery politicians as villains and antislavery politicians like the authors themselves as heroes. For many years this story told by the likes of Giddings and Wilson, history written by the victors, was the widely-accepted story of the American Civil War.[15]

Simultaneously though, Southerners like former Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Vice President Alexander Stephens developed a factually insincere counternarrative that laid the foundation for a generation of twentieth-century historians who would deny slavery's importance in the sectional conflict. Stephens, writing barely a few years after the war, argued that slavery represented only a "*minor question*," "a drop in the ocean compared with … other considerations." Davis and Stephens instead characterized secession as motivated by a constitutional quarrel over states' rights—a claim belied by Stephens's 1860 letter to his old friend Abraham Lincoln asserting that only conflict over slavery could explain the depth of southern ire at Lincoln's election.[16]

Other modern arguments resembling Earle's can be seen in Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Ch. 7, and Sean Wilentz, "Slavery, Antislavery, and Jacksonian Democracy," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 202-223. Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), more carefully considers the importance of abolitionist politics and the complicity of northern Jacksonians in protecting slavery.

[14] For a good overview of historiographical trends in Civil War interpretation through the mid-twentieth century, see Thomas J. Pressley, *Americans Interpret their Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954).

[15] Joshua Reed Giddings, *History of the Rebellion: Its Authors and Causes* (New York: Follet, Foster & Co., 1864); Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (Boston: J.R. Osgood and Co., 1872-1877); Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians' absorption of this interpretation is exemplified in the work of James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (New York: Harper, 1892-1906), and *Lectures on the American Civil War* (New York: MacMillan, 1913). Reflecting a general nationalist mood favoring sectional reconciliation, Rhodes is less vindictive in his characterization of slaveholders but otherwise largely reproduces the earlier depiction of the war as a moral battle over slavery.

[16] Alexander H. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States; its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results. Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall* (Philadelphia, Penn.: National Publishing Company, 1868, 1870), quotes from V. 1:12; Stephens's 1860 letter to Lincoln is cited in Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), V. 2:467; Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), quotes from V. 1:vi; Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), provides convincing evidence of slavery's importance in shaping the secession

By the 1920s, Progressive historians of the Civil War, led by Charles and Mary Beard, succeeded where ex-Confederates had failed in pushing slavery to the side. Grafting conflicts they observed in twentieth-century America onto antebellum politics, the Beards described the Civil War as a cataclysmic contest over national economic policy between the declining agricultural elite who controlled southern politics and an emerging capitalist elite in the North. This interpretation left little room for any substantive abolitionist political influence.[17]

"Revisionist" Civil War histories of the 1930s and 40s returned slavery and abolitionism to the center of the sectional crisis. Irresponsible, shortsighted politicians, Revisionists argued, appealed to sectional passions and unwittingly plunged the nation deeper and deeper into an otherwise "repressible" sectional conflict. Drawing on southern historian Ulrich B. Phillips's characterization of slavery as a paternalistic, unprofitable institution, whose peaceful demise was imminent by the eve of the Civil War, Revisionists lamented Civil War bloodshed as pointless. James Randall famously described late-antebellum politicians as "the Blundering Generation," condemning, as did other Revisionists, both abolitionists and southern fire-eaters for inflaming tensions over artificial issues. Reserving especial vehemence for abolitionists, Revisionists charged them with recklessly infusing antebellum politics with the high-stakes emotional rhetoric that made further compromise intolerable. Comparing several antislavery activists to Nazi and Stalinist propagandists, Frank Owsley's presidential address to the Southern Historical Association (published in 1941), offered the most extreme (and outrageous) revisionist denunciations of American abolitionism. Modern historians rightly dismiss these Revisionists for disparaging any activism outside the political mainstream and for their underlying (or in some cases overt) racist indifference to slavery. They were perceptive, however, in calling attention to the powerful influence of political abolitionists, who, I argue, magnified the serious—perhaps irrepressible—conflict between northern and southern society.[18]

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movement, notwithstanding leading Confederates' postwar denials. For a discussion of the efforts of Stephens and Davis to write slavery out of the history of secession, see 13-17.

[17] Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1927), Volume 2: *The Industrial Era*, 3-121, passim. Among this interpretation's other flaws, the Beards exaggerated the degree to which industrial interests controlled northern politics at a time that agriculture still dominated the northern economy and underemphasized the capitalist nature of southern agriculture, both on and off the plantation. For a specific denigration of political abolitionism, see 2:38-40.

[18] Avery Craven, "Coming of the War Between the States: An Interpretation," *Journal of Southern History* 2 (August 1936), 1-20; Craven, *The Repressible Conflict, 1831-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939); Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1942); Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Changing Interpretation of the Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History* 3 (Feb. 1937), 3-27; Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor, as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton, 1918); J.G. Randall, "The Blundering Generation," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (Jun., 1940), 3-28; Frank Owlsley, "The Fundamental Cause of the Civil War: Egocentric Sectionalism," *The Journal of Southern History* 7 (Feb. 1941), 3-18, asserted, "Indeed as far as I have been able to ascertain, neither Dr. Goebbels nor Virginio Gayda nor Stalin's propaganda agents have as yet been able to plumb the depths of vulgarity and obscenity reached and maintained by George Bourne, Stephen Foster, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and other abolitionists of note," 16; The Revisionist condemnation of radicals who made compromise untenable has been incorporated into later, more judicious arguments untainted by the Phillips school's racist defense of slavery. David Potter's posthumous masterpiece, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), seems to sympathize with compromisers who hoped to quell sectional tension, even as Potter argues that genuine antipathy to slavery and to slaveholders' political power played a fundamental role in the increased allure of sectional appeals in northern politics. See also Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1948).

Most historians of both American abolitionism and national politics in the second half of the twentieth century found good reason to distance themselves from the conclusions of Civil War Revisionists as well as from the earlier triumphalist interpretations of the immediate postwar generation. In the process, though, they threaten to reproduce the Beardian conclusion that the slavery issue simply did not matter as much as other issues. Ethnocultural interpretations like those of Gienapp and Holt clearly diminish the contribution of political abolitionism. Even Foner's influential interpretation, which put slavery far closer to the center of national politics, does not give political abolitionists their full due for helping *create* the arguments and political climate that facilitated the rise of a northern anti-Slave Power majority.

Additionally, revisionist denigrations of abolitionists' motives spawned a new set of questions that combined with the overwhelming emphasis on Garrison to further direct twentieth century abolitionist historiography away from abolitionists' political tactics. David Donald fixed the parameters of this debate by depicting abolitionist leaders as conservative elites recklessly misusing the antislavery movement as an effort to restore lost social status. Discrediting revisionist arguments like Donald's thus became another major interpretive thrust of the abolitionist scholarship inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. By the 1960s, numerous historians convincingly argued that genuine moral passion motivated the "antislavery vanguard," but new debates over abolitionists' conscious and subconscious motives emerged. [19] As scholars strove to reconstruct a demographic portrait of the antislavery movement, new work assessed the relationship of abolitionists to American society, as well as the role of antislavery sentiments in legitimating the rise of Western capitalism.[20] Concerned primarily with abolitionists' motives

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[19] David Donald, "Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists," in *Lincoln Reconsidered* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 19-36. Donald, 32, also stresses a false division between "political antislavery … in the 1840s" and immediatist abolitionism; Betty Fladeland, "Who Were the Abolitionists?" *Journal of Negro History* 49 (Apr., 1964), 99-115; Martin Duberman, "The Abolitionists and Psychology," *Journal of Negro History* V. 47, No. 3 (Jun. 1962), 183-191; Within *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists*, ed. Martin Duberman (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), Fawn Brodie, "Who Defends the Abolitionists," 52-67, is most vociferous in its defense of the abolitionists. In that volume, see also Larry Gara, "Who Was an Abolitionist?" 32-51, and Martin Duberman, "The Northern Response to Slavery," 395-413; Gerald Sorin, *The New York Abolitionists: A Case Study of Political Radicalism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971) responded directly to Donald and concluded that most abolitionist organizers were moderately prosperous community leaders integrally involved in economic modernization; For a more recent argument that further discredits Donald's notion that abolitionists represented a displaced elite, see John W. Quist, "'The Great Majority of our Subscribers are Farmers': The Michigan Abolitionists Constituency in the 1840s," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Autumn, 1994), 325-358.

[20] Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), seeks to ground abolitionists in the middle-class culture of their era. Lawrence Friedman, *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), also argues that abolitionists were culturally well-adapted and found in their activism a social community in their which helped further sustain their commitment; David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (Sept. 1962), 209-230, revisits the religious and ideological motives that shaped the emergence of immediatist abolitionism, connecting the evangelical impetus to immediatist abolitionism established by Barnes and Dumond to the emergence of a new, modern worldview emphasizing individuals' capacity to transform the world; In other work, Davis, attributes the rise of abolitionism to a subconscious quest to legitimate the capitalist values of an increasingly exploitative wage-based free labor system. This argument, which focused initially on British abolitionism, appeared first in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975); In contrast to Davis's (and Donald's) view, Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1985) locates the abolitionist constituency in the working class, finding that skilled workers and small proprietors dominated the antislavery rank and file in several

rather than with the scope and effectiveness of abolitionist tactics, this scholarship focused more on *who* the abolitionists were and what they *thought* than on what they *did*.

My argument instead reveals precisely how abolitionists worked to politicize slavery in hopes of breaking down the Second Party System, establishing a major antislavery political party, and ultimately promoting national emancipation, if not necessarily through fratricidal war. Political abolitionists rightly saw the rise of the Republican Party as a vindication of their years of contesting the Slave Power's control of national politics, even if the party fell short of their most ambitious aims. Political abolitionists had worked for decades to make slavery and the Slave Power the central issues in national political debate, and by the mid-1850s, they seemed to have succeeded.

The southern side of these developments has been compellingly explicated by William Freehling. Freehling illuminates the complicated political landscape of the antebellum South, which created opportunities for extreme proslavery politicians to insist on ever more aggressive proslavery policy stances within both state politics and national politics. Proslavery extremists, justifiably feared rising antislavery sentiment and its potential impact on the Upper South, and thus incited numerous controversies that in turn bolstered political abolitionists' Slave Power argument. With persistent secessionists among the culprits, some of this provocation may have been designed to encourage the national political showdown over the future of American slavery that political abolitionists also sought. The antislavery counterparts of Freehling's southern agitators, however, remain due for further study.[21]

This dissertation thus explores the evolution of political abolitionist strategy from the mid-1830s through the consolidation of the Republican Party as a nationally competitive anti-Slave Power coalition in the mid-1850s. The first chapter demonstrates how abolitionist arguments about overbearing Southerners' disproportionate political power developed into a sophisticated analysis condemning both the Democratic and Whig Parties. The chapter then shows how the Slave Power argument informed political abolitionists' tactical choices, including their move toward third-party politics.

The second chapter highlights political abolitionists' strategies for building collaborative relationships with prominent antislavery politicians, especially the handful of potential Whig allies political abolitionists found in the U.S. House of Representatives. Antislavery representatives served as conduits through which abolitionists might broadcast portions of their message to a national audience. As political abolitionists lobbied and collaborated with antislavery congressmen, together they helped diffuse an anti-Slave Power message to an ever more receptive northern audience.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how Liberty partisans also used electoral politics to draw attention to the Slave Power's influence over both major parties. Capitalizing on intense competition between Whigs and Democrats in many northern constituencies, abolitionists

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industrializing towns in Upstate New York and central and western Massachusetts; Magdol's conclusions are reinforced by Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*.

[21] William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). This line of argument was proposed earlier by Benson, "Explanations of American Civil War Causation: A Critical Assessment and a Modest Proposal to Reorient and Reorganize the Social Sciences," in *Toward the Scientific Study of History* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972), 225-340. Benson clearly influenced Freehling, who includes Benson in a list of his "best history teachers" to whom Freehling dedicated *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

marshaled balances of power to impede major-party attempts to evade the slavery question. These efforts were especially productive in New England's majority-rule elections, where Liberty men forced repeated runoffs as a way to further expose Democrats' and Whigs' responsibility for upholding the Slave Power.

The next two chapters illustrate how the Mexican-American War provoked an explosion of anti-Slave Power sentiment across the North, and how political abolitionists capitalized on it. Chapter 4 reinterprets congressional debates over the Wilmot Proviso, which attempted to bar the extension of slavery into any territory acquired through the war. Those debates powerfully exhibited the growing appeal of antislavery arguments originally developed by political abolitionists. Chapter 5 then reexamines how coalition-minded Liberty men seized on this widespread anti-extension feeling to make the case for a new, broader anti-Slave Power party. While antislavery Whigs and Democrats still clung to faint hopes that their parties might nominate anti-extensionist presidential tickets, Liberty coalitionists laid the groundwork for the Free Soil Party. With its expanded ranks, third-party antislavery emerged more powerful than ever in Congress.

The final chapter illustrates how Free Soil congressmen deftly used the toolkit developed by political abolitionists in the 1830s and early 1840s to combat the Slave Power in the 1850s. Thus when the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act provided a new flashpoint, Free Soil leaders in and out of Congress stood ready to promote the establishment of the anti-Nebraska coalition that quickly evolved into the Republican Party and became a powerful anti-Slave Power force in congressional and electoral politics.

Vignettes describing five elections for Speaker of the House punctuate this dissertation and highlight political abolitionists' efforts to reshape congressional politics. Together these contests elucidate the series of events through which antislavery politicians first imagined they could, and then eventually did, control the organization of the House of Representatives.

The need for reevaluating the political influences of abolitionism calls for a reconsideration of arguments freighted with the baggage of two musty, distasteful historiographical traditions. I would never endorse the self-righteous triumphalism of slavery-centered histories penned by antislavery politicians like Wilson and Giddings, nor anything remotely resembling the racist hyper-conservatism of most Revisionists. It is, however, high time that we revisit their claim that abolitionist political activity deserves a central place in the history of sectional conflict. To understand how maintaining a political system half-slave and half-free became increasingly untenable over the antebellum period, we must return to a narrative that concentrates on the profoundly influential role of political abolitionist agitation within both the antislavery movement and national politics. This is the challenge I take up in the pages that follow.

CHAPTER 1

Political Abolition and the Slave Power Argument, 1835-1840

Scholars of antebellum America have long been familiar with the Slave Power argument. For decades, historians have acknowledged the centrality of the Slave Power Conspiracy theory to the rapid rise of the Republican Party to the preeminent northern political party by 1856 and the election of Lincoln in 1860. Yet, already by the late 1830s, *abolitionists* had elaborated the concept of the Slave Power as a fundamental threat to northern liberties. While this argument rehashed some earlier northern Federalist sectional arguments, a new generation of abolitionists rebranded this political antislavery analysis with a compelling label—initially the *slaveholding power*—and eventually just the *Slave Power*.

The key innovation in the abolitionist political argument was its analysis of the Second Party System as designed to protect and augment slaveholders' rights and power. This Slave Power argument informed nearly all of political abolitionists' tactical decisions and led many abolitionists to the conviction that they must form their own party. The only way they could combat the Slave Power would be to extricate themselves from the two parties it controlled. By the time the phrase "Slave Power" was popularized in 1839, abolitionists were already well on their way to making this argument the basis of a political platform for the embryonic abolitionist political grouping that became the Liberty Party. Liberty partisans further elaborated this argument over the 1840s and then imported it into the Free Soil Party, whence it was incorporated into the creed of the anti-Nebraska coalition that evolved into the Republican Party.

The Slave Power thesis has often been characterized as an appeal to amoral anti-southernism, in contrast to abolitionists' genuine moral animus against slavery. Attacks on the Slave Power, in this view, appealed to Northerners not on antislavery grounds as much as on anti-southern grounds—aiming selfishly to promote pro-northern economic policies and reverse southern predominance among federal officeholders. The Slave Power idea is thus often inaccurately disassociated from its abolitionist pedigree.[1]

This prevailing perspective has shrouded the history of abolitionists' role in pioneering this argument. Abolitionists recognized that opposition to the Slave Power could encompass a broad spectrum of northern political opinion. Abolitionists gradually accepted the potential alliances this elasticity promoted, because they increasingly believed that Slave Power control over the government constituted the primary obstacle to emancipation. If they could wrest the

[1] For example, Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978), 28-29, 39, 51, 151-154, 191-199, 209-212, presents the Slave Power idea as central to "the political crisis of the 1850s," but marginalizes abolitionists' contributions to the argument, and to the politics of sectional conflict more generally; Larry Gara, "Slavery and the Slave Power: A Crucial Distinction," *Civil War History* (March 1969): 5-18, also distances the Slave Power idea from abolitionism and overlooks the abolitionists' role in originating the argument; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995), Ch. 3, demonstrates the importance of the Slave Power conspiracy idea to Republican Party and explores how Liberty partisan Salmon Chase articulated the legal doctrines that came to undergird the argument. Foner, however, primarily depicts the Slave Power argument as a subcomponent of Republican free labor ideology.

support of the federal government from slavery, they argued, the institution would soon crumble (though they were often hazy about exactly how).[2]

Conventional accounts of the Slave Power conspiracy often classify it as merely an example of American politicians' use of counter-subversive rhetoric appealing to popular paranoia of conspiracies against republicanism. Leonard Richards, however, has vindicated much of the Slave Power argument by pointedly illustrating how slaveholders designed institutional rules and exploited Democratic Party discipline to dominate the federal government from the Jeffersonian ascendancy until the election of Lincoln.[3]

In contrast to Richards's portrayal of acquiescent proslavery northern Democrats, other recent histories have echoed, if sometimes moderating, Arthur Schlesinger's famous 1945 paean to the egalitarian impulses of Jacksonian Democracy. Schlesinger insisted that "the group which took the lead on the political stage in combating the slave power were the radical Democrats in the straight Jacksonian tradition." Recent reexaminations of radical Democrats similarly depict the Slave Power idea as derived from Jacksonian anti-bank and anti-corporate populism. Jonathan Earle traces the intellectual origins of the Slave Power concept to Jacksonian anti-monopolism, arguing that Ohio Democratic Senator Thomas Morris "formulated and popularized the concept of a Slave Power." Because Morris, in an 1839 Senate speech, was the first to employ the term "slave power" in a public forum (although abolitionists used "slaveholding power" previously), Earle casts Morris as the originator of this political analysis. Linking the Slave Power, as Morris sometimes did, to Jacksonian opposition to the Second Bank of the

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[2] The most detailed analysis of abolitionist efforts to develop this argument remains Russel B. Nye, *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860* (Michigan State University Press, Rev. ed. 1963, Original ed., 1949), which argues that assaults on abolitionists' civil liberties stimulated the movement's growth. Nye, 217-249, credits abolitionists with originating the "Great Slave Power Conspiracy" idea, but focuses on the period after 1845 (perhaps not coincidentally the moment numerous major party politicians began to espouse it); Richard Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 6-79, 86-89, 102-106, offers the best extant discussion of political abolitionists' anti-Slave Power arguments; Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 24-25, 53-54, 227-230 briefly discusses the place of the Slave Power concept in Liberty rhetoric; Merton L. Dillon, *Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), provides an excellent survey of the abolitionist movement. Chapter 5 touches on some of the issues raised below.

[3] The most important example is David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1969). Davis argues that in the 1850s politicians' and clerics' increasingly popular and often grandiose depictions of the Slave Power conspiracy demonstrate the idea's affinity with a longstanding American anti-conspiratorial political tradition. Also see James Huston, "The Origins of 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics,'" in *Saints and Revolutionaries*, eds. David Hall, John Murrin, and Thad Tate (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 332-372, specifically 366-369 and William Gienapp "The Republican Party and the Slave Power," in *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America*, eds. Robert Abzug and Stephen Maizlish (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 51-78. Gienapp, 53-54, 56, 59-67, notes that abolitionists devised the Slave Power idea, but he too sees it, as it came to be used in the 1840s and 1850s, as aimed at popular anxieties about a conspiracy against the Republic; Holt, *Political Crisis*, 151-154, 191-199, 209-212, also focuses on how the Slave Power Conspiracy drew on concerns about threats to republican government; While Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000), demonstrates the validity of the Slave Power argument, he too barely mentions political abolitionists in his brief genealogy of the Slave Power idea.

United States and its affiliated "Money Power," Earle depicts the Slave Power argument as fundamentally Democratic in origin.[4]

Abolitionists' publications and private correspondence demonstrate that the roots of this political argument lay not with Jacksonian Democrats, but rather with abolitionist agitators, most of whom deeply distrusted Jacksonian policy. Contemporary Jacksonian leaders viewed Morris's stance as heresy (as Earle acknowledges). Morris was read out of the Ohio Democratic Party for his antislavery heterodoxy, and his celebrated use of the term "slave power" on the Senate floor came during his final lame-duck session, after Democratic colleagues in Columbus had jettisoned him as too outspoken against slavery. Well before Morris's most famous speech, he began associating directly with Southern Ohio abolitionists, many of whom did not share his economic views (much less his partisan affiliation), but did agree with his analysis of slaveholders' political power. Not long after Morris's first antislavery senate oration, when he worried publicly over southern attempts "to overwhelm us with the power of this Government," Morris joined leading Ohio abolitionists James Birney and John Rankin at the November 1836 founding of the Clermont County Anti-Slavery Society. With Morris in attendance, the society resolved, "That the recent encroachments by the South on the Indisputable rights of the North,—encroachments that are instigated by the spirit of slavery, are fearful omens of the utter prostration of our liberties, if slavery be long continued." Clearly Morris learned more about the contours of the Slave Power from moralistic associates like Birney than from the anti-bank Democrats who repeatedly sought to stifle his antislavery outbursts.[5]

While abolitionists anticipated Leonard Richards's assessment of northern Democrats' role in upholding the Slave Power, by the late 1830s many abolitionists found northern Whigs similarly culpable. Northern Whigs articulated antislavery policy stands far more frequently than Democrats. Some even became antislavery heroes for resisting overbearing Southerners' assaults on abolitionists' civil liberties. Political abolitionists nevertheless eventually came to indict even the most radical Whigs as sharing responsibility for the proslavery orientation of the federal government. Their membership in a cross-sectional party and support of its many proslavery leaders made it impossible for Whigs to effectively oppose the Slave Power.

By the late 1830s, the Slave Power, for political abolitionists, was embodied in the two-party system of Whigs and Democrats. Abolitionists perceived that the cross-sectional competitiveness of the Whigs and Democrats placed a premium on avoiding controversy over slavery for the sake of party unity. With even the most antislavery members of these parties routinely privileging partisan obligations over antislavery convictions and supporting slaveholders and their sympathizers for the nation's highest offices, abolitionists came to blame the party system for the supremacy of the Slave Power.

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[4] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1950), 433; Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 18, 37-48; Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Ch. 7, also overemphasizes the "Antislavery Democracy"; Richards, *The Slave Power,* 23-25, accurately assesses the importance of Thomas Morris's speech against the "slave power" as a pivotal moment in the concept's history, but not as indicating any fundamentally Democratic bent to the Slave Power argument. Richards identifies numerous Whig uses of the Slave Power idea, but slights the early anti-Slave Power rhetoric of abolitionists already disaffected from both major parties by the late 1830s.

[5] Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 46; *Gales and Seaton's Register of Debates in Congress*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 1165-1171; "Clermont Co. Anti-Slavery Society," Cincinnati *Philanthropist*, Dec. 9, 1836.

Antebellum abolitionists' more comprehensive institutional analysis differentiated their Slave Power argument from the earlier anti-southern political rhetoric on which it seems to have drawn. Attacks on the disproportionate power of slaveholders were certainly employed by northern Federalists in the early nineteenth century and by northern Jeffersonian during debates over the Missouri Compromise. By the mid-1830s, though, abolitionists, while avoiding mention of a lineage that could be traced to the discredited Federalists, updated those arguments to emphasize new aggressions of the slaveholding power: especially the House gag rule against antislavery petitions, postal censorship of abolitionist mailings, and proslavery expansionists' designs on Texas. Thereafter antebellum abolitionists' employed their Slave Power arguments far more continuously than Early Republic forerunners had.[6]

Because the Slave Power argument was so deeply intertwined with condemnation of the Second Party System, antebellum abolitionists used anti-southern polemics to call for a thorough restructuring of national political debate around the issues of slavery and freedom. Motivated by a deep commitment to weakening and ultimately eradicating American slavery, antebellum political abolitionists' Slave Power argument was both a strategic rhetorical device as well as a central component of their policy agenda. The political parties' deep implication in the Slave Power's ascendancy would thus ultimately necessitate organized abolitionist political action.

Confronting the Slaveholding Power in the mid-1830s: Postal Censorship, the Gag Rule, and Texas

In the second half of the 1830s, slaveholders' efforts to censor abolitionist mailings and gag antislavery petitions, as well as to augment their political power by annexing Texas, led abolitionists to increasingly foreground claims about slavery's deleterious influence on American government. Furthermore proslavery efforts to restrict northern political rights seemed to parallel the anti-abolitionist rioting that challenged free discussion in northern cities from 1833 to 1838. Abolitionists easily connected this mob violence to their political argument, perceiving that mobs were often encouraged, and sometimes led outright, by local political elites. Among the foremost early advocates of antislavery politics, James Birney, a reformed ex-slaveholder, experienced firsthand slavery's threat to non-slaveholders' basic freedoms. While working to set up an abolitionist press, Birney faced threats of violence and riotous mobs first in slaveholding Kentucky and then in Ohio. In the process, Birney learned that when the issue ceased to be emancipation and became freedom of the press, slavery's role in American political life appeared far more troubling to antislavery sympathizers. In response to the 1836 riot that destroyed Birney's press, Cincinnati lawyer Salmon Chase offered his first public defense of the antislavery movement. Chase exemplified how threats to freedom of discussion drew thousands into antislavery activism: "Much as I have deprecated the course of the abolitionists, I regard all the consequences of their publications, as evils comparatively light when contrasted with the evils produced by the prevalence of the mob spirit." Over the next few years, Chase became

[6] On anti-southern and antislavery political rhetoric in this earlier period, see Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006). For an intriguing interpretation of the links between Federalist sectional arguments and antebellum abolitionism see Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Ch. 3, 6, who argues that anti-Jacobin rhetoric played a crucial role in bridging the anti-southern politics of these two eras.

deeply involved in the abolitionists' fight to preserve constitutional liberty, and soon became one of the most effective champions of a legal argument and political strategy designed to unite opponents of the Slave Power.[7]

Mob violence against abolitionist meetings across the North in the 1830s convinced many Northerners that slavery threatened republican freedom. In late 1837, the martyrdom of Reverend Elijah P. Lovejoy galvanized the abolitionist movement. Lovejoy's religious newspapers spoke out against slavery first in St. Louis (where slavery was legal) and then in southern Illinois, at Alton (where it was not). Anti-abolitionist crowds destroyed three of his printing presses. When the fourth arrived in Alton, Lovejoy insisted on defending it, and was shot to death by an angry mob. Abolitionists denounced this lawlessness as "pregnant with destruction to our free institutions." However, they also recognized that "this event has opened eyes and ears heretofore closed" and could be used to "rouse up, and unite the freemen of the non-slaveholding states … whatever may be their sentiments respecting southern slavery and its immediate abolition."[8]

By the time of Lovejoy's murder, these were familiar arguments that fit neatly into the narrative abolitionists had crafted about the slave interest that threatened freedom of discussion. By the end of the 1830s, this line of argument focused overwhelmingly on the national government and the two major political parties. Through aggressive postal and petition campaigns, abolitionists challenged southern slaveholders and their northern accomplices, who responded with anti-democratic efforts to smother abolitionism. As antislavery activists smeared the federal government as dominated by proslavery interests, they embroiled themselves ever more deeply in the political process. Their political argument focused especially on the petition controversy that gripped the House of Representatives from 1835 through 1844, when proslavery majorities passed rules to systematically silence antislavery petitioners. Through a defiant political counteroffensive, abolitionists increasingly concentrated on dramatizing slaveholders' political power as a threat to the freedom of whites as well as blacks.

Most scholars of abolitionism have focused primarily on abolitionists' moral suasion techniques in the 1830s, only briefly discussing abolitionist political activism before the founding of the Liberty Party in 1840. In this vein, historians typically view the petition controversy in the context of moral suasion tactics, and not necessarily as evidence of an already thorough politicization of abolitionism by the mid-1830s.[9] In fact, the petition controversy grew

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[7] Salmon P. Chase (SPC) to Cincinnati *Gazette*, Nov. 1836, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Box 19: "Materials Relating to Slavery"; Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, 193-217, discusses the impact of anti-abolitionist mob violence on public opinion; Abolitionists' understanding of political elites' role in instigating anti-abolitionist riots also anticipates the work of Leonard Richards. His *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), remains the best modern discussion of anti-abolitionist mobbing.

[8] For a good, succinct discussion of the "Alton tragedy," see Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, 115-121; Resolutions of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, quoted in New York *Emancipator*, Nov. 30, 1837; Editorial, Ibid.

[9] Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 98-109, discusses the petition controversy but argues, "In the 1830's, the union of politics and morality was still to be forged." Though excessively disdainful towards Garrisonians, Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1933), esp. 109-152, presents an impressive account of the petition campaign, but fails to adequately connect it to subsequent abolitionist political action. Dillon, *Abolitionists*, 100-103, and James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 81-93, both offer good, although brief, discussions of the gag rule controversy. Stewart tends to be more sympathetic to abolitionists seeking to preserve the movement's moral purity rather than those working to expand its political appeal. The most detailed account is William Lee Miller's painstaking recapitulation of congressional

directly out of the main political strategy advocated by abolitionists in the early 1830s, targeting congressional abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia as an *initial* policy goal, one they hoped would be the first in a long line of legislative inroads against American slavery, including eventually prohibition of the interstate slave trade—"the great door to the slave Bastile, left in the side of the constitutional temple," as Utica abolitionist lawyer Alvan Stewart described it. Both the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and the Declaration of Sentiments issued at the American Anti-Slavery Society's 1833 founding meeting emphasized the need for abolitionists to encourage constitutional federal action against slavery.[10]

Even their ostensibly apolitical "moral suasion" brought abolitionists into the maelstrom of national politics. Most famously associated with William Lloyd Garrison's Boston *Liberator*, moral suasion presupposed that abolitionists must convince liberal Southerners of the immorality of slavery and convert them to the antislavery cause. This model of inducing conversions evoked the Second Great Awakening preachers who converted thousands to reorient their lives around a new, more proactive evangelical Protestantism. By 1835, the American-Anti Slavery Society's moral suasion campaign had turned out thousands of pamphlets, tracts, and newspapers and sent lecturing agents traveling across the North to spread their antislavery gospel.[11]

That year, the American Anti-Slavery Society embarked on its most impressive expansion of the moral suasion campaign. Capitalizing on the sophisticated national postal system and discounted mailing rates for newspapers, the society's New York office circulated mounds of antislavery literature to potential southern converts. This postal onslaught mailed at least 175,000 separate items into the slave states in the summer of 1835 alone. Outraged Southerners alleged that abolitionists sought to incite slave insurrection, and the conflict came to a head when Charleston vigilantes calling themselves the "Lynch Men" broke into the post office and seized and publicly burned a sack of mail that the Charleston postmaster had detained.[12]

Abolitionists railed against federal complicity in the assault on freedom of the mails. President Andrew Jackson's Postmaster General, Amos Kendall of Kentucky, acknowledged "an obligation to the laws," but avowed "a higher one to the communities in which we live" and deliberately looked the other way while subordinates broke federal law. New York City's Democratic Postmaster, Samuel Gouverneur deferred to his slaveholding bosses and asked the American Anti-Slavery Society to put their campaign on hiatus pending Kendall's instructions.

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squabbles over abolitionist petitions, *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Miller, 105-112, 301-309, discusses abolitionists' impressive efforts in organizing massive petition campaigns, but John Quincy Adams remains the central protagonist of a story that focuses primarily on altercations on the House floor.

[10] Alvan Stewart (AS), "Mr. Stewart's Remarks Before the Vermont Legislative Committee (Concluded)," in Utica *Friend of Man*, Dec. 19, 1838; On abolitionist hopes for abolishing the interstate slave trade see David L. Lightner, *Slavery and the Commerce Power: How the Struggle against the Interstate Slave Trade Led to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), esp. Ch. 5; *Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1831; "Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention," *Liberator*, Dec. 14, 1833.

[11] Although completely discounting Garrison's important role, Barnes, *Anti-Slavery Impulse*, remains an otherwise useful account of the moral suasion strategy; For a more balanced discussion of moral suasion in the early to mid-1830s, see James Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 50-64.

[12] On the controversy over the abolitionist postal campaign, see, Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, 67-85, and Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), Ch. 7, specific figures from 261.

When the society refused "to surrender any of the rights or privileges which we possess in common with our fellow citizens," Gouverneur took it upon himself to withhold their mailings.[13]

Abolitionists recognized that proslavery politicians' efforts to censor Northerners' mail discomfited many who had previously scorned antislavery agitators. When Congress reconvened, President Jackson requested legislation barring "incendiary" materials from the mails. Although Congress accepted neither Jackson's proposal, nor proslavery extremist South Carolina Senator John Calhoun's demand for state censorship, both drew attention to abolitionist arguments that "the supporters and apologists of slavery" had "*determined to annihilate American liberty altogether!*" Wealthy philanthropist Gerrit Smith, a prized new convert to abolitionism, observed that "the Anti-Slavery Society is now so far identified with the right of free discussion, on account, not only of its manly defence of that right, but still more on account of the lawless and brutal endeavors to hinder its exercise of it."[14]

South Carolina Governor George McDuffie's response to the postal campaign especially confirmed abolitionists' arguments. His November 1835 address to the South Carolina legislature declared that abolitionists should be punished "BY DEATH WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY" and eulogized "domestic slavery" as the "CORNERSTONE OF OUR REPUBLICAN EDIFICE." McDuffie also insisted that northern states pass penal laws to suppress antislavery activism. Four other southern legislatures passed similar resolutions, and several northern politicians, including New York Democratic Governor William Marcy, expressed support—though no northern states criminalized abolitionism. Abolitionists quickly noticed that such southern overreactions aided their movement's growth. James Birney explained, "McDuffie's Message is doing a great deal for the salvation of the Country."[15]

No southern offense did as much to inspire the Slave Power argument as the infamous gag rule. Even more egregious than efforts to censure abolitionist mailings, the House of Representatives inaugurated a new policy of unceremoniously dismissing antislavery petitions in the spring of 1836. The political controversy that erupted over abolitionist petitioning would dominate debate over slavery and the Slave Power for the next nine years. Imperious southern tactics to suppress antislavery petitions became abolitionists' clearest evidence of the troubling political power of slavery. Through their experience with the petition controversy, abolitionists quickly apprehended the allure of a Slave Power argument.

This "Pearl Harbor of the slavery controversy," as historian William Freehling aptly described it, came on unexpectedly, during the House of Representatives' routine round of petition presentation in December 1835. Abolitionists had been submitting congressional petitions since the very first Congress. In 1834, though, the newly founded American Anti-Slavery Society persuaded abolitionists to undertake an expanded, organized petition drive, which sent petitions bearing at least 34,000 signatures and calling mainly for emancipation in the

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[13] Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, 70; Elizur Wright, Jr. (EWJ) to Samuel L. Gouverneur, Aug. 8, 1835, Samuel L. Gouverneur Correspondence, Special Collections and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, microform; Gouverneur to Gentlemen [President and Directors of the American Anti-Slavery Society], Aug. 6[?], 1835, copy, included in Gouverneur to Amos Kendall, Aug. 7, 1835, Ibid.; Gouverneur to Gentlemen, Aug. 1835, Ibid.

[14] William Goodell, "Common Cause," *Emancipator*, Oct. 20, 1835; Gerrit Smith (GS) to Abraham L. Cox, Nov. 12, 1835, in *Emancipator*, Nov. 1835.

[15] "Governor McDuffie's Message to the Legislature of South Carolina," *Liberator*, Dec. 12, 1835; Goodell, *Slavery and Antislavery: A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres; with a view of the Slavery Question in the United States* (New York: William Harned, 1852), 413-420; Birney to Lewis Tappan (LT), Jan. 7, 1836, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966, original edition 1938 by AHA), 1: 297.

District of Columbia to the House of Representatives for the 1835-36 session. When William Jackson (W-MA) tried to present one such petition, South Carolina's James Henry Hammond made the unexpected demand that Congress refuse to receive petitions protesting slavery—an impetuous act by a freshman representative with far-reaching consequences for both abolitionism and congressional politics.[16]

For almost two months, the House debated the merits of receiving petitions for abolition in the District, with a small group of northern Whigs, led by ex-President John Quincy Adams and Vermont Representative William Slade (both Whigs), defending abolitionist petitioners against proslavery extremists like Hammond and Democratic allies of Vice President, and presidential hopeful, Martin Van Buren of New York. As they followed the debate over petitioners' rights, abolitionists quickly grasped its potential to corroborate their arguments about the incompatibility of slavery and freedom.

Finally, Charleston's Henry Laurens Pinckney, trying to "arrest discussion of the question of slavery, " "harmonize the Union," and "put down fanaticism," proposed that Congress refer antislavery petitions to a select committee chaired by himself; which declared abolition of slavery in the capital inexpedient but constitutional, and produced the first gag rule: "All petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way, or to any extent whatsoever, to the subject of slavery or the abolition of slavery, shall, without being either printed or referred, be laid on the table and that no further action whatever shall be had thereon." Adams offered the lone protest: "I hold the resolution to be a direct violation of the Constitution of the United States, the rules of this House and the rights of my constituents." Cries of "Order!" silenced Adams, and the Democratic leadership rammed through Pinckney's resolution, soon to be known as the gag rule, or just the gag by a vote of 117-68.[17]

In response, abolitionists shrewdly concentrated their rhetoric on this gag. Abolitionists asserted that the Pinckney resolution demonstrated that "the oppression that has so long robbed the slave of his rights and liberties, is now grasping at the rights and liberties of all." Henceforth abolitionists would cast their movement as "the conflict of liberty with slavery—the issue of which is to be universal freedom or universal bondage."[18]

Soon after Congress adjourned, the American Anti-Slavery Society issued a public address, "not to urge upon" readers "the sinfulness of slavery, and the safety of its immediate abolition," but rather to alert them to the "conduct of your rulers." The address admonished,

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[16] William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: V. 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 308. Freehling, 310-321 describes Hammond's ultimatum as a challenge to slaveholding Democrats perceived as moderates by some Deep South politicians; On early abolitionist petitioning, see Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), esp. Ch. 2; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 107-108, 111-112, notes that the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society regarded the count of 34,000, made by the Pinckney Committee, of which more below, as a gross underestimate; Barnes, *Anti-Slavery Impulse*, 131; *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 24th Congress, 1st Session, HRUS, December 16, 1835, 27-29. Drew Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982), 169; For the text of the petition that triggered Hammond's outburst, see "Copy of the Wrentham Petition," *Liberator*, Jan. 2, 1836.

[17] *CG*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 170-171; For the lengthy debates preceding this temporary denouement, see Ibid., 29-165, *passim*; The failure of Pinckney's reelection bid is mentioned in Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 146; *CG*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 498-499, 505-506; Though the name "gag rule" was a misnomer, since it was technically a resolution applicable only for the session and not a standing rule until 1840, Richards, *The Slave Power*, 132, notes that the resolution was "known from the beginning as the 'gag rule.'"

[18] EWJ, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; With the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, Held in the City of New-York, On the 10th May 1836, and the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1836), 84-85.

"Let no one think for a moment, that because he is not an abolitionist, his liberties are not and will not be invaded." The committee also demanded a political response: "We ask you as free-men, not to permit your constitutional privileges to be trifled with, by those who have sworn to maintain them," imploring readers "to give your suffrages hereafter only to such men as you have reason to believe will not sacrifice your rights." This call for opposition to northern abettors of the Slave Power became a staple of antislavery politics. Adopting the derisive epithet that the eccentric John Randolph of Roanoke, Virginia had famously, cryptically coined during debates over Missouri's admission, abolitionists lambasted northern "doughfaces" as "servile" accessories to slavery's political power.[19]

This abolitionist response doomed any attempt to eschew congressional discussion of slavery. Abolitionists fulminated against the rule, cognizant that Southerners had given them a powerful tool. Antislavery societies across the North continued to inundate the House, and especially Adams, with petitions against slavery in the District of Columbia, and Congress repeatedly passed new rules to stifle them. Instead of quieting abolitionists, controversy over the petition question thrust slavery into the center of national legislative debate.[20]

This House obstruction of the rights of antislavery petitioners and southern incursions against the sanctity of the mails led abolitionists to increasingly emphasize southern political influence, anticipating language they would soon deploy about a grasping Slave Power. Antislavery discourse stressed the coherence, and power, of the slaveholding interest in the federal government. In 1836, the American Anti-Slavery Society lamented that "the broadest and highest bulwark of our liberties already lies prostrate to make room for the grasping monster." Alvan Stewart, in a letter to the founding meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, similarly anticipated future personifications of the Slave Power by describing slavery as "a dreadful monster" preying on slaves' labor and Northerners' freedoms.[21]

In the face of repeated renewals of the gag rule, abolitionists denounced slaveholders and their doughface allies as an aggressive political power that controlled Congress. Quaker abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier urged the New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society to flood Congress with petitions in revolt "against the augmentation of that Power, which standing on the necks of the enslaved, has laid its hand heavily on the liberties of the free." Similarly, the *Vermont Free Press* protested, "The influence of slavery is becoming so predominant in Congress that it is impossible for a northern representative to express the sentiments of his constituents on that subject without being subjected to insults and contumely the most shameful and degrading."[22]

In the mid-1830s, abolitionists elaborated a response to southern political power that formed the foundation of the Slave Power argument. As early as 1837, abolitionists described slaveholding politicians and their northern allies as a dangerous "slaveholding power in the national councils." Facing this congressional "slaveholding power," abolitionists urged

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[19] *Emancipator*, Apr. 23, 1836; EWJ, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 84-85; *Emancipator Extra*, Jun. 1836; The best study of doughface Democrats is Richards, *The Slave Power*. On the term's origin, see 85-88.

[20] *CG*, 24th Congress, 2nd Session, 51-52, 79-81, 106.

[21] EWJ, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 46; Letter of Alvan Stewart to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Convention, Jan. 22, 1837, in *Emancipator*, Feb. 9, 1837.

[22] John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW) to John Farmer, June 6, 1837, in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), V. 1: 233-236; *Vermont Free Press*, quoted in *Emancipator*, Mar. 3, 1837.

organized political action from the "friends of freedom." Indiana abolitionists seeking to create a statewide antislavery society, warned, "The slaveholding power is *aiming to extend* itself into all the states; and that, in order to obtain its end, it will never rest satisfied with a less sacrifice than the dearest rights of free men." In making this claim, the Decatur County Anti-Slavery Society evoked the specter of slavery expanding over the entire country, a rhetorical strategy that later became central to antislavery political arguments.[23]

The great strength of this argument was its ability to both target a wider audience and remain persuasive to immediatist abolitionists. Addressing a convention of committed abolitionists, Henry B. Stanton emphasized that "slavery endangers liberty everywhere," and "not only makes the slave a slave, but it destroys the love of freedom *here*." Stanton stressed his paramount concern for "the rights of free citizens" and warned that "this spirit of slavery at the North would not only prevent freeing the slaves of the South, but would make us slaves." Stanton also exhorted auditors to capitalize on these encroachments to induce new conversions to abolitionism. Similarly, Judge William Jay, among the more politically conservative of the antislavery movement's leaders urged abolitionists "to withhold their votes from men who are hostile to the liberty of the speech & the press & who are aiding in perpetuating slavery." Jay wrote soon thereafter, "We commenced the present struggle to obtain the freedom of the slave—we are compelled to continue it to preserve our own."[24]

Even those who hesitated about the movement's politicization adopted these arguments. The New York City Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society exemplified this point of view when it sought to "disclaim politics as forming any part of our plan of operation," but could not "deny that anti-slavery is a political as well as moral question." Slaveholders had long "ruled this nation," while, "for the sake of peace, the concessions of the North have been so many as to render them a habit." The North, these young men insisted, could no longer submit to southern demands for the "surrender of free discussion."[25]

Abolitionists pursued their strategy of emphasizing slaveholders' tyrannical assaults on northern liberties through a vigorous effort to ensure that the gag rule remained in the national political spotlight. In the spring of 1837, the American Anti-Slavery Society implemented an ambitious new petitioning campaign designed to draw continued attention to the controversy. Whittier and Stanton, two of the movement's most gifted political thinkers, joined the indefatigable Theodore Dwight Weld at the New York office to spearhead this political initiative. Together they oversaw a greatly expanded, centralized petition campaign. The abolitionist leadership understood that the more petitions they sent, and the more names they amassed for the House to silence, the more they would dramatize the antislavery cause. The American Anti-Slavery Society disseminated directions to every county Anti-Slavery Society, explaining:

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[23] *Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine* II, ed. EWJ, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, July 1837), 345; "New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Anniversary," from the *Herald of Freedom*, in *Philanthropist*, Jun. 30, 1837; *Philanthropist*, Oct. 9, 1838; "Indiana—Decatur Co. Society—Call for a State Convention," *Philanthropist*, Feb. 20, 1838; Also see William Jay (Wm Jay) to John Quincy Adams, Jul. 9, 1839, John Jay Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

[24] Address of Henry B. Stanton to the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, in *Emancipator*, Jul. 21, 1836; William Jay to LT, Aug. 22, 1836, Lewis Tappan Papers (LT Papers), Library of Congress, microform; Letter of William Jay, Sept. 26, 1836, in *Emancipator*, Dec. 1, 1836.

[25] "Third Annual Report of the New York City Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society," quoted in *Emancipator*, May 25, 1837.

> The success which has attended the exercise of the right of petition thus far, in producing discussion in legislative bodies, in arousing the people … has shown, that it is one of the most efficient instrumentalities which the friends of the slave can employ. The voice of the people, thus expressed, can arouse the nation.

The committee called for every county society secretary to send names of abolitionists who could be entrusted with circulating petitions in each town in their county. At the same time, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women ran a parallel women's petition campaign. With central boards in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, South Carolina-born Quaker Sarah Grimké hoped they could secure "a million signers to our Petitions before the next session of Congress [about seven months away]."[26]

Antislavery societies across the North continued to urge increased petitions as "the true gunpowder by which your generals" in Congress could "carry the war into Africa," and the centralized men's and women's petition campaigns flooded the desks of antislavery congressmen with an "immense load." Impressive grassroots mobilization combined with the administrative feats of petition drive coordinators like Stanton, Weld, Whittier, and Sarah and Angelina Grimké to swell the antislavery petition tide to unprecedented levels—415,000 signatures on petitions to Congress in the centralized campaign's first year by the Anti-Slavery Society's accounting. This impressive output ensured the continued salience of congressional debates over antislavery petitions, providing new opportunities to dramatize abolitionists' political goals and southern suppression of northern liberties. Over the nine years from 1836 through 1844, the gag rule provided the most consistent and compelling evidence for arguments about the potent and sinister influence of slavery in Congress, and in American politics generally. Abolitionist newspapers thus continued to print form petitions that could be cut out and easily circulated and then prodded readers to send so many that Congress would have to construct a new building to store them all. "From these entombed prayers," the Hartford *Charter Oak* predicted, "a voice may go forth which shall shake, not only the capitol, but the nation to its remotest corner."[27]

Abolitionists also made sure that the politics of the gag reached into the state legislative arena. Aggressively petitioning state legislatures to send antislavery resolutions to Congress, abolitionists hoped Congress would find it more difficult to reject the resolutions of "sovereign states," or if Congress did, it would further expose "Southern domination." The Massachusetts House of Representatives responded to these petitions by inviting Stanton in 1837 to address a committee considering resolutions advocating abolition in the District of Columbia and opposing the gag. Over two days of wide-ranging remarks, Stanton covered such varied topics as the

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[26] Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 301-305; Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, 46-47; American Anti-Slavery Society's Directions to County Anti-Slavery Societies, 1837, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965, original edition 1934 by AHA), V. 1: 403-405; Sarah and Angelina Grimké to Theodore Dwight Weld (TDW), May 18, 1837, in *Weld-Grimké Letters*, ed. Barnes and Dumond, 1: 387; On women's petitions, see Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery &Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), 69-104, esp. 84-86. Zaeske argues that, over the course of the petition contest, female abolitionists modified their earlier deferential tone to an increasingly demanding, political rhetoric that had implications for the nascent movement for women's political rights. Zaeske also notes that the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women adopted an organized petitioning plan days before the male-controlled American Anti-Slavery Society and suggests that Stanton, Weld, and Whittier imitated the design of the women's convention; See also, Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great and Silent Army of American Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998), 86-94.

[27] *Emancipator*, Dec. 14, 1837, Jan. 11, 1838; Dillon, *Abolitionists*, 101-102; Hartford *Charter Oak*, Dec. 1838.

constitutionality of abolition in the District, the immorality of holding property in man, federal responsibility for the domestic slave trade, and the national security hazard and diplomatic embarrassment caused by slavery at the capital. Returning frequently to proslavery control of Congress, Stanton charged, "In our National Legislature, freedom of speech is struck dumb, by the omnipotence of slavery." Stanton prophesied that this restriction of freedom would soon strengthen abolitionists' political influence: "The war has but just begun … Abolitionists may yet be Members of Congress … For THE PEOPLE will be abolitionists; and that they will elect men, who will faithfully represent them in Congress, I cannot doubt." To abolitionists' great pleasure, the committee endorsed resolutions against the gag rule and asserting congressional jurisdiction over slavery in the District of Columbia, and the resolutions passed resoundingly.[28]

Abolitionists' addresses to state legislative committees soon became commonplace. When Birney addressed the Vermont legislature he found a receptive audience containing many "abolitionists … of the most thorough stamp." The following year, Birney and, more remarkably, Angelina Grimké expounded on slavery in the District of Columbia before the Massachusetts legislature. A year after that, New York abolitionists Alvan Stewart and William Chaplin spent two nights addressing the Judiciary Committee of the New York Assembly on slavery in the District of Columbia.[29]

State legislative hearings provided abolitionists an additional stage from which to broadcast their goals. Abolitionists also pressured state legislatures for racial civil and political equality in the North, but most political abolitionists remained closely focused on Congress. The discussions that called abolitionists before state legislatures pertained directly to congressional proceedings on the gag rule and slavery in the District of Columbia, the "foul cancer on the breast of the body politic." Abolitionist political organizers often viewed state legislatures as another route into national political debate, believing that "the action of Congress will be but the echo of the action of the State Legislatures—if *this* be correct, *that* cannot long be wrong." Furthermore, even a thoroughly abolitionized state legislature could only accomplish so much. In 1840, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* prodded "Vermont friends" who had "obtained ... all that your State Legislature can grant you" to demand that their congressmen support "similar purification of the Congressional statutes."[30]

Abolitionists' antipathy to the slaveholding interest in Congress also shaped their denunciations of proslavery designs on the newly independent republic of Texas. Abolitionists viewed the 1835-36 Texas Revolution as a proslavery conspiracy and claimed that southern politicians advocated annexation to increase slaveholders' congressional representation. These

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[28] For examples of abolitionists' hopes for state legislative action, see "Petitions to the Legislature," from the *Haverhill Gazette*, reprinted in *Liberator*, December 10, 1836, and Montpelier *Voice of Freedom*, Sept. 21, 1839; Stanton, *Remarks of Henry B. Stanton in the Representatives' Hall, on the 23nd [sic] and 24th of February: before the committee of the House of Representatives, of Massachusetts, to whom was referred sundry memorials on the subject of slavery* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), 40, 55, 42.

[29] Birney to Joshua Leavitt (JL), Oct. 30, 1837, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 1: 428-432; JGW to Edward Davis, February 26, 1837, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 223; Massachusetts General Court, House of Representatives, *Report and resolves relating to slavery in the District of Columbia* (Boston: 1837); "M W C" [Maria Weston Chapman], "Angelina E Grimké," *Liberator*, Mar. 2, 1838; E.W. Goodwin, "New York Legislature. Light and Shadows of Abolition," *Liberator*, Mar. 29, 1839.

[30] For examples of abolitionists' efforts to influence state policy on civil rights in Massachusetts, see Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 108-124; "The third annual meeting of the Washington County [Vermont] Anti-Slavery Society," Resolutions, in *Voice of Freedom*, Feb. 9, 1839; Pittsburgh *Christian Witness*, Jul. 18, 1838; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 19, 1840.

anxieties about increased southern representation were made particularly acute by the expansiveness of Texan territorial claims. Abolitionists feared Texas could be carved into as many as six to eight new slave states, vastly amplifying southern power in both houses of Congress.[31]

The earliest and most vocal warnings appeared in the writings of Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy. Lundy identified a conspiracy of slaveholders working in concert as a pro-annexation "party". Lundy's detailed knowledge of Texas, acquired during three visits searching for sites for freedmen colonies, shaped abolitionists' perceptions of Texan politics. His widely disseminated pamphlets argued that Texans revolted to protect slavery and cautioned that the "influence of the SLAVE HOLDING PARTY in the United States is now so completely in the ascendant, and so thoroughly sways the deliberations and proceedings of our Federal Government," that admitting Texas would imperil the American Union.[32]

Reiterating arguments about southern demands to control the national government, abolitionists warned that slaveholders' efforts to safeguard slavery against dissent extended even beyond suppressing Northerners' civil liberties. They now demanded a bellicose and dangerous foreign policy designed to guarantee their continued national political supremacy in the face of rapid northern population growth. If the annexation project succeeded, abolitionists warned, the result would be either the "permanent ascendancy" of "the slaveholding power and policy, in the national councils," or an effort by emboldened secessionists to establish their own "slave empire." Furthermore, "the sudden, and hasty, and unexpected recognition of Texas independence" in the final days of the 1836-37 congressional session seemed to indicate plans for an imminent annexation treaty to increase slaveholders' political power.[33]

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[31] Joel H. Silbey, *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6-15; Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1989), Ch. 2, quotes from 48-49, concludes slavery was an "underlying" but "not the primary cause of the Texas Revolution"; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), complicates abolitionists' analyses, showing how *Tejanos* and Anglo Texans alike struggled to negotiate the conflicting forces of the American market and the Mexican state. Reséndez, 161-162, acknowledges that "efforts to preserve slavery contributed at least to some extent to the independentist impulse," noting that Mexican legislation had repeatedly challenged Texan slavery and that "uncertainty over the future was a major concern for most Anglo Texans," who could anticipate little support for slavery from either of the factions contending to control the Mexican government; Birney, EWJ, and Stanton, *Fifth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society, with the minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business, and the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, On the 8th May, 1838* (1838; repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1972), 72; *Philanthropist*, Jul. 7, 1837.

[32] Lundy dedicated most of his adult life to the twin projects of fighting slavery and advocating creation of colonies of freed blacks to show they could achieve prosperity and respectability. He began publishing the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* in 1821, and continued publishing antislavery newspapers sporadically, usually under that title, for the rest of his life, printing in Ohio, Tennessee, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and Illinois over eighteen years. Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), Preface, describes Lundy as "the leading figure in the American antislavery movement before 1830"; Benjamin Lundy, *The Origin and True Causes of the Texas Insurrection, commenced in the year 1835*, Published under the pseudonym Columbus (Philadelphia, May 1836); Lundy, *War in Texas; Instigated by Slaveholders, Land Speculators, &c. For the Re-Establishment of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Republic of Mexico*, Published under the pseudonym "A Citizen of the United States" (Philadelphia, Merrihew and Gunn, 1836), 47.

[33] "Letter from the Senior Editor [Birney]," *Philanthropist*, June 16, 1837; David Lee Child, "Texas," *Philanthropist*, May 27, 1836, also presciently speculated about future designs to seize additional Mexican territory

Proslavery responses confirmed abolitionists' apprehensions. Unabashedly advocating annexation as a way to maintain southern political power, Senator William Preston (Nullifier-SC) assailed northern anti-Texas sentiment as treacherously seeking to eliminate the South's ability to "resist [antislavery] incursions" in Congress, particularly in the Senate. Mississippi's state legislature similarly called for annexation to maintain a sectional "equipoise of influence" in Congress. The Cincinnati abolitionist newspaper the *Philanthropist* angrily retorted:

> Are the people of the free States prepared to see al[l] their political power and influence unjustly wrested from them? To see the protection of their interests, their rights their liberties, taken out of their own hands, and given to those who have never exhibited any particular affection for them? Are they ready to be thrown into the balance as a mere make-weight, an 'equipoise,' to the rogues and renegades of Texas?

If the United States annexed Texas, the *Philanthropist* warned, the South would soon "have concentrated the *whole political power* of the Union in its own hands."[34]

Seeking to rouse antislavery voters, abolitionists quickly followed these forebodings to their logical conclusion that the additional southern representation gained from Texas would enable slaveholders to further stifle northern liberty. American Anti-Slavery Society Corresponding Secretary Elizur Wright, Jr. insisted that annexation would "give to slaveholders the power to carry any measure in the federal Congress, which they may think expedient for the stability of their 'domestic institutions.'" "What will hinder them," Wright continued, "when by the annexation of Texas they have secured a southern majority in the federal legislature, and bribed half the North into the bargain, from crushing the very life of liberty throughout the entire republic, in the Anaconda coils of our idolized Union?" Abolitionist state representative Thaddeus Stevens (W-PA) likewise raised the specter of increased southern power, reminding an audience of Pennsylvania abolitionists "that the slaves have their representatives in Congress [through the three-fifths clause], though deprived of the benefits of their legislation." Stevens challenged, "Why then shall we add slave territory till the Representatives of slaves shall govern us? Are the freemen of the North … to become the slave of slaves!"[35]

With this added political power, abolitionists warned, Southerners would be even more effective in their efforts to silence northern critics. In 1838, the American Anti-Slavery Society asserted that slaveholders knew they would need this added strength to counteract the anticipated growth of abolitionism. The South demanded Texas "to secure the control of the national government, even after abolitionism shall have gained entire possession of the north." Alluding to the invective of Governor McDuffie and to demands for an even more stringent gag rule, the *Emancipator* opined, "The annexation of Texas … will put a whip into the hands of the South which she is but too well prepared to use. She can then pass Mr. Calhoun's gag law, or hang as many northern citizens 'without benefit of clergy' as she thinks expedient." Raising these fears

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onto which slavery could expand; "Washington Country [Pa.] Anti-Slavery Meeting," from *Washington Reporter*, in *Christian Witness*, Sept. 6, 1837; *Friend of Man*, June 28, 1837.

[34] "Speech of Mr. Preston, of South Carolina, in Senate, Apr. 21, 1838—On the resolution for the annexation of Texas," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* (*CG Appendix*), 25th Congress, 2nd session, 555-558; Birney, EWJ, and Stanton, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 75; *Philanthropist*, Sept. 8, 1837.

[35] *Quarterly Antislavery Magazine* II, ed. EWJ, 345; Joshua Blanchard, letter of Sept. 18, 1837, in *Emancipator*, Sept. 28, 1837.

of slaveholders' tyrannical tendencies, abolitionists effectively cast the Texas annexation project as part of the Slave Power's plan to permanently cement its political ascendancy.[36]

To the abolitionists' delight, northern sentiment responded to their alarm. By 1838, the Rhode Island, Vermont, Ohio, and Massachusetts legislatures along with the lower houses of the New York and Maine legislatures had passed resolutions opposing annexation and demanded their congressmen vote against it. In the report accompanying the Massachusetts resolutions, state senator James Alvord characterized the annexation proposal as a "flagrant wrong," designed to extend slavery and "increase the relative power and weight of the Southern States." Southern Senators' aspersions against Vermont's Resolutions touched off acrimonious debates as Senator Benjamin Swift (W-VT) insisted his state would not be "driven from the right to express her opinions" and claimed that they reflected "the general feeling throughout the North."[37]

This northern outpouring of opposition helped stanch (at least temporarily) southern ambitions for an annexation treaty. Abolitionists' argument against the aggrandizing slaveholding power seemed to have worked. The North writ large had rejected annexation. The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society rejoiced that "the danger of the admission of Texas is, probably, past. Thanks to the abolitionists, the free states have been roused to the disgrace and ruin of becoming a partner in the crimes of that bloody and slave-trading republic." While thrilled with this success, many abolitionists remained vigilant. William Jay admonished that although "the formal attempt at annexation roused the fears of the North, … It is folly" to imagine that "the project of annexation is abandoned either by the South, … nor does it need the gift of prophecy to foresee that the first favourable opportunity of making war on Mexico, will be embraced by the Federal Government."[38]

The Anti-Slave Power Basis for Abolitionist Political Action

In 1838 and 1839, abolitionists further systematized their argument about slaveholders' alarming political power and new aggressive designs to promote slavery and stamp out abolitionism. As the Slave Power argument occupied an increasingly prominent place in abolitionists' discourse, many argued for closer attention to electoral politics. As abolitionists became more and more convinced that the Slave Power's national supremacy represented a fundamental obstacle to emancipation it seemed increasingly important that opposition to the Slave Power dictate abolitionist voting. Consequently, political abolitionists worked simultaneously to further elaborate and disseminate their analysis of proslavery influences in American politics, and also to explore political tactics that would help abolitionists combat this troubling Slave Power.

In 1839, abolitionist Judge William Jay's *View of the Action of the Federal Government in Behalf of Slavery* provided the most comprehensive analysis yet of slaveholders' national

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[36] Birney, EWJ, and Stanton, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 72-73; *Emancipator,* Jun. 22, 1837.

[37] Massachusetts General Court, "Joint Committee on the Annexation of Texas," *Report on the Annexation of Texas to the United States* (Boston, 1838), 32; Birney, EWJ, and Stanton, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 72; *CG*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 39-40, 107-109.

[38] Silbey, *Storm Over Texas*, 13-17; *CG*, 24th Congress, 2nd Session, 213, 214; *Emancipator,* Aug. 23, 1838; Wm Jay, *A View of the Action of the Federal Government in Behalf of Slavery* (1839; repr., Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), 158-159.

political power. Focusing especially on the "slave power in Congress," Jay demonstrated how Southerners controlled national politics through their disproportionate congressional representation, their united "anxiety to protect and perpetuate slavery," and their ability to intimidate northerners with threats of disunion or co-opt northern politicians either "acting from party views" and "seeking the spoils of victory" or acting "from their love of southern trade." Jay's examination of the "sources of the slaveholding influence" concluded with a pointed attack on the federal government's designs on Texas and restriction of abolitionists' mailings and congressional petitions.[39]

That same year, Senator Thomas Morris helped disseminate these ideas to a national audience by encapsulating the detailed analyses of abolitionists like Jay in the epithet "slave power." Reaching a broad northern readership, Morris's valedictory speech firmly ensconced the phrase in the national political lexicon. In his lame duck senate session, Morris boldly declared, "The slave interest has at this moment the whole power of the country in its hands." Although at times conflating the "the slave power of the South, and banking power of the North," Morris saw no reason for hope in the alleged democratic principles of his old party (nor in the Whig Party): "Both political parties ... courted them [abolitionists] in private and denounced them in public, and both have equally deceived them." Echoing abolitionist arguments, Morris implored Northerners to join him in contesting "the insatiable grasp of the slaveholding power as being used and felt in the free states."[40]

By the summer of 1839, abolitionist publications abounded with assaults on the Slave Power. This argument became the basis of political abolitionists' case for deeper involvement in electoral politics. After Morris helped popularize the phrase, abolitionists widely adopted "Slave Power" as the most prevalent, pithy name for the critique of southern political power that had been elaborated in by Jay's *View of the Action of the Federal Government* and broadcast in abolitionist publications and speeches for years prior. Many abolitionists now emphasized termination of Slave Power control over the federal government as the first, fundamental step towards eradicating American slavery. Abolitionists increasingly argued that they must cease hoping for meaningful action from Whigs and Democrats. Faced with a political system so deeply imbued with deference to slave owners' interests, abolitionists concluded they could only defeat the Slave Power through independent political action.

Like Jay, abolitionists across the North emphasized Congress as the linchpin in their Slave Power argument. Abolitionists had long recognized Congress as a locus of slaveholders' national power, because of the extra representation southern states received for three-fifths of slaves. Slavery maintained its power because it "is actually represented by TWENTY-FIVE MEMBERS of CONGRESS" and thereby "dictates to the nation." These extra representatives ensured that "the slave power in Congress" remained "the predominating and ascendant power." Using this added influence, Southerners invariably promoted the needs of slaveholders over "all *the other* interests of the country." Enough free state representatives consistently acquiesced, leaving "the liberties as well as the interests of northern freemen … at the mercy of a slave power, which always holds its own interest paramount to all others."[41]

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[39] Wm Jay, *View of the Action of the Federal Government*, quotes from 18-20, 117.
[40] *CG Appendix* , 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 167-175.
[41] AS, quoted from speech to the Vermont Legislature, in *Friend of Man*, Dec. 12, 1838; *Emancipator*, Oct. 8, 15, 1840; Quoted from Utica *Anti-Slavery Lecturer* in *Emancipator*, Dec. 12, 1839.

In the second half of the 1830s, abolitionist leaders thus began to insist that abolitionists could only conscientiously vote for candidates who would oppose the Slave Power in Congress. Already in the summer of 1836, the American Anti-Slavery Society responded to the gag, by recommending abolitionists "give your suffrages hereafter only to such men as you have reason to believe will not sacrifice your rights." If abolitionists could make it widely "understood that whatever may be their individual political sentiments, they will not vote for any candidate of any party who is ready to sell their rights to the Slaveholders," the parties would soon "take care to present" antislavery candidates.[42]

Abolitionists increasingly argued that right political action was both a practical strategic departure and a religious duty. Beriah Green, president of the reform-minded manual labor college the Oneida Institute, lamented that abolitionists had "treated politics too much as a smutty concern" and stressed their challenge of making politics "sacred." The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society similarly demanded, "Our moral convictions must follow us to the ballot-box." Gerrit Smith thus advocated that abolition societies adopt new constitutional clauses requiring members to withhold votes from candidates that did not support immediate abolition and rebuked "sham abolitionists" who would continue supporting proslavery candidates.[43]

By early 1837, the antislavery society in heavily abolitionized Middlesex County, Massachusetts insisted that members could never vote for a representative or state legislator that did not wholeheartedly defend the right of petition, as well as freedom of the press and the mails. Days later at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting, Stanton proposed strong resolutions against the gag and argued that the rule demonstrated the need for organized abolitionist political action. If abolitionists unequivocally demanded antislavery candidates they could coerce acceptable nominations from both parties in Massachusetts.[44]

As the battle over the gag rule involved abolitionist leaders ever more deeply in political action, they increasingly argued that slavery's political protection came from the national two-party system. Abolitionists began to disregard earlier political affiliations and evaluate candidates based on their record on slavery. For example, Whittier, a party operative for Massachusetts Whigs and before that National Republicans, increasingly perceived that, on the national level, northern Whigs were, like their Democratic counterparts, beholden to slaveholding co-partisans. Whittier warned that even his old Whig ally Representative Caleb Cushing might not be safe from abolitionist attacks if he did not couple his acclaimed defense of the right of petition with support also for the prayers of abolitionist petitions. Whittier already envisioned the abolitionists as a powerful independent bloc, asserting, "No party in the country is now so thoroughly organized, and so united as the abolitionists. … They move in a mass, and that too without concert, because all are governed under all circumstances, by the same principles of action. So long as they remain thus, they are invincible." However, the next few

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[42] "Address to the People of the United States, from the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society," printed in the *Liberator*, Jul. 9, 1836; Wm Jay to Samuel Webb (draft), Jan. 3, 1838, John Jay Collection.
[43] Beriah Green to GS, Nov. 29, 1838, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America), Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers); "Address of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Board of Managers to the Abolitionists of Massachusetts," in *Emancipator*, Aug. 23, 1838; GS to Amos A. Phelps, December 12, 1838, GS Papers, Letterbooks.
[44] *Liberator*, Feb. 11, 1837; "Fifth Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society," in Ibid.

years would demonstrate the hazards of expecting abolitionists to "move in a mass" without any institutionalized political organization.[45]

Putting antislavery above partisanship became a tactical necessity once abolitionists came to view the two-party system as integral to slaveholders' control of the national government. Initially abolitionists across the North advocated interrogation of candidates for state and national offices. Embracing a strategy previously employed by British abolitionists, American antislavery organizers first used questionnaires to ascertain candidates' views on a variety of antislavery measures and then publicized which, if any, candidates furnished acceptable answers. When no candidate met abolitionists' standards they advocated "scattering" their votes to write-in candidates: "Let every friend of the slave nominate his own candidate in all those places where the political parties refuse to put up worthy men. … Your 'scattered' testimony with be as bread cast upon the waters." In the many New England elections that required a majority, "scattering" abolitionists could demonstrate their influence by preventing an election in any district in which they could marshal even the narrowest balance of power.[46]

The questionnaire strategy transformed the relationship of abolitionists to the party system. By publicly proclaiming which candidates were worthy of abolitionist support, antislavery societies demanded abolitionists abandon former party ties. They could no longer be antislavery Whigs or antislavery Democrats. They would now vote their antislavery convictions. If abolitionists could make it widely "understood that whatever may be their individual political sentiments, they will not vote for any candidate of any party who is ready to sell their rights to the Slaveholders," then many abolitionists believed the parties would "take care to present" antislavery candidates. Too often though, candidates failed to respond, gave non-committal answers, or reneged on their promises once in office.[47]

Whittier and the abolitionists of Essex County, Massachusetts attempted the questionnaire strategy as early as 1834, with Whittier pushing his friend Cushing to pledge support for abolition in the District of Columbia. In 1838, Cushing's ambiguous responses to the Essex County Anti-Slavery Society convinced the group that abolitionists should vote against him. Cushing observed these proceedings silently and undetected in the back of the society's meeting. When Whittier arrived the next morning to implore him to take a bolder stance, Cushing, still in his nightclothes, hurriedly drafted a letter in support of abolition in the District of Columbia. He was then safely reelected with abolitionist backing.[48]

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[45] JGW to Abijah Wyman Thayer, January 10, 1836, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 185-187; JGW to Cushing, February 10, 1836, Ibid., 1: 188-189; On Cushing's speech, see Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 243-249; Whittier, perhaps more than any of his other peers, had long viewed politics as central to abolitionist tactics. Whittier, who edited several National Republican and Whig papers sporadically from 1829 through 1834, initially believed he might push the Whig party of Massachusetts towards a strong antislavery posture. Whittier's abolitionism, however, rankled local party leaders and cost him a state senate nomination, although he did later serve an unexceptional term in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Frederick Blue, "To Mitigate the Suffering of Our Countrymen: John Greenleaf Whittier, Abolitionist Poet," in *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 37-46; JGW to Rantoul, Mar. 13, 1837, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 226-227.

[46] *Emancipator*, Oct. 25, 1838; Wm Jay to Samuel Webb (draft), Jan. 3, 1838, John Jay Collection.

[47] On the "inherent flaws in the interrogation system," see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 14-17.

[48] JGW to an Unidentified Correspondent, November 8, 1838, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 312-313; JGW to Cushing, November 9, 1838, Ibid., 1: 313-314; JGW to Cushing, January 17, 1839, Ibid., 1: 317; Cushing and Whittier's exchanges in the buildup to this election are discussed in Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 13-14, and John M. Belohavek, *Broken Glass: Caleb Cushing & the Shattering of the Union* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State

Since Congress had long seemed one of the most important bastions of Slave Power influence, abolitionists especially sought to target elections for the House of Representatives. Antislavery publications disseminated model interrogatories to be posed to congressional candidates across the North. Although the 1838 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society declaimed against forming an abolitionist political party as "suicidal," the Society promulgated an official policy of encouraging all abolitionists "to vote, irrespective of party, for those only who will advocate the principles of universal liberty." The society especially urged that abolitionists interrogate their congressional candidates and publish their answers across their districts. A public document issued on behalf of the society by Wright, Birney, and Stanton reminded abolitionists they might control a balance of power "*in a large number of Congressional Districts*." The society advised abolitionists to create rolls of antislavery voters to demonstrate their influence and then conduct organized interrogations in their districts, focusing only on a few specific issues, especially abolition in the District of Columbia and federal territories, and opposition to the admission of Texas or any new slave states.[49]

Political abolitionists believed they could thus influence the complexion of the next Congress. "By an energetic discharge of our duty at this crisis," using the questioning strategy, abolitionists hoped to "send many able advocates of our cause to Congress, where above all places they are now most needed." If abolitionists could influence the northern parties to nominate only antislavery candidates, the next Congress might well "agitate slavery to its foundation." An *Emancipator* correspondent averred, "Congress is but a weathercock. It veers with the wind … let it blow strongly towards abolition." Alvan Stewart believed abolitionists could pressure the Whig party in many districts to nominate an "Abolition Congressman" selected by local abolitionists. Abolitionists might then support party candidates for state and local offices in exchange. By this method Stewart hoped abolitionists could elect as many as thirty congressmen. That abolitionist presence in Congress, Stewart believed, would pay dividends by making "abolition respectable in certain quarters," thus helping win perhaps 200,000 new converts. Stewart, always a bit visionary, hoped abolitionists might then "fling a hundred men into Congress." Though a bit more realistic, Elizur Wright likewise believed, "as soon as we have put in Congress men who do not care a straw for other questions in comparison with that of slavery, sufficient to hold the balance of power there," they could end the gag rule and bring on the real "*battle*" over slavery.[50]

By 1838, abolitionists in Massachusetts's fourth congressional district (Middlesex County) had constructed the nation's best organized vote scattering campaign. Neither incumbent Democrat William Parmenter nor his Whig challenger Nathan Brooks adequately answered the interrogatories posed by local abolitionists, so they decided to withhold support from both. This scattering strategy could be highly effective in closely contested elections where victory required an absolute majority—as in Massachusetts congressional elections (and most other antebellum New England contests). The American Anti-Slavery Society sent talented

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University Press, 2005), 99-101. In light of Cushing's later political career as a doughface Democrat, and Attorney General under President Pierce, Cushing's antislavery positions were likely motivated by electoral considerations.

[49]*Emancipator*, May. 31, Sept. 6, 1838; EWJ, Birney, and Stanton on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society Executive Committee, in *Emancipator*, Sept. 20, 1838.

[50]EWJ, Birney, and Stanton on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society Executive Committee, in *Emancipator*, Sept. 20, 1838; AS to Samuel Webb, Jun. 26, 1838, Alvan Stewart Papers (AS Papers), New York Historical Society (NYHS), New York City; *Emancipator*, Sept. 6, Oct. 25, 1838; AS, quoted, in Ibid., Aug. 15, 1839; EWJ, quoted in Ibid., Dec. 26, 1839.

political organizer Henry B. Stanton to canvass the district to prevent the election of any candidate. Over five months and three ballots, abolitionists prevented an election, scattering over seven hundred votes on the second runoff. Whittier congratulated Stanton, predicting that this obstruction would announce across Massachusetts that "none but a true friend of Human Rights can be permitted to take a seat in Congress" and "establish conclusively the fact, that there is power in our principles to break down the despotism of party." Abolitionists elsewhere attentively followed "this contest" as "one of surpassing interest, not to the electors of Middlesex merely, but to the free states at large." Unfortunately, at the fourth election, Democrats mustered an increased turnout and narrowly reelected Parmenter, with many who had previously scattered votes to abolitionists returning to old loyalties. Still, abolitionists demonstrated they could be politically formidable and that officeholders risked defeat if they disregarded mounting antislavery constituent pressure. As Bruce Laurie has argued, this impressive scattering campaign convinced many Massachusetts abolitionists that direct political action would be essential to the future of abolitionist tactics.[51]

Abolitionists in the West similarly recognized the importance of direct political action against the Slave Power, even though they could not exploit majoritarian electoral rules, which had made vote scattering attractive to Massachusetts abolitionists. Gamaliel Bailey, Birney's successor as editor of the Cincinnati *Philanthropist*, urged Ohio abolitionists to use their votes to reward abolitionism's friends and punish its enemies, recognizing that such pressure might force politicians to adopt stronger antislavery positions. Despite misgivings that many abolitionists were "fearful of their shadow," Bailey interrogated local candidates, believing that "politicians in this community *are* greatly concerned as to how we vote." In 1838, Cincinnati Whigs even admitted to Bailey that abolitionists' votes might well "control the fate of the elections."[52]

In 1838, with Senator Morris up for reelection, Bailey recommended that abolitionists vote for Democratic state legislators, even though candidates from both parties ignored abolitionist questionnaires. When Bailey publicized a story about Whig governor Joseph Vance extraditing abolitionist John Mahan to Kentucky to be tried for abetting a slave escape, even more Ohio abolitionists abandoned the Whigs. The Ohio Democracy swept into office with this newfound abolitionist backing. Ohio abolitionists had shown they "know how to *vote*" and "preached a sermon to the politicians that will not soon be forgotten." Although Ohio abolitionists had clearly manifested their electoral power, the Democratic legislators they helped elect disregarded their assistance and spurned Morris. These Democrats also bolstered the state's discriminatory Black Laws, ignored abolitionist petitions, and voted against Whig state senator Benjamin Wade's resolution supporting Congress's right to end slavery in the District of Columbia. Like Parmenter's final victory in Massachusetts, this betrayal at Columbus illustrated the potential shortcomings of non-partisan electoral strategies.[53]

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[51] JGW to H. B. Stanton, January 12, 1839 in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 316; *Emancipator*, Mar. 21, 1839; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 11, 1839; *Voice of Freedom* Jan. 26, 1839; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st through 105th Congresses* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1998), 124; This manifestation of abolitionist political power was especially convincing for Elizur Wright. Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 41-47.

[52] Gamaliel Bailey (GB) to Birney, October 14, 1837, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 1: 426-428; For a good example of Bailey advocating political action, and directly connecting it to eastern abolitionists' political tactics, see *Philanthropist*, Sept. 4, 1838; GB to Birney, October 28, 1838, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 1: 472-476; GB to Birney, Oct. 14, 1837, in Ibid.

[53] "Political Action in Belmont," *Philanthropist*, Nov. 6, 1838; GB to Birney, October 28, 1838, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 1: 472-476; Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State

The 1838 New York gubernatorial contest elicited the most widely publicized, controversial, and ultimately disappointing, abolitionist use of the questionnaire system. In 1838, New York State Anti-Slavery Society leaders William Jay and Gerrit Smith interrogated all four candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor: Democratic incumbents William Marcy and John Tracy and their Whig challengers William Seward and Luther Bradish. Focusing on issues directly under the purview of the state government, abolitionists asked the candidates whether they would support a state law guaranteeing jury trials for alleged fugitive slaves, repeal the "nine months law" allowing slaveholders to bring slaves into New York and keep them there as slaves for up to nine months, and eliminate the property qualification on black male suffrage. While the Democratic candidates answered all three queries unfavorably, the Whig candidates had to juggle the support of both antislavery and anti-abolitionist Whig constituents, the latter especially among Manhattan elites. Whig managers fretted about how to "give no just cause of offense either to abolitionists or to those who are hostile to them."[54]

Facing continued abolitionist pressure, Bradish finally answered Jay and Smith less than a month before the election. Two days later Bradish received a request that he go to Seward's home to confer. By then it was too late. Bradish answered all three queries so favorably that abolitionists claimed the letter would "diffuse joy through all the anti-slavery associations in the land." Bradish believed New York Whigs could ill afford to avoid the slavery issue, "daily increasing in importance," and some other leading Whigs agreed.[55]

Once Bradish answered, Seward felt compelled to respond, but Seward did not join in Bradish's support for equal suffrage. New York Whig leaders despaired over Bradish's more radical letter, as Jay and Smith advised abolitionists to vote only for Bradish and cast no gubernatorial vote. Smith implored abolitionists to "convince these [political] parties … that you are not hypocrites" by rejecting candidates who "like Governor Marcy and Mr. Seward, speak out for slavery." Seward's advisor Thurlow Weed feared abolitionism's electoral "influence may be *pervading*, and if so, must prove disastrous." Weed, like many Whigs, assumed political abolitionists sought to destroy the Whig Party and "build an Abolition party" on its "ruins." New York's conservative Whig senator, Nathaniel Tallmadge, warned Seward: "If you at all fellowship these deluded hypocrites, you throw the whole South into the arms of Mr. Van Buren." As abolitionists often insinuated, the desire to maintain southern Whig support clearly curbed New York Whigs' willingness to placate abolitionists.[56]

University Press, 1986), 28-29; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 18-19; *Philanthropist*, Oct. 2, 1838; *Emancipator*, Nov. 1, 1838; *Philanthropist*, Nov. 20, 1838; Ibid., "Election of Senator," Jan. 1, 1839; Ibid., Jan. 29, 1839.

[54] Wm Jay and GS to William H. Seward (WHS), Oct. 1, 1838, Papers of William H. Seward (WHS Papers), Microfilmed by Research Publications, Woodbridge CT, from the Holdings of the Rush Rhees Library, Department of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Rochester; Wm Jay and GS to Bradish, Oct. 1, 1838, Luther Bradish Papers, NYHS; John C. Spencer to Bradish, Oct. 8, 1838; James Watson Webb to Bradish, Oct. 10, 1838, Ibid.

[55] Thurlow Weed to WHS, Oct. 28, 1838, WHS Papers; WHS to Bradish, Oct. 27, 1838, Bradish Papers; Bradish to Wm Jay and GS, Oct. 13, 1838, in *Emancipator*, Oct. 25, 1838; LT to Bradish, Oct. 25, 1838, Bradish Papers; Bradish to WHS, Nov. 16, 1838, WHS papers; Theodore Spencer [from Rome] to WHS, Sept. 28, 1838, Ibid.

[56] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 17-18; *Emancipator*, Oct. 25, 1838, Nov. 1, 1838; GS, "Letter to the Abolitionists of Madison County," Nov. 8, 1838, from *Cazenovia Union Herald*, in *Friend of Man*, Nov. 14, 1838; "Vote for Bradish and Against Seward, Extract of a Letter from Henry B. Stanton," Oct. 26, 1838, in *Friend of Man*, Nov. 7, 1838; Thurlow Weed to WHS, Nov. 4, 1838, WHS Papers; Weed to Bradish, Oct. 28, 1838, Bradish Papers; James Watson Webb to Bradish, Nov. 1, [1838], Ibid.; *Friend of Man*, Nov. 29, 1838; Nathaniel P. Tallmadge to WHS, Nov. 25, 1838, WHS Papers.

Both Seward and Bradish won by about ten thousand votes, a victory margin just under three percent. To abolitionists' dismay, Seward narrowly outpolled Bradish. By the *Emancipator*'s accounting, Seward won 563 more New York City votes than Bradish, while Tracy outpaced Marcy there by about 250. From these results, the *Emancipator* concluded, "250 whigs voted for Tracy in preference to Bradish, preferring to give, by possibility the casting vote in the [state] senate to the opposite party, rather than vote for a man who is opposed to slavery!" A "*commercial* whig" ticket that replaced Bradish's name with Tracy's even circulated in New York City. To many abolitionists, this election proved "the impossibility of wrenching off the adherents of party on the *scattering system*."[57]

This "terrible Election" convinced Alvan Stewart and his closest allies that "we must form a 3d party or we shall be overwhelmed by the weight & connections of these parties." Stewart reached this conclusion earlier than most abolitionists, in part because he believed the Whigs had snubbed him in 1838. "They refused to nominate me to Congress," Stewart complained, "simply on the ground of my being an abolitionist—nothing else." Calling for independent nominations, Stewart observed, "Even full blooded abolitionists have been swept away in the torrent of old party predilections because we have no candidates up who could bind us together." Abolitionists could only "carry forward" their "Reformation … by forming a 3d party & breaking down one of the great parties." Stewart also interpreted the U.S. Constitution to permit federal emancipation under the Fifth Amendment's protection against deprivation of liberty without due process. His constitutional analysis eventually influenced many abolitionists, but most maintained that Congress could not legislate emancipation in the southern states.[58]

By early 1839, a small cadre of Upstate New York abolitionists, led by Stewart and former Erie Canal Commissioner turned abolitionist newspaperman Myron Holley, demanded a new political strategy. These two were soon joined by New York State Anti-Slavery Society President Gerrit Smith, who marveled at the "monstrous ... inconsistency of talking & writing & praying *against* slavery, at the same time, that we are voting *for* it!" While few agreed with Stewart and Holley's third party project, most shared their interest in combating the Slave Power through politics. Stewart, nonetheless, vainly hoped he could foist his third party agenda on the American Anti-Slavery Society leadership at a convention scheduled for July, 1839 in Albany.[59]

While Stewart failed to establish a third party, this Albany convention was something of a success for those who prioritized antislavery politics. At this well-attended national gathering, abolitionists resolved to focus on political action and withhold their votes from anti-abolitionist candidates. William Goodell's keynote address fulminated against the "encroachments of the Slaveholding Power," including the gag rule, the mails controversy, and the push to annex Texas. "The events of last five or six years," Goodell continued, "leave no room for doubt that the SLAVE POWER is now waging a deliberate and determined war against the liberties of the free States." Goodell thus demanded that abolitionists vote only for avowed opponents of slavery. This logical conclusion of their repeated assaults on slavery's control of national politics essentially inaugurated abolitionists' transition into partisan politics. The convention, after some controversy, advocated nominating "distinct anti-slavery candidates in case no tried and true

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[57] *Emancipator*, Nov. 15, 1838; EWJ, "The Human Rights Party," from *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, in *Friend of Man*, Dec. 11, 1839.

[58] AS to Samuel Webb, Nov. 22, 1838, AS Papers, NYHS; AS to Thurlow Weed, Dec. 17, 1838, WHS Papers; Blue, *No Taint of Compromise*, Ch. 1, esp. 24-27, 29-31; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 49-51.

[59] GS to Myron Holley, Jan. 17, 1839, Gerrit Smith Miscellaneous Manuscripts, NYHS; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 55-56.

friends of emancipation are offered by either of the political parties," but stopped short of supporting an abolitionist party by suggesting that such nominations be made locally.[60]

Few abolitionists were yet ready to second Stewart's argument "that a third party or an abolition party is the only real available mode to prosecute our great undertaking politically." As late as September 1839, Stewart worried about the lack of support from even Joshua Leavitt and William Goodell, editors of the *Emancipator* and *Friend of Man* (and soon to be two of the most dedicated third-party proponents). Applying the Slave Power argument to all Democratic and Whig politicians, Stewart predicted that any "milk and water abolitionist" nominated by the major parties would "surrender his abolition as a debt of gratitude to the party for his election." By the next month, Stewart and Holley had convinced Leavitt, whose *Emancipator* became the most important mouthpiece for abolitionist third-party politics. Goodell soon followed. Earlier in 1839, Elizur Wright and Reverend Charles Torrey split Massachusetts abolitionism over the question of antislavery political action and called for creation of a "HUMAN RIGHTS PARTY," unless the Whigs nominated a decidedly antislavery presidential ticket.[61]

Making the Case for an Abolitionist Third Party

The approach of the 1840 presidential election powerfully accelerated simmering divisions over the direction of abolitionist activism. The famous and complicated rift between Garrison and political abolitionists deepened in 1839 and 1840, and a pitched debate over increasingly vocal demands for an abolitionist third party erupted among those who espoused abolitionist political action. With both parties appearing to be dominated by the Slave Power, especially after they nominated proslavery presidential tickets, a small but committed group of abolitionists worked vigorously to erect an independent abolitionist political party that could challenge the Slave Power-controlled major parties.

Many historians have explored the divisiveness of efforts to politicize the abolitionist movement. William Lloyd Garrison's opposition to organized political action has been well-chronicled in sympathetic and unsympathetic accounts. By the mid-1830s, Garrison was the nation's best known abolitionist. Garrison championed increasingly radical views about politics in addition to strident anticlericalism and controversial support for women's rights. By the decade's end, Garrison espoused a non-resistant philosophy that condemned all human government as rooted in the implicit threat of violence. Garrison, and many of his followers, thus refused to vote to avoid implicating themselves in the sin of coercive government.

Tensions escalated as many Massachusetts abolitionists, most notably Elizur Wright, demanded concrete political action and condemned Garrison's distracting willingness to foment dissension over the "woman question." In the midst of the 1838-39 Middlesex scattering campaign, Wright and Stanton made an abortive attempt to commit the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to political action and then founded the Massachusetts Abolition Society, and Wright began editing its new organ, the *Massachusetts Abolitionist*. By 1839, advocates of

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[60] *Emancipator* Aug. 15, 1839; JGW to Moses Cartland, Aug. 6, 1839, in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Aug. 15, 1839; For a brief description of this convention see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 51-54.

[61] AS to Edwin Clark[e], Sept. 14, 1839, Clark(e) Family Miscellaneous Manuscripts, NYHS; *Emancipator* Oct. 10, 1839; Goodell openly supported a third party strategy by the end of the year. See for example, *Friend of Man*, Dec. 4, 1839; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 45-48; EWJ, "The Human Rights Party," from *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, in *Friend of Man*, Dec. 11, 1839.

political action enjoined all abolitionists to employ the franchise to aid the slave. Garrisonians viewed this as a direct assault on their non-resistant doctrines.

Many historians emphasize the "women question" (in part because of its important implications for the emergence of the women's rights movement) or evangelical abolitionists' relation to national church organizations in discussing the fissures in American abolitionism. Disputes over the role of political tactics, especially in the crucible of the 1840 presidential campaign, however, were equally central to the divide. The 1839 American Anti-Slavery Society anniversary meeting exported the Massachusetts divisions to the national society, with numerous attendees supporting a controversial resolution that cast antislavery political action as a moral duty. The following year the national society split, this time ostensibly over the issue of women's inclusion as officers of the society, as Garrisonians assembled a larger delegation than their evangelical and politically minded opponents and forced the issue. Still, the schism can only be understood with similar attention to politics. The division in Massachusetts that presaged the national separation revolved around the abolitionists' quarrel over political strategy. When the "woman question" ultimately divided the national society, friction between political and anti-political abolitionists provided a crucial subtext, as evidenced by the presence of several women's rights advocates in the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society founded by bolters from the old society's 1840 convention. The new organization's leaders all either supported, or at least acquiesced in, political action.[62]

For many abolitionists, political action still meant using the questionnaire system to identify which candidates should receive abolition votes, but by late 1839 independent nominations had been tried in several northern locales, with some limited success. That year, abolitionists in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and several New York counties nominated candidates, vowing "to disregard political parties" and stand "united to contend" against "THIS slave power." New Hampshire abolitionists fielded a state ticket combining the Whig gubernatorial nominee and one Whig congressional candidate (New Hampshire elected congressmen at-large) who answered abolitionist interrogatories favorably with independent nominees for other offices (including other congressional seats). That ticket won an impressive 1800 votes, despite opposition from the state's leading antislavery journalist, Garrison ally Nathaniel Rogers.[63]

The more general failure of the interrogatory system, as historians have widely noted, contributed to rising interest among abolitionist leaders in independent nominations, and ultimately an abolitionist political party. But that new strategy stemmed as much from abolitionists' evolving analysis of the Slave Power as from specific disappointments with interrogation. By the eve of the 1840 presidential election, the most compelling antislavery political appeal was the Slave Power argument. Increasingly, political abolitionists explained the continued dominance of the Slave Power through their analysis of the Second Party System. As cross-sectional alliances, both the Whig and Democratic Parties incentivized northern politicians to compromise with slaveholders to secure national power. Antislavery Whigs as well as well as

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[62] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 24-47, 74-76, explains the movement's divisions over political action, and Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 32-48, closely examines the conflict in Massachusetts, suggesting that Garrison maintained some flexibility, but was adamant against organized partisan political action. For a pro-Garrisonian view, see Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), Ch. 3 on the importance of the woman question, and Ch. 5 on divisions over political action.

[63] AS to Edwin Clarke, Oct. 21, 1839, Clark(e) Family Miscellaneous Manuscripts; *Friend of Man*, Nov. 20, 1839, Dec. 25, 1839; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 58; "Letter to the Voters of Alleghany County," Oct. 2, 1839, in *Emancipator*, Oct. 17, 1839; *Emancipator*, Feb. 28, 1839; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 31, 1839.

doughface Democrats perpetuated a system in which those controlling national policy were invariably slaveholders or their most pliant apologists. To effectively combat the Slave Power abolitionists would have to erect their own organization. The interrogatory tactic had become necessary when abolitionists insisted on voting for antislavery candidates; a third party became necessary when abolitionists concluded that even committed antislavery politicians would inevitably be beholden to the Slave Power as long as they remained Whigs or Democrats.

Abolitionists, as well as many northern Whigs, had long criticized Democrats' and especially the Van Buren administration's friendliness to southern interests. Van Buren's opposition to abolition in the District of Columbia, vigorous prosecution of the Second Seminole War in the slaveholding Florida territory, and pro-southern distribution of patronage all attested to the doughfaced character of the Democratic Party in the North. Van Buren's handling of the *Amistad* case especially infuriated abolitionists. When the enslaved Africans on board the *Amistad* rebelled against their Cuban captors and arrived in the Long Island Sound, the Van Buren administration initially sought to remand the Africans to Spanish authorities. When the case instead went to federal court, abolitionists aided and defended the accused Africans while the Van Buren administration actively worked to promote a decision that would return them to Cuba. Even worse, President Van Buren, seeking to quiet antislavery agitation, covertly deployed the *U.S.S. Grampus* to Connecticut. The naval ship waited in port in case the captives lost in court to spirit them back to Cuba before abolitionists could appeal, a fact that came to light after the judge surprisingly ruled in the Africans' favor.[64]

Abolitionists assailed Van Buren's congressional followers almost as bitterly. Antislavery presses flayed the fifty-nine northern Democratic Representatives who voted for the original House gag on antislavery petitions and especially Charles Atherton, "THE WHITE SLAVE," the New Hampshire author of the gag resolution passed for the 1838-39 congressional session, and yet twenty-seven northern Democrats still voted for a more stringent permanent gag in 1840. For good reason, abolitionists had long smeared the Democratic Party as proslavery.[65]

By the late 1830s, abolitionists extended their Slave Power argument to also include the Whig Party. Both major parties, the *Emancipator* insisted, were "alike firm and cordial in their devotion to slavery." No matter which party was in power, the paper argued, "slavery grows more and more dominant, and the free States more and more subservient." Alvan Stewart similarly characterized both the Whigs and the Democrats as "pro-Slavery parties who hate us more than they do each other." Slaveholders controlled "the people of these *free* northern states, through the means of the political parties." Politicians deceived northern voters into believing "that his party, if successful, will govern the nation according to certain political principles," but in reality both parties, "as well as the nation," would always be "governed by … the principles by which slavery may be made the most durable."[66]

With Van Buren and the Democrats so obviously advocating proslavery policies, political abolitionists strove to expose the Whig Party's less obvious, and thus potentially more

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[64] For a good, brief account of the *Amistad* rebellion and trials, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 205-220. For more detail see Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[65] Richards, *The Slave Power*, 132-33, 137-38; Good examples of invective directed at Atherton can be found in *Charter Oak*, Dec. 1838 and *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 20, 27, 1838.

[66] *Emancipator*, Jul. 18, 1839; AS to Edwin Clark[e], Sept. 14, 1839, Clark(e) Family Miscellaneous Manuscripts; "Slaveocracy," from *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, in *Emancipator*, Apr. 25, 1839.

dangerous, support of the Slave Power. Many abolitionists gradually recognized the "utter delusion" and "common mistake into which many Whig Abolitionists have fallen," of believing "the Whig party are almost an abolition party." As Joshua Leavitt explained, "So long as the men in office are 'nominated and elected' members on the ground of adhesion to one party or the other, they will deem their honor virtually pledged to regard the success of their party," and not abolitionism, "as the first object." Similarly Gerrit Smith condemned the Whigs as "guilty of … emulating" the Democratic Party "in professions of submission to slavery." If the Whigs would just nominate a non-slaveholder for president on a clear antislavery platform, Smith predicted the nation would divide between "THE LIBERTY PARTY and the SLAVERY PARTY" and antislavery would triumph. Alvan Stewart similarly expressed optimism that "this nation will, in a short time, be divided into two great parties which will swallow all others up, to wit: an anti-slavery one on one side, and a pro-slavery one on the other."[67]

Political abolitionists dismissed northern Whigs' antislavery stances as inconsequential, since they remained bound to a party controlled by the Slave Power. Political abolitionists even attacked the smattering of abolitionist Whig officeholders, men like Slade and former Genesee County (New York) Anti-Slavery Society secretary Congressman Seth Gates, as "yielding" for their willingness to support their party's proslavery leadership. "It is to encourage the patience of the abolitionists under its general pro-slavery character," abolitionists charged, "that a political party occasionally affects a slight regard for the slave." By 1840, leading abolitionists asserted, "*Whigs* though professing to be the friends of the freedom of discussion, the right of petition, [and] the cause of universal liberty" would never "jeopardy the peculiarities of their party when they and abolition come on collision." Indeed Whigs in antislavery Vermont feared "political abolitionism" as "the darkest cloud in our political horizon."[68]

For political abolitionists, Henry Clay symbolized Whigs' unreliability on antislavery. Into 1839, Senator Clay was the frontrunner for the party's 1840 presidential nomination. In his younger days, Clay had developed an antislavery reputation, advocating gradual emancipation for Kentucky in 1799, and espousing in the Senate a vague hope for slavery's gradual end as late as 1832. As he prepared for another possible presidential run, Clay needed to convince southern voters of his sectional loyalty, notwithstanding his ownership of dozens of slaves. On February 7, 1839, Clay delivered a lengthy Senate speech opposing abolition in the District of Columbia and vilifying "ultra abolitionists." Clay proudly attested that neither of "the two great parties in this country has any designs or aims at abolition." Clay's speech demonstrated to abolitionists "that both parties are at this time making it the leading object of their movements to identify themselves with slavery, and gain power by pledges in its favor." John Greenleaf Whittier finally abandoned his faint hopes for Clay, resignedly acknowledging "the homage which slavery requires of all candidates for office in our *free* country." Clay's speech, the *Emancipator* hoped, "opened the eyes of thousands of [Whig] abolitionists" and "thus weaned them from their long cherished man-worship" of Clay. Abolitionists recalled that Clay was "once the eloquent, devoted advocate of emancipation," but his recent "abject prostration before the slaveholding power, is a foul blot, on his fame." The *Philanthropist* also observed a shift among many

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[67] Edwin Clarke to Thomas Meacham, Oct. 26, 1839, Clark(e) Family Miscellaneous Manuscripts; *Emancipator*, Dec. 26, 1839; "Letter from Gerrit Smith to Hon. Seth M. Gates," Oct. 22, 1839, in *Friend of Man*, Oct. 30, 1839; AS, "Mr. Stewart's Remarks Before the Vermont Legislative Committee (Concluded)," in *Friend of Man*, Dec. 19, 1838.

[68] *Emancipator*, Aug. 13, 1840; LT to Joshua Giddings (JG), Feb. 17, 1840, LT Papers; D. Pierce to Erastus Fairbanks, May 20, 1839, Fairbanks Papers, Vermont Historical Society, Barre.

formerly antislavery Whig presses, who, following Clay's lead, began to mirror "the Van Buren press" in "abuse of abolitionists."[69]

As the presidential contest approached, abolitionists insisted that no northern Whigs, no matter how antislavery they seemed, could receive abolitionist backing if they endorsed Clay. Because Whigs and Democrats alike relied on the support of slaveholders, political abolitionists predicted both parties would select candidates "incurably obnoxious to the friends of the slave." The *Philanthropist* advised that if Van Buren faced Clay in the 1840 presidential election, abolitionists must "sacrifice all their party-predilections, on the holy altar of freedom." Many antislavery Whig partisans indeed rejected Clay after his egregious speech. Whig officeholders representing antislavery districts, like avowed abolitionists William Slade and Seth Gates, worried that a Clay nomination would cause third-party abolitionism to spread "like wild fire."[70]

The growing politicization of the movement and its increasing attention to the Second Party System's corruption by the Slave Power gave third-party advocates reason for optimism. Myron Holley was even elected to chair an October 1839 American Anti-Slavery Society convention in Cleveland with over four hundred delegates, a clear vote of confidence for abolitionist politics. Holley helped push the convention to support resolutions committing abolitionists to political action, but the delegates tabled his resolution in favor of nominating an abolitionist presidential ticket. Still, Henry B. Stanton reported that while "the sentiment was quite general against making a nomination under the present circumstances … it was nearly as general in favor of making a nomination at some future time." Holley hoped that future time could be the next month, when he spearheaded a convention in Warsaw, in the county adjacent to his Rochester home. Over five hundred abolitionists met there to promote independent nominations. Seemingly succeeding where he failed in Cleveland, Holley persuaded the enthusiastic convention to nominate James Birney for President and Pennsylvanian Francis LeMoyne for Vice President. LeMoyne summarily declined, fearing "a majority of the Abolitionists" would oppose a third party, and that the movement was not prepared, or influential enough, to make this strategy viable. Birney, too, initially refused the Warsaw nomination, believing it would "distract and divide" abolitionists, who were not yet sufficiently organized to commit the "great Anti-Slavery enterprise" to "independent nominations." Soon after, Birney had second thoughts, and suggested to Holley that he would be "willing to *withdraw*" his letter and leave the convention's offer unanswered, "letting it remain so to await future action."[71]

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[69] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 586; "Speech of Hon. Henry Clay, of Kentucky, in the Senate, February 7, 1839, *CG Appendix*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 354-358; *Philanthropist*, Apr. 30, 1839; Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99-100, argues that Clay's anti-abolitionist speech aimed at securing southern support for his nomination, and also at influencing the Virginia legislature to elect Clay ally William C. Rives to the United States Senate as a proxy endorsement of Clay. Clay failed to secure a resolution to the deadlock in the Virginia legislature but did ensure united southern Whig support for his candidacy; *Emancipator*, Feb. 21, 1839, Mar. 7, 1839; Letter from JGW, Feb. 26, 1839, in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 7, 1839.

[70] "Slaveocracy," from *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, in *Emancipator*, Apr. 25, 1839; *Philanthropist*, Apr. 30, 1839; Letter from Albert L. Post, Editor of the Montrose *Spectator*, May 28, 1839, in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jun. 6, 1839; William Slade to JG, Jul. 25, 1839, Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform; Gates to Seward, Nov. 23, 1839, WHS Papers; E.H. Prentiss to Erastus Fairbanks, May 23, 1839, Fairbanks Papers.

[71] Holley to Birney, Nov. 16, 1839, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Myron Holley, NYHS; Emancipator, Nov. 7, 1839; *Friend of Man*, Nov. 13, 1839; Lemoyne to Birney, Dec. 10, 1839, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 511-514; Birney to Myron Holley, Joshua H. Darling, and Josiah Andrews, Dec. 17, 1839, in Ibid., 514-516; Birney to Holley, Dec. 26, 1839, in Ibid., 516-517; On the Warsaw convention, see also Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 61-62.

Shortly after the Warsaw convention, the Whig party held its presidential nominating convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania from December 4-6, 1839. When General William Henry Harrison of North Bend, Ohio defeated Clay for the nomination, abolitionists crowed that their influence had destroyed Clay's presidential hopes. The *Emancipator* was glad to see Clay "laid upon the shelf," and attributed this to "the Anti-Slavery feeling of the North … in connection with" Clay's "own ostentatious and infamous pro-slavery demonstration in Congress." Most abolitionists, however, recognized that the southern born anti-abolitionist Harrison promised little more than Clay.[72]

The nomination of fierce states' rights advocate and Virginia slaveholder John Tyler as Harrison's running mate strengthened abolitionists' arguments about the immorality of the Whig Party. The "unanimity of the Convention in nominating for the second office a more bigoted devotee of Colonization and slavery than even Henry" showed that the Whig Party remained "anxious as ever to testify its unshaken allegiance to the SLAVE POWER." Throughout the 1840 presidential campaign, abolitionists became ever more assertive that both political parties were fundamentally proslavery, the Whigs no less than the Democrats, since both aimed to elevate slaveholders and their allies to the nation's highest offices. As vice president, Tyler would ensure slaveholding control of the Senate. Southerners, abolitionists argued, had "been careful for twenty-five years to secure the casting vote in the Senate," and for that reason the Harrison-Tyler "ticket [was] so acceptable to the Slave Power."[73]

Slaveholding Congressional Whigs further antagonized abolitionists by proposing, and passing, a new, permanent gag rule. To defend his party's commitment to slavery, Maryland Whig William Cost Johnson proposed the most stringent gag to date: a permanent standing rule rejecting petitions outright, instead of the session rules automatically tabling them in past Congresses. After securing the floor, Johnson took the opportunity also to endorse William Henry Harrison and contemptuously advised his northern co-partisans to "tell their women petitioners to attend to knitting their own hose and darning their stockings, rather than come there and unsex themselves, be laid on the table, and sent to a committee to be reported on." Abolitionists condemned Johnson's "tyrant resolution," which the House approved by a 114-108 vote, and derided the one northern Whig and eleven northern Democrats who voted for it as "*white slaves*." To abolitionists' further chagrin, northern Whig congressmen joined in advocating Harrison from the House floor. Even William Slade capped an unprecedented two-day, five-and-a-half hour speech demanding immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia with an exhortation that Whig abolitionists support southern sympathizer Harrison for President, because abolitionism was still in its "infancy," unready "to be rocked in the whirlwind of a presidential election."[74]

The prospect of having to choose between two clearly proslavery parties provided the primary motivation for increasing numbers of abolitionists to advocate a national abolitionist third party. By late 1839, political abolitionists assailed both parties' shared "determination … never to resist the shameful encroachments of the slave power." In response, they argued, abolitionists must "range ourselves in a separate organization, based on a sacred regard for the

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[72] LT to Joseph Sturge, Dec. 14, 1839, LT Papers; *Emancipator*, Dec. 12, 1839.

[73] *Emancipator*, Dec. 12, 1839, Mar. 12, 1840. See also *Friend of Man*, Dec. 18, 1839.

[74] *CG*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 150-151; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 6, 1840; *CG Appendix*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 906-907; William Slade to William (son) Slade, Jan. 19, 1840, Jan. 20, 1840, Slade Family Papers, Henry Sheldon Museum, Stewart-Swift Research Center, Middlebury, VT, Volume 1: William Slade Letters (Domestic Correspondence Scrapbook).

inalienable rights of man." As the presidential election approached, political abolitionists stridently insisted that "the slave power controls the national government" and that only "an administration … publicly pledged to its overthrow" could receive abolitionists' support. The fact that both parties always nominated slaveholders and their sympathizers for the nation's highest offices confirmed that neither would ever advance antislavery policy. Accurately assessing the importance of presidential ambitions in American politics, political abolitionists grasped that "the President is the very incarnation of the party that supports him" and his "politics are, for the time being, the politics of the nation" and "control, to a great extent, the politics of the states, the counties, the cities, and the towns, insomuch that the State and local elections are made to turn chiefly on the presidential question." Since "the SLAVE POWER … controls … the presidency," it "controls likewise THE NATION." Slaveholders allowed only "the most subservient" northern politicians to rise in national politics. Both parties' "very existence," the *Pennsylvania Freeman* explained, rested "on their subserviency to the slave power," and neither would "dare do the behests of abolition."[75]

Abolitionists like Myron Holley and Gerrit Smith thus continued to push for third-party nominations despite the failure of the Warsaw Convention. In late January, 1840, Holley and Smith brought six to eight hundred abolitionists, mostly from Western New York, together at Arcade, not far from Warsaw, to endorse a call for an April 1 antislavery convention at Albany to reconsider nominating an abolitionist presidential ticket. The Arcade convention overwhelmingly rejected Harrison and Van Buren and called for "an independent political party." Since both parties would "be inevitably the creatures and tools of the SLAVE POWER," abolitionists' only recourse was to make their own nominations.[76]

The April 1, 1840 Albany Convention finally nominated a national abolitionist presidential ticket, but the weak support for this decision cast doubt on the convention's legitimacy. Third-party opponents derided it as the "April Fool convention." Only 121 men participated, over one hundred of them New Yorkers, and many abstained on the vote that authorized independent nominations by a tally of only 44 to 33. Still third-party advocates celebrated this allegedly national convention's endorsement of independent nominations. Once this point had been decided, the Convention nominated Birney and Pennsylvania abolitionist Thomas Earle with what an observer called "great unanimity." Scattered meetings across the North, but especially in upstate New York, emphatically endorsed the decision. This time Birney proudly accepted the nomination, offering his name "as a means of concentrating the votes of abolitionists" to aid in "the rescue of the country from the domination of the slave power." Earle accepted, but less enthusiastically, and, to the dismay of many who hoped to wean antislavery Whigs from their party, Earle expressed support for Van Buren's political principles on issues unrelated to slavery.[77]

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[75] "Address to the Freemen of Oswego County," in *Emancipator*, Nov. 14, 1839, "Ascendancy of the Slave Power," *Friend of Man*, Sept. 2, 1840; AS, quoted in *Emancipator*, Apr. 25, 1839; *Emancipator*, Sept. 3, 1840; *Emancipator*, Aug. 13, 1840; *Pennsylvania Freeman* Oct. 1, 1840.

[76] GS to Goodell, Feb. 8, 1840, in *Friend of Man*, Feb. 19, 1840; "A Second National Convention," from the Rochester, *American Citizen*, in *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Feb. 20, 1840; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 66-67; *Friend of Man*, Mar. 4, 1840.

[77] *Friend of Man*, Apr. 8, 1840; For an example of meetings endorsing the nominations, see *Friend of Man*, May 20, 1840; Birney to Holley, JL, EWJ, May 11, 1840, and Thomas Earle to Myron Holley, JL, EWJ, May 30, 1840, in *Friend of Man*, Jul. 8, 1840; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 69-72; EWJ, *Myron Holley: And What he did for Liberty and True Religion* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1882), 258-268.

To meet objections to the authority of the New York-dominated Albany Convention to make national nominations, the convention appointed a Central Corresponding Committee, which held a convention in New York City in May to ratify the Albany nominations while many abolitionists were in Manhattan for the (divisive) anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Attended by delegates from ten of the thirteen free states, this nominating convention listened to Birney's acceptance letter and Earle's acceptance in person, and then unanimously endorsed the nominations. For its leaders, this meeting sanctioned the nominations and began the process of molding inchoate political abolitionist forces into a party. Third-party abolitionists followed with conventions to nominate state and local tickets and established newspapers to promote their candidates. That summer, Massachusetts, Vermont, Illinois, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, and Ohio abolitionists held conventions to choose presidential electors, and other states followed shortly before the election. Still, abolitionists faced an uphill battle in the 1840 contest, in which partisan tempers ran so famously high.[78]

Through 1840, though, many voting abolitionists still clung to the interrogatory system as a way to avoid moral responsibility for supporting a proslavery nominee. Lewis Tappan feared that if abolitionists formed their own party they would lose their moral stature, their influence with members of the major parties, and their focus on bringing slaveholders to repent. Also, they risked broadcasting their numerical weakness, a criticism Tappan shared with non-voting Garrisonians. Though he voted for Birney, Tappan refused to publicly support the Liberty Party until 1843. In 1840 he still hoped to avoid an abolitionist political party, vainly advocating that abolitionists continue interrogating candidates and making local nominations if no major-party candidate was acceptable. However, most abolitionists who initially opposed a third-party strategy believed wholeheartedly in some sort of political solution to the slavery problem. As they seemed to understand the unlikelihood of reorienting either major party toward antislavery, it would only be a matter of time before most came to support the abolitionist political party.[79]

Still others who accepted the wisdom of independent political action feared the 1840 election might be an inopportune time to launch a new party. The leading black abolitionist newspaper, the New York *Colored American*, at first expressed skepticism about "whether an independent general ticket will meet the circumstances now." John Greenleaf Whittier penned a letter for the April 1840 Albany Convention, declaring it inexpedient to nominate, because most abolitionists were not yet ready. Whittier was "persuaded that the time is not far distant when *voting* abolitionists" would "bury … the shackles of party" and "see the necessity of opposing a political combination in behalf of slavery, with a similar one in behalf of freedom. But that time," Whittier argued, "is not now." Whittier feared the political disaster of the 1838 New York gubernatorial election would be replicated across the free states if abolitionists fielded an independent ticket in 1840. Whittier worried that "*nine tenths of the voting abolitionists* … will be opposed to a *nomination*" and warned that Whigs would smear any abolitionist nomination "as a Van Buren trick." Whittier had hoped the Albany Convention would instead "settle" the legitimacy of antislavery political action *and* independent nominations but only advise abolitionists to oppose Harrison and Van Buren and wait for a future time to actually make

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[78] *Friend of Man*, Jun. 3, 17, 1840; *Philanthropist*, Jun. 16, 1840; Austin Willey, *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation* (Portland, Me.: Brown, Thurston, and Hoytt, Fogg & Donham, 1886), 134.

[79] *Emancipator*, Nov. 14, 21, 1839; See also LT to Birney, Dec. 6, 1839 in *Emancipator*, Dec. 12, 1839 and LT to Francis Gillette, P. Canfield, S.J. Cowles, Com. of Arrangements for a Special Meeting of the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, Dec. 5, 1839, LT Papers; LT to GS, Mar. 14, 1841, GS Papers; LT to Samuel D. Hastings, LT Papers.

national nominations. Henry B. Stanton shared Whittier's apprehensions, believing "at least 19/20ths of the Abolitionists" in Massachusetts "are decidedly hostile to an independent national nomination this year."[80]

Elsewhere, many leading political abolitionists continued supporting the Whigs, or simply abstained. Even Jay seemed to support a policy of voting for the lesser of evils. Vermont's Secretary of State and leading abolitionist newspaper editor Chauncey L. Knapp, who had long hoped to abolitionize the Whig Party and enjoyed some success in his home state, refused to campaign for Harrison but also would not endorse Birney. Knapp instead preferred to sit the presidential election out, an example many seemingly followed as Vermonters cast over five thousand more votes for governor than for president (a difference of almost 10 percent).[81]

In Ohio too, leading political abolitionists, including Birney's former partner Gamaliel Bailey, initially opposed the independent nominations. Although the 1840 presidential contest transformed the familiar debate over scattering versus concentrating votes, Bailey still went "tooth and nail against" an abolitionist third party through 1839 and into 1840, "mortified that the world should see how divided we are." Accepting the strength of Whig Party loyalty among Ohio abolitionists, Bailey initially supported Harrison and then later advocated "a position of neutrality." Bailey finally endorsed Birney in the summer of 1840, and in September, he barely persuaded a convention of Southern Ohio abolitionists to do the same. Several of Bailey's Ohio allies continued to support Harrison, though. Key Ohio figures in the future growth of third-party abolitionism such as Salmon Chase, Samuel Lewis, and Edward Wade adhered to the Harrison ticket. Chase, already during the summer of the campaign felt disgusted with both parties, despite his election to the Cincinnati City Council "last spring as a Harrison man." Chase foreshadowed his future involvement with the Liberty Party, though, when he admitted that he was "not sorry" to see the third party's emergence, even if he considered it "premature."[82]

The small but growing group of third-party advocates dismissed this circumspection as tactically impractical. Once the Albany Convention nominated its ticket, Stanton and Whittier avidly supported it, but continued to fret that most abolitionists would "vote with their pro-slavery parties." Charles B. Ray, editor of the *Colored American*, more enthusiastically endorsed the new party that summer. Because "the two great political parties of the country are wedded to slavery," third-party advocates maintained, "we must have independent political action or none." Abolitionists must not seek "neutrality" or stay at home, and certainly must not vote "for the slaves of slaveholders, to wit, Van Buren and Harrison." Abolitionists also reminded voters that voting for Van Buren or Harrison also meant supporting either incumbent Vice President Richard Johnson of Kentucky or Tyler, giving a slaveholder the tie-breaking vote in the U. S. Senate. Even if Whig attempts to cast Harrison as the less proslavery presidential

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[80]New York *Colored American*, Apr. 18, 1840; JGW to the Anti-Slavery Convention at Albany, Mar. 22, 1840, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1:398-399; JGW to EWJ, Mar. 25, 1840, in Ibid., 1:400-401; Stanton to Birney, Mar. 21, 1840, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 541-543.

[81] Wm Jay to GS (draft), Jul. 25, 1840, John Jay Collection; Andrew S. Barker, "Chauncey Langdon Knapp and Political Abolitionism in Vermont, 1833-1841," *New England Quarterly* 73 (Sept. 2000), 434-462, 457-459.

[82]GB to Birney, Mar. 3. 1840, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 535-538; GB to Birney, Nov. 28, 1839, in Ibid., 508-510; GB to Birney, Apr. 18, 1840, in Ibid., 556-558; *Emancipator*, Jul. 2, Aug. 13, 1840; *Philanthropist*, Sept. 8, 1840; Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union*, 33-36, Edward Wade to GB, July 9, 1840, in *Philanthropist*, Oct. 13, 1840; SPC to Charles Cleveland, Aug. 29, 1840, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), 2:69-71.

candidate might contain a kernel of truth, third-party advocates could never support Tyler, who could only "be elected by the votes of the abolitionists."[83]

Much in the way many abolitionists' feelings of shared responsibility for slavery spurred their original commitment to immediatist abolitionism, many abolitionists came to view antislavery voting as a high moral duty. To bear honest testimony against slavery meant voting for abolitionist candidates untainted by association with policymakers that supported Slave Power control of the national government. For "too long," antislavery voters had "aided the slave power of the country by enrolling … in these parties." If abolitionists continued their old party allegiances, they would "become as great criminals as the slaveholders, by voting for candidates who in base subserviency to slaveholders, have turned humanity out of doors." Alvan Stewart chided abolitionists, "To vote for either of the pro-slavery candidates, is to take the deep guilt of slavery on your souls," and the P*ennsylvania Freeman* warned, "You may cast your ballot in a single moment, but the consequences of your act will follow you as long as you live." Charles B. Ray thus justified "Political action" as "a necessary fruit of our abolition principles … and an *independent political abolition party*" as "a necessary fruit of political action." [84]

Many historians have emphasized these moral and religious impetuses for political abolitionists' formation of a third party, but a false dichotomy between moral purity and practical politics has obscured the strategic vision of the third-party movement. Third-party advocates construed their new strategy as both a moral protest *and* a practical tactical move. "The question of Independent Anti-Slavery Nominations" was as much "a mere question of expediency," as one of moral responsibility. The third party aimed "to dethrone the inexorable SLAVE POWER from its present political ascendancy … a very strong, if not the strongest citadel of slavery in this land," and this "citadel" could "never be carried … but by a direct, and determined" effort to make "the question of slavery the grand question of *national* politics—which of course, requires a corresponding national nomination." Political abolitionists valued the third-party strategy as both a means to maintain their moral probity by providing nominees for whom abolitionists could conscionably vote *and* as a strategy that would play an important role in overthrowing the Slave Power. Political abolitionists insisted, "To be a partizan of either the Whig or Democratic ranks, is to be ex-officio pro-slavery." Thus abolitionists "must have independent political action or none." As John Greenleaf Whittier explained in October 1840, "The slaveholder makes his allegiance to his political party altogether dependent upon *its* allegiance to slavery," while abolitionists too often made "party paramount to principle."[85]

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[83] *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 29, 1840; JGW to GS, Aug. 30, 1840, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1:438; *Emancipator*, Aug. 13, 1840; *Colored American*, Aug. 22, 29, 1840; "Address to the Abolitionists of Oneida County," *Friend of Man*, Jul. 29, 1840; Augustus Sawyer to Goodell, May 26, 1840, in *Friend of Man*, Jun. 10, 1840.

[84] Samuel E. Sewall, Isaac Clark, and EWJ, "Address to the Abolitionists of Massachusetts," in *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Jun. 25, 1840; "Address to the Abolitionists of Oneida County," *Friend of Man*, Jul. 29, 1840; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 22, 1840; *Colored American*, Oct. 10, 1840.

[85]For examples of scholarship focusing on the moral imperative to third party action see Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 66-76, Alan Kraut "Partisanship and Principles: The Liberty Party in Antebellum Political Culture," in *Crusaders and Compromiser: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System*, ed. Alan Kraut (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 71-100, 78-80, and Ronald Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,1976), 15-18 ; *Emancipator*, Mar. 12, 1840; Ibid., Jan. 9, 1840; "Mc." [James McKim] to Charles C. Burleigh, in

The "subserviency of both of the great political parties … to the Slave Power" clearly generated abolitionists' demand for their own party. They understood that their party would start out weak, unable to even unite voting abolitionists. Not "disheartened by the smallness of the beginning," they believed that antislavery Whigs and Democrats could gradually be "disabused of party ties." In the mean time, the "abolition party" would act "as a STIMULUS to one or both of the other parties to be as favorable as they possibly can … to the cause of freedom, in order to catch the votes of half-way abolitionists." Political abolitionists asserted that only organized "resistance" against northern politicians "who vie … to bind the North at the chariot wheels of the Slave Power," could eradicate "its gags, its Post Office restrictions, its political intolerance," and "its interference with every political and financial interest" of the country.[86]

Even many who did not fully support the move into third-party politics agreed that Harrison and Van Buren were "equally obnoxious" to "consistent abolitionists." As the campaign heated up, Birney supporters dredged up old votes and anti-abolitionist speeches to further demonstrate how incurably proslavery both Van Buren and Harrison were. Casting Harrison as the "*slavery-bent* hero of the *North-bend*," political abolitionists especially attacked his congressional vote for the Missouri Compromise and support for race-based indentures as governor during Indiana's territorial stage. Abolitionist newspapers strove to debunk "wide-spread delusions" about Harrison's pretended antislavery sympathies and printed his aspersions against "the schemes of abolitionists" as "fraught with horrors upon which an incarnate devil only could look with approbation."[87]

Furthermore, Harrison and Van Buren seemed to be staking out ever more proslavery positions as they vied for slaveholders' votes. Harrison intimated the unconstitutionality of abolition in the District of Columbia and Van Buren suggested Congress could not abolish slavery in the territories. In response to these dubious constitutional claims, political abolitionists prefigured Republican Party forebodings of the late 1850s by raising the specter that soon the "Slave Power" would claim "that the northern States had no right to abolish slavery in their own borders, because it disturbs the consciences and alarms the fears of the slaveholders." For the next two decades, political abolitionists continued to highlight how presidential contests incited new concessions to a continually increasing proslavery belligerence.[88]

While abolitionists conceded that "Whigs have been more friendly than the Van Buren men," abolitionists saw no reason to expect genuine antislavery progress from the Whig Party with "unequivocal" anti-abolitionist General Harrison as its standard-bearer. Indeed abolitionists suggested that "Whig leaders" were threatening "to outstrip" Van Buren in "demonstrations of subserviency to the Slave Power" to secure victory by the President's own strategy: "'carry the South by concessions to slavery, and the North by party machinery.'" With

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Pennsylvania Freeman, Oct. 1840; JGW to Charles C. Burleigh, Oct. 8, 1840, in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 22, 1840; *Colored American*, Oct. 10, 1840.

[86] From Middlesex County Abolition Society, in *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Jul. 17, 1840; Ibid., Apr. 16, 1840; *Emancipator*, Jan. 9, 1840, Oct. 1, 1840; *Colored American*, Oct. 3, 1840. Also see Sept. 12, 1840; JL, "Sketch of a Speech" delivered at the First Anniversary of the Massachusetts Abolition Society, May 29, 1840 in *Emancipator*, Jun. 25, 1840.

[87] *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 29, 1840; EWJ, letter of Apr. 4, 1840, in *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Apr. 4, 1840; *Emancipator*, May 29, Aug. 13, 1840. Also see, Ibid., Aug. 20, 1840, which catalogues Harrison's long career of opposition to abolition.; LT to JG, Feb. 17, 1840, LT Papers; "Address to the Abolitionists of Oneida County," *Friend of Man*, Jul. 29, 1840.

[88] *Emancipator*, Aug. 6, 1840; "Address to the Abolitionists of Oneida County," *Friend of Man*, Jul. 29, 1840; See also *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sept, 10, Oct. 1, 1840 and *Philanthropist*, May 12, 1840.

many antislavery voters vowing to defeat Van Buren at all costs, abolitionists warned of "a systematic attempt on foot to amalgamate abolition with the Whig party, and make it a mere appendage, subservient to their party interests."[89]

In addition to combating Whig arguments that Van Buren's defeat should be the antislavery cause's highest political priority, abolitionists also had to dissuade antislavery Whigs who conceded that Harrison was proslavery, but were willing to overlook that to promote Whiggish economic policies. As the election approached, third-party men recognized "that multitudes of abolitionists" would vote for Harrison, "notwithstanding their dislike" of his "pro-slavery demonstration" in hopes that Whig victory would bring "certain measures, which the party leaders … have not the slightest intention of introducing," such as high protective tariffs. Third-party proponents insisted slavery must trump all other issues, and also retorted with an economic argument about the Slave Power's threat to free labor. Abolitionists blamed the nation's economic crisis on "mal-administration of the National Government … by the Slave Power." Criticizing slaveholders for promoting an unstable economic policy, the New York State Anti-Slavery Society decried the Slave Power's "fluctuating, changeful, and deranging measures of political economy" as designed to "disturb and cripple the free States."[90]

Abolitionists could only reverse the "ascendancy in the national councils" of the "SLAVOCRACY" by demanding that "the ONE IDEA of abolishing slavery" dictate how abolitionists vote. Focsuing on the "ONE IDEA" became an important Liberty Party strategy. Until abolitionists put antislavery above all other political concerns, "*the people* of the North" would continue "to be dictated to by the Slave Power, and to be humbugged" into concentrating on "mere questions of money getting." In addition to their Whiggish economic interests, many Whig abolitionists were simply swept up in the "perfect mania" of the Harrison campaign and seemed willing to "wade to their armpits in molten lava to drive Van Buren from power."[91]

These forebodings were correct, and Harrison won in a landslide, running especially well in antislavery districts. In many northern states the third party lacked sufficient time to organize and could not unify abolitionists behind a state ticket. In Maine for example, the Whigs' gubernatorial nomination of a known antislavery sympathizer seriously weakened the organizational efforts of third-party advocates. Nationwide, the Birney ticket mustered barely seven thousand votes, a mere 0.3 percent of the total popular vote.[92]

As the new Liberty Party came out of this electoral defeat, its leaders reiterated their intentions to move forward. Despite the meager vote total, third-party men insisted they exerted more influence than they could have by scattering. During the campaign many had acknowledged that "when the Presidential election shall have been settled … abolitionists will be truer," at which point "the liberty party will have numerous advocates." The Committee of Correspondence for the Birney presidential ticket, effectively the national campaign committee, celebrated the new strategy: "The power which will overthrow slavery has been discovered; it is

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[89] *Emancipator*, Aug. 6, 1840; "Address to the Abolitionists of Oneida County," *Friend of Man*, Jul. 29, 1840.
[90] *Emancipator*, Oct. 1, 8, 1840; Leavitt explicated slavery's detrimental effect on American political economy most comprehensively in an Ohio speech on "The Financial Power of Slavery", first published in *Emancipator*, Oct. 22, 1840, and later as a pamphlet.
[91] *Emancipator*, Oct. 29, 1840; Stanton to Birney, Mar. 21, 1840, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 541-543; For further detail on the "one-idea" strategy, see Chapter 3 below.
[92] Willey, *History of the Antislavery Cause*, 134-135; Stephen J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 49-50.

the terse literature of the northern ballot box." Supporters of an abolitionist third party came out of the 1840 contest convinced the existing "political parties of the *North* have joined hand in hand for the support of the Slave Power," and that the "Slave Power" must "at once be crushed" by abandoning "our former political parties." The Committee urged continued organizing and called on abolitionists to nominate third-party candidates for local office and to elect delegates to attend an 1841 national convention to nominate presidential and vice presidential candidates for 1844. Many leaders believed that fielding a ticket (which most expected to include Birney and Earle again) early would enable abolitionists to more effectively generate interest in their new party. While the party had not been formally named, its adherents increasingly adopted Gerrit Smith's preferred moniker, Liberty Party, which eventually became the official name.[93]

Liberty men now sought to erect a party at the grassroots. At the same time, these political abolitionists focused ever more closely on Congress. "The greatest good can be done to the cause of Liberty and the slave," Joshua Leavitt argued, "by placing *one man* in Congress, who owes no allegiance or obligation to either of the great proslavery parties, and who can be relied on as true to principle under all contingencies." As they attempted to build their party, abolitionist leaders, especially Leavitt, strove to further infiltrate congressional debate to promote the antislavery cause. While they hoped to elect Liberty men to Congress, abolitionists' careful lobbying efforts nurtured important collaborative, if often tense, relationships with antislavery congressmen (mostly Whigs). This, along with the continued growth of the Liberty Party organization, would ensure that conflicts over the reach of the Slave Power remained at the center of national political debate in the 1840s.[94]

[93] *Colored American*, Aug. 29, Dec. 5, 1840; National Committee of Correspondence, *Emancipator* Dec. 17, 1840; New Haven Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, Ibid., Dec. 3, 1840; JL to Birney, Oct. 1, 1840, *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 603-604; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 71-73.
[94] *Emancipator*, Dec. 31, 1840.

The Slave Power and the Speakership: December, 1839

As a key component of their assault on the Slave Power's congressional ascendancy, political abolitionists highlighted southern domination of the institution of the House speakership. Abolitionists aptly perceived the formidable policymaking role of antebellum Speakers of the House. In the months preceding the opening of the 26th Congress in December 1839, Joshua Leavitt's *Emancipator* pointed out that "the two parties, who will be very evenly balanced, are looking forward with much anxiety to the choice of speaker." Stressing the agenda-setting power of antebellum speakers, Leavitt explained to readers, "This is a very important election, as the speaker has the appointment of committees, and much influence in other respects," and thus "of course neither party will dare to run any other than a slaveholder." Mocking the Second Party System's deference to "'the dark spirit of slavery,'" Leavitt continued sarcastically, "It would be contrary to all rule and comity, and would greatly endanger our happy union, were a freeman and the representative of freemen to be elected to preside over the most august republican assembly in the world."[1]

The controversial December 1839 election for Speaker of the House substantiated abolitionists' charges that participation in the Second Party System necessarily entailed subservience to the Slave Power. It took two full days and eleven ballots before the Whig Party shepherded an intensely proslavery speaker into the House's chief office. Observing the stalemate that delayed this election also helped abolitionists discern institutional dynamics favorable to third party action. That contest made clearer than ever that even Whigs who claimed to be abolitionists would cave to party pressures. However, it also suggested that a small third party in Congress could wield real power in the American political system. Because of the competitiveness of the two parties, the requirement of a majority for election, and the importance the parties placed on controlling the organization of the House, a determined minority in Congress could hold both parties hostage by denying either the majority necessary to elect a presiding officer and begin legislating.[2]

As the new Congress arrived in Washington, the Whig Party, as expected, easily settled on John Bell of Tennessee, the only former speaker elected as a Whig (1834-35), as its nominee. The Democratic caucus had more difficulty reaching a choice, with the previous speaker James Polk now governor of Tennessee. According to Senator John Calhoun, leader of the Democrats' extreme proslavery or States' Rights faction, his fellow South Carolinian Francis Pickens was the preferred nominee of a "large majority of the Democrats." Pickens, a strong States' Rights man with close ties to Calhoun, however, was detained caring for his sick wife and thus apparently disqualified himself by failing to arrive in time for the caucus. Many proslavery Democrats who

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[1] New York *Emancipator*, Oct. 10, 1839.

[2] This contest was a watershed not only for abolitionist political thought, but also for the institution of Congress. As the first one determined by *viva voce* voting (instead of secret ballot), everyone, not least political abolitionists, could identify what positions particular congressmen had endorsed in their speakership votes. Charles Stewart III, "The Inefficient Secret: Organizing for Business in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–1861," Unpublished paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Ga., Sept. 1–5, 1999, Draft of Aug. 25, 1999, http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/papers/speakers.pdf, 4-5, 18-19; See also Stewart, "Speakership Elections and Control of the U.S. House, 1839-1859," Unpublished paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill., Apr. 27–30, 2000, Draft of Apr. 20, 2000, http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/papers/midwest2000.pdf.

had championed Pickens turned to Alabama's Dixon Lewis, but to the dismay of several proslavery hardliners, Virginia's John Jones beat out Lewis in caucus by a single vote.[3]

The House finally began balloting for speaker on Saturday December 14, twelve days after it first convened, as a controversy over contested seats that could swing the speakership election nearly paralyzed the House.[4] The first two ballots clearly pitted Jones against Bell, with Jones leading Bell 113 to 102 and 113 to 99, but falling short of a majority of 118. An intractable States' Rights minority from both parties prevented an election by scattering twenty votes to other southern candidates. On the fourth ballot, twenty-nine representatives, several of them northern Whigs, including Joshua Giddings, cast their vote for Robert M.T. Hunter, a young States' Rights Virginian with ambiguous partisan loyalties. By the end of the first day of balloting, after six fruitless roll calls that each took about an hour, Hunter had become the Whigs' leading contender. Hunter, however, was further from a majority than the party's previous candidates had been, and now the vote scattering had spread beyond the slaveholders and included about a dozen northern Whigs.[5]

On the second day of voting, this disorder continued with the Whigs retrying and then re-abandoning Bell and the Democrats concentrating on Lewis after Jones withdrew. The confusion was such that even on the tenth ballot, sixteen candidates garnered votes, and six (all but one of them Southerners) received over ten. When enough States' Rights men united with the mass of the Whig Party in support of Hunter, Adams and every other antislavery Whig duly cast Hunter votes to help him reach a three-vote majority. Even former Genesee County (New York) Anti-Slavery Society secretary Seth Gates, who had resolutely voted for northern candidates (usually Adams) on the third through tenth ballots, switched his vote to Hunter.[6]

To political abolitionists, this result demonstrated how little could be expected from even known abolitionists who refused to privilege their antislavery principles over their party obligations. It was a "great pity" the *Massachusetts Abolitionist* lamented, that "whig abolitionists in Congress" were less resolute than States' Rights men. Indeed the recent contest

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[3] John C. Calhoun (JCC) to A[nna] M[aria Calhoun] Clemson, Dec. 18, 1839, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, Volume XV, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 20; Some accounts of the Democratic caucus suggested that Missouri's Democratic Senator Thomas Hart Benton, one of Calhoun's fiercest intraparty adversaries, played a crucial role in promoting Jones over Lewis. John Quincy Adams (JQA), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (CFA) (Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-1877), V. 10: 144.

[4] For five of New Jersey's six seats, two sets of representatives (five Whigs and five Democrats) arrived with election credentials. The Whigs possessed official certifications signed by the state's Whig governor, but Democrats charged electoral fraud and demanded that neither delegation be seated until the House elected its officers, a resolution that seemed likely to provide the Democrats with a majority in organizing the House. After twelve days of wrangling the House narrowly agreed to this controversial postponement of the decision until after the House organized. During these stormy proceedings John Quincy Adams chaired the otherwise unorganized House sessions, after being nominated for that duty by fire-eating South Carolina Democrat Robert Rhett, who proposed Adams, the second most senior member, after the longer-serving Lewis Williams (W-NC) declined. JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 10: 142-162, provides a good account of these proceedings. Also see *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 1-52, passim, and for a briefer account, William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 358-359.

[5] *CG*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 52-54; JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 10: 163-164; Two of the initial scattering votes came from Bell and Jones, who followed the antebellum custom of never voting for oneself for Speaker.

[6] *CG*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 55-56; The *Congressional Globe*'s tally of Hunter votes on the penultimate ballot, contains ten Whig names—seven from the North including Gates's—appended to the end of the list, not in alphabetical order with the other ninety-nine Hunter voters, suggesting that these ten either voted late or changed their vote at the end of the count to secure Hunter's election; JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 10: 164-65.

showed that "a poor abolitionist, with his party-collar on, is understood to be one of the limberest of all mortals—like clay in the hands of the potter, or rather *dough* in those of the baker." Leavitt's *Emancipator* caustically remarked, "Hence an intelligent and zealous abolitionist, like Mr. Gates, does not scruple to give his vote for a slaveholder and a supporter of the gag-law, if it is for the interest of the party who elected him." Attacking sixteen putatively antislavery Whigs who supported Hunter, Leavitt bemoaned "that the elevation of a slaveholder to the Chair of the House of Representatives, was the act of the abolitionists." "Had they been only as much opposed to slavery," Leavitt continued, "as they are true to their party, they might with ease have secured the election of a man unstained at least with the open crime of slaveholding." The fact that, unlike Bell, Hunter was not even a dependable Whig made this treachery all the more disgraceful. After the Whig party had "called on the [many] abolitionists" who opposed Van Buren's financial policy to put aside their abolitionism "to assist in pulling down" Democrats' "sub-treasury scheme, or the country would be ruined," Whigs elected by abolitionists' votes proceeded to "vote for a sub-treasury-slaveholding speaker." The accused antislavery Whigs, of course, angrily rebuked the "wild ultraism" of their political abolitionist critics, and especially attacked the *Emancipator*. Giddings complained that "the Emancipator is out upon every man in Congress whose heart beats in union with the friends of humanity" and ridiculed as absurd Leavitt's suggestion that the sixteen leading antislavery Whigs "might have controuled the Election of Speaker" and "could have elected an abolitionist."[7]

As political abolitionists made their case for a third party, they emphasized antislavery Whigs' speakership votes as particularly damning evidence of the Slave Power's dominance of both major parties. The votes "to place a slaveholding Speaker in the chair" by Whig congressmen who had been elected "on the ground of their anti-slavery professions" provided irrefutable testimony that genuine antislavery victories could never be achieved within the major parties. The New York State Anti-Slavery Society especially chastised Gates and Vermont's William Slade, who both had been so prominent as antislavery politicians, for "bowing down to the slave power" and "casting their votes for a slaveholding Speaker of the House" at the Whig Party's "bidding." Gerrit Smith similarly concluded that his friend "Seth M. Gates the abolition member of congress, voted for a slaveholder for speaker" precisely because American "political parties" had become "so far identified with slavery that to ask" a politician "to go against slavery is to ask him to go against his party."[8]

Confirmation for abolitionist charges that antislavery Whigs' speakership votes had buttressed the Slave Power can be found in the satisfaction of slavery's champions at Hunter's election. George Fitzhugh, who later achieved notoriety as slavery's leading social theorist, was "elated and delighted." Calhoun was similarly excited, even though he wished the House had elected Jones on the first ballot and avoided all the commotion and "jealousy." Still, Calhoun celebrated the power of States' Rights men to dictate the election and showed little concern for the modicum of victory that Whigs could claim. "The only reason" Calhoun could ascertain "why they should prefer" Hunter to a States' Rights Democrat was that in his congressional race Hunter had refused to pledge support for President Van Buren's reelection. "On this slender

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[7] *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Feb. 20, 1840; *Emancipator*, Dec. 26, 1839; Letter from Augustus Sawyer, May, 26, 1840, in Utica *Friend of Man*, Jun. 10, 1840; Joshua Giddings (JG) to Sir [Royal Cowles?], Dec. 28, 1839, Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform.

[8] Alvan Stewart, quoted in *Emancipator*, Feb. 6, 1840;"The Fifth Annual Report of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society," in *Friend of Man*, Sept. 23, 1840; Gerrit Smith to William Goodell, Feb. 8, 1840, in Ibid., Feb. 19, 1840.

ground the whigs claimed him," but Calhoun, like the abolitionists, recognized that "in every other respect … his position is identical with Mr. Lewis, Mr. Pickens and other State rights men."[9]

The fact that a small extremist States' Rights bloc had essentially handpicked the speaker suggested that antislavery representatives could do the exact same thing. This further supported the case for an abolitionist political organization. Leavitt saw the power exerted by extreme proslavery representatives, and thought why not us?

> There are in the House as many abolitionists as State Rights men, who, if they had been equally united, and equally firm, and equally ready to sacrifice their party predilections to their higher principles, could have gained their end … and thus have broken up, probably forever, one of the prerogatives of the Slave Power—that of appointing all the presiding officers of our national legislature.

Using this speakership vote to bolster arguments for a third party, a correspondent of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* similarly cited "the power possessed in Congress by the State Rights junto" as "proof" that a "very small minority, acting in concert … may compel a majority of ten times their numerical strength into their measures."[10]

Even abolitionists who initially opposed a third-party strategy recognized the force of these arguments. Lewis Tappan desperately hoped to avoid third-party politics but privately chastised Gates, Giddings, and "the abolitionists in the H. of R." for failing to unite on an antislavery candidate. Tappan understood that continued party loyalty on the part of abolitionist Whigs might strengthen the case for independent political action, a prospect he found disconcerting. Of course, Tappan was already acknowledging the institutional logic that would encourage a third-party strategy when he insisted that antislavery politicians disregard party dictates while organizing Congress—one of the most pivotal partisan contests. Yet Joshua Giddings also had a point when he cautioned that abolitionists should be careful not to repel their few potential congressional allies. These developments made clear just how important it would be for abolitionists to cultivate relationships with antislavery congressmen, even as political abolitionists erected the Liberty Party and challenged antislavery Whigs in the electoral arena.[11]

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[9] George Fitzhugh to R. M. T. Hunter, Dec. 17, 1839, in *Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter, 1826-1876*, ed. Charles Henry Ambler (Washington: Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1916, Volume II, 1918), 31; JCC to Orestes Brownson, Dec. 30, 1839, in *The Papers of JCC*, V. XV, ed. Clyde Wilson, 25.

[10] *Emancipator*, Dec. 26, 1839; "Mc" [James McKim] to Charles C. Burleigh, in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct., 10, 1840.

[11] Lewis Tappan (LT) to Seth Gates, Jan. 31, 1840, Lewis Tappan Papers, Library of Congress, microform; LT to JG, Feb. 7, 1840, Giddings-Julian Papers, Library of Congress, microform.

CHAPTER 2

Stoking the "Abolition Fire in the Capitol": Antislavery Congressional Alliances and Liberty Lobbying

The Liberty Party's poor showing in the 1840 election suggested to critics its futility, but abolitionists continued to develop political strategies that allowed them to exert political influence far out of proportion to the vote totals they polled (which did increase continually after 1840). Liberty men coupled their third-party electoral strategy with concerted efforts to build partnerships with congressmen who could help thrust slavery and the Slave Power argument into national political debate. Beginning in the mid-1830s, political abolitionists skillfully exploited Congress as a forum through which they could publicize their cause. They worked energetically on the ground in Washington, and through copious correspondence, to cultivate allies among a small cadre of mostly Whig antislavery congressmen, headlined by ex-President John Quincy Adams. Abolitionists lobbied, and sometimes directly collaborated with, these men, even though their differences on electoral tactics often engendered friction. Together they provoked proslavery belligerence that further dramatized the Slave Power's sway over national politics.

After creating an independent party, however, political abolitionists had to renegotiate their alliances with men who were ostensibly partisan opponents, but also represented the most promising and visible antislavery collaborators. These fraught relationships revealed just how conflicted antislavery Whigs felt about the tensions between their abolitionist inclinations and party obligations. Political abolitionists valued collaboration with antislavery Whig congressmen, even as Liberty men emphasized all Whigs' complicity in the Slave Power. For their part, this coterie of vocally antislavery, congressmen relished opportunities to incite controversy over slavery, often appreciating, and sometimes relying on, abolitionist support. Abolitionists could be counted on to publicize any antislavery activity in Congress, especially when Washington papers like the *National Intelligencer* (the capital's Whig paper of record) would not.

The abolitionist approach to lobbying potential congressional partners represented a unique strategy in antebellum politics. Contemporary lobbying was typically non-ideological and focused primarily on securing private bills, known also as special legislation. Since these private bills represented an overwhelming proportion of the legislative output at the state level, antebellum lobbyists predominantly worked in state capitals to secure government contracts, patronage appointments, and corporate charters. Political abolitionists concentrated on Congress for both jurisdictional and strategic reasons. Whig and Democratic politicians often focused on winning at the state level, where important economic policies were decided and more attractive patronage plums were at stake. For Liberty partisans, and Free Soilers afterwards, influencing Congress was far more valuable because it possessed jurisdiction to promote the anti-Slave Power political program. But beyond their jurisdictional interest in Congress, political abolitionists saw important *strategic* reasons for infiltrating congressional politics.[1]

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[1] The only modern book on nineteenth-century lobbying is Margaret S. Thompson's *The "Spider Web": Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant* (Ithaca: N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1979); On antebellum lobbying at the state level, and its emphasis on special legislation, see Douglas E. Bowers's excellent article, "From Logrolling to Corruption: The Development of Lobbying in Pennsylvania, 1815-1861" *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Winter

Unlike professional lobbyists paid to advocate for specific special interests, political abolitionists engaged in broad issue-oriented lobbying on an unprecedented scale. Quaker abolitionists in the 1790s had anticipated these tactics, but their antebellum counterparts far exceeded the organization and sophistication of those earlier efforts. Many proponents of abolitionist lobbying (especially Lewis Tappan and Joshua Leavitt) also gained experience integrating lobbying with mass petitioning in the Sabbatarian campaign against Sunday mail service (1828-1831). These precedents notwithstanding, antebellum abolitionists developed an innovative approach to congressional advocacy.[2]

Political abolitionists' lobbying often aimed simply at generating antislavery debate in Congress, and, to a lesser extent, northern legislatures, for consumption by a national audience. Although they had few opportunities for substantive policy victories at the national level before the late 1840s, lobbying provided a key tactic through which political abolitionists could articulate opposition to the Slave Power and induce new conversions. Members of Congress have often powerfully influenced national political history by "taking stands" intended more for swaying public opinion than for affecting the disposition of particular legislation. Abolitionists perceived this and strove to exploit congressional debate to disseminate their arguments about slavery's disproportionate influence in the federal government, especially since newspaper coverage of Congress was so extensive in this era.[3]

These sorts of extra-electoral practices have often been identified with those excluded from conventional political participation. Foremost among political actors denied suffrage were reform-minded women, who lacked the vote but used their claims to motherly virtue to influence politics in other ways, including, for some, through the antislavery petition campaigns. Liberty

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1983), 439-474; Mark W. Summers's account of political corruption in the 1850s, *The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union, 1849-1861*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 85-112, concentrates on lobbyists seeking government contracts or other favors on behalf of private interests like steamboat and railroad companies.

[2] On early attempts to lobby Congress, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Private Access and Public Power: Gentility and Lobbying in the Early Congress," in *The House and the Senate in the 1790s: Petitioning, Lobbying, and Institutional Development*, ed. Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon (Athens, Oh.: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by Ohio University Press, 2002), 57-99, and "Democracy, Gentility, and Lobbying in the Early U.S. Congress," in *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy*, ed. Julian E. Zelizer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 38-62. Both articles portray lobbying in the Early Republic as intertwined with a culture of gentility that offered elites special access to congressional politicians; Pasley's main exception to this characterization of early congressional lobbying is Quaker abolitionists who lobbied primarily against the African slave trade. A more detailed discussion can be found in William C. DiGiacomantonio, "'For the Gratification of a Volunteering Society': Antislavery and Pressure Group Politics in the First Federal Congress," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Summer, 1995), 169-197. DiGiacomantonio depicts Philadelphia Quakers who traveled to New York City to attend the First Congress as the first modern lobby; On the Sabbatarian movement see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System," *Journal of American History* 58 (Sept. 1971) 316-341, and Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 179-189.

[3] David R. Mayhew's unique canvass of congressional history (and historiography) suggests that many of the most influential actions taken by individual congressmen have little directly to do with legislating, *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. 90-102; On news coverage of Congress in this period, see Thomas C. Leonard, *The Power of the Press: the Birth of American Political Reporting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 63-96; Samuel Kernell and Gary C. Jacobson, Congress and the Presidency as News in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Politics* 49, (Nov. 1987), 1016-1035;" and Samuel Kernell, "The Early Nationalization of Political News in America," *Studies in American Political Development* 1 (Mar. 1986), 255-278.

strategy incorporated *both* formal partisan politics—operating a political party and voting against the Slave Power—and extra-electoral strategies of political influence. While Liberty men possessed, and employed, the franchise, they never elected enough of their own partisans to shape national politics without resorting to other tactics too.[4]

Cultivating Congressional Partnerships and Courting Political Controversy

Abolitionists began seeking out congressional partners well before the formation of the Liberty Party. As abolitionists increasingly turned towards political action in the second half of the 1830s, they sought nationally visible collaborators among antislavery politicians. Emphasizing the Slave Power in the face of the House gag rule, political abolitionists especially strove to cooperate with antislavery congressmen. When Congress restricted antislavery petitions, abolitionists saw more than just an infringement on civil liberties. They saw opportunity—not only to bolster their arguments about the threatening power of slaveholders, but also to cultivate alliances with frustrated northern congressmen.

Abolitionists learned that by working with antislavery congressman and encouraging them to circumvent the rule, they could ensure continued national attention to this most obvious manifestation of the Slave Power. The gag rule provided a shared project in which immediatist abolitionists and antislavery congressmen relied on each other's support for effective resistance. Congressional debates, now replete with contentious showdowns featuring eloquent, combative antislavery representatives, popularized the abolitionists' political message to a much broader audience than had joined the movement. Realizing this, many political abolitionists concentrated closely on Congress and the few allies they found there.

John Quincy Adams frequently employed the abolitionists' petition onslaught to control the House floor for multiple petition days on end. At one point late in the 1837-38 congressional session Adams defiantly "occupied the morning hour for TWELVE mornings." Adams's well-chronicled battle against the gag made him the prized target of political abolitionist lobbying, As abolitionists presented Adams with mounds of petitions, they also lobbied him, in person and through the mail, to precipitate new congressional controversies. Antislavery societies across the North repeatedly passed formal resolutions praising Adams's "upright and manly course" in Congress, and this encouragement strengthened his resolve. Though unwilling to be associated with immediatist abolitionism directly, Adams embraced the role of anti-Slave Power agitator

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[4] Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *Journal of American History* 89 (Jun., 1984), 620-647, best articulates how separate-spheres gender ideologies both provided and circumscribed opportunities for women to exert moral and political influence in nineteenth-century America; An excellent discussion of women's roles in antebellum politics can be found in Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), which focuses on the political activities of white women from slaveholding families; On women's use of the petition to influence national policy, see Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005). Portnoy argues that women's petition campaigns against Indian Removal remained highly deferential, while abolitionist activism called for women's increased mobilization as political actors. For a similar take on the uniquely politicizing effect of abolitionist petitioning, see Susan Zaeske: *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003); For a brief allusion to antebellum lobbying as especially the province of women, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Minnows, Spies, and Aristocrats: The Social Crisis of Congress in the Age of Martin Van Buren," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Winter 2007), 599-653, 614-615.

and came to be praised across the North as "Old Man Eloquent" and by some abolitionists as an "inflexible opponent of the baneful system of slavery." Many abolitionists joined Sarah Grimké in "cordially" thanking Adams for his efforts, but criticized his steadfast opposition to immediate abolition in the District of Columbia as "a surrender of moral principle to political expediency." Abolitionists importuned Adams to avow support for emancipation in the District, which many viewed as an antislavery "test question," but he consistently disappointed them.[5]

Adams expressed "regret to lose their good will," but complained that "the abolitionists generally are constantly urging me to indiscreet movements." Adams repeatedly rebuffed John Greenleaf Whittier's entreaties to attend antislavery conventions and to lead the Massachusetts congressional delegation in a formal "solemn & united *protest*" against the gag rule: "For the formation and the expression of the public opinion, *out* of Congress upon this subject, I have thought it would best become me to take no active or leading part." Initially ambivalent about his antislavery congressional stands, Adams confided to his diary in 1837, "The exposure through which I passed at the late session of Congress was greater than I could have imagined possible; and, having escaped from that fiery furnace, it behooves me well to consider my ways before I put myself in the way of being cast into it again."[6]

Pressed by abolitionists and their numerous petitions, Adams, despite his misgivings, continually plunged back into that fiery furnace. Adams routinely attempted to present armloads of prohibited petitions. Moreover, his efforts to ridicule the gag rule and embarrass its proponents precipitated congressional strife that made him the epicenter of sectional political conflict in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

In one of his first great attempts to humiliate the gag rule's defenders, Adams told the chair he had a petition purporting to come from slaves and asked if it would fall under the ambit of the gag. Adams then coyly dodged the Chair's initial request to see it, suggesting that could be tantamount to admitting the petition. Southern hotheads accused Adams of encouraging slave insurrection, and one Georgia representative suggested they burn the petition on the House floor. Adams bided his time while the fracas escalated. Finally he interjected to explain that the petition requested Congress *not* interfere with slavery. At this revelation, Southerners accused Adams of committing "a flagrant contempt on the dignity" of the House and furiously demanded

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[5] Cincinnati *Philanthropist*, Jul. 7, 1837; New York *Emancipator*, Jul. 5, 1838; On Adams's leading role in the contest against the gag rule, see William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), passim, Leonard Richards, *The Life and Times of Congressman John Quincy Adams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 117-131, 135-139, and William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: V. 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 343-352; Utica *Friend of Man*, May 31, 1837; Also see examples included in William Lloyd Garrison (WLG) to John Quincy Adams (JQA), Apr. 10, 1837 and Francis Jackson and Amos A. Phelps (AAP) in behalf of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to JQA, Feb. 3, 1838, Adams Family Papers, Microfilm Edition, Part IV: "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; JQA to John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW), Jan. 26, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Part II: "Letterbooks"; JGW to JQA, Jan. 23, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Sarah Grimké to JQA, May 8, 1837, Ibid.; *Philanthropist*, Nov. 14, 1837; Adams preferred a gradual mode of abolition in the capital, similar to that used earlier in northern states like Pennsylvania and New York. JQA to LT, Jul. 15, 1841, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks. See also JQA to JGW, Apr. 19, 1837, Ibid.

[6] JQA to Gerrit Smith (GS), Jul. 31, 1839, Adams Papers, Letterbooks; JQA, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (CFA) (Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-1877), V. 9: 365; JGW to JQA, Jan. 23, 1837, Apr. 12, 1837, Jan. 3, 1838, JQA to JGW, Jan. 26, 1837, Apr. 19, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; JQA to Lundy, Aug. 10, 1837, Ibid.; JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 9:349-350.

formal censure. The ensuing debates lasted nearly a week. Adams mocked Southerners' suggestions that he be indicted, attacked the institution of slavery and immorality of slave owners, and defended the right of slaves to petition. By the time he finished, any hope of censuring him had been lost. Adams's dramatic rebuke to the slaveholding interest on the House floor cemented his role as the leading antislavery sympathizer in Washington and further dramatized southern repressiveness.[7]

Abolitionists applauded Adams for his "faithful and fearless resistance to the usurpations of the Slaveholding power" and urged him to continue to provoke this sort of commotion. "The conduct of Mr. Adams—his noble intrepidity—and the success he has had in resisting the southern members" would, James Birney predicted, "give courage to many who would otherwise stand aloof." William Jay explained to Adams that his congressional stands "sowed much precious seed" from which abolitionists expected to reap a "glorious harvest."[8]

Abolitionists, not the Massachusetts Whig Party, cooperated with Adams to further publicize the slave petition feat. Boston abolitionist Isaac Knapp (printer of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*) published a pamphlet edition of Adams's epic House speech on the slave petition, along with his letters to his constituents (first printed in the *Quincy Patriot*). Whittier added an introduction extolling Adams's "graphic delineation of the slavery spirit in Congress." The next summer, as new petition drives got underway, the *Emancipator* republished Adams's letters and urged that they be read publicly to inspire antislavery activists.[9]

Abolitionists reveled in the congressional attention generated by debates over their petitions, appreciating that these disputes publicized abolitionists' arguments far more effectively than they could on their own. Lewis Tappan underscored this benefit of the House debates when he explained to Adams that abolitionist petitioners did "not expect so much to convert members of Congress as their constituents." As Theodore Dwight Weld put it, antislavery congressmen "are in a position to do for the A. S. cause by a single speech more than our best lecturers can do in a year." The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society similarly emphasized this benefit of infiltrating congressional debate: "We … value political action, chiefly as a means of agitating the subject … and never is agitation so thorough and effectual, as when it begins in the halls of legislation." "The country," the Society continued, "has learned more of the dangerous tendencies of slavery, and of the desperate character and designs of its supporters, by the discussions in Congress, than we could have instilled directly for years." For this reason abolitionists continued furnishing petitions and lobbying Adams for further attacks on slavery and the Slave Power.[10]

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[7] *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 24th Congress, 2nd Session, 162-175; Resolutions of Feb. 6, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received and Other Loose Papers; While Adams defeated the censure motion, an overwhelming majority on the floor resolved that slaves did not possess the constitutional right of petition, Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 271-273.

[8] William Jay (Wm Jay) to John Quincy Adams, Jul. 9, 1839, John Jay Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University; Birney to LT, February 25, 1837, *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966, original edition 1938 by AHA), V. 1: 374.

[9] *Letters from John Quincy Adams to His Constituents of the Twelfth Congressional District in Massachusetts, To which is Added his Speech in Congress Delivered February 9, 1837* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), 3-4; *Emancipator*, Jun. 15, 1837.

[10] LT to JQA, May 13, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Theodore Dwight Weld (TDW) to LT, Dec. 14, 1841, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965, original edition 1934 by AHA), V. 2:879-882; Address of

In addition to establishing Adams as the focal point of abolitionist lobbying, his slave petition ruse highlighted the value of goading southern congressmen. Abolitionists urged antislavery incursions likely to produce embarrassing overreactions and exulted at the ensuing disarray. An *Emancipator* correspondent mocked the southern response to antislavery petitions: "The effect is electrical. The House is in commotion at once. If a nest of rattlesnakes were suddenly let loose among them, the members could manifest but little more 'agitation'." Ohio's leading antislavery sheet likewise recognized that "slaveholders are prime agitators," and a northern Ohio lecturing agent hailed the obstreperousness "of the Slave party in Congress" as a boon for the abolitionist movement. This congressional chaos, as William Jay wrote a Georgia congressman, "so augmented the strength of the Abolitionists, that they themselves have found it good policy to keep up the irritation." The *Emancipator* concurred: "A hundred thousand undisturbed lecturers on abolition, at all events, could not have done half so much to spread their doctrines, as has been effected by the violence of those who sought to suppress them." The *Vermont Free Press* predicted, "A few such scenes as recently transpired in Congress in relation to Mr. Adams" would "rouse the nation." Political abolitionists enthusiastically strove to incite new confrontations that would further expose the Slave Power's intransigence.[11]

To further promote antislavery controversy in Congress, abolitionists repeatedly attempted to establish a lobbying presence at the capital, notwithstanding the financial constraints imposed by the depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s. Even in the panic year of 1837, the American Anti-Slavery Society pledged sparse resources for a congressional lobby. The society requested that Weld "repair to the City of Washington, when the discussions on Slavery shall come up," but he declined, and the society never appointed a substitute. In the winter of 1838 Henry B. Stanton attended Congress as an abolitionist lobbyist to confer with Adams and "look after the imperiled right of petition," and in 1840 Whittier visited Washington to discuss the slavery issue with congressmen from both sections. As Lewis Tappan explained, "Our great object now should be to get anti Slavery before the intelligent mind of the community." For this purpose, Tappan visited Washington multiple times and tried to establish an antislavery book depository there.[12]

Seeking to attract new allies, or at least generate publicity, Tappan also hoped the *Emancipator* could reach the desk of every congressman, a goal editor Joshua Leavitt worked to implement. In 1837, the American Anti-Slavery Society's Executive Committee adopted an official plan "to send a copy of the Emancipator, weekly, to each Senator and Representative in Congress," and also offered to provide "any gentleman in Congress, on request" with "any books, pamphlets, or papers" in the American Anti-Slavery Society's collection. The Cincinnati *Philanthropist* likewise sporadically sent papers to members of Congress, and Vermont Whig William Slade advised Amos A. Phelps of ninety-two representatives and six senators who

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the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Board of Managers to the Abolitionists of Massachusetts, in *Emancipator*, Aug. 23, 1838.

[11] *Emancipator*, Jan. 19, 1837, *Philanthropist*, Apr. 24, 1838; John Keep to TDW, Jan. 11, 1839, *Letters of TDW, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Barnes and Dumond, 2:738; *Emancipator*, Jan. 19, 1837; Wm Jay to Richard Wylly Habersham (draft), Feb. 24, 1840, John Jay Papers, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New York; *Emancipator*, Feb. 9, 1837; Quoted from *Vermont Free Press*, in *Emancipator*, Mar. 2, 1837.

[12] Joshua Leavitt (JL) to TDW, Nov. 16, 1837, in *Letters of TDW, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Barnes and Dumond,1:478; Henry B. Stanton, *Random Recollections* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), 59-61; JGW to Joseph Healy, Jan. 28, 1840, in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), V. 1: 381; LT to Seth Gates, Feb. 29, 1840, Mar. 10, 1840, Lewis Tappan Papers (LT Papers), Library of Congress, microform.

would be likely to at least peruse gratuitous copies of Phelps's *Massachusetts Abolitionist*. Later the national society developed a plan to distribute William Jay's *View of the Action of the Federal Government* to at least fifty congressmen, with the aid of New York congressman Seth Gates.[13]

In 1840, ex-Senator Thomas Morris suggested, more ambitiously, that abolitionists in every northern state select a delegate to "form an organized body" that would conduct "daily sessions" in Washington concurrently with Congress. Morris hoped such a group could "collect all possible information on the subject of American Slavery" and provide accurate reports on congressional debates and national political news. While the abolitionist movement never established a Washington organization as systematic as Morris envisioned, abolitionist newspaper editors and correspondents, most importantly Joshua Leavitt, soon served a similar function, providing an influential abolitionist lobbying presence in Washington.[14]

As political abolitionists moved in and out of the capital city, they also shaped national debate through their interactions with the District's sizable black community. Abolitionist visitors along with several antislavery congressmen worked with local African Americans to create what Stanley Harrold has described as a biracial subversive community. A small group of radical political abolitionists in Washington, sometimes supported by Gerrit Smith and his Upstate New York associates, promoted aggressive antislavery activity in the one southern locale that abolitionists could safely frequent. These efforts, many of them spearheaded by radical political abolitionist newspaperman Charles Torrey (of the Albany *Tocsin of Liberty* and then the *Albany Patriot*), further polarized the Washington community. Torrey collaborated with black Washingtonians to organize extensive Underground Railroad operations. When he died in 1846 while serving time in a Maryland penitentiary for abetting slave escapes, Torrey instantly became a martyr for abolitionists of all political persuasions. This aggressive brand of often illegal antislavery subversion at times influenced congressional debate by raising the stakes of the abolitionist threat for slave-owning officeholders. Leavitt and a few antislavery congressmen, but not Adams, were sometimes aware of these activities and on occasion exploited them to emphasize the horrors of slavery in the capital city, a major slave-trading depot. Both Leavitt and

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[13] LT to Seth Gates, Mar. 10, 1840, LT Papers; *Emancipator*, Sept. 14, 1837; *Philanthropist*, Jan. 6, 1837; William Slade (Wm Slade) to AAP, Jan. 12, 1839, Amos Augustus Phelps Papers (AAP Papers), Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library (BPL), Rare Books and Manuscripts Department. Unfortunately the list is no longer preserved with Slade's letter; JL to Wm Jay, Feb. 6, 1840, John Jay Collection; On Jay's scathing 1839 book-length indictment of the Slave Power, see Chapter 1 above.

[14] Thomas Morris to Gamaliel Bailey (GB), in *Philanthropist*, Oct. 28, 1840; The best accounts of Leavitt's lobbying work can be found in James B. Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 52-53, 66-71, 87-90, James McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency in the Whig Party, 1839-1842," *Journal of Negro History* 43 (Jul., 1963), 177-195, and Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt: Evangelical Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 176-200. Still, Leavitt's important place in American political history has eluded most antebellum political historians. Michael Holt's encyclopedic *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), fails to note Liberty Party efforts to lobby antislavery legislators, and Joshua Leavitt's role in Liberty Party politics generally goes unmentioned in Holt's tome; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 550-551, 554, 557, discusses Leavitt's presence in Washington only very briefly; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), barely discusses the Liberty Party and does not mention Leavitt.

the congressmen, however, remained focused on congressional debate as the most influential venue for combating the Slave Power.[15]

While Adams represented the most visible antislavery collaborator in Congress, political abolitionists also worked intently to build partnerships with the handful of younger congressmen who openly identified as abolitionists. A small group of antislavery Whig representatives led by Seth Gates of Le Roy, New York, Joshua Giddings of Jefferson, Ohio, and William Slade of Middlebury, Vermont thus became central to political abolitionist strategy.[16] Many of these men represented strong Whig districts, some from the highly evangelized "Burned-over District" stretching across Western New York and the northern Midwest and several from the uniquely antislavery state of Vermont. A smaller number, like textile manufacturer Nathaniel Borden, hailed from industrializing regions, where skilled workers and small proprietors comprised much of the "antislavery rank and file." These antislavery congressmen worked closely gradually with abolitionists, as well as Adams, to exploit openings in House rules that allowed for disruptive dilatory tactics. Most importantly, they capitalized on "the wide range of debate" in the Committee of the Whole, a parliamentary device constituting the entire house as a committee on the state of the Union. In the whole House a simple majority could move the previous question to cut off debate and immediately bring a measure up for a vote, but the Committee of the Whole provided antislavery representatives far more latitude "to bring forward the subject of slavery."[17]

Among the House's antislavery vanguard, Vermont Whig William Slade especially earned the admiration of political abolitionists. From early on, they lavished Slade with praise and pressed him to challenge the Slave Power at every opportunity. Slade consistently joined Adams's floor contests against the gag and was initially the House's most militant antislavery voice. Although Slade lacked Adams's penchant for extemporaneous invective (in part because Adams's greater prestige and parliamentary expertise made it harder for the House to silence him), Slade prepared at least one blistering antislavery diatribe for each congressional session. Though a loyal Whig until 1848, Slade proudly avowed his abolitionism and boldly advocated racial equality. Lamenting his choice of a life in politics instead of the ministry, Slade felt morally impelled to use his office to be a "*benefactor*" of "this degraded guilty, suffering world."

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[15] Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003). On Torrey, see 64-93.

[16] Other Whig Representatives that allied themselves with Gates, Giddings, and Slade and at times collaborated with abolitionists included Sherlock Andrews of Ohio, Nathaniel Borden, William Calhoun, William Jackson, and Stephen C. Phillips of Massachusetts, Francis James of Pennsylvania, and Heman Allen and John Mattocks of Vermont, along with Vermont's Samuel Crafts, who had even presided over a county anti-slavery society meeting in 1839, before serving as a Whig Senator in 1842 and 1843. Montpelier *Voice of Freedom*, Feb. 2, 1839.

[17] Whitney R. Cross's famous description of religious revivalism in *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York State, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950), 217-226, situates abolitionism in the small towns and cities of this mostly rural but decidedly commercial region. Many of these areas were, not coincidentally, areas of Whig electoral strength, as noted in James B. Stewart, "Abolitionists, Insurgents, and Third Parties: Sectionalism and Partisan Politics in Northern Whiggery, 1836-1844," in *Crusaders and Compromisers*, ed. Kraut, 26-43, 26-27; Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), esp. Ch. 4, 5. Also see Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. Ch. 4, on the role of labor reformers in the Liberty Party in Massachusetts's industrial towns; Joshua Giddings (JG), "Diary of *Three months* During the Second session of the twenty fifth congress of the United States," Entry for Jan. 29, 1839, Joshua R. Giddings Papers (JG Papers), Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform.

Slade consequently vowed to fight unflinchingly for congressional legislation against slavery in the District of Columbia.[18]

Like the abolitionists, Slade relished the fact that his antislavery speeches "produced no small excitement in the House" and "disturbed the nerves of the slaveholders." The opposition he faced from "the foolish hot heads of the South," Slade recognized, would cause his oratory "to be read by thousands, who, but for that would have felt little or no interest to see it." Slade praised the abolitionist movement as a "noble cause" and hoped to have "the pleasure of aiding its advancement." Slade was so devoted to his antislavery calling that he did not even return to his sick and grieving wife after the death of his daughter (Lewis Tappan, but not Slade himself, attended the funeral) because he believed "it is very important for me to say something on presenting my petitions on the subject of acknowledging the Independence of Hayti; and it should be done *now*." Slade, like Adams, faced occasional death threats, but dismissed them as mere "growling" with no "bite." Never able to achieve Adams's political independence, Slade worried intensely about juggling the support of his abolitionist Whig constituents and those loyal to the party's southern leadership. When political abolitionists began condemning all Whig politicians as the Slave Power's accessories, Slade, to his sincere dismay, absorbed some of the sharpest criticism, especially from the *Emancipator*, of which Slade was a "constant reader."[19]

In antislavery Vermont, Slade did not view his Whig partisanship as contradicting his abolitionism. Both parties in Slade's home state claimed a strong abolitionist membership. Whig and Democratic officeholders worked alongside each other in the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, which counted among its most active members Whig Lieutenant Governor David Camp, Whig Secretary of State Chauncey L. Knapp, and three-time Democratic lieutenant gubernatorial candidate Edward D. Barber, the society's corresponding secretary for 1838 and 1839. Whig and Democratic leaders alike condemned proslavery national leaders and supported racial equality, both politically and socially, at home—a suicidal position for party politicians in nearly every other state. Vermont abolitionists from both parties celebrated that "a large majority of the people" shared their aspirations of repealing the gag rule and abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. The bipartisan Vermont Anti-Slavery Society also advocated that abolitionists vote only for antislavery candidates, paying lip service at least to the goal of avoiding any "alliance with either of the political parties of the day." In 1840, though, political abolitionists still denigrated Vermont politicians, notwithstanding the presence of "many of the most prominent abolitionists in the state" on both parties' tickets. Holding fast to the Liberty position that the

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[18] For example see *Philanthropist*, Feb. 19, 1836, New York *Colored American*, Jul. 21, 1838, and Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, *Address to the Senators and Representatives of the Free States, in the Congress of the United States* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838); Wm Slade to Abel Libolt, Jun. 25, 1839 in *Voice of Freedom*; Wm Slade to James Slade, Jan. 28, 1836, William Slade to William (son) Slade, Mar. 27, 1836, Wm Slade to Abigail Slade, Dec. 22, 1837, Slade Family Papers, Henry Sheldon Museum, Stewart-Swift Research Center, Middlebury, Vt., V. 1: William Slade Letters (Domestic Correspondence Scrapbook); Wm Slade to William (son) Slade, Dec. 31, 1837, Ibid.

[19] Wm Slade to Abigail Slade, Dec. 22, 1837, Slade Family Papers; Wm Slade to William (son) Slade, Dec. 31, 1837, Ibid; Wm Slade to Dr. Isaac Parrish, Mar. 18, 1836, in *Emancipator*, Jul. 14, 1836; Wm Slade to James Slade, Dec. 20, 1838; also see Wm Slade to Abigail Slade, Dec. 26, 1838; LT Journal Entry for Dec. 9, 1838, LT Papers; Wm Slade to William (son) Slade, Dec 31, 1837; Wm Slade to JG, Jul. 25, 1839, JG papers; On Adams's political independence, Giddings wrote in an 1839 diary entry, "Mr Adams belongs to no local district, to no political party, but to the Nation and to the people … While in the house of Representatives, he consults with no one, takes the advice of no one acts with no one, but the Nation." Entry for Jan. 1, 1839, JG Papers; Letter from Wm Slade in *Emancipator*, May 6, 1841.

parties were the mainstays of the Slave Power, the *Emancipator* griped that "Slade, Camp, Barber, & c, will, of course, uphold pro-slavery men in the General Government." While third-party proponents routinely assailed the partisanship of Vermont's major-party abolitionists, they understood that Vermont Whigs and Democrats aided the abolitionist cause immensely by sending antislavery legislative resolutions and, more importantly, earnest antislavery representatives like Slade to Congress.[20]

Political activism at the state level complemented abolitionists' congressional lobbying by providing additional opportunities to capitalize on the visibility of sympathetic state officeholders. Many political abolitionist leaders lobbied close to home, especially when they had personal relationships with their congressmen or local elites. From early on, John Greenleaf Whittier perceived that local political figures might be able to "take hold of the cause without essentially endangering their popularity." Whittier knew he had "some influence with this class," since his work as a National Republican journalist had "gained me a large number of political friends" through whom "the higher classes of our statesmen, etc. may be reached." Seeking to exploit his connections in Essex County, Massachusetts, Whittier vigorously lobbied his friend and U.S. Representative Caleb Cushing in the mid-1830s. Whittier both cautioned Cushing about the political power of his abolitionist constituents and praised his defense of petition rights, offering specific advice about how to best handle the slavery issue in Congress. By 1837, Whittier encouraged not only Whig friends, but also prominent Massachusetts Democratic state representative Robert Rantoul. Whittier assured Rantoul even at that early date that abolitionists would put antislavery before party. Increasingly distrustful of Whig partisanship, Whittier exhorted Rantoul to sponsor antislavery resolutions in the legislature, so that the Whig Party would not be able to take credit for them.[21]

On rare occasions abolitionist state legislators could generate the kind of attention that made political abolitionists across the North take notice. Antislavery newspapers lauded Massachusetts state senator James Alvord's 1838 "sterling" legislative reports, the first against annexing Texas and the second in support of almost the entire political abolitionist program, even prohibition of the domestic slave trade. Both of Alvord's reports passed with overwhelming support. Abolitionists forcefully advocated Alvord's nomination to Congress and rejoiced when he was nominated and then elected with broad antislavery support. To their great sorrow, Alvord died before his term.[22]

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[20] For an example of Camp's abolitionist sentiments, see his address to the Orleans County Anti-Slavery Society in *Voice of Freedom*, Feb. 9, Feb. 16, 1839; Barber's three unsuccessful runs for lieutenant governor are noted in Office of the Vermont Secretary of State, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, General Election Results, Lieutenant Governor, 1813-2008, http://vermont-archives.org/govhistory/results1/pdf/ stoff2ltgov.pdf, Accessed July 10, 2009; Andrew S. Barker, "Chauncey Langdon Knapp and Political Abolitionism in Vermont," *New England Quarterly* 73 (Sept. 2000), 434-462, 452-462; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society: With the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, Holden in Middlebury, February 21 &22, 1838* (Brandon: Telegraph Office, 1838); *Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented At Middlebury, February 20, 1839, with Minutes of Proceedings at the Annual Meeting* (Montpelier: Allen & Poland, 1839); *Emancipator*, Jun. 25, 1840.

[21] JGW to Abijah Wyman Thayer, January 10, 1836, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1: 185-187; JGW to Elizur Wright, Jr. (EWJ), Feb. 25, 1834, Ibid., 1:142; JGW to Cushing, February 10, 1836, Ibid., 1: 188-189; JGW to Rantoul, March 1, 1837, Ibid., 1: 225-226; JGW to Rantoul, March 13, 1837, Ibid., 1: 226-227

[22] *Emancipator*, Mar. 22, Apr. 26, Oct. 25, 1838, Oct. 17, 1839; *Liberator*, Apr. 20, 1838, "Abstract of Sixth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society," in *Philanthropist*, May 21, 1839.

Probably the most provocative abolitionist state legislator was Thaddeus Stevens, a Pennsylvania Anti-Mason who eventually made peace with (and joined) the Whig Party. In Stevens, abolitionists found an ally who enjoyed goading anti-abolitionists in Harrisburg as much as Slade and Adams did slaveholding congressmen. Like Adams, Stevens had a flair for the dramatic. In 1837, Stevens got himself elected a delegate to a Harrisburg Convention of "Friends of the Integrity of the Union"— intended as a euphemism for anti-abolitionists. At the convention, though, Stevens argued that slavery, not abolitionism, endangered the "Integrity of the Union." "The house, thus made up of materials as repellent and incongruous as the north poles of magnets," abolitionist Jonathan Blanchard scoffed, "was constantly fluctuating between roars of laughter and almost out-breaking rage." When Stevens offered resolutions declaring all men created equal and that Congress had the right to abolish the interstate slave trade and slavery in the District of Columbia, the convention adjourned rather than be forced to vote. Abolitionists delighted in this spectacle, and soon after praised Stevens for his (unsuccessful) efforts to prevent the 1838 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention from excluding black men from the franchise. Stevens actively participated in abolitionist meetings and regretted being unable to attend the 1839 antislavery convention at Albany.[23]

Promoting state-level agitation and political partnerships became a high priority for black abolitionists, both Garrisonians and Liberty men. This was especially true in Pennsylvania, where black suffrage had been eliminated in 1838, and New York, where black men who owned less than two hundred fifty dollars worth of property had been disfranchised in an 1821 constitutional revision. In Pennsylvania black abolitionists convened from across the state multiple times to protest the 1838 Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention's disfranchisement of black voters. In Michigan, which barred black suffrage in its initial 1835 constitution, escaped slave, memoirist, and Liberty Party activist Henry Bibb played a leading role in organizing black abolitionists to protest for equal suffrage.[24]

The sophisticated suffrage campaign of New York's black abolitionists especially resembled the national abolitionist movement's strategy for influencing Congress. Black abolitionists' New York Association for the Political Elevation and Improvement of the People of Color strove to flood the New York Assembly with petitions for equal suffrage, beginning in 1838. The New York *Colored American* urged not only extensive petitioning, but also the appointment of an "agent in Albany" to oversee the petitions. Black Liberty Party activist Henry Highland Garnet executed this plan in 1841. After spearheading a new petition drive, Garnet

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[23] Jonathan Blanchard to AAP, May 5, 1837, in *Emancipator*, May 18, 1837; Letter from Jonathan Blanchard, Sept. 18, 1837, in *Emancipator*, Sept. 28, 1837; Stevens had established his antislavery credentials by defending fugitive slaves in court and drafting a pro-abolitionist response to southern legislatures' requests that northern states censor abolitionists when Stevens was chairman of the judiciary committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives (which rejected his committee's report). Hans Louis Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-century Egalitarian* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997), 46-47, 50-51; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 25, Feb. 22, 1838; Letter from Thaddeus Stevens, Jul. 15, 1839, in *Emancipator*, Aug. 29, 1839 . This was the Albany convention that pledged the abolitionist movement to political action, but not yet to forming an independent party.

[24] Robert Purvis, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838); *Proceedings of the State Convention of the colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, Held in Pittsburgh, On the 23d, 24th and 25th of August, 1841, for the Purpose of Considering their Condition, and the Means of Its Improvement*(Pittsburgh: Matthew M. Grant, 1841), 4-5, 12-13; On Michigan, see for example, *Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of Michigan: Held in the City of DETROIT on the 26th & 27th days of October, 1843, for the Purpose of Considering Their Moral and Political Condition as Citizens of the State.* Detroit: William Harsha, 1843.

spent the winter at Albany lobbying the legislature for equal suffrage. Garnet even received a hearing before the Judiciary Committee, but the suffrage restrictions survived.[25]

Already possessing the vote in Massachusetts (as in most New England states), black Liberty men worked with white co-partisans to contest other forms of discrimination there. The Massachusetts Liberty Party pushed for repeal of the legislative ban on intermarriage and for legislation banning segregation on railroads and mandating public school integration. However, in Massachusetts, unlike New York, most African Americans remained loyal to Garrison, Nonetheless, black Liberty partisans and black Garrisonians worked together to fight railroad and school segregation. In those efforts both groups collaborated with antislavery Whig legislators, such as George Bradburn of Nantucket, and, most famously, John Quincy Adams's son Charles Francis.[26]

Political abolitionists, black and white, concentrated on pressuring antislavery congressmen and legislators, rarely seeing hope for executive assistance, since northern electorates (except in Vermont) seldom elected antislavery governors before the 1850s. However, on the infrequent occasions when governors took decisive antislavery action, political abolitionists took advantage. Most famously, New York Governor William Seward received political abolitionist plaudits (notwithstanding their earlier conflict over Seward's 1838 campaign) for refusing repeatedly to extradite three free black sailors to Virginia, where they were charged in 1839 with abetting a slave escape. In 1841 the controversy escalated when the Virginia legislature passed a law requiring all New York vessels docked in Virginia to undergo inspection and pay bonds, and new Governor John Patton (author of the 1837 gag resolution) renewed the demand for the sailors. The Virginia legislature promised to repeal the offensive new law only if New York extradited the three men and repealed its guarantee of a jury trial for alleged fugitive slaves. Hoping to pressure Seward by hampering New York's southern commerce, South Carolina passed similar legislation in solidarity with Virginia, but Seward remained firm. In 1842 the newly elected New York Senate, with a Democratic majority, urged Seward to comply, but he persisted in refusing to "recogniz[e] such a natural inequality of men." Abolitionists extolled Seward, and the *Emancipator* celebrated that he "takes the highest anti-slavery ground on all the points in controversy," even though that meant "crossing the policy of his party." The Liberty newspaper even suggested that abolitionists should support Seward's reelection if he continued to demonstrate "that he values truth and liberty and the constitution above party," but Seward did not run again.[27]

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[25] *Colored American*, Jun. 16, 23, Jul. 14, 1838, Jul. 27, 1839; On Garnet's leadership in the 1841 petition campaign, as well as his efforts to present the petitions to the legislature, see "Proceedings of the New York State Convention held in the city of Troy, August 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1841," in *Colored American*, Sept. 11, 1841; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 17, 1841; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would be Free: Blacks Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 183-184, and Jane H. and William H. Pease, *Bound with Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 169-173; On Garnet's contributions to the Liberty Party and his fight for equal suffrage in New York, see Joel Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 33-44.

[26] Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 84, 106-124; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 15-25, 48-49, 73-74.

[27] William Henry Seward and Frederick William Seward, *William H. Seward: 1831-1846* (New York: Published by Derby and Miller, 1877), 428-429, 437-439, 463-465, 510-511, 528-531, 595-596; William Henry Seward, "The Virginia Controversy," Message to the Legislature, March 26, 1841, in *The Works of William H. Seward*, V. 2, ed.

Leavitt imagined Seward might do even more for antislavery in Congress. Leavitt believed Seward could rival Adams as a "bold" antislavery orator with both a "soul & tongue." While abolitionists appreciated Governor Seward's public opposition to southern demands, they recognized that challenges to the Slave Power in its congressional stronghold provided the most compelling, and most widely circulated publicity for political abolitionist arguments.[28]

With Seward unwilling to run for Congress (or leave the Whig Party), the House's most impressive instigator of southern hysteria after Adams became Joshua Giddings, a Whig from Ohio's highly abolitionized Western Reserve. By 1846, when a stroke severely limited Adams, Giddings had assumed the mantle as the House's leading antislavery gadfly. When Giddings first arrived in Washington in 1838, abolitionists in his Western Reserve district warily pinned their hopes on the staunch Whig. It did not take long before Giddings revolted at the "self important airs" and "overbearing manners" of the "southern bullies." Giddings was even more appalled by the "drove of human male & female" he witnessed "driven past the Capitol."[29]

Coaxed on by abolitionist correspondents at home, Giddings became determined to take a stand in the winter of 1839. He consulted Gamaliel Bailey, the leading abolitionist editor in the West, and Bailey promised that Ohio abolitionists would support Giddings even if he only moved against the slave trade in Washington. Bailey understood that "slaveholders are now, tremblingly alive to the slightest demarcation of hostility to their beloved institution. They are well aware that a single movement, though only indirectly unfavorable, would be but the *beginning of a series*; and they would array themselves as fiercely and stubbornly against *that*, as they would against an effort to do all at once."[30]

Having secured Bailey's support, Giddings proceeded by attacking a bill seemingly unconnected to slavery—a tactic for obtaining the floor that would become a staple of antislavery congressional agitation. Opposing an appropriation to build a new bridge over the Potomac, Giddings repudiated any expenditure for the District not absolutely necessary for the functioning of the federal government, while the House "refuse[d] to hear" "many thousands of our people" and "treat their petitions with contempt." No Northerner, he said, could "consent to continue the seat of Government in the midst of a magnificent slave-market." Congress should move the capital somewhere congressmen could look out the window without seeing innocent "men, women, and children, indiscriminately chained by the neck." Outraged members from both sections clamored for the floor and "the greatest confusion prevailed" before the majority unsurprisingly ruled Giddings out of order.[31]

Abolitionists also appreciated their congressional allies' ability to serve as antislavery watchdogs. Along with producing controversies highlighting the Slave Power in Congress, these congressmen could use their political access and their congressional platform to alert the nation

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George E. Baker (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), 390-393; *Colored American*, Apr. 21, 1841; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jun. 2, 1841; *Emancipator*, May 6, 1841.

[28] JL to GS, Mar. 11, 1842, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America), Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers).

[29] Uri Seeley to Joshua Giddings, Nov. 28, 1838, JG Papers; JG Diary, Entry for Dec. 14, 1838, Ibid.; JG to "Sir," Feb. 26, 1839, Joshua R. Giddings Miscellaneous Manuscripts, New York Historical Society (NYHS).

[30] For example see Uri Seeley to JG, Nov. 28, 1838 and Edward Wade to JG, January 29, 1839, JG Papers; For Bailey's early years, see Stanley Harrold's excellent biography, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), Ch. 1-2; GB to JG, February 7, 1839, Giddings-Julian Papers (G-J Papers), Library of Congress, microform.

[31] *CG*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 181; "Remarks of Mr. Giddings (of Ohio,) Wednesday February 13, 1839," *Liberator*, Mar. 22, 1839; James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 41-43.

to new aggressive designs of the Slave Power. In the early 1840s, when some Southerners attempted to divide the Florida territory to create two future slave states (one in West Florida, and one in East Florida once it was more fully settled), abolitionists and antislavery congressmen worked together to expose the "ulterior object" of "The Florida war with its enormous expenditure of property and human life." The U.S. government had apparently decreed that "the Seminoles are to be exterminated," possibly "by bloodhounds," for the purpose of "manufacture[ing] … A NEW SLAVE STATE." The next congressional session, Giddings expounded for three hours "with the most perfect calmness and self-possession" on the proslavery aims of the costly guerilla war being waged against the Seminole Indians, "although the House was nearly all the time agitated like the waves of the sea." Seeking to enlighten and rouse the northern public, Giddings's polemic cast the war as a grand slave-hunting expedition that transformed the American army into "slave-catchers." Edward Wade, Giddings's frequent Liberty Party challenger on the Western Reserve, praised the speech as "the most important" one "ever delivered in congress on the subject of Slavery." Abolitionists widely lauded the speech and gladly purchased the pamphlet version as the best available source of information on the Florida war. [32]

Adams similarly worked with abolitionists to transform the House into a platform from which to apprise the nation of the federal government's proslavery machinations. For example, to expose the Van Buren administration's manipulation of the judicial process to favor the Africans' Spanish captors, Adams demanded an inquiry into executive documents on the *Amistad* trial. In the spring of 1840, Lewis Tappan and Roger Baldwin, the *Amistad* Africans' lead counsel, conferred with Adams about the administration's "scandalous mistranslation" of "*ladinos*,"—meaning slaves born in the colonies or imported before the prohibition of the slave trade—a material falsification by Havana officials, as "sound negroes," a description irrelevant to the Africans' case. (Later, however, the proofreader claimed the mistake resulted from sloppy handwriting.) To Adams and the abolitionists, the error seemed a calculated attempt to evade the question of whether the captives had been taken illegally from Africa.[33]

As a public champion of the abolitionists' case on behalf of the illegally enslaved Africans, Adams spotlighted the Van Buren administration's blatant attempts to manipulate the judicial process to predetermine a proslavery outcome. When the case reached the Supreme Court, Tappan enlisted Adams as co-counsel to generate added publicity. Although Tappan admitted Adams was "not probably a very good lawyer," abolitionists and antislavery Whigs both recognized that he could use his Supreme Court appearance "to make a speech for the country." Adams did not disappoint. "He showed," Congressman Seth Gates reported, "how all the National sympathies were in favor of slavery" with "biting, burning, blistering sarcasm poured out upon" Van Buren's slaveholding Secretary of State John Forsyth. When the Supreme Court freed the Africans, Adams assured Leavitt it was "one of the happiest events of my life."[34]

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[32] *CG*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 112-113; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 16, 1840; Letter from JL, Feb. 8, 1841, in *Emancipator*, Feb. 18, 1841; JG, "The Florida War," in *Speeches in Congress* (1841-1852) (Cambridge, Mass.: John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 10; Edward Wade to JG, Apr. 3, 1841, JG Papers; *Colored American*, Feb. 27, 1841; Salmon P. Chase (SPC) to JG, Dec. 30, 1841, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), 2: 81-83; E.D. Moore to AAP, Jan. 10, 1842, AAP Papers.

[33] JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 10: 287; Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 144-148.

[34] Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 153-55; LT to Wm Jay, Oct. 29, 1840, John Jay Collection; Gates to GS, Feb. 1, 1841, GS Papers; JQA to JL, Mar. 15, 1841, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks.

On the Texas issue, more than any other, Adams and the antislavery congressmen strove to be effective watchdogs that could rouse antislavery forces across the nation. Proslavery designs on Texas in the mid-1830s sparked one of the earliest and most fruitful collaborations between abolitionists and Representative Adams. In the midst of the tumultuous session that eventuated in the first gag rule, Quaker abolitionist editor and Texas expert Benjamin Lundy sought out Adams's aid in publicizing the proslavery aims of the Texas Revolution. Adams agreed that "there can be *no doubt* that the grand object of the Insurgents [in Texas] is the reestablishment of slavery." As Adams requested information on Texan slavery, Lundy delightedly obliged, furnishing Adams with pamphlets, maps, a history of Texas, and translations of Mexican abolition laws, among other documents. Adams marshaled this information to charge the Administration and its supporters with pushing the country toward an aggressive, proslavery war with Mexico. (In that speech, Adams also pronounced the doctrine of emancipation by war powers, suggesting a war on the southern border could give Congress the reason, and constitutional justification, for abolishing slavery in the southern states.)[35]

Lundy quickly realized the efficacy of Adams's congressional stands against slavery and urged him on: "No man, occupying the station in [the] community which has fallen to thy lot, ever had a better opportunity to establish an imperishable fame on an extended basis than is now offered to thy acceptance." In subsequent years Lundy's lobbying continued to enable Adams to demonstrate the proslavery designs of annexationists, and abolitionists then praised Adams's "watchfulness" and "ability to meet any emergency." Adams declined Lundy's requests that he draft an anti-Texas memorial for Lundy to circulate and that he speak publicly at a Philadelphia abolitionist meeting, but he did agree to confer privately for two hours with Lundy and his Quaker colleague Lucretia Mott. Writing Lundy privately, Adams described antislavery as "the cause in which you take so much interest, and to which probably more than anything else, the remainder of my political life will be devoted." In late 1837, Adams made sure that "a huge pile" of "printed copies of diplomatic correspondence between the United States and Mexico, in relation to Texas" was placed on every congressman's desk. These, an abolitionist observer remarked would "speedily open the great subject now agitating the country." Adams remained in regular correspondence with Lundy, who continued to prevail on him to serve as a congressional watchdog against any renewed efforts to annex Texas. When Lundy died in 1839, Adams mourned him "as a brother." Together Adams, Lundy, and the abolitionists helped generate the pervasive northern anti-annexation sentiment that shelved the Texas issue until the Tyler administration revived it in the early 1840s.[36]

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[35] JQA to Lundy, May 12, 20, 1836, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; Benjamin Lundy, *War in Texas; Instigated by Slaveholders, Land Speculators, &c. For the Re-Establishment of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Republic of Mexico,* Published under the pseudonym "A Citizen of the United States" (Philadelphia, Merrihew and Gunn, 1836), 47; JQA to Benjamin Lundy, May 12, 1836, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; Leonard L. Richards, *Life and Times of Congressman John Quincy Adams*, 154-172; JQA to Lundy, May 20, 1836, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks.

[36] Lundy to JQA, Jun. 9, 1836, Dec. 15, 1837, Adams Family Papers, , Letters Received; EWJ to JQA, Sept. 21, 1837, Ibid.; JQA to Lundy, Aug. 10, 1837, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 9: 302; JQA to Lundy, May 20, 1836, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks. This quote may refer more specifically to Adams's opposition to Texas, but the more likely construction of Adams's cryptic phrasing is that he meant the antislavery cause generally; *Emancipator*, Oct. 14, 1837; Lundy to JQA, June 9, 1836, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; JQA to JGW, October 28, 1839, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; For more on the abolitionist response to the Texas annexation project as part of the Slave Power's agenda, see Chapter 1.

Once the Tyler administration began plotting annexation, abolitionists again worked with their congressional watchdogs to warn the northern public. In 1842, Adams attempted to alert the North to plans for "the dismemberment of Mexico, and the annexation of an immense portion of its territory to the slave representation of this Union." Lewis Tappan likewise feared a new southern congressional attempt "to smuggle Texas in" and urged the importance of abolitionist lobbyist Joshua Leavitt's presence at Washington in late 1843: "Do not … sleep upon your post. You are now *the watchman* at head-quarters."[37]

Working with Leavitt, Seth Gates kept abolitionists informed of Tyler's covert maneuvering. Gates consulted Gerrit Smith on anti-annexation strategy, and encouraged abolitionists to lobby their state and national representatives, especially Democrats Gates could not reach. In Washington, Gates joined Leavitt and Weld in drafting an anti-Texas speech for another New York Whig to deliver. Then Gates rallied antislavery voters with his 1843 "Address to the People of the Free States," signed ultimately by twenty-one northern Whigs. This address, printed in antislavery-leaning newspapers across the North, aimed to alert the nation to the Tyler administration's designs on Texas. Gates warned that annexation would ensure "*the undue ascendancy of the slaveholding power in the Government*" unless "*the entire mass of the people in the Free States become aroused*" to defeat it. Leavitt's *Emancipator* praised this "admirable exposition of the danger of this infamous conspiracy," but also questioned Whig claims to be the anti-Texas party, when only twenty-one signed the address, eight of them belatedly. As Gates continued to feed political abolitionists crucial information about the annexation scheme, he veered gradually toward Liberty partisanship.[38]

Joshua Leavitt and the Washington Liberty Lobby

After embracing third-party politics in the early 1840s, leading political abolitionists deepened their committment to a concerted lobbying strategy. Even as Liberty men disparaged all Whig partisans for deference to the Slave Power, they simultaneously worked to convert prominent antislavery Whigs. At a minimum, third-party abolitionists had to be careful not to completely repel their most important political allies. To nurture Liberty congressional alliances, Joshua Leavitt established an influential abolitionist lobbying presence in Washington. There Leavitt worked with leading antislavery congressmen to instigate controversies that forced Congress to grapple over slavery and drew further national attention to the demands of the Slave Power.

Seth Gates's brief congressional career (1839-1843) especially demonstrates the advantages of, and the obstacles to, Liberty attempts to build congressional alliances. Gates's immediatist background and his break from the Whig Party in 1843 differentiate his political

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[37] JQA, "Address to his Constituents, delivered at Braintree, September 17," in *Quincy Patriot*, Oct. 29, 1842; LT to JL, Dec. 29, 1843, LT Papers.

[38] Gates to GS, Mar. 14, 1842, Gates to GS, Feb. 9, 1843, Gates to GS, Apr. 8, 1842, GS Papers; Boston *Emancipator and Free American*, May 11, 1843. From December of 1841 through March of 1844, the *Emancipator*'s name was changed to *Emancipator and Free American*. In the notes that follow, I will continue to cite it as *Emancipator* for issues throughout this period; When Gates sent the list of eight who had delayed signing to add to the original thirteen signers, Leavitt challenged, "Does our honest friend, Mr. Gates, rely for the final onset upon the floor of Congress upon troops that are so tardy in coming up to a mere paper warfare?" Ibid., May 25, 1843.

evolution from most other prominent antislavery Whigs. A former secretary of the Genesee County Anti-Slavery Society, Gates had a longstanding relationship with abolitionist leader Gerrit Smith, and the two corresponded frequently to compare tactics. Also a prominent local Whig, Gates accepted the editorship of his town's Whig paper, the *Le Roy Gazette*, in 1838. In that capacity, Gates uniformly sided with his party in its clash with abolitionists over the 1838 New York gubernatorial election and celebrated the election of southern Whigs, even South Carolina's Waddy Thompson, one of Adams's most rabid congressional adversaries. After Gates's faithful editorial service, the Whig Party nominated him for U.S. Representative. Abolitionists hailed his election in 1838, before the Liberty Party's founding, as an abolitionist triumph.[39]

By the fall of 1839, however, as Gates prepared to depart for Congress, many upstate abolitionists insisted stridently on complete independence from the major political parties. Gates's future law partner F.C.D. McKay admonished, "Even our friend Gates must be either *abolition, or Whig*. To be both is impossible." To Gerrit Smith, although surely not to fellow Whigs, Gates portrayed his partisanship as instrumental, swearing that once he could "see that duty or expediency required it" he "would swing clear of party." Gates worried independent action would "unite both parties against us" and discourage potential converts "who were weak in the faith, but were accessable." Already though, Gates insinuated he might eventually abandon his party if ever convinced of Liberty assertions it supported the Slave Power.[40]

As he wavered, Liberty partisans pursued Gates ever more vigorously. Before departing for Washington, Gates beat back an effort to pledge a Genesee County antislavery convention to abolitionist voting. Gerrit Smith responded by publicly deprecating his friend as exerting a "most disastrous" influence on the antislavery cause. To Gates's great personal offense, the Liberty Party quickly circulated Smith's denunciatory letter in 1500 handbills, many in Gates's district. Gates, even while working loyally for the Whig Party, viewed himself as a dedicated abolitionist. Having twice braved anti-abolitionist mobs alongside abolitionist lecturing agent Amos Phelps, Gates deeply resented Smith's public condemnation. Gates published a lengthy retort, in which he disparaged the third-party strategy as "*utterly impracticable*." Smith realized he had deeply offended a powerful friend and softened, but did not rescind, his criticism. Smith assured Gates, "My own judgment of you is that you are a genuine abolitionist—a sincere friend of the slave—but that being blinded and misled by political party feelings, you have, on one point, gone widely astray from the requirements of our holy cause." Representative Gates's experiences exemplify the fraught relationships between Liberty partisans and antislavery congressmen.[41]

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[39] The best, although still sparse, discussions of Gates can be found in James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, and Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt*; *Le Roy Gazette*, Jul. 24, Sept. 19, Dec. 26, 1838; On the 1838 New York election see Chapter 1 above; Gates won the abolitionists' endorsement by averring support for abolition in the District of Columbia and opposing admission of new slave states and annexation of Texas. He also suggested that he was inclined to support ending the interstate slave trade, but that the issue warranted further investigation. Gates to C.O. Shephard, Oct. 26, 1838, in *Emancipator*, Nov. 15, 1838; Ibid., Oct. 25, Dec. 13, 1838.

[40] F.C.D. McKay to GS, Nov. 18, 1839, GS Papers; The partnership of Gates and McKay is advertised in Rochester *American Citizen*, Dec. 7, 1841; Gates to GS, Aug. 28, 1839, GS Papers.

[41] *Le Roy Gazette*, Oct. 9, 1839; "Letter from Gerrit Smith to Hon. Seth M. Gates," Oct. 22, 1839, in *Friend of Man*, Oct. 30, 1839; *Le Roy Gazette*, Dec. 11, 1839; Gates to GS, Nov. 4, 1839, GS Papers; "Answer of Seth Gates to Letter of Gerrit Smith," Oct. 29, 1839, in *Le Roy Gazette*, Nov. 6, 1839; GS to Gates, Dec. 21, 1839, GS Papers, Letterbooks; *Emancipator*, Dec. 12, 1839.

The 1840 presidential campaign and the creation of an abolitionist third party exacerbated these tensions. The approaching election raised the stakes of the petition question considerably, led to Maryland Whig William Cost Johnson's permanent gag rule, and generated intense debate that Leavitt celebrated as "abolition fire in the Capitol." Slaveholding Democrats attacked the Whig Party by asserting, as abolitionists well understood, that antislavery Whigs were "drumming up recruits" for the abolitionist movement. North Carolina's Jesse Bynum railed against the antislavery Whigs' "language which was sufficient to rouse every slave in the nation to murder and assassination." Johnson responded with his new standing gag rule, designed to defend his party's proslavery commitment. While abolitionists condemned Johnson's "infamous resolution" and his "air of confidence and self-congratulation," they welcomed the heated debates that preceded the rule's enactment: "This body professes not to discuss the subject of slavery. … Yet, it nevertheless happens for the last fortnight the House of Representatives has been entirely engrossed with this prohibited subject." "One thing is now most manifest," the *Pennsylvania Freeman* continued, "the slave question *can* be discussed in Congress … The Washington papers publish the debates—solid columns of 'incendiary' matter—and [Postmaster General] Amos Kendall scatters them over the whole South & yet we hear of no disastrous consequences." John Greenleaf Whittier assured Adams that the more audacious Johnson Gag would provide an even stronger national antislavery target than previous gag rules.[42]

Though abolitionists valued the intense debate over petitioners' rights, they railed against antislavery Whigs who prioritized Harrison's election over the assault on the Slave Power. While Slade exulted, "What hath God wrought!" at being permitted to deliver a two-day argument in the "very den of slave holders and slave traders" for abolition in the District of Columbia political abolitionists assailed the speech's gratuitous presidential endorsement. "Mr. Slade … attacked the Monster Slavery like a man … showed the system to be hellish & monstrous, and that its influence in our country was all powerful," but then "bowed down and licked the boot of oppression," despite being "fully aware of" Harrison's "determined deadly hostility to the principles of Liberty."[43]

As political abolitionists embarked on their maiden third party campaign, they challenged antislavery support for William Henry Harrison by denigrating the antislavery contributions of his adherents, especially Slade and Gates. "The slaveholders will listen patiently to Mr. Slade, and let his speech circulate all over the South," Leavitt chided, "if he will wind up by giving his vote for Speaker and for President as slavery dictates," even though Leavitt recognized the slaveholders' alarm at Slade's speeches and their usefulness for the antislavery cause. Leavitt did not spare even the venerable ex-President: "Of what avail are the whinings of John Quincy Adams … about the encroachments of slavery," when he tacitly supported Harrison. At times Leavitt berated abolitionist Whigs so aggressively that Giddings suggested he needed a "strait jacket." Since abolitionists' anti-Slave Power invective threatened to strain their relationships

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[42] *Emancipator*, Jan. 30, 1840; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* (*CG Appendix*), 26th Congress, 1st Session 142-144; *CG*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 150-151; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 30, Feb. 6, 1840; JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 10:206.

[43] *CG Appendix*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 906-907; For more on Slade's speech and on the Johnson Gag see Chapter 1; Edwin Clarke to Thomas Meacham, Aug. 14, 1840, Clark(e) Family Miscellaneous Manuscripts, NYHS.

with potential congressional mouthpieces, personal lobbying became all the more crucial for nurturing congressional alliances.[44]

At the same time that political abolitionists publicly chastised antislavery Whig congressmen, they privately worked to exploit these representatives' ability to generate congressional controversy over slavery. The two groups came to respect each other, if at times grudgingly, and both benefited from their collaboration. Abolitionist petitions provided the basis for many of the stands taken by antislavery Whigs, and Liberty partisans' private support encouraged them to voice their antislavery convictions and sometimes achieve celebrity (and notoriety) in the process.

Despite their weak showing in the 1840 election, Liberty men remained confident of future success if they could continue to precipitate antislavery disruptions in Congress. To facilitate this, Leavitt installed himself as a congressional lobbyist. Leavitt quickly became a Washington fixture, the leading abolitionist in the capital. Even as he castigated antislavery Whigs in his party press, Leavitt personally encouraged and aided their efforts in Congress. Leavitt arrived in the winter of 1841 to report on the Supreme Court trial of the *Amistad* Africans and assist in Adams's preparations. Leavitt also spent as much time as possible observing congressional debate and buttonholing antislavery representatives. Leavitt frequently alleged his desire to avoid returning to the "hotbed of politics and sin," but for four years, the *Emancipator* repeatedly beseeched contributions to support him in Washington, for the good of the antislavery cause. His presence on the floor, and unsolicited distribution of his paper to all members, even became a subject of House debate, exposing Leavitt to a threat of censure and expulsion. Leavitt claimed that many congressmen enjoyed reading the *Emancipator*, though it certainly irritated some Southerners. Earlier, when John Calhoun received a copy in his Senate mail, he "deliberately held it out at arms length—tore it in pieces & threw it on the floor" with abolitionist John Jay (William Jay's son) looking on in the Senate gallery.[45]

Many abolitionists who remained staunch Whigs also valued Leavitt's presence at Washington, since the reports he disseminated provided an important abolitionist perspective on Congressional debate and Supreme Court proceedings. The Whig abolitionist editor of the Xenia, Ohio *Free Press* praised Leavitt as "one of the most vigilant and indefatigable politicians in all our acquaintances," notwithstanding his "*third partyism*." Antislavery Whig congressmen too appreciated Leavitt's work, despite his frequent attacks on their partisanship. Slade, though he publicly complained about the *Emancipator*'s "bitter censure" of Whig abolitionists, praised Leavitt's "talent and industry" and privately defended his impatience. Gates assured his friend Gerrit Smith that Leavitt was "doing good of course." Conceding the validity of some Liberty Party criticisms, Gates confidentially wrote Smith "as though … not a political opponent!" and admitted that Harrison "will be pro slavery enough" and was "very proud of his Virginia birth,

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[44] *Emancipator*, Oct. 1, 1840; JL, "Sketch of a Speech" delivered at the First Anniversary of the Massachusetts Abolition Society, May 29, 1840, in *Emancipator*, Jun. 25, 1840; JG to Sir[Royal Cowles?], Dec. 28, 1839, JG Papers.

[45] James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976),106-107 ; Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt*, 176-180; McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency," 182-184; JL to Roger Hooker Leavitt, Dec. 10, 1841, Joshua Leavitt Papers, Library of Congress, microform; *Emancipator*, May 5, 1842; JL to JG, Apr. 22, 1842, JG Papers; *Emancipator*, Jan. 21, 1841; John Jay to William Jay, May 26, 1838, John Jay Collection. This is John Jay (1817-1894), sometimes known as John Jay II or John Jay, Jr., to distinguish him from his namesake and grandfather John Jay (1745-1829), the founding father, diplomat, New York governor, and first U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice.

whereas if I had a dog born in that state, it would afford a strong inducement to shoot it, rather than be proud of it."[46]

Abolitionist lobbyists developed close relationships with their congressional coadjutors, even as the two butted heads over electoral tactics. Leavitt sometimes requested advice from Giddings about when he should return to Washington and relied on Giddings and Gates to receive his mail through their frank and also to reserve a room for him. As these antislavery Whigs staked out increasingly aggressive stances, Liberty partisans grew hopeful of converting them. Ohio Liberty manager Salmon Chase attempted to cajole Giddings into acting with Ohio Liberty men in support of ex-Whig judge and state senator Leicester King for governor in 1842, in part by pretending that Chase had only supported the independent nomination because he expected Giddings would approve. Chase urged that if Giddings would "give us the weight of your name & influence" along with that of the "the other friends in Congress from our state," the Liberty Party's "triumph will be sure & soon." To Chase's chagrin, though, most prominent antislavery Whigs, including Giddings, persisted in supporting their party's state and national nominees. The fact that the Whigs finally controlled Congress in the early 1840s only increased the cross pressures on antislavery Whig congressmen.[47]

Even at the special session President Harrison had called to address the persistent economic depression, the Whig Party could not avoid the issue of antislavery petitions. Leavitt did his best to make sure of that. Leavitt pledged "to be on the spot as early as possible, to watch the progress of events, and report whatever concerns the great cause." Before the session commenced, Tyler acceded to the Presidency—the "melancholy issue," Leavitt lamented, of the vigorous Whig efforts to persuade abolitionists to support Harrison. The *Emancipator* urged increased petitioning to force abolitionism into the special session and to sustain Adams, who had already "thrown himself once more into the breach, for the rescue of the Right of Petition." By contrast, stauncher Whigs like Slade, eager to confront the national financial crisis and implement the Whig economic agenda after years in the minority, advocated that abolitionists reserve their petitions for the regular session. The *Emancipator*, however, predicted that Southerners would attempt to reenact the previous Congress's rules, including the Johnson Gag, at the special session. Leavitt thus implored abolitionists to use their petitions to prevent that result or at least to provoke a new controversy before the House adopted rules. Leavitt understood that antislavery Whigs thought they could best aid the cause by aiming "first at the specific points of policy" they considered "beneficial to free labor," such as a protective tariff and national bank, but Leavitt disagreed with any deferral of political action against slavery and the Slave Power.[48]

By the time Leavitt scraped together funds to return to Washington, these antislavery Whigs had again disappointed Liberty partisans. Adams seemingly expunged the gag, but the House reconsidered and ultimately passed special session rules that tabled *any* petitions not pertaining to the specific policies the session had been called to enact. Antislavery Whigs, excepting Adams, defended this compromise as discontinuing extraordinary treatment for antislavery petitions. Abolitionists vehemently disagreed, expressing dismay that "Borden, Slade, Gates, Giddings and others who have been regarded as almost—some of them

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[46] Quoted from Ohio *Free Press* in *Emancipator*, May 13, 1841; Wm Slade to Abigail Slade, Jan. 3, 1841, Slade Family Papers; Letter from Wm Slade, in *Emancipator*, May 6, 1841; Gates to GS, Feb. 1, 25, 1841,GS Papers.
[47] JL to JG, Mar. 31, Oct. 29, 1841, JG Papers; SPC to JG, Dec. 30, 1841, *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:81-83.
[48] *Emancipator*, Apr. 8, May 6, Jun. 10, 1841; Wm Slade to *Voice of Freedom*, Apr. 28, 1841, in *Emancipator*, May 13, 1841; JL to JG, Oct. 29, 1841, JG papers.

altogether—abolitionists, are recorded among the Ayes on this question." Even temporarily silencing antislavery petitions out of benign motives diverted political debate away from slavery and the Slave Power. Furthermore, abolitionists believed that "this special rule" had been "adopted at the instance of slaveholders" and "modelled according to their views" as a way to proscribe debate over "whether Congress is constitutionally bound to receive abolition petitions." Still, because of Adams's protracted struggle for repeal of the gag, abolitionists viewed the proceedings "with the liveliest satisfaction." Abolitionists celebrated the "three weeks agitation, though it be indirect, of the subject of slavery, in the city of Washington, by our national legislature, and under the eyes of the whole country" and considered "the $50,000, which this discussion has cost the country … money well expended." For political abolitionists, prolonged national attention to the Slave Power in Congress was vital.[49]

Despite their disappointment at Adams's narrow defeat during the special session, Liberty partisans urged continued pressure on Congress. In preparation for the regular session, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society disseminated a comprehensive plan calling for increased petitions and for abolitionists to engage their representatives "openly, face to face" and in conventions in every congressional district. The Society instructed petitioners to also address a separate letter to Gates, inventorying the request, location, and signers of the petition, "in order to facilitate the registering of the petitions, and that the whole amount of petitioning may be ascertained." "The discussions in Congress," the Society asserted "greatly promoted our righteous cause, and prove that legislative bodies are not immoveable." The Society also promised that "a noble band will stand by our rights at the next session," as long as abolitionists made sure they were "well sustained *by the number of petitions*." This "deliberately formed plan of operation" even caught the attention of Virginia Representative Henry Wise, a well-known proslavery extremist and one of Adams's more adroit combatants in the gag rule battle. Wise railed against the "carefully and skillfully laid" plan, coordinated with "the Hon. Seth M. Gates, the agent of the abolitionists on the floor of Congress," as a "mine … ready to blow the Union into ten thousand fragments."[50]

To ensure that antislavery representatives would use these petitions to attack the Slave Power, Leavitt intensified his lobbying efforts. Leavitt moved into Ann Sprigg's boarding House, messing with Giddings, Slade, Gates, and several other antislavery Whig congressmen. Over the next few years, this group, which Giddings styled an antislavery "select committee," strategized to circumvent the gag. Leavitt planned tactics with these representatives and pressed them to challenge slavery on the House floor and privilege antislavery convictions over party

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[49] On the tension over the rules, see, McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency," 184-185, and *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jun. 23, Jul. 7, 184; Leavitt's analysis of these complicated proceedings can be found in Ibid., Jun. 24, Jul. 1, 8, 1841; Gates defended the rule in his letter to the *Albany Evening Journal*, in *Le Roy Gazette*, Jul. 14, 1841; For similar arguments see the letters of Slade and Giddings in *Emancipator*, Jul. 15, 1841; Ibid., Jul. 8, 15, 1841; Also, Leavitt thought ignoring slavery to focus on the country's financial woes an exercise in futility, since they stemmed primarily, in Leavitt's view, from the instability of the slave-based sector of the American economy. See Leavitt's speech "The Financial Power of Slavery," in *Emancipator*, Oct. 22, 1840; Arthur Tappan and Joshua Leavitt, For the Executive Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, "Appeal to the Abolitionists, and the Friends of the Constitutional Right of Petition, Throughout the United States," Sept. 1, 1841, from the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, in *Philanthropist*, Nov. 3, 1841.

[50] Arthur Tappan and Joshua Leavitt, For the Executive Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, "Appeal to the Abolitionists, and the Friends of the Constitutional Right of Petition, Throughout the United States," Sept. 1, 1841, *From the Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Printed in *Philanthropist*, Nov. 3, 1841; *CG*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 172.

obligations. While Leavitt believed Whigs like Gates and Giddings to be misguided, he understood that they considered themselves "sincerely opposed to the slave power" and hoped that on practical tactics they could be "of one mind."[51]

Leavitt urged other political abolitionists to join him in a more formidable lobby and bemoaned James Birney's decision to move to Michigan since it would prevent him from accompanying Leavitt during the coming congressional session. Leavitt wished "a number of known abolitionists" would "visit Washington," even if only briefly, "for the purpose of sustaining, by their countenance, those of our representatives who are disposed to do right." Leavitt especially hoped for assistance during the session's opening month, which he correctly anticipated would be dominated by debates over antislavery petitions.[52]

While few abolitionists were able to comply with Leavitt's exhortations, famed semi-retired abolitionist lecturer Theodore Dwight Weld joined Leavitt and the congressmen at Mrs. Sprigg's for parts of two sessions. Giddings and his congressional housemates furnished the cost of Weld's board in exchange for his help compiling evidence that could be included in antislavery floor speeches. This "abolition house" soon became so crowded that Leavitt and Weld had to share a bed. While Weld avoided direct embroilment in Liberty electoral politics, he wholeheartedly supported antislavery lobbying, in large part because antislavery congressional speeches would be published in newspapers "scattered all over the south as well as the North." The Grimké sisters (Weld's wife and live-in sister-in-law) similarly reminded Weld that, beyond just "collecting facts," the real importance of his presence at the capital was "the influence" he could exert through "counsel & conversation" with antislavery politicians.[53]

When Weld arrived, he and Leavitt immediately began preparing ways for Giddings and his colleagues to elude the gag, but before those came to fruition Adams precipitated another scuffle that required Leavitt and Weld's fulltime involvement as political advisers. Following Adams's attempt to present an abolitionist petition for dissolution of the Union, enraged slaveholders called for censure (and, as in the proceedings five years earlier, one advocated burning the petition on the House floor).[54]

This new controversy gave Leavitt and Weld an even stronger voice in House debate. Gates, Giddings, Slade, and six other antislavery Whigs conferred with their abolitionist housemates and deputed the two of them to assist Adams in what became a dramatic two-week arraignment of slavery's role in national politics. Through the ordeal, Weld served as Adams's research assistant. Giddings secured an alcove for Weld in the Library of Congress, where he spent countless hours voraciously searching for materials Adams could use in his defense. At night, Adams met with Weld and Leavitt to discuss strategy for the following day. Adams's

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[51] JL to JG, Oct. 29, 1841, JG Papers; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 403-408, provides a brief account of the antislavery "select committee" and the important role played by Leavitt and Weld, but slights Leavitt's tactical sophistication by dismissively describing him as "a pure reformer" operating on his "abstract idealism"; On the antislavery lobby, also see Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 177-184. While acknowledging the significance of Leavitt's role, Barnes's account downplays the lobby's links to the Liberty Party, as part of the book's more general denigration of the third-party political strategy.

[52] JL to Birney, Oct. 12, 1841, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:638-640; *Emancipator*, Oct. 14, 1841; Letter from JL in Ibid., Dec. 10, 1841.

[53] JG to Laura Waters Giddings, Jan. 1, 1843, JG Papers; TDW to LT, Dec. 14, 1841, *Letters of TDW, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Barnes and Dumond, 2:881; LT to GS, Feb. 7, 1842, GS Papers; Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké to TDW, Feb. 1842, Weld-Grimké Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[54] McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency," 190-91; Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 183-87.

tirades sounded strikingly similar to Liberty rhetoric as he denounced the "conspiracy … against himself, and, through him, against the right of petition, and all the rights and liberties of the free people of this union." Gates gleefully reported to abolitionist friends that the House was "in the midst of abolition excitement" and "the Slaveocracy are in a great rage." Giddings similarly rejoiced that Adams "made the entire south tremble before him." After a full six days of this defense (spread over two weeks), Adams offered to forgo the remainder of his intended remarks if the House chose to table the censure motions, but if not, "he had a great deal of time yet to require." Enough southern Whigs decided it would be prudent to "lay the whole subject on the table" rather than allow Adams to go on.[55]

After throwing out the censure motions, the House returned to its outstanding business of petition presentation, and the floor reverted to Adams. He promptly offered almost 200 more antislavery petitions. Giddings marveled at "the power of his eloquence" and reported to Ohio Liberty manager Salmon Chase that "I have with my own eyes seen the Southern Slaveholders literally shake and tremble through every nerve and joint, while he arrayed before them their political and moral sins." "The last two weeks," Giddings continued, "have done more in congress on this subject than the last ten years previous." Giddings proudly asserted "that the charm of the Slave power *is now broken*," and confidently predicted that "a moral revolution in this nation will take its date from this session of Congress." And yet, the Washington Whig newspaper, the *National Intelligencer*, refused to publish Adams's speeches. Instead Leavitt took copious notes, despite objections to his presence on the House floor, and then sent them off to not only his *Emancipator* publisher, but also his antislavery Whig competitor, the more widely circulated *Boston Courier*.[56]

Liberty partisans eulogized the antislavery representatives' efforts and encouraged them to go further. William Jay congratulated Adams on his "glorious triumph" over censure and observed that "multitudes have sided" with Adams, many of whom "till now have held little sympathy with the abolitionists." Edward Wade assured Giddings that the congressional strife was "opening the eyes of the people to the fact that there is something more radically rotten in the administration of public affairs than our political doctors have been willing to admit." Wade predicted that Giddings and Representative Sherlock Andrews (W-OH) could "in two years revolutionize the free states" if they would just renounce the Whig Party. By Wade's appraisal, "The Whigs are up full river above canoe navigation" and could only be saved by welcoming the

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[55] JQA, *Memoirs*, ed. CFA, 11:75, 79; JG, *History of the Rebellion: Its Authors and Causes* (New York: Follett, Foster & Co., 1864), 161-172; McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency," 191; Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 183-187; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 429-444; After Adams defeated censure, Weld continued to volunteer "any services" that could " relieve [Adams] from any *drudgery*" required for his "discharge of … vast responsibilities to human freedom." TDW to JQA, Mar. 11, 1842, Adams Family Papers, , Letters Received; *CG Appendix*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 975; Gates to GS, Jan. 24, 1842, GS Papers; Leavitt also recounted his memories of Adams's "trial" in Boston *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle*, Mar. 7, 1844, From March of 1844 through October of 1845, the *Emancipator*'s name was changed to *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle* before being changed back to simply *Emancipator*. In the notes that follow, I will continue to cite it as *Emancipator* for issues throughout this period; *CG*, 27th Congress, 2nd Sessions, 214.

[56] McPherson, "Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency," 192; Adams did, however, refrain from presenting the two disunionist petitions remaining in his drawer, announcing that he would postpone their presentation in light of "the present disposition of the House." *CG*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 215; JG to SPC, Feb. 5, 1842, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia; JG to Laura Waters Giddings, Feb. 6, 1842, JG Papers; Also see James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 71-73; For a brief discussion of the *Courier* and its longtime editor Joseph Buckingham, see Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 54-55.

abolitionists and casting the slaveholders "overboard to be swallowed by sharks or whales or any thing else that won't vomit them up again." The *Emancipator* similarly joked that "some of our northern members [of Congress] are in *great danger* of becoming LIBERTY MEN!"[57]

Seeking to widen the congressional rift over slavery, the lodgers at Mrs. Sprigg's followed up Adams's triumph by proceeding with the antislavery incursions they had prepared for the session. Leavitt, Weld, and their fellow boarders moved forward with their original plan to focus congressional debate on slavery: a set of resolutions drafted by Weld for Giddings in support of the coasting ship *Creole*'s slave mutineers. Giddings attempted to assert Weld's "municipal theory of slavery," contending "that slavery being an abridgement of natural law" was only legal in the jurisdiction of the states that had enacted specific laws to legalize or protect it. Consequently the *Creole* slave rebels "violated no law" and were, Giddings told Congress, "justly liable to no penalty" for "resuming their natural rights" through violent uprising. Proslavery representatives angrily censured Giddings without allowing him to defend himself, after which Giddings promptly resigned and returned home to campaign for his constituents' re-endorsement.[58]

Leavitt and Gates sent Giddings regular updates from Washington warning him not to expect support from fellow Ohio Whigs (except Andrews): "The Lord send you deliverance, for your Whig colleagues won[']t. I hope I can scare you pretty well, so you will never trust much to slaveocrats again." The Ohio delegation scuttled Gates's efforts to organize a meeting of northern Whigs in support of Giddings, since Ohio Whigs were, perhaps justly, "alarmed it should be considered an abolition movement & do hurt in Ohio." "There will be a terrible effort" directed at sympathetic Ohio members, Gates warned, "to prevent their doing any thing, to scare them off." As Ohio Whigs deserted Giddings, Gates suspected they might even pressure Ohio's Whig governor to delay the special election to fill the seat. Gates reported, that "Leavitt & all the third party folks" were, by contrast, "deeply anxious for" Giddings's return to Washington—a telling indication of the common ground that antislavery radicals like Giddings and Gates shared with Liberty men but not with Whig co-partisans [59]

Abolitionists found the censure of Giddings "producing a happy effect," persuading antislavery voters to abandon their old political parties. Despite the timidity of his Ohio colleagues, support for Giddings mounted across the North. William Slade remarked in response to a fervent pro-Giddings Philadelphia meeting:

> This outrage will it is evident, wake up a spirit in the country, such as has not been waked up before. It will be worth one hundred thousand,—yea, a million abolition lectures. The slaveholders are taking the business of abolition out of our hands. We have nothing to do but to stand still, and see the salvation.

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[57] Wm Jay to JQA, Feb. 11, 1842, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; Edward Wade to JG, Jan. 26, 1842, JG Papers; *Emancipator*, Mar. 31, 1842.

[58] Weld explained this concept in *The Power of Congress over the District of Columbia* (New York: John F. Trow, 1838); Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 183-185, 186-189; *CG*, 27th Congress 2nd Session, 342-346.

[59] Gates to JG, Mar. 25, Apr. 4, 1842, JG Papers; James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 71-76; JL to JG, Apr. 22, 1842, JG Papers.

Liberty partisans, of course, had no intention of standing still. Working with well-disposed politicians like Slade and Giddings, they continued to inflame proslavery congressmen.[60]

While the Whig Party disdained Giddings's abolitionism, Liberty men embraced Giddings more than ever before. Even without support from the Whig machinery, Giddings won reelection resoundingly. With the contest a referendum on Giddings's congressional opposition to slavery, the Ohio Liberty Party provided its full support, this once, for the special election, and Liberty gubernatorial candidate Leicester King stumped across the district for Giddings. Salmon Chase celebrated Giddings's resolutions as almost identical to the Ohio Liberty Party's position that "slavery cannot be extended one inch beyond state limits and that so soon as a human being held a slave within passes beyond them he is thenceforth a freeman, except in the special case of escape into another state." Giddings's triumph indicated to Liberty partisans that "we have now reached a point at which the slave question in its thousand & one relations *must & will be met*." Finally "the *North*" was ready to "make a stand against the domineering *encroachments* of slavery." One sign of the improving prospects of antislavery politics was the difficulty Southerners had defeating Adams's attempts to repeal the gag in late 1842 and 1843 (the gaggers clung to majorities of five votes or fewer both years). Giddings claimed (reflecting years later) that the odious rule had "morally ceased to operate" once he overcame his party's hostility and won reelection in the spring of 1842.[61]

Congressman Gates's disgust at his party's course through Giddings's ordeal suggested the potential efficacy of Liberty efforts to coax antislavery representatives to abandon their party. Working closely with Leavitt and Weld, Gates soon believed, "We must inevitably come to a northern party ere long." Gates, however, remained unsure whether the northern party "would be under the banners of the Liberty or Third Party as that is now organized." In 1842, Gates still wistfully hoped northern Whigs might "stand up vigorously for the rights of the North & the slave," and thus, "use up the capital of the third party & stand a chance to survive the alliance between the slaveocracy" and northern Democrats. By late 1843 Gates had given up on the Whig Party, and Liberty men proudly touted his defection. Gates's decision coincided with his withdrawal from political office (he returned home to tend to his health), but his rupture with the Whigs is best explained by his disgust at the party's apparent devotion to its slaveholding anti-abolitionist standard-bearer Henry Clay, whom Gates deemed "rotten as a stagnant fish pond on the subject of slavery." Once absent from the "sinful metropolis" of Washington, Gates missed his daily plotting with Leavitt, "with his iron pen, invincible zeal & indomitable courage, unretiring faith & indefatigable labors," and praised him as " the safest & strongest Liberty party man in America." Gates warned Giddings against supporting Clay and wished Giddings could somehow stump for both antislavery and Whig principles, "without saying much about Clay."

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[60] Wm Slade to JG, Mar. 26, 1842, JG Papers; GS to W.M. Clarke and Chas. Wheaton , Apr. 7, 1842, GS Papers, Letterbooks.

[61] *Philanthropist*, Apr. 6, 13, 1842; On King's efforts, see JG to Gates, Apr. 1, 1842, in GS Papers; SPC to JG, May 19, 1842, JG Papers; AAP to Joseph Sturge, Apr. 30, 1842, Amos August Phelps Copybooks, Anti-Slavery Collection, BPL; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 467, 472; JG, *History of the Rebellion*, 197; Scott R. Meinke, "Slavery, Partisanship, and Procedure in the U.S. House: The Gag Rule, 1836-1845," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32 (Feb. 2007), 33-57, affirms this contemporary assessment that rising antislavery constituent pressure helped defeat the gag. As many districts grew increasingly anti-Slave Power, northern Democrats became less willing to sustain the gag, a phenomenon, though, that operated primarily through the inter-term replacement of Gag supporters with Gag opponents, as shown by Jeffery A. Jenkins and Charles Stewart III, "The Gag Rule, Congressional Politics, and the Growth of Anti-Slavery Popular Politics," Unpublished paper, Draft of Apr. 16, 2005, http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/gag_rule_v12.pdf.

With support for Clay the new test of Whig loyalty, Gates conceded that abolitionists could no longer operate within the party. His health excused him from accepting Smith's suggestion that he run for lieutenant governor, but Gates did attend the 1843 Liberty nominating convention.[62]

While Liberty men frequently beset partisan antislavery Whigs, Adams received more lenient treatment. By 1843 abolitionists who had worked with Adams came to tolerate, if not condone, his refusal to support immediate abolition in the District of Columbia. Increasingly distant from national party contests, Adams's political renown made him an important symbol of antislavery politics. His leadership in the gag battle, along with his role in the *Amistad* trial, earned him many political abolitionists' "warmest gratitude." Leavitt praised "Mr. Adams' sincerity and deep devotion to the cause of Liberty," declaring him "one of the greatest of living men" and "one of the truest patriots that ever lived" and asserting "that he is as fully bent on doing whatever he thinks best calculated to hasten the overthrow of slavery as any abolitionist in the land." Adams reciprocated this respect and told political abolitionists that his "sentiments, I believe very nearly accord" with members of "Abolition societies, Anti-slavery societies, or the Liberty Party."[63]

With this mutual understanding, Liberty men worked ever more closely with the ex-President to facilitate his provocative theatrics. In one of the most impressive of these collaborations, Adams and a Boston abolitionist committee brought national attention to abolitionist arguments against the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law. The Latimer Committee, formed to prevent the rendition of escaped slave George Latimer led a massive petitioning campaign across Massachusetts, garnering almost 52,000 signatures on a request that the state "be freed from its connexion with slavery." During the 1843 petition drive, organizers William F. Channing (son of famous Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing) and Liberty Party activist Henry I. Bowditch, contacted Adams to coordinate the logistics of transporting the massive roll into the House. Once the House gagged it, Adams displayed the enormous petition—three feet in diameter spooled around a wooden wheel and nearly a half-mile long if unrolled—on his desk. The petition, indeed, was so large that Adams was "prevented from occupying his usual seat," when addressing the House. Joshua Giddings gloated at embittered southern representatives' "cold sweat" at viewing the monumental petition, and a regular Whig party press that clearly grasped the abolitionists' congressional strategy complained of the "good deal of ostentation in thus parading a memorial before the House" simply for the purpose of trying "to agitate—agitate—agitate the country."[64]

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[62] Gates to GS, Jan. 24, Feb. 4, 1842, GS Papers; Gates had also battled illness while in Congress. At one point in 1841, Gates was so sick that a Liberty paper praised him for "almost risking his life" when he "came out of his sick room" to vote for the Bankruptcy Bill, in an "act of patriotic devotion." Rochester *American Citizen*, Aug. 31, 1841; Gates to JG, Jul. 31, Dec. 5, 1843, Oct. 2, 1844, JG Papers; Gates to GS, Sept. 18, 26, Oct. 10, 1843, GS Papers; Gates to JG, Aug. 24, 1843, Oct. 2, 1844, JG Papers; Gates never again served in elected office, although he later became one of Western New York's leading Free Soilers and ran for lieutenant governor in both 1848 and 1852, *National Era*, Jul. 13, 27, 1848, Oct. 7, 1852.

[63] JGW to JQA, Feb. 10, 1841, *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1:492-493; *Emancipator*, Mar. 7, 1844; For counterexamples critical of Adams, see Birney to Leicester King, Jan. 1, 1844, and EWJ to Birney, Feb. 6, 1844, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:766-773, 777; *Quincy Patriot*, Dec. 9, 1843.

[64] William F. Channing to John Quincy Adams (JQA), Jan. 31, 1843, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 171; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 116-118; Wm. F. Channing and Henry I. Bowditch to JQA, Feb. 12, 1843, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Washington *National Intelligencer*, quoted in *Emancipator*, Mar. 9, 1839; Joshua Giddings (JG) to TDW, Feb. 21,

By the mid-1840s Lewis Tappan celebrated that "everybody is talking about the movements in Congress." In 1844, when neither Leavitt nor Weld could join the congressmen in Washington, Giddings genuinely lamented their absence, and Tappan became fixated on revitalizing their lobbying strategy. He idealistically hoped the Liberty Party could send eight to ten men to Washington. The New York State Anti-Slavery Society dispatched William Chaplin to succeed Charles Torrey as "a watch-dog" there "to *see* what may pass before my eyes, and make a true report to the good Liberty public" (and Chaplin, like Torrey became involved in organizing slave escapes). Tappan, however, hoped to fund a more permanent political abolitionist presence in Washington.[65]

In 1844, to the Liberty Party's consternation, many of the most progressive antislavery Whigs, including Giddings, campaigned vigorously for slaveholding presidential candidate Henry Clay. After that divisive 1844 election, Lewis Tappan pushed for a national Liberty Party convention at Washington while Congress was in session, but the plan was postponed because it did not leave enough time for winter travel to Washington. Abolitionists celebrated the long-awaited repeal of the gag rule (by a vote of 108-80) in December 1844 but fretted over the imminent annexation of Texas and the possibility of war with Mexico. Those developments, though, would ultimately make the Slave Power argument all the more convincing and provide the impetus for Tappan to establish the Washington *National Era* in 1846. That paper would not only provide the Liberty Party with a newspaper at the capital but also would enable editor Gamaliel Bailey to create a permanent abolitionist congressional lobby. Bailey's continued pursuit of the lobbying strategies pioneered earlier in the decade would play a crucial role in strengthening abolitionist alliances with antislavery congressmen in the late 1840s.[66]

Since 1839, political abolitionists had rejected any party connection with slaveholders or their advocates. They combined electoral opposition to antislavery Whig congressmen like Adams, Gates, Giddings, and Slade with lobbying efforts designed to precipitate congressional debate that drew national attention to slavery and the Slave Power. Liberty leaders benefited immensely from the assistance of Whig allies who could win national office and ensure a broad audience for antislavery. In rare cases, Liberty leaders convinced prominent politicians like Gates to repudiate their old party connections and espouse political abolitionism. Most of Gates's antislavery Whig colleagues, however, clung to their party until the 1848 presidential election again forced them to choose between supporting a slaveholder and deserting their party. Despite their refusal to join in Gates's break with the Whig Party, political abolitionists and antislavery congressmen would continue to cooperate to incite controversies that could further expose the reach of the Slave Power.

Challenging the Slave Power together, political abolitionists and antislavery Whig congressmen collaborated to repeatedly inject slavery into congressional debate, even as both dismissed each other's electoral strategies. Promoting these congressional alliances was

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1843, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Barnes and Dumond, 2:975-977; *U.S. Gazette*, quoted in *Emancipator*, Mar. 9, 1839.

[65] JG to TDW, Jan. 28, 1844, *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Barnes and Dumond, 2: 990-991; LT to JL, Jan. 9, 1844, LT to GB, Jan. 18, 1844, LT Papers; William L. Chaplin Correspondence, in *Albany Patriot*, Dec. 18, 1844.

[66] *CG*, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, 7; Gates to JG, Oct. 2, 1844, JG Papers; For more on how this 1844 presidential campaign shaped political abolitionists' relationships with antislavery Whigs, see Chapter 3 below; *Albany Patriot*, Dec. 18, 1844, Jan. 8, Feb. 12, 1845; On the *National Era*'s founding, and its connection to earlier lobbying, see Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union*, 81-84 and 127-128.

precisely the reason abolitionists established a presence in Washington. Their efforts helped make slavery a central question in national politics. The ever-increasing national attention to the Slave Power in Congress aptly complemented Liberty electoral strategies that similarly sought to expose the Slave Power's control of national politics. Because of this abolitionist pressure in and out of Congress, by the late 1840s many northern congressmen from both major parties felt not only comfortable with, but perhaps even politically compelled, to denounce the Slave Power. Once they did, any hope of eliminating slavery as a divisive national political issue vanished, which of course had been the goal of abolitionist lobbying all along.

"A Temporary 'third party'": Antislavery Whig Dissidents in the 1841 Speakership Contest

The 1841 election for Speaker of the House produced no controversy comparable to the previous Congress's contest, but it did reveal that several antislavery congressmen felt genuinely conflicted about continued membership in a cross-sectional party. Riding the coattails of William Henry Harrison, the Whig Party achieved a dominating victory in the 1840 congressional elections. Excited about their party's supremacy and facing a daunting economic crisis, congressional Whigs prevailed on President Harrison to call a special session beginning May 31, 1841. (Harrison, however, would never witness it, as he succumbed to pneumonia on April 4). Holding a hefty forty-vote advantage, there would be no need for Whigs to accept an unreliable candidate like Hunter again. Instead Kentucky slaveholder John White, a close ally of the party's Senate leader and next presidential heir apparent Henry Clay, received the Whig nomination and easily won the speakership. However, unlike in the prior Congress, some antislavery Whigs refused to abide yet another slaveholding speaker. The obvious anxieties of antislavery congressmen struggling to reconcile their partisanship with moral disgust for slavery offered Liberty men a promising indication that they might soon succeed in detaching antislavery politicians from the Whig Party. This goal undergirded Liberty leaders' vigorous lobbying and also induced them to structure third-party electoral campaigns around exposing the impossibility of meaningful antislavery progress within the major parties.[1]

In advance of the congressional session, northern Whigs, the sectional majority within the preponderant party, looked forward to finally selecting a Speaker from the free states. Abolitionists had been "well assured" that many northern Whigs intended only to "vote for a *free* Speaker." Abolitionists maintained "a strong hope that their courage" would "hold out." The Cincinnati *Philanthropist* listed several northern Whig papers that "claimed that, inasmuch as the President was from the South, and the slaveholders had furnished the office of speaker for twenty years, the speaker ought now to come from the North." As the Washington correspondent for Congressman Seth Gates's hometown Whig paper the *Le Roy Gazette* (of which Gates was former editor) similarly noted, "the Slave States have given us the Speaker for 27 out of the last 30 years," so that "there was every where an expectation and desire in the free States that a northern Speaker should be selected." Touting Millard Fillmore of Buffalo, the *Le Roy Gazette* urged that the Empire State, by far the largest in the Union (its representatives comprising about a sixth of the House), deserved its turn in the Speaker's chair.[2]

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[1] On the intraparty tension surrounding the question of whether to call a special session, and Harrison's reluctant acquiescence in Clay's demands for it, see Michael F. Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125-127; On White see, William Henry Smith, *Speakers of the House of Representatives of the United States*, (1928; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1971), 111-113; Clay insisted that he played no role in the choice of speaker and vehemently denied charges that he had handpicked his "warm friend" White. Henry Clay to Waddy Thompson, Apr. 23, 1841, and also Clay to Robert P. Letcher, Jun. 11, 1841, in *The Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. Robert Seager and Melba Hay (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), Volume 9: 522, 543-544.

[2] New York *Emancipator*, May 27, 1841; Cincinnati *Philanthropist*, Jun. 10, 1841; *Le Roy Gazette*, May 12, Jun. 2, 1841. Fillmore fully expected to win, having already lined up most of New York's large Whig delegation behind his candidacy. As a consolation he received the chairmanship of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. Robert J. Rayback, *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society), 117-118.

Both "out of doors" preceding the Whig caucus and then within it, Gates, Giddings, and Slade strove to promote a northern candidate "on the ground that the speakership was due to the free states." To their frustration, White beat out Fillmore and Pennsylvania's Joseph Lawrence. As a response, the antislavery dissidents resolved to "make a demonstration that there were men who would no longer vote for a slaveholder when we had good candidates of our own," but the three insurrectionists persuaded only Adams and John Mattocks of Vermont to join them. Nathaniel Borden followed their example and cast his vote for his Massachusetts colleague George Briggs. The Whig Party, not needing those six votes to secure White's election, grudgingly tolerated the defection. Even with six antislavery Whigs voting for northern candidates and several States' Rights Whigs voting for Henry Wise (W-VA) (and Wise himself voting for standing gag rule-author William Cost Johnson (W-MD)), White won a ten-vote majority on the first ballot, with twenty-seven votes more than Democratic candidate John Jones of Virginia.[3]

Leavitt, not yet in Washington, erupted when he learned that House Whigs had selected another slaveholding speaker. Uninformed of the six antislavery protest votes, Leavitt savaged "Messrs Borden, Slade, Giddings, Gates, and numerous other members who at home appear to have a deep abhorrence of slavery, and a fixed determination to resist the further encroachments of the SLAVE POWER," but once in Washington "quietly succumbed" to the Slave Power's "dictation" in an apparent repeat of antislavery Whig support for Hunter—or so Leavitt assumed. These antislavery Whigs angrily complained of the "great injustice" done by Leavitt's precipitate, unfounded criticism. After learning that his "first and painful surmise" had been incorrect, Leavitt apologized and commended their "firmness." Political abolitionists profusely praised the six antislavery dissenters who "refused this time to bow to the Slave Power." Having corrected his earlier mistake, Leavitt lauded the "five northern men [apparently forgetting to count Borden's vote for a different Northerner], headed by JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, who thought Southern duellists and overseers had ruled the House long enough."[4]

Leavitt's initial accusation, though, evinced political abolitionists' continued suspicion of Whig antislavery action. Northern Whigs had previously insisted it was their section's turn to choose the speaker, but once the caucus selected White, all but six dutifully voted for a slaveholding disciple of Henry Clay. Liberty men bemoaned that the "Slave Power has again triumphed." The six antislavery dissidents' act of independence further highlighted the perfidy of the many other northern Whigs who had yet again "yielded to party dictation." Unlike with Hunter's election, another few antislavery defections still would not have defeated White, but free state Whigs collectively controlled more than enough votes to have demanded a northern speaker. Liberty men chastised known abolitionists who helped elevate White, especially Cleveland's Sherlock Andrews. Andrews, along with New York Whigs Victory Birdseye and Abel Foster Lawrence, had rebuffed private entreaties from Gates, Giddings, and Slade to vote for a Northerner. The *Emancipator* denounced several ostensibly antislavery congressmen who backed White, including Andrews, Birdseye, Maine antislavery Whig William Pitt Fessenden

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[3] Seth Gates to Gerrit Smith (GS), Jun. 7, 1841, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers); Seth Gates to James Birney, Jun. 7, 1841, *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966, original edition 1938 by AHA), Volume 2: 630; *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-1877), V. 10: 470; *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 27th Congress, 1st Session, 2.

[4] *Emancipator*, Jun. 3, 10, 1841; Gates to GS, Jun. 7, 1841, GS Papers; *Philanthropist*, Jun. 10, 1841.

(son of frequent Maine Liberty gubernatorial and congressional candidate Samuel), and three Massachusetts Whigs, one of whom (Osmyn Baker) had been elected originally as the replacement for deceased abolitionist James Alvord.[5]

The six votes repudiating White, however, suggested that political abolitionists could further loosen antislavery Whigs' partisan fetters. A Brooklyn Liberty meeting chaired by Arthur Tappan, for example, hailed "the vote of the six members of Congress" who would not support "a slaveholder for Speaker" as "the beginning of a continued and united effort in Congress against the further encroachments of the slave power." Liberty men emphasized how these noble antislavery stands had required the congressmen to flout party discipline and confidently anticipated that abolitionists might soon dissever antislavery Whigs from their proslavery party. Leavitt maintained "great respect … for those who formed a temporary 'third party' in the election of Speaker, in despite of all the solicitations of party interest," but warned that political abolitionists would neither "countenance what they do against" liberty, nor excuse them for "things left undone."[6]

The subsequent speakership contest again gave credence to the Liberty Party's continued insistence on the deleterious influences of membership in a cross-sectional party. In December 1843, with a presidential campaign approaching, Adams, Giddings, and several other antislavery Whigs (Borden, Slade, Gates, and Mattocks were no longer in Congress) cast speakership votes for White, the same Southerner they had adamantly rejected two years earlier. Perhaps they felt White earned those antislavery votes because he had "regarded northern rights in the appointment of Committees," including making Adams and Giddings respectively the chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Committee on Claims. That year those two apparently escaped Leavitt's censure, as he concentrated on the Democrats who controlled two-thirds of the House. Condemning northern Democrats' "fealty to the slave power," Leavitt still managed to disparage Whig servility by noting that the election of John Jones "echoed the testimony of the Whigs in the last Congress, that in these parties, no man who is not a slave-holder can ever be elected Speaker." In 1845, antislavery congressmen were finally spared the embarrassment of having to either abandon their party or vote for a slaveholder. Both parties nominated Northerners, and Indiana doughface Democrat John Wesley Davis easily outpolled Ohio Whig stalwart Samuel Vinton.[7]

The 1841 contest, however, demonstrated that the Slave Power's disquieting demands wore heavily on antislavery Whigs. Striving to convince receptive Whig politicians that the Slave Power controlled their party, Liberty men urged them to desert it as the only course consistent with their 1841 speakership votes. With Gates at least, the Liberty men succeeded. Those who remained active office seekers were far more reluctant. Liberty partisans thus strove to also use electoral politics to highlight the major parties' subservience to the Slave Power. By

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[5] *Philanthropist*, Jun. 10, 1841; Gates to GS, Jun. 7, 1841, GS Papers; Gates to Birney, Jun. 7, 1841, *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:630-631; *Emancipator*, Jun. 10, 1841.

[6] Kings County Liberty Party Meeting, Resolutions, in *Emancipator*, Oct. 14, 1841; Ibid., Jul. 15, 1841.

[7] *House Journal*, 28th Congress, 1st Session, 8; Joshua Giddings to Joseph Addison Giddings, Jun. 24, 1841, Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform. White also graciously allowed Leavitt a seat on the floor as a reporter. *Emancipator*, Jul. 1, 1841; Boston *Emancipator and Free American*, Dec. 14, 1843. From December of 1841 through March of 1844, the *Emancipator*'s name was changed to *Emancipator and Free American*. In the notes that follow, I will continue to cite it as *Emancipator* for issues throughout this period; *CG*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 2; William Henry Smith, *Speakers of the House*, 114-117, summarizes the career of John Wesley Davis and notes that he routinely voted with the South on slavery-related issues.

generating antislavery constituent pressure at the same time that abolitionist leaders were refining their lobbying strategy, Liberty partisans hoped to sway prominent antislavery politicians to abandon their proslavery parties.

CHAPTER 3

Creating a "Liberty Power": Third-Party Electoral Politics, 1841-1845

As they worked to accelerate debate over slavery in Congress, Liberty Party leaders simultaneously strove to create a formidable electoral force. The Liberty Party was not merely a protest party, and political abolitionism was not merely moral suasion by other means. Liberty men knew how difficult it would be to build a viable party that might win electoral victories, but they believed they could. Liberty men understood that the competitiveness of the Second Party System created valuable opportunities for third-party influence. They skillfully used electoral politics to pressure the major parties *and* to dramatize northern Whig and Democratic subservience to the Slave Power and thereby attract new converts. As Liberty men insisted that the South controlled both political parties, they cast nearly all Whig and Democratic Party actions as efforts to placate the Slave Power.

Since they observed a minority group of slaveholders manipulating the political system to create a daunting Slave Power, abolitionists reasoned they could rouse latent antislavery sentiment in the North to produce a similarly influential "Liberty Power." Liberty men repeatedly identified institutional openings through which they could encourage the growth of an influential third party in the face of a robust two-party system. Among the most important of these institutional openings were the majority-rule electoral systems prevalent in nineteenth-century New England. These rules allowed a relatively small number of Liberty men to disrupt the major parties' abilities to resolve elections and highlight the Slave Power's influence over both parties.

The Aims and Arguments of the Liberty Organization

Historians have labeled the final two thirds of the nineteenth century the "party period" to indicate the impressive rise of mass political parties as the key institutions organizing American political behavior. Third parties during this period have often been glossed over or marginalized as protests against this intense partisanship. Most Liberty men, however, were not fundamentally anti-party; they understood the important functions of parties in antebellum politics but railed against the proslavery orientation of both the Democratic and Whig Parties. Liberty leaders built party structures and participated in partisan politics. (Indeed, more than a few abandoned promising careers as major-party operatives when they joined the Liberty Party.) The goal of most Liberty partisans was not to offer an alternative to Jacksonian-era hyperpartisanship, but rather to provide a rival organization that could direct popular political fervor into antislavery channels. Notwithstanding the intense party loyalty of most northern Whigs and Jacksonians, Liberty men believed they could function effectively as a third party by

emphasizing their Slave Power arguments and seizing opportunities to control a balance of power between the two parties.[1]

Both possible strategic goals of Liberty Party activism—achieving national political victory or pressuring one or both of the major parties to transform itself into an antislavery party—required construction of an organized, viable political party. Still, most scholarship on American abolitionism, as well as much of nineteenth-century political history, portrays the Liberty Party as fundamentally unlike the sophisticated party organizations against which it competed. Historians who extol Garrisonian radicalism have unsurprisingly scoffed at meager Liberty vote totals as evidence that third-party political action was not only morally debasing but also strategically ineffectual.[2] For many years, historians sympathetic to the more "conservative" evangelical wing of the movement also shared this low estimate of Liberty politics.[3] Douglas Strong's work on antislavery religious and political radicalism in Upstate

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[1] On the "party period," for example, see Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1991); For a recent reevaluation, of the "party period" concept, see Ronald P. Formisano, "The 'Party Period' Revisited," *Journal of American History* 86 (Jun. 1999), 93-120; Even those historians that take seriously the third-party tradition in nineteenth-century America have misread the Liberty P1arty as emblematic of anti-partisan third-party thought. Mark Voss-Hubbard, who has skillfully analyzed the Know-Nothing Party in three northern counties, suggests the importance of anti-partisanship in generating support for third party movements, including the Liberty and Free Soil parties. Voss-Hubbard, however, overstates the case for viewing Liberty men as focusing either their goals or their tactics on anti-partisan rhetoric. It may indeed have shaped the party's initial founding, but it quickly became clear that the Liberty Party would encourage a new abolitionist partisanship to counteract the Slave Power parties. Mark Voss-Hubbard, "The Third Party Tradition Reconsidered: Parties and American Public Life, 1830-1900," *The Journal of American History* 86 (Jun. 1999): 121-150, esp. 130, and *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); William B. Hesseltine *Third-Party Movements in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: L D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1962), 31-39, offers a brief, but useful description of the Liberty Party's history, depicting it as a pressure group pushing major parties to avow particular issue stances. While this was indeed one option Liberty men had in mind, many assumed that no meaningful antislavery policy could be anticipated from either of the existing parties; Two of the best examples of budding party politicians who became Liberty leaders are John Greenleaf Whittier and Salmon Chase. Whittier abandoned promising opportunities in the National Republican Party, and Chase had already been elected to municipal office as a Whig.

[2] Henry Mayer's highly sympathetic biography of William Lloyd Garrison derided the Liberty Party as striving for the "fantasy of an abolitionist political takeover," *All on Fire, William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 383. See also, Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1989, original copyright 1967), esp. Ch. 6; Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of the God in the Antislavery Thought* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 170, presents the Liberty Party as "antipolitical, … moralistic, … and individualistic"; Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957 [c1933]), 176, characterizes the Liberty Party as "the most pathetic residue of antislavery organization," even as he praises Joshua Leavitt's efforts to promote antislavery action in Congress, 177-182; For a less extreme example of this sort of underestimation of the Liberty Party's political efficacy, see Lawrence Friedman, *Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 89-94, 115-121.

[3] Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 13-18, argues that political abolitionism was as much an "ethical statement" as a political strategy and sees Garrisonians and Liberty men as sharing apprehensions about partisan politics; See also Alan M. Kraut, "Partisanship and Principles: The Liberty Party in Antebellum Political Culture," in Alan Kraut, ed. *Crusaders and Compromiser: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System*, (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 71-100, and Alan M. Kraut "The Forgotten Reformers: A Profile of Third Party Abolitionists in Antebellum New York," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1979), 119-145.

New York has complicated this picture by arguing that Liberty partisans there campaigned aggressively, but disdained the sort of institutionalization that characterized the major parties. In Strong's view, Liberty men aimed primarily to assert their moral authority and thus gradually transform politics by example, rather than by manipulating political institutions with the purpose and effectiveness that I suggest.[4] Political scientists have more frequently treated nineteenth-century third-parties, including the Liberty Party, as operating like major parties and meaningfully challenging the two-party system, but this work misses the full breadth of Liberty Party activity by concentrating overwhelmingly on presidential politics.[5]

Competing at all levels within the American political system, and focusing especially on Congress, Liberty men quickly sought to organize a party structure mimicking the old parties. Liberty men aggressively attacked antislavery Whigs and Democrats with partisan vehemence rivaling their major-party opponents. Within a year and a half of the third party's founding, some political abolitionists envisioned an institutionalized party organization reaching down to the school district level. More formally, the New York State Anti-Slavery Society called for at least county-level organizations that would meet quarterly in every county in the state, and Liberty men elsewhere likewise adopted this goal. It is true that some abolitionists expressed ambivalence about the morality of abolitionist party politics, but this was precisely because so many Liberty managers were clearly building a party that would operate within the partisan order and not merely register protest against it. Over time, Liberty publications strove to promote increasingly systematic party institutions. Often Liberty leaders even suggested that, upon gaining control of the national government, they would promote abolition by deploying federal patronage to empower antislavery voices in the South, in much the same way that Democrats and Whigs used patronage to stanch northern antislavery. The root problem was neither patronage nor partisanship themselves, but the ability of slaveholders to control both parties and thus barter patronage for acquiescence in proslavery policies.[6]

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[4] Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999) focuses on connections between the Liberty Party and the antislavery church network in Upstate New York. For Strong's view on the party's lack of institutionalization, see 81-83. Many of these same themes also figure prominently in Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest* (Kent State University Press, 1990); Richard Sewell's *Ballots for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 80-86, in contrast, treats Liberty men as sophisticated political strategists.

[5] James Sundquist's classic work on party change in American history, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties it the United States*, Revised Edition (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 41-96, simultaneously depicts the Liberty party as pushing "major party politicians in the North" only "as far toward the abolitionist pole as necessary to absorb most of the movement, to the frustration of the third-party men," and suggests that the Liberty Party's arguments challenged the existing party structure, threatened to realign the American party system in the 1840s, and ultimately spurred the Republican realignment of 1852 through 1856. Stephen J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 48-51, 79, argue that nineteenth-century third parties "behaved like major parties, they drew from the major parties, and they evolved into or from major parties."

[6] Alvan Stewart imagined an even more minute level of organization, urging the appointment of multiple groups of five within each school district, responsible for recruiting five more party activists within the next two months. Alvan Stewart (AS) to Samuel Webb, Nov. 13, 1841, Alvan Stewart Papers (AS Papers), New York Historical Society. Utica *Friend of Man*, Jun. 1, 1841; *Friend of Man*, Aug. 24, 1841; Hallowell (Me.) *Liberty Standard*, Dec. 8, 1841; By 1844, New York Liberty men hoped to create precinct-level voting rolls listing every single Liberty voter, *Albany Patriot*, Dec. 11, 1844; James Birney, "Letter No. 1," in Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Sept. 25, 1844.

Liberty partisans genuinely believed they could build a party that would gradually siphon off enough antislavery Northerners from the major parties to become the dominant northern party. They would do this by refocusing the nation's attention on slavery and institutionalized racial discrimination *as political problems*. By doing so they could ultimately construct a party large enough to be a counterbalance to the Slave Power. Liberty men also recognized an intermediate value to their third-party strategy. By maintaining a separate antislavery organization, Liberty voters could pressure major-party candidates in many northern districts into taking antislavery stances to guard against antislavery defections from their own voting bases. In many places, major-party congressional and state candidates could ill afford to be portrayed as kowtowing to overbearing slave masters. Abolitionists hoped their continued political pressure would either lead antislavery Whigs and Democrats to join the Liberty ranks, or push one of the major parties into adopting an antislavery program that could unite opponents of the Slave Power.

More immediately, the antislavery stance forced on politicians by Liberty electoral pressure could at least draw slavery ever closer to the center of national political discussion, much like Liberty efforts to lobby antislavery congressmen. This sort of pressure might ultimately precipitate an antislavery revolt within one or both of the major parties and the emergence of an enlarged base of support for a much-expanded and potentially dominant Liberty Party. As Joshua Leavitt explained in 1843, the Liberty Party would also be fully satisfied if either major national party took a sufficiently antislavery stance to absorb the Liberty men, but until they did, Liberty men would keep striving to build a party that could end Slave Power control of national politics:

> Whether the Liberty party is destined to come into the possession of political power, or whether it is to serve only as a means of driving up the other parties to their duty, we have never undertaken to prophecy, nor are we very anxious to be able to foresee. We have always told the politicians that it was in their power at any time to annihilate the Liberty party. Let them do their duty, and the Liberty party dies … Such an issue we contemplate with perfect complacency. At the same time, we have not the remotest expectation of such a result.[7]

Many political abolitionists fantasized about enlisting antislavery Southerners into their organization, and the party creed insisted that the Liberty Party was a national not a sectional party. A select group took bold initiatives in the Border South to combat slavery on its own ground. Still, even those who hoped to see the Liberty Party develop a cross-sectional following understood the need initially for an exclusively northern political party. While inclined to spurn "geographical political parties," Gerrit Smith told a friend in 1842 of his "growing conviction that a northern political party will be found indispensable for the overthrow of American slavery." Smith felt confident that "The nucleus of that party is the little 'Liberty party.'" Ohioans Salmon Chase and Gamaliel Bailey were among the most vigorous advocates of an antislavery vision that would incorporate non-slaveholding Southerners eventually. Yet those two also pushed vigorously for the sectionalization of American political debate. By demanding

[7] Boston *Emancipator and Free American*, Mar. 30, 1843. From December of 1841 through March of 1844, the *Emancipator*'s name was changed to *Emancipator and Free American*. In the notes that follow, I will continue to cite it as *Emancipator* for issues throughout this period.

a new political party freed from all connection with the Slave Power, they effectively demanded a movement, at least temporarily, disconnected from the South. Chase imagined that "there are many, very many slaveholders who believe slavery to be a curse" and "look to the Liberty Party with great interest," hoping its success might enable them to promote southern emancipation "without the fear of being crushed by the weight of the local slavery party." Chase firmly believed that if Northerners "would act as Liberty Men against National Slavery consistently, unitedly and efficiently, they would find themselves soon reinforced by the friends of Liberty in slave states." Thus, even the vision of a truly national Liberty Party first required political change in the North.[8]

As an electoral force, the Liberty Party indeed started small, but the mere six or seven thousand Liberty votes polled in the 1840 presidential election did not discourage party leaders. The decision to move into partisan politics had been a momentous one, subjecting political abolitionists to bitter condemnation from both foe and friend. The intensity of their commitment to third-party action had to be quite deep for them to brave such overwhelming opposition; so their optimism about their party's eventual triumph should come as no surprise. Liberty men truly believed that the Slave Power's influence over national policy was at the root of American slavery's strength, and that the Slave Power's supremacy stemmed from its ability to use the Second Party System to protect slavery by directing national attention to more trivial issues and focusing northern leaders on securing the spoils of government patronage. Once Liberty men had effectively pitched this message to the northern electorate, voters would feel compelled to abandon their old party connections. At times Liberty Party leaders may have been overly sanguine, but most were not naïve or impractical. They understood the workings of the national, state, and local political systems, and quickly developed a sense of how to exploit rare openings for third-party influence. Douglas Strong captures the sentiments of only a fraction of Liberty leaders when he claims that they viewed themselves as political novices and imagined their party's growth as simply ordained by God.[9]

In their efforts to enhance the party's appeal, many abolitionists advocated broadening the Liberty Party's program to incorporate other reforms. The majority of Liberty men, though, adhered to the "one-idea" principle, arguing that political abolitionists should focus only on opposition to slavery and the Slave Power—the one idea that united them. This strategy would position them to maximize new recruits from both major parties. As Pennsylvania political abolitionists asserted, the one idea was sufficiently important to "cover the entire ground of national policy, that the country now needs." Even Chase, who espoused a political philosophy of promoting individual freedom generally (which later led him to look sympathetically upon the

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[8] Gerrit Smith (GS) to Charles King, Mar. 18, 1842, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers), Letterbooks; Also, see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 86-88; Salmon P. Chase (SPC) to Lewis Tappan (LT), Feb. 15, 1843, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), V. 2:101-102; In a letter to William Ellery Channing, Chase avowed his belief that many Southerners, including slaveholders, would be happy to join in antislavery action if it could be made acceptable in the South (and the best way to do this would be by making their action "directed against the unconstitutional countenance & sanction of [slavery] by the general Government,"). SPC to William Ellery Channing, May 3, 1842, in Ibid., 2:94-96; On abolitionist activity in the Border South, see Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Anti-Slavery Community in Washington D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003) and *Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1995). On Chase and Bailey's ideas about southern abolitionism see *Abolitionists and the South*, 135-139.

[9] Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, 121.

northern Democracy) asserted in 1842 that the "great & leading object of the Liberty Party is & should be the deliverance of the country from the curse of slavery within Congressional legislation & from the control of the slaveholding policy and the slave power."[10]

The main widely accepted exception to the "one-idea" principle was the demand for full civil and political equality for black Northerners. The party included many leading black abolitionists, although historians have debated the degree to which black men were incorporated into the party's rank and file. Among the subsection of free blacks who could vote, some remained allied to Garrison or preferred to support the Whig Party, with its more credible promise of imminent repeal of racist legislation. Still, prominent black leaders like Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, Henry Bibb, Charles Ray, and Theodore S. Wright played important roles in third-party politics and gradually directed much of free black male abolitionism towards a close affinity with the Liberty Party by the mid-1840s. It is true, however, that, over time, the more politically effective Slave Power argument increasingly eclipsed discussion of black rights. The two stances remained compatible though, and political abolitionists throughout the free states continued to fight institutionalized racism, even as they focused their political appeals on slaveholders' political power.[11]

Focusing on combating the Slave Power, the Liberty Party enjoyed substantial growth. Liberty vote totals increased steadily from 1840 to 1843 in every free state. In Maine, for example, where only 195 men cast Birney votes in 1840, the Liberty Party polled 1662 votes in 1841, 4080 in 1842, and 6746 in 1843. In New York, abolitionists controlled 4.5 percent of the electorate in 1843. In Vermont, the growth was especially dramatic, with 1843 Liberty gubernatorial candidate Charles K. Williams receiving 7.5 percent of the votes. Even in New Hampshire, where the doughfaced Democratic machine reigned unrivalled, Liberty men polled about 3000 votes in 1842, and elected four representatives to the New Hampshire legislature; the following year Liberty partisans sent ten representatives to Concord. While major-party votes still dwarfed Liberty totals, the party's increase was truly dramatic. By 1844, the party had even

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[10] On arguments over the meaning and validity of the one-idea principle, see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 88-90; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Aug. 4, 1841; SPC to William Ellery Channing, May 3, 1842, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:94-96.

[11] For a discussion of Liberty efforts to promote racial equality, see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 95-101. For a counterargument that casts Liberty men as abandoning their commitment to principled antiracism, see Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*; Bruce Laurie's adaptation of the notion of paternalism to explain the Liberty Party's improvement over the overt racism of Massachusetts major party politicians presents a good historiographical compromise position between those who describe Liberty men as abandoning an earlier tradition of abolitionist racial egalitarianism and those who, like Sewell, go much further in defending the compromises with racial hierarchy that politicians, even abolitionist politicians, were forced to make, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. Ch. 3. Harrold, *Subversives*, suggests how the most radical of political abolitionists maintained a commitment to genuinely egalitarian interracial cooperation that was diminished among more mainstream Liberty men and later Free Soilers in the late 1840s. Omar H. Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 32-41, notes the role of prominent black leaders in the Liberty Party but questions the degree of support the party received from the black electorate; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 183-185, sees black abolitionists as playing a significant role in the Liberty Party, and presents black voters as supportive of the third-party; Also see Howard H. Bell, "National Negro Conventions of the Middle 1840's: Moral Suasion v. Political Action," *Journal of Negro History* 42 (Oct. 1957), 247-260.

achieved sufficient legitimacy that the Maine state legislature allowed the state Liberty convention to use the hall of the Maine House of Representatives.[12]

The Liberty party's primary appeal relied on continued reiteration of the Slave Power's control over both political parties, and through them, national policymaking. Both "desperate parties" were "pledged to the Slave Power" and "arrayed against the friends of Liberty." Liberty men reminded voters that this analysis of the major parties was no mere segment of the Liberty program—it was *the* justification for abolitionist political organization. Northern politicians and their electoral supporters bore a primary responsibility for the growing power of slavery for allowing themselves to be distracted from the importance of the slavery issue. A Liberty Party pamphlet explained, "While the Democratic and Whig parties suppose themselves to be engaged in settling important questions, they are in reality only the puppets of a confederation of petty autocrats." The first resolution of the Massachusetts Liberty Party Convention in 1842, insisted "that under all political changes of parties and administrations, the slave power still maintains its ascendency, in controlling the legislation, patronage and diplomacy of the government." At that convention, ex-slave orator Henry Highland Garnet, chastised the hypocritical antislavery professions of those still "clinging to the old proslavery parties" and predicted that as abolitionists further exposed the "Slave Power" the Liberty Party would soon become the "most powerful party in our country; nothing can arrest its progress." Identifying the major parties with the Slave Power was a valuable campaign tactic, but political abolitionists like Gerrit Smith genuinely believed that "the prospect of overthrowing American slavery will be *precisely* in proportion to the inroads, which, under the Divine blessing, we shall make upon our proslavery parties. They are the keepers of the great American Bastile."[13]

Liberty leaders especially emphasized this line of argument during election campaigns. For example, when former state representative Francis Gillette accepted the Connecticut Liberty Party's 1841 gubernatorial nomination, he attacked the Slave Power for making slavery "not merely a southern but a national institution." Gillette believed that most Democratic and Whig voters did not "delight in the service of the slave power" but rather were "swept away in the whirlwind of popular enthusiasm, and confused by the clamors which are incident to the desperate scramble for place and power." By casting light on Slave Power control of the major parties, Gillette hoped "these patriotic citizens [could] be disabused of their corrupt party associations, and brought out of the cloud into the clear sun light of truth."[14]

Liberty Party leaders repeatedly stressed that supporting either Whigs or Democrats reinforced slaveholders' disproportionate political power. No matter how strong the antislavery sympathies of major-party candidates at the local, state, or even congressional level, they would always be pledged to vote for organizing the House and filling the presidency as dictated by their

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[12] The Liberty Party [Joshua Leavitt], *The Right Sort of Politics*, Liberty Party Tract. No. 2 (Boston: J.W. Alden, 1843) Austin Willey, *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation* (Portland, Me.: Brown, Thurston, and Hoytt, Fogg & Donham, 1886), 227, 240; Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 113; Office of the Vermont Secretary of State, Vermont State Archives, General Election Results, Governor, 1789-2006, http://vermont-archives.org/govhistory/officers/pdf/governor.pdf, Accessed Jan. 30, 2008; *Emancipator*, Mar. 16, 1842, Apr. 27, 1843; John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW) to Samuel Edmund Sewall, Mar. 16, 1842, *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), V. 1: 549-550; Albany *Tocsin of Liberty*, Nov. 10, 1842.

[13] *Emancipator*, Mar. 4, 1842, Feb. 2, 1843; *The Right Sort of Politics* (Boston: J.W. Alden, Liberty Tract No. 2, [1843]); GS to John Scoble, Jan. 1, 1843, GS Papers.

[14] *Emancipator*, Oct. 28, 1841.

parties' proslavery leaderships. An 1843 Liberty "Address to the Free Electors of the Sixth Congressional District" of Massachusetts attacked both major parties as "tools of the South," asserting that "BOTH ALIKE DEPEND ON THE VOTES OF SLAVE-HOLDERS to enable them to grasp the helm of State." Slaveholders exploited these partisan arrangements, the address asserted, by demanding control over the Presidency, with its executive patronage, and the House speakership to dictate congressional committee assignments and control House debates. Furthermore, as an Albany abolitionist newspaper noted, the "servile lickspittle press" worked continuously as the "tool" of the proslavery parties to deceive the northern electorate.[15]

Shunning the major parties' corruption, but not their tactics, the Maine Liberty Party saw itself as a counterweight to the old parties: "putting forth the same efforts for the promotion of our cause, as are put forth by the existing party organizations for the attainment of their objects." The Liberty Party could thus rally "the political power of the North … as effectually for the destruction of slavery as it now is [employed] for its support." The Maine Liberty Party's 1841 address reiterated the duty of Maine abolitionists, and indeed all northern voters, "to arrest these encroachments of the slave power" before it was too late. Otherwise free white Northerners might "see their institutions perish and their children slaves," a specter antislavery politicians raised occasionally throughout the 1830s and 40s which became a common Republican charge after the 1857 Dred Scott decision. Urging Liberty votes as a way to prevent this impending disaster, the Maine Address emphasized that with both Whigs and Democrats "deriving alike in a great measure their political power from slavery, to slavery alike they must bow."[16]

New York State political abolitionists drew on the growing upstate sentiment for "coming out" from proslavery churches by urging readers to come out from proslavery parties. New York Liberty Party pamphleteer James C. Jackson cast the Whig and Democratic parties as the "TWO GREAT AGENTS" of slavery and attacked their "political depravity," in using their power "for the election of slaveholders, slave breeders and their abettors, to the highest offices under the government." While the two major parties competed "in prostituting the political trust of a free and hard working people to the SLAVE POWER for *political* SUPREMACY," the Liberty Party stood as the only alternative.[17]

The Slave Power argument also incorporated an economic analysis of how slaveholders had destroyed the national finances at a particular cost to free labor. That line of argument was deployed in such a way as to help abolitionists make the case for their single-minded, one-idea focus on slavery and the Slave Power. Liberty men insisted the slavery issue must preempt all other political divisions, not only because it was of greater moral and political import, but also because it would be futile to address other political economic concerns before the slavocracy had been checked. Ohio Liberty gubernatorial candidate Leicester King explained that Northerners'

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[15] *Emancipator*, Dec. 28, 1843; Albany *Tocsin of Liberty*, Nov. 24, 1841.

[16] "Address to the Electors of Maine," in *Emancipator*, Aug. 12, 1841; Probably the most famous Republican partisan articulation of this argument was Abraham Lincoln's 1858 "House Divided" speech, in which he declared the union would necessarily soon become either half-slave or half free and warned, "We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free, and we shall awake to the reality instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State," "June 16, 1858.—Speech Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, at the Close of the republican State Convention by which Mr. Lincoln had been named as their Candidate for United States Senator," in *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, eds. John G. Nicolay and John Hay (New York: The Century Co., 1907), V. 1:240-245.

[17] James C. Jackson, *The Duties and Dignities of American Freemen* (Office of the N.Y.A.S. Society, 1843); On "come-outerism," see Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, esp. 83-86, and William Goodell, *Come-Outerism: The Duty of Secession from a Corrupt Church* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1845).

"prosperity can not be permanently restored" until the "government [was] delivered from the usurped control of the slave power." Joshua Leavitt's speech on the "Financial Power of Slavery" during the 1840 presidential election campaign articulated these arguments most comprehensively, and subsequent Liberty discussions of the Slave Power followed his lead. "Slavery is the chief cause of our present commercial embarrassments," he argued (probably inaccurately), since fickle, indebted slaveholders promoted a "fluctuating policy" that inhibited the nation's financial stability and drained northern capital. Party leaders suggested that by 1844 southern debts to the North had reached at least $300 million. During the 1844 presidential campaign, the New York Anti-Slavery Society urged Liberty votes as a way for laboring Northerners to defend their own economic interests, since "both of the [major] political parties, in submitting to the dictation of the *Slave Power*, are doing all they can to enable the slaveholder to live through our commercial, social, and political relations, upon the results of Northern industry." In these polemics, Liberty men cast free labor as virtuous and efficient and slave labor as demoralizing and wasteful. These lines of argument, as Eric Foner has explained best, would become crucial to the broadening of the antislavery appeal in the 1850s.[18]

Notwithstanding this increased Liberty attention to economic arguments, the Slave Power concept remained first and foremost an argument about slaveholders' disproportionate political power, wielded through the major parties. As Liberty partisans made "Slave Power" a household phrase, they observed that if slaveholders could control the nation, a power on behalf of liberty might similarly build enough support to challenge the Slave Power for national political primacy. Seeing slaveholders, a propertied minority of about 250,000 by standard Liberty estimates, exert this sort of sway, Liberty leaders envisioned themselves similarly manipulating the nation's political institutions, but toward abolitionist goals. As Vermont abolitionist Kiah Bailey explained, Liberty voters could "be terrible as an army," so that "office-seekers would soon find them worth as much as slaveholders."[19] If the Liberty men maintained their antislavery consistency, Cincinnati *Philanthropist* editor Gamaliel Bailey predicted: "Their power will augment from year to year, till the politicians of the country will be compelled to pay the same respect to its will, that they now do to the commands of the Slave-Power." This was of course the goal of antislavery politics—transforming a political system in which acquiescence to slaveholder demands was a prerequisite for advancement into one in which it would guarantee defeat. Liberty men increasingly characterized national political action as a contest between "two Antagonist Forces … the Slave Power and the Liberty Power," or more commonly, the Slave Power and the Liberty Party. Liberty publications predicted dramatic growth, frequently extrapolating from the proportional increases of the Liberty Party's first few years that the party

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[18] Copy of Leicester King response to J.W. Piatt, Aug. 22, 1842, Salmon P. Chase Papers (SPC Papers), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia; Joshua Leavitt (JL), *The Financial Power of Slavery, The Substance of an Address Delivered in Ohio in September, 1840*; Charles D. Cleveland, "Address of the Liberty Party of Pennsylvania to the People of the State," in *Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845*, (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1867, repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 40-43. See also, for example, *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Aug. 4, 1841 and *Emancipator*, Mar. 4, 1842; James C. Jackson, *The Condition of Living*, (Utica, N.Y.: N.Y. S. A. S. Society, Monthly Tract No. 8, 1844), 7; On this facet of the Slave Power argument, see also Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 103-106; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995), passim.

[19] *Emancipator* Dec. 17, 1840; Cincinnati *Philanthropist*, Oct. 4, 1843; Letter from Kiah Bailey of Hardwick, Vermont, Aug. 22, 1842, in *Emancipator*, Sept. 8, 1842.

could poll over a million votes by 1847 and control the presidential election in 1848, although leaders often privately acknowledged that such forecasts might be overly optimistic.[20]

Ohio Liberty leaders like Bailey became especially known for their emphasis on "deliverance of the government from the control of the slave power." Some abolitionists found it troubling when Chase suggested that any "man who adopts & acts upon" this goal of wresting the control of the government from the Slave Power "and severs himself from the slavery parties is a Good Liberty man," even if "adverse" to the name "abolitionist." This was the sort of crass political calculation that Garrisonians (and their modern enthusiasts) along with several eastern Liberty men deprecated as illustrating the corrupting influence of partisanship on the antislavery cause. Still, Ohio Liberty leaders made clear to eastern colleagues their "hope that if success shall crown our efforts to divorce the government from slavery, that State after State will speedily and voluntarily emancipate until the land shall be delivered from slavery's curse." If this result did not materialize, then at that point they might advocate amending the Constitution. The 1842 Ohio Liberty Convention's address, penned by Chase, delivered by his close associate and convention president Samuel Lewis, and adopted unanimously by two hundred delegates, forcefully advocated the "ABSOLUTE AND UNQUAIFIED DIVORCE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FROM SLAVERY." Chase believed wholeheartedly that they had created a platform "on which all can stand of both parties who desire the deliverance of the country from the Slave Power." Still, Chase promised concerned co-partisans that neither he nor any of his Ohio colleagues intended to return to the Whig or Democratic parties.[21]

A shared commitment to overcoming the Slave Power by defeating its key auxiliaries—the major parties—united Liberty men with varying degrees of abolitionist radicalism. Joshua Leavitt understood that overturning Slave Power control over the government was effectively the same program as more radical easterners' calls for "'employing all honorable and constitutional means to hasten the removal of slavery.'" Even a devoted moralist like Lewis Tappan could accept the political program of "aiming only to divorce the general Govt from all participation in Slavery & the Slave Trade," and praise the "truly National" principles of the "Ohio Party."[22]

Chase's trenchant appraisal of the Slave Power argument's political appeal, at least in his own state, is borne out in the writing of embattled antislavery Whigs there. Albert G. Riddle, a leading Western Reserve ally of Joshua Giddings, agreed "that the time is not far distant when the issue must be made directly between the North & South." While Riddle feared that the "Self Styled Liberty Party" was "making great effect" in efforts aimed at "destruction of the Whig Party," he also "wish[ed] most sincerely that we *were* all with them." Furthermore, though Riddle and his supporters "heartily … dislike[d] the name of abolitionist," he understood that "their eyes" would "flash" and "their faces burn" as soon as one spoke to them of the "question

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[20] Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Sept. 1, Oct. 2, 1844; Henry B. Stanton to GS, GS Papers Nov. 23, 1844; AS to Samuel Webb, Feb. 7, 1843, AS Papers; James Jackson, *Duties and Dignities of American Freemen*.

[21] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 90-92; SPC to GS, May 14, 1842, GS Papers; For a good discussion of Chase's Slave Power arguments, with an emphasis on his constitutional thought, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995), Ch. 3; *Philanthropist*, Jan. 5, 1842; SPC to Joshua Giddings (JG), Jan. 21, 1842, Giddings-Julian Papers (G-J Papers), Library of Congress, microform; Thomas Morris, William Birney, Gamaliel Bailey, and William H. Brisbane to Boston Liberty Convention, Feb. 9, 1842, *Emancipator*, Jun. 16, 1842; Frederick J. Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 46-47.

[22] JL to SPC, May 20, 1842, SPC Papers; LT to William Jay, Mar. [Date Mutilated], between Mar. 13 through Mar. 16,] 1843, Lewis Tappan Papers (LT Papers), Library of Congress, microform; See also LT to SPC, Jun. 7, 1842, SPC Papers, HSP.

of Southern dictation." This, despite Riddle's Whig affiliation, made him "rejoice" that it "would require but little to annihilate party distinctions" and unite opposition to the Slave Power.[23]

The Liberty Attack on Whig Partisanship: The Specter of President Henry Clay

The incessant Liberty attacks on both major parties as subservient to the Slave Power especially affronted antislavery Whigs. Since the Whig Party nominated far more antislavery candidates and attracted far more antislavery voters than the Democrats, northern Whigs responded angrily to Liberty attempts to smear them as proslavery. Abolitionists could confront Democrats directly without having to persuade antislavery voters not to trust Democratic politicians. Only on rare occasions (before 1846) did northern Democrats proclaim their antislavery credentials. By contrast, Whigs across the North often campaigned as antislavery candidates, or even portrayed themselves as "the true 'liberty party.'" Thus Liberty men faced the dual challenge of disabusing voters of these Whig professions and reassuring them that the Liberty Party would not weaken political antislavery by aiding the Democrats.[24]

Repeatedly struggling to defend themselves against Whig aspersions that Liberty men were covertly working for the Democrats, many Liberty leaders came to prefer "the open, above-board baseness of the Democracy on the subject of abolition, to the hypocrisy and treachery of the Whigs." Because both parties supported slavery at the national level and placed slaveholders and doughfaces in positions of power, neither could be trusted, regardless of which harbored more antislavery voices. As Chase put it, "So long as" a proslavery extremist could be "just as good a Whig as Mr. Adams or Mr. Slade," while men like "Mr. Calhoun" could be "just as good a democrat" as antislavery Democrats like the *New York Evening Post*'s William Cullen Bryant, it would remain "impossible that the Liberty men would unite with either the Whigs or Democrats." Abolitionist publications described the Democrats as "mortgaged soul and body to

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[23]Albert G. Riddle to JG, Jun. 7, 1842, Joshua R. Giddings Papers (JG Papers), Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform.

[24]Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000), 137, notes that "abolitionists made their heaviest inroads in districts represented by Whigs," since antislavery societies, the Liberty Party, and the Whig Party were all likely to be strong in the same districts; For further discussion of the role of antislavery in northern Whig partisanship see James B. Stewart, "Abolitionists, Insurgents, and Third Parties: Sectionalism and Partisan Politics in Northern Whiggery, 1836-1844," in *Crusaders and Compromisers*, ed. Kraut, 26-43. For the influence of Whig antislavery stances in electoral politics, see esp. 29-30, 33-36. More recently, Stewart, "Reconsidering the Abolitionists in an Age of Fundamentalist Politics," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Spring 2006), 1-24, calls attention to the way evangelically motivated abolitionists sometimes struggled in the decision between supporting Liberty men or evangelical Whigs, but often gravitated to the latter. This, precisely, suggests why Liberty men felt it so important to belabor the point that even the most radically antislavery Whigs buttressed the Slave Power by maintaining their party allegiance; The most important early antislavery Democrats were New York *Evening Post* editors William Leggett and William Cullen Bryant, and Thomas Morris, who had abandoned the Democratic Party and joined the Liberty Party by 1841. For more on these men and other antislavery Democrats see Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Boston *Daily Atlas*, Nov. 9, 1842.

slavery," but more frequently focused on the Whig Party's "*Janus-faced*" attempts to present itself as "*anti* slavery in (some portions of) the North and slaveocratic in the South."[25]

While political abolitionists deplored the continued alliance of antislavery Whigs with the proslavery leaders of the national Whig party, Liberty papers pointed to the increasing prominence of abolitionist Whigs as evidence of Liberty influence. Self-described abolitionist John Mattocks had been elected governor of Vermont in 1843. Roger Baldwin, the abolitionist lawyer who had secured the freedom of the *Amistad* Africans, ran as the Connecticut Whig gubernatorial candidate unsuccessfully in 1843 and victoriously in 1844 and 1845. While Liberty men preferred to see their own ranks swelling, they took solace in the degree to which they had pushed segments of the major parties toward antislavery stances. Even Giddings's re-nomination in 1843 came to be seen as evidence of Liberty Party power on the Western Reserve. After reapportionment, Giddings's district had been stripped of many antislavery Whig voters, encouraging some Whig leaders to consider dumping Giddings, but the Liberty challenge made such a move far too risky. While it "was very humiliating," for leading Cleveland Whigs "to come down on their knees and nominate Giddings for their representative," a refusal "to nominate Giddings on account of his anti-slavery … would at once invite all the abolitionists to join the Liberty party." Indeed, Giddings's friends alleged that Liberty candidate Edward Wade's nomination aimed "merely to force the Whigs to *nominate*" Giddings, but Wade criticized that notion as "deceiving the liberty men" by eliding genuine differences between his Liberty independence and Giddings's Whig Party obligations.[26]

The best example of Liberty influence coercing antislavery nominations from the Whig Party came when Vermont Whigs gave their 1844 gubernatorial nomination to William Slade, the most "thorough abolitionist" that ever "spoke in Congress" by the *Philanthropist*'s estimate. Political abolitionists reproached Whig leaders' apparent designs to mobilize Slade's antislavery influence to help the proslavery national party secure the presidency in 1844. Nonetheless, abolitionists exulted that "the nomination of William Slade by the Whigs, *was forced upon them by the existence of the Liberty party*." The *Philanthropist* argued that "the habitual feeling of servility to the South, which has pervaded both parties, would have forbidden his nomination, but for the fact that the Liberty sentiment of the State was organized, and in efficient operation." Slade privately admitted that many Vermont Whigs had only "been willing to *use me* to keep down the third party."[27]

Liberty leaders celebrated that their political pressure seemed to have made support for abolitionism "the sure way to promotion" for many Whig politicians who once would have viewed it as "political suicide." Indeed Liberty partisans believed hopefully that "the time is near at hand, when no man not known as a decided anti-slavery man, can expect office, in New

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[25] *Emancipator*, July 20, 1843; SPC to GS, May 14, 1842, GS Papers; "Appeal to the Anti-Slavery Whigs of Monroe, and New York Generally," Rochester *American Citizen*, Oct. 19, 1841.

[26] "Letter from John Mattocks," Jul. 29, 1843, in Montpelier *Voice of Freedom*, Aug. 10, 1843; *Emancipator*, Oct. 5, 1843; Edward Wade to SPC, Oct. 24, 1843, SPC Papers, HSP; Salmon Chase made this point earlier about a previous congressional nomination Giddings received in SPC to JG, Feb. 9, 1842, G-J Papers; On these Liberty party electoral challenges to Giddings, see also James B. Stewart *Joshua Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland, Oh.: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 84-87, 95-98.

[27] Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Oct 2, 1844, Sept. 25,1844; Slade went on to predict that the Liberty Party could not "be kept down after the pending Presidential election is over, but will bound onward with great strides. It is, at present gaining considerable accessions from the Locos in this state; even if the Whigs follow the counsels of certain of their leaders, it will next year, cut into that party in a way that will astonish those leaders beyond measure." Slade to JG, Jun. 6, 1844, JG Papers.

York or any of the New-England States." Yet they also bemoaned the fact that "all these [Whig] Abolitionists are supporters of a pro-Slavery national party, and use all their influence to promote the election of a Slaveholder [to the presidency]." As the Liberty Party forced increasingly antislavery nominations on northern Whig party organizations, Liberty men had to work ever more vigorously to persuade antislavery voters to forsake the Whig Party, with its "unfounded [antislavery] pretensions." Thus, much of Liberty campaign rhetoric aimed at illustrating how even professedly antislavery Whigs repeatedly "yielded submissively to the control of the Slave-Power."[28]

The Liberty Party's best evidence of the Whig Party's commitment to proslavery policy was its clear intention to run Henry Clay for president in 1844. Clay, an anti-abolitionist slaveholding duelist was the figurative head of the Whig party and that in itself would profoundly limit antislavery Whig attempts to promote an abolitionist agenda. In addition to his large slaveholdings, Clay was especially anathema to Liberty men because he had mercilessly savaged the abolitionist movement in several prominent senate speeches that appeared to be little more than barefaced attempts to curry favor with potential slaveholding supporters for his presidential bid. Utica Liberty editor William Goodell illustrated the depth of abolitionist opposition to Clay when he insisted that Clay was even worse than South Carolina proslavery extremists precisely because Clay's "cunning, calculating, and apparently compromising" action "excites little opposition." Harsher Liberty rhetoric demeaned northern Whigs as slave-like in their obedience to Clay—as "white Charlies," a reference to Clay's well-known enslaved personal servant Charles.[29]

Throughout the early 1840s, Liberty leaders deployed the specter of Clay's election to the presidency and predicted (correctly, as it turned out) that Whig officeholders would be called upon to devote themselves to a Clay ticket in 1844. The widespread acceptance of Henry Clay's claim as the heir apparent to the party's 1844 presidential nomination came to exemplify the Slave Power's control over the seemingly northern-dominated Whig Party. Indeed, because of this, the *Emancipator* claimed to "prefer the open, above-board baseness of the Democracy on the subject of abolition, to the hypocrisy and treachery of the Whigs." Furthermore, as the 1844 election approached, President Tyler's efforts to annex slaveholding Texas became a major national campaign issue. In response, Clay initially cast himself as the anti-annexation candidate, but later repositioned himself as only opposing annexation under existing conditions and willing to accept it eventually.[30]

As early as January 1841, even before President Harrison's inauguration, the Liberty Party had begun preparing for the next presidential contest, assuming that "Clay, Van Buren and Birney will stand before the people until 1844." Since both Clay and Van Buren had "linked themselves irrevocably with slavery," there could be no hope for effective antislavery policymaking from either Whigs or Democrats. Clay became a powerful Liberty symbol of the hypocrisy of Whig antislavery professions. The prospect of Clay's candidacy provided a tangible example of abolitionist contentions that Whigs, like Democrats, were institutionally

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[28] *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Oct. 2, 1844, Mar. 16, 1844.

[29] The most significant speech to this effect was Clay's speech against abolitionist petitioning on Feb. 7, 1839, *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 167, which touched off the debate with Ohio Senator Thomas Morris that helped popularize the phrase "Slave Power." See chapter 1; *Friend of Man*, Mar. 20, 1841; Albany *Tocsin of Liberty*, Nov. 11, 1842.

[30] *Emancipator*, Jul. 20, 1843; Clay's stance on annexation is discussed briefly below.

beholden to the Slave Power. Slaveholding Whigs would always insist on, and secure, sound proslavery nominees like Henry Clay and Speaker John White for the nation's highest offices.[31]

Leavitt's *Emancipator* did not spare any antislavery Whigs from these attacks. Almost remarkably, Leavitt managed to connect nearly every antislavery Whig action back to Clay's presidential bid. Leavitt portrayed even the gubernatorial nomination of Roger Baldwin as a way to dupe Connecticut abolitionists into support of the Kentucky planter. By passing a resolution in praise of Clay, the 1843 Connecticut Whig nominating convention illustrated "that Mr. Baldwin's known opposition to slavery, his spotless morals, and his faithful professional services in the Amistad case, are held up by the Whig party" solely for the object of "drawing in a certain class of voters to the support of the party, who could [otherwise] not now be induced to vote for a slave-holder and a duelist." Leavitt characterized Democratic votes as similarly endorsing either "John C. Calhoun, the working man's foe, or Martin Van Buren, the Northern man with Southern principles," but abolitionist publications more frequently emphasized how northern Whigs consistently, if implicitly aided the advancement of "Henry Clay, the chief of slaveholders." To Leavitt it had become clear that "the present leading object of the managers of the Whig party is to destroy the Liberty political movement" so as to mobilize antislavery support for Clay's presidential candidacy.[32]

This "unrighteous game of political gambling" became "the grand movement of the Whigs in all those States where the Liberty party holds the balance of power." The Liberty press, portrayed the nomination of Millard Fillmore for governor of New York in much the same light, as Fillmore had developed an antislavery reputation (which he would eventually negate completely) in the late 1830s. Vermont, where antislavery sentiment was most pervasive, provided Liberty partisans with even more conspicuous examples of the Whig tactic of making abolitionist nominations "in order to wheedle the friends of impartial liberty into the support of Henry Clay for the Presidency." In 1843, Vermont Whigs nominated abolitionist congressman John Mattocks to head a decidedly antislavery state ticket, and yet the same convention selected two pro-Clay delegates to represent Vermont in the Whig national nominating convention.[33]

Liberty assessments of the Whigs' strategy of using antislavery men like William Slade to mobilize antislavery votes for Clay are borne out in the correspondence of Whig managers. As early as 1840, Vermont Whig strategists touted the political value of nominating Slade for governor because he was "an Abolitionist, tho not so much so as to sink his character as a sound Whig." By 1843, Vermont Whig leaders worried that the "3rd party movement" would be the "most prominent and most important" of the "obstacles to our success in 1844." Former legislator (and future Governor) Erastus Fairbanks greatly feared the influence of abolitionism. Fairbanks felt certain that to maintain their state dominance Vermont Whigs would need to demonstrate a commitment to abolitionism, either by founding a new antislavery organization or

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[31] *Emancipator*, Jan. 28, 1841.

[32] *Emancipator*, Dec. 7, 1843; The previous election season the *Emancipator* similarly described Baldwin's nomination as an effort to draw liberty voters toward the Whigs, and then, "to transfer the credit of his services over to the benefit of Henry Clay," *Emancipator*, Feb. 16, 1843; *Emancipator*, Feb. 9, 1843; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 25, 1844; *Emancipator*, Mar. 16, 1843; On connections between dueling, slavery, and the southern culture of honor (as well as a great many other things), see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[33] *Emancipator*, Aug. 3, 1843; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Oct. 2, 1844; For an example of abolitionists celebrating Fillmore's earlier antislavery stance, see *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 15, 1838; *Emancipator*, Jul. 20, 1843.

by staunchly supporting the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society (which remained neutral as to Liberty Party). If "principal Whigs in the state" would "unite in sustaining lecturers … which advocate the principles of Abolition and the rights of the free states," Fairbanks believed the Whig Party might "reasonably suppose that much of the evil of the 3rd party movement will be paralized [*sic*]."[34]

Fairbanks testified to the organizational sophistication of the Vermont Liberty party when he warned of their plans to work vigorously at "ingratiating themselves with the people" during the winter "*interregnum* of political action." This persistent Liberty campaigning, Fairbanks feared, would produce "effectual injury to" the Whig "cause next summer." For the lead role in Fairbanks's antislavery lecturing counter-strategy, he recommended, of course, William Slade, "so well known as a good Whig & yet a thorough abolitionist." Slade's financial woes, Fairbanks hypothesized, might encourage him to accept Whig pecuniary assistance by taking the paid lecturing assignment as a "*Quid pro Quo*." Fairbanks advocated a similar journalistic tack, urging Whig papers to cast "their own cause" as "the Anti Slavery cause," as a more effective way to "destroy the 3rd party influence." Clearly Fairbanks's assessment of the Liberty threat proved compelling to state party chieftains, inasmuch as Slade finally received the Whig gubernatorial nominations in both 1844 and 1845 and won both times. During the presidential election year, Slade publicly endorsed Clay and chastised the Liberty Party at the state Whig convention for promoting Texas annexation by refusing to support Clay. Vermont Liberty men scoffed at these sorts of arguments about making Clay president to protect against annexation as "so much like setting the wolf to guard the sheep."[35]

By the approach of the 1843 Massachusetts state elections, abolitionists saw the potential for the Liberty Party to similarly transform the Bay State's political terrain—precisely because both parties struggled at the state level to disassociate themselves from the national parties' proslavery leaders. As the *Emancipator* observed, "The *Whigs* of New England stick fast in *Clay*. The party reels and staggers under a load of slave-holding, gambling and dueling. The *Democrats* are divided between the Carolina Nullifier and the Kinderhook Magician." The paper also characterized antislavery Whig gubernatorial candidate George Briggs as "a stool pigeon to catch abolition votes for Henry Clay."[36]

By repeatedly emphasizing the partisan connections between state and national politics Liberty politicians shrewdly worked to direct political attention to the Slave Power's national supremacy. Ohio Liberty men thus framed Whig Thomas Corwin's 1842 gubernatorial campaign as a direct referendum on Henry Clay's impending run for the White House. The *Philanthropist* wrote that "the fates of Henry Clay and Thomas Corwin are indissolubly linked in this State." If Corwin was defeated, the *Philanthropist* contended, then the Whig party would "hardly dare try"

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[34] For example see LT to Slade, Nov. 18, 1843, LT Papers, LC; Boston *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle*, Jul. 31, 1844. From March of 1844 through October of 1845, the *Emancipator*'s name was changed to *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle* before being changed back to simply *Emancipator*. In the notes that follow, I will continue to cite it as *Emancipator* for issues throughout this period; Ibid., Mar. 7, 1844; Charles Davis to Erastus Fairbanks, Apr. 21, 1840, Fairbanks Papers, Vermont Historical Society (VHS), Barre, Doc 95, Folder 54; Erastus Fairbanks, to Albert G. Whittemore, Oct. 27, 1843, VHS, Misc. 437.

[35] Ibid.; In several letters in the Slade Family Papers, Henry Sheldon Museum, Stewart-Swift Research Center, Middlebury, VT, Volume 1 William Slade Letters (Domestic Correspondence Scrapbook), William Slade discusses his financial difficulties. For example see William Slade to James Slade, Mar. 28, 1838, and William Slade to "Wife", Jul. 7, 1842; *Voice of Freedom*, Jul. 4, 1844, Aug. 15, 1844.

[36] *Emancipator*, Aug. 17, 1843, Sept. 28, 1843, Nov. 9, 1843.

Clay, that "prince of duelists," as a candidate in Ohio. Thus, "Every vote given then for Corwin is a vote that Henry Clay shall be President."[37]

Even Giddings could not escape the *Emancipator*'s censure that he was "nominated, plainly for no other object but to secure his influence and the votes of those who respect him, in favor of the election of Henry Clay, in 1844." Furthermore, leading Cleveland Whig manager James Briggs privately confirmed Liberty suspicions when he reported that as "a Whig, and a Clay man," Giddings "would give us the abolition vote … and exert a good influence throughout the state by out-maneuvering the third party ultras." Leavitt perceived Giddings's potential influence "as the representative of Henry Clay," and maintained that "every vote given for [Giddings] is given for a slave-holder and a duelist."[38]

This idea that the major parties, including the Whigs, were fundamentally corrupted by slavery, coupled with constant reference to their proslavery presidential aspirants became ever more central to Liberty political discourse. Furthermore, when 5500 Liberty votes contributed to Corwin's loss of the gubernatorial race by 3000, political abolitionists proudly took credit, and sanguinely forecast that those efforts might well have "defeated Clay" in his efforts to secure the 1844 nomination, since "the Clay-managers" had "invested" so much in the race as to give it "all the importance of a presidential contest." Liberty partisans understood that, much as they had used alliances with congressmen to dramatize Slave Power arguments, they could use state and local election contests to emphasize their assertions of both major parties' deference to the Slave Power. These opportunities to publicly challenge the antislavery professions of major-party Northerners was a crucial benefit the Liberty Party gained from contesting so many races it had no chance of winning.[39]

Liberty partisans sought to control a balance of power to extract concessions from the major parties, but more importantly they wanted to make their power known and disseminate their arguments to promote future success. Thus, when Corwin ran for governor, Liberty men cast the entire election as an opportunity to express condemnation of Corwin's support for Clay. Salmon Chase believed Liberty men could soon "secure the balance of power in the Legislatures of the Free States, and in Congress" and thus be able to "accomplish immense good for the country, by checking the ruinous measures of one party and aiding & carrying the beneficial propositions of another, without any bias in favor of either." Likewise New York abolitionists exulted at holding the balance of power in four counties in 1841 and believed that soon they could mobilize this "balance power" to secure a "Liberty representation on the floor of the [state] capitol."[40]

Majority-Rule and Minority Power in New England

Liberty partisans could exploit their balance of power especially influentially in the New England, where election required an absolute majority. In the five New England states other

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[37] "Henry Clay and Thomas Corwin," *Philanthropist*, Sept. 17, 1842.
[38] *Emancipator* Oct. 5, 1843; James A. Briggs to Oran Follett, July 26, 1843, Oran Follett mss., Cincinnati Historical Society, quoted in James Stewart, "Abolitionists, Insurgents and third Parties: Sectionalism and Partisan Politics in Northern Whiggery, 1836-1844," in *Crusaders and Compromisers*, ed. Kraut, 25-44, 34.
[39] Gamaliel Bailey (GB) to James Birney, Nov. 16, 1842, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966, original edition 1938 by AHA), V. II: 709-712.
[40] SPC to JG, G-J Papers, Jan. 21, 1842; Albany *Tocsin of Liberty*, Nov. 24, 1841.

than Rhode Island, election rules required a candidate to win a majority (not merely a plurality) of votes cast to be elected to any state office as well as to the U.S. House of Representatives. In such contests, abolitionists could control the balance of power and threaten to dictate the outcome. They had already observed how they might capitalize on majoritarian electoral rules in their few effective scattering campaigns of the late 1830s and in their analysis of the 1839 House speakership contest. On occasion, abolitionists might be able to use their position to bargain for concessions (as the Free Soil Party would later do) from one of the major parties. More often, however, Liberty partisans maintained an unwavering commitment to their candidates and forced the parties into embarrassing standstills that could only be resolved with significant abstentions by one party at the expense of their own interests and professed principles. These majority-rule systems thus allowed a relatively small number of Liberty men to disrupt the major parties' abilities to govern and provided prime opportunities to call attention to the Slave Power's influence over both parties' northern wings.[41]

Even though the major parties usually resolved these deadlocks and eventually elected one or the other of the major party candidates, the process was time-consuming, painstaking, embarrassing, and most importantly, newsworthy. Any delay in the functioning of the governmental apparatus could be used to draw attention to the Liberty Party and its arguments. Thus, Liberty men enthusiastically practiced dilatory electoral tactics, analogous to the dilatory parliamentary tactics pursued by minority blocs in legislatures. Liberty Party efforts to delay electoral choices, potentially indefinitely for some offices, served two functions: preventing effective governing by a plurality antithetical to Liberty Party interests and offering time for Liberty men to further articulate their message in hopes of drawing supporters to their side and breaking down the solidarity of their opponents. The Liberty Party's aggressive efforts to produce extended delay in these electoral contests thus served many of the same functions for the third party as dilatory motions would for a legislative minority.

Douglas Dion's excellent discussion of dilatory legislative strategies argues that legislative minorities employ dilatory tactics (and majorities attempt to use procedural change to limit the opportunity for dilatory tactics) when the margin between the majority and minority parties is small.[42] Majority-rule requirements and the narrow margin between the two major parties in so many majority-rule contests enabled the Liberty Party to effectively practice its dilatory strategy and operate in much the same way as Dion's large minorities. Additionally, Liberty partisans saw value in delay simply for the sake of delay—by creating additional electoral contests in which Liberty votes played a decisive role, Liberty partisans generated further opportunities to argue about the Slave Power's corruption of both major parties. All of these strategic benefits were further augmented by the annual occurrence of statewide elections in these states. At times it must have seemed to New England politicians that one Liberty-induced stalemate had barely been resolved before another beckoned.

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[41] Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), Chapters 5-7, provides a series of detailed summaries of Liberty politics in every northern state. His discussion of New England Liberty politics provides the best extant illustration of how majority-rule electoral systems and annual elections created opportunities for Liberty men at the state and local level. Johnson focuses on demonstrating Liberty influence in state politics and thus rarely connects these contested local and state races to national Liberty strategy or congressional politics.

[42] Douglas Dion, *Turning the Thumbscrew: Minority Rights and Procedural Change in Legislative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

Even for the many majority-rule contests that would automatically be resolved by state legislatures if no candidate won a popular majority, the devolution of the choice on a state legislature sometimes offered similar advantages for political abolitionists. At a minimum, it could further expose Whigs' and Democrats' complicity with the Slave Power as they worked to resolve the impasses. In rarer situations, Liberty men could elect enough legislators to wield a balance of power either for bargaining or dilatory purposes within one, usually the lower, house of the state legislature. Liberty men understood that with majority requirements and the parties often so evenly matched, a tiny fraction of the electorate could erect formidable political roadblocks for the major parties. In Connecticut in 1842, for example, Gillette denied the major parties a gubernatorial choice by popular election with only about 1300 votes out of 50,000.[43]

From the get-go, the strategy seemed highly promising. Liberty vote totals mounted each election cycle, and Liberty leaders saw northern Democrats and Whigs tacking toward Liberty positions in an effort to stem the flight from their parties. Liberty men were pleased at this shift, but also suggested that it was the reason that the Liberty increase had not been even greater. Furthermore, it forced Liberty partisans to work ever harder to paint all major-party politicians as corrupted by membership in proslavery party organizations. Outright Liberty victories remained few, but there was no denying the party's growing influence, especially in comparison to its inauspicious beginnings in the 1840 presidential campaign. For example, in five of the seven Vermont gubernatorial elections featuring Liberty candidates, the third party forced the legislature to choose the governor.[44]

In no state more than Massachusetts were abolitionists better organized to exploit majority-rule elections and harness a relatively widespread and growing antislavery sentiment to put electoral pressure on the major parties. Already by 1841, the Liberty Party polled nearly 3500 votes across the state, and party leaders looked forward to persuading numerous committed abolitionists that yet remained tied to the major parties. As Bruce Laurie has shown, the Liberty following dwarfed the Garrisonians, even in Garrison's Bay State headquarters. Laurie describes the many attempts, and occasional successes, of Massachusetts Liberty partisans to promote civil rights, personal liberty, and pro-labor laws. Equally important to Massachusetts Liberty leaders was the role of local and state elections in illustrating the power of proslavery interests in both major parties and in providing political abolitionists a beachhead in their efforts to ultimately transform national politics.[45]

When the struggling finances of the *Emancipator* (in an era of deep economic depression) forced editor Joshua Leavitt to move the paper from New York to Boston and absorb the Boston *Free American*, it trained the attention of one of the abolitionists' most incisive

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[43] *Emancipator*, Apr. 14, 1842.

[44] In the other two Vermont gubernatorial contests, Whig Charles Paine won an electoral majority with only 50.9 percent of the vote in 1842, and in 1844 William Slade received 51.5 percent of the popular vote. Office of the Vermont Secretary of State, Vermont State Archives, General Election Results, Governor, 1789-2006, http://vermont-archives.org/govhistory/officers/pdf/governor.pdf, Accessed Jan. 30, 2008

[45] Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 74-76, 80-81, discusses Liberty Party exploitation of the majority-rule system in Massachusetts, but does not emphasize the commotion Liberty men created by prolonging, especially congressional, electoral contests as a way to call attention to major party subservience to the Slave Power. For Liberty Party successes in promoting civil rights legislation see especially Ch. 3; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) demonstrates the significance of the majority-rule system for earlier, more episodic, third-party movements in Massachusetts, such as the Workingmen and Anti-Masons. He only briefly treats the Liberty Party, 298-299, 326-330, but rightly notes that the party succeeded in drawing off some votes from the major parties, especially the Whigs.

political minds directly on the opportunities that Massachusetts afforded for Liberty men to wield a balance of power. Leavitt immediately recognized the value of publishing in a place where he could highlight majority-rule electoral systems' openness to third-party manipulation:

> In regard to the great political effort for the renovation of our government, and the fearful and constitutional annihilation of slavery, every one can see that the rule of voting in Massachusetts, and the decided strength and union of abolition voters, … point to this glorious old Commonwealth as the State that is most likely to be first in taking its position, as a State in favor of universal and impartial liberty.[46]

Leavitt appreciated the value of this majority-rule electoral system for third-party action at all levels of New England government and began working vigorously to promote the election of Liberty representatives to the Massachusetts legislature. Leavitt knew that in many New England states, "the friends of Liberty have obtained the absolute control of the balance of power, so that no election can take place by the people, except of Liberty men." Because state senate and state executive races in which no candidate received a majority were decided by the legislature, it became equally important that Liberty men exert this electoral power in town elections for state legislators. Only if Liberty men could "secure control of the Legislature" could they hope to shape state politics, but with a "discreet, and seasonable, and *energetic* movement" to "secure Liberty representatives at the very next election," they could "compel the election of a Liberty Governor—or none." Furthermore, legislatures selected United States Senators, and Liberty men desperately hoped to place an antislavery voice in the Senate. Thus Leavitt implored his readers to "remember … that United States Senators are chosen in the Legislature; and how much we need a few men there who will stand by truth and liberty."[47]

With the Liberty Party's continued focus on wresting control of the federal government from the Slave Power, Massachusetts Liberty campaigners focused primarily on national issues and cast the 1841 state elections a proxy battle over slavery's role in national politics. Even though the Whig and Democratic gubernatorial candidates John Davis and Marcus Morton may "have professed Anti-Slavery principles," both, the *Emancipator* asserted, had "shown themselves, on every occasion, ready to sacrifice their Anti-Slavery for the good of their party." Sizing up the growing power of the Massachusetts Liberty Party, Leavitt had "very little doubt that both the old parties will be thrown into a minority," forcing the legislature to choose between the Whig, Democrat, and Liberty candidates. Leavitt especially hoped for a split legislature, with opposing parties controlling the state senate and state house, believing that scenario might force the choice of a Liberty governor.[48]

The results of the popular contest showed Leavitt to have been overconfident, but not deluded. Davis won a narrow majority over the combined votes for Morton and Liberty candidate Samuel Sewall. Nonetheless, the state's Liberty total had more than doubled from 2533 in the 1840 presidential contest to 5882 in the 1841 state elections. Although the Liberty Party did not control a balance of power that year, Davis achieved his majority by less than one percent of the vote, and the Liberty Party wreaked sufficient havoc in political contests across the state that hopes for soon controlling the balance seemed entirely practicable. Enough Liberty

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[46] *Emancipator*, Dec. 10, 1841
[47] "LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS," *Emancipator*, Sept. 8, 1842.
[48] *Emancipator*, Nov. 4, 1841.

voters rejected the major party candidates to deny initial elections of representatives to the General Court in over eighty Massachusetts towns. In some, the parties were so closely matched that a prominent abolitionist who could poll even a smattering of votes, such as John Greenleaf Whittier's thirty-four votes in Amesbury, could repeatedly deny a majority choice. Unable to cajole the Whittier bloc after three elections, exasperated town leaders decided not to send an assemblyman to Boston that year. The town of Holliston similarly chose to go unrepresented "because [according to the *Emancipator*] a little band of 17 true hearts, after several trials, could neither be bought nor intimidated." Leavitt gloated that even New Bedford (incidentally a major destination of fugitive slaves), with a population of 13,000, held four unsuccessful elections before deciding to go "unrepresented in the legislature this year, because … a chosen few loved liberty more than party."[49]

Having controlled over three percent of the statewide vote in the 1841, barely a year after the party's organization, Massachusetts Liberty men looked optimistically to the following year's contest, which would also include congressional races. In a letter to the Whig *Newburyport Herald*, Liberty Party journalist (and 1842 congressional candidate) John Greenleaf Whittier made the case for electing Sewall governor in 1842. Morton could not receive Liberty votes, "because he is the candidate of a party" that "has so far *practically* supported the vilest system of slavery which exists on the face of the earth." Whittier similarly insisted abolitionists could not vote for Davis's reelection, "because he is the candidate of a party which has hoisted the red flag of the duelist and the black flag of the slave holder, by nominating Henry Clay for the Presidency." Whittier further mocked the Whigs as "a party whose leaders admit the evil influences of slavery upon the prosperity of the country, and sagaciously propose, as a remedy, the elevation of a slave-holder to the presidency." Furthermore, as the Whig press corroborated, "CLAY and DAVIS" had become the party's "watchwords." Sewall, by contrast, stood as the candidate of a party aiming to "rescue" the national government from the "all-grasping 'Slave Power.'"[50]

Furthermore, the prospect of forcing a divided Massachusetts legislature to decide the choice of state officers delighted Liberty partisans. As the likelihood emerged that Whigs would control the Massachusetts house and Democrats the state senate, the *Emancipator* exulted at how the divided legislature's challenge of choosing a governor would create a powerful opportunity to either elect a Liberty man or demonstrate the depth of both parties' shared commitment to silencing abolitionism. Massachusetts electoral laws required, in the event that no gubernatorial candidate received a popular majority, that the state House of Representatives vote to select two candidates from whom the state senate would choose. Electoral rules required the lower house to ballot until one candidate received a majority and then to ballot again until a second candidate received a majority. By 1842, Leavitt's *Emancipator* predicted confidently that the Liberty Party would deny both Morton and Davis an electoral majority. In that scenario, Leavitt predicted, the Whig lower House would be expected to select Davis on the first vote, but afterwards would be forced to choose between Morton and Samuel Sewall. If Whig legislators selected their alleged nemesis Morton over Sewall, knowing full well that the Democratic senate would choose

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[49] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 85-86; *Emancipator* Nov. 25, 1841, Dec. 10, 1841; For an extensive account of fugitive slaves passing through, and settling in, New Bedford, see Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). Grover, however, barely mentions the Liberty Party in New Bedford.

[50] JGW to the *Newburyport Herald*, printed under title "The Liberty Party" in *Newburyport Herald*, in Nov. 1, 1842, *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 1:576-77; Boston *Daily Atlas*, Sept. 16, 1842.

Morton, they would belie all their professions that other partisan issues mattered more than the slavery question. Thus would the Massachusetts Whigs, "violate their direct and implied pledges to their constituents, and bow the knees to the dark spirit of slavery at the bidding of the Clay-overseers of Massachusetts." The election produced an even better result for the Liberty Party than the divided legislature Leavitt had projected. Liberty men sent six representatives to Boston, enough to control the balance of power between the Whig and Democratic Parties in the state House, and the third party also defeated the election of sixteen of forty state senators.[51]

Before the legislature could select a governor, it first had to organize by selecting a speaker and filling the sixteen open senate seats. Liberty control of the balance of power threatened to dramatically complicate both tasks. After four unsuccessful ballots, both Whigs and Democrats abandoned their caucus candidates and instead divided between Daniel P. King, a Whig with abolitionist sympathies, and Lewis Williams, the Liberty choice and a former Democrat. When King won with a mix of Whig and ex-Whig abolitionist votes, abolitionists who had theretofore (and thereafter) insisted on the impossibility of major-party candidates receiving Liberty support cast King's election, perhaps disingenuously, as a Liberty triumph: "Every member of the Massachusetts house of Representatives, with three solitary exceptions, abandoned their old parties, wheeled into the Abolition ranks at a moment's warning, … and struck for Emancipation … the Liberty men of other States, shout our triumph—for, the Liberty Party of Massachusetts has swallowed up both of the other parties." On the vote for the unfilled senate seats, five Liberty men caucused together and refused to budge, but one Whig defected from his party and enabled the Democrats elect their entire senatorial slate, with the single exception of one ex-Whig Liberty man who received two Democratic votes in conjunction with Whig and Liberty support. Despite these mixed results, Liberty men anticipated more from the legislature's next order of business—electing a governor. Even Sewall himself placed a high estimate on his chances for victory.[52]

Instead the gubernatorial contest provided the long-awaited showdown that would illustrate both Massachusetts parties' subservience to the Slave Power. On only the second ballot, two Whig legislators abandoned their party and voted to send Morton up as the first candidate to the state senate, virtually assuring his election as governor. Then on the ballot for the second candidate to face Morton, Davis received 271 of 292 votes cast. Nearly every Democrat had selected the Whig candidate to run against Morton rather than give credence to the Liberty Party. These results, the *Emancipator* remarked, provided further "proof, that HOSTILITY TO LIBERTY IS THE ONLY COMMON GROUND WHERE THE TWO GREAT PARTIES WHICH HAVE SO LONG CURSED THE COUNTRY" could "UNITE." Of course, Leavitt also cast the two Whig votes to send Marcus Morton's name up to the

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[51] *Emancipator*, January 5, 1843; Leavitt had overoptimistically hoped for a similar outcome the previous year, suggesting that the state senate and house set to be elected in 1841 might be controlled by opposing parties, believing that scenario could force the choice of a Liberty governor. Leavitt predicted that year that a Whig house, to validate their adamancy on the importance of party issues, would have to select the Whig and Liberty candidates, and then the hypothetical Democratic senate "would doubtless choose the latter," *Emancipator*, Nov. 4, 1841; Boston *Daily Atlas*, Nov. 22, 1842.

[52] *Emancipator* Jan. 12, 19, 1843; See also Samuel Sewall's letters quoted in Nina Moore Tiffany, *Samuel E. Sewall: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 94-95; Reinhard Johnson, "The Liberty Party in Massachusetts, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third Party Politics in the Bay State," *Civil War History* 28 (1982), 238-265, esp. 250-252, discusses these proceedings in the Massachusetts state legislature before the choice of Governor. Johnson's attention to this interesting moment in Massachusetts political history primarily stems from its implications for understanding debates about if, and when, a Liberty man could support major party politicians.

Democratic state senate as exemplifying Whig desires to appease Henry Clay and his supporters by avoiding association with abolitionism.[53]

The *Emancipator* always emphasized the implications of state political action for national politics. With the Liberty Party having successfully forced the choice of governor into the legislature the previous election, there seemed, by 1843, to be "scarcely a doubt that the choice of Presidential electors in Massachusetts [which also carried a majority-requirement for popular election] will devolve upon the Legislature." If the Massachusetts Liberty Party took "efficient action" they could likely elect twenty-five to forty members, enough to secure "beyond all question … a share of the electoral votes." Through that election season, Leavitt belabored the point: "every vote given this year for a Whig or Democratic candidate, for [state] Senator or Representative, is a direct vote for a pro-slavery ticket—Van Buren or Clay—for the Presidency." When the Whigs won a majority in the state legislative elections, Henry B. Stanton still hopefully believed that many of the "Whig abolition candidates" nominated to stem the growth of the Liberty Party would refuse to "vote for Clay electors" and would thereby ensure that Massachusetts's electoral votes go to either Birney or no one.[54]

Congressional races in majority-rule states provided especially telling opportunities for Liberty men to focus non-presidential elections on the national political debate over slavery, not least because the state legislature could not resolve undecided contests the way it could for state officers. In September of 1842, Leavitt reminded readers of the importance of nominating good congressional candidates, hoping the Liberty party could elect "two or three sterling Liberty men, who can neither be bullied, bought nor flattered, nor yet overseerized." Leavitt also reminded readers that the incoming Congress could choose the next president if both major party nominees failed to win an Electoral College majority in 1844. Unlike in contests for state executive officers, congressional seats would remain unfilled until someone was elected, and unlike in elections for assembly seats, no one could simply decide to call off the election and leave the seat unfilled. Congressional electorates would ballot continually until someone got a majority, sometimes leaving numerous seats vacant when Congress opened. Liberty men understood that this set of bizarre institutional rules created a valuable political opening for a third party that knew how to take advantage of them. Thus, throughout the majority-rule states in New England, Liberty politicians trained their attention on disrupting congressional races. By so extending the election season, Liberty men could continue to belabor their arguments about major-party submissiveness to the Slave Power.[55]

By the Liberty Party's second round of congressional elections, they could employ this strategy to great effect. In elections beginning in 1842 for the 28th Congress, which would open in December of 1843, Liberty men delayed choices in eleven New England congressional districts (four in Maine, six in Massachusetts, and one in Vermont), up significantly from the three districts that had required runoffs for the previous Congress. Furthermore, the number of runoffs, or "trials" as contemporaries described them, reached dramatic new levels in 1843. One Massachusetts district required seven trials before Whig Amos Abbot won with just over fifty-one percent of votes cast. Liberty men forced six separate elections in two other Massachusetts races and one Maine race, and four trials in another district in each of those two states. Three

[53] *Emancipator*, Jan. 19, Feb. 9, 1843.
[54] *Emancipator*, Sept. 28, 1843; Henry B. Stanton to GS, Dec, 20, 1843, GS Papers.
[55] *Emancipator*, Sept. 15, 1842.

Massachusetts representatives were not seated until after the Congressional session was well underway, and a Maine Democrat missed the entire first (longer) session of his term.[56]

The lengthy campaigns for the unfilled Massachusetts seats particularly illustrate how Liberty men exploited the electoral gridlock to assail Slave Power control of the major parties. As of February 1843, after two rounds of voting, the strong Liberty showing left six of the ten Massachusetts congressional seats still unfilled. The lengthy contest over these unfilled House seats provided further evidence that the "two desperate parties, both of which are pledged to the Slave Power, are arrayed against the friends of Liberty." As the ordeal persisted through its third round of voting, with a decision in only one of the contested districts, Leavitt celebrated the mounting Liberty vote totals, while major-party candidates' support dwindled. "None but Liberty men," Leavitt projected, "can represent those five districts in the next Congress," unless one party abandoned the contest and left "the Liberty Party to contend single-handed against one division of the 'dough-faces.'" Ultimately, enough major party voters abstained in each contest to enable one of the major parties to elect its candidate, but this result simply vindicated Liberty contentions that Whig and Democratic politicians were more concerned with stanching the growth of political abolitionism than with the supposedly paramount issues distinguishing the major parties from each other. This was dilatory electoral politics at its finest. For months the state had been unable to fill a majority of its congressional seats, and one congressional election had been delayed for nearly seventeen months, all because of the little Liberty Party. This Liberty obstructionism became so irritating to major party leaders in Massachusetts that some proposed (unsuccessfully however) abolishing the majority electoral rules in 1843. In light of their effective exploitation of majority-rule voting systems, Liberty partisans' confidence approaching the 1844 election seems idealistic but comprehensible.[57]

The Election of 1844 and Texas Annexation

By early 1844, the Whig and Democratic national conventions had validated Liberty forebodings that both would nominate proslavery presidential tickets. Clay, as long expected, secured the Whig nomination. To abolitionists' dismay, New Jersey's Theodore Frelinghuysen had been added to Clay's ticket as southern Whigs' preferred choice for a northern vice presidential candidate. William Jay chastised Frelinghuysen, known as the "Christian Statesman" for his opposition to Indian removal and support for temperance and other reform causes: "You have lent the influence of your name, associated as it is with the religious zeal and benevolence of the nation, to the cause of slavery." The Democratic nomination proved more contentious as southern calls for Texas annexation disrupted party unity and denied Martin Van Buren his expected nomination, because of his stated opposition to fighting a war to secure Texas. Instead the party chose a so-called dark horse, James K. Polk, an expansionist Tennessee slaveholding former speaker of the house who had recently fallen on political lean times, with two gubernatorial defeats.[58]

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[56] Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st through 105th Congresses* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1998), 136-137.

[57] *Emancipator* Feb. 2, 23, Apr. 13, 1843; Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 136-137; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 75-76.

[58] *Emancipator*, May, 8, 1844; *Letter of The Honorable William Jay to Hon. Theo Frelinghuysen* (New York: 1844); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume I, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford

Leading up to the contest, some Liberty men also began to rethink their presidential nominee, hoping to find a candidate with a broader appeal. Birney had been re-nominated by a national Liberty convention held in May of 1841, over three years prior to the presidential election. Since then the party had counted massive new accessions in each intervening canvass. Through the early 1840s, well aware of all they had gained from working with prominent antislavery politicians, several Liberty Party leaders privately conspired to replace Birney with a more renowned candidate. The leaders in this effort to find a new nominee were Cincinnati Liberty managers Salmon Chase and Gamaliel Bailey, the two of whom would repeatedly maneuver to expand the reach of political antislavery.[59]

Thinking practically about how to broaden the Liberty party, they, like major party politicians, considered electability an important criterion for their choice of national standard-bearer. By the end of 1841 Chase, Bailey, and their allies controlled the Ohio Liberty Party. As these Cincinnati Liberty leaders worked vigorously to emphasize the goal of divorcing the federal government from slavery, they attempted to prepare the way for a possible abandonment of Birney. First they put out feelers to Birney to see if he would place his name before another national nominating convention with the power to replace him. Chase feared it would be "difficult to persuade any considerable body of the people to unite in the support of one so little known as Mr Birney and who has seen so little of public service," and instead suggested prominent antislavery Whig politicians like John Quincy Adams or William Seward. Local Ohio conventions followed their lead, such as an August 1842 Miami County Liberty Convention that proposed nominating Adams for the presidency.[60]

Birney sharply rebuked Chase for these efforts: "It seems strange to me that any abolitionist conversant with our cause could have thought … of going *out* of our ranks for candidates for any office." For good measure, Birney roundly condemned Adams's "Anti-abolition zeal." He also cautioned Chase against pushing the Ohio Liberty Party towards overemphasizing "opposition to Slavery … so much as a matter of money policy—so little as a matter of religious duty." Eastern party leaders like Leavitt and Stewart backed up Birney, and Chase's efforts seemed to be quieted.[61]

Still, others, including Lewis Tappan, shared Chase's assessment of Birney's inadequacy as a national political candidate. Tappan sounded out Adams and Seward, particularly believing Adams, if he would avow abolitionism, to be a better candidate than Birney. As early as 1841, Tappan had futilely suggested to Joshua Giddings that the few congressional antislavery Whigs

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University Press, 1990), 429-430; David M. Potter *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 23-24; Incidentally Polk would narrowly lose again in Tennessee during the presidential race, making him the only President ever elected without the support of his home state.

[59] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 121-125.

[60] Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom,* disputes the degree to which local Liberty organizations followed the Cincinnati leadership's direction. Regardless, it is clear that Chase and Bailey's anti-Slave Power orientation dominated the official stances of the state party organization; SPC to James Birney, Jan. 21, 1842, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:661-662; One of the major drawbacks of Birney's candidacy was his aversion to universal manhood suffrage. For example see, GB to Birney, Mar. 31, 1843, Ibid., 725-728; For Birney's explanation of his views see, Birney to Samuel Lewis, Jul. 13, 1843, Ibid., 743-748; SPC to JG, Jan. 21, Feb. 9, 1842, G-J Papers; For an overview of Chase's role in these efforts, see Frederick Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 47-50; "Correspondence from LIBERTY, Aug. 22, 1842, Troy, Ohio," *Philanthropist*, Sept. 10, 1842.

[61] Birney to SPC, Feb. 2, 1842, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:670-672; JL to Birney, Feb. 14, 1842, Ibid., 673-674; JL to SPC, Feb. 16, 1843, SPC Papers, HSP.

unite in an attempt to put forth Adams as an alternative presidential candidate. Even though his sense of moral consistency prevented Tappan, by 1843, from supporting drafting Adams, he privately acknowledged that if the party nominated Adams "in a proper manner, it would go thru the country like electricity."[62]

In 1843, Chase and Bailey again urged Birney to consider whether he was "the most eligible candidate," suggesting that William Jay might garner more votes without compromising the party's morals. Tappan joined Chase in pushing for Jay's nomination as a more politically appealing choice who still (unlike Adams) could claim himself a member of the abolitionist ranks, but Jay quickly dismissed Chase and Tappan's plotting. Still, numerous eastern abolitionists joined Ohio leaders like Chase in privately preferring Jay once he openly identified himself with the Liberty Party by accepting its New York gubernatorial nomination in 1843. Many leading, and otherwise quite savvy, political abolitionists, however, advised strongly against abandoning Birney, believing it would appear to be too strong a concession to expediency. Even among Liberty men who preferred William Jay, there were few who would support the change unless Birney willingly stepped aside. Eventually, Birney privately suggested he would acquiesce in Jay's nomination, but only reluctantly empowered Leavitt to withdraw Birney's name at the party's 1843 convention. Leavitt, as expected, declined to do so, and Birney remained the nominee.[63]

The 1844 campaign came to be dominated by the Texas issue. Polk called unequivocally for unconditional annexation of the slaveholding Texan Republic. Henry Clay by contrast set out his position in his April 1844 "Raleigh Letter." Clay opposed annexation unless it could be done with Mexico's approval *and* a widespread consensus across the United States—two nearly impossible preconditions. A few months later though, Clay issued two letters (which became known as the "Alabama Letters") hedging his Raleigh Letter and suggesting support for Texas annexation at some future time, provided it could be done peacefully and without sectional discord. This further impaired northern Whig efforts to persuade abolitionists to vote for Clay as the anti-annexation candidate. Liberty men reminded antislavery voters that preventing Texas annexation was only one of many important ways to check the Slave Power, and that Liberty men would be most "disheartened to see abolitionists striking hands with their proslavery opponents, and voting for their slaveholding candidates, in the vain hope of [Texas's] exclusion." Furthermore, even if Texas was the sole campaign issue, Liberty men insisted that Clay's ambiguous anti-annexation posture could not be trusted. Abolitionists understood that Clay's Raleigh letter was crafted for a race against Van Buren. Once Clay faced an annexationist slaveholder, Clay tacked towards a more proslavery position with his Alabama letters. Consequently Birney was "the only anti-annexation candidate," and a strong Liberty vote could

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[62] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, Oh.: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 269, 274-276; LT to JG, Jul. 24, 1841, JG Papers; LT to JL, Aug 29, 1843, LT Papers, LC.

[63] GB to Birney, Mar. 31, 1843, in *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:725-728; LT to SPC, LT Papers, Mar. 20, 1843; Chase to LT, Feb. 15, 1843, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:101-102; H.B. Stanton to GS, Aug. 4, 1843, GS to H. B. Stanton, Aug. 9, 1843, GS Papers; 2-9-42 SPC to JG, Feb. 9, 1842, G-J papers; Birney to Charles H. Stewart and JL, Aug. 17, 1843, *Letters of James Birney*, ed. Dumond, 2:754-758; On Leavitt's responses to Chase and Bailey's efforts, see Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt: Evangelical Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 207-211.

"speak in thunder-tones in the ears of Northern Congressmen," "keep Texas out of the union," and help wrest the national government "from the grasp of the Slave Power."[64]

Riding a wave of expansionist fervor in both sections, Polk won the Electoral College vote by sixty-five but won only a plurality in the popular vote. The Liberty Party polled fewer than 70,000 votes and just over two percent of the national total, far below the expectations of optimistic Liberty leaders who had hoped for dramatic increases over 1843 state election results. Birney had further hurt his cause by expressing doubts about universal suffrage. Still, the party multiplied their 1840 total almost tenfold, and more dramatically, Liberty control of the balance of power in New York famously denied Clay the state's thirty-six electoral votes, which would have put him in the White House. Whigs widely blamed New York Liberty voters for Clay's defeat. Then, lame-duck President Tyler claimed Polk's narrow victory as a mandate for Texas annexation. When an annexation treaty failed to receive the sanction of two-thirds of the Senate in December, congressional Democrats pushed annexation through Congress in February of 1845 with the constitutionally questionable device of a joint resolution. In response, northern Whigs attacked Liberty partisans as responsible for annexation and as leagued with the Democracy, repeating the campaign strategy Whigs employed in disseminating the "Garland forgery." That fraudulent letter had cost Birney votes by depicting him as working for the Democrats and appeared too late in the campaign for Liberty men to discredit it before the election.[65]

After the contest Liberty men concentrated on rebutting Whig attempts to blame Liberty men for annexation. The responses of political abolitionists sometimes disputed Whig arithmetic, but more often simply retorted that the Whigs should have instead nominated an antislavery candidate, and then they might very well have swept the free states. Liberty men "organized to elect *anti-slavery men* to office, not to choose the least guilty of two hoary slaveholders." Gerrit Smith explained to New York Whigs in a public letter to ex-Governor William H. Seward, "that Mr. Clay is a slaveholder, is reason sufficient why the Liberty party could not vote for him." Slaveholders in both national parties would always insist on "making slavery" the parties' "paramount interest" and that "of itself" provided "abundant and conclusive evidence that the Whig party is proslavery." Furthermore, the Utica *Liberty Press* saw the continued Whig condemnation of the Liberty Party as "a concession to our power" that would only "make us more confident" in attacking the Slave Power "until pro-slavery parties are broken down." When even prominent antislavery Whigs like Giddings chastised the third party as responsible for Polk's election, Liberty men snapped back that antislavery Whigs should not have endorsed a candidate that they knew could never receive the votes of genuine abolitionists. Lewis Tappan sanctimoniously told Giddings, "If Mr Clay's character had been as good as Mr Polk's he would have been elected."[66]

Outside of New York, Clay won several of the more highly abolitionized states, including, to Leavitt's dismay, Massachusetts with a clear majority. Even with Clay's majority

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[64] Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:426-430, 433-437; Michael F. Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 178-186; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 25, 1844; Utica *Liberty Press*, Aug. 6, 1844.

[65] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 109-111, 120-124; Lee Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 134-136, demonstrates that, although New York Whigs seem to have lost far more votes to the Liberty Party than Democrats did, the Liberty Party's gains from the Whigs had been made primarily in the 1843 state elections. In fact, the Liberty vote dropped off slightly from 1843 to 1844 in New York.

[66] Utica *Liberty Press*, Jul. 19, 1845; Gerrit Smith, "William H. Seward, Esquire : Peterboro, January 1, 1845," (Peterboro[?], N.Y., 1845), GS Papers; LT to JG, Dec. 14, 1845.

there, the Liberty men still defeated an election in four of the state's ten congressional districts. Birney's vote showed a gain of over two thousand from Sewall's the previous year, and Birney ran ahead of Sewall, showing that many Whigs and Democrats at least rejected their party's proslavery presidential nominees if not the entire parties. In one of the unfilled Massachusetts districts it took nine trials before Whig Artemas Hale was elected well after the opening of Congress, and even in that conclusive ninth contest Liberty candidate Laban M. Wheaton polled a higher vote total than any Liberty candidate (the party had switched its candidate multiple times during the year of balloting) in the previous eight votes. Three Maine seats, one in Vermont, and one in New Hampshire also required runoff elections.[67]

That New Hampshire contest proved to be a turning point in the history of antislavery politics. There the uncompromising anti-annexation stance of Congressman John P. Hale (no apparent relation to Artemas Hale) exhibited the first open rift over slavery in the Northern Democracy in the very state known for Democratic dominance and doughfaced loyalty to southern party leaders. The developments that resulted from Hale's independent position, also provided a tantalizing example of how Liberty partisans might combine with antislavery dissidents from the major parties to augment the assault against the Slavery Power.

New Hampshire held its congressional elections months after the presidential contest, and by that time Congressman Hale had already voted and spoken against the annexation resolutions in the House of Representatives. In doing so, Hale contravened his own Democratic-dominated state legislature's resolutions advocating annexation. To explain his position to the electorate, Hale issued a public letter "To the Democratic Republican Electors of New Hampshire," attacking Texas annexation as a barefaced plot to expand slavery and protect the interests of Deep South slaveholders who feared the prospect of an emancipated Texas. Laying his anti-Texas views before the public, Hale inserted the Texas issue into the center of his reelection campaign. Hale's vote was one thing, but his attempt to make the election turn on the slavery question and his calling forth the "scorn of the earth and the judgment of heaven" against the zealous pro-annexation co-paritsans with whom Hale shared a ticket were too much for leading Granite State Democrats. State party chair Franklin Pierce, a former college friend of the rebellious congressman, threw the full weight of the New Hampshire Democratic organization against Hale. Applying public and private pressure, Pierce ensured that party operatives fell into line, and a special nominating convention easily agreed to take Hale off the Democratic ticket and nominate party loyalist John Woodbury in his stead.[68]

Liberty men, though, celebrated Hale's letter as "one of the boldest and noblest words ever spoken for Liberty." Abolitionists assured Hale that he would receive many Liberty votes, even though the Liberty Party could not yet openly endorse him, and Hale's schismatic Democratic allies anticipated Hale winning nearly "all the abolition votes." Hale's lieutenant Amos Tuck predicted that "this question of slavery is to be the dividing point between the parties that will soon divide the country," much as Liberty men had long hoped. Tuck presciently envisioned a long national political future for Hale as an enemy of the Slave Power, urging him, "Let your abhorrence of [slavery] be as notorious of that of J.Q. Adams." Even Garrisonians sent prominent lecturers, including famous escaped slave Frederick Douglass, to New Hampshire

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[67] Henry B. Stanton to GS, Nov. 12, 1844, GS Papers; Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 142-143.

[68] *Letter from John P. Hale, Of New Hampshire, to his constituents, on the Proposed Annexation of Texas*, (Washington: Blair & Rives, 1845), in Hale-Chandler Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Special Collections Library, Hanover, N.H.; Franklin Pierce to John P. Hale (JPH), Jan. 24, 1845, Ibid.; Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 52-58.

to urge Hale's reelection. Already at that point, some of Hale's allies began to imagine that if they could not return him to the House they might later force his selection for the U.S. Senate seat that would become available in 1847.[69]

Three of the four congressional nominees on the Democratic ticket (New Hampshire still elected congressmen on a general statewide ticket, although this would be the last time) won reelection easily, but support for Hale ensured that Woodbury failed to receive the necessary majority. Hale supporters, who adopted the moniker "Independent Democrats," had now given themselves valuable time to organize, since the runoff would not be scheduled until September and Hale's congressional seat would be the only office on the ballot. Additionally, Hale would be back from Washington and able to campaign all spring and summer. After that first election, Hale's allies assured him that the "*Leaders* of the *Abolition party*" seemed to indicate that he would "*certainly* receive their support" going forward, and in subsequent runoffs the Liberty Party declined to field a candidate in opposition to Hale. Many anti-annexation Whig voters now also seemed likely to back Hale. Hale traversed the state speaking against the proslavery implications of Texas annexation, while a new paper formed to support his reelection, the *Independent Democrat*, publicized his efforts. Again in September Woodbury failed of a majority. As the Hale movement continued to grow, Bailey's Cincinnati Liberty paper urged that Liberty men, Whigs, and anti-annexation Democrats unite to elect Hale at the next runoff, and on a third trial in November, Woodbury failed once more to win a majority as Hale's votes continued to mount.[70]

With the next trial scheduled to coincide with the March 1846 state general election, Independent Democrats, Liberty men, and Whigs now saw further incentive to work together, not only to support Hale, but also to strike at the opportunity to deny the Democratic Party control of the governorship and state legislature for the first time in years. More or less openly cooperating in many locales, the combined totals of the Whig gubernatorial nominee and the joint Liberty and Independent Democratic candidate threw the election into the state legislature. There Whigs, Independent Democrats, and Liberty men would hold a sizable majority if they could work together. In Congress, Joshua Giddings wrote Hale of the "deep affliction" apparent on the "woe-begone countenances" of "the slaveholders and servile doughfaces" at the news of the regular Democrats' defeat in their former stronghold.

United in their opposition to the expansion of slavery, Whigs, Liberty men, and Independent Democrats cooperated in the legislature to divvy up the offices at stake. Of course John P. Hale won the most important one of all. After first electing Hale speaker of the state House of Representatives, the anti-Texas allies in the state legislature then united to send Hale back to Washington to serve a full six-year term in the United States Senate, where he would build a reputation as a potent antislavery firebrand. Soon, some Liberty leaders would begin to imagine emulating the successful anti-Slave Power coalition strategies that had elected Hale to

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[69] JGW to JPH, Jan. 24, 1845, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:654-655; Jacob H. Ela to JPH, Jan. 15, 1845, John Parker Hale Papers (JPH Papers), New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS), Concord; Wm. M. Claggett to JPH, Jan. 21, 1845, Ibid.; John G. Parkman to JPH, Jan. 14, 1845, Ibid; Amos Tuck to JPH, Jan. 15, 1845, JPH Papers; Ela to JPH, Jan. 29, 1845, Ibid.

[70] Sewell, *John P. Hale*, 67-76; Tuck, *Autobiographical Memoir of Amos Tuck* (n.p., 1902); G.W. Wendell to JPH, Feb. 20, 1845, Ibid.; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Apr. 9, 1845.

the U.S. Senate. In the meantime they celebrated this momentous election of a U.S. Senator who had refused to "bow down to the 'dark spirit of slavery.'"[71]

While Hale's election seemed an auspicious sign that many northern Democrats might soon refuse any further complicity in proslavery expansionism, the fact of Texas annexation revealed an emboldened Slave Power. In response to the increasingly aggressive program of proslavery politicians, Liberty leaders undertook ever more vigorous efforts to broaden their party. The ensuing war with Mexico (1846-48) soon heightened national attention to the role of slavery and the Slave Power in the national government and created further opportunities for anti-Slave Power political action.

In an effort to reenergize the Liberty Party and recruit new supporters of a broad anti-Slave Power agenda, Salmon Chase organized the Southern and Western Liberty Convention, held in Cincinnati in June of 1845. This time the Liberty Party would not make the same mistake of nominating a candidate over three years before the election, but without a national convention, this Cincinnati convention could serve an important organizing function by bringing together Liberty men from across the West, along with some from the East and a handful from Kentucky and western Virginia. Three thousand abolitionists descended on a Cincinnati tabernacle, overflowing the hall and crowding at the windows in an enthusiastic conclave that one New York participant characterized succinctly as "a *rouser!*" The Convention had been designed to include men of all parties who sought to deliver the country from the Slave Power and, as its name suggested, aimed to attract Upper South antislavery sympathizers. Notwithstanding this ecumenical invitation, many convention speakers urged support of the Liberty Party as the only true way to oppose the Slave Power. The Convention called Birney to the chair, but Chase oversaw the all-important resolutions and address committee. Chase's wide-ranging address drew on religious, economic, and constitutional arguments against slavery. As usual, the Liberty Party's Slave Power argument stood at the center of Chase's appeal, and he called on anti-slavery men to "renounce at once all proslavery alliances" and thereby reverse their "suicidal, fratricidal course" and to "vote for no man, [and] act with no party politically connected with the supporters of slavery."[72]

Impressed by the Southern and Western Convention, eastern Liberty men organized a similar "Convention of the Friends of Freedom in the Eastern and Middle States" for October in Boston. Excited Liberty leaders anticipated that this convention would "be the greatest anti slavery meeting ever held in this continent." This eastern convention followed the Southern and Western Convention in aggressively attacking depredations of the Slave Power, even as speakers at Boston drew more directly and explicitly on antislavery religious fervor and generated an

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[71] Sewell, *John P. Hale*, 76-85; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Jun. 17, 1846; Hale's old house seat, meanwhile, remained vacant for the duration of the 28th Congress, Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 144, fn. 20.

[72] "Letter from G[eorge]. W. Clark," Jun. 16, 1845, Utica *Liberty Press*, Jun. 28, 1845; Modern historians have more commonly put the attendance at 2000—still an impressive number, Frederick Blue, *Salmon P. Chase*, 50; Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist* Apr. 23, Jun. 18, 25, 1845; Salmon P. Chase, "The Address of the Southern And Western Liberty Convention, Held at Cincinnati, June 11 and 12, 1845, To the People of the United States," *Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, Originally published in 1867 by Sampson Low, Son, and Marston), quotes on 111, 124; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 154-155, presents this convention and address as indicative of Chase's angling towards coalition with the Democratic Party. As Earle notes, Chase's use of the phrase "True Democracy" to describe the Liberty Party raised eyebrows among Whiggish abolitionists. While Chase held many economic views that coincided with northern Jacksonian stances, Earle overstates the degree to which the address represented more of an attack on Whigs than Democrats. Chase's main arguments were attacks on Slave Power's perversion of the Constitution and control of both major parties.

inconclusive debate over the constitutional authority of the federal government over slavery in the southern states. The convention's first resolution asserted "that slavery is the greatest political evil which afflicts the nation … and that the Liberty party is nothing more or less than a united political effort to throw it off." Perennial Massachusetts Liberty gubernatorial candidate Samuel Sewall drafted a call for fierce opposition to any congressional legislation to consummate the admission of Texas into the Union, and the Convention created a series of anti-Texas committees designed to organize a cross-party anti-Texas movement in every county in the free states. The Convention address, penned by Gerrit Smith, concluded that both major parties, "made up of slave-owners as well as non-slave owners," would always succumb to slaveholders' willingness to "sacrifice every interest" to slavery. Through this political system, the North had become "the servant of the South," while Northerners in both parties claimed to be "indirectly" promoting "the overthrow of slavery." Smith, however, declared "that slavery is a monster to be overcome only in direct encounter and deadly grapple," and "the Liberty party is the only political party in the Nation" designed to accomplish this.[73]

As Liberty men watched the increasing audacity of southern aggression and further articulated these anti-Slave Power arguments to ever broader audiences, they came to believe that the collapse of the proslavery Second Party system could be imminent. By 1844 the Liberty Party had developed a well-established and growing influence across the North, as Whittier affirmed:

> The Liberty Party is no longer an experiment. It is a vigorous reality, exerting already a powerful influence upon the policies of the country. It has had no hot-bed growth, but has risen up slowly and steadily under adverse circumstances, and against the contempt, prejudice and desperate opposition of both old parties.

Even in the heat of the 1844 presidential campaign, some Liberty men imagined that the days of proslavery party unity were numbered. By late 1845, many Liberty men were convinced that "the old parties have had their day" and there would soon "be a new combination of the political elements for other and higher objects." Thus, "a full and increased Liberty vote" would "have an incalculable power in spreading the cause of freedom," and this would expedite "the crisis when there" would "be but two parties in the country—one an anti-slavery party and the other a pro-slavery party."[74]

Liberty men continued to hope eagerly for fissures in the major parties over slavery and saw reason for optimism in Hale's elevation to the Senate. Exploiting their balance of power between two closely matched parties in many locales and trumpeting their arguments about the major parties' corruption by the Slave Power, Liberty men strategized to bring together an ever larger political constituency dedicated to destroying the Slave Power. The aggressive pro-southern expansionism that became a guiding policy of the Polk administration helped provide new opportunities to make this sort of broad antislavery political mobilization seem increasingly possible, and eventually, almost certain.

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[73] Elizur Wright, Jr. to AS, Sept. 5, 1845, AS Papers; *Proceedings of the Great Convention of the Friends of Freedom in the Eastern and Middle States, Held in Boston, Oct. 1, 2, & 3, 1845* (Lowell: Pillsbury and Knapp, 1845), Quotes from 4, 15, 19.

[74] JGW to the Liberty Voters of District No. 3, Jan. 1, 1844 (originally published in *Essex Transcript*), in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, I:623-624; Martin Mitchel, "To the friends of Freedom," Oct. 25, 1844, in *Liberty Press*, Nov. 9, 1844; *Liberty Press*, Nov. 1, 1845.

CHAPTER 4

"A Magnificent Abolition Society": The Wilmot Proviso and Congressional Slavery Politics

While Texas annexation challenged northern party unity in rare cases like Hale's New Hampshire insurgency, the Mexican-American War dramatically raised the stakes of the slavery expansion issue and gave further credence to Liberty charges that the Slave Power controlled the national government. As Congress prepared to adjourn in August of 1846, only three months into the war the likelihood of American conquest of Mexican territory intensified fears that the outcome of the conflict would further spread American slavery. President Polk's unwillingness to compromise on the strip of territory between the Texan province's traditional boundary at the Nueces River and Texas's dubious claims extending to the Rio Grande had, in the opinion of critics, provoked a war aimed at expanding the nation's slaveholding territory. The U.S. Army's speedy occupation of Mexican Alta California and New Mexico quickly introduced into national political debate the question of slavery's future in this conquered territory. This issue was further complicated by the fact that, unlike in Texas, the 1829 Mexican emancipation edict had succeeded in ending chattel slavery in California and New Mexico. The prospect that the United States might reestablish slavery where it had been previously prohibited horrified Northerners across the political spectrum.

These fears became crystallized in the Wilmot Proviso, an 1846 legislative amendment named for author David Wilmot, a hitherto little-known and fiercely partisan Democratic politician from remote northeastern Pennsylvania. On August 8, 1846, the sweltering second to last day of the congressional session, President Polk sent the House of Representatives an appropriation bill requesting $2 million to be used in making peace with Mexico. This unexpected requisition confirmed widespread northern suspicions that Polk intended to acquire Mexican territory beyond the disputed Texas boundary region that had ostensibly caused the ongoing Mexican War. Taken aback by the eleventh hour request, the House postponed the vote until after a recess for dinner, during which several northern Democrats prepared an amendment that slavery should be forever banned in any territory captured or purchased from Mexico. When debates resumed, two northern Whigs condemned the idea of fighting to augment the nation's slaveholding territory, and one called upon northern Democrats to offer precisely the sort of amendment that Wilmot, an "ultra-democrat, who had heretofore voted with slave-holders" (John Greenleaf Whittier's characterization), had sitting on his desk. Among its architects, Wilmot first secured the floor, perhaps because of his pro-Administration record. He moved to amend the Two Million Bill by adding the proviso that became his namesake, stipulating:

> *Provided*, That as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the moneys herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever

> exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.[1]

As Congress hurried to finish its business, this amendment occasioned only brief debate. The Proviso and then the amended appropriation bill both passed the House on almost purely sectional votes. Though the appropriation was designed to fund expansion, northern Whigs who had long opposed territorial acquisitions almost unanimously supported the amended bill, while nearly every southern expansionist voted against it because of the offensive antislavery rider. Ultimately, the appropriation, and with it the Proviso, died in the Senate without a vote.[2]

The Proviso's language drew explicitly on the slavery ban of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, passed under the Articles of Confederation and later upheld by Congress. Equating the new proviso with the slavery prohibition in the Northwest Territory helped legitimize the non-extensionist demand, not least because the 1787 ordinance had been penned by Democratic luminary and Virginia slaveholder Thomas Jefferson. Liberty partisans, especially Salmon Chase, had previously referenced the Northwest Ordinance as the "most significant and decisive" evidence that the founders intended that "slavery would be excluded from all places of national jurisdiction" before the Slave Power had perverted this design. Liberty men, Whigs, and Democrats all cast the Proviso as the sequel to the 1787 non-extension ordinance and therefore "an essential indispensable principle in the administration of the general Government." This slanted history overlooked both the proslavery Southwest Ordinance of 1790 and the actual incursions of slavery into the Old Northwest, but connecting the Proviso to the nation's early history established its supporters' reverence for American political traditions and rebutted accusations that Proviso advocates were fomenting disunion.[3]

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[1] *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 29th Congress, 1st Session, 1214-1217; John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW) to Joseph Sturge, Aug. 28, 1846, in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), V. 2:30.

[2] A brief filibuster by Massachusetts Whig John Davis prevented a vote on the bill before the mandatory adjournment time. In a speech the following session, Davis explained that he had intended to force a vote on the House bill without leaving time for the Senate to amend it and return it to the House. Davis failed in this ploy because the House adjourned eight minutes before the Senate, because of a discrepancy between the clocks in the two chambers. Once news of the House's adjournment reached the Senate, the session was officially over, and the Senate was obliged to adjourn without a vote. While Davis was widely criticized for his role in defeating the Proviso, it seems unlikely that an appropriation containing the Proviso would have passed the Senate anyway. Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 22-23; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 509.

[3] Salmon P. Chase (SPC), "The Address of the Southern And Western Liberty Convention, Held at Cincinnati, June 11 and 12, 1845, To the People of the United States," *Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, Originally published in 1867 by Sampson Low, Son, and Marston), 79-83. On Chase's interpretation of the founders' antislavery views, see also Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995), 75-77; Preston King to SPC, Aug. 16, 1847, Salmon P. Chase Papers (SPC Papers), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP); Salmon Chase's close ally Gamaliel Bailey was a strong proponent of this interpretation of the founders' gradualist antislavery policy. In his Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*'s first issue after receiving news of the Proviso, Aug. 19, 1846, Bailey characterized it as simply "an extension of the Ordinance of 1787." Later, in the *National Era*, Apr. 1, 1847, Bailey asserted, "The Wilmot proviso is but a re-enactment of the anti-slavery article of the ordinance of 1787"; Congress specifically omitted the slavery prohibition while otherwise replicating the Northwest Ordinance when it wrote the Southwest Ordinance of 1790, which organized the territory that became Tennessee. John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 1-4, 9-11.

Wilmot's proviso rapidly came to encapsulate the festering sectional division over slavery's extension. In the arguments that this legislative amendment touched off, it became clear that anti-Slave Power rhetoric had fully infiltrated congressional discourse, producing dislocations in the northern portions of the Whig and Democratic parties. The Wilmot Proviso debates marked a transformative moment in the history of American antislavery politics and seemed to be a potential touchstone for reorganizing political parties into a division between the Slave Power and a new Liberty Power.

Interpreting the Proviso

Even though the Wilmot Proviso seemed to be an abstract issue and not a pressing governmental measure, members of both houses, of both parties, and from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line went to great lengths to divert discussion to this paramount question long before the United States actually acquired any of the territory in question. Political abolitionists who had long valued congressional attention to slavery were overjoyed at the ongoing display. The bitter contest over the extension of slavery reflected the dramatic sectional polarization of the American political arena by the mid-1840s. Northern representatives' and senators' rhetoric demonstrated the intensity of northern popular antipathy to slavery and of northern demands that it expand no further—both evidence of growing abolitionist political influence.

The most detailed accounts of the Wilmot Proviso devote overwhelming attention to divining the motives of its small band of Democratic authors, who had until then been loyal partisans. Several, notably Chaplain Morrison's 1967 monograph, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism*, concentrate on Democratic intraparty conflicts as the prime cause of the Proviso's introduction and persistence. Morrison cites the frustration of Van Burenite Democrats, or Barnburners, with Polk's role in denying Van Buren the 1844 presidential nomination and Polk's subsequent patronage policies. Polk's 1846 veto of legislation for river and harbor improvements popular in the Northwest and his willingness to compromise with Great Britain on Oregon's territorial boundaries also rankled many northern Democrats. In contrast, Eric Foner views the Proviso as arising from its authors' compulsion to inoculate themselves against charges of support for a proslavery war. While disagreeing about the causes of the Proviso's introduction, Foner and Morrison both concentrate on discerning its authors' rationale. While Morrison portrays the Proviso's architects as intentionally disruptive, Foner interprets the Proviso as an attempt to keep slavery *out* of politics and to restore the Democratic tradition of pacifying sectional antagonisms.[4] Many other analysts of the Proviso have been similarly preoccupied with explaining its surprising origins. While acknowledging the sorts of constituent pressure to which Foner alludes, most echo Morrison's attention to intraparty grievances over Polk's patronage decisions and pro-southern economic policies.[5]

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[4] Chaplain Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1967); Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History* (Sept. 1969): 262-279.

[5] For example see Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk Continentalist* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 476-484; Roy F. Nichols and Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Stakes of Power, 1845-1877*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 15-17; and Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 22-29; Don E. Fehrenbacher, "The Wilmot Proviso and the Mid-century Crisis," in *The South and Three Sectional Crises* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 34-35, aptly describes the Proviso as "a proposal so radical

Histories of the Wilmot Proviso movement typically minimize its antislavery character and the promise it seemed to offer for political abolitionists seeking to reorient national political debate around slavery. Part of the reason for this confusion seems to be excessive attention to why the Proviso was introduced. Historians have agonized over the specifics of who crafted the Proviso and what motivated its original proponents. These conventional accounts obfuscate the most intriguing features of the protracted debates the Proviso engendered. Those debates provide strong indications of a growing antislavery commitment among northern politicians and also register antislavery constituent pressure to combat the Slave Power, if not necessarily eradicate slavery itself.

Because of the tendency to focus on the Proviso's authors, leading histories of the antebellum Democracy treat the Proviso as a Democratic measure, subsuming its appeal under some core Jacksonian ideology. Many historians of the Democratic Party, notably Sean Wilentz and Charles Sellers, have stressed anti-market economic radicalism as the party's guiding principle, and have accordingly viewed the Wilmot Proviso as aimed at reserving western lands for northern free laborers. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., (in many ways the progenitor of this interpretation) emphasized Wilmot's Jacksonian ideological commitment to "defense of the rights of labor." Indeed, Schlesinger argued that the "free-soil issue was … formulated and laid before the country in terms which invoked deep Jacksonian sentiments." More recently, Jonathan Earle linked the moderate antislavery of free-soil Democrats to an older Jacksonian tradition of radical anti-monopolism, economic egalitarianism, and support for free land programs. While nuanced enough to acknowledge other influences, Earle's argument sees the Proviso as an essentially Democratic position rooted in the party's radical economic ideology. [6]

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that it had no real precedent," but, like Morrison, emphasizes the role of Northern Democrats "who had grown dissatisfied with southern domination of their party and with certain policies resulting from that domination," especially the compromise Oregon treaty and Polk's veto of the 1846 Rivers and Harbors Bill. Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 150-154 incorporates the interpretations of both Morrison and Foner; Richard Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 131, 144-146, 171-173, 189-193, touches on the Proviso several times, noting first how the Wilmot Proviso "touched off a bitter debate which both advertised the transcending importance of the slavery issue and jeopardized traditional political alliances," but then concentrates primarily on the Proviso's Democratic authors and on Proviso supporters' racial views; All historians of the Proviso also must acknowledge Charles Buxton Going, *David Wilmot, Free-Soiler: A Biography of the Great Advocate of the Wilmot Proviso* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924) which, over eighty years later, remains the only book-length biography of Wilmot. Going attempts to rehabilitate Wilmot by proving his authorship of the Proviso and insisting that Wilmot's opposition to slavery extension stemmed from genuine "ethical" motives and not crass "political calculations," 117.

[6] Charles G. Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, repr. 2004), and on these issues more specifically, Wilentz, "Slavery, Antislavery, and Jacksonian Democracy," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 202-223; Arthur Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945, reprint, 1953), 451-452; Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-3, 66-74, 132-139, and 164-165; Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997), 39-86, likewise sees Northern Democratic arguments as wholly consistent with Democratic principles, framing their support for the Proviso as rooted in a conservative, strict constructionist free soil argument. Michael Morrison contrasts the Democrats' views with notions of national moral uplift that provided the ideological underpinnings of northern

In contrast to these sympathetic economic views of Jacksonian Democrats, several historians, most notably David Roediger and Alexander Saxton, have, at least as convincingly, identified white supremacy as the central principle binding together a disparate antebellum Democracy. From this perspective, the Wilmot Proviso appears to be motivated by the desire to keep blacks, free or slave, out of western territories. Alexander Saxton's *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* acknowledges the divisiveness of the Proviso for Democrats but still sees it as consistent with their party's emphasis on *white* male equality—and the inferiority of all non-whites.[7]

Both sides of this debate about the ideological content of Jacksonian Democracy make room for the Wilmot Proviso, and in doing so exaggerate its specifically Democratic character. Both Saxton and Earle, for example, focus almost exclusively on the Democratic originators of the Proviso. Saxton thus fails to appreciate the anti-racist views articulated by many of the Proviso's non-Democratic proponents and gives short shrift to the more prominent moral justifications articulated in Congress. Earle acknowledges the prevalence of anti-Slave Power arguments in these debates, but focuses almost exclusively on anti-aristocratic Democratic versions of this rhetoric. Earle's emphasis on Jacksonian contributions to the Slave Power idea leads him to overlook the already well-established anti-Slave Power commitment to non-extension among Liberty partisans and antislavery Whigs.[8] By casting the Proviso as a Democratic measure and focusing primarily on its Democratic adherents, historians of the sectional conflict often conclude that the persistent, widespread northern commitment to the Wilmot Proviso rested almost entirely on either the exaltation and protection of free labor, or on racist northern desires to keep all blacks, free or slave, out of the territories.[9]

Whig support for the Proviso. In making these distinctions, however, Morrison downplays the similarity in rhetoric of the Proviso's bipartisan proponents and their use of tropes inherited from the antislavery movement.

[7] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991). Also see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983). Roediger draws on Baker, but focuses especially on the way that this racial appeal was used to attract working class immigrant voters, particularly the Irish, by offering them a race-based equality that accorded with the white supremacist views inherent in the Democratic Party's proslavery positions. In Roediger, see especially 140-144; Alexander Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (New York: Verso, 1990), esp. 153-154; In an intricate argument about Northern racism, Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, Rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 122-130, presents the Northern Democrats who initiated the Wilmot Proviso as motivated primarily by racist free labor considerations. These congressmen felt betrayed, Hietala argues, since they acquiesced in Texas annexation only after Secretary of Treasury Robert Walker promised that the black population would be contained east of the Rio Grande should the United States acquire additional territory. The prospect of slavery, and blacks generally, in California disturbed Proviso Democrats.

[8] See Chapter 1 above on Earle's reading of the history of the Slave Power argument and how it differs from my own. In a moderated version of Earle's argument, Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 594-601, concludes that "the Wilmot Democrats' crowning argument" was that "slavery and the Slave Power were at war with democracy itself," but this construction still diverts attention from the Slave Power's Liberty pedigree at this pivotal moment in the idea's popularization, as well as from the key role antislavery Whigs played in the Proviso debates.

[9] In a recent brief biographical treatment of Wilmot, Frederick J. Blue, "Neither Slavery Nor Involuntary Servitude: David Wilmot and the Containment of Slavery," in *No Taint of Compromise* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 184-212, emphasizes free labor and racist components of the support for his Proviso and focuses on Wilmot's construction of the Slave Power as a "landed aristocracy" (Blue's words), 193; Among those more attentive to the anti-Slave Power component of Wilmot Proviso support, Michael Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 49-53, Holt still overlooks the similarity of the non-extensionist rhetoric across

This widespread desire among political historians of the Jacksonian era to explain the Wilmot Proviso as a Democratic measure has obscured the fact that the Proviso constituted a momentous antislavery intervention into congressional discourse and an acute threat to Democratic and Whig party harmony. More so than even their votes against slavery, northern congressmen's forceful anti-Slave Power oratory belied claims that they prized sectional accord. The increased use of antislavery and anti-Slave Power rhetoric by mainstream politicians marked a dramatic divergence from the traditions of the Democratic Party. That party had long prided itself on evading slavery when possible and protecting it when necessary. The sectional discord exposed by the Wilmot Proviso threatened to unravel the Democratic coalition. While Whig leaders tolerated greater heterodoxy on slavery (perhaps in part because they so rarely controlled the national government), they too recognized that the intensity of northern support for the Proviso undermined party unity. As abolitionists had long warned, the Whig Party could never brook any genuine threat to focus national politics on slavery. When the Wilmot Proviso did just that, political abolitionists saw both a culmination of their efforts to put slavery at the center of national political debate and an unprecedented opportunity to better organize the enemies of the Slave Power.

Political abolitionists immediately recognized that the Wilmot Proviso could transform congressional politics. Liberty partisans celebrated the free states standing "shoulder to shoulder for the limitation of slavery" as a portent of "Liberty's coming triumph." Encouraged Liberty newspapers predicted that, even if the Proviso did little more than attract "general and earnest attention to the great questions involved, this of itself" would hasten the "contest between the slave power and the friends of liberty." Liberty partisans recognized that passage of the Wilmot Proviso would represent "a committal of the nation to freedom" and dubbed the Proviso the most important development on the slavery question since the time of the Missouri Compromise. If discussion of the Proviso resumed as expected, political abolitionists believed it would be "be of incalculable value to the cause of human freedom, and render us, the abolitionists, an immeasurable service." Gamaliel Bailey's *Philanthropist* thus predicted that antislavery sentiment "out of doors" would "penetrate Congress" and ensure that "the great struggle between Liberty and Slavery, between the Propagandists of Eternal Slavery, and its Antagonists, will inevitably take place in the next session of Congress." Ohio Liberty manager Salmon Chase similarly assured Gerrit Smith that "our Liberty leaven is working finely … Wilmot's proviso will exert a tremendous influence."[10]

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the two parties in the North and the abolitionist lineage of the Slave Power idea. Holt slightly revises his argument in *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 26-28, which describes the variety of pro-Proviso rhetoric, including opposition to the Slave Power and moral objections to establishing slavery where it had already been abolished. Holt also notes "northern and southern public opinion best explains the continuing sectional polarization over" the Proviso. Still, he argues that free labor and free land concerns were the most important motivations for the flowering of anti-extensionism, and again makes little mention of political abolitionists; David Potter, *The Impending Crisis* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 18-77, recognizes the intense sectionalism that made the Wilmot Proviso debate fundamentally about the future of slavery. While he acknowledges that the abolitionist movement had become a significant force by the 1840s, Potter's interpretation of sectional conflict as driven almost solely by the problems of territorial acquisition diminishes the importance of earlier political abolitionist controversies.

[10] Boston *Emancipator*, Sept. 16, 1846; Prairieville (Wisconsin) *American Freeman*, Sept. 1, 1846; JGW to Joseph Sturge, Aug. 28, 1846, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2: 30-31; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Aug. 19, 1846; Alvan Stewart to Samuel Webb, Dec. 11, 1846, Alvan Stewart Papers, New York Historical Society; *Weekly Herald*

Though Giddings and other insurgent antislavery Whigs still hoped to convert their party to antislavery, Giddings nonetheless joined Liberty men in exulting at being "in the midst of a revolution" in which "we shall find all party calculations deranged, and all political expectations uncertain." Indeed Giddings assured Chase that "the demonstrations of the Slave power during the late session of Congress has brought our Whigs to feel the absolute necessity of ridding ourselves of the slave power," insisting that neither major party could "long submit to the Slave power and maintain its ascendancy." Giddings seemed to join Liberty men in relishing the possibility of a sectional reorientation of national politics (though he vainly hoped it could be overseen by northern Whigs). His local political organ the Ashtabula *Sentinel* extolled the Proviso and averred that "the subject of *Northern Rights*" was "paramount to all others." The deeply antislavery *Boston Daily Whig* (edited by John Quincy Adams's son Charles Francis) joined Giddings and the Liberty men in foreseeing the Proviso's significance: "As if by magic, it brought to a head the great question which is about to divide the American people." Although, to the dismay of antislavery radicals, the Proviso seemed to have little effect on the fall 1846 elections, the next congressional session soon validated their optimism that the Proviso would transform national debate. Upon returning to the Capitol, Joshua Giddings observed that many northern congressmen, while home in their districts, "made commendable progress on the slave question during the recess of Congress," so that they now understood "that the antislavery sentiment of the north is no longer to be trifled with."[11]

The Uncompromising Rhetoric of Congressional Anti-Extension

When Congress reconvened, antislavery New York Democrat Preston King reintroduced the Two Million Bill on his own authority as a way to renew the Proviso agitation, even though Wilmot himself had promised Polk he would not broach the issue. King's reintroduction of the Proviso precipitated acrimonious debate over the westward extension of slavery and ensured that this divisive question would remain at the center of national politics. A month later, Polk requested a new appropriation, now $3 million, for making peace. At this point King, Wilmot, and most free state congressmen vehemently insisted on prohibition of slavery in any territory ever acquired by the United States. Northerners repeatedly lined up in favor of the Proviso, indeed so many times that Abraham Lincoln later claimed (probably with some exaggeration) to have voted forty-two times for versions of the Proviso during his single congressional term. After King's motion, the House again attached the Wilmot Proviso to Polk's requested appropriation and again passed the amended appropriation—both on sectional votes. The

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and Philanthropist, Aug. 19, 1846; SPC to GS, Sept. 1, 1846, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), V. 2:128-130.

[11] Joshua Giddings (JG) to SPC, Sept. 18, 1846, Oct. 30, 1846, SPC Papers, HSP; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Aug. 31, 1846; *Boston Daily Whig*, Aug. 15, 1846; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Aug. 19, 1846; Michael F. Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 251, and Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 597; Though the Proviso seemed to be an insignificant factor in most 1846 elections, there were occasional exceptions. Hartford's Democratic mayor, for example, worried that "the late elections are of a character to stimulate the Whigs," owing to the "growing feeling that we have been used by the south about long enough." Calvin Day to Gideon Welles, Gideon Welles Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division (NYPL), microform; JG to Charles Francis Adams (CFA), Adams Family Papers, Microfilm Edition, Part IV: "Letters Received and Other Loose Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Senate, however, excised the Proviso and returned the original appropriation bill to the House. At that point, President Polk began "moving heaven and earth to prevent the Wilmot amendment from being adopted." With this presidential arm-twisting and, by Liberty and Whig accounts, liberal distribution of executive patronage, the Proviso-less Senate bill narrowly passed the House. Indeed, Giddings believed the Proviso could only have been excised in conjunction with the passage of a bill authorizing ten new army regiments, which would provide Polk with enough new military "offices to purchase a sufficient number of votes."[12]

Notwithstanding that defeat for the Proviso's many advocates, the question of slavery's extension dominated ongoing debates over the Mexican War, territorial expansion, and organization of the Oregon territory. The vast majority of northern congressmen refused to countenance any enlargement of the nation's slaveholding territory. Congress became preoccupied with controversy over slavery, and the rhetoric on both sides illustrated growing polarization around political and moral disagreements over slavery. The fact that a fundamental threat to partisan unity had been touched off by obscure Congressman David Wilmot's failed last-day-of-the-session appropriations amendment reveals just how entrenched northern antipathy to Slave Power expansion had become. Wilmot's legislative rider had turned Congress into an arena of intense moral and political debates about the legitimacy of American slavery.

For this reason, Liberty partisans, long accustomed to temporary legislative defeats, emphasized the Proviso as a positive sign of rising antislavery sentiment, rather than dwelling on the narrow failure of its adherents to engraft it as a condition on further military appropriations. Indeed the *Emancipator* concluded: "The cause of freedom has lost nothing in this struggle. It has not gained as much as we desired, yet it has gathered strength, which will yet increase until slavery shall not only be checked in its march, but entirely overthrown." The *Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* noted: "In no year since the commencement of the anti-slavery effort in this country has there been so much discussion on the subject of slavery as during the past year. In the halls of the National and State Legislatures, in newspapers, in ecclesiastical assemblies, and among the people, the question of slavery has occupied unusual attention." The *Emancipator* further cast the Proviso debates as "the question of liberty or slavery—of republicanism or tyranny" and celebrated that "the anti-slavery excitement which has been rocking the nation … these ten years past, has wrought a mighty change" so that "public sentiment in the north, demands the limitation of slave territory." Wisconsin's leading Liberty paper similarly asserted that while "no one anticipated the Wilmot Proviso," it reflected "the silently pervading influence of right principles" disseminated by the political influence of "Liberty men … ringing the truth for years." "Up to the time the proviso was introduced into Congress," the paper continued, "none but antislavery men had advocated such a measure."[13]

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[12] *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 96, 105, 114, 303, 425-426, 555-556, 573; According to Wilmot's account two years later, Polk did not expect slavery to be extended into conquered territory and urged Wilmot to therefore refrain from reintroducing the disruptive Proviso, so that the peacemaking appropriation could pass without sectional controversy, *CG Appendix*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 139; John George Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York: The Century Co., 1890), 285; JG to Seth Gates, Jan. 25, 1847, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America), Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers); *National Era*, Mar. 11, 1847, and "How it Was Done: Correspondence of the New York *Tribune*," in Ibid., Mar. 25, 1847; JG to CFA, Jan. 25, 1847, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Richards, *The Slave Power*, 153, notes that eighteen of the twenty-two Northerners that ultimately helped defeat the Proviso were serving as lame ducks and therefore probably worried less about popular sentiment.

[13] *Emancipator*, Mar. 31, 1847; *Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: William Harned, 1847), 4-5; *American Freeman*, Apr. 5, 1848.

The intensity of the antislavery rhetoric in Congress seemed to confirm this sanguine abolitionist outlook. In advocating adoption of the Wilmot Proviso, northern representatives and senators from both parties presented a sudden outburst of moral condemnations of slavery. Most commonly, antislavery lawmakers denounced slavery, as Wilmot himself did, as a "great moral and political evil." Almost as often they employed much harsher language. Even rabid partisan Democrats disparaged slavery as "a dark stain upon the institutions of the country" and "a curse to mankind." Many non-extensionists, especially those who merely labeled slavery a "political evil," were exceedingly vague about the exact meaning of these criticisms. Nonetheless, all of these epithets made the case for non-extension by attacking the entire institution of slavery wherever it existed.[14]

Numerous anti-extensionist Whigs and Democrats condemned slavery as a backwards, barbarous national embarrassment inconsistent with Christianity. Northern Whigs in the House and Senate described slavery as the "worst feature of the feudalism of the thirteenth century," and "disgraceful to us as a nation," since it "was denounced by the Christian world." Even some Democrats, such as Representative George Fries (OH), joined in smearing American slavery as "frowned upon by the whole civilized and Christianized world." "We oppose the extension of this institution," Fries continued, "because we believe it to be incompatible with every principle of right, of justice, and of Christianity; we oppose it, because we believe the great mass of the civilized and Christianized world are against it … and I believe that slavery is directly at war with the teachings of the Bible."[15]

An especially dramatic example of this sort of Christian moralizing, typically associated with abolitionists, or perhaps evangelical Whigs, appeared in a speech of Democrat Jacob Brinkerhoff (OH), one of the Proviso's architects (indeed he claimed credit as its true originator). Brinkerhoff appealed to northern morality when he effusively praised the Wilmot Proviso, savaged those who dubbed slavery a "positive good," and tried to shame wavering colleagues:

> I ask them to put it to their consciences; I ask them to remember that not only political life, but natural life, ends; and that after death—I will not say what; but there *is* such a thing as right and wrong; and though I make no pretensions to extraordinary sanctity … there are some wrongs so great I cannot consent to commit them; some rights so sacred, that I cannot consent to be instrumental in their violation.

His denial of "pretensions to extraordinary sanctity" would appear to be the basis for differentiating himself from abolitionists, a common concern of many who hoped to retain the support of their still numerous anti-abolitionist constituents as they simultaneously appealed to anti-Slave Power sentiment. Brinkerhoff's disclaimer enabled him to present his position as part

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[14] *CG* 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 355; Examples of similar condemnations of slavery can be found in the speeches of Sen. William Dayton (W-NJ) in Ibid., 544, and of Rep. Ephraim Smart (D-ME) and Rep. Joseph Root (W-OH) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 545-547, 664; Rep. Frederick Lahm (D-OH) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 552; Rep. John Pettit (D-IN), in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 181.

[15] Rep. Cornelius Darragh (W-PA) in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 477-78; Sen. James Dixon (W-CT) in *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* (*CG Appendix*), 334; Sen. Samuel Phelps in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 883; George Fries in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 443-444.

of a more broadly shared, less doctrinaire moral standard. Yet, his theatrical, combative homily concluded with a pious avowal that the "tribunal above" would vindicate his antislavery stance.[16]

Even when not denouncing slavery in its entirety, supporters of the Proviso raised decidedly moralistic objections to its extension. They sought to avoid implicating Congress, themselves, or their constituents, in *establishing* slavery. Since slavery was prohibited in all Mexican territory the United States might, and eventually did, acquire (as was also the case in Oregon), many Northerners argued that this territory would remain free unless Congress positively established slavery. They strenuously remonstrated against such an enactment, insisting that it was "wrong to acquire foreign territory by arms for the purpose of making what is now free territory into slave territory." "An acquisition of territory for the purpose of establishing slavery where it has once been abolished," Representative Luther Severance (W-ME) opined, "would be turning backward in the march of civilization, and be a national calamity." Senator Thomas Corwin (W-OH) dramatized his seemingly unbending commitment to non-extension (and also his racist assumptions) by declaring he would never vote "to establish slavery"—not even if the United States "conquered the hottest climate on the earth, where the white man could not work." In the House, George Fries vowed "that no further territory shall come into this Union with the institution of slavery ingrafted upon it, unless it is found there when it comes in: not one single square foot." Wilmot's hometown Democratic paper echoed these concerns and declared that "the armies and navy, the treasure and the blood, the diplomacy and legislation of the whole Union" should no longer "be devoted to the nefarious purpose of spreading that barbarous institution over regions now unpolluted by the footsteps of a slave." Antislavery Whig Columbus Delano (OH) similarly warned Southerners that he spoke "for the North, for all the free States" when he insisted the West would "*never*" become "slave territory." Delano continued, "Our principles are just—they are fixed—and our constituents will adhere to them to the end of time. Never, never shall you extend your institution of slavery one inch beyond its present limits."[17]

Moral aversion to the extension of slavery usually went hand in hand with attacks on Slave Power control of the government, much as they had for the Liberty Party since its inception. By the mid-1840s, numerous mainstream northern politicians accepted the abolitionist argument against aggressive southern politicians and their doughface allies, although not the Liberty Party's full-blown condemnation of the cross-sectional parties. During debates over the Proviso, leading antislavery congressmen, especially Giddings, New Hampshire Independent Democrat Amos Tuck, and new member John G. Palfrey (W-MA), repeated the abolitionist litany of proslavery manipulations of the government, including the gag rule, the Seminole War, the executive branch's support of the Spanish claimants in the *Amistad* affair, and the annexation of Texas. More moderate Proviso supporters still echoed abolitionist attacks on

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[16] For Brinkerhoff's claim to be the Proviso's true author, see his letter to SPC, Nov. 22, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP. There is an old but lengthy historiography attempting to adjudicate this claim that is summarized in Foner, "Wilmot Proviso Revisited," 262-265; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 377-380.

[17] *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 191; *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 282-289; *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 994; *CG* 29 Congress, 2nd Session, 443; For other examples of this common argumentative tack see the speeches of Preston King and Pettit in Ibid, 115, 181, and Rep. Robert Schenck (W-OH) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1023; *Bradford Democrat*, quoted in *National Era*, May 27, 1847; *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 281.

the Slave Power by cataloging disproportionate southern representation in the most powerful offices of the republic and attributing this inequity to the three-fifths clause.[18]

Proponents of the Wilmot Proviso repeatedly invoked the specter of a looming Slave Power as they resisted the extension of slavery as a pro-slavery offensive to enhance the Slave Power's political influence. Southerners seemed particularly concerned with providing territory for new slave states to maintain sectional balance in the Senate and preserve slaveholders' veto over potential antislavery incursions in the House. John C. Calhoun, slavery's preeminent sentinel, warned that if the institution did not expand, the South would "be at the entire mercy of the non-slaveholding States," a quandary made more acute by the recent admission of Iowa and imminent statehood for the Wisconsin Territory. For many Northerners the intimation that protecting southern investments in human property should determine federal territorial policy confirmed, and gave new weight to, abolitionists' familiar charges of a grasping Slave Power seeking to dominate the national government.[19]

More than ever before, northern congressmen inveighed against Slave Power control of the government because they, and the constituents they represented, sought to avoid complicity in slavery. Permitting the Slave Power to augment its sway over the federal government would implicate them in the evil of slavery. Southern aggression had apparently convinced a broad spectrum of northern voters of the validity of abolitionist attacks on the Slave Power. James Dixon (W-CT) insisted that his constituents would never agree to "steep their souls in the guilt of extending the dominion of slavery." Dixon warned his fellow representatives that "the people of the North are watching, with anxious attention, the votes of their representatives on this floor." Connecticut's Democratic Senator, John Niles, similarly insisted that Northerners would "resist … to the last" the efforts of the "slave power" to "extend slavery over the continent." Wilmot declared that "Free territory shall not be fettered, it shall not be trampled upon; it is ours, and we will hold on to it with a grasp that shall bid defiance to the slave power." Amos Tuck wondered aloud, "Are we to sit still, with our arms folded, and behold all the great functionaries of this Government wielding its vast power in defence of an institution which we all abhor?" Increasing northern reluctance to shoulder this moral burden of supporting slavery induced free-state congressmen to tenaciously contest the Slave Power's tightening grip on the federal government. Underscoring this shift in the electorate, the *Emancipator* confidently predicted that "there are

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[18] See *CG*, 30th Congress, 198-200, 245-246; While new to Congress in late 1847, Palfrey was an accomplished theologian, public servant, and amateur historian, who had previously served as a Harvard Professor and Dean of its Divinity School, as well as Secretary of the Commonwealth for Massachusetts. On Palfrey, and his many careers, see Frank Otto Gatell, *John Gorham Palfrey and the New England Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); For a Proviso Democrat's version of these arguments see George Rathbun's speech in *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 177-180.

[19] In addition to its obvious implications for sectional balance in the Senate, some Northerners worried that extension of slavery would help Southerners make up ground in the House, as any new slave representation there would be augmented by the three-fifths rule. For example see Darragh's speech in *CG*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 477-478. In response to this particular criticism Southerners, however, pointed out (perhaps correctly) that extending slavery westward would not increase the number of slaves. Thus, the slaves would continue providing the same three-fifths representation for Southerners in the House. However, Robert Schenck's rebuttal to these arguments, in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1023, suggested that new slave territory would encourage an increase in the enslaved population by raising the value of slaves, and thus would indeed augment southern power in the House; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 454-455.

thousands of the democratic rank and file" who would no longer allow their votes to be "sold to the man mongers of the South."[20]

Even given the moral force with which antislavery and anti-Slave Power arguments were broadcast, the free labor arguments that many scholars have emphasized were certainly present in the speeches of Proviso supporters. These free labor antislavery arguments are often viewed as outgrowths of Democratic ideological traditions, but largely reiterated arguments also articulated earlier by Liberty men like Chase and Leavitt. Many northern congressmen vigorously argued that slavery threatened free labor by creating unfair competition, or by making labor odious. Democratic and Whig congressmen both charged that slavery "discourages productive industry of every kind" and demanded that free migrants to the West not be forced to compete with slave labor. Integrating this view with the Slave Power concept, Jacob Brinkerhoff argued that allowing slavery in the new territories would promote the creation of a powerful planter aristocracy there.[21]

As many historians have noted, virulent racism figured integrally in several congressional paeans to free labor, especially those of staunch Democrats. Wilmot repeatedly assured auditors that he had "no morbid sympathy for the slave." In demanding non-extension Wilmot stood "by my own race, and my own color," spurning the surrender of new territory to "the degrading and servile labor of the Negro race." Several congressmen apparently hoped to exclude blacks, free or slave, from the territories (and also to prevent further black migration into the North). Most often, though, racist northern anti-extensionists' primary concern was that black slavery debased free white labor. Preston King argued that no northern representative should be willing to "place free white labor upon a condition of social equality with the labor of the black slave."[22]

Notwithstanding the presence of both anti-capital and racist pro-labor rhetoric within their speeches, Proviso Democrats broke sharply from Jacksonian tradition when they repeatedly prioritized sectional concerns over party unity. Designed initially to enable northern Democrats to remain loyal on the key partisan issue of the day—the Mexican War—the Proviso seemed a panacea that could neutralize criticisms that they were supporting a proslavery war. Northern Whigs who had been opponents (however hesitant in many cases) of the Mexican War arraigned the war as an egregious aggression of the Slave Power. A growing number of antislavery Whigs

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[20] Wilmot and Dixon in *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 317, 333; Tuck and Niles in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 200, 1060; For other examples of Northern refusal to accept responsibility for slavery see the speeches of Representative Martin Grover (D-NY) in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 138 and JG in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 670; For several examples of Whigs coupling attacks on the Slave Power conspiracy with moral opposition to slavery, see the speeches of Senator William Upham (VT) in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 546-548 and Palfrey and Schenck in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 245-246, 1023; *Emancipator*, Oct. 6, 1847.

[21] For a brief discussion of Liberty arguments that the Slave Power stifled the prosperity of northern free labor, see Ch. 3 above; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 379; Other examples of these sorts of free labor arguments can be found in the speeches of Representatives Preston King, Pettit, Paul Dillingham (D-VT), and Timothy Jenkins (D-NY) in Ibid., 114, 181, 402, 419, and of Smart, Upham, and Schenck, in *CG*, 30th Congress, Second Session 547, 548, 1023; Examples of fears that slavery would obviate the possibility of free white Northerners emigrating can be found in the speeches of Representative John Wentworth (D-IL) and John Dix in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 342, 543, and Representative Robert McClelland (D-MI) in *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 392.

[22] Again using racism to distance himself from abolitionists, Wilmot also asserted that he had no "no morbid sympathy for the slave" *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 354, *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 314-318; A few weeks earlier John Pettit used strikingly similar language: "I've no sickly sympathy with the Negro." Pettit went on to assert, that he was "not one of that class of men who are constantly harping upon the wrongs of the degraded or degenerate blacks," *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 181; Ibid., January 15, 1847, Also see the speech of Allen Thurman (D-OH) in Ibid., 190; Ibid., 114.

argued that lust for slave territory had led slavery's most energetic supporters to plunge the country into an unnecessary, unjustified "bloody war of conquest." Proviso Democrats' devotion to non-extension aimed to counter anti-war Whigs and reframe the aims of the ongoing war, which had grown unpopular in antislavery constituencies. Preston King wholeheartedly endorsed further operations against Mexico but insisted publicly and privately that the "Wilmot Proviso must be most rigidly adhered to" and its "agitation must set permanent perpetual barriers against the extension of slavery—by law of Congress." Martin Grover (D-NY) acknowledged that "the northern mind was in doubt" but believed the Proviso would convince his constituents that the war sought to promote freedom and not slavery. But by resolutely demanding antislavery policy, dissident Democrats challenged their party's core principle of fostering sectional harmony, usually through concessions to slavery. [23]

Objecting to slavery on moral, political, and economic grounds, proponents of the Proviso proclaimed the utter impossibility of compromise. This stance resembled the inflexibility long expressed by political abolitionists and their small band of antislavery Whig coadjutors (like Giddings, Seth Gates, and William Slade) but rarely by mainstream party politicians who had so prized intersectional unity up until this point. Most northern congressmen now cast any further compromise with slavery as cowardly and unmanly, but slavery moderates from both sections held out hope of a new settlement based either on the old Missouri Compromise or a new "popular sovereignty" formula.[24]

Defeated multiple times (including the day the Proviso was first presented) by overwhelming northern opposition, the proposal to extend westward the Missouri Compromise line demarcating the northern boundary of slavery in the Louisiana Purchase at 36º 30' north latitude became many southern congressmen's (and the Polk administration's) preferred plan for resolving conflict over the territories. Northern congressmen, however, refused to consent to Congress establishing slavery. The original Missouri Compromise, they noted, did not *establish* slavery, but rather allowed slavery to *persist* in part of the Louisiana Purchase. Mexican territory was different; slavery had already been abolished there, a distinction that was also never lost on Liberty partisans. The majority of northern Whigs and Democrats refused to accept any compromise that might extend slavery.[25]

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[23] Eric Foner, "Wilmot Proviso Revisited," esp. 276-278; Columbus Delano's (OH) speech provided one of the most scathing Whig denunciations of the war's proslavery aims, *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 278-282, quote from 281. Also see Root's speech in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 86; Preston King to John Dix, Nov. 12, 1847, John A. Dix Papers, Columbia University, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, New York; Also see King's speech in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 114-115; Ibid., 136.

[24] On the gendered component of non-extension rhetoric see Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008), 186-189. Varon argues that northern Democrats' concern with demonstrating the manliness of their anti-extensionist stand stemmed from a desire to disarm southern attempts to depict them as feminized sentimental abolitionists; For a few of the many examples of Northern refusals to compromise on the extension issue, see the speeches of Rep. Washington Hunt (W-NY), Grover, and Rep. Hannibal Hamlin (D-ME), in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 72, 139, 196; *Herald and Philanthropist*, Dec. 1, 1846; *National Era*, Sept. 16, 1847; The extreme southern position in these debates closely resembles the reasoning that appeared in Chief Justice Taney's infamous decision of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* in 1857.

[25] This Missouri Compromise formula was first proposed as a substitute for the Proviso by Indiana doughface Rep. William Wick (D), *CG*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 1218; Examples of southern democratic endorsements of this proposal can be found in the speeches of Representatives Edmund Dargan (AL) and Howell Cobb (GA) in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 135-136, 360-362, and of Senator Henry Foote (MS), and Representative David Kaufman (TX) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 998, 1013; On Polk's eventual commitment to the Missouri Compromise solution see David Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 69-73.

Popular sovereignty posited that Congress either could not or should not decide the fate of slavery for territorial inhabitants, ceding that responsibility instead to the local determination of the territorial legislature, although at what moment in the territorial process was hazy. Antislavery critics warned that once slavery gained a foothold in a new territory, eradicating it would be difficult if not impossible. At this seemingly late point in the sectional conflict over the territories, the popular sovereignty plan also received minimal northern support.[26]

Developments in Oregon intensified the dispute over slavery in the territories. Even though Southerners and Northerners both accepted the proposition that Oregon's climate would not support slavery, and despite urgent pleas for a territorial government from settlers warring with local Indians, congressmen from both sections transformed the Oregon question into a proxy debate over slavery's future in conquered Mexican lands. Southern congressmen insisted that the federal government had no power to interfere with slavery, while Northerners called just as vociferously for organization of the Oregon territory under the antislavery (although also anti-black) constitution its (white) inhabitants had already drafted. As Oregonians awaited their territorial government, Congress rehashed the arguments that had been articulated for and against the Wilmot Proviso.[27] Would-be compromisers saw another opportunity to establish a precedent for either the Missouri Compromise or popular sovereignty formula, while antislavery men like Senator Hale used controversy over Oregon to advocate prohibition of slavery in all future American territories. The recently-established Washington Liberty paper the *National Era* denounced the "spectacle" of "the slave power doggedly forbidding the erection of a *free* government in Oregon," simply because Northerners would not "give the national sanction to a slave government in California and New Mexico."[28]

After both popular sovereignty and the Missouri Compromise line seemed doomed to fail, a Senate committee led by John Clayton (W-DE) devised a plan to organize Oregon and divest Congress of any further responsibility for determining the fate of slavery in the territories. This proposal evaded explicit affirmation of the right of Congress to legislate for or against territorial slavery by entrusting the question of slavery in Oregon to its inhabitants (who would certainly prohibit slavery) and in California and New Mexico to the federal judiciary. The Senate passed the Clayton Compromise at 7:53 in the morning on July 27, 1848, concluding a grueling twenty-one hour session. Unmoved by the upper chamber's labors, the House quickly tabled the bill. A leading Whig from each section dismissed this harebrained scheme as merely

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[26] On popular sovereignty, see Ibid.

[27] For southern and northern assertions of slavery's unfeasibility in Oregon, see the speeches of Sen. James Westcott (D-FL), Rep. Cornelius Darragh (W-PA), Rep. Thomas Bayly (D-VA), Sen. Edward Hannegan (D-IN), Sen. Andrew Butler (D-SC), and Sen. George Badger (W-NC), in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 409, 477, and *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 662, 804, 811, 871; For northern concerns that Southerners might indeed transport slaves to Oregon if allowed, see speeches by Ephraim Smart (D-ME), and John Hale (Independent Democrat/Liberty), in Ibid., 547, 805; Good examples of the antislavery and proslavery positions in House debates over Oregon can be found in the speeches of Rep. Harmon Conger (W-NY) and Rep. Sampson Harris (D-AL) in *CG Appendix*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 956-964.

[28] Attempts to write a precedent for extension of the Missouri Compromise line into the bill organizing the Oregon territory, can be seen in the speeches of Representatives Stephen Adams (D-MS) and Armistead Burt (D-SC), in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 169, 187, Westcott in Ibid., 409, and Sen. Jesse Bright (D-IN) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 875; For one of the strongest northern voices in favor of popular sovereignty see the speech of Sen. Daniel Dickinson (D-NY) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 808; For a southern example, see Joseph Underwood (W-KY), 818; Ibid., 805; *National Era*, Feb. 4, 1847; On racism in nineteenth-century Oregon, see Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1967), Ch. 4.

postponing sectional conflict until the courts reached a decision bound to offend one section. The tabling opened the door for a new round of sectional recriminations that persisted through the remainder of the session and long after (notwithstanding the Senate's acquiescence in Oregon settlers' slavery prohibition during the session's closing days).[29]

The emergence of Clayton's solution in the Senate (not without substantial opposition) demonstrated that Congress had no confidence in either popular sovereignty or the Missouri Compromise line as solutions for the status of slavery in the territories. The summary defeat of the proposal in the House dismissed it as another untenable plan for resolving the vexing question of slavery in the territories. Ideological positions on the slavery issue had advanced so far that the polarized rhetoric it generated easily overwhelmed, and nearly supplanted, pressing practical questions about territorial governance. The recurrent failure of these various compromise options illustrates the seeming impossibility of a territorial settlement that could win support from a significant number of northern congressmen. Invested with moral absolutism, their stand in favor of the Proviso became one from which few seemed willing to retreat, even in part. Delighted Liberty partisans saw evidence of their own influence in this new antislavery firmness of most northern congressmen.

During Senate debates over the Clayton Compromise, Hale, now a self-proclaimed Liberty Party ally and its intended presidential candidate, asserted the impossibility of "any compromise which the people would ratify." In the lower chamber, Hale's close ally Amos Tuck echoed his friend's intransigence: "There can and there will be no compromise." More moderate advocates of the Proviso also consistently refused to support any compromise. Wilmot himself dubbed non-extension a "question of naked and abstract right." Wilmot's close ally (and Abraham Lincoln's future Vice President) Hannibal Hamlin (D-ME) thus rebuked the Missouri Compromise plan: "To any proposition for taking territory now free, and sending there the shackles and manacles of slavery, I never will consent; never. … I will go for no compromise line of any character."[30]

Political Abolitionists and Anti-Slave Power Constituents in the Proviso Debates

Critics of the Proviso impugned northern representatives' repudiation of conventional legislative bargaining as evidence of non-extensionists' affiliation with, or desire to appease, fanatical abolitionists. Like the abolitionists themselves, proslavery expansionists viewed anti-extensionism "in its remote origins" as an outgrowth of abolitionism. Virginia Democrat Thomas Bayly directly tied antislavery agitation in Congress to the abolitionists. This

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[29] On the Clayton Compromise, which was actually, at least in part, the brainchild of Daniel Dickinson, see David Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 73-75, and Michael Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 335-336; *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 950, 1002; Ibid., 1007; Senate examples of criticisms similar to those made in the House can be seen in the speeches of Jacob Miller (W-NJ) and Corwin, Ibid., 992, 994; Oregon was ultimately admitted in the final hours of this session without any alteration to its proposed constitutional prohibition of slavery. The passage of this Oregon bill in the Senate was only made possible by the reluctant last-minute acquiescence of Missouri's Thomas Hart Benton and Texas's Samuel Houston, both vigorous expansionists. *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1078.

[30] *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 928; On Hale and the Liberty Party's presidential nomination for 1848, see Ch. 5 below; *CG*, 30th Congress, 1022; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 353; Ibid., 196; For one of the earliest such instances of this assertion of a refusal to compromise on this question, see the speech of Rep. Charles Hudson (W-MA), *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 51.

congressional antislavery movement, Bayly asserted, began in the 1830s with the abolitionists' petition onslaught and had since been channeled into support for the Wilmot Proviso. Another Virginia Democrat complained that "the House seemed to have been converted into a magnificent abolition society." A northern opponent of the Proviso similarly lamented that abolitionist sentiment had "become sufficiently formidable … to make it the *present* interest of politicians" to endorse an incendiary measure like the Wilmot Proviso.[31]

Abolitionists wholeheartedly concurred with these proslavery estimations of their influence and celebrated the dissension in the Whig and Democratic Parties as "owing primarily to the pressure of the Liberty Party." John Greenleaf Whittier viewed the "Wilmot and Brinkerhoff resolution" as a direct response to the "complete triumph of Hale" and the growing "attitude of hostility to the Slave Power." While praising antislavery Whigs like Adams, Giddings, and Slade (now Vermont's most recent ex-governor) and staunch Proviso Democrats like Wilmot, King, and Brinkerhoff for having "taken, at times, very just grounds against slavery," Liberty men questioned whether they would "have stood firm" if "the Liberty party had not been in existence." Liberty partisans did not fail to note that many of these antislavery congressmen "represent districts in which the pure doctrines of anti-slavery prevail, embodied in the liberty party." Similarly, Illinois abolitionists credited the impressive Liberty Party vote for Owen Lovejoy in Chicago Democrat John Wentworth's northern Illinois district with having "driven Wentworth and the dominant influence of his party, to take a position ahead of the democratic party in any other section of the Union." Formerly a reluctant backer of the gag rule, Wentworth became a firm Proviso man, and initially the only Illinois Democrat to support it. The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society proudly summed up the abolitionists' influence on the new political landscape:

> The Northern States have at length, under the 'stimulus of public opinion received from Abolitionists,' become aroused to feel their degradation, the reproach of the country, if not the wrongs of the slave and it is hoped that no political magician will ever again be able to wave his *compromising* wand over the National Legislature, and induce truckling doughfaces to violate the Constitution and break their plighted faith.[32]

Even Liberty partisans who criticized Proviso supporters for their unwillingness to go beyond this incomplete measure and adopt the full Liberty program still viewed it as "one of the strongest rays of hope" for reorienting national politics around slavery.

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[31] Rep. William Giles (D-MD), in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 387-388; Bayly in 30th Congress, 1st Session, 661-662; Rep. Shelton Leake (D-VA) in 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 188; Wick, *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 666.

[32] Edward Wade to SPC, Jul. 7, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; JGW to GB, Dec. 1846, in *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. Pickard, 2:48-49; "What has the Liberty Party Done?" by "A Congregationalist Minister, *Of Undoubted Orthodoxy*," from the Montpelier *Green Mountain Freeman*, quoted in *American Freeman*, Apr. 14, 1847; Lovejoy won sixteen percent of votes cast in the 1846 congressional election. Chicago *Western Citizen*, Apr. 11, 1848; J.P. Bartlett of Kane County, a self-described "farmer on the Illinois prairie," echoes this assessment of Wentworth's concern for Liberty electoral pressure in a letter to JPH, Nov. 27, 1847, ohn Parker Hale Papers (JPH Papers), New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS), Concord; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Chicago Giant: A Biography of "Long John" Wentworth* (Madison, Wis.: American History Research Center,1957), 68-69, explains that Wentworth's antislavery shift stemmed from a multitude of concerns but "must always be viewed against the background of rising antislavery sentiment in his own district, which the recent election had so forcefully verified"; *Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: William Harned, 1847), 5.

Acknowledging the severe limits to Wilmot's antislavery, the *Philanthropist* nonetheless lauded his Proviso as signaling that the "power and the progress of the anti-slavery movement," along with the Polk administration's misdeeds, had "opened the eyes of the country to the pro-slavery policy of the slaveholding interest." "Next to the abolition of slavery itself," the *Emancipator* admitted, "we can conceive of nothing which will exert so controlling an influence upon the destiny of this country as the exclusion of slavery from, or its admission into the new territories acquired of Mexico." Banning slavery from the territories, the paper continued, would be not only "an incalculable gain to freedom," but also "the first important victory which liberty has won over slavery in this country during the last half-century."[33]

Although numerous northern congressmen denied the Proviso's connection to the abolitionist movement, their rhetoric clearly drew on antislavery polemics and articulated a view that slavery was immoral and unjust—only one step (if ultimately a very long one) away from the abolitionists' logical conclusion that it should be ended immediately, everywhere. Some of the Proviso's most inflexible supporters were quite explicit about this connection. In language that must have terrified southern congressmen, Columbus Delano cautioned slaveholders: "If you will drive on this bloody war of conquest to annexation, we will establish a cordon of free States that shall surround you; and then we will light up the fires of liberty on every side, until they melt your present chains, and render all your people *free*." More tepid Proviso supporters emphasized the antislavery constituent pressure they faced.[34]

The obvious continuities between abolitionist ideology and the non-extensionist program espoused by Proviso advocates put many in the difficult position of trying to marginalize abolitionists within an emerging antislavery consensus that drew extensively from political abolitionist ideals and rhetoric. For example George Ashmun (W-MA) explained, "There were ultra men on both sides [proslavery and antislavery]; … But these were not the great mass of the people of the North; and it was the mass of sober-minded, reflecting, foreseeing people of the free States who would" demand the Proviso. George Fries, who had made some of the most moralistic assaults on slavery extension, asserted with no intention of irony that "no man in my district is suspected less of being an Abolitionist than I am." Race-baiting Ohio Democrat Allen Thurman, who spoke at length in favor of the Proviso, responded to allegations of abolitionism's connection to the Proviso movement simply by attacking the "Abolition party" and declaring: "It is most ridiculous and preposterous to suppose that the *Democratic* party of the North is seeking to court the Abolitionists." All Northerners shared a "general disinclination to slavery" and "a belief that slavery is injurious to any community in which it exists," but these sentiments did not make Thurman an abolitionist. Wilmot, an especial target of southern invective, responded angrily to critics who classed him with the abolitionists, whom Wilmot "denounced … publicly upon all occasions" (including years earlier when he had expressed "surprise and mortification" at plans for an 1840 Towanda, Pennsylvania abolitionist meeting and spearheaded an effort to proscribe the group from local houses of worship and public buildings). The fact remains, though, that Proviso Democrats like Wilmot and Thurman, previously so eager to ignore slavery, suddenly accepted many of the abolitionists' contentions about the Slave Power. Northern congressmen, especially virulently racist Democrats, had never before insisted with such

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[33] *Emancipator*, Mar. 29, 1848; *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Dec. 1, 1846; Also see *Emancipator*, Jun. 16, Oct. 13, 1847, and Edward Wade to SPC, Jul. 7, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP.
[34] *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 281.

frequency, to quote Thurman, "that slavery is injurious to any community in which it exists." Thurman was correct in distinguishing this position from abolitionist immediatism, but Southerners and abolitionists were equally astute in interpreting the prevalence of such statements as marking a sea-change in the congressional politics of slavery.[35]

Notwithstanding explicit denials of abolitionists' influence, northern congressmen from both sides of the aisle acknowledged a need to shield themselves from abolitionist attacks. Representative Martin Grover (D-NY) rejoiced that "when we address abolitionists, or anybody else, [we can] tell them it is a question we have nothing to do with; that we have nothing more to do with slavery than with serfdom in Russia." Proviso advocates from both parties avowed their longstanding commitment to avoiding federal action on slavery. Since the South had recently "joined with this Liberty party in their doctrine that Congress had power over the subject," northern congressmen now felt forced to side with the Liberty Party and demand that Congress contain rather than enlarge slavery. Indeed in these efforts to blame the South, and not abolitionists, for the rising anti-Slave Power fervor, New York Democrat Bradford Wood attacked slaveholders' earlier insistence on the gag rule and support for anti-abolitionist mob violence. Recognizing what Liberty partisans had for years, Wood predicted that "the violent speeches which have been made by some of you on the floor of this House" would "make more Abolitionists than the whole of the North could unmake."[36]

Despite the strenuous efforts of most northern congressmen to distance themselves from abolitionism, their rhetoric demonstrated that growing pressure from antislavery constituents encouraged them to steadfastly support the Proviso. Northern representatives and senators continually reiterated and dramatized the united northern commitment to non-extension. Northern Whigs opposed new territorial acquisitions. Northern Democrats lusted after western territory. Both concurred in the unanimity of northern repugnance at the idea of extending slavery. One Democrat estimated that "nine-tenths of the people of the free States are in favor of the Wilmot proviso." A Whig similarly assured the House that the Proviso "embodied the universal sentiment of the North," and yet another averred that "there was no division of sentiment at the North. On this question the whole North went as one man."[37]

These emphases on northern unity demonstrate a deep awareness among most northern lawmakers of a political imperative to support the Wilmot Proviso. New York moderate Samuel Gordon (D), for example, initially worried that the Proviso had been prematurely introduced, but soon recognized, "After what has taken place on this subject, I dare not, in reference to public opinion in the North, vote against it … I mean to carry out the enlightened judgment of the North so far as I know it, if the sky falls." Preston King, Congress's leading antislavery Democrat, praised Gordon's speech as evidence of the "development of public opinion" in support of the Proviso. King and Bradford Wood insisted that support for the Proviso was no "mere political movement," but rather represented "the uprisings of the people." Whigs also asserted that

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[35] *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 601; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 443-444; Ibid., 189-190; Ibid., 353-354. On the Towanda incident see *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 6, 1840. Wilmot had reputedly even supported a reinstatement of the gag rule in 1845, *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Dec. 1, 1846, and had voted at least once to table petitions for abolition in the District of Columbia, putting him on the opposite side of not only Whigs like Giddings and John Quincy Adams but also fellow future Proviso architects Brinkerhoff, King, and Hamlin, , *CG*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 43.

[36] *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 138, 333; Also see the speech of Rep. Jacob Collamer (W-VT) in Ibid., 478; *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 343.

[37] *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 443; *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Sess., 72; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 86.

"thousands upon thousands" of "sober deliberate, and substantial men" (as opposed to abolitionist "fanatics") "would resist, by every means in their power" the extension of slavery into conquered Mexican territory. Joshua Giddings optimistically predicted that Proviso Democrats would "dare not disregard" this powerful antislavery impulse. Giddings hoped to take advantage of the outpouring of support for the Proviso to force each congressman to "show whether he be on the side of oppression or of freedom."[38]

Many northern Congressmen spoke explicitly about the need to placate constituents committed to non-extension. They expressed a desire to avoid implicating themselves or their constituents in any responsibility for supporting slavery. Representative Frederick Lahm (D-OH) defended his action as "what I conceive to be the wishes of a majority of my constituents," citing the non-extensionist commitment manifested in a Democratic meeting in his district. Proviso adherents felt compelled to assail the "curse of slavery," as Michigan Democrat Kinsley Bingham put it, "*for my constituents but not for the house*." Bingham, though he remained a partisan Democrat privately praised both antislavery Whigs and Gamaliel Bailey's "abolition press—a paper conducted with great talent and prudence." Even northern senators, not directly responsible to voters and less frequently subject to the pressures of reelection, recognized constituent pressure to oppose slavery extension. For example, Simon Cameron (D-PA) announced that a vote against the Proviso would directly contravene the sentiments of his state.[39]

Those professing more determined antislavery opinions, usually Whigs, were deeply suspicious of northern Democrats, but recognized that intense constituent pressure would preclude most of them from abandoning non-extension. Representative Joseph Root (W-OH) granted that there would always be some who would compromise with the South, but this course had become untenable for any who sought reelection. Root warned that Northerners who abandoned the Proviso would face certain defeat, as well as social embarrassment:

> There always had been *some* recreants to the North. But the time would come when met it must be. [Root] cared not how many 'dough faces' they could scare up among representatives of the free States. They could not be used but once. The mere touch of a man for such a purpose destroyed his future hopes forever and a day, and these men themselves knew it. They knew that any northern man whose vote should be given against the North on that question, must make up his mind to brave the scorn and execration of his constituents; to hang his head before his old neighbors; nay, to make his wife ashamed for him.

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[38] Ibid., 389-390; Preston King to Azariah Flagg, Feb. 22, 1847, Azariah Cutting Flagg Papers, NYPL; *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 343-345; The quote about "sober and deliberate men" comes from a speech by Hudson, in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 51; Ibid., February 13, 1847, Giddings, 421; JG to Seth Gates, Jan. 25, 1847, GS Papers; For other references to popular constituent support for the Proviso see the speeches of Representatives Gordon, Caleb Smith (W-IN), Grover, Robert Winthrop (W-MA), Thurman, Hannibal Hamlin, and Darragh, in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 84, 124, 137, 146, 196-197, 477-478 and Dixon and Senator Webster in *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 333-335, 555.

[39] *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 552; *CG Appendix*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1110; Kinsley S. Bingham to Mary Bingham, Jan. 10, 1848, Apr. 21, 1848, Kinsley S. Bingham Papers, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, microform; For other examples of Democratic representatives referencing the need to appease anti-extension constituencies, see the speeches of Gordon, Grover, Brinkerhoff, and Fries in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 84, 138, 379, 443; Ibid., 551.

Columbus Delano similarly warned "'doughfaces'" that "whenever they sell themselves again at the expense of freedom, and the rights of the free States, they will find the indignation of their constituents too hot for their political existence, and their doom is inevitable."[40]

Underscoring the pervasiveness of northern opposition to the extension of slavery, nearly every northern state legislature sent non-extensionist resolutions to their congressional delegations—both to enter these states' positions into the congressional record and to influence the course of their representatives. Furthermore, political abolitionists celebrated that most northern legislatures passed these resolutions requesting representatives and instructing Senators to vote against any bill for territorial acquisition that did not include a provision barring the establishment of slavery in the territories with near "unanimity." In the Senate, John Dix (D-NY) similarly touted "the unanimity with which the Legislatures of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and other states have acted" in support of the Proviso as "an index to the universal opinion which pervades the whole North and West." Cornelius Darragh (W-PA) specifically pointed out that Pennsylvania's 1847 resolutions in support of the Wilmot Proviso had been passed unanimously in the state's lower house, and over the dissent of only one or two state senators.[41]

Furthermore, northern representatives and senators were often quite explicit about their sense of compulsion to abide their states' resolutions. Senator John Clarke (W-RI) explained that he could not vote for the Clayton compromise because "the resolutions of the Legislature of Rhode Island required" him to oppose the introduction of slavery into free territory. Proviso supporters also castigated northern congressmen who did not comply with their states' resolutions. John Niles expressed disbelief that New York's senators, who had twice been instructed to oppose any extension of slavery, had made no vocal efforts on behalf of non-extension. Darragh chastised the five Pennsylvanians who had already voted against the Proviso once, warning of the political peril of further ignoring their legislature's resolutions.[42]

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[40] *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 333; More disparagingly, Rep. George Perkins Marsh (W-VT) maligned the Democrats' motives, asserting that they only voted for the Proviso because of "a propelling force operating at home," further revealing the role of popular northern antislavery demands in driving opposition to slavery's extension. *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 333; *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 281.

[41] Over the 1846-47 and 1847-48 sessions of Congress, resolutions opposing the extension of slavery were submitted to Congress at least once by the legislatures of New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Ohio, Michigan, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and the new state of Wisconsin. For many of these state legislative resolutions, see the speech of Rep. Sidney Lawrence (D-NY) in *CG Appendix*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 680, which included resolutions from ten states. For the Connecticut resolutions and the Wisconsin resolutions (not included in Lawrence's catalogue for the 30th Congress, 1st Session) see *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 51, 965; Lewis Tappan to Amos A. Phelps, Feb. 5, 1847, Lewis Tappan Papers, Library of Congress, microform; *National Era*, Mar. 11, 1847; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 542; Ibid., 478; For specific examples of resolutions demanding that slavery be barred from all territory currently under control of the federal government and in any future acquisitions, see Ohio's resolutions presented by Sen. Charles Allen (D) and Wisconsin's by Rep. Mason Darling (D), in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 808, 965; Some state resolutions coupled opposition to slavery's westward extension with calls for more radical measures. In 1848, the Rhode Island General Assembly demanded abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia or relocation of the national capital to another city. *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 804, 822; Even more boldly, the legislature of New Hampshire, when controlled by the antislavery coalition that elected Hale to the U.S. Senate, resolved in favor of the full political abolitionist panoply, including support for measures to curtail the domestic slave trade, opposition to admission of any new slave states, and general vigilance against "the increasing and progressive encroachments of the slave power," along with the more common demands for congressional prohibition of slavery in the territories and abolition in the District of Columbia. *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 95.

[42] *CG*, 30th Congress, 992; Ibid. 812. Incidentally, Niles's calumny was probably unfair to Senator John Dix. Dix repeatedly endorsed the Wilmot Proviso, even if he had not given any recent speeches on the question at the time of

As most Northerners assumed this uncompromising posture, they elicited spirited replies from livid southern colleagues, much like those that antislavery radicals like Giddings had incited with abolitionist aid in earlier congresses. The most radical Southerners matched the non-extensionists' moral absolutism with equal bluster and intransigence. Proslavery extremists denied Congress any right to legislate on slavery in the territories, and jealously defended proslavery prerogatives, pontificating on slavery's morality to horrified antislavery politicians. In response to the stream of religious aspersions against slavery, Alexander Sims (D-SC) elaborated biblical justifications for slavery, concluding, "No man who is a Christian can denounce slavery as immoral." Southern leaders repudiated northern allegations that a Slave Power controlled the government with well-worn protestations of their defensive posture. When tempers became sufficiently heated, southern congressmen menacingly alluded to the possibility of disunion. A prophetic North Carolinian declared, "When sectional grounds turn a presidential election, then the Union is truly at an end." A similarly clairvoyant (and more ironic) southern spokesman, Jefferson Davis (D-MS), implored, "Let not the battle-fields of our country be stained with the blood of brother fighting against brother."[43]

With the sections so polarized and amidst fire-eaters' threats of secession, moderate southern Whigs sought to eliminate the troubling question by renouncing any territorial acquisitions. Championed by many national Whig leaders (including several Northerners who consistently supported the Proviso), this "No Territory" strategy aimed to avert an irreparable rift within the Whig Party—or even worse the Union—by circumventing the territorial question altogether. Meredith Gentry (W-TN), for example, decried any new acquisitions because the ensuing debate over slavery in the territories would threaten the Union. Gentry recognized, even before the most vigorous Proviso debates, that Northerners and Southerners would find little room for compromise once the question of extending slavery was injected into national politics. Senator Reverdy Johnson (W-MD) similarly cautioned, "As you love the Union … as you deprecate civil war and all the manifold calamities which ever follow in its train … Keep out this fearful element of eternal strife—KEEP OUT TERRITORY." The following session, Johnson clarified that, unlike many of his Whig colleagues, he harbored no principled objection to expansion, but he deeply feared "the conflict to which such an acquisition would lead." Numerous conservative northern Whigs, such as Daniel Webster, who supported the Wilmot Proviso but preferred to avoid sectional tension, also heartily espoused No Territory.[44]

Niles's challenge. For New York's other Senator, Daniel Dickinson, the criticism stuck. Dickinson, a doughface advocate of popular sovereignty, regularly bucked the legislature's non-extensionist instructions; *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 478.

[43] This extreme southern position can be seen in the speeches of Rep. Franklin Bowdon (D-AL) in *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 137-139, Representatives Joseph Woodward (D-SC) and Abraham Venable (D-NC) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 775, 1045, and Senators John Calhoun (D-SC), John Berrien (W-GA), Herschel Johnson (D-GA), and Jefferson Davis (D-MS), Ibid., 876, 879, 906, 927; Even some Southerners who supported the Missouri Compromise solution out of expediency questioned its constitutionality, but magnanimously accepted both the original compromise and the contemporary attempt to extend it to the Pacific as southern concessions justified only by the desire to preserve the Union. For example, see the speeches of Representatives Robert Toombs (W-GA) and Burt in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 142, 178-179, and Sen. James Mason (D-VA) in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 903; Sims in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 291; Rep. Thomas Clingman (W-NC) and Sen. Jefferson Davis in *CG*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 66, 927; Also see examples of threats of secession in the speeches of Sen. Andrew Butler(D-SC) and Mason in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 543 and in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 903.

[44] Gentry, Reverdy Johnson, and Webster in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 47, 554, 555-556; Reverdy Johnson in *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 149. For more southern examples, see the speeches of Berrien and Sen. James Morehead (W-KY) in *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 330, 345-346, and Edward Cabell (W-FL) and Berrien in *CG*,

Southern Whigs, few of whom had ever been ardent expansionists, viewed total rejection of territory as more feasible than northern acceptance of slavery's expansion. Southern Whigs recognized that the significance of the Proviso for many of its Whig supporters was as much symbolic as about practical territorial governance, much as it was for many Liberty men. The Proviso would establish an important antislavery precedent for the federal government. Even though few northern Whigs coveted this territory, they wanted to ensure that if acquired it would remain free. This was also the stance of Liberty men, most of whom condemned the Mexican War far more vociferously than leading northern Whigs. To the great dismay of Liberty partisans and antislavery Whigs alike, Thomas Corwin, initially an antislavery hero for his vocal opposition to the Mexican War, embraced the No Territory principle and downplayed the Wilmot Proviso. Political abolitionists assailed Corwin, Webster, and other No Territory advocates for skirting the slavery question to placate southern Whigs. Salmon Chase described this Whig gambit as a "humbug" and "the most palpable deception in the world." Committed antislavery Whigs like Giddings and Sumner joined Liberty partisans in balking at the No Territory strategy as a transparent effort to evade the Proviso's anti-extensionist mandate, "put forth [by] those who have strong affinities with the slave power." Ultimately though, ratification of the Treaty of Guadeloupe-Hidalgo in March of 1848 foiled conservative Whigs' No Territory strategy by ceding the United States territory encompassing California and most of the modern American Southwest.[45]

By early 1848, a growing circle of radical antislavery congressmen collaborated with Liberty allies to promote further antislavery demonstrations in Congress. For example, Massachusetts abolitionists worked with Sumner and Giddings to lobby famous education reformer and recently elected Whig Congressman Horace Mann (chosen to replace John Quincy Adams after he died in the Capitol at age eighty-one) to speak out forcefully against slavery. Like Liberty lobbyists, Sumner recognized the importance of such congressional attacks on slavery: "every new voice against Slavery on the floor of the House helps mightily to create a Public Opinion." Giddings, by now long accustomed to private collaboration with abolitionists, eagerly awaited the arrival of Gamaliel Bailey in Washington in late 1846 to edit the new national Liberty Party paper, the *National Era*, just as controversy over the Proviso heated up. Bailey worked vigorously on the ground in Washington to pressure antislavery Congressmen and regularly attended congressional debates, as Leavitt had in the past. Bailey's home became a

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30th Congress, 1st Session, 428, 484; While most northern Whigs opposed territorial acquisition, most also praised the Wilmot Proviso and supported its principle even if no territory was acquired. Moreover, most northern Whigs, when given the opportunity to establish a non-extensionist precedent, chose the Proviso over their anti-expansionist leanings, voting in favor of the appropriations for territorial acquisition that included the Proviso. There were some, however, who, like their southern colleagues, preferred to avoid a decision on this issue for fear of the threat to the Union that such a charged sectional debate would produce. For example, see the speeches of Representatives Alexander Harper (OH) and George Evans (ME) *CG*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 421, 482.

[45] Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 253-255, 265-267; *National Era*, Sept. 16, Oct. 7, 1847; *Emancipator*, Dec. 22, 1847; SPC to JPH, Sept. 23, 1847, JPH Papers, NHHS; SPC to JPH, May 12, 1847, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:153; JG to CFA, Aug. 12, 1847, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; Charles Sumner (CS) to Thomas Corwin, Sept. 7, 1847, in *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 1:194-197; To the misfortune of historians, no accurate account exists of Senate debates over the treaty, which were held in secret session.

gathering place for antislavery congressmen from both parties and Bailey persuaded abolitionist friends like Salmon Chase to attend Congress when possible to aid in his lobbying.[46]

In a political climate increasingly dominated by argument over slavery, congressional antislavery voices grew more numerous and more strident, addressing a variety of antislavery causes. While many of these polemics were limited to Congress's antislavery vanguard (the sorts of men who fraternized with Bailey and his Liberty friends), their language and tone closely resembled that employed by more moderate Proviso proponents. The radical speeches of leading antislavery representatives like Giddings and Tuck had become less widely viewed as impermissible intrusions, enabling them to more frequently render Congress a public forum for interrogating slavery's power in the American political system.

Tuck paired the longstanding abolitionist demand for abolition in the District of Columbia with non-extension as the two conditions necessary to prove the North's independence of the Slave Power. In arguing for abolition in the capital, he appealed both to moral sentiments and political fears of the Slave Power. He invoked the image of a slave market visible from the window of the Capitol building and fulminated against the idea that the free states were obligated "in humble obsequiousness to the Slave Power, to sustain their peculiar institution in a District where Congress has 'exclusive jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever.'" Joshua Giddings advocated both abolition of slavery in the capital as well as the more moderate reform of eradicating the slave trade there, which he had championed since 1838. Giddings dramatically condemned this trade that had "so long disgraced the nation" as "commerce in human flesh" and a "practice at the mention of which humanity shudders."[47]

Antislavery congressmen railed with equal vigor against the fugitive slave law of 1793, combining moral denunciations of the "heinous act" with allusions to the Slave Power designed to elicit broad support across the North. "Such a law," antislavery Whig John Palfrey argued, "insulted, if it did not endanger, the liberty of every white man in the land." While appealing to this mounting fear of the Slave Power, northern radicals simultaneously articulated militant antislavery beliefs, such as Senator (and former counsel to the *Amistad* Africans) Roger Baldwin's (W-CT) contention that *any* slave should be considered free *as soon as* he or she sets foot on the soil of the free states, essentially denying the legality of federal fugitive slave legislation.[48]

Even more dramatic than their agitation of these old political abolitionist standbys, antislavery radicals exploited a failed April 1848 slave escape to further inflame Congress. In the Pearl affair, seventy-seven fugitive slaves and free black relatives (including slaves owned by Secretary of the Treasury Robert Walker and former first lady Dolley Madison) residing in or near the District of Columbia attempted to flee north on a boat named the *Pearl*, in an effort organized by radical political abolitionist and Gerrit Smith ally William Chaplin. Uncooperative winds slowed the vessel, and local slaveholders apprehended and imprisoned the slaves and their collaborators. This failed escape incited anger and consternation within the Washington community and induced a mob to gather outside the *National Era*'s office and harass its activist employees, who may or may not have had an inkling of Chaplin's scheming. In response, John

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[46] CS to JG, Mar. 6, 1848, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:223-225; JG to SPC, Sept. 18, 1846, SPC Papers, HSP; GB to SPC, Sept. 14, 1847, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2: 157-158; Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), 127-129; Also see the brief discussion of Bailey's antislavery gatherings in the early 1850s in Ch. 6 below.

[47] *CG*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 1022; Ibid., 394.

[48] *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 245, 818.

Palfrey proposed a House committee to inquire whether the mob action in Washington threatened any congressmen. By broaching the *Pearl* affair, Palfrey set off a lengthy debate in which Southerners berated antislavery radicals, blamed Palfrey and Giddings for the escape attempt, accused them of promoting insurrection, and suggested they deserved to be hanged.[49]

In the Senate, Hale offered a municipal anti-rioting bill that alluded only implicitly to the mob activity that followed the *Pearl* affair. Although the bill did not mention slavery, no fewer than six southern senators immediately attacked the bill as incendiary and Hale as suggesting that "slaves should be permitted to cut the throats of their masters." Southern senators saw in Hale's action further evidence of abolitionist designs to destroy slavery by encouraging slave rebellion, and they spoke at length about the threat posed by rising antislavery sentiment in the North. Henry Foote (D-MS) declared that if Hale ever came to Mississippi, "He could not go ten miles into the interior, before he would grace one of the tallest trees of the forest, with a rope around his neck, with the approbation of every virtuous and patriotic citizen; and that, if necessary, I should myself assist in the operation." Hale's response to the southern assaults affirmed his abolitionist convictions, but he focused on highlighting the paranoia of the slaveholding senators who so viciously denounced him for a bill that purposefully avoided mention of slavery, merely stipulating measures for the protection of property in case of a riot. Hale mocked southern belligerence in his sardonic reply to Foote, who had just threatened to hang him. Inviting Foote to go "into some of the dark corners of New Hampshire," Hale assured Foote he "would find that the people" there "should be very happy to listen to his arguments and engage in an intellectual conflict with him, in which the truth might be elicited."[50]

Perhaps even more embarrassing to those who hoped to evade the slavery issue, antislavery congressmen seized on the 1848 French Revolution as yet another opportunity to embarrass the Slave Power and its minions. In both the Senate and the House, the rising of the French populace to overthrow the Orléanist monarchy and erect a republican government won plaudits from both sections. However, when Congress attempted to pass resolutions praising the revolution, Hale in the Senate and George Ashmun in the House proposed amending the resolutions to also congratulate the new republic on abolishing slavery in all French colonies. These resolutions incensed southern congressmen who had grown "sick and tired of this continual thrusting of the subject of slavery" into congressional debate "upon every occasion." Senator Hale lauded France for having "not limited her views of liberty to any particular hue or complexion of men," but his amendment was overwhelmingly defeated, as senators from both sections chided Hale for intentionally instigating conflict over events on which the Senate was otherwise so united. In the House, Ashmun's amendment was shuffled away without a roll call vote, but only after passionate endorsements by Giddings and Ashmun. Ashmun's far-ranging speech not only eulogized French emancipation but also digressed into advocacy of non-

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[49] Rep. William Haskell (D-TN) asserted that these antislavery radicals "ought to swing as high as Haman," *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 653; Other southern overreactions can be seen in the speeches of Representatives Abraham Venable (D-NC), Frederick Stanton (D-TN), John Thompson (W-KY), and Thomas Bayly, in Ibid., 654, 657, 662; On the *Pearl* escape and the reaction in Washington, see Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2003), 116-145. Palfrey and Hale's responses are mentioned on 142. Ultimately the crowd dispersed without serious damage to the *Era*'s property and without any violence, although it did very briefly shut down the paper.

[50] Hale's bill would have made "any city, town, or incorporated place within the District liable for all injuries done to property by riotous or tumultuous assemblies." *CG Appendix*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 500-510.

extension and attacks on the Slave Power. Despite these resolutions' failures, their proponents capitalized on the chance to enter further condemnations of slavery into the public record.[51]

As northern congressmen distanced themselves from proslavery expansionism, they acknowledged, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that sectional loyalty had overtaken partisanship on the territorial issue. The *Utica Democrat* asserted that "the time has now come for the North to unite," even as it explained that northern partisans need not "abandon our support of or opposition to other prominent measures of national policy." Proviso Democrat Frederick Lahm responded to accusations that the Proviso was "calculated to divide the Democratic party of the country" by trying, unconvincingly, to bracket the slavery issue as an issue outside of, and having no bearing on, partisan politics:

> Whenever you make the question of slavery, in any shape, a political test, you do away with the old, well-defined party lines, and array the North against the South. This ought, and I have no doubt will be avoided. In our action here, every man must be governed by his own convictions of what is right and due to his constituents.

Joshua Giddings likewise, but far less apprehensively, observed:

> The members here are divided into the propagandists of slavery, and the advocates of freedom. The old party lines are becoming indistinct and uncertain. A portion of those who have acted against us now go for limiting that institution. New political associations are forming, and have been for years; and the trammels of party are often broken, and their influence disregarded.[52]

This point that the Proviso was a moment when sectional concerns eclipsed partisanship had been demonstrated every time northern Whigs supported this measure as eagerly as the northern Democrats who initiated it. More telling was the fact that antislavery, anti-expansion Whigs repeatedly voted for not only the Wilmot Proviso but also the expansionist bills to which it had been attached. This support for territorial acquisition bills from northern Whigs reveals the overriding importance of the slavery question. Nearly every antislavery Whig forsook opposition to expansion to capitalize on the precious opportunity to enact a legislative promise that slavery would never be extended. The Wilmot Proviso quickly became as much a standard for northern Whigs as for northern Democrats.

The Democratic Party had long prided itself on maintaining unity by keeping embarrassing, divisive controversy over slavery out of national political discussion. When faced with antislavery pressures, Southerners had always relied on the cooperation of a large number of northern Democrats. The Proviso opened a dramatic rift in the Democratic Party. Southerners could no longer count on northern Democratic support, nor even northern

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[51] *CG*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 573-575, 577, 591-592; Hale's amendment was defeated 28 to 1, with only Samuel Phelps (W-VT) voting in support, Hale himself being out of the room at the time of the roll call, *CG*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 592; Ibid., 576-579, 599-602, 604.

[52] *Utica Democrat*, quoted in *National Era*, May 27, 1847; *CG*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 553; Ibid., 394.

Democratic reticence. Antislavery rhetoric had infiltrated the mainstream of American politics and threatened to expose and exacerbate the sectional tensions that party unity had previously suppressed. Democratic and Whig congressmen both felt palpable antislavery influences from their home districts and were compelled to act and speak forcefully against the extension of slavery and the threat of a growing Slave Power.

The moralistic antislavery and anti-Slave Power rhetoric used by the Proviso's supporters both demonstrated the inroads antislavery activists had made in the national political arena and suggested that increasing numbers of Northerners might be convinced to abandon their Slave Power parties. The vast majority of northern legislators not only opposed the extension of slavery, but justified this stance with uncompromising denunciations of the institution's political influences and immorality. Northern congressmen refused further concessions to the Slave Power in large part because they believed their constituents simply would no longer tolerate them. Debates over the Wilmot Proviso reveal that by 1847 Congress had become a forum for sectional controversy. This marked a new watershed for political abolitionists who had long believed Congress could be used to disseminate anti-Slave Power arguments to the northern electorate. Whether or not northern politicians ever admitted or even recognized their debts to political abolitionism mattered little to Liberty partisans. The anti-Slave Power rhetoric that abolitionists had voiced incessantly since the late 1830s had found its way into the political lexicon of most northern congressmen.

Seeing this stunning progress, many Liberty men reasoned that numerous major-party politicians might now be persuaded to accept a more complete version of the abolitionists' Slave Power argument, with its insistence on independence from the proslavery Whig and Democratic parties. More sanguine than ever about prying antislavery Whigs and Democrats from their corrupt party allegiances, political abolitionists across the North anticipated the 1848 presidential campaign as an unparalleled opportunity to expand the Liberty Party. It remained questionable, though, whether the Slave Power's new congressional adversaries would maintain their antislavery stances under the partisan strain of a presidential contest. Seizing on the Wilmot Proviso and the intensely antislavery rhetoric of its congressional adherents, many Liberty Party leaders believed they had finally found their chance to wrest antislavery Democrats and Whigs en masse from their proslavery national organizations.

"Let the Lines be Drawn": Conscience Whig Insurgency and the 1847 Speakership Election

Despite the potential destabilizing influences of the Wilmot Proviso, most northern congressmen remained deeply committed to their party organizations. The House that convened in late 1847 had been chosen in elections conducted in the fall of 1846 through early 1847, well before the congressional controversy over slavery's extension had fully blossomed. With enthusiasm for Polk's expansionist war waning and the economy lagging, Whigs scored gains throughout the county. The Whig Party looked forward to controlling the incoming House in December of 1847, but held only the narrowest majority, opening the door for new antislavery disruptions. Over the months between the congressional elections and the opening of the 29th Congress, bitter debates over the Proviso had sharply exacerbated sectional tensions, and a few antislavery members now saw the organization of the incoming House as a valuable opportunity to advocate for antislavery legislation.

Antislavery Conscience Whigs recognized that the speakership election offered a chance to publicly avow antislavery principles, and Charles Sumner consequently advised Giddings, "Let the lines be drawn … *in the organization of the House*."[1] Since most Whigs opposed the Mexican War, or supported it hesitantly and unenthusiastically, many northern Whigs had successfully campaigned as opponents of Slave Power aggressions in the Southwest. Frustrated Liberty men meanwhile blamed this hypocritical posturing for denying the Liberty Party droves of potential converts. Despite their supposed opposition to slavery extension and the Mexican War, few Northern Whigs seemed ready to stake the organization of the House on the slavery question, and most remained willing as ever to continue appropriating money for war supplies. In this sectionally-charged atmosphere, Representatives Joshua Giddings, John G. Palfrey and Amos Tuck cast controversial protest votes. In voting against Whig nominee Robert Winthrop, Conscience Whigs Giddings and Palfrey demonstrated the deepening tensions within the northern Whig Party.[2]

After long-serving Ohio Whig Samuel Vinton declined to be a candidate for speaker, the House Whig caucus nominated Boston's Robert Winthrop, a conservative "Cotton Whig" whom southern moderates were willing to tolerate. While Winthrop had voted for the Wilmot Proviso, his action at the 1847 Massachusetts state Whig Convention had reassured southern Whigs and severely antagonized Massachusetts Conscience men. There, Winthrop had led the opposition to Palfrey's proposed resolution that the state party should refuse to support any presidential candidate who did not pledge himself against the extension of slavery.[3]

Because Winthrop had failed to forcefully resist congressional support for the Mexican War, Giddings did not trust him to appoint committees that would promote peace and favor

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[1] Charles Sumner (CS) to Joshua Giddings (JG), Dec. 1, 1847, in *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 1: 202.

[2] For a brief account of these developments focused primarily on Palfrey, see Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 219-221. For more detail see *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 141-146, on Giddings, and Frank Otto Gatell, "Palfrey's Vote, the Conscience Whigs, and the Election of Speaker Winthrop," in *The New England Quarterly* 31 (Jun. 1958), 218-231, on Palfrey.

[3] *Boston Daily Whig* (*BDW*), Oct. 13, 16, 1847; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jan. 31, 1848.

antislavery legislation. Declining to attend the Whig caucus, Giddings instead waited at the Washington train station for antislavery Massachusetts "Conscience Whig" John G. Palfrey, while their ostensible co-partisans met to nominate Winthrop. On Giddings's suggestion, Palfrey sent Winthrop a note inquiring whether, if elected Speaker, he would arrange key committees so as to promote antislavery legislation. Winthrop refused to make "pledges of any sort," confirming Palfrey and Giddings's inclination to vote against the Bostonian. Amos Tuck, the New Hampshire ex-Democrat elected by an antislavery cross-party coalition of Liberty men, Whigs, and "Independent" Democrats, happily offered to join them, noting that "Mr. Giddings was in extacies of joy at the resolution which he found on the part of Palfrey and myself."[4]

On the first ballot, Winthrop, opposed by Giddings, Palfrey, Tuck, and two southern Whigs, fell three votes short of a majority. On the next ballot he failed by only one, as one of the Southerners switched his vote to Winthrop and the other abstained. On the decisive third ballot, South Carolina Democrat Isaac Holmes, "a rabid Calhoun Democrat," who had "been electioneering for Winthrop" all week, dramatically donned his coat and exited the chamber. Then on that final vote, Lewis Charles Levin, the single member from the anti-Catholic American Party, switched his vote to Winthrop, and the Boston conservative eked out a bare majority after a nearly three-hour contest.[5]

The controversy over Winthrop's election had further opened festering wounds between antislavery radicals like Giddings and more conservative northern Whig politicians. Leading Whigs berated Palfrey and Giddings (and sometimes Tuck), and the controversy continued even after Winthrop's ascension to the Speaker's chair. Attacks from the Whig leadership were met in turn by both Conscience Whig and Liberty rebuttals praising the insurgents' "noble stand." Massachusetts Conscience leaders Sumner and Charles Francis Adams assured Giddings and Palfrey that their votes were "perfectly correct," and praised their "courage, firmness & conscience" as having "struck a strong blow for freedom." Giddings proudly replied to Sumner, "It has been my object since I reached Washington to draw the Line of seperation between the *men* and the *Doughfaces* of the north. Our vote for speaker was the first important step."[6]

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[4] JG to Seth Gates, Dec. 4, 1847, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America), Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library; John G. Palfrey (JGP) to Charles F. Adams (CFA), Dec. 6, 1847, Adams Family Papers, Microfilm Edition, Part IV: "Letters Received and other Loose Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; JGP to Winthrop (draft), Dec. 5, 1847, Palfrey Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; As Amos Tuck summarized, Palfrey asked whether Winthrop would "so constitute the Committee on Foreign relations, and of ways and means, as to favor Peace; the committee on the Territories, so as to favor the prohibition of Slavery therein; the Committee on the Judiciary, so as to favor the repeal of the law of Feb. 12, 1793, denying a trial by jury to persons claimed as fugitive slaves; the Committee on the District of Columbia so as to favor the abolition of slavery and the slave trade therein." Tuck to George G. Fogg, Dec. 6, 1847, George G. Fogg Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS), Concord; Winthrop to JGP, Dec. 5, 1847, Palfrey Family Papers.

[5] *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 30th Congress, 1st Session, 2; *National Era*, Dec. 9, 1847; Tuck to Fogg, Dec. 6, 1847, George G. Fogg Papers; JGP to CFA, Dec. 6, 1847, Adams Family Papers, Letters Received; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jan. 31, 1848; For the story about Holmes walking out, see Gatell, "Palfrey's Vote," 223-224.

[6] LT to JGP, Dec. 16, 1847, JGP papers; CFA to JG, Dec. 8, 1847, JG Papers; CS to JGP, Dec. 10, 1847, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:203-204; JG to CS, Jan. 15, 1848, *The Papers of Charles Sumner* (CS Papers), Houghton Library, Harvard University, microform edition, ed. Beverly Palmer (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988); For some other examples of Conscience Whig sentiments see, Stephen C. Phillips to JGP, Dec. 9, 1847, JGP Papers, *Ashtabula Sentinel* Dec. 27, 1847, Jan. 3, 1848, and *BDW* Dec. 10, 11, 14, 16, 1847, Mar. 20, 22, 1848, and for Liberty views, see *National Era*, Dec. 9, Dec. 16, 1847, and Boston *Emancipator*, Dec. 15, 1847.

The votes of Giddings, Palfrey, and Tuck suggested that Liberty men might very soon convince antislavery politicians to abandon their proslavery parties. To Giddings's regular Liberty challenger Edward Wade the vote offered "cheering hopes that Mr G. may be redeemed from his vassalage to party." Henry Stanton similarly saw it as evidence that Liberty men and Conscience Whigs "agree in more points than we differ in," and Boston Liberty man Henry Bowditch was "delighted" that Palfrey and Giddings voted against Winthrop, whose election was "one of the greatest disgraces that could happen to Boston." Bowditch asserted, "I knew he could not be chosen without bowing down to Slave power," and concluded after seeing Winthrop's committee assignments that "it is evident that he did so." The *Emancipator* echoed those criticisms, smearing the new speaker as a "cringing suppliant and supple tool of the Slave Power," and praising Conscience Whigs who supported the rebellious Whig congressmen.[7]

This 1847 speakership contest, though it only briefly delayed the organization of the Thirtieth House, portended more momentous divisions over slavery in future choices of speaker. Even the nomination of a non-slaveholder was no longer sufficient to attract the votes of the most radical antislavery members. The 1847 contest demonstrated that antislavery members now demanded a speaker who would promise meaningful antislavery committee appointments. This contest drew new attention to the power of the House committees on Territories, Foreign Policy, the District of Columbia, and the Judiciary to promote of policies that might relieve the federal government from the support of slavery. The rebellion of Giddings and Palfrey also heartened Liberty men who hoped to further detach antislavery men from the major parties and thereby enable the Liberty Party or some new antislavery coalition to transform national politics. The developments that ultimately eventuated in the Free Soil Party would give Giddings and a new band of allies even more power to disrupt future congresses and further highlight the political power of slaveholders and their allies, much as Liberty activists had long hoped.

[7] Edward Wade to JPH, Dec. 13, 1847, John Parker Hale Papers, NHHS; Henry B. Stanton to JG, Dec. 11, 1847, JG Papers; Henry I. Bowditch to JPH, Dec. 29, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; *Emancipator*, Dec. 22, 1847.

CHAPTER 5

Liberty Men and Creation of an Anti-Slave Power Coalition, 1846-48

As congressional controversy over the Wilmot Proviso fixated the nation's attention on the slavery question, important segments of the Liberty Party prepared the way for a broad anti-Slave Power coalition. By the spring of 1847, ongoing debates over the Proviso gave Liberty men newfound confidence that they could soon reorganize national politics around the Slave Power issue. With sectional tensions threatening to derail Whig and Democratic efforts to once again unite their partisans behind proslavery presidential tickets, Liberty leaders believed they could exploit the 1848 presidential contest to enlarge the base of support for antislavery politics. Many countenanced antislavery political action only under Liberty auspices, but others suggested that a new, and implicitly somewhat moderated, anti-Slave Power coalition might better attract new converts, challenge the major parties, and, they hoped, transform national politics. This latter coalitionist group, including Gamaliel Bailey, Salmon Chase, Henry B. Stanton, and John Greenleaf Whittier, played a vital role in the formation of the Free Soil Party in 1848. Through the long buildup to the 1848 presidential election, Liberty coalitionists made crucial strategic calculations that paved the way for a new and distinctly anti-Slave Power political coalition.

Most conventional accounts of the Free Soil Party's founding concentrate on the revolt of disgruntled Barnburner Democrats, motivated as much by an intraparty feud (rooted in longstanding grievances unrelated to the slavery question) as by antislavery political ideals, and give the impression that Liberty men largely went along with an unanticipated opportunity to form an unlikely coalition. In light of the Free Soil Party's 1848 Barnburner and Conscience Whig presidential and vice-presidential nominations and the larger Barnburner and Conscience Whig voting bases, the role of the Liberty Party is often underemphasized. However, the Free Soil Party can be best understood as the product of a conscious effort by Liberty managers and a small group of deeply antislavery Whig allies to increase the reach of anti-Slave Power politics. Undoubtedly, the numerical power of New York Barnburner Democrats gave them a powerful influence on the coalition they joined, but the seeds of the Free Soil Party predated the maturation of the Democratic schism. [1]

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[1] For example, David Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861*, (Completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.), 77-82, acknowledges Liberty elements of the Free Soil coalition only after discussing Barnburners and Conscience Whigs: "Along with these, there were also the Liberty men." Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics 1848-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), Ch. 1-4, pays closer attention to Liberty influences, especially the role of Salmon Chase, but concentrates closest on Barnburner Democrats; See also Holman Hamilton, "Election of 1848," in *History of American Presidential Elections 1789-1968*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. ed. (New York: Chelsea House, 1971): 865-920, 870-871, Chaplain Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 145-157, and Joel Silbey, *Party over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), which, in its quest to assert the enduring power of Whig and Democratic partisanship, undervalues the importance of the Free Soil Party's founding in the expansion of political antislavery, especially at the congressional level; In contrast to Silbey, Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970) argues that the slavery extension issue was crucial to the politics of the 1848 election; Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 157-162, recognizes the influential role played by Liberty coalitionists like Chase, but still overemphasizes the Jacksonian roots of popular political antislavery; Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in*

The establishment of a national organization that could shape northern politics beyond the 1848 election owed much to Liberty men who saw rising anti-extensionism as offering a valuable opportunity to reorient national politics around the issues of slavery and the Slave Power. In the final run-up to the founding of the new party, Joshua Leavitt highlighted this goal:

> "*The Slave Power* is now indissolubly incorporated in the political nomenclature of this country, & will be inscribed indelibly upon the historic page. We must make the most of that word. It is not necessary that they who use it should ever know who taught it to them—the name & the thing—but the incessant use of the term will do much to open the eyes & arouse the energies of the people. *The Slave Power*! … We must keep our eyes upon this, & familiarize the people to the facts; and must not be drawn by any acts into a compromise with the Slave Power. We must rescue the government from the control of the Slave Power, as slavery has evidently fastened its death-grasp upon the political institutions of the country, we shall doubtless be compelled to pursue this controversy until slavery itself shall be no more."[2]

Liberty Strategic Debates and the Vision of Broadened Antislavery Politics

By 1846, many Liberty partisans were growing anxious about the third party's slowing rate of growth. As vote totals stagnated (although they rarely dropped off significantly) in many states, some Liberty men grew concerned. This was especially true in parts of New York state and the West, where plurality election rules made wielding a narrow balance of power a far less promising strategy than in the majority-rule New England states (and some of them were in the process of eliminating majority requirements for certain offices, precisely because of the Liberty menace). At the same time, though, the rising antislavery sentiment among northern Whigs and Democrats heartened many Liberty men who began to envision broader anti-slavery action. The Hale movement's success had heightened many Liberty men's aspirations for a new antislavery coalition, the Wilmot Proviso debates stirred dissension over slavery in both major parties, and

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American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1989, orig. 1967), 181-189, describes the Free Soil Party as a betrayal of Liberty Party ideals, and thereby obscures the important promise that coalition offered for Liberty men who had long aimed at reorienting national political debate around defeating the Slave Power; Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), Ch. 4, similarly sees the Liberty move into the Free Soil Party as politically unsuccessful and ideologically compromising, especially in forcing Liberty men to abandon the most radical antislavery interpretations of the Constitution, the importance and prevalence of which I think Johnson overstates; The best discussion of coalitionist movements among Liberty men remains Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), Ch. 6-8. This chapter builds on Sewell's contributions by placing the emergence of the Free Soil Party in the context of the well-elaborated Liberty anti-Slave Power partisan arguments that I have described in previous chapters.

[2] Joshua Leavitt (JL) to Salmon P Chase (SPC), Jul. 7, 1848, Salmon P. Chase Papers (SPC Papers), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia.

the near defeat of Winthrop's speakership bid demonstrated just how tenuously the Slave Power held on to its national political prerogatives.[3]

In this exciting political climate a handful of coalition-minded Liberty leaders looked to broaden their party by incorporating large numbers of antislavery dissidents from the major parties into the anti-Slave Power movement, if necessary by forming a new political coalition to replace the Liberty Party. In these efforts they found a few eager antislavery "Conscience Whig" or "Young Whig" partners, mostly in Massachusetts and Northeastern Ohio. Charles Sumner and Joshua Giddings, the leading Whig advocates of antislavery collaboration, had both already worked closely with abolitionists to promote antislavery politics. Although the Whig Party's slaveholding leadership had begun to alienate Sumner, Giddings, and their many allies, they still imagined they might pursue antislavery politics through Whig partisanship. Antislavery Northerners, they hoped, would soon seize control of the Whig Party. Most antislavery Democrats remained even more committed to old party loyalties. Political abolitionists recognized, though, that if the major parties nominated proslavery tickets in 1848, many frustrated Northerners might consider bolting. Coalition-seeking Liberty men thus worked vigorously to channel broadening anti-Slave Power sentiment into a formidable northern political movement that could shape national politics far more dramatically than the Liberty Party had.

Even before the Wilmot Proviso sowed discord in the major parties, some Liberty men, inspired by the Independent Democratic movement in New Hampshire, strategized to broaden the anti-Slave Power political coalition. Like its western neighbor, Maine had long been dominated by the Democratic Party, but Polk's proslavery war policy disturbed many Maine Democrats. The state's leading Liberty editor, Austin Willey of the *Antislavery Standard*, hoped to extend "the great and auspicious reformation" that John P. Hale had initiated in New Hampshire across the state border, but feared that "for the sake of greater numbers and earlier success, too low positions will be taken." Willey urged continued Liberty organization to draw in new converts but remained wary of "even the appearance of any compacts with the proslavery parties." John Godfrey, editor of the Liberty *Bangor Gazette* (which often bickered with the *Standard* over the state party's direction), aimed, with fewer reservations, to reorganize Maine politics along similar lines as in New Hampshire. Godfrey entreated Hale's direct support and assured Hale that though they were "not in name politicians of the same party," their shared desire for "the overthrow of the accursed slave power" gave Hale the "power to do in this state [Maine] what no other man can," especially by reaching out to Maine's Proviso Democrats.[4]

While Maine Liberty men failed to persuade Democratic leaders to join them in a new antislavery coalition for the 1846 election, Liberty gubernatorial candidate Samuel Fessenden

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[3] Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, clearly identifies this trend of mounting Liberty anxieties, but may slightly overstate his case, as in many states Liberty leaders remained optimistic about winning new converts, not least because of the example of the Hale movement in New Hampshire; In 1845, Connecticut's legislature modified its election laws so that a plurality on the first runoff would decide the winner in state representative contests, Ibid. 133, and Maine also switched to only requiring a plurality for state representative elections in 1847, Hallowell, Me. *Liberty Standard*, May 18, 1848. In 1848, Vermont passed a law stipulating that congressional elections would initially require a majority, but if no candidate achieved a majority, the first runoff election would choose a congressman by plurality, Charles L. Williams, *The Compiled Statutes of the State of Vermont* (Burlington: Chauncey Goodrich, 1851), 59; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st Through 105th Congresses* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 1998), 157.

[4] Austin Willey to John Parker Hale (JPH), Jul. 25, 1846, John Parker Hale Papers (JPH Papers), New Hampshire Historical Society (NHHS), Concord; *Liberty Standard*, Sept. 3, 1846. See also Ibid. Sept. 17, 1846; John E. Godfrey to JPH, Jul. 22, 1846, JPH Papers.

still won over many former Democratic voters. Increasing the Liberty vote total by over three thousand to 9343, 13 percent of the total, Fessenden defeated the choice of a governor by popular election, winning, by Liberty estimates, "two thirds of our gain this year … from the democratic Party." Liberty men elsewhere celebrated that Maine antislavery men, like their New Hampshire counterparts, had "produced a schism which has prostrated the proslavery Democracy."[5]

The Hale movement's success in New Hampshire and the progress of Maine Liberty men in recruiting Democrats encouraged coalitionist national Liberty leaders like John Greenleaf Whittier. Whittier explained to Hale that "we want some common ground for all who love Liberty & abhor Slavery to unite upon." Whittier viewed Massachusetts Conscience Whigs like Charles Sumner and Charles Francis Adams as "almost with us" and suggested a new "great *League of Freedom*." Working together, Liberty men and their allies could make "Abolition of Slavery the leading & paramount political question" in national politics. While such a league as Whittier envisioned might be a departure from Liberty partisanship, it would continue to insist on "no voting for Slave holders" or "men who are in political fellowship with Slave-holders." "Nothing can be done," Whittier asserted, "until a union is formed of all who love liberty." At the local level too, Whittier thus strove to engineer a cross-party movement in Amesbury, Massachusetts, calling for "All Free Soil voters" to join the town Liberty caucus.[6]

In Ohio, Whig congressman Joshua Giddings pursued the alternative strategy of trying to recruit Liberty men into the Whig antislavery ranks. Giddings first proposed formal cooperation between Ohio Liberty men and Whigs days before Wilmot introduced his Proviso. Giddings insisted that northern Whigs were "generally prepared to take the right ground" and suggested a meeting between Ohio Liberty leaders and leading antislavery Whigs to issue a joint public message advocating repeal of Ohio's discriminatory Black Laws. Through the summer of 1846, Giddings badgered Salmon Chase to support this plan so they could also begin working together for "repeal of all Laws of the federal govt that sustains slavery," at least until they could get out "from under the heel of the slave-power."[7]

Chase and many fellow Ohio Liberty leaders desperately hoped to broaden the reach of anti-Slave Power politics. They took Giddings's overtures seriously but ultimately rejected them. Liberty men could not participate in any conference that would appear Whig-controlled. Giddings underscored his sympathy for the Liberty anti-Slave Power program with his genuine enthusiasm for Gamaliel Bailey's planned Liberty paper in Washington: "*We* [emphasis added] ought to have had a paper there long since." Notwithstanding Giddings's good will, Ohio Liberty leaders continued to oppose formal collaboration with the Whig Party. Former Congressman Edward Hamlin, editor of the antislavery Whig Cleveland *True Democrat*, had offered a similar

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[5] Letter from Samuel Fessenden to John Keep, from *Cleaveland American*, quoted in Montpelier *Green Mountain Freeman* (*GMF*), Jan. 7 1847; *Essex Transcript* quoted in *GMF*, Jan. 7, 1847; Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 107-109; Austin Willey, *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation* (Portland, Me.: Brown, Thurston, and Hoytt, Fogg & Donham, 1886), 304-307.

[6] John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW) to Joseph Sturge, Nov. 28, 1846, in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier,* ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 2:44; JGW to JPH, Jul. 16, 1846, Hale-Chandler Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Special Collections Library, Hanover, N.H.; JGW to John Gorham Palfrey (JGP), Sept. 21, 1846, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:36-37; JGW to Alden Bradford Morse, [September] 28 [1846], in Ibid., 2:39.

[7] Joshua Giddings (JG) to SPC, Aug. 3 1846, SPC Papers, HSP; JG to SPC, Aug. 31, 1846, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), 2:127-28; See also James B. Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 117-118.

proposition at the June 1846 North-Western Liberty Convention held in Chicago. In response Bailey praised the goal of uniting "Anti-slavery members of all parties, North and South," but criticized proposals "for a union between Liberty men and Whigs." Bailey asserted that Liberty men would happily join antislavery men from *both* parties "in National council, to consult on the great question." Formally coalescing with either, however, remained impossible as long as each refused "to incorporate genuine anti-slavery principles into its creed or practice."[8]

Chase, unlike Giddings, believed that Ohio Whig leaders only sought "the cooperation of the Liberty men … in consideration of certain advantages to be secured" for themselves. Chase could not "accede to any political union, which is not based upon the substantial principles & measures of the Liberty men." Chase also sympathized with Democrats on issues unrelated to slavery (such as in his opposition to protective tariffs and support for a hard-money policy) and expressed some hope of joining antislavery Democrats in a new "True Democratic" party, but it remained all too clear that few Democrats were ready to renounce the Slave Power. In October of 1846, Chase reiterated to Giddings the well-worn Liberty analysis of the Slave Power's control over both major parties, explaining that since the Whigs and Democrats were "national parties admitting no anti slavery article into their creed," neither could be counted on for "uncompromising hostility to slavery & the Slave Power." Thus Chase would continue to "act with and in" the Liberty Party as the "Only Party, with which I agree as to Principle & action in relation to the paramount political question before the country."[9]

By the spring of 1847, though, Chase lamented to Hale that "I see no prospect of greater future progress" for the Liberty Party. "As fast as we can bring public sentiment right," Chase continued, "the other parties will approach our ground, and keep sufficiently close to it, to prevent any great accession to our numbers." While Chase soon became the most vigorous proponent of a new national antislavery party, he first floated the idea of a cross-party "Anti-slavery League" whose members would pledge to vote only for antislavery candidates. By "operating upon both parties from without" this league might "accomplish the great work of overthrowing slavery."[10]

Gamaliel Bailey shared Chase's desire for collaboration with antislavery Whigs and Democrats. And Bailey's voice reached thousands. Beginning publication of the Washington *National Era* on January 7, 1847, Bailey soon became the Liberty Party's preeminent opinion-shaper. Controlling the first truly national Liberty paper, and with access to fast-moving political developments in Washington, Bailey played a vital role in promoting a new antislavery

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[8] Ann Arbor *Signal of Liberty*, Aug. 8, 1846; Cincinnati *Weekly Herald and Philanthropist*, Aug. 26, 1846.

[9] SPC to JG, Aug. 15, 1846, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:125-126; JG to SPC, Sept. 18, 1846, SPC Papers, HSP; SPC to JG, Sept. 23, 1846, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:130-131; SPC to JG, Oct. 20, 1846, in Ibid. 2:133-134; Chase's Democratic affinities are manifested in his letters Chase to Hale, Jan. 30, 1846, in Ibid., 2:122-123 and SPC to JG, Aug. 15, 1846, in Ibid., 2:125-126; For more on Chase's interest in the idea of a "True Democratic" party and his attraction to Jacksonian economic stances, see John Niven, *Salmon P. Chase: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95-96, and Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil*, 155-159. I think, however, that Earle overemphasizes the degree to which these True Democratic coalitionist leadings reflected the depth of Chase's desire to promote Jacksonian economic policies. And it should be noted that one of the most important antislavery *Whig* newspapers in Ohio was Edward Hamlin's *True Democrat*.

[10] SPC to JPH, May 12, 1847, Papers of Salmon P. Chase, Library of Congress (LC). Chase had also discussed this antislavery league concept at the 1846 Chicago North-Western Liberty Convention, Ann Arbor *Signal of Liberty*, Jul. 4, 1846 See also, Niven, *Salmon P. Chase*, 99-102.

coalition. Bailey's paper developed a wide readership across the North and Border South and made him a powerful advocate for broadened antislavery politics.[11]

Still, most Liberty men were not ready to give up their organization. In some places, there seemed to be good reason for optimism. In the face of the Wilmot Proviso enthusiasm, Vermont Liberty men celebrated that "the foundation principles of the Liberty party are forcing themselves upon the whole people of the free States." During the winter of 1847, Vermont Liberty men aimed to capitalize on this political climate by calling "a mass Convention of the friends of Liberty, & True, Independent Democracy" and sought to attract a wide audience with a keynote speech by the fugitive slave and Liberty leader Henry Bibb. The party urged an "energetic campaign against the pro-slavery parties in Vermont," and skilled ex-slave orator Henry Garnet traversed the state on behalf of the Liberty cause. Vermonters rewarded these efforts with enough Liberty votes to elect nineteen Liberty men (compared to twelve a year before) to the lower house of the state legislature and prevented the candidates for state executive offices from winning a popular majority.[12]

Even in Chase's Ohio there were cheering signs. In 1846, the Ohio Liberty Party polled its highest vote ever, for gubernatorial candidate and Chase ally Samuel Lewis, even though the total vote statewide had dropped off significantly from the 1844 presidential election. Liberty men especially gained on the Western Reserve, vindicating Liberty leaders' decision not to ally with Giddings.[13] Most importantly, though, the fiery anti-Slave Power rhetoric that had come to dominate congressional debate over the Wilmot Proviso signaled the potential for an expanded national antislavery politics.

With the enticing defections in the northern Whig and Democratic ranks, many Liberty leaders began working even harder to prepare the antislavery rank and file of all parties for a new anti-Slave Power coalition. Those who angled for a new coalition as well as Liberty men who aimed to promote anti-Slave Power politics through the established Liberty organization *both* steadfastly demanded an antislavery presidential ticket. By the summer of 1847, the "organs of the South" had made clear that slaveholders would "support no man but a determined friend of slavery, and sworn opponent of the Wilmot Proviso." Political abolitionists urged that the North must also "for once, be prepared for the conflict." New Hampshire Liberty men insisted that with both national parties still "in alliance with slaveholders," antislavery Democrats, Whigs, and "Independent men of whatever name" should refuse to support any "*candidate belonging to a party that supports slaveholders for office*." Gamaliel Bailey, as he personally observed the incessant congressional quarrel over the Proviso, likewise asserted that "the old parties" were "perfectly indifferent to what is in fact the true issue before the country—Shall slavery be extended by the power of the General Government, or not?"[14]

Since coalition-minded Liberty men felt assured, even a year in advance, that the major parties would again field proslavery presidential tickets, some advocated postponing the Liberty

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[11] Gamaliel Bailey (GB) to SPC, Sept. 14, 1847, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:156-158; On the founding of the *National Era* and its early success, see Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), Ch. 7.

[12] *GMF*, Mar. 4, 18, May 27, Jun. 24, Sept. 16, Oct. 21, 1847. Among Vermont Liberty men, however, there was some disappointment that the total third party-vote dropped off by three percent owing to "general apathy". The Whig vote decreased by six percent, while the Democrats increased their total three percent.

[13] Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 185-86.

[14] *GMF*, Jun. 3, 1847; "Advice to Honest Men" quoted from Concord, N.H. *Granite Freeman* in *GMF*, Jan. 28, 1847; *National Era* Apr. 15, 1847; Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey*, 109-112.

nomination until after the major parties nominated. Bailey's *Era* argued that waiting until after the major party conventions would enable the Liberty Party to select candidates likely to attract disaffected elements of the other parties. Bailey's opponents insisted on an 1847 convention for precisely the same reason, fearing that waiting for political developments might pave the way for the party's collapse. Joshua Leavitt's *Emancipator* provided the strongest voice advocating an early convention and aggressively denounced Liberty leaders who disagreed. With Liberty principles and candidates publicly avowed, major-party deserters would join the Liberty Party on its merits, not to manipulate it for their own political purposes.[15]

Bailey insisted, however, that the Liberty rank and file shared his opposition to an early convention. Chase joined Bailey's push for postponement, expecting that "events of the [coming] Winter" would "convince many of the necessity of independent action" and "prepare the way for the organization, not of a Liberty Party, exactly, but of an Independent Party … making Slavery or Freedom its paramount issue." Chase sought to avoid an early nomination that might discourage secessions from the old parties and harbored hopes of putting Senator John P. Hale at the head of a national movement of antislavery "Independents." To their dismay, though, the Liberty national committee decided on an early convention by a clear majority.[16]

At the root of this controversy over the Liberty convention date was a simmering disagreement over how to channel the broadening antislavery impulse. Coalitionists like Chase hoped Liberty men could remain available to join a new anti-Slave Power coalition. Leavitt, by contrast, accustomed to electoral battles with Massachusetts's formidable antislavery Whigs, insisted that political abolitionists could only challenge proslavery control of the government by maintaining the Liberty organization. To promote new accessions to the party, Leavitt wanted a presidential candidate in the field early. Edward Wade, hardened by political competition with Western Reserve Whigs (especially his own brother Benjamin and Joshua Giddings), similarly believed that the major parties required "further breaking down under the Liberty hammer before they will dissolve into elements out of which a *real* Liberty party can be founded."[17]

As important for the future of Liberty politics were the party's debates about its next presidential candidate. On this question, the *Emancipator* proved far more flexible. The *National Era* had been working hard to build enthusiasm for setting John P. Hale up as the anti-Slave Power champion, whether in the Liberty Party or a new broadened coalition. By the summer of 1847, the *Emancipator* was willing to go along, dropping its original preference for Samuel Fessenden. Hale had been the darling of the abolitionist lecture circuit since late 1846 and was beset with requests from Liberty managers to speak at rallies across New England. Tapping Hale, a more viable candidate allied but not officially affiliated with the Liberty Party, would clearly expand the Liberty appeal and encourage support from outside the party's ranks.[18]

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[15] Waukesha *American Freeman*, Oct. 13, 1847; *Emancipator*, Apr. 14, 21, May 12, Jun. 6, 1847; For other examples of Liberty fears that efforts to postpone the Liberty nomination aimed at promoting a "lax, compromising policy," see also *Liberty Standard*, May 20, 1847, Letter of Kiah Bailey in *GMF*, May 28, 1847, and *GMF*, Jun. 24, 1847; *National Era*, Apr. 15, 29, May 13, 1847; For examples of these contrasting points of view from rank-and-file Liberty men, see John Thomas to SPC, Jun. 11, 1847, and John Cochran to SPC, Jun. 21, 1847, Papers of SPC, LC.

[16] *National Era*, Apr. 29, May 13, Sept. 16, 1847; SPC to Edward Wade, Jun. 23, 1847, Papers of SPC, LC; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 136, puts the committee's vote at 7 to 2. Enumerating the letters included in *Emancipator* Jun. 23, 30, 1848, Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 409, fn. 16, instead counts eight for the early convention and three against.

[17] Edward Wade to SPC, Jul. 7, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP.

[18] *Emancipator*, Mar. 31, Aug. 11, Sept. 1 1847; For examples of Liberty leaders requesting Hale appearances, see the following letters from JPH Papers: Henry B. Stanton to JPH, Jul. 21, 1846, Daniel Hoit to JPH, Aug. 6, 1846, Stanton to JPH, Sept. 4, 1846, Joseph Poland to JPH, Sept. 10, 1846, Henry I. Bowditch to JPH, Sept. 15, 1846;

While some Liberty leaders expressed doubt about nominating such a recent convert, many argued that Hale now stood firmly with Liberty men in opposition to the Slave Power and independence from the major parties. Stanton worked tirelessly to make the case for Hale. A new associate editor at the *Emancipator* beginning in August 1847, Stanton gradually took over many of Leavitt's editorial roles and looked much more favorably than Leavitt on Bailey and Chase's coalitionist leanings. Lamenting the "unpleasant discussions" and excessive emphasis on the convention date, Stanton was far more concerned with the choice of candidate. Stanton did not believe it necessary that Hale "swallow every particle" of the abolitionist creed and very much hoped he would take a strong enough antislavery stance to win Liberty support.[19]

In August of 1847, Stanton helped arrange for Hale and his close allies George Fogg, editor of New Hampshire's leading Hale newspaper, and Congressman Amos Tuck to meet with several northeastern Liberty leaders. The sterling Liberty group that Stanton assembled to vet Hale included the other members of the *Emancipator* editorial staff, Leavitt and Joseph C. Lovejoy (brother of the martyred Elijah Lovejoy and of Illinois Liberty politician Owen Lovejoy), along with John Greenleaf Whittier, Austin Willey, and Lewis Tappan. Before the meeting, Stanton privately assured Hale of the "very strong desire among a great many leading anti Slavery men, that you should be a presidential candidate in 1848."[20]

After the "friendly conference" in East Boston, these eastern Liberty leaders were satisfied with Hale's antislavery commitment. Whittier predicted that "the nomination of Hale would combine all the scattered fragments of anti Slavery in the country." As long as Hale would promise to accept a Liberty nomination, he seemed sure to receive it. While Leavitt and many other Liberty leaders had dismissed the efforts of Chase and Bailey to postpone the Liberty nominating convention, leaders on both sides of that debate now had a shared interest in making Hale the antislavery presidential candidate.[21]

Praising Hale's "hearty devotion to the principles and objects of the Liberty Party," Lewis Tappan, Stanton, Willey, Whittier, and Philadelphia's Charles D. Cleveland together requested permission to submit Hale's name to the Liberty nominating convention. Liberty men anticipated "great accessions from the Democratic and Whig ranks" if they could make Hale their candidate. Stanton deemed Hale "the strongest man we can bring out." Stanton excitedly predicted that Hale "would get all the Liberty party votes—a great many independent whig votes—all the independent democrats in New England," and also the votes of increasingly disgruntled antislavery Democrats in New York, who had pinned their hopes on supporting recently deceased ex-Governor Silas Wright as their pro-Proviso party candidate.[22]

Sherman M. Booth to JPH, Oct. 16, 1846, Chauncey L. Knapp to JPH, Dec. 10, 1846, Austin Willey to JPH, Dec. 19, 1846; Stanton to JPH, Oct. 1, 1846, Hale-Chandler Papers.

[19] Leavitt announced his retirement as fulltime editor of the *Emancipator* in August of 1847, but remained an influential contributor until the spring of 1848, at which point the operation came fully under the control of publisher Curtis C. Nichols, with the aid of Joseph C. Lovejoy, *Emancipator*, Aug 18, 1847; Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt: Evangelical Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1990), 236-237.

[20] Fogg's Concord *Independent Democrat and Freeman* had been formed through the merger of the Liberty newspaper the Concord *Granite Freeman* and the *Independent Democrat*, which began as a Hale campaign paper ; Stanton to SPC, Jul. 17, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; Stanton to JPH, Jul. 6, 1847, JPH Papers.

[21] JGW to Samuel Fessenden, Jul. 26, 1847, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:93.

[22] Lewis Tappan (LT), JL, Stanton, Willey, JGW, and Charles D. Cleveland to JPH, Jul. 26, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers ; July 30, 1847, JGW to JPH, Jul. 30, 1847, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:93-94; LT to JPH, Jul. 28, 1847, enclosed in, LT et. al. to JPH, Jul. 26, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; Stanton to SPC, Jul. 17, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; Stanton to JPH, Sept. 10, 1847, JPH Papers.

It was not clear, though, whether Hale, not yet formally associated with the Liberty Party, would accept. Some of Hale's closest allies initially advised against it, and many Conscience Whigs hoped Hale would refuse a Liberty nomination so that *they* might use him to unite the antislavery elements of the North. Liberty men, however, persisted in urging Hale to accept a Liberty nomination as the best way to unify the opposition to the Slave Power. Though clearly ambivalent, Hale promised Liberty leaders that he would not "shrink from any post of duty, where I can by any possibility advance the interests of humanity." His reluctant willingness to allow the national Liberty Convention to "make such use of my name in connexion with the nomination they propose to make for President, as to them may seem best" was all the reassurance excited Liberty managers needed. Liberty papers enthusiastically promoted Hale, and supporters politicked aggressively on his behalf, few more so than Stanton and Whittier.[23]

As the Convention approached, coalitionists, especially Chase, still hoped to persuade their Party to defer its nomination. Whittier convinced an Essex County (Massachusetts) Liberty meeting to resolve in favor of delaying the nomination. Leavitt, aware of these persistent efforts to forestall a nomination, urged Chase to concede defeat, since adjourning without nominating Hale might weaken his national standing. Further delay would create the impression that Liberty men needed to "*try* Mr. Hale," and would only nominate him after observing his course in the Senate. Moreover, with Hale nominated before Congress convened, his antislavery stands in the Senate would redound to the benefit of the Liberty organization.[24]

Complicating the political abolitionist landscape during the turbulent summer of 1847, a Liberty splinter group established a new platform and made its own nominations. Since 1845 a small but growing number of Liberty men, especially in Michigan and Upstate New York, had called for expansion of the Liberty platform beyond its antislavery "one-idea." In early 1846, James Birney urged the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society to recast the state Liberty organization as a "*reform party*" advocating a dramatically weakened central government.[25]

In New York, William Goodell spearheaded a similar effort to reposition the Liberty Party as a party of universal reform. With the aid of James C. Jackson's *Albany Patriot*, Goodell won a few prominent adherents from among the Liberty leadership, including Gerrit Smith. Initially forming a "Liberty League" as an organization within the Liberty Party, in 1847 Goodell issued a call for a convention to nominate a presidential ticket on a "universal reform" platform that League members would then attempt to force on the Liberty Party proper. At Macedon Lock, New York, these abolitionists formally established the Liberty League as an independent organization and adopted a radical constitutional interpretation that declared slavery illegal everywhere. The radical political abolitionists of Upstate New York no longer trusted Liberty

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[23] Amos Tuck to JPH, Aug. 2, 1847, JPH Papers, Fogg to JPH, Aug. 3, 1847, Ibid.; After the death of Silas Wright, however, Tuck advocated that the New Hampshire Liberty convention send delegates prepared to support Hale for President to the Liberty nominating convention, as Tuck had become convinced of the "fixed fact that we stand on the only true, impregnable foundation for northern men, and Christian patriots," Tuck to JPH, Sept. 11, 1847, JPH Papers; *Liberty Standard* Sept. 23, 1847; *Emancipator*, Sept. 1, 15, 22, 1847. Stanton to JPH, Sept. 10, 1847, JPH Papers; JGW to JPH, [Nov. 2, 1847], in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:95-96; JPH to JGW, Aug. 13, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; LT to SPC, Oct. 6, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP.

[24] JGW to JPH, [Nov. 2, 1847], in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:95-96; JL to SPC, Sept. 27, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP.

[25] Birney to President of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society, Jan.1, 1846, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966, original edition 1938 by AHA), 2:990-996; On support in Michigan for broadening the platform, see Theodore Foster to Birney, Mar. 30, 1846, in, Ibid., 2:1007-1009, *Signal of Liberty*, Jul 4, 1846, and Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 115-117.

Party leaders, who now seemed "too anxious to adapt" the party "to the expectation of winning to its Standard Whigs *as Whigs* and Democrats *as Democrats*." Perhaps even more controversial than its constitutional interpretation, the Liberty League made nominations and drafted its own platform. The League's universal reform agenda advocated free trade, free (or nearly so) homesteads, and opposition to legalized monopoly, including the postal system. This contradicted the one-idea strategy that had held the Liberty Party together by putting aside policy questions unrelated to slavery and the Slave Power. In addition to its new platform, the Macedon Lock convention also nominated Smith for president.[26]

The Macedon Lock platform found sympathy in many quarters, but few were prepared to stake the national party on it. Wisconsin's Liberty paper expressed sympathy for the League's issue stances and choice of Smith, but refused to support the separate nomination, because it would drive so many Liberty voters away. Vermont abolitionists likewise dismissed the plan to add other issues to the Liberty creed and expressed disbelief that Smith had ceased to be "a firm and staunch friend of the One Idea." Alvan Stewart, who originated the radical constitutional interpretation championed by the Macedon Lock Convention, also criticized the movement to yoke secondary issues to the antislavery cause as a dangerous distraction.[27]

On October 20, 1847, about one hundred fifty national Liberty delegates convened in Buffalo. There they resoundingly voted down both Gerrit Smith's attempt to commit the party to the Liberty League's universal reform agenda and Chase's last-ditch effort to postpone the party's nominations. Stanton and Leavitt meanwhile "left no stone unturned" as they urged Liberty men to nominate Hale for president. With only Liberty Leaguers in opposition, Hale easily defeated Gerrit Smith on an informal ballot. The convention enthusiastically resolved in favor of nominating Hale and selected Ohio's Leicester King, a former Liberty gubernatorial candidate and before that an ex-Whig state senator and judge, as Hale's running mate.[28]

Liberty leaders from across the North celebrated the nomination. Leavitt was especially pleased that Hale's candidacy would provide a "rallying point" for "all who wish to resist slavery." Whittier, one of Hale's closer acquaintances among the Liberty leadership, urged him to accept at once, cheerfully assuring him that "everywhere the nomination is received with enthusiasm by the Liberty men; and many influential Whigs and Democrats are regarding it with favor." "Everything, in short," Whittier continued, "looks favorable, beyond our hopes."[29]

Hale stalled for nearly two months before formally accepting the November nomination in a letter sent on New Year's Day of 1848. While endorsing the Liberty platform, Hale also

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[26] Blue, *Free Soilers*, 8-10; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 117-120; Johnson, *Liberty Party*, 64-65; *Address of the Macedon Convention, By William Goodell, and Letters of Gerrit Smith* (Albany: S.W. Green, *Patriot* Office, 1847)

[27] *American Freeman*, Jul. 21, Aug. 25, 1847; *GMF*, Jun. 24, 1847; Quoted from Burlington, Vt. *Liberty Gazette* in *Emancipator*, Jul. 7, 1847; Alvan Stewart to Samuel Webb, Nov. 6, 1847, Alvan Stewart Papers, New York Historical Society (NYHS).

[28] John St. John to JPH, Oct. 22, 1847, JPH Papers; Stanton to JPH, Oct. 22, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; On the informal ballot, Hale's 103 votes dwarfed Gerrit Smith's 44, with 11 scattering. *National Era*, Nov. 11, 1847; LT to JPH, Oct. 27, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; Over the course of 1847, Chase had been a popular possibility for the Liberty vice presidential nominee, but Chase made clear before the Convention that a Liberty vice presidential nod did not interest him, especially because it might hamper his future efforts to seek coalition. SPC to Edward Wade, Jun. 23, 1847, Papers of SPC, LC; Flamen Ball to SPC, Sept. 1, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; JL to SPC, Feb. 21, 1848, Ibid.; SPC to Charles Sumner (CS), Sept. 22, 1847, *The Papers of Charles Sumner*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988), microform (CS Papers).

[29] Willey to JPH, Nov. 5, 1847, JPH Papers; Titus Hutchinson to JPH, Nov. 9, 1847, JPH Papers; *GMF*, Oct. 28, 1847; JL to JPH, Nov. 9, 1847, JPH Papers; JGW to JPH, [Nov. 8, 1847], in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:96-97.

foresaw the emergence of a new coalition to replace the Liberty Party. Hale noted that the Liberty Convention had "made provision for the reassembling of another Convention" if "unforeseen contingencies and emergencies" created new opportunities to unite "the good & true of every party." Hale asserted that he would be "most glad, with the consent of those friends who have placed my name before the people, to enrol myself among the humblest privates in the hosts who will rally under such a banner." Relieved that Hale's letter left open the possibility that he could step aside for a broader movement, Liberty coalitionists continued to prepare for the "unforeseen contingencies and emergencies" Hale mentioned.[30]

Both coalitionists and purists among the Liberty leadership appreciated the opportunities that would grow out of having, for the first time, a prominent congressional politician as their standard-bearer. Long committed to inciting congressional controversy over slavery, Liberty men emphasized Hale's "most important position before the country." Illinois's leading Liberty journalist urged Hale to use his Senate seat to raise an antislavery "feeling" in the electorate, and Stanton reminded Hale that he was in position to "lead the great anti slavery movement of the country." When Hale then delivered a dramatic Senate speech against enlisting ten new regiments for the Mexican War, the *Era* praised his "boldness" in defense of "Truth and Justice and Freedom," and the *Emancipator* office published 15,000 copies of the speech. Leavitt conceded that although Hale was "not so thoroughly identified with the Liberty party as I might wish," he was "as fully and absolutely & irrevocably alienated from the old parties, as any man could desire." Moreover, as such a recent convert, Hale benefited from being "entirely clear of that intense odium which clings … to all our old warriors."[31]

Major Party Schisms and Coalition Opportunity

Observing the continued congressional wrangling over slavery, Liberty coalitionists recognized the disaffection of many staunch Proviso advocates from their party organizations. Antislavery Whigs, especially in Massachusetts and northern Ohio, were growing more and more receptive to a national coalition, and New York Barnburner Democrats also seemed increasingly frustrated with conservative co-partisans. Gamaliel Bailey, on scene in Washington to observe congressional debates and collaborate with antislavery congressmen as Leavitt had in prior years, especially appreciated the tensions within the major parties. Leading antislavery Whigs like Charles Francis Adams, Joshua Giddings, Edward Hamlin, and Charles Sumner particularly appeared to be potentially receptive, if uncertain, allies in erecting a new national anti-Slave Power coalition. By late 1846 Sumner wrote Chase of his desire for "a new chrystallization [*sic*] of parties, in which there shall be one grand Northern party of Freedom." Sumner shared the Liberty view, even at that early date, that "there is no *real* question now before the country except the Slave-Power." That fall, in fact, Sumner had briefly considered accepting a Liberty nomination and then an Independent Whig nomination to run for Congress against Robert Winthrop. The next year, after meeting with Sumner, Chase's law partner (a Liberty man)

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[30] JPH to Samuel Lewis, Jan. 1, 1848, Hale-Chandler Papers; Henry Bowditch to JPH, Feb. 27, 1848, Ibid.

[31] Stanton to JPH, Oct. 30, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; Zebina Eastman to JPH, Mar. 15, 1848, JPH Papers; Sewell, *John P. Hale*, 109-11; *National Era*, Jan. 13, 1848; Stanton to JPH, Jan. 20, 1848, Hale-Chandler Papers; JL to SPC, Feb. 21, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP ; JL to JPH, Mar. 10, 1848, JPH Papers.

assured him that Sumner genuinely desired a "general breaking up of the old parties & … union of northern democrats, Liberties—& 'conscience' whigs."[32]

While antislavery Whigs privately discussed abandoning their party, their efforts to promote a new coalition necessarily remained limited by their belief that the Whig Party might nominate an acceptable presidential ticket. Even as antislavery Whig leaders intimated interest in coalition, they strove to place the national Whig Party on an anti-extensionist footing. Because most antislavery Whigs still believed they might dissuade their party from nominating proslavery candidates, they could not fully commit themselves to the project of a new anti-Slave Power coalition. Giddings lamented that the "constant intrigues … in regard to the Presidential candidates" made it difficult to manage the slavery extension question. Liberty coalitionists, by contrast, saw the approaching presidential election as an ideal opportunity to force the hand of antislavery factions within the major parties.[33]

Massachusetts's growing Conscience Whig group seemed the most ripe for rebellion. Hoping to guide the Massachusetts party in the 1848 presidential campaign, Conscience Whigs eagerly anticipated the 1847 state Whig convention as a chance to avow anti-extension principles, but party leaders disappointed Conscience Whigs by defeating a declaration that would have pledged the state party to support only a Proviso advocate for president. From early on, the Boston *Daily Whig*, Charles Francis Adams's Conscience organ, had insisted on a pro-Proviso ticket as a condition for the paper's continued party loyalty. Adams privately sympathized with Liberty hopes for "general and combined action," but insisted that Conscience Whigs maintained greater "confidence in the ultimate correctness of the course of the Whigs than in that of any other existing party." Through most of 1847, the *Whig* remained supportive of Kentucky slaveholder Henry Clay, fantasizing that he might finally champion the Proviso as the national convention neared. Though ultimately compelled to give up public support for Clay, Adams privately maintained an unrealistic shred of hope (as late as April 1848!) that Clay would announce support for the Proviso and then receive the Whig nomination. The *Whig*, nonetheless, responded to the South's strident unity against the Proviso much as Liberty coalitionists had—by arguing that Northerners must make "adherence to the Wilmot proviso through thick and thin … the main point around which the election of candidates for office shall be made to turn."[34]

Such a unified antislavery political movement seemed increasingly likely to Liberty coalitionists once Louisiana planter and Mexican War general Zachary Taylor became the favorite to win the Whig presidential nomination. Taylor first emerged as a possible candidate of a southern cross-party movement. Conscience Whigs thus saw Whig interest in Zachary Taylor, a political novice who had never voted, as signaling that Whig leaders would acquiesce in southern demands that the party reject the Wilmot Proviso. Preventing Taylor's nomination thus became the key condition for Conscience Whigs' continued party allegiance.[35]

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[32] Charles Sumner to SPC, Dec. 2, 1846, Papers of SPC, LC; Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 200-203; Flamen Ball to SPC, Sept. 1, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP.

[33] JG to CS, Jan. 4, 1847, CS Papers.

[34] *Boston Daily Whig* (*BDW*), Sept. 28, 29, 30, Oct. 9, 13, 1846, Aug. 24, 1847; Ibid., Dec. 31, 1846, Mar. 3, 1847; Ibid., Nov. 17, Dec. 1, 1847, Jan. 27, 1848; Charles Francis Adams (CFA) to GB, Aug. 15, 1847, Adams Family Papers, Microfilm Edition, Part II: "Letterbooks," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; CFA to JG, Apr., 21, 1848, Joshua R. Giddings Papers (JG Papers), Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform; *BDW*, Mar. 12, 1847.

[35] See Michael Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 269-274.

Initially, many antislavery Whigs, especially Joshua Giddings, doubted that Taylor could gain northern support. As the Taylor movement persisted, however, Giddings committed himself to working to "arouse and unite the north against" Taylor, believing he could do this best from within the northern Whig party. While concentrating on Ohio, where he urged that Whigs convene to demand a pro-Proviso nominee, Giddings also joined his former colleague, and now Liberty man, Seth Gates to "set the ball in motion" in western New York. All that year on the Reserve, Giddings's organ the Ashtabula *Sentinel*, condemned the Taylor movement and berated northern Whigs who seemed willing to support a slaveholder or Proviso opponent for president.[36]

More moderate antislavery Whigs voiced similar disgust at the Taylor groundswell. *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley especially hoped to avoid another slaveholding nominee, believing he might steer the party towards Ohio's anti-war Senator Thomas Corwin. More willing to compromise, though, Greeley was representative of the many modestly antislavery northern Whig managers who wielded greater national power than insurgents like Sumner and Giddings. Giddings knew that New York's leading Whigs could not be trusted, not even ostensible antislavery men like Greeley and ex-Governor William Seward, and Greeley would ultimately bear out Giddings's apprehensions by reluctantly endorsing Taylor despite Greeley's private disgust with "the putrid corpse" of his party. [37]

Charles Sumner, far more than antislavery moderates in New York—and even than Giddings—recognized the unlikelihood that a national Whig convention would "adopt candidates who are *true* on our questions." So in early 1847, Sumner, Stephen C. Phillips (a former congressman and mayor of Salem, Massachusetts), and Giddings began advocating a *popular* movement to "bring forward Corwin *at once* as a candidate for the Presidency." Sumner believed Conscience Whigs might use "an agitation on his name" to "give a direction to public sentiment." The *Boston Whig* warmly praised Corwin's vocal opposition the Mexican War, and many Conscience men did indeed rally to his support. Despite reservations about his reluctance to openly advocate the Proviso, the *Whig* long held out hope that Corwin would assume an uncompromising anti-extensionist stance and win the Whig nomination.[38]

Corwin, however, remained non-committal. Sumner explained to Corwin the "vast importance" to Conscience Whigs "that we should … not be cajoled into the simpler cry of 'no more territory.'" Corwin thus dismayed Sumner when his well-publicized speech at Carthage, Ohio advocated the No Territory policy. Sumner considered the Proviso "the beginning of the rally against the Slave-Power which will save the Union," but Corwin, northern Whigs' supposed anti-extension favorite, was stumping for the No Territory strategy—the gambit designed by southern Whigs to evade the slavery question. Giddings admitted that Corwin had spoken too much about the dangers of the Wilmot Proviso, but continued to defend him.

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[36] JG to CS, Jan. 25, Apr. 12, Jun. 2, Aug. 5, 1847, CS Papers; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Apr. 26, May 3, Jun. 14, 28, Jul. 12, 1847.

[37] Horace Greeley to Thurlow Weed, Jan. 13, 1847, Horace Greeley Miscellaneous Manuscripts, NYHS; Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, May 1, 1847, Horace Greeley Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division (NYPL), microform; JG to CS, Jul. 15, 1847, CS Papers. Giddings was especially skeptical about Thurlow Weed, JG to CS, Aug. 5, 1847, Ibid.; Greeley to Colfax, Sept. 15, 1848, Greeley Papers, NYPL. See also Greeley to CS, Jun. 25, 1848, CS Papers.

[38] CS to JG, Jan. 21, 1847, in *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 1:186-187; CS to JG, Feb. 19, 1847, Ibid., 1:187-188; 3-22-47, CS to Francis Lieber, Mar. 22, 1847, Ibid., 1:188-190; *BDW*, Feb. 16, 27, May 5, 10, Jul. 31, Sept. 1, 1847, Mar. 23, 1848; Ibid., Oct. 7, 1847, Jun., 13 1848.

Giddings optimistically imagined that Corwin might eventually come out boldly in support of the Proviso, win the presidential nomination, and redeem their party.[39]

From his Washington vantage point, Giddings predicted that "Union among northern men, will be necessary to the triumph of free principles," but he still hoped that Whigs could dictate the terms of such a union. Giddings observed that "a portion of the democratic party are quite friendly, and really desire to see the Slave power curtailed" and that many northern Whigs would refuse to accept a slaveholding candidate for *either* President or Vice President—an almost unprecedented demand (only twice had a major party nominated a ticket without at least one slaveholder, and both of those—the 1812 Federalist ticket and 1828 National Republican ticket—had lost). Sumner privately agreed that many Proviso Democrats "have come nearer to our position than our associates the Whigs" and sanguinely predicted, "They must become Abolitionists." Sumner supported a cross-party anti-Slave Power coalition, but hoped that "many of the Northern Democrats, & perhaps all of the Liberty Party would join" the antislavery Whigs. Confident that New York Democrats would eventually support an anti-extensionist union, Sumner placed especial faith in Upstate congressman Preston King, who assured Sumner that "he does not care whether the Presidential candidate is a Whig or a Democrat, *but he must be a Wilmot Proviso-man*." Sumner regretted that Liberty men had already nominated Hale, but remained in close correspondence with coalitionists like Chase. Vigorously advocating "a powerful party of Independents," Chase demanded a strong antislavery platform as the only condition for his support of a union of all "practical, dosomething, anti-slavery men."[40]

Convinced that Taylor would be the Whig nominee, Cleveland antislavery Whig Edward Hamlin became a powerful new ally for Liberty coalitionists. Hamlin worked with Chase to unite opponents of the Slave Power, believing Taylor could "be defeated only by a rally of all northern antislavery men upon the ground of opposition to slavery." Hamlin encouraged Sumner to support "a National Convention of all who are opposed to the extension of slavery," and proposed to Sumner that they initiate "a correspondence" with "anti-slavery men throughout the country" to help lay the groundwork for a national anti-Slave Power convention. Hamlin had far less hope than most Conscience men that Whigs would select strong free territory candidates. He believed a Taylor nomination might in fact be the "best thing for the cause of freedom," since it would sunder "party cords," promote "new political associations," and speed "the end of slavery" (even, Hamlin added, if it might "end in blood").[41]

As the presidential election approached, Giddings, in contrast to Hamlin, continued to imagine there was still a chance of placing Proviso supporters at the top of the Whig ticket. Through the 1848 winter, notwithstanding the machinations of Taylor supporters, Giddings remained hopeful that his party would nominate an acceptable northern candidate—either Corwin or Supreme Court Justice John McLean of Ohio, a cautiously antislavery presidential aspirant. Giddings promised Chase, though, that he and many others would desert the Whigs if

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[39] JG to CS, Feb. 21, 1847, CS Papers; CS to Thomas Corwin, Sept. 7, 1847, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:194-197; Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 267; Corwin to CS, Sept. 20, 1847, CS Papers; CS to JG, Nov. 1, 1847, 1:200-201; JG to CS, Oct. 18, 1847, CS Papers.

[40] JG to CS, Jan. 4, 1847, CS Papers; CS to JG, Jan. 21, 1847, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:186-187; JG to CS, Jan. 25, 1847, CS Papers; CS to Thomas Corwin, Sept. 7, 1847, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:194-197; CS to JG, Nov. 1, 1847, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:200-201; CS to JG, Dec. 1, 1847, in Ibid., 1:202-203; SPC to CS, Sept. 22, 1847, CS Papers.

[41] Edward S. Hamlin to SPC, Dec. 3, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; Hamlin to CS, Feb. 28, 1848, CS Papers; Hamlin to SPC, Mar. 18, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP.

Taylor received the nomination. But even in April 1848, Giddings still believed antislavery Whigs might secure the party's nomination for McLean.[42]

Proviso Democrats seemed even more hesitant than antislavery Whigs about joining any anti-Slave Power coalition. Ohio Democratic Congressman Jacob Brinkerhoff, one of the Proviso's chief architects and most uncompromising floor advocates, politely acknowledged that Chase "thought best, in order to forward *The Great Cause*, to disconnect yourself from both the great parties of the country." Brinkerhoff, however, believed he "could best advance the same Great Cause" from within the Democratic Party. The way that many northern Democrats incongruously combined anti-extensionism with Democratic partisanship can be seen in the Democrat-dominated Michigan House of Representatives's passage of a strong resolution supporting the Wilmot Proviso on the same day that forty-four of the Democratic state representatives formally endorsed their state's doughface senator Lewis Cass "as their first and favorite candidate for the Presidency."[43]

In the New York Democracy, riddled with factionalism for years already before the Wilmot Proviso, Liberty coalitionists saw more cause for optimism. By the start of 1847, an open split, partly over the Proviso, threatened to rend the party in the nation's largest state. Initially though, in the months after the Proviso's first passage, the Albany *Atlas*, the primary organ of Radical or "Barnburner" Democrats, was nearly silent on the measure.[44]

The fissure within the New York Democracy had deep roots in older disputes over patronage and state economic policy. New York Barnburners had been seething at the conservative "Hunker" wing of their party since the 1844 election. After the Democrats won both nationally and in New York, some Barnburners expressed concern about Texan slavery, and thirteen of twenty-three New York Democratic representatives voted against annexation by joint resolution. Representative Lemuel Stetson cautioned that if Congress annexed Texas by joint resolution before Polk's inauguration—as it ultimately did—proslavery interests would dominate the Polk administration. Illustrating both the persistent virulent racism among Barnburners and their awareness of the growing political cost of association with the Slave Power, Stetson predicted: "Before one year is over, democracy will have so strong a smell of niggers that ¼ of our friends will be drawn to the abolition ranks and the next contest for the Presidency would be a great sectional war between the North and South." Though some Barnburners complained about absorbing blame for annexation, most dedicated surprisingly little energy to contesting slavery's expansion before late 1846. Barnburner State Comptroller Azariah Flagg, for example, demurred when approached by some of the most aggressive New York antislavery Democrats to support anti-annexation resolutions during the 1844 campaign. Once annexation passed, Barnburners loyally supported the incoming president, publicly defending Polk's hawkish policy towards Mexico. At that point, most Barnburners were more concerned with patronage than the spread of slavery, but Polk disappointed them on that count too, making their Hunker adversary William Marcy Secretary of War, the Empire State's lone representative in Polk's cabinet.[45]

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[42] JG to CS, Jan. 28, 1848, CS Papers; JG to SPC, Mar. 6, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; JG to CS, Apr. 17, 1848, CS Papers.

[43] Jacob Brinkerhoff to SPC, Nov. 22, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; New York *Evening Post*, Feb. 16, 1848.

[44] Albany *Evening Atlas* (*Atlas*), May 3, 1847. The name "Barnburner," originally intended as a slur, analogized Radical Democrats willing to destroy their party to the story of a Dutch farmer who burnt down his barn to eliminate a rat infestation. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 62.

[45] Richards, *Slave Power*, 137-148; Lemuel Stetson to A.C. Flagg, Dec. 31, 1844, Azariah Cutting Flagg Papers, NYPL; Circular letter to Azariah C. Flagg, July 1844, Signed by George P. Barker, William C. Bryant, J.W.

The Wilmot Proviso engrafted the slavery question onto those earlier divisions. By 1847, Representative Preston King pushed his many slower-moving colleagues to boldly avow the Wilmot Proviso as their guiding principle. After reintroducing the Proviso in early 1847, King, more than any other elected Democrat, strove to make it integral to the New York party's creed, even though it might divide their organization. By the summer of 1847, King not only insisted on "the Wilmot proviso" as "an essential indispensable principle in the administration of the general Government." King also asserted that "the time for the contest between freedom and slavery on this continent has come" and assured Salmon Chase that "the democracy of the free states" would refuse to support any presidential candidate "favorable to the extension of slavery."[46]

As discord over the Proviso was overlaid onto the muddled map of preexisting controversies, the New York intraparty conflict increasingly revolved around the politics of slavery. The Albany *Atlas* praised the Proviso profusely, and William Cullen Bryant's *New York Evening Post*, the New York Democracy's most aggressive antislavery public voice, predicted that slavery would now shape all "the great political topics of the day." Liberty men welcomed the *Post*'s conclusion that "the entire institution, its morality, its expediency, its extension, its duration, are all at once sucked into the vortex of national politics." By the spring of 1847, the *Atlas* also deemed the slavery extension question the most pressing issue facing the nation.[47]

Aware of this anti-extensionist fervor, Hunkers prepared for the October 1847 state convention by designating their own delegates to contest the seats of previously elected Barnburner delegates. When the party convened in Syracuse, Hunkers seized control, defeated a proposed resolution expressing "uncompromising hostility to the extension of slavery into free territory," and controlled the selection of a state ticket. The Syracuse Convention also set the stage for contention over the presidential nomination by rejecting the "established usage" of choosing a slate of state delegates to the Democratic national convention, instead authorizing each congressional district to select its own delegates. The *Atlas* attacked this as a ploy to prevent a potentially disruptive New York delegation united in support of the Proviso.[48]

Thoroughly frustrated with their conservative co-partisans, New York Barnburners gathered in protest the next week at Herkimer (southeast of Utica). Barnburners, representing by Liberty estimates at least half the New York Democracy, lambasted the Syracuse Convention and refused to support its nominees. Electing the Syracuse nominees would, in the opinion of John Van Buren, New York attorney general and son of the ex-president, render a "verdict against freedom." The assembled Democrats proclaimed non-extension "an inseparable element" of their "political creed." Already looking to the vital role these issues would play in 1848 (notwithstanding John Van Buren's denial of being "now engaged in president-making"), Barnburners condemned the Syracuse plan for choosing national convention delegates.[49]

Edmonds, David Dudley Field, Theodore Sedgwick, Thomas W. Tucker, and Isaac Townsend, Ibid.; Flagg supported James Polk's candidacy and asserted that Texas was a matter to be dealt with only in Congress. Flagg to "Gentlemen," (Authors of July 1844 Circular), Jul. 29, 1844, Ibid.

[46] Preston King to Flagg, Sept. 24, 1847, Flagg Papers, NYPL; King to Flagg, Jan. 12, 18, Sept. 14, 1847, Ibid.; King to SPC, Aug. 16, 1847, SPC Papers, HSP; King to Gideon Welles, Sept. 11, 1847, Preston King-Simeon Smith Papers, St. Lawrence University, Canton, N.Y.

[47] *Atlas*, Jan. 18, 20, 21, 25, Feb. 3, 15, 18, 1847; *Evening Post*, quoted in *GMF*, Feb. 11, 1847; *Atlas*, Apr. 23, 1847.

[48] Ibid., Oct. 4,5,6, 1847.

[49] *Herkimer Convention; The Voice of New York!, Proceedings of the Herkimer Mass Convention of Oct. 26, 1847* (Albany *Atlas* Extra, Nov. 1847), quotes from 6, 25-26.

Coalition-minded Liberty men celebrated this rift among New York Democrats. Chase waxed eloquent about how he knew "of no event in the history of Parties in this Count[r]y, at all approaching, in sublimity & moment, the Herkimer convention—or rather the great movement of which that Convention was the most signal visible expression." Chase now felt more confident than ever about organizing "a great convention of all anti slavery men." Henry Stanton, writing from New York State "in the midst of the Wilmot Proviso Barnburners," concluded that they had "passed the Rubicon." Based on his "best informal sources," Stanton felt sure that if the 1848 Democratic candidate was "hostile to them & the Proviso, then they will lay open a wide field for us to enter & cultivate," and Barnburner managers concurred "that a dough-face cannot get the vote of this state for President in 1848." Stanton conceded that a desire to avenge Hunker desertions of Martin Van Buren and ex-Governor Silas Wright motivated many Barnburners, but he believed they would "stand their ground none the less firm for that." Stanton even hoped they might support Hale as a national anti-extension candidate. By March of 1848, Stanton asserted "that there is no prospect of a healing of the breach in this State between the branches of the democracy" and considered Barnburners as "Missionary ground" for Liberty men to convert.[50]

To the further delight of political abolitionists, Democratic Parties elsewhere in the North squabbled over whether to commit their state parties to the Proviso, although none of those dissensions matured into a formal division as in New York. In the Vermont Democratic Convention, party leaders attacked the majority's support for the Proviso as "cowardly yielding to abolitionism," but, as the state Liberty paper happily reported, "the young democracy came manfully to the rescue." Massachusetts antislavery Democrat Amasa Walker attempted to force his state party to vote on a resolution endorsing the Proviso, but party managers evaded the question. Chase urged somewhat receptive antislavery Democratic acquaintances to promote a similar rebellion in Ohio, but the party there lacked the old fissures present in New York.[51]

Liberty men, still convinced that both parties would ignore the Proviso and nominate proslavery candidates, worked to lay the groundwork for a new movement. When increasingly discomfited antislavery Democrats and Whigs were finally ready to abandon their parties, preparations for a new coalition would already be well underway. With this in mind, Stanton urged Hale to privately woo the Barnburners. More importantly, Chase began working to organize free territory meetings that would convene shortly after the national nominating conventions. Chase exulted at the "augury of approaching union, among the true & earnest lovers of freedom of all parties," and argued that the "best means of concentrating anti-slavery effort" would be "to assemble in National Convention" after the major party conventions. Chase ecumenically assured Sumner that he would advocate endorsing the Whig or Democratic candidate if either took "decided ground against the extension of slavery." This private suggestion flew in the face of years of Liberty insistence on the Slave Power's corruption of both parties, but Chase had no expectation that either would choose such a candidate. Chase knew that both would likely "nominate men, not to be depended on for such opposition to slavery extension," which would allow the antislavery convention to make its own nominations.[52]

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[50] Stanton to JPH, Oct. 30, 1847, Hale-Chandler Papers; SPC to CS, Dec. 2, 1847, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:160-162; Flagg to John A. Dix, Nov. 13, 1847, John A. Dix Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University, New York (Columbia RBML); Stanton to JPH, Mar. 2, 1848, JPH Papers.

[51] *GMF*, Oct. 28, 1847; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 120-121; SPC to Edwin M. Stanton, Jan. 9, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:163-165.

[52] Stanton to JPH, Mar. 2, 1848, JPH Papers; SPC to CS, Feb. 19, 1848, CS Papers.

By late March, Chase was pre-circulating to potential allies a public call for a people's convention in Columbus in June after the major party nominating conventions. Joined by fellow Cincinnati Liberty leaders Samuel Lewis and Stanley Matthews, several prominent Cincinnati Whigs, and one Democrat, Chase beseeched antislavery men "to be ready, if need be, to suspend, for a time, ordinary party contentions, and unite … for the holy cause of Freedom and Free Labor." Since both parties seemed intent on nominating candidates who would "favor, either by active co-operation, or silent connivance, the designs of the Slave Power," the signers demanded that antislavery men prepare in advance to "resist, by all constitutional means, the extension of Slavery into the territories." Assembled together, a convention of all "who prefer Freedom to Slavery and Free Territory to Slave Territory" could either endorse a worthy major party nomination, or, more likely, field a new ticket to challenge the Slave Power.[53]

Giddings showed interest and advised Chase that the proposed convention should rest "upon the principle of supporting the Willmot Proviso." Giddings feared the terms antislavery or abolitionist might "frighten people," although he *was* amenable to a platform based on ending all federal support for slavery. As Chase urged Sumner to initiate a similar movement in Massachusetts, Sumner also advocated focusing on the Wilmot Proviso "because it has a peculiar practical interest at the present moment, while its discussion would," as antislavery men had already seen in congressional debates, "of course, raise the whole question of Slavery." Meanwhile, John G. Palfrey suggested an analogous "meeting of the friends of the Proviso" in Washington, but Giddings persuaded him that "the Democrats are not yet prepared for it."[54]

When Chase sent the formal call for the Ohio convention, however, Giddings refused to sign. He and Palfrey both still hoped the Whig Party would nominate an anti-extensionist. Even Sumner, as late as April 1848, wistfully expressed hope that Clay might position himself against Taylor as the non-extension candidate, urging Giddings "to give Clay every opportunity of putting himself in a position, which will take from us the necessity of organising an opposition." The *Ashtabula Sentinel*, now under the charge of Giddings's son Joseph, similarly suggested it would endorse Clay if he avowed support for the Wilmot Proviso.[55]

As Chase planned the convention that would ultimately spearhead the movement for a national Free Soil Party, he began feeling out Hale's willingness to step down. Chase argued that in the unlikely event that one of the major parties made the campaign turn on "the Free Soil issue" by nominating "Mc Lean or some other out & out free soil man," it would be important that Liberty men "see to it that the Free soil Ticket be not defeated through our apathy, or opposition." Chase also wondered what Hale would do in the more probable scenario that a "union of all Anti-slavery men" developed in response to nominations pitting Taylor against a doughface Democrat. Edward Hamlin echoed Chase's interests in a broadened antislavery coalition, assuring Hale that the "Liberty men of Ohio" were "generally of the liberal class, and will support any ticket that gives assurances of arresting the progress of slavery."[56]

Many Liberty men, though, remained skeptical of coalescing with antislavery men who seemed so reluctant to leave their party folds. As late as April, Leavitt reiterated that he did not

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[53] SPC to JG, Mar. 10, 1848, Papers of SPC, LC; Call for a "People's Convention," Mar. 23, 1848, Cincinnati, enclosed with letter of N.M. Sawyer to Thomas Morris, Apr. 1, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP.
[54] JG to SPC, Mar. 16, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; SPC to CS, Mar. 21, 1848, CS Papers; CS to SPC, Feb. 7, 1848, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:206; JG to CS, CS Papers, Mar. 18, 1848.
[55] JG to SPC, Apr. 7, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; CS to JG, Apr. 21, 1848, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1: 232-233; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Apr. 22, 29, 1848.
[56] SPC to JPH, Apr. 29, 1848, JPH Papers; Hamlin to JPH, May. 20, 1848, Ibid.

"in the slightest degree" share Chase's "anticipations of a union of effort among 'Free-Territory men' at the coming election." Leavitt promised not to oppose Chase's effort "unless it is arrogantly put forward as a worthy substitute for the Liberty party," but Leavitt continued to consider the Liberty Party "as the last hope of the country for the deliverance from slavery in our day or by peaceful means." The Wisconsin Liberty Party similarly rejected the idea of uniting with any party simply pledged to support the Wilmot Proviso.[57]

The hesitant antislavery course of Conscience Whigs demonstrated that both sides of this Liberty debate had merit. In the months before the Whig nominating convention, Conscience Whigs seemed to despair of their party nominating a non-extensionist. Still, they waited. Many held out hope, however faint, that their party might endorse the Proviso. As the convention approached, though, the *Boston Whig* reiterated that Conscience Whigs would flee the party before supporting Taylor, who had skirted the free soil question by promising only to veto unconstitutional legislation. The *Boston Whig* questioned conservative northern Whigs' assertions that Taylor would therefore accept the Wilmot Proviso, since no one knew whether Taylor, like many Southerners, considered the Proviso unconstitutional. Many antislavery Whigs expressed "nausea," as his nomination became increasingly likely. Still, Giddings excitedly noted Greeley's efforts to rally Whig congressmen to oppose Taylor in the Whig convention. Liberty men, by contrast, watched and hoped for the long-awaited rift within the Whig Party.[58]

Meanwhile, with growing dissension in the Democratic Party, Chase also had increased hope of cooperation from antislavery Democrats. In Wisconsin's strongly antislavery first congressional district, the Democratic Party overwhelmingly endorsed non-extension and won a clear electoral victory on the strength of that position. Jacob Brinkerhoff shared with Chase his opinion that "the Democratic [presidential] candidates now spoken of are all like rotten eggs—incapable of being made worse." Yet, Brinkerhoff, like Giddings, declined to sign Chase's call for a Free Territory convention. Wilmot too abjured a formal endorsement of Chase's free territory convention. Wilmot would welcome "a movement in favour of the integrity of free soil," but feared northern Democrats outside New York were not ready.[59]

Meanwhile, in early 1848, the schism within the New York Democracy simmered as the Democratic Party stood poised to nominate an anti-Proviso man, most likely Lewis Cass, who was doubly anathema to Barnburners for his role in defeating Van Buren's nomination in 1844. New York Hunkers selected delegates by district as stipulated by the 1847 Syracuse Convention, while Barnburners chose their slate in convention and avowed "uncompromising hostility to the extension of slavery." When Democrats convened in Baltimore in May, rival delegations would claim to represent New York. Martin Van Buren, who ensconced himself in a Manhattan hotel to help coordinate Barnburner tactics, urged his son John and lieutenant Samuel Tilden that they must insist on full acceptance of the Barnburner delegates.[60]

The Baltimore Convention erupted in acrimony over which New York delegates to seat. When offered the seats in exchange for a pledge to abide the Convention's decision, Barnburners

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[57] JL to SPC, Apr. 1, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; *American Freeman*, Apr. 26, 1848.
[58] JG to CS, May 17, 1848, CS Papers; *BDW*, Mar. 10, 28, 30, May 19, Jun. 6, 1848; Tuck to George Fogg, May, 10, 1848, George G. Fogg Papers, NHHS; JG to CS, May 1, 1848, CS Papers; Hamlin to CS, Feb. 28, 1848.
[59] *Evening Post*, May 16, 1848; Jacob Brinkerhoff to SPC, Feb. 2, 1848; Brinkerhoff to SPC, Mar. 28, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:168; Brinkerhoff's reluctance is also discussed in Hamlin to SPC, May 20, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; David Wilmot to SPC, May 29, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP.
[60] *The Utica Convention: Voice of New York* (*Albany Atlas Extra*, February 1848), quote from 17; *Evening Post*, Feb. 19, 1848; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 74-76.

refused this apparent design to force them to support an anti-Proviso nominee. So, in a self-evident ploy to weaken New York's influence, the Convention sat both delegations and gave each member half a vote. Already seething at this compromise, Barnburners condemned the presidential nomination of Cass, whose "Nicholson letter" endorsed popular sovereignty as the solution to the territorial question. Barnburners considered the nomination a "nullity" and bolted the Convention, which then adopted a platform opposing federal interference with slavery.[61]

Liberty men celebrated the Barnburner defection. Chase praised "the action of the New York Democracy" as "manful & noble," and expected "much good" from it. Seizing on the Barnburner secession, Bailey encouraged Conscience leaders Sumner, Adams, and Stephen C. Phillips to join Stanton in a strategy session with Preston King and Barnburner ex-congressman George Rathbun. This way the three groups could "agree, if possible, upon a certain declaration of principles and certain mode of action." Hale, Bailey assured Sumner, would be unlikely to stand in the way of a cross-party anti-Slave Power organization.[62]

At the Whig convention a couple weeks later in Philadelphia, delegates split primarily between Taylor and Clay, with most Southerners for Taylor. On the second day of the Convention, the Taylor forces triumphed, but some Northerners demanded resolutions requiring Taylor to endorse "Whig principles," including non-extensionism. The Convention, however, dismissed this as out of order. As Liberty men had anticipated, Massachusetts's Charles Allen and Henry Wilson then led a Conscience Whig revolt. Allen declared, over great clamor, his "belief that the Whig Party is here and this day dissolved," and Wilson declared, "I will go home; and so help me God, I will do all I can to defeat the election of" the Whig ticket. The convention, nevertheless, concluded by nominating New York's Millard Fillmore for vice president and declining to draft a platform, partly to avoid taking any position on the Proviso.[63]

As delegates poured out of the convention hall, fifteen Northerners remained behind to coordinate support for a new national anti-extension coalition. Led by Wilson, this group embraced the national antislavery union that Liberty coalitionists like Chase and Bailey had been advocating for months. The dissident Whigs appointed Allen, Giddings, and antislavery editor John C. Vaughan a committee to oversee the transition and deputed Vaughan and other Ohio men, including Liberty attendee Stanley Matthews, to urge the Columbus Free Territory convention to eschew nominations. Whig bolters hoped that the Free Territory men at Columbus would instead call a national convention for Buffalo (a centrally-located destination) in August.[64]

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[61] *Atlas*, May 24, 25, 26, 1848; *National Era*, Jun. 1, 1848; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 70-71; *Evening Post* May 22, 27, 1848; Donald Bruce Johnson, compiler, *National Party Platforms, Volume 1: 1840-1956* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 11.

[62] SPC to CS, Jun. 5, 1848, CS Papers; GB to CS, May 31, 1848, Ibid.

[63] Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (Boston: J.R. Osgood and Co., 1872-1877), 133-139; Tuck to Fogg, May 10, 1848, Fogg Papers; Donald Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, 16; For a detailed discussion of the machinations involved in the 1848 Whig nominations, see Holt, *Rise and Fall*, Ch. 10.

[64] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 334; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 205; Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, 142-144; Vaughan was an antislavery Whig who had abandoned South Carolina and moved to Kentucky where he first worked on Cassius Clay's antislavery Whig paper the Lexington *True American* and then founded his own Louisville *Examiner*. He later became editor and part owner of the Cleveland *True Democrat* and after that part owner of the Republican newspaper the *Chicago Tribune*. Stanley Harrold, *Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 29-30; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase*, 99-101.

Assembling the New Anti-Slave Power Party

Chase and the Columbus convention organizers, of course, had a national convention in mind all along. Having made arrangements before the national nominations, the Columbus Convention stood poised to direct the course of a broadened third-party movement. Most crucial to ex-Liberty men would be that any new party insist on comprehensive opposition to the Slave Power, and not merely to slavery in the territories. When New York Democrats pushed Martin Van Buren, who had failed to renounce his earlier position against abolition in the District of Columbia, Liberty coalitionist leaders' careful management ensured that he could only become a national candidate by accepting a thorough anti-Slave Power platform.

Chase had prepared the ground well for these developments by pre-scheduling the Free Territory Convention in advance of the major parties' nominations. Liberty coalitionists and Western Reserve Conscience men together looked forward to a successful convention in the face of the proslavery nominations Liberty men had foreseen. Reserve Whigs' indignation exceeded Giddings's expectations. He proudly predicted that the Columbus Convention would be "well attended by our long tried & faithful Whigs." To promote *national* cooperation, Giddings and Chase agreed that the convention should emphasize "*seperation of the federal government*" from slavery as the best way to combat the Slave Power without scaring off new converts.[65]

Meeting in the hall of the Ohio House of Representatives, "filled to overflowing," the Ohio Free Territory Convention called for a national convention of the "Friends of Freedom, Free Territory, and Free Labor" to be held in Buffalo on August 9. Condemning both major party nominations, Ohio's free territory men resolved "to resist inflexibly the aggressions of the Slave Power" and asserted their hope of cooperating with New York Barnburners. This Convention enthusiastically supported a national convention to unite all "antislavery men" on an anti-extension platform and specifically urged antislavery Ohioans to vote only for known anti-Slave Power candidates for Congress and the state legislature.

The next day, a preplanned Ohio Liberty convention met in the same hall to concur in support of a national convention. Recommending Hale and King, the assembled Ohio Liberty men "earnestly hope[d]" the Buffalo Convention would provide "the means of uniting the People of the free states … for the final overthrow of the tyrant Slave Power." Declining to nominate a gubernatorial candidate, Ohio Liberty men chose to concentrate the party's "resources and energies" on campaigning for an anti-Slave Power presidential ticket and for independent antislavery congressional and state legislative candidates.[66]

While Ohio Liberty men were meeting to ratify the Columbus Free Territory convention, New York Barnburners gathered at Utica to chart *their* political course. Disgusted with the Baltimore nominations, New York bolters had immediately called a state convention at which Barnburners might nominate their own ticket. In the intervening weeks, Barnburner managers tried to persuade Martin Van Buren to lead their opposition to the regular Democrats. Van Buren finally lent public support to the schismatic movement, but professed his desire to avoid another nomination. Van Buren meanwhile, told his close friend Benjamin F. Butler (Van Buren's former Attorney General) that New York Barnburners should aim to avoid entangling

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[65]SPC to CS, Jun. 5, 1848, CS Papers; JG to SPC, Lynds Jones, E.S. Hamlin, and H.L. Chaffee, Jun. 7, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; JG to CGS, Jun. 17, 1848, CS Papers.

[66] *National Era*, Jul. 6, 1848; Chase had carefully coordinated the timing of the Free Territory and Liberty conventions the same week in Columbus. Niven, *Salmon P. Chase*, 107.

themselves in a national movement and focus on working independently in their own state. Van Buren also addressed a letter to be read to the Utica Convention, commending the Barnburner bolt, urging opposition to the Baltimore nominees, and asserting the importance of protecting free territory from slavery. Van Buren, however, to abolitionists' dismay, also endorsed his past course of opposing abolition in the District of Columbia. Van Buren asserted his "unchangeable determination never again to be a candidate for public office," but Butler and Van Buren's son John nonetheless felt confident that he would accept if nominated, and John had been working for weeks to orchestrate his father's nomination as an anti-extension candidate.[67]

Consequently, at Utica, the New York Barnburners, joined by a contingent of Wilmot Proviso Democrats from other states, adopted resolutions forcefully opposing the extension of slavery and unanimously nominated Martin Van Buren for president and Senator Henry Dodge (D-WI) for vice president. The Convention did stipulate "that in case any Convention of the free states … for the purpose of collecting and concentrating the popular will in respect to the question of the Presidency," should be called, Barnburner delegates would be "authorized to attend and take part." Barnburners, though, were most interested in promoting Van Buren. The *Atlas* proudly put the names of Van Buren and Dodge on its masthead, even though it was not certain that either would accept (and indeed Dodge ultimately declined).[68]

Liberty coalitionists had worried in advance that Barnburner intentions to nominate "without consultation" could threaten the prospects of a "united movement" with a "national organization." Chase had anticipated the Barnburners' go-it-alone nomination but still was "much disappointed," and complained that Van Buren had "some sins to answer for." Nonetheless, Chase remained willing to consider backing Van Buren *if* he received a national Free Soil nomination on an acceptable platform. "If he is true to the Free States & Freedom," Chase wrote, "much in the past may be overlooked." Some Barnburners attempted to persuade abolitionists and antislavery Whigs in New York State that they should simply support the Utica ticket without any new convention, but those efforts met with little success. Liberty coalitionists like Chase expected the Barnburners to participate at Buffalo.[69]

Notwithstanding the hesitancy of the Utica Convention, any uncertainty about the prospects of assembling a national convention was dispelled by the incredibly successful People's Convention held in Worcester on June 28. Outraged at the Taylor nomination, Massachusetts Conscience Whigs arranged a mass convention that drew support from antislavery elements of all three parties. The *Boston Whig* urged, "Let Whigs, Democrats and Liberty men, all forget alike their vain party differences, and unite in support of that sacred *principle*, which will be violated by the election of Cass or Taylor—*Freedom in Free Territories*." Though guided by Conscience Whigs like convention chair Stephen C. Phillips, Charles Francis Adams, and of course, Sumner, this convention also featured prominent Liberty men like Leavitt and Joseph Lovejoy and Democrats such as Amasa Walker and New York City's John Bigelow. The

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[67] *Atlas*, May 27, 1848; Martin Van Buren (MVB) to Benjamin F. Butler, Jun. 20, 1848, Butler Family Papers, Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Manuscripts Division (Princeton RBSC); *Atlas*, Jun. 23, 1848; MVB to Samuel Westbury, David Dudley Field, and others, Jun. 20, 1848, in O. C. Gardiner, *The Great Issue: Or the Three Presidential Candidates* (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., 1848), 110-116; John Van Buren (JVB) to Francis P. Blair, May 20, 1848, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Manuscripts Division.

[68] Gardiner, *The Great Issue*, 118-120; *Atlas*, Jun. 24, 1848.

[69] S.B. Parsons to CS, Jun. 16, 1848, CS Papers; SPC to CS, Jun. 20, 1848; J. B. Elwood to CS, Jun. 24, 1848, CS Papers; SPC to JPH, Jun. 2[5], 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:174.

convention, though numerically dominated by Whigs, followed the precedent set in Columbus of appointing equal numbers of Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty men as delegates to Buffalo.[70]

Liberty participants celebrated this "grand beginning and the desire for union among all the opponents of the Slave Power." Drawing at least five thousand "men of all classes, with the "fire of Freedom burning in their bosoms," the Worcester Convention's "enthusiasm was unmeasured, bordering, at times, even on wildness." Although, "it was generally taken for granted that the issue in the present contest was to be the non-extension of slavery," Liberty men were pleased to discover that "the feeling of the meeting … went far beyond this, embracing the whole scope of the Liberty movement." Whittier especially rejoiced that Massachusetts "Liberty men" seemed "disposed to join heartily in the new movement."[71]

Coalitionists like Chase, Bailey, and Stanton had been preparing for precisely this situation for quite some time and looked forward eagerly to the Buffalo convention. Staunch Liberty men across the North now agreed that opponents of slavery "*all* better rally around one common standard," believing the Buffalo Convention would "tell mightily against the Slave Power." Even before the Columbus, Utica, and Worcester conventions, the Indiana Liberty Party promised to "heartily unite in the support" of a ticket nominated by an anti-extension "National Mass Convention," and "the Freemen of Seneca Falls, New York, without distinction of Party," protested the major party nominations in a meeting organized by Henry Stanton, who had recently moved to the town (which his wife Elizabeth Cady Stanton would soon make famous). In the strongest abolitionist state, Vermont Liberty men praised the free soil movement and planned to attend the Buffalo Convention, even though the state Liberty convention did not officially endorse participation at Buffalo, for fear of formally pledging to support its nominees. Vermont Liberty men heartily participated, though, when Proviso Democrats called a state free soil convention in response to their state party endorsing Cass. Longtime *Green Mountain Freeman* publisher Joseph Poland served as secretary and the convention nominated Liberty man Oscar Shafter as the Free Soil candidate for governor. "It is impossible to keep pace with the movements of the people," the *National Era* remarked, as it applauded public denunciations of Taylor by Whig congressman Joseph Root (OH) and ex-congressman Horace Everett (VT) and listed dozens of Whig and Democratic presses that had rebuked their party nominations.[72]

After the three large state conventions, unity movements emerged across the North to select delegates to Buffalo. With former Whig Congressman-turned Liberty man Seth Gates a key organizer, the majority of voters in Warsaw, New York united across party lines to combat the "alarming aggressions of the Slave Power." Filling the Wyoming County courthouse beyond capacity (rain prevented an outdoor rally), the Warsaw convention urged that participants only support candidates who would act independently of the proslavery parties for President, Vice President, Congress, and state legislature. Gates noted that "all the Liberty party men in the county" supported the movement. Just west, Livingston and Monroe counties held similar meetings, and in Lockport, New York, "Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty men" similarly joined to

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[70] *BDW*, Jun. 20, 1848; Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, 146-148; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 212, Blue, *Free Soilers*, 58-59, Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153-59.

[71] Letter from "C.," Jun. 29, 1848, in *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; Letter of "G.W.L.," Jun. 29, 1848, in *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; JGW to William Stevens Robinson, [Jun. 1848], in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:107.

[72] Moses Cartland to JPH, Jul. 20, 1848, JPH Papers; *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; Stanton to CS, Jul,. 15, 1848, CS Papers; *GMF*, Jul. 13, 20, 1848; Samuel H. Price to CS, Jul. 17, 1848, CS Papers; Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 117-118; *National Era*, Jun. 29, 1848.

attack the Slave Power and endorse the upcoming Buffalo convention. Although Gates claimed that many Western New Yorkers opposed Van Buren's nomination, cross-party coalition meetings elsewhere, for example in Pittsburgh and western Massachusetts, endorsed Van Buren as a potential standard-bearer for a new free territory organization. Even in slaveholding Maryland, a "movement" developed, and its Baltimore leaders predicted that a free soil ticket might control a balance of power there.[73]

Despite this burst of antislavery enthusiasm, many Liberty partisans remained critical of the movement for coalition. As coalitionist sentiments germinated in the days after the major party conventions, the leading Wisconsin Liberty sheet denigrated "this movement as an abandonment of the Liberty party." With "the whole land" being "rocked with the Anti-slavery agitation, as with an earthquake," editor Sherman Booth argued that political abolitionists now more than ever should fight for the entire abolition of slavery, not merely for non-extension.[74]

Moreover, after the Utica Convention, many Liberty men grew concerned about uniting in a coalition that might replace Hale with Van Buren. Bitterly attacking the possibility of Hale's withdrawal, some feared that this would "strike nearly a death-blow for the Liberty movement in the United States." Liberty stalwarts like Leavitt, Whittier, and Joseph Lovejoy all hoped Hale could be persuaded not to step down, and Lewis Tappan went so far as to argue that Liberty men shouldn't even attend the Buffalo Convention.[75]

Most Liberty partisans were more open-minded than Tappan, but remained concerned that any new antislavery organization adopt the Liberty Party's opposition to the Slave Power. Longtime New Hampshire Liberty leader Daniel Hoit, for example, welcomed a broadened national movement as long as Liberty "principles" were "engrafted into" the new party. The *Green Mountain Freeman* asserted its willingness to give up Hale's candidacy, but warned that Van Buren would have to accept a platform contravening his Utica Convention letter's position on abolition in the District of Columbia. Liberty men would only join a movement dedicated to combating the Slave Power throughout the federal government. Austin Willey worried that if Liberty men supported Van Buren, "The cause would be shorn of its moral aspect and character." Nonetheless, Willey's *Liberty Standard* promised that if the "new movement" would "plant itself on the true principles of constitutional liberty, we will give it our humble support." At a minimum, Liberty men would insist not only on an acceptable platform, but also that the convention's nominees explicitly pledge to support that platform.[76]

Even Whittier, a *National Era* contributor and longtime Bailey ally, worried that the Buffalo Convention might "prove the greatest farce in which earnest and honest men ever engaged," since anti-extension was far "too narrow for the basis of a great party." Whittier predicted that Liberty partisans would "not contend about *men*" as long as the Buffalo Convention advocated "the entire divorce of the government of the United States from slavery." But as the Convention approached, Whittier publicly doubted whether the contingency that

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[73] Letter of Seth Gates, Jul. 3, 1848, in *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; Letter from E. J. Chase, Jul. 5 1848, in Ibid.. Letter from Gates, Jul. 14, 1848, in *National Era*, Jul. 27, 1848; *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; Letter of James E. Snodgrass, Jul. 20, 1848, in *National Era*, Jul. 27, 1848.

[74] Milwaukee (relocated from Waukesha) *American Freeman* Jun. 7, 14, 28, 1848.

[75] T.B. Hudson and J.H. Fairchild to JPH , Jul. 24, 1848, Hale-Chandler Papers; *American Freeman*, Aug. 1, 1848; LT to JPH, Aug. 2, 1848, JPH Papers.

[76] Daniel Hoit to JPH, Jul. 18, 1848, JPH Papers; *GMF*, Jul. 20, 1848; "The Crisis—What is Our Duty?" in *GMF*, Jul. 27, 1848; JL to JPH, Jul. 1, 1848, JPH Papers; Austin Willey to JPH, Jul. 6, 1848; *Liberty Standard*, Jul. 13, 1848; J.W. Alden to JPH, Jul. 21, 1848, JPH Papers.

would allow Liberty men to abandon Hale had yet arrived, asserting that they could only support the coalition if it took far higher ground than Van Buren's letter to the Utica Convention.[77]

Conscience Whigs shared abolitionists' reluctance "to bear the burthen of the unpopular and odious acts of Mr Van Buren's administration." Many expressed concern that Van Buren would struggle to win ex-Whig votes, because of both old party prejudices and his "opinions and practice upon the subject of slavery while in office." Most Conscience Whigs hoped the Buffalo Convention would nominate John McLean. Sumner shared these pro-McLean sympathies, but he would, if necessary, accept Van Buren. Sumner, like Chase and Bailey, was ready to do just about whatever it took to "build a new party, which shall be truly democratic," and Adams too seemed willing to suppress his misgivings. Though Van Buren's "rather superfluous re-affirmation of his opinion with regard to Slavery in the District of Columbia" disappointed Sumner, he optimistically interpreted that Van Buren's "language, however, admits of explanation, &, I hope, he will be able to remove some of our difficulties." Recognizing that New York Barnburners felt obligated to Van Buren, Sumner soon became "reconciled" to Van Buren "as our candidate." Still Sumner hinted to Barnburners that some friend of Van Buren at Buffalo should be prepared to explain his views on slavery in the District of Columbia.[78]

Most coalitionists among the Liberty men shared Sumner's confidence about the prospects of a new national union of the "friends of Freedom." The Utica *Liberty Press* urged political abolitionists' attendance at Buffalo, predicting the Convention would "be a mighty gathering" that "may drive a long nail into the coffin of the Slave Power." A correspondent of the Chicago *Western Citizen* joined in celebrating "the popular feeling in opposition to the slave power." The Columbus, Utica, and Worcester conventions all appeared to Chicago's Liberty paper to be "fruit of the seed of our own sowing." If "settled hostility to the Slave power" could provide the "bond of union," then the Buffalo Convention would commence "the downfall of the Slave power." Several newspapers that staunchly supported Hale also declared their desire to "cooperate heartily in any movement which promises most surely to redeem this country from the dominion of the Slave Power."[79]

Even Leavitt, long fearful of compromising the Liberty Party's contest against the Slave Power, came to support the movement for coalition. Commending Chase's "superior sagacity," Leavitt celebrated "the movements of the masses of people, who have left the old parties never to return." Though he hoped Hale would receive the Free Soil nomination and thought Van Buren might struggle to unite antislavery voters, Leavitt's primary concern was with the new movement's platform. Leavitt welcomed bolting Whigs' and Democrats' newfound willingness "to look to 'the overthrow of the Slave Power' as the ultimate result of our movement."[80]

To secure this anti-Slave Power platform, Liberty coalitionist leaders like Chase were prepared to sacrifice Hale's candidacy. Furthermore, even before the Columbus Convention,

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[77] *National Era*, Jul. 20, 1848; JGW to William Stevens Robinson, [Jun. 1848], in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:107; JGW, "Union," in *National Era*, Aug. 3, 1848.

[78] W.B. Spooner to CS, Aug. 4, 1848, CS papers; JG to CS, Jul. 23, 1848, CS Papers; Stephen C. Phillips to JGP, Jul. 17, 24, 30, 1848, Palfrey Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Hamlin to SPC, Jun. 12, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; CS to George Sumner, Jun. 13, 14, 1848, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:230-233; CS to JG, Jun. 23, 1848, in Ibid., 1:234-235; CFA to JGP, Jul. 2, 16, 1848, and CFA to Seth Gates, Jul. 30, 1848, Adams Family Papers, Letterbooks; CS to SPC, Jul. 7, 1848, Papers of SPC, LC; CS to JG, Jul. 5, 1848, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:235-236 ; CS to CFA, Jul. 30, 1848, 1:238-240.

[79] Utica *Liberty Press*, quoted in *National Era*, Jul. 20, 1848; Chicago *Western Citizen*, Jun. 27, Jul.4, 25, 1848; quoted from *Independent Democrat and Freeman* and *Washington Patriot*, both in *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848.

[80] JL to SPC, Jul. 7, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP.

Chase received letters from Hale expressing his willingness to be withdrawn, provided that Liberty supporters approved. Though more committed to Hale's candidacy, Stanton likewise sought Hale's approval to withdraw his name, since "the Buffalo Convention represents a movement having so many points of identity with ours, that if they make a good nomination, take high ground in their resolutions & c., that it will sweep us by the board." By mid-July, Hale made public that he would gladly withdraw with "the concurrence of his friends," but Liberty men would only permit this if convinced that the replacement candidate would pledge opposition to the Slave Power. Meanwhile, McLean also privately wrote Chase to request "that my name should not be mentioned as a candidate."[81]

Barnburner managers had made Chase well aware that they intended only to support Van Buren for president, but they would accept a Liberty or Whig vice presidential nominee, Dodge having declined anyway. With their numerical power in the nation's largest state, Barnburners were well positioned to demand Van Buren's nomination, perhaps, some thought, even if he did not speak out against slavery in the District of Columbia. But Chase understood that Liberty men could likely persuade Barnburners to support a platform that went beyond mere non-extension. A consultation with Barnburners convinced Giddings too that Van Buren would accept a platform endorsing abolition in the District of Columbia. Still, Chase warned John Van Buren that it would be crucial "to have all doubt on this matter removed." Chase made clear to the ex-President's son, "Our contest is with the Slave Power … The People will not stop with the exclusion of slavery from territories: they will demand its complete denationalization."[82]

Finally after weeks of organizing, on August 9, 1848, twenty-thousand Liberty men, Whigs, and Democrats, along with a host of other political recusants, from land reformers to Clay Whigs, descended on Buffalo. Meeting under an enormous tent because no building in Buffalo could hold the throng, this mass meeting was essentially a two-day antislavery political rally with the fervor of a camp meeting. Dozens of orators repeated over and over that slavery had superseded the issues that had divided the old parties, as Charles Francis Adams, still publicly mourning his illustrious father (who had died in February after collapsing on the House floor), presided. Over the course of these speeches, Democrats, Whigs, and Liberty men each proudly claimed credit for his partisans as the free soil movement's true originators. Far too unwieldy to organize a new party, this mass meeting cheerfully accepted the proposal to allow the actual delegated convention to retire to a nearby church. There this "Committee of Conference" of nearly 500 would hammer out a platform and select candidates before returning to the masses for ratification. Following the precedent established by the Ohio and Massachusetts conventions, this "Committee" allocated up to six at large votes per state and three votes per Congressional district so that all three parties could be given equal representation. Nine southern delegates (from Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) also joined.[83]

The evening before the convention, private negotiations had laid the groundwork for the founding of the Free Soil Party. Before the conference committee met, Chase, Leavitt, and Stanton, "satisfied" that Hale "could not be nominated," promised to back Van Buren if the

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[81] JPH to SPC, Jun. 8, 14, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP; Stanton to JPH, Jul. 17, 1848, Hale-Chandler Papers; *National Era*, Jul. 13, 1848; John McLean to SPC, Aug. 2, 1848, SPC Papers, HSP.

[82] Samuel J. Tilden to SPC, Jul. 29, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:179-180, *National Era*, Jul. 6, 1848; *Atlas*, Jun. 30, 1848; David Dudley Field to CS, Jul. 8, 1848, CS Papers; JG to CS, Jul. 7, 1848, Ibid.; SPC to JVB, Jun.[sic, Jul.] 19, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:176-178.

[83] Oliver Dyer, *Phonographic Report of the Proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, N.Y., August 9th and 10th, 1848* (Buffalo: G.H. Derby, & Co, 1848), passim, especially pages 8, 16-17, 20-22.

Barnburners would "agree to give us a thorough Liberty platform," withdraw the Utica nomination to "place Mr. V.B. unreservedly before the Convention, & pledge themselves that he should accept the nomination on that platform." Crafting a platform that could please all parties was essential, and for Liberty men it had long been imperative that any coalition platform go beyond non-extension. The resolutions committee carefully balanced members from all three parties, including such Liberty luminaries as Chase, Leavitt, Owen Lovejoy, Stanton, and Joseph Poland. The resolutions ultimately drafted were primarily Chase's handiwork and resembled his long-articulated anti-Slave Power platform.[84]

When the Conference Committee convened, nearly all conferees shared the Liberty concern "that we must nominate *after* we had got the platform." At first some more conservative members, hoping "to adopt a narrower basis" of non-extension, balked at the draft platform resembling the anti-Slave Power "Ohio Free Territory Resolutions somewhat amended." But with Preston King joining Liberty men in urging "that not only should slavery be excluded from territories now exempt, but the General Government should rid itself of all responsibility for its existence under the action of national legislation," the conferees accepted Chase's anti-Slave Power resolutions. Then Benjamin Butler presented the platform to the mass convention, and the assembled thousands responded "with the most enthusiastic applause."[85]

While focusing foremost on opposition to slavery extension, the resolutions committee expressed a "determination to rescue the Government" from the "Slave Power." The key resolution for Liberty men declared "That it is the duty of the federal government to relieve itself from all responsibility for the existence or continuance of slavery wherever that government possess constitutional power to legislate on that subject, and is thus responsible for its existence." This resolution, resembling Liberty calls for divorce of the federal government from slavery, implied for Liberty men, without explicitly mentioning, support for abolition in the District of Columbia. Of course, the platform was more explicit in its demand for "No more slave territory and no more slave states." A full ten resolutions related to slavery, its extension, and the Slave Power, and the preamble condemned the major parties for bending to "slaveholding dictation."[86]

In addition to the ten antislavery resolutions, a few others addressed "certain other questions of National policy," advocating "cheap postage," "retrenchment of expenses and patronage of the Federal Government," "River and Harbor improvements," a "tariff of duties as will raise revenue adequate to defray" the government's "necessary expenses" and debt payments, and a free land policy. The overwhelming majority of participants, though, clearly considered this diverse handful of economic planks as secondary to the antislavery resolutions that dominated the platform and distinguished Free Soilers from the major parties."[87]

While Liberty coalitionists applauded the Buffalo Platform's opposition to the Slave Power, the resolutions did not quite match the idealism of former Liberty platforms. The

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[84] Stanton to JPH, Aug. 20, 1848, JPH Papers; Dyer, *Phonographic Report*, 12; The *Cincinnati Weekly Herald* reported that Butler credited SPC as "the author of the admirable set of resolutions which constitute the Free Soil platform," quoted in *National Era*, Aug. 24, 1848; On these negotiations, see also, Blue, *Free Soilers*, 70-74, Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey*, 120-122, and Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 156-157.

[85] SPC to James W. Taylor, Aug. 15, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:183-185; Dyer, *Phonographic Report*, 19.

[86] Ibid.

[87] SPC to James W. Taylor, Aug. 15, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:183-185. The tariff plank, and the free lands resolution have been perceived as designed to appeal mostly to ex-Democrats. The tariff resolution, however, should be understood as a compromise, endorsing a tariff as the primary source of federal revenue while emphasizing the policy's revenue rather than protective objectives. In fact, a Whig delegate actually proposed the resolution to ensure that the platform didn't ignore tariff politics altogether.

platform Liberty men had adopted in 1847 explicitly pointed out "that the paramount object of the Liberty party is the abolition of slavery in the United States, by the constitutional acts of the federal and State Government," and specifically called for repeal not only of slavery in the District of Columbia, but also the 1793 fugitive slave act, and in due time, the constitutional clause granting representation based on three-fifths of a state's slave population. Additionally, the 1848 Free Soil platform omitted any endorsement of equal rights for free blacks. Nonetheless, when ex-slaves Frederick Douglass and Henry Bibb were invited to address the mass convention at Buffalo, the audience responded with "most deafening cheers." Also, the platform's explicit invocation of the Declaration of Independence enabled Liberty men to assert that the party would insist on the "absolute and universal equality of human rights," although most Barnburners certainly did not extrapolate such a lofty egalitarian interpretation of that plank. Still, the anti-Slave Power platform testified to the crucial role played by Liberty men in creating the Free Soil Party, and Liberty men had long asserted that eliminating federal support for slavery would ultimately lead to "peaceful emancipation throughout the Union." Liberty influence in promoting antislavery coalition and their power at the Buffalo convention had impelled Barnburners to make antislavery concessions that went beyond the Utica resolutions.[88]

Once the Buffalo platform had been enthusiastically ratified, the Conference Committee moved on to nominating a presidential ticket. To present the appearance that the nomination was not predetermined, Barnburners agreed to allow Van Buren's and Hale's names to be placed before the Convention for an "open" vote, and it was by this time known that Conscience Whig favorite John McLean did not want the nomination. Butler and Stanton withdrew Hale and Van Buren from their earlier nominations, and Butler read from a letter Van Buren sent to assure the conferees that he trusted the delegates to do what they deemed best to promote "the prevention of the introduction of human slavery into the extensive Territories of the United States." As Butler endorsed the ex-President, he digressed into a lengthy discussion of Van Buren's contentment on his farm and pride in his vegetable cultivation, at which point an exasperated Ohio delegate shouted, "Damn his cabbages and turnips! What does he say about the Abolition of Slavery in the Deestrick of Columby?" Butler weathered this outburst by promising that Van Buren would accept the platform, regardless of his earlier position on slavery in Washington. This swayed enough Conscience Whigs to vote for the better-known Van Buren over Hale. With this Whig support and a few Liberty votes, including those of Chase, Leavitt, and Stanton, Van Buren won the nomination on the first informal ballot with 244 votes to Hale's 183.[89]

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[88] Oliver Dyer, *Phonographic Report of the Proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, N.Y., August 9th and 10th, 1848* (Buffalo: G.H. Derby, & Co, 1848), 24; *National Era*, Nov. 4, 1847; Douglass, however, declined to speak beyond an explanation that he was recovering from throat surgery, *New York Herald*, quoted in *National Era*, Aug. 17, 1848; Ibid., Aug. 31, 1848; On the racism of most Barnburners, see Eric Foner, "Politics and Prejudice: The Free Soil Party and the Negro, 1849-1852," *Journal of Negro History* 50 (Oct. 1965), 239-256.

[89] Among historians of the convention, it is a matter of dispute whether McLean's desire was formally announced or if this information simply circulated among the delegates. Rayback, *Free Soil*, 226-27, strongly insists that there is no contemporary evidence of Chase formally withdrawing McLean's name, while Blue, *Free Soilers* 76, and Niven, *Salmon P. Chase*, 110, claim that Chase withdrew McLean's name, based on Richard Henry Dana's account from an August 22, 1848 speech, printed years later in Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Speeches in Stirring Times and Letters to a Son* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 154; MVB to the New York Delegation in the Buffalo Convention, Aug. 2, 1848, BFB Papers; Oliver Dyer, *Great Senators of the United States Forty Years Ago, (1848 and 1849)* (New York: Robert Bonner's Sons, 1889), 100-102; Henry B. Stanton *Random Recollections* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1887), 163-64; Dyer, *Phonographic Report*, 32, reports Van Buren's vote total as 244, but Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 87, notes that Dyer's tabulation of each state's votes actually adds up to 254.

After this vote, Joshua Leavitt urged a motion of unanimity, calling it "the most solemn experience of my life." Claiming to "feel as if in the immediate presence of the Divine Spirit," Leavitt asserted that "the Liberty party is not dead, but translated." Ex-Whig George Julian (Giddings's future son-in-law) reminisced that "there did not seem to be a dry eye in the Convention." With Liberty men having achieved an approximation of their desired platform, and the Barnburners getting the presidential choice, Whig received the vice presidential nominee. The conference happily ratified the proposal of Ohio Whigs to nominate Charles Francis Adams. Announcing Adams's nomination to the mass convention, Chase specifically emphasized Adams's famous father, "'old man eloquent'" John Quincy Adams.[90]

The Free Soil Campaign and its Fruits

Most Liberty men fell in behind the new party, and Liberty leaders exerted a disproportionate influence in shaping the strategy of the Free Soil Party. Though Van Buren failed to seriously challenge the major party candidates, Liberty partisans who had long concentrated on Congress soon celebrated the new congressional anti-Slave Power presence that the Free Soil Party made possible.

As they returned home, Hale supporters felt proud to "have secured a glorious platform." Moreover, as Hale's close ally George Fogg wrote, "what is of great consequence, we have consolidated the forces of freedom." Liberty men like Leavitt were pleased to have "found the zeal & generosity of the Van Buren men, so far beyond what was deemed possible." Gates, who had previously opposed Van Buren's nomination, had also been convinced "upon canvassing the whole ground" at Buffalo that all antislavery men should join the Free Soil Party. Even Sherman Booth's *American Freeman*, formerly so vehement against joining an anti-extension coalition, endorsed the Buffalo ticket, since "the Liberty party was fully represented, and its members were unanimous for both the platform and the men to stand upon it." Although Booth disliked the nomination, he was "convinced … of the depth, and strength of Anti-slavery feeling among the masses." "The fires of freedom," Booth asserted, "united and burst forth into a mighty flame."[91]

The *Emancipator* was at first more hesitant, praising the Free Soil platform but demanding proof that Van Buren would endorse it. As glowing reports came in from Liberty participants returning from Buffalo, the *Emancipator* accepted the compromise touted by Leavitt at the Convention: "The Barnburners have their choice for the Presidency, the Conscience Whigs theirs for the Vice Presidency, and the Liberty men have the principles—the platform. This is the union." A letter from Leavitt also reassured readers that the Liberty Party had not been abandoned but rather "expanded into the great Union party."[92]

However, 244, seems to me to be the correct number, as the number of votes listed for Ohio both by Dyer and Johnson exceeds the number of delegates to which the state was entitled (78 Ohio are votes listed, but Ohio should have had only 69, counting three delegates for each of twenty-one congressional districts plus six at-large delegates).

[90] Dyer, *Phonographic Report*, 27; George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Company, 1884), 60-61.

[91] Fogg to JPH, Aug. 21, 1848, JPH Papers; JL to JPH, Aug. 22, 1848, Ibid.; Letter from Seth Gates Aug. 17, 1848 in *National Era*, Aug. 24, 1848; *American Freeman*, Aug. 16, 23, 1848.

[92] *Emancipator*, Aug. 16, 23, 30, Sept. 6, 1848.

Liberty coalition supporters, of course, anticipated complaints about Van Buren's nomination. The *Era* consequently replied to Liberty criticisms of the new Free Soil nominee:

> Mr. Van Buren was subservient to the Slave Power in 1836 [when he pledged to veto any bill abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia], you say—well, he is not, like Gen. Cass, a vassal of it, or, like Gen. Taylor, its embodiment, in 1848. On the contrary, he is its open direct antagonist. … His experience and ability, and the whole power of his position, he has pledged to the establishment of No Extension of Slavery. He alone of all the principal candidate for the Presidency, represents the cause of Freedom, Free Labor, and Free Soil.

The *Era* further asserted that the seemingly incongruous ticket containing the names Van Buren and Adams indicated "that a crisis has come, in which minor questions are to be merged" and "old animosities forgotten, in the Common Sentiment of devotion to Freedom and opposition to Slavery."[93]

Conscience Whigs also agreed to overlook Van Buren's "delinquencies in former times." Although he had been wrong in the past, he was right "*now*," the renamed Boston *Daily Republican* (having recently dropped the name *Whig* as "appropriated by the new Taylor Party") declared. Despite its previous opposition, the *Ashtabula Sentinel* now too supported Van Buren "as the instrument" by which antislavery men would "check the alarming strides of the slave power." Despite his flaws, Van Buren stood pledged "to maintain our principles and carry them out in the administration of the Government," whereas Cass and Taylor, "the candidates of the slave power," would "extend and perpetuate the horrible crimes of slavery." Sumner likewise acknowledged that "Mr Van Buren's past course puts a load upon the cause, which I regret that it is obliged to bear," but nonetheless, the enthusiastic ratification meetings Sumner witnessed across Massachusetts convinced him that Van Buren might well carry the state.[94]

Van Buren's public acceptance letter helped dispel lingering antislavery concerns. The Free Soil candidate lauded the Buffalo platform and promised that he would not veto a bill for abolition in the District of Columbia. Thoroughly persuaded, Whittier told friends that "the adhesion of ex-president Van Buren, once a decided opponent to the liberty platform, bringing with him a host of able and influential men … is an event of signal importance." Leavitt too had been convinced that Van Buren was "with us, heart & soul, & will be with us to the last battle against the Slave Power," after he met with the "glorious old man" in person.[95]

While unenthused about Van Buren, even the *Emancipator* praised his acceptance letter's "Statesmanlike" endorsement of the platform, and celebrated that "the spirit of Liberty is aroused, the fetters of party are broken;" and "a union of freemen for the sake of freedom" had been erected to contest "the aggressions of the Slave Power." Renamed as the *Emancipator and Free Soil Press*, the paper became deeply committed to the Free Soil Party. In fact, not long after the 1848 election, the *Emancipator* merged with the former *Boston Whig* to create the

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[93] *National Era*, Aug. 24, 31, 1848.

[94] Boston *Daily Republican*, Aug. 16, 1848 (The issue of Aug. 9, 1848 was the first taking this new name); *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Aug., 12, 1848; CS to JG, Sept. 3, 1848, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:251.

[95] Letter of MVB in *National Era*, Aug. 31, 1848; JGW to Sturge, [October] 1848, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:118-119; JL to SPC, Aug. 21, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:188

Emancipator and Republican, which became a leading Free Soil paper with ex-Liberty men editing the weekly edition while Henry Wilson oversaw the daily and semiweekly versions.[96]

With tens of thousands embracing the new movement, leaders from all the constituent parts of the Free Soil Party looked forward to the upcoming elections. Giddings whipped northern Ohio antislavery men into a fervor in support of the new party, even if many would have preferred an ex-Whig candidate. Leading Barnburner Preston King asserted overly optimistically that he had "no doubt" Free Soilers would carry New York. He was on firmer ground when he predicted an overwhelming majority for Van Buren in King's own St. Lawrence County. In Massachusetts, Leavitt traversed the state speaking to promote "our glorious cause." Massachusetts Liberty men convened in September and urged former Liberty partisans to "carry the uncompromising and steadfast spirit of the Liberty party into the new movement."[97]

Free Soil tickets and organizations across the nation often attempted to balance representatives of the three old parties. For example, New York Free Soilers ran Barnburner senator John Dix for Governor with ex-Whig Liberty man Seth Gates as his running mate. In Massachusetts, Conscience Whig Stephen Phillips ran for governor with Proviso Democrat John Mills as the lieutenant gubernatorial candidate, while the state central committee selected Sumner as chair and Leavitt and ex-Democrat Marcus Morton, Jr. as its secretaries. In some locales where congressional elections were held in advance of the presidential election, coalition nominations between Free Soilers and one of the major parties ensured victories of staunch proviso advocates at least. Those antislavery politicians, such as Lewis Campbell (W-OH), carefully avoided committing themselves to a specific presidential ticket so they could attract votes from both their old party and the third-party men. This meant that several congressmen with antislavery sympathies were elected with Free Soil aid across the North, but it was ambiguous where their loyalties would lie. Some, like Campbell, would prove to be as partisan in Congress as they had been before the Free Soil revolt, but others, like Connecticut Proviso Democrats Walter Booth and Loren Waldo and Michigan free soil Whig William Sprague, would come to privilege antislavery convictions over party obligations.[98]

Despite their smaller voting base than Conscience Whigs or Barnburners, Liberty men played a prominent role on Free Soil tickets across the North. Liberty leader Chauncey Knapp, the former editor of the abolitionist Montpelier *Voice of Freedom*, ran as a Massachusetts Free Soil candidate for Congress and ultimately finished second in a three-way race, as did abolitionist lawyer John Joliffe of Ohio. In one Wisconsin District, the Free Soil Party enthusiastically nominated the recent president of the state Liberty Association, Charles Durkee for Congress. Though the Free Soil organization was weak in Rhode Island, both of its congressional nominees were ex-Liberty men. In Maine, too, Liberty men dominated the Free Soil organization, and Samuel Fessenden ran as the party's gubernatorial nominee.[99]

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[96] *Emancipator*, Aug. 30, 1848; The staff of the *Emancipator* handled the weekly *Emancipator and Republican*, while Henry Wilson, the new editor of the *Republican* (formerly the *Whig*) new editor Henry Wilson continued to edit the *Daily Republican* and the Semi-weekly *Republican*. *Emancipator and Republican*, Nov. 17, 1848.

[97] JG to CS, Aug. 24, 1848, CS Papers; King to Simeon Smith, Sept. 2, 1848, King-Smith Papers; In St. Lawrence County, Van Buren ended up winning 59 percent of the vote, Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, Table 2, 200; JL to SPC, Aug. 21, 1848, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:188; *Emancipator and Free Soil Press*, Sept. 20, 1848.

[98] *Emancipator*, Sept. 13, 1848; Lewis D. Campbell to CS, Oct. 19, 1848, CS Papers; Blue, *Free Soilers*, 137; John Niles to Gideon Welles, Mar. 26, Apr. 5, 1849, Gideon Welles Papers, NYPL, microform.

[99] Letter from JGW, from Newburyport *Beacon of Liberty*, Oct. 28, 1848, reprinted in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:117-118. Knapp had relocated from Montpelier to Lowell in 1844, Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 136-137; For

Former Liberty men threw themselves into the campaign with unbounded enthusiasm. Austin Willey, who had opposed a Van Buren nomination, excitedly projected over 12,000 votes "for Liberty" in Maine, and Whittier predicted that "in view of the great moral revolution," the Free Soil Party could more than quadruple the last year's Liberty vote. Longtime abolitionist leader William Jay celebrated that while "the old parties are greatly disorganized & exhibit very little zeal," the new "Anti Slavery party under the name of the *free soil party* has become formidable to the others, & will before long be predominant in the Northern states." Though Jay was not certain Van Buren would carry any states, Jay expected him to at least "poll a very heavy vote," and saw in this the expansion of the Liberty Party's anti-Slave Power political impulse: "The *third* or free soil party, to which the abolitionists have almost unanimously attached themselves is making wonderful progress. The seed the abolitionists have been scattering for years is suddenly germinating." Even ex-Democratic Free Soilers like Connecticut Senator John Niles acknowledged the powerful influence of the Liberty Party.[100]

Gamaliel Bailey quickly established the *Era* as the leading national Free Soil paper, and through the fall, he dedicated its columns almost wholly to promoting the party ticket. Having thoroughly set the stage for antislavery coalition, the *Era* was well prepared to promote the new party as a culmination of Liberty anti-Slave Power politics. The *Era* worked hard to convince voters of the prospects of the Free Soil ticket, often exaggerating (probably knowingly) its chances. The *Era* exulted in the founding of a dozen new Free Soil presses, and in even more old presses dropping earlier endorsements of Taylor or Cass (and in one case Gerrit Smith) in favor of the Free Soil ticket. The *Era* asserted the electability of Van Buren and Adams and later suggested that Free Soilers might at least throw the election into the House and wield enough power there to extract antislavery concessions from the eventual presidential choice.[101]

For those who predicted a national victory for Van Buren, or thought his candidacy would at least throw the election into the House of Representatives, the results were somewhat disappointing. Many who had spoken so confidently, though, did so to convince voters to sever their party ties, rather than out of a true conviction Van Buren would win. The Free Soil ticket polled slightly less than 300,000 votes, approximately 10 percent of the national vote and 14 percent of the free-state vote, far more than Birney's 65,000 in 1844. Van Buren did not carry a single state but probably was responsible for denying Cass the electoral votes of New York. Van Buren finished second, ahead of Cass, there (with 120,510 for 26.4 percent of the vote) as well as in Massachusetts (with 38,058 for 28.4 percent) and Vermont (with 13,837 for 28.9 percent). The Vermont Free Soil Party forced runoffs in three of four congressional districts, and ran second in all but one of the original elections, and in that one, ex-Liberty man A. Judson Rowell still polled nearly a quarter of the votes. Vermont Free Soilers also elected over a third of the lower house of the Vermont legislature. Wisconsin Free Soilers also ran especially well, polling over a quarter of the state's presidential vote for Van Buren. Though the 11 percent vote in Ohio

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information about congressional election results (and consequently lists of candidates as well), see Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 151-155; Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 110.

[100] Austin Willey to JPH, Sept. 22, 1848, JPH Papers; JGW to Sturge, [October] 1848, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:118-119; William Jay to Ella Kingsfield Jay, Oct. 1, 1848, John Jay Collection, Columbia RBML; William Jay to John Jay, Sept. 13, 1848, Ibid.; Niles to Welles, Sept. 17, 1848, Welles Papers, NYPL, wrote that "Had it not been for the Liberty Party no movement here [Connecticut] could have been made," but since Liberty men understood the prejudice against abolitionists, the "leaders of the liberty party" had respected "the necessity or advantage of putting forward other agents as much as possible."

[101] *National Era*, Sept. 7, Oct. 5, 1848.

was disappointing, the state's 35,354 total Free Soil votes were enough to deny Taylor the state, since so many Ohio Free Soilers were Western Reserve ex-Whigs. Former Liberty men felt "satisfied that a great work has been done in the organization of the 'Free Soil party,'" and celebrated its disruptive effects, claiming that Free Soilers had "flogged both parties."[102]

Most former Liberty men energetically embraced the opportunity to more effectively challenge the Slave Power, even as some remained concerned that the new party would moderate political abolitionism. Accepting widespread Liberty involvement as a given, scholars have labored to discern the relative proportions of ex-Whigs and ex-Democrats in Van Buren's electoral base. For some time, historians have known that in many parts of the North Van Buren Democrats dominated the Free Soil Party. This was certainly true in New York, where Barnburners rolled up Free Soil pluralities in their strongholds in the northeastern part of the state, including sizable majorities in Preston King's St. Lawrence County and neighboring Herkimer. Jonathan Earle argues that more ex-Democrats nationwide voted for Van Buren than ex-Whigs. In Ohio, though, the bulk of the party's strength clearly came from Giddings's antislavery Whig base on the Western Reserve. Ex-Whigs also provided a major source of Free Soil votes in Indiana, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, although Democrats also played a strong role in the Bay State, and it has proved difficult to determine the exact composition of the Free Soil vote there. Still, the nomination of Van Buren undoubtedly proved more attractive to fence-sitting Democrats than Whigs. The northeastern Illinois counties bordering Chicago's Cook County became banner Free Soil counties by capitalizing on both Barnburner strength and the impressive Liberty base that congressional candidate Owen Lovejoy had cultivated. In the strong Liberty states of Maine and Vermont, ex-Liberty men played especially prominent roles in the Free Soil organization, although a large number of Vermont Democrats joined them.[103]

Despite the 11 percent vote polled in Ohio, falling below the Free Soil average for the North, the Ohio results were particularly auspicious. In addition to electing Giddings and Joseph Root as Free Soil congressman, the new third party achieved a balance of power in the state legislature, enabling the election of Salmon Chase to the U.S. Senate and the repeal a portion of the Ohio Black Laws. Chase won his narrow election with mostly Democratic votes only after a series of contentious political maneuvers through which two Western Reserve Free Soilers, Norton Strange Townshend (a former Liberty man) and John F. Morse (a former Whig), gave Democrats control with their casting votes in a complicated apportionment dispute. In exchange for the votes of Townshend and Morse, the Democrats supported Chase for senator and accepted Morse's bill (which Chase helped write) to repeal part of the state's ignominious Black Laws and to establish public schools (though segregated) for Ohio's black children. Whigs and many Free Soilers seethed at Townshend and Morse, since the ex-Whig majority of the Free Soil bloc had hoped to maintain their independence and force Whigs to join Free Soilers to send Giddings to the Senate. Nevertheless, Townshend received resounding plaudits from former Liberty men.[104]

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[102] Blue, *Free Soilers*, 141-151, and Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 169-180, provide thorough analyses of the election results, and the discussion of election results in this paragraph and the following one rely primarily on data from the tables in Blue, 142, and Earle's appendix, 200-210. For data on congressional elections, I have used, Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 152-155; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 110, cites Birney's 1844 total as 65,608; Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 119; John Jay to CS, Dec. 8, 1848, CS Papers; *National Era*, Nov. 16, 1848.

[103] Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party*, 109-111, 119, 200-201.

[104] Much of this maneuvering can be tracked in Chase's correspondence. For example, the following letters from the Papers of SPC, LC have been particularly helpful: Eli Nichols to SPC, Dec. 15, 1848, SPC to E.S. Hamlin, Jan. 20, 1849, Stanley Matthews Jan. 24, Jan. 26, 27, 1849, B.F. Hoffman to SPC, Jan. 25, 1849; as well as these from the

While Chase maintained that he would have happily welcomed Giddings's elevation to the Senate, Chase closely followed the developments at Columbus, and his lieutenants actively worked to promote Chase's chances. Giddings on the other hand preferred that his supporters avoid any compromise with the major parties. Chase meanwhile assured Giddings (and numerous others) of his support for Giddings, while insinuating that the cause might benefit more from his own election, which would provide an additional, aggressive, antislavery voice in Congress (Chase could never have expected election to the House running in Cincinnati), and some former Liberty men clearly agreed. Furthermore, the Democrats seemed more likely to be open to coalition. Chase worried (probably correctly) that Giddings had too long irritated the conservative Whigs to expect that enough would join Free Soilers to give Giddings a majority. While Chase undoubtedly believed all of these motives valid, his ambition also played a significant role in the way he handled himself during that turbulent political season.[105]

Many ex-Whig Free Soilers felt Chase, Townshend, and Morse had betrayed Giddings, and Reserve voters did not return Townshend or Morse to the next legislature. Nonetheless, their bargain gave the Free Soil Party its second senator and ensured repeal of the worst of the Black Laws. In response Chase claimed, perhaps sincerely, that "Repeal of those laws is an object dearer to me than any political elevation whatever; and is worth more to us as a Party than the election of any man to any office in the gift of the Legislature." Even those who disliked Chase celebrated at least that coalition facilitated Black Law repeal. Acrimony lingered, though, and some fretted over the possibility of continued cooperation between some Ohio Democrats and Free Soilers. Recognizing that Chase would join Hale as a potent anti-Slave Power voice in the Senate, though, Free Soilers outside Ohio "rejoiced" at Chase's election as almost unbelievable, and former Liberty leaders celebrated that the election solidified "our glorious movement." Leavitt considered "this one result as a full equivalent for the campaign of 1848."[106]

Perhaps even more exciting than the election of a new antislavery Senator, Free Soilers won several House races across the North. Wisconsin Free Soilers celebrated the election of former state Liberty Association president Charles Durkee to Congress as having "vindicated the honor of one two-hundred-and-thirtieth part of this Republic." In Massachusetts, Charles Allen and John G. Palfrey both won pluralities on the initial ballot. The vigorous organization that followed elected Allen on the second trial, but Palfrey was less successful. Although he never

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SPC Papers, HSP: Hamlin to SPC, Jan. 18, 19, 20, 30, 1849; John F. Morse to SPC, Jan. 29, 1848; Flamen Ball to SPC, Feb. 8, 10, 17, 1849; Norton Strange Townshend (NST) to Brewster Randall, Feb. 19, 1849; S.D. Griswold to NST, Jan. 23, 1849, Samuel Lewis to NST, Jan. 29, 1849, H.C. Taylor to NST, Jan. 30, 1849; Woolsey and Tiffany Welles to NST, Feb. 2, 3, 1849, Norton Strange Townshend Papers (NST Papers), William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This dispute hinged on the questionable constitutionality of an apportionment bill passed by the previous Whig legislature, despite the absence of a quorum in the state senate, dividing Hamilton County into multiple state legislative districts. The parts of the Black Laws that Chase worked to repeal were those barring black testimony against whites in court and an outrageous requirement that required a five hundred dollar bond from black immigrants into the state. The best analysis of these two and a half months of complicated political maneuvering can be found in Stephen E. Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism: The Transformation of Ohio Politics, 1844-1856* (Kent State University Press, 1983), Ch. 6. Chase's election to the Senate and the issues surrounding the question of coalition with Ohio Democrats, are also detailed in Blue, *Free Soil Party*, 162-171, Niven, *Salmon P. Chase*, 116-122, and Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 168, 206-208.

[105] SPC to JG, January 20, 1849, SPC Papers, HSP. Chase expressed similar views to NST, January 23, 1849, NST Papers; James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 173-175; Q.F. Atkins to NST, Jan. 26, 1849, Ibid.

[106] SPC to Hamlin, Jan 20 1849, SPC Papers, HSP; H.C. Taylor to NST, Jan. 30, 1849, NST Papers; CS to SPC, Feb. 27, 1849, Papers of SPC, LC; S. Dana to JPH, Feb. 23, 1849, JPH Papers; Butler to SPC, Mar. 3, 1849, SPC Papers, HSP; JVB to SPC, Mar. 6, 1849, Ibid.; JL to SPC, Mar. 2, 1849, Ibid.

served in Congress again, Palfrey's strong Free Soil support prevented either major party from filling the seat *for the entire next Congress*, as his district balloted unsuccessfully a dozen additional times. Wilmot and King were both returned by their Proviso Democrat-dominated districts. All told, Free Soilers won at least eight seats in a closely divided Congress, and were joined by several more committed non-extensionists who had won with the aid of Free Soil voters. Estimates of expected Free Soil strength ranged from ten to eighteen men who would prioritize free territory over party allegiance. It seemed almost certain that Free Soilers would wield a balance of power between the two Slave Power-dominated parties in the House. With this new balance of power, political abolitionists were optimistic that "the party of Freedom" would "henceforth give shape and character to the legislation of the country."[107]

Although it had not lived up to the hopes of its most sanguine supporters, the Free Soil Party transformed the national standing of antislavery politics. To old Liberty strategists who had long privileged congressional antislavery action, the influx of new congressmen severed from ties to the old Slave Power parties offered a new promise of forcing congressional confrontations. Free Soil congressmen soon, if temporarily, fulfilled this promise, obstructing legislation to draw attention to the Slave Power's pervasive influence over the major parties. From their new congressional vantage point, Free Soil partisans would play a vital role in assuring continued attention to slavery and the Slave Power, despite the major parties' best efforts to quell the sectional tensions that the 1848 election had laid bare.

[107] *Wisconsin Freeman* (formerly the *American Freeman*), Nov. 15, 1848; Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 155; Blue, *Free Soilers*, 137; *National Era*, Nov. 16, 1848, May 3, Jul. 5, Aug. 30, Oct. 11, 1849; *Wisconsin Free Democrat* (formerly the *Wisconsin Freeman*), Jan. 3, 1849.

"Glorious Confusion in the Ranks": The Free Soil Balance of Power and the Speakership, 1849

The speakership contest in the 31st Congress represented a pivotal moment for political abolitionists. In the incoming House, Free Soilers achieved what the Liberty Party never could: a congressional balance of power. In December of 1849, the wheels of legislation stood still for three weeks as the House repeatedly failed to organize. Ultimately it took fifty-nine ballots over twenty days before the House gave up the time-honored majority rule and resolved to appoint a plurality winner unacceptable to over half the House. After votes were counted for the sixty-third and final time, Georgia Democrat Howell Cobb was elected to preside.

Over the weeks of stalemate, though, the deep divisions over slavery in the national legislature became ever clearer. Threats of disunion, physical violence, and general pandemonium characterized the proceedings, displaying the old parties' inability to silence disagreement over slavery. By repeatedly defeating the major parties' attempts to organize and insisting that any candidate meet certain basic antislavery demands to receive their votes, Free Soilers established the new power of political antislavery in national legislative politics. Most scholarly treatments of this pivotal congressional session mention the speakership contest only briefly as a prelude to the Compromise of 1850, rather than noticing its significance in marking the emergence of an organized antislavery bloc in Congress.[1] Free Soilers' ability to disrupt the election of a proslavery, or noncommittal, speaker presented an exciting opportunity to demonstrate their clout and advance the goal of uniting opponents of the Slave Power.

Counting nine Free Soil representatives along with several others elected with the party's aid, Free Soilers hoped to force the election of an antislavery Speaker and guarantee themselves a voice on key committees out of which they could report antislavery legislation: a bill from the Committee on Territories incorporating the anti-extensionist Wilmot Proviso, a bill from the Committee on the District of Columbia to abolish slavery at the capital, and a bill from the Judiciary Committee repealing the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. If neither party's southern wing would permit the election of a Proviso supporter, Free Soilers thought they might do one better, and precipitate a sectional organization. At a minimum they would dramatize slaveholders' control of both major parties.[2]

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[1] Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 191-195, offers the best extant account of Free Soil Party's role in this disruptive battle over the speakership and provides a detailed account of the abortive attempt to marshal Free Soil support for William Brown (see below). Blue does not, however, pay close attention to Free Soilers' analyses of the strategic value in promoting sectional gridlock, nor does he fully illustrate the depth of frustration among major party members; While historians have often glossed over this contest, political scientists Jeffery A. Jenkins and Charles Stewart III, "Sophisticated Behavior and Speakership Elections: The Elections of 1849 and 1855-56," Paper Presented at the Midwestern Political Science Association, Chicago, Apr. 19-22, 2001, Draft of Apr. 9, 2001, http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/papers/sophisticated_speakers_3.pdf, show that the deadlock stemmed largely from members' concerns about their highly sectionalized constituencies.

[2] Estimates of expected Free Soil strength varied widely. Several incoming representatives had been supported by the Free Soil Party and ran on their anti-extension credentials but had not renounced their old party ties. One overestimate from the Boston *Republican*, quoted in *National Era*, Aug. 30, 1849, counted eighteen Free Soil votes including men elected with Free Soil support (and hoped for two more in New England runoffs). In a more measured assessment the *National Era*, Oct. 11, 1849, counted ten or eleven (depending on Palfrey's fortunes in the upcoming runoff) that would act together in organization of the House. Over the course of these proceedings, the number of free soil Whigs and free soil Democrats voting against their party's nominees fluctuated. On the first

By the end of the summer of 1849, Free Soil partisans recognized their balance of power in the next House and enthusiastically awaited the new Congress. With the major parties so closely divided and so wracked with tension over the slavery expansion question, the new third party in Congress could exploit the tensions within the Second Party System. The *National Era* anticipated that "as a separate organization, the Free-Soilers can effect much by holding a whip over the old parties."[3]

Veteran congressional brawler Joshua Giddings naturally became the focal point of efforts to make the speakership contest the first great stand of the Free Soil Party in the House. Giddings exhorted Charles Sumner to rouse voters to elect Massachusetts Free Soiler John G. Palfrey at his next runoff, because the party would need every possible vote in the speakership contest. Sumner similarly urged Giddings to buttonhole anti-extension Whig Horace Mann to vote against incumbent Whig Speaker Robert Winthrop. Giddings recognized the attention that disputes over Winthrop's previous speakership election had drawn to the importance of key committee arrangements. Now, two years later, Giddings was joined by a party of allies ready to renew that controversy.[4]

Joseph Root, another former Whig from northeastern Ohio, was equally active in preparing for the contest. Root understood that Free Soilers might hold a balance of power, but nervously counted votes, disbelieving "Free-Soil newspapers [that] tell us that there will be at least 17 freesoilers" and that Free Soilers could "elect one of their own number Speaker and control the legislation of Congress on the subject of Slavery." Root cautioned Giddings about the difficulty of "putting old wine in new bottles," worrying that ex-Democrats like Wilmot and Preston King would only support other former Democrats. King, however, assured Giddings of his determination that Free Soilers must vote for their own man. Root was adamant that Free Soil members "stand aloof from both old parties" believing they would be better served by dramatizing the power of slaveholders and "driving the old parties into a coalition with each other than by coalescing with either especially if we were to make any concession." Both Root and Giddings clearly appreciated that their balance of power in the House would provide valuable opportunities to advance their cause, even if ultimately only by further exposing the Slave Power's domination of the national Whig and Democratic Parties.[5]

When representatives began arriving in Washington, it quickly became clear that neither the Whig nor Democratic caucus candidates could win a majority. On the eve of the 31st Congress, Giddings boasted to his wife of the "glorious confusion in the ranks" of the major parties. While Free Soilers could count on only nine sure Free Soil votes, they might expect up to sixteen defections from free soil Whigs and free soil Democrats "who hang between heaven and he-ll," torn between the Wilmot Proviso and old party loyalties. As expected, the major parties both nominated candidates unacceptable to Free Soilers. The Democratic caucus tapped gifted floor leader Howell Cobb, a thirty-four year old Georgia planter whom moderate anti-

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ballot, fourteen total representatives (with Indiana Free Soiler George Julian absent and Palfrey's seat still unfilled) cast anti-extension votes against the caucus candidates. *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 31st Congress, 1st Session, 2.

[3] *National Era*, Aug. 30, 1849.

[4] Charles Sumner (CS) to Joshua Giddings (JG), Aug. 20, 1849, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 268-269; JG to CS, Jul. 11, Oct. 29, 1849, *The Papers of Charles Sumner* (CS Papers), Houghton Library, Harvard University, microform edition, ed. Beverly Palmer (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988); CS to JG, Nov. 29, 1849, Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, microform (JG Papers).

[5] Joseph Root to JG, Jun. 12, Sept. 29, 1849, Preston King to JG, Sept. 19, 1849, JG Papers.

extension Democrats might tolerate because of his refusal to sign John C. Calhoun's secessionist Southern Address. The Whigs nominated the conservative incumbent Winthrop. Faced with one dogged opponent of the Proviso, and another candidate only tepidly supporting it, Free Soilers caucused to support their own David Wilmot and hunkered down for a long battle. [6]

When the Free Soilers finally entered the House of Representatives, they were well prepared to employ their balance of power to fix the nation's attention on slavery. For months, Free Soil representatives had been calculating to defeat the election of a proslavery speaker. On the first ballot Cobb ran six votes ahead of Winthrop but fell nine short of a majority, as Wilmot received eight votes, and himself voted for a Free Soiler, while five other Northerners cast protest votes. The result on the next several ballots was similar. Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era* excitedly reported:

> For the first time in the history of the Government, a distinct Anti-Slavery party held the balance of power between the old parties, and much anxiety was felt in relation to its policy and purposes …
> The Free-Soilers distinctively, count nine votes, and, beside these, five were constantly given by Free-Soil Whigs and Democrats, in opposition to the caucus nominees. It was apparent that there was a body of fourteen men determined to make opposition to Slavery in the Territories of the United States, just as the slaveholders had determined to make Opposition to Slavery-Restriction, a test.

Cobb himself likewise blamed antislavery sentiment, privately attributing his failure to "the Northern free-soil Democrats who would vote for no southern man."[7]

Free Soilers made clear that they would support either a staunch Wilmot Proviso Whig or Democrat and disputed aspersions that they were merely disruptive obstructionists. Free Soilers insisted they would unite with Democrats to elect William Strong, a Wilmot Proviso Democrat, or with Whigs behind abolitionist Whig Thaddeus Stevens (both Pennsylvanians). Even better, Free Soilers might eventually unify all Proviso supporters and organize the House along sectional lines. The *National Era* noted that the Free Soil Party would gladly allow any of its members to accept the nomination of either major party. The Free Soilers, the *Era* explained, sought "nothing for themselves" and stood "ready, at any moment, to vote for any candidate, Whig or Democrat, who would appoint the committees of the House so as to give a fair expression to the Public Sentiment of the country."[8]

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[6] JG to Laura Waters Giddings, Dec. 2, 1849, JG Papers; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), suggests that Toombs and Stephens's aggressive demands were in part rooted in an internal struggle with Georgia Senator John Berrien for control of their state's Whig Party.

[7] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 2; Jenkins and Stewart, "Sophisticated Behavior and Speakership Elections," 19; "31st Congress," *National Era*, Dec. 6, 1849; Six southern Whigs and three South Carolina Democrats also scattered their votes to nominees more suitably proslavery than Winthrop or Cobb. Led by Georgia's Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens, the disgruntled southern Whigs became known derisively as the "impracticables." Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 467-470; Howell Cobb to His Wife, Dec. 4, 1849, *The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb*, ed. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970, orig. American Historical Association, 1913), 178.

[8] For examples of support for Strong and Stevens, see the speech of Preston King in, *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 36, and JG to Joseph Addison Giddings, Dec. 8, 1849, JG Papers; "Not Factious," *National Era*, Dec. 20, 1849.

Gradually, members of the major parties grew troubled by the impasse, and tried to devise some method to end the controversy. Already by the second day (but after thirteen unsuccessful ballots) future president Andrew Johnson (D-TN) was sufficiently frustrated to propose a plurality rule. Johnson was willing to immediately accept a Whig or Democrat so they could begin legislating. At this point few agreed. The House tabled Johnson's motion, 210-11. After several more days of inconclusive ballots (bringing the total to thirty-one), Democrats and Whigs began to yearn for *any* solution to the unseemly standoff. Isaac Morse (D-LA) suggested leaving the organization of the House to chance by putting Cobb's and Winthrop's names in a box and drawing one for speaker. When this lottery method failed, Robert Schenck (W-OH) offered to eliminate the problem of accountability to one's constituents by resorting to a secret ballot, but the House discarded that plan too.[9]

Free Soilers responded by highlighting this evidence of just how desperately the major parties sought to evade the slavery issue, by any, however anti-democratic, method necessary. Root mocked Morse's "gambling resolution" that would make the House "a ridiculous assemblage." Root also attacked the suggestion that Free Soil men alone bore responsibility for disorganizing the House, when the other 220 members also could not find a way to organize. Root expressed complete satisfaction with his disruptive role: "That was the very accountability he (Mr. R.) courted." Charles Durkee (FS-WI) similarly celebrated that the failure to organize advanced the "cause of freedom" by making it "obvious to the whole American people, that the great struggle is between the slavery propagandists and the slavery restrictionists."[10]

Indiana Democrat William Brown came closest to a majority, failing by only two votes on December 12, after surprisingly receiving five Free Soil votes, including those of ex-Whigs Giddings and Charles Allen (MA), along with the vote of every anti-extension Democrat who had refused to support Cobb. Brown fell just shy in part because three Free Soilers would not vote for him, but also because a few Southerners who had previously supported him instead voted for Kentucky's Linn Boyd after witnessing his Free Soil support.[11]

With the near Democratic victory, Whigs got nervous. Edward Stanly (W-NC) proposed that Whigs and Democrats collaborate in some settlement that would exclude Free Soilers, suggesting a conference between three members from each of the two major parties. Stanley also took the opportunity to chide disunionist southern fire-eaters: "This Government was not coming to an end yet, no matter what gentlemen might say about Free Soilism, Wilmot Provisoism, and all such tomfoolery." Stanley then insinuated that the Democrats had made a bargain with the Free Soilers to gain Brown's election. George Ashmun (W-MA) followed by noting the "common rumor" that Brown had pledged to "constitute the committees in a manner satisfactory" to Free Soilers.[12]

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[9] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 5-6, 13-14.

[10] Ibid., 13; Durkee, "Letter from D.," December 7, 1849, in *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, Dec. 19, 1849.

[11] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 16-18. Brown's personal position on the Wilmot Proviso was ambiguous. Brown had sided with the South on many issues, including Texas annexation, but he had missed the opportunity to vote for or against the Proviso, since he did not sit in the 29th and 30th Congresses while serving as Assistant Postmaster General under President Polk. In that capacity, though, he proscribed Barnburners from patronage offices during their 1848 revolt. Jenkins and Stewart, "Sophisticated Behavior and Speakership Elections," 22-23; Root, ex-Whig John Howe (PA), and Amos Tuck refused to support Brown. With decades of hindsight, George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Company, 1884), 74-76, argued that Brown's later doughfaced record vindicated the Free Soilers who voted against Brown.

[12] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 19.

Assaults on Free Soilers drew an angry cautionary response from Joseph Root (who had not voted for Brown). Root highlighted the rift in the Whig Party when he warned Stanley "that nine out of ten of those representing the Whig party from the North would not, and the others dare not, when brought before their constituents, say that the Wilmot proviso was a humbug and tomfoolery." This "deep-seated immovable sentiment, fixed in the hearts of the northern people" could not be suppressed by the major parties' efforts to "dodge the Wilmot Proviso."[13]

Brown then grabbed the House's attention back by producing his correspondence with Wilmot. As Whigs had accused, Brown had indeed given assurances to the Free Soilers who voted for him. Wilmot and Brown both explained that Wilmot had demanded and received only a promise of a fair arrangement of the Territorial, Judiciary, and District of Columbia Committees—a pledge that they would not have southern majorities that could easily stifle efforts to pass the Proviso, contest the fugitive slave law, and promote abolition in the capital. This correspondence had given Wilmot "reason to believe that a majority of these committees would be composed of fair northern men." Once Brown apprised southern Democrats of this correspondence, he lost all chance of election, and Free Soilers lost the committee power Brown had seemed to promise. The House returned to deadlock and tempers continued to rise.[14]

In this unsuccessful maneuver, Giddings, King, and Wilmot verified that they were not disrupting Congress simply for obstruction's sake. This showed that they *were* willing to organize the House. They had nearly crowned a Democratic speaker as soon as he provided written assurance that under his speakership they could have anticipated committees that would bring antislavery legislation up for debate. Angry northern Whigs assailed Free Soilers, especially former Conscience Whigs, as negotiating with the South. As far as Free Soilers were concerned, embittered Whigs missed the point. Free Soilers had been elected to combat the Slave Power. Ensuring committees that would report antislavery bills out to the House was one of the best ways to do this. This was why Free Soilers distrusted Winthrop. Under Winthrop's previous speakership the House's "committees on the District, the Territories, & the Judiciary" had been, as Free Soil senator Salmon Chase put it, "constituted for *inaction*."[15]

Even skeptical Free Soil partisans commended the Free Soil representatives' aims. Former Liberty leader Joshua Leavitt argued that their votes for Brown demonstrated that the Slave Power bore responsibility for obstructing the House: "The only men who've made an honorable concession for the sake of organization is the Free Soil [men]. They can afford it. With only half the concessions our men have made, the Whigs & Democrats of the North can choose a speaker any moment." Leavitt continued to stress that Whigs or Democrats could organize the House if they would unite on any man with known free soil proclivities.[16]

Brown's defeat demonstrated that coalition between the Free Soilers and either of the major parties would be impossible. For days, Free Soilers had been suggesting that Democrats unite behind William Strong or Whigs behind Thaddeus Stevens. The Free Soil votes that would follow would organize the House for whichever party nominated a strong anti-extension

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[13] Ibid.
[14] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 21-22.
[15] Orin Fowler to Artemas Hale, Dec. 12, 1849, Artemas Hale Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Salmon P. Chase (SPC) to CS, December 14, 1849, *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), 2:265.
[16] Joshua Leavitt to JG, December 15, 1849, JG Papers; See also "Proceedings in the House on the 12th Instant—W. J. Brown, "*National Era*, Dec. 20, 1849, and SPC to Edward S. Hamlin, Dec. 30, 1849, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:271-272.

candidate. Yet, as soon as Free Soilers were seen to be massing behind a Democratic candidate with a far more ambiguous record than Strong or Stevens, many slaveholding Democrats withdrew support from Brown. Clearly Southerners would never suffer the election of any man acceptable to Free Soilers. Instead they had to remain firm and hope to so immobilize the House that a partisan organization would be deemed hopeless and give way to a sectional one.[17]

If the old parties fragmented, the Free Soilers stood poised to spearhead the longtime Liberty goal of uniting all opponents of the Slave Power. The *National Era* argued that "non-slaveholders of the country, constituting the great majority of the citizens, demand that the committees of the House should represent the Sentiment of Liberty, and not that of Slavery." This, for Bailey, signified dramatic progress towards the goals for which abolitionists had left "their respective parties in 1840, and commenced the policy of voting for candidates pledged in favor of Human Liberty." The stalemate provided the most promising opportunity yet to confront the Slave Power:

> Let the Slavery Men and Free Soil Men meet each other face to face, with no compromisers between them. The aim of one party is to *denationalize* Slavery, of the other, to *nationalize* it. Let each vote for the candidate representing its views … The sooner Congress is brought to this point, admitting of no evasion, compromise, or postponement, the better for the peace of the country.

Representative Charles Allen concurred, declaring that slavery constituted the "principle which divides the whole House into two, and but two parties." Since substantive policy stands no longer unified the Whig and Democratic parties, Allen believed their "artificial division" should give way so that "an organization may be at once effected, which shall give security to freedom, establish the prosperity of the nation, and advance the cause of justice and humanity."[18]

The day after Brown's ignominious defeat, the House witnessed even greater unrest. Ardent proslavery Democrat Richard Meade (VA) suggested that "those who are desirous of crushing this demon of discord, for the purpose of uniting the conservatism on both sides" resolve against abolition in the District of Columbia and slavery prohibition in the federal territories. Meade, magnanimously promised to "take a Speaker from either side of the House" if that resolution were adopted, but then truculently declared, "If the organization of this House is to be followed by the passage of these bills—if these outrages are to be committed upon my people, I trust in God, sir, that my eyes have rested upon the last Speaker of the House." Unsurprisingly, Meade failed to mollify the chamber. New York Whig Duer reproached Meade by branding him a disunionist. When Meade angrily denied the epithet, Duer called him a liar. Meade exploded and had to be physically restrained from assaulting the New Yorker.[19]

Free Soilers exulted in the disorganization and the attention it drew to the Slave Power's influence over both parties. Senator Chase rejoiced at the "true grit" of the "Spartan Band of Free Soilers," and reported to associates back in Ohio that slaveholders threatened disunion and "got up blood & thunder in their most approved style," but "were astonished to find that menace

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[17] Later in the session, the Free Soilers repeatedly reminded those who criticized their obstructionism that they had been willing to support Strong or Stevens but neither major party would unite with them. See the speech of JG in *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 79.

[18] "The Contest for Speakership," *The National Era*, Dec. 13, 1849; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 35.

[19] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 25-27.

and hyperbole had ceased to operate after the old fashion." Assessing the possible outcomes, Chase declared it "impossible to predict what turn things may take," but he maintained hope that a northern Democrat could be elected by "anti-extension votes from both sides of the House." Though he believed an antislavery "union would decide the matter and bring things to a crisis at once," Chase feared the obstinacy of major party allegiances.[20]

Free Soil representatives shared Chase's cautious optimism. "The old parties," Giddings asserted, "appear to be totally paralised, and their leaders incapable of action." He assured Sumner that "separation between the northern and southern wings" of both major parties was "becoming daily wider and wider." As the standstill persisted, Giddings grew increasingly sanguine about Free Soilers' efforts to unravel the major parties, now "scattered never again to come together." In Giddings' opinion, the Free Soilers, consulting almost nightly, stood as the House's "only organized party." Durkee reported to his constituents that "the two old pro-slavery connexions are now pretty well broken up" and that the standoff had drawn increased attention to the antislavery cause. Though he foresaw "a stormy session," Durkee remained confident it would "tend greatly to hasten the time, and promote the cause of emancipation."[21]

To Free Soilers' dismay, the House adopted a rule to eliminate debate the day after Meade and Duer's altercation (December 14) for the apparent purpose of expediting a decision, and probably also to prevent a repeat of the previous day's embarrassing display. Over the next few days, members unsuccessfully advocated more inventive methods for choosing a speaker, though none were debatable anymore. One called for the election of anyone who could win a plurality of 49/100 on the next ballot or 48/100 on the ballot after that or 47/100 on the third, continuing successively until someone reached this incrementally declining benchmark for plurality election. Even more convoluted was the proposal made after the 57th ballot by Chester Butler (W-PA). Butler proposed that one Whig and one Democrat be appointed a "committee," and then each would also select one witness. The original two would each write ten names on a list (excluding their own and the witnesses'). Added to those twenty, one other representative would be chosen by lot from the remaining members. Then the "committee" and witnesses would retire to the speaker's room with their list of twenty-one members and alternately strike out names until one remained. This glorified, and absurd, version of Morse's original plan to draw names out of a hat made little headway but demonstrated the widespread desperation to select a speaker by any method that would avert a sectional organization of the House.[22]

Eventually a simpler anti-majoritarian plan succeeded, despite vociferous Free Soil resistance. The House appointed a private conference of six Whigs and six Democrats—three Southerners and three Northerners from each party. Giddings and Root loudly declaimed against this conference, but were silenced by an appeal to the rule passed on December 14 to eliminate debate. Giddings demanded a hearing for his and Root's protests, thundering on amidst calls to order that "gentlemen may cry 'order' till they are hoarse. They will not deprive me of my rights on this floor." When finally quieted, Giddings self-assuredly and caustically noted that "this was

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[20] SPC to Albert G. Riddle, Dec. 3, 10, 1849, Papers of Salmon P. Chase, Library of Congress, microform; SPC to CS, Dec. 14, 1849 and SPC to Hamlin, Dec. 15, 1849, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:265-268; SPC to E.M. Stanton, Dec. 14, 1849, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[21] JG to Lura Maria Giddings, Dec. 16, 1849, JG Papers; JG to CS, Dec. 15, 1849, CS Papers; JG to Joseph A. Giddings, Dec. 25, 1849, JG Papers; Letter from Charles Durkee, Dec.14, 1849, in *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, Dec. 26, 1849.

[22] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 34; Butler claimed his plan originated with an unnamed retired member of Andrew Jackson's cabinet. Ibid., 47.

not the first time he had been choked down on this floor." Two days later the conference committee reported back with a motion that after three more unsuccessful ballots, the fourth one would select a speaker by plurality vote.[23]

Despite the outrage of Free Soilers, the plurality rule passed 113 to 106, supported by some southern Democrats but mostly by Whigs, who needed the House organized to enable any action from the Whig administration and also perhaps believed that in a plurality contest Free Soilers would swallow Winthrop to defeat Cobb. The Whigs were disappointed when the House called the roll for the 63rd time. Cobb won 102 votes compared to Winthrop's 99. Even the long-awaited appointment of a Speaker, however, could not restore calm. It took dozens of ballots and two more weeks of similar sectional discord before the House reached agreement on a clerk and sergeant-at-arms, and then gave up entirely on the stalemated contest for a new doorkeeper.[24]

In so delaying the House's organization, Free Soilers had shown their potential to wield power on the national level. The Free Soil Party had incorporated thousands of Liberty Party abolitionists who saw the broader movement as offering a genuine opportunity for concrete power in Congress. Congressional Free Soilers' ability to obstruct legislation and sow chaos through both national political parties confirmed this Liberty hope and dramatized both major parties' deference to the Slave Power. With the House's abandonment of majority-rule selection for speaker, the Free Soilers' apparent control of the Congress abruptly ended. The Compromise of 1850 would soon provide new obstacles for those seeking to challenge the still powerful Democratic and Whig party organizations. The depth of Free Soil commitment to pursuing antislavery policy at the national level, and the determination of Whigs and Democrats to evade the slavery issue, clearly demonstrated, though, that third-party anti-Slave Power politics could continue to undermine the Second Party System as sectional conflict grew ever more salient in national politics.

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[23] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 49-50, 61-63.

[24] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 66. Evincing the House's general uncertainty, Cobb privately reported that Whig supporters of the plurality rule claimed they believed it likely to elect Cobb, but Cobb, himself, voted against the rule, assuming it would elect Winthrop. Howell Cobb to His Wife, Dec. 20, 22, 1849, *Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb*, 179-180; *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 67, 75-76.

CHAPTER 6

Free Soil Politics and the Birth of the Republican Party, 1850-1855

Free Soilers never again matched their 1848 showing that gave the third party the balance of power in the U.S. House. Yet by 1854, prospects for establishing a major party committed to defeating the Slave Power seemed better than ever. In the period between the opening of Congress in December of 1849 and passage of the infamous Kansas-Nebraska Act in May of 1854, Free Soilers played an important role in sustaining anti-Slave Power politics. Free Soil congressmen employed strategies developed by political abolitionists to draw further attention to the Slave Power. Using Congress as an antislavery platform, Free Soilers ensured continued national attention to slavery, even as major-party politicians worked vigorously to tamp down brewing sectional conflict. The Free Soil Party also created new opportunities for antislavery men to bargain for power in many northern states. Free Soilers' complicated coalition strategies at the state level often ended in disappointment for antislavery men but some played a vital role in ensuring a continued antislavery congressional presence. Notwithstanding the compromises made in some states, most Free Soilers recognized the imperative to remain aloof *nationally* from the Slave Power-dominated parties. With the Slave Power's new demands in the mid-1850s, Free Soil congressmen were in the vanguard in promoting a new antislavery political party that could better challenge the Slave Power's control over national politics.

Compromise and Resistance

The ultimate defeat of the Free Soil agitators in the 1849 speakership contest provided an ominous prelude to the session that would follow. Over the coming months a sufficient majority was cobbled together to endorse another unsatisfying sectional compromise. The Wilmot Proviso debates had originated as a hypothetical argument over laws for territory the United States did not yet own, but by the start of the 31st Congress, California, flooded with immigrants during the 1849 Gold Rush, demanded admission as a free state. With President Taylor endorsing California statehood, Congress could only procrastinate for so long, since the disorderly territory had attracted a considerable population (exceeding that of some states) and drafted a state constitution. Admitting California as a free state, however, would be impossible without some concession for slavery in the southern-dominated Senate.

In the ensuing Compromise of 1850 (the not quite accurate conventional name for this Congress's bundle of legislation pertaining to slavery), northern anti-extensionists gained the free state of California and the nearly meaningless concession of an end to the public slave trade at the capital (commerce in human beings simply moved across the river to Alexandria). Free Soilers correctly viewed the 1850 compromise as a bitter defeat. Congress disregarded the Wilmot Proviso and organized two new territories, New Mexico and Utah, through bills that failed to prohibit slavery. Congress also resolved a charged boundary dispute between Texas and the federal territory of New Mexico by assuming $10 million of state debt in exchange for Texas relinquishing a significant portion of her dubious land claims. This settlement, though, still left the westernmost slave state with thousands of acres that Free Soilers thought belonged

with New Mexico. Worst of all, Congress passed a more stringent Fugitive Slave Act, authorizing federal commissioners to return alleged fugitives to slavery without jury trials or testimony from the accused. Among the most needlessly offensive provisions of that bill, commissioners received ten dollars for remanding an alleged fugitive, but only five for releasing him or her. Though it was supposedly designed to compensate for extra paperwork, abolitionists unsurprisingly cast this pay scale as a bribe to encourage findings against alleged fugitives. Perhaps the most galling component of the bill was its provision for federal marshals to require northern citizens to join slave hunting posses, with hefty fines and prison time as penalties for refusal. Northerners were now at risk of being enlisted into new national versions of the slave patrols that terrorized blacks across the South. This disturbing new aggression, though, gave Free Soilers added evidence for their assault on the Slave Power.[1]

This famous legislation originated in Senator Henry Clay's attempt "to settle and adjust amicably all the existing questions of controversy … arising out of the institution of slavery." President Taylor had called for avoiding the territorial question, and thus the Wilmot Proviso, by simply admitting California and New Mexico as states, with an antislavery constitution certain in the former and likely in the latter. Clay offered a different solution that would admit California as a free state while mollifying southern tempers in other ways. Clay incorporated James Mason's (D-VA) more stringent bill for recovery of fugitive slaves, but many southern senators still saw Clay's proposals as rife with concessions to northern fanaticism, while Free Soilers denounced the onerous fugitive slave proposal and Clay's rejection of the Wilmot Proviso.[2]

In the closely watched debates over Clay's compromise, senatorial orations by aging political giants like Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun further fixated national political interest on the slavery question. In the most dramatic articulation of Deep South opposition to Clay's proposals, Calhoun, emaciated and dying (he expired later that month), drafted a final "speech" eulogizing American slavery, which was read by Mason. Identifying antislavery efforts to "exclude the South" from the territories as aimed at securing northern power to ultimately destroy slavery—a correct assessment at least of most political abolitionists' motives, Calhoun explicitly warned that that without new protections for slavery, disunion would soon become necessary.[3] Webster responded, "not as a Massachusetts man, nor a northern man, but as an

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[1] In addition to the primary sources cited below, my discussion of the "Compromise of 1850" and debates preceding it, draws on the syntheses of William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: V. 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 487-510; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 210-231; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 633-645; and David M. Potter *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 90-120. Potter demonstrates that this legislation was less a compromise than an "armistice," in which moderates staved off further conflict without getting a majority of congressmen to agree on the entire settlement; For a very useful analysis of the underappreciated importance of the Texas boundary issue, see Mark J. Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1996); On the controversial and legally innovative provision of the new fugitive slave bill allowing federal commissioners to deputize a citizen posse, see Gautham Rao, "The Federal *Posse Comitatus* Doctrine: Slavery, Compulsion, and Statecraft in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Law and History Review* 26 (Spring 2008), 1-56.

[2] Clay's initial resolutions can be found in *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 31st Congress, 2nd Session, 246-47.

[3] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 451-455; While Calhoun advocated a constitutional amendment giving the South a sectional veto over the northern majority in Congress, most southern opponents of Clay's proposals made more conventional demands for a geographical division of California. Proslavery senators, led by future Confederate president Jefferson Davis (D-MS), hoped to leave the less settled southern portion of California open to slavery (a

American," with a famous endorsement of Clay's proposals, including the proposed fugitive slave law. Condemning abolitionist agitation, Webster opined that, on the issue of northern obstruction of fugitive slave rendition, "the South is right, and the North is wrong." In this renowned "Seventh of March Speech," Webster established conservative northern Whig support for compromise and drew forth angry rebukes from antislavery men across the North.[4]

Antislavery senators of course met Webster's challenge, and Free Soilers Salmon Chase and John P. Hale especially exploited the highly newsworthy debates to generate opposition to the Slave Power's new demands. However, antislavery Whig William Seward's senatorial retort to Webster has long been the best known response because of its incendiary appeal to "higher law." With close ties to Taylor and his plan of avoiding the territorial stage, Seward opposed the compromise measures championed by his party's senate leaders and notoriously asserted that "there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes" of justice and liberty.[5]

Free Soil speeches went even further in opposing the compromise measures, beginning with John P. Hale's two-day attack on slaveholders' national political power. Focusing his most aggressive rhetoric on the proposed fugitive bill, Hale assailed its presumption that alleged fugitives were necessarily slaves. By denying them due process and a jury trial, the bill proceeded "entirely on the assumption that there are no rights in the Constitution, except the rights of slavery." In reply to southern appeals to "save this Union," Hale urged Southerners to "cease from representing the North as oppressive" and the Wilmot Proviso as unconstitutional. "If you can only purchase peace with us by compelling us to surrender everything which exalts us above your slaves," Hale further responded, "let disunion come."[6]

Chase's similarly lengthy attack on the compromise proposals forcefully argued, as Liberty men long had, that "freedom is national; slavery only is local and sectional." Urging support for the Proviso and challenging the constitutionality of the fugitive bill, Chase attacked the major parties' continual efforts to paper over sectional differences with the "equally obnoxious" policies of "silence with reference to important measures" (an allusion to the Whigs' 1848 campaign) and of "ambiguous expressions" (Democrat Lewis Cass's strategy in 1848). Chase's anti-Slave Power speech won abolitionist plaudits and seemed to be well-received by all three parties in Ohio, and Chase actively worked to ensure that the speech was widely circulated, in both English and German versions.[7]

While radicals from both sections drew attention to the question of slavery's future in the American polity, Mississippi Democrat Henry Foote, an enigmatic Deep South moderate who had earned the epithet "Hangman Foote" for his 1848 threat to hang Hale if he ever came to Mississippi, worked to push Clay's plan through as a single "omnibus bill." Otherwise, Foote feared, California would be admitted without any concessions to the South in exchange.

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proposition which would long continue to have champions, mostly southern migrants, within the state) by extending the Missouri Compromise line westward, even though previous Houses had so clearly rejected this plan. Leonard L. Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 125-131.

[4] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 476-484.

[5] *Appendix to the Congressional Globe* (*CG Appendix*), 31st Congress, 1st Session, 260-269.

[6] Ibid., 1054-1065.

[7] *CG Appendix*, 468-480; Flamen Ball to Charles Sumner (CS), May 22, 1850, *The Papers of Charles Sumner*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988), microform (CS Papers); SPC to Stanley Matthews, May 6, 1850, in *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1993), 2:291-294.

Convinced by Foote, Clay watched his compromise go down to defeat from both sides. Most northern Whigs refused to support any bill containing Mason's fugitive law, and Deep South Democrats could not bear a free California or Texas's surrender of such extensive land claims. Though the omnibus failed, one of the main impediments to compromise disappeared that same month (July 1850) when President Taylor died suddenly of a stomach ailment. New president Millard Fillmore of New York, was widely assumed to favor Clay's proposals. Fillmore further signaled his inclination to support compromise legislation when, from Free Soilers' perspective, the new president "insulted the whole North" by appointing Webster Secretary of State.[8]

As an exhausted Clay left Washington, Illinois Democrat Stephen Douglas (Clay's junior by thirty-six years) picked up the pieces of the discarded compromise and cobbled together majorities for each proposal individually. Douglas convinced enough northern Democrats and Upper South Whigs to compromise and join the large sectional blocs voting for the separate bills that benefited either the slave or free states. Most contentious was the Texas boundary issue, which James Pearce (W-MD) addressed with a bill augmenting Texas to its present size and providing for federal assumption of Texas's $10 million debt in exchange for the state accepting Pearce's borders. Free Soilers assailed this bill as a bribe to Texas for relinquishing "her unfounded pretension" to land that was never hers, while Deep Southerners who had a greater interest in Texas's size than its finances opposed the Pearce bill for potentially closing off thousands of acres to slavery. With a Texan military expedition against the U.S. Army in New Mexico looming, this issue threatened to derail the entire compromise in the House. Ultimately a "Little Omnibus" yoking New Mexico's admission under popular sovereignty rules to the Pearce border settlement passed 108-97, with the support of most northern Democrats, nearly all southern Whigs, and a number of pro-administration northern Whigs and Upper South Democrats too. Soon after, the House passed the remaining compromise bills with shifting coalitions resembling those assembled by Douglas in the Senate. When all of this legislation reached Fillmore's desk in September of 1850, he quickly signed the compromise bills into law.[9]

Though many cheered the compromise as an end to sectional tension, anyone who had paid close enough attention to the debates would have realized that harmony would likely prove fleeting. In House debate, Free Soilers repeatedly called attention to the major parties' efforts "to convert the Government into an instrument for the protection and perpetuation of slavery." Well before it even came up for a Senate vote, Amos Tuck declared the proposed compromise "odious to the whole people" of the North. Antislavery Whig Horace Mann (MA), who drifted from his party during these debates and soon after won reelection as a Free Soiler, published letters to his constituents smearing slavery extensionists by appealing to free labor ideals:

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[8] For one example of Free Soilers' use of this nickname for Foote, see Montpelier *Green Mountain Freeman* (*GMF*), Jan. 3, 1850; On the competing efforts of Foote and his instate rival Jefferson Davis to shape the terms of California's admission, see Richards, *California Gold Rush*, 102-109. Two key differences in Clay's omnibus bill form the separate bills that finally passed were that the omnibus bill left Texas smaller than it ultimately became and the omnibus specifically barred the territories of New Mexico and Utah from passing legislation concerning slavery, while the final bills to organize those territories ignored the question of slavery's status, thus tacitly endorsing a popular sovereignty formula; *GMF*, May 2, Aug. 1, 1850.

[9] On the Pearce Bill and the "Little Omnibus," see Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850*, Ch. 8, 11; See also Holman Hamilton *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1964), 136-138, 151-159; SPC to Edward S. Hamlin, Aug. 14, 1850, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:303.

> "Fifty hardy gold diggers from the North will never stand all day knee-deep in water, shovel earth, rockwashers, &c., under a broiling sun, and see a man with his fifty slaves standing under the shade of a tree, or having an umbrella held over is head, with whip in hand, and without wetting his dainty glove, or soiling his japanned boot, pocket as much at night as the whole of them together."

As debates wore on, former Liberty men grew excited that after years of having "almost hopelessly labored to awaken the public mind to a sense of the wrong of slavery, and the danger of its subverting our free institutions," they now saw "not only the masses, but the Congress of the nation itself, engrossed, for a whole session, with none other than the 'one idea' they were ridiculed for entertaining." "Slavery and Freedom," Free Soilers celebrated, "have become almost the sole questions agitated here. Northing else is discussed; nothing else is talked of."[10]

After the compromise measures passed, unrelenting antislavery radicals continued striving to make Congress a platform for opposition to the Compromise's proslavery concessions. To Free Soilers' delight, antislavery Whig Thaddeus Stevens (PA), for example, gave notice of a bill to repeal the Fugitive Slave Act just four days after it had passed the House. Preston King, finally finding an opening in the session's closing days, proposed a bill for emancipation in the District of Columbia, but the House did not allow him to introduce it. Perhaps the most dramatic immediate rebuke to the "Healing Measures of Congress," was George Julian's (FS-IN) diatribe asserting that "a tissue of more heartless and cold-blooded enactments never disgraced the legislation of a civilized people." Attacking the Fugitive Slave Act, Julian defiantly warned that both his constituents and Julian himself would resist it with their lives, if necessary. "If," Julian continued, "I believed the people I represent were base enough to become the miserable flunkies of a God-forsaken southern slave hunter by joining him or his constable in the blood-hound chase of a panting slave, I would scorn to hold a seat on this floor by their suffrages, and I would denounce them as fit subjects themselves for the lash of the slave-driver." "The passage of the fugitive slave bill," Julian predicted, would "open a fresh wound in the north, and it will continue to bleed just as long as the law stands unrepealed."[11]

While indignant at the Texas boundary adjustment and the rejection of the Proviso for the New Mexico and Utah territories, Free Soilers directed their fury against the Fugitive Slave Law—the Compromise's most barefaced proslavery concession. Even Free Soilers who believed the Texas boundary question was of far greater importance soon concentrated their fire on the Fugitive Slave Act. The new law, like the gag rule in prior years, provided valuable confirmation for the Slave Power argument. Former Liberty leaders optimistically asserted that "the slaveholders have overdone the matter and waked up an intense excitement—so the work goes on when seemingly adverse." "This fugitive law," Austin Willey asserted, "is doing a great work and we ought I think to make the most of it." Protesting the "atrocious measure," the Boston *Emancipator and Republican* asserted that "if any southern blood hound or northern spaniel crosses our threshold in search" of a fugitive, "he will be kicked out as we would serve

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[10] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1136-37, 1561-63; "Letter of Hon. Horace Mann to his Constituents on the Slavery Question," in Boston *Emancipator and Republican* (*E & R*), May 9, 1850; *GMF* Aug. 1, 1850; Cleveland *Daily True Democrat* (*DTD*), Mar. 17, 1850.

[11] *CG*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1827-28, 1954; *DTD*, Sept. 24, 1850; *CG Appendix*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1299-1302.

any dead dog." Even men who had recently "been the apparent slaves of hunkerism" denounced the Fugitive Slave Act.[12]

While speedy repeal seemed unlikely, antislavery congressmen at least hoped to use their public platform to highlight how the major parties upheld the Slave Power. Giddings, for example, delivered a withering response to Fillmore's December 1850 exhortation that Congress accept the "final settlement" of the slavery question. Giddings acknowledged Fillmore for at least being honest about supporting the odious fugitive law, unlike many northern Whigs who had voted against it but now opposed its repeal. "The remnant," of Giddings's former party had "literally become a slave-catching party." Invoking a "higher law," Giddings insisted that "our people of northern Ohio" would "continue to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, and to relieve the oppressed." Though the President requested Congress neither repeal nor agitate the law, Giddings promised, "Agitation will never cease until the law ceases."[13]

Free Soilers especially attacked Webster, the onetime Proviso advocate whose endorsement of the Fugitive Slave Act could be used to highlight northern major-party politicians' subservience to the Slave Power. Upbraiding Webster as a "pliant tool of the slave power," Free Soilers exploited his sectional treachery to urge antislavery secessions from the Whig Party. The day after Webster's oration, Joshua Giddings instructed his editor son: "Don't fail to use the weapon which Webster has put into the hands of the free soilers to beat out the brains of the Whigs." Former Liberty man John Jay similarly appreciated:

> "The apostacy of Webster melancholy as it is, is so open, bare-faced, & palpably unprincipled that I trust it will not be without its good effect in teaching the people of New England to judge for themselves, without reference to the views of political demagogues, & in awakening the citizens of the North generally, to the corrupting influence of slavery Even upon their greatest & strongest men." [14]

If white Free Soil strategists saw this new Slave Power usurpation as at least providing political capital, for northern black communities the Fugitive Slave Act was an unmitigated disaster. This law directly threatened the tenuous freedom of all black Northerners—fugitives, freemen, and freedmen. Though only about 300 were apprehended under the law (through 1860), the danger of recapture forced many fugitives who had made lives in the North to choose between constant fearful vigilance or fleeing to British Canada. Several dramatic arrests and episodes of black and biracial resistance further dramatized the Slave Power's threat to northern freedom and at times seemed to heighten the slavery conflict that the 1850 Compromise was supposed to allay.[15]

While the law was still under debate in the Senate, black Bostonians organized a "League of Freedom" and warned that enforcement "would be a dangerous business." In

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[12] *GMF*, Sept. 5, Oct. 10, 1850; Austin Willey to JPH, Oct. 14, 1850, John Parker Hale Papers (JPH Papers), New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord; *E & R*, Sept. 19, 1850; Jacob Brinkerhoff to SPC, Nov. 29, 1850, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia.

[13] Fillmore's message, Dec. 2, 1850, quoted from *CG*, 31st Congress, 2nd Session, 5; *CG Appendix*, 31st Congress, 2nd Session, 252-256.

[14] *GMF*, Mar. 28, 1847; Joshua Giddings (JG) to Joseph A. Giddings, Mar. 8, 1850, Joshua R. Giddings Papers (JG Papers), Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, microform; John Jay (Jn Jay) to CS, May 15, 1850, CS Papers.

[15] For a statistical summary of the alleged fugitives apprehended under this law, see Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1968), Appendix, 199-207.

October, this League challenged one of the federal authorities' first attempts to execute the legislation. The League of Freedom sprung into action when two slave catchers arrived in Boston to apprehend famous fugitives William and Ellen Craft, who had fled Georgia in 1848 with fair-complexioned Ellen posing as a sickly master traveling north with a manservant. While William armed himself, the League organized Boston's free blacks and white abolitionists to concert in protecting the fugitives and in pestering and intimidating the slave catchers. After a weeklong standoff, the Georgians left the city, to the abolitionists' great delight.[16]

A few months later, more dramatic resistance in Boston garnered national, and indeed congressional, attention. In February of 1851, slave-hunting agents seized a fugitive known as Shadrach Minkins and carried him to the city's federal courthouse. An angry, predominantly black crowd surrounded the courthouse and forcefully rescued Minkins, who escaped Boston and fled to Canada, to the frustration of conservative Webster Whigs. Though the Fillmore Administration insisted on indictments, the Boston jury would not convict the eight men charged (four black and four white, including longtime Liberty activist Elizur Wright).[17]

In the most violent resistance, a Maryland slaveholder was killed trying to recover escaped slaves in Christiana, Pennsylvania on September 11, 1851. Since anti-abolitionists preferred to blame white agitators rather than acknowledge black militancy, Castner Hanway, a white miller who refused to join the posse, was alleged to have instigated the violence. Southerners cast the trial as a test of the government's proslavery credibility, and the district attorney charged thirty-eight men on 117 counts of levying war against the U.S. Government—the largest treason proceedings in American history. The *National Era* condemned the charges as absurd, and warned of the Slave Power's new American "Reign of Blood." With the trial garnering national attention, Maryland's attorney general enlisted as an assistant prosecutor, while Thaddeus Stevens headed Hanway's defense team. A jury of Hanway's peers found him innocent of treason after deliberating for just fifteen minutes. Realizing the futility of further trials, the federal government dropped the remaining treason charges soon after.[18]

In October 1851, shortly after the Christiana murder and months before Hanway's acquittal, another dramatic slave rescue further aggravated Fillmore's efforts to proclaim sectional peace. While Gerrit Smith's remnant of the Liberty Party was holding an annual meeting in Syracuse, news spread that fugitive William Henry, known as "Jerry," had been taken into custody. A mostly black group of rescuers, egged on by Smith and Samuel May, a leading Garrisonian-turned-political abolitionist, broke Jerry out of the jail, ultimately sending him north to Canadian freedom and his shackles south to Washington as a gift to mock President Fillmore. Again federal efforts to prosecute the ringleaders were largely unavailing.[19]

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[16] *E & R*, Mar. 14, 1850; Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 94-104.

[17] Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 117-120, 148-151.

[18] This account here is based primarily on Thomas P. Slaughter's excellent discussion of the "Christiana Riot" and the ensuing treason trials, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). This book also uses these events as a jumping off-point for an exploration of the intersection of race relations, social violence, and the legal system in antebellum Lancaster County.

[19] Washington *National Era*, Oct. 9, 1851; For summaries of some of the most famous fugitive slave incidents, see Varon, *Disunion!*, 236-241, and Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 645-653; For more detail on some of the these episodes, including, obviously, the Minkins rescue, see Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, Ch. 5-9; Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 154-157, shows though that most cases prosecuted under the 1850 act resulted without incident in the return of the alleged fugitive to slavery; On the Jerry rescue, see Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 136-142.

Congressional Free Soilers seized on these dramatic challenges to the fugitive law in northern communities, to further advocate its repeal, while Southerners and northern compromisers bemoaned abolitionist resistance. The Shadrach rescue even elicited a senatorial resolution demanding that President Fillmore reiterate his commitment to enforcing the law, and he soon complied. Exploiting the southern posturing, Hale mocked "the idea of the President of the United States issuing a formal proclamation, calling upon all the naval and military force of the Government to hold themselves in readiness … to defend this great Republic against a handful of negroes in Boston!" Back in Boston, Charles Sumner similarly remarked, "The excitement at Washington about the Fugitive case here is most ridiculous. A *very few unarmed negroes did it all*. Their success shews the little support the law has in our community."[20]

In the next Congress, the approach of the 1852 presidential election discouraged most northern Whigs and Democrats from challenging the compromise measures, but Free Soilers like Giddings were not constrained by the need to maintain partisan sectional unity and remained eager to broadcast the Free Soil position. Giddings seized on a motion to print the New Jersey legislature's resolutions endorsing the Compromise as an opportunity to expostulate on the Free Soil opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law. Giddings chided Southerners, "It is your privilege to catch your own slaves." "It is not our duty," he continued "to play the blood-hound for you." Edward Stanly (W-NC) recognized Giddings's stratagem and complained to the House, "Here upon a motion to print the resolutions of the Legislature of New Jersey," Giddings had given "half hour's discussion, not upon printing those resolutions, but upon slavery and the slave trade." To make matters worse, Giddings's speech also alluded to his intention to introduce a bill for abolition of the coastwise slave trade.[21]

Notwithstanding such antislavery orations delivered on Capitol Hill and the handful of dramatic fugitive rescue attempts, the most compelling arguments against the Fugitive Slave Act appeared in the sentimental fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe. First serialized in Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly* was an instant sensation. Though originally planned as a short story that would run for ten weeks, Stowe responded to popular acclaim by expanding it into a full-length novel. Bailey was all too pleased to run *Uncle Tom's Cabin* week after week for nearly ten months. Stowe's book personalized the horrors of the slave system by drawing especially on themes of domesticity to appeal to a middle-class Christian readership of both genders.[22]

The novel was an immediate success, winning plaudits far beyond what Stowe or Bailey could have anticipated. Recognizing the sudden popularity of Stowe's serialized story, Gamaliel Bailey made a point of regularly reiterating that all new subscribers could be provided with back issues that would enable them to catch up on Stowe's story. When the novel was completed in the *Era*'s pages, the initial print run of five thousand books sold out in under a week. The book sold perhaps as many as 100,000 copies in its first two months in print and 300,000 in one year, making it the most commercially successful nineteenth-century American novel; and it sold even better in Great Britain.[23]

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[20] *CG*, 31st Congress, 2nd Session, 597-598, 660; CS to Mann, Jan. 28, 1851, in *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 1:322-323.
[21] *CG*, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, 531-535.
[22] Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union*, (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1986), 142-144.
[23] *National Era*, Jul. 3, 1851, Apr. 1, May 27, 1852; Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 223, 233.

To political abolitionists' delight, Stowe's story enabled antislavery arguments to reach many who had previously seemed inured. *National Era* correspondents wrote to the paper of the serialized novel's great success in "enlisting" the "sympathies" and "removing" the "prejudices" of "many persons heretofore violently opposed to everything of an Anti-Slavery nature." John Jay celebrated that "'Uncle Toms Cabin' is revolutionizing public opinion in circles heretofore inaccessible." John Greenleaf Whittier even expressed "*Thanks* for the Fugitive Slave Law!" since it "gave occasion for 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'!" which ensured that the abhorrent law would undermine rather than bolster American slavery.[24]

Uncle Tom's Cabin clearly sensitized new groups of Northerners to the horrors of the domestic slave trade and generated new ire against the Fugitive Slave Act. It was unclear, though, the degree to which this could translate into antislavery political gains, with so many northern politicians hoping to maintain party unity by silencing divisions over slavery, and with such a large segment of the book's readership—middle-class northern women—unable to vote. Certainly, though, the novel (and the promise of future contributions from Stowe's pen) had helped win the Free Soil *National Era* thousands of new subscribers.

The Promises and Perils of Coalition Politics

Outside of Washington, Free Soilers in many northern states attempted to improve the prospects of political antislavery through a series of experiments in coalition politics. In these efforts, Free Soilers often attempted to compromise away state power to elect antislavery men to Congress, where they could most directly contest the Slave Power. In these coalitions Free Soilers often worked with state Democratic Parties holding questionable antislavery credentials, but coalition with the Whigs usually seemed ill-advised as long as they dictated proslavery federal policy, with their slaveholding President Taylor and his doughface successor Millard Fillmore. As both major parties' national commitments to the new compromise became harder and harder to overlook, though, coalition efforts became difficult, or impossible, to sustain.[25]

Preferring Democratic economic policies and the name Free Democrats, Senator Chase vigorously promoted coalition between Ohio Free Soilers and old line Democrats Now that antislavery men were actually electing a substantial number of officeholders, Chase argued that political abolitionists could no longer afford a one-idea strategy, since as legislators they would have to vote on other issues. After the controversial 1849 coalition between Ohio Democrats and Free Soilers that sent Chase to the U.S. Senate and repealed many of the state's Black Laws, antislavery Democrats and Free Soilers saw continued coalition as a chance to both promote antislavery political action and end Whig dominance on the Western Reserve. Other Free

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[24] Letter of S.E.M. of Arispe, Ill., Dec. 29, 1851, in *National Era*, Jan. 29, 1852; Jay to CS, Jul. 5, Dec. 20, 1852, CS Papers; John Greenleaf Whittier (JGW) to William Lloyd Garrison, May 1852, in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 2:191.

[25] SPC to My dear friend [Norton Strange Townshend?], Aug. 2, 1851, SPC Papers, HSP; For a good example of Chase explaining his preference for the name Free Democrats, see his letter to CS, Feb. 26, 1851, CS Papers; Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics 1848-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 154, notes in passing that only Free Soilers in Congress were able to effectively maintain their independence, but this point actually underlines the third party's continued focus on combating the Slave Power. In the states, Free Soilers might collaborate with antislavery-leaning party organizations, but in Congress, partisan independence was invaluable. There it was impossible to avoid confronting the continued influence of the Slave Power over both major parties at the national level.

Soilers, however, disputed Chase's claim that Free Soilers' "'natural sympathies are with the Democracy.'" Former Liberty man Edward Wade insisted on third-party independence and "spurn[ed]" the "depraved bastard called Democracy … as I would an imp from Hell," These tensions between coalitionists and advocates of strict independence action continued to wrack the Ohio Free Soil Party, even as the two positions' leading proponents, Chase and Giddings, trusted and respected the other far more than their rank-and-file enthusiasts did [26]

In early 1850 some Free Soilers grew optimistic about using coalition to again trade state office for congressional power. Edward Hamlin hoped Free Soilers could curry Democrats' favor by supporting their gubernatorial candidate Reuben Wood. For Free Soilers, "The great object immediately to be sought by us should be the control of the next Legislature [which would choose a U.S. Senator], and the election to Congress of anti-slavery men." Just as a Democratic-Free Soil alliance seemed poised to force anti-extensionism on both Ohio parties, the Democratic state convention's failure to espouse the Wilmot Proviso convinced Free Soilers to maintain a "separate political organization." When frustrated Free Soil legislators then held the major parties hostage in the state House of Representatives, Whigs and Democrats, to the awe of many, cooperated to overcome Free Soil obstruction. Disillusioned, Hamlin bewailed the treachery: "The Democratic party have … no *virtue*. They are quietly lying on their backs, with [anti-Proviso presidential hopeful Lewis] Cass holding their legs, while the Whig Party is ravishing them. The result will be the birth of a bastard, half hunker Whig & half hunker Democrat." Former coalitionists now conceded that Free Soilers would have to field an independent ticket.[27]

Though Free Soilers polled only 5 percent of the 1850 gubernatorial vote (barely better than the best Liberty showing), the third party continued to play a disruptive role in Ohio politics. Fillmore's endorsement of the congressional compromise measures once again arrayed Free Soilers against Ohio Whigs, and the prospects for revived Free Soil-Democratic cooperation improved when Governor Wood advocated abolition in the District of Columbia and attacked the Fugitive Slave Act. Then John F. Morse and Norton Townshend, Chase's original allies from the 1849 legislature, respectively won the speakership of the Ohio House and a seat in Congress as Free Soil-Democratic coalition candidates. Chase had especially pined for Townshend's election to Congress as another "colaborer, devoted to our great cause," and his victory seemed to provide a "complete vindication" of the coalition strategy.[28]

But in 1851, Democratic legislators refused to support another Free Soil senator. Free Soilers once again aimed to force either party to elect Giddings, but Whigs responded by instead nominating Judge Benjamin Wade, a Whig loyalist who Giddings nonetheless admitted was "a man of talents" and "a hater of slavery." This swayed enough ex-Whig Free Soilers to support Wade's election—a signal defeat for advocates of a Free Soil-Democratic alliance. With the

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[26] On Chase's election to the Senate, see the previous chapter; I.W. Gray to SPC, Apr. 17, 1849, SPC Papers, HSP; Hamlin to SPC, Apr. 8, 1849, Ibid.; Edward Wade to SPC, Jan. 14, 1850, Ibid.; JG to SPC, Aug. 12, 1851, Ibid; On the complicated course of coalition in Ohio, see Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 200-211; Stephen E. Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism: The Transformation of Ohio Politics, 1844-1856* (Kent State University Press, 1983), 149-174; and Blue, *Free Soilers*, 168-172, 182-186. The discussion below draws on all three of these, but especially on Maizlish.

[27] Hamlin to SPC, Jan. 18, 1850, Ibid.; SPC to Hamlin, Jan. 12, 1850, Papers of Salmon P. Chase, Library of Congress (LC); *DTD*, Aug. 24, 1850; Edward Hamlin to SPC, Mar. 11, 1850, SPC Papers, HSP; Adams Jewett to SPC, Feb. 3, 1850, Papers of SPC, LC.

[28] John G. Breslin to SPC, Apr. 5, 1850, SPC Papers, HSP; Hamlin to SPC, Dec. 6, 1850, Ibid.; SPC to Norton Strange Townshend (NST), Jul. 15, 1850, Aug. 10, 1850, May 24, 1851, Norton Strange Townshend Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

continued instability of Ohio politics, Free Soilers remained influential and experienced occasional successes, like the 1852 election of Edward Wade (Benjamin's brother) to Congress. The Free Soil Party, however, clearly could not control Ohio politics as Chase had desired. So in 1851, to the dismay of more resolute third-party men, Chase backed Governor Wood for reelection over Free Soil candidate Samuel Lewis, Chase's old Cincinnati Liberty ally.[29]

Chase's interest in working with Ohio Democrats increased the tension within Ohio's largely ex-Whig third party, but Chase sat securely in the Senate for a six-year term that would not expire until 1855. From that chamber his speeches could forcefully promote opposition to the Slave Power, so Free Soil allies rightly celebrated that they could be "sure of one reliable advocate of Liberty" in the Senate "for the next six years." A contingent of Chase allies, like Hamlin and Townshend, praised Ohio Democrats for refusing to endorse the 1850 Compromise, but most Free Soilers joined Giddings in insisting on independence as the 1852 election approached and both parties' *national* leaders seemed likely to endorse the Compromise.[30]

Throughout the North, Free Soilers pursued similar, if usually less sustained, coalition strategies. Though it dissolved after the 1849 elections, a Connecticut Free Soil-Democratic coalition elected three anti-extensionist congressmen who refused to support Cobb for speaker. The power of "the anti slavery free soil principle" was also established by Free Soilers' ability to briefly control a balance of power in the state. Democratic leaders, however, refused to continue working with the "few miserable free soilers" who controlled a balance in the state legislature. Connecticut Free Soilers instead remained independent and briefly threatened to control the election of a senator in 1850.[31] In Democratic-dominated Michigan, Free Soilers formed a rare alliance with the Whigs after Proviso Democrats made peace with the state party's Cass wing. Free Soilers and Whigs worked together to defeat Cass lieutenant and Fugitive Slave Law supporter Alexander Buel and elected two coalition congressional candidates. In Wisconsin, efforts to unite Free Soilers and Democrats at first seemed promising, but ended in disaster as Democrats outmaneuvered the once potent Wisconsin Free Soilers, and many returned to their pre-1848 allegiances. Still, in 1850 Free Soilers instead worked with Whigs to reelect Free Soil Congressman Charles Durkee and James Doty, a strong anti-extension Democrat (and a scatterer in the 1849 speakership contest), who had been jettisoned by the party leadership in his district.[32]

In New York, the well-chronicled failure of coalition was more dispiriting. Even the staunchest Barnburners receded into the Democratic Party, vainly believing they could transform it. While Free Soilers had outpolled the Cass Democrats in 1848, the election also demonstrated the futility of a go-it-alone approach in the Empire State. Whigs won thirty-two of thirty-four congressional seats and nearly as daunting majorities in both houses of the state legislature, even though they polled less than a majority of the state's votes. To prevent a long period of Whig

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[29] John F. Morse to SPC, Oct. 31, 1850, SPC Papers, HSP; Hamlin to SPC, Dec. 6, 1850, Ibid.; JG to CS, Mar. 17, 1851, CS Papers; SPC to C.R. Miller, Aug. 25, 1851, in *National Era*, Sept. 11, 1851.

[30] Adams Jewett to SPC, Jan 20.1850, Papers of SPC, LC; Ultimately, national politics would force Chase back squarely into the third-party ranks.

[31] John Niles to Gideon Welles (GW), Mar. 26, Apr. 5, 8, 1849, Gideon Welles Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division (NYPL), microform; A.E. Burr to GW, Jun. 6, Jul. 12, Aug. 8, 1849, Ibid; John Niles to JPH, Apr. 9, 1850, JPH Papers.

[32] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 211-214; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 210; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st through 105th Congresses* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1998), 158; On Wisconsin Free Soilers' attempts to build antislavery coalitions, see Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1998), 55-78.

dominance, Barnburners reunited with their old intraparty adversaries. At first, ex-Free Soilers insisted on the 1848 Buffalo platform. "There is no doubt in my opinion," Preston King believed, "that the whole party will fight together the battle of freedom." Even Seth Gates (the former Whig congressman who became a Liberty man and then the Free Soil lieutenant gubernatorial candidate) praised "the Union," since "nine tenths of the hunkers have come in cordially & done well." A year later though, Gates complained about "how shabbily the Democracy have acted in this state," and "how nearly they ignored the glorious Buffalo Platform." When New York Democrats endorsed the 1850 Compromise, most Barnburners accepted. Even former Liberty leader Henry Stanton, now a state senator, grudgingly acquiesced. The New York Democracy soon descended into a complicated struggle to maintain unity among Barnburners, Soft Shells who welcomed back the 1848 bolters, and Hard Shells who opposed reunion.[33]

Vermont Free Soilers had more success at sustaining antislavery coalition politics. There the Democratic Party reached out to antislavery men in 1849. The resulting Vermont Free Democratic coalition forcefully advocated the Wilmot Proviso and abolition in the District of Columbia. While abolitionist Democrats like Edward Barber enthusiastically championed the coalition, other Democratic leaders participated reluctantly, disgusted both at having to rejoin those who had deserted the party in 1848 and with the prospect of "fighting shoulder to shoulder with the party of '*one idea*.'" Since the intra-Democratic divisions proved still more vexing in 1849, former Liberty man Horatio Needham won the coalition's gubernatorial nomination. Barber, at least, appreciated that "the Liberty men have been acting independent of both of us for years & have been fighting the Whigs as hard as they have the democrats." "All," Barber predicted, "would fall into their support easily." Clearly, Free Soil activists, at least in Vermont, recognized the new anti-Slave Power third-party's deep debts to its Liberty predecessor.[34]

Once the compromise measures passed, though, many Vermont Democratic leaders deemed the territorial question settled and the Wilmot Proviso "dead," and grew frustrated with "ultra Free Soilers" like Barber and ex-Whig Edward Stansbury (the 1848 Free Soil candidate for Treasurer), who sought to make repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act a new Free Democratic test. Barber hoped to promote "a democratic creed on national questions, & the liberty creed with it" as the 1852 presidential contest approached, but lamented that his party's leaders seemed ready to "Hunkerize." Though Vermont Free Democrats never defeated the Whigs in a state contest or congressional election, the party ran well ahead of recalcitrant Hunker Democrats in 1849, 1850, and 1851, but, as elsewhere, the 1852 presidential election destroyed the alliance. [35]

In Massachusetts, though, coalition bore its most valuable fruit—the election of Charles Sumner to the Senate. As in Vermont, Bay State Free Soilers had become the state's second party during the 1848 contest but faced continued Whig dominance in state politics. Gesturing toward cooperation in 1849, the Massachusetts Democratic Party adopted a series of antislavery

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[33] Benjamin F. Butler (of N.Y.) to SPC, Jul. 30, 1849, SPC Papers, HSP; Preston King to JG, Sept. 19, 1849, JG Papers; Seth Gates to JG, Nov. 10, 1849, Nov 16, 1850, Ibid.; Blue, *Free Soilers*, 154-162, 179-182, Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 223-229; Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 187-190; The most prominent Soft Shell leader was William Marcy, who served as Polk's Secretary of War and soon won appointment as Secretary of State in the cabinet of President Franklin Pierce. The leading Hard Shell was former Senator Daniel Dickinson, a doughfaced proponent of popular sovereignty.

[34] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 216-218; John Roberts to Charles G. Eastman (CGE), May 1, 1849, Charles G. Eastman Papers (CGE Papers), Vermont Historical Society, Barre; Levi Vilas to CGE, Apr. 20, 1849, Ibid.; John Cain to CGE, May 4, 1849, Ibid.; Barber to CGE, May 13, 1849, Ibid.

[35] John Cain to CGE, Jul. 21, 1849, Ibid.; D. W. Robinson to CGE, Feb. 7, 1851, Ibid.; Barber to CGE, Mar. 20, 1851, Ibid.

resolutions. The Free Soilers responded in kind with a platform Sumner wrote supporting state reforms that Democrats had long desired, such as the secret ballot. Democrats and Free Soilers worked together in many locales, but Whigs again controlled the state government. In 1850, however, with the albatross of Webster's "Seventh of March" speech around Whig necks, prospects for a Free Soil-Democratic coalition appeared promising. Despite the skepticism of ex-Whig Free Soil leaders like Charles Francis Adams and John Palfrey, several younger Free Soilers, led especially by Henry Wilson, worked hard to promote coalition. In state committee chairman Charles Sumner, Wilson found a valuable, if somewhat noncommittal, ally.[36]

With the approach of the 1850 state elections, a coalition strategy became even more tantalizing, as the next state legislature would be tasked with selecting a new senator. Free Soilers eagerly anticipated an opportunity to trade state offices for the senate seat. During a summer 1850 meeting, John Greenleaf Whittier helped convince Sumner that he should be prepared to accept a U.S. Senate nomination from a Free Soil-Democratic coalition. Although the two parties did not unite on a state ticket, Democrats and Free Soilers recognized that the majority-rule electoral laws would allow them to collaborate in the legislature to control state politics. Although Whigs ultimately won seven of ten congressional seats, voters reelected Free Soilers Horace Mann and Charles Allen, and Robert Rantoul, an increasingly antislavery Democrat, won in a runoff after the withdrawal of Free Soil candidate Samuel Sewall, a former perennial Liberty gubernatorial candidate.[37]

Whigs won their expected plurality, but if Democrats and Free Soilers could cooperate, they would control the state government—and the senatorial selection. In Washington, Chase, Giddings, and Bailey all excitedly interpreted these election results as indicating that Massachusetts would send a Free Soiler, likely Sumner, to join Chase and Hale. Joshua Leavitt, once so zealous for Liberty independence, also expressed excitement about Sumner's prospects. In Boston, Wilson led Free Soil legislators to support Democrat Francis Boutwell for governor. In exchange, Democrats promised to help elect Sumner. This bargain clearly highlights Free Soilers' continued prioritization of congressional over state power; though Free Soil legislators outnumbered Democrats, the latter party was given nearly all the state offices in exchange for the senatorship. Once elected though, Governor Boutwell disappointed Free Soilers with an "insulting and monstrous" pro-Compromise message to the legislature. Worse still, about thirty "Indomitable" Massachusetts House Democrats, led by the onetime anti-Gag Whig but now doughface Democrat Caleb Cushing, held out against Sumner. Though Sumner led Winthrop on ballot after ballot, he consistently fell short of a majority. Samuel Gridley Howe, working vigorously on Sumner's behalf, commented that the "excitement" was "intense," since many Whig representatives "in their souls" preferred Sumner, but "their souls are not their own." After a four month stalemate, Sumner finally won a bare majority on the twenty-fifth ballot.[38] The

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[36] The narrative here and in the following paragraphs of the Massachusetts coalition has been drawn in large part from Blue, *The Free Soilers*, Ch. 8; David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 177-204; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 218-223; and Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 184-187.

[37] Also, one of the victorious Whig congressmen was Orin Fowler, who faced no Free Soil challenge, since his denunciation of Webster and the compromise had earned him antislavery support. Dubin, *U.S. Congressional Elections*, 158, 161; The original discussion between Sumner and Whittier is recounted in JGW to Grace Greenwood, May 18, 1851, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:177.

[38] SPC to CS, Nov. 18, 1850, CS Papers; JG to CS, Nov. 25, 1850, CS Ibid.; GB to CS, Nov. 27, 1850, Ibid.; JL to CS, Dec. 18, 1850, CS Papers; JGW to CS, Jan. 16, 1851, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:171-172; As part of the arrangement to make Boutwell governor and Sumner senator, Democrats received most of the remaining state offices and the speakership of the state house for Nathaniel Banks, while Wilson himself would be the Free Soil

coalition also secured some of the state reforms for which Massachusetts country Democrats clamored, notably the secret ballot (although this was retracted soon thereafter). Facing a combination of Hunker Democrats and Whig Compromise supporters, however, frustrated Free Soil legislators found it impossible to pass either a new personal liberty law or resolutions condemning the Fugitive Slave Act. Still, the election of Sumner to the Senate and Wilson's forceful leadership kept most Free Soilers supportive of the Bay State coalition. [39]

Antislavery politicians who valued Congress as the best venue for antislavery agitation viewed Sumner's election as a momentous victory. With his "heart … full of gratitude to God," Whittier asserted that Sumner's triumph would spell the "near and certain [d]oom of the wicked Slave Laws." Even New York Barnburners supported Sumner's Senate bid, notwithstanding the tentative course they pursued in their own state. Perhaps no one relished Sumner's entrance into the Senate more than Chase, who looked forward to having an antislavery colleague with whom he could regularly consult (this was not Hale's style, and Seward and Wade remained Whig partisans).[40]

To the dismay of many supporters at home, though, Sumner bided his time as months passed and abolitionists grew "much perplexed at the utter silence." Finally resolving to speak out against what he still preferred to call the Fugitive Slave "Bill" (since referring to it as an "Act" would give credence to its legality), Sumner struggled to gain the floor. On July 27, after seven months in the Senate, Sumner finally proposed a motion for repeal and got ready to deliver a long-rehearsed antislavery tour-de-force. To his shock, the Senate refused to grant him the customary privilege of speaking on his motion. Exasperated, Sumner now staked all on a risky strategy of bringing in his speech collaterally during appropriation debates slated for the session's final week. Appearing resigned to save the oration for the next session, Sumner cleared off his desk and sat patiently. On August 26, Virginia Democrat Robert M.T. Hunter (speaker of the 26th House) gave Sumner an opening with an amendment designed to defray the costs of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act by reimbursing "extraordinary expenses" of federal officers. Sumner quickly moved his own amendment demanding that "no such allowances be authorized for expenses incurred" in executing the Fugitive Slave Act and also, he added casually, the repeal of "said act." Sumner then commenced the tirade he had been planning for months.[41]

Sumner's speech, later titled "Freedom National," condemned as "absurd" the major-party attempts to insist "that there is a final settlement, in principle and substance, of the question of slavery, and that all discussion of it is closed." Trying to prevent discussion of slavery would be as futile as an "attempt to check the tides of the ocean, the currents of the Mississippi, or the

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choice selected as president of the state senate. Also, Robert Rantoul was elected to fill the remaining six weeks in Webster's senate term before Rantoul entered the succeeding Congress as a Representative. Accepting this arrangement, the (not fully attended) Democratic caucus agreed to support Sumner by a 65-6 vote; Though it has proven impossible to determine what change enabled Sumner's election, it seems likely that a few anti-Compromise Whigs changed their votes to secure Sumner's election over Winthrop

[39] On the secret ballot issue specifically, see Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 213-220.

[40] Samuel Gridley Howe (SGH) to Horace Mann, Jan. 23, Jan. 31, 1851, in *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, ed. Laura E. Richards, (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1909), 2:334-336; Flamen Ball to CS, Apr. 25, 1851, CS Papers; E.A. Stansbury to CS, Apr. 25,1851, Ibid.; JGW to CS, "Second day Morning" [after Apr. 24, 1851], 2:176; David Dudley Field to CS, Jan. 9, 1851, CS Papers; John Van Buren to CS, Feb. 20, Apr. 7 1851, Ibid.; SPC to CS, Apr. 28, 1851, Ibid.

[41] J.P. Blanchard to CS, Mar. 14, 1852, Ibid.; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 222-227; *CG*, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, 2371.

rushing waters of Niagara." Moving then into learned legal disquisitions on the Constitution and on alleged fugitives' rights to a jury trial, Sumner concluded "that the Constitution nowhere recognizes property in man, and that, according to its true interpretation, freedom and not slavery is national, while slavery and not freedom is sectional." Sumner's nearly four-hour harangue touched off a debate in which over a dozen senators spoke at length. While the amendment for repeal failed 47-4 (only Chase, Hale, and Benjamin Wade joining Sumner) Sumner's speech further energized Free Soil assaults on the Fugitive Slave Law and the Slave Power parties that endorsed it. Chase assured Sumner, "Hundreds of thousands will read it and every where it will carry conviction to all willing to be convinced." A longer version of Sumner's speech became a widely-circulated Free Soil pamphlet, and antislavery Northerners as diverse as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Barnburner Bradford Wood lauded the speech. Even Garrisonian David Child told Sumner that, "with the exception of Uncle Tom's cabin, nothing has occurred in the whole history of the slave question in the United States, that has consoled me so much under the sting and the shame of Southern usurpations and Northern treachery."[42]

The Election of 1852 and its Aftermath: The Final Battle of the Slave Power Parties

Notwithstanding the excitement over Sumner's oratory, the approaching presidential contest looked far less auspicious than had the 1848 election. This time Free Soilers, or Free Democrats as they widely called themselves now, offered no overwrought predictions of third-party victory. As it would turn out, the most important result of that election was its foreshadowing of the coming decline of the Whig Party. Torn by sectional dissension over the compromise measures, the Whig Party was further undermined by widespread efforts to place temperance and nativism at the center of northern political debate. Even sympathetic Free Democrats approached the enthusiasm for prohibition and nativism warily, but they strove nonetheless to help further break down the Whigs as the more vulnerable of the two Slave Power parties. Then, as Free Democrats observed the Whig Party's apparent disintegration in the wake of the 1852 election, antislavery men eagerly awaited new opportunities to further consolidate enemies of the Slave Power.

During the preceding year, Free Democrats had harbored diverse opinions about how to best pursue anti-Slave Power politics in the next election. Thinking selectively of the positive results of coalition, some Democratic-leaning leaders like Bailey hoped for a new antislavery Democratic party and even fantasized that the national Democrats might nominate an acceptable candidate on a platform recapitulating the 1848 Buffalo resolutions. Chase had so tied himself to the Democrats that he seemed likely to support any Democrat who could at least be considered neutral on the Compromise, and Chase found allies in ex-Democratic Free Soilers like

[42] Sumner's speech is in *CG Appendix*, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, 1102-1113. The extensive debate that followed appears in Ibid., 1113-1125. It was published as *Slavery Sectional; Freedom National: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on his Motion to Repeal the Fugitive Slave Bill, in the Senate of the United States, Aug. 26, 1852* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852); SPC to CS, Sept. 9, 1852, CS Papers; Harriet Beecher Stowe to CS, Nov. 7, 1852, Ibid.; Bradford Wood to CS, Nov. 10, 1852, Ibid.; David L. Child to CS, Feb. 8, 1853, Ibid.

Vermont's Edward Barber, who hoped to promote "old-fashioned democracy on national questions with the Jeffersonian anti-slavery doctrines superadded."[43]

Ohioans more loyal to the third-party organization moved to initiate plans for the 1852 campaign at a Ravenna convention of the Friends of Freedom in the summer of 1851. Drawing a "large assemblage of the Friends of Freedom" numbering perhaps over 2000 and including many of Ohio's leading Free Soilers, including Giddings, John Morse, Samuel Lewis, former Whig congressman Daniel Tilden, and even Chase, the Ravenna convention resolved to support the 1848 Buffalo creed and attacked both major parties' apparent intentions to "engraft into their respective creeds an unyielding support of the …Fugitive Law as the test of partisan fidelity." With Giddings presiding, the Ravenna meeting called for "a National Convention of the friends of Freedom throughout the Union" to be held in Cleveland on September 24, 1851 "for the purpose of consulting together as to the next Presidential canvass, and to harmonize and unite all the sentiment of the nation opposed to the slave power."[44]

That Cleveland Convention, also guided by Giddings, aimed to establish that Free Soilers would once again be a disruptive antislavery force in the national presidential campaign. In Cleveland, a diverse antislavery group, including such radicals as Lewis Tappan and Francis LeMoyne, resolved against the Slave Power and appointed a committee to call a third-party national nominating convention. With opportunistic Barnburners no longer shaping the party, supporters of Gerrit Smith's Liberty League, who had reconstituted themselves under the old Liberty Party name, worked unsuccessfully for a declaration that slavery was unconstitutional. In rousing speeches, Free Soilers condemned the fugitive "bill of abominations" and observed "that the Whig party" was "rapidly fusing itself into the pro-slavery ranks," while Democrats stood equally "pledged to the accursed compromise measures."[45]

Bailey and Representative Charles Allen worked to ensure that the date of the 1852 national nominating conclave would fall after the major party conventions, so that Free Democrats could tailor their platform and candidates to promote the strongest possible showing. By December of 1851, the committee appointed by the Friends of Freedom had agreed with near unanimity on a convention to meet in Pittsburgh after the conclusion of the major-party. In the interim, both major parties nominated unacceptable candidates on unacceptable platforms.[46]

First Democrats nominated New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce, a doughface dark horse, on a platform explicitly endorsing the compromise measures. When the Democrats convened in Baltimore in June of 1852, Lewis Cass had again been the party's frontrunner with southern favorite James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, New York Soft Shell William Marcy, and Stephen Douglas, as his main competitors. None, however, ever achieved a majority of the ballots cast, let alone the two-thirds required for nomination. It was not until after thirty-four unsuccessful ballots that anyone (the Virginia delegation) cast votes for Franklin Pierce, a longtime party boss in New Hampshire, Hale's main adversary during the mid-1840s revolt of the Independent Democrats, and briefly a Mexican War general. Finally on the forty-ninth ballot, there was a

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[43] Blue, *Free Soilers*, 234-235; SPC to My dear friend [NST?], Aug. 2, 1851, SPC Papers, HSP; Barber to CGE, Mar. 20, 1851, CGE Papers; Edward Hamlin to SPC, Dec. 3, 1851, SPC Papers, HSP; From this point forward, I use the terms Free Soiler and Free Democrat roughly interchangeably, as contemporaries did.

[44] Quoted from Ohio *Star* Extra, in *National Era*, Jul. 10, 1851; "Call for a National Convention of the Friends of Freedom," in *DTD*, Jul. 15, 1851.

[45] *DTD*, Sept. 26, 27, 29, 1851; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 241-242; James B. Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 200-205.

[46] *National Era*, Dec. 11, 1851.

sudden rush to support Pierce. Then North Carolina's delegates switched their votes and urged party unity, and the convention selected Pierce all but unanimously. Southerners understood that Pierce would unequivocally support the party platform, which defended the Compromise of 1850 and insisted that "the democratic party will resist all attempts at renewing, in congress or out of it, the agitation of the slavery question." Free Democrats responded caustically by denouncing the "infamous convention" for having "eaten Southern dirt, and adopted a pro-slavery faith."[47]

Also meeting in Baltimore just a couple weeks later, the Whigs offered little more to attract antislavery voters. Again Whig leaders attempted to straddle the concerns of northern and southern constituents and this time satisfied neither. President Fillmore entered as the pro-Compromise southern favorite, while Mexican War hero Winfield Scott attracted the support of anti-Compromise Northerners allied with William Seward. Recognizing General Scott's northern strength in the convention, southern delegates insisted that the party draft a platform before choosing candidates. The Whigs, much like the Democrats, endorsed the compromise measures as "a settlement in principle and substance, of the dangerous and exciting question which they embrace" and denounced any further antislavery "agitation." Only after Scott assured Tennessee Senator James Jones that he would endorse the Whig Party platform, could he beat out Fillmore in a bitter fifty-three ballot contest.[48]

Free Democrats concluded that both parties had "deliberately sold their followers to the Slave Power." Third-party men asserted convincingly that "on the Free Democracy, alone, now rest the last hopes of Freedom." Free Soilers thus made a point of circulating the major party candidates' endorsements of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Vermont Free Democratic convention asserted that there had "ceased to be any distinguishing principles and measures of public policy between the self styled National Whigs and National Democrats … both having placed themselves upon sectional pro-slavery platforms." Southern success at forcing a slavery extension "policy upon the two great political parties" left the "friends of Freedom" compelled to "vigorously maintain their separate political organization." Free Soilers also attacked as absurd the major parties' attempts to proscribe future discussion of slavery. Former Liberty men were delighted, though, that Democrats and Whigs "left us the *whole road*." After the major-party conventions, even Senator Chase agreed on the necessity of third-party independence.[49]

Meanwhile, as this season of "president-making" proceeded, Free Soilers looked to Congress for new demonstrations that could direct national attention to the Slave Power. In the wake of the major party nominations, Austin Willey instructed Senator Hale, "The ear of freemen is now turned to Washington to hear the word *advance*." Free Democratic meetings praised antislavery congressmen "for their fearlessness and fidelity in the support of the interests of freedom against the encroachments and domination of the slave power." Even before settling

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[47] *Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held at Baltimore, June 1-5, 1852* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1852); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 14-16); *Essex County Freeman*, quoted in *National Era*, Jun. 17, 1852.

[48] Gienapp, *Origins*, 16-19; Donald Bruce Johnson, compiler, *National Party Platforms, Volume 1: 1840-1956* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 21; The lengthy balloting is all the more telling since Whig conventions required only a simple majority in contrast to the Democratic two-thirds supermajority rule. Pro-Compromise northern Whigs who clung to the forlorn hope of nominating Webster were partly responsible for the deadlock.

[49] *GMF*, Jun. 24, Jul. 15, 1852; *National Era*, Jul.15, 1852; Concord, N.H. *Independent Democrat*, Jun. 17, 1852; Austin Willey to JPH, Jun. 21, 1852, JPH Papers; CS to Charles Francis Adams (CFA), [Jun. 13, 1852], in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:362; SPC to Edward Keyes, Jul. 5, 1852, in *GMF* Jul. 15, 1852.

on nominees, Free Soilers urged the circulation of antislavery congressional speeches as their best campaign literature against Pierce and Scott.[50]

Among possible Free Democratic presidential candidates, Senators Chase and Hale were the clear favorites, although neither seemed to want the nomination. Among the two, Hale seemed more likely to win favorable reception from the mass of antislavery men. Chase, seeking to avoid the nomination himself, urged Hale that the people were "bent on having you." "The spontaneous impulses of the anti-slavery men every where," Chase added, "designate you as the nominee." Charles Francis Adams similarly begged Hale "*not to desert*" their friends "at this crisis," asserting "the impossibility of making any other nomination." Though Henry Wilson, Adams's primary Massachusetts intraparty rival, privately preferred Chase, Wilson explained to Hale that Chase refused to run "under any circumstances," and thus it was clear: "*You must be the man*. It is the voice of the party and you must submit."[51]

In the face of such widespread support for Hale, several of his closest advisors urged him to disavow interest in the nomination, thinking it might ruin his political future and also defeat Scott and elect Pierce. Hale thus sent a letter averring his unwillingness to run to George Fogg, editor of the Concord, New Hampshire *Independent Democrat*, just days before Free Democratic delegates prepared to convene in Pittsburgh. When news of the letter leaked out, convention managers were distraught. With no other candidate who could unite the party, Free Democrats seemed to have little choice but to nominate Hale and hope he would feel compelled to accept.[52]

The Pittsburgh convention incorporated an array of antislavery luminaries, and its leadership was characterized by a deeper moral antislavery impulse than that of the Buffalo Convention. Though no less a politician than Henry Wilson was chosen to preside, many immediatist radicals received leadership roles, and the convention even appointed famous former slave and Gerrit Smith-ally Frederick Douglass as one of its secretaries. The resolutions, mainly crafted by Giddings, replicated much of the 1848 platform, with added attacks on the "repugnant" Fugitive Slave Act and "the Whig" and "Democratic wing[s] of the great Slave Compromise party" more generally. A minority of the resolutions committee, led by Smith, sought to declare slavery "entirely incapable of legislation," but their minority report was easily laid on the table. Instead the platform embodied moral opposition to slavery in a more abstract resolution "that slavery is a sin against God and a crime against man, which no human enactment nor usage can make right." The convention then tapped Hale as its presidential nominee by a 192-16 vote, and in a much closer vote, nominated George Julian over Samuel Lewis for vice president. Even though it was smaller than the 1848 convention, Free Soilers celebrated that "in every element of real moral force, in dignity, sober, earnestness, ability and *principle*, Pittsburg far exceeded Buffalo." Most Free Democrats left Pittsburgh eager to campaign against the Slave Power, even knowing they had virtually no chance of winning a single state.[53]

With the Pittsburgh Convention nominating Hale in spite of his letter to Fogg, Free Democrats from around the nation urged him to accept. Walt Whitman beseeched Hale to help

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[50] Willey to JPH, Jun. 21, 1852, JPH Papers; *GMF*, Jul. 15, Sept. 9, 1852.

[51] CFA to JPH, Aug. 15, 1852, Hale-Chandler Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Rauner Special Collections Library, Hanover, N.H.; Henry Wilson to CS, Jul. 22, 1852, CS Papers; Henry Wilson to JPH, Aug. 2, 1852, Hale-Chandler Papers; SPC to JPH, Aug. 5, 7, 1852, JPH Papers.

[52] George Fogg to JPH, Aug. 3, 1852, Hale-Chandler Papers; Amos Tuck to JPH, Aug. 5, 1852, JPH Papers; Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 144-147.

[53] *National Era* Aug. 26, 1852; Willey to JPH, Aug. 19, 1852, Hale-Chandler; Letter from Fogg, Aug. 9, 1852, in *Independent Democrat*, Aug. 26, 1852.

establish a new "real live Democratic party" that would "gradually win the hearts of the people." Giddings explained to Hale, "You can have no conception of the overwhelming determination to have you and no one else for the candidate." Despite Hale's reluctance, supporters from all sides persuaded him that only he could unite Free Democratic support.[54]

At first even Gerrit Smith encouraged Hale, but soon Smith wavered, and his rump Liberty Party ultimately erected its own ticket headed by William Goodell. That ticket eventually won the endorsement of an ambivalent Frederick Douglass, but most black political activists supported the Free Democratic Party despite its failure to adopt a plea for racial equality. At the opposite end of New York's antislavery spectrum, Barnburners held fast to the reunion with the Democratic Party. Even Preston King opposed a third-party campaign. Free Democrats were especially disappointed that John Van Buren and former immediatist Henry Stanton, "the two most powerful Free Soil speakers in the State of New York, in the campaign of 1848, publicly gave in their adhesion to the National Democratic Party, and consequently to the Slave Power." In response to Free Democrats' criticisms, Congressman Timothy Jenkins (D-NY) attempted to explain to a surely skeptical Gerrit Smith that Barnburners believed they could repudiate the "proslavery part of the Democratic platform" and still "support the ticket of our party thinking we can do more good in efforts to reform that party than to quit it."[55]

In the meantime, Free Democrats grew antsy as Hale deliberated for nearly a month. On September 6, he finally sent national committee chair Henry Wilson a brief acceptance letter, declaring that he did not feel "at liberty" to decline the Free Democratic nomination he had so assiduously attempted to avoid. True to his obligations, once he accepted, Hale campaigned vigorously, stumping across the West at a torrid pace.[56]

While Free Soilers knew not to expect victory, throughout the 1852 campaign season they remained optimistic that they were working towards a transformation of national politics. "When the fight is over," Joseph Root foretold, "the Northern Whigs will be convinced that it was their truckling to the slave power that broke them down and when the new president makes his appointments and avows his policy the democrats of the free states will find they have been sold. Then perhaps something effective may be *begun* for freedom." Austin Willey predicted, "We can break down the defeated party, then the other falls of necessity. They stand and fall together." George Fogg likewise asserted that "with the end of the present campaign, one party is destined to be dissolved. Not again, during this generation, will two great national organizations go through the farce of running two candidates upon a common platform" dedicated to "the sustentation of human slavery, and resistance to free discussion."[57]

Despite Free Democrats' enthusiasm, the 1852 presidential campaign more generally was one of the dullest in decades, and turnout dropped to its lowest level since 1836. Both major parties avoided the slavery issue as much as possible, and Franklin Pierce won in a landslide.

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[54] Walt Whitman to JPH, Aug. 14, 1852, JPH Papers; JG to JPH, Aug. 16, 1852, Hale-Chandler Papers; Letter from Fogg, Aug. 9, 1852, in *Independent Democrat*, Aug. 26, 1852.

[55] Blue, *Free Soilers*, 248-49; Preston King to Francis P. Blair, Feb. 26, 1852, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Manuscripts Division; *GMF*, Jun. 24, 1852; Timothy Jenkins to Gerrit Smith (GS), Aug. 20, 1852, *Microfilm Edition of the Gerrit Smith Papers* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America), Originals from Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library (GS Papers).

[56] JPH to Henry Wilson, Sept. 6, 1852 in *National Era*, Sept. 23, 1852; Sewell, *John P. Hale*, 148-49, cites that Hale spoke nearly every day except Sundays, often multiple times.

[57] Joseph Root to JG, Feb. 23, 1852, JG Papers; Willey to JPH, Aug. 19, 1852, Hale-Chandler Papers; Letter from Fogg, Aug. 12, 1852, in *Independent Democrat*, Aug. 26, 1852.

Winfield Scott won a meager four states as his candidacy disgruntled many southern Whigs, while the platform's compromise endorsement cost him antislavery Whig votes as well.[58]

Moreover, in many places a resurgent nativism and movement for alcohol prohibition powerfully weakened the northern Whig Party. These traditionally Whig issues held growing cross-party appeal in the early 1850s and threatened to further destabilize the alliances of the Second Party System. In 1851, the Maine legislature passed a law prohibiting the sale of alcohol, which became known as the Maine Law and profoundly shaped state and municipal politics across the North. Though these disputes seemed to bear little on the politics of slavery, Free Soilers would soon benefit from their own ability to attract temperance voters. New contention over naturalization and Catholic challenges to Protestant-dominated public schools also weakened party ties in many northern cities, and the liquor issue dovetailed with nativist opposition to Catholic immigrant cultures associated with imbibing. During the 1852 campaign, meanwhile, Scott's ill-conceived attempt to attract support from the growing population of traditionally Democratic Catholic voters backfired and repelled many Whig nativists. The increasing centrality of temperance and nativist politics in many northern states combined with antislavery Whig dissatisfaction to raise questions about whether the Whig Party could again contend for national power.[59]

On the slavery issue though, most Democrats and many Whigs interpreted Pierce's victory as a national endorsement of the Compromise of 1850 as a final settlement of the slavery question. Free Democratic analysts took different lessons from their second national defeat. Free Democrats explained away the party's decrease by almost half from 1848 by arguing that the New York Barnburners who had inflated the 1848 total were never truly part of the anti-Slave Power movement. Free Democrats preferred to compare Hale's 150,000 votes, about 5 percent of the national total, to the much smaller 1844 Liberty vote. Free Democrats disputed major-party commentators who claimed "that the Free Democracy is dead, perhaps because Mr. Hale is not elected President." Antislavery men predicted that "great events will soon take place, which cannot fail to test the strength of our free institutions, and Northern men must take their stand in their defence, or else in support of slavery." Never before had both major parties so unequivocally submitted to the Slave Power, and as national prosperity made the old economic issues that had differentiated them obsolescent, party ties further frayed.[60]

In congressional races too, Free Soilers came up short of their 1848 successes but still celebrated the continued presence of a Free Soil congressional bloc that could exploit Congress as a national platform for antislavery stand-taking. Even though Townshend returned to Ohio, and Durkee failed to win reelection, Free Soilers still found reason for optimism in the continued presence of Sumner and Chase in the Senate and the election of a new, if small, group of Free Soil Representatives. Back, once again, was Joshua Giddings who won a plurality in spite of a gerrymander designed to rid Congress of its most prominent firebrand. Even worse for the compromisers, Free Democrats elected abolitionist Edward Wade, Giddings's former longtime Liberty challenger, in the district carved partly out of Giddings's old one. In central Massachusetts, another Free Democrat, Alexander DeWitt won election from the region previously represented by Charles Allen. The most exciting result, though, was the victory of Gerrit Smith as an independent abolitionist candidate supported by the Free Democratic Party.

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[58] Gienapp, *Origins*, 27-29.
[59] Gienapp, *Origins*, 20-27, 30-35, 47-50; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 234-246.
[60] Blue, *Free Soilers*, 256; *Independent Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1852; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jan. 15, 1853.

Smith's election appeared to show that "the people recognise a 'north' and will try to bring the knowledge of it home to our government." In the weeks leading up to the election, Henry Wilson told Smith "The cause of Liberty would gain more by your election than by the election of any man in the country." Smith's "wealth," "purity of character," and "well merited reputation for benevolence," one correspondent recognized, would allow him "to exercise a very considerable influence in Congress and over the public mind."[61]

Gamaliel Bailey provided the small band of committed antislavery congressmen a gathering place where they could caucus, work to persuade sympathizers, or simply unwind and develop camaraderie with like-minded members. Bailey and his accomplished abolitionist wife Margaret consciously transformed their home (unlike most congressmen, the Baileys lived in a family household rather than a boarding house) into an antislavery salon. There Free Soilers and potentially sympathetic members like William Seward, Hannibal Hamlin (D-ME), and Thaddeus Stevens were often joined by abolitionist activists like Leavitt, Tappan, and Whittier and noted literary figures, especially the female contributors to Bailey's newspaper, including on rare occasions Harriet Beecher Stowe. By 1851, Bailey opened his home "every Saturday night" to Free Soil congressmen for a "talk and a cup of coffee" (the Baileys did not drink or serve alcohol). George Julian reminisced later that Bailey recognized the "political value" of these soirees and made a point of inviting major party men "who were tending" in an antislavery "direction" and "were evidently helped forward by the influence of these meetings." Such efforts at antislavery persuasion became ever more promising as the Whig Party continued to crumble.[62]

With the presidential campaign passed, the losing party seemed on the brink of disintegration, and when it finally collapsed, national politics would be ripe for reorganization. Antislavery moderates like Seward and Greeley would be hard pressed to continue working with slaveholders and the conservative "Silver Greys" who rallied behind ex-President Fillmore. "Out of this chaos," Sumner urged Seward, "the party of Freedom must rise." Sewardites took an opposite view, believing they might now make the Whigs an antislavery party, but they had little success outside of New York. Even one of Seward's trusted lieutenants admitted that if he lived in any other state, he might feel compelled to abandon the party. Within months of the election, antislavery Whig newspapers loudly dissented from the party's "obnoxious" platform and publicly advocated unity among all "honestly opposed to the … slave power."[63]

Free Soilers rejoiced at this prospect, reiterating old Liberty arguments that both parties relied on the other to organize political conflict around issues unrelated to slavery. With the Whigs in freefall, politicians would soon enough be forced to focus on the conflict between slavery and freedom. Giddings asserted: "Let the Whigs disband, and the slave-democracy cannot keep up their organization.—Take from them the outside pressure and they will fall to pieces of their own weight." "The destruction of the Whig party," the *Green Mountain Freeman*

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[61] James Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 214-216; Neal Dow to GS, Nov. 18, 1852, GS Papers; Jabez Hammond to GS, Mar. 7, 1853, Ibid.; Henry Wilson to GS, Oct. 11, 1852, Ibid.; See also, H.C. Taylor to GS, Nov. 8, 1852, and A.N. Cole to GS, Nov. 17, 1852, Ibid.

[62] Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey*, 133-134; GWJ to his wife, Jan. 11, 1851, in Grace Julian Clarke, "Home Letters of George Julian, 1850-1851," *Indiana Magazine of History* 29 (1933), 130-163,156; Grace Greenwood, "An American Salon," in *The Cosmopolitan*, Feb. 1890, 441-447, quote from GWJ on 447.

[63] CS to WHS, Nov. 6, 1852, in *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:373-374; WHS to CS, Nov. 9, 1852, Sept. 23, 1853, CS Papers; George E. Baker to CS, Aug. 8, 1853, Ibid.; *Lockport Journal*, quoted in *Independent Democrat*, Jan. 6, 1853.

argued, "must involve the destruction of the Democratic party also." Then national politics could be transformed into a contest between the "party of Liberty and the party of Slavery."[64]

Elections in 1853 offered new promise of furthering this goal, even if Free Democrats did not experience successes that matched the earlier triumphs of Chase and Sumner. Giddings's Ohio organ exulted that elections in early 1853 "appear to have pretty much annihilated the Whig party" in Connecticut and Rhode Island, and predicted that northern Pierce Democrats would soon face similar electoral retribution. New Hampshire Free Soilers improved dramatically on their previous results and predicted that Hunker Democrats' "God-blaspheming, man-enslaving tyrant worship" would soon "come to an end."[65]

Growing northern interest in the ethnocultural politics of temperance shaped many of these elections. While most Free Soilers preferred to focus on slavery, Maine Law disputes provided a potent reagent that further dissolved traditional party loyalties, often to the benefit of antislavery men, most of whom were temperance men anyway. Furthermore, Free Soilers, and Liberty men before them, had long believed that breaking down the Second Party System in the North would end the Slave Power's ascendancy in national politics. Though many antislavery men distrusted nativism and considered the Maine Law secondary to the slavery issue, they saw much promise in the Whig Party's further disintegration.[66]

Even where anti-liquor politics dominated the political reorganization, as in Maine, Free Soilers, most of whom were strong temperance men, still celebrated that "slave hunkerism" was "routed" when a coalition of Whigs, Free Democrats, and prohibitionist "Morrill Democrats" (after gubernatorial candidate Anson Morrill) elected William Pitt Fessenden to "stand … for freedom" in the U.S. Senate. Both there and in and Connecticut, Free Soilers formally emphasized temperance as a way to break down the old parties. In Vermont, where the liquor issue was also influential, Free Soilers secured a balance of power in the legislature, with which they hoped to elect a Free Democratic Senator. That state legislature, however, deadlocked and never resolved the senatorship. Nonetheless Free Soilers used their power to make ex-Liberty man Horatio Needham speaker of the state House, and the apparent "prostration of the Whig Party" seemed to mark the beginning of a "political revolution."[67]

Nowhere, though, were signs of the times so propitious as in Ohio and Wisconsin. Throughout 1853, Ohio Free Soilers asserted that "the fallow ground of party is better broken up now than ever before." If they maintained their "distinctive organization, under the name of 'Independent or Free Democracy,'" they might help reorganize party allegiances. In some Ohio locales, antislavery Whigs despaired at their party's pro-Compromise leadership, and by the

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[64] *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Apr. 28, 1853; JG, in Ibid., Jun. 2, 1853; *GMF*, Jul. 14, 1853; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978), 101-106, 133-140, pointedly illustrates how the weakness of the Whig Party and the absence of meaningful issues distinguishing the major parties profoundly destabilized national politics. He underemphasizes, though, the important role played by antislavery men in working to bring about this very situation and then striving early to capitalize on it.

[65] *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Apr. 14, 1853; *Independent Democrat*, Feb. 24, Mar. 10, 1853.

[66] On the importance of the Maine Law and nativism in the disruption of party politics in the North and in the weakening of the Whig Party specifically, see Gienapp, *Origins*, 44-67; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Aug. 18, 1853, includes a good example of how Free Soilers took advantage of the opportunities created by the expanded interest in temperance while still focusing on opposing the Slave Power.

[67] *Independent Democrat*, Sept, 22, 1853; Samuel Fessenden to William Pitt Fessenden (WPF), Feb. 11, 1854, Freeman H. Morse to WPF, Feb. 12, 1854, William Pitt Fessenden Papers, LC, microform; Austin Willey to CS, Feb. 18, 1854, CS Papers; JGW to Edward A. Stansbury, Minthorne Tompkins, Monroe B. Brant, and George W. Rose, Sept. 23, 1853, in *Letters of JGW*, ed. Pickard, 2:233-235; *GMF*, Oct. 20, 1853.

summer of 1853, the Ohio Whig Party appeared "to be perishing of atrophy." Even when the Democrats swamped their Ohio opponents (guaranteeing Senator Chase's retirement after the 1854-55 session), Free Soilers celebrated gubernatorial candidate Samuel Lewis's impressive gain over Ohio's 1852 Hale vote, winning over 17 percent of the vote, compared to Hale's 8.8 percent. The Whig share dropped to barely 30 percent. The impressive showing of Samuel Lewis, the only pro-temperance Ohio gubernatorial candidate, stemmed partly from his appeal for anti-liquor voters, but if Free Democrats' goal was to promote the destruction of one of the two proslavery parties, in Ohio at least, they seemed well on their way. In Wisconsin, they seemed to be all but there. Free Democrats absorbed nearly all of the state's reeling Whig Party, and their ex-Liberty Free Democratic gubernatorial candidate polled about forty percent of the state vote, more than doubling the totals cast for Van Buren in 1848 and Hale in 1852.[68]

Even in Massachusetts, where prospects looked bleak after Whigs elected their governor and defeated Free Democrats' controversial 1853 constitutional revisions (many of which were expressly designed to weaken the Whigs), some Free Democrats remained confident that future events would strengthen antislavery politics. They took pride in Henry Wilson's 30,000 votes for governor, even though the Whig majority in the legislature chose all the state officers and Democrats largely abandoned the coalition at the behest of Pierce's Attorney General Caleb Cushing. Some Free Soilers like Amasa Walker still presciently assumed that, "doubtless the slave power will make new aggressions, and if so the people will be aroused." Walker recognized that the position of congressional spokesmen like Sumner would enable Free Democrats to continue to "do battle ... with the monster slavery in his very citadel."[69]

By the time the Democratic Congress elected on Pierce's coattails convened in late 1853, many Free Soilers were optimistic that they were witnessing the calm before a massive sectional storm. While alcohol and nativism played prominent and disruptive roles in state politics, several national issues loomed that might reignite political conflict over slavery. Though the "Baltimore Doughfaces" fancied that they had killed antislavery agitation, Free Soilers knew better. The Fugitive Slave Act remained unpopular among many Northerners, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continued to fly off shelves, doubtlessly winning new antislavery sympathizers in the process, even as leading Whigs and Democrats continued to insist on the finality of the compromise. Moreover, President Pierce's expansionist designs sowed the seeds of new controversies.

When Pierce entered the White House, it seemed that agitation of the slavery question would concentrate primarily on Spanish Cuba, after which proslavery expansionists had lusted for some time. When the Whig administrations of Taylor and Fillmore failed to continue Polk's support for Cuban annexation, southern expansionists supported several filibustering expeditions by Cuban revolutionary Narcisco Lopez. With the Democrats retaking control in Washington, more formal efforts to acquire Cuba were widely expected. Free Soilers recognized the southern commitment to annexing Cuba as a new slave state. When rumors began to fly about Britain negotiating for Cuban emancipation, many Americans intimated that this would, under the Monroe Doctrine, offer grounds for a declaration of war. In the Pierce administration, expansionists found a willing partner. The President signaled that persuading Spain to cede

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[68] Edward Wade to SPC, Oct. 17, 1853, SPC Papers, HSP; *National Era*, Jun. 23, 1853; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jul. 14, Sept. 15, Oct. 27, 1853; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 252-253.

[69] For example, the proposed 1853 constitution attempted to weaken the cities, mostly Whig-dominated, in the legislature and to eliminate the general ticket system that had allowed Boston to return dozens of Whig legislators to Beacon Hill year after year. Blue, *Free Soilers*, 275-279; Amasa Walker to CS, Dec. 8, 1853, CS Papers.

Cuba would be his administration's "darling project" by appointing the "notorious" Louisiana expansionist Pierre Soulé his minister to Spain. Pierce's interest in acquiring Cuba as a slave state made painfully obvious to Free Soilers that he would acquiesce in "whatever the Slave Power asks." A *National Era* correspondent sarcastically condemned the southern belief that it was "the manifest destiny of this Republic to extend slavery from Mason and Dixon to the South Pole." Many Free Democrats, however, instead of fearing the new aggressions, emphasized the absurdity of staking national politics, and potentially international war, on the plan of annexing the Spanish sugar island. One Free Democratic newspaper celebrated this evidence "that a wise Providence is making the Slave Power insanely craving, to the end that its destruction may be more speedy and surer." Senator Chase similarly asserted that "no movement can be made in that direction which will not rather advance than retard the interests of freedom."[70]

But it was domestic territorial policy that once again made slavery the controlling issue in national politics. In this case, manifest destiny was already intertwined with sectionalism in the competition for federal railroad support. For many American expansionists, North and South, the construction of a Pacific, or transcontinental railroad seemed the most pressing national policy question. Indeed, in 1853 Whig newspaperman Horace Greeley told a trusted friend that his "creed" for the 1856 presidential contest would be simply "the Pacific Railroad," and he would support "whoever is for that" as "good enough." Unlike Greeley, Southern boosters sought to establish a southern route from New Orleans across Texas. They were so committed to this goal that Pierce's minister to Mexico, James Gadsden, a South Carolina extremist, negotiated a treaty to purchase the barren land that is now southern Arizona to ensure a passable southern right of way to the West Coast, a project abolitionists derided as yet another concession to "the Slave Power, whose behest is little less than law at Washington." Expansionists further north argued that a road to the San Francisco Bay with a terminus at either St. Louis or Chicago made far more sense. To enable either the central or northern route, though, Congress would have to again venture into the sensitive business of organizing federal territories, this time on the large remaining northern portion of the Louisiana Purchase (bounded by the state of Missouri and the Missouri River on the east and the Continental Divide on the west).[71]

By 1853 Senator Douglas, an ambitious expansionist and incidentally an owner of property whose value seemed sure to skyrocket if Chicago became the starting point of a Pacific route, determined that he could wait no longer to organize the western territory. Douglas had already proposed bills to organize the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase as the Nebraska Territory as early as 1845 in the House and 1848 in the Senate, but neither had been taken up for debate. As American settlers trickled into Nebraska, they dispatched a delegate to Washington, further motivating Douglas and his House ally William Richardson (also an Illinois Democrat), conveniently the chairmen of the two congressional committees on territories, to push forward.

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[70] On Lopez's filibustering see Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), 20-35. A preponderance of extant evidence suggests that Pierce initially welcomed continued filibustering plots and intimated through indirect channels that he would not stand in the way of the maturing plans for a new invasion of Cuba led by Mississippi's ex-governor John Quitman, but by the summer of 1854, Pierce had come out against such an expedition, hoping to secure Cuba through diplomacy, and perhaps recognizing his political weakness after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Ibid., 119-123; *Independent Democrat*, Apr. 21, 1853, Jul. 14, 1853; *National Era*, Aug 25, 1853; SPC to Charles D. Cleveland, May 27, 1853, HSP; *Independent Democrat*, Dec. 23, 1852.

[71] Horace Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Apr. 24, 1853, Horace Greeley Papers, NYPL, microform; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 145-154,178, 182-83; *GMF*, Jun. 23, 1853.

Signs of the coming storm over this issue appeared late in the 1853 session, when Richardson introduced a bill to organize Nebraska. As soon as the House considered the bill, Giddings perceived the bitter southern opposition to organizing new northern territories. "The increase of free power," Giddings wrote, "is ominous to the downfall of slavery, and never was that fate more evident" than when the Nebraska Bill passed the House 98-43. Most Southerners rejected the bill because the 1820 Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery in the proposed Nebraska territory, all of which lay north of the 36° 30' compromise line. The House bill consequently failed in the Senate 23-17 when Douglas finally brought it forward on the poorly attended Senate's final day. Every southern senator excepting the Missourians voted against it.[72]

The Nebraska Outrage and the Emergence of the Republican Party

Observing these developments, Free Soilers anxiously predicted that the next Congress would attempt to open Nebraska to slavery. Aware that "one of the first measures likely to come before Congress, will be the Nebraska Territory Bill," Free Soilers fully expected Senate President *Pro Tempore* David Atchison, a western Missouri slaveholder, to insist on repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a condition for its passage. While Atchison had reluctantly supported the 1853 Nebraska bill to avoid antagonizing expansionist constituents and St. Louis railway boosters, the proslavery senator made clear "in every speech" he delivered to constituents the next summer that he now stood "solemnly pledged … to resist the bill to the last, unless provision can be made for admitting slavery into the territory." As the session approached, the *National Era* warned that "the restless, determined, unscrupulous antagonism of Slavery to Freedom" threatened northern hopes for the speedy organization of a free territory in Nebraska.[73]

Before Douglas, Atchison and his powerful southern Democratic messmates (known as the "F Street Mess") could finish hammering out a proslavery Nebraska Bill, antislavery men prepared their own efforts to bring slavery into congressional debate without delay. Gerrit Smith, the most radical abolitionist ever to serve in Congress, led off. Exploiting debate over the reference of President Pierce's message, Smith used a seemingly unrelated point of diplomatic controversy between the United States and Austria to launch into a moralistic assault on American proslavery policy. Smith charged that it was unseemly for Secretary of State William Marcy to "taunt" Austria as despotic when America was "a much greater and guiltier oppressor." When a Marylander attempted to call Smith to order for his irrelevant "Abolition speech," Smith calmly conceded that he was indeed "making an Abolition speech," and asked for the same patience he would provide when one of his colleagues offered "an *anti*-Abolition speech." Giddings followed the next day with a studied rebuttal of President Pierce's recommendation that Congress reimburse the *Amistad* slave owners for the "property" they lost when the Supreme Court freed the illegally enslaved Africans. Giddings speculated that Pierce aimed simply to further win "the favor of the slave power." Giddings exulted to his son: "Smith and I let'em

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[72] *National Era*, Apr. 17, 1853; *CG*, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session, 539-542; Letter from JG, Feb. 8, 1853, in *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Feb. 17, 1853; Letter from JG, Feb. 15, 1853, in Ibid., Feb. 24, 1853; *CG*, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1116-1117.

[73] *National Era*, Apr. 17, Nov. 17, 1853; *Independent Democrat*, Nov. 17, Dec. 15, 1853.

have it on the first two days of going into Committee on the Presidents message. Some hunkers awoke from their sleep with perfect astonishment at finding free soil was not dead." [74]

After the New Year's holiday concluded, Congress stood poised for its greatest sectional conflict in years as Douglas prepared to introduce his new Nebraska Bill. The "friends of liberty," Giddings asserted, celebrated that "this must inevitably bring up the anti-slavery discussion in the Senate" and welcomed the opportunity to "drive members to take their positions either for or against slavery." The *Green Mountain Freeman* echoed Giddings:

> We are gratified nonetheless that this bold step has been taken; for it drops a large portion of the disguise, which the Slave Power has ever assumed to conceal her settled design of complete supremacy, and which has prevented the North from believing what, during the last three years, has become undeniable, that the question of Liberty or Slavery is now a national issue, and the next one to be settled by the American people."[75]

Douglas would concede much to slaveholding powerbrokers to ensure passage of his bill. With the F Street Mess's approval, Douglas rewrote the language of popular sovereignty to give proslavery Democrats sufficient concessions to seemingly obviate the need for repealing the Missouri Compromise. Allowing the territorial legislature to decide the fate of slavery early in the territorial process, the Missouri Compromise would only bar slavery until settlers elected a territorial legislature, which proslavery western Missourians were confident they could control. Before this Nebraska Bill came up for debate, though, a southern Whig promised to demand an amendment repealing the Missouri Compromise. Once this proposal was on the table, slaveholding senators could accept nothing less.[76]

On January 23, 1854, Douglas introduced the finalized version of his bill to organize Nebraska. The bill abolished the slavery restriction of the Missouri Compromise, and, for the first time, also proposed to create two territories, setting off the southern part bordering Missouri as the Kansas Territory to increase the likelihood of settlers establishing slavery in at least that portion. Chase and Sumner immediately requested a postponement, ostensibly to evaluate the new bill. In fact, these Free Soilers, or Independent Democrats as they now sometimes described themselves, sought the delay to alert the northern public through an address written primarily by Chase, with the aid of Sumner, Giddings, and Gerrit Smith. On January 24, those four and Representatives Alexander De Witt and Edward Wade, issued the already completed "Address of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the People of the United States," or as it came to be known, "Appeal of the Independent Democrats," in both the *National Era* and the more

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[74] The F Street Mess included Senators Andrew Pickens Butler (SC), Robert M.T. Hunter (VA), James Mason (VA), all proslavery zealots and all chairs of powerful senate committees, while Atchison himself was the upper chamber's president *pro tempore*, Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:550-551; *CG Appendix*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 50-55; JG to Grotius Giddings, Dec. 25, 30, 1853, JG Papers.

[75] Letter from JG, Jan 5, 1854, in *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jan. 12, 1854; *GMF*, Jan. 12, 1854.

[76] There is some historiographical debate about whether Seward instigated Kentucky's Archibald Dixon to offer this Missouri Compromise repeal resolution. Gienapp , *Origins*, 70-71, argues that Seward intended it to serve the dual purpose of strengthening southern Whigs at home while ensuring the bill's defeat in the House. Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:554-555 disagrees, believing that embattled southern Whigs like Dixon needed little encouragement to pursue this sort of proslavery one-upmanship.

moderate *New York-Daily Times*.[77] Eric Foner aptly described this "Appeal" as "one of the most effective pieces of political propaganda in our history," but most discussions do not fully appreciate the Appeal's connections to earlier political abolitionist congressional activism.[78]

The arguments and the form of the Appeal, as a public document penned and signed by a small group of issue-oriented antislavery congressmen, reflected the decades-old history of political agitation against Slave Power influences in Congress. The Appeal strove to rouse the northern electorate against Douglas's Nebraska Bill by framing it as a new extreme in the Slave Power's efforts to control federal policymaking. These antislavery propagandists also recast the Missouri Compromise as a "sacred pledge," of which the Nebraska Bill was a "criminal betrayal," notwithstanding years of abolitionist attacks on the 1820 legislation. For decades the South had reaped its benefits, and now, with the people of the free states finally ready to settle Nebraska, southerners wanted to renege. Much of the Appeal then concentrated on debunking Douglas's canard that the Compromise of 1850 somehow overrode the Missouri Compromise in spirit, if not in law.

As political abolitionists had done for nearly two decades, the Independent Democrats beseeched "the People to come to the rescue of the country from the domination of slavery." In directing attention to the aggressive designs of a "Federal government controlled by the slave power," they drew on the established antislavery discourse about how slaveholders' power presented an "imminent danger" to "the Freedom of our Institutions" and "the Permanency of our Union." Also emphasizing slavery's threat to the dignity of free labor, the Appeal charged that Douglas's bill would transform Nebraska into "a dreary region of despotism, inhabited [only] by masters and slaves," instead of by a "free, industrious, and enlightened population."

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[77] *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session 239-240; George W. Julian, *The Life of Joshua R. Giddings* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1892), 311-312; *National Era*, Jan. 24, 1854. Since it had been completed before Douglas's newest amendments, the initial version of the Appeal did not mention Kansas, but the Independent Democrats soon published a postscript; The *New-York Daily Times*, Jan. 24, 1854, however, misprinted the "Appeal" as coming from the "Senators and a majority of the Representatives from Ohio," a common initial misconception, replicated for example in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, Jan. 25, 1854. Chase hypothesized that this mix-up stemmed from the fact that the Independent Democrats had at first sought signatures from Ohio congressmen to issue an address to the people of Ohio, but when some representatives requested revisions, the Independent Democrats decided to avoid delay and issue the Appeal in its original form, *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 280; This is explicated by Dick Johnson, "Along the Twisted Road to Civil War: Historians and the 'Appeal of the Independent Democrats,'" *Old Northwest* 4 (1978), 119-141, 136-138.

[78] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, repr. 1995), 94-95; Roy F. Nichols, "The Kansas-Nebraska Act: A Century of Historiography," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43 (Sept. 1956), 187-212, 205-206, likewise viewed this "manifesto" as successfully setting off "a chain reaction which gave northern leaders their desired opportunity to mobilize the anti-southern voting strength of the more populous north"; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 163-164, convincingly argues that the Appeal demonstrated that its Free Soil authors were "quite astute politically," and "found in this type of propaganda a strategic way to compensate for the weakness of their organizational position" He exaggerates, however, the degree to which the Appeal used overemotional rhetoric to inflame readers; The best recent discussion is Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 673-674. Wilentz briefly describes the "Appeal" as rooted in "familiar Liberty and Free Soil Party arguments" against the Slave Power and designed to promote "a revival of antislavery politics;" For a counterargument that questions the importance and reach of the Appeal, see Mark E. Neely, Jr., "The Kansas-Nebraska Act in American Political Culture: The Road to Bladenburg and the *Appeal of the Independent Democrats*," in *The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854*, ed. John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 13-46. Neely overlooks how the Appeal enabled Chase and Sumner to structure Senate debates over the Nebraska Bill around contesting the aggressive Slave Power's new demands. Those debates unquestionably reached a broad and diverse northern audience.

The Independent Democrats concluded by pledging to "resist" the Nebraska Bill "by speech and vote, and with all the abilities which God has given us." They promised, even if they failed in Congress to "go home to our constituents" and "erect anew the standard of Freedom."

In addition to repeating arguments made originally by Liberty partisans, the Appeal's use of Congress as a forum from which to educate the nation about the Slave Power drew on established third-party antislavery tactics. The Appeal succeeded in enabling the Independent Democrats to use their congressional platform to shape the terms of debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. With its wide publication in antislavery-leaning papers of all party affiliations, the Appeal quickly reached a broad audience. The Appeal became a central subject of Senate debate as soon as discussion of the bill resumed on January 30. Douglas, acting aghast at the Appeal's abuse, complained that he "granted" Chase and Sumner the week postponement as an "act of courtesy," but the "Abolition confederates" had instead "assembled in secret conclave" to publish "to the world a document," designed to' "deceive the people of the United States."[79]

In his rebuttal, Chase characteristically asserted the political abolitionists' well-established anti-Slave power policy program:

> "All that we have ever insisted upon is, that the Territories of this Union shall be preserved from slavery; and that where the General Government exercises the exclusive jurisdiction, its legislations shall be on the side of liberty. It is because we defend these positions that the Senator from Illinois attacks us."

Appreciating that this congressional conflict would further promote anti-Slave Power sentiment, Chase thanked Douglas "for having brought it [the Appeal] so prominently before the country. It will now reach thousands and tens of thousands who would not have read it but for the discussion which has taken place here to-day."[80]

The Independent Democrats embraced this intense interest, and Sumner urged political abolitionists to petition both houses of Congress to ensure constant discussion of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, much in the way earlier abolitionist petitions had repeatedly reinserted slavery into congressional debate. Sumner urged abolitionist John Jay to ensure that "the people" provided the congressional Independent Democrats with at least one petition for each day. Sumner predicted that Jay's prodigious organizational efforts in New York would "tell strongly here," since congressional politicians were "indifferent to every thing except the popular voice." The ensuing antislavery uproar against the Kansas-Nebraska bill was so dramatic that Giddings, a congressional veteran of fifteen years, reported home, "We are in as great excitement here as I have ever seen and the prospect is that it will increase." The New York *Tribune*'s correspondent similarly observed, "There is nothing talked of now but Nebraska." A vast array of northerners responded to the call for anti-Nebraska petitions. One Brooklyn petition measured one hundred feet in length. Soon after the petition of three thousand New England clergymen and professors, the vast majority of the region's clergy, to "solemnly protest" the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as both a

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[79] For example the "Appeal" appeared immediately, along with editorial praise, in both the Democratic *New York Evening Post*, Jan. 25, 26, 1854 and the Whiggish *New-York Daily Times*, Jan. 24, 1854; *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 275-279.

[80] *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 279-282.

"breach of faith" and "a great moral wrong" touched off another lengthy Senate debate when Douglas denounced the petitioners and blamed the Appeal for inciting this continued agitation.[81]

The Independent Democrats exploited the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as a flashpoint for the creation of an anti-Slave Power party that could control the national government.[82] As Senate debate progressed, Chase and Sumner both asserted their expectation of "an inevitable reorganization of parties" around the slavery question. Sumner proudly averred on the Senate floor, "The old matters which have divided" political parties "have lost their importance," replaced by a "question grander far." Slavery could "never be withdrawn from national politics," Sumner warned, until the federal government "erase[d] the blot of Slavery from our national brow." Numerous seasoned abolitionists analogized Sumner's Senate stand against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill to John Quincy Adams's famous earlier battles against the Slave Power in the House of Representatives, and Frederick Douglass proudly told Sumner that "all the friends of freedom, in every State, and of every color, may claim you, just now, as their representative.[83]

Free Soil allies agreed, "Old party ties are like flax in the fire." "Clenched fists and set teeth everywhere" demonstrated "the inexpugnable hatred that this last, crowning outrage has created toward the Slave power." If the "Nebraska iniquity" passed, it would enable Independent Democrats to rally northerners of all parties, "Free Democrats, old line Democrats, Whigs," to "beat out the brains of that infernal slave power." "Douglas," Jay asserted, was "doing what no abolitionist could do—arousing the Country to a sense of its danger—& a remembrance of its duty." The more conservative *New-York Daily Times*'s Washington correspondent similarly recognized, although less enthusiastically, that "moderate men fear … that the passage of the bill would arouse a storm of indignation in the North, the effect of which would be to give that section completely into the hands of GIDDINGS, GERRIT SMITH, CHASE, SUMNER, and their political friends."[84]

Notwithstanding the powerful efforts of Chase and Sumner, aided by Seward, Benjamin Wade, and a handful of other northern Whigs, the Senate passed the Nebraska Bill, 37-14. Douglas forced this vote at 3:30 in the morning on March 4 after a five-hour speech and won the support of nearly half the Northerners voting and all but two Southerners. Douglas's bill faced a stiffer challenge in the House. William Richardson tried to fast-track the Senate bill by referring it to his Committee on Territories, from which it could then be introduced into the House "at an auspicious moment" and "forced through" without debate "under the screw of the previous

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[81] CS to Jn Jay, Jan. 12, 1854, in, *Selected Letters of CS*, ed. Palmer, 1:399-400. See also CS to Jn Jay, Jan. 21, 22, 1854, in Ibid., 1:401-403; JG to Grotius R. Giddings, Feb. 5, 1854, JG Papers; JG to Grotius R. Giddings, Feb. 12, 1854, Giddings-Julian Papers, LC, microform; *New York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1854; *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 580, 617-623; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Mar. 16, 1854.

[82] Several historians, including Gienapp, *Origins*, 71-73, and Nichols, "The Kansas-Nebraska Act," 205-06, have noted Independent Democrats' goal of promoting sectional reorganization of American politics; Dick Johnson, "Along the Twisted Road," suggests that the "Appeal" was first designed to catalyze a new Ohio antislavery party; Holt, *Political Crisis*, 151-153, characterizes the Appeal as a shrewd, partly self-interested, attempt "to provoke the reorganization of parties along sectional lines that [Free Soilers] had been seeking since the 1840s," but overstates his case that this anti-Slave Power propaganda was only effective "precisely because" Northerners were "*already* so concerned about dangers to republican values for reasons that had almost nothing to do with the sectional conflict."

[83] *New-York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1854; *CG Appendix*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 140, 269; William Jay to CS, Apr.[?] 1854, William Jackson to CS, Jul. 1, 1854, and Francis Jackson to CS, Jul. 4, 1854, CS Papers; Frederick Douglass to CS, Feb. 27, 1854, Ibid.

[84] E. A. Stansbury to CS. Feb. 23, 1854, CS Papers; J. D. Baldwin to CS, Feb. 28, 1854, Ibid.; Jn Jay to CS, Jan. 24, 1854, Ibid.; *New-York Daily Times*, Jan. 20, 1854.

question." Instead, a House majority stymied Richardson and committed the bill to the Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, where it would languish behind dozens of other bills and then be subject to a full-dress debate when, or if, it finally came up. This antislavery procedural victory put "the bill so far off on the roll of bills to be taken up in order, as to give ample time for the people, through their Legislatures, State Conventions and primary meetings to give their expressions on this new and stupendous aggression of the Slave Power." However, this delay did not dispel fears that presidential patronage could whip enough northern Democrats into line to pass the bill, as Pierce had clearly staked the "political destiny" of his "depraved administration" on "the policy of extending slavery over Nebraska."[85]

By May 8, Douglas's allies were finally satisfied they had the votes to get his bill through the House. In Committee of the Whole, Richardson and Georgia's Alexander Stephens (a Whig who would soon switch parties) maneuvered vote after vote to postpone each preceding bill on the Committee's calendar. When formal debates commenced, antislavery Northerners from all three parties savaged the "iniquitous larceny of freedom's birthright," as Edward Wade dubbed the bill. Giddings, meanwhile, "hailed with peculiar interest and joy the discussion of this great question," arguing that the bill's supporters "had done more to agitate the great question of humanity in one short month than he had been able to accomplish in the twenty years he had been a member of this body." It had now "become obvious to all," Giddings declared, "that these conflicting institutions of freedom and slavery cannot flourish together under the same Government." Even "an earnest and devoted friend of the Democratic party" like Galusha Grow (PA) warned colleagues that if they passed the bill, "you will have destroyed the last breakwater that stands between your rights and the surges of northern Abolitionism" and also guarantee an "anti-Administration majority in the next Congress."[86]

Notwithstanding the widespread northern outrage at the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, concert in opposition strategy proved elusive. Gamaliel Bailey and ex-congressman Preston King worked the lobbies to organize cross-party cooperation, but old loyalties died hard. Not until May 20, did Bailey succeed in assembling leading anti-Nebraska men in a private caucus that included future candidates for speaker Lewis Campbell (W-OH) and Nathaniel Banks (D-MA). Though these anti-Nebraska men called a second meeting, the bill passed before they could reconvene. On May 22, through a little-used parliamentary gambit, Richardson and Stephens succeeded in discharging the bill from committee to bring it before the House for a final vote. With half the northern Democrats joining nearly every Southerner, the bill passed 113-100, as the sounds of both "hissing" and "prolonged clapping" rang across the galleries and the House floor. Unsuccessful as Bailey and King had been in outmaneuvering the Slave Power, their efforts helped lay the groundwork for a cross-party anti-Nebraska union.[87]

The thirty anti-Nebraska members who reconvened after the bill's passage discussed plans for founding a new "Republican" fusion party, but the group took no definitive public

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[85] *National Era*, Mar. 16, 1854; *GMF*, Mar 30, 1854; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Apr. 6, 1854.
[86] *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 1130-1249, passim; *CG Appendix*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 663, 1197, 972-976.
[87] Gienapp, *Origins*, 78-79; Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey*, 160-161; In Committee of the Whole, Stephens moved to strike out the "enacting words" of the Senate bill. The Committee would then report "this action" to the House, which would reject the report, and which point it would become possible for Richardson to introduce his own Kansas-Nebraska bill as an amendment to substitute for all of the Senate bill after the enacting clause, from which Richardson's bill differed only in its excision of an anti-immigrant clause that John Clayton (W-DE) had added to the Senate bill. The Senate then abandoned the Clayton amendment and ratified the House bill, rather than risk another fight in Committee of the Whole. *CG*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 1240-1254; *National Era*, May 25, 1854.

action. Instead a much larger meeting of anti-Nebraska members assembled to issue an "Address to the People of the United States." Rejecting Lewis Campbell's initial draft as too radical, the bipartisan meeting declined to advocate a new party. The address, however, asserted, "We are ready to do all that shall be in our power to restore the Missouri Compromise, and to execute such further measures …as may be necessary for the recovery of the ground lost to Freedom and to prevent the further aggressions of Slavery."[88]

Most Free Soilers, though disgusted at the passage of the bill and fearful of its potential results, saw real promise in this unprecedented Slave Power aggressiveness. Free Soilers vigorously fanned the conflagration of anti-Slave Power sentiment in response to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. So great was the outrage against Douglas, that he famously quipped that he "could travel from Boston to Chicago by the light of my own [burning] effigy." In Giddings's Ashtabula County, the "Friends of Freedom" wryly objected to this wave of effigy construction as "the greatest indignity and insult" to the straw being molded into Douglas's likeness. Earlier, "wives, mothers, and daughters" from Stark County, Ohio had chastised the Illinois Senator's betrayal of the North by sending him thirty pieces of silver (three-cent coins) sewn together in gauze. Within weeks of the bill's passage, men like Giddings celebrated the "cheering" news of free state outrage, even among "adherents" of the 1850 compromise."[89]

Free Soilers, or Independent Democrats, immediately hoped that the Kansas-Nebraska Act would provide the fulcrum for the national realignment political antislavery men had so long desired. With the Whig Party already in shambles in many northern states, Douglas's bill now offered the potential for dividing the northern Democracy to create a new winning antislavery coalition. As calls for cross-party anti-Nebraska fusion multiplied, the emergence of a potent anti-Slave Power party suddenly seemed imminent, and sanguine political antislavery veterans like Giddings could now "begin to feel confident of a majority of anti-slavery members in the next House of Representatives."[90]

Amid the furor over Douglas's Nebraska Bill, two sensational fugitive slave rescue attempts, one successful and one not, further fueled antislavery anger at the Democratic Party. In May of 1854, just days after the Nebraska Bill passed, a federal marshal arrested fugitive slave Anthony Burns. Thousands "without distinction of Party" gathered at Faneuil Hall to protest, while a smaller, more militant, and mostly black, group determined to rescue Burns. Led by the radical white abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson (who later commanded the first official black regiment in the Union Army), they broke down the jailhouse door but were pushed back by the armed guard. In the melee, shots were fired and a deputy was stabbed to death. Burns meanwhile remained incarcerated. President Pierce, anxious to defend federal law, deployed marines, cavalry, and artillery to Boston, along with a boat to transport Burns to Virginia. Furthermore, the Pierce administration reputedly deterred Burns's master from selling Burns's freedom to abolitionists, so that Pierce could demonstrate his commitment to enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. With perhaps fifty-thousand Massachusetts men and women observing, federal troops escorted Burns from the courthouse to the dock where the boat was waiting.[91]

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[88] Gienapp, *Origins*, 89-90; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jul. 6, 1854; "Address to the People of the United States," in *National Era*, Jun. 29, 1854.

[89] Douglas, quoted in Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 451; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jul. 6, 1854; *GMF*, Mar. 30, 1854; Letter from JG, Jun. 15, 1854, in *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jun. 22, 1854.

[90] Letter from JG, Jun. 15, 1854, in *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Jun. 22, 1854.

[91] *GMF*, Jun. 1, 1854; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 676-77; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 239-242.

Free Soil voices around the country condemned the proceedings: "It is time to have it understood that there is something more sacred than a wicked law, or a court-house in the custody of brothel pimps and thieves, or even the life of a kidnapper." The *National Era* blamed this resistance to the Fugitive Law on the Kansas-Nebraska Act's "flagrant outrage against Freedom and Free Labor" having inflamed Boston antislavery men and "deepened the abhorrence with which every attempt to enforce the Fugitive Slave act is regarded in Boston."[92]

The rescue that same spring of Joshua Glover from a Wisconsin jail cell attracted similar national attention. Upon receiving news that Glover, a Missouri fugitive, had been apprehended in Racine and imprisoned in Milwaukee, longtime political abolitionist editor Sherman Booth road through Milwaukee supposedly shouting "To the Rescue!" At the ensuing rally, Booth roused the crowd of over five thousand, after which a smaller group battered down the jail door and freed Glover, who was safely escorted to Canada. Four days afterward Booth was arrested for inciting the jailbreak. The Wisconsin Supreme Court, however, dismissed Booth's case, and, more astoundingly, declared the Fugitive Slave Act unconstitutional as a violation of Wisconsin's states' rights. This legal battle took place against the backdrop of the Wisconsin Republican Party's rapid emergence, with Booth one of its most prominent and radical leaders.[93]

Wisconsinites laid claim to initiating the Republican Party, since a February 28 cross-party meeting at a Ripon church called for a new "Republican" Party if the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed. By summer, with the recently acquitted Booth as a key organizer, Free Soilers and Whigs orchestrated an impressive Republican state convention. With over a thousand delegates descending on the state capitol grounds, the meeting enthusiastically established the new party and adopted a platform resembling previous Free Soil ones. District conventions conveniently selected a Free Soiler, a Whig, and an anti-Nebraska Democrat to run as Republicans for Wisconsin's three congressional seats. The unified party elected two of the three and controlled the state legislature, which sent former Liberty man Charles Durkee to the U.S. Senate.[94]

Michigan fusion advocates achieved similar early success. A February 22 fusion meeting in Jackson plausibly challenged the Ripon men for the honor of being the new party's founders, although it did not use the name "Republican." That meeting first proposed a cross-party ticket headed by anti-extensionist Democrat Kinsley Bingham. Six months later a mass convention met in the same city and adopted the name "Republican" and formally nominated Bingham. Republicans swept the state elections and elected three of four congressmen.[95]

In antislavery Vermont, Free Soilers especially shaped the new party. Organized political nativism struggled to gain a foothold there, as the largely antislavery Whig Party joined with Free Soilers and a smattering of antislavery Democrats to erect a powerful new Republican Party. Though Free Democrats had to accept gubernatorial and congressional candidates who simultaneously ran as Whigs, the Whigs adopted the fusionists' antislavery platform and united in support of Free Soiler Ryland Fletcher for lieutenant governor. When the Whig-Republican ticket won, the state's former Liberty organ celebrated that "in view of the fact that the

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[92] *Independent Democrat*, Jun. 15, 1854; *National Era*, Jun. 1, 1854.

[93] Frederick J. Blue, "Freemen to the Rescue: Sherman M. Booth and the Fugitive Slave Act," in *No Taint of Compromise* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 127-135; *Reminiscences of the Busy Life of Chauncey C. Olin*, in, Chauncey C. Olin, *A Complete Record of the John Olin Family* (Baker-Randolph co., 1893, Indianapolis), liii-lxxiv. Tried in federal court also though, Booth ultimately faced incarceration in 1860 after the U.S. Supreme Court decided against him in 1859 in the case of *Ableman v. Booth*.

[94] Mcmanus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin*, 89-96, 138.

[95] Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 264; Gienapp, *Origins*, 104-106.

aggressions of Slavery through the instrumentalities of the Administration and otherwise, were the only issues," the "friends of freedom" could "safely claim it as a Anti-Slavery victory."[96]

In many northern states though, the political calculus facing antislavery leaders proved far more complicated. Ethnocultural politics threatened to impinge on the slavery question in many northern states. Since the beginning of the decade, liquor prohibition and proscription of foreigners had grown increasingly popular among northern voters. In 1854, many northern states witnessed the sudden emergence of the American (Know Nothing) Party to capitalize on these sentiments, along with a rising anti-partisan climate generally. This imposing new political force arose out of the nativist and anti-Catholic secret society, the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, whose members soon received the nickname Know Nothings, for their custom of claiming to "know nothing" when questioned about the order. In many parts of the North, this new American Party seemed as effective as anti-Nebraska fusionists at taking advantage of northern Whiggery's impotence. In Louisiana and the Upper South too, Know Nothing parties emerged as a landing-place for ex-Whigs who sought to protect slavery and union by avoiding new controversies and limiting the growth through immigration of the northern electorate.[97]

In Ohio, one of the most important early fusion states, nativism undoubtedly influenced the anti-Nebraska victory. Several anti-Nebraska congressional candidates held Know Nothing affiliations, including ex-Whig Lewis Campbell, who had played one of the most prominent roles in the House battle against the Nebraska Bill and in organizing the Ohio anti-Nebraska convention. Nonetheless, led by men like Giddings and Chase, the fusionists' triumph relied primarily on anti-Nebraska outrage. And what a triumph it was. Anti-Nebraska candidates won all twenty-one Ohio congressional seats. On learning the results, New Hampshire's *Independent Democrat* rejoiced, "Anti-Nebraska Republicans 21! Administration Nebraska-ites 0!"[98]

In Indiana and Pennsylvania, organized political nativism was far more influential. Indiana Know Nothings controlled their state's anti-Nebraska movement, even though they did not nominate a separate ticket. The Anti-Nebraska ticket handpicked by the Know Nothings scored a resounding victory, so that all but two members of the state's next House delegation would be anti-Nebraska men, even if most also were Know Nothings. In Pennsylvania, where third-party antislavery had never been strong outside Wilmot's district, Know Nothingism was an even more decisive factor in realignment. An anti-Nebraska Whig won the governorship, but the state elected a Democratic canal commissioner, both on the strength of Know Nothing support. Throughout the state, Know Nothing endorsements deranged political calculations. Know Nothing success in the central and western parts of the state, where foreigners were few, though, can be attributed to the movement's ability to capitalize on pervasive pro-temperance and anti-Nebraska sentiment in those regions.[99]

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[96] *GMF*, Sept. 14, 1854.

[97] On the important role of anti-partisanship in the Know Nothing movement see Mark Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). On Know Nothingism in the South see Freehling, *Road to Disunion: V. II, Secessionists Triumphant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-94.

[98] Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 68-71; Maizlish, *Triumph of Sectionalism*, 198-206; Gienapp, *Origins*, 119-121, depicts a stronger Know-Nothing influence in these Ohio elections but still holds that anti-Nebraska sentiment was the primary factor in explaining the resounding rebuke of the Nebraska Democrats.*Independent Democrat*, Oct. 19, 1854.

[99] Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 71-73; Gienapp, *Origins*, 109-110; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 57-68.

In New Hampshire, where formal anti-Nebraska fusion came relatively late, an anti-Slave Power strategy nonetheless united the opponents of the Democratic Party and provided common ground for them to work together on national questions. In early 1855, Whigs, Independent Democrats, and Know Nothings still ran separate state tickets, but all three groups selected the same three congressional candidates, including Hale's close ally Mason W. Tappan, and all of those anti-Administration nominees won in President Pierce's home state. Know Nothings won the governorship and a legislative plurality, but Independent Democrats still considered the election "one of the most thorough and remarkable political revolutions ever witnessed in this or any state." "The victory is not of the American organization alone," George Fogg's *Independent Democrat* asserted, "but of all the friends of Freedom, Temperance, and Reform, acting shoulder to shoulder for a common object—the overthrow of the Administration Slavery power in this State, and the establishment of a Freedom and Reform power in its stead." In the legislature, Tappan, both a Know Nothing and an Independent Democrat (as well as U.S. Representative-elect), maneuvered skillfully to ensure the election of John P. Hale to one of the two open Senate seats even though Hale was not a member of the order.[100]

Nowhere was the Know Nothing triumph as dramatic as in the Bay State, a result in large part of the strong antislavery appeal incorporated into the nativist movement there. With the collapse of the Free Soil-Democratic coalition and the weakening of the Whig Party, a political vacuum emerged in Massachusetts. Free Soilers attempted to erect a Republican organization to capitalize on the welling discontent over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the rendition of Anthony Burns. In September 1854 they nominated Henry Wilson for governor, but they were quickly eclipsed by the Know Nothings. Wilson trimmed his sails to the nativist movement and strengthened his personal position by declining the Republican nomination. Casting his lot with the Know Nothings, Wilson backed their gubernatorial candidate Henry Gardner, a shrewd Webster Whig, in exchange for a promise that Wilson would receive Gardner's support for election to the Senate. The state's demoralized Republicans were "stunned and overwhelmed" by the magnitude of the Know Nothing victory. Winning every state senate seat and all but three in the lower house, Know Nothings ushered in an astonishing political revolution. Even opponents of the movement like former Congressman Palfrey celebrated "the 'eternal sunset' into which," the Know Nothings had brought the two corrupt old parties in Massachusetts."[101]

The Know Nothing Movement in its banner state triumphed only by coupling a fierce anti-Slave Power program with its anti-foreignism and anti-Catholicism.[102] The Know Nothing General Court resolved against the Kansas-Nebraska Act and passed a robust personal liberty law. When the conservative Gardner vetoed the bill, the legislature easily overrode him. Moreover, Know Nothing legislators desegregated the Massachusetts common schools. And of course, this legislature elected to the Senate Henry Wilson, who, for all his wheeling and dealing, was a genuine opponent of the Slave Power. By capitalizing on *both* antislavery and anti-foreign

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[100] *Independent Democrat*, Mar. 15, 22, 1855; Sewell, *John P. Hale*, 154-162.

[101] On the Know Nothing movement in Massachusetts, as discussed in this paragraph and the next one, see Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 272-284; SGH to Horace Mann, Nov. 14, 1854, in *Letters and Journals of SGH*, ed. Laura Richards, 2: 403; John G. Palfrey to JG, Dec. 20, 1854, JG Papers.

[102] This is not to say that Massachusetts Know Nothings were insincere. Stoked by the explosion of the state's impoverished Irish Catholic immigrant population in the wake of the 1848 potato famine, many Know Nothings held strong anti-Catholic and anti-foreign sentiments, and nativist legislators in the 1850s passed laws to disfranchise immigrants by requiring for suffrage a literacy test and a two-year period after naturalization. Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 286.

sentiments, Know Nothings stalled the emergence of the Republican Party as a serious power in state politics. When national politics, however, forced Massachusetts Know Nothings to choose between nativism and antislavery, the Republican Party stood poised to emerge from the shadows. In 1856, antislavery men put up no Republican challenger to Governor Gardner in exchange for a Know Nothing commitment to join Republicans in the presidential canvass. Once again antislavery men bartered power in the state for national political influence.

In New York, the unique, unpredictable, political landscape (with Hard and Soft Shell Democrats still at odds) created conditions that both slowed the rise of Republicanism and also foreshadowed the future character of the national Know Nothing movement. In the nation's most populous state, Know Nothingism was hardly an antislavery enterprise. Instead conservative Silver Grey Whigs dominated the party's support in 1854 and consequently played down antislavery as they challenged William Seward and the antislavery wing that now controlled New York Whiggery. Working with his close ally and preeminent Albany wirepuller Thurlow Weed, Seward aimed to refurbish his party as an antislavery force in state and perhaps national politics. In his state, Horace Greeley commented, "Know Nothingism is notoriously a conspiracy to overthrow 'Seward , Weed and Greeley,' and particularly to defeat Gov. Seward's reelection to the Senate." Seward and Weed, meanwhile, remained loyal Whigs, fearing that if they joined a new fusion or Republican party it would be harder for Seward to win another senate term. Once Seward was elected with some antislavery Know Nothings' votes and others' abstentions, the state Whig Party seemed to have outlived its last useful purpose. During the 1855 campaign season, a majority of the old Whigs followed Seward and Weed, finally, into the burgeoning Republican Party. Conservative Know Nothings, however, triumphed over their Republican and (multiple) Democratic challengers in close elections for several state offices.[103]

The Know Nothing movement had so powerfully shaped election results that analysts had little idea what to make of it. Many Free Soilers distrusted the Know Nothing movement both for its anti-immigrant bigotry as well as for the threat it posed of diverting frustrations against the old parties into issues unrelated to slavery. Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era* especially attacked the Know Nothing movement for both of these reasons. But for Free Soilers-turned fusionists, the most important and auspicious result of the elections of 1854 and 1855 was the anti-Nebraska commitment of what at times seemed like nearly every northern congressman elected. Over 70 percent of Northern Democrats who ran for reelection lost, and the party lost twenty-one of the twenty-two congressional districts represented in 1854 by northern Democrats who had voted originally to commit the Kansas-Nebraska Bill to the Committee of the Whole but then voted for the bill's final passage. Even in New York, where fusionists failed in the 1854 congressional elections to absorb the Whig Party, antislavery men rejoiced that they would have a "strong Anti Nebraska delegation in the next Congress.[104]

Modern scholars have long debated whether the Know Nothing movement shaped the collapse of the Second Party System or simply benefited from the political chaos brought on by the Nebraska bill. In many of the northern states where Know Nothinginsm was its most potent, it clearly capitalized on antislavery sentiment by presenting itself as another anti-Nebraska alternative to the Democratic Party. While the Know Nothing movement's success was

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[103] Greeley to Colfax, Aug. 24, 1854, Sept. 7, 1854, Greeley Papers, NYPL; Gienapp, *Origins*, 176-178.

[104] *National Era*, Feb. 15, May 17, 1855; Bruce C. Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 199; Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000), 187-191; John Bigelow to CS, Nov. 8, 1854, CS Papers.

astonishing to most and troubling to many, Free Soilers generally believed that when the pressures of national-decision making confronted the many antislavery leaders of the nativist party, few American partisans North or South would be able to ignore their section's positions on slavery in Kansas, still the most contentious *national* political issue.[105]

Already in some locales, fissures in the Know Nothing movement over slavery were manifested in the emergence of a splinter group called the Know-Somethings. Cleveland *Leader* (formerly the *True Democrat*) editors Joseph Medill and John Vaughan, created the Independent Order of the Friends of Equal Rights, or Know-Somethings, as a stratagem for maneuvering Know Nothings more generally into the Republican Party. Welcoming Protestant immigrants, Know-Somethings combined anti-Catholicism with enhanced emphasis on the slavery issue. This new organization developed a potent, if short-lived, presence in northern Ohio and more limited followings in other strong antislavery locales, including parts of Massachusetts and New York. As Salmon Chase prepared to bid for an anti-Nebraska gubernatorial nomination in 1855, he celebrated that the "bold stand" of the Know-Somethings suggested Republicans would soon overwhelm Ohio Know Nothings. This Know-Something movement indicated the difficulty that Know Nothings would face when organizing a *national* party forced them to address slavery.[106]

The votes of northern Know Nothing legislators for U.S. senators further demonstrated the degree to which antislavery concerns could supersede Know Nothing partisanship. The election of radicals like Wilson and Hale powerfully underscored this point. Additionally, in New York, thirty Know Nothing legislators, despite the unremitting exertions of conservative co-partisans, supported Seward's reelection (although Weed's control of state patronage, through Governor Myron Clark, also helped grease the wheels for Seward). Bailey's *Era* lauded Seward's reelection "as a triumph over the combined forces of the Pro-Slavery and Know Nothing parties," pointing out that his victory had hinged on his stand against the Nebraska Bill. Connecticut Free Soilers predicted that the election of old Liberty man Francis Gillette to fill a short term in the U.S. Senate would "send a thrill of joy through the hearts of his fellow-laborers in the cause of Freedom." While Gillette failed of reelection the following year, the antislavery reputation of Know Nothing candidate James Dixon in Connecticut clearly helped him win Republican votes; and by the time he entered the Senate in 1857, he was firmly in the Republican

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[105] A classic argument for slavery trumping nativism can be found in Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*. See also Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power*. Two of the most important works arguing the other side of this question are Gienapp, *Origins*, and Holt, *Political Crisis*; For a synthesis that ultimately privileges antislavery, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*; For an additional perspective see John Aldrich, *Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 135-56. Aldrich asserts that "ambition theory" best explains the timing of politicians' decisions to abandon the Whigs and join the Republicans, positing that ambitious Whig politicians strategized about when to move into the Republican fold based on calculations of which party gave them the best chance at being part of a national majority party *and* at winning short-term victory. Consequently, the trajectory of the Republican Party's rise in a given state had everything to do with the strength of the Whig Party and its American Party successor. By oversimplifying the link between the Whigs and the Know Nothings and failing to fully explore the diversity of views on slavery among those who either clung to the Whig Party or joined the Americans, Aldrich misses some of the complexity of this political moment. Nonetheless, Aldrich offers a useful framework for understanding the rapidity of the Republican Party's emergence in many states. The fact that so many "ambitious" politicians felt compelled to join an explicitly anti-Nebraska party highlights the depth of popular frustration with the major parties' failures to confront the Slave Power.

[106] Maizlish, *Triumph of Sectionalism*, 209-210; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 163-64; SPC to CS, Jun. 19, 1855, CS Papers.

camp. In Pennsylvania, the Know Nothing-dominated legislature's inability to agree on a choice of senator also laid bare the tensions within the nativist party over the antislavery issue.[107]

With the coming speakership contest and presidential campaign, the slavery issue would intrude even further to force northern Know Nothings to establish their priorities. Gamaliel Bailey recognized that while "acting in their several States, in State affairs, and under the oath of secresy, it is easy enough to manage in reference to the Slavery Question." However once Know Nothings began "openly aspiring to the control of the Federal Government," the party would need to enunciate a position "either for Slavery or against it." "The fact that the order exists in all the Southern cities, and that it seeks to assume a National form, is very conclusive evidence," the *Ashtabula Sentinel* agreed, "that the Anti-Slavery cause has but little to expect from it." Thus antislavery men remained cautiously optimistic that the approaching contests for speaker of the house and president would force genuine antislavery Know Nothings into the Republican Party. Developments over the intervening year made these expectations seem all the more likely.[108]

As it turned out, antislavery Know Nothings were forced to confront slavery's threat to their national movement before contesting for either the speaker's chair or the White House. Southern Know Nothings loudly complained that the antislavery actions of some fellow nativists had cost the party votes in the Upper South. To bring together the loosely affiliated state Know Nothing parties, it would be imperative to devise a national platform. Southerners had no intention of tolerating the anti-Slave Power sentiments so prevalent among nativists in places like Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The national council meeting set to meet in Philadelphia in June of 1855 thus loomed large for antislavery men across the North.

When the Know Nothings convened, Southerners determined to challenge radical delegates like Henry Wilson and the Massachusetts "Abolition" members. Meanwhile, northern moderates, like Governor Gardner for example, hoped to simply submerge the slavery issue and allow tacit disagreement, much as the Whigs had. Wilson and his radical cronies, though, were as eager for confrontation as the proslavery men. Indeed, Wilson apparently hoped to foment a schism that would enable him to steer anti-slavery Know Nothings into the Republican coalition. Southern Know Nothings insisted on a platform resolution "to abide by and maintain the existing laws upon the subject of Slavery," including the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "as a final and conclusive settlement of that subject." Additionally, the platform committee proposed resolutions that Congress could not prohibit slavery from a territory, abolish it in the District of Columbia, or bar admission of new slave states. The insistence of Southerners and a few northern conservatives on these positions outraged the majority of northern delegates. While many antislavery Know Nothings continued to use the organization in local and state politics, Republicans seized on the Philadelphia meeting to argue ever more convincingly that the national Know Nothing movement was beholden to the Slave Power. Salmon Chase commented to Sumner that the result had done "great good" in promoting the Republican cause.[109]

In Ohio these developments ultimately secured Salmon Chase's election as governor. Managing to simultaneously placate antislavery Know Nothings and Know-Somethings without making any platform concessions, Chase won the governorship in a landslide and established the Republicans as one of the two major parties in the West's largest state. Though Know Nothings

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[107] Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 147-154; *National Era*, Feb. 15, 1855; Hartford *Republican*, quoted in *Independent Democrat*, Jun. 1, 1854.
[108] *National Era*, Nov. 23, 1854; *Ashtabula Sentinel*, Nov. 2, 1854.
[109] Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 165-174; SPC to CS, Jun. 19, 1855, CS Papers.

comprised the remaining eight candidates on his state ticket, Chase ran on an exclusively antislavery platform and appealed to both nativists and antislavery German immigrants. Chase and antislavery Know Nothing leader Lewis Campbell alike exulted at the "glorious and complete" Republican victory when Chase won in spite of his refusal to join the order.[110]

In other radical states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Vermont, antislavery men maintained control of both the Republican Party and their state governments. Elsewhere in the North though, Republican fortunes were shakier, as Know Nothings continued to control anti-Nebraska politics in Pennsylvania and remained stronger than the growing Republican Party in Massachusetts. Most discouragingly, in Maine, where Republicans continued to ride the Maine Law hobby, anti-Nebraska Governor Anson Morrill failed to win a majority in his reelection bid, Then in the legislative maneuvering thereafter, Democrats secured control of the state by emphasizing Republican overreaching on the temperance issue.[111]

Events in Kansas further heightened sectional tensions and improved Republican prospects by making it seem more and more certain that slavery would soon be established as the central issue in national politics. Making a mockery of the Kansas-Nebraska Act's "popular sovereignty," thousands of proslavery Missourians descended on Kansas for the congressional delegate election in November of 1854 and the territorial legislature election in March of 1855. These "Border Ruffians," incited by Senator Atchison, waged a concerted intimidation campaign against free settlers and controlled the election of a territorial legislature that the *Green Mountain Freeman* derided as "Atchinson's [*sic*] bowie-knife and revolver legislature." This fraudulently elected assembly quickly passed a bundle of egregious legislation that could rival any Deep South state in criminalizing antislavery agitation. By late 1855, a bloody civil war on the Kansas frontier seemed alarmingly likely. These events in Kansas combined with the Know Nothings' stance at Philadelphia to strengthen the case for the Republican assault on the Slave Power.[112]

Though its consolidation was far from secure, the Republican Party had made impressive progress by the end of 1855. Erstwhile Free Soilers looked forward excitedly to the next year's presidential contest and before that the arrival of the Congress elected in response to Douglas's Nebraska Bill. Regardless of the disparate partisan tickets on which they had been elected, the vast majority of incoming northern congressmen had been chosen in 1854 or early 1855 expressly for their opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. For the swelling Republican ranks, this was the crucial result of the political tumult instigated by Douglas's territorial legislation. If antislavery men could indeed control even the lower House of Congress, many felt confident this would constitute a crucial step towards the regeneration of national politics and the defeat of the Slave Power. As the *National Era* issued a prospectus for its tenth volume in December of 1855, it knowingly predicted that the organization of the House would "witness" the "first national struggle" between "the Republican and the Pro-Slavery" parties. Furthermore the reasonable likelihood that the anti-Nebraska men might actually triumph in that contest augured well for the

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[110] SPC to CS, Oct, 15, 1855, Ibid.; Lewis Campbell to CS, Oct. 16, 1855, Ibid.; SPC to James S. Pike, Oct. 18, 1855, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:425-426; On Chase's maneuvering for the nomination and his election, see Maizlish, *Triumph of Sectionalism*, 207-224.

[111] *National Era*, Oct. 4, 1855; Russell Errett to SPC, Nov. 16, 1855, in *SPC Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:430-431.

[112] *GMF* Aug. 2, 1855; Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 52-88; For a much briefer but very good summary of these developments see Varon, *Disunion!*, 260-61.

future of political antislavery, which had come so very far since the first enunciations of opposition to the slaveholding power in the late 1830s.[113]

[113] "Prospectus of the Tenth Volume of the National Era," in *National Era*, Nov. 29, 1855.

Epilogue and Conclusion

Election of the First Republican Speaker

Like so many antislavery political initiatives, the move to consolidate the budding Republican Party nationally centered first on Congress. After watching slaveholders occupy the speaker's chair for thirty-one of the previous thirty-five years, antislavery men anxiously awaited the organization of the new House with hopes of finally electing an antislavery speaker. Doing so, they understood, would powerfully solidify the Republican Party, which was still struggling with the Know Nothings for supremacy in many antislavery constituencies.

After the wave of indignation at the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Democratic congressional candidates had been thoroughly routed across the North. Pro-Nebraska Democrats would comprise not even a third of the House set to convene in December of 1855, but it remained unclear how, or if, the diverse opposition would coalesce. When elected in 1854 or early 1855, almost two-thirds of the anti-Nebraska members were also affiliated with the Know-Nothing movement, and some had run as members of the now all but defunct Whig Party. Much changed between those elections and the opening of Congress. Among the most important events of the intervening year was the American Party's Philadelphia Council Meeting, where southern Know Nothings had forced a proslavery platform on the nativist party. By the time northern representatives arrived in Washington, only a fraction of those elected as Americans seemed likely to act with southern co-partisans. By one historian's estimates, the incoming House included about 121 members who had been elected as Know Nothings and 115 elected as anti-Nebraska candidates, but only 92 fit into both categories. For an anti-Democratic organization of the House, one of these two issues would have to be submerged.[1]

Facing even greater confusion than in the famous 1849 contest between Cobb and Winthrop, the 34th House voted for speaker into February, balloting one-hundred thirty-three times before selecting Massachusetts's Nathaniel Banks by plurality. This time, though, it was the burgeoning antislavery forces who benefited from a plurality election. The struggle and ultimate victory of Banks's anti-Nebraska coalition played a vital role in establishing anti-Slave Power Republicans, and not the nativist American Party, as the leading party in the North.

When the House opened on December 3, only the Democrats stood united behind a single candidate: Illinois's William Richardson, a man thoroughly identified with the Kansas-Nebraska

[1] Thirteen of sixteen free states held elections for the 34th Congress during the summer or fall of 1854, and the remaining three had concluded their elections by April of 1855, Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of the Political Parties in the United States: 1789-1989* (New York: MacMillan, 1989), 33-34. Martis notes that the Whig label was only used in elections in Iowa, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, all of which held congressional elections between August and November, 1854; Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism & Slavery*: *The Northern Know-Nothings & The Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 166-169; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 251; William E. Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 240-241 estimates the anti-Nebraska strength at 118.

Act. In the nominating caucus, though, Democrats, in what proved a crucial mistake, passed a unanimous resolution condemning not only Republicans, but also Know Nothings.[2]

For the Republican and American Parties, a unified nomination was impossible. Republican efforts to assemble an anti-Nebraska caucus at first seemed to founder. On November 30, the first attempt only brought out 25 members. Two days later, though, a meeting of seventy anti-Nebraska men, while failing to agree on a single candidate, unanimously adopted Joshua Giddings's resolution "that we will support no man for Speaker who is not pledged … to organize the standing committees of the House by placing on each a majority of the friends of freedom." This, to antislavery veterans, was far more pressing than uniting on a nominee.[3]

Three anti-Nebraska frontrunners emerged, all with ties to *both* the fledgling Republican Party and the Know Nothing movement. Among them, Ohio ex-Whig Lewis Campbell was considered both the most antislavery and the most committed nativist. Massachusetts ex-Democrat Nathaniel Banks had opportunistically used the Know-Nothing movement to help him win election on an anti-Nebraska platform, but this disingenuousness actually made him appealing to antislavery Republicans seeking to downplay nativism and focus on combating the Slave Power. If Campbell and Banks both failed, many in the anti-Nebraska ranks planned to turn to New Jersey's Alexander Pennington. Elected as a Whig, Pennington seemed to stand the best chance of attracting conservative northern Know Nothings.[4]

When balloting commenced, Campbell led all anti-Nebraska candidates with 53 votes, but it quickly became evident that he could never approach a majority of the 220-some being cast. When this became clear, antislavery men like Giddings led a trickle of support towards Banks, which soon became a flood. By the end of the first week, Banks had reached 100 votes, just eleven shy of a majority. The next Monday, Banks attained his high of 107, and he led for the remainder of the contest (consistently within twelve votes, and often as few as six or seven, of a majority). Meanwhile, up to forty-one Know Nothings concentrated on Henry Fuller of Pennsylvania. Fuller further intensified the cross pressures on conservative anti-Nebraska men clinging to the American organization by declaring his preference for leaving the Kansas-Nebraska Act alone so as to avoid "agitation of the subject of slavery." Republicans now argued persuasively that recalcitrant northern Know Nothings were succumbing to the Slave Power. Indeed once the speakership contest turned into a three-way race between Banks, Fuller, and Richardson, members' ideological stances on the slavery question almost completely dictated their votes.[5]

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[2] Robert D. Ilisevich, *Galusha A. Grow: The People's Candidate* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 108; Charles Henry Jones, *The Life and Public Services of J. Glancy Jones* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1910), 1:266.

[3] Joshua Giddings (JG), *History of the Rebellion: Its Authors and Causes* (New York: Follett, Foster & Co., 1864), 383; George Washington Julian, *The Life of Joshua R. Giddings* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1892), 322.

[4] Gienapp, *Origins*, 241-242; Michael F. Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 962-963.

[5] *Congressional Globe* (*CG*), 34th Congress, 1st Session, 3-4, 7-8, 11-15; JG, *History of the Rebellion*, 384; Fred Harvey Harrington, "The First Northern Victory," *The Journal of Southern History* 5 (May, 1939), 186-205, 192; Of the forty-one Fuller supporters, only thirteen were Northerners, Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 199; Fuller explained that if forced to vote on restoration of the Missouri Compromise, he would vote for it, but he "opposed" continued "agitation of the question." He further clarified his sentiments by averring his willingness to support Kansas's admission as a slave state if the territorial population so chose. *CG*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 54-5; *National Era*, Dec. 13, 20, 27, 1855; During the last week of January, Democrats switched to South Carolina's James Orr, in hopes he might fare better with southern Know-Nothings than Richardson had, but found no

With Banks so close to victory, antislavery Republicans designated him "as *the* Republican candidate." Republican managers feared that if they supported Pennington, the American Party would endorse him and claim his election as a victory for nativism rather than for the anti-Nebraska cause and the Republican Party. Fuller supporter Solomon Haven, the lieutenant and former law partner of ex-President and 1856 American Party presidential hopeful Millard Fillmore, stood "ready to help elect Pennington," for example, viewing Pennington as "a good American" with "no such thing as republicanism in him." An Ohio Republican thus explained: "It is a point of honor with us who have thus sustained Mr. Banks, and indentified him as *the* Anti-Nebraska candidate for speaker, not to yield." A Banks steering committee met almost nightly to coordinate strategy, identifying potential backsliders and lobbying hesitant northern Know-Nothings. The committee even sent out letters to wavering congressmen's constituents, beseeching telegrams instructing their representatives to "Stick to Banks."[6]

The steering committee of Republican managers found the more radical Giddings an especially eager collaborator in their efforts to promote Banks at all costs. After "eighteen years" in the "business" of "struggling with Slavery and the Slave Power," Giddings exulted at the "good prospects of success" for an antislavery speakership. Thanking God that he could "witness some fruits of my labor" Giddings marveled to "see 100 men standing firmly on the very doctrines for which I was expelled fourteen years since."[7]

Debates over organization in 1855-56 again became a spectacle that magnified the rising sectional political conflict. For two months, Southerners regularly threatened disunion, and Republicans developed a policy of ridiculing them by making "the House ring with laughter." Among proposed solutions to the impasse, the most obvious method was election by plurality. Antislavery politicians, including veterans of the 1849 battle, now championed plurality election and unsuccessfully urged it on the House at least a dozen times. Banks's opponents, meanwhile, proposed a range of less conventional, often preposterous, alternatives including: organizing the

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significant change, and then, as discussed below, William Aiken of the same state replaced Orr on the final ballots; Using spatial voting analysis (as developed by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal), Jeffery A. Jenkins and Timothy P. Nokken, "The Institutional Origins of the Republican Party: Spatial Voting and the House Speakership Election of 1855-56," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 25 (Feb. 2000), 101-130, show convincingly that representatives' ideological positions on slavery (as computed from congressional voting data) were highly predictive of members speakership votes, and also that Banks organized most House committees to represent the antislavery sentiments of his winning coalition. For the underlying methodology used by Jenkins and Nokken see Poole and Rosenthal, "A Spatial Model for Legislative Roll Call Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (May 1985), 357-384 and "Patterns of Congressional Voting," Ibid. 35 (Feb. 1991), 228-278; For a countervailing, and I believe less compelling, argument, see Joel H. Silbey, "After 'The First Northern Victory: The Republican Party Comes to Congress, 1855-1856," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 20 (Summer, 1989), 1-24.

[6] Edwin B. Morgan to Henry and Richard Morgan, Dec. 12, 1855, in Temple R. Hollcroft " A Congressman's Letters on the Speaker Election in the Thirty-Fourth Congress," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43 (Dec. 1956), 444-458, 450-451; *National Era*, Dec. 20, 1855; Gienapp, *Origins*, 245; JG, *History of the Rebellion*, 386; Solomon Haven to James M. Smith, Dec. 11, 1855 and Dec. 20, 1855, Solomon G. Haven Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Timothy Crane Day to John Bigelow, Dec. 30, 1855, John Bigelow Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division; Prominent members of the steering committee included ex-Democrats Galusha Grow (PA) and Francis Spinner (NY), ex-Whigs Schuyler Colfax (IN, also a Know Nothing), William A. Howard (MI), Edwin B. Morgan (NY), Justin Morrill (VT), Benjamin Stanton (OH), Cadwallader Washburn (WI), Elihu Washburne (IL), Israel Washburn, Jr. (ME), and ex-Free Soilers, Anson Burlingame (MA) and Mason Tappan (NH), both also Know Nothings, Gienapp, *Origins*, 245, Harrington, "First Northern Victory," 195, Ilisevich, *Galusha Grow*, 112.

[7] JG to Lura Maria Giddings (LMG), Jan. 27, 1856, Giddings-Julian Papers (G-J Papers), Library of Congress (LC), microform.

House without a speaker by appointing Ways and Means and Foreign Policy committees; voting up or down on each member in alphabetical order until one received a majority; banning "meat, drink, fire, or other refreshments" to expedite the winter debates; and having every member of the House resign (to which Republican congressman and former Liberty man Edward Wade wryly replied that President Pierce should then also resign). [8]

Most dramatic was an all night session in which Democrats, anxious to open Congress for President Pierce, experimented for twenty-one hours with refusing to adjourn until a speaker was selected, hoping to force pro-Nebraska Know Nothings to elect Richardson. Republicans accepted the Democratic challenge and joined in opposing adjournment as the January 9 session dragged on into the night, and then into the early morning, and then the not-so-early morning of January 10. Republican members won praise for their endurance and "orderly" conduct, and one participant boasted in a letter drafted at 8:15 AM that "*not one*" of the Banks voters was "in the least intoxicated," whereas "not less than a dozen of our opponents have been & are still as drunk as owls." Republicans celebrated the "constant battle and confusion" as Democrats and Banks men joined to defeat the numerous Know-Nothing-led attempts to adjourn. By daybreak, Democratic resolve began to waver, and around 8:30 or 9:00 AM the House finally voted to adjourn. Giddings proudly concluded that the overnight session had fortified the Republican ranks and would provide "a spectacle of moral sublimity" for the American people.[9]

As with previous speakership elections, antislavery men recognized that the protracted contest would focus national attention on the Slave Power. Veterans of antislavery third-party politics celebrated the "most exciting contest," believing that "the Election of Banks will … consolidate the union of our friends" Political abolitionists praised Banks votes as "strong testimonies against the Slave Power" and recognized that "even the struggle is a triumph--& should constitute a band of union for those Engaged in it." Giddings similarly observed that the contest "got our party founded, consolidated and established," which was "of far more importance than the election of a Speaker."[10]

On February 2, 1856, the House finally adopted a plurality rule with the support of several southern Democrats who believed they had found in South Carolina's William Aiken a Democratic candidate that pro-Nebraska Know Nothings would accept. By eliminating Fuller's chances and making the contest a referendum on "this anti-slavery monster, so horrid that he makes gentlemen shudder," these Southerners believed they could attract sufficient Know

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[8] Edwin B. Morgan to Henry and Richard Morgan, Dec. 22, 1855, in Hollcroft, "A Congressman's Letters," 451. For an example of this derisive laughter at threats of disunion, see *CG*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 61-62; Jenkins and Nokken, "Institutional Origins of the Republican Party," 124, fn. 22; *CG*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 27, 58-59, 72, 149; *National Era*, Jan. 17, 1856; JG to LMG, G-J Papers, Jan. 11, 1856.

[9] JG to LMG, G-J Papers, Jan. 11, 1856; *National Era*, Jan. 17, 1856; Edwin B. Morgan to Henry and Richard Morgan, Jan. 10, 1856, in Hollcroft, "A Congressman's Letters," 454; *CG*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 170-199, Giddings quote on 199. Giddings also supported the final adjournment vote that morning, declaring that he could not "see that we are likely to bring about any beneficial result by protracting the session further."

[10] JG to Grotius Giddings, Dec. 12, 1855, JG Papers; Preston King to Francis P. Blair, Feb. 3, 1856, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Manuscripts Division; LT to Sidney Dean, Jan. 5, 1856, Lewis Tappan Papers (LT Papers), LC, microform; John Jay to Charles Sumner (CS), Dec. 18, 1855, *The Papers of Charles Sumner*, Houghton Library, Harvard University, ed. Palmer (Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988), microform; JG to LMG, Feb. 1, 1856, G-J Papers.

Nothing votes to defeat Banks. Instead, on the penultimate 133rd ballot, Banks was elected with a plurality of 103 votes over Aiken's 100, with several northern Know Nothings scattering.[11]

When Banks won, old Free Soil stalwarts Charles Sumner and Joshua Giddings waxed eloquent that the "proud historic moment" was akin to arrival "in the promised land which flowed with milk & honey." "Never," a Banks supporter wrote, "was there such a triumph gained by freemen for freedom over the Slave breeders & Slave Power." When the House declared Banks speaker, his supporters on the floor and in the galleries unleashed "vociferous cheers," cried, and waved handkerchiefs in celebration, while many of Aiken's backers hissed, "look[d] daggers & swore like pirates." Waltham, Banks's hometown, fired a one hundred-gun salute to celebrate, and more creative Chicago and Bangor Republicans commemorated Banks's winning plurality with hundred-and-three-gun salutes. Even so uncompromising a political abolitionist as Lewis Tappan exulted at this "first victory freedom has had in Congress for many years."[12]

Veterans of antislavery politics understood just how monumental an achievement it was to select a speaker who was independent of the Slave Power. Political abolitionists had been working for over a decade and a half to contest the Slave Power's control of Congress. Banks's election and the lengthy contest beforehand played crucial roles in solidifying the Republican coalition, such that of the seventy-two final-ballot Banks voters who ran for reelection, sixty-nine ran on Republican tickets. By uniting opponents of the Slave Power in advance of the 1856 presidential campaign, this "first northern victory" (as one historian characterized it) established the Republicans, rather than the Americans, as the Democrats' main competitor in the North, ensuring that the slavery question would henceforth organize national political debate.[13]

Republicans, the Slave Power, and the Coming of the Civil War

Meanwhile, as the speakership battle was raging, Chase, Sumner, Gamaliel Bailey, Preston King, and soon-to-be speaker Banks spent Christmas day in Silver Spring, Maryland at the house of Francis P. Blair, a former advisor to President Jackson and powerful Democratic journalist who had broken with his party over slavery extension. Together these men adopted Bailey's plan for a preliminary informal Republican national convention in early 1856. Following their lead, five state party chairmen jointly called a national gathering of all "Republicans of the United States" to be held in Pittsburgh on February 22.[14]

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[11] Aiken was considered most likely to win the support of southern Know Nothings on a plurality ballot because he had avoided the Democratic caucus that had condemned Know Nothingism. On the plurality vote, he did indeed win the votes of most Southern Know Nothings, but several Northerners, along with one Maryland Know Nothing and another from Delaware, scattered their votes to Fuller or Campbell, allowing for Banks's narrow victory. *CG*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 324, 335-337; Harrington, "First Northern Victory," 200-202; Gienapp, *Origins*, 246; Jenkins and Nokken, "Institutional origins of the Republican Party," 114-115.

[12] CS to Charles Francis Adams, Feb. 5, 1856, in *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 1:442-443;; 2-9-56, JG to LMG, Feb. 9, 1856, G-J Papers; Edwin B. Morgan to Henry and Richard Morgan, Feb. 3, 1856, in Hollcroft, "A Congressman's Letters," 457; JG to LMG, Feb. 3, 1856, G-J Papers; JG, *History of the Rebellion*, 389; *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 6, 1856, *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 5, 1856; "Chronological Resume of Lewis Tappan's life written by him," Entry for Feb. 3, 1856, LT Papers.

[13] Jenkins and Nokken, "Institutional Origins of the Republican Party," 118; Harrington, "First Northern Victory."

[14] Stanley Harrold, *Gamaliel Bailey and Antislavery Union* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1986), 172-174. Harrold explains that the effort to call a February convention in Pittsburgh actually initiated with Ohio Republicans who hoped to unite with northern Americans to nominate Chase, but Bailey refashioned this plan to simply call for

Meeting just weeks after the Republican triumph in the speakership battle, the convention-goers could confidently establish their national party organization and begin planning for a presidential campaign. Assembling Republicans from across the antislavery spectrum, the Convention featured prominent roles for radicals like Giddings and former Liberty men Owen Lovejoy and Vermont's Lawrence Brainerd but was often led by conservatives like *New York Daily Times* editor and proprietor Henry J. Raymond and Blair, who was chosen to preside over the convention despite the facts that he still owned slaves and advocated restoration of the Missouri Compromise as his preferred creed. The meeting's resolutions, though moderate, went beyond its southern chairman. Emphasizing opposition to slavery in the territories, the resolutions called for "overthrow" of the national Democratic administration, "identified" as it was "with the progress of the slave power to national supremacy." Consequently, the *National Era*, for example, "cordially" endorsed the convention as having "placed the Party in a position, in which it accepts the issue forced upon it by the Slavery and Administration Party." More important anyway would be the results of the Philadelphia convention, where Republicans would gather in June to select a presidential ticket and write a full party platform.[15]

Before the party could reconvene, though, events in Kansas and in Washington gave added urgency to Republican warnings of the Slave Power's threat to American democracy. On May 21, hundreds of proslavery men descended on Lawrence, Kansas and destroyed two free-state presses and burnt down the Free State Hotel; soon after, guerilla warfare stalked the territory. A day after this "sacking of Lawrence," South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks famously caned Sumner on the Senate floor in response to the radical Massachusetts senator's recent "Crime Against Kansas" speech, which had not only condemned the Slave Power's "rape of a virgin territory" but also personally besmirched Brooks's cousin Senator Andrew Butler (also of South Carolina). Even more galling than the fact that Brooks battered the defenseless senator (Sumner was pinned under a desk, where he had been franking copies of the speech) so mercilessly that Brooks split his gutta-percha cane, was the hero's welcome Brooks received from South Carolinians who defiantly reelected him to Congress. These two developments, "Bleeding Kansas and Bleeding Sumner," quickly became conjoined in Republican campaign literature as the freshest evidence of the sinister Slave Power.[16]

Trumpeting this all too potent evidence of the Slave Power's audacity, and Democratic complicity, Republicans urged the election of a Republican President as the only way to upend the increasingly belligerent Slave Power. Gathering in Philadelphia, the party enthusiastically selected the iconic "Pathfinder of the West" Colonel John C. Frémont, a political neophyte who was renowned more for his western exploration and his elopement with former Senator Thomas Hart Benton's (D-MO) daughter Jessie than for his brief and unremarkable term representing California in the Senate. Though Giddings and other radical antislavery party leaders, to say nothing of abolitionists more generally, would have preferred a well-known antislavery man, they concentrated, as in 1848, less on the candidates than on the party's platform, which

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an informal gathering that would then implement plans for a later delegated convention empowered to nominate a Republican Party ticket; *National Era*, Jan. 17, 1856.

[15] *National Era*, Feb. 28, Mar. 6, 1856; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 277-279.

[16] *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 530; David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 278-311; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008), 266-271; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 688-693.

demanded that Congress prohibit slavery in the territories and focused especially on Bleeding Kansas and the Administration's responsibility for the disaster there.[17]

Republicans championed Colonel Frémont with appeals to turn back the Slave Power and preserve the territories for free labor, but they faced a still formidable Democratic organization that relied heavily on race-baiting scaremongering to encourage loyalty to its doughfaced candidate James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. Despite his many years of public service, Buchanan's strongest qualification might well have been that he was abroad (serving as Pierce's minister to Great Britain) during the heated debates over the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Buchanan and the Democrats won, but to Republicans, the results of the canvass nonetheless confirmed the promise that anti-Nebraska men had seen in Banks's election as speaker. A new and powerful Republican Party had clearly eclipsed the conservative American Party across the North. Frémont won eleven of the sixteen free states and a 45 percent plurality of the northern popular vote in the three-way race with Buchanan and American candidate Fillmore (whose strongest support came from southern ex-Whigs). Indeed Frémont could have been elected president by moving only Pennsylvania and either Indiana or Illinois into his column. For veteran antislavery political activists, the long-pined-for advent of northern majority rule suddenly seemed imminent.[18]

Meanwhile, Republican forebodings that the new Democratic-controlled national government would be especially subservient to the Slave Power were quickly corroborated in the Supreme Court's decision of *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, coupled with President Buchanan's inaugural address urging acceptance of the forthcoming decision, "whatever this may be." Two days later Chief Justice Roger Taney's court ruled against Scott, who had petitioned for freedom by virtue of his residing in free territory before being taken back to Missouri slavery. In deciding against Scott, Taney declared that Scott should never have been permitted to sue because under the U.S. Constitution "the black man has no rights that the white man is bound to respect." This offensive finding should at least have obviated the need for any further ruling, but Taney went on to declare that the Missouri Compromise had been unconstitutional and that Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the federal territories, nor, implicitly, to delegate that power to the territorial population. Effectively, Taney had declared the Republican platform, and likely also the Douglas Democrats' popular sovereignty formula, unconstitutional. Republicans responded by denying the full scope of Taney's decision, claiming (following the two dissenting justices) that the rulings on the territorial question were non-binding *obiter dicta* once the Court threw out the suit by denying Scott's competency to sue. National political debate now largely rehashed the Wilmot Proviso dispute, with Taney and most southern Democrats adopting the once extreme Calhounite position that the government could not bar slavery from any federal jurisdiction,

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[17] For a detailed discussion of the 1856 Republican national convention and the events leading up to it, see Gienapp, *Origins*, Ch. 10; For the 1856 Republican platform, see Donald Bruce Johnson, compiler, *National Party Platforms, Volume 1: 1840-1956* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 27-28; For a brief biography of Jessie Benton Frémont, with an emphasis on her antislavery views, see Frederick J. Blue, "Quite a Female Politician: Jessie Benton Frémont and the Antislavery Movement," in *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 238-264. For a more complex interpretation about Mrs. Frémont's role in the 1856 campaign and the gender politics of the early Republican Party, see Also, Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), Ch. 5-6.

[18] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 264-65; Gienapp, *Origins*, 413-415.

Republicans running on a non-extension, and northern (and some southern) Democrats adhering to Lewis Cass's hazy middle ground of popular sovereignty.[19]

For Republicans the new ruling was the most striking evidence yet of the grasping Slave Power's nefarious designs. Sensing, correctly, that Buchanan had already been informed of the decision when his inaugural address urged respect for whatever Taney ruled, Republicans employed increasingly anti-conspiratorial rhetoric in denouncing the Slave Power. The most famous articulation of these themes appeared in the Springfield, Illinois "House Divided" speech with which Abraham Lincoln launched his nearly successful bid for Douglas's senate seat. Lincoln suggested that Douglas, Pierce, Buchanan, and Taney had acted in concert all along to facilitate the expansion of slavery, and then Lincoln raised the specter of the Supreme Court legalizing slavery nationwide: "We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free, and we shall awake to the reality instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State." Though this foreboding may now seem far-fetched, many Republicans harbored realistic fears that the Taney Court might well seize on the *Lemmon* slave case, winding its way through the New York courts at the time, to declare that free states could not even bar Southerners from taking slaves into the North.[20]

Over the course of the Buchanan administration, sectional recriminations continued to escalate, spurred on by well-chronicled controversies that Republicans interpreted as substantiating the Slave Power argument and Southerners saw as illustrating that the Republican Party represented an abolitionist conspiracy. First Southerners insisted, and President Buchanan complied, on making a Democratic test of support for proslavery Kansans' Lecompton Constitution, which was ratified in a sham election that free-state men boycotted. The House narrowly blocked admission of Kansas as a slave state, but Buchanan's insistence on the Lecompton Constitution further convinced many Northerners, including a good number of Democrats, that the Slave Power controlled the national administration.[21]

Then in October 1859, John Brown, a pious abolitionist vigilante and the most notorious figure to emerge from the Kansas frontier violence, ratcheted up sectional tensions even further when he famously raided, and briefly captured the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. In Brown's attempt to raise a slave insurrectionary force, proslavery politicians saw evidence that Republican antislavery pronouncements encouraged slave rebellion, perhaps none more so than William Seward's provocative 1858 Rochester declaration that slavery and the free labor system were engaged in an "irrepressible conflict." Furthermore, tributes to Brown from numerous

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[19] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, ed. Ward M. McAfee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 280-283; For a much more detailed analysis of not only the case, but also its roots in, and influence on, American slavery and American political life see Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); On the powerful role that southern concern for the future of property rights in slaves played in fueling secessionism, see James L. Huston, *Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), esp. Ch. 5-6. Huston, passim, convincingly explicates the economic and political significance more generally of slaves *as property*; indeed slaveholdings comprised an asset class in antebellum America exceeded in total value only by real estate.

[20] Abraham Lincoln, "June 16, 1858.—Speech Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, at the Close of the republican State Convention by which Mr. Lincoln had been named as their Candidate for United States Senator," in *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, eds. John G. Nicolay and John Hay (New York: The Century Co., 1907), V. 1:240-245; On the Lemmon case, see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 302-304.

[21] On the controversy over the Lecompton Constitution, see Varon, *Disunion!*, 305-314, and William W. Freehling, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion: V. II, Secessionists Triumphant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 130-144.

northern abolitionists who cast the convicted murderer as an antislavery martyr antagonized the South and raised sectional tensions to a boiling point as the 36th Congress prepared to convene.[22]

In the winter of 1859-60, yet another contentious election for speaker of the House amplified the widening sectional divide. Republicans held a clear plurality but could not elect a speaker without overcoming opposition from a diverse collection of minor parties including small groups of Americans and anti-Lecompton Democrats, and a larger Opposition Party comprised mostly of Upper South ex-Whigs. Republicans resolved to stand resolutely behind Ohio moderate John Sherman, much as they had Banks, and Sherman got as close as three votes from a majority. But Southerners refused to budge; this time, Democrats were not prepared to gamble on a Republican-proposed plurality rule. In the second longest speakership contest in American history (by duration, not number of ballots), debates descended into a heated rehearsal of southern arguments for disunion and Republican attempts to rebuke them. In light of Brown's recent execution, the Harpers Ferry Raid provided a crucial subtext to the shrill debates that accompanied the balloting for speaker, especially since on the other side of the Capitol southern senators incessantly assailed Republicans as responsible for Brown's invasion. More specifically though, Congressman Sherman had made himself especially unacceptable to slaveholders by endorsing the *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, a Republican campaign pamphlet which abridged North Carolinian Hinton R. Helper's more inflammatory 1857 antislavery pro-free labor book *The Impending Crisis of the South*.[23]

After nearly eight weeks of deadlock, Sherman, fearing the "national calamity" of a pro-Administration speaker, backed out. Seeking any Republican victory, Sherman had received promises that three men who had opposed him (a New Jersey anti-Lecompton Democrat, and Americans from New York and Maryland) would support New Jersey Republican William Pennington (a cousin of Alexander mentioned above), although it took five ballots before all three made good on the pledge. Pennington, a conservative ex-New Jersey governor and freshman congressman who had only recently renounced the Whig Party, critically, had not endorsed the *Compendium*. Finally on the 44th ballot, the House elected him by a bare majority with only a single southern vote, and (by Sherman's account) the new speaker largely accepted the Republican committee appointments that Sherman had already devised.[24]

Yet again, Congress, and the speakership election specifically, had become a pivotal venue for further polarization of national politics around slavery. Southern pretensions to stand in judgment over what Republican politicians could and could not endorse provided another alarming manifestation of the Slave Power's intolerance of free speech. Southerners meanwhile viewed Republicans' support for Sherman as indicating their intention to meddle with slavery in the states, in part by inciting poor southern whites, along with slaves as manifested in the Brown raid, against the slaveholders' regime. Indeed, South Carolina's governor was prepared to order

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[22] On Brown's raid and popular reactions to it, see Ibid., 205-221, and Varon, *Disunion!*, 326-334; On Seward's "irrepressible conflict" speech and how it colored southern responses to Brown, see Ibid., 317-321, 330-332.

[23] John Sherman, *Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate, and Cabinet: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Werner Company, 1895), 138-144; David Brown, *Southern Outcast: Hinton Rowan Helper and* The Impending Crisis of the South (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006), 152-170; See also Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 386-391, and Richard F. Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 47-57. Bensel also elucidates how tariff politics contributed to the standoff.

[24] The denouement of this lengthy speakership contest can be followed in *CG*, 36th Congress, 1st Session, 634-647, 649-650, and Sherman, *Recollections*, 145-146; Among the apparent changes Pennington made to Sherman's planned committee appointments, Sherman received the chairmanship of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, although there does not seem to be evidence of any explicit bargain between the two speakership candidates.

troops to Washington to prevent Sherman from ascending to the speaker's chair. Brown's raid, Helper's book, and the acrimonious speakership contest dovetailed to convince a growing number of Southerners that slavery faced a far more serious threat than ever before. Over the ensuing winter and spring, southern disunionists worked vigorously and effectively to prepare the southern populace for secession in the event that the nation elected a Republican president.[25]

In this tense political atmosphere, a reliable but moderate antislavery nominee seemed essential for Republican victory in the northern swing states that Frémont had lost. When the perceived radicalism (coupled with other flaws) of frontrunner William Seward, as well as of longtime aspirant and former Liberty man Salmon Chase, destroyed their candidacies, Abraham Lincoln emerged as a choice acceptable to all wings of the heterogeneous party. Running on a platform condemning disunionism, calling for the immediate admission of a free state of Kansas, and unequivocally opposing slavery in the territories, Lincoln won the four-way race without a single southern electoral vote and less than 40 percent of the national popular vote. Liberty abolitionists' vision of a federal government freed from the Slave Power's grasp seemed at long last to be coming to fruition. There was little time to celebrate, though. In response, seven Deep South states seceded before President Lincoln was even inaugurated, disproving Republican assumptions that southern threats of disunion were mere bluster. A bloody resolution to the sectional political conflict now loomed.[26]

In the wartime Congress, a cadre of Radical Republicans, including many men with roots in earlier antislavery political parties, helped push the Union, and Lincoln, to make the slavery issue central to northern war goals. While few at first anticipated the intensity of the bloody conflict that would produce emancipation, most radicals responded eagerly to the opportunities created by the thousands of slaves who fled their masters and streamed into Union war camps. Nudged by antislavery activists in and out of Congress, and pressed by this growing tide of slaves who were emancipating themselves, Lincoln ultimately insisted on emancipation as a matter of war policy. With emancipation achieved and the Union victorious, the men who had been contesting the Slave Power for decades expressed pride and joy at the great work they had wrought (often understating or ignoring slaves' decisive role in their own liberation).[27]

Many leading Republicans, especially antislavery radicals with Liberty or Free Soil antecedents like Senators Hale, Sumner, and Wilson, Representatives George Julian and Owen Lovejoy, and new Supreme Court Chief Justice Chase, had high hopes for not only vanquishing the Slave Power and emancipating the bondsmen but also for reshaping southern society to establish a virtuous free labor economy and legal and political racial equality surpassing what existed in most of the North. Though Radical Republicans, relying heavily on support from the Union Army, experienced short-lived success in legislating dramatic changes in southern society, the North soon abandoned their most ambitious designs. The federal government's abdication

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[25] David Brown, *Southern Outcast*, 170-173.

[26] *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, Held at Chicago, May 16, 17, and 18, 1860* (Albany: Weed, Parsons, and Company, 1860), 79-82; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 361-365; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 418-430

[27] The role of slaves in their own emancipation has been especially uncovered by the work of the Freedman and Southern Society Project, which is nicely summarized in Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Stephen F. Miler, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More*: *Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Similar themes were presented in Robert F. Engs's iconoclastic unpublished lecture "The Great American Slave Rebellion," first delivered to the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, Jun. 27, 1991, which is cited, somewhat unfavorably, in James M. McPherson, "Who Freed the Slaves," in *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 193, 195-196.

for nearly a century of enforcement of the legal and political guarantees of the 14th and 15th amendments represents a sad coda to the remarkable rise of antislavery politics.[28]

Against the starkest of odds, political abolitionists worked with surprising effectiveness to challenge the Second Party System of Whigs and Democrats. Attacking those parties as vital auxiliaries of an insidious Slave Power, political abolitionists used the institutions of a political system stacked against them to popularize this Slave Power argument to the point that it became the central appeal of the victorious Republican Party. Perhaps in their reliance on the capacious Slave Power argument, which could easily incorporate relatively conservative or even deeply racist antislavery men, political abolitionists set themselves up for failure in the post-emancipation quest for true political and legal equality (to say nothing of those who even more ambitiously hoped to foster economic and social equality). Unlike Liberty men, most Republicans cared *much more* intensely about defeating the Slave Power than about ultimately eradicating slavery. Thus it should come as little surprise that as the war faded into the past, Republican will to demand fundamental change in American society slowly dissipated. Yet we should not jump to condemn political abolitionists' strategic choices. An alternative of waiting patiently for a nationally electable abolitionist party hardly seems preferable to the anti-Slave Power tack they pursued. Furthermore, abolitionists correctly believed that overcoming the Slave Power would lead to emancipation, even if most failed to adequately plan for the daunting political and social obstacles to a just and enduring Reconstruction. The collapse of efforts to radically reconstruct southern, and indeed American, society should be blamed not on the decisions of Liberty men, Free Soilers, and Radical Republicans to concentrate on the Slave Power instead of on racial inequity, but rather on the pervasive northern racism that made a Slave Power argument the most effective way to undermine race-based slavery in the American political arena.

Perhaps partly because of the ultimate failure of the post-war Radical Republican program, political and abolitionist historians have together overlooked the incredible success of political abolitionists in catalyzing by the mid-1850s a nationally viable, if moderate, anti-Slave Power party. This Republican Party was almost certainly inconceivable to nearly every prominent politician just a decade and a half earlier when a small group of committed abolitionists made the fateful decision to found the Liberty Party. Reintegrating the oft-disconnected histories of antebellum abolitionism and of the sectional political conflict that produced the Republican Party, helps us understand both histories far better. With a fuller appreciation of political abolitionist influences, we can see that those two histories are, in truth, much the same story. Despite the compromises political abolitionists had to make, their story represents perhaps the most impressive instance of a radical American social movement infiltrating, and ultimately reshaping national politics. In doing so, they forced the nation to confront the power of American slavery and begin rethinking the meaning of American freedom.

[28] The best comprehensive discussion of Reconstruction's temporary successes and ultimate failures is Eric Foner, *Reconstruction America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

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