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Populism and public life : antipartyism, the State, and the politics of the 1850s in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.

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POPULISM AND PUBLIC LIFE:
ANTIPARTYISM, THE STATE, AND THE POLITICS OF THE 1850S IN
CONNECTICUT, MASSACHUSETTS, AND PENNSYLVANIA

A Dissertation Presented

by

MARK VOSS-HUBBARD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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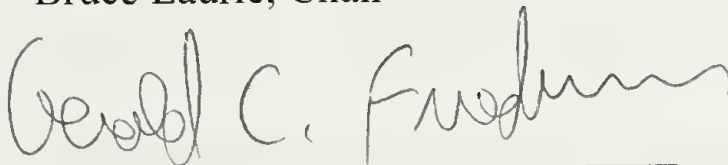
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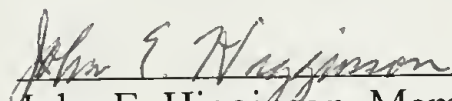
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ABSTRACT

POPULISM AND PUBLIC LIFE:

ANTIPARTYISM, THE STATE, AND THE POLITICS OF THE 1850S IN CONNECTICUT, MASSACHUSETTS, AND PENNSYLVANIA

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This is a study of popular political thought and its interaction with the culture of governance in three northern states before the Civil War. By putting matters of governance at the center of antebellum politics, this study differs from reigning society-based interpretations of the era. Drawing upon the polity-centered framework of Theda Skocpol and the broader cultural approach to the political public sphere pioneered by Jürgen Habermas, this dissertation emphasizes how political actors struggled to translate socially conditioned anxieties into political questions that bore fundamental relationship to governance.

The story pivots on the rise and fall of the Know Nothing movement, a quintessential expression of nineteenth-century American populism. It argues that the movement's breathtaking fury and appeal flowed from a pervasive sense that governance was lacking in a broad moral purpose; that wire-pulling politicians, blinded

by partisan calculation, had allowed dangerous special interests to threaten the public good. Like other populist movements, the Know Nothings framed their agenda with transcendent *antiparty* calls to eliminate office chasers and special interests from public life. While key differences distinguished the movement regionally, Know Nothings in each state cast the decade's principal issues--slavery, immigration, and economic insecurity--as crises of governance within a radically changing public culture.

The decline of the Know Nothings suggests what happens to an antiparty reform movement once it becomes a formal political party. Though Know Nothing lawmakers in each state added a significant corpus of reforms to their prescriptive anti-Catholic agenda, this dissertation stresses the limits of populism--a combination of internal contradictions and cultural constraints that can be termed the third party dialectic. Despite the Know Nothings' rhetoric of patriotic unity, factionalism dogged the movement, while leaders undertook praetorian actions which contradicted the rank and file's antiparty designs.

The study concludes by examining how the emergent Republican party established partisan loyalty at the grassroots in the context of sectional polarization. By the eve of the Civil War, the Republicans' antisouthern and *herrenvolk* appeals incorporated the popular ideal of governance devoted to the public good and the parallel fear of special interests in American public life.

PREFACE

This is a study of popular ideas of politics and governance in three northern counties--New London County, Connecticut, Essex County, Massachusetts, and Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. Initially, I was inspired by recent calls for a resynthesis of social and political history. I had been especially interested in applying the methods and insights of social history to the politics of the 1850s, suspecting that economic changes felt at the grassroots broadly informed the electoral disruptions of that decade. As the project unfolded I realized that a purely society-centered approach is inadequate for explaining the political upheavals of the 1850s. The choices of political elites figured prominently in the decade's politics, both in framing the issues at stake and giving momentum and direction to voter concerns. The actions of national and state governments on a range of moral and political economic questions also bulked large, both in spreading voter discontent and shaping popular ideas of politics and governance. Most important, I discovered that voter anxiety over slavery and socioeconomic change alone cannot account for the political movements that swept the three counties during the 1850s. Socially conditioned anxieties were foundational to politics, but their *political* significance lay in a larger shift in popular attitudes towards party government. The political upheavals of the 1850s must be traced to voter anger with the character and direction of the era's political regime.

By putting ideas of governance at the center of the story, this dissertation differs from reigning interpretations of antebellum politics. Political historians continue to

ethnoreligious affiliation, or class sentiment in shaping the political ideas and behavior of northerners.¹ Meanwhile, a generation of social historians have brought challenging concepts and methodologies to the debate. Their work documents the persistence of an egalitarian and communal “moral economy” at odds with the atomism and liberal individualism that neoclassical political economy assumes were necessary corollaries of the nineteenth-century’s “market revolution.” In a variety of private and public contexts men and women contested the valorization at law and in ideology of absolute private property rights and disdained classical liberalism’s sharp separation of social relations from moral considerations. These findings have led social historians to describe how small producers expressed their opposition to the market’s disruptive consequences in explicitly political terms. Opposition broke out suddenly and assumed many forms. Always, social historians trace popular politics to some variant of a small producer ideology, from the (whites-only) republicanism of Jacksonian democracy to the cultures of protest that informed the entire panoply of nineteenth-century labor and agrarian insurgencies.²

Despite the richness and complexity of their findings, most political and social historians of nineteenth-century America share fundamental assumptions. Both groups build from a society-centered paradigm that focuses attention on the social origins--whether they be class, ethnoreligious, or sectional--of antebellum politics and political thought. This dissertation pivots on a different axis. The emphasis here is on how popular ideas of governance, in a period of acute economic and cultural transition, themselves patterned third party mobilization; how political elites and insurgent

reformers alike struggled to translate the insecurities and aspirations of ordinary people into *political* questions that bore fundamental relationship to *governance*. What distinguishes my approach from others is my focus on ideas of governance and the interaction of those ideas with the political and governmental regime. I shall call this approach regime-centered, and it is informed by the political-institutional focus associated with Theda Skocpol and Stephen Skowronek.³

By adopting a regime-centered approach, I am not discounting the relevance of large social and economic processes to politics. On the contrary, especially in the 1850s changes in society and economy imposed new demands on the regime. But those issues became politically meaningful only when political actors--individuals, parties, reform movements, the state itself--translated them into questions of governance. Thus, I have not abandoned my initial impulse to weave together society and politics so much as I have attempted to reframe the problematic in nineteenth-century political history as one of ideas of governance in a changing public culture.

One place to begin untangling the relationship among governance, society, and political thought in the nineteenth century is the northern Know Nothing party. The Know Nothings, like many influential third parties, have attracted considerable scholarly attention. The portrait that is emerging today, at least regarding the northern Know Nothings, is of a much more complex and fissiparous movement than many earlier historians assumed.⁴ Northern Know Nothings blended nativist militancy with evangelical Protestantism, a profound distrust of party politicians, and a reform agenda that included business regulation, debtor relief, political reform, and the ten-hour

working day. Moreover, in some northern states the early Know Nothing party--say before 1856--was as antislavery as it was anti-Catholic. In its programmatic heterogeneity and antiparty animus towards the political regime, the northern Know Nothings shared much with other nineteenth-century "populist" movements.⁵

The idea that populism may lay at the heart of northern politics in the 1850s raises important questions about how people in that decade conceptualized politics and especially governance. Populism is an oft-invoked but terribly slippery category that has defied political historians' best efforts to define and theorize it. One possible definition equates populism with the democratic and antimonopoly agenda and small producer base of the original populists, the People's party.⁶ There are substantial problems, however, with this approach. The most obvious is the range of policies that populist movements have pursued over the course of American history. What does one do with "reactionary" populism, the xenophobia of nativist movements, or the white backlash of Alabama's George Wallace?⁷ Populist third party movements have exhibited too much diversity over the years to equate populism with a specific programmatic or ideological orientation. A broader cultural approach to populist belief also presents problems. Populism is often understood as a generalized suspicion of concentrated power, both political and economic.⁸ Yet if this is the unifying theme of populism, the same may be said of American politics. Leaders of the major political parties have routinely expressed opposition to powerful economic and political interests. Because of these theoretical conundrums Michael Kazin, in a highly stimulating synthesis of American populism from the Gilded Age to the present, rejects

“essentialist” definitions of populism altogether. Kazin sees populism as the nation’s common language of protest and persuasion, one that different political movements at different times seized and filled out with their own bogeys to convince Americans of the righteousness of their cause.⁹

Kazin quite rightly resists defining populism as a coherent system of ideas unique to one material circumstance, social group, or political economic worldview. But Kazin’s alternative plunges populism into a conceptual muddle. Defining populism merely as the American way of political discourse strips the concept of all operational meaning as a distinctive signifier of political dissent. This point is of crucial significance for the study of third party movements. How does one differentiate third party movements from the major parties, if leaders of both easily deployed populist keywords and thus can be said to have been populists in the broad sense?

The linguistic approach divorces populism from its larger implications for the study of governance and political thought. I believe there is an essence to populism, a common thread which runs through all populist movements in American political history. Whether the particulars of populist movements fall to the right or left, populist movements have shared an abiding distrust of the established political parties that resonated emotionally with voters because of a more basic belief that governance itself was failing. On the surface this seems elementary--it is easy to see that populism expresses voter anger. But the point moves beyond the prosaic if we ask how people at particular historical moments conceptualized governance and what, in turn, they expected of their political leaders. Certainly voter anger arises within many historically

conditioned contexts--perceptions of political powerlessness, periods of economic insecurity, a sense of cultural transition or decline. In this way the populist spirit does indeed have roots in society-centered developments. But at its core, the political anger which populism expresses reflects back the ideals and values that people long to find in their system of politics and governance. To study populist movements is to study why people thought what government *was* doing conflicted with their ideas of what government *ought* to be doing.

I have conceptualized this dissertation to address the large question of populism's essence and the specific matter of 1850s-style populism in the shape of the Know Nothing party. The defining feature of Know Nothing populism was its pervasive antipartyism. Several historians have noted the antiparty themes of the Know Nothings, but none have placed antipartyism at the heart of the movement nor theorized its wider implications for political thought.¹⁰ To a considerable extent this is because scholars view antipartyism as ideosyncratic in an era of high voter loyalty to the parties and a political culture that celebrated partisanship. Certainly, that orthodoxy has much to recommend it. By the 1830s few raised fundamental objections to political parties in the way that Madison and other thinkers of his generation did.¹¹

Nonetheless, a primary argument of this dissertation is that both antipartyism and nonpartisanship were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century public life, and as such broadly informed popular ideas of politics and governance. Underpinning both antipartyism and nonpartisanship was the widely shared conviction that politics and governance ideally worked to promote the public welfare, not party victories,

politicians' careers, or special interests. Political thought in the antebellum republic fully accommodated the political party and its associated culture of partisanship. But Americans also demanded that ultimately politics be guided by a larger moral vision than simply electoral victories and the advancement of party influence over public affairs. Governance should embody the public good, and partisan politics, however disputatious, should not interfere with that more fundamental aim of public life. Here, I draw upon the work of Jürgen Habermas¹² to argue that antebellum citizens imagined two frameworks of normative action in their (political) public lives: the contested and highly charged arena of formal electoral politics on the one hand, and matters of governance on the other. The former was a distinctively stylized framework of public life, by the late 1830s characterized by intense and mass-based partisanship, especially during campaigns when ostensibly free and equal citizens debated the issues of civil society and ritualized their divisions over them. The other framework dealt with matters of both public and private governance and, ideally, was nonpartisan in character, because nonpartisanship, as both ideal and practice, gave vision and concreteness to an elusive but always appealing public interest.

Antebellum Americans' desire for a political and governmental regime that transcended mere party interests created problems for the major parties if their leaders failed to adhere uppermost to what voters at specific historical junctures saw as the public welfare.¹³ Populism, I suggest, is a function of how and to what degree men and women draw upon their nonpartisan expectations of, and experiences with, governance to express their anger with the failures and governing style of the regime's political

elites. The populism of the 1850s flowed from a pervasive sense that the regime was lacking in a broad moral purpose; that wire-pulling politicians, blinded by partisan calculation, allowed dangerous special interests to threaten the public good in government. The Know Nothings framed themselves as *anti*-party reformers and forged an oppositional movement culture based on the nonpartisan ideal of governance.

Hence I argue that during the 1850s political conflicts over industrialization, immigration, and slavery reflected more than popular anxiety over socioeconomic and ethnocultural change. Native-born citizens made their nonpartisan expectations of governance central to their antiparty populist politics. In 1853-4 native-born citizens, profoundly dissatisfied with the regime's solicitude toward special interests, especially immigrants and the Slave Power, turned to the Know Nothing movement in hopes of restoring the public good in governance. Like other nineteenth-century populist movements, the Know Nothings framed their agenda with transcendent antiparty calls to eliminate party hacks and special interests in politics, and thereby restore responsive government. During the 1850s ideas of nonpartisan governance, politicized through a broader moral critique of partisan politics and distributive policymaking, figured crucially in the political conflicts over industrialization, immigration, and slavery.

A synthesis essay opens the dissertation by providing a larger frame of reference for the analysis of antiparty populism in the 1850s. Chapter One moves beyond the antebellum era and offers a comprehensive historiographical and theoretical overview of nineteenth-century third partyism from the Working Men's party to the Populists. The chapter develops the case for a regime-centered approach to third parties and

emphasizes the antiparty and commonwealth ideas that third parties shared. Contradictions associated with nineteenth-century party politics and distributive policymaking, no less than those attributable to socioeconomic change, are central to any explanation of third partyism. Chapter One also analytically distinguishes populist *movements* from the third *political parties* that arose from them. Preexisting configurations of power and modes of political organization decisively shaped populist movements as they completed the transition to formal political parties. But the structural obstacles to third parties, though significant, were not the only reason for their defeat. Third parties also fell victim to the dialectical tension that partisan organization and political compromise created for movements rooted in antiparty ideas.

The remainder of the dissertation examines the gradual emergence of antiparty populism in the 1850s and its eventual cooptation by the early Republican party in three northern counties. The framework is comparative and interdisciplinary. I draw upon methodologies from social and political history and cultural theory to reconstruct public life before the Civil War in New London County, Connecticut, Essex County, Massachusetts, and Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. This approach demands attention to grassroots ideas of politics, government and society, and illuminates a more complex and variegated public culture than a conventional elite-centered narrative of state or national level politics would reveal. The comparative framework also highlights the uneven character of socioeconomic change and political development in the antebellum North. The main body of the dissertation thus moves back and forth from county/state

to county/state, and encourages a shift in focus from social factors to political cultural ones in elucidating the core political themes of the 1850s.

Chapter Two provides a social and economic overview of the three counties in the decades before the Civil War and underscores the discontinuous character of mid-nineteenth-century industrial and agrarian transformation. Throughout the antebellum era petty production and accumulation persisted alongside the concentration of industry and agriculture that accompanied the spread of railroads and banks and the arrival of immigrant labor from Europe. Chapter Three examines how men and women at the grassroots experienced politics and governance at the height of the second party system. By supporting the major parties at elections, citizens in all three counties vitalized a distributive political economy that greatly expanded the private sector. But while electoral politics in the 1840s was highly partisan, nonpartisan values also flourished. Party leaders themselves encouraged such ideas in their rhetorical efforts to link their party to a larger moral vision of governance. Nonpartisan values found clearest expression in areas of public life that lay beyond partisan politics, most notably in voluntary associations, local government, and local economic boosterism. In those areas of public life people put aside presumably durable partisan ideologies to work in nonpartisan ways for the private reform of society and various positive actions by government. Nonpartisan values flowed from the efforts of people to improve their communities and make government work, as well as the culture of governance (both state and local) that such efforts set in motion. During the heyday of the second party system frameworks of partisanship and nonpartisanship intertwined to shape popular

ideas of politics and governance. Partisan politics taught citizens which issues were “political,” and hence characteristically partisan, and which issues were not; grassroots nonpartisanship schooled people about the publicness of governmental issues (public issues not necessarily political in the formal sense), and the larger moral purpose of governance in public life.

Chapters Four and Five trace the gradual ascendancy of antiparty populism in each county, climaxing in the early Know Nothing party. As economic and demographic changes stimulated new demands on the regime, politics after midcentury turned on public issues that politicized governance. In the early 1850s reformers focused attention on such matters as constitutional reform and fiscal policy, business regulation, liquor, immigration, and slavery. As efforts for reform within the existing party structure stalled, reformers’ translated their nonpartisan ideals into a populist, antiparty indictment of the political and governmental regime--in a word, party government. Antipartyism resonated widely, sowing the seeds for the Know Nothing eruption. While key differences distinguished this process in each state, Know Nothingism in all three counties represented the principal problems of the decade--the Slave Power, political Roman Catholicism, and a broadly felt economic and cultural insecurity--as a function of the failures of the regime and its highly partisan style.

In chapters Six and Seven the focus shifts to the Know Nothings in power and their decline by 1858. Though Know Nothing lawmakers in all three states added a significant corpus of reforms to their prescriptive nativist agenda, I stress the limits of antiparty populism. Once the Know Nothing movement chose political leadership and

chose political leadership and entered formal electoral politics and policymaking, it confronted broader cultural forces and structural realities. Legislative outcomes varied widely from state to state, underscoring how the immediate political context and balance of political forces within the Know Nothing coalition shaped policymaking.

Meanwhile the Know Nothings split over state patronage issues and especially the national question of slavery in the territories. In antebellum America the interests of southern slave holders had consistently found sanction in the federal government. In this sense the antebellum regime, at the national level, was very much a pro-slavery one. Beginning with the abolitionists and the antislavery Liberty and Free Soil parties, northern voters had slowly but inexorably registered their opposition to this Slave Power regime. The turning point for popular antislavery consciousness came in 1854 when the northern Know Nothings grafted antislavery onto their expansive reform agenda, popularizing an antisouthern, *herrenvolk* appeal that the Republicans would soon seize as their own. Between 1854 and 1855 antislavery coexisted with a spate of state and local issues in the antiparty populist politics of the North. But during the presidential election of 1856 grassroots attention fixed on the national scene, enabling the Republican party to claim the populist reform mantle from the badly splintered American party. Internecine struggles over slavery and other issues continued to drive wedges in northern Know Nothingism at the state level, and by 1857-8 the Know Nothings in each county and state had lost the political initiative to the Republicans. By the late 1850s the Republican party's *herrenvolk* and antisouthern appeal expressed

northerners' nonpartisan vision of governance and their parallel fear of special interests in politics. For the Republicans, section was a surrogate for both party and nation.

A final note on the three counties and why I chose them. First, I wanted counties in states where the Know Nothings gained considerable power in government, thus ruling out several states where the movement was weak in comparison to Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Next, I looked for counties that exhibited some socioeconomic and regional diversity, and of course, strong support for the Know Nothing party. A search for appropriate archival and newspaper sources for the study of grassroots public life narrowed the possible choices. The three counties I finally decided on meet these criteria--I imagine scores of others do too. Thus I make no claim that these counties can stand as ideal representations of political experience in the antebellum North. To the extent that the three counties reveal important differences and broad continuities, I hope that my conclusions about them have implications well beyond their borders. But on one level this is a dissertation very much about particular people living in particular places. Still, these counties are as good a collection of sites as any to execute a comparative study of political thought in the North before the Civil War. The themes of this dissertation may be as easily studied in these three counties as anywhere else in the North.

Notes

1. An excellent recent review, one with an original and quite provocative argument in its own right (something rare in review articles these days), is Ronald P. Formisano, "The Invention of the Ethnocultural Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 99 (April 1994), 453-77.
2. For a good recent review of this approach, see Melvyn Stokes, "Introduction," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1996), 1-20. Also see the historiographical discussion in Chapter One.
3. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Stephen Skowronek, *Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Other studies of nineteenth-century politics that build from this perspective include Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard R. John, *Spreading The News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
4. The most recent review is Tyler Anbinder, *Slavery and Nativism: The Northern Know Nothings & the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ix-xv. In the 1970s, the Know Nothings were rescued from obscurity by several pioneers in the "new political history." Illustrative works include Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969). These scholars, often lumped together under the rubric "ethnocultural historians," were challenging an older interpretation of the politics of the 1850s that stressed the national crisis over slavery in the territories. Representative works in this vein include, Anbinder, *Slavery and Nativism*; John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-15, 493-98; Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* 2 vols (New York: 1933), 2-54; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press 1970), and *idem.*, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United*

States, 1837-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). As one can readily see by the overlap in dates, this debate has not been resolved; both interpretive frameworks remain alive.

5. Ron Formisano explicitly calls the Massachusetts Know Nothing party a “populist” movement, though refrains from exploring the larger questions the use of that label raises: *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. 329-43. See also the varied discussions in Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*; Amy Bridges, “Becoming American: The Working Classes in the United States Before the Civil War,” in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 157-96: 182-9; Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton & Company, 1989), 354-87; Holt, “The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism,” *Journal of American History* 60 (September 1973), 309-31; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990). I have also made the case for the Know Nothings as reform movement in: “The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism in Antebellum Massachusetts,” *Journal of Social History* 29 (Spring 1996), 565-90. The argument developed in this dissertation modifies that earlier approach, in particular by placing greater emphasis on the Know Nothings’ antiparty ideas of politics and governance.

6. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993). This line of argument has been central to historical explanations of nineteenth-century third party movements. See the historiographical discussions in Chapter 1. For a larger theoretical argument about the material origins of populism in trans-national perspective, see Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: New Left Books, 1977), esp. 143-198.

7. See for example Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); John Higham, *Strangers In The Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963).

8. See for example Harry C. Boyte, “Beyond Politics as Usual,” in Boyte and Frank Riessman, eds., *The New Populism: The Politics of Empowerment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 3-15; Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long,*

Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), esp. 143-68.

9. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

10. The first scholar to take notice of Know Nothing antipartyism was Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, 249-50. Others who have picked up on the theme include Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 122-6; Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (September 1973), 309-31.

11. The classic study of antiparty thought in the Revolutionary and Early Republican eras is Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). For more recent approaches, see Edward L. Mayo, "Republicanism, Antipartyism, and Jacksonian Party Politics: A View From the Nation's Capital," *American Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1979), 3-19; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [translated by Thomas Burger] (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1991). In fact, while one is tempted to take from Habermas an undifferentiated public sphere, his point of theoretical departure and much of what he implies about the state ("authority") and public opinion ("publicity"), suggests the importance of: 1) considering both *together* in the making of the public sphere; and 2) viewing the state (governance) and political public opinion (as manifested in parties, *among much else*) as functionally related yet operationally distinct. For the purposes of historical political analysis, public opinion, formal politics, and the state should be considered as unique dimensions that unfold in dynamic interrelation to make "the public." For related discussion, see Geoff Eley, "Nations, Politics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 291-339.

13. For a related discussion see James A. Morone, *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of American Government* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), esp. 1-30.

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CHAPTER I

THE "THIRD PARTY TRADITION" RECONSIDERED: THIRD PARTY MOVEMENTS AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE, 1830-1900

The point of departure for this chapter is John D. Hicks' Mississippi Valley Historical Association presidential address, delivered over sixty years ago. "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics" capped a generation of Progressive scholarship on third parties, much of it focused on the nineteenth century. In it, Hicks catalogued the contributions of third party insurgencies to the larger story of American political development. The ground Hicks covered is by now familiar; he pointed to the abolition of slavery, the regulation of railroads, trusts and monopolies, the Australian ballot, the direct election of senators, the national nominating convention, and attributed their origin to one or another nineteenth-century third party. In the process of surveying the field, Hicks offered a formulation which has largely fallen out of favor among scholars today. Third party movements, he concluded, "have played perhaps quite as important a role as either of the major parties in making the nation what it is today."¹ To Hicks and others of his generation, the centrality of third parties to the American political system--their function as vehicles for policy innovation, democratic expression and reform--appeared obvious.

In the spirit of Hicks's address, this chapter surveys the literature on nineteenth-century third partyism to interrogate and reformulate that older theoretical insight. An historiographical review might serve to reopen discussion of third parties' systemic

relationship to nineteenth-century politics and governance. Indeed my larger purpose, developed in the second half of the chapter, is to suggest a provisional framework that can reintegrate third parties and nineteenth-century public life. As both a review of scholarship and theoretical intervention, this chapter is necessarily speculative, meant to stimulate a broader rethinking of the third party phenomenon and politics more generally. In my view, the need for rethinking is justified by current scholarship's failure to systematically reckon with the ubiquity and recurrence of nineteenth-century third partyism. It is, after all, a commonplace interpretation of both political science and political history: nineteenth-century third parties were narrowly based single-issue movements that wielded scant influence over the course of American political history. One respected historian of nineteenth-century politics proclaimed recently that "most of the time... nonconformist political movements played little role electorally or in policy making in a culture textured by the partisan imperative."²

Such assessments have become incantatory. Yet we know that nineteenth-century third parties were almost never single issue movements, their constituencies almost never limited to a narrow band of the social spectrum. We know, too, that in numerous state and local elections third parties were electorally competitive and occasionally won influence over local and state government. In fact, third party movements were pervasive in American politics from roughly 1830 to 1900. At least one major third party erupted in each decade in this era; several at a time flared in the postbellum years. A few, such as the Know Nothing and People's parties, had lasting national repercussions. As Paul Kleppner reminds us, the average vote for third parties

in most regions often exceeded the average difference between the two major parties. For that reason alone major party leaders kept a careful eye on developing insurgencies.³

Certainly we are not lacking in good scholarship on nineteenth-century third parties. Each of the principal third parties has a robust literature, complete with historiographical landmarks and seemingly irrepressible debates.⁴ With few exceptions, however, recent scholarly output has taken the form of specialized investigations of questions and categories keyed to a particular movement.⁵ We know a great deal about the rich variety of nineteenth-century third party movements, but what characteristics did third parties share? How did third partisans imagine politics and governance? Can we identify common political and systemic themes in their rise and fall?⁶ Arriving at preliminary answers to these questions requires devoting less attention to the unique features of specific third parties than is currently fashionable. This chapter, then, proceeds from the ironic premise that flattening the many differences among third party movements may well prove useful in advancing scholarly thinking about them.

Developing a broader systemic perspective, this chapter makes the case for shifting scholarly focus to the antiparty and commonwealth ideas that third parties shared. I argue that contradictions associated with the regime of nineteenth-century party governance--chiefly distributive policymaking and patronage politics--are central to any explanation of third partyism. The regime also shaped third party movements when they formally entered the electoral arena. Building upon the arguments of Peter

Argersinger and Richard Oestreicher, I stress the structural obstacles to the long-term viability of third parties. Yet the structural obstacles to third partyism, though significant, were not the sole reason for the defeat of third parties. I suggest that the process of electoral mobilization itself raised a basic contradiction for movements rooted in antiparty ideals, and created what can be called the third party dialectic.

Historical Explanations of Nineteenth-Century Third Parties:

Progressives versus Counter-Progressives

In his address Hicks explained why third parties burst forth with such frequency in American history the same way he had explained Populism. Discounting other factors, such as economic hardship, Hicks concluded, "American third parties have come about as natural by-products of our diverse sectional interests." Like Hicks, early scholars of farmer-based third parties traced their origins to the hothouse of western settlement and the clash between sectional interests.⁷ Other Progressive historians, studying eastern insurgencies, fashioned a different framework. They developed a class explanation that pitted producer-based third parties against a conservative phalanx of the wealthy and powerful.⁸ Whichever model was adopted, Progressive scholars reached identical conclusions: third parties, originating in socioeconomic and geopolitical divisions that cut deeply in American society, were liberal-tempered reform movements. More ambitious theoretical efforts by some Progressive scholars put third parties at the center of American political development. Third parties were a

“means for agitation and education,” theorized the political scientist P. Orman Ray, enabling a “considerable body of political opinion to find rational expression at the ballot box.” They were, according to the historian Fred Haynes, nothing short of the “American method of dealing with political and economic reforms.”⁹

Yet certain third parties did not fit the Progressive mold. Believing that third parties were “instruments” of “social politics,” Progressives had difficulty making sense of the Prohibition party.¹⁰ Then in the 1930s scholars under the tutelage of Richard Purcell uncovered rampant xenophobia in the Antimasonic, Native American, and Know Nothing parties. A parallel problematic crystallized in early interpretations of abolitionism and antislavery. This work portrayed antislavery reformers as unpatriotic fanatics whose recklessness had pitched the nation towards an otherwise avoidable Civil War.¹¹ That some third party movements could serve such illiberal ends as nativism and disunionism cast doubt on the idea that they were, necessarily, liberal expressions of democratic values.

These and other contradictions inevitably led scholars to question the fundamental assumptions of Progressive scholarship. If third parties represented the interests of farmers or workers rather than bankers or industrialists, it followed that their leaders and membership should hold ideas about government consistent with such interests. Progressive scholars rarely questioned that syllogism; in the 1940s and 1950s it sustained withering scrutiny. New scholarship argued that liberal capitalist impulses motivated such radicals as Langton Byllesby, Frances Wright, and George Henry Evans. A young Richard Hofstadter drove the larger point home in a pithy assessment

of Wendell Phillips's postbellum career as labor champion: "there was little of the Marxist in the American labor reformer." Likewise a new generation of labor historians, focusing on the Working Men's and Loco Foco parties, found coalitions of skilled tradesmen, middle-class reformers, and frustrated political elites--hardly bona fide expressions of working-class politics.¹²

Counter-Progressive revisionism achieved its clearest form in Hofstadter's canonical reinterpretation of Populism, *The Age of Reform* (1955). Ostensibly, Hofstadter's subject in *Reform* was the era of reform ferment from the 1890s to the 1930s. At several junctures, however, he claimed to have identified a "larger trend of thought, stemming from the time of Andrew Jackson, and crystallizing after the Civil War in the Greenback, Granger, and anti-monopoly movements."¹³ Like the Progressives before him, Hofstadter theorized the place of insurgency in nineteenth-century politics.

Reform overturned virtually every key finding of the Progressives. In place of the older materialist explanation of Populism Hofstadter offered his well-known "status anxiety" thesis: the Populists were middle-class capitalist farmers suffering less from "real" economic grievances than amorphous anxieties over "the rapid decline of rural America." Populism was a reactionary impulse rooted in the past, not visionary, as the Progressives had imagined. As if to cinch the case, Hofstadter went to extraordinary lengths to show the "common climate of absolutist enthusiasm" which he believed supplied much of the energy behind insurgent movements in America. There was, he contended, a "populistic mind," salient throughout American history, flush with anti-

Semitism and anti-Catholicism, prone to irrational theories of economic conspiracy, and reflexively suspicious of cosmopolitan values.¹⁴ Hofstadter's focus on these themes gave critics a range of easy targets to shoot at.¹⁵ Yet, despite *Reform*'s many problems, scholars then and since have envied the sophistication Hofstadter brought to his subject. *Reform* moved the study of politics beyond the simple narration of political events to the structures of popular thought and culture from which they sprang. Within a decade, new studies appeared that deployed Hofstadter's pathbreaking intellectual and cultural approach. Antimasonry, political nativism, labor parties that shone nativist hues, abolitionism and political antislavery, the anti-liquor crusade--all were linked in one way or another to the protean "status" politics that Hofstadter pegged central to populist dissent.¹⁶

The claims advanced by Counter-Progressives had profound implications for the study of nineteenth-century third parties. Third parties became anomalous examples of extremism within a shared political consensus that was pragmatic and liberal capitalist. And just as Progressives had greatly overstated the case for economic radicalism among third parties, so, too, had they greatly understated the liberalism of the major parties. Hence a final orthodoxy of Progressive scholarship--third parties as the system's wellspring of policy innovation--could also be brushed aside. Indeed, political insurgency was soon written out of the story of nineteenth-century reform altogether. Scholars cut from the Counter-Progressive mold traced overhauls of the banking industry to groups within the liberal mainstream, usually bankers and entrepreneurs looking to jettison mercantilist constraints on enterprise. Others argued

that the so-called Granger Laws regulating railroads, held up by Progressives as examples of how agrarian insurgency could produce far-sighted policy, resulted from a complex political campaign waged by a host of groups--but spearheaded by urban merchants and financiers--to maintain economic hegemony and commercial stability. Such important developments as the expansion of public education, general incorporation law, and laws to protect debtors, Counter-Progressives argued, flowed from a normative tradition of "liberal humanitarianism," not agitation by nonpartisan reformers or worker-based third parties. Innovative ideas about government's role in society sprang from the liberal center that included the major parties but excluded the minor ones.¹⁷

Parties, Policymaking, and the Two-Party Synthesis of the New Political History

The Counter-Progressives' original formulations had a lasting impact on the field of political history. But, if politics was not a mask for economic self-interest merely, what were its systemic features? The birth of the "new political history" in the 1950s and 1960s signaled the awakening of intense scholarly interest in the social bases of the parties and the systemic features of politics. The new approach was unabashedly social scientific, applying functionalist theories and statistical methodologies to political behavior. The social science approach matched social history's concern for the study of ordinary people, chiefly through analysis of voting behavior. Indeed, the social science orientation shifted the frame of reference in political history away from

party elites to the voting behavior, partisanship, and social characteristics of rank-and-file voters.¹⁸ Social science methods also influenced the study of policymaking. New political historians closely scrutinized roll call data in both the national Congress and state legislatures, focused attention on the policymaking circuitry of legislatures, and systematically documented the social and regional make-up of legislative bodies. As the research unfolded scholars consistently found partisanship to be the best, but by no means the only, predictor of legislative behavior.¹⁹

Without doubt the most significant contributions of the new political history were the conceptual models scholars developed to produce a long-range view of American political history. Policymaking was linked to a broad framework first advanced by political scientist Theodore Lowi. Scholars categorized nineteenth-century policymaking as “distributive,” rather than regulatory or redistributive, both seen as more modern zero-sum types.²⁰ The study of mass voting behavior also yielded distinctive long-range patterns and novel periodizations. Scholars identified “systems” of voter alignments, each with unique social, cultural, and policy features, then folded them into a larger “realignment synthesis,” in which certain critical elections punctuated the transition from one alignment to the next.²¹ At a broader level, the research uncovered a “partisan imperative” throughout the nineteenth century. Enviably high levels of turnout among staunchly partisan voters produced striking levels of popular political participation and lent a fundamental stability to nineteenth-century electoral politics.²²

These considerable contributions notwithstanding, third parties generally did not figure prominently in the new political history. To some extent this is understandable, given the emphasis on the functions of parties and legislatures and the long-range behavior of electoral systems. Those concerns necessarily directed attention away from episodic reform movements. Certain third parties, however, received sustained attention from new political historians and historically minded political scientists. This work demonstrated that a few third parties--the Know Nothings, for example--functioned as provisional intermediaries in a process of voter reshuffling that periodically expanded the nineteenth-century electorate and recast its electoral alignments. Thus, the new political history did indeed acknowledge an important systemic role for some third parties.²³ But the significance of third parties, according to this formulation, is not intrinsic to the phenomenon of third partyism itself. Rather, third parties are important for what they reveal about the movement of voters from one major party alignment to the next. New political historians and allied scholars, analyzing long-term voting patterns and the broad functions of political institutions, told us much about the organizational and behavioral framework of nineteenth-century politics. But they failed to theorize third partyism as a distinctive and recurrent force throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, one that both shaped and was shaped by the two-party regime.²⁴

Broader theorizing does, nevertheless, require coming to terms with many of the findings of the new political history because they constitute the wider political cultural context of nineteenth-century third partyism. No less important, the themes that the

new political history tended to downplay, especially distributive policymaking and the relationship between the major parties and public administration, also factor into the study of third partyism. We need to consider both areas in some detail.

Because the spread of communication and commercial systems proceeded unevenly, parties were perhaps the most important trans-local institutions of social and cultural integration in nineteenth-century America. Though sectionalism as a theme in politics did not disappear, the major parties nevertheless aggregated a diversity of interests across a broad social spectrum and geographic expanse; elections provided annual opportunities for Americans to learn and then recast a common set of political cultural norms through participation in political campaigns and attention to the parties' symbolic gestures and policy orientations. A festive atmosphere attended nineteenth-century campaigns, reflecting the enthusiasm which Americans had for politics generally, as well as the birth pangs of mass entertainment. The rich cultural conduct of campaigns completed the process of socialization that party leaders initiated when they drafted platforms and issued manifestos. The social cohesion embodied in rallies, parades, and pole-raising, the shrill partisanship of the local press, election day hoopla filled with roving bands of ballot pushers and myriad treating rituals--all strengthened a sense of shared interest and destiny among residents of close-knit communities.²⁵

Although historians can agree that a lively culture and distinctive "style" framed nineteenth-century politics, they disagree over why voters chose one party over another. One well-known explanation has come to be called the "ethnocultural interpretation." Scholars taking this view hold that major party voting alignments in the nineteenth

century generally followed lines of ethnic and religious division in American society. Party elites carefully crafted platforms and symbolic appeals to reflect the preferences of rival “pietist” and “liturgical” constituencies. Voters responded predictably to those appeals, turning out regularly and in large numbers for the party whose campaign symbolism and policy orientation broadly reflected their own cultural and religious sensibilities.²⁶

A less unified group of political historians have questioned these findings. Through careful analysis of local politics, they have shown that ethnocultural divisions were not always sharply drawn in nineteenth-century electorates, nor were ethnocultural issues always constitutive of partisan loyalty and combat. Often partisanship passed from heads of families to sons and daughters and other kin. It was also reproduced by collectivities of voters through social custom, or through subtle and highly personal relations of influence and deference, all for reasons that had little to do with ethnoreligious affiliation *per se*.²⁷ No one seriously disputes that party leaders paid close attention to religious and cultural issues, for segments of the electorate were extremely passionate about them. But many other issues besides ethnoreligious ones, like economic development policies, electoral reform, and highly charged racial or sectional matters, found unmistakable expression in major party politics. Partisanship and political representation--that is, the relationship between voters and their elected party officials--was seemingly more complicated than the ethnocultural interpretation implies.²⁸

The activities of state legislatures raise the greatest doubt that a straightforward connection existed between voting, partisan affiliation, and policymaking. In the nineteenth century lawmakers spent most of their time sorting through the mountain of demands by individuals and particularistic interest groups for economic goods and privileges, such as a liberally worded charter of incorporation or state money for a local improvement.²⁹ At other times, assemblies debated such economic policies as banking and railroad regulation. Ethnoreligious loyalties may or may not have cemented partisan affiliations. What is clear, however, is that ethnoreligious issues occupied only a small fraction of legislators' time. Certainly lawmakers occasionally legislated on social or cultural issues such as education policy or liquor restriction, and no doubt, too, such policies reflected deep divisions within the nineteenth-century electorate over lifestyle choices and cultural preferences. But in general lawmakers, of whatever party, sought to avoid making a stand on polarizing questions. Lawmakers preferred distributive policies that allocated goods and resources in what appeared to be an impartial and nonideological manner. That way, they could campaign as public spirited and fair minded, virtues most voters looked for.

Voters, for their part, generally rewarded the major parties with loyalty and support, because distributive policies that modernized the economy were, above all, popular and ostensibly did not set one constituency directly against another. Naturally, on an issue connected to a national or state party platform lawmakers came under intense pressure to vote according to party dictates. However, in most assemblies roll calls on clearly partisan questions were exceptional events. Policy outputs in

nineteenth-century legislatures derived from the ways that lawmakers managed the cross-pressures inherent in patronage decisions and legislative log-rolling. It was through those mechanisms principally that political elites determined the allocation of economic goods and governmental appointments, engaged in trade-offs with other lawmakers, and remained popular among key individuals and groups after a campaign.

The distributive tendencies of elected party leaders dovetailed with their control over and elaboration of government patronage. With the acceptance of the Jacksonian spoils ideal, the parties emerged as recruiting grounds for the staffing of government posts at all levels of the federal system. An expanding array of state and local and national governmental offices--from postmasterships to customs officers to federal land surveyors--came under the purview of patronage, in effect enabling major party elites to constitute the state's basic administrative framework and its specific functions. Of course patronage decisions were, then as now, based on political calculations such as the pressure to reward loyal party workers. But from the wider perspective of governance, patronage is a paradigmatic form of distributive politics, and along with the considerable authority enjoyed by elected assemblies in the nineteenth century, it served to solidify the parties' stranglehold over public administration. The nineteenth-century's distributive regime was, in large part, a system of party governance.³⁰

The centrality of distributive economic policies and party patronage in the nineteenth century underscores the preeminent role played by elected assemblies in determining the essential features of a highly decentralized public administration. But nineteenth-century governance was more than the sum total of patronage decisions and

legislative allocations; the courts also figured in this regime. For one, they assisted the parties in their efforts to distribute goods and promote the economy. By the 1830s, as Donald Pisani points out, the balance between regulation and promotion that marked early American constitutionalism had tilted “permanently in favor of promotion” as the courts extended sweeping new powers to business corporations.³¹ Through innovation at common law the courts established the private business corporation as America’s leading instrument of economic development. In addition state assemblies, for political reasons, also grew increasingly solicitous of business interests. Under pressure from growing communities, no less than individual capitalists, to expand the economy, state assemblies voluntarily dropped many of the early regulations they had written into early business charters. In western states before the Civil War, pressure to limit spending on public works compelled legislators to divest state government from direct involvement in the economy. The rise everywhere of general incorporation law, a purely administrative innovation, also signaled the willingness of lawmakers to liberalize the legal environment in which private economic activity took place. Moreover lawmakers increasingly deferred to the courts on a range of thorny matters such as labor and conspiracy law and debtor-creditor relations, underscoring the political explosiveness of those issues and the preference in American constitutionalism for judicial resolution of economic conflict.³² It should be stressed, however, that neither innovation at common law, the rise of general incorporation, nor the de facto establishment of the courts as arbiters of economic conflict completely obviated the regulatory impulses that drove early public policy towards corporations. Indeed, the platforms of many

nineteenth-century third parties are eloquent of the persistent popularity of statutory regulation of the economy.

The Challenge Of (and To) Social History: Nineteenth-Century Third Parties

Beyond the Class-Culture-Community Paradigm

Political and legal developments, seemingly independent of the partisan ideologies held by voters and lawmakers, intersected in the nineteenth century to advance the broadly popular goal of economic expansion by the private sector within an overarching distributive framework of party governance. But what of third parties? Over the past two decades scholars inspired by the methods and concepts of the “new social history” have offered fresh insight into nineteenth-century third partyism. From their favorite vantage point, the community study, social historians of politics highlight the struggle of ordinary Americans for economic justice and political democracy and the positive role that third party movements played as vehicles for that struggle. Many third parties offered a powerful critique of the nineteenth-century’s distributive regime by focusing on the social costs and human casualties of economic development and championing policies intended to mitigate those costs. Still the social history approach is less concerned with governance than with linking politicization to everyday social experience. Social historians of politics probe the changing economic and social relations of workers and farmers for the common threads of daily life--the “culture of protest”--that anchored political insurgency in the nineteenth century. While labor and

agrarian-based insurgencies bulk large in this project, nativist and antislavery third parties have also been analyzed through the conceptual lens of social history.³³ Though variations on the theme abound, one pattern emerges clearly: large numbers of nineteenth-century Americans were not always satisfied with the major parties, and swarmed into independent movements when the major parties failed them.

Certainly this insight is suggestive of a role for third parties *in* the political system beyond that of merely halfway house in a process of voter realignment. For social historians of politics insist that transformations in the nation's demography and economy periodically thrust difficult new issues to the fore and altered popular expectations of governance. These new issues and ideas, in complex and politically mediated ways, produced pressure for specific governmental action--debtor relief laws, anti-trust law, antislavery policy, anti-immigrant policy--that were not given adequate expression, at least initially, by the two major parties. In what can be called a society-centered explanation of third partyism, social historians, in a much more sophisticated way, have redeployed an old argument. Insurgent movements spoke for the have-nots in society, raised important issues that the major parties slighted, and prodded the system forward to new policies and governing arrangements.

Yet recent scholarship also contains a number of conceptual limitations. Because so much of this work subjects political insurgency to micro-analysis--examining the origins and impact of political opposition at the local level--it has overstated the importance of insurgency to normative modes of political action and governance. Certainly third parties vented popular aspirations for political democracy

and a more just economic order, and occasionally gained local power through skillful appeals of that sort. But the larger relationship of third partyism to politics and governance in the nineteenth century is not at all clear in this work. It has been said many times: social historians need to step back from their workers, cultures, and communities if they wish their work to have broader relevance for political history.³⁴

More problems arise if we interrogate the concepts social historians deploy to examine politics. Typically, as in recent studies of labor and agrarian-based third parties, historians stress the social ideologies and discourses associated with such movements. Oppositional ideology has appeared in many guises over the past two decades: *artisanal republicanism*, *labor republicanism*, *herrenvolk republicanism*, and *equal rights* are but some of the rubrics one encounters in this work.³⁵ Whatever the terminology invoked, insurgents are seen to use oppositional ideology to indict the major parties for corrupt practices, or for adopting policies that benefit the few at the expense of the many. Recently, Philip J. Ethington and Michael Kazin have refurbished this argument with provocative interpretations of political discourse and political development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ethington describes a grand transformation from “republican liberalism” to “pluralist liberalism” in post-Civil War San Francisco; Kazin finds a “populist persuasion” at the center of politics from the Gilded Age to our own time. Both argue that insurgent movements were pivotal to changes in American public life, infusing public debate with new discourses of politics, government and society.³⁶

For all the attention to popular ideology and discourse, however, it is not clear what these categories explain in political terms. It is significant that very few Americans in this period would have disagreed with the basic values embedded in these discourses. Specifically, the belief that liberty was imperiled by concentrated power, that the power of government in particular was susceptible to abuse, that good government was fiscally conservative government, that all white men were entitled to formal political equality, that there was a public interest that transcended private interests, and that it was the responsibility of politicians and government to mediate fairly and honestly between them when they came into conflict--these were common sense (if exclusionary) notions that nearly all white men after 1830 or so would have insisted on. While it may have provided a vocabulary of opposition, neither republicanism, nor any of its baroque variations, tells us much about the specific issues and policy demands insurgents carried into politics. How and why Americans chose to cast off party loyalties in favor of a third party at some moments but not others are questions that have little to do with ideology or discourse per se.

While social historians have told us much about the ideologies associated with insurgent movements, we know much less about their political characteristics. For one, nineteenth-century third parties, including those commonly thought of as farmer and worker-based, assailed unresponsive and corrupt leadership at all levels of government as often as they attacked corporate greed or exploitative relations in the private sector. Empirical work on the social composition of nineteenth-century third party movements, moreover, shows they were volatile cross-class and multi-issue coalitions.³⁷ In social

terms, we might try to imagine them as the late Herbert Gutman once did. In his seminal analysis of political insurgency in Gilded Age Paterson, New Jersey, he found an archetypal pattern: a broad-based movement that united elements of the city's economically dispossessed with a significant segment of what he termed the "old middle class."³⁸ This was a fissiparous yet self-aware group of mostly native-born skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen, petty merchants and shopkeepers, and lower status professionals. Here were the nineteenth-century's middling sorts, men who were propertied though not rich, had acquired their competence and sunk deep roots in Paterson. They thus felt entitled to police "their" city on behalf of the "public good," under siege, they believed, by an overweening industrial elite and their toadies in city government. Recognizing third party movements as the cross-class and inherently fragile coalitions they were might help us identify nodes of everyday experience that gave such commonwealth language about the public good genuine social meaning. Certainly union halls and alliance meetings were important sites where workers and farmers forged common ideas about the public good. But there were undoubtedly other focal points of experience, perhaps more important in the long run than discontinuous protest organizations, that nurtured commonwealth ideas. Churches and local government were probably key, as was the contradictory mix of mutualism and paternalism that as frequently as not patterned class relations in the nineteenth century.³⁹

Towards A Regime-Centered Explanation of Nineteenth-Century Third Parties

The shortcomings and strengths of recent social history approaches to politics suggest we might recast our categories when examining third parties. Instead of rehashing their economic ideologies, we might study third parties for the problems in partisan politics and distributive policymaking that they identified. Accounts of various third party movements provide important clues to how nineteenth-century Americans conceptualized politics and governance in ways that differed from the highly partisan and patronage driven politics of the major parties. Joel Silbey and Michael McGerr, among others, have argued that parallels in campaign style and organizational structure between third and major parties indicate the period's "partisan imperative" gripped third parties too.⁴⁰ Yet the preponderance of *antipartyism* in nineteenth-century third party movements does not sit well in that scheme.

Antipartyism expressed the oppositional character of populist third party movements and framed the specific issues and problems they identified. Those issues tended to fold into very broad and recurrent themes--poverty, urbanization, immigration, slavery, abuse of wealth or power. In this sense, as virtually all previous models of political behavior have assumed, third parties indeed had origins in society-centered issues. But third parties also had origins in regime-centered issues.⁴¹ Antipartyism communicated anger with a system of governance that addressed needs according to the modes of distributive politics. The regime of party governance itself gave rise to and in turn shaped nineteenth-century third party movements.

Protestations of antipartyism mark the formation and development of all nineteenth-century third parties. The adoption of the moniker “Independent” everywhere in the nineteenth century by scores of third party conventions attests to antipartyism’s pervasiveness. A few third party movements did not call themselves parties at all. What was in reality a recrudescent Greenback party in 1884 preferred the infelicitous but nonpartisan “Anti-Monopoly organization of the United States.”⁴² In an entirely different context and time, a Massachusetts Antimasonic convention in 1833 pledged not to pursue “the mere triumph of party or the success of their candidates.” George Henry Evans believed antipartyism at the core of the Working Men’s party mission: “We will unite with no party, *as a party*” he pledged in 1830, “but simply unite, if we can, the honest from all parties.”⁴³ In the 1840s followers of the Liberty party scorned the “baneful spirit of partyism.” A decade later, the astute observer of antebellum politics and Lincoln’s future Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles noted that thousands “flocked” to the Know Nothing movement “for the purpose of relieving themselves from the obligations and abuses of the old [party] organizations.”⁴⁴ In the preamble to their first national platform in 1869, the Prohibition party decried a central purpose of partisanship: “A lamentable evil is the education of the people into the belief that a permanent political party is a great good....” In the 1890s, midwestern Populists portrayed their movement as “a protest against the dangers and tyranny of permanent party organization.”⁴⁵

Similar examples can be easily multiplied. Indeed, the reigning interpretive paradigm fails to account for the ubiquity of antipartyism well after a two-party system

of government became fixed in American public life. That third parties adopted proven tactics when they organized themselves and waged electoral combat does not constitute evidence that their members valued partisanship. Those purely organizational parallels could have been merely artifacts of mobilization in that century's system of mass politics. At all events, antipartyism was a constant in nineteenth-century public life; its latent attraction helps us understand the lengths to which party regulars went to shore up partisanship. Elaborate campaign ceremony, cheeky political rhetoric, and in the 1890s, legal barriers to third parties--all suggest that major party leaders knew the appeal of antipartyism and feared its disruptive potential.

The emphasis on the organizational and behavioral features of partisan politics has obscured evidence of nonpartisanship, the building bloc of antipartyism, in other areas of public life. If previous work is any indicator, the still embryonic project of re-integrating women into nineteenth-century public life will find them central to an influential nonpartisan tradition of social and moral reform activism. Middle-class white women reformers in particular infused the nineteenth-century public sphere with transcendent notions of government's moral obligation to protect society's vulnerable citizens, a theme echoed by many third parties.⁴⁶ The act of abstaining by otherwise loyal partisans, a phenomenon that apparently was more pervasive than previously thought, also hints at a significant antiparty sensibility in the nineteenth century, for it suggests a wellspring of dissatisfaction among the party rank and file.⁴⁷

There is also the matter of local government, a crucial area of public life that has received insufficient attention from political historians. In her extraordinarily

suggestive study of government and political thought in rural New York State Paula Baker finds “the simultaneous existence of partisanship and anti-party politics figured crucially in male politics.” Baker focuses on the choices and actions of local and county governments, as opposed to the obviously partisan context of elections, and discovers rural New Yorkers valued nonpartisanship when local officials made decisions on policy matters that affected their daily lives. Divisive partisanship simply had no place in the struggle to solve such common problems as poor roads, inadequate public services, and perennial budget shortfalls.⁴⁸ In other areas of public life, too, Americans during the nineteenth century worked in nonpartisan ways for positive action from government. Grassroots campaigns to leverage support from state legislatures for economic development projects, like a branch-line railroad or turnpike, were often notable for their nonpartisanship. In those campaigns boosters stressed their project’s larger promise to improve the local economy, and dwelt but briefly on their own material interest as investors. Usually, though not always, affected residents accepted reasoning of that sort--and in turn expected results.⁴⁹

The values of partisanship and nonpartisanship came into conflict, of course, and always existed in tension. That dynamic of tension is suggested in the pre-histories of the nineteenth-century’s principal third parties. The seeds for nineteenth-century insurgency were sown by protean social movements often led by grassroots voluntary organizations. Typically these movements turned to independent politics reluctantly, after voluntary strategies failed. Stubborn traditions of partisanship explain some of that hesitation. Equally important were the particular agendas of community-based

organizations; in their voluntary phase, social movements stressed self-help and nonpartisanship on matters both economic and moral. The panoply of farmers' associations--Granges, Wheels, and Alliances--that waxed and waned in Gilded Age America immediately spring to mind. These groups adopted cooperative economic programs to solve such persistent problems as high transportation costs and low commodity prices. At the same time they sought to influence state and national policy through nonpartisan techniques, querying candidates on specific issues such as railroad regulation or stay laws and, ideally, voting for the candidate who responded favorably. The Antimasons launched their crusade against Freemasonry in this manner as well, carefully probing political candidates for ties to the secret order. Antislavery politics commenced in the 1830s, not in 1840, when the American Anti-Slavery Society mounted a series of nonpartisan petitions against the admission of new slave states, the interstate slave trade, and for the abolition of slavery in Washington, D.C.⁵⁰

The prevalence of grassroots nonpartisanship in the nineteenth century suggests that people conceptualized questions of governance separately from their formal partisan political identities. Party politics provided space for ostensibly democratic debate over key public issues and the articulation of ritualized political difference over those issues. On matters of governance not systematically incorporated into party platforms, on the other hand, people seemed willing to lay aside supposedly rigid party ideologies in efforts to forge common ground. This hypothesis--that nonpartisanship both framed ideas of and constituted experiences with governance while partisanship *normally* framed political ideas and defined formal political experience--should not be

surprising. Historians have long noted the persistence of classical antiparty belief into the age of Jackson, while scholars of the Progressive era have identified nonpartisanship to be among the many impulses driving reform of urban politics and state election law.⁵¹ We should consider the possibility that nonpartisanship was not discontinuous. The multilayered federal structure of the American state provided ample room for nonpartisanship and partisan politics to exist throughout the nineteenth century more or less in parallel. Governance on the one hand and partisan politics on the other were seemingly interrelated yet distinctive frameworks of nineteenth-century public life, each a sphere of unique social experiences and cultural imperatives.

Any analysis of third parties must consider both of these frameworks of thought and experience together. Although electoral politics in the nineteenth century *was* remarkably partisan, nonpartisan ideals of governance could also be accommodated. On issues that lay outside of party platforms, partisanship was expected to yield to the public interest. This is not to argue that citizens completely disconnected party from governance and policymaking. Voters took seriously the broad pledges that parties made; broken promises sometimes led voters to break party ranks. Nevertheless, when it came to matters that affected everyday life, citizens wanted and expected government to respond effectively and fairly. One of the primary ways elected officials demonstrated their responsiveness was by delivering the economic goods that people clamored for. But what happened when segments of the electorate became restless over recurrent social problems that required more discriminating action by government? Vexed issues of that sort were omnipresent in the nineteenth century;

distributive policies that modernized the economy were, ironically, one important source of them. Industrial workers squared off against abstemious and sometimes ruthless employers; debtors charged banks purposefully maintained crushing cycles of debt by controlling the currency; women and men blamed alcohol consumption for rising crime rates and high taxes (to fund poor relief). As they groped for solutions, party politicians felt great pressure to avoid taking sides. New and potentially disruptive issues augured unpredictability at elections, a condition party leaders sought to avoid.

For their part, citizens worried over intractable social problems found scarce little in partisan politics which suggested easy solutions. Local experience reinforced nonpartisan ideals about governance devoted to the public interest. Experience with state and local government in a distributive regime raised expectations for action by fair-minded lawmakers. Yet lawmakers, for political reasons, looked to duck volatile issues. Recurrent social or economic problems related to class conflict, regional conflict, or cultural difference therefore tended not to find expression in major party platforms, at least in any consistent and unambiguous manner. On balance this was a source of great strength for the parties. But the parties' imprecision on issues was also an essential source of popular frustration with party politics when groups of voters grew concerned over issues that demanded very specific responses. When people alighted upon specific agendas for governmental action, the parties became especially vulnerable to the *antiparty* charge that they were more interested in winning elections and distributing patronage than addressing voters' felt needs. Nineteenth century

insurgents had little trouble linking public problems to partisan intrigue and corrupt special interests, because partisanship and particularistic interests were the mainsprings of the distributive regime. In other words, the regime of party governance itself provided momentum and a ready target for nineteenth-century insurgents. Again and again third party movements turned nonpartisan ideals of governance against the regime by framing their reform agendas in explicitly antiparty terms, seizing on telling examples of partisan calculation to focus an angry citizenry fed up with the mishandling or avoidance of pressing public concerns.

Indeed, the charge that governance under major party auspices had become corrupted by self-interested politicians stands out as a central theme of every third party movement in the nineteenth century. In the 1830s, the Antimasonic and Working Men's parties called for greater democratization because they believed politics was becoming the exclusive domain of aristocrats out of touch with people's needs. The nativist and antislavery parties of the 1840s and 1850s framed their agendas with calls to overthrow conniving politicians and party hacks, who they believed pandered shamelessly to such "special interests" as Irish immigrants and southern slave holders. For their part, the nativist Know Nothing party also identified state-level partisan corruption as a principal rationale for their movement.⁵² Prohibitionists in the 1870s and 1880s idealized their movement as an expression of evangelical Protestant democracy that would break the grip of the country's liquor interests over government and restore Christian virtues to politics. The Populists, of course, saw reforms like the

direct election of senators and Australian ballot as tools to end party control and restore responsive government.⁵³

Nineteenth-century condemnations of office-chasing politicians constituted more than a trans-historical language of protest. They expressed genuine anger at the limitations and failures of the nineteenth-century's distributive framework of party governance. Third parties organized to fill the interstices of a system that smoothly mobilized national coalitions and distributed economic goods but sometimes sputtered on issues related to class, occupation, ethnoculture, region or locality. Agitating issues the major parties balked at, nineteenth-century third parties crystallized opposition to the partisan and patronage driven system of mobilization and representation that marked public life. Antipartyism resonated in nineteenth-century third party movements because it mediated the powerful ideal, reinforced by grassroots experience, that governance ought to advance the public good. Of course, the major parties cast themselves in similar terms--Republicans in the 1880s stumped for high tariffs and against Grover Cleveland and insisted, among other things, the public interest would be served by Republican administrations. The nonpartisan vision of governance was, in all likelihood, a shared vision, not one inherent to third partyism per se. And yet, because third parties identified failures of party governance as the *political* source of people's problems, they constituted movements of a qualitatively different sort. Antipartyism eventually formed the core of third party dissent because it communicated the idea that the major parties had somehow failed to meet voters' nonpartisan expectations of governance. Antipartyism served as the key organizing

principle for third party movements because segments of the electorate finally decided that the major parties had strayed too far from their larger moral purpose: ideally, a government independent of special interests and a politics that served the public interest, not party spoils merely.

Despite the pervasiveness and flexibility of antipartyism, third parties focused on reform agendas specific to their socioeconomic and cultural circumstances. If the major parties were long on popular themes such as economic expansion, household independence, and fiscal responsibility, but short on policy specifics, third parties raised specific demands for government action, especially at the state and local level where their chances for success were brightest.⁵⁴ A brief perusal of third party platforms illustrates the point. The Working Men's parties of the 1830s stumped for increased spending on public education for the poor and middling classes, debtor relief measures such as abolition of imprisonment for debt and mechanics' lien laws, along with more labor-specific reforms like a ten-hour day in textile factories.⁵⁵ The multitude of Gilded Age labor parties organized around an expansive agenda that included free homesteads, Henry George's single tax scheme, an eight-hour day, abolition of convict and child labor, creation of state bureaus of labor, municipal ownership of "natural" monopolies like gas and street car companies, and compulsory child education.⁵⁶ The famous Omaha Platform of the People's party adopted in 1892 was a visionary agenda designed to reform politics, reign in monopoly capital, and assist small producers hobbled by debt. The Populists proclaimed "the power of government...should be expanded," and offered a far-reaching platform for activist

government that included inflationary monetary policies, a graduated income tax, public ownership of railroads and telegraph companies, and a litany of labor and electoral reforms.⁵⁷

Though the local political economic context was decisive in shaping the specific agendas of third party movements, we should not lose sight of the common themes which run through nineteenth-century third parties. Third party movements framed their agendas with antiparty rhetoric and self-images. Often they claimed to be reform vehicles, not parties in the conventional sense. Indeed, as reform movements, they implicitly celebrated their *lack* of partisanship. Precisely because of their antiparty designs, moreover, third party movements were, at least according to their spokespersons, well suited to pull up the roots of a corrupt or unresponsive status quo. Thus third parties also pegged specific legislative proposals for reform to the transcendent appeal of nonpartisan governance; government belonged to the organic community--the People--and therefore ought to advance the common good, not partisan-political or personal agendas. In the context of the industrial, commercial, and demographic revolutions of the nineteenth century, the common good most often meant that government should insure these processes entailed a minimum of disruption to communities and insecurity for individuals. In this way many nineteenth-century third party movements also nurtured traditional commonwealth ideas about government's role as enforcer of social responsibility and guarantor of the public interest. They carried forward into the modern era of mass politics traditions of state activism which the nineteenth-century regime suppressed. As the regime of "courts and parties" fell

into line with the imperatives of laissez faire capitalism, third party movements served as vehicles for the statutory regulation of economic and social life. Though it is quite true that government was divested from direct involvement in the economy by the 1830s, in other areas of public policy, such as prohibition, education, debtor relief, protective labor legislation, and early business regulation, activism by state governments continued to ebb and flow throughout the nineteenth century. It is hardly controversial to suggest that third party movements often figured crucially in the politics of that story.

Movement Into Party: The Third Party Dialectic

Just as the regime of party governance helped fuel third partyism, so too did it impose limits on such movements when they entered formal politics. As Peter Argersinger and Richard Oestreicher have stressed, it is important to realize that nineteenth-century insurgency took place within an institutional and cultural context that was beyond a third party's capacity to alter in the short run.⁵⁸ That context included: preexisting ideas about politics and government that weighed against immediate acceptance of radical new formulations of government and society; well-funded major party organizations, each with a corps of well-heeled operatives and profusion of party mouthpieces; near complete party control over public sources of patronage; single member, winner-take-all electoral districts that strengthened the hand of fusionist elements within third parties during state and national campaigns; traditions

of partisanship that exerted centripetal force on voters, especially in lead-ups to national elections; near major party monopoly over key legislative committees and procedural protocol that were critical to determining outcomes in legislatures. These structural features posed enormous obstacles to insurgent parties seeking to sustain independence over several political seasons. They dramatically underscore the need to distinguish analytically between protest movements and the political parties that arose from them. When social movements became third political parties, they were shaped by the regime's institutional configurations and cultural norms.

Third parties faced daunting structural obstacles, but certain features of nineteenth-century politics redounded to their benefit. Nineteenth-century election law gave third parties access to the political process. Until the 1890s the parties administered campaigns and elections. They set times and sites for holding nominating conventions, printed and distributed ballots, and oversaw the integrity of election results. Such control gave the parties important sources of patronage and reinforced their authority locally even as it put increased pressure on them to stir up partisan loyalty. Insurgents turned this system to their advantage. With minimal resources any disgruntled group was free to print ballots for distribution on election day. So easily could insurgents exploit this private system that major party politicians turned to "election reform" at the turn of the century to stifle insurgents. The Progressive era movement to wrest control of elections from the parties was waged by major party politicians who seized the opportunity to raise voting qualifications, restrict ballot access, and erect a maze of legal barriers to insurgent candidates and parties. Before

those changes, however, private control of elections within a federal political structure gave third parties an important toehold in the system.⁵⁹

The sheer variety of issues that fueled third party movements and the relative ease with which they could mobilize illuminates the considerable potential that existed in nineteenth-century America to challenge the status quo. At the same time the tendency towards multi-issue politics reflects how other features of the nineteenth-century regime thwarted third party movements. Gaining meaningful political power, at whatever level in the federal system, meant putting together the same sort of broad-based coalition as the major parties. The winner-take-all system of election and representation undoubtedly encouraged the choc-a-bloc accretion of issues that distinguishes so many nineteenth-century third parties. In their desire to achieve political potency, the tendency among third parties was to forge a super coalition of the disaffected through appeals to other third party movements and pockets of discontented voters. Ironically, the most influential nineteenth-century third parties were often the most fragile, prone to internal power struggles between competing factions over the minimal patronage third party leaders commanded. Simply adding more issues to the insurgent cause was an easy way for third party leaders to mobilize potential constituencies in a winner-take-all system. At the same time, it cut against the larger themes of antipartyism and commonwealth at the heart of third partyism because it contributed to subsequent fragmentation.⁶⁰

Third party factionalism also points to a crucial but often overlooked factor of third party formation and development, namely leadership. The ways in which third

parties recruited leaders--and vice versa--as well as the quality of leadership they offered, are critical to understanding their rise and fall. Third party leaders typically pushed and pulled their movement in directions they believed would enrich their own interests. Careful studies of the Farmer's Alliance and People's party, for example, have shown the character of leadership figured crucially in the party's demise. The conservatism of Alliance and People's party leaders in North Carolina and Alabama, men such as Marion Butler and Reuben F. Kolb, shaped the free silver, pro-Bryan cast of those states' Populist movements. On the other hand, the radicalism and independence of men like MaCune in Texas and Watson in Georgia invigorated "mid-road" Populism in those states. A similar pattern prevailed in the Midwest. In Iowa conservative leaders beat back the more radical projects of midwestern Populism, the sub-treasury and land-loan plans, at a very early stage in the movement's development. In other states these ideas remained potent among the rank and file and leadership for a longer period of time.⁶¹

The interrelated problems of leadership and party organization raised a fundamental contradiction for third party movements, organized around antiparty anger with partisan politics. In their formative stages third parties generally turned to experienced pols with histories of opportunism to provide leadership and expertise in party-building. Massachusetts's Ben Butler and Henry Wilson, New Hampshire's John P. Hale, Iowa's James B. Weaver, Pennsylvania's Simon Cameron, South Carolina's "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, North Carolina's Leonidas L. Polk: all were political mavericks in their day whose quirky ideas and independent streaks made them difficult

bedfellows in the major party organizations that dominated politics in their state. Covetous of but largely shut out from access to patronage, these ambitious men viewed third party movements as opportunities to build a political machine that could elevate its leader to an exclusive inner circle of power brokers. Experienced politicians no doubt infused third parties with much needed organizational skills, but the actions of political wire-workers--so necessary for electoral success--were at odds with the antiparty vision at the core of many third party movements. For its part the third party rank and file, seeking legitimacy for the cause and quick results from government, usually capitulated in what was a classic dialectic. When nineteenth-century antiparty movements were translated into political parties the outcome was shaped, as often as not, by cadres of self-aggrandizing politicians, more interested in the spoils of office than in carrying out the antiparty reform vision of the rank and file.⁶²

The third party dialectic is best illustrated in the phenomenon of fusion. Again, the winner-take-all system encouraged most third parties to adopt fusion as a means to maximize their clout. In closely contested elections, one or another major party often coaxed and cajoled third party movements into fusion by endorsing a few third party candidates or incorporating some third party issues into their platform, usually at the state and local level. Through fusion third parties gained an important entry point into government--in effect, the power to extract concessions from the regime.⁶³ But fusion had its downside too, as Peter Argersinger has most recently shown. For if third parties hoped above all to end politics-as-usual, how could such high ideals possibly be advanced by fusion with one of the major parties?⁶⁴ In fact, because fusion often

occurred at the behest of the principal politicians involved, it entailed the sort of compromises and horse-trading that most third partisans had banded together to eliminate. Fusion laid bare the dialectic that crystallized in all nineteenth-century third parties as they completed the transition from antiparty movement to third political party. Because all third party movements looked to government for solutions to their problems, they were compelled to mobilize within a political cultural framework that rewarded unity, discipline, and subordination to organization and leadership. A winner-take-all regime reinforced the tendency toward practical politics: the setting of limited goals and a willingness to compromise in the interest of maintaining the long-term viability of the organization. These tactical particulars are, of course, characteristic of political organization in any system of party politics. They are also at odds with the antipartyism that defined the third party challenge to the nineteenth-century regime.

The regime's cultural characteristics also undermined third party movements in one final way. When third parties threatened to make lasting inroads among voters the major parties naturally defended themselves with the familiar tactics of distributive policymaking and party patronage. The major parties responded in piecemeal fashion to the issues powering insurgency, driving wedges in third party movements and defeating their most radical challenges. Through fusion and some plum appointments, the major parties could usually rob third parties of their most popular and able leaders and compromise their organizational integrity. Because they almost always controlled the machinery of state, moreover, major parties could selectively engage the third party

program. Ultimately, the issue-oriented agendas of third parties *could* be managed, however unsystematically, in a distributive regime. Insurgent workers and small producers concerned for their economic security could be given new “rights” in the form of lien laws, homestead exemptions, state bureaus of labor, or extensions of the tariff; antimonopoly forces could be palliated with general incorporation laws and state commissions to oversee railroad and banking industries; land reformers could be quieted with the Homestead Act; nativists with anti-immigrant rhetoric and, if necessary, laws restricting the political rights of the foreign born.

Then too, on more explosive matters such as union activity or conflicts over land use by railroads, politicians could always defer to the courts, which throughout the nineteenth century strongly asserted their suzerainty over labor relations and property disputes.⁶⁵ Nineteenth-century constitutionalism, in other words, helped politicians craft ambiguous regulatory policy that could both defuse radical movements and maintain a propitious environment for capital. And so it could go on indefinitely at the state level, as long as insurgents did not insist upon a redistribution of wealth or expensive tax increases to expand the public sector.

Indeed, as long as restless citizens could be stilled with state level reforms of a distributive kind, the issue-oriented agendas of third parties could be easily disaggregated into piecemeal demands for government action that the distributive regime was geared to manage.⁶⁶ In the process of beating back third party challenges with piecemeal reform, the major parties could afford to be selective, because third party movements, built on the antiparty appeal, were never so disciplined as to present

an impenetrable front. In the end, when third parties made strong bids for power, they succumbed to the constraints on insurgency built into the regime. They were beguiled by the major parties' skillful use of patronage and short-term recognition of their issues. They were fatigued by the struggle to be viable in a winner-take-all system of election and representation. And they imploded on the contradiction of having morphed into a party out of antiparty material.

Conclusion

If the regime of nineteenth-century politics and governance, no less than social and economic change, spawned third parties, it was also the means by which the major parties quickly reestablished connections to disaffected voters. When the major parties responded to third party challenges, therefore, it was with methods they knew best--the patronage and distributive policies that were the hallmark of nineteenth-century public life. Nineteenth-century third parties, however, offered an alternative. They mobilized a diversity of classes and interests by tapping popular nonpartisan and commonwealth beliefs about governance, thereby challenging the prevailing framework of patronage democracy and distributive politics. They met with mixed success. On the one hand, many third parties won a number of policy concessions from the regime. But those victories came at the expense of the larger antiparty vision of politics and governance that underlay the attraction of third party movements. Party patronage and distributive policymaking, in articulation with long-term social and economic change, produced

specific instances of third partyism, while those very same attributes of party governance operated to defeat, at least momentarily, the antipartyism at the core of each third party's appeal.

Nevertheless, at a broader level third parties were among the nineteenth-century system's principal nodal points for policy innovation because they aggregated divisive issues and articulated controversial ideas about government. It is axiomatic that the bulwark of liberal pluralism in American politics has been the ideologically flexible and socially miscellaneous major party. But too often modern scholarship has built from that truism to conceptualize third parties as exogenous forces, situated on the outside of the American political system looking in.⁶⁷ Surely third parties deserve an important place *in* the system. Third party movements often played leading roles in American political development, pushing the two major parties to overcome vested interests, to break the built-in inertia, to change and adapt. Third parties served crucial functions *within* the system of nineteenth-century politics and government; it is time scholars analyzed them that way.

It is elementary that third parties organize at moments of acute disaffection from the political status quo. The challenge awaiting historians is to theorize the subject of voter anger--in a word, populism--in all of its political dimensions and implications. Developing a satisfactory history of third partyism is fundamentally an interdisciplinary task because it involves both partisan and nonpartisan political culture, the architecture of the American state, and the socioeconomic and political context of specific third party eruptions. The project centrally involves theorizing the *political*

character of insurgent movements, analyzing their interaction with the major parties within a broad constitutional and political context, and identifying the changes and continuities in politics and government that were left in the wake of third party challenges.

The analysis presented here suggests scholars might return to an older understanding of politics, one in which the creative tension between popular and elite sources of issue politicization, the style and character of leadership, and competition for the spoils of office assume important roles. We need not embrace all the assumptions underpinning the Progressive oeuvre in order to imagine, as the Progressives did, an important role for third parties in nineteenth-century public life. After all, if third parties were vehicles for “social politics,” the regime of “courts and parties” always had the last word. Historians, nevertheless, might fruitfully reposition third parties and their social politics against a larger institutional and political backdrop. In their limited way, Progressive scholars accomplished such a synthesis. Modern scholars might well return to their enterprise, if not their categories.

Notes

1. John D. Hicks, "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 20 (June 1933), 3-28: 4.
2. Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 196. See also Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970), 27-30; Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan, Nancy H. Zingale, *Partisan Realignment: Voters, Parties, and Government in American History* (London: Sage Publications, 1981), 135-6; V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* 4th Edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1958), 280-309; Paul Kleppner, "Partisanship and Ethnoreligious Conflict: The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892," in Kleppner, et al., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 114-46, and *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), Ch. 7: "The Politics of Political Pluralism: Minor Parties and the Third Electoral System;" Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* 5th Edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), 49-5; James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1973), 20-2.
3. Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 239. I take up these points in greater detail below. But by way of example see Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1995); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford, 1983), 173-244, 330-43; Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War, With Special Reference to Iowa: A Study in Social Politics* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916); Walter E. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-1837* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Bruce Laurie, "'Spavined Ministers, Lying Toothpullers, and Buggering Priests': Third Partyism and the Search for Security in the Antebellum North," in Howard Rock, Paul Gilje, Robert Asher, eds., *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1967).
4. The various literatures on nineteenth-century third parties are naturally too extensive to list here. I survey some representative debates and problems below. Good introductions to the historiography of the more significant nineteenth-century third parties are Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and*

the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), ix-xv; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 3-11; Paul Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition, 1826-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii-x; William F. Holmes, "Populism: In Search of Context," *Agricultural History* 64 (Fall 1990), 26-58; Alan M. Kraut, "Introduction," in Kraut, ed., *Crusaders and Compromisers: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 1-22; Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1-12; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford, 1984), 3-19.

5. A handful of modern works have examined the interaction of American third parties and the political system. However this literature is either too general to be of much use, or concentrates on the twentieth century. See J. David Gillespie, *Politics At the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); David A. Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1974); Henry P. Nash, Jr., *Third Parties in American Politics* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959); Rosenstone, et al., *Third Parties in America*.

Suggestive insights regarding the systemic dimensions of third partyism in the nineteenth century can be gleaned from Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*; Michael F. Holt, "The Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of U.S. Political Parties Vol I: 1789-1860: From Factions to Parties* (New York: New York: Chelsea House, 1973), 575-620; Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford, 1986), esp. 89-259. McCormick in particular called on historians to reexamine both third partyism and its step-child, antipartyism, for what they can tell us about how Americans conceptualized politics and governance in the nineteenth century. That McCormick's call went virtually unheeded is, to my mind, a good reason to return to the problems and categories that he originally identified.

6. These could be intrinsic to third parties, such as shared ideas about politics, government and society, or they could be relational, such as the systemic "functions" of nineteenth-century third parties within a broad institutional framework of government, law, parties, and pressure groups.

7. Hicks, "Third Party Tradition," 27. See also Solon Justus Buck *The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and Its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestations, 1870-1880* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 80-237, and "Independent Parties in the Western States, 1873-1876," in Guy Stanton Ford, *Essays in American History Dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1951 [originally pub. 1910]), 137-64; Haynes, *Third*

Party Movements; Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance* (Minneapolis: 1931).

8. Though in the most sophisticated of this work, one finds a blend of regional and class explanations. See for example Julian Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," *American Historical Review* 34 (January 1929), 250-64; Frank T. Carlton, "The Working Men's Party of New York City, 1829-1831," *Political Science Quarterly* 22 (September 1907), 401-415; John R. Commons, "Horace Greeley and the Working-Class Origins of the Republican Party," *Political Science Quarterly* 24 (September 1909), 468-88; Arthur B. Darling, "The Workingmen's Party in Massachusetts, 1833-1834," *American Historical Review* 29 (October 1923), 81-6, and *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848: A Study in Liberal Political Movements in Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925); Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1928); Helen Sumner, "Citizenship (1827-1833)," in John R. Commons, et al., *History of Labour in the United States* 2 vols (New York: Macmillan House, 1918), I: 169-332. A late-Progressive study that stands out for their sophistication are Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), esp. 114-54, on the Antimasonic party.

9. P. Orman Ray, *An Introduction to Political Parties and Practical Politics* (New York: Scribners, 1913), 66; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, 3. See also Hicks, "Third Party Tradition;" Moisei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Party System in the United States*, (New York: 1910), 294-320.

10. See for example Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States*; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*. For Progressive interpretations of the temperance movement that alternately stress its reformist and coercive aspects, see John A. Kraut, *The Origins of Prohibition* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1925); Asa Earl Martin, "The Temperance Movement in Pennsylvania Prior to the Civil War," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 49 (July 1925), 195-230.

11. Here, the classic statement is Avery O. Craven, *The Repressible Conflict, 1830-1861* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1939). Early treatments of nativism include Sister M. Theophane Geary, *A History of Third Parties in Pennsylvania, 1840-1860* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1938); Mary St. Patrick McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland, 1830-1860* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1928); J. Carroll Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut, 1828-1860* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1938); Sister M. Evangeline Thomas, *Nativism in the Old Northwest, 1850-1860* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1936). A similar tack was taken by Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1938).

12. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition, and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Knopf, 1948), 161. See also Carl N. Degler, "The Loco-Focos: Urban 'Agrarians'," *Journal of Economic History* 16 (1956), 322-53; Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization II* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 637-95, and "The Jackson Wage-Earner Thesis," *American Historical Review* 54 (January 1949), 296-306; Hofstadter, "William Leggett, Spokesman of Jacksonian Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly* 58 (1943), 581-94; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*; Pessen, "Did Labor Support Jackson? The Boston Story," *Political Science Quarterly* 64 (June 1949), 262-74, and "The Working Men's Party Revisited," *Labor History* 4 (Fall 1963), 203-26; William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1955), 159-207.

13. Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 4-5.

14. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 7; 17; 35, and passim.

15. Hofstadter's most dogged critic was Norman Pollack, who repeatedly attacked *Reform* for marshalling evidence selectively and for having only a casual relationship to the historical record. See in particular Norman Pollack, "Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of *The Age of Reform*," *Journal of Southern History* 26 (November 1960), 478-500, and "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism, and the Historian," *Agricultural History* 39 (April 1965), 59-67.

16. See for example Carleton Beals, *The Brass-Knuckle Crusade: The Great Know Nothing Conspiracy, 1820-1860* (New York: Hastings Publishers, 1960); David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (September 1960), 205-24; David Donald, "Toward A Reconsideration of the Abolitionists," in Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York: Random House, 1956); Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 3-67; Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 7-22.

17. The concept of the liberal humanitarian state is developed by Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy, Massachusetts 1776-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), esp. 203-44. See also Lee Benson, *Merchants, Farmers and Railroads: Railroad Regulation and New York Politics, 1850-1887* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1955); Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and*

Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard, 1948), 181-285; Milton Sydney Heath, *Constructive Liberalism: The Role of the State in Economic Development in Georgia to 1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), esp. 1-9 and 189-367.

18. Perceptive reviews of the new political history include Allan G. Bogue, "The Quest for Numeracy: Data and Methods in American Political History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21 (1990), 89-116; Formisano, "The Invention of the Ethnocultural Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 99 (April 1994), 453-77; J. Morgan Kousser, "The 'New Political History': A Methodological Critique," *Reviews in American History* 4 (March 1976), 1-14; McCormick, "Ethno-Cultural Interpretations of Nineteenth-Century American Voting Behavior," *Political Science Quarterly* 89 (June 1974), 351-77.

19. Representative of this literature are Thomas B. Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967); Richard E. Beringer, "The Unconscious 'Spirit of Party' in the Confederate Congress," *Civil War History* 18 (December 1972), 312-33; Allan G. Bogue, "Bloc and Party in the United States Senate, 1861-1863," *Civil War History* 13 (September 1967), 221-41; Bogue, et. al, "Members of the House of Representatives and the Process of Modernization, 1789-1860," *JAH* 63 (September 1976), 275-302; Ballard C. Campbell, *Representative Democracy: Public Policy and Midwest Legislatures in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Herbert Ershkowitz and William G. Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures During the Jacksonian Era," *JAH* 58 (December 1971), 591-621; Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967); Gerald W. Wolff, "Party and Section: The Senate and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill," *Civil War History* 18 (December 1972), 293-311.

20. Theodore J. Lowi, "American Business, Public Policy, Case-Studies, and Political Theory," *World Politics* 16 (July 1964), 677-715.

21. Good introductions to party systems include Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*; William Nisbet Chambers and Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Kleppner, et. al., *Evolution of American Party Systems*; Silbey, Bogue and Flannigan, eds., *History of American Electoral Behavior*; Sorauf, *Party Politics in America*; Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*.

22. On these points, see especially Burnham, *Critical Elections*; Chambers and Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems*; Clubb, Flannigan, Zingale, *Partisan Realignment*; Kleppner, et al., *Evolution of American Party Systems*; Silbey, Bogue and Flannigan, eds., *History of American Electoral Behavior*. Good accounts of the rise of

partisanship and electoral mobilization from the 1830s to 1890s are Gienapp, ““Politics Seems To Enter Everything”: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860,” in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on Antebellum American Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station TX: Texas A&M Press, 1982), 15-69; Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 28-54; Richard P. McCormick, “Political Development and the Second Party System,” in Chambers and Burnham, eds., *American Party Systems*, 90-116; Shade, “Political Pluralism and Party Development: The Creation of a Modern Party System: 1815-1852,” in Kleppner, et al., *Evolution of American Electoral Systems*, 77-111; Silbey, *American Political Nation*, esp. chapters 2, 3, and 7.

23. See for example Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*; Michael F. Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1969); Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1971); Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System*, and “Partisanship and Ethnoreligious Conflict: The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892.” For the political science variant of this thesis, see Burnham, *Critical Elections*, 27-30; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale, *Partisan Realignment*, 135-6; Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 280-309; Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, 20-2; Zingale, “Third Party Alignments in a Two-Party System: The Case of Minnesota,” in Silbey, et al., eds., *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 106-33.

24. An important exception is the richly textured case study by Ron Formisano of third parties and the emergence of the second party system in Massachusetts, *The Transformation of Political Culture*. Formisano offered an enviably detailed account of Massachusetts politics in the first half of the nineteenth-century, giving attention to the social context of economic transformation and market revolution, patterns of ethnoreligious and regional division, specific cases of social and community conflict, and changing attitudes towards party and politics, all of which shaped broad changes in the political system. In the process, he argued, correctly in my judgement, for a central role for third parties in the modernization of politics and public life.

25. The above summary of nineteenth-century election and campaign culture drawn from Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 238-68; McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 12-41; John F. Reynolds, *Testing Democracy: Electoral Behavior and Progressive Reform, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 1-48; Mary P. Ryan, *Women In Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 130-71; Silbey, *American Political Nation*, Ch. 2, 3 and 7.

26. Classics of the “ethnocultural” interpretation include Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*; Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*; Holt, *Forging A Majority*; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*; Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*; Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), and *The Third Electoral System*; Samuel T. McSeveney, *The Politics of Depression: Political Behavior in the Northeast, 1893-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); William G. Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972). It should be stressed that these scholars, to varying degrees, integrate other categories of analysis including regional differences, conflicting attitudes toward party, and indeed political economic issues or those of social class. In the end, however, the influence of these factors on voting behavior occurs at the periphery of the political universe, and are seen by these historians as reflective of more basic patterns of ethnocultural difference. Recently, Ron Formisano has charged that skeptics of the ethnocultural interpretation vastly oversimplified the above noted works in a series of critical reviews. See Formisano, “The Invention of the Ethnocultural Interpretation.” Yet, to my mind, there can be little doubt these scholars advance an “ethnocultural” explanation of nineteenth-century voting behavior.

27. See for example Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), esp. 27-140; Paula Baker, “The Culture of Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Community and Political Behavior in Rural New York,” *Journal of Social History* 18 (1984), 167-93; Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 149-53, 264-8, and passim; Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*, 105-19, and “The Social Bases of New England Politics in Jacksonian America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (Spring 1986), 23-57; Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

28. See for example John Ashworth, “Agrarians” & “Aristocrats”: *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 143-354; Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford, 1970); Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 305-43; Holt, “The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of Jacksonian Voting Behavior,” in Cooper, et al. eds., *A Master’s Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 16-58; Keller, *Affairs of State*; Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and*

the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); McCormick, *Party Period and Public Policy*; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso Press, 1990); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*.

29. The following paragraph derives from my appropriation of McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *JAH* 66 (September 1979), 279-98, in combination with Paula Baker, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life*, 24-118; Douglas E. Bowers, "From Logrolling to Corruption: The Development of Lobbying in Pennsylvania, 1815-1861," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Winter 1982), 439-74; Campbell, *Representative Democracy*; L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, passim; Keller, *Affairs of State*, 85-121, 285-370; Harry N. Scheiber, "Federalism and the American Economic Order, 1789-1910," *Law & Society Review* 10 (Fall 1975), 57-118; Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 19-162.

30. See for example John M. Dobson, *Politics in the Gilded Age* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972): Ch. 1: "Administrative Staffing Through Patronage;" Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System From Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Seymour J. Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), esp. 46-75; Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, 19-30, and passim; Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954).

31. Donald J. Pisani, "Promotion and Regulation: Constitutionalism and the American Economy," *JAH* 74 (December 1987), 740-768; 755. This paragraph is distilled from my reading of Pisani and Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1994); Gunn, *Decline of Authority*; Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*; William E. Nelson, *Americanization of the Common Law: The Impact of Legal Change on Massachusetts Society, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Scheiber, "Federalism and the American Economic Order," and "Government and the Economy: Studies of the 'Commonwealth' Policy in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (Summer 1972), 135-51, and *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).

32. By the 1830s, argues Donald Pisani, the courts, joined later by “quasi-judicial” institutions like early railroad and banking commissions, were the principal sites in the American constitutional system where the common law tradition of economic regulation was modernized and carried forth into the postbellum era. See Pisani, “Promotion and Regulation.” Pisani’s formulation is consistent with what we know to be the essentially autonomous role that the courts played in regulating labor in the nineteenth century. See for example William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Victoria C. Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power: The Origins of Business Unionism in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

33. The “new social history” on nineteenth-century insurgent movements was established in two waves. The first came in the 1960s and 1970s: Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), esp. Ch. 5: “Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth-Century American Industrial Cities: Patterson, New Jersey: A Case Study;” David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967). The second wave, a much larger one, came mostly in the 1980s, when the field matured with the refinement of concepts of group consciousness and cultural articulation derived from Geertz, Mintz and Weber, and theories of republican political ideology developed by intellectual historians Bailyn, Pocock, Shalhope and Wood. See for example Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 269-397; Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy*; Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), and *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989); Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists’ Constituency* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 101-15; McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Bruce Palmer, “Man Over Money”: *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class-Consciousness, 1875-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Steven J. Ross, *Workers’ On the Edge: Work, Leisure and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1790-*

1888 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Richard Schneirov, "Political Culture and the Role of the State in Labor's Republic: The View From Chicago, 1848-1877," *Labor History* 32 (Summer 1991), 376-400; Ronald Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and Politics of Class, 1720-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Voss, *Making of American Exceptionalism*; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*.

34. Here I am echoing Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?" *Social History* 5 (May 1980), 249-71; Ira Katznelson, "The 'Bourgeois' Dimension: A Provocation About Institutions, Politics, and the Future of Labor History," and the challenges by members of the *ILWCH* editorial board in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 46 (Fall 1994), 7-92; McCormick, *Party Period and Public Policy*, 89-140. Recent studies that point in the right direction include Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*; Bridges, "Becoming American: The Working-Classes in the United States Before the Civil War," in Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns on Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 157-98; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*; Martin Shefter, "Trade Unions and Political Machines: The Organization and Disorganization of the American Working Class in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Working-Class Formation*, 197-278.

35. For examples of social and labor historians using the concept of republicanism--or similar language with roots in eighteenth-century political theory--to describe nineteenth-century insurgency, see works cited in note #33.

36. Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

37. See the data presented by Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 142-6; John Dibbern, "Who Were the Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliancemen in Dakota," *Agricultural History* 56 (1982), 677-91; Eggert, "'Seeing Sam': The Know Nothing Episode in Harrisburg;" Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, passim; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 198, 222-44; Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*, 157-62; Holt, *Forging A Majority*, 151-57; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 112-28; Alan M. Kraut, "The Forgotten Reformers: A Profile of Third Party Abolitionists in Antebellum New York," in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds., *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 119-45; Magdol, *Antislavery Rank and File*, 68, 101-15; McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard*, 163. For dissenting interpretations of similar data, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 34-51; Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, "Antimasonry Re-examined: Social Bases of the Grass-Roots Party," *JAH* 71 (1984), 269-93; John W. Quist, "'The Great Majority of Us Are Farmers': The

Michigan Abolitionist Constituency of the 1840s," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Fall 1994), 325-58.

38. Gutman, "Class, Status and Community Power," 259.

39. For suggestive insight, see Paula Baker, *Moral Frameworks of Public Life*, 24-89; Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), esp. 3-55; Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 247-51.

40. McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 214-19; Silbey, *American Political Nation*, 205-6. Also see Kraut, "Partisanship and Principles: The Liberty Party in Antebellum Political Culture," in Kraut, ed., *Crusaders and Compromisers: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 71-99; Rosenstone, et al., *Third Parties in America*, 11-2; 78-80.

41. This formulation is informed by Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Skowronek, *Building a New American State*. I have adopted the term regime-centered because it conveys a broader conception of the state and public life, which includes government, and normative modes of mobilizing to obtain power or influence in government, such as partisan politics or nonpartisan pressure group tactics.

42. As cited in Donald Bruce Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, comp., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1972* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 64. See also for example Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*; Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*.

43. Antimasonic convention cited in Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*, 108; Evans cited in Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working-Class*, 20.

44. Liberty party activist Salmon P. Chase cited in Richard R. Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 83. Gideon Welles cited in Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Norton, 1978), 165.

45. Prohibition party platform cited in Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 253; Annie Diggs cited in Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, 12.

46. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). See

also Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *AHR* 89 (June 1984), 620-47; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); McGerr, "Political Style and Women's Power, 1830-1930," *JAH* 77 (December 1990), 864-85; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Recently, work has appeared that seeks to demonstrate and explain female partisanship, at least during presidential campaigns: Ryan, *Women In Public*, 130-71; Elizabeth R. Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *JAH* 82 (September 1995), 494-521. Though this work is intriguing, I remain unconvinced that partisanship constituted a central element of women's political culture. It is worth asking, for example, what women partisans did *after* presidential campaigns? The answer is, in all likelihood, that they continued their public activism in the tradition of nonpartisan reform.

47. Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*.

48. Baker, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life*, 24-118; 54. For more on local government and nonpartisanship in the nineteenth-century, see Hal S. Barron, "And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: Public Road Administration and the Decline of Localism in the Rural North, 1870-1930," *Journal of Social History* 26 (Fall 1992), 81-103; Bridges, "Creating Cultures of Reform," *Studies in American Political Development* 8 (Spring 1994), 1-23; John A. Fairlie, *Local Government in Counties, Towns and Villages* (New York: The Century Company, 1906); Keller, *Affairs of State*, 115-7.

49. Unless of course they had a stake in some preexisting project and felt threatened by the prospect of competition. We need more work on the community character of economic boosterism in the nineteenth century. Suggestive studies are Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); Thelma M. Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut River Valley," *Smith College Studies in History* 23 (October 1937-July 1938); John Majewski and Daniel B. Klein, "Economy, Community, and the Law: The Turnpike Movement in New York, 1797-1845," *Law & Society Review* 26 (1992), 469-512; Majewski, Klein, and Christopher Baer, "Responding to Relative Economic Decline: The Plank Road Boom in Antebellum New York," *The Journal of Economic History* 53 (March 1993), 106-22.

50. The above summary drawn from Buck, *Granger Movement*, 40-301; Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*, 3-102; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 51-70, 81-94; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, 67-88; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 10-89; Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 3-42; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 74-96. The labor movement's well-known caution towards independent politics also underscores this tension. See for example Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, Ch. 2: "The Uses of Political Power: The Knights of Labor and the State;" Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power*, 120-2, 129; Laurie, *Artisans into Workers*, 141-210; Oestreicher, "Terence Powderly, The Knights of Labor, and Artisanal Republicanism;" Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*; Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 114-77; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 219-96.

51. See for example Bridges, "Creating Cultures of Reform;" Formisano, "Political Character, Antipartyism, and the Second Party System," *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter 1969), 683-709; Samuel P. Hayes, *The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), esp. 152-8; Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of A Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Edward L. Mayo, "Republicanism, Antipartyism, and Jacksonian Politics: A View From the Nation's Capitol," *American Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1979), 3-20; McCormick, *Party Period and Public Policy*, Ch. 6: "Antiparty Thought in the Gilded Age," and *From Realignment to Reform: Political Change in New York State, 1893-1910* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 104-37 and passim; Gerald W. McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals and Politics, 1884-1920* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975); James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

52. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 75-126; Holt, "Politics of Impatience;" Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 80-201; Stewart, "Abolitionists, Insurgents, and Third Parties: Sectionalism and Partisan Politics in Northern Whiggery, 1836-1844," in Kraut, ed., *Crusaders and Compromisers*, 25-43; Mark Voss-Hubbard, "Populism and Public Life: Antipartyism, the State, and the Politics of the 1850s in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1997), esp. 232-97. On the Working-Men's and Antimasonic parties, see for example, Brooke, *Heart of the Commonwealth*, 353; Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 114-22; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 197-244; Goodman, *Towards A Christian Republic*, passim; Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 9-33.

53. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 177-274; Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 27-46; McMath, *American Populism*, 143-62. On the Gilded Age prohibition movement, see especially Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 79-106; Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 240-57.

54. On this point see also Bridges, "Becoming American;" Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, 18-37; Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870-1940," *JAH* 74 (March 1988), 1257-86.

55. See for example Bridges, "Becoming American;" Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 222-44; Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers*, 67-85; Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 9-33; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 172-216.

56. See for example Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*; Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers*, 141-75; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 115-27 and passim; Ross, *Workers' On the Edge*, 296-304.

57. The Omaha platform is reprinted in "Populists (People's) Platform of 1892," Johnson and Porter, *National Party Platforms*, 89-91. Good introductions to the Populist movement include McMath, *American Populism*; Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 27-46.

58. Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, 1-34; Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior."

59. On this point see Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation and the State: Nineteenth-Century England in American Perspective," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 257-84: 273. On turn-of-the-century election law changes see Argersinger, "'A Place On the Ballot': Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws," *AHR* 85 (April 1980), 287-306; Keller, *Affairs of State*, 522-31; Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics*; McCormick, *From Realignment to Reform*, esp. 260-63; Reynolds, *Testing Democracy*, 49-70.

60. Consider, for example, the debilitating factionalism that marked Henry George's 1886 Clarendon Hall coalition, the Populists, and the Know Nothings. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 162-219; Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, esp. 102-35; Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States*, 37-50; McMath, *American Populism*, esp. 137-42, 180-211; Palmer, "Man Over Money", 96-125.

61. Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, 102-35; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 90-150, and *American Populism*, 143-211; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 154-74; Palmer, "Man Over Money", 144-96.

62. Anbinder, *Nativism & Slavery*, 150-4; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 222-30; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 172-3; McMath, *Populist*

Vanguard, 110-31; Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 360-70; Mulkern, *Know Nothing Party of Massachusetts*, 30-44, 78-80, 118-29; Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 39-45, 168-70; Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), and *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 237-40, 279-85.

63. On fusion in specific contexts see for example Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*, passim; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, esp. 189-411; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, passim; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 11-50; Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 243, 277-8; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 121-27; Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1890: A Study in Democracy* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1929), 350-64.

64. Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*, esp. 10-1.

65. Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power*, esp. 30-75; Keller, *Affairs of State*, 343-70; Pisani, "Promotion and Regulation;" Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic*, passim.

66. Consider how elements of the Working Men's movement succumbed to Democratic blandishments; Anti-Monopoly movements slowed by Democratic and Republican Granger Laws; Populists cooled by Democratic party appointments, promises of free silver, and dogged racebaiting; Gilded Age labor uprisings defeated by the selective appropriation of their reforms by urban political machines, and charges of dangerous fanaticism when radicals remained militant for thoroughgoing change. See Bridges, "Becoming American," esp. 166-8; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 245-67; McMath, *American Populism*, 180-211; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 233-36; Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 45-68, and passim; Shefter, "Trade Unions and Political Machines," esp. 251-72.

67. Representative are Silbey, *American Political Nation*; Sorauf, *Party Politics in America*.

CHAPTER II

SOCIETY AND ECONOMY IN THE AGE OF MARKET REVOLUTION

In winter 1850 a Stonington, Connecticut, resident assailed the New London, Willimantic and Palmer Railroad in a letter to the New London *Daily Morning Star*. "One of the Olden Time" questioned the value of railroads by focusing on developments in Stonington, a coastal community eight miles east of New London, since the advent of another railroad, the New York, Providence and Boston, in 1837. Olden Time began by harkening back to the days before the railroad. Stonington was then a farming and fishing community of independent householders, notable for its broadly distributed wealth and harmony of class interest. Each citizen "was acquainted with the condition and wants of all the others," and residents subordinated petty "jealousies" and individualistic impulses to the "common interests." In those days, Olden Time reminisced, townsfolk were content "in their own limited circle, shut out to a certain extent from the remainder of the world." However, in 1837 a branch-line railroad connected the center of Stonington to Providence, Rhode Island, and Boston via the New York, Providence, and Boston Railroad. The railroad changed everything. Goods produced hundreds of miles distant overwhelmed local producers and storekeepers. "Our merchants suffer sadly from this state of things," rued Olden Time. The younger generation scorned the "country folk and ways with contempt." They disdained labor as "countrified," followed slavishly the "latest city fashions." "Homespun and satinet gave place to brocade and broadcloth, cowhide to patent

leather; steel forks to silver.” The values of mutuality and community that Olden Time happily recollected had by now retreated before the conspicuous commercialism and cultural pluralism of the modern commercial order.¹

Other Stoningtonians issued complaints about late antebellum society that had similar origins. In 1845 over 500 townsfolk petitioned for reinstatement of a law that gave local civil authorities the power to regulate, even abolish outright, the sale of liquor within town borders. Three years earlier a Democratic-controlled General Assembly had struck down the old local option law, thus depriving local communities of a legal means for regulating traffic in liquor. Stonington’s location on the rail network was the decisive factor in creating what the petitioners described as an “open market” in liquor. Because of the railroad the town suffered an “invasion” of “vagrant rumsellers” who also brought with them “their former patrons.” Thus liquor dealers, “invited by our milder legislation,” utilized a key instrument of the market revolution to threaten moral consensus. Stonington, once “conspicuous for the temperate habits of its people,” became “a community of drunkards.” Intemperance, considered the chief source of poverty and social discord, accompanied the new market society to Stonington. Indeed, the petitioners invoked an earlier time when vigilance committees, sure of community approval, forced local rum dealers to “voluntarily” cease their wicked ways. By the mid-1840s, however, townsfolk apparently felt they could no longer rely upon their “moral economy” to discipline community members. According to the petitioners, the state, through the law, now had to sanction, indeed (re)constitute, morality in the face of changing social circumstances.²

No doubt these complainants exaggerated Stonington's isolation and homogeneity before the railroad. Nevertheless the anecdotes express far more than mawkish romanticism. By midcentury New London County was industrializing, and towns like Stonington experienced a metamorphosis. Certainly there were many who avidly embraced this far reaching transformation. But many also felt ambivalence and anxiety towards the market and industrial revolutions, for as the motor of social change, they spawned problems of public morality and ultimately governance. Those problems of governance, in turn, provided the basis for populist movements that would transform the North's political landscape.

In the half century after the Revolution the northern United States underwent a commercial revolution. Improvements in transportation, in systems of finance, in business law, and in some locales industrial processes, fueled the development of a capitalist infrastructure across the Northeast and Midwest. Turnpikes and canals connected insular agricultural communities to regional and long-distance markets and lured farmers into commercial exchange; banks supplied venture capital that stimulated entrepreneurship; manufacturers divided labor processes into discrete tasks and displaced skilled artisans with young and ill-trained hands; the nation's first factories turned out woolen and cotton cloth cheaply and supplied wage work to redundant labor in the countryside.³

Government bulked large in all of these developments. At the national level, Hamiltonian economic policies facilitated interstate commerce, while early decisions by the Marshall Court helped to lay "the legal foundation for a national market" by

codifying freedom of competition in capital and labor markets.⁴ State governments took the most direct action. As individual entrepreneurs and in many cases whole communities lobbied for economic development, state legislatures liberally granted charters that conferred privileges to private business enterprises. To satisfy the popular demand for economic development in the absence or scarcity of private capital, some state governments invested heavily in private transportation companies and also created publicly financed canal systems, complete with rudimentary public administrations to oversee their construction and maintenance.⁵ In short the actions of state governments, no less than private entrepreneurs, figured crucially in the market revolution.

How broadly based was the support for the market revolution and the policies that facilitated it? The question has generated heated and at times polarized debate.⁶ One key to resolving the debate is to appreciate the contradictory and conditional character of popular belief towards government and the economy. At the broadest level, most ordinary Jacksonians hewed to what Philip Scranton has called a “capitalism of competence”--the contradictory goal of economic security in a market economy dominated by independent small proprietors.⁷ This was the enduring vision of the middling classes in antebellum America: a faith that the traditional ideals of competency and propertied independence were compatible with the new freedoms--and new dependencies--of the Jacksonian market economy. The crucial point here, developed more fully in the chapters that follow, is that economic development, whether undertaken by private or public capital, enjoyed broad public sanction in the antebellum years. This ideal contained contradictions. Dislocation and uncertainty

accompanied the market and industrial revolutions--as our editorialist and petitioners from Stonington attest--and prompted searches for ways to accommodate marketplace imperatives and relationships to the goals of security and order. Still, by 1830 if not earlier relatively few northerners disputed the idea, popularized by local boosters no less than political economists like Henry Carey, that economic policies which modernized the economy heralded prosperity for local communities and the nation.

The Market Revolution in Jacksonian America, 1815-1840:

Society & Economy in Three Northern Counties

Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, New London County, Connecticut, and Essex County, Massachusetts are good places to examine in comparative perspective the social context of northern politics before the Civil War. For one thing, the states themselves offer a nice contrast of public economic policy. Massachusetts and Connecticut, hobbled by Revolutionary War debts but blessed with considerable private capital, were archetypal “commonwealth” states. They promoted economic development by stimulating private investment in transportation improvements and banks through such incentives as public incorporation, tax exemptions, and limited stockholder liability. Pennsylvania, in contrast, was a classic “public enterprise” state. A shortage of private capital necessitated considerable public investment in banking and transportation companies and construction of the nation’s largest system of publicly owned canals and railroads.⁸

The cultural and demographic conditions of the counties also varied. Palatinate German and Scots-Irish settler groups gave Dauphin County a rich cultural heterogeneity. Sternly Calvinist German Lutheran and Reformed communicants competed for spiritual supremacy with Scottish and English Presbyterians and Methodists, while fighting an insurgency from within by German Methodists. The Yankee stock settler groups of New London and Essex counties gave them an altogether different cast. New England's Presbyterian and Congregationalist establishment heavily influenced Essex and New London, though in the latter's case, more populist strains of evangelical Protestantism challenged moderate light orthodoxy.⁹

The three counties also contrast well along a number of economic axes. Both New London and Essex underwent a general shift from sea-based commerce and fishing to industry in the decades before the Civil War. This broad transformation, however, unfolded in each county in distinct ways. In Essex County early industrialization produced a diversity of economic organization by the 1840s. Industrialization followed three paths simultaneously: a factory model, exemplified by the woolen factories located at Lawrence and a few other sites; an outwork model, devoted to such items as boots and shoes and palm-leaf hats and organized by merchant capitalists in Lynn, Haverhill, and other towns; and a decentralized small shop model, spread throughout the county and involving a plethora of industries. New London County industrialized along a narrower path. Though traditional craft manufacturing persisted, the county gradually came to depend on whaling and textiles.¹⁰

Industrialization came later to Dauphin County. Until the late 1840s the county's economy relied on craft manufacture and commercial farming linked to a regional trade of agricultural and light manufactured goods. Lumber, wheat, and flour from saw and grist mills floated down the Susquehanna River to Harrisburg, Dauphin County's dominant market town, for transshipment to Philadelphia or Baltimore. Harrisburg, the county seat and state capital, developed quickly into a lively administrative center with more than its share of political jobbers who swarmed there to seek favorable legislation on pet projects. State legislators, anxious to improve communications with the state capital, usually favored transportation projects that ran through Harrisburg. By the 1840s the city occupied an enviable site on the state's thickening railroad, turnpike, and publicly-funded canal network.¹¹

Located on the mouth of Long Island Sound in the southeastern corner of Connecticut, New London County's geography determined its early economic development. Because of its superior size and location, New London Harbor emerged in the second half of the eighteenth-century as one of New England's principal links in the West Indies trade. From New London goods destined for the interior moved up the Thames River or overland to Norwich, the interior's primary market town located near its geographic center north of New London. Endowed with many of the state's best harbors, the county's coastal belt naturally turned to whaling and fishing and related enterprises.

A wealthy merchant class poured capital into whaling after the War of 1812, and by 1850, New London was the third largest whaling port in the nation. By the mid-

1840s, when the industry reached its zenith, whaling far outstripped other industries in the county in reported capital investment and hands employed, and ranked second to textiles in value of goods produced. During its heyday the Whale City was a single industry town. In 1845 fully eighty percent of its non-agricultural workforce labored in whaling or fishing.¹²

The enormous growth of the whaling industry after 1820 fueled a population explosion in New London. After two decades of stagnation, New London grew rapidly over the course of the next three decades, peaking at a rate of sixty-three percent in the 1840s. The success of local whalers also stimulated growth in subsidiary industries. Small-scale boat and ship-building, cordage and coopering, sail-making, and soap and candle manufacture employed a growing number of skilled artisans. Self-conscious of their skill and independence, these petty producers, along with scores of neighborhood businesses, occupied the expanding middle stratum of New London's social order in the 1830s and 1840s. Growing numbers of young women and men employed as outworkers in either the manufacture of ready-made sailors clothes or boots and shoes constituted a different sort of workforce. Outworkers made up the city's third largest sector in 1845, and their prevalence testifies to the transitional character of the local economy. Though these workers fell into the orbit of the merchant-manufacturers who set piece rates and quality-control standards (such as there were), outwork freed men from the drudgery of the factory, dock, or whaling vessel and women from total financial reliance on men. Working at home, outworkers employed traditional

handicraft skills in production within a satellite outwork system spread throughout the city and surrounding towns.¹³

In fact, transitional aptly describes the economy of the entire coast. Stonington swelled by forty percent in the 1840s, a threefold increase over the three previous decades, thanks in part to dramatic expansion of the town's whaling industry. Stonington also boasted a handful of small shops specializing in the manufacture of oil and fish casks, cordage, and in small to mid-sized fishing and whaling vessels. In addition small woolen mills, machine shops, carriage-making shops, leather works, and boot and shoe manufactures supplemented the maritime trades. In the smaller coastal towns residents combined fishing with small-scale farming and manufacture in the hoary New England tradition of by-employments.¹⁴

The economy of the county's interior hinged on the development of the Thames River basin, a system of streams and small rivers spread out over eastern Connecticut that converge at Norwich and feed the Thames River. By the late eighteenth-century villages surrounding Norwich--Lisbon, Griswold, Franklin, Bozrah, and Lebanon--flourished as landowners erected grist and sawmills on these streams. In the 1820s and 1830s local capitalists from Norwich and New London, along with a few from more distant centers like Providence and Boston, saw still greater potential in this drainage system. Small, family-based spinning houses modeled after Rhode Island's Slater mills evolved in the 1820s and 1830s into fully integrated cotton and woolen factories. Though more modest ventures than the huge mill-complexes at Lowell or Lawrence--

few exceeded 100 hands--these small factories signaled that large-scale industrialization was on the horizon.¹⁵

Magnets of settlement, the textile mills of the Thames River basin exerted powerful influence over social experience in the countryside. Mill owners and managers assumed prominent roles in building the institutions of village life and promoting the moral rectitude of community members. Successive waves of popular religious revivals, some of “uncommon power,” swept over New London County between the 1790s and 1840s, raising Baptist and Methodist churches to majority status by 1850 (see Table B.1 in Appendix B). Mill owners like Cyrus Williams of the Williams Manufacturing Company, a cotton firm located in North Stonington, encouraged the new religiosity by financing the construction of churches and avidly promoting temperance and Sabbatarianism.¹⁶ The blend of factory production, religious revivalism, and elite piety and paternalism helped popularize the idea that Christian values could flourish amid industrial order. Mill paternalism normally reflected a genuine concern for the well-being of the community even as it enhanced the power of mill owners and managers. The social and cultural interventions of capitalist Smith Wilkinson at Pomfret Mills, a manufacturing village in southern Windham County, reveal the combination of pious benevolence and avuncular authoritarianism that prevailed in eastern Connecticut’s rural milltowns. No country grandee, Wilkinson lived by design in a modest home close to the mills in hopes of establishing a “family connection” between himself and his workers. Committed to uplifting the region’s struggling yeomanry, Wilkinson reasoned that requiring hands to

toil twelve hours a day, six days a week in textile mills would keep villagers from the “vicious amusements.” Wilkinson doggedly enforced a puritanical regime both in and outside the mills. Ball playing or gaming of any kind was prohibited and Sabbath observance mandated. Wilkinson countenanced no public drinking and even purchased extra land to prevent outsiders from setting up grog shops on the village outskirts. Sharing in the enthusiastic Protestantism of his workers, Wilkinson displayed his Christian benevolence by donating land for a Baptist church.¹⁷

Wilkinson’s Christian paternalism was in fact the reigning ethos in the eastern Connecticut countryside before midcentury. In stark contrast to the moral laxity and class conflict that punctuated industrialization in England, the example of the Pomfret Mills suggested that industrialization could accommodate the values of moral order and class harmony. Modest in size, locally managed, and paternalistic in practice, the typical New London County textile mill integrated easily into the social and cultural fabric of rural life and moved the bucolic countryside imperceptibly to the edge of the modern industrial order.

The preponderance of small mills in New London County reflected both a broad cultural preference and basic economic realities. Much of the capital controlled by the region’s rural elite was tied to farmland whose value had rapidly diminished in the 1820s and 1830s, when New England agriculture began to suffer from the competition of western producers. Economic downturns hit the textile industry and the county’s rural belt especially hard, hastening emigration outward. Rural exodus was in fact a leitmotif of the Connecticut countryside. Most small farmers scratched only a modest

living from Connecticut's gravelly soil. Excepting the rich flood plains along the Connecticut River Valley, high quality farmland in Connecticut was dear, and nearly all of it long since alienated. Productive farmland in Connecticut sold at a premium; higher in this state at the beginning of the nineteenth century than in any other. Faced with poor soil conditions and steep prices for quality land, many simply left for the west, or the region's growing industrial centers.¹⁸

The small land holdings of New London County farmers supported only the most modest efforts at commercial agriculture. As late as 1860, two-thirds of New London County's farms were smaller than one hundred acres. The region's farmers relied on New England staples such as corn, rye, oats, and potatoes, crops sturdy enough to yield small surpluses. The only steady source of cash was the sale of wool to local mills, and by the 1840s, the sale of butter and cheese.¹⁹ The relationship between farm families and rural mills was complex. Farm families, seeking an additional source of work for women and children, and a dependable market for wool, slowly turned to the textile industry. The mills, of course, set prices for raw wool, rates for weaving contracts, and wages for the hundreds of young men, women, and children who episodically labored there for cash. Yet farm families probably entered such arrangements with the intention of securing the continued independence of the farm.²⁰ By periodically selling a portion of its labor power to a local mill, the family farm generated quick cash as a hedge against a poor crop. Ironically, the pre-1850 expansion of the rural textile industry boosted farmers' otherwise grim fortunes in New London County. On the other hand the close ties of county wool raisers to area mills also made

farm families susceptible to downturns in the woolen industry, as in the late 1840s, when reduced duties adopted under the 1846 Walker Tariff threw domestic wool manufacturing into crisis. New London County wool production plunged 51 percent between 1845 and 1860. By the 1850s New London County farms ranked among the poorest in the state ²¹

Situated on the Bay State's northeast coast, Essex County, Massachusetts, grew to be a giant in the colonial and revolutionary era shipping and carrying trade. Salem and Newburyport in particular were key sites. Capital accumulation in these two cities soared after the Revolution, producing the region's first resident merchant class and a highly stratified social order. At the top stood the merchant families--the Derby, Parsons, Currier, Phillips, and Crowninshield clans were among the most powerful--who amassed vast fortunes in the West Indies trade. At the bottom, untold hundreds of anonymous working-class families found unskilled and semi-skilled employment on the city's wharves or at sea. International commerce acted as a stimulus to a variety of maritime trades in and around Salem and Newburyport, including fishing, ship and boat-building, sail-making, and rope and cordage manufacture. Such related industries rose in importance after the War of 1812. By the 1820s an economic transition, still incomplete by the Civil War, pulled both cities away from sea-based commerce to industry and interior trade. Gradually and inexorably, the industrial middling classes of Salem, Newburyport, and other coastal towns pressed their political and economic interests above those of the old merchant elite.²²

Outside of these two dominant ports, independent petty production patterned economic life. True, the craft of shoemaking, traditionally carried on in “ten-footers,” gradually gave way to a ramifying network of rural outwork production built on semi-skilled and underpaid adolescent and female labor. It is equally true that in these decades textile factories sprang up along the Merrimac River and brought the people of northern Essex County to the doorstep of industrial revolution. But amid these revolutionary new techniques for mobilizing labor power it is important to see the continued vitality of older forms.²³ Before 1840 the remarkable feature of the county’s economy is the numerical preponderance of independent craftsmen, “cottage fishermen,” small farmers, and petty merchants, all of whom traded mainly in local and regional markets.

Several factors militated against commercial agriculture in Essex County. The first was average to poor soil conditions. Too, land scarcity magnified the problem. Indeed, Essex County farms were among the smallest in the state. Though average farm size did increase slightly between 1820 and 1860, over four-fifths of all farms remained smaller than 100 acres; nearly six of ten were under 50 acres. As transportation with the West gradually improved, competition from western producers struck the final blow to commercial farming in Essex. What commercial agriculture remained was conducted on a very limited scale. Fresh fruit, upland hay, and dairying were ready sources of cash in local markets. Nevertheless, antebellum agriculture in Essex County, concludes a recent study, was “largely geared to self-sufficiency.”²⁴

Rising birth rates and lower infant mortality rates meant more mouths to feed, and in turn required more efficient allocation of family labor power. During the first four decades of the nineteenth century area farm families apportioned a growing share of their labor power to wage work in local textile mills and in the regional outwork networks for the manufacture of shoes and straw or palm-leaf hats. That the early industrial revolution in Essex County built upon preexisting relationships of power and dependency within the traditional patriarchal family almost goes without saying. Periodic stints of wage labor gradually disciplined the wives, sons, and especially daughters of yeoman farmers to industrial production. Yet it is also clear that before 1840 or so farm families hired out sons and daughters largely to meet subsistence needs. Modest state and local taxes had to be paid, but after that the cash from such arrangements normally went back into the farm enterprise for farm implements and seed, for last season's debt at the local store, or perhaps for a few "luxury" consumer goods. Hard work and improvement were the means; economic security and family independence the goal. As a result shoe manufacturers had difficulty recruiting dependable sources of labor. High rates of failure plagued these early enterprises, owing in part to the unpredictability inherent in the outwork system for mobilizing labor power.²⁵

As the antebellum era wore on, male heads of households also turned to other sources of income, pursuing a craft during winter lulls or engaging in day labor felling timber and hauling firewood. The practice of by-employments had deep roots in colonial New England and held on for so long because of its versatility as a strategy for

maintaining propertied independence in the new market economy of Jacksonian America. In small interior towns such as Middleton, Lynnfield, and Georgetown by-employments figured crucially in the continued economic viability of the small farm enterprise. By-employments persisted in non-agricultural towns as well. “Cottage fishermen” combined diversified fishing with farming and household manufacture in the coastal communities of Ipswich, Manchester, Essex and Salisbury. Cod fishing in these towns gradually declined as residents first diversified their takes at sea, then turned to the landward crafts. By the 1830s the economic base of Marblehead, a fishing town adjacent to Salem and Lynn, broadened considerably as shoe bosses from those centers offered easy work (that is, compared to fishing) at decent wages binding and stitching shoes. Though it is likely that some of those engaged at shoemaking had already ceased fishing or farming altogether, it is equally likely that many Marblehead families, along lines permitted by the sexual division of labor, followed both shoemaking and the fishery. The only coastal town where by-employments were not prevalent was Gloucester, which deepened its dependence on the fishery, pushing competitors in Essex County to the brink of extinction.²⁶

The preponderance of by-employments among farmers and fishermen reflected and reinforced the rich diversity of craft industry in Essex County in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The county’s transition to an industrial economy unfolded over several generations, as area families slowly turned to industry to make up for declining opportunities on the land or at sea. By the 1830s Essex County was among the Bay State’s leading producers of boats, sails, leather, hats, boots and shoes, and

woolen cloth. Shoes and woolens bulked large in the long distance market that developed after the War of 1812, accounting for an ever larger fraction of the county's industrial output. In the shoe industry merchant-manufacturers in Lynn, Haverhill, Danvers, and Beverly, commanding small armies of rural outworkers, slowly gained control of the market for cheap brogans and bootines. In the textile industry capitalists from Boston teamed up with local managers to erect woolen and cotton mills along the Merrimac and its tributaries. Andover, Amesbury, and Salisbury emerged as woolen centers in the 1820s, while cotton factories also sprang up at Methuen and Newburyport.²⁷

These were medium-sized firms that, like the mills of New London County, blended into the surrounding communities more easily than the mammoth complexes at Lowell or Waltham. The woolen mills at Amesbury and Salisbury, towns of about 2,500 at 1840, were typical. Employing on average 250 and 360 hands, respectively, the Amesbury Flannel Manufacturing Company and Salisbury Manufacturing Company lay between the Waltham and Slater models. The companies' original agents, James Horton (SMC) and Joshua Aubin (AFMC), were long-time residents of Amesbury and had contributed to the founding capital when their firms were incorporated in the early 1820s. The mills attracted some migrants from New Hampshire and Maine, but for the most part both companies relied on local men, women, and children who lived in their own homes or unsupervised tenements near the mills. The agents also practiced a sort of informal paternalism that eased the transition to early industrial capitalism in these towns. Symbolic gestures such as distributing turkeys to operatives and the town poor

were annual Thanksgiving rituals for the two agents. More substantive was the long-standing prohibition against hiring youths under fourteen years of age, a policy not required by state law. At other times townsfolk did not wait for company benevolence. In 1849 concerned residents solicited Aubin's help in improving the education of younger millhands. The obliging agent convinced the AFMC's Boston-based directorship to establish a library on company property, cut back winter hours, and open a night school for teenage women operatives.²⁸

Partly because of such paternalism, early industrial development in Essex County took shape in ways that small producers could accommodate. Local textile mills helped sustain the small producer economy. Mechanic and "country" merchant households, just like yeoman farm families, hired out sons and daughters for stints of wage labor in factories. Thus the gendered division of labor enabled middling families to exploit the early development of industry for their own ends: the continued security and independence of the patriarchal household. Skilled men, with a little surplus capital, could set up a carriage-making shop or dry goods store; their wives and children could then supplement the husband's income with some wage work. Local mills also provided small producers with short-term employment and contracts for repair work, allowing more choices to mechanics and workers seeking a competency.²⁹

It is important to recognize that, despite the coming of factories and spread of putting out networks, small producers were not immediately "done in" by industrial capitalism. Indeed, where petty producers before the Civil War are concerned, a more appropriate metaphor is rise and fall.³⁰ Though industrial and commercial change

fundamentally altered the petty producer's environment, until the 1840s much of the county's male labor force toiled in decentralized small shops tied in to local markets. Combmaking, carriage-making, cabinet making, silversmithing, cigar manufacture, and a plethora of leatherworking industries were among the diverse trades practiced more or less along traditional craft lines, while various sea-based trades also thrived in towns up and down the coast.³¹

While the Jacksonian era saw an explosion of industrial and business diversity in New England, more rural states like Pennsylvania experienced a different economic transformation. Dauphin County, located in southeastern Pennsylvania on the banks of the Susquehanna River, remained essentially agricultural before midcentury. To the south and southeast lay the entrepôts of Baltimore and Philadelphia, to the west the rich agricultural region of the Cumberland valley, the rugged Alleghenies, and beyond them the Ohio River valley, gateway to the west. First attracted to this natural crossroads were Palatinate German farmers pushing northwestward from neighboring Lancaster County in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Then came equal numbers of Scots-Irish beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. English stock people also settled in Dauphin over a much longer period, and remained its third largest ethnic group. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, eastern Pennsylvania's three principal ethnic groups dominated Dauphin's two distinct regions: the Lower End, a rolling plane that encompassed the fertile agricultural lands south of Blue Mountain and the booming market town of Harrisburg on the Susquehanna River; and the Upper End, a rocky region of elongated mountain chains and narrow valleys that scarred the

northern half of the county in a southwest-to-northeast swathe. The sparsely settled Upper End was known for its stands of hardwood, deposits of iron ore, abstemious soil, and poor roads. In the 1820s the region's prospects brightened dramatically when geologists located the southern termini of Pennsylvania's anthracite fields in the hills of the Upper End.³²

The cultural preferences of these pioneer settler groups shaped Dauphin's religious life and political culture. The early preponderance of German and Scottish settlers gave the region a strong Calvinist accent that it would retain throughout much of the nineteenth century. As late as the 1850s German Lutheran and Reformed churches constituted from two-fifths to one-half of all church accommodations in Dauphin County (Table B.2). Though in Europe these two sects had split over doctrinal disputes dating to the sixteenth century, Germans muted their religious differences in the New World. In Dauphin County German Lutheran and Reformed congregations often pooled resources for a single house of worship used by the two denominations on alternate Sundays. In some instances, out of a common distrust of non-Germans, these "church" Germans reunified their congregations and formed united Lutheran Reformed institutions. The preferred religion of the early Scots was old school Presbyterian, another of the Old World Protestant sects committed to traditional Calvinism.³³

From the outset arminian German Moravians and Mennonites challenged Calvinism in Dauphin County. Small and isolated, these pietistic sects anticipated the appeal of anticlericalism among the county's Germans during the explosion of religious

populism in the Jacksonian era. In the first half of the nineteenth century religious revivals swelled the ranks of the Methodists, split the Presbyterian church into old and new schools, and precipitated the formation of whole new sects like the Church of God (Winebrennarians) and Disciples of Christ. By the mid-nineteenth century Dauphin County enjoyed a heterogenous and increasingly plebeian religious culture. Sectarian ferment prior to 1850 concentrated in the more populous and economically dynamic towns of the Lower End. The United Brethren in Christ and the Church of God (founded by John Winebrenner in 1827 at Middletown, a small lumber port on the Susquehanna south of Harrisburg) found ready converts in communities that began to commercialize with the turnpike and canal boom of the 1810s-1830s.³⁴

Just as the transportation revolution of the early nineteenth century helped propel revivalism, so too it structured the county's economy. Fear of falling terminally behind New York and Maryland for the bonanza of western trade prompted state legislators to embark on an ambitious program of internal improvements. Private capital in the Keystone state was scarce and demand for improvements intense after New York announced plans to construct the Erie Canal. Philadelphia's powerful merchant elite, nervously eyeing Baltimore's rapid rise, avidly promoted such a project for Pennsylvania, as did untold thousands of smaller merchants in the countryside. The Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Improvements, a nonpartisan lobby with origins in Philadelphia's counting houses but which soon attracted broad support, orchestrated the statewide campaign for a system of public canals and railroads. The proposal initially received a chilly response from Dauphin County because of its

southward orientation. Residents opposed any public expenditure on communications with the west, rather preferring improvements be made to the Susquehanna River. However, after boosters gave assurances that money for branch lines and other improvements would be included in any public system, locals quickly warmed to the plan. The campaign culminated in the spring of 1825 with a state convention at Harrisburg. A year later the legislature approved appropriations to create the Pennsylvania State Works and the Keystone state “began her canal-building orgy.”³⁵

The chief artery of Pennsylvania’s public works was the Main Line, a chain of canals and railroads connecting Philadelphia to Pittsburgh via Harrisburg. With the completion of a mechanical Portage railroad over the Alleghenies in 1834, through travel between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia over the entire system was at last made possible. Representatives from outlier regions demanded that funds for branch line canals and stock subscriptions to local transportation companies be included in annual appropriations. Omnibus public works bills during the 1830s extended the scope of the state’s transportation network, as well as the commonwealth’s obligations to bond holders and banks. By the early 1840s, when economic depression and charges of corruption ended expansion of the Public Works, nearly 900 miles of canals had been laid. Though a drain on public confidence in politicians no less than the state treasury, Pennsylvania’s Public Works effectively brought rural communities into the orbit of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and the growing commercial towns along the Main Line.³⁶

One such town was Harrisburg, the county seat and state capital since 1810. Harrisburg’s role in the river trade of the Susquehanna basin had long been a prominent

one. Grist and lumber mills and whiskey distilleries jumped into feverish production each spring when freshets made for safe and easy downstream shipping on the otherwise shallow Susquehanna. Huge arks of lumber and rafts laden with wheat, rye, flour, and coal made their way down to Harrisburg. The coming of turnpikes and canals accelerated Harrisburg's development as an interior entrepot, luring the region's farm families into commercial relationships with its merchants. Dealers and forwarding merchants set up shop at Harrisburg to profit off the trade of goods and resources between city and hinterland.³⁷

The emerging system of improvements stimulated rural industries that could process the products of farm and forest. In the countryside, along major waterways and turnpikes, grist and saw mills, distilleries, small collieries and iron furnaces appeared in expanding numbers. Commodity markets in Harrisburg and Middletown raised demand for increased output of the region's farms, particularly in the more fertile and accessible lands south of Blue Mountain. Many farmers obliged, tempted by newfangled manufactured goods that could be had at the shops of Harrisburg merchants in exchange for grain, flour, or homemade whiskey. Using value of farm machinery as a surrogate for commercialized agriculture suggests the extent to which Lower End farmers had embraced the opportunities of the expanding market economy. Farms in the Lower End held an average of \$125 worth of farm machinery at midcentury; Upper End farms less than \$90. As the market's tentacles reached into the hinterland, Lower End towns such as Lower Swatara, Derry, Conewago, and the Hanovers became Dauphin's most commercially oriented agricultural towns. Increasingly area farmers

raised beef cattle and sheep for export of raw wool to mills in Philadelphia and New England.³⁸

And yet, despite these unmistakable signs of commercialized production, most area farmers remained on the cusp of modern capitalist agriculture throughout the antebellum era. Before midcentury countervailing traditions of security-first productive strategies prevailed in the Pennsylvania countryside. Family farms in Dauphin County raised such crops for home use as corn in amounts equal to commercial crops such as wheat and other grains. As in Essex and New London counties by-employments constituted a crucial element in the ensemble of subsistence-surplus strategies that distinguished small from larger farms. One historian noted the overwhelming preponderance of “part-time farmers” in antebellum Pennsylvania, men who gave hyphenated occupations like tinsmith/farmer when canvassed by town census takers. The testimony of a Dauphin County dairy farmer before the state Board of Agriculture recollects the traditional character of local dairying and farm life about 1840:

Butter making did not constitute a business in itself because it formed one of the many smaller...industries to be found on every farm at the time. In every village or small town...the possession of a cow by each well-to-do family was quite common. In such places there was no place for the milk dealer. Each family who did not have its own milk supply, sent to a neighbor.... Every farmer kept a few cows, but no farmer kept a large herd. Butter was made, sufficient for the family use and, for at least part of the year, the housewife would have a few pounds each week to exchange at the neighboring store for coffee, sugar, or such other groceries or dry goods as were needed....³⁹

The farmer remembered a locally oriented economy built on small family farms and suffused with the customary values of reciprocal exchange. It was a rural economy in transition, a degree removed from the modern commercial order.

Meanwhile Dauphin's primary commercial center and county seat expanded enormously. Harrisburg seized full advantage of the changes underway in the Jacksonian economy because of its natural dominance in the river trade and its unique status as state capital. The economic infrastructure that a first-class interior entrepot and administrative hub required dovetailed nicely and gave Harrisburg interests in the state legislature leverage when jockeying for local improvements.

Harrisburg's early transportation revolution, engineered by a relative few, opened opportunities for a diversity of enterprises. Unlike other mid-sized cities in Pennsylvania that industrialized sooner, Harrisburg's economy remained commercial until the 1850s. Artisanal production thrived, sustained by the steadily rising demand in the region for finished consumer goods. Harrisburg's artisans produced consumer and light industrial goods primarily for local markets; relatively few seem to have developed extensive links to markets significantly beyond Dauphin, Lebanon, and Cumberland counties. As late as 1850, the earliest date for which reliable data are available, there existed in Harrisburg only a single enterprise that employed twenty-five or more hands and utilized steam or water power in the production process. The preponderance of these workers were native-born males; Harrisburg's antebellum workforce was structured rigidly by gender, race, and ethnicity. Few women, native or otherwise, found employment in industry prior to 1850. The same can be said for Irish immigrants who entered the city's workforce in the 1840s (that group constituted 5.4% of the city's total population at 1850). Opportunities for skilled, high wage work were dearer still for the city's African-American population, a surprisingly high 11.3% at

midcentury. Indeed four of five black males in 1850 toiled in the service sector or as common unskilled labor. The city's status-conscious white upper crust especially prized black male and female domestics, cooks, and gardeners. On the other hand German immigrants--4.5% of the city's population in 1850--fared much better. Many newly arrived Germans immediately stepped up to employment in skilled trades such as baking, brewing, cigarmaking, and cabinetmaking.⁴⁰

The Market Revolution Matures, 1843-1861: Railroads and Industrialism

Beginning with the economic recovery of 1843 the northern United States entered a second, industrial phase of the market revolution. Westward expansion and lower tariffs with Europe stimulated demand for manufactured goods, while the discovery of gold in California eased the availability of investment capital. Railroads both manifested and extended the new industrial order; their economic effects dwarfed those of turnpikes and canals. In the two decades before the Civil War railroad construction stimulated subsidiary and complementary industries including coal mining, iron foundries, and the manufacture of locomotives and rolling stock.⁴¹ In these years a high tide of economic expansion swept over Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, in large measure due to railroads. The number of corporate charters granted to banking, insurance, transportation, and manufacturing companies soared. Between 1800 and 1840 Connecticut granted charters or capital increases to 40 banks. In the ensuing twenty years that number climbed to 124; 94 alone in the 1850s. Next to

banks, railroads received the most attention. In the two decades before the Civil War railroad mileage in Massachusetts jumped from 270 to 1,264, in Connecticut from 94 to 601. By the end of the 1850s, Pennsylvania had nearly 2,600 miles of track, over 2 ½ times its mileage in canals.⁴²

Meanwhile government remained a key actor, though its role changed. In all three states the volume of special charters for business enterprises skyrocketed, while at the same time state assemblies passed general incorporation laws standardizing incorporation procedure. In a very broad sense, as many previous scholars have argued, these developments betrayed a reaction against the mercantilist ideas that had once guided economic policy. By the 1840s if not earlier the legislatures of the three states allowed private sector imperatives to determine the broad course of economic development. Government's hand, once an ubiquitous presence in economic life, retracted from direct involvement in the economy.⁴³

The revulsion against state involvement was strongest in western states like Pennsylvania. The state had paid for additions to the Public Works principally through direct borrowing and bond issues. As a method for funding internal improvements this was relatively painless, for it minimized taxes, popular among no one. But it did create an enormous debt, over \$36 million by 1840. With the onset of hard times traffic on the Works suddenly lightened and annual income from tolls soon failed to cover interest payments. In 1843, on the verge of default, the Commonwealth sold much its stock in private transportation and banking companies. The following year a non-binding plebiscite for sale of the Main Line won a popular majority. The Public Works

would not be sold for more than a decade as legislators skirmished over such particulars as the proper selling price, the appropriate buyer, and what if any privileges should be included in the deal. But on the general concept of “public enterprise” it was clear a majority of the public had done an about face.⁴⁴

As we shall see in later chapters, the Public Works would remain at the center of Pennsylvania politics in the 1850s, shaping debate over politics and governance. And so, too, would the people of Massachusetts and Connecticut continue to debate the relationship between politics, governance, and society. Thus while government’s *direct* involvement in the economy diminished, it was not at all clear what government’s role would be in other areas of public policy, including, ironically, general statute law regulating business corporations. Such was the ambiguous legacy of the reaction against early public enterprise and the decisive shift towards private economic development--uncertainty as to the future role government *could* assume in a rapidly industrializing society.

In many ways Dauphin County epitomized the economic and commercial changes wrought by railroads. The Pennsylvania Railroad, chartered in 1846 as the state’s primary east-west trunk line, reached the county at Harrisburg in 1849. A series of lesser trunk lines criss-crossed at the state capitol by the late 1850s, while smaller feeder lines opened the anthracite fields of the Upper End.⁴⁵ Agriculture, still the county’s largest employer in 1860, felt the impact most acutely. The elaboration of the rail network introduced Pennsylvania farmers to competition from western growers.

Export prices for wheat and other cereals plummeted, putting an additional squeeze on wheat values, at one time the most dependable of Pennsylvania's cash crops. The upshot was that railroads brought speedier shipping between industrializing centers and their hinterlands. In Dauphin County, as throughout rural Pennsylvania, market pressures and improvements in transportation precipitated a shift towards commercialized dairying. Improvements in transportation sharply increased average value of farm land and stimulated output of milk and butter. On the other hand wheat production per farm leveled off in the 1850s, while beef cattle grazing and sheep raising declined. These trends appear to have occurred evenly across the county. Dauphin farmers also utilized agricultural equipment on a wider and more systematic scale during the 1850s. The development of eastern Pennsylvania's iron industry in the 1840s and 1850s suddenly made a variety of drills, rakes, reapers, and plows affordable. With their land values rising farmers could now risk short-term loans for such improvements, and many did so.⁴⁶

Railroads also stimulated industry. Small shops remained the dominant form of industrial enterprise before the Civil War, but large-scale coal mining and iron making emerged as leading industries, accounting for nearly 40% of the county's industrial workforce by 1860.⁴⁷ Harrisburg led the county's industrial and demographic expansion. Its population grew by 71% in the 1850s, rising to over 13,400. Over half the county's industrial workforce toiled there, as the early 1850s saw a fully integrated cotton mill, a factory for the manufacture of railroad cars, and two large-scale anthracite furnaces set up business. Iron making proved to be the Lower End's long-

term source of industrial expansion. Prior to midcentury, the region's iron industry consisted of small furnaces and rolling mills that by necessity located along streams near forests that supplied the charcoal for fuel. The refinement of the hot-blast for firing anthracite and forging pig, and the application of steam-engines to power rolling mills and other machinery used in casting, enabled capitalists to establish vastly expanded works in urban centers like Harrisburg with abundant labor and good communications.⁴⁸

The beginnings of industrialization in Harrisburg coincided with the development of deep-shaft anthracite mining in the Upper End. Modern shallow surface mining began as early as 1825, when the anthracite deposits were first uncovered. Mining companies soon organized to exploit the deposits on a larger scale. The first coal companies were speculative ventures, launched in the early 1830s by such wealthy Philadelphians as Simon Gratz and J. Edgar Thompson, later president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The pioneer firm was Gratz's mammoth Wiconisco Coal Company, founded in 1831. Like other early efforts in eastern Pennsylvania, Wiconisco Coal spent the first years developing its lands for leasing. The company conducted extensive surveys, laid out the villages of Lykenstown and Wiconisco, and built houses for lease to miners, the first group of whom were Englishmen and their families imported from adjacent Schuylkill County. Anthracite coal became an important commodity in the canal trade, and a principle source of home heating fuel in Dauphin.⁴⁹

The investors had grander visions, however. The company reorganized itself in 1836 as the Lykens Valley Coal Company. Lykens Coal eyed the Baltimore and Washington markets, but high operating costs plagued the company. Throughout the antebellum era anthracite mining barely turned a profit and then only when coal sold at a premium. Rates of failure among smaller mining companies and coal merchants soared in the 1840s when coal prices fluctuated and the iron industry was just beginning to use anthracite. Though another large enterprise, the Short Mountain Coal Company, began in Wiconisco in the 1840s, the great potential for industrial growth buried in the hillsides around Wiconisco and Lykens went unrealized before the late 1840s.⁵⁰

Change accelerated in the Upper End after midcentury. Demand for coal shot upward as cities along the Atlantic seaboard industrialized. High prices induced expansion and consolidation as the industry improved deep-shaft mining and above ground processing technology. Deep-shaft mining commenced in 1849 and coal output rose steadily thereafter, averaging over 119,000 tons annually in the second half of the 1850s. The town of Wiconisco stood at the forefront of the social changes sweeping the Upper End. During the 1850s the town's population doubled, eclipsing 2,600 by decade's end and making Wiconisco the county's third largest town and biggest in the Upper End. Hundreds of Welsh, English, German, and Irish miners and laborers rushed into Wiconisco and the neighboring town of Lykens for work in the sprawling collieries of the Lykens Valley and Short Mountain Coal Companies. By the 1850s

Wiconisco was a single industry, two company town. By 1860 the two companies employed between 75 and 90 percent of Wiconisco's industrial workforce.⁵¹

To observe that the 1850s brought industrialism and intensified commercial agriculture to Dauphin County is not to argue the county's economy changed profoundly, only that change was patchy. The county as a whole remained basically agricultural. In 1860 the average farm in Dauphin County was fairly modest, about 75 acres, while two-thirds of all farms were smaller than 100 acres in size. And if the capitalist transformation of rural Dauphin County was still incomplete by 1860, so too was its industrial revolution. Manufacturing in Harrisburg, as Gerald Eggert has documented in an exhaustive survey, remained the province of traditional skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen well after the Civil War. And this pattern persisted across the county. The dynamic villages of Hanover, Lykens, and Middletown, for example, housed such traditional handicrafts as tanning, cabinet making, carriage making, and blacksmithing.⁵² Industrial factories and large-scale anthracite mining came to Dauphin in the 1850s, but it would take another generation or more for the tradition of rural industry to loose its grip on Dauphin County.

Essex County's railroad boom erupted earlier than in Dauphin or New London. Over four-fifths of the county's pre-Civil War track mileage dates to the 1840s. The two pioneer roads, the Eastern and Boston and Maine, remained the county's most important throughout the antebellum era. Begun in the early 1840s, these north-south railroads served as the county's two trunk lines. Originating in Boston, the Eastern railroad connected the coastal communities, then ran northward into southern Maine.

The Boston and Maine cut through the interior of Middlesex County before reaching Essex County's newest textile city, Lawrence, in the county's northeast corner. It then extended northward into New Hampshire and Maine. Over the course of the 1840s and 1850s eight major cross lines and several lesser spurs were built between these roughly parallel roads, bringing every community in Essex County within the orbit of the maturing network. With the coming of railroads to Essex County, rhapsodized a resident booster, "the country has been carried to the city, and the city with its advantages, for all practical purposes, has been carried into the rural districts."⁵³

Essex County's railroads generated demographic and economic changes that far outstripped those of the still mainly rural Dauphin County. Because of westward migration Essex County experienced only modest population growth between 1810 and 1840--a decennial average slightly below 10%. During the 1840s the county population exploded by nearly 40 percent and rose another 25 percent in the 1850s. Rapid industrial expansion accompanied this growth. Beginning about 1840 and intensifying after 1850, centralization and capitalization characterized industrial development in Essex as the spread of railroads permitted inexpensive long-distance shipping of consumer goods, and banks increased the availability of venture capital. In the 1850s alone, reported capital investment in industry increased by 62 percent, while numbers employed in manufacturing and industry rose by 32 percent. Indeed, on the eve of the Civil War, nearly 50,000 county residents labored in industry, and an increasing fraction of these in large steam- or water-powered factories or manufactories.⁵⁴

The founding of the textile center of Lawrence marked the arrival of truly mammoth corporations in Essex. Like the textile cities of Lowell and Waltham, Lawrence owed its existence to Boston-based investment capital. Abbott Lawrence immodestly gave his name to the new site, carved out of Andover and Methuen in 1845, after he and other investors financed construction of a huge dam on the Merrimac River. Unlike Lowell, which specialized in cottons, Lawrence began as a woolen and worsted center. The first firm, the Bay State Mills, commenced operations in the late 1840s and employed at its peak over 1,700 hands. Other mills soon followed, again financed with Boston capital. By 1855 five woolen mills gave employment to 2,300 operatives, about 1,000 of them women. Capitalists soon diversified operations at Lawrence to include cotton manufacturing, which promised larger profits than wool. By 1855 six cotton factories employed more hands than did the local woolen mills. Rapid expansion characterized other industries, too. Large factories utilizing both water and steam power produced steam engines and boilers, railroad rolling stock and other vehicles, paper, and cotton and woolen machinery.⁵⁵

The influx of capital and industry into Lawrence transformed the city's social character and demographic make-up. Lawrence grew at a dizzying pace: in the six years preceding 1850 its population climbed from virtually nothing to 8,300. By 1860, after the population more than doubled--a rate of growth that far out paced all other Essex county towns--Lawrence was Essex county's third largest city, behind only Salem and Lynn. Much of this growth owed to a tidal wave of Irish Catholic and Scottish immigrants attracted to work in the new mills. Indeed, the percentage of

foreign-born in Lawrence, over 41% in 1860, exceeded the countywide figure by over twofold. Overnight Lawrence developed perhaps Essex County's largest resident, self-reproducing working class, drawn to the city because of the textile industry's dynamic expansion and reputation for fair wages. The lucky ones found steady work and decent housing; the remainder, plagued by underemployment and squalid living conditions, fell into Lawrence's burgeoning underclass. Other communities witnessed similar, though less thoroughgoing transformations. Newburyport, like other Essex County communities that industrialized along factory lines, grew rapidly. Immigrants and native-born alike flocked there as cotton and woolen factories expanded.⁵⁶

Similarly high rates of growth in the 1850s prevailed in the county's principal shoe and leather towns, where the widespread deployment of machines in shoe binding and stitching concentrated production in large central shops. With the expansion and consolidation of the shoe industry the population of the county's principal shoe towns, especially Lynn, Danvers, and Haverhill, soared. The central shops competed with the old putting-out network for labor power. Shoe bosses frequently played one group of shoeworkers against the other, thereby keeping wages low, especially in the central shops, where workers might more easily organize and register their opposition to exploitative conditions. More and more shoe bosses expanded into large shops outfitted with the new technology, and hired adolescents and women in place of skilled journeymen; both developments severely reduced the ranks of rural outworkers. Before the Civil War, it should be stressed, these changes manifested in the large shoe towns, for a majority of shoeworkers continued to labor in outwork networks. Nevertheless,

the transformation of production in Lynn, Haverhill, Danvers, and Marblehead left little doubt about what the steam powered central shop augured for shoe manufacturing. During the 1850s these large enterprises “began to function like factories,” as Mary Blewett points out, dividing the labor process into discrete and redundant tasks and enabling close and constant supervision of shoeworkers.⁵⁷

Other industries mirrored these transformations. During the 1850s factories emerged for the manufacture of paper, combs, and hats, displacing traditional handicraft production. Other trades, though resistant to the technological innovations and productive efficiencies that define modern factory organization, nevertheless underwent consolidation and expansion. The local dynamics of this process can be seen in Amesbury, a town that, in addition to woolens, specialized in carriages. Between 1845 and 1855, the number of carriage-making establishments fell to twenty-one from fifty-six, while the average number of employees per shop leapt upward to fourteen hands from two. By 1855 reported capital investment in this sector rose to \$258,000, a tenfold increase in just a single decade. Much of this resulted from greater access to capital and more distant markets enjoyed by local craftsmen after a spur was finally laid between Amesbury and Newburyport by the Eastern Railroad in 1848. Now, money-minded masters could more profitably undertake the risk of mortgaging their property, expanding production and distribution. By the 1850s carriage makers entered partnerships with other tradesmen whose skills and expertise complemented their own: production of carriages rapidly centralized in fully integrated manufactories. The fortunes of the areas’ wheelwrights illuminates the scope of accelerated

industrialism. Nearly two dozen such workers labored in small independently owned shops throughout the 1840s. In 1848, however, capitalists incorporated the West Amesbury Manufacturing Company, and for the first time in this town water-power was harnessed in the production of wheels. Five years later the town was bereft of independent wheelwrights. As one resident later recalled, previous to the founding of this factory the high precision trade “gave employment to many wheelwrights,” but soon “nicely adjusted machinery performed nearly all the work.”⁵⁸

The gradual expansion of small shops into large manufactories signified a broader reorganization of economy and society in Essex County. In the two decades before the Civil War the coming of railroads, the influx of cheap immigrant and rural migrant labor, and above all the increased availability of capital worked an industrial revolution in Essex County. The range of business opportunities available to the county’s resident producers, their very success or failure in the new economy, depended more and more upon the effective use of capital to mobilize wage labor and produce goods that could be sold in long-distance markets. The region’s diversified, small shop economy that had prevailed until the mid-1840s fell into eclipse.⁵⁹

Between 1845 and 1860, while stagnation characterized New London agriculture, economic and demographic changes in the county’s industrializing cities and towns dramatically altered the region’s social order. Predictably, New London’s growth communities concentrated along the region’s first railroads. The 1837 spur connecting Stonington to the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad foreshadowed a railroad boom in the 1840s and 1850s. The Norwich and Worcester,

completed in 1840 (with bond help from the state of Massachusetts and the city of Norwich) was another early sign. The New London, Willimantic and Palmer, opened for travel in 1849, really launched the building craze. By the eve of the Civil War several railroads connected New London's busy ports and factory towns to New Haven, New York City, and Boston.⁶⁰

The coming of railroads accelerated the decline of New London County agriculture, quickened the pace of its industrialization, and increased the economic and social distance between the county's rural and industrializing communities. Capital and numbers employed in such sea-based industries as whaling and fishing and boat and ship building dropped precipitously after 1845, underscoring the considerable economic troubles of the coast. The coast's general dependence on whaling and subsidiary enterprises augured poorly for the region when innovations in ship design and rising costs suddenly gave fleets in Massachusetts the competitive edge (though there the industry had long since seen its best days). By 1860 knowledgeable observers claimed that only one in twenty expeditions yielded a profit. With the demise of whaling, the area's merchant elite diverted capital to railroads, financing the boom of the 1850s but also limiting the amount of local capital available for other industries; industrialization in these years eluded the coastal belt. What few advances took place did so largely along traditional lines in the form of modest expansion in certain trades like blacksmithing, leathers, and carriage-making. But overall the coastal belt limped through the 1850s, suffering from chronic unemployment and the lowest per capita property values in the region.⁶¹

The abrupt fall of whaling coincided with the rise of capital intensive industries in the interior. Indian-rubber and iron manufacturing emerged to complement the established textile and paper-making industries. The fortunes of the county's leading industry, textiles, illustrate the broad trends. Whereas prior to 1850 the large textile factory was an anomaly, scarcely a decade later large factories had overtaken the industry in Norwich and indeed much of the surrounding region. In 1845 the average cotton manufacturing firm controlled just under \$30,000 in capital; by 1860 mean capital per firm rose to over \$191,000. Norwich, the epicenter of these developments, sent shockwaves through adjacent communities. Bozrah, Griswold, and Lisbon, once emblematic of the bucolic Yankee milltown, saw their small woolen and cotton mills superseded by full-sized cotton manufacturing corporations. For the first time industrialization produced a large and more permanent factory class, as the surging industry attracted native-born families from the countryside and Irish-Catholic immigrants from abroad for steady but monotonous work. The transformation of work and economy in the 1850s occurred in other industries. Outwork of boots and shoes and ready-made clothes declined, further marking the turn toward factory production. New technologies in book binding and printing reduced the need for high skilled and high priced labor in those industries.⁶²

In this context small shop production, rather weak in northern New London County to begin with, declined still further. The rise and fall of petty production in the town of Griswold, in the county's northeast corner, fits this pattern. Rocky soil made agriculture an uninviting prospect in Griswold, so most people looked to industry for a

livelihood and especially to textile mills clustered at Jewett City, a village of Griswold at the natural falls of the Quinnebaug. So promising was this mill site that Samuel Slater and his brother John, in addition to their substantial interests across southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island, poured money into mills at Jewett City in the early 1810s. By the early 1830s five small to mid-sized cotton factories and a woolen mill turned out cotton sheeting and satinets for commission merchants in Norwich, Hartford, and New York. The mills supported scores of families, which in turn attracted a bevy of small cottage industries devoted to hats, shoes, carriages, cabinets, and various leather trades. But mill shutdowns and rural exodus during the depression years choked off the local market for light consumer goods. Prosperity returned by the mid-1840s, but with it came a weaker market for rural manufacture. Railroads and other transportation improvements brought affordable goods of decent quality to Griswold, soaking up an ever increasing share of the millhand's income. By the 1850s nearly Griswold's entire industrial labor force worked in cotton manufacturing. Though the town's fate exaggerated the completeness of the transformation, in New London County the status of the traditional small manufacturer had slipped badly in the 1850s.⁶³

Conclusion

The social and economic history of the three counties form an important backdrop to their politics in the decade before the Civil War. By the mid-1850s

industrialization and commercial expansion buffeted communities throughout the North, producing unease among residents who worried over their own economic wellbeing and that of their community. One Amesbury, Massachusetts, writer undoubtedly expressed the anxiety of many when he assailed “manufacturing corporations” for “killing off...ship-building, machine-works, shoe business, and in fact many other branches” of small, independent industry which for generations had thrived alongside textile mills.⁶⁴ The writer’s point, though drawn in terms unusually stark for the antebellum era, was unmistakable: the early republic’s industrial and commercial revolutions had progressed to a point where the transitional world of the petty producer, including the community values associated with that social formation, was in eclipse. The small-farm, small-shop economy of the first half of the nineteenth century gave way before a new industrial economy, one more stratified socially and more dependent on the successful marshaling of wage labor than ever before. Though small farming and traditional trades did not die out by any means, the spread of large economic institutions and recondite market relationships irretrievably altered the social and cultural landscape. A sense of inescapable dependence on outside market forces increasingly characterized the social experience of the middling classes by the 1850s. To varying degrees everyone perceived this, and whatever their opinion of change, few could deny its unsettling impact on traditional modes of life and relationships.

Industrial and market revolution also produced more tangible threats. By the 1850s labor strife was on the upswing in all three counties as textile corporations eschewed paternalism for an autocratic managerial style and a demanding regimen. As

we shall see native-born workers in all three counties, made doubly insecure by rising immigration rates, organized in opposition to changing social relations of work, sparking the sort of class and community conflict which most had naively assumed would not erupt in the New World.

Immigrants, implicated to one extent or another in the new economic order and its attendant social tensions, gave residents of all three counties a convenient scapegoat. In New London immigrants accounted for less than 10 percent of the population in 1850; by the end of the decade, they numbered nearly 16 percent. Most new arrivals, three-quarters of whom were Irish-Catholic, settled in the factory communities of Griswold, Lisbon, and Colchester, or in the cities of Norwich, New London, and Stonington, precisely those places most acutely affected by industrial and commercial expansion.⁶⁵ In Essex County Irish-Catholic immigrants caused a labor glut which plagued the county's textile and shoe towns during the 1850s, feeding fears of job insecurity and wage stagnation. That only six of the county's thirty-four towns had a higher percentage of foreign-born in their population than the county as a whole--18% by 1860--mattered little to struggling native-born workers, because the rate of growth of the immigrant population during the 1850s far outstripped that for the native-born population.⁶⁶ In Dauphin the rate of influx was much less significant. Although Irish Catholics constituted over half of all foreign-born residents in 1850, fully 95% of the population was native-born, a ratio that remained virtually unchanged a decade later.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Irish-Catholics in Pennsylvania, as in Massachusetts and Connecticut, appeared to embody the forces of social disintegration that accompanied

economic and social change before the Civil War. In each county ethnoreligious and class antagonisms intertwined to produce a highly volatile politics. Immigration pitted Irish-Catholic workers against native Protestants, enabling factories to slash wages and “drive from our manufacturing villages the best portion of the native population, and to fill their places with a vagrant, dependent and irresponsible class.” By the mid-1850s spread-eagle rhetoric excoriating Europe for “vomiting her filthy Catholic population upon our shores,” inflamed Protestant xenophobia and wove the threads of fear and anxiety into a virulent nativist politics. Immigrants personified crime, drink, and public disorder and hence, a crisis of governance for the regime. “Let the people carefully note,” read a typical editorial in 1854, “the attempts to overthrow our Republican school system,...the insolent demand for the abolition of all Sunday laws, Thanksgiving days, Prayers in Congress and the Legislature, and oaths upon the Bible. We say, let the American people carefully note these movements, and they will have a solution to the question, “what can be the cause of the fearful increase of immorality and crime in the country?”⁶⁸

Despite many differences, then, common themes stand out in the social and economic history of these three counties. Socioeconomic modernization introduced vast segments of the native-born middling classes to two fundamental realities of an industrializing market economy: insecurity and dependency. Antebellum industrialization and commercialization raised difficult questions for northerners, questions that constituted the subtext of politics in the 1850s. Would industrialization, dependent in part on immigrant labor, create a permanent proletariat and choke off

upward mobility into the ranks of independent proprietor? Would it dissolve the glue of common interest and mutuality that appeared to distinguish class relations in Jacksonian America? Would social order and moral piety be realized amidst the new pluralism of an industrializing society? Above all, the accelerated pace of economic and demographic change produced an explosive mixture of expectations and anxieties among citizens and an unstable environment for political elites.

For public life in the North it is crucial that acute industrial and social change coincided with the repoliticization of slavery in the territories. But, just as antislavery reformers questioned the efficacy of national party leadership on the slavery issue, so too temperance activists, nativists, moral and labor reformers, and antimonopoly theorists framed their reform agendas as crucial matters of governance. People expected major party elites to rise to the occasion, as they had done in the 1840s, by responding to new issues and demands. Ultimately their failure to do so opened the door for third party movements that derived their political potency from the belief, pervasive at the grassroots, that governance had broken down, corrupted by self-interested and arrogant party elites. Before we can fully comprehend and appreciate the meaning of those developments we need first to examine how ordinary citizens experience politics and government before midcentury.

Notes

1. New London *Daily Morning Star* 11 January 1850.
2. "Stonington Petition, 1845" [handwritten copy], in the Cyrus Williams Papers, Box 3, Division of Rare Books and Manuscripts, New York Public Library.
3. These broad transformations are now staples of the social and economic history of Jacksonian and Civil War America. The best comprehensive introductions remain Stuart Bruchey, *The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607-1861: An Essay in Social Causation* (New York: Harper Row, 1965); George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951). Two good modern syntheses that start with these changes as context for analyzing politics and culture are Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Vintage Press, 1984).
4. Bruchey, *Roots of American Economic Growth*, 97. State courts were also pivotal in redefining common law as to give preference, under certain circumstances, to the interests of long-term economic development over those of private landowners. See Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); William E. Nelson, *The Americanization of the Common Law: The Impact of Legal Change on Massachusetts, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).
5. Landmark studies of nineteenth-century public economic policy include Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads, 1800-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Public Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969; rev. ed; 1st ed. 1947); Milton S. Heath, *Constructive Liberalism: The Role of the State in Economic Development in Georgia to 1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948); Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).
6. Classic statements in this debate include Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalité* in Pre-Industrial America," *William*

and *Mary Quarterly* 35 (January 1978), 3-32; Michael Merrill, "Cash Is Good To Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 3 (1977), 42-71; Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For the dissenting view, see for example Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Winifred B. Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Recently, more nuance studies have appeared that appreciate the ambiguous, transitional character of *mentalité* and economic production and exchange, particularly in the colonial and early republican America. See especially Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Thomas Dublin, "Rural Putting-Out Work in Early Nineteenth-Century New England: Women and the Transition to Capitalism in the Countryside," *New England Quarterly* 64 (December 1991), 531-73; Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: Norton, 1995); Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Jean H. Quataert, "A New View of Industrialization: "Protoindustry" or the Role of Small Scale, Labor-Intensive Manufacture in the Capitalist Environment," *International Labor and Working Class History* 33 (Spring 1988), 3-22; Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Daniel Vickers, *Farmers & Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

7. Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 222. Also see Howard P. Chudacoff, "Success and Security: The Meaning of Social Mobility in America," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982), 101-12.

8. The two categories of nineteenth-century public economic policy, "commonwealth" and "public enterprise," are adopted from Scheiber, "Government and the Economy: Studies of the "Commonwealth" Policy in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (September 1972), 135-51. Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*, 51-181; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*; Jarvis Means Morse, *A Neglected Period of Connecticut's History, 1818-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 233-83.

9. On the settlement and early history of the three counties see William Henry Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Evarts and Peck, 1883); D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of New London County, Connecticut* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1882), and *History of*

Essex County, Massachusetts (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1887); Luther Reilly Kelker, *History of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania* (New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1907).

10. I take up these themes in greater detail below. But see for example Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 3-141; Grace Pierpont Fuller, "An Introduction to the History of Connecticut as a Manufacturing State," *Smith College Studies in History* (October 1915); David R. Meyer, "The National Prominence of Connecticut's Industrial Centers in the Early Nineteenth Century," *The Connecticut Historical Society Historical Bulletin* 55 (Winter/Spring 1990), 68-80; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 261-324.

11. Again, a fuller treatment of these themes appears below, but by way of illustration see Gerald G. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community* (University Park: the Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), *passim*; Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon*, 118-20, 310-35.

12. Fuller, "Introduction to the History of Connecticut as a Manufacturing State," 40-1; Thelma M. Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut River Valley," *Smith College Studies in History* (October, 1937-July, 1938), 66-8; Robert Decker Owen, "The New London Merchants, 1645-1909: The Rise and Decline of a Connecticut Port," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1970), 169-87; Daniel P. Tyler, *Statistics of the Condition and Products of Certain Branches of Industry in Connecticut for the year ending 1845* (Hartford: John L. Boswell, 1846), 66-8; 85-7.

13. J. D. B. DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 85-7; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 135; Tyler, *Statistics of the...Branches of Industry in Connecticut...1845*, 66-8; Emily A. Williams to Cyrus Williams, 19 January 1849, and *ibid.*, 28 October 1850, Cyrus Williams Papers, Box 1, NYPL. For more on the transitional character of outwork in antebellum America, see Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*, 44-67; Dublin, "Rural Putting-Out Work in Early Nineteenth-Century New England."

14. Data on population and religion derived from DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, 79, 85-6; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 35; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *The Eighth Census of the United States: Population, 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 40, and *Statistics of the United States, in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 360-1. On employment, see Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut River Valley," 66-8; Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...1845*, 66-88.

15. Hurd, *History of New London County*, 278-9, 326, 376; Fuller, "Introduction to the History of Connecticut as a Manufacturing State," 40-1; Morse, *Neglected Period*, 240-1.

16. Rev. Edgar F. Clark, *The Methodist Episcopal Churches of Norwich, Connecticut* (Norwich: N.P. 1867), 146 (quotation), 66, 92. Data on religion derived from Federal Nonpopulation Schedules: New London County, Connecticut, Social Statistics, 1850, Mss., Connecticut State Archives. See also Rev. Jonathan Ayre, Jr., to Cyrus Williams, 11 July 1842, and Samuel S. Mallery to Cyrus Williams, 29 January 1835, Cyrus Williams Papers, Box 1, NYPL; Rev. Frederic Denison, *Notes of the Baptists and Their Principles, in Norwich, Connecticut, from the Settlement of the Town to 1850* (Norwich: Manning, 1857), 78-9; Fuller, "Introduction to Connecticut as a Manufacturing State," 14; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 294, 376, 590.

17. On Wilkinson see Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 230-1.

18. *Norwich Mechanics', Operatives', and Laborers' Advocate* 15 May 1837; *Hartford Courant* 4 September 1850; Paul W. Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 29; Kennedy, *The Eighth Census of the United States: Agriculture, 1860*, 194.

19. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854), 208-11; Kennedy, *Eighth Census of the United States: Agriculture, 1860*, 194.

20. See for example Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*; Prude, *Coming of Industrial Order*; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*.

21. At 1850 the average value of a New London County farm, including implements and improvements to the land, was only \$164.16, ranking it seventh out of Connecticut's eight counties. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States...Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 208-11; Kennedy, *Eighth Census of the United States: Agriculture, 1860*, 14-5; Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...Connecticut...1845*, 224-30.

22. See especially Gary J. Kornblith, "The Rise of the Mechanic Interest and the Campaign to Develop Manufacturing in Salem, 1815-1830" *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 121 (January 1985), 44-65. This theme is also limned in Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five Massachusetts Towns, 1800-1860* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 9-79. For more on the early history of Salem and Newburyport see Samuel Eliot

Morrison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947); Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

23. Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 261-324. Various aspects of Essex County's social and labor history have been the subject of a number of finely detailed recent studies. See especially Blewett, *Men, Women and Work*; Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); Doherty, *Society and Power*; Paul Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*; David A. Zonderman, *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

24. Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 295; and passim. Also see Hurd, *History of Essex County*, 391-414; 674-747; Henry Colman, *First Report on the Agriculture of Massachusetts, County of Essex, 1837* (Boston: State Printers, 1838); James R. Newhall, *The Essex Memorial for 1836* (Salem: Henry Whipple, 1836), passim. Data on soil conditions and acreage derived from DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, 58-9, and *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 256-8; Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, 74-5, 202.

25. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*, 3-67; Dublin, "Rural Putting-Out Networks;" Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers*, 58-76.

26. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, "From Sails to Spindles: Essex County in Transition," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95 (April 1959), 115-36: 124-5; John P. Bigelow, *Statistical Tables: Exhibiting the Condition and Products of Certain Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1837* (Boston: State Printers, 1838), 13-4; Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers*, 26-7; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 273-309.

27. Bigelow, *Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1837*, 5-20; Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*, 44-67; Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers*, 58-99; Louis McLane, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, 1832. Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States* 22nd Congress, 1st Session, Doc. No. 308, 2 vols. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1833) I: 210-59; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 311-5; Mark Voss-Hubbard, "The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History* 29 (Spring 1996), 565-90.

28. Amesbury *Essex Transcript*, 22 February 1849; Amesbury and Salisbury Mills' *Villager*, 29 March 1850; Voss-Hubbard, "The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike," 567.

29. See Voss-Hubbard, "Amesbury-Salisbury Strike," 567-8.

30. The phrase "done in" was coined by Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). For good correctives, see Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*. For a fine portrait of how industrial and commercial growth can strengthen the economic position of small producers, see Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

31. Albion, "From Sails to Spindles;" Bigelow, *Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1837*, 5-20; McLane Report, I: 210-1, 252-3; Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules, Manufacturing, 1850; Palfrey, *Statistics of the...Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1845*, 8-38; John J. Allen, "History of Carriage Manufacturing, Automobile Building, and Accessories, in Salisbury, Amesbury, and West Amesbury...1800-1955," unpublished manuscript, APL, n.d., 1-6, 185, and passim; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, 9-32; Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*, 309-24.

32. Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon*, 112-19; Stevenson Whitcomb Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1640-1840* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1950), 46-52; Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 487. On the Upper End prior to the arrival of deep-shaft coal mining, see Richard Cowling Taylor, *Report on the Coal Lands, Mines, and Projected Improvements upon the Estate of the Dauphin and Susquehanna Coal Company* (Philadelphia: E.G. Dorsey, 1840), and *Report of the Geological Examinations, the Present Condition and Prospects of the Stony Creek Estate...* (Philadelphia: E.G. Dorsey, 1840).

33. Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon*, 335; Kelker, *History of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania*, 224-48. For evidence of German Reformed and German Lutheran cooperation in other regions of eastern Pennsylvania, see for example Roger D. Peterson, "The Reaction to a Heterogenous Society: A Behavioral and Quantitative Analysis of Northern Voting Behavior, 1845-1870, Pennsylvania as a Test Case," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1970), 110-26; William G. Shade, "Pennsylvania Politics in the Jacksonian Period: A Case Study, Northampton County, 1824-1844," *Pennsylvania History* (July 1972), 313-33.

34. Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 224-94. For more thorough treatment see for example Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1950); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale: New Haven Press, 1989); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of*

Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 202-68.

35. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 43; 38-42, 43-5; Joseph Austin Durrenberger, *Turnpikes: A Study of the Toll Road Movement in the Middle Atlantic States and Maryland* (Valdosta, GA: Southern Stationary & Printing Co., 1931); Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 129-60; Peter Andrew Wallner, "Politics and the Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857," (Ph.D. dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1973), 30-52.

36. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 43-5; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 87-129, 161-9.

37. Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon*, 112-9; Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*, 261-87; Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 308-10.

38. Above summary drawn from Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 323-26; Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*, 144, 286-92. Data on value of farm implements derived from Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: Dauphin County Agriculture, 1850. For more on early commercial agriculture in Pennsylvania, see Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country*.

39. Testimony of a Dauphin County farmer in *Annual Report of the Bureau of Agriculture* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1878), as cited in Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*, 182-3. Also see Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*, 41, 70-1. Data on farm size derived from Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States, 1860*, 122-5.

40. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes*, Table 10.2, and 121-42, 158-78, 185-262; Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon*, 310-2. For more on Harrisburg's African-American community during the nineteenth century, see Eggert, "Two Steps Forward, A Step-and-a-Half Back: Harrisburg's African American Community in the Nineteenth Century," *Pennsylvania History* 58 (January 1991), 1-36.

41. Themes covered in greater detail in Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, passim; Bruchey, *Roots of American Economic Growth*, passim.

42. Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*, esp. 175-202; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, esp. 11-64; Robert B. Saylor, *The Railroads of Pennsylvania* (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 2-91; Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 79. Data on Connecticut derived from *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1789-1836* 2 vols. (Hartford: State Printer, 1837); *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1836 to 1857* 2 vols.

(New Haven: State Printer, 1857); *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1757 to 1871* 2 vols. (New Haven: State Printer, 1871).

43. See for example Bruchey, *Roots of American Economic Growth*, 141-77; Gunn, *The Decline of Authority*, 99-197; Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*, 161-202; Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era*, 269-352.

44. Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 161-80.

45. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes*, 40-1; 49-51; Walter R. Johnson, *Report of an Examination of the Bear Valley Coal District, in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Joseph & William Kite, 1841); William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1955), 10-1.

46. Data on agriculture drawn from Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: Dauphin County Agriculture, 1850 and 1860; Fletcher, *Agriculture and Country Life*, II: 60, 261-66, and passim. For more thorough treatment, see for example Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, *To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North* (Ames IA: Iowa State University Press, 1987), 201-4; Gates, *The Farmer's Age*, 156-72.

47. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 301; Kennedy, *Manufacturers in the United States, 1860*, 506; *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Agriculture...1872-3* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1874), 36.

48. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes*, esp. 49-69, 135; Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 323; Kennedy, *Manufacturers in the United States, 1860*, 506; Henry R. Mueller, *The Whig Party in Pennsylvania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 100.

49. Egle, *History of Dauphin and Lebanon Counties*, 450-60; Johnson, *Report of an Examination of the Bear Valley Coal District, in Dauphin County*, 15-8; Kelker, *History of Dauphin County*, 415-6.

50. Johnson, *Report of an Examination of the Bear Valley Coal District, in Dauphin County*. For the woes that plagued the Pennsylvania anthracite industry, see Taylor, *Report on the Coal Lands, Mines, and Projected Improvements Upon the Estate of the Dauphin and Susquehanna Coal Company*, 76-8; Anthony F.C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town's Experience with a Disaster Prone Industry* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

51. For data on aggregate coal produced, see *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Agriculture...1873*, 210-1; Data on Wiconisco derived from

DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, 167; Federal Population Census Schedules: Dauphin County, 1860; Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: Dauphin County Manufacturing, 1850 & 1860.

52. For example, of the 27 industrial enterprises in the town of Lykens enumerated in the 1860 manufacturing census, none was larger than 4 hands. See Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: Dauphin County Manufacturing, 1850 and 1860. Also see Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life*, 41, 70-1; Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States, 1860*, 122-5; Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes*, 185-232. Data on population from DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, 167; Kennedy, *Population of the United States, 1860*.

53. Newburyport *Herald*, 2 July 1853. Mileage fraction estimated from data on Massachusetts railroads in Kennedy, *Statistics of the United States, 1860*, 325: "Railroads of the United States." See also Charles J. Kennedy, "Railroads in Essex County a Century Ago," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95 (April 1959), 137-48.

54. Data on population derived from Jesse Chickering, *A Statistical View of the Population of Massachusetts, From 1765 to 1840* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), 16-7, 44-5; Barbara M. Solomon, "The Growth of the Population in Essex County, 1850-1860," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95 (April 1959), 82-103. Data on industrial output drawn from DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 259; Kennedy, *Manufacturers of the United States in 1860*, 234-36.

55. Albion, "From Sails to Spindles," 130-1, 134-5; Cole, *Immigrant City*, 18-31. Data on firm size derived from DeWitt, *Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1855*, 135-9.

56. On Lawrence, see Cole, *Immigrant City*, 26-30; Solomon, "Growth of the Population of Essex County," 87-8. On Newburyport, see DeWitt, *Statistical Information Relating to Certain Branches of Industry...1855*, 151-4; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, 9-56.

57. Blewett, *Men, Women and Work*, 97-141, quote on 97; Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers*, 164-233; Solomon, "Growth of the Population."

58. Joseph Morrill, *History of Amesbury and Merrimac* (Haverhill: Press of Franklin P. Stiles, 1880), 363. See also *Essex Banner* 17 July 1852; 7 August 1852. Statistical data compiled from DeWitt, *Branches of Industry in Massachusetts...1855*, 111-3; Palfrey, *Branches of Industry...1845*, 8-9; Voss-Hubbard, "Amesbury-Salisbury Strike," 576-7.

59. Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen*.

60. Sidney Withington, *The First Twenty Years of Railroads in Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). See also Kennedy, *Statistics of the United States, in 1860*, 326.

61. Reported value of the county's whaling product dropped by 43% between 1845-1860, while numbers employed declined by 79%. Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...1845*, 66-88; Kennedy, *Manufacturers of the United States in 1860*, 44-6; Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut Valley," 120-51; Owen, "The New London Merchants," 230-5.

62. Above summary drawn from Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: New London County Manufacturing: 1850 and 1860; Kennedy, *Manufacturers of the United States in 1860*, 44-6; John Niven, *Connecticut For the Union: The Role of the State in the Civil War*, 373-6; Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...1845*, 66-88.

63. Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules: New London County Manufacturing: 1850 and 1860; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 404-6; McClane, *Report I*, 1035; Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...1845*; Tyler, *Statistics of the Branches of Industry...1845*, 74-5.

64. Amesbury and Salisbury Mills' *Villager*, 23 February 1854.

65. Derived from DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, 79, and *Statistical View*, 206-7; Francis A. Walker, *Statistics of Population: Ninth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 35, 305, 348.

66. The six towns were Lawrence, Andover, North Andover, Gloucester, Nahant, and Salem. Data on population and foreign-born percentages derived from Solomon, "Growth of the Population." On glutted labor markets, see Blewett, *Men, Women and Work*, 112-6; Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers*, 94-5; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, 21-2.

67. The figure rose to 6.5% in 1860. See DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, 296-7; Kennedy, *Population of the United States, 1860*, 438.

68. *A Succinct Account of the Late Difficulties on the Salisbury Corporation* (Amesbury and Salisbury Mills: W. H. B. Currier, 1852), 11; *Harrisburg Morning Herald*, 22 June 1854; 8 May 1854.

CHAPTER III

CULTURES OF PUBLIC LIFE: FRAMEWORKS OF PARTY AND GOVERNANCE IN THE AGE OF MASS POLITICAL PARTIES

The residents of Dauphin, Essex, and New London counties would have agreed with modern scholars about the main features of antebellum partisan politics. Election campaigns were vibrant and festive social events. All members of the community, male and female, young and old, participated in the rich pageantry of partisan politics. Men organized town “clubs” named for their favorite presidential candidate that sponsored events in which partisans socialized and cemented durable bonds of friendship. Women organized auxiliaries that sometimes coordinated with the male clubs, sometimes sponsored their own events, and certainly extended the sisterly camaraderie that was a keynote of their otherwise nonpartisan social activism. Political campaigns came alive with exciting and long-anticipated picnics, pole raisings, parades, and conventions. Here, in the autumn lead-up to an election, the substance and symbolism of politics intertwined. Local partisans saw friends, relatives, or neighbors in positions of public leadership, perhaps carrying a banner at the head of a long party procession, leading a marching band, or waxing eloquent in partisan rhetoric about protective tariffs and internal improvements. On election day a high proportion of eligible voters went to the polls and cast ballots, usually for one of the major parties. Residents of the three counties participated enthusiastically in the rich social life of

campaigns, learned and shouted partisan verities, and voted in high numbers for the major parties.¹

It would serve no useful purpose to reproduce such findings here. The aim of this chapter is to explore other features of antebellum public life.² What lessons about politics and government did citizens draw from political campaigns? What sorts of ideas of politics and governance did citizens, whether Democrat, Whig, or independent, hold in common? Did partisanship define certain issues as “political?” If so, how were public issues, those not systematically incorporated into formal partisan discourse, conceptualized? Put differently, what were the boundaries--and connections--between partisan campaign culture and the other less partisan spheres of public life? After all, while antebellum campaign culture was strikingly partisan, it was an ephemeral culture, for the election season was brief. Investigation of such questions might complicate our understanding of politics and governance in the antebellum republic. It can also suggest clues about the sources of antebellum populism.

Despite its partisan trappings, politics in these years ideally worked to advance the general goal of economical government devoted to the public good. Though deeply held convictions about the pluses and minuses of the parties’ policy orientations actuated voters to some degree, broader rhetorics framed the construction of partisan combat over such specifics as tariffs and banks. Party publicists collapsed issues into an amorphous yet powerful appeal to party “principles,” such as loyalty and self-sacrifice for the cause. During political campaigns voters learned of their party’s honorable work on behalf of great principles which, regardless of any particular

ideological orientation, furthered the wellbeing of the entire community, state, and nation, just as they had learned these virtues in their youth from parents and schoolteachers.³ It mattered not whether the office at stake was President or Canal Commissioner, party leaders cast elections as epic struggles between competing “armies,” one marshalled on behalf of government in the name of the public interest, the other of special interests, party spoils, and profligate administration. Partisanship reinforced popular expectations of politics as an inclusive, democratic arena within a broader public sphere. In partisan politics people engaged in cross-class socialization and action towards the general goal of effective and economical government.

Similar ideals framed descriptions of candidates. Party workers stressed their candidates’ moral attributes necessary for effective government. If voters cared to know the specific policies that a candidate might pursue if elected, they were surely frequently disappointed. Candidates were said to be independent of special interests, free of the taint of selfish motives, and unfailingly loyal to the party. A framework of partisanship, emphasizing loyalty to party principles and selfless standard-bearers, established the contours of partisan political culture in antebellum public life.

Meanwhile, ideas of governance took shape in another framework of public life, one that held sway, by and large, outside of partisan politics. Of course, governance included affairs of state, and when legislative assemblies debated partisan issues, governance could easily produce intense partisanship. Yet governance in the broadest sense encompassed a much wider scope of issues and activities than party manifestos might suggest. For one thing, governments, both state and local, undertook a wide

range of functions independent of the pressing political debates of the day. In such spheres of public life as local government and local economic development, people found political elites willing to lay partisanship aside to promote the wellbeing of communities. For another, governance was understood broadly to include individual moral agency (self-government) and social virtue (community obligation) because of the public implications of such issues as liquor or worker-employer relations. In such cases people first groped for nonpartisan solutions out of a belief that problems of private and community governance were best handled through citizenwide appeals to private morality and communal obligation. Such voluntary societies as the Washingtonians, for example, adopted nonpartisan strategies to effect the moral perfection of individuals and communities. From this perspective, issues of both private morality and community obligation entered public life as issues of governance, not politics *sui generis*. They were public issues, akin in that respect to the condition of local roads or the regional economy, yet distinct from the issues which animated the highly formalized and stylized arena of partisan politics.⁴

This framework of governance, I suggest, was nonpartisan for two reasons. First, the vast majority of public issues with implications for governance lacked salience as political questions in the formal sense that partisan politics taught. This would change in the 1850s, as social transformation allowed reformers to politicize new issues as problems of governance. In so doing they translated public questions into explicitly political ones--in effect, bridging the partisan and nonpartisan arenas of the public sphere through politicization of the nonpartisan ideal of governance.

Second, and related, people hoped above all to keep partisanship from despoiling the processes of governance. In the 1850s reformers, and ultimately third partisans, constructed antiparty appeals for support on precisely that ideal--that the major parties had allowed party to corrupt governance.

Prior to midcentury, however, the distinction between party politics and governance held more or less intact because most people saw little reason to question the major parties' fealty to the ideal of nonpartisan governance. Viewed as a whole, public life in these years taught citizens the virtues of partisanship in politics and nonpartisanship in governance. In the antebellum republic partisanship and nonpartisanship intertwined as mutually reinforcing values in the mix of peoples' experiences with, and expectations of, politics and governance.

The Partisan Framework of Politics:

Mass Mobilization and the Vernacular of Party and Governance

Political campaigns are opportunities for partisans to draw stark distinctions between their party's candidates and those of the opposition. In the 1840s partisan spokesmen in the three counties, in tediously repetitious editorials and stump speeches, claimed that incalculable benefits would flow to the nation if only their party's position on protective tariffs, government spending, and the war with Mexico were adopted.⁵ Throughout, partisans framed these familiar issues with rhetoric about political leadership and its fundamental relationship to governance. The Harrisburg

Pennsylvania Telegraph, a Whig paper, contrasted its party's 1844 gubernatorial candidate General Joseph Markle with his Democratic rival, Francis Shunk. Markle, a veteran leader of men in wars to conquer Indian land, was an "*honest*, true-hearted FARMER, who never held an office of emolument." The General was no mere political hack. He had "risked his life for his country." Markle's agricultural background and patriotic service, according to the *Telegraph*, qualified him for office. Markle's self-sacrifice, honesty, and lack of ambition for office contrasted with Democratic candidate Shunk, "a *veteran office-holder*, who never served *anyone but himself* and his *party*."⁶ According to the *Telegraph*, this was a contest not simply over competing policy agendas. It pitted two men with wholly different characters and moral attributes. One candidate, the paper's own, was a selfless and dutiful citizen-soldier, the other a wire-puller out for the spoils of office and mere party rule. A "veteran office-holder" struck suspicious deals on behalf of partisan or private interests. A favorite candidate's long record of office-holding, in contrast, reflected statesmanship, sterling integrity, unmatched character. Partisans never failed to point out the sordid political motives of their opponents. But they saw their own party's warhorses in more favorable light. Their men were consistent and firm in principle, intrepid public servants on the hustings and in office.

The *Telegraph*'s attacks on Shunk's partisan motivations failed to persuade a majority of Pennsylvania voters. Shunk defeated Markle by about 4,000 votes in a competitive race typical of Pennsylvania elections in the 1840s, though he failed to carry Dauphin County, a Whig stronghold in this mostly Democratic state (Table B.7).

The *Telegraph*'s rhetoric, however, had applications well beyond Dauphin; analogous examples suffuse campaign discourse about candidates. Among the qualifications that the New London *Morning News* listed for John A. Rockwell, Whig candidate for Congress in Connecticut's Third District, was his past work as "a thoroughgoing Whig" who "has done good service in that glorious cause." Rockwell's private life also recommended him to voters. A well known lawyer, Rockwell was a "gentleman...a man of unsullied honor and integrity in all the transactions of life." Integrity in private life and service on behalf of the "glorious cause" in public life should convince voters, especially Whig voters, that Rockwell "will not submit to Southern dictation nor sacrifice the interests of his constituents for any sinister advantage for himself."⁷

Framers of partisan opinion frequently described a candidate's personal virtues that qualified him for office. Under normal circumstances descriptions of individual candidates rarely included specific policy positions. Indeed, even the party platforms to which candidates were pledged, such as those that committed Whigs to a protective tariff and Democrats free trade, in fact were quite ambiguous. What, for instance, constituted a protective tariff? What specific items would be protected, and to what degree? Very few platforms were that specific. Rather than make direct promises to voters about future laws, a qualified candidate must possess an unyielding commitment to principle, honorable service to the party, and a solid moral character. Equipped with these virtues, leaders could resist the temptation that came with elective office to abuse power or cave in to special interests. The Harrisburg Clay Club lionized Henry Clay as

a “great champion, advocate and defender” of the Whig cause, which included “honest and economical administration of the Government, leaving public officers perfect freedom of thoughts.” The *Telegraph* backed Charles Trego for Canal Commissioner in 1846 because he was a successful merchant “familiar with the improvements and business of the state” who enjoyed the respect and admiration of “men of all parties.”⁸

Democrats tended to be more specific than Whigs on issues. But with equal tenacity they also highlighted their candidates’ personal virtues. According to the *Lynn Bay State*, Essex County’s Democratic party ticket consisted of men “who have raised themselves, by labor and enterprise, to high positions as moral, intellectual and valuable citizens.” One candidate was said to be “honest, capable, and worthy of the support of freemen,” another a merchant of “undoubted integrity and good talents,” while still another possessed “the integrity which will never allow him to abuse the trusts committed to his charge.” Democratic candidates had the sterling integrity necessary for disinterested public service, unlike Whig candidates, who legislated on behalf of “the money power.” Democrats in New London County campaigned on an impressive array of state reforms, including abolishing imprisonment for debt and abolition of the state’s poll tax. Yet, on one level, these were offered not so much for their ideological content as evidence of the Democracy’s unyielding commitment to enduring principles. The Whigs used the tariff for “base party purposes,” while the “honest, faithful, and capable” leaders of the Democratic party worked for the “welfare of Connecticut.”⁹

The Newburyport *Herald* directed readers' attention to an exchange between state senatorial candidate Joseph T. Buckingham and the Committee of the Industrial Reform Association of Lowell in 1846 to illustrate the values that Whig candidates in Essex County should emulate. The Committee's letter to Buckingham was part of a nonpartisan campaign of the Industrial Reform Association to compel political candidates to take clear positions on a number of "labor" issues. The Committee sought assurances on a ten-hour labor law, a policy of free homesteads to western settlers, and a homestead exemption law. Buckingham began with a noncommittal answer to the questions of free homesteads and homestead exemptions. These were matters "that are now for the first time presented to me for consideration. In my humble judgement, no wise and prudent man would venture to a definitive action on questions...without first giving to them the most thorough and sober investigation." Lawmakers with the public good in mind did not jump to rash conclusions, Buckingham was saying, but thought carefully before adopting a prudent course. Moreover, Buckingham considered the Committee's letter off-putting in the first instance, for "on all questions of general policy, instructions from [constituents] and pledges from [legislators] are equally improper, and both have a tendency to check that freedom of action and to disturb that impartiality of judgement, for which every honest legislator should aspire." Buckingham thus argued that candidates distance themselves from the special claims of narrow interest groups. Such candidates made fair and independent lawmakers, who in turn governed in the public interest.¹⁰

Buckingham's claim to be above the debilitating influence of special interests did not dissuade him from offering an opinion of the ten-hour law. Buckingham opposed the law because "the *hours* as well as the *price* of labor should be settled by agreement between the employer and the employed." "How can it be otherwise?" he averred. Markets, not legislatures, should determine economic relations; worthy candidates for government office should possess a commonsense knowledge of legal precedent and economic theory. Nor was Buckingham dissuaded from offering a specific rationale for his candidacy. He invoked his "mechanical profession" (Buckingham was a printer and editor by trade), which "has given the public the opportunity to know something of the principles which govern my actions, and to form a proper estimate of my character." Buckingham got right to the heart of the matter concerning his character. "If, in my career as the editor of public journals,...I have misused my influence in flattering wealth, supporting injustice, advocating fraud, extenuating hypocrisy, adverse to any scheme for the melioration and improvement of society [and] the alleviation of calamity,...if I have cringed at the footstool of power, pandered to the vices of authority, or have endeavored to promote my own private interest at the expense of my neighbor," concluded Buckingham in a lofty flourish, "then, gentlemen, I am entirely unworthy of your consideration, and a promise to support your favorite measure would not deserve your confidence."¹¹ A private career of selfless principle offered the surest prediction of wise leadership in public life. The people's government would be safe with Joseph T. Buckingham, a man who would stand firm against the special interests.

An objection might be raised that such pervasive campaign rhetoric was mere diversion, intended to mask the unsavory side of political ambition. No doubt this is partly true. Partisans dressed up their candidates with selfless values and good character traits because politics was tainted with opportunism and cupidity. Politics put men in power, which everyone understood could be used for good or for ill. Political leaders controlled access to patronage, wrote law, gave vision to government. Their decisions affected the lives of people, who were keenly aware that benevolent magnanimity rarely describes the actions of office holders. But this should not obscure the central place that ideas of character occupied when people imagined the values that a government, through its leadership, ought to embody.¹² The rhetoric that evolved to describe candidates' virtues reflected a genuine desire that politics should produce leaders who would work for purposes of broad concern to the entire public. The character of candidates was a recurrent rhetoric because it provided a narrative of heroic resistance to the emoluments of political power, a testament to the public good triumphing through principled statesmanship and sterling character. The rhetoric of candidates' virtues constituted a vital component of a popular vernacular in antebellum America which expressed the general values that citizens expected to find in politics and government. This popular vernacular constituted a shared vision of politics and governance in antebellum America that linked enthusiastic partisanship with nonpartisan values. Partisan politics for mere party's sake could be carried to a slavish extreme and thus devolve into a form of special interest. Devotion to the public good,

not partisanship per se, ought to drive politics. On that general point party leaders and voters could agree.

Party spokespersons faced the difficult task of celebrating party and partisanship in ways that were consistent with the popular expectation that politics and government be guided by a broader public purpose than merely winning elections. One way they accomplished this was by focusing attention on the character of candidates. Party leaders also deployed rhetoric that linked the wellbeing of communities with the partisanship of voters and the success of their party. They translated party platforms in ways that resonated with local voters, a critical mass of whom seemingly required reassurance before they would dutifully march to the polls and vote the party line.¹³

Party leaders connected the fate of local communities with their party's electoral fortunes by accenting the universal aim of economical government and principled leadership embedded in the popular vernacular. The Harrisburg *Clay Bugle* stuck to the twin themes of high protective tariffs and economy in state government throughout the months leading up to the 1844 election. The paper pointed to gubernatorial candidate Joseph Markle's pledge to enforce "the most rigid economy in the administration of the state government." "Every man's farm is mortgaged for its [the state debt] redemption," charged the *Clay Bugle*. According to the *Bugle*, the Democrats abused the vast patronage of state government and the Public Works. "The public works have been used as a part of the political machinery of the State," the *Bugle* wailed, used by Democrats "for enriching political favorites, and buying power." Government in the hands of Democrats unduly taxed ordinary people for the

enrichment of party solons and their sinecures. What specifically the Whigs would do to rectify the corrupt culture on the Public Works, besides staffing it with Whigs, was never too clear. The point the *Bugle* wanted voters to realize was that continued Democratic control of state government would mean high taxes and profligate administration.¹⁴

Drawing connections between the wellbeing of voters and electoral outcomes led partisans to make grand claims about the issues at stake in elections. According to the *Norwich Weekly Courier* the election of 1843 was one in which “the fate of the present Tariff policy...may hang upon the issue” of which party controls the Connecticut State House. The New London *Morning News* admitted it was a stretch to connect the 1845 state election to the issue of Texas annexation. The paper nevertheless bent to convention. “Although the immediate and direct results of the election may not be a matter of vital importance...yet we apprehend that its influence upon the great questions now before Congress, will be plainly felt and seen by all.”¹⁵ In the state election of 1846 a convention of Dauphin County Whigs repeatedly stressed their opposition to the Walker Tariff. Prior to the “suicidal policy” of reducing the tariff, one speaker proclaimed, the local economy furnished “profitable employment for the poor, and home markets for the surplus of agricultural productions.” After further resolves celebrating Whig candidates as worthy defenders of Pennsylvania interests, the convention invited “all honest and independent Freemen, opposed to the dictation of politicians in office, to party favoritism and prodigality,...and of the repeal of the British tariff, to unite with us in support of James M. Power, for the office of Canal

Commissioner.” The precise relationship between Pennsylvania Canal Commissioner and national tariff policy was anybody’s guess. But Whig voters did not have to draw a close connection between the two, for more was at stake than tariff policy. The opposition had bowed to “party favoritism” in government, and right-minded Whigs, along with other “independent Freemen,” must rally to the polls to set government straight.¹⁶

During the campaign season partisan banter over tariff or banking policy reflected much more than a calculated ploy to tap the self interest of farmers or industrialists. Issues operated at several complex levels on activists and voters alike, but almost certainly worked to jar emotional identifications and fond memories of past campaign glory. Democrats “knew” aristocratic Whigs were out to raise the tariff and bestow special privileges on parasitic bankers. These were issues of intense political contestation in the past, and would surely be so again, unless Democrats turned out en masse. At the same time, however, partisanship meant loyalty to principles bigger than any issue or interest. Partisan duty meant acting upon those principles by working for the party’s triumph. In this way issues acted as party cues, signifiers of a tradition of honorable principle and service which all members were said to share, independent of any rational calculation by voters or activists to weigh their own interests against election outcomes. The party’s specific issues and interests mattered, of course, but were scarcely comprehensible outside of the intellectual framework provided by the popular vernacular. Deploying that framework in campaigns enabled party leaders to fold issues and interests into a transcendent moral purpose consistent with peoples’

expectations of politics and government. Every election counted in the moral struggle of principles over selfish men.

Party politics transcended the mundane, partisan opinion-makers insisted, because it required honor and sacrifice for lofty principles. According to the Newburyport *Herald*, the election of 1844 was “not a struggle of contending parties for office alone, as every one with any discrimination will readily see.” That the Whig party worked for purposes more meaningful than winning elections was obvious to all, this editorial implied. “Great principles are involved in this contest; and many important and vital interests are at stake.” For the sake of “great principles,” the party rank and file should sacrifice their personal interests for the good of party and country. Party politics affirmed the virtues of individual sacrifice and loyalty to a transcendent cause. Partisanship was an honorable demonstration of one’s commitment to the wellbeing of community and nation. A Norwich Whig denied that winning elections was the paramount goal of his town’s Clay Club. “It is not victory alone we wish to achieve,” proclaimed this local organizer. “We have more liberal views--a more noble and enlightened purpose. The contest is for principles.”¹⁷ Self-seekers need not apply to the Norwich Clay Club.

Certainly partisans crafted such idealized constructions of the meaning of partisan mobilization in part to obfuscate less honorable motives. Like the rhetoric of candidates’ virtues, the rhetoric of partisanship reflected popular ambivalence towards politics because politics elevated men to public office, where they manipulated the levers of power on behalf of certain individuals and interests but not others. The

rhetoric of partisanship was so overwrought in part because party leaders worried that voters might reject partisan politics in light of that fact. Usually voters registered their dissatisfaction with party politics by staying home on election day, a subtle form of protest that frequently determined close elections. Partisans designed rhetorics of party loyalty to make the choice of staying home seem unbecoming, even unpatriotic.

Voters might also be attracted to third parties. At times when voters appeared ready to bolt the party, major party leaders redoubled their calls for party unity. The *Telegraph* portrayed the efforts of the local Native American party as a dire threat to the wellbeing of Dauphin County. The Native Americans were run “by a set of office holders, who have sprung into existence through the want of harmony in our ranks.” Whig opinion makers responded by idealizing their party as a vehicle of patriotic virtue, deploying the popular vernacular in their challenge to Whig voters to stand firm. “Union of the Whigs for the sake of the union,” went the typical battle cry. Conceding that dissatisfaction existed among some Whigs in 1845, the paper cast the upcoming election as a test of these voters’ continued fealty to the virtues of self-sacrifice. The *Telegraph* summoned Whig voters to unite in defense of time-tested party principles higher than any single goal or personal reward. “Let all individual preferences be left aside,” one editorial urged, “for the performance of a more important duty, the maintenance of our principles, and the great interests of our country against the uplifted hand of spoilers.”¹⁸ Third parties challenged major party leaders to elaborate the character traits and broad vision of government that both justified and flowed from partisan politics.

The mass demonstrations staged by the parties during campaigns also celebrated, in publicly ritualized ways, the good character traits and broad vision of government that partisanship was said to foster. The pageantry of partisanship reached its zenith in presidential contests, when party leaders intensified partisan interest through pole raisings, picnics, parades, and conventions that both entertained and schooled citizens in the virtues of partisan politics. A mass meeting of Pennsylvania Whigs held at Harrisburg in 1844 was claimed to have ennobled local Whigs, for the locals did their “duty” and entertained the thousands who flocked to the city. Wealthy party leaders provided food and drink for the faithful. In return leaders were publicly eulogized for demonstrating right virtues. Thomas Elder, member of one of Harrisburg’s first families and a leading Whig patrician in the city, “lunched and furnished refreshment for upwards of EIGHT HUNDRED.” “If any other private citizen has shown greater liberality and zeal in the cause,” waxed the *Telegraph*, “we hope to see his name known to the Whig party.”¹⁹ The processions themselves symbolized the party’s concern for the wellbeing of the entire community. Carpenters, stone cutters, weavers, blacksmiths, and other craftsmen plied their trade on the back of wagons with banners that read “by industry we thrive.” A “beautifully rigged ship, manned with boys, in tarpaulins” followed a canal boat filled with commercial goods. Farmers worked the latest agricultural implements mounted on wagons in scenes of rural labor. Women put their stamp on the parade as marchers, as spinners of cloth, and through presentations of banners “of surpassing beauty” to the men.²⁰ The spectacle of campaign pageantry schooled onlookers and participants alike in the

party's democratic roots and broad appeal, as well as its particular legacy and policy orientation. Parades showcased how partisan politics harmonized society's diverse elements and composed them into the higher moral purpose of achieving victory for the hallowed cause.

Women's partisan participation most clearly expressed the ideal that partisanship worked towards the public interest. Party leaders seized upon evidence of women's partisanship to reinforce the party's image as defender of public virtue. In a speech before the Essex North Clay Club, club president John Porter interpreted the support women gave to the Whigs through their work weaving banners for the club. A crowded audience of both men and women listened intently as Porter proclaimed "that mothers and daughters...should smile upon our principles, is sufficient guaranty of their excellence." When women enter "into the spirit of our public dangers," Porter intoned, their example "elevates, ennobles, and sanctifies our cause." The women brought their female virtues to bear on public questions, Porter argued, and found Whig principles congenial to liberality, benevolence, and sacrifice for the public good. "That they [Whig women], apart from their prejudices and passions, should instinctively appreciate and sustain THE RIGHT, may well shame our doubts and divisions, and ought to inspire us to united action for the common good." Party leaders reproduced discourses of feminine virtue when describing women's partisanship. Antebellum white women who actively supported a party "proved" its moral purpose.²¹

Voters had an important role to play in government. They took the measure of men standing for office and separated the fit from the unfit. Meanwhile party leaders

artfully crafted ceremony and rhetoric to ensure that voters fulfilled that obligation in a partisan manner. Party leaders had to be artful. Elections in this period were usually very competitive, in the three counties as throughout the United States (See Tables B.3-B.6). Margins of victory proved chronically slim; frequently the number of votes for a third party exceeded the difference between the two majors (Table B.6). In an age of competitive, winner-take-all elections and high voter turnout, a near complete mobilization of the party's base held the key to electoral success.²² The high rates of voter turnout in these years reflect in part the success party leaders enjoyed in mobilizing their base (Tables B.4 and B.5). Voters who deigned to stay home on election day, or support an opposition party, were the bane of nineteenth-century party politics. In their rhetoric and ceremony, party leaders went to great lengths to convince people of this.

The emotional ties that constituted partisanship rested on much more than the parties' skill at entertainment and melodrama. Partisan culture reflected the interests of the parties and their candidates, who had one goal that took precedence above all else: to win.²³ Parades and other spectacles, constant reference to longstanding party "issues," colorful negative campaign rhetoric, fulsome descriptions of a candidate's public and private virtues, use of the popular vernacular--all geared to cementing a voter's emotional ties to the party. In the main, such tactics worked better to unify a miscellaneous social base than, say, detailed policy pronouncements and promises about laws to be enacted. The very competitiveness of the system and the multiplicity of conflicting interests in the emerging capitalist order weighed strongly against that

alternative tactic. So partisan culture in the antebellum republic prodded voters to connect and reconnect with the party's grand tradition and rather amorphous vision, not its particular "ideology" in any instrumentalist sense. Partisanship was based primarily on emotional ties constructed over many seasons of socialization to the party, its history, its leaders, and its symbolic universe.²⁴ Throughout, the major parties folded particular issues into transcendent rhetorics which celebrated their commitment to the larger moral vision that voters expected from politics. Electoral campaigns fused values of nonpartisanship and partisanship and translated political combat into battles over ideals that were said to be larger than the specific issues and interests in play during partisan campaigns. For the parties insisted above all that they were instruments for advancing the common good, an elastic yet powerful principle far nobler than party dogma or specific policy objectives. The culture of partisanship reflected the needs of political elites in search of formal political power, but also bore the imprint of the broad nonpartisan values embedded in the popular vernacular.

The Antipartisan Framework of Governance:

Local Nonpartisanship and the Ideal of a Public Interest

But what were the sources of this nonpartisan framework, one in which the public good, not partisanship, ideally guided public life? Clues come from an 1844 election postmortem in the New London *Morning News*. After a hard fought "war," the paper called for a "truce to politics." "Gladly, we bid farewell to politics for a time; at

least to the strife and turmoil and commotion of politics. We renounce caucuses, conventions, mass meetings, processions, torch-light marches, clubs, estimates, comparisons of returns and calculations of chances. All these, and the other adjuncts of the great struggle, have had their day and place, and now," concluded the editorial, "like the scenes and properties of a melo-drama that has had its run, they may be stowed away in vaults, garrets and lumber-rooms until the lapse of time calls them forth again."²⁵ However appropriate for elections, the "turmoil" that partisan campaigns brought into focus seemed ill-suited for life after the campaign. By calling for a "truce," the paper implied that intense partisanship, expressing stark differences among people, had its place in elections, but should not pattern the whole of public life.

The editorial is suggestive of the capacity of citizens in the antebellum republic to see partisan politics as a distinct arena of public life. What of the other arenas of public life? This chapter closes with an examination of three areas of public life that, as the *Morning News* implied, fell largely outside the "strife" of electoral politics: local government, voluntary activism, and local boosterism for "progress" in the form of economic development projects. These areas of public life are certainly not exhaustive. Nor were they by any means free of conflict. Indeed, nonpartisanship constituted a powerful ideal precisely because conflict imbricated public life. But evidence drawn from the three counties does suggest that antiparty, or nonpartisan values had genuine roots in the social experience of antebellum communities, where public concerns intersected intimately with private lives. In these areas of public life people acted to solve problems or resolve differences which they understood to be public but not

necessarily political. The desire expressed by the *Morning News* for an end to the strife that accompanied electoral politics reflected an ethos that derived from local struggles over matters of governance in public life. More than anything else, it was the cumulative experience in these areas of public life that helped constitute a nonpartisan framework of governance.

Like state government, local government undertook a range of functions in the antebellum era. Local administration grappled with building and maintaining public roads, promoting fire and night watches, overseeing public schools, and assisting in pauper relief. Party ideology informed very little of what local government did in the antebellum republic. Rather, local government enlisted the energies of all residents to solve shared problems, local road administration being one good example.²⁶ The maintenance of local roads constituted far and away the single largest item of business of local governments. In 1842 the common council of Harrisburg devoted fully 72% of its business to the repair, care, and construction of roads and sewers, often inseparable forms of activity. Throughout the antebellum era and indeed well beyond, teams of neighborhood men organized to build and maintain roads through a road tax based on the value of their real property. Those who held no property were assessed a poll tax, which still obligated them to minimal service on road teams. The system was progressive in the sense that large landowners, who presumably benefited the most from roads, worked--or paid--more than small holders. Frequently the wealthy avoided working on road teams by paying men to take their place or lending oxen and horses to the teams. Road administration was localistic in that residents usually worked on

projects nearest their homes. It was also flexible, for residents could send their sons to work in their place or pay the road tax with a combination of labor and cash. Road teams organized twice a year, typically May-June and September-October, but most work commenced in the spring to accommodate farmers. The records kept by a road surveyor in Stonington, Connecticut, for 1841 indicates that labor fulfilled over 80 percent of the entire road tax.²⁷ In antebellum America the success of local road administration, like local government itself, rested on mobilizing private individuals in the work of grassroots public administration.

Community mobilization aside, what did people expect from local government? Here, the sharp and presumably rigid party ideologies that historians have employed to explain political behavior in this epoch tell us very little. Local government in the antebellum era, as Paula Baker shows, bent to the overriding goals of economy and harmony.²⁸ Pursuing economy in local administration promised to quell potentially divisive debates over tax increases to fund county roads, new county or municipal buildings, or public schools. Such projects, unless they benefited large segments of the community, were sure to produce controversy.

Town meetings and councils frequently voted to postpone or deny consideration of divisive matters that involved increased expenditures. In 1844 pointed debate erupted at a Norwich, Connecticut, town meeting after some residents petitioned the town to rebuild a badly rutted road in the north of town. Opponents howled that the city had already raised the local road tax; the ambitious project of rebuilding the road would surely entail yet another tax increase because the city's road budget was already

in the red. Proponents retorted that if the road could be repaired economically, the benefits were well worth a slight tax increase. In the end, the town meeting voted to indefinitely postpone the proposal, leaving the option open for later consideration, but effectively dooming any immediate plans to relieve the petitioners. A similar situation prevailed in Lynn, Massachusetts. Several petitions asked the local highway department to lay out a public way in their neighborhood, where, it was claimed, the roads were inadequate to meet rising commercial needs. Time and again residents from other sections of Lynn defeated the plan. Local officials, loathe to divert funds to such an unpopular project, simply ignored the petitioners' request. Parsimonious residents "have an influence upon our city officers, preventing them from doing what they know ought to be done," wrote one frustrated petitioner. Postponement was a good strategy when problems proved divisive, and local resources scarce.²⁹

Concern for economy and harmony informed views of county government as well. The decisions of county government often pitted towns against one another. Towns vied for the prestige or money (in the form of building contracts) that such institutions as county courthouses or jails inevitably bestowed. In the 1850s residents of Lawrence, Massachusetts, pushed for relocation of the county courthouse to their city at the cost of over \$150,000 in county funds. The court's current location at Salem, in the extreme south of the county, inconvenienced residents of northern Essex County, the boosters claimed. Opponents argued that the county debt was already too high, and the claims of Lawrence unjustified. "Here is a contemplated expenditure," the *Lynn News* editorialized, "for which no necessity exists." The *News* insisted that

countywide considerations ought to drive spending decisions by county government.

“The most important considerations...which bear upon this question, are a regard for *economy*, and a desire to prevent an increase of our already enormous county debt.”

Thus, the claims of Lawrence residents that their city was entitled to a courthouse “are improper and absurd. The convenience and equal accommodation of all the people require that all the courts should be removed to Salem,” argued the *News*, “not for the sake of that city, but for the benefit of the whole county.”³⁰

Nonpartisan goals also influenced the conduct of local elections. Interestingly, most local elections were not held concurrently with state and national elections. For example, before the Civil War most town and county elections in Dauphin and Essex counties were held in the spring. According to at least one contemporary, the rationale for the practice was to “separate these offices, as far as possible, from the influences which naturally exist and govern men in voting for members of the Legislature and other clearly political offices.” The duties of local government officers required a level of fairness and respect for the diverse needs of communities that transcended partisan politics. “Let them be selected with as little regard for politics as possible, and voted for at a time when political feeling influences men but little or not at all.”³¹ Though the parties often put forward distinct tickets in many of these races, this by no means assured a high level of partisanship. The dearth of reportage in the partisan press at Harrisburg on borough elections, to say nothing of local elections in surrounding towns and villages, is illustrative. The silence indicates that elections for local offices rarely evoked the partisan interest and acrimony characteristic of fall elections. Especially in

small communities, partisans usually refrained from turning town elections into party brawls. In the Essex town of Amesbury, for example, the tradition was merely to represent each section of town on the three member council and other offices.

Partisanship rarely informed these "elections" (more like ad hoc appointments by the annual town meeting); members of all parties routinely served in politically mixed administrations.³²

Even in smaller cities, where the patronage accompanying municipal government encouraged partisan competition, voters seemingly preferred to keep partisanship out of local elections. George Hood accepted the nomination for mayor of Lynn by a "People's Meeting" in 1850 because "he desired to see the spirit of party allayed, and all good citizens united on a ticket for the public good." Lynn had just emerged from a series of local struggles over the issue of a municipal charter, which the General Court had granted after a plebiscite narrowly approved the measure.³³ The charter issue divided the city into pro- and anti-charter factions, culminating in a movement by pro-charter forces to exclude from city government those who voted against the charter. The charter forces believed that the plebiscite was like any other high stakes political election, an election which they had won. Hood and the "People's Meeting" saw matters quite differently. Their municipal ticket comprised equal numbers of Democrats, Whigs, and Free Soilers who would "fairly represent the different interests, feelings, and parties of the city." Mayoral candidate Hood, in a speech before the meeting, argued that "in the management of our local concerns there is no necessity...of party spirit." In "all the common interests of our local government,"

Hood continued, “the spirit of party or sect should be forever hushed....” On the basis of such appeals Hood and the nonpartisan People’s ticket gained a narrow victory.³⁴ Obviously, such episodes can be read both ways. The pro-charter forces, after all, did attempt to mobilize a prescriptive movement, even if it had little to do with the familiar themes of party politics. But nonpartisanship was resurgent again and again in municipal elections. Four years later the *Lynn News* rhapsodized that “the system of carrying politics into municipal elections has been effectively checked...” “Of the political connection of those who shall be elected to the various city offices,” the *News* asserted, “we care little--if they are men qualified for the places which they are to occupy.”³⁵

While it would be a gross error to claim that all local elections were free of partisanship, it seems equally true that residents of small towns, and even smallish cities, drew distinctions between local government and state and national politics. Local government dealt with matters of broad concern to the community--the public. In this context prescriptive party ideologies would have greatly complicated the already delicate task of mediating the inherently divisive challenges that local administrations faced. Such challenges could produce bitter conflict, and might even lead some to call for tax increases--two things communities sought above all to avoid. Before the Civil War the goal of nonpartisanship, therefore, seemed better suited for achieving economy and harmony in local government. While clearly not always attained, nonpartisanship was the popular ideal in local government.

Voluntary association was another important arena where nonpartisanship was both learned and then carried into public life, sometimes with explosive results. In the 1830s and 1840s the nonpartisan voluntary association emerged as the principle means for improving the material lives of people and the moral and spiritual condition of society. Labor reform associations, for example, like many voluntary organizations in antebellum America, emphasized cross-class solidarity by framing worker grievances as issues of concern to the entire public, meaning the (white) community at-large. They deployed the rhetoric and organizational forms of moral reformers by forcibly shunting the private--in this case, economic relations--into the public.³⁶ At the same time voluntary association privileged grassroots, nonpartisan solutions to labor problems. Before midcentury, labor reformers underlined the fundamental relationship of labor's plight to public life, yet in the main eschewed partisan political activity that might divide them.

In New London, nonpartisan alliances--infelicitously dubbed Mechanics,' Operatives,' and Laborers,' Associations--sprung up in 1836-7 to agitate for the ten-hour day while an independent weekly newspaper appeared in Norwich to publicize their efforts. The *Mechanics', Operatives', And Laborers' Advocate* pledged "not to meddle with *party* politics" and treated readers to essays that assailed the "crafty, designing, selfish, and ambitious spirits" who headed parties. Private negotiation with employers and nonpartisan campaigns to improve workers' lot were the primary strategies of the New London County labor movement. It sought foremost to persuade employers of the morality and justice of shorter hours by appealing to their moral

conscience. The movement also folded labor reforms like the ten-hour working day, the abolition of child labor, and the abolition of imprisonment for debt into a broader moral vision that included temperance and Sabbath observance.³⁷ In part this nonpartisan approach reflected the success of voluntarism. Under pressure from the Associations, master craftsmen and manufacturers in the building trades, machine shops, and iron foundries of eastern Connecticut adopted the ten-hour rule in the summer and fall of 1836. The owners of the region's textile factories, however, remained resolutely opposed. Thus in February 1837 the Associations unveiled a plan for a nonpartisan petition drive to codify ten-hours as a legal day's work in textile factories.

The early optimism of the campaign quickly disintegrated. For one thing, now that the ten-hour day was the rule throughout the region's trades, some journeymen saw no further need for action, and in fact complained in the pages of the *Advocate* that the Associations were devoting too much attention to the plight of textile operatives. In this way labor activists learned that even such nonpartisan political activity as petitioning could be divisive. Then disaster struck. Firm closings and widespread unemployment accompanied the financial crash of 1837. By May, the *Advocate* ceased publication, its subscription list having evaporated. The much heralded ten-hour petition never materialized.³⁸

Elsewhere, labor reformers adopted similar strategies. In the 1840s Essex County labor reformers eschewed third party politics and organized grassroots voluntary societies of male and female factory operatives and skilled journeymen to

raise wages and shorten the length of the working day. Groups of mechanics and factory operatives in Andover, Lynn, Marblehead, Newburyport, and Danvers loosely affiliated themselves with the New England Association of Workmen (renamed the New England Labor Reform League in 1847), and the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. The principal voice of the eastern Massachusetts labor movement was the *Lynn Awl* and the *Voice of Industry*, based in the sprawling cotton city of Lowell, immediately adjacent Essex. Both papers enjoyed a large circulation in Essex County. Weekly editorials called on male and female workers to unite for higher wages and especially a ten hour day, so that workers might have time to cultivate spiritual and moral perfection. Indeed, as Teresa Murphy shows, labor activists developed a powerful critique of social inequality based in large part on inverting Yankee middle-class conceptions of private morality, turning such values as moral piety and Christian conscience against exploitative employers and claiming shorter hours would greatly improve the moral condition of operatives and factory towns.³⁹

Such a focus cut two ways. On the one hand, appropriating the language of moral reform enabled labor reformers to forge alliances with middle-class sympathizers and other fellow travelers. Like various moral reform causes, labor reform gained adherents faster when it was understood as an issue of conscience and morality. But this emphasis reflected, too, the essentially nonpartisan character of labor reform during the 1840s. These local organizations did question candidates on "labor" issues, and sponsored a handful of nonpartisan petitions for a ten-hour law in manufacturing establishments that were notable for the participation of skilled artisans, merchants and

retailers, and farmers. Through the pages of their weeklies they also perennially debated the question of whether the labor movement would be better served by a reentry into independent politics. Despite the sheer volume of political rhetoric, however, in the end labor reformers focused mainly on mutual aid and self-improvement, such as teetotalism, cooperative union stores, lyceums, and widow's benefits, while also appealing to employers to voluntarily accede to their just demands.⁴⁰ Thus, while activists thrust the cause of labor into public spotlight, the reigning strategy for solving labor-capital relations remained voluntary appeals to employers' social obligation to the welfare of their workers and operatives. The overall emphasis betrayed a deeper commitment to the ideal of a producerist and reciprocal society in which even wealthy members met customary standards of morality and fairness. By the 1850s, social changes coupled with a new political critique would cast doubt on this ideal, tilting reformers' efforts decisively in favor of state coercion. The critique and its public representation would remain the same: private social relations inevitably affected the moral character of the public sphere and thus demanded the community's attention. The solution reformers would seek in the 1850s, however, demonstrated a renewed emphasis on the state as the constitutional embodiment of the public welfare.

Other voluntary movements with potentially divisive agendas were also careful to stress nonpartisanship. In Dauphin County the Sons of Temperance swore off discussion of subjects "of a sectarian or political character," as their Constitution made explicit. Its members proclaimed that "the society is strictly a Temperance Beneficial

Association,” indirectly acknowledging the politically charged nature of the liquor question. The closely related Harrisburg Washingtonian movement followed this tactical path as well. Washingtonians stressed moral suasion over coercion, hoping to facilitate the policing of personal morality through fraternal organization and vigilant self-improvement. Men and women flocked to the movement in Harrisburg; in its first three years, over 1,700 men and women signed the pledge of total abstinence.

Women’s activism in the Martha Washingtonian Society in Harrisburg naturally spilled into poor relief, given the organization’s emphasis on identifying and reforming the downcast inebriate. The male and female associations also sponsored lectures by local clergy so as to publicize the moral codes necessary to strengthen the wills of their members, for fear of a dreadful backslide into “rum slavery” haunted many. Always, the Washingtonians boasted of their power to improve public morals. Said one member: “The moral effect on the community is more powerful than legislative enactment; and designed more harmoniously [than legal coercion] to carry out the great object of the Temperance enterprise.”⁴¹

The nonpartisan framework was equally strong in Essex County. David H. Barlow, editor of the *Essex County Washingtonian*, published between 1842-44, pledged that his temperance sheet “will not meddle at all” with “partizanship in Politics or sectarianism in Religion.” Barlow plainly hoped that by pursuing the goal of total abstinence in this way he would win wide acceptance for his paper and cause. Indeed, Essex County was a hotbed of Washingtonianism and temperance activism. Lynn, Andover, Amesbury, Salisbury, Danvers, Marblehead, and Newburyport all had large

Washingtonian and temperance societies. Temperance forces in the 1840s, like labor reformers, eschewed partisanship altogether in favor of the moral regeneration of inebriates, which in turn would improve public society. Drink was an issue with public ramifications because it was said to impact families, poverty rates, crime, and public morality generally. Promoting total abstinence among individuals promoted the moral betterment of society, temperance activists claimed time and again.⁴²

As moral suasion proved disappointing, temperance reformers turned first to local option laws. By the late 1840s the local option movement enlisted a phalanx of men and women concerned for the decay of public life in the form of crime and pauperism, and private morality in the form of domestic and child abuse, all allegedly encouraged by unregulated liquor. In 1849 Dauphin County women, asserting that lawmakers were the “constituted guardians of the public prosperity,” petitioned for a countywide licensing ordinance. Few if any questioned the legal right of the state to grant such petitions, and by midcentury, local option laws were a common feature of the Pennsylvania law code. Although certainly coercive in many respects, local option emerged from the voluntaristic culture of nonpartisan governance. In such cases where a petition was granted, lawmakers in effect constituted at law the reformers’ key claim that issues of public morality were best handled through the normative institutions and practices of local governance. Lawmakers seemed most comfortable handling the issue on a case by case basis. When lawmakers were faced with strong grassroots opposition to local option laws, they typically refused to devolve the state’s police power to local anti-liquor zealots.⁴³ In this way, as William Novak has recently shown, the state’s

police power over liquor and other unpopular commodities remained subject to local control, unleashed only when local residents presented sufficient evidence of the popularity and necessity of the “well regulated” community.⁴⁴

Labor and temperance reform during the 1840s illuminates how people conceptualized the broad question of personal and communal governance in a rapidly modernizing society. Both movements identified private morality--unreconstructed drunkards or selfish employers--as the principle sources of potential trouble for communities. Both movements intimately connected the private to the public, primarily by underscoring the debilitating effects of strong drink and exploitative working conditions for public order and social relations in communities. Nonpartisan voluntary activism aimed not simply at reform of the private but also of the public, ascribing to the private a recognizably public connotation because of its consequence for social comity and communal order. Nonpartisanship “fit” the larger intellectual framework within which reformers of the private-public nexus operated because, ideally, it mobilized the entire community on behalf of private improvement which, in turn, benefited the community at-large.

The ideal of nonpartisanship did not originate in some distant ideological tradition so much as it flowed from social experience with local institutions that nurtured commitment to mutuality and commonalty in matters affecting governance. The break with the partisan framework was made easy because of the perceived “public” character of governance--antebellum communities confronted a raft of social and economic problems that demanded everyone’s attention irrespective of their

partisan identification. Nonpartisanship suffused antebellum public life because of people's efforts to imagine and then realize a single public interest out of the fractiousness that inhered in the public sphere. Sustained partisan or sectoral conflict within the comparatively limited bounds of the local town or village was in no one's best interest. This is not to romanticize the antebellum community so much as it is a recognition that certain key features and institutions of local public life reinforced extant social, material, and cultural predispositions for nonpartisanship.

The countless efforts of antebellum communities to gain assistance from state legislatures for local economic improvements provide perhaps the best evidence for this dynamic. Such projects were as varied as the needs of communities. They included monies for public roads, bridges, river improvements, and canals, or charters for private transportation and indeed even industrial enterprises that promised to infuse jobs and money into the local economy. Projects like these usually elicited broad nonpartisan support among affected residents and within state assemblies. Indeed, grassroots economic boosterism reflected both the general popularity of local economic development and the distributive pattern of nineteenth-century economic policymaking. Much has been made about the competing political economic ideals that divided the major parties.⁴⁵ But in fact, by the 1840s, both the major parties proved quite willing to use government for economic modernization. In Massachusetts, the Whig party dominated state government in part because of the popularity of their "American System" of protective tariffs, internal improvements, and the liberal distribution of corporate charters and business privileges. State government in Connecticut, though

usually divided equally between Whigs and Democrats, likewise aggressively pursued economic development through liberal charter policy. In Pennsylvania, Democrats controlled state government and promoted economic development through liberal charter policy and the state's elaborate system of Public Works, while the Whigs carped about the enormous debt rolled up by Democratic administrations and pushed for even greater reliance upon private enterprise.⁴⁶ Despite the differences in the partisan make-up of state assemblies, government in all three states promoted economic development. Public economic policy was largely determined by intense inter-regional competition, not party ideology. The specific distribution of economic goods in the form of charters, tax abatements, or public works' funds depended on nonpartisan mobilization of individuals and communities.⁴⁷

This was certainly the case in the city of New London's campaign on behalf of the New London, Willimantic, and Palmer Railroad, chartered in 1847. The initial impulse for the railroad was the collapse of the city's whaling industry. The city's leading whaling merchants, looking for new areas of investment, promoted the plan to provide the city with its first railroad from New London to the small manufacturing centers of the Thames and Willimantic valleys to the north. Urging everyone who could to purchase at least "one share," the *New London Morning News* reasoned that even if "the original money subscribed is lost, business of every kind will increase in that proportion that would more than doubly meet the loss on stock."⁴⁸ Backers argued that the railroad would raise property values, stimulate commerce and industry, and claimed unrealistically that New London would emerge as a dominant commercial

entrepot. Fear of falling behind the region's other cities was a central argument in defense of the plan. Boosters stressed the general economic benefits that the railroad would bring to the local economy.

Though a few viewed the NLW&P as another example of government sponsored "monopoly," most New Londoners initially welcomed the plan. One study of the stock subscription lists of the NLW&P found that over 85 percent of the shareholders in the enterprise held between one and five shares, with the largest average holdings concentrating in the city of New London (5.72 per subscriber), and small holdings the rule in interior towns along the road's route (2.76 per subscriber).⁴⁹ If the railroad enjoyed broad financial support among the region's middle and upper classes, it also received hearty praise in the local Whig and Democratic press. Partisans put aside supposedly deep ideological differences to lend united support for a project that most viewed as essential to the economic wellbeing of the city and region.⁵⁰

To be sure, economic elites often led such nonpartisan campaigns. Predictably, they linked their own material interests with those of the community at-large, seizing on the quixotic ideal of the harmony of class interests to legitimate their public-mindedness and win handsome profits in the bargain. Thus the nonpartisan ideal of governance by no means constituted an ipso facto threat to the power of elites. On occasion, class differences between elites and non-elites complicated local economic development policy, sparking controversy and class conflict within communities. That said, most of the time, when opposition to such economic institutions as railroads or

banks did erupt, it took the form of quite specific problems and objections that were not directly born of class interests.

For example, in New London County a local Sabbatarian questioned whether “Christians of this community” should be supporting the NLW&P, which would operate on the Sabbath. Other opponents of the NLW&P were motivated by what economic historian George Rogers Taylor called “metropolitan mercantilism.” The NLW&P evoked a chilly response from Norwich, because it threatened to siphon business from that city. Residents of small towns north of New London who had campaigned vigorously for the railroad turned against it as they realized the NLW&P was not going to pass through their town. Many in New London itself criticized the NLW&P’s distribution of free passes to political elites and its speculation in Massachusetts railroad stock. Still others grew antagonistic when the NLW&P petitioned city government for loans to pay debts and finish construction. Why should the city float a bonded debt to bail out a poorly managed railroad, critics justifiably asked?⁵¹ Opposition to railroads arose for many reasons, but few of them had to do with partisan ideology or, for that matter, some broader anti-development *mentalité*.

Similar examples can be cited for Essex and Dauphin. In Essex the railroad “mania” consumed the imaginations of Liberty, Democratic, and Whig partisans alike. Railroad projects attracted wide support, in some cases occasioning unanimous town meeting votes pledging the town’s financial and moral backing.⁵² In Dauphin, the desire to keep Harrisburg and the rest of the county a step ahead of its regional rivals prompted nonpartisanship on a variety of economic development issues, from support

for the Pennsylvania Railroad in its epic struggle with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, to a campaign for the removal of a federal Iron Works to the state capital.⁵³ Broad community support for projects which foreshadowed growth and “progress” did not stop at transportation companies. In Harrisburg both the Democratic and Whig press celebrated the founding of the Harrisburg Cotton Mill Company in 1849 because it augured “the amelioration and improvement of the condition of laborers, and the rapid growth of the borough in population and wealth.” Analysis of company subscription lists shows that while Harrisburg’s merchant and banking elite invested handsome sums, fully 62% of stockholders held between one and five shares.⁵⁴

In the 1850s railroads and manufacturing companies would come under increased criticism for mismanagement, high shipping rates, exploitative working conditions, and the disruption of residential neighborhoods. Such problems in tandem with other issues fueled the populist eruptions of that decade. But throughout the antebellum era, few doubted that the key to expanding opportunity and assuring their community’s prosperity lay in the spread of transportation and manufacturing. In these counties, the appeal of development far outweighed generalized suspicion of economic modernization. In this sense, local development projects took on a public character before the Civil War. While all recognized that profits were to be made, people also saw that such projects brought additional jobs and commerce to their community--outcomes few objected to. Suspicions of economic development certainly followed failure, and critics minced few words expressing their anger with promises unfulfilled.

But the public character of economic development led most people to conceptualize economic growth in ways that suited their needs and expectations.

Conclusion

Local campaigns for economic development projects further illuminates how residents of the three counties understood the limits of partisanship. When it came to meeting local economic development needs, partisanship provided few solutions, if only for crass material considerations. So, too, was partisanship of limited utility in local government, where the goals of economy and harmony proved more attractive and durable guides. Partisanship seemed equally at odds with the voluntaristic strategies of labor and moral reformers. In all of these areas people worked in nonpartisan ways for solutions to problems that can be broadly viewed as matters of governance, whether they be the state of the local economy or poor roads or alcohol or labor relations in a local factory. Viewed in this way, few in the 1830s and 1840s seemed inclined to interject partisanship into local governance.

Two frameworks constituted antebellum public life, one partisan the other nonpartisan, sometimes unfolding in harmony, other times in tension. These overlapping frameworks were forged in electoral politics and community projects and local and state government and voluntary association, merging into a broadly shared set of ideas and experiences that echoed in the popular vernacular of political discourse. Citizens applied lessons learned through local experience to evaluate their government

and its leaders. Above all, they expected nonpartisanship to prevail in matters of governance. Even in electoral politics, where certain select issues fostered--indeed, even constituted--partisanship, people found that the parties folded their appeals into a popular vernacular that bore the imprint of nonpartisan governance. Political leaders should be responsive to democratic impulses, work to harmonize antagonistic interests, and most importantly pursue the larger goals of economy and the public good. From the perspective of most citizens in these years, politics and government worked in ways that were consistent with these basic expectations. It was left to reformers, politicizing the nonpartisan vision amid social and economic flux, to change that.

Notes

1. For partisan mobilization and the culture of campaigns see William E. Gienapp, "'Politics Seems To Enter Into Everything:' Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on Antebellum American Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 15-69; Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press); Elizabeth R. Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of American History* 82 (September 1995), 494-521. Studies of partisan ideology include John Ashworth, *"Agrarians & Aristocrats": Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); William G. Shade, *Banks Or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972).

2. A similar point of departure is suggested by Paula Baker, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life: Gender, Politics, and the State in Rural New York, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 24-118. The argument developed in this chapter owes much to Baker's seminal study of men and women's "moral vision of politics" in rural New York during the Gilded Age. For more work on grassroots political culture that also stress factors other than partisan ideology and ethnocultural orientation, see Baker, "The Culture of Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Community and Political Behavior in Rural New York," *Journal of Social History* 18 (1984), 167-93; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 45-52; Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

3. For a simply brilliant discussion of how early education and family upbringing dovetailed into future partisanship, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, esp. 27-107.

4. This is not to say that what I've chosen to term "public issues" were always distinct from "political issues." On the contrary, a major theme of Chapters Four and Five will be the politicization of such "public issues" as immigration, labor-capital relations, and drink in the 1850s. This chapter aims to delineate what I see as the two dominant frameworks of antebellum public life--partisan politics and nonpartisan governance. The conceptual distinction I draw between formal party politics and governance in public life is informed by Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural*

Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society [Trans. by Thomas Burger] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). The best introduction to Habermas through the varied disciplinary perspectives of history, feminist studies, and cultural criticism is Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

5. For local party platforms and conventions, see for example *New London Morning News* 28 March 1845; *Norwich Weekly Courier*: 15 November 1843, 17 January 1846; *Newburyport Herald*: 12 October 1846; *Merrimac Journal* 16 October 1842; *Clay Bugle* 8 February 1844; *Democratic Union* 2 November 1844; *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 11 February 1846. Good secondary accounts of party politics in the three states during the Second Party System include Jarvis Means Morse, *A Neglected Period of Connecticut's History: 1818-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933); Lex Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), and "Retrospective Voting and the Presidential Election of 1844: The Texas Issue Revisited," 24 (Fall 1994), 837-54; Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southern Expansion, 1843-1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967); Arthur B. Darling, *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848: A Study of Liberal Movements in Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1770s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Charles McCool Snyder, *The Jacksonian Heritage: Pennsylvania Politics, 1833-1848* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1958).

6. *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 14 August 1844. See also *ibid.*, 18 September 1844; *Harrisburg Clay Bugle*, 19 September 1844.

7. *New London Morning News*, 2 April 1845. See also *ibid.*, 10 March 1845; *Norwich Weekly Courier*: 22 March, 5 April 1843; *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 13 December 1848; *Newburyport Herald* 14 October 1842.

8. "Constitution of the Central Clay Club of Dauphin County," in Minute Book, Central Clay Club of Dauphin County Papers, 1843-1844, Historical Society of Dauphin County, MG-48; *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 7 January 1846. See also *Newburyport Herald* 11 November 1842; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 15 March 1843; 5 February 1844.

9. *Lynn Bay State*, 6 November 1851; *Address of the Democratic Association of Norwich* (Norwich: n.p. 1844), 2, 11. See also *Lynn Bay State*, 11 October 1849.

10. *Newburyport Herald*, 3 November 1846.

11. *Newburyport Herald*, 3 November 1846.

12. Paula Baker makes this point in, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life*, 27.

13. An excellent study of how party leaders in the 1840s translated their platforms in ways that made “emotional sense” to local voters is Watson, *Cumberland County*.

14. *Clay Bugle* 8 August 1844. See also *ibid.*, 13 June 1844.

15. *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 6 September 1843; *New London Morning News*, 1 April 1845.

16. *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 2 September 1846.

17. *Newburyport Herald*, 14 September 1844; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 10 January 1844.

18. *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 6 August 1845; 3 September 1845. See also *ibid.*: 12 September, 16 September, 1 October, 8 October, 1845.

19. *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 18 September 1844.

20. *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, 18 September 1844.

21. *Newburyport Herald*, 19 September 1844. See also *ibid.*, 24 September 1844; *Pennsylvania Telegraph* 14 August 1844; *Norwich Weekly Courier*: 24 January, 18 September 1844. For more on women and partisan politics, see Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Varon, “Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too.”

22. Scholars who have emphasized partisan turnout--as opposed to party switching--in determining election outcomes include Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*; Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

23. This, of course, is the view of mass based parties advanced by Richard P. McCormick, *The Second Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1966).

24. Here, I am not arguing that parties had no guiding principles nor partisans no foundational ideas. But it may well be that the concept “ideology” is simply too insufficiently nuanced to capture the whole constellation of emotions and beliefs that constituted the political character of rank-and-file partisans, if not leaders themselves.

People in voluntary political institutions such as parties do, of course, hold broadly similar ideas about the world around them and attempt to act in concert on those shared ideas. In theory at least those ideas might become clearly articulated, well understood, and more or less universally accepted by the members, cohering into something we can call a formal ideology. But ideology, in the rigorously finite and prescriptive meaning of the term, cannot be simply adduced from partisan conflict and then deployed to “explain” the phenomena. In my opinion major party campaign rhetoric, policy orientation, and especially legislative outputs were far too conditional (both socioeconomically and politically) for “ideology” to serve as a *fundamental* determinant of partisanship, whatever its ascriptive utility may be for creating general taxonomies of thought. In terms of rank-and-file partisanship, mine is mainly a social and cultural explanation that rests on the functions of parties as socializing agents in a changing, more commercially and culturally complex world, for that is what I believe nineteenth-century parties, in addition to modernizing the American economy, did best. For related discussions, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*. Also helpful is Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), Ch. 8: “Ideology As a Cultural System.”

25. New London *Morning News* 14 December 1844. See also *Andover Advertiser*, 17 November 1856.

26. For more on this point, see Hal S. Barron, “And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: Public Road Administration and the Decline of Localism in the Rural North, 1870-1930,” *Journal of Social History* 26 (Fall 1992), 81-103; Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*, 95.

27. “Harrisburg Borough Council Minutes, 1813-1860,” Pennsylvania State Archives, Microfilm Mss., County Records; “Rate Bill for 9th Highway District in Stonington, 1841-2, kept by Benjamin F. Stanton, Surveyor,” in Stonington Records: Town Accounts, CHS: Mss. 70286; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 4 December 1844.

28. Baker, *Moral Frameworks of Public Life*, 90-118.

29. *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 9 October 1844; *Lynn Bay State*, 22 June 1854. See also *Bay State*, 25 April 1850; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 13 September 1843; *Newburyport Herald*, 31 January 1854.

30. *Lynn News*, 26 January, 2 February 1855. Also see *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 29 January 1847.

31. *Lynn Bay State*, 7 February 1850.

32. This summary is derived from my close reading of local political sources in this town: Amesbury Town Meeting Records, 1844-1861, Microfilm Mss., Amesbury

Public library; *Essex Transcript*, 1842-49; Amesbury and Salisbury Mills *Villager*, 1849-60.

33. *Lynn Bay State...Extra*, 26 April 1850; *Bay State*, 25 April 1850.

34. *Lynn Bay State*, 26 April 1850; 9 May 1850. For more on this campaign, see also *ibid.*: 11 April, 2 May 1850.

35. *Lynn News*, 24 November 1854.

36. On this point see especially Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For a related discussion, see Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 192-229.

37. *Norwich Mechanics', Operatives', and Laborers' Advocate*: 14 October 1836, 10 October 1836. See also *ibid.*: 22 August 1836; 29 August 1836; 12 September 1836; 19 September 1836; 10 October 1836.

38. *Mechanics', Operatives', and Laborers' Advocate*: 23 January, 16 January, 27 February, 24 April, 8 May, 15 May 1837.

39. Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor*, 131-63. See also Jama Lazarow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), *passim*.

40. Charles E. Persons, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," in Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *Labor Laws and Their Enforcement: With Special Reference to Massachusetts* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 3-129; 24-49. For more on the cultural and ideological dimensions of the 1840s labor movement in Massachusetts, see Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 68-96; Thomas Dublin, *Women At Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 108-31; Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), esp. 197-208; Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor*, 131-63.

41. *Constitution, By-Laws, and Rules of Order, of the Central Division, No. 10, of the Sons of Temperance, of the State of Pennsylvania, Instituted August 13, 1844* (Harrisburg: n.p. 1845), 4-7, 23; *Harrisburg Telegraph* 20 August 1845; *ibid.*, 14 March 1848. See also Papers of the Washingtonian Temperance Society, 1841-1844

(Harrisburg), Pledge Book, MG-123, DCHS; William R. DeWitt, *Profanity and Intemperance, Prevailing Evils* (Harrisburg: Fenn & Wallace, 1840); *Telegraph*: 27 August 1845; 4 March, 21 March 1846; 2 September 1846; 16 March 1847; 27 January 1849.

42. *Prospectus of the Essex County Washingtonian* Printed Broadside, 1842, American Antiquarian Society, BDSDS 1842. See also *Essex County Washingtonian*, 21 July 1842; *Amesbury Essex Transcript*, 14 April 1843; *Amesbury and Salisbury Mills Villager*, 15 May 1851; *Newburyport Herald*: 7 August 1846; 3 October 1846; *A Concise Statement of the Origins, Progress, and Present Condition of the Washington Total Abstinence Society of Newburyport and Vicinity* (Newburyport: n.p. 1845); *First Annual Report of the Washington Total Abstinence Society, Lynn, 1842* (Lynn: n.p. 1842); *First Annual Report of the Salisbury and Amesbury Young Men's Temperance Association, June, 1833* (Amesbury: Currier Press, 1833). For more on the Washingtonian movement in Essex County, see Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor*, 101-30.

43. *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 10 March 1849. For example, in 1848 temperance advocates in Washington County mustered a petition for a strict local license law, only to be thwarted by an equally lengthy petition from opponents in Washington County. See "Circular...To the Friends of Temperance in Washington County," and other petitions, Records of the General Assembly, House File, 1848, RG-7, box 14, Pennsylvania State Archives (PSA). Also Pennsylvania State Temperance Society, *Address to the People of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Relative to the License Question*, printed circular contained in Records of the General Assembly, House File, 1847, RG-7, box 14, PSA. For examples of local option legislation, see for example *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania...1850* (Harrisburg: J. M. G. Lescure, 1850), 275-6; 634-6. A good general treatment of the anti-liquor crusade in antebellum Pennsylvania is Asa Earl Martin, "The Temperance Movement in Pennsylvania Prior to the Civil War," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 49 (July 1925), 195-230.

44. William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law & Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. 149-89.

45. See in particular Ashworth, "Agrarians and Aristocrats", and *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 289-381; Howe, *Political Culture of the American Whigs*; Kohl, *Politics of Individualism*.

46. Good accounts of Massachusetts' political economy, and especially the dominant role played by the Whigs in state government, include Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 268-301; Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947); Carl

Siracusa, *A Mechanical People: Perceptions of the Industrial Order in Massachusetts, 1815-1860* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 43-148. An excellent recent analysis, one that stresses the General Court's vital role in both promoting and regulating economic activity in antebellum Massachusetts, is Pauline Maier, "The Debate over Incorporations: Massachusetts in the Early Republic," in Conrad Edick Wright, ed., *Massachusetts and the New Nation* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society Press, 1992), 73-117. On Connecticut, see Morse, *Neglected Period*, 52-3, 253, 266, 291-99; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 107-9, and *passim*. On Pennsylvania, see for example Douglas E. Bowers, "From Logrolling to Corruption: The Development of Lobbying in Pennsylvania, 1815-1861," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Winter 1983), 439-74, and "The Pennsylvania Legislature, 1815-1860: A Study of Democracy at Work" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974), esp. 179-224; Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 42-51.

47. For related discussions see Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 113-9; L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1-22, 57-143; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 21-33; 42-51; Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *JAH* 66 (September 1979), 279-98.

48. New London *Morning News*, 29 January 1848.

49. Thelma M. Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut River Valley," *Smith College Studies in History* (October, 1937-July 1938), 85-90, 243-9. The popular appeal of the NLW&P in eastern Connecticut is consistent with patterns found elsewhere. See for example John Majewski and Daniel B. Klein, "Economy, Community, and the Law: the Turnpike Movement in New York, 1797-1845," *Law & Society Review* 26 (1992), 469-512; Majewski, Klein, and Christopher Baer, "Responding to Relative Economic Decline: The Plank Road Boom of Antebellum New York," *The Journal of Economic History* 53 (March 1993), 106-22; George R. Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1951), 97-100.

50. See for example *New London Chronicle*: 16 October 1849; 13 March, 15 April 1852; *New London Daily Morning Star*: 2 March, 11 March, 13 June 1850; 17 March 1852; 13 April 1852; *New London Morning News*: 6 February 1847; 22 February 1848.

51. Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 98; Kistler, "The Rise of Railroads in the Connecticut River Valley," 75-9; *New London Daily Chronicle*, 12 November 1852; *New London Daily Morning Star*: 15 January 1850; 13 April 1852.

52. A Rockport town meeting, for example, unanimously voted to loan \$50,000 to a branch line project that would connect the town to the Eastern Railroad, and appointed a committee to petition the Massachusetts General Court on behalf of the plan. See *Lynn Bay State* 22 December 1853. For other similar examples, see *ibid.*: 12 June 1851; 16 October 1851; 9 February 1854; *Newburyport Daily Evening Union*: 31 October 1850; 25 February 1853.

53. *Harrisburg Telegraph*: 7 January, 14 January, 11 March 1846; 29 October 1847. On the conflict between the Pennsylvania and Baltimore and Ohio, see Joseph S. Clark, Jr., "The Railroad Struggle for Pittsburgh: Forty-Three Years of Philadelphia-Baltimore Rivalry," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 48 (1924), 1-37.

54. *Harrisburg Telegraph* 16 May 1849. Data on stockholders derived from "List of Subscribers to the Harrisburg Cotton Company," undated, Harrisburg Cotton Mill Company Papers, 1849-1865; Stock Subscription Lists, Historical Society of Dauphin County, MG-158: folder 2. The records contain four subscription lists, one of them dated 1865. The above list, compiled in a small journal separate from the main record book, appears to be the first subscription drive. See also *Harrisburg Democratic Union*: 3 January, 18 July, 1 August 1849; *Harrisburg Telegraph*: 30 May, 20 June 1849; Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes*, 52-7.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL ROOTS OF ANTEBELLUM POPULISM: PARTY GOVERNMENT AND ANTIPARTY REFORM AT MIDCENTURY

Antebellum political elites could be reasonably confident in their abilities to meet Americans' general expectations of politics and governance. Yet, by midcentury, reformers of various stripes identified problems in the North's changing demographics and economy and relationship to the South. Liquor consumption seemed dangerously at odds with evangelical Protestant ideals of piety and order, clouding peoples' moral judgement and leading to poverty and the dissolution of families. Immigration brought foreigners by the thousands to once relatively homogenous communities, where they competed with the native-born for jobs and political influence. The spread of railroads and factories unleashed a larger reorganization of work and economic relationships and produced class tensions that threatened to disrupt community harmony and forestall further commercial progress. The influence of powerful commercial interests on the political parties and state government proved equally worrisome. Then too, the spread of slavery into newly acquired territories made many nervous about the future of the West and the pro-slavery drift of the federal government. In the three counties, as across much of the North, an array of "reform" impulses generated new demands on political elites and their parties.

Specific socioeconomic and political contexts determined the priorities that reformers set in each county. Those differences notwithstanding, the reform impulses

of the early 1850s were variations on one overarching theme. Above all reformers developed a critique of party government. They raised fundamental questions about political leadership and the direction of the regime under major party auspices. The political stability of the 1830s and 1840s had rested on the parties' success at meeting nonpartisan expectations of governance. Insurgent reformers asked voters to reevaluate the capacity of the parties to meet the many new challenges of governance that now confronted society.

As that process of reevaluation unfolded, reformers politicized nonpartisan ideals of governance. The reformers adopted antiparty rhetoric, assailing partisan politics for its paucity of broad moral vision, its single-minded pursuit of winning elections and the spoils of office. Politics and government under the two parties operated in the interest of career politicians, the reformers charged, and thus failed to address the needs and concerns of the public. As the preeminent oppositional discourse of the 1850s, antipartyism emerged from the social experience of local public life to communicate genuine disaffection from the regime of party government. Antiparty appeals to voters worked particularly well on issues that lay outside of the framework of formal party competition: prohibition, nativism, certain state and local political economic issues, and eventually the expansion of slavery. These were issues with broad public ramifications, and as such framed larger debates about governance in a changing society. Whichever the issue at hand, reformers mobilized people on the idea that partisanship ought not to affect decisions on issues of broad concern to the entire polity. Antipartyism lay at the heart of populism in the 1850s because a critical mass of

citizens came to believe that the major parties had strayed too far from their larger purpose--both a government independent of special interests and a politics that served the public good.

This chapter and the next focus on that process of politicization at the grassroots. This one examines the origins of antiparty populism between roughly 1849 and 1853. The first half surveys politics and government in each county and state, directing attention to the rising significance of state political economic reform issues in state politics; the second half traces how reformers developed new frameworks for comprehending party politics and its relationship to governance in that new context. The next chapter will take up the Know Nothing movement during its formative season of 1854-5. The chapters do not present a blow-by-blow narrative of electoral politics in the three counties. Rather, they investigate changing ideas of politics and governance in specific contexts and the politicization of those ideas in the form of the Know Nothing movement.

Transitions: Party Government at Midcentury

The demographic and industrial changes that reordered society and economy in the three counties provided one impetus for changes in public life.¹ Equally important were the connections that people drew between distributive policies, new public issues, and the question of governance. Distributive economic policies implicated the parties in industrial and commercial expansion. Such projects reassured citizens that

governance was, generally speaking, attuned to the public welfare. But while most people supported economic growth in their communities and expected government to facilitate it, many citizens recoiled from the insecurities that accompanied economic modernization. At midcentury economic anxiety swept the ranks of the native-born working- and middling classes, and state-level distributive policies became one important source of political controversy. At first, the major parties in the three counties and states managed the many impulses for reform by and large within the existing party framework. At the national and state level, Whig and Democratic party leaders suppressed sectional discord and supported the Compromise of 1850, the regime's *deus ex machina* on the vexed slavery question. There were, to be sure, dissenting voices over the Fugitive Slave Law, but the major parties' pro-Compromise consensus reflected the turn towards local and state issues.² State policy issues related to debtor relief, the regulation of business, and, in Pennsylvania, the future of the Public Works, gradually crowded out the traditional issues that had undergirded national party competition.

Essex County

Antiparty populism in Essex County was built upon foundations laid by the Democratic-Free Soil Coalition. The Coalition was the brain-child of Democratic leaders George Boutwell, Nathaniel Banks, and Free Soil leader Henry Wilson, all of whom recognized the softness of Whig political hegemony in Massachusetts. The

Whig appeal rested on the aggressive promotion of economic growth. Whig political economy envisioned the state as a facilitator of commercial and industrial expansion, ideally promoting general economic opportunity. The interests of the Bay State's commercial and industrial elite lay at the center of Whig political economy, but across Essex County Whiggery had a plebeian dimension that has been routinely underestimated by historians: what we might call popular Whiggery. Especially during the 1840s, Whigs had worked hard to wrap their patrician image in plebeian cloth, emphasizing the benefits that would redound to workers and the petit bourgeoisie from high tariffs and liberal charter policy. As popularized in the 1840s, Whiggery promised an interdependent polity working to ensure upward mobility from the ranks of the dependent laborer to the independent small proprietor.³

During bullish periods such sunny optimism seemed a stretch to only a fraction of the electorate. Nevertheless, the Whigs had little margin for error; in many places their electoral support hovered at or below fifty percent. But the party skillfully parlayed the state's election laws--including a general ticket system for most of the state's large eastern cities and an apportionment system in the General Court that favored eastern towns--into near monopoly control of Massachusetts government. The Coalition's electoral strategy was thus a straightforward one. In many of the state's electoral districts, including Essex County, Democrats and Free Soilers together outnumbered the Whigs; if they united behind single tickets for state senator and representative, they could gain control of the General Court. The Coalition could then elect its own candidates to the United States Senate, fill state offices with Democrats

and Free Soilers, and thereby control state policy. Central to the entire scheme was the fact that on a number of state reform issues, Democrats and Free Soilers were agreed. The Coalition in Essex County pitched their movement to small producers with such issues as abolition of imprisonment for debt, homestead exemptions, mechanics' liens, and general incorporation laws, all policies that the Coalition enacted during their two-year reign (1851-1852).⁴

The theme of economic security and its connection to governance suffuses Coalition politics in Essex County. In one campaign column entitled "Laboring Men Remember," for example, Lewis Josselyn, editor of the new *Lynn Bay State* and an architect of the Coalition in Essex County, argued that a mechanics' lien law would "secure the pay of the mechanics and all workmen, for their labor on buildings, and prevents their being cheated by Whig shylocks." Similarly, homestead exemptions offered safety against the vicissitudes of the market, where failure threw families of limited means into debt and sometimes out on the street. A homestead exemption law would enable "laboring men and all men of small means to secure a home for their families from the grasp of avaricious creditors, who think more of money than of souls." Just as the Whigs had popularized the protective tariff, so too the Coalition tapped the widely popular goal of security and competency among the county's native-born middling classes.⁵

General incorporation and free banking laws constituted another policy theme of the Coalition. Like debtor relief measures, general incorporation laws addressed the anxieties of mostly middling folk with reasonable hopes of acquiring a small business.

The General Court routinely handed out special privileges to banking, railroad, and manufacturing corporations, thus facilitating the concentration of economic power. Curtailing the authority of the state legislature to create concentrated economic enterprise would reduce special legislation and, perhaps, the influence of private business interests over lawmaking. It would also democratize economic opportunity by insuring that privileges enjoyed by large corporate businesses were freely available to all. Amesbury *Villager* editor William H. B. Currier described general incorporation as a “democratic measure...designed as a check upon the special legislation which has occupied the time of the General Court...in behalf of the great corporate bodies of the state.” Regulation also figured prominently in arguments for general incorporation laws. Coalition supporters pushed for a free banking law that would standardize chartering procedures, limit capitalization, require annual reports to the legislature, and impose stringent specie and bond reserve requirements on banks. As George J. L. Colby argued, the state ought to “give all the advantages of entering into the business [of banking] who desire it, and secure the public against mismanagement and frauds, by placing them under proper regulations.”⁶

While the Coalition’s broad policy orientation looked to allay the anxieties of middling sorts, it also directed attention towards state politics and governance more generally. Coalition publicists folded specific reform policies into a larger critique of government under Whig auspices in Massachusetts. Indeed Whiggery, particularly elitist “Boston Whiggery,” quickly emerged as the Coalition’s reigning negative referent. The Coalition fingered Boston’s financial and industrial elite which,

reformers claimed, exercised a controlling influence over the Whig party and thus state government. “The Whigs, although the minority, rule the State through their corporate influence,” the Democrat-Coalition paper Haverhill *Essex Banner* proclaimed flatly.

The *Banner* linked the growing power of corporations directly to Whig rule in the Bay State, echoing a principal theme of the Coalition. Lewis Josselyn chimed in: “let the whole people, and not a few capitalists and speculators, be the only ones that engross the time and attention of legislators.”⁷ Coalition forces pegged Whiggery to problems and failures of Massachusetts government, an easy connection to draw, since the Whigs had ruled for the better part of two decades. As described by Coalition publicists, Whiggery was synonymous with special interests, particularly commercial and industrial interests, and therefore stood against the public good in government.

The Coalition’s anti-Whig animus dovetailed into a series of legislative and electoral reforms designed to break Whiggery’s stranglehold over state government. At issue, according to reformers, were several features of the Bay State’s constitutional system that advantaged Whiggery. Among them, the general ticket rule of many Whig controlled cities--Boston, Lowell, Springfield, and Salem, for example--which magnified Whig power in the General Court; countywide election of state senators, which favored Whig candidates from larger towns; majority rule for elections, which undermined the strength of minority parties in the state; and most important, an outmoded system of representation in the General Court that favored Whiggery’s base in the densely populated towns of eastern Massachusetts.⁸

Other features of the state's electoral law also generated cries for reform. Coalitionists viewed the \$1.50 poll tax, small though it was, as a symbol of *ancien regime* in a democratic age. A similar anti-aristocratic temper informed the Coalition's critique of open voting, a procedure that prevailed in most Massachusetts towns throughout the antebellum years. For decades Democrats and labor reformers had complained that the open ballot was a tool used by Whig employers to intimidate workers into voting Whig. As the Coalition crystallized, reformers resurrected the secret ballot issue and incorporated it into the Coalition's agenda. The implacable opposition of most Whigs to a secret ballot raised suspicions that Whig elites did indeed blackmail voters through the open ballot procedure, as did a highly publicized case in 1851 of coercion by Whig managers and agents of Lowell's Boott Manufacturing Company. To Essex County Coalitionists, the Lowell example confirmed how public life under the Whig regime was "retrograding and diminishing in the very elements of personal equality and freedom."⁹

Such themes played well in Essex County, historically a Whig stronghold. Between 1850 and 1853, Essex County was a battleground of closely fought contests. In races for Essex County's five senate seats, Coalition candidates won three in 1850 and swept all five in 1851. In elections for state assembly Coalition candidates fared nearly as well, battling the Whigs to a draw in 1850 and 1851, and winning 18 of 30 races in 1852. As we shall see, this late surge by the Coalition owed to the politicization of the ten-hour working day in Essex County. Indeed, though they failed

to pass a ten-hour labor law, pro-labor Coalition lawmakers brought ten-hour bills to the floor for votes, a first in Massachusetts.¹⁰

A brief analysis of voting in Essex County further illuminates the social geography of Coalition politics (Tables B.7 and B.8). The tables outline a clear portrait of Whiggery's base of support in these years, and by implication, that of the Coalition. On average, the Whigs did best in small towns and large cities with high per capita property values and lower percentages of industrial workers. These were the nonindustrial and farming communities of Topsfield, Lynnfield, Bradford and Essex, and the cities of Salem and Newburyport, the former an essentially commercial economy, the latter a more mixed industrial/commercial center. Through 1851, the Whigs carried the factory towns of Andover, Salisbury, and Lawrence and the shoe town of Danvers. In 1852, however, they slipped badly. Not surprisingly, the Whigs also ran strong in towns that accommodated large numbers of Orthodox Protestant communicants, namely Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians.

Conversely Coalition bailiwicks reflected the particular social characteristics of Free Soil and Democratic towns. Communities dominated by Dissenting Protestant denominations, or communities where Orthodoxy and Dissent were closely balanced and thus more likely to experience inter-denominational conflict, on average registered greater levels of support for Coalition.¹¹ The Coalition also tended to run very strong in shoe towns like Haverhill, Lynn, Georgetown, and Marblehead, and the fishing communities of Gloucester and Swampscott (until 1851, a village of Lynn). After

1851, the Coalition made deep inroads in the factory towns, as well as towns with a mixture of large and small manufacturing.

New London County

Unlike Whig-dominated Massachusetts, Connecticut's party system from its inception was extremely competitive.¹² Intense party competition compelled party leaders to react swiftly to new and potentially destabilizing issues. Close elections in Connecticut put great pressure on party leaders to adopt flexible and pragmatic policy orientations, for they often had to craft symbolic appeals and policy gestures that could mollify potentially restless voters in their own ranks.

The Democrats are a good place to start. The party rose to prominence in the mid-1830s by championing a variety of reforms that included expansion in the number of popularly elected state officials, public education, debtor relief, and a ten-hour labor law for children. It also attracted "wet" voters by fighting Whig-inspired local option and license laws; it satisfied white supremacists with cuts in state aid to several private schools devoted to educating African American children. Slowly, pragmatic elements gained control of the party and steered it towards greater support for commerce and industry, a necessity in a state coming to be dominated by banking, insurance, and railroads.¹³

Connecticut Whigs, like their Massachusetts counterparts, countered by trumpeting the "American System" as the engine of social mobility and economic

security for the middling classes. Throughout the 1840s the party gradually shed its elitist image, which stuck longer in Connecticut than in Massachusetts because of Whig support for poll taxes and property requirements for voting. By 1845, however, under the guidance of Governor Roger Sherman Baldwin, the Whigs ended their opposition to suffrage qualifications, signaling the maturity of the party's popular wing.

Connecticut Whigs also moved to undermine the incipient Liberty party with antisouthern and antislavery rhetoric and policies. The party strongly endorsed the Wilmot Proviso, while Baldwin's influence helped produce a personal liberty law preventing state officers from arresting alleged runaways. Whig antisouthernism and antislavery, especially when framed against the state Democracy's defense of the Polk administration, made Whiggery in Connecticut appear a credible vehicle for opposing southern domination of the federal government.¹⁴

Increasingly after midcentury the dynamics of politics in Connecticut altered. From 1850 through 1853, the Democrats gained the advantage by refurbishing the themes of state political economic reform. Behind their popular governor, Thomas Seymour, the Democracy regained complete control of state government for only the second time since 1842, adding to its majorities in successive General Assemblies by campaigning as reformers. In New London and across the state Democrats stumped as the "party of the people." Democratic assemblymen, taking their cue from Seymour, abolished imprisonment for debt and strengthened the state's mechanics' lien law, enacted the state's first free banking law that imposed strict limits on currency circulation and capitalization, expanded the powers of the state's Bank Commission,

created the state's first independent Railroad Commission with broad powers of inspection and oversight, and for the first time imposed direct taxes on banks, railroads, and insurance companies. The increased revenue nearly eliminated the state debt and permitted more spending on social and benevolent services like the state Reform School and Asylum for the "Insane Poor."¹⁵ Though a faction of the party, led by Seymour, supported bans on small note issue, unlimited stockholder liability, homestead exemptions and ten-hour factory laws, those forces were outnumbered by pro-business Democrats, Whigs, and the tiny contingent of Free Soil representatives. Indeed, though Seymour did his best to stop new bank charters by issuing a blanket veto of twenty bank charters in 1851, his efforts failed; the chartering of banks and railroads actually increased slightly over previous Whig-led sessions.¹⁶

As in Massachusetts, the security of individuals in the market figured prominently in political economic issues at midcentury. Connecticut Democrats predicated their arguments on the belief that government's role in creating large businesses obligated the state to insure that the market operated in ways that minimized dislocation. On free banking and general incorporation laws, Seymour was straightforward: "The vast power given to banking corporations calls for the exercise on the part of the Legislature, of frequent scrutiny into their operations." Banks were "created for the public good," Seymour reasoned, and government officials must always probe prospective banks to discover "how far the main purpose of obtaining their charters [e.g., the public good] is proved to be the real one." On the need for a

state Railroad Commission, the Governor was equally blunt: "...a law is wanted to bring our railroad companies under the immediate supervision of the State."¹⁷

In Connecticut, then, economic expansion produced efforts in the 1850s that, at least in theory, carved a role for the state in overseeing large private businesses. Unlike Massachusetts, however, one of the major parties--the Democrats--managed political economic reform issues in ways that strengthened its position in state politics. But the new emphasis on state issues and the role of government in society spilled into other areas of policy that eventually undermined the Democrats' majority and, more important, wrecked the Whigs.

The initial culprit was a robust prohibition movement. On that issue Seymour, along with most of his party, stood implacably opposed, in sharp contrast to the party's earlier flexibility. The Whigs proved even more inept at handling the issue, at first picking it up as their own only to quickly drop it. Free Soilers took up the cause with abandon in 1853, and watched their electoral fortunes rise to unseen heights in New London County. Voting patterns confirm the key role of the Maine Law in New London County politics in 1853 and 1854 (Tables B.9 and B.10). (Because Connecticut held its state elections in April, this and later discussions of Connecticut politics will extend into the spring of 1854, just before the Know Nothing emergence.) The Free Soilers surged in 1853, but the following year, with independent Maine Law candidate Charles Chapman in the field, the Free Soil vote returned to its normally anemic level. The Maine Law's popularity, whether registered by Free Soil or independent Maine Law votes, was most pronounced in the industrial city of Norwich

and the fishing cities of New London and Stonington, along with the economically “mixed” coastal towns of Groton and Lyme. The first three in particular had been among Whiggery’s principal strongholds, and much of the Whigs’ losses after 1852 can be traced to poor performance in those communities, the county’s largest. On average, Democrats did best in the crescent of small textile towns north of Norwich, the small farming towns also surrounding Norwich, and the mixed farming-fishing-light industrial towns along the coast. The Democrats also ran strong in Norwich, New London and Stonington--that is, until Chapman’s independent candidacy. Though the Democracy had a history of running well in Dissenting towns (in New London, that meant mostly Baptist and a smaller fraction of Methodists), its share of votes in these locations slipped significantly in 1854. Indeed, Chapman’s particular strength in Baptist and Methodist towns is unmistakable.

Dauphin County

Just as the Maine Law movement threw party politics into chaos in New London County, so too in Dauphin, where the issue fractured the Whigs and launched the careers of several insurgent politicians. Until 1851, Dauphin County routinely produced decisive Whig majorities that reflected widespread support across the entire county. Even in the Democratic strongholds of Harrisburg, the county’s only city, and the semi-subsistence farming towns located mainly in the mountainous Upper End, the Whigs culled a respectable vote. But the party’s base clearly lay in the county’s

wealthier commercial farming towns of the Lower End, notable for their greater investment in farm machinery and a more aggressive pursuit of dairy production. The Whigs also dominated the “mixed” commercial/industrial and farming towns of Swatara, Middletown, and Paxton, all situated on the Susquehanna River. With smaller majorities, they carried the Upper End coal mining towns of Lykens and Wiconisco. High proportions of German Lutheran and Reformed churches and various Dissenting congregations also characterized the centers of Whig power in Dauphin County.

Straightaway one notices the impact of the Maine Law insurgency on Whig fortunes after 1851 (Tables B.11 and B.12). In 1852 the Whigs failed to obtain an outright majority of votes cast for the first time since 1846 and only the fourth time since 1840. The downward spiral continued precipitously thereafter, owing chiefly to the inroads local Maine Law candidates made among Whigs. By 1853 the Maine Law affected the Whig party across a broad spectrum of towns and religious groups. The most striking aspect of the Maine Law movement was its success in normally Democratic Harrisburg. There Maine Law candidates cut into the popular base of both parties and outpolled their Whig and Democratic opponents. The Whigs in particular suffered a major bloodletting, and teetered on the brink of total collapse by the end of 1853.

For Whig partisans, the timing of their fall must have seemed strangely ironic. Long the minority party in Pennsylvania, between 1848 and 1851 the Whigs had finally managed to compete on nearly equal terms with the Democracy by politicizing the Democrats’ handling of state government. By posing as the reform party in state

government, the Whigs advanced themes that had marked their slow rise during the 1840s. In order to understand Pennsylvania politics at 1850, it is necessary to briefly trace the broad pattern of economic policymaking in antebellum Pennsylvania.

Spending on the Public Works had risen sharply by 1840s, spurred by grassroots demand for improvements and the legislative practice of “logrolling” and omnibus legislation. Lawmakers looking to secure a branch-line feeder to the Public Works for their district routinely traded their votes on other bills in order to gain the support of colleagues for their project. The result was that the scope of the system ramified annually and inexorably. In lieu of raising taxes, Pennsylvania floated a massive debt--over \$40 million by 1844--to fund the expansion. Meanwhile logrolling also pervaded private charter policy. Special charters of incorporation often appeared in their final form in “omnibus” bills that incorporated several enterprises simultaneously and sometimes contained a variety of general laws. The practice of bundling legislation together created embarrassingly long and often internally incongruous bills. As the antebellum era wore on, moreover, the practice accelerated, despite an explicit ban on omnibus bills in the 1838 Constitution. In 1850, for example, fully 133 of the session’s 473 “laws” were in reality at least two distinct laws, and a majority of those several laws in one.¹⁸

The proliferation of logrolling reflected the influence of lobbyists at Harrisburg, or “borers” as they were then disparagingly termed. Commercial and industrial interests employed borers to influence legislators and if necessary, blandish cash, preferred stock, free railroad passes, and jobs as inducements.¹⁹ But logrolling also

reflected more than corruption. In a state where intense inter-regional and inter-city competition drove economic policy, logrolling sustained intraparty unity in the face of powerful centrifugal tendencies. The mobilization of people and communities for economic goods determined economic policymaking in Pennsylvania, regardless of which party controlled the Capitol.²⁰ Reforms proved futile. In response to the growing outcry against special legislation, Pennsylvania legislatures enacted general incorporation and “model charter” laws for voluntary associations (1833), towns and boroughs (1834), manufacturing companies (1849), banks (1850), and insurance companies (1856). In theory, such laws reduced the decision-making burden and constitutional authority of the legislature by transforming incorporation into a simple court-audited procedure. In practice, before the Civil War lawmakers almost always ignored these laws.²¹

Pennsylvania’s Public Works, itself a creation of localistic demand, along with logrolling in charter policy, produced a political culture of particularistic mobilization and enhanced legislative authority. The Works gave lawmakers a source of jobs and contracts that they could annually earmark for their region. This made lawmakers resistant to challenges to their prerogatives, because such authority vastly increased the patronage at their disposal and enabled them to appear responsive to local communities. The persistent developmental and legal functions of the legislature and the political pressures those functions placed on lawmakers led to an explosion of public works spending, special legislation, and omnibus bills in Pennsylvania. As one observer exquisitely summarized the overall pattern, “(n)o one deems it wrong to take

and give for his county or district.... Exchanges of local advantages are the levers that move the whole commonwealth.”²²

Usually out of power, the Whigs throughout the 1840s consistently linked the state’s fiscal embarrassments to political corruption and mismanagement on the Public Works under successive Democratic regimes.²³ Democrats, for their part, attempted to deflect Whig attacks by admitting the need to eliminate corruption on the Public Works. In Dauphin County, which had supported the idea of selling the Main Line by over a ten point margin in an 1844 referendum,²⁴ Democrats gravitated to this position. Yet, despite such gestures the Democratic party remained stubbornly pro-Public Works. Democratic governors Francis Shunk (1845-48) and William Bigler (1851-1854) defended the Public Works even as they paid lip-service to the need for reform, as did “improvement” Democrats from the northern and central parts of the state poorly served by the transportation network.²⁵

The Whigs’ focus on “retrenchment and reform” in state government finally bore fruit in 1848, when Governor William Johnston carried the state by the razor thin margin of 300 votes. Johnston had been a Democrat until 1846 when he broke with his party over the Walker Tariff, a highly unpopular measure in a state which usually evinced broad, bi-partisan support for protectionism. He was a vocal advocate of the Wilmot Proviso, and had been pivotal in a successful legislative struggle in 1847 for a controversial personal liberty law (rescinded in 1852 by a Democratic-controlled assembly) that prevented slave claimants from using state and county jails to detain suspected runaways. But in 1848, Johnston’s antislavery ideas mattered much less in

Dauphin County than his personal popularity and reputation as a reformer. A skilled politician who broke tradition and barnstormed the state on his own behalf, Johnston won a record majority in Dauphin County by promoting protectionism, reform of the state's Public Works system, and fiscal retrenchment.²⁶ Johnston's coattails were long enough to secure a slim majority in the General Assembly for fellow Whig lawmakers, only the second time in the 1840s that the party controlled the Capitol.

Taking office in 1849, Johnston immediately proposed a sinking fund for the gradual elimination of the state debt, to be paid for by bank "bonuses" equal to a small percentage of capital paid in. The bonuses would be imposed on banks as a condition for receiving a charter or an extension upon an existing one. Bank bonuses were sure to create added pressure for bank chartering, and Johnston was at pains to warn legislators against "any extraordinary increase of banking capital," admonishing that "care should be taken in the grants of authority to these corporations." Johnston blazed a middle road on bank charter policy, insisting that banks operate safely and beyond reproach, with enough securities and specie in reserve to guarantee the value of their notes.²⁷

Johnston also urged reform of the state's 1848 ten-hour law. That statute declared ten hours a legal days work in textile, silk, flax, and paper mills, but included a proviso that permitted companies to hire workers under special contracts requiring longer hours. Johnston proposed striking out the proviso. In fact, both parties had endorsed the change in their 1848 platforms, and Johnston had directly campaigned on this issue in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Lancaster, where labor had organized to

enforce the 1848 statute, only to meet with dogged resistance from mill owners. Strikes in those cities generated pressure for a clarification of the statute.²⁸

Lawmakers responded to Johnston's leadership with a wave of reform. Johnston's sinking fund plan and bonus requirement for banks were made law. The special contract proviso in the ten-hour law was eliminated, while enforcement mechanisms were put in place for the statute's child labor and school attendance provisions. In addition, lawmakers enacted a homestead exemption law and extended several mechanics' liens. Another law gave a preference to the back wages of coal miners and iron foundry workers in certain insolvency proceedings. General incorporation and model charter laws were also established for manufacturing companies, turnpikes, and railroads. Education reformers were placated when the General Assembly abolished school districts that operated outside the common school system and invested the Secretary of State with superintendency powers over the entire common school system. Finally, over a three year span several appointive public offices, including constables, district attorneys, auditor generals, and Supreme Court judges, were made elective.²⁹

Most of the legislation passed the Whig-controlled 1849 assembly. Local Whigs took the credit, often casting the Democrats as opponents of reform. Such Whigs annually directed their campaigns to "Tax-payers" with rhetorical questions like: "Who Created the State Debt? And Who Is Now Paying It Off?" Of the homestead exemption law, Whig editor Theophilus Fenn wrote: "This bill is in effect but carrying out the spirit of the law that exempts the debtor from imprisonment, and the spirit of

the age which is moving rapidly against the credit system, particularly in reference to the poor.” The bill had been “passed with Whig votes,” Fenn pointed out, and “violently opposed by leading locofocos.” Fenn similarly endorsed the general incorporation law as a plebeian measure. General incorporation enabled “those of even limited means to associate their capital for manufacturing purposes.”³⁰

On the other hand, once the Democrats regained control of the General Assembly in 1850, local Whigs seized on Democratic opposition to reform the Canal Board as evidence of the party’s continued perfidy.³¹ Local Whigs also attempted to score the Democrats for their Model Bank Law. That statute required banks to make annual reports to the state auditor, imposed a graduated tax on dividends and a 4.5% bonus fee on all new or renewed charters, banned small notes of \$5 or less, and established the ratio of specie to circulating paper at three to one. Ironically, the law’s specie to paper ratio was *more* liberal than Johnston and most Whigs had wanted. Thus, Whigs charged that, “instead of restraining these institutions in their issues,” the law actually facilitated greater speculation on the part of banks. Because Johnston and most Whigs had supported stricter limits on note issue, and because the Democratic-controlled assembly chartered several new banks, Whigs could creditably argue that Democrats were “the friends of *monopoly and special privilege*.” Indeed, local Whigs annually blasted Democrats for turning the state legislature into a “Locofoco Bank Factory.”³²

The Whigs’ opposition to Democratic bank policy stemmed less from clear ideological differences than the party’s strategy to taint state government under

Democratic rule as corrupt. "For years past the public improvements of this Commonwealth have been under the exclusive management of a set of political swindlers," Harrisburg Whig John J. Clyde declared in the archetypical "reform" language that Whigs adopted in the early 1850s. More than mere swindlers of public money, Democratic lawmakers bowed to powerful special interests. In the Democratic-controlled assemblies of the early 1850s the "wheels of legislation were well "greased"" by lobbyists blandishing money and privileges in return for special charters. "Notwithstanding all the professions of hostility to the increase of Banking capital," wrote Clyde in another column, "Locofoco legislators can swallow a dozen Bank bills (if they are well "greased") without so much as making a crooked face!"³³ In truth, Democratic-controlled assemblies from the mid-1840s onward were no more amenable to business interests than Whigs, and if one focuses exclusively on the minority radical element of the party, they were less so. A majority of both parties practiced an indiscriminate charter policy in these years, but some Democrats, including Governor William Bigler (1852-1855), sought legal restraints on corporate power, such as unlimited liability for stockholders. Bigler, too, unlike most Pennsylvania Democrats, was suspicious of banks under certain circumstances, vetoing over a dozen bank charters passed by assemblies controlled by his own party.³⁴ Not surprisingly, however, such shades of intra-party variation attracted very little attention among Whigs. Both in and out power, the Whigs positioned themselves on the high ground of reform in state politics.

The Whig effort in Dauphin County and across the state to link their party to the cause of state reform illustrates broader themes of public life at midcentury. In all three states political economic reform constituted an important dimension of politics.

Modernization of the economy and the anxieties it fed produced specific political and legislative efforts designed to ease the disruptions that so marked the late antebellum era. Whether the felt problem was fiscal, political, economic, or some combination, state and local issues moved to the forefront of political debate.

Preexisting political configurations in the three states mediated this political process. Whigs in Pennsylvania politicized the Public Works under Democratic administration, blamed profligate Democratic lawmakers for a ruinous state debt, and advocated a corpus of debtor relief and labor reform measures to undercut the Democrats' own pro-labor appeals. Democrats in Connecticut experimented with early forms of railroad and banking regulation, imposed new taxes on those institutions, and dallied with various debtor relief, general incorporation, and labor reform laws. In Massachusetts the specifics of reform were similar, though its political manifestation complicated by the strange alliance between Democrats and Free Soilers, unified to topple the Bay State's one-party government.

The Shifting Framework of Public "Reform," 1849-1853

Nothing that reformers advocated constituted a radical departure in political economic thought. Pleas for debtor relief measures, ten-hour laws, general

incorporation laws, or, in Pennsylvania, reform of the Public Works, had been bruited about for years. Nevertheless policies that affirmed the state's role in protecting debtors from the disruptions of the market or extended the state's police power over corporations raised difficult questions. What, precisely, was government's role in historically private areas like debtor-creditor relations, labor law, or business enterprise? How far could the state go in policing private affairs in the name of the public good? In the early 1850s the politics of state political economic reform reflected a deeper struggle over the moral dimensions of the state, the responsibility of government to new social and economic realities.³⁵ The change found clearest expression in a number of antiparty reform causes which eventually propelled "reform" beyond the bounds of regular politics and party government.

Essex County

From the start, Coalitionists understood that residual partisan loyalties and enmities figured to complicate matters. Those committed to the defeat of the Whigs and reform of state government had to imagine a different sort of politics guided by specific reform objectives, not party victories in the conventional sense. Lewis Josselyn put it this way. "A union of parties for the sake of office only, should always be opposed....But when men agree in principle and wish to bring about the same results, *to refuse to act together* is in violation of principle, and...sets up *party* as of more importance than principle itself."³⁶ In the familiar idiom of the popular

vernacular, Coalitionists denied they were out for mere political office. Placing “reform” ideals above traditional party goals, the backers of Coalition in Essex County framed their efforts in transcendent antiparty terms. In the unlikely alliance between Free Soilers and Democrats in Massachusetts, “party” stood in the way of “principles.”

Antiparty ideas also framed the Coalition’s reform appeals. Town and county conventions of Free Soilers and Democrats abjured party labels, and pledged support for “Union,” “Reform,” “Coalition,” or “People’s” tickets in races for state senator and representative, as well as some county offices. Coalition publicists reinforced the new departure by deploying antipartyism and linking it directly to the defeat of the Whigs and triumph of state reform. The *Amesbury Villager* urged voters to support the “Union” state senatorial ticket of 1850 because “these gentlemen are pledged to the principles of state reform.” The *Essex Freeman* backed the same ticket because “it was designed to be supported by both parties, upon the basis of State reform.” “There is not a man on the ticket,” the *Freeman* continued, “who is not known to be true to the great object of *state reform*.” Lewis Josselyn, addressing skeptical Democrats wary of joining with Free Soilers, stated simply: “For our part we are willing to act with any body of men who desire to see change in the legislation of this State.” “Throw mere party questions to the winds,” urged George J. L. Colby, “and let one effort be made for the people.”³⁷ In races for seats in the General Court, the Coalition cast itself as a nonpartisan vehicle for reform, and in so doing, implied that partisanship stood in the way of the project of remaking Massachusetts government.

No issue better illuminates the antiparty dimensions of Coalition reform in Essex County than the ten-hour working day. The hours issue reemerged in 1850 after journeymen shoemakers in Lynn and mechanics in Salem forced master manufactures to voluntarily adopt the ten-hour rule. The county's Democratic party adopted a ten-hour plank in its state platform in fall 1850, while a few Coalition papers began to devote more attention to the issue. But the real turning point for the movement came in 1852. In that year a series of "Ten Hour" conventions at Boston put the statewide ten-hour movement on a solid foundation. The first meeting, a small organizing affair, convened in January, and included such labor veterans as Charlestown's James M. Stone, Boston's William Fielding Young, and Lowell's William S. Robinson and Benjamin Butler. Subsequent meetings in fall 1852 functioned more like mass conventions, attracting delegates from across the state. The initial meeting founded a central coordinating body for the statewide ten-hour movement, the State Central Committee, which facilitated the organization of auxiliary ten-hour "Clubs" at the town level. The locals worked closely with the Central Committee, reported regularly on their membership activities and provided up-to-date lists of local officers. Later in the spring and summer the State Central Committee also set up lecture tours and organizing circuits. Butler, Stone, and other leading activists scoured the Bay State's factory towns, promoting the ten-hour cause and the need for local organization.³⁸

The leadership and coordination supplied by the Central Committee produced immediate dividends. By early spring 1852 ten-hour locals cropped up in some of the state's principal manufacturing towns, including the Essex towns of Lawrence,

Andover, and Lynn. As the grassroots organized, the State Central Committee orchestrated a ten-hour petition to the General Court. The 1852 petition differed from earlier ones in two crucial respects. First, nearly all the petitions were standardized, with identical print and preamble language, suggesting a high level of coordination, perhaps even the fingerprints of a single printing shop. Second, the 1852 campaign asked for a general ten-hour law, with no exceptions for special contracts or workers above a certain age. Such coordination and consistency had not characterized previous ten-hour petitions.³⁹

Events in two Essex county towns in summer 1852 politicized the ten-hour issue across much of the region. In June strikes at the Salisbury Manufacturing and Amesbury Flannel Manufacturing companies plunged Amesbury and Salisbury into political turmoil and galvanized the area's ten-hour movement. The conflict began when new agents took over management at the mills and moved to clamp down on a lax workplace culture. Under the previous paternalistic management, the companies' skilled male operatives had always enjoyed the right to take fifteen minute breaks in the morning and afternoon to do the day's shopping, tend to their vegetable gardens, or whatever. With agents and overseers turning a blind eye, the operatives occasionally extended the fifteen minute breaks into longer absences with impunity. However, things changed quickly in June 1852 when the new agents abolished the fifteen minute breaks and stopped the practice of unauthorized absences. At both companies virtually all operatives, male and female, staged walkouts in June and July to protest the new rules. Residents of both towns overwhelmingly supported the strikers and organized

ten-hour locals. Meanwhile, the new management dug in its heels and defeated the operatives in August by hiring permanent replacements, many of whom were Irish Catholic.⁴⁰

The Amesbury-Salisbury strike spurred the organization of ten-hour locals in several heretofore unorganized towns. All of the county's major opposition mouthpieces, as well as Democratic and Free Soil papers in Lowell, supported the strikers and used the conflict as an opportunity to elaborate several key themes for the opposition. The overweening actions of the new management and the corresponding demise of older paternalistic practices in the mills crystallized several issues: opposition to more demanding work regimens; popular hostility towards the growing power of corporations; the responsibility of the state to protect vulnerable workers from corporate tyranny and harsh working conditions; the influx of Irish Catholics into the regional labor market. Many observers thus submerged the specific issues involved in the strike into a set of larger themes that attracted support from a broad cross-section of area residents. An analysis of the social composition of the ten-hour locals in Amesbury and Salisbury shows that skilled craftsmen, petty merchants, and professionals such as school teachers and ministers dominated the local movement.⁴¹

Commentary in the Coalition press linked the cause of the operatives and the ten-hour day to a broader vision of government devoted to the rights of ordinary people, conflated with the "public good." In this sense ten-hour advocates expressed more a political critique of corporate power in the market and polity than an anti-corporate *mentalité*. A local meeting of ten-hour activists in Amesbury resolved: "we

are actuated by no feeling of hostility or prejudice against Corporations as such, and when properly and honorably conducted, but desire their success, and we believe that a ten hour system of labor would result in the mutual benefit of employees and employed.” Ten-hour reformers built their critique from the nonpartisan ideal of governance: “The institution of government was originally designed to promote the interests and protect the rights of all the parties to a compact, without favor or partiality.”⁴² State government had already handed out privileges to corporations in order to grow the economy and advance the public good, ten-hour supporters realized. This created both the precedent and moral obligation for the state to regulate the hours of labor, because policies designed to promote private enterprise implicated the state in the plight of factory operatives. As James Coffin’s *People’s Advocate and Marblehead Mercury* put it, “the Legislature, having created Corporations, consequently must possess the power to limit their actions.” Claiming a ten-hour law for manufacturing establishments “would promote the health, morals, intellectual capacities, and lives of the men and women who labor in factories,” Coffin cheered that “the ten-hour question will be made the issue in our next election.”⁴³

From his home in Newburyport, George J. L. Colby followed the events in Amesbury and Salisbury closely. “It perhaps would not be wise or politic, now, to wage an indiscriminate war upon corporations,” he wrote in a letter to the striking operatives, “they are too powerful and the people are too much involved in them.” But for Colby that by no means closed the matter. One option remained open, “you may regulate them. Fix to them bounds and set to them limits, and watch, as you are now

doing, that they do not pass them.” Amesbury’s William Currier, situated literally at the center of the crisis, plainly stated that management’s actions at the local mills “is a case which makes us sensible of the value of the state.”⁴⁴

Like the Coalition’s debtor relief and regulatory policies, the ten-hour issue grew from the intersection of rapid social change and previous nonpartisan state activism in the economy. References to the “health” and “intellectual capacities” of factory workers suggested the broader implications for nonpartisan governance in ten-hour agitation. The difference was that in this later, more political phase of labor agitation, reformers redrew the state’s responsibilities in light of new social realities. The earlier promotional activities of state government worked in parallel with changes in the social relations of factories and their towns to shape the emerging critique of party government in Massachusetts. Thus, perhaps more than any other Coalition issue, the ten-hour day facilitated antiparty appeals to voters. From Salisbury came cries “to throw aside all party differences” in the upcoming 1852 election and nominate ten-hour men, while Amesbury’s William Currier implored “workmen and their friends...to unite on [ten-hour] candidates, *irrespective of party*.” One *Bay State* correspondent recounted how earlier attempts at gaining a ten-hour law had failed “owing to the *heartlessness* of legislators....” The situation could be different, however, if voters put aside “the clamor of political strife” and selected pro-labor candidates. “Let men of all parties, in making up their tickets, see to it that they select such men as will vote for the ten hour system.”⁴⁵ Indeed, in 1852 Coalition candidates for the General Court in several towns pledged support for a ten-hour law. In some

factory towns Coalition standard-bearers ran as “Ten Hour” candidates for the state legislature--and won. In the spring of 1853 the State Central Committee organized the largest ten-hour petition yet, while Lowell’s William S. Robinson and Amesbury’s Jonathan Nayson, both elected to the General Court as “Ten Hour” representatives, successfully shepherded a ten-hour bill through the 1853 Massachusetts House. That bill, however, was defeated by a Whig-controlled Senate. Ten-hour reformers remained frustrated with the political status quo.

Despite the predominance of state political economic issues, the slavery issue simultaneously threatened to divide the Coalition in Essex County. Initially, Democrats and Free Soilers handled these tensions well, chiefly by downplaying national questions. To be sure, Free Soilers were less inclined to mute national issues, for to them, the immorality of slavery was uppermost. Still the party hierarchy gradually warmed to the Coalition. If there were any doubts, the Fugitive Slave Law convinced the state’s Free Soil leadership that the party of Daniel Webster had to go at any cost. With a few notable exceptions, pragmatism guided the Bay State’s Free Soil establishment, including leading Essex County Free Soilers John Greenleaf Whittier, Stephen C. Phillips, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, into alliance with Democrats.⁴⁶ But however expedient the Free Soil leadership was, a large segment of the antislavery rank and file without doubt supported state reform. The evidence for this is overwhelming, ranging from the prominent role that Free Soilers played in the region’s ten-hour labor movement to the consistent endorsements of state reform in the county’s antislavery press during electoral campaigns and legislative sessions.⁴⁷ It was

natural for party leaders to insist that coalition changed nothing when it came to antislavery, always the Free Soil *raison d'être*. Such pronouncements reassured their most zealous and single-minded followers, and had the ring of truth in any event.

Nevertheless it is the partisan tensions that inhered in the Coalition that stand out as the key theme shaping its history. Because the Whigs could only muster a plurality in most towns, theoretically the Coalition could have swept most races for state representative and certainly all of the county's five senate seats. The inability of Democrats and Free Soilers to unite completely explains the Coalition's uneven electoral success in Essex County. The elections of 1849 through 1851 saw Democrats and Free Soilers "bolt" in large enough numbers to prevent the Coalition from fully capitalizing on their numerical majority. Conservative Democrats, who were always uncomfortable in the Coalition, were scandalized after Coalition lawmakers elected radical Free Soiler Charles Sumner to the U.S. Senate. In 1851 conservatives organized meetings of "National Democrats" to protest their party's apostasy on slavery and to formally establish a splinter movement. The Nationals, or "Hunkers," received assistance from an unlikely quarter, conservative "cotton" Whigs in Salem, Lawrence and Marblehead, who actively campaigned on behalf of National Democratic candidates. The Hunkers fielded rump tickets again in 1852, supported by new National Democratic sheets based in Lawrence and Salem.⁴⁸

Against this portentous backdrop, reformers geared up for what proved to be their last battle as the "Coalition." In 1852 voters approved a plebiscite on the question of revising the state Constitution. Coalitionists had brought the referendum forward

after efforts to pass electoral reform ran afoul of Whig obstructionism and regional differences in their own ranks. Elections in spring 1853 chose delegates to a state Constitutional Convention and Coalition forces in Essex again made antiparty appeals on the more basic principle that partisanship should yield to the public welfare--a fairer Constitution. George J. L. Colby hoped the Constitutional Convention would "not be connected with political associations, farther than is absolutely necessary." In typical Coalition fashion, Colby enlisted antipartyism on behalf of a larger anti-Boston, anti-Whig message. "If, however, he be a whig," the editor concluded with a warning, "it should be certain that Boston does not hold a bill of sale for him, and that he will rise above his party connections." Of the county's 44 delegates to the Convention, 25 were Coalition products, while some of the county's Whig delegates also committed to reform.⁴⁹

Coalition forces, which dominated the Convention, produced a wholly new Constitution, subject to popular approval in November 1853. The document was a bold attempt at sweeping change in the state's political-constitutional order, representing a fitting capstone to the Coalition's reform efforts. Virtually the entire package of democratic reforms that had been advanced by the Coalition was to be codified in a refurbished Constitution, including house reapportionment in favor of small towns over large cities, election by plurality for most state races, single-member senate districts, abolition of the poll tax, a secret ballot, and the replacement of the general ticket system in cities with a ward system of representation. In addition, the 1853 Constitution proposed to eliminate the considerable patronage that the majority

party wielded in Massachusetts. A raft of state and local offices heretofore appointed annually by the Governor were to popularly elected.

The document also contained several economic, legal, and social reforms, including doubling of the state's public school fund, abolition of imprisonment for debt, and a constitutional ban on special laws of incorporation for all banking and manufacturing companies. Nativism was also a theme of the Constitutional Convention. One provision prohibited the use of state funds for sectarian schools, a clear attempt by the Coalition to capitalize on the growing fear among Protestants of the Catholic Church's influence in education matters. Indeed, anti-immigrant sentiment was a subtext in Convention debates over a number of issues. Some proponents of reapportionment, for example, invoked the immigrant vote as one justification for scaling back urban representation in the General Court, while the Convention also considered a literacy amendment for voting and a proposal to prevent unnaturalized citizens from serving as Governor.⁵⁰

Taken as a whole, the 1853 Constitution synthesized many of the reform themes of the Coalition, but its reapportionment scheme proved controversial. Whigs repeatedly charged that the plan was a "party trick" gotten up by the Coalition leadership to ensure their permanent control of state government. Eastern voters responded by ringing up large majorities against the Constitution, sending it down to defeat by a narrow margin and handing state government over to the Whigs in the process. Overall, Essex County voted against the Constitution by a 6 point margin, hardly a smashing victory for the status quo, but nonetheless underscoring the problems

of the reapportionment plan among eastern voters and the skill with which the Whigs had politicized the issue.⁵¹

Besides the inherent problem of reapportionment, several other factors also contributed to the Constitution's defeat. Some prominent Free Soil and Democratic leaders joined the Whig hierarchy in opposition. Essex County Whigs quickly alerted voters to this fact, circulating anti-Constitution speeches by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., John G. Palfrey, Marcus Morton, and Orestes Brownson. These cracks in the Coalition facade betrayed much deeper fissures that proved fatal to the Free Soil-Democratic alliance. Franklin Pierce's election in 1852 had shifted the center of gravity in the Democratic party decisively towards its pro-southern National faction. The ascendancy of the Nationals placed renewed emphasis on party discipline, and patronage was a key variable in the equation. In Essex County, the Pierce administration handsomely rewarded Democrats who backed the party's pro-slavery, 1852 Baltimore Platform and punished those who collaborated with Free Soilers. Salem Hunker Nathan J. Lord acted as the administration's eyes and ears in Essex County, and through his influence, post offices, collectorships, federal surveyors, and Custom's House jobs were given to those who "had lent their aid in the county to build up the democratic party distinct from coalition and freesoilism."⁵²

The resurgence of the National Democracy augured trouble. In the midst of the 1853 campaign, a momentous struggle erupted between Nationals and Coalitionists for control of the Democratic County organization. Its 1853 county convention, echoing the state convention, eulogized Pierce and backed the Baltimore Platform in the

clearest expression yet of pro-slavery by a Democratic convention in Essex County. But Hunkers remained unsatisfied, and eventually held a rival convention that nominated a senate ticket untainted by any free soil influence whatsoever. Then, less than three weeks before the election, U.S. Attorney General and Newburyport's own Caleb Cushing issued his famous "ukase" pronouncing the Coalition a "fatal error" and enjoining all Democrats to cease further cooperation with Free Soilers. James Coffin's *People's Advocate* was the first Coalition paper to endorse the National line, railing against the Coalition in the weeks before the election. Others hedged their bets, downplaying Coalition in the lead-up to the election while stumping hard for the proposed Constitution. Later, after the election, Coffin formally announced that the Democratic party in Essex County "will find it necessary to commence a new career," to be realized "by avoiding all side issues and resisting all factious temptations."⁵³ Democrats uncomfortable with the Baltimore Platform and the party's pro-slavery orientation were shown the exits.

Meanwhile, the Whigs had moved to capitalize on their rivals' factionalism. After the near passage of the ten-hour bill in the 1853 General Court, the state's textile barons, most of whom moved in the Whig party's exclusive inner circle, defused the ten-hour issue by voluntarily adopting an eleven hour day in textile factories across eastern Massachusetts. This gesture reflected broader currents within the state's Whig party. Whig conventions in summer and fall 1853 endorsing most of the reforms contained in the proposed Constitution, while in a few locales Whigs endorsed a ten-hour law. Observers in Essex County claimed that the local Whig party was little more

than a stalking horse for an incongruous assortment of anti-Constitution forces.

Whatever the case, the key point here is that the Whig party opposed the reapportionment scheme, and framed it as a power play by designing Coalitionists. Thus, according to Whigs, the Coalition had produced not a “people’s Constitution but a party Constitution.” As the campaign unfolded, Whig leaders and editorialists argued that the next General Court could address the need for reform without altering the state’s existing constitutional framework or reshuffling its regional balance of power. Whigs, in short, claimed to have finally accepted the necessity of state reform and promised to protect eastern hegemony to boot. Coupled with the demise of the Coalition and the inherent unfairness of the reapportionment plan, Whig gestures towards reform defeated the Constitution and secured one last Whig victory.⁵⁴

The loss hit reformers hard. “Yesterday not only settled the coalition, blowing that to splinters, but it has settled the very existence of the minor parties, for all practical action,” wrote a sullen George Colby, who had battled for the Constitution till the end. Others acknowledged the death of the Coalition, but insisted that reform remained at the center of public life. “If the coalition has received its quietus,” wrote Amesbury’s William Currier, “the ten hour agitation has not.” Indeed, another reported that ten-hour sentiment was stronger than ever, and as a result “party lines are forgotten by many who were once leading members of the leading political parties.”⁵⁵

New London County

In contrast to Essex, antiparty reform in New London County took the form of a Protestant middle-class uprising over the failure of Connecticut lawmakers to address the liquor question. The Maine Law movement expressed anxieties related to evangelical Protestant demands for piety amid a new cultural heterogeneity.⁵⁶ But that was only one element of its appeal. In New London County, Free Soilers and Maine Law advocates (and later the Know Nothings) linked ethnoreligious symbolism to failures of the regime of party government. As a political issue liquor was nothing new. During the mid-1840s Democrats and Whigs skirmished over liquor licensing and local option laws. But the idea of a statewide prohibition statute contravened the earlier tradition of allowing individuals or local communities, through appeals to conscience, licensing or local option, to determine policy on the issue. Perhaps more than any other single issue, Maine Law agitation represented the midcentury shift away from voluntarist and local strategies towards greater state activism in public life.⁵⁷

The campaign for a Maine Law began as a nonpartisan effort. In 1851 and again in 1852, the Connecticut Temperance Society (CTS) called on “the friends of Temperance in each and every town...to concentrate their strength, without distinction of party,” behind candidates who supported prohibition. The Whigs seized the opportunity, nominating candidates who backed the Maine Law. No doubt many Whigs supported the Maine Law for sincere reasons, yet many also embraced it on the hunch that it might well give the party the boost it needed to recapture state

government. In 1851 Whig lawmakers introduced a bill that provided for a referendum on prohibition, which gained just enough support from eastern Democrats to pass. Most Democrats, however, opposed the measure, and Governor Seymour pocket-vetoed the bill. From the Whig point of view, the growing popularity of the Maine Law, coupled with Democratic opposition and especially Seymour's veto, presented an opening wedge.⁵⁸

With the Whigs playing up the Maine Law, the 1852 election turned into a Democratic rout. Governor Seymour, who had adopted a position of silence on the issue, swept into a third consecutive term with an outright majority, a first for any Democratic gubernatorial candidate since 1843, while the party made even greater gains in the General Assembly. Crestfallen Whig bosses, convinced their strategy had backfired, officially abandoned prohibition after the 1852 debacle.⁵⁹ Though the Whigs' 1853 gubernatorial candidate Henry Dutton was known to be friendly to a Maine Law, he dutifully toed the party line and withheld any public pronouncement on the matter. Intended to reunite the party on time-tested national questions, the strategy further eroded the party's base in New London County, where support for the Maine Law's was spreading fast.

By spring 1853, support for the Maine Law became a precondition for nomination in most party caucuses for state representative and senator in New London County, the Democrats included. Free Soil gubernatorial candidate Francis Gillette earned the endorsement of the CTS, and the party blended the Maine Law into its regular antislavery campaign. In New London County there was considerable overlap

in the Maine Law and Free Soil movements. Norwich's Moses Pierce, a longtime leader of the county's Free Soil party, doubled as a prominent activist in the New London County Temperance Association [NLCTA]. Pierce urged Free Soilers to campaign hard on the Maine Law. The issue so dominated New London County politics that some local Free Soil activists worried privately that prohibition was crowding out the antislavery message. But most others were far less circumspect about identifying the party with the Maine Law. Most shocking from the Whig point of view was that Gillette actually outpolled Whig gubernatorial candidate Henry Dutton in New London County in 1853.⁶⁰

The Maine Law movement reached its zenith between the 1853 and 1854 elections. The CTS and the General Association of Congregational and Baptist churches in Connecticut collaborated on a huge petition to the Democratic-controlled 1853 assembly. Meanwhile, a young and obscure reformer from Norwich, Andrew Stark, founded an independent weekly, the *Norwich Examiner*, to capitalize on the popularity of the issue. Stark devoted his paper to the Maine Law, and by mid-1853 boasted a circulation of over "2,000 families." Throughout its two year run, the independent paper agitated for a range reform causes, including public education, Sabbatarianism, and women's rights, while also running a regular column devoted to agricultural improvement and tips on domestic economy. Later, in 1854-5, when the focus of local politics shifted, Stark turned to antislavery and political nativism. But it was the Maine Law, and the social cultural anxieties it crystallized, which served as the staging ground for future insurgent politics. The epicenter of the local movement was

urban and industrial--Stonington, New London, Norwich, and the factory towns ringing that city. Indeed, the bulk of New London County's petitions originated in Norwich and the surrounding factory towns.⁶¹

The Maine Law movement served as a vehicle for evangelical Protestants to express their concern about the cultural and social changes buffeting their communities. Again and again, proponents offered the Maine Law as a panacea for a spate of public problems. Strong drink led to crime and poverty and broke up families, Maine Law zealots insisted. "Fully four fifths of all the pauperism in our State, and seven eighths of all crime," one temperance convention resolved, "are directly traceable to the sale and use of intoxicating liquors." The Maine Law, by forcing individuals to adhere strictly to a high moral standard of personal conduct, would improve individual lives, family relations, and benefit the public at large because it would "increase our powers of industry as a people..."⁶²

Prohibition advocates spun lurid tales of intoxicated young men disturbing the public peace with profane and violent outbursts. Intemperance was invariably portrayed a male vice, the effects of which were especially troublesome for innocent women and children, compelled to negotiate the unwholesome public spaces created by vulgar and besotted males. Retreat to the private home promised no relief from the scourge. Drunken voyeurs were said to visit the homes of respectable women and press bloated red faces and ogling bloodshot eyes against window panes, while wives and children of chronic drunkards suffered economically, emotionally, and physically from the husband's moral depravity. One tale told of an inebriate who spent every nickel he

owned, along with his wife's dowry, on reeling binges of "beastly intoxication," depriving his starving children of food and driving his wife insane. Indeed, local women supporters of the Maine Law sometimes played on gendered tropes of female innocence and victimization in their own arguments on behalf of prohibition. A local petition for a Maine Law from "Clarissa Ashley and 132 Ladies of Groton" recounted the "rapid strides of intemperance in our midst" and justified their single-sex petition by asserting that "our sex are the sufferers by the traffic in intoxicating drinks...."⁶³

The Maine Law offered, in the words of one booster, "protection against the dram shop, as well as against the horse thief and the burglar..." And if intemperance was, as prohibitionists claimed, responsible for such a multitude of social problems, the logical response was to turn to state government. Indeed, local Maine Law activists justified legal coercion by reference to the state's obligation to act in the public interest. "That which contributes nothing to the wealth and happiness of the community, but saps the foundations of both," Stark wrote simply, "cannot be justly classed among legitimate articles of commerce. It ought to be strictly regulated." Maine Law advocates cast their cause as a people's movement to clean up public immorality and vice. What better instrumentality to realize such a goal, prohibitionists reasoned, than the state, the vested guardian of the people's welfare? Like so many other reformers, Maine Law activists cast their cause as a matter of governance, seizing upon earlier regulatory precedents, such as statutory restrictions on gambling, to legitimate their own proposal. Such precedents, according to Stark, "show that there is nothing new in the feature of the Maine Law by which property, in the form of liquor...is seized and

destroyed....For no man has a right to keep or sell property to the injury of the common welfare.”⁶⁴ Whether they reasoned from such an informed legal position or not, all Maine Law proponents viewed the liquor question as a preeminent public matter, one that imposed moral obligations on the state the politicians that ran it, regardless of party affiliation.

Such an orientation led reformers to issue antiparty calls to break the chains of partisanship. Maine Law promoters cast their movement as standing above the normal tactical considerations of the Democratic and Whig machines, which, they believed with equal vehemence, had thwarted the glorious reform. One supporter from New London wrote the *Examiner* that “many, here, have long felt that it was highly desirable utterly to divorce temperance from both political parties, *as parties*, that all its friends might act for its promotion, as they would any other moral object, untrammelled by political connections.” Another writer agreed: “Standing aloof, as *we* do, and mean to do, from all party organizations, we say to the friends of the Maine law, beware of divisive measures,” by which the writer meant party divisions that have “postponed the object at which we all aim.” Temperance advocates in New London County conceptualized the issue in such a way as to peg party affiliation as the chief obstacle to moral reform. Andrew Stark explained. “We, who are for the Maine Law first and our respective parties next, are not the real disorganizers....”⁶⁵

Thus as support for the Maine Law spread, advocates held that partisanship divided people on an issue of grave public consequence. Meanwhile the major parties, concerned for their own political futures, had placed party survival over moral

obligations to serve the public interest. Here the Whig leadership seemed especially devoid of principle, for it had pursued prohibition for political reasons, only to back off at the critical moment. One disgusted Whig put it thus: "We are tired of the shuffling expediency which has been exhibited in the management of the [Whig] party for the last two years, and hope that men this spring will, for once, be outspoken somewhere -- that they will be on one side of the fence or the other."⁶⁶

By late 1853 temperance men thus faced a dilemma: form an independent party based exclusively on the Maine Law, or continue the failed voluntarist strategy of soliciting pledges from candidates of the major parties. The movement remained divided. In New London County temperance forces sent out feelers about an independent electoral run as early as December 1853. The responses, reported at a meeting of the NLCTA, were mixed. Many recoiled at the prospect of voting Maine Law if that meant breaking completely with their party. However, others in the movement welcomed the tension between partisan loyalty and transcendent moral causes, viewing the independent Maine Law ticket more favorably. Norwich's Free Soil cum Maine Law leader Moses Pierce interpreted a possible Maine Law ticket against the larger backdrop of antislavery politics and an ailing party regime. "Our great object as Free Democrats is to extend our principles until they pervade and control the Legislation of this State and the nation," he wrote state Free Soil party chairman Joseph Hawley in the fall of 1853, "our object as Maine Law men is to promote temperance by securing the Maine Law. Now if we can promote the first while we secure the second in an "independent organization," then I am in favor of it."

Pierce's careful choice to wrap independent organization in quotes is revealing, for he clearly understood that any putative Maine Law political organization would necessarily be strongly influenced, if not controlled outright, by antislavery men. As he continued his theorizing: "I fully believe that a...very large majority of Whigs & Democrats who leave their parties to support a temperance organization will never go back but will be found in the ranks of the Free Democracy hereafter." If such conjectures proved correct, Pierce concluded, the antislavery cause would "gain faster by an independent organization for [the] Maine Law than we do without it."⁶⁷

The resolution satisfied most Free Soilers and prohibitionists, while Pierce's prophecy was eventually borne out. Disgusted with the Whigs and Democrats, in the spring of 1854 statewide temperance forces finally agreed to field an independent prohibition candidate for Governor, the well-known Charles Chapman, a prominent Whig. But the grassroots strategy of querying major party candidates for their position on the liquor question continued unabated by Chapman's independent candidacy; in races for state representative and senator, the movement maintained its familiar role as nonpartisan pressure group. The two-pronged strategy further eroded voter loyalty to the major parties' state machines, while allowing Maine Law men to maintain the web of connections and friendships that partisanship in local communities had been built upon--*as long as* the local party caucus dropped traditional party themes and agreed to field candidates that backed the Maine Law. After nearly two years of Maine Law agitation, the frames of reference that guided most Whigs and at least some Democrats in political matters had shifted. Increasing numbers of voters, disapproving of the

parties and placing the Maine Law at the center of public life, followed leading reformers to the logical antiparty conclusion about party government in Connecticut.⁶⁸

By early 1854 the Whigs teetered on the brink of total collapse, their traditional party appeals and issues of little effective use. Indisputably, then, the Maine Law issue already had scrambled party lines and begun the process of Whig decomposition locally. That process further intensified in early March, when the U.S. Senate passed Illinois Congressman Stephan A. Douglas's fateful bill overturning the Missouri Compromise and opening the Kansas-Nebraska territory to slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, passed by the Senate with strong northern Democratic support, struck the knockout blow to the Second Party System in New London County. Local mass meetings, held "without distinction of party," immediately denounced the Senate's action. In New London, an angry meeting hanged Democratic Senator Isaac Toucey in effigy for supporting the bill, while in Norwich, leaders of the Democratic, Free Soil, and Whig parties addressed throngs of outraged citizens. Similar meetings erupted in the county's smaller towns. Local anti-Nebraska forces quickly alighted upon the *herrenvolk* themes that would constitute the basic building blocks of Know Nothing and later Republican indictments of the Slave Power. "The meeting at the Town Hall in this City was just what we anticipated it would be," cheered one Norwich commentator, "it was a great gathering of *working men*," brought together by their common "stake" in determining whether "the teeming West...shall be the abode of freemen like yourselves, or of *slaves*."⁶⁹

In Connecticut all parties, Democrats included, denounced the bill. But the Democrats' association with Nebraska indisputably hurt the party, no matter how sincerely local and state party leaders opposed the bill.⁷⁰ The Whigs, for their part, seized on Nebraska as an opportunity to revive their flagging fortunes. Locally and statewide, the party attempted to position itself as the anti-Nebraska party, wasting few chances to attack the Democratic party and the Pierce Administration.⁷¹ Even at this earliest of stages the question of slavery in the territories, everyone recognized, was a critical one.

There can be little doubt that the Nebraska controversy extended the voter disaffection begun by the liquor question. In this way both issues are best seen as two dimensions of the single phenomenon of populist anger at the regime of party government. Most people were familiar with Chapman's views on slavery; one New London Free Soiler considered him anything but a "hunker" Whig. Meanwhile Stark's Maine Law *Examiner* covered local anti-Nebraska meetings closely, supporting candidates who were sound on *both* the Maine Law and Nebraska.⁷² For his part David S. Ruddock, a local Democratic leader with antislavery leanings, attributed the Democratic loss to the Nebraska bill. "We deny, in toto, that the Maine Law question has defeated us," he wrote, "last year we swept the state on this issue..." Ruddock acknowledged that both the Maine Law and Nebraska "had a hand" in the Democrats' misfortune, but insisted "Nebraska is by far the greatest murderer."⁷³

Whatever the sources, the defeat was indeed a bad one for Democrats. Its dimensions can be best seen at the grassroots level, where the party won less than 40%

of state races to the Connecticut House of Representatives; in New London County, the figure was 33%. Democratic losses were even more pronounced in senate races, where the party won only 5 of 21 seats. This represents a startling reversal of the previous two-year trend when the party, facing the Maine Law challenge, had claimed large majorities in both chambers, for example, 64% of the house and 71% of the senate in 1853. Indeed, across New London County ad hoc meetings of “Freemen” opposed to the Nebraska bill, led by Free Soilers but attracting antislavery Democrats and Whigs, demanded that candidates for state representative and senator profess opposition to the bill. The result was an irregular assortment of Democrats, Whigs, and Free Soilers committed to a Maine Law *and* opposed to Kansas-Nebraska. Only a handful of openly avowed Hunkers seemed to have survived the 1854 reaction. Such evidence adds still more weight to the idea that Nebraska figured crucially in spreading voter anger with the regime.⁷⁴

Indeed, local anti-Nebraska Whigs and Democrats were none too pleased with the late actions of their respective leaders, if for different reasons. One anti-Nebraska Whig denounced the Whig press for attempting to use Nebraska for partisan advantage. Adopting antipartyism, the writer rather hoped for its defeat “by a union of parties at the North” through some entirely new vehicle. “[I]f whig editors must be constantly claiming that voters should support the whig ticket because the whigs are the only party opposed to the extension of slavery,” the writer warned, “I, for one, should bid farewell to any hope of unity or strength in our opposition to the measure.” For their part, anti-Nebraska Democrats felt they were “made to occupy a false position” on the Nebraska

question. One wrote ruefully: "The subject of the extension of Slavery is not a political one between whigs and democrats," for a majority of both opposed it. For most New London citizens, of whatever party, the Nebraska bill seemed a grotesque breach of faith between the sections, "a wanton violation of the principles of humanity and freedom, unparalleled in the history of legislation in this country."⁷⁵ Many opponents of the Nebraska bill in New London County recognized the intimate connection between party leadership and governance. Nationally, the regime now appeared unequivocally pro-slavery and prosouthern.

The evidence from New London County suggests it is folly to neatly separate the Maine Law and Nebraska, as if many anti-Democratic voters in 1854 were concerned with one at the exclusion of the other. If the question is, What issue initiated voter dissatisfaction with the major parties in New London County?, then the answer must be the Maine Law. That issue had polarized the electorate in a way that Connecticut's political establishment was unused to, and irretrievably damaged the Whig party well before the repoliticization of slavery. But, in relation to 1854, surely that question is beside the point. For what we are interested in is the state of confidence with which voters viewed the regime of party government in the spring of 1854. On that score both major parties were in severe trouble, at least among traditional native-born voters. Increasingly, of course, the Democrats would turn to other sources of popular support to make up for native-born defections, namely immigrants. The Whigs were already too far gone to save themselves using antislavery, or any other issue.

In the four way race Whig Henry Dutton received less than one third of the popular vote, but was elected governor by a General Assembly controlled by antislavery and prohibitionist Whigs and Free Soilers. Dutton repaid the favor with a lofty plea for the Maine Law and a lengthy peroration against the Kansas-Nebraska bill.⁷⁶ Whig lawmakers finally passed a Maine Law statute in 1854, while adding a strong antislavery resolution to the official record. Despite this hasty conversion, however, Connecticut's Whig party was faltering badly. Both the Maine Law and anti-Nebraska movements emerged from the more basic nonpartisan idea that certain issues relating to governance stood above party considerations. Through their early antiparty indictment of party politics, Maine Law and anti-Nebraska reformers drove wedges between major party elites and their traditional constituencies.

Dauphin County

Maine Law advocates in Dauphin County constructed a similar framework for understanding the relationship between moral reform issues and partisan politics. Just as the Maine Law movement in New London County linked the cause of prohibition to the resolution of public disorder, so too the movement in Dauphin County, where reformers pegged crime, debauchery, moral decay, and high taxes to the spread of intemperance. As Maine Law reformers made their case, they also made demands on local residents to imagine antiparty paths of political mobilization.

The first unambiguous signs of the Maine Law's remarkable popularity in Dauphin County appeared in early 1852, though the movement for a statewide prohibition statute had been launched two years earlier. In 1852 Maine Law meetings in several Lower End towns, including Harrisburg and Middletown, organized as a statewide petition was underway to the General Assembly. In February, temperance reformers from across the state convened a huge Maine Law convention at the state capital, in hopes of drawing the General Assembly's attention to the movement. The throng resolved that intemperance left a "fearful train of evil" in its wake, including the devastation of families and higher county taxes for "the trial, conviction and support of criminals and paupers." Claiming that all "gradual and moderate remedies have failed to cure this great public disease," the assembled reformers pledged to stir up "public sentiment" until the day when lawmakers shall become convinced "that the people are *prepared* and ready for the Maine Law." Finally, the reformers warned legislators about the political consequences of ignoring this "all-important object." The reformers would, "if necessary,...sacrifice our party attachments, and support no candidate for the Legislature who refuses to pledge himself favorably to this movement."⁷⁷

The statewide meeting immediately stimulated more local Maine Law gatherings in Harrisburg and surrounding towns. From the start, leadership of the local movement fell to Whig publicist John J. Clyde, editor of the *Whig State Journal*, and his close associate, Stephen Miller, a Whig newcomer to Dauphin County. Both had attended the statewide meeting and served on organizing committees in Dauphin County. Other leading lights included C. C. Rawn, one of a handful of Free Soilers in

the area, and a spate of Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Church of God ministers across the county who preached the Maine Law from their pulpits and gave their churches over to local Maine Law meetings. Another was Henry Radabaugh, a Harrisburg labor activist and subscription agent for George W. Morgan's *Borough Item*, an independent pro-labor and pro-Maine Law weekly. In 1852 Radabaugh stood for one of Dauphin County's two seats in the General Assembly as an independent Maine Law candidate. His insurgent candidacy attracted only a small fraction of votes (Table B.11), but it was enough to prevent area Whigs from obtaining a majority for the first time since the mid-1840s (Table B.3). Dauphin County Maine Law reformers headquartered in Harrisburg, where Radabaugh achieved double-digits. German and Scotch-Irish residents of the county's Upper End, on the other hand, remained decidedly less enthusiastic about prohibition.⁷⁸

In the movement's formative years Clyde's role proved pivotal, for as editor of one of Dauphin's leading Whig papers, he was in an ideal position to publicize the Maine Law. As an outspoken proponent, Clyde was an exception among the county's Whig editors. *Telegraph* editor Theophilus Fenn initially hedged, then turned strongly against the movement as it became clear that it threatened to hive off Whig voters. Fenn acknowledged that the cause was an honorable one, but expressed doubt that rum could be "driven out of our State" through legislation. "Moral suasion, after all, is the engine to be used." By fall 1853, with the Maine Law movement again fielding an independent ticket, Fenn was ranting away at the influence of local clergy and

complaining of “those who have foisted themselves” into positions of leadership in both the Maine Law movement and the local Whig party.⁷⁹

Another opponent was John J. Patterson. Patterson purchased the *Whig State Journal* sometime in the fall of 1853 from Clyde, who sold the paper in apparent disgust at Whig stalling on the Maine Law. Indeed, Clyde soon found employment at the *Crystal Fountain*, voice of the county’s prohibition movement. For his part, Patterson wanted to unite local Whigs around such traditional issues as reform of the Public Works and protectionism. Like Fenn, he attacked the independent Maine Law ticket “as a trick worthy of the best wire-workers in the State.” One month into his editorship, in response to charges that he opposed the Maine Law, Patterson offered the orthodox Whig view of the whole matter of moral reform and its relation to regular party politics. “We never discussed the question in our columns, nor do we intend to do so now....We devoted our columns to the success of Whig candidates...without ever intimating our views on the moral reform being agitated.”⁸⁰ It was a response that captured perfectly what Maine Law reformers believed was wrong with the local Whig party. Political calculations, not moral imperatives, guided the Whigs; Whigs offered silence on the Maine Law, not open avowals of positions for or against.

Fenn and Patterson’s championship of the “old landmarks” of Whiggery sowed the seeds of discontent among Maine Law proponents in Dauphin County. That discontent was antipartisan and political, though Maine Law politics rested on a thick overlay of social anxieties and moral aspirations. A large and impassioned meeting in Middletown condemned intemperance as “the greatest scourge that has afflicted our

Commonwealth, and the most prolific source of crime, immorality and pauperism.”

Clyde also routinely pointed to the social costs of intemperance and the pecuniary advantages of a Maine Law. “The people will gain from *five to ten millions annually in money saved* by the abolition of the liquor traffic.” Clyde failed to cite the source of his estimates, but no doubt most of his readers were less interested in matters of evidence than the connections Clyde drew between “the people,” felt social problems, and a reform cause that transcended party politics. Local women, too, threw “their influence in the scale of Humanity, Patriotism, and Religion.” Clyde, for his part, felt it necessary to publicly approve of women’s Maine Law activism. “Let them talk, write, petition, hold meetings, agitate for the Maine Law,” he wrote. Having given the women his benediction, Clyde described the Maine Law in gendered terms. The law would serve as a “broad shield...spread for the protection of every wife, mother and every daughter.”⁸¹ Like reformers in New London County, Dauphin County prohibitionists framed the Maine Law as a public necessity with broad implications for the protection of women and children and the betterment of society.

Given the cold welcome by Whig regulars and the implacable opposition of most Democrats, Maine Law reformers inevitably sharpened their antiparty attacks on party government itself. Maine Law reformers declared with thumping certainty that “the people demand a law,” and assured everyone, “they will have it, regardless of the consequences to the existing political parties.” The fate of political parties mattered not in the great moral crusade of prohibition. According to reformers, petitions were one measure of the popularity of their crusade. In 1853, Maine Law forces across the

state marshalled a petition over 300,000 strong, and leaders made plain that this was the legislature's last chance. "If the people are again disappointed, and their petitions disregarded," the question of prohibition will enter politics "to the disorganization and defeat of the existing parties." Should lawmakers refuse to enact a prohibition statute, another Maine Law meeting declared, "it will...become our duty to use our political power in such a way as to secure a legislature favorable to prohibition."⁸²

Despite the threats, the Democratic-controlled assembly balked at legislation. Local Maine Law activists were incredulous, and infuriated. "Such another Legislature cannot be elected in the face of an Indignant Press and an outraged people," wrote William P. Coulter, editor of the independent *Crystal Fountain*. Coulter linked the failure to the wider culture of corruption and logrolling that pervaded Pennsylvania government. He published indictments of the 1853 legislature taken from the regional press and complained of the legislature's "neglect of public business and public interests." Corruption and bribery was widespread, the "representatives of the people bought and sold like sheep." Democrats and Whigs alike, concluded Coulter, must undertake to send a "REFORMED AND REGENERATED LEGISLATURE."⁸³ For Maine Law reformers in Dauphin County, antiparty appeals followed legislative inertia and party backpedaling.

Conclusion

The early 1850s have long been interpreted as years of ethnoreligious polarization in the North, punctuated by a few obtrusive antislavery reformers out to rekindle interest in the slavery issue and develop a politics based on sectional identification.⁸⁴ That interpretive framework has yielded important insights into the changing social composition of the northern electorate, the role of local and state issues in mid-nineteenth-century public life, and the social cultural origins of the Know Nothing party. But the evidence from Dauphin, Essex, and New London suggests that more complex political forces stirred the electorate prior to the Know Nothing eruption.

In these years a *Zeitgeist* of “reform” swept across the counties. Reform assumed many and various guises, and directed attention to a range of political strategies and solutions. In this light, Essex County presents the most interesting case, for reformers there focused mainly on political economic issues, not ethnoreligious ones.⁸⁵ Also of particular interest is the broader debate in Pennsylvania over the Public Works and the corrupt culture of lawmaking that gradually intensified in these years. As we shall see, the Know Nothing movement would assimilate their nativist agenda to this larger political cultural milieu, combining anti-Catholicism with a forcible assault on the patronage politics and corrupt practices that the Public Works emblemized. Then too, Connecticut’s spring 1854 elections demonstrated the intensity of popular anger with the Democratic party’s pro-slavery orientation, a harbinger of things to come in the other states. To be sure, the Maine Law crusade in both Dauphin and New

London can be broadly termed ethnoreligious in character. And certainly the Know Nothings would take up ethnoreligious causes. But it will not do to abstract ethnoreligious issues from their wider political context. In all three counties, reformers differentiated themselves from the party regime by politicizing issues that lay outside the boundaries of normative Whig/Democratic politics and developed alternative forms of political mobilization to realize their goals.

Part of the reason lay in the specificity of the reformers' agenda and the uncompromising character of the movements they led. Reformers adopted the broad rhetoric of the popular vernacular to couch their causes in the name of the public good, yet they also demanded quite specific answers from government--a Maine Law statute, a ten-hour working day, constitutional revision, the overturn of the Nebraska bill, and so on. Reform gained momentum in these years for a number of reasons, including the socioeconomic and cultural transformations that imbricated anti-liquor crusades and labor reform. But reform also attracted attention because the parties' distributive policies, framed in the popular vernacular, had long since raised expectations among citizens about the nonpartisan, public purpose of politics and particularly government. Although most citizens rightly viewed the parties' lofty claims about service to the public good with some skepticism, they nevertheless expected principled leadership and a minimum of partisan calculation when elites took up matters of governance. When sharp-eyed reformers spotted persistent societal-wide problems, citizens took stock of party government and its leaders. Eventually, the reformers' antiparty critique of a corrupt, unresponsive political system seemed persuasive. By 1853-4, many

citizens, alienated from their party organizations and flush with reform ideas, became convinced that politics and government required a major overhaul. Into this context rushed nativism.

Notes

1. For more on these developments, see Chapter Two.

2. For reactions of the parties in Dauphin County and Pennsylvania as a whole to the Fugitive Slave Law and the Compromise of 1850, see for example Harrisburg *Whig State Journal*, 2 September 1851; *Telegraph*, 24 March 1852; John F. Coleman, *The Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, 1848-1860* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1975), 33-8; Michael F. Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 54-60; Henry R. Mueller, *The Whig Party in Pennsylvania* (New York: Columbia University, 1922), 152-70. For New London County, Connecticut: *Norwich Evening Courier*, 27 March 1851; *New London Daily Morning Star*, 24 April 1851; *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 26 March 1851; *Norwich Aurora*, 2 April 1852. Also see Lawrence Bruser, "Political Antislavery in Connecticut, 1844-1858," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1974), 148-57; J. Carroll Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut, 1829-1860* (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 1938), 147-8.

3. For more on the appeal of the Massachusetts Whigs, see Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 268-301; Paul Goodman, "The Politics of Industrialism: Massachusetts, 1830-1870," in Richard L. Bushman, et al., eds., *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1979), 163-207; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990) 7-27. Good accounts of the Coalition's formative days include William G. Bean, "Puritan versus Celt, 1850-1860," *New England Quarterly* 7 (1934), 70-9; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 30-59; Kevin Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation and Reform: Coalition Politics in Massachusetts, 1847-1853," *Civil War History* 22 (June 1976), 119-21; Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* 2 vols. (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1876-8), II: 339.

4. On the Coalition's formative days in Essex County, see Lynn Bay State, 11 October 1849; James Kimball [Essex County Free Soil Party Chairman], Letter to Members of County Committee, 2 August 1849, Broadides, 1849, American Antiquarian Society; Robert D. Bulkley, Jr., "Robert Rantoul, Jr., 1805-1851: Politics and Reform in Antebellum Massachusetts," (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1970), 358-9.

5. Bay State, 30 October 1851. See also *ibid.*: 27 February 1851; 20 March 1851; Newburyport *Daily Evening Union*, 7 November 1850; Amesbury and Salisbury Mills *Villager*: 20 February 1851; 11 August 1853; *Lowell American*, 14 January 1850; *Essex Freeman* 8 January 1850. For related discussions, see Goodman, "The Emergence of Homestead Exemption in the United States: Accommodation and Resistance to the

Market Revolution, 1840-1880," *Journal of American History* 80 (September 1993), 470-98; Mark Voss-Hubbard, "The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History* 29 (Spring 1996), 565-90.

6. *Villager*, 6 February 1851; *Daily Evening Union*, 31 January 1853. See also *Bay State*, 11 October 1849; 2 October, 30 October 1851; *Daily Evening Union*, 6 January 1853.

7. Haverhill *Essex Banner*, 28 September 1850; *Bay State*, 10 January 1850. See also *Bay State*, 6 November 1851; *Daily Evening Union*: 23 October, 7 November 1850, 24 February 1853; *Essex Freeman*, 18 October 1849; *People's Advocate and Marblehead Mercury*, 27 November 1852; *Villager*: 14 November 1852, 24 February 1853.

8. See *Daily Evening Union*: 3 September 1850; 2 March, 9 July 1853, *Bay State*: 29 January 1852; 27 October 1853; and letter of William S. Robinson in 28 October 1852.

9. *Villager*, 24 February 1853. See also *ibid.*, 17 October 1850; *Bay State*, 1 November 1849; *Daily Evening Union*, 7 November 1850; Thomas Dublin, *Women At Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 200; Charles E. Persons, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," in Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *Labor Laws and Their Enforcement* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 70-3. See also Michel Brunet, "The Secret Ballot Issue in Massachusetts Politics From 1851 to 1853," *New England Quarterly* 25 (1952), 354-61; Carl Siracusa, *A Mechanical People: Perceptions of the Industrial Order in Massachusetts, 1815-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 185-6.

Though the secret ballot issue without question informed the Coalition's broader anti-Whig populism, I have my doubts that the open ballot procedure worked to sustain Whig political power as the critics claimed. Certainly the open ballot did not prevent opposition to Whiggery from gelling in Massachusetts; Massachusetts Whiggery disintegrated rapidly and completely without a secret ballot. To my mind, the imbroglio over the 1851 Lowell case demonstrates how rare such instances of open coercion actually were in antebellum Massachusetts. Anyone with an ounce of political instinct could have predicted events in Lowell and the backlash against Whiggery that ensued there. Until more cases of voter intimidation can be documented, the singularity of the Lowell example seems to confirm that elites of whatever political party were normally wise enough to avoid such brash displays of their power.

10. Election data compiled from *Lawrence Courier*, 29 May 1853; *Lynn Bay State*: 21 November 1850; 13 November 1851; 18 November, 25 November 1852.

11. For more extensive discussions, see for example John L. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 360-75; Formisano, *Transformation of Political Culture*, 283-301; Goodman, "Politics of Industrialism," 163-207; 171-3.

12. For statewide political patterns see Jarvis Means Morse, *A Neglected Period of Connecticut's History: 1818-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933); Lex Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), and "Retrospective Voting and the Presidential Election of 1844: The Texas Issue Revisited," 24 (Fall 1994), 837-54.

13. See for example Chauncey F. Cleveland, *Message from his Excellency...to the Legislature of Connecticut, May Session, 1842* (New Haven: Public Printer, 1842); Henry W. Edwards, *Message from His Excellency...to the Legislature of Connecticut, May, 1835* (Hartford: Public Printer, 1835), and *Message of the Governor to the General Assembly of Connecticut, May, 1837* (Hartford: Public Printer, 1837); Morse, *Neglected Period*, 52-3, 253, 266, 289-302; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 107-9.

14. See for example, New London *Morning News*: 17 March 1845, 11 March 1845; Hartford *Courant*: 13 August 1844; 13 January 1845; Norwich *Weekly Courier*: 15 November 1843; 6 March 1844; 27 March 1844; 9 October 1844; 16 October 1844; 17 January 1846. Also, Roger S. Baldwin, *Message From His Excellency...to the Legislature of Connecticut* (Hartford: Public Printer, 1844); Morse, *Neglected Period*, 318-23; Bruser, "Political Antislavery in Connecticut," 68-75, 82-7; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut*, 127-33; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 120-6, 152-5.

15. New London *Daily Morning Star*: 16 February, 28 February, 8 March 1850; 22 February 1851; 2 April, 20 October 1852; 26 February, 23 June 1853; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1850, (Hartford: State Printer, 1850): 64; 66-7; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1851: 43-4; 50-67; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1852: 23-36; 67-8; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1853: 75-7; 81-2; 102-15; 132-45. For Democrats statewide, see Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 170-84, 264-71. Also Henry F. Waldradt, *The Financial History of Connecticut, from 1789-1861* (New Haven: Yale University, 1912), 114-7.

16. For example, the annual legislative outputs of new bank charters, or authorizations for capital increases for extant banks, with the controlling party in parentheses, breaks down thus:

<i>Banks</i>	<i>Railroads</i>
(W) 1847 = 2	2
(W) 1848 = 5	2
(W) 1849 = 5	2
(D) 1850 = 4	2

(D) 1851 = 14 2

(D) 1852 = 0 6

(D) 1853 = 1 1

Derived from *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1836-1857* (New Haven: State Printer, 1857), vols. III & IV.

17. Thomas H. Seymour, "Governor's Message," *Norwich Aurora*, 5 April 1852; *ibid.*, 7 April 1853.

18. *Statute Laws Passed by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1850 (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1850). See also Douglas E. Bowers, "From Logrolling to Corruption: The Development of Lobbying in Pennsylvania, 1815-1861," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Winter 1983), 439-74, and "The Pennsylvania Legislature, 1815-1860: A Study of Democracy at Work" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974), esp. 179-224; Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 44-8; Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1905), Vol I: 58. On the state debt, see W.P. Snyder, *Compendium and Brief History of Taxation in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1907), 12-3; T. K. Worthington, "Historical Sketch of the Finances of Pennsylvania," *Publications of the American Economic Association* 2 (May 1887), 123-227, 53-4.

19. By far the most celebrated case involved Nicholas Biddle and his campaign for a state charter for the Second Bank of the United States in 1836. Biddle hired a coterie of mercenaries with deep pockets to exert pressure on dubious lawmakers. He passed out stock subscriptions to private turnpike and railroad companies to sweeten the deal. In addition, Biddle struck a bargain with Thaddeus Stevens, chair of the powerful Inland Navigation and Internal Improvement Committee, that required the BUS II to fork over \$9 million in cash "bonuses" and loans to the state which were then funneled to public works projects and the new public school system. Biddle's was only the most spectacular case in which logrolling and "boring" combined to produce results. Powerful business interests as a matter of course bought legislation in Harrisburg. See Bowers, "From Logrolling to Corruption;" *idem.*, "Pennsylvania Legislature," 179-224; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 47; Snyder, *Jacksonian Heritage*, 75-9.

20. For the essentially random nature of charter policy regarding banks, railroads and insurance companies, see *Pennsylvania Statute Laws: 1845-1860*; Bowers, "Pennsylvania Legislature," 453-6. On the importance of local mobilization for economic policymaking in Pennsylvania, Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 113-9; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 21-33; 42-51.

21. On the failure of general incorporation laws to reduce the volume of special legislation, see Bowers, "Pennsylvania Legislature," 134-151; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 40-2. My own reading of the *Pennsylvania Sessions Laws* between 1840 and 1860 confirms the findings of Hartz and Bowers that special legislation pertaining to divorce decisions, borough incorporations, voluntary associations, and banking and manufacturing corporations continued unabated well after passage of general incorporation laws affecting these areas.

Examples of lawmakers flaunting general incorporation laws can be easily multiplied for Connecticut and Massachusetts too, raising difficult questions for historian L. Ray Gunn's contention that general incorporation resulted in an appreciable diminution of legislative authority before the Civil War. See L Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 222-45. See for example Oscar and Mary Flug Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 218, 237; Pauline Maier, "The Debate over Incorporation: Massachusetts in the Early Republic," in Conrad Edick Wright, ed., *Massachusetts and the New Nation* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1992), 73-117: 113-5.

22. Charles I. Ingersoll quoted in Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 45.

23. See for example *Harrisburg Chronicle*, 6 May 1840; *Harrisburg Clay Bugle*, 8 February, 8 August 1844; *Harrisburg Telegraph*: 30 June, 11 August 1841; 5 October 1842; *Telegraph*, 17 January 1846; 24 August 1847; 21 September 1847.

24. The 1844 sale plebiscite produced a 20,000 vote statewide majority (54%) in favor of sale. Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 87-9, 103, 162-4. Though the 1844 referendum on the Main Line crossed party lines, the vote revealed that opposition centered in the interior counties where Democrats enjoyed a decisive edge. A majority of voters in only three of the state's thirty-three solidly Democratic counties supported sale. In contrast, a majority of voters in only one of the sixteen counties that can be classified Whig bailiwicks voted to oppose sale. What tipped the balance in favor of sale was the intersection of three developments: proponents of sale won majorities in politically divided counties; counties that supported sale did so with larger majorities than those that opposed sale; and counties favoring sale were located in the populous southeastern and southwestern parts of the state. Data drawn from Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 163; Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, 159. Party strongholds are defined as counties that supported the party in at least four out the five presidential contests between 1836 and 1852. About three quarters of these strongholds supported the party in every election.

25. Harrisburg *Democratic Union*, 16 March 1844; *Telegraph*, 3 April 1853; "Papers of the Governors, 1845-1858" *Pennsylvania Archives* Vol. VII, Fourth Series, (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1902), 633-4; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 63-5; Peter Andrew Wallner, "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1826-1857," (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1973), 241-2.
26. Harrisburg *Telegraph*: 3 October, 17 October 1848; Coleman, *The Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, 26-30. See also J. Lynn Barnard, *Factory Legislation in Pennsylvania: Its History and Administration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1907), 18-20; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 189-91; Holt, *Forging A Majority*, 51-61; McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I: 177.
27. "Governor's Message," *Telegraph*, 6 January 1849.
28. Holt, *Forging A Majority*, 53-59; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 148-9; McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I: 177-8.
29. *Statute Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1849: 10-17; 79-87; 167-9; 337; 441-9; 495; 508-9; 533-4; 563-9; 672-3; 697; 686; *Statute Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1850: 434-5; 611-3; 654-5; *Statute Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1851: 648-51.
30. *Telegraph*: 18 September 1850; 10 February 1849; 18 April 1849; 25 July 1849. See also *ibid*: 24 January, 30 May, 25 July, 22 August 1849; 17 April 1850; 1 May 1850; 1 January 1851; Harrisburg *Daily American*: 1 February, 13 February 1851; *Whig State Journal*: 3 June 1851; 19 August 1851.
31. *Telegraph*, 8 January 1851; "Papers of the Governor," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 381-2; Wallner, "Politics and the Public Works," 250.
32. *Statute Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1850, 477-95. *Telegraph*: 22 May 1850; *Whig State Journal*, 22 April 1852. See also *Telegraph*: 30 May, 25 July, 22 August 1849; 17 April, 1 May, 8 May, 29 May 1850; Harrisburg *Daily American*, 1 February, 24 February, 9 April 1851; *Whig State Journal*, 30 September 1851.
33. *Whig State Journal*: 21 April 1853; 26 February 1852.
34. "Papers of the Governor," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 518; 567-79; 596-7.
35. Here, the relevant historiographical context are the so-called "commonwealth studies" of nineteenth-century economic policymaking. Good

examples include Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads, 1800-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*; Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens, OH: The Ohio University Press, 1967). A still useful review of this literature and the larger theoretical and substantive issues it raises is Scheiber, "Government and the Economy: Studies of the "Commonwealth" Policy in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3 (September 1972), 135-51. For an excellent recent study of the legal theories and specific case law which underpinned and justified government intervention in a variety of public issues and spheres, see William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law & Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Also of interest in this regard is Freyer, *Producers versus Capitalists*.

36. *Bay State*, 25 October 1849.

37. *Villager*, 10 October 1850; *Essex Freeman*, 27 September 1850; *Bay State*, 8 November 1849; *Daily Evening Union*, 2 March 1853.

38. *Lynn Bay State*: 30 May-13 June 1850; 26 September, 17 October 1850; 7 October 1852; *Daily Evening Union*, 7 November 1850; *Lowell Tri-Weekly American*, 2 February 1852; *Villager*: 5 August, 26 September, 14 October 1852; Persons, "Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," 63-5; 75-6. For more on the broader cultural and ideological dimensions of labor activism in antebellum Massachusetts, see Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 68-96; Dublin, *Women At Work*, 197-208; Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

39. The petitions are preserved in files included in "Bills and Papers Relating to the Ten Hour Law," House Unenacted #3757 (1854), Massachusetts State Archives. On the earlier petitions, see Persons, "Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," 24-49.

40. For a fuller discussion of the Amesbury-Salisbury strike, see Voss-Hubbard, "The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism in Antebellum Massachusetts." Also, *Account of the Difficulties on the Salisbury Corporation* (Amesbury and Salisbury Mills Village: Villager Press, 1852); *Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor* (Boston: Rand, Avery, & Co., 1880), 9-14. For more on the economics of 1850s factory production, and the subsequent protests it spawned, see Victor C. Clark, *History of Manufacturers in the United States, 1607-1860* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1916), 613-5; Arthur C. Cole, *The*

American Wool Manufacture 2 vols., (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1926), I: 267-78; Dublin, *Women at Work*, 133-6; Caroline F. Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture: A Study in Industrial Beginnings* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966 [originally published in 1931]), 108-14.

41. An incomplete list of local papers that commented on the strike and lent moral support for the plight of the strikers includes: the Amesbury Mills *Villager*; the *Exeter News Letter*; the (Haverhill) *Essex Banner*; the *Haverhill Gazette*; the *Lowell American*; the *Lowell Patriot*; the *Lowell Courier*; the *People's Advocate and Marblehead Mercury*; the *Lawrence Sentinel*; the (Lynn) *Bay State*; the (Newburyport) *Daily Evening Union*; the (Salem) *Essex Freeman*. On the popular base of the ten-hour movement see data presented in Voss-Hubbard, "Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism," 575-6; Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor*, 155-63.

42. *Villager*, 30 September 1852. The need for ten-hour legislation to maintain and advance the harmony of interests was also the primary theme in ten-hour petition language. Petitions in 1852 and 1853 from Amesbury and Salisbury, Lynn, Lawrence, Andover, and Ipswich posited "that much benefit to all classes of the community, and especially to all interested, either laborers or capitalists, in manufacturing industry, would arise from a reduction of labor..." See "Bills and Papers Relating to the Ten Hour Law," House Unenacted #3757 (1854), Massachusetts State Archives.

43. *People's Advocate and Marblehead Mercury*, 7 August 1852. See also *Bay State*: 1 July, 15 July 1852; *Essex Banner*, 23 October 1852; *People's Advocate and Marblehead Mercury*, 17 July 1852.

44. Newburyport *Daily Evening Union*, 17 June 1852; "Letter from G. J. L. Colby," to the Committee for the Late Female Operatives, 8 July 1852, printed in *Succinct Account of the Late Difficulties on the Salisbury Corporation*, 17-9; *Villager*, 15 July 1852.

45. *People's Advocate and Marblehead Mercury*, 19 June 1852; *Villager*, 24 June 1852; *Bay State*, 30 September 1852.

46. *Bay State*, 3 October 1850; 16 October 1851. See also *ibid.*: 8 November 1849; 17 January 1850; 14 November 1850, 28 June 1851; *Daily Evening Union*: 3 September 1850; 23 October 1850; 7 November 1850; *Essex Banner*, 19 October 1850. See also Higginson's further correspondence in *Daily Evening Union*: 9 November, 17 December 1850; 15 January 1851; *Essex Freeman*, 10 October 1850. For statewide developments, see Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 28-9; Goodman, "The Politics of Industrialism," 163-207, 188-9; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 30-2; Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, II: 343.

47. See for example *Essex Freeman* 8 January, 27 September 1850; *Lowell American*: 14 January 1850, 2 February 1852; *Villager*: 17 October 1850; 20 February 1851; 8 July 1852. For statewide Free Soil support for state reform, see Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 29-59; Siracusa, *Mechanical People*, 202, 217.
48. *Bay State*: 13 February, 27 February, 22 May, 29 May, 28 June, 16 October, 30 October 1851; 2 September, 9 September, 23 September, 4 November 1852; *Daily Evening Union*: 22 October 1852. See also *Bay State*: 8 November, 15 November, 22 November, 29 November 1849; 31 October, 14 November, 21 November 1850; 23 January, 13 February, 1 May 1851; *Daily Evening Union*, 15 January 1851; *Villager*, 17 October 1850; John Greenleaf Whittier to Henry Wilson, 18 November 1850, Whittier Papers, PEM, box 9 [photostat]. Bulkley, "Robert Rantoul, Jr.," 359-61.
49. *Daily Evening Union*, 24 February 1853. See also *ibid.*, 28 February, 2 March 1853; *Bay State*, 20 October 1853; *Villager*, 10 November 1853; *Lawrence Courier*, 11 March 1853. The plebiscite passed with nearly 54% of the popular vote. See *Official Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the State Convention...1853* 3 vols., (Boston: White & Potter, 1853), III: 732-6. The popular vote in Essex County on the plebiscite followed party lines, with support for the convention correlating negatively with the Whig vote in 1852: $-.26 \text{ prob. } Z > |\tau| = .044$.
50. There were also unsuccessful efforts to incorporate an improved homestead exemption and a ban on state loans to private transportation companies into the document. On homestead exemption, state loans to transportation companies, and nativism in the Constitutional Convention, see *Debates and Proceedings of the State Convention*, I: 93, 204-10; 323; 949; II: 115-6; 295-6; 304; 666-75. The most thorough secondary account of the Constitutional Convention is Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 40-59. Also useful is Samuel Shapiro, "The Conservative Dilemma: The Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1853," *New England Quarterly* 33 (1960), 207-24.
51. Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 51-2, 55-9.
52. *People's Advocate*, 12 November 1853. See also *Newburyport Herald*, 4 November 1853.
53. *People's Advocate*, 26 November 1853. On the two Democratic conventions, see *Bay State*, 29 September 1853; *People's Advocate*, 22 October 1853. See also *People's Advocate*: 5 November, 12 November, 19 November 1853; *Bay State*, 27 October 1853.
54. *Lawrence Courier*, 30 September 1853. See also *ibid.*: 27 September, 30 September, 18 October 1853; *Essex Banner*, 15 October 1853; *Newburyport Herald*: 5 November, 8 November, 12 November 1853; *Villager*, 29 July 1853; Charles Cowley,

Illustrated History of Lowell (Boston, Lee and Shephard, 1868), 148-9; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 53-4; Persons, "Early History of Factory Legislation," 88; Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation, and Reform," 135-6.

55. *Daily Evening Union*, 15 November 1853; *Villager*, 1 December 1853; *Essex Banner*, 26 November 1853. See also *Bay State*, 17 November 1853.

56. The interrelationship between evangelical Protestantism, prohibition, and the politics of the 1850s has been well analyzed by, among many others, Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1991), 1216-39. This chapter seeks to develop a more secular argument about the connections between prohibition and the spread of voter dissatisfaction with the major parties and with governance.

57. For more on the midcentury shift away from moral suasion among moral reformers, see Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics*; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For earlier partisan debates over liquor licensing, see Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 156-7.

58. *Hartford Courant*, 11 April 1851; *Daily Morning Star*, 1 April 1852; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 28 June 1851; 13 March 1852; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 21 February 1852; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut*, 151-2; Robert David Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966), 40-2; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 181-3.

59. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 6 April 1852. See also *New London Weekly Chronicle*: 8 April, 15 April 1852. For the Whigs' negative statewide reaction, see Henry E. Emmons to Lucius Hendee, 16 March 1852, Lucius Hendee Correspondence, Connecticut Historical Society; *Hartford Courant*, 7 April 1852; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 52-5; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut*, 153; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 182-3.

60. H. H. Starkweather to Hawley, 31 March 1853, Hawley Papers, LC; Josiah R. Steward to Joseph Hawley, 6 March 1853; Moses Pierce to Hawley: 11 March 1853, 15 March 1853, Hawley Papers, LC; Julius Clark to Hawley, 29 January 1853, Hawley Papers, LC; *New London Weekly Chronicle*: 24 February, 31 March 1853; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 5 April 1853; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 54-5; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut*, 175-7.

61. *Norwich Examiner*: 20 August, 10 September 1853; 24 December 1853; 11 March 1854; 5 August 1854; 15 September 1854; 2 September 1854; 3 November 1854. See also the various extant Maine Law petitions from Norwich, New London, Bozrah, Groton, Salem, and Lebanon in "Records of the General Assembly, 1853," RG-2, Boxes 59, 60, 62, Connecticut State Library (CSL).
62. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 13 March 1852. See also *Norwich Examiner*: 19 August 1854; 31 August 1855; Printed petition from Greeneville village, Norwich, "Records of the General Assembly, 1853," RG-2, Box 60, CSL.
63. "Petition of Clarissa Ashley..." "Records of the General Assembly, 1853," RG-2, Box 60, CSL; *Norwich Examiner*: 11 March 1854; 12 August 1854.
64. *Norwich Examiner*: 4 March 1854; 11 February 1854; 4 March 1854.
65. *Examiner*: 20 August; 27 August; 10 September 1853.
66. Meriden *The Connecticut Whig*, 20 October 1853.
67. Moses Pierce to Joseph Hawley, 12 September 1853, Hawley Papers, LC. On the NLCTA, see *Examiner*, 24 December 1853.
68. See *Examiner*, 4 March, 1 April 1854; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 85-6; Jarlath Robert Lane, *A Political History of Connecticut During the Civil War* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 31-6; Parmet, "The Know Nothings in Connecticut," 283-6.
69. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 23 March 1854. See also *Examiner*, 11 March 1854; *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 30 March 1854. See also *ibid.*: 16 March 1854; *Norwich Evening Courier*: 4 March, 23 March 1854; *Hartford Courant*: 4 February, 9 March 1854.
70. See for example *Daily Morning Star*: 25 February, 28 February 1854; *Hartford Times*, 11 February 1854; Bruser, "Political Antislavery in Connecticut," 207-8; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 282-3.
71. See for example *Norwich Evening Courier*: 14 February, 25 February, 14 March, 30 March, 1854; *Hartford Courant*: 4 February, 9 March, 3 April 1854.
72. *Examiner*: 11 March, 1 April 1854; Moses Pierce to Joseph Hawley, 11 March 1853, Hawley Papers, LC.
73. *Daily Morning Star*: 7 April 1854; 5 April 1854. See also *ibid.*, 10 April 1854; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 6 April 1854; William Goodwin, *Goodwin's Annual*

Legislative Statistics 1854, (Hartford: State Printer, 1854); Parmet, "Know Nothings in Connecticut," 84.

74. See Moses Pierce to Joseph Hawley, 27 March 1854, Hawley Papers, LC; *Examiner*, 1 April 1854; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 30 March 1854; *Goodwin's Annual Legislative Statistics*, 1852-1854. For similar evidence statewide, see Henry Hammond to Hawley, 30 March 1854, Hawley Papers; Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut*, 181-2; Parmet, "Know Nothings in Connecticut," 84. For different interpretations that downplays the effects of Nebraska on the 1854 election, see Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 287; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 86.

75. *Daily Morning Star*: 6 March 1854; 7 April 1854; 23 February 1854; *Examiner*, 11 March 1854.

76. Governor's "Annual Message," printed in *Journal of the Connecticut State Senate* (Hartford: State Printer, 1854), 15-41; 28-41.

77. *Whig State Journal*, 4 March 1852. For the local precursors, see *Telegraph*: 21 February, 28 February 1852. Earlier organizational efforts at the statewide level can be glimpsed in "Annual Meeting of the State Temperance Society, February 24, 1851," Pennsylvania State Temperance Union Convention Flyer, MG-143, Dauphin County Historical Society.

78. *Whig State Journal*: 5 February, 4 March, 18 March, 21 October 1852; *Telegraph*: 21 February, 3 March 1852; *Borough Item*, 21 March 1853. C. C. Rawn recorded attending several Maine Law lectures and meetings in various churches across Dauphin County in 1852-4: C. C. Rawn, *Diary, 1830-1862*, Papers of C. C. Rawn, DCHS. On the Upper End, see Simon Sallade to George M. Lauman, 2 October 1853, Sallade-Bickel Family Papers, New York Public Library; Rawn *Diary*, 4 October 1854, DCHS.

79. *Telegraph*: 21 February 1852. See also *ibid.*, 31 August, 19 October 1853.

80. *Whig State Journal*: 6 October 1853; 20 October 1853. For more on Patterson's decision to purchase the *Journal*, see Eggert, "'Seeing Sam': the Know-Nothing Episode in Harrisburg," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 111 (July 1987), 305-40: 310.

81. *Telegraph*: 21 February 1852; *Telegraph*, 14 April 1852; *Whig State Journal*, 12 February 1852.

82. *Whig State Journal*, 18 March 1852; *ibid.*, 10 February 1853; *ibid.*, 3 March 1853.

83. *Crystal Fountain* quoted in *Whig State Journal*, 21 May 1853. See also "Oscar" quoted in *Telegraph*, 13 April 1853.

84. See for example Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*; Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Norton, 1978).

85. It should be pointed out, however, that beginning 1852 certain Free Soil and other moral reformist elements in Essex County started to agitate for the Maine Law, while the nativist gestures in the abortive Constitution signified an emergent ethnoreligious sensibility among reformers. I will take up those themes in the next chapter. The crucial point of this chapter, however, is that those tendencies remained ancillar to Coalition politics from 1849 to 1853.

CHAPTER V

TO “EXCLUDE BROKEN-DOWN WIRE-PULLERS AND PARTY HACKS”: KNOW NOTHING POPULISM

In October 1854, Harrisburg’s Stephen Miller, editor of both the Harrisburg *Morning Herald* and Harrisburg *Telegraph*, analyzed the Know Nothings’ startling success in the recent election. A prominent Maine Law activist, Miller had spent the previous months railing against “political Jesuitism” and championing the mysterious Know Nothing order. With the Know Nothings assured of a Governor and majority control of the House of Representatives, Miller described the antiparty temper that underlay the movement. “There is a determination everywhere to take from the professional politicians the government of States and cities...” The Democrats and Whigs had treated “this country as the mere skittle-ground of gambling politicians,” and for that the Know Nothings had overthrown “the banded officials and their servile press.” “The purposes for which the great Know Nothing movement has been organized” Miller concluded proudly, “is the purification of official administration [and] the preservation of American Nationality.”¹

Know Nothing self-descriptions in Essex and New London counties echoed Miller’s patriotic and antiparty drum-beating. The leading nativist organ in New London County listed the “overthrow of corrupt parties and politicians” among the Know Nothings’ first principles. Likewise the Hartford *Courant*, the Connecticut Know Nothings’ statewide mouthpiece, called the movement “a spontaneous uprising of the great middling classes; the real virtue, enterprise and substance of the land

irrespective of old foggy party hacks.”² A Know Nothing from Essex County was more effusive. This portrait, like many, glossed over nativist xenophobia with astonishing equanimity. With no apparent irony this writer asserted that the Know Nothings were “true Americans who left the party clique, and cast all prejudice aside.” The Know Nothings’ rapid rise demonstrated an elemental principle of men’s politics: “when a party gets corrupt, the sooner a man clears his skirts of them the better.” Notwithstanding the bizarre sartorial metaphor, clearing one’s “skirt” of corrupt parties was the crux of the matter. The Know Nothings were hard sons of toil who had cast off the yoke of party to bring democracy and good government back to the Bay State. “The American movement gives more power to the mechanics, the true strength of the country. It excludes those broken-down wire-pullers and party hacks who will sell themselves for political office.”³

What are we to make of these antiparty self-images? It is tempting to dismiss this nativist variant of the popular vernacular as transparent bombast. In the antebellum language of political suasion, as we have seen, the antiparty ideal of patriotic principle trumping particularistic interest was ubiquitous. So, too, was the related construction of designing politicians threatening the public interest and its embodiment, the nation’s expansive class of upright, independent producers. As historian Michael Kazin has most recently shown, these reified categories have been close to the center of American political discourse since the birth of mass parties.⁴

But to regard antiparty rhetoric simply as a common lexicon of political discourse, indiscriminately deployed by elites and insurgents across time and setting

and political spectrum would be unsatisfactory. In regards to the Know Nothings (or any other insurgency), such an approach conflates the movement's political distinctiveness and oppositional character with the normative currents of American political culture. Worse, such an approach could lead to a cynical evaluation of the movement's pronouncements of faith, reducing them to base voter manipulation. Know Nothing self-descriptions conveyed real beliefs and expectations of their movement, of their political setting, and of the state of governance as they viewed it in the mid-1850s. Many people in the three counties had both good reasons and new vehicles for turning against the regime of party government. Reformers politicized new issues by utilizing antiparty techniques and appealing to the nonpartisan ideal of governance. The parties and their leaders, reformers charged, corrupted governance by allowing partisan motives to guide action on crucial public questions involving liquor, political economic and labor reform, and slavery. Ultimately, the Know Nothing movement's signal achievement was its capacity to absorb many "reform" impulses under a single, transcendent vehicle that promised to reconstitute government's purity of purpose. Embedded in the movement's programmatic multiplicity were two common denominators: extreme anger at the regime of partisan politics and idealized notions of the pursuit of the public good in governance. Elaborating upon the work of earlier reformers, the Know Nothings used nativism to complete the process of political translation whereby new issues entered the space of formal politics. Partisan politics thwarted the public good by bending governance to

serve party ends. Native-born citizens attracted to Know Nothingism hoped to recenter governance on what most perceived to be its normative nonpartisan axis.

In this sense the specific issues in play in Know Nothing politics were less important than their indictment of how party leaders handled those issues. Issues, most prominently immigration, served as a kind of ballast in Know Nothing culture around which the movement framed a larger agenda of jettisoning partisanship and turning out the regime's corrupt party officials. Know Nothings always folded their specific fears of Irish-Catholics--and for that matter, all of their demon "Others"--into the political situation as they perceived it. The most basic of Know Nothing beliefs was that they were collectively engaged in a reform movement, distinct from and opposed to partisan politics. They considered their movement immune to the partisan calculations and obligations which had, in their view, hogtied the leadership of the regime and laid bare its disastrous failures.

In this light Know Nothing antipartyism has intrinsic analytic and conceptual significance. If situated in the appropriate political economic context and taken seriously as a relational category of political thought and action, it can reveal both the scope of discontent with the two-party regime among Know Nothings and the constitutive features of their distinctive political culture--in a word, their "movement culture."⁵ This chapter aims to recover that movement culture in its formative stages. First, it locates Know Nothingism in the specific social context of the three counties, and from there traces the Know Nothing movement culture to suggest the antiparty character of 1850s-style populism. Before investigating the Know Nothings'

movement culture, it will help to briefly investigate the social dimensions of the movement.

The Social Dimensions of Know Nothingism

In general, the social bases of Know Nothingism in the three counties diverged little from the conventional wisdom: Know Nothing candidates ran strongest in industrial-factory-urban towns and towns with high percentages of evangelical Protestant denominations (Tables B.13-B.18). Without question, Know Nothingism both reflected and politicized the social and cultural transitions of the decade: the threat to Protestant certitudes posed by immigrants and their associated cultural dispositions, particularly those of Irish Catholics; and economic insecurity attendant upon immigration and the North's industrializing market economy.⁶ Partly on these grounds alone the movement appealed strongly to younger, first-time and casual voters. Low turnout among the demoralized Whigs and unenthused Democrats and Free Soilers further inflated Know Nothing majorities.⁷

Consider New London County, the Know Nothings' banner county in Connecticut's spring 1855 election. Here the Know Nothing state ticket, headed by ex-Whig William T. Minor, carried 17 of New London's 18 towns--all but four with an outright majority. The order appeared in fall 1853 in New Haven as a small fraternal organization and slowly rose to power during the second half of 1854. New Haven was the de facto nerve center for the order, headed by Nehemiah D. Sperry, a

shrewd operative who had solidified his political friendships and honed his organizational skills as Arch Chancellor of the Connecticut Order of United Americans (OUA). In February, with a membership of 22,000 billeted in 169 lodges, the Know Nothings pegged Minor to head their independent state ticket over then Whig Governor Henry Dutton, who had signed the state's 1854 Maine Law.⁸

Though the movement was led mainly by ex-Whigs, Minor attracted roughly equal numbers of Democrats and Whigs, while also gaining a significant share of the independent Free Soil vote. The extent of Know Nothing power is somewhat obscured by the statewide returns. Minor could only muster a bare plurality in a three-way race against separate Democratic and old-line Whig tickets. But across the state the Know Nothings fused with Democrats, Whigs, and Free Soilers in state assembly and senate races, thereby carrying the General Assembly overwhelmingly. In New London County the Know Nothings' three state senate nominees averaged 64% of the popular vote, while Know Nothing--or Know Nothing approved--candidates won 26 of the county's 27 assembly seats.⁹

Know Nothing power concentrated in the county's coastal belt. The chief point of entry for new immigrants, the coastal belt comprised towns suffering a stubborn recession and a declining whaling industry. New London, Stonington, and Groton also harbored the county's largest sector of small-shop industry and commerce; here scores of native-born mechanics and petty merchants clung to their independence amid the ravages of whaling's collapse. Know Nothingism also fared better than average in the small to mid-sized cotton and woolen towns that ringed

Norwich. The party easily carried Norwich, another industrial center specializing in textiles, paper, printing and firearms, albeit by a smaller figure than its countywide average.¹⁰

If impressionistic local accounts are valid, a steep rise in the prices of staple goods and a drop in wages helped raise awareness of the immigrant “problem.” For younger mechanics, immigration refocused attention on the changing social relations between employer and employee. The appearance of the OUA and its sister organization, the Order of United American Mechanics (OUAM), was one manifestation of this growing restiveness among native-born middling sorts. As nativist fraternal societies, the OUAM and OUA offered an array of material benefits and programs to a heterogenous Protestant membership. They offered entitlements like disability “insurance” and financial assistance to widowed families. Regular lectures on temperance and savings associations schooled members to the virtues of self-improvement. Beyond this, the OUA and the OUAM, with their strange regalia and assorted secret grips, passwords, and incantations, offered a ritual reaffirmation of the cultural and social bonds that united native-born producers. Both organizations prefigured the fraternal emphasis of Know Nothingism and served as staging grounds for their antiparty politics. As one member of the New London OUAM put it, the OUAM and OUA “suppress party spirit,” uniting “men of all parties” into a “purely American Brotherhood” devoted to the “common good.” The Know Nothing contribution was to direct this fraternal energy into explicitly political channels.¹¹

Inexorably, the influx of cheap labor into urban areas enabled employers to challenge the mutualistic social relations that the OUA and OUAM embodied. The complaints of one OUAM member are illustrative. He wrote of a local manufacturer who quipped that he could easily replace his highly paid native-born workforce with “workmen of *foreign birth*, who would be glad to work for four dollars a month and board!” Initially, the manufacturer resisted the temptation, but pressure to reduce costs was apparently too strong (or too attractive) to resist a pay cut of twenty-five percent. Curiously, the mechanic did not begrudge the manufacturer for slashing wages. Rather, he took a step back and examined the decision in context. There were two crucial points to take from the episode. First, it would not be very long “before those who are disposed to pay a fair price for labor will be compelled to follow the example of their unscrupulous competitors, or abandon their business.” The competitive logic of the free market gave the upper hand to a few “grasping and avaricious capitalists” and undermined the intentions of honorable employers to do good by American labor. The employer’s traditional sense of obligation to his employees, the mutualism that had always existed among proprietor and journeyman--these customary relations were in jeopardy, and immigrants were to blame. The second point, even more starkly drawn, was that as selfish capitalists displaced honorable employers, American mechanics “will be reduced to the condition of European serfs.”¹²

It is impossible to discern which of these two developments the writer rued more--the erosion of mutualism among employer and employed, or his own job

insecurity and potential proletarianization. For to this native-born mechanic the two were clearly of a piece. The same process was at work in New London's merchant houses, where clerks were astir over grueling work schedules. Clerks held meetings in July 1852 to call on the city's merchants to voluntarily close early, thereby shortening the workday, normally about fourteen hours. The clerks appealed to the merchants' sense of fraternity and mutual interest in closing early and shortening hours for all. At least one merchant responded favorably, insisting that merchants had "a duty in this matter" to refrain from lording over their employees, "even if they are to us what we once were to others--clerks." But, according to this merchant, the problem was more complex than the clerks seemed to realize. Larger market forces increasingly conditioned labor relations, shunting moral considerations to the margins. Alas, observed the merchant, even well-intentioned merchants had to keep long hours because their competitors kept long hours.¹³

In the early 1850s such incidents were episodic in New London County, but nevertheless indicate a growing sense among native-born middling sorts that labor relations in the industrializing marketplace seemed impervious to purely private, voluntaristic intervention. Such was undoubtedly the rationale behind the ten-hour petition campaign that erupted in Norwich and surrounding milltowns in 1853 and 1854.¹⁴ Though small in size and barely noticed amid the Maine Law and Nebraska imbroglios, those efforts anticipated a more noteworthy campaign during the Know Nothing-led assembly of 1855. As Know Nothingism took hold in New London

County, growing numbers of people turned to the state to solve problems of governance that had once been the primary province of private, voluntaristic action.

But that lay just ahead of the horizon. As the Know Nothings organized and made appeals to voters, they rarely made specific arguments about labor laws or shop-floor policies. Rather, they deployed an elastic economic nationalism that could appeal to struggling workers and small producers and well-off employers alike. More so in New London than in either Essex or Dauphin counties, nativist cries for protectionism were incantatory. Norwich's Andrew Stark, convinced that foreign investments bled the nation of its own capital, urged "American laborers" to "protect themselves by protecting capital." For Know Nothings, it was vital that native-born merchants, mechanics, and manufacturers recognize their common interest in protecting economic opportunity in America. Such opportunity was central to maintaining avenues of upward mobility. This construction gained greater salience in the process of distinguishing Americans from immigrants. Native-born "journeyman mechanics," wrote the *Hartford Courant*'s Thomas Day, well knew "the distinction which should exist, between skilled labor and uninstructed labor. It was utterly idle to tell these skilled laborers that they have nothing to fear from competition with raw imported labor from Europe."¹⁵ Ignorant, unskilled, dependent on wage work, immigrants embodied the fears of many who felt that opportunities for modest accumulation and upward mobility might someday be choked off. The solution offered by Know Nothings--a movement that would both protect and privilege

American rights and institutions--implied a mutuality of economic interest among native-born members of the producing and capitalist classes.

The Know Nothings in Pennsylvania, even more so than Connecticut, magnified their influence through fusion with both the major parties at the state and local level. The movement eschewed an independent state ticket, instead choosing from among Whig, Democratic, and Native American candidates already in the field. A considerable degree of maneuvering and wire-pulling among Know Nothing leaders and party regulars cloud these arrangements, but one thing is clear: in what amounted to a secret primary, local lodges across the state selected Whig candidate James Pollock to head their own state ticket after Pollock reportedly joined a Know Nothing lodge in Philadelphia. Pollock, a Presbyterian known for his moral stridency, also won the nomination of the tiny Free Soil party and the state's muscular Prohibition movement after he pledged opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and support for a Maine Law.¹⁶

Despite the choice of Pollock, the Pennsylvania Know Nothing movement was no mere recrudescence of Whiggery. Know Nothing lodges selected Democratic candidate Henry Mott (widely believed to be a Know Nothing) for canal commissioner and the Native American candidate Thomas H. Baird (a Know Nothing) for supreme court. The choice of Baird assured a means to measure independent Know Nothing strength across the state, and to the astonishment of Whig regulars, Baird's total clearly showed that Know Nothings dominated the state's anti-Democratic forces.¹⁷ Dauphin County Know Nothings cleaved to the multi-party state

ticket, but in local races, mostly backed nominal Whigs who were members of Know Nothing lodges. Know Nothings running as Whigs easily won races for state senator, and U.S. Congress. The only Democrat to receive the movement's endorsement was Hummelstown's Jonathan Stehley, a close confidant of Simon Cameron who carried one of the county's two state assembly seats, evidently following assurances from the county's Know Nothing hierarchy that a Democratic Know Nothing would be placed on the local ticket.¹⁸

Know Nothing-backed candidates did best in towns notable for their dissenting or mixed religious orientations, high proportions of non-agricultural workers, and high per capita farm and property values (Tables B.15 and B.16). Predictably, they did less well in towns dominated by German Reformed and Lutheran accommodations. Supreme Court Justice Baird tallied far below his countywide average in four of five church German towns. Nevertheless, it is clear that in certain communities a large fraction of German stock voters gravitated, if perhaps uneasily, towards the Know Nothings because of the movement's anti-Catholicism. For example, the Upper End small-shop town of Lykens, served exclusively by German Lutheran and Reformed accommodations, was one of the Know Nothings' strongest. Several church German ministers regularly issued anti-Catholic sermons, while others lent their meeting houses to local Maine Law meetings, a cause closely linked to Dauphin County Know Nothingism. The county's chief Know Nothing publicist, Stephen Miller, a third-generation German Methodist, openly courted German stock Protestants by focusing on "Popery" and muting the

broad anti-immigrant themes in nativist rhetoric and goals. German stock bulked large in the social composition of Dauphin County, thus shaping the local character of political nativism, and prompting area Know Nothings to enlist Protestants of all nationalities in the war against “*Jesuitical* schemes.”¹⁹

At the same time, the Know Nothings’ enthusiastic support for Prohibition drove away many Germans, especially the more libertarian Lutherans. Indeed, church German towns overwhelmingly rejected prohibition in the non-binding ballot question on the issue. Democrats campaigned against the plebiscite by targeting German wheat and rye farmers and inn-keepers. Hoping to “scare the country people by its [the Maine Law] effect,” Democrats circulated anti-Maine Law tracts (printed in both German and English) that emphasized personal liberty and the economic losses that prohibition would surely visit upon farmers. Such appeals worked, leading a frustrated Stephen Miller to launch harangues at German “Lager Beer” houses as the campaign wore on.²⁰ Cross-pressured by competing issues and loyalties, Dauphin’s German stock voters divided in 1854.

Miller’s close association with the Maine Law movement and the keen interest that the plebiscite question generated gave Dauphin County Know Nothingism a strong prohibition cast. But forces besides anti-liquor fervor also underlay the movement. As in New London, economic issues leavened Know Nothingism in certain Dauphin County towns. The context was similar; high prices and low wages plagued the county’s commercial towns throughout 1854. Miller occasionally invoked protectionist labor doctrines and the “cheapening and degradation of

American labor” by Irish immigrants. Such rhetoric undoubtedly reassured American mechanics whose nativist sensibilities had been awakened by the fraternal brotherhoods. Indeed, several of the Know Nothings strongest towns, including Lykens, Middletown and Harrisburg, had histories of OUAM activism. Moreover, several influential labor leaders, including George H. Morgan, Robert S. Boyd, Henry Radabaugh (an OUAM leader), and Washington W. Barr all joined the same nativist lodge. In fact Morgan was a founding member, and he and Radabaugh openly canvassed on behalf of “Americanism” during the 1854 campaign. Historian Gerald Eggert’s analysis of the social composition of this lodge, based on an extant membership list, confirms the well-established pattern: middling skilled and semi-skilled tradesmen, clerks, and small merchants joined in higher proportions than their numbers in the city at large. Stephen Miller’s description of the social base of Know Nothingism, at least in Harrisburg, was probably not far off the mark: men “who occupy the middle ground between riches and poverty.”²¹

As clear as the movement’s social and ethnoreligious tendencies appear, it must be emphasized that Know Nothingism attracted a broad, heterogeneous constituency. This was particularly so in Massachusetts, where the Know Nothings swept nearly every town and state office with a record majority. “There has been no revolution so complete since the organization of government,” observed an awestruck Charles Francis Adams after the 1854 election. Unlike Connecticut and Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Know Nothings fielded completely independent tickets at both the state and local levels.²² Essex was one of four Massachusetts

counties where Know Nothing gubernatorial candidate Henry Gardner, a wool merchant with Whig antecedents, received over 66% of the popular vote. Gardner carried all of Essex's 32 towns, 30 with an outright majority.

Statewide the Know Nothings ran strongest in urban and industrial centers, and Essex County was no exception. The shoe towns of Lynn and Haverhill and the factory towns of Andover, Salisbury, and Lawrence delivered enormous majorities to Gardner, as did several towns with a mix of small shops and larger factories. Shoe and factory towns underwent rapid transformation in the 1850s, as immigrants, railroads, and California gold enabled capitalists to consolidate and expand these industries. The pace of change was particularly acute in shoes and textiles, but also jarring in other trades, including carriage-making and comb manufacturing. Chronic unemployment and depressed wages in the shoe and textile industries added to the county's economic woes.²³

It is tempting to read from this evidence a direct link between Know Nothingism and working-class politicization. Indeed, one scholar has concluded that Massachusetts Know Nothingism was an uprising of the urban working-class suffering the dislocations of industrialization. True enough, Essex County Know Nothingism had a labor orientation rooted in the reform agenda of the Coalition, including the ten-hour day. Yet labor reform was but one of several threads running through the movement. As Tables B.17 and B.18 show, Know Nothingism was by no means limited to industrial enclaves, to say nothing of native-born "working-class" voters.²⁴ Like the movement statewide, the Know Nothings in Essex decisively

carried farming communities and small-shop towns. The movement cut across the fault lines of class, party, denominational affiliation, and economic typology partly by constructing a multifaceted argument about the impact of unchecked immigration. In Essex, as in the other counties, the immigrant--lumpen, clannish, alien--became a master symbol for the forces of both moral decay and social stratification. As metaphor for the impersonal and amoral industrial order, the immigrant embodied a world wracked by clashing social groups and bereft of moral certitudes.

Some observers directly implicated immigrant Irish labor in the regional recession. One described how immigrants “introduce the greatest of all curses which can visit a manufacturing community, a permanent class of factory operatives.” Something had to be done to preserve cherished ways of life, this nativist contended, before “the evils which have characterized the manufacturing towns of the old world [are] transplanted with their operatives into our manufacturing towns.”²⁵ In Essex County, as elsewhere, immigrants symbolized the degree to which impersonal market forces redefined the meaning of free labor to include a perennial underclass of dependent wage workers.

Irish-Catholic resistance to Protestant conventions also fueled conflict. In Lynn and Lawrence, Irish-Catholic families protested the use of the King James Bible in the public schools, sparking reaction among angry Protestants. Catholic attempts to gain public funds for parochial schools enraged Protestants, while the formation of Irish militia and fraternal groups sent natives into a frenzy. Nativists blamed immigration for introducing “criminals and paupers” to the region, echoing the

arguments of Maine Law supporters who linked liquor to a profusion of social problems. Indeed, as the native-born sought to clarify their identity amid the onslaught of newcomers, many simply refused to admit that Irish-Catholic immigrants were anything but a “drunken, vagrant class,” unreachable through the hoary traditions of self-improvement and moral suasion.²⁶

Such demonology was commonplace in all three counties, suggesting nativism’s wide and multidimensional appeal. In fact there is a real danger in obscuring the heterogeneity of Know Nothingism by focusing only on its central tendencies. For example, in each county (but especially Dauphin and Essex), Know Nothingism found numerous adherents among “orthodox” Protestant communicants. If, as one enemy charged, the Know Nothings were “Red Republicans” in politics, they were often simply “Protestants” in religion. In its ability to mobilize across denominational lines, Know Nothingism gestured distinctly towards a Protestant ecumenism built upon the postmillennial idea that Christian activism and spiritual awakening must necessarily antedate the Lord’s second coming.²⁷ Know Nothings in all three counties repeatedly invoked “Protestantism” to unify an otherwise diverse constituency behind a messianic project to repulse Romanism’s march across America. Roman Catholicism was said to be “venomous as the asp, poisonous as the dragon, bloodthirsty as the starving hyena.” Its spread threatened to “make America a combination of numberless clans, as discordant in their purposes as in their national characteristics.”²⁸ More than mere bigotry was in play here. Immigrant Catholics symbolized a genuine cultural transition in American public life. With immigration

re-constituting the nation's social and cultural fabric, Know Nothings turned to Protestantism to reassert purity and singularity of purpose and vision. Local Protestant churches witnessed revivals as political nativism crystallized, while local clergy threw their support behind anti-Catholicism and other reforms. Know Nothing movement culture was in part an expression of this reinvigorated religiosity among native-born Protestants and their clergy, politicizing the ahistorical belief, made possible by a sudden inundation of the "Other," that a common religious bond unified the nation's institutions and history of past greatness. Nativists constructed a patriotic cosmology with Protestant certitudes at the center of things. Revivalism and cultural chauvinism also fueled the movement's unremitting optimism, a righteous faith that native Protestantism would conquer foreign Catholicism--that good would triumph over evil.²⁹

Just as the movement's appeal bridged denominational differences, so too those of class. The central tendency was plebeian, but it is claiming too much to see Know Nothingism as a stalking horse for working-class politics. When viewed across all three counties the movement appears a rather miscellaneous assemblage. What *can* be said, however, is that the economic transitions of the times (railroads, industrialism, increased commercialism) set the broad context for the movement's appearance and subsequent appeal. Middling voters came to feel that impersonal economic and demographic processes introduced fundamental changes in the social structure and moral fabric of community life. Voters acutely concerned for their economic security found in Know Nothingism a movement that addressed, however

unsystematically, their anxieties over a social order increasingly fragmented by class and ordered by impersonal market forces, not the ethical maxims of Protestantism. Know Nothings built on the hoary ideal of America as the land of social harmony, unified by shared economic goals and Protestant virtues. Permanent cultural differences and class distinctions scarcely existed in such a construction. In Know Nothing discourse the immigrant reflected people's worries over troubling centrifugal forces in American society. That same discourse also inscribed immigrant lifestyle choices and culture as antagonistic and amoral. Know Nothing discourse, in turn, framed the movement as an all-purpose vehicle for the advancement of the public good, defined by its elision of the Irish-Catholic immigrant.³⁰

Know Nothing Antipartyism

It is easy to trace the social dimensions of Know Nothingism, but questions remain. What was the political character of the Know Nothing movement? What did it mean in political terms to be a Know Nothing, a third party movement that asked its members to jettison party attachments and identify with a new constellation of emotional referents? Here, we need to investigate the formal political frameworks of the movement. Certainly, the Know Nothing movement had origins in rapid social change, but in the final analysis was a populist uprising against the regime of regular politics. As an electoral movement, its success turned on its facility in translating broad social anxieties into meaningful political and governmental problems.

What did it mean to be a Know Nothing in the movement's formative days? At the center of the Know Nothing movement culture was its double-edged antiparty appeal: Know Nothings stressed the corrosive effects of a corrupt political regime while also constructing a positive image of the movement as a popular, regenerative vehicle for the reform of politics and governance. Know Nothings saw special interests and partisan intrigue looming everywhere in 1854, corrupting governance and thwarting the public good. Their broad antiparty rhetoric mediated the many issues and grievances in play in 1854--immigration, the expansion of slavery, liquor, industrialism, political corruption, and so on. Antipartyism blurred this issue-diversity, enabling Know Nothings to avoid setting priorities on contentious issues with partisan overtones that might turn some against the movement. The Know Nothing movement stood against the political power of immigrants, calculating politicians, and party government; beyond that, any specific elaboration of aims might inflame divisive partisan identifications.

Antipartyism also served the movement in other ways. As a political organization, the Know Nothings were lacking in several particulars that formal political parties always rely upon during campaigns: the emotional ties of rank and filers constituted over years of partisan campaign and response; the cohesive functioning of an integrated organization; a stable leadership; a disciplined press. Indeed, such characteristics were anathema to Know Nothings, who offered an implicit critique of formal party organization when they routinely denounced "old fogyism." By focusing on fawning politicians and washed-up party organizations,

Know Nothings overcame this deficiency by turning it into a virtue. Know Nothings attacked partisan politics for its paucity of principles. In turn, they constructed a public culture that celebrated the movement's sources in the antiparty tradition--the framework of public life devoted to nonpartisan governance.

Essex County

March 1854 witnessed the Know Nothings' initial foray into Essex County politics, but tight-lipped nativists must have quietly organized parts of the county well before that date. The Know Nothings had founded lodges in Boston in fall 1853 in anticipation of the city election in December, which the movement carried easily. Know Nothing lodges, organized as secret fraternal associations modeled on the OUA and OUAM, spread quickly beyond Suffolk County. But the Know Nothing's cloak of secrecy kept Essex County in the dark about the presence of the mysterious order until the spring, when its opening political salvo stunned seasoned observers. With barely a warning, Know Nothing tickets swept several spring municipal elections, including Democratic Marblehead and Lynn, and Whiggish Salem, where high turnout in the plebeian wards delivered a 70% majority for Mayor George L. Newcomb, a political neophyte with a base in the city's machine shops. Word soon spread of "wigwams" and "lodges" in several of the factory towns, no doubt piquing interest in the new movement. By mid-August Know Nothing lodges flourished in

nearly every Essex County town, leading one knowledgeable sympathizer to crow, “they claim a clean majority.”³¹

As the movement spread sympathetic editors printed what they took to be the Know Nothings’ platform. These convey both the abrasive and amorphous quality of typical Know Nothing boilerplate. The movement stood for “War to the Hilt, on Romanism!” and “Death to all Foreign Influences whether in high places or low!” and simply, “American principles.” As publicly framed, the Know Nothing agenda was specific on only two counts: laws to prevent the organization of foreign-born militia companies and extend the nation’s naturalization period to twenty-one years.³² As an agenda for future legislative action, this was pretty thin. From time to time nativist editors betrayed their personal preferences for other reforms, usually antislavery, occasionally labor and other political economic reforms. But such digressions rarely occurred within the specific context of advancing the cause of nativist politics.³³ Early on antislavery and other reforms, though often invoked and clearly part of the spate of issues which propelled voter disgust with politics-as-usual, appeared oddly removed from nativism.

Nativists were more direct in pegging the immigrant to problems of governance. Linked to a raft of social ills, immigrants seemed incorrigible degenerates bent on undermining cherished institutions and beliefs. Know Nothings viewed the crime and drinking and public disorder that immigrants allegedly brought to the New World as problems of social governance which the major parties had failed miserably to address. What was worse, the politicians, placing party fortunes

above the public good, vigorously courted these newcomers rather than meet the public's need for prohibition or pauper removal. The Know Nothings' folded their campaign to curb the political privileges of Roman Catholics into a larger critique of partisanship despoiling governance. This happened, according to Know Nothings, every time leaders of the two parties shamelessly truckled to immigrants and other special interests and ignored the problems caused by both. This antiparty sensibility, more than any individual issue or combination of issues, provided Know Nothingism with its transcendent quality and unifying thematic thread. Searching for answers for the Know Nothings' startling success in 1854, one Essex County Democrat recounted how "Americanism was simultaneously hoisted, and every supposed issue abandoned--except *opposition to the old parties*." "It is not Anti-Catholicism," continued this local pol, "which furnishes ground for action...we are told--but a sudden and sweeping hostility to the old parties."³⁴

Know Nothing antipartyism often consisted of blanket indictments of politicians, reflecting the indeterminacy that this old-line Democrat found so vexing. At other times, however, nativists were quite specific about recent failures of the state's political regime. In Essex County, this meant the Whig establishment and its resistance to "reform." The Whigs' narrow defeat of the 1853 Constitution was one issue that allowed publicists to synthesize anti-Catholic and anti-Whig sentiment. Many proponents of the Constitution believed that Irish Catholics, energized by question #6 prohibiting the use of public funds for parochial schools, had provided the margin of victory against the Constitution. As a result, griped one nativist, the

Irish gave “the government of Massachusetts into the hands of a powerful party.” The “whole influence of Catholic priests” combined with “the money-bags of State Street,” had defeated the Constitution. Another described the fallout that this alleged Whig-Irish alliance caused in local politics: “The Catholics...have only made more sure the adoption of an anti-sectarian amendment to the Constitution, while the Whigs have provoked the formation of a new party which...will probably sweep the State next fall.” The “Whigs,” concluded this writer, “deserve severe rebuke and chastisement for first setting the example in Massachusetts of an appeal to religious prejudices in favor of party success.”³⁵

Other recent actions by Whiggery prompted still more opprobrium. True to their 1853 Fitchburg “reform” platform, Whig lawmakers in 1854 enacted seven constitutional amendments, including house and senate reapportionment, election by plurality, popular election of various state and local offices, and the prohibition of state funds for sectarian schools.³⁶ But by spring 1854, such efforts fell short of reformers’ dreams, and at any event had initially encountered Whig stalling efforts. Meanwhile, Whig lawmakers stood firm against yet another ten-hour bill, and balked at other popular reforms like the secret ballot and abolition of imprisonment for debt. The 1854 Whig-led legislature also failed to resolve the thorny issue of revising the 1852 prohibition statute after the state Supreme Court had rendered its search-and-seizure clause unconstitutional. “A large majority of the people desire extensive change,” spat one critic in summation of the General Court’s work, “and not the piece of patchwork which the Whigs have endeavored to botch up.” Another evaluation,

flush with scathing contempt, closed with a pregnant warning: “How long the great mass of the people of this Commonwealth will submit to Whig rule in this manner, we know not. But for one, we are ready to lay aside party dictation, and help break up this heartless, unprincipled minority clique, who aspire above the people.”³⁷ In the spring and summer of 1854, labor reformers and Maine Law activists had ample reason for laying aside “party dictation” to join a movement that promised to bring the state’s Whig-controlled regime crashing down.

The same can be said for Essex County’s antislavery forces. The Kansas-Nebraska Act rekindled intense interest in the slavery issue just as the Know Nothings were organizing the grassroots. In spring 1854, while Congress debated the bill, mass anti-Nebraska meetings, held “without distinction of party,” spontaneously erupted in many towns. In Lawrence, over 1,000 filled the public square on two separate occasions to condemn the bill as a “deliberate breach of the plighted faith of the Nation.” Another bi-partisan meeting in Amesbury and Salisbury issued a ringing denunciation of the bill and declared the expansion of slavery a “common danger” to “Northern capital and labor.” Free Soilers undoubtedly took the lead in these meetings. But from the outset, Know Nothings also positioned themselves in the van of anti-Nebraska unrest. A Lynn “American” called for a mass meeting and an anti-Nebraska petition as early as February. As in New London County (see Chapter IV), the Kansas-Nebraska Act politicized an issue that had, since 1850, remained outside the framework of formal party politics. Many thus felt the issue had been purposefully interjected by a self-serving Democratic party and administration on

behalf of a special interest--the Slave Power--for rank political and material objectives.³⁸

Both the Free Soil and Whig establishments viewed Nebraska as an opportunity to improve their party fortunes. With the state's Democratic party toeing the national pro-Nebraska line, the Whigs jettisoned their old chestnut, the American System, and focused almost exclusively on anti-Nebraska and anti-Administration themes. Meanwhile, the Free Soilers, recognizing the broad bi-partisan support for antislavery in Massachusetts, founded the state's Republican party in September of 1854, after a series of so-called "People's" meetings and conventions. Both strategies were doomed to fail, but not, as is sometimes posited, because nativism trumped antislavery among voters in 1854. For one thing, Massachusetts Whiggery had become synonymous with clubby, aristocratic government well before the party's eleventh-hour conversion to a radical antislavery-extension position. By August, when the Whigs formally unveiled their antislavery campaign, much of the party's popular base had already vanished.³⁹

Doubts and suspicions also shadowed the incipient Republican party. Its principle founders were ex-Free Soilers who were personally and politically obnoxious to antislavery Whigs and Democrats, whose previous partisan animosities towards "disunionists" still held strong. The residual bonds of party, more than anything else, explains why antislavery Whigs and Democrats hesitated to join the early Republican party, led as it was by longtime Free Soilers with axes to grind. Far better to sit tight in the Know Nothing movement, which in Essex County, expressed

unambiguous outrage at the Pierce Administration--that "tool [of] of southern slave-breeders"--but was not headed by an overweening cabal of single-minded zealots. One local nativist said as much. Under the auspiciously blurred rubric Know Nothingism, "party ties are dissolving, and the northern whig, democrat, and free soiler, with the Nebraska villainy fresh before them, are shaking hands with each other over pledges to LIBERTY AND THE NORTH." Thus, despite the unprecedented rise in antislavery feeling during 1854, the reaction to the founding of the Republican party in Essex County ranged from denunciation of this transparent "Free Soil trick," to enthusiastic support of antislavery principles but caution towards the organization itself.⁴⁰ And when word leaked out that the Free Soil hack Henry Wilson, the Republican Party's first gubernatorial nominee, was in fact already a member of a Know Nothing lodge, the new organization had egg on its face and no hope for the November election. In a final indignity that well-illustrated his unmatched talent for opportunism, Wilson formally withdrew from the race a week before the election, having secretly obtained the Know Nothings' endorsement of his plan to run for U.S. Senate in the upcoming General Court session.⁴¹

Wilson was precisely the breed of professional office chaser that the Know Nothings had secretly banded together to eliminate. From the outset, Know Nothing lodges turned away many prominent politicians; Essex County lodges required initiates to foreswear all former party allegiances and political connections before members would agree to enroll them. Indeed, Know Nothings routinely distinguished themselves from the unsavory practices of self-interested politicians and their

bankrupt political parties. "Close up all our public offices to those who would sell our freedom to make party stock out of the operation" of immigration, raged one nativist editor, as he explained the Know Nothings commitment to long naturalization periods. Another complained that Catholics form "a distinct and important political power which the great parties" prized above all. It was therefore "not surprising" that immigration, "operating on the ambitions of political parties, should be found corrupting the sources of executive and legislative authority." The influx of immigrant voters raised partisan temperatures and corrupted government. In such a context, wrote another nativist, "principles have been sacrificed to the ignorance and dishonesty of those...who have bartered them for place and power."⁴² The message was straightforward: party politicians had dangerously threatened the nation by courting immigrant votes. As reformers had done before them, the Know Nothings indicted the partisan motives of politicians, this time for allowing the foreign enemies of American institutions to gain influence over government.

Antipartyism communicated frustration with the regime, but also romanticized Know Nothingism as a popular uprising to reform politics and government. "Glorious Moment!" one Know Nothing editor gleefully regaled, "the crushing of foreign influence and domestic politicians will produce a magnificent era in the history of the Republic!" "The people have been so often tricked," wrote another, "that party allegiance is now easily renounced, where the honor of the community and public good require it." They would do "the CLEAN THING," wrote yet another, "independent of old party organizations." The Know Nothing object, concluded this

nativist, “is to take from the parties control of the government, and put it in the hands of the people.”⁴³

The purpose of all this party-bashing was clear: the Know Nothings were a movement to reform governance, not a party in the conventional sense.

Organizationally, this was to some extent the case; initially, of course, the movement crystallized as a secret fraternal association. Its first victories in the spring municipal elections were announced in editorials that puzzled over how “reform” tickets could have exerted such cabalistic influence over so many voters.⁴⁴ This was not a formal party, operating in the open, at the behest of established leaders, in the name of platforms hammered out at public conventions and celebrated in partisan campaign rituals. But Know Nothings’ public image reflected much more than its early organizational structure, which in any case gradually took on many of the features of a recognizable party apparatus even as it remained “dark lantern.”⁴⁵ Know Nothings sought above all to set themselves up as a patriotic movement apart from Party--that type of political movement run by loathsome office chasers prone to unprincipled compromises over pressing public issues. In political cultural terms, these were the movement’s primary emotional identifications and persuasions. The construction was more than rhetorical. The secret meetings of Know Nothing lodges were sites to forge bonds of patriotic commitment. Other, less furtive events provided similar space for “becoming” American. A large American picnic, held in rural Georgetown, attracted hundreds of families from northern Essex County towns. Here “gentlemen...of sound American principles” and the “fair daughters of Essex North”

turned out for “the good cause.” Nativist speeches and patriotic music by a local brass band punctuated a day of cheerful feasting and friendship. Picnics celebrating Americanism were both social occasions and formative political cultural events in the process of establishing emotional ties to the nativist reform movement.⁴⁶

Antiparty rhetoric and self-images articulated with the political and social environment to set the parameters of what it meant to be a Know Nothing. Theirs was a patriotic movement devoted to the defense of America against “the minions of the Roman hierarchy.” What cause could be any less partisan? Know Nothingism implied an absence of spoilers and manipulators; indeed, it implied an absence of party and partisanship itself. Know Nothings promised that the movement would not, “like another recent party, abandon their principles to procure a temporary party triumph.” As another nativist put it, Know Nothingism was “a mighty movement now surging onward among Americans, awakening the hopes of every true patriot.” Success was certain, this nativist concluded, “if only we can keep politicians from the helm.”⁴⁷

The epithet “politician” conjured unflattering images of Whig and Democratic power-brokers, pandering to paddy and the Slave Power. These were the two most obvious political enemies of “Americanism” in the political universe of Essex County in 1854, serving to reinforce the rank and file’s quixotic idea that the movement was independent from and in opposition to all things partisan. A Know Nothing rank and filer from Lynn perhaps described best what it meant to be a Know Nothing when he endorsed Gloucester’s Timothy Davis, Know Nothing candidate for U.S. Congress in

the 6th district. Unlike conniving politicians who luxuriated in power, the young and obscure Davis was “but a plain American citizen.” Wrote Q: “Having spent his life among laborers, fisherman, and mechanics, he is not *above* the people, but *of* and *among* them.” Davis was a humble patriot, committed to nativist policies but independent of party tethers that could pull him down a wrong-headed course. In other words, Q concluded, Davis “loves his country more than party.”⁴⁸

New London County

With the Know Nothings well organized by early 1855, it is not surprising that established party activists viewed the movement with some alarm. New London Free Soil leader Edward Prentiss initially suspected Know Nothingism a “Southern trick” that might swallow up the “cause of Liberty and Temperance.” Such fears would prove entirely baseless, as events soon demonstrated, but on the eve of the 1855 campaign season Prentiss could only express astonishment at the “change of...sentiment and action of some of (what we thought) our most reliable men.” In spite of his serious reservations Prentiss, no fool in politics, apparently joined a nativist lodge after he was advised by a leading Know Nothing that membership was a prerequisite for Know Nothing support of his candidacy for the state senate. Thus aligned, Prentiss easily carried the 7th Senatorial district as an “American Whig.” For his part, Prentiss had a larger goal in mind when he joined the Know Nothings. Before the election he and other local Free Soilers had discussed “whether we ought

not to join the order and by that means do our best to guide the current.” Know Nothingism was gaining adherents everyday, Prentiss observed in early 1855, and “such men must have leaders[;] our opponents...understand that very well.”⁴⁹ In seeming recognition that Free Soilism had reached its natural limits in New London County, leading antislavery activists hoped to infiltrate the Know Nothing movement and guide it towards more radical ground.

Though Prentiss’s strategy eventually worked, it was by no means clear in 1855 that Know Nothingism was a force that older party leaders could harness for their own ends. As the movement spread across the county, the parties found it difficult to keep their own rank and file in line. Nowhere was this more evident than in the nominating process for state and federal offices. Typically, local Know Nothings first met in secret to choose candidates. Then they would colonize Whig and Free Soil conventions--an easy feat, since the secrecy oath meant that outsiders had no idea who was and was not a Know Nothing. Thus Know Nothing activists ensured their man would be endorsed by one of the other parties too. This was how Prentiss, after timely conversion to nativism, gained both Know Nothing and Free Soil-Whig backing. These tactics first befuddled then enraged the old-line party faithful who were less skilled at the game than Prentiss. The *Norwich Evening Courier*, a mouthpiece for establishment Whiggery, complained that the nomination of Francis A. Peabody for state senate by the “Whigs” of the 8th Senate District suddenly left the party without a candidate. “That he is a Know Nothing seems to be settled,” the

Courier bemoaned, “and that the convention which nominated him...was made up of members of that order, seem to be facts pretty well understood.”⁵⁰

Though the party’s impressive showing in 1855 might suggest a high degree of organizational and programmatic unity, in reality Know Nothingism in Connecticut, as elsewhere, composed a multiplicity of interests and issues that defy easy classification. The labels adopted by Know Nothing candidates in 1855 suggest the movement’s breadth: New London County Know Nothings variously ran as “American,” “Whig American,” “Democratic American,” “Free Soil American,” and “Independent American.” One Groton representative, evidently uncertain as to the state of things in 1855, decided to cast an unusually wide net by declaring himself a “Free Soil Whig American.”⁵¹ To a considerable extent, New London, indeed the whole state, lacked a political center of gravity in 1855.

Know Nothingism filled the vacuum in large measure because of its multivalent appeal. Given the extended time between the order’s appearance and its maiden entry into statewide politics, the nativist press had ample opportunity to develop the nativist case on a range of issues. Several of the state’s most important and widely circulated sheets, including James Babcock’s *New Haven Palladium* and Thomas Day’s *Hartford Courant*, gravitated into the nativist orbit well before the April 1855 election, giving Connecticut Know Nothingism a distinct antislavery and protectionist character. These papers were supplemented by two publicly aligned Know Nothing organs, the *Meriden Transcript* and the *Norwich State Guard*. The *Meriden Transcript*, edited by a young Orville H. Platt, then straight of out a law

apprenticeship, was the successor organ to the *Connecticut Whig*, a “family” weekly devoted to temperance, public education, the tariff, and the “mechanic arts.” Displaying the political instincts that would eventually make him one of Connecticut’s most influential Republican politicians, Platt seized the nativist moment in January 1855, renaming his paper the *Meriden Transcript* and fashioning it into an unabashed Know Nothing paper. The *Norwich State Guard* was published by none other than the obscure Maine Law publicist Andrew Stark. By the fall of 1854, with Connecticut’s Maine Law safely on the books, Stark turned his attention to nativist politics, running a series of hostile exposes of the “Strides of the Romish Hierarchy.” Stark must have sensed he was on to something big. In February 1855, still maintaining weekly publication of his “independent” *Examiner*, Stark put out the first number of the *State Guard*.⁵² Together, these four organs framed the public agenda of Connecticut Know Nothingism by speaking directly to the popular underbelly of the major parties--rank-and-file Whigs, Democrats, and Free Soilers disenchanted with the regime of party government.

Connecticut Know Nothingism moved closer to recognizable policy orientations on antislavery, prohibition, and protectionism than in Massachusetts or Pennsylvania. Thomas Day stressed the movement’s anti-Democratic-Slave Power tendencies. Know Nothingism, he was sure, aligned “every friend of Freedom, Temperance, and genuine Americanism” against “such crawling slaves of the South” as the Connecticut Democracy. If not for the timely appearance of political nativism, he was convinced, the Democrats would send to the U.S. Senate “some tame tool like

Isaac Toucey, who shall be proud of his degrading connections with the South.” The key point Day drove home time and again was the failed leadership of the “old-line” Democracy, evidenced in the Nebraska bill and the party’s incessant “pandering to all the prejudices of foreign-born voters.”⁵³ Day pitched political nativism as a vehicle to halt a pro-slavery and pro-immigrant Democratic regime. Avowed Know Nothing editors Andrew Stark and Orville Platt also combined nativist chauvinism with ringing attacks on slavery and southern expansionism, sometimes in the same editorial. Platt, for his part, was perhaps the most specific about the other issues that Know Nothingism was designed to redress; he launched his nativist career with a laundry list of guiding principles that included antislavery, anti-Catholicism, and protectionist labor doctrines. Similarly, Stark broadened nativism with essays on slavery and the Slave Power. In one, he itemized 36 points of similarity between “popedom and Slavedom.” Number One claimed, “both are based upon the lust for money and power.” Number Thirty-Six warned, “both can reign together without quarreling and with mutual helpfulness.”⁵⁴

Stark’s Number One point--the “lust for money and power” allegedly shared by slaveholders and the Catholic church--was just one of many examples in which an abiding fear of powerful special interests imbricated nativism. In Know Nothing rhetoric, the Slave Power and the Papal Power became two sides of the same special interest coin: both had corrupted the processes of governance in palpable ways, divorcing policymaking from larger moral considerations. The nonpartisan ideal--that governance should flow from a moral commitment to the public good, not

partisanship--also found expression in Know Nothing discourse on the state's recently enacted Maine Law. Know Nothing sympathizers predictably celebrated the statute, urged vigilant enforcement at the local level, and warned of a rollback if the anti-Maine Law Democrats regained a majority in 1855. "Private interests must yield to the public good," intoned Stark. "How much more when we know that rum-sellers have not regarded the public welfare." Like the prohibitionists before them, Know Nothings vigorously defended the statute as the public's instrument to address problems of vital significance to daily life--crime, poverty, moral debasement in communities. In so doing, they also endorsed an expanded vision of the state's police power as an end-run around party government.⁵⁵

Appeals to the "public good," of course, could accommodate an array of issues and grievances. Despite the movement's clarity on protectionism, antislavery, and prohibition, there remained an elasticity to antiparty populism in the mid-1850s that suggested few specific answers to threats to the "public good," to say nothing of how the Know Nothings would prioritize among those threats. As soon as leaders alighted upon specific priorities and solutions, differences were bound to appear. All of that would play itself out later, when the Know Nothings took the reigns of state government and had to give concrete form to their protean goal of Americanism.

During the campaign of 1855, however, Know Nothings in New London, as in Essex and Dauphin, could shelter themselves behind a lack of political definition. With no previous history to encumber them, the secret order could tap a raft of issues and grievances. Thus, Know Nothings most often struck negative themes that were

sure to resonate with most native-born voters--protection to "American interests," attacks on Papal absolutism, hard-drinking Irish, foreign-born militia companies, the Slave Power, and the corrupting influence of all these on "American institutions." Stark's *State Guard* stood ready to "oppose all papal and foreign influences [upon] our free, republican institutions."⁵⁶ The movement was, according to Stark, "devoted to the advocacy of Native American principles, the good of our Common Country, our Common home." Who, besides immigrants, could oppose such a movement? Know Nothings had one consistent answer: party politicians. Unscrupulous politicians allowed their own personal prejudices and partisan motivations to intrude on their decision-making. In the world of the Know Nothings, party had superseded the public good in governance.

As in Massachusetts, the Know Nothings in Connecticut wrapped themselves in antiparty raiments. Assailing corrupt political leadership, Know Nothings represented themselves as patriots of unimpeachable character and motives. The movement was made up of "honest men,...disgusted with the various measures that were put forth by party leaders under the guise of "principles." A lack of principle implied amoral partisanship. One Norwich rank and filer asserted that the "special mission" of the movement "is to protect at the ballot box the institutions of our country." For that glorious purpose, wrote this nativist, Know Nothingism had disavowed "all allegiance to party" to overthrow "unprincipled politicians, who, for years, have compromised every proper sentiment, and debased themselves to obtain elevation, with Catholic votes." Another local rank and filer from the farming town

of Lebanon struck a similar theme: “whether it [Know Nothingism] is a crafty machination of any political party or no, remains to be proved; at least men of *all* political parties have taken a decided stand to defend *American Rights*.”⁵⁷

Know Nothing resistance to Whig governor Henry Dutton also illustrates the movement’s antipartyism. For having presided over the enactment of Connecticut’s Maine Law, Dutton was eulogized by long-suffering prohibitionists, but his political celebrity served him poorly with the Know Nothings. Know Nothings with Whig antecedents, intending to formalize fusion with the Whig party, mounted a concerted effort for Dutton in the state convention. Though most nativists liked Dutton well enough, some suspected that political calculation had prompted his eleventh-hour decision to join a nativist lodge. In the state convention a majority made clear their preference for a less widely known politician. Stark reported that Dutton’s “marked identification with the Whig party” excited opposition to his candidacy under the Know Nothing banner. No doubt many leaders viewed the situation from the vantage point of electoral strategy: Whig incumbent Dutton surely would alienate Democrats who had joined the order. A Dutton candidacy would raise doubts about the willingness of Know Nothings to practice the antiparty politics they preached. Orville Platt put it this way: “The duties of the convention were, in short, to forget as far as possible, all old party names, to bury obsolete issues, and to unite upon an American candidate,...fresh from the ranks of the people.”⁵⁸

Of course Minor, successful wool merchant and ex-Whig state legislator, was not as “fresh from the people” as Platt and others made him out to be. Indeed, despite

a reputation in New London County for “refusing membership to noddies, particularly lawyers,” Know Nothingism locally was led by such eminent public figures as the wealthy Whig merchant and railroad developer Henry P. Haven and the Free Soil lawyers Edmund Perkins and H. H. Starkweather. Nevertheless, publicists drew distinctions between the Know Nothings’ commitment to patriotic principle and the hollow partisanship of the major parties. The major parties insisted on “fossil issues of the dead past,” accused one nativist, betraying their preoccupation with partisanship and hence their unwillingness to take the lead on the day’s far more important matters. The parties failed to meet their obligation to the commonweal, whether that constituted nativism, antislavery, the Maine Law, or whatever else Know Nothings had in mind when they assailed “old-fogy party hacks.” Antipartyism crystallized dissatisfaction with the regime at all levels and among diverse voters, while also distinguishing these champions of the people from the partisans of old. “What is it to be American,” asked Thomas Day, in the lead-up to the 1855 election. Eschewing specific issues, his answer was that ingenious Know Nothing banality: “America for Americans! is the cry -- and it is a cry that will leave its mark...on our political history.”⁵⁹

Dauphin County

A handful of individuals loom large in Dauphin County Know Nothingism, and none bigger than Stephen Miller and John J. Clyde. As young turks in the local

Whig party, the ambitious twosome figured prominently in the early Maine Law movement that divided the party in the early fifties. As we saw last chapter, Clyde edited the *Whig State Journal* between 1851 and 1853, turning it into a sounding board for the Maine Law before selling it and moving to the independent Maine Law paper, the *Crystal Fountain*. The articulate and charismatic Miller, a Methodist lay preacher and forwarding merchant, was a regular speaker at local temperance meetings, and by 1854, had risen to a berth on the State Prohibition Central Committee. Most significant for the local history of Know Nothingism was Clyde and Miller's collaboration at Harrisburg's two largest anti-Democratic newspapers, the *Telegraph* and the *Morning Herald*. Clyde and Miller founded the daily *Herald* in December 1853 ostensibly "independent of parties, cliques, [and] entangling alliances...." The *Telegraph* had long been one of the staunchest Whig journals in the state. Clyde and Miller gained full control of the paper in May 1854 when the old-line Whig editor John J. Paterson sold them his controlling share and moved to Pittsburgh. Editorial duties at the *Morning Herald* and the *Telegraph* fell to Miller, who quickly tacked both sheets towards political nativism.⁶⁰

Another important nativist publicist was G. P. Crap, publisher of the independent *Borough Item*. Crap joined the very same nativist lodge that enrolled Clyde and George H. Morgan, the labor reformer and occasional *Borough Item* essayist. In early June, as rumor of the movement's growth in Dauphin County was rapidly spreading, he produced an exposé of a Know Nothing meeting after one of his correspondents claimed to have secretly observed it from a nearby treetop. (In fact,

many details contained in the story, such as a description of an American eagle embroidered on the Chief's chest holding a ballot box in one talon and a streamer in its beak that read "Down with Foreign Influence," indicate that the correspondent participated in the meeting.) Many impressionable readers were probably made more curious by the account of the secret meeting, held at night in a wood and attended by about two hundred men wearing red wafers on the end of their noses. The highlight of the evening was a bizarre initiation ritual for new members that involved riding a goat blindfolded, getting dunked in a nearby swamp after stripping bare, and receiving the coveted red wafer from the Chief as he read aloud an indecipherable incantation. Afterwards, Crap's office was inundated by letters from local Know Nothings, many bemused, a few angered, by the exposure. By this time Crap had already betrayed his "Americanism," publishing the minutes and resolves of the state American Party convention in March and some letters from Know Nothing correspondents. Following the exposé, Crap embraced Know Nothing tenets in a series of editorials.⁶¹

Miller and Crap were well situated in 1854 to broadcast Know Nothingism to a curious public. Though neither identified themselves publicly as Know Nothings, both commented favorably as word spread of mass conversions to the secret order. Both also helped the cause in more tangible ways, most directly by a regular outpouring of nativist screeds. Miller followed the movement's growth closely, recounting its founding at Harrisburg and subsequent spread across the county in columns sardonically titled, "More comfort for the Papists and Old Foggy Politicians!" Miller depicted Know Nothingism as a spontaneous outpouring of patriotic

Americanism, but at least in Dauphin's Upper End, the movement owed its growth in part to organizing by Know Nothings from the coal fields of adjacent Schuylkill County, whence many Upper Enders traced their roots. Whatever the role that friendship and perhaps even kinship networks may have played in the spread of Know Nothingism, Miller relished in the consternation felt by older politicians at the swiftness with which Know Nothings organized the county. "[T]he political hacks who have heretofore wielded and abused power, stand amazed at finding themselves overthrown by an invisible hand." By June Miller was boasting that Know Nothingism will "effectually break up canvassing and wire pulling in the political machinery of the old party organizations, and the office-holders...[will know not] from whence the calamity came."⁶²

In truth, the "office-holders" of Pennsylvania had to look neither long nor hard to find the sources of popular antagonism towards "old party organizations." Throughout 1854 Dauphin's nativist press generated a small library's worth of ad hominem anti-Catholic recitations. In essays and speeches long on hyperbole but short on intellectual rigor, Know Nothings could produce no evidence of a secret Catholic plot to obtain political supremacy in the United States. Rising instances of crime and pauperism, Catholic resistance to Protestant moralizing, the energy with which many politicians courted newly naturalized voters--such evidence was apparently all nativists required for their fantastic theories of Jesuit conspiracies. Nevertheless, the last claim about the culpability of native politicians was of crucial significance to the Know Nothing understanding of things. The belief that party

politicians had courted the Irish-Catholic vote led Know Nothings to the self-righteous conclusion that the “sons of the soil have decided to throw off all allegiance to party.”⁶³ Linking political Roman Catholicism to a variety of problems, Know Nothings in Dauphin, like their comrades in Essex and New London, ultimately politicized the nonpartisan ideal that governance should be insulated from overtly political aims. Of course, in nativist rhetoric the links between political Roman Catholicism and the regime were often framed indirectly and suggestively, as in the oft-repeated charge that the parties, especially the ruling Democrats, were run by “base trucklers” who genuflected at the shrine of “Papal Power.” But few sentient Pennsylvanians could miss the larger point: the reckless pursuit of party interests now threatened to give control over the machinery of state to a dangerous special interest. Pennsylvania nativists believed they had at least one foolproof illustration that hit close to home, President Franklin Pierce’s appointment of Philadelphia Catholic James Campbell as postmaster general.

Campbell’s rise to the prized post began inauspiciously. In 1851 he was the only Democrat to lose statewide election in Pennsylvania when nativist elements in his own party refused to back his election to the state supreme court. Governor Bigler moved swiftly to conciliate angry Catholics by appointing Campbell as his secretary of state. A year later James Buchanan, undoubtedly driven by similar impulses, recommended Campbell for a cabinet position. From his office in Washington, it was widely alleged, Campbell systematically dispensed postmasterships to Catholic friends in the Democratic party. To local nativists, the whole arrangement reeked of

partisan horse-trading, while Campbell's discriminating use of the patronage power confirmed their worst nightmares. Campbell's rapid ascent laid bare "the whole anti-American political alliance of truckling, trading, and bartering politicians and Jesuitical priests with their entire Roman Catholic rank and file enlistment."⁶⁴

As potent as the Campbell appointments were, other issues accompanied nativists to the public stage in 1854. In keeping with the *Borough Item's* pro-labor tradition, Crap covered the defeat of a ten-hour bill in the 1854 legislature, dominated by a Democratic majority. Then too both he and Miller railed against the political influence of banking corporations and other business interests at the state capitol, claiming the 1854 legislative session surpassed all others for bribery and logrolling. A record 45 charters or re-charters for banks, insurance companies, and railroads did not help Democratic lawmakers turn back these charges. A correspondent in the *Borough Item*, identifying himself as "Know Nothing," believed that "nothing but bribery and corruption secured the passage of sundry railroad, bank, and other corporation bills."⁶⁵

Harrisburg's well-deserved reputation for corruption dovetailed easily into the nativists' party-in-government polemic. A major issue was the failure in 1854 to sell the Main Line of the Public Works, Pennsylvania's avatar of political corruption. By 1854 the idea had gained bi-partisan support across the state, and in fact the General Assembly produced a bill for sale which Bigler, after some hesitation, signed into law. But the minimum price, \$10 million, was set too high (some felt purposefully high) to attract buyers, frustrating the sale movement for at least another year. Thus

the issue remained potent--a specific case of broken governance that could flesh out the Know Nothings' expansive canvass of antiparty imagery. Miller pilloried Bigler and the Democrats for excessive borrowing and tax increases to reward cronies with jobs on the Public Works. Bringing rampant political corruption to an end, not some abstract commitment to *laissez faire*, seemed to motivate many proponents of sale in Pennsylvania. "The whole system of management of our public improvements for years past has been a system of partizan piracy," Miller thundered in one editorial. "The state must come under a new *regime*," he concluded in another, "these wicked rulers must give place to a wise and patriotic administration."⁶⁶ While concern over corruption at the state capitol had long been a part of Pennsylvania politics, nativist publicists proved especially deft at incorporating these themes into their broader antiparty appeal. Older suspicions of corrupt government strengthened the immediate impression of party government run amok.

The opposition of Bigler and most Democrats to prohibition also allowed nativists to score the Democrats for interjecting party into governance. With great reluctance, the 1854 assembly bowed to Maine Law pressure with legislation for a non-binding ballot question on the matter in the upcoming October election. It also passed a law that banned the sale of liquor to anyone of known "intemperate habits," and another which provided for stricter licencing of taverns and "lager beer" houses. The licencing bill was later pocket vetoed by Governor Bigler, a fact that outraged prohibitionists kept before the public eye in 1854. Clearly, such legislative movements on the anti-liquor front stemmed from prohibition agitation over the

previous years, but Maine law zealots only grew more frustrated by what they took to be half-way measures. Prohibitionists viewed the non-binding referendum especially as a ploy by shifty lawmakers to postpone decisive action. State and county prohibition meetings denounced the legislature's "unwillingness to trust the people," but resolved to "defeat the rum party on its own ground" in the fall by working for the plebiscite's passage. Maine Law forces in Dauphin County proved particularly well organized, sponsoring lectures and public meetings, often held in Protestant churches, in most area towns in the lead-up to the October plebiscite.⁶⁷

According to Miller, opponents of prohibition were nothing but "time-serving politicians and hangers on." When Democrats John Patrick and Rev. John Chambers, two prominent officials in the statewide Sons of Temperance, endorsed Bigler over Pollock, the *de facto* fusion nominee pledged to prohibition, Miller went on the offensive. Patrick and Chambers have "a higher regard for *party* than for Temperance," and "prostitute [their] high offices to the basest partisan purposes." Bigler's actions also illuminated the baleful party connection. Bigler hoped Prohibition would simply go away, charged Miller, while "questions of less importance, touching the interests of 'the party,' have received a large share of the Gubernatorial attention."⁶⁸

Prohibition forces refrained from independent politics, continuing the nonpartisan strategy of querying candidates about their position on the Maine Law and endorsing those that responded favorably. The result was that the link between Know Nothingism and the Maine Law remained, by and large, subterranean. The

county prohibition committee endorsed the Know Nothing ticket for Governor, state assembly, and senate, though as we have seen, this essentially was a fusion anti-Democratic ticket. Miller occasionally theorized that the “liquor traffic is *principally* in the hands of *foreigners*,” proclaiming that the “final triumph of the temperance cause depends upon the success of the American movement, and the overthrow of political demagogues who have so long truckled to foreign influence...” But such unambiguous linkages were infrequent. Content to brand Democratic opposition as an example of how partisanship blinded lawmakers to the public good of prohibition, Miller usually left it to his native-born readers, used to demagoguery about besotted and degraded Catholics, to identify Know Nothingism as the solution.⁶⁹

The relationship between slavery and nativism provides a similar example. As in Essex and New London counties, the Kansas-Nebraska act sparked antisouthern and antislavery sensibilities that raised antiparty tempers. At Harrisburg, anti-Nebraska meetings, at which Stephen Miller spoke, followed Senator Douglas’ introduction of the bill. Anti-Nebraska remained a consistent theme in both the *Telegraph* and the *Morning Herald* throughout 1854. Local opponents of the bill hewed to the antisouthern/white supremacist variant of antislavery that echoed the *herrenvolk* themes of fellow Pennsylvanian David Wilmot. Many probably shared the perspective of “Mechanic,” who framed the issue at stake following Harrisburg’s electric anti-Nebraska meeting: “Will free white Mechanics and laboring men go into a Territory, where laboring men, and labor is degraded?...No never! Then I tell you, free white laborer of the free States, if you admit the black bond-man and his lordly

master into that magnificent domain, ...you as effectively exclude yourselves as though a wall of fire was built around it.” For his part, Miller printed a “Black List” (pun?) of Pennsylvania’s “traitors to the North,” the state’s eleven Democratic Congressmen who voted for the measure. Miller was at pains to stress his opposition to Nebraska in conservative tones. “This is not an “abolition” movement,” he reassured a readership unused to even mild antislavery doctrines, “but a movement of the moderate, conservative men...who up to this time, have stood shoulder to shoulder in support of the Compromise of 1850, fugitive slave law and all.” To Miller’s mind, all blame lay with the National Democratic party and its northern puppets for “having opened up anew the question that has been the source of so much strife, by the violation of a shared National compact.... The free men of the North, of all parties,” Miller solemnly intoned, “are now determined to resist, to the last extremity, all further encroachments of the Slave Power.”⁷⁰

Miller’s use of Slave Power imagery helped established the political lessons that could be drawn from the bill’s passage. As Miller told it, the principal agent of the Slave Power was the Pierce administration, which dangled patronage before Northern Democratic congressmen to pressure them into support of the bill. The larger design of the Nebraska bill was thus to “extend human servitude and sustain “the party.”” Miller was most effusive in his denunciations of Governor Bigler’s vacillating response to Nebraska. Bigler, worried over the growth of the Know Nothing movement and the endorsement of Pollock by both the Whig and Free Soil state conventions, hoped to gain reelection in part by distancing himself from the

Pierce Administration. At the same time, Bigler could not alienate his base of Democratic activists and editors, most of whom bent to party discipline and embraced popular sovereignty. Thus Bigler brought double talk to the rostrum, frequently espousing opposition to Nebraska in western townships, where Wilmotism was strongest, and the virtues of popular sovereignty in the Democratic east. It seemed a sound strategy, certainly a recognition of the potency the issue held in 1854, but left him and his party wide open to charges of opportunism and inconsistency. Miller and others across the state punished Bigler for untrustworthiness and base motives. Because he would not “openly resist the aggressions of Slavery, today,” Bigler “cannot be relied upon for the future--he is hopelessly rotten--unsound to the core, and will sacrifice his country’s highest interests and glory for mere partizan considerations.”⁷¹

Only once in the 1854 campaign season did Miller link Americanism directly to the antislavery cause. The occasion was Miller’s election postmortem, when he announced the October results in boldface: “Americanism Triumphant--The Nebraska Swindle Repudiated.”⁷² Hence in regards to slavery, like prohibition and political economic reform, the issue-orientation of Dauphin County Know Nothings appears to have been as protean as that of their New London and Essex comrades. Know Nothings in Dauphin tirelessly identified Roman Catholicism as *the* overarching threat to the nation’s democratic institutions and Protestant heritage. Yet, beyond specific pledges to correct this by electing only Americans to office and extending the naturalization period, promises of laws to be enacted were rare in Know Nothing

campaign discourse. Certainly the issue of the Public Works and Miller's association with the Prohibition and anti-Nebraska movements gave Dauphin Know Nothingism a distinctive anti-Democratic temper. Governor Bigler, and by implication the state and nation's Democratic party regime, appeared as negative referents in local Know Nothing rhetoric almost as often as Jesuit priests and drunken Irish. Nevertheless, most of the time native-born citizens in Dauphin, as in Essex and New London, were left to build their own issues and priorities onto the movement's nativist and antiparty foundation.

The attacks by their opponents gave nativist publicists opportunities to cast their movement in positive light. Miller berated the local Democratic press for denouncing the secrecy and religious bigotry of the movement and for urging party regulars to publicly renounce any affiliation with Know Nothingism. Every Democrat "who has had the independence to say that he would vote against Bigler," Miller said, "has been denounced as a "guerilla," and excommunicated from the party." Patriots should be aghast at such purges, Miller intimated. Having appropriated such transcendent symbols as President Washington, the American eagle, indeed, America itself, it required little exertion to find unscrupulous and unpatriotic forces at work behind the opposition. The movement's opponents were "at war with every principle of true republicanism," forcing upon their "subjects a system of *partizan slavery*, and servile submission to the will of its leaders." Know Nothings, by contrast, "having nothing to do with party politics," were incapable of such blind servility to political dictation. Know Nothing antipartyism suggested that the rank and file, engaged in

great sacrifice for the dearest interests of their country, were independent voters “who refuse to yield to a blind allegiance to party.” And the independent voter, Miller waxed rhapsodic in an editorial on the same, “exerts a powerful influence for good.”⁷³

Independent, but not neutral. Know Nothings assailed a political system that seemed geared to the advancement of parties only, and so constructed a new terminology to represent themselves in public. Supporters variously described Know Nothingism as “the American movement,” the “American Reform Movement,” “invisible reformers,” and “a voluntary police force in aid of Americanism and public morality.”⁷⁴ In the Know Nothing lexicon, Party was a term reserved for ridicule. With the avowed object being the preservation of the rights and liberties of the American people against all manner of political and social and cultural threats, the movement’s touchstone necessarily was the vague but powerful pledge to resist partisan influences in the name of the national commonweal.

Antipartyism in Dauphin was most clearly expressed when Know Nothings differentiated their movement from the normative partisanship of regular politics. Know Nothing lodges provided rank and filers with concrete evidence of their own and their movement’s antipartyism. The formation of local lodges was announced with boasts that members “solemnly pledged to “know nothing” of mere party organization in politics.” Men of all previous party affiliations fraternized in lodge meetings and secret initiation ceremonies in order to safeguard “all American Interests.” Pledges to uphold the “doctrines of WASHINGTON” and “Protestant Interests” enlisted popular mythology in the denial of partisanship. Upbeat

summaries of election results showing the spread and triumph of Know Nothingism across the state and nation confirmed the popularity of Americanism and demonstrated that “these Know Nothings appear to know no party.”⁷⁵ Antipartyism’s moral transcript--governance in the name of the public good, not party rule--expressed both the movement’s disgust with the regime of regular politics and its vision of itself as a patriotic crusade to save the nation.

Nativist rhetoric made the antiparty case in print, but Know Nothings also publicly affirmed this view in other, more ritualized ways. Members of the “Original Order of the Know Nothings” in Harrisburg and vicinity turned out in full regalia to openly parade the streets on the Fourth of July. A month before the election, Know Nothing women produced a material culture of patriotic Americanism. They expressed solidarity with the movement by wearing “Know Nothing Head Dresses”--a sort of bonnet draped with red, white and blue ribbons--and aprons emblazoned with the national colors as they shopped and promenaded the city. Such public displays of Know Nothingism were said to educate young people to the principle of “love of country which will constitute our surest defense against the insidious wiles of foreign influence.”⁷⁶ Appropriating the nation’s colors and birthday, the Know Nothings established historical continuities where none actually existed. Believing their cause to be greater than mere temporal philosophies, nativists came close to reifying Know Nothingism and its central tenets.

Conclusion

Know Nothingism has indeed generated a rich historiography. Today most scholars recognize the multi-issue nature of the movement, particularly in the Northern United States, where the fecundity of political issues and social forces in play in the decade before the Civil War yields many interpretative possibilities. It is hardly controversial to call the movement a welter of ideological and social tendencies. In all three counties Know Nothingism was socially diverse, though did have an undeniable plebeian accent. Know Nothingism tapped several streams of issues and discontents in the political universe of the 1850s. Some of these issues emerged from political configurations unique to the three counties and states, such as the anti-Bigler themes of the movement in Dauphin County, or the anti-Whiggery of Essex County Know Nothingism. Others issues, including immigration and anti-Catholicism, transcended political context. In its social composition and contradictory blend of issue-diversity and messianic conviction, Know Nothingism looks very much like other influential populist movements in American history.

What brought and held Know Nothingism together? Jean Baker has offered probably the best summation of the current scholarly paradigm. “[F]or nativists the term “America” and the symbols of Union and Constitution were an effective rallying point, and efficient means of identification, and, above all, a shorthand for nativist beliefs.”⁷⁷ Baker, of course, means here old-fashioned bigotry, but also the emotional identifications that Know Nothings constructed as they built their movement.

Accurate as far it goes, this intellectual and cultural interpretation appears to me oddly removed from the political context which putative Know Nothings found themselves in. Conceptualizing Know Nothingism as a *political expression* moves us closer to the heart of the matter concerning parallels with other populist movements, and indeed, the very character of nineteenth-century populism itself.

Know Nothingism's mucilage, at least in these three counties, was antipartyism. In their public discourse Know Nothings represented themselves as a popular reform movement, not a political party. In this way they both romanticized and exploited their movement's lack of history as a party *sui generis*. Know Nothings expressed more basic ideals of governance unfettered by the partisan imperative that drove formal action in the sphere of electoral politics. The Know Nothing focus on immigrants and "Americanism" must be viewed in light of this formulation. Just as governance was viewed as that locus of the public sphere where Americans transcended partisan difference in pursuit of the commonalty, so too Know Nothings presumed that both their cause and their movement stood above the partisan fray. It was this emotional connection nativist publicists hoped to complete when they flailed away at immigrants or penned platitudinous obsequies to American icons like Washington or common schools. The relative newness of nativism as an explicit political issue, with all the partisanship that the same implied, contributed to the distinction Know Nothings drew. When they howled that immigrants would strike a blow at Protestant traditions Know Nothings signaled their break from the interminable nattering over tariffs and banks that had constituted the substance of

politics in the recent past. The problems Know Nothings identified transcended politics. From that point, Know Nothings represented their grievances by arguing that politics (partisanship) had prevented the regime's leaders from recognizing and responding to their problems.

Drawing upon the nonpartisan tradition of governance, the Know Nothings entered the electoral arena as an *anti*-party and wrought a political upheaval of unprecedented proportions. Now, Know Nothings set out with confidence to right the ship of state, to cleanse public life of dangerous special interests, themselves conflated with the regime of party government. The ironic result of their antiparty mission constitutes the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Harrisburg *Morning Herald*, 16 October 1854.
2. Norwich *State Guard*, May 1855, quoted in *Courant*, 14 May 1855; Hartford *Courant* 4 April 1855.
3. Amesbury and Salisbury Mills' *Villager*, 7 December 1854.
4. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
5. The term movement culture is, of course, Lawrence Goodwyn's: *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). In this chapter, my use of the term will be more heuristic than Goodwyn's schema involving a "sequential process" through which social movements pass. My understanding of political culture derives from Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).
6. Thus I disagree with Tyler Anbinder's recent revisionist provocation that northern Know Nothingism owed more to resurgent sectional issues than the movement's immediate social context. See *Nativism & Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings & the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 33-43, and passim. Anbinder downplays economic and ethnoreligious factors to make his argument that "slavery, not nativism, destroyed the second American party system" (p. xiii). Though I agree that northern Know Nothingism, at least initially, was a vehicle for expressing antislavery sentiment, I find Anbinder's study inadequate for 1) the social bases of the movement, 2) the importance of the modernization of the North's economy and society in setting the broad context of the movement, and 3) the way in which Know Nothing antislavery was part of a much larger constellation of issues informing their view of politics, a view unified not by free labor, nor even nativism, but a populist sensibility conditioned by the failures of governance at a moment of acute social and cultural transition.
7. For the Know Nothings' ethnoreligious bases, see William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael F. Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969). Accounts of how economic issues imbricated the movement include Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), 354-63; Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *JAH* 60 (September 1973), 309-31; James L. Huston, "Economic Change and Political

Realignment in Antebellum Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 113 (July 1989), 347-95; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), passim; Mark Voss-Hubbard, "The Amesbury-Salisbury Strike and the Social Origins of Political Nativism in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History* 29 (March 1996), 579-83. Other excellent studies of the movement include Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), esp. 90-7; David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (September 1960), 205-24; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 239-65.

8. *Hartford Times*, 17 February 1855. See also *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 5 October 1854. See also *Norwich Examiner*, 1 July 1854; *Hartford Courant*, 4 January 1855; State Council of the American Party of Connecticut, *Constitution of the S.C. of the State of Connecticut, Adopted February 7, 1855* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Co., 1855). Good general treatments of the emergence of the Connecticut Know Nothings include Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 274-5; Jarlath Robert Lane, *A Political History of Connecticut During the Civil War* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 45-8; J. Carroll Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut, 1829-1860* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1938), 189-209; Robert David Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966), 69-123.

9. *Courant*, 5 April, 7 April 1855; William Goodwin, *Goodwin's Annual Legislative Statistics of State Officers, Senate and House of Representatives, of Connecticut* (New Haven: The Compiler, 1855). Know Nothing and Know Nothing-aligned candidates won nearly two-thirds of the races for state assembly in the April 1855 election; Straight Democrats claimed just over 25 percent; straight Whigs and Free Soilers together accounted for only 10 percent. Lex Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), 321, estimates that over 1/3 of former Democrats, 1/4 of former Whigs, and most former Free Soilers voted for Minor. See also Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 275.

10. This finding raises difficult questions for the contention that Know Nothingism was strongest in "the more isolated, less economically developed" regions of Connecticut. See Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 274.

11. *Daily Morning Star* 13 May 1852. For local evidence of declining prices and wages, see for example *New London Chronicle*, 19 May 1853; *New London Daily*

Morning Star, 31 January 1854; 25 April 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 29 May 1855; *Norwich Examiner*, 12 January 1855. Nationwide evidence of a “hidden depression” between 1853 and 1855 is summarized in Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 354-62. New London’s OUA was founded in 1851, the OUAM a year later. See *New London City Directory, for 1855-6* (New London, 1855), 99; *Turner’s New London City Directory, for 1853-4* (New London: 1853), 91-2. For more on the OUAM and the OUA, see Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 336-8; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 364-8; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 174-6; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 323.

12. “U.A.M.” quoted in (West Meriden) *The Connecticut Organ* 27 December 1851.

13. *New London Weekly Chronicle* 22 July 1852.

14. *Journal of the Senate of the State of Connecticut, May 1853* (Hartford: 1853), 23, 204; *Daily Morning Star* 12 May 1854.

15. *Norwich State Guard* 21 February 1855; *Courant* 14 March 1855. See also *Courant* 17 January 1855; *Examiner* 11 February 1854; 29 September 1854; *Meriden Transcript*: 1 February, 1 March 1855; *Constitution, Ritual and Platform of Principles of the American Party of the State of Connecticut, Adopted August 1855* (Hartford, 1855).

16. “Papers of the Governor,” *Pennsylvania Archives* vol. VII, Fourth Series (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1902), 783-5. For more extensive discussions of the election of 1854 in Pennsylvania, see Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 139-47, and “Nebraska, Nativism, and Rum: the Failure of Fusion in Pennsylvania, 1854,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 109 (October 1985), 425-71: esp. 449-50. Evidence for the local primary process is contained in the September 5, 1854 entry in a minute book of a Harrisburg Know Nothing lodge: *Guard of Liberty Minute Book, 1854-55*, Records of the Know Nothing Party, Guard of Liberty Camp #1, Harrisburg, June 24, 1854-March 6, 1855, MG-8, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). A comment on the Harrisburg Guard of Liberty Minute Book is in order. In his *Nativism & Slavery*, 301, Tyler Anbinder asserts that this cannot be a Know Nothing source, because in some regions self-described Guard of Liberty lodges were “rivals” to the Know Nothings. While it is plausible that the Harrisburg Guard of Liberty may have started independent of the Know Nothings, certain facts from the minute book clearly establish the lodge’s Know Nothing allegiance: its proclamation of principles and its political orientation is virtually identical to Know Nothing platforms; the lodge participated in the Know Nothings’ statewide primary and backed the Know

Nothing state ticket in toto; the lodge also gave unanimous support to all but one of the Know Nothing's eventual county ticket for state senate, assemblymen, and lesser offices. The records also detail how the lodge sent delegates to the Know Nothing county convention, and contains a membership list with the names of several men with unquestioned connections to Know Nothingism. Anbinder's hasty dismissal, therefore, is counter-intuitive and at odds with the basic history of Harrisburg's Know Nothing movement.

17. The state's tiny Free Democratic party, led by the influential David Wilmot, also endorsed Pollock. See *Harrisburg Morning Herald*, 21 September 1854; Gienapp, "Nebraska, Nativism, and Rum," 449-50.

18. In mid-August, Stehley wrote confidently to Cameron that "the election of one Democrat" from the county was assured. Unless Stehley was engaging in idle boast, unlikely in this historically Whig county, no other explanation besides a private agreement forged by Democratic-Know Nothings and other members of the order to balance the assembly ticket is plausible here. See Jonathan Stehley to Simon Cameron, 16 August 1854, Simon Cameron Papers, Dauphin County Historical Society (DCHS). For more on local Cameron Democrats moving into and hoping to control the Know Nothings, see Samuel B. Cooper to Cameron, 26 February 1854, and H. Walters to Cameron, 11 July 1854, Cameron Papers, DCHS. For his part, Cameron, coveting a return to the U.S. Senate, privately worked to influence senate and assembly nominations across the state while publicly maintaining his Democratic bona fides. See for example Reah Frazer to Cameron, 26 September 1854, Cameron Papers, DCHS; Henry E. Muhlenberg to Cameron, 2 October 1854, Cameron Papers, DCHS. For more on Cameron, see Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 172-3.

19. *Morning Herald*, 10 July 1854. See also *ibid.*, 4 July, 26 August, 22 September 1854; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 5 July 1854; *Whig State Journal*, 6 January 1853; *Borough Item*, 23 September 1853; C. C. Rawn Diary, entry for 26 January 1854, MG 62, Box 1, DCHS. For more on Miller, see Gerald G. Eggert, "'Seeing Sam': The Know-Nothing Episode in Harrisburg," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 111 (July 1987), 305-40: 308-9. For similar voting patterns across the state, see Gienapp, "Nebraska, Nativism, and Rum," 463; Huston, "Economic Change and Political Realignment," 366-95.

20. See for example *Morning Herald*, 4 October 1854. On the Democrats, see S. Eckert to Simon Cameron, 4 October 1854, Cameron Papers, PHMC. Also see "Sallade! Liberty!..." Broadside contained in the Sallade-Bickel Family Papers, New York Public Library, folder "Simon Sallade"; Memorandum Book of Simon Sallade, 1852-1854, Sallade-Bickel Papers, NYPL; *Morning Herald*, 7 October 1854.

21. *Morning Herald*, 8 July 1854; *Morning Herald*, 15 August 1854. See also *Herald*: 23 January, 31 March, 22 June, 20 July, 7 October 1854; *Telegraph*, 25

January, 24 December 1854. Also, *Boyd's Business Directory of the Counties of Adams, Bucks, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin...* (Philadelphia: William H. Boyd, 1860), 239; Eggert, "'Seeing Sam,'" 316-21; Guard of Liberty Minute Book, 1854-55, Records of the Know Nothing Party, Guard of Liberty Camp #1, Harrisburg, June 24, 1854-March 6, 1855, MG-8, PHMC. For other empirical data on the Know Nothing rank and file, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 34-51; Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 142-6; Holt, *Forging A Majority*, 154-6; George L. Haynes, "A Chapter From the Local History of Knownothingism," *The New England Magazine* 21 (1896), 82-96.

22. C. F. Adams diary quoted in Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 76. The most comprehensive statistical analysis of the Massachusetts Know Nothing vote is Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24-54. See also Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 133-8; Paul Goodman, "The Politics of Industrialism: Massachusetts, 1830-1870," in Richard L. Bushman, et al., eds., *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1979), 163-207: esp. 181-96. Baum's uses his statistical extrapolations to question the conventional view of the Know Nothings as a conduit for Free Soilers and antislavery Democrats into the Republican party. More broadly, Baum challenges the work of Ron Formisano and Michael Holt, who argue that Free Soilism and later Republicanism was socially and culturally proximate to Know Nothingism. According to Baum, former Free Soilers made up roughly 20% of Gardner's vote. Thus, he writes "the vast majority of Massachusetts Know-Nothings were not former Free Soilers" (p. 33). But that fact is deceptive. Former Free Soilers could never have made up the bulk of Gardner's total, because "the vast majority of Massachusetts" voters in 1854 "were not former Free Soilers" either. Furthermore, Baum's own statistical analysis finds that a) fully two-third's of former Gardner voters (1854) went for Lincoln, and b) less than one-fifth of Gardner voters (1854) voted for one of Lincoln's opponents (pp. 54). The remainder either abstained or had moved out of the state by 1860.

23. On wages and prices, see *Lynn Bay State*, 23 February, 28 December 1854; *Lynn News*, 5 January 1855; *Newburyport Herald*, 9 January, 11 May 1854; *Salem and Marblehead People's Advocate*, 22 April 1854. Also see Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Gender, Class and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), esp. 97-115; Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 34-7; Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1981), 174, 222-4; Voss-Hubbard, "Amesbury-Salisbury Strike," 575-7.

24. On the continued potency of labor reform during the Know Nothings' formative days in Essex County, see for example *Lynn Bay State*, 6 April 1854; *Villager*, 2 February, 6 April 1854; *Newburyport Herald*, 28 March 1854.

Nevertheless, the wide reach of Massachusetts Know Nothingism raises difficult questions for Mulkern's narrow conceptualization of the movement as a working-class uprising based in the east's urban, factory, and industrial centers. Quite simply, how to account for the Know Nothings' stunning success in small towns across the entire state? Mulkern's own evidence undermines his thesis. Statewide, the movement averaged 55% of the popular vote in small towns (less than 3,000) presumably with few or no factories: see Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 81. It is true that Know Nothingism did best in factory towns, both in Essex and across the state. But even here, can we say with assurance that this owed to working-class votes? The "working-class" in factory towns such as Lawrence or Fall River consisted largely of women and children--who could not vote--and recently arrived Irish immigrants--who did not vote Know Nothing. This suggests that the Know Nothings built their movement from among native-born voters who, for the most part, were not proletarians laboring in factories. Of course, many younger, unskilled laborers found Know Nothingism attractive, and it is an arguable point to call these folks "working-class." In my opinion, it makes better sense to conceptualize Know Nothingism as a revolt of the state's middling sorts--skilled and semi-skilled mechanics, small and moderately sized merchants, clerks, petty professionals. These made up the bulk of the native-born electorate in any case. In addition, the mobility studies of the 1960s and 1970s tell us that these folks were likely to have moved up from the ranks of dependent, unskilled wage earners as they grew older and acquired skills and modest capital. Thus, outside of New York and other major metropolitan centers, it is problematic to think of most native-born *men* in the 1850s as constituting a "working-class," if by that we mean (as Marx would insist) a self-reproducing class of industrial laborers. For related discussions, see Howard P. Chudacoff, "Success and Security: The Meaning of Social Mobility in America," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982), 101-12; Herbert G. Gutman and Ira Berlin, "Class Composition and the Development of the American Working Class, 1840-1890," in Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 380-94; Voss-Hubbard, "Amesbury-Salisbury Strike;" Nathaniel T. Wilcox, "A Note on the Occupational Distribution of the Urban United States in 1860," in Fogel, Ralph A. Galantine, and Richard L. Manning, eds., *Without Consent or Contract: Evidence and Methods* (New York: Norton, 1988), 458-73.

25. Amesbury *Villager*, 27 January 1853; 23 February 1854.

26. Newburyport *Saturday Evening Union and Weekly Family Visitor*, 30 September 1854; *Villager*, 24 June 1852. See also *Villager*, 26 January, 27 April, 11 May 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 15 August 1854; *Lynn News*, 16 June 1854; Newburyport *Herald*, 14 January 1854.

27. Newburyport *Herald*, 2 March 1854. For more on this point generally, see the insightful Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1993), *passim*; Howe, "The Evangelical

Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System," *JAH* 77 (March 1991), 1216-39.

28. *Telegraph*, 28 June 1854; Lowell *American Citizen*, 19 August 1854. See also for example Newburyport *Herald*, 21 April 1854; *Saturday Evening Union*, 17 June 1854; *Villager*, 26 July 1855. For Dauphin and New London, see Harrisburg *Telegraph*, 8 May, 27 December 1854; *Morning Herald*, 21 January 1854; *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 5 October 1854; *Norwich Examiner*, 2 September 1854.

29. *Morning Herald*: 1 July, 4 July 1854; 2 February, 2 March 1855; *Saturday Evening Union and Weekly Family Visitor*, 24 June 1854; *Villager*, 1 June 1854; Rev. B. P. Byrum, *History of the First Baptist Church, Amesbury and Salisbury: Four Discourses* (Salisbury MA: W. H. B. Currier, 1860), 82; For more on the Manichaeic worldview of the Know Nothings, see Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 32-3, and *passim*.

30. For a similar argument about Antimasonry's use of Masonry, see Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition, 1826-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Also see Bridges, *City in the Republic*, 90-7.

31. Newburyport *American Sentinel and Essex North Record*, 17 August 1854. See also Lynn *Bay State*, 16 March 1854; Newburyport *Herald*: 9 March, 15 March, 14 August 1854; Amesbury *Villager*, 27 April, 17 August 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 28 March 1854. On Salem's 1854 vote, see Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five Massachusetts Towns, 1800-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 96-8. On Boston, see Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 68.

32. *Villager* 4 May 1854; *Lynn News*, 2 June, 25 August 1854; *American Sentinel*, 17 August 1854.

33. One exception was William H. B. Currier, editor of the Amesbury *Villager*. Though definitely a nativist and most probably a member of the Know Nothing order, Currier was also a consistent advocate of antislavery who systematically incorporated the issue into the nativist agenda. See for example, *Villager*: 14 September, 28 September, 9 November 1854.

34. *People's Advocate*, 2 December 1854. See also *Bay State*, 16 March 1854; *Lynn News*, 16 June 1854; *Villager*, 29 June 1854; *Herald*, 16 February 1855.

35. *Villager*, 24 November, 17 November 1853; *Bay State*, 11 May 1854. See also *Bay State*, 24 November 1853. Historians have since dismissed the idea that Irish Catholics turned out en masse in 1853. See Baum, *Civil War Party System*, 29-30, 33; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 55-9; Kevin Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation and Reform: Coalition Politics in Massachusetts, 1847-

1853," *Civil War History* 22 (June 1976), 116-37. There can be little doubt that the Constitution was defeated by forces besides Irish Catholics. Nevertheless, in late 1853 and 1854 many reformers, nativists or otherwise, retrospectively blamed the Irish for the Constitution's demise and the Whig ascendancy.

36. *Herald*, 3 May, 20 August 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 22 August 1854; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 105-6.

37. *Bay State*, 13 April 1854; *Essex Banner*, 6 May 1854. See also *Herald*, 21 April 1854; *Bay State*, 16 February, 16 March, 6 April, 18 May 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 28 February 1854; *People's Advocate*, 6 May 1854; *Villager*, 27 April 1854; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 137-8.

38. *Lawrence Courier*, 3 March, 7 March, 1854; *Villager*, 2 March 1854; *Bay State*, 23 February 1854. See also *Bay State*, 16 March 1854; *Villager*, 23 February 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 14 March 1854; Haverhill *Essex Banner*, 11 March, 18 March 1854.

39. *Villager*, 9 November 1854. For the Whig, People's/Republican, and Democratic state conventions, see *Bay State*, 28 September 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 25 July, 28 July, 22 August 1854; *People's Advocate*, 16 September, 14 October 1854; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 66, 72-3; Virginia C. Purdy, "Portrait of a Know-Nothing Legislature: The Massachusetts General Court of 1855," (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1970), 71-4.

40. *Lynn News*, 9 June, 16 June 1854. See also, *Herald*, 1 February, 26 August 1854. For local reactions to the formation of the Republican party see for example *Lynn News*, 15 September 1854; *Villager*, 27 July, 14 September 1854. Contrary to the popular wisdom, many earlier "ethnocultural" historians recognized the antislavery energy of northern Know Nothingism. See for example Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*; Holt, *Forging a Majority*.

41. Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 69, 73-5, 97-9. Years later, in his famous memoirs, Wilson downplayed his behind-the-scenes deal-making with the Know Nothing party in 1854 and subsequently, and in any event, claimed his involvement stemmed from the belief that, for the antislavery movement to succeed, the Democratic-Whig party system had to be smashed. The Know Nothings, Wilson wrote, were the best vehicle to accomplish this. *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* 3 vols., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1872-77), 2: 414-5. Subsequent historians have found little reason to doubt the sincerity of Wilson's larger antislavery intentions, just his self-serving memory of how he positioned himself as a leading Know Nothing.

42. *Saturday Evening Union and Weekly Family Visitor*, 17 June 1854; *Herald*, 10 October 1854. See also *Herald*, 6 September 1854; *Lawrence Courier*, 28 March 1854; *Lynn News*, 16 September 1854.
43. *American Sentinel and Essex North Record*, 17 August 1854; *Herald*, 17 October 1855; *Lynn News*, 15 September 1854.
44. *Bay State*, 16 March 1854.
45. See for example, Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, esp. 108-27; Holt, "The Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of United States Political Parties* 4 vols., I: "1789-1860: From Factions to Parties" (New York: Chelsea Publishers, 1973), 575-622.
46. *American Sentinel and Essex North Record*, 17 August 1854. See also *Herald*, 31 August 1854.
47. *Villager*, 4 May 1854; *American Sentinel*, 17 August 1854.
48. *Lynn News*, 20 October 1854.
49. Edward Prentiss to Francis Gillette, 25 December 1854 (copy), Joseph R. Hawley Papers, Library of Congress; Prentiss to Gillette, 5 January 1855 (copy), Hawley Papers.
50. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 22 March 1855. Also see *ibid.*, 27 March 1855. The presence in the 1855 General Assembly of 43 "Democratic Americans" suggests that Know Nothings also infiltrated some Democratic party caucuses. See Goodwin, *Goodwin's Annual Legislative Statistics*.
51. Goodwin, *Goodwin's Annual Legislative Statistics*.
52. *Examiner* 5 August 1854. Also *ibid.*: 2 September 1854; 3 November 1854. See also *Meriden Transcript* 1 February 1855. Also see *The Connecticut Whig* 18 January 1854; *The Connecticut Organ* 24 January 1852.
53. *Courant* 27 March 1855; 21 February 1855; 4 January 1855. See also *ibid.*, 3 June 1854; 28 March 1855; *Constitution, Ritual and Platform of Principles of the American Party of the State of Connecticut, Adopted August 1855*.
54. *Examiner* 3 November 1854. Platt was also up front about his antislavery radicalism. See for example *Meriden Transcript* 1 February, 1 March 1855. Indeed, Platt would later play an important role in translating Know Nothingism into Republicanism in Middlesex County. See Lane, *Political History of Connecticut*

During the Civil War, 59.

55. *Examiner*, 26 August 1854. See also *ibid.*: 12 January, 30 January, 23 March 1855; *Courant*, 19 January 1855.

56. *Norwich State Guard* 21 February 1855. See also *New Haven Palladium*, 25 January 1855.

57. *Meriden Transcript* 1 February 1855; "H.L.R." quoted in *Examiner*, 2 September 1854; "K.G.W." quoted in *Hartford Courant* 29 March 1855.

58. *Meriden Transcript* 15 March 1855. Also see *Examiner* 6 April 1855.

59. *Courant*, 5 April 1855; 26 January 1855.

60. *Morning Herald*, 21 January 1854. See also William Henry Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1883), 343, 352, 567; Eggert, "'Seeing Sam'," 308-10.

61. *Borough Item*: 3 June, 4 June 1854. Also *ibid.*: 2 March, 10 May, 4 June, 19 July, 24 July 1854.

62. *Morning Herald*: 14 June 1854; 17 June 1854; 12 June 1854. See also *ibid.*, 19 April, 20 June, 4 July, 2 August, 17 August 1854; *Borough Item*, 10 May 1854; *Telegraph*: 22 April 1854. Evidence for Schuylkill County Know Nothings assisting in the organization of lodges in the Upper End is contained in H. Walters to Simon Cameron, 11 July 1854, Simon Cameron Papers, DCHC.

63. *Telegraph*, 28 June 1854. See also for example *ibid.*: 27 May, 5 July, 27 December 1854; *Herald*: 8 May, 15 May, 30 May, 6 June, 12 June, 20 June, 11 July, 19 August 1854.

64. *Telegraph*: 12 July 1854. See also *ibid.*, 17 May 1854; *Herald*, 28 June 1854. For more on the political effects of Campbell's appointment, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 30; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 94-5; Alexander McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1905), I: 191-3.

65. *Borough Item*, 17 May 1854. See also *Borough Item*: 25 March, 7 April, 6 May 1854; *Telegraph*, 17 May 1854; *Herald*, 16 May 1854.

66. *Telegraph*, 27 December 1854; *Telegraph*, 11 January 1854. See also *Borough Item*: 18 February, 1 March, 6 March, 29 March 1854; *Herald*: 27 March, 15 April, 17 April 1854; *Telegraph*, 1 March 1854; *Laws of the General Assembly of the*

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania...1854, 520-7, and passim.

67. *Morning Herald*, 21 March 1854; 8 June 1854. See also *ibid.*: 26 April, 11 May, 23 September, 25 September, 5 October 1854; *Telegraph*, 28 June 1854; entries for 1854, C. C. Rawn Diary, Papers of C. C. Rawn, MG 62, DCHS, Box 1; "Papers of the Governor," *Pennsylvania Archives Fourth Series*, 769-75; *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1854* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1854): 543-4; 663-4.

68. *Herald*: 29 August 1854; 23 May 1854.

69. *Herald*, 16 August 1854. See also *ibid.*, 10 April, 9 June, 30 August, 23 September 1854.

70. *Borough Item*, 1 March 1854; *Telegraph*, 7 June 1854. See also *Telegraph*: 8 May, 17 May 1854; *Herald*: 18 April, 4 May, 22 May, 25 May, 17 July, 21 September, 28 September 1854; C. C. Rawn Diary, entries for 1854, MG 62, box 1, DCHS. In an otherwise solid treatment of the social bases of Know Nothingism in Harrisburg, Gerald Eggert fails to acknowledge that Miller used antislavery and antisouthern themes throughout 1854, suggesting instead that such appeals developed only later. See Eggert, "'Seeing Sam,'" 326.

71. *Herald*: 25 May 1854; 21 August 1854. See also, *ibid.*: 15 April, 23 May, 19 September, 21 September, 25 September, 28 September 1854.

72. *Herald*, 18 October 1854.

73. *Morning Herald*, 27 September 1854; 24 July 1854; 31 July 1854.

74. See for example, *Morning Herald*: 2 September, 1 June, 6 June, 24 July, 3 October, 16 October 1854.

75. *Morning Herald*, 2 May 1854; Guard of Liberty Minute Book, 1854-55, Records of the Know Nothing Party, Guard of Liberty, Camp #1, MG-8, PHMC; *Telegraph*, 12 July 1854.

76. *Morning Herald*, 2 September 1854. See also *ibid.*, 1 September 1854; *Telegraph*, 12 July 1854.

77. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 36.

CHAPTER VI

THE MANY FACES OF GRACCHUS: KNOW NOTHING GOVERNMENT

As the 1855 legislative season opened Know Nothings in all three counties had reason to be optimistic. Know Nothing governors controlled the executive branch in each state, and hence could frame the legislative agenda with their Annual Message, the legislature's traditional stepping-off point. Control of the executive branch put considerable patronage in Know Nothing hands, a power with great potential to solidify the movement. The Know Nothings also enjoyed majority control of each state's legislative branch. In Massachusetts the entire senate and nearly the entire house was Know Nothing. In Connecticut the movement claimed strong majorities in both houses. In Pennsylvania the future looked somewhat murkier. Because Pennsylvania elected only eleven of thirty-three state senators each year, the Democratic party controlled the upper chamber. But the Know Nothings countered with a decisive majority in the lower chamber and on joint ballot.¹

Grassroots nativists touted their elected leaders' reformist intentions and promised they would seize the opportunity to write law according to Know Nothing principles. Of Connecticut's 1855 General Assembly, Norwich's Andrew Stark said simply: "We shall be much mistaken in our expectations if it does not leave its mark upon our statute book in the form of some wholesome changes and additions."

Commentators in Massachusetts believed that Know Nothing lawmakers were poised to break the logjam that had frustrated political and social reformers for years. The

1855 General Court was “in the hands of men who were connected with the late coalition,” wrote an onlooker from the senate chamber, combining “all those who wish to gain a great triumph over the relentless aristocratical conservatism of old foggy whiggery, which has its seat in Boston.” Harrisburg’s Stephen Miller, soon to receive a plum appointment as Philadelphia’s flour inspector, wrote that Know Nothing assemblymen intended to “steer clear of all entangling alliances with both the old parties, and plant themselves upon a platform of their own.” A major piece of that platform was elimination of Pennsylvania’s system of “public plunder,” the Public Works. “[M]any representatives were elected with direct reference to this question,” he maintained. Critics scoffed at such roseate predictions, but on one thing everyone agreed: in 1855 the Know Nothings enjoyed a rare opportunity to enact virtually whatever policies they chose.²

Aside from nativism, the Know Nothings’ broad policy orientation was borne of political circumstances unique to each state. The frustration of prohibitionists, political reformers and labor activists patterned Know Nothingism in Massachusetts. The regulation of liquor, the eradication of corruption on the Public Works and sale of the Main Line figured crucially in Pennsylvania Know Nothingism. Antislavery forces bulked large in the movement in Massachusetts and Connecticut, suggesting that Know Nothing government in those states would actively affirm antislavery principles, something abolitionists had been demanding for two decades. Beyond these issues, the Know Nothings’ antiparty populism communicated a broader if fairly diffuse

conception of social reform that prompted some in the movement to urge expansion of the state's police power over the economy.

Once in power, however, the Know Nothings confronted a number of structural and systemic impediments. The slow pace of the legislative process was one obstacle. The Know Nothings had gained unprecedented popularity with their millennial appeal to purify politics and governance. Now they had to be patient as bills made their way through a cumbersome committee and floor process, and demonstrate discipline, for bills were subject to revision by the vested committee and then faced possible hostile amendments if and when they reached the floor. The brevity of the legislative calendar in the antebellum period, anywhere from two to four months, also threatened to frustrate a movement brimming with reform ideas. Often Know Nothing lawmakers brought forward several competing bills on the same issue, a fact that illustrates both the movement's reformist energy and poorly integrated structure. The Know Nothings' zeal for drafting public bills, coupled with an immense influx of requests for special legislation, created legislative bottlenecks. Would the customary short session provide enough time for Know Nothing lawmakers to satisfy the expectations of a diverse constituency? One solution was to lengthen the session. But short sessions reflected the normative ideal in nineteenth-century America of unobtrusive and economical government. Extending the legislative calendar would leave Know Nothings open to charges that they were intoxicated by power and beholden to special interests.

Less mundane features of the nineteenth-century regime also figured to complicate Know Nothing government. State governments legislated on all manner of

private and parochial subjects, including certain private property rights and individual liberties, the establishment of local governments and the designation of their administrative capacities, and the authorization of businesses and voluntary associations. In this specific constitutional sense private law remained the creature of state authority. In practice the state's power over private and local matters was typically, though by no means uniformly, authorizational in character; nineteenth-century assemblies devolved much of the routine operations of governance to local authorities and individuals, again reflecting prevailing ideals of local control and weak central state authority. Yet, because state legislatures held authoritative power over a broad range of local and private matters, narrowly defined interests had to mobilize to gain validation and procedural authority from the state capital. The distributive regime, marked by particularistic inputs and diffuse outputs, generated its own cultural momentum and institutional imperatives, both in the polity and legislative arena. Citizens were *used* to mobilizing on behalf of parochial issues, and invariably gained entrée to the legislative process through their own representative or senator. Vested economic interests, such as banking and railroad companies, were equally adept at pressuring lawmakers for desirable legislation. The result was a deluge of petitions and informal requests for special legislation on narrowly defined and parochial topics.³

Antebellum lawmakers devoted great care and attention to the requests of narrow and often temporarily constituted interest groups, for they invariably originated in their home district. But what were the political ramifications of such a common sense response to particularistic inputs, especially for a self-styled reform movement

opposed to the status quo? Indeed, aside from political Roman Catholicism, few issues agitated the Know Nothings more than special lawmaking. Yet despite incantatory warnings that “legislation, so far as practicable, should be general and uniform,” Know Nothing legislators found themselves enmeshed in a system geared to special legislation. As we shall see, the Know Nothings’ success at breaking from this distributive framework proved at best mixed, at worst disappointing.⁴

Know Nothing government faced still greater obstacles. The most troublesome of all was the movement’s own antipartyism. At his inaugural, Pennsylvania Know Nothing Governor James Pollock spoke in familiar Know Nothing boilerplate about the movement’s pure intentions for governance, a “living illustration” of “a true and single allegiance” to the commonweal.⁵ But how would he and his antiparty cohort perform in power? Beyond nativism and a few other issues, no one could say with confidence how the Know Nothing vision of the public good would translate in practical terms. Moralistic and antiparty appeals to reconstitute the public good in governance had won the votes of the disaffected, but provided little guidance on the panoply of commercial, fiscal, and governmental issues that perennially crowded the legislative calendar. Moreover patronage decisions had to be made, which were likely to stoke old jealousies, and worse, appear incongruous for a movement that boasted of antiparty designs.

Finally, in the spring of 1855 the slavery issue occupied the public’s imagination as never before. Each newly elected governor devoted a portion of their inaugural address to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, said by Governor Gardner

to have “moved men’s minds at the North to an extent no other political occurrence has done within the memory of the present generation.” Slavery was now a potent symbolic issue that politicians could massage to great advantage; it also impinged on substantive matters in the state capitols. The assemblies in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts were to elect a U.S. Senator, while Know Nothings in all three states had the power to legislate policy that related to sectional politics. Meanwhile, a process of national party-building, earnestly pursued by Know Nothings in spring and summer 1855, thrust the issue to center stage.⁶

In short, the Know Nothings would now have to sharpen their vision of the public good on issues besides Catholicism and party government. The movement, more a congeries of the frustrated and angry than a formal political party, failed to build the cohesion and discipline necessary to make the leap. The Know Nothings’ heterogeneity made holding the movement together problematic, while the rank and file’s antipartyism reacted back on the leadership. Having risen to power on popular frustration with party government and its signature compromises and accommodations, rank-and-file Know Nothings eventually recoiled at their own leadership’s handling of pressing public issues. Compromise and accommodation are paradigmatic to policymaking and party-building, the public face of political power, but aggravate the antiparty temper, impatient with political calculation on matters of the public welfare. Power once obtained unleashed a destructive internal dialectic. Factions rapidly crystallized and went to war over first principles, the essential ambiguity of which, ironically, had contributed so much to Know Nothingism’s raging popularity and

populist energy. It would take three years for Know Nothingism to expire completely, but by the middle of 1855 the movement was already unraveling.

Know Nothing Government: Preliminary Observations and Broad Trends

Certain features of Know Nothing government, especially in the three states under review here, are familiar enough. Contemporary observers made much of the youth, political inexperience, and plebeian background of Know Nothing office holders. This image, exaggerated by contemporaries for political purposes, is nonetheless borne out in the hard data. Know Nothing office holders were on average slightly younger than non-Know Nothing office holders. The matter of experience is more difficult to nail down. Regarding Connecticut, Parmet found much impressionistic evidence that many Know Nothing lawmakers hailed from the state's oldest families, but did not reconstruct a genealogy for all Know Nothing lawmakers nor show a relationship between a verdant family tree and political experience. Anbinder undertook a limited comparison of Know Nothing and non-Know Nothing legislators in 1855 and 1856, and discovered the Know Nothings enjoyed considerably more "recent" political experience. But it is not clear what such data mean. These were the years of Know Nothing ascendance, so it is not significant that the movement's leaders enjoyed greater political success in the recent past than their immediate competitors did. Purdy's exhaustive work on Massachusetts, on the other hand, compared Know Nothings to previous as well as future General Courts so as to

locate Know Nothing government on a meaningful historical continuum, something contemporaries undoubtedly did when they pegged the Know Nothings as political neophytes. In that light she found that Know Nothing legislators were in fact significantly less experienced than their predecessors.⁷

A more intriguing side of the social profile of Know Nothing office holders is wealth and occupation. While all three Know Nothing assemblies were socially heterogenous, distinctive patterns do emerge from the data. Know Nothing lawmakers on average held less real and personal property than their predecessors and Democratic competitors. Indeed, especially when compared to their predecessors, Know Nothings appear substantially less wealthy. In Massachusetts, the average wealth in realty held by Know Nothing office holders was only 39% of the average held by lawmakers in 1850. Anbinder's data on Pennsylvania and Connecticut are less dramatic, but this may be partly an artifact of his methodology. He compared Know Nothings to contemporary non-Know Nothings, an inadequate measure of how the Know Nothings stack up historically. In any event, Anbinder found that Know Nothings were less wealthy than their competitors by a factor of one-quarter to one-third.⁸

Across the board Know Nothings were much less likely to be farmers than were lawmakers from other parties. Other occupational trends are specific to only one or two of the states. The number of petit bourgeois mechanics and shopkeepers was significantly higher in the 1855 assemblies of Massachusetts and Connecticut than in previous years, but not so in Pennsylvania. Know Nothings from Connecticut elected a disproportionately large number of solidly bourgeois merchants and manufacturers,

those in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, disproportionately fewer. In Massachusetts lawyers were greatly under-represented and clergymen significantly over-represented, although these trends did not prevail elsewhere. In fact the shortage of legal expertise was so critical in the General Court that legislative committees recruited outside counsel to assist them on matters of debtor-creditor relations and the regulation of liquor. Suffolk County senator Albert J. Wright, chair of the Massachusetts Special Joint Committee on Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt, candidly admitted that the committee submitted their draft bill to several Boston lawyers because they “have not had the advantage of legal talent among their own number.” Wright quickly added that the committee chose lawyers known to be “favorable to the proposition.”⁹

The crucial issue is whether and to what degree the social characteristics of Know Nothing lawmakers shaped their policymaking. The question involves more than analyzing the bills and law produced by Know Nothing assemblies. That aspect of Know Nothing government has generated a fascinating if not altogether complete portrait of a movement that largely delivered on its reform promises.¹⁰ When properly understood in relation to the cultural and institutional limits that acted and reacted on them, all three Know Nothing assemblies were indeed reformist. We shall return to this matter and the specifics of Know Nothing government in a moment, but now we should take up another equally important question: Did the 1855 legislatures evince broad behavioral patterns that might warrant a strong claim for distinctiveness? One method is to compare the ratios of private to public law passed by the Know Nothing legislatures to those produced by other assemblies. If the Know Nothings were indeed

exceptional in avoiding the trough of distributive politics and enacting general reforms, we should see evidence of this in the aggregate ratios of public to private legislation.

From this wider perspective, however, it appears that the Know Nothing assemblies did not deviate significantly from antebellum patterns. It is important to note that in all three states the sheer volume of both private and public law produced by the state legislatures increased dramatically and almost annually between 1840 and 1855. But with the one exception of Massachusetts, the ratio of private to public law in 1855 did not suddenly improve with Know Nothings at the helm. Consider the 1855 Pennsylvania General Assembly, where reportedly over two-thirds of the members were enrollees in Know Nothing lodges. It actually passed *fewer* general bills as a percentage of total output (13%) than the 1840 assembly (16%), although the Know Nothings did modestly better in this regard than Pennsylvania lawmakers in the early 1850s, a period when logrolling and omnibus legislation peaked. On the plus side, the 1855 assembly *did* scale back dramatically the passage of omnibus bills, a practice consistently condemned by Pennsylvania Know Nothings. In Connecticut, 34% of legislative outputs in the 1855 legislature was general in nature, an increase of 3% over 1850 and 9% over 1840. Yet as these figures suggest, the ratio of public to private law had been slowly rising in Connecticut since the early 1840s. The Connecticut Know Nothings simply continued an established pattern. Only in Massachusetts do we find a significant break with previous trends. The Bay State Know Nothings enacted a record 552 laws. Of these 32% were general in scope, representing a meaningful increase over the last fifteen years during which the ratio fluctuated between 12% and 20%. Yet the

Massachusetts Know Nothings, widely viewed as reformers, did not best their Connecticut counterparts on this score. Indeed, the improved ratio in Massachusetts may tell us more about legislative conservatism in Massachusetts before 1855 than the capacity of the Bay State Know Nothings to break dramatically from the distributive framework.¹¹

We can identify still more parallels between Know Nothing government and the nineteenth-century norm by examining general patterns in roll-call voting. As was true for other nineteenth-century legislatures, the overwhelming preponderance of laws enacted by the Know Nothing assemblies sparked little if any conflict, even between rival party blocs. Indeed, neither the vast majority of private nor most public bills occasioned roll-calls; they were simply passed without fanfare. Nonetheless Know Nothing assemblies debated and voted on a range of policies that can be divided into discrete spheres. Tables B.19 and B.20 presents the Rice Index of Party Cohesion scores and Index of Party Disagreement (IPD) between Democrats and non-Democrats (almost all Know Nothing), for select roll calls by policy sphere in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.¹² Cohesion and disagreement scores for Connecticut's 1855 legislature have been tallied by Lex Renda, and are consistent with those in the tables.¹³ Indeed, historians of nineteenth-century policymaking have routinely found high levels of party cohesion and partisan disagreement on issues that relate to "community mores." On the other hand economic, governmental, and fiscal policies tended to produce significantly lower levels of intraparty cohesion and interparty conflict, except on the few issues that were linked to party platforms.¹⁴

As the tables show, the Know Nothing legislatures fit this general behavioral pattern. Cohesion and disagreement scores for economic, governmental, and fiscal policies were typically less robust--in most cases far less robust--than for votes on policies that reflected competing mores. Naturally, votes on nativist policies generated comparatively high rates of bloc voting among Know Nothings (for) and Democrats (against). So too did many other moral or value-laden issues. For example, bills regulating liquor produced among the highest cohesion and disagreement scores in the Pennsylvania House (Table B.19). Connecticut had dealt with the liquor issue in 1854, so Know Nothing lawmakers there did not tackle the issue. The 1855 Massachusetts Senate passed a stringent anti-liquor law without a roll, so no scores are included in the table. However the bill produced a cohesion score of 71 among Know Nothings in the Massachusetts House, second only to votes on nativist policies (77). Antislavery policies and resolutions, included under the rubric "mores," also generated strikingly high levels of bloc voting among Know Nothings in Massachusetts and especially Connecticut.¹⁵ Pennsylvania lawmakers, by contrast, did not vote on bills that can be directly related to slavery, though as we shall see, the struggle to elect a U.S. Senator certainly had powerful sectional overtones.

In sum, only a small fraction of legislation in the 1855 Know Nothing assemblies disturbed the consensus, a pattern not unlike policymaking in state legislatures throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, only a fraction of the contested issues generated high levels of unity among Know Nothings and polarity between them and their opponents.

It is important to note that the high level of cohesion and party disagreement on policies related to community mores suggests the ease with which political elites could translate mores issues into generalized policy orientations, both in the wider polity and the more exclusive legislative domain. Issues such as liquor, immigration and slavery subsumed the ethnoreligious tensions, political frustrations, and socioeconomic insecurities of late antebellum society; the meanings that citizens ascribed to conflicts over mores were subjective, conditional, and multifaceted. Hence, they were more readily translatable into broad political constructs that could in turn “explain” a variety of circumstances in the antebellum social formation. Battles over community mores had powerful and multiple symbolic dimensions that made it relatively easy, and economical, for lawmakers to palliate diverse constituencies anxious for responsive government.¹⁶

With few exceptions economic or fiscal or governmental policies generated altogether different alignments of interests, and hence, different voting patterns in nineteenth-century legislatures, the Know Nothing assemblies included. Generally speaking, the interests brought to bear on lawmakers in these spheres of policy were notable for their particularism. This certainly holds for virtually all of the private and parochial topics on which state legislatures held forth. On bills incorporating private businesses, the parties who manifested interest at the state capitol were invariably specific to the substantive matter at hand, even though business charter policy certainly had broad public import. Significantly, the same was true for most public laws as well. When the 1855 Pennsylvania General Assembly appropriated \$10,000 to create the

Farmers' High School of Pennsylvania it was responding less to a generalized impulse for agricultural improvements than a specialized campaign for the project orchestrated by elites of the state's agricultural society, even if lawmakers identified public benefits in the institution.¹⁷

That broad behavioral patterns in the 1855 assemblies did not depart from nineteenth-century standards is not surprising. The Know Nothings came to power in a distributive regime in which the allocation of divisible goods and the authorization of special powers and privileges was normally noncontroversial and nonpartisan, though by no means inconsequential. Particularistic interests did not cease clamoring for special legislation, despite the patriotic antipartyism and public-spiritedness that perfused Know Nothing movement culture. Observers at the grassroots were keenly aware that within the prevailing framework inhered a tension, made the more salient because Know Nothing heterogeneity. "A characteristic of the present legislature is an extreme sensitiveness to outside opinions," observed the *Lynn News*. Indeed, several Massachusetts senators publicly proposed a long legislative session because reform ideas and special projects proliferated. For its part, the *Salem Gazette* was not surprised by such proposals. "[I]t was obvious at the beginning of the session, that all the members (but a few) being "bran new" at the business, and seven-eighths of them being charged each with some special project or whim, it would require anything but a short session to give them all a hearing." Pennsylvanians aired related analyses. "We hear an honest Senator say," read one editorial on horse-trading among Pennsylvania

Know Nothings, “that he was compelled to vote for a good many banks against his judgement, in order to secure the charter he was asking for his district.”¹⁸

Patterns of petitioning further illuminate the point. For example, of the 344 petitions to the Pennsylvania Senate in 1855, 78% were for purely private or local subjects. Moreover only a select few of the petitions for public laws produced the sort of broad-based mobilization that might suggest a generalized policy orientation across the state’s diverse regions and interests. The exceptions were petitions for laws to restrict liquor sales and consumption, which generated tens of thousands of signatures from across the state, and a smaller petition for sale of the Main Line of the Public Works. Labor reformers in Philadelphia, Lancaster, and several other factory towns also mobilized an impressive, if narrower, petition for a ten-hour law. But the dispersed and specialized origins of the ten-hour petition more closely approximated the distributive regime’s cultural norm. With few exceptions, petitioning involved a bewildering array of narrowly based groups activated by specialized and/or parochial objectives, especially when it came to policies of an economic or administrative nature. And if newspaper accounts are any indication, direct lobbying activities were equally narrow in scope, if not more so. Small wonder, then, that policy outputs overall were weighted towards specialized interests and concerns.¹⁹

Know Nothing Government: In Search of the People's Welfare

From a wide-angle perspective, Know Nothing lawmakers shared much with their nineteenth-century counterparts, at the very least suggesting the limits of Know Nothing reform. That said, there was margin for maneuver within the prevailing framework. An agenda for change accompanied Know Nothings into the halls of power. In the broadest sense, the Know Nothings' experiences with the regime conditioned their orientation to "reform" and to the state. The subject of Know Nothing populism--the regime's failure to act in the public interest--defined the object of Know Nothing government. The movement's antipartyism demanded proactive government, especially on issues that Know Nothing publicists singled out to illustrate the regime's failures. An analysis of Know Nothing government in the areas of government and fiscal policy, commercial policy, and community mores reveals much about the internal tensions and cultural constraints that eventually split the movement.

Government and Fiscal Policy

Given the movement's signature antagonism towards corrupt party governance, it surprised no one that to varying degrees Know Nothing lawmakers in each state pursued political and/or fiscal reforms. In Massachusetts, where the movement closely adhered to the reformism of the defunct Coalition, Know Nothing political reforms were indeed impressive, if not wholly attributable to the movement alone. The 1855

General Court inherited a series of constitutional amendments, based on those advanced earlier by the Coalition, which had been approved the previous session and awaited passage in 1855 before they could be turned over to voters for final ratification. Constitutional amendments stipulating election by plurality in most state races, popular election of the Governor's Council, the Secretary of State, State Treasurer, and Attorney General, as well as a raft of county and local offices passed both chambers easily. Legislation extending the popular election procedure to other local and county offices also sailed through the General Court. Wary of special interests intruding on lawmaking, senators instituted a rule that prohibited members from voting on bills in which they held a financial stake. The Massachusetts Know Nothings' shrank the patronage power and expanded representative democracy, earning them high praise from both contemporary political reformers and later historians.²⁰

The actions of Know Nothing lawmakers on other fronts of governmental and fiscal policy, however, fueled opposition and tarnished somewhat an otherwise laudable reform record. State spending rose to historic levels in 1855; up 45% from the previous year alone. Over the course of their two year reign Massachusetts Know Nothings were especially generous in the area of early social welfare, lavishing unprecedented sums on the common school system, a refurbished system of pauper relief, a new school for the mentally handicapped, and a modern hospital for the insane poor. A 50% property tax hike and a small tax increase on mutual insurance companies paid for only a fraction of these and other expenditures; the remainder was simply tacked onto the state's growing debt. Though moral and social reformers might

champion the Know Nothings' social welfare policies, the movement's liberality cut against prevailing ideals of economy in government.²¹

Opponents of Know Nothing government thus had many targets to shoot at. They seized on the tax increases and higher deficits to excoriate the Know Nothings as wasteful spendthrifts. It did not help matters when the 1855 General Court voted itself a hefty pay raise. Indeed, the salary increase, coupled with a long session, extended committee hearings, unusually high printing costs, and the implementation of another 1855 innovation, a state decennial census, sent the ordinary expenditures of government soaring. More than one Essex County observer singled out fiscal indiscipline as a sure sign of "unblushing corruption." Among the more frivolous expenditures held up for public ridicule was the purchase of over 800 penknives, at a cost of roughly \$3 each, that were distributed among lawmakers as mementos. Critics granted that the need for stationary and other incidentals had always led to minor abuses of the purse power. Yet the case of the 1855 "Penknife Legislature" was "singular" because Massachusetts government was in the hands of "a party which was to reform the abuses and corruptions of the old political parties."²²

While the 1855 Massachusetts General Court blew the roof off of government spending, the Know Nothing assemblies in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, perhaps chastened by the presence of a Democratic opposition, proceeded with greater caution and deference to normative ideals of economy. In debt-conscious Pennsylvania, Know Nothing and Democratic lawmakers together defeated a proposal to increase funding for common schools, while overall, expenditures remained consistent with previous

sessions, despite a Know Nothing-inspired salary increase of nearly 40%. In Connecticut, social welfare expenditures modestly outstripped previous levels. Yet the appropriations for social welfare purposes by Connecticut's 1855 assembly paled in comparison to later Republican-controlled legislatures.²³

Know Nothing lawmakers in Connecticut and Pennsylvania demonstrated their commitment to economical government in other ways. Connecticut's assembly, at the urging of Governor Minor, launched an ambitious overhaul of the state's judiciary. The impetus for judicial reform was the system's mushrooming costs and widespread frustration over its numerous inefficiencies. Spending on the judicial system had nearly doubled since 1846 to become the single largest item in the state's annual budget. In addition to that fiscal pressure, proponents of reform also cited a rising rate of crime among immigrants, claiming it overwhelmed the system. Despite stiff resistance by the Democratic minority which feared centralization of the courts, Know Nothing legislators streamlined the bloated system, improving public access to small claims' courts by expanding the county court circuit and devolving purely routine matters such as divorce and probate to local justices of the peace.²⁴

In Pennsylvania, the drive to economize manifested in the struggle to sell the Main Line of the Public Works. The sale issue had been an important subtext to state politics since the mid-1840s and a potent symbol of the Pennsylvania Know Nothings' antiparty indictment of fraudulent governance. In the 1855 session the issue bulked larger than any single order of business. While the movement for sale crossed party lines, differences over the terms and conditions of sale generated weak but crucial

partisan tendencies. Many Democrats favored sale but on terms more demanding than their opponents. A few held out against sale altogether. Distrust of the power and influence of J. Edgar Thompson's Pennsylvania Railroad, the only likely purchaser of the Main Line, informed the Democrats' cautious attitude towards sale. The 1854 Democratic-controlled legislature had passed a bill for sale of the Main Line at a minimum price of \$10 million, only to have it pocket vetoed by Governor Bigler. Few ardent proponents of sale believed the Pennsylvania Railroad would buy at the \$10 million price tag at any event. As expected, in 1855 Governor Pollock denounced the Public Works for its "prodigality, extravagance, and corrupt political favoritism" and urged the legislature to avoid "the errors of former legislation" by crafting a bill to sell the Main Line "on terms favorable to the State, and beneficial to the purchaser."²⁵

Initially, Know Nothings at the grassroots seemed confident that their elected leaders would swiftly resolve the sale issue. Championing sale as way to provide tax relief, Stephen Miller also advocated abolition of the three member Canal Board as a means to purify government. The Canal Board drained the treasury and threatened American interests, Miller insisted, for it regularly "planted along the improvements an army of foreigners, to eat out our substance, and vote down American citizens." Moreover, Miller charged that the Canal Board and its friends were responsible for encumbering the 1854 sale bill with onerous provisions. To many Know Nothings, eliminating the Canal Board and selling the Main Line would uproot a corrupt vested interest and break the reform logjam.²⁶

Producing a workable sale bill, however, proved extremely difficult for lawmakers; the legislature bogged down in a protracted struggle over details. The minimum price remained a source of contention. Some legislators were comfortable with the \$10 million price tag; others, charging that figure was a thinly veiled plot to prevent sale altogether, urged \$7 million; still others argued for some compromise figure and a few for no minimum price whatsoever. More ambitious reformers proposed sale of the entire Public Works system. An intense lobbying campaign by the Pennsylvania Railroad greatly complicated matters. President J. Edgar Thompson coveted the Main Line, his corporation's principle competitor for the western trade. Aware of the popularity of the sale issue, he let his terms be known in a series of indiscreet communiques: \$7.5 million for the Main Line, plus elimination of the company's tonnage tax which had been imposed as a condition of incorporation in 1846. Lawmakers had designed the tonnage tax to protect the Main Line's coal and timber shipping revenues, jeopardized by competition from the new railroad. By 1855 most advocates of sale accepted Thompson's reasoning that the tonnage tax violated principles of free enterprise and would be obsolete at any rate once the Main Line was disposed of. But other lawmakers opposed repeal of the tonnage tax because of the revenue it generated for the state. Many too were simply repelled by the influence that Thompson and his corps of lobbyists appeared to wield over the entire process. Indeed, the Pennsylvania Railroad's ubiquitous hand was obliquely acknowledged more than once during floor debates. Convinced that the Pennsylvania Railroad controlled "too many members," one Democratic legislator, matching the Know Nothing's ethnic

intolerance, spat that the company was “playing the Jew with us.” In the context of the railroad’s aggressive lobbying campaign, senate and house Democrats, along with a handful of nervous Know Nothings, insisted that any sale bill contain a condition that the Pennsylvania Railroad pay an additional sum above the minimum price.²⁷

As the legislative struggle wore on, reformers grew impatient. The Democrats scored the proponents of sale for caving to corporate pressure and betraying the public trust. Many Know Nothing opinion leaders expressed frustration over the whole affair. By March even Stephen Miller acknowledged that the 1855 assembly had wasted too much time on special legislation and salary increases. “The people expected better things from this legislature,” he wrote in an unguarded moment. Miller addressed public letters to “Our American Legislators” to express the “people’s” disapproval of “the delay that has occurred” in the sale of the Main Line and abolition of the Canal Board, as well as “the long continuance of the present session.” Writing in “no spirit of dictation or unkindness,” Miller nevertheless warned that the success of the American party “requires immediate passage of these bills and the early adjournment of the Legislature.”²⁸

In the end, Miller and other political reformers had to be satisfied with barely half a loaf. In the last week of the session, a price of \$7.5 million for the Main Line was finally agreed upon, with the proviso that if the Pennsylvania Railroad should be the purchaser, it would pay \$8.5 million. In return, the railroad was to be exempted from the tonnage tax, and the Commonwealth’s traditional right to “enter upon, resume and purchase the railroad of said company” was to be forever voided. It seemed a

victory for the Pennsylvania Railroad, yet the company held out until 1857 for even better terms--a complete exemption from *all* state taxes, present and future. Thus, although the 1855 Know Nothings were instrumental in producing a sale bill, no insignificant achievement, they did not succeed in selling the Main Line. Probably because of this failure, Miller held back commentary on the bill's passage. Political reformers were frustrated further by the defeat of companion measures to abolish the Canal Board and sell other parts of the Public Works. Perhaps most important, the entire process made many Know Nothing legislators appear as tools of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Despite majority control of state government, Pennsylvania Know Nothings had fallen short of their lofty goals.²⁹

Commercial Policy

Know Nothings did not revise the basic relationship between government and the economy. But in all three states they responded to the late antebellum context of economic uncertainty with a flurry of legislation designed to strengthen family security in the industrializing market economy. Consider Connecticut's 1855 assembly. It expanded the state's mechanics' lien law; revised the insolvent debtors' law to ensure due process for debtors, and a more equitable distribution of property among multiple creditors; and extended married women's property rights to cover personal property, thereby insulating virtually all of her property from seizure by her husband's creditors. Massachusetts' legislators produced a similar list of reform, and went further to abolish

imprisonment for debt and expand the state's homestead exemption law from \$500 to \$800. Pennsylvania's 1855 General Assembly enacted an expanded mechanics' lien law; made it lawful for inn keepers to seize a borders' baggage as a lien on up to 14 days back rent; and extended the legal status of "feme sole trader" to married women in cases where the husband "from drunkenness, profligacy, or other cause, shall neglect or refuse to provide for his wife, or shall desert her."³⁰

Stay laws, mechanics' liens, and homestead exemptions had been at the center of land reformers' and urban mechanics' political goals throughout the Jacksonian era. By the 1850s, such policies had become fairly routine in most states. Indeed, nearly all of these laws built upon existing statutes and passed without a roll-call. In fact, few occasioned serious legislative debate or much public commentary, signaling a general consensus among Know Nothing lawmakers and the public at large that these sorts of policies were neither particularly controversial in 1855 nor a radical departure from established precedents in antebellum contract and property law.³¹

Still the Know Nothings' broad orientation to mitigate the particular insecurities of petit bourgeois families did not result in unambiguous triumphs for small producers. In Massachusetts, where the movement's small producer tendencies are well-established, a proposal to expand preferences for mechanics' back wages in attachment proceedings went nowhere, presumably because generous preferences made banks less inclined to loan money for risky improvements. The Connecticut House passed a homestead exemption law, only to see it defeated by the senate.³² These failures suggest that the specific motivations underlying Know Nothing legislation on debtor-

creditor relations were complex. Though the sources are nearly silent on the question of motivation, a few hint at the competing interests and legal tangles that lawmakers had to sort through. How to accommodate the hoary ideal of small producer security amid a ramifying market without injuring the interests and crucial stimulative capacities of creditors seems to have been the primary concern of Know Nothing lawmakers.

Massachusetts is a case in point. Governor Gardner urged abolition of imprisonment for debt in his inaugural address to the General Court, but quickly added that provisions were necessary to protect against “fraudulent debtors” and ensure “the payment of his just debts,” injunctions that shaped the final legislation.³³ J. Q. A. Griffin, a Republican-Know Nothing from Charlestown and Chair of the House Judiciary Committee responsible for the 1855 mechanics’ lien law, struck a similar note of compromise when reporting the “great practical difficulty in framing a satisfactory [lien] law.” He explained:

[I]f a statute be enacted such as the mechanic demands, the owner of the building may be defrauded or wronged. While on the other hand, if we afford adequate protection to the owner, we leave the mechanic without that security which he requires. There is, moreover, a limit which we cannot pass in legislating on this matter.

A major complication for the committee was the practice of subcontracting in the construction market, which created a maze of economic exchanges and contractual relationships. This came to the fore in attachment proceedings when a general contractor went insolvent and fled without paying the subcontracts. In such cases, Griffin explained, the subcontractors often filed liens against the property owner,

creating a legal (and social) tension between statutory intent and contract law. “How to afford adequate protection to all these parties is the problem so difficult to solve,” Griffin wrote. In the end, the committee’s bill limited the lien to subcontractors who provided materials (thus preventing laborers in the employ of the subcontractor from joining the attachment as co-claimants) and gave notice of intention to file a lien *before* furnishing materials and commencing work. A mechanic’s incentive *not* to file attachment thus became greater under the 1855 law, for to do so could conceivably cost him business. Furthermore, property owners could now prevent attachments simply “by giving notice in writing...that he will not be responsible” for materials and wages.³⁴

The interaction of contract doctrine with an increasingly complex market thus mediated the Know Nothings’ efforts to continue statutory recognition of small producer security. While this esoteric legal process largely played out in committee rooms, other more controversial commercial policies spilled onto the public stage. Conflicts over labor reform and differences over the proper balance of regulation and promotion of business punctuated Know Nothing government and shaped the public’s reaction to it. We shall consider each in turn.

Labor reformers in all three states viewed the Know Nothing movement as a potential vehicle for realizing their longstanding goal of a ten-hour workday. As we have seen, ten-hour reformers in all three states, especially Massachusetts, had been active for several years organizing petition campaigns and raising public awareness of the issue. When the 1855 assemblies opened it was clear that they would deliberate seriously on the matter. The Massachusetts General Court was convened scarcely more

than a week when the Newburyport *Herald* observed that a ten-hour bill was already in the making, and “from the great number of mechanics in that body,” was almost certain to pass. As Connecticut’s General Assembly organized at the beginning of May, the Norwich *State Guard* listed a ten-hour law as “among the reforms we hope will receive the attention of our Legislature.”³⁵ If there were any lingering doubts, renewed petition campaigns soon dispelled them. In Pennsylvania the biggest of these campaigns centered in Philadelphia and Lancaster, the state’s largest textile centers, but the issue also generated small pockets of support in scattered factory towns. In Harrisburg, for example, George H. Morgan and other local labor reformers staged ten-hour meetings blocks from the Capitol. In Massachusetts and Connecticut the pattern was similar: pressure emanated principally from textile towns such as Lowell, Chicopee, Salisbury, and Lawrence, Massachusetts; Willimantic and Norwich, Connecticut. None of the 1855 petitions came close to matching the size and scope of the 1853 Massachusetts campaign, yet joint select committees quickly formed to tackle the subject.³⁶

Laws regulating the hours of labor in factories constituted a significant extension of the state’s police power over economic relations. Several states, including Pennsylvania (1849) and Connecticut (1842), had experimented with general ten-hour and especially child labor laws, but such legislation had always proved controversial. If anything, by 1855 the issue was more highly charged. Counter-petitions against the laws flowed into the state assemblies. Some opponents argued that placing a statutory limit on the workday would depress wages, and thus hardly benefit the laboring classes. More significant, others attacked the laws from the standpoint of an emergent liberal

orientation that defined the economy as purely private and self-regulating. In this framework the police power becomes not only unnecessary but injurious, both to the property claims of individual capitalists *and* the public welfare, subsumed in Capital. As one Whig American legislator explained: “legislation on the subject is not required, and not to the advantage of the operative, but on the contrary, is really injurious.” Another Democrat was “opposed to all legislation on the subject. It appeared that [legislators] were about to ruin what they wanted to mend.” Such ideas, though rapidly in ascendance in certain quarters after the Civil War, were at odds with deeply embedded legal and political economic traditions of the antebellum republic. Labor reformers’ attempts to apply the police power to productive relations in privately-owned factories compelled their antagonists to elaborate a counter-vision of the public welfare that specified the divisibility of the private from the public.³⁷

Proponents of hours’ legislation made their stand on traditional formulations of the police power. For one thing, the state had an imperative interest in promoting harmonious relations between labor and capital, relations that long hours severely strained. As a ten-hour meeting of operatives and citizens of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, resolved: “[I]n our opinion the interests of Labor and Capital are *identical*, and that all circumstances which render *strikes* for hours or wages necessary are detrimental to that identity.” A ten-hour law would conduce to a commonality of interest because factory operatives, persuaded of the justice the measure, “will not be satisfied with anything less than the Ten Hour System.” Here the petitioners were engaging in revisionist history. Earlier labor protest in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Lancaster in 1849 and

again in Lancaster and Harrisburg in 1853 stemmed from the earlier interventions of state government. Inspiration for those protests came from the 1848 and 1849 ten-hour laws. The state's legal recognition of shorter hours emboldened operatives to formally claim their rights. In 1855 workers simply turned again to the state for an elaboration of the police power. In making their case, labor reformers also emphasized that long hours of toil was both unhealthy and an obstacle to moral and spiritual self-improvement. Again, in this formulation the issue was of paramount public concern, and thus fully within the state's purview. Hence the reform manifested "a deep interest in the welfare of our country, in the education of our children, in the support of our churches and in the perpetuity of those glorious institutions and great blessings bequeathed to us by our fathers," explained Augustus C. Carey, Chair of the Massachusetts Joint Special Committee on the Hours of Labor. Transformations in the gendered composition of industrial work embodied in the rise of large factories also figured crucially in the case for ten-hours' labor. The maintenance of traditional gender norms amid the social transformations of late antebellum society was of particular concern to labor's champions. As "mothers of the coming generation," wrote Carey, women factory workers needed time "to be trained in other duties besides those of spinning and weaving." Excessive hours of factory work rendered female operatives "unfit for the duties which await them in life."³⁸

Know Nothings in all three states placed special emphasis on the social and moral problem of child labor. The arguments of Norwich's Andrew Stark are telling. Endorsing a ten-hour day for all operatives, Stark nevertheless focused on the particular

evils of child labor. Laboring in dreadful conditions, young operatives quickly became overtasked, and soon “the fear of the overseer is the only motive” compelling them to daily toil. Under such conditions, Stark maintained, youth “have no time to read, no time nor disposition to think.” In broader terms, Stark believed that a ten-hour law for minors was needed to revivify the nation’s sapped moral will. As Stark put it: “Let such things be regulated by legislative enactments, and one thing will be done to save our country from mental and physical deterioration, and our own institutions from downfall.” Emphasis on the debilitating influence of factory work on women and children permitted labor reformers to cast the issue in terms that transcended the boundaries that opponents erected to differentiate private issues from public ones.³⁹

Labor reformers also manipulated the nativist political context to impute special meaning and urgency to their cause. Stark’s appeal to “save our country” was an indirect reference to nativist patriotism. In Massachusetts, the immediate impetus for the Know Nothings’ 1855 child labor law was a series of conflicts between the school committee and Catholics in the textile city of Lawrence. The school committee charged that Irish children had labored in the textile mills during the exact periods that a Catholic priest vouched for their attendance in the city’s Catholic parochial school. Petitions from Lawrence demanded the law be revised to give final authority over the question of school attendance to local school committees, thus undermining Catholic autonomy. Know Nothing lawmakers responded with a law that prohibited children under aged 15 from working in factories unless they attended either a public or private school, “of which the teachers shall have been approved” by the local school

committee, at least eleven weeks a year. Nativist political culture enabled Massachusetts Know Nothings to confront the state's powerful textile industry and chip away at its dike against state regulation.⁴⁰

Similarly, ten-hour petitions in Connecticut struck nativist chords. A ten-hour law would ensure the "right of American citizens" to have time enough for their "physical, social, moral and intellectual wants." The coercive nature of the relationship between management and operative, read one, undermined "independence and fearlessness...the noble characteristics of Americans." Petitioners appealed to nativist chauvinism by drawing parallels between their own condition and that of American slaves and European proletarians. "In the pride of Americans we have [boasted] of the superiority of our condition over that of all other people in the world, and in the kindness of our hearts we have felt unmeasured commiseration with the negro slaves of our own country, and the factory laborers and miners of England, but we are growing ashamed and alarmed, for ourselves and our country, to see how near we have approached their worst condition." Slavery also proved a potent symbolic weapon for labor reformers. In one editorial Stark attempted to fuse the moral and social arguments underpinning antislavery and labor reform by asking "Shall the Children be slaves?" Stark suggested that northerners practiced hypocrisy when they condemned Southern slavery and ignored "oppression north of Mason and Dixon's line."⁴¹

Such appeals swayed nativist lawmakers in all three states, at least on the child labor front. The chairman of Connecticut's Joint Committee on the Hours of Labor, Lebanon senator and antislavery Know Nothing Learned Hebard, admitted that the

provisions of the state's 1842 child labor law "are almost, if not totally disregarded." That statute had established a ten-hour day for children under aged 14 and prohibited their employment unless they had attended school at least three months a year. Hebard said the committee had found "an existing wrong" in Connecticut's textile industry regarding not only the question of child labor but the condition of adult millhands too. "How to reach, or remedy the evil," Hebard wrote in measured prose, "has been a matter of embarrassment with your committee." The committee rejected a bill to establish a legally binding ten-hour day for the entire industry. Instead, it proposed a sort of compromise that in substance became Connecticut's ten-hour law. The committee recommended: a blanket declaration that ten-hours' constitute a legal day's work in Connecticut, with a "special contract" proviso that gave corporations the right to "negotiate" longer hours with adult employees, thus conceding a core principle of liberal political economy regarding the adult labor market; a compromise eleven-hour day for minors under 18 that *would*, in principle, be legally binding; the total prohibition of child labor under age 11.⁴²

Hostility even to these compromise measures was intense. The textile industry had opposed the 1842 law because young millhands performed essential tasks which adult operatives resisted taking up. The industry ignored the law because they feared that sending lapboys, bobbin girls, and apprentices home after ten hours' labor would result in a *de facto* ten-hour day for the entire mill. More basically, the law set a precedent that the textile industry was simply loath to accept. These interests came into play in 1855. On the senate floor, Hebard and others beat back several efforts to

eliminate the symbolic ten-hour day and the eleven-hour day for minors. Before the bill's final passage, however, opponents were successful in dropping the minimum age for factory work from 11 to 9 years.⁴³

In Pennsylvania the process and outcome was similar. Proponents of hours' legislation invoked the 1849 ten-hour law for legal precedent, while also pointing out that it had in fact gone entirely unenforced. Veteran labor reformers wanted a restatement of the general ten-hour rule for incorporated manufactories coupled with new enforcement mechanisms. These proposals made little headway in the 1855 legislature, so labor reformers turned to an alternative ten-hour law for minors and a bill requiring factories to provide a reading library for their operatives. That latter proposal was defeated decisively in the Democratic senate, but both house and senate judiciary committees reported out ten-hour bills for employees aged 20 years or less in textile, bagging, and paper manufactories. Opponents attempted to weaken the bill with amendments reducing the minimum age to 16 and limiting its application to factories with more than 50 hands. Democratic lawmakers from Philadelphia took the lead in steering the bill through committee and floor debates intact. In the end the bill passed easily with particularly strong support from senate Democrats and Know Nothings in both houses. Indeed, the cohesion demonstrated by house Know Nothings on this bill was as high as any during the 1855 session (Table B.19).⁴⁴

The result of labor reform in Massachusetts, aside from the child labor law, proved disappointing, especially since the Bay State labor movement enjoyed direct ties to the Know Nothing General Court. Know Nothing representatives Augustus C.

Carey (Ipswich), Putnam C. Taft (Worcester), and Middlesex County senator Elihu C. Baker (Medford) had cut their political eyeteeth on the grassroots ten-hour movement of 1851-3; Taft had served as President of the state's Ten Hour Central Committee. All three gained berths on the joint select committee organized to receive petitions and draft a ten-hour bill. Few doubted that 1855 would be the breakthrough year for long-suffering labor reformers. In the past, "[l]egislation has been had to protect the capitalist, resolves have been presented and passed in favor of the slave of the south," wrote Carey in the preface to the ten-hour bill, reported out unanimously by the committee, while factory operatives "have been compelled to toil on, unnoticed by those in power...remembered only when their vote was necessary to the office holder's welfare." Carey insisted that things were different now. Factory operatives, "knowing that this legislature is made up of men whose interests are the same as their own, appeal to us with a degree of hope amounting almost to a certainty."⁴⁵

Such confidence was misplaced. Reflecting the strength of labor reformers in the 1855 General Court, the committee's bill called for a legally binding ten-hour day for all categories of workers in certain industries including textiles. It was a daring and uncompromising bill that entailed considerable risk since the textile industry had voluntarily adopted an eleven hour rule at the height of previous ten-hour agitation in 1853. In 1855 many eleven hour petitions, signed by folk who sincerely wished to codify the industry's political expediency, were introduced by legislators who probably saw the eleven hour alternative through equally expedient eyes. Labor reformers were well aware that an eleven-hour bill would probably pass. But labor veterans held out

for a ten-hour bill because it originated in the labor movement, not the counting houses of the textile industry, and because “there may be a disposition on the part of some of the mills to return to the old system.” The ten-hour question embodied a twenty-year struggle in Massachusetts between labor and a baronial textile industry backed by Boston’s financial citadels. Indeed, the committee exempted from their bill many categories of workers in the powerful railroad industry. Before the final report, several more categories of workers were hastily added to the exemption clause, including employees of glass works, blast furnaces, paper mills, operators of electric telegraphs, and night watchmen.⁴⁶

Thus amended, the bill sailed through the house by better than a two-to-one margin. The senate was the stumbling block. After a hostile special proviso amendment failed, the bill’s chances suddenly and unexpectedly dimmed. A last ditch eleven-hour amendment was summarily rejected, evidently put forward to stave off a total loss. The original bill was then defeated handily, with the crucial votes coming from the labor movement’s backyard: the counties of Essex (4 nays out of 5 votes), Middlesex (4 of 6), and Worcester (3 of 4). Such a pattern of opposition is intriguing in light of Charles Cowley’s tantalizing but unprovable charge that “corporation gold” was used to “line the pockets” of lawmakers before the final vote. In any case, the failure galled labor. An Amesbury ten-hour advocate wrote: “It is evident that the laboring classes have been mistaken in their men, so far as the Senate is concerned.”⁴⁷

Soon thereafter Massachusetts labor reformers experienced another crushing defeat on an issue unrelated to commercial policy but close to their hearts: the secret

ballot. Putnam Taft reported a bill from the House Judiciary Committee that revived the 1851 and 1852 secret ballot provisions of the state's election codes, both of which had been repealed in 1853. The house passed the bill, only to see it languish in the Senate Judiciary Committee, headed by none other than Elihu C. Baker. Baker finally reported out a negative recommendation, thus imperiling this second plank of labor's unwritten platform in Massachusetts. The senate first accepted Baker's report, but upon reconsideration, rejected it and sent the bill to a second reading. However, that vote was only successful because senate president Henry W. Benchley, a Worcester Know Nothing with ties to the city's nativist labor movement, cast the tie-breaker. The victory was Pyrrhic, for the vote demonstrated that the bill lacked enough support to safely carry the senate, a fact that doomed the bill in subsequent efforts to force a final vote.⁴⁸

It seems likely that Baker's opposition to the secret ballot bill was motivated by political calculations. Baker's star was rising in the fledgling American party; he would soon receive a berth on the party's Executive Committee. Perhaps Baker and other Americans believed that the open ballot procedure, in the context of the discipline the movement had shown in the election of 1854, was one way for them to maintain that discipline as the movement completed the transition to an open political party. Whatever the case, political pressure certainly impacted the prospects for labor legislation in all three states, especially in light of the considerable resources that industrial interests could provide any fledgling political party. After all, even in Massachusetts labor was but one of several overlapping factions and tendencies in the

Know Nothing movement. Of course, that Know Nothings even contemplated hours' legislation is quite significant in and of itself. It is equally true that statutory regulation of child labor was an important early breakthrough in the history of social policy, one that Gilded Age reformers would subsequently build upon, and just as certainly reveals a broader reform sensibility in play among the Know Nothings. Still it must also be acknowledged that powerful currents against labor interests influenced the majority of the Know Nothing movement. In all three states thoroughgoing labor reform was either defeated or side-stepped in favor of fairly timid measures that left adult factory operatives with scarce little to celebrate.

We can see the limits of Know Nothing labor reform by turning to the question of enforcement. A major impulse behind the 1855 legislation was the failure of previous laws regulating the length of the workday. Such legislation, though under increasing ideological attack, broadly accorded with traditional police power theory in American political economy and jurisprudence. Generally, the more regulatory aspects of the police power were traditionally vested in local communities. Out of deference to the principle of popular sovereignty, state government normally limited itself to delegating regulatory functions to local governments. Thus empowered, local officials crafted specific regulations for public health and safety, public markets, liquor licensing and consumption, and so forth, as their community demanded. The extent of regulation by local governments, as well as the acquiescence of state governments and the courts in such activities, proves the myth of nineteenth-century *laissez faire*.⁴⁹ This distributive culture of governance also had its political benefits, namely, allowing

political elites to mold power to particular social and political contexts. Thus not incidentally the broader goal of harmony in matters of governance was also (ideally) accommodated by the distribution of the public's coercive power to local authorities who were subject to close community scrutiny.

By passing statewide legislation governing child labor, it can be said that the Know Nothings gestured towards a reconceptualization of the locus of the police power in an industrializing society, namely, in the direction of greater centralized state authority. As we shall see, the Know Nothings' prohibition statutes carried a similar potential. Yet in the final analysis this was a gesture principally in the realm of theory, not substance. The enforcement mechanisms of the 1855 labor laws, though more explicit than earlier statutes, relied on the traditional idea that local authorities were best suited to wield the police power on the public's behalf. Thus the Pennsylvania law entreated all "ward, borough and township constables...to attend to the strict observance" of the ten-hour law. The Connecticut and Massachusetts laws stipulated that violators pay a fine into the town treasury for the support of common schools, thereby relying principally on the monetary incentive of local school officials in detecting violations.⁵⁰ Though important in laying an intellectual foundation for later social and labor reformers, the Know Nothing view of the state as evidenced in these laws did not break fundamentally from customary bodies of thought or practice.

This becomes clear in an episode of labor conflict in Connecticut that followed quickly on the heels of the 1855 ten-hour law. As the law took effect in August, supporters expected that it would be "complied with cheerily by employers, and

insisted upon by operatives.”⁵¹ Soon however a wave of strikes swept across eastern Connecticut as millhands demanded enforcement of the ten-hour rule while employers held fast to the proviso clause. Concentrated at Willimantic, North Windham, and Norwich, labor protest in eastern Connecticut was furious but short-lived that summer. Evidence on these outbursts is sketchy, but a few key points are clear. First and most important, the strikes resulted from the millhands’ newfound confidence instilled by the passage of the ten-hour law. The actions of government figured prominently in public life during the 1850s, giving rise to popular efforts to concretize the rights that the state had formally recognized but left at the mercy of private negotiation and administration. Second, the strikes rapidly lost momentum due to public apathy, resulting in few if any gains for millworkers. At several mills, workers offered compromise proposals for an eleven-hour day during the week and a nine-hour Saturday, but management at most mills refused such overtures. The industry stubbornly fought the supposedly binding eleven-hour day for minors because abiding it would have strengthened the movement for reduced hours for all millhands.⁵²

Ten-hour supporters were left with few options but to appeal to public opinion, presumably enshrined in the law. According to labor reformers the “necessity of the law is made apparent by the deliberate opposition” it generated. “The public have a deep interest in this subject,” wrote Andrew Stark in an attempt to galvanize local support for the workers’ cause. But in the face of industry opposition and most importantly public indifference, particularly among local elites whose support was crucial, frustrated reformers could do little but issue toothless proclamations that “rich

men, or corporations, which violate this law will find very little favor with the public.”⁵³ With protest easily snuffed out the 1855 ten-hour law became another in a series of unenforced and largely symbolic antebellum labor laws. The specifics of Connecticut’s law and the conceptualization of society and the state that underlay it were paradigmatic of the limits of reform in the distributive culture of governance.

To say this is to put Know Nothing government into perspective. We gain still greater perspective if we examine other dimensions of commercial policy under Know Nothing government, namely the regulation and promotion of business. Massachusetts provides a most interesting and contradictory case. On the one hand, Massachusetts Know Nothings created an Insurance Commission with broad powers of inspection and oversight, and a state Pilots’ Commission that superseded local oversight of Boston Harbor. Traditional police power doctrine concerning the public’s interest in well-regulated commerce informed the creation of these commissions. These acts originated in the Committee on Mercantile Affairs and Insurance, and the accompanying reports attest to this committee’s keen concern for the public welfare. In the case of the Insurance Commission, committee chairman James M. Hood pointed to the deficient “security offered by the policies of a number of different [insurance] companies” in the state. Consumers were threatened by the rampant speculation of the industry. “This is notoriously the case with companies that most anxiously solicit business, allure it with low premiums, and issue policies with little caution as to the risk,” wrote Hood. For precedent Hood invoked the state’s Banking Commission, “universally regarded as successful” and necessary. To Hood and his colleagues, it was “obvious” that “without

any supervision of State authority," the public's confidence in the insurance industry and the safety of policyholders would be jeopardized.⁵⁴

In many other areas of commercial policy, however, the Massachusetts Know Nothings submerged their protean public vision in a sea of particularistic policymaking that served aggressively promotional ends. Their general incorporation law for manufactories doubled the maximum capital that could be incorporated under the law and gave corporations the power to issue special stock, something they had long coveted. Moreover, the 1855 legislature granted 21 charters or capital increases to banks and 20 to insurance companies, the latter a pre-Civil War record. The number of special laws, new charters, and charter extensions for railroads tallied 54, another unprecedented figure. Indeed, railroad promotion took on near manic dimensions in 1855. The General Court gave several local governments the power to subscribe to railroad stock, and passed legislation that extended state loans to the Western Railroad and the Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad. Those last two bills were thwarted only because Governor Gardner's vetoes were upheld in close votes.⁵⁵

That railroad interests should receive such solicitude from the General Court is not surprising. During debates on Gardner's veto of the bill to aid the Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad, lobbyists mingled with lawmakers on the house floor, prompting an order that the floor be cleared. The scene recalled Henry Wilson's words two years earlier: "[W]e have annually here around the State House, numbers of men who come here as the agents of these [railroad] corporations, either to accomplish something for themselves, or to defeat somebody else."⁵⁶ Indeed, railroads played a

prominent role in shaping Know Nothing policymaking. The issue of safety at railroad crossings is illustrative. Since the early 1850s dangerous railroad crossings in the city of Boston and adjacent towns had sparked public outcry for bridges and underpasses to accommodate safe travel and commerce on the Hub's bustling avenues and streets. In 1854 the General Court appointed a commission to examine the problem. It heard testimony from the railroads, "represented either by their officers or by counsel," and presented a detailed plan to the 1855 General Court that called for several route changes and construction of a series of tunnels and bridges to eliminate the remainder of the more heavily trafficked crossings. The railroads were to pick up the bill for these changes and receive eminent domain grants and charter extensions for the new corridors. As committees in both houses considered the report and various other options, lines that promised to be affected by the outcome, including the Boston & Lowell and the Eastern Railroad, weighed in at the capitol with requests that any laws regulating crossings should be statewide in scope, so as to burden all railroads equally. This was the political context behind the 1855 "Act to Secure the Safety of Passengers at Railroad Crossings," which required all engines to stop completely before proceeding slowly through a crossing, and "An Act to Prevent Obstructions to Highways and Townways by Railroads," which specified that railroads be financially responsible for building bridges and underpasses at crossings with major highways throughout the state.⁵⁷

Another 1855 law required railroads to post adequate security for assessment proceedings prior to seizing land through eminent domain, clearly a victory for property

owners. However, several more sweeping reform proposals were simply rejected by the vested committees as “inexpedient,” including a general incorporation law for railroads, unlimited liability for stockholders in railroad companies, the erection of gates and the employment of flagmen at all street crossings, and pro rata regulation of passenger fares and freight schedules. The one exception, a bill for a state Railroad Commission, modeled on the state’s Banking Commission, was rushed onto the senate floor in the final days of the session, only to be defeated 20 to 1. In fact, the state’s railroads had little to fear from the bill; the House Committee on Railroads and Canals had already killed the measure with a negative report. Even a proposal to prohibit railroad companies from hiring persons of “known drinking habits” was uncharacteristically squelched in this militantly anti-liquor General Court.⁵⁸

The question of the proper balance of regulation and promotion of business interests also bulked large in Connecticut’s 1855 General Assembly. Under Know Nothing government the powers of the state’s Railroad Commission, founded in 1853, were expanded; one act stipulated that railroads obtain a certificate from the commissioners attesting to the road’s safety before it could open for public travel. The 1855 legislature also reestablished the independent three member Banking Commission, originally created in 1837. Empowered to inspect the books of private banks, verify specie reserves, monitor currency levels, and make annual reports to the General Assembly, the Banking Commission had been abolished in 1854 because the state’s banking interests viewed it and other regulations as overbearing and unnecessary. For its part, the 1855 assembly viewed these commissions as public

necessities and legally justifiable under incorporation and police power doctrine. The 1855 Railroad Commission noted that much of the capital controlled by the state's railroads "has been furnished by persons of limited means, in small amounts," and that "in too many instances these investments have proved disastrous." Because so many middle class folk, "unskilled in the affairs of corporate bodies," had money invested in railroads, it was "necessary that the same legislative body which created these corporations, should throw around the same safeguards, and exercise the same supervision over their financial affairs, which are considered necessary to guard and protect other public interests."⁵⁹

In addition to extending the police power over these powerful industries, the 1855 legislature resisted pleas from both for additional charters and capital increases. Here lawmakers bucked powerful recent trends; 65 banks and 20 railroads received private charters, or were authorized to increase capital, in the 1850s alone. In 1855, only one additional bank and a one railroad was chartered, though 11 banks, previously chartered under the 1852 free banking law, were re-chartered as private banks. Regarding banks, the 1855 General Assembly seemed to follow the recommendation of their newly reconstituted Banking Commission. An avalanche of petitions for bank charters fell upon lawmakers, but in its annual report the Bank Commission stated "there is sufficient capital in the state; they therefore are opposed to the charter of any new banks."⁶⁰

While a broad consensus characterized charter policy and government commissions in 1855, a major controversy erupted over the state's free banking law.

The 1852 law was a sore point for the state's banking interests. The act stipulated that banks chartered under its provisions transfer public securities to the State Treasurer, who then issued special "circulating notes" to each bank equal to the market value of the stocks. The circulating notes were engraved and printed under the authority of the Treasurer and registered with the state's seal; the Treasurer held the stocks as security against any bank that might suspend redemption of its notes. In addition, the law required a minimum specie reserve equal to 10% of circulation, and capped capitalization at \$1 million. Because of these regulations, most private investors avoided the free banking law, continuing to petition for, and receive, private charters of incorporation through the 1853 and 1854 legislative sessions. Champions of the banking community viewed the law's restrictions and procedures as "harassing legitimate commercial activity," and launched an intense lobbying effort in 1854 and 1855 to rescind it.⁶¹

Meanwhile many of the law's supporters, including 11 of the 13 banks that were incorporated as "free banks" under its provisions, also clamored for repeal. For one thing, the recent recession had sent the bond market into a tailspin, restricting the amount of currency that the free banks could issue against their securities. Economic recession gave powerful momentum to the effort to repeal the free banking law, now portrayed as irresponsibly anti-bank and an obstacle to recovery. Others pointed to the inconsistencies in Connecticut's two-tiered banking policy. As the *Hartford Courant* put it, "we believe ours is the only state presenting the anomaly of an effective Free Banking law, and new [special] bank charters being granted at the same time."⁶²

With opposition mounting and support wavering, the 1855 Bank Commission recommended repeal of the 1852 law. The legislature again followed the commission's lead, voting for repeal in a tight vote. A majority of Know Nothing legislators backed repeal, but the crucial margin came from Democrats, about one-quarter of whom broke with their party and voted with the repealers. Once again banking in Connecticut was to be conducted exclusively through special incorporation. In this way, Connecticut's banking industry achieved a major victory. And in a related measure, the 1855 legislature also increased the amount of capital and deposits that a Connecticut bank could loan out of state, a clear victory for Hartford-based institutions with interests in western railroads.⁶³

However, the 1855 assembly passed additional measures related to banking policy that were designed to raise revenue and ensure sound banking in a volatile and capital intensive economy. In the same bill that sanctioned increases in the amount of out of state loans, the legislature capped a bank's indebtedness and circulation at 25% of capital "actually paid in." This was a new, more restrictive cap that aimed to curb note over-issue. In the past, private bank charters had routinely included provisions that limited indebtedness, but normally to 50% of capital stock paid in. In the free banking repeal law, the General Assembly included a condition that all free banks must first deposit a "bonus" of 2% of its capital stock into the state treasury before receiving the special charter. Later in the 1855 session, this bonus requirement was expanded to cover all future banks chartered through 1857. The banking community considered the

bank bonus law a blow to the industry. One commentator denounced it as “all wrong in both theory and practice and a disgrace to Connecticut legislation.”⁶⁴

Connecticut’s 1855 session thus produced a mixed record on banking policy. The banking community was relieved of what it perceived as onerous regulation and was given the uniform policy it demanded; proponents of greater regulation could point to the refurbished Bank Commission and certain other minimal standards of sound banking. And with the general bank bonus law, the legislature affirmed a commitment to general legislation designed with some broader public end in mind. Prior to the mid-1850s, bonuses were irregularly imposed on banks. The provisions of these early bonuses, furthermore, reflected the changing character of public policymaking in Connecticut. Before 1840, bank bonuses were almost always for a particular economic project such as the purchase of new railroad stock or money for river and harbor improvements. Bank bonuses were thus a means for legislators to exact concessions from banking interests and further fund popular development projects. By the late 1840s and early 1850s, if banks were required to pay them at all, bonuses were without exception designated for charitable or social reform purposes such as the State Normal School or local libraries or hospitals.⁶⁵ The 1855 bank bonus law, in contrast, required all banks to pay bonuses directly into the state treasury. Bonus monies were no longer tied to some specific economic or benevolent project; they were deposited into the state treasury and became part of the general operating fund. Bonuses were no longer imposed intermittently, at the caprice of some legislative committee or faction; they became a routine requirement for all banks.

If lawmakers in Massachusetts and Connecticut achieved something of a balance between the regulation and promotion of business in 1855, those in Pennsylvania sided more with promotion. Under pressure to reduce the state debt, the 1855 General Assembly did enact legislation establishing procedures for the collection of bank taxes by requiring annual reports of capital stock and dividends to the Auditor General. But plans to impose bonuses on banks and restrict the emission of small notes, invariably proposed by the Democratic minority, met with defeat on the senate and house floors. A railroad safety bill passed the Democratic senate only to be quashed by the Know Nothing house, while proposals for regulating passenger and freight rates on railroads failed to make it out of committee.⁶⁶ More revealing still is the 1855 Pennsylvania Assembly's record on business charter policy. Dozens of applications for new bank charters and capital increases to existing banks appeared before the 1855 legislature, prompting Governor Pollock to warn legislators against an "extravagant, improper or unreasonable increase of banks and banking capital." From the grassroots nativists decried the horde of lobbyists who brought scores of bank and railroad charter applications to the halls of the capitol. Stephen Miller, believing first-time lawmakers especially vulnerable to lobby pressure, cautioned Know Nothing assemblymen to "avoid a professional *borer* as you would the itch."⁶⁷

Few lawmakers in 1855 could resist the temptation to scratch the special charter itch. The assembly enacted a record 31 special laws incorporating new banks and insurance companies or granting extensions and capital increases to existing ones. Most new bank charters, furthermore, were granted for 20 year periods, an unusually

long charter life.⁶⁸ Party cohesion scores on a selected number of bank charters suggests the cross pressures that produced this liberal batch of special legislation (Table B.19). Throughout the session some senate and house Democrats of the old Jacksonian school and Know Nothings with Whig roots voted consistently pro- or anti-bank, but a majority evinced no clear pattern of voting that might indicate a strong ideological position on special incorporation. Rather, regional considerations and political calculations appeared to shape legislators' decisions. Petitions for economic improvements invariably argued that they constituted a public necessity, implying that local communities were the appropriate arbiters of questions involving economic development. Prodded by such entreaties, lawmakers appeared willing to lend support for projects outside their district in order to secure the support of colleagues for projects demanded by their own constituents.⁶⁹

Thus the culture of logrolling, especially pronounced in a large and diverse state like Pennsylvania, decisively affected policy outputs on commercial policy, a fact that was not lost on local nativists. As the session unfolded grassroots commentary on the 1855 legislature turned increasingly negative. Despite assertions that Know Nothing legislators would resist the beguiling influence of lobbyists, Stephen Miller quickly grew disenchanted as borers easily swayed assemblymen into supporting a large increase in banking capital. "The reckless facility with which the Legislature of Pennsylvania--and especially the House of Representatives--thrust through the applications for new banking institutions," he wrote in one representative editorial, "has alarmed the people, startled the commercial community, and astonished every

reflecting citizen;--our legislators, monied tyrants and unscrupulous monopolists excepted." In search of an explanation for the flurry of special bills, Miller turned to the culture of distributive politics. Even prudent lawmakers had their own "peculiar interests" to advance, he acknowledged, so they feared "to interpose [against special bills] lest they may arouse a spirit of retaliation when their locality is to be provided for." Miller's analysis was on the mark, and could well have described his own position when it came to banks in Dauphin County. While Miller recognized that a frenzy of bank chartering could tarnish the reform credentials of his fledgling party, without apparent irony he backed bills for new banks in Harrisburg because the "business and population of the county has greatly increased since 1850, while the banking capital has not."⁷⁰

The Know Nothings' record on special incorporation proved especially troubling because of their professed intentions to purge special interests from government. Critics juxtaposed the Know Nothing record with earlier reform pronouncements, raising doubts about the integrity of Know Nothing leadership. An excellent illustration of how the Know Nothings' distributive proclivities reacted back on the movement is the case of the Norwich Gas Light Company, chartered by the 1855 Connecticut General Assembly amid intense local controversy. The charter gave Norwich Gas a monopoly over the supply of gas to the city, leaving the Know Nothing legislature open to criticism that it had worked to "crush out the rights of the citizens of Norwich."⁷¹

The story of the Norwich Gas Light Company begins in 1851, when inventor Frederick W. Treadway was granted a fifteen year monopoly privilege by the Norwich Common Council to provide natural gas to the city. Treadway's company commenced laying a network of pipes to serve both commercial and residential needs. Trouble developed quickly, however. Residents complained of leaking pipes and noxious odors from the coal-based gas; shade trees died along roads where the company had laid pipes; waste from Treadway's firm backed up into cellars, kitchens, and baths. Several lawsuits for recovery of damages failed because limited liability doctrine and the city's failure to secure indemnity against damages sustained in the course the company's normal operations. Thus popular pressure built to halt further installation of gas lines by Norwich Gas, something the Norwich Common Council ordered in the summer of 1852. But Treadway ignored the order, and in February 1854 the council voted unanimously to revoke Treadway's license.⁷²

Treadway responded by hiring a coterie of lawyers, including soon-to-be Know Nothings Edmund Perkins and H. H. Starkweather, to lobby for a state charter, which the 1854 assembly granted. With his new charter, Treadway insisted that the monopoly privilege granted under the initial city license still held. Outraged residents backed a movement to organize a competitor to Treadway's company under the state's joint stock law. The new company quickly rose \$60,000 in stock subscriptions from area residents. Threatened by this competition, Treadway's lawyers filed a legal challenge to the joint stock company, claiming it violated Norwich Gas's exclusive monopoly right. Meanwhile, Treadway, Perkins, and Starkweather halted their competitor's

operations by leading gangs of workmen to the joint stock company's excavation sites and filling in the ditches.⁷³

The issue was apparently settled in January 1855 when the circuit court ruled against Treadway's company, declaring the monopoly granted under the original license unconstitutional because the city's charter did not give it the power to create monopolies. With the legal dispute now settled, in March the Norwich Common Council voted to grant the joint stock company the right to lay its pipes again. But Treadway, Perkins, and company were undeterred. Treadway again sent work gangs to thwart the joint stock company's operations, while Perkins, newly elected Know Nothing representative from Norwich, drew up an amendment to Norwich Gas's charter that would grant it exclusive monopoly privileges. Later, enemies of Treadway's company accused Perkins, a longtime Free Soiler, of joining the Know Nothings and securing election to the General Assembly merely to win a monopoly for Norwich Gas. While such charges probably exaggerate things, there is no doubt that Perkins' election positioned him well to gain the monopoly privileges that his client had long coveted. It also gave munition to opponents who wanted to show the hollowness of the Know Nothings' reform claims.⁷⁴

A storm of protest erupted as word of Perkins' efforts in Hartford reached Norwich. Opponents raised a remonstrance against Perkins' charter amendment, complete with official resolutions of the Norwich Common Council.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, residents geared up for the June municipal election that turned on the controversy. The Know Nothings nominated a ticket that opponents quickly dubbed the "Monopoly

Ticket” because “nearly every man on [it] is an “old Gas man.” Opponents rejoined with a “New Gas,” or “Equal Rights” ticket that brought together Democrats, old-line Whigs and nascent Republicans under a banner proclaiming “equal privileges to both companies--exclusive privileges to none.” By now reports filled the local press that “some of the most active and unscrupulous members” of the local Know Nothing movement joined “for no other reason than to break down the Joint Stock Company.” Many rank-and-file Know Nothings “were opposed to such a perversion and abuse of the power and influence of the Order,” a fact borne out by the difficulty the “Old Gas” ticket had in winning the local Know Nothing nomination. The nominations split the Know Nothing caucus almost evenly. The unusually intense municipal election was a disaster for Norwich’s Know Nothing movement. Unable to galvanize its rank and file, the Know Nothings suffered abysmal turnout and won less than 35% of the popular vote, a drop of over 20 points from April’s statewide election. In the aftermath, more than one observer claimed that many Know Nothings had rejoined their old party via the anti-monopoly movement.⁷⁶

With the municipal elections less than a week old, the Committee on Corporations Other than Banks reported out Perkins’ resolution for a monopoly privilege for Treadway’s company. In one of the few instances of even moderate polarization on business charter policy in 1855, the house passed the bill with a majority of Democrats opposed and a majority of Know Nothings in favor. The senate followed suit after adding an amendment, subsequently agreed to by the house, which capped the price that Norwich Gas could charge customers. The issue split the New

London County delegation, almost entirely Know Nothing or Know Nothing-affiliated, reflecting the tumult the issue generated locally. Franklin A. Palmer, a Know Nothing representative from Stonington and opponent of the bill, later recounted that the Committee on Incorporations initially planned to report the bill with a negative recommendation only to change course at the last minute with a near unanimous endorsement. Palmer was nonplussed; local critics seized on his suggestive account to attack the secret and mysterious workings of the Know Nothings. Led by scheming and unscrupulous men, the Know Nothings, said one critic, “originally intended as an agent for the advancement and security of popular rights, was converted into an engine for *crushing out* popular rights, for the benefit of a private corporation.”⁷⁷

Community Mores

In many respects the Know Nothings were most successful breathing life into their vision of the public good in the area of community mores. Fearing a papal conspiracy against American republicanism, Know Nothing office holders vigorously built up the Catholic “threat” with the clear intent to strike it down and earn popular approval, even if their nativist policies overall were less severe than their rhetoric. In Boston, Massachusetts, Governor Gardner opened his inaugural by reciting immigration statistics. He concluded that “the times are peculiarly propitious for the development of this great American movement,” evidently for the benefit of his slow listeners. From there he urged the Know Nothing General Court to abide “the great

primary principles of our government, and...the sentiments and purposes of its founders.” Like the tyranny of the British Crown, the hydra-headed evils of immigration and political Roman Catholicism “tend naturally to attract and bind together the people in one united national, not party, movement.” The nativist theme was especially prominent in Gardner’s address, reflecting the political priorities of His Excellency, but his basic message was restated in Harrisburg and Hartford. Control of the machinery of state gave Know Nothings a platform to cement certain emotional identifications in the public’s mind. Bruiting about and acting upon nativist prejudice would reify the movement’s campaign abstractions. Voters would have some tangible sense that the Know Nothings could deliver on promises to reconstitute a larger moral purpose in governance.⁷⁸

Know Nothings in all three states acted upon nativist prejudice in ways that went well beyond the symbolic. Pennsylvania Know Nothings, backed by a majority of their Democratic opponents, enacted a church tenure act that prohibited clerical authorities from holding church property and transferring it to successors, a blow at the Catholic practice. Connecticut’s 1855 assembly required all church property be vested in the laity through incorporation. To assure that the measure apply to Catholic property only, exemptions were given to the Methodists, Shakers, and Jews. Violations could result in seizure of land by the state. In addition, Governor Minor dissolved several Irish militia companies, while the assembly passed legislation stripping state courts of the power to naturalize aliens, passed a literacy test for suffrage as an amendment to the constitution (it had been approved the previous year), and initiated a

constitutional amendment of their own: a 21 year naturalization period. Passing easily, the 21 year amendment would need a two-thirds majority in 1856 before it could be presented to the public for ratification.⁷⁹

Nowhere was the nativist assault more thoroughgoing than in Massachusetts. Operating without opposition in the General Court, the Bay State Know Nothings abolished Irish militia companies; dismissed Irish state workers; banned the teaching of foreign languages and required daily readings from the King James Bible in the state's public schools; banned the spending of state funds for parochial schools; prohibited state courts from naturalizing aliens; and advanced the ideals of American republicanism by creating a special joint legislative committee to investigate alleged acts of "villainy, injustice, and wrong" in convents and parochial schools. The farcical Nunnery Committee, as it came to be called, eventually was the source of a major public scandal that at least made for entertaining reading in Massachusetts and beyond. In the meantime, Massachusetts Know Nothings dusted off an old Free Soil-inspired statute, the 1852 pauper removal act, and ordered the Board of Alien Commissioners to briskly enforce its draconian provisions. Hundreds of indigent immigrants were summarily shipped back to the Old World; a beaming Governor Gardner boasted the state had saved over \$100,000. As in Connecticut, Massachusetts Know Nothings also initiated a series of constitutional amendments that would require approval of subsequent General Courts. One prohibited anyone who held "allegiance to a foreign potentate" from serving in government, two others withheld the right to vote or hold public office from all who had not domiciled in the country for at least 21 years. Only

the most extreme nativist proposals, such as an amendment to the state constitution that would have prevented the foreign-born from holding office *for life*, failed to win favor with the 1855 General Court.⁸⁰

The movement's millennial Protestantism also fueled its drive to impose stricter codes of public morality on an ethnically and socially diversifying society. Massachusetts Know Nothings were particularly active in this area, enacting legislation regulating billiard rooms and bowling alleys and imposing tougher penalties for proprietors of brothels, gambling houses, and speakeasies.⁸¹ But it was the crusade against liquor that most clearly reflected the Know Nothings' view of the state as arbiter of public morals. The temperance movement was a prominent constituency in the Know Nothing movement, though its relative influence varied from state to state. Anti-liquor reformers were not disappointed by Know Nothing government. In Connecticut Governor Minor hailed the 1854 prohibition statute and warned that any effort to repeal it would be "detrimental to the best interest of the State." Likewise Governor Pollock and Governor Gardner urged passage of strict anti-liquor laws. As Gardner put it: "The evils of intemperance...drain our treasury, and swell the long catalogue of pauperism and suffering. They are universally recognized as a legitimate object of legislation."⁸²

Cues from the executive branch dovetailed with grassroots pressure to produce tough anti-liquor legislation in both Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. In Massachusetts lawyers from the ranks of the state temperance movement assisted lawmakers in drafting a densely packed twenty-page statute aimed at answering the constitutional

problems of enforcement that the state supreme court had identified in the search and seizure clause of the earlier 1852 prohibition law. Pennsylvania assemblymen voted nearly unanimously to ban the sale and consumption of liquor on the Sabbath, and in a much closer vote, passed a law that trebled licensing fees for most grog and ale shops and prohibited the sale of liquor in quantities less than one quart. The provisions of this so-called “Jug Law” targeted recreational beer houses, centers of working-class German and Irish sociability and political culture. The close vote on the bill reflected more than Democratic opposition. Prohibition forces had originally insisted on a total ban, and looked upon remedies like the Jug Law as half-way measures. But because of the defeat of the prohibition plebiscite in 1854, most Know Nothing leaders demurred on complete prohibition. As it became clear that the votes were simply not there for a prohibition bill, the State Prohibition Committee grudgingly gave its approval to the Jug Law. Nevertheless some prohibitionist lawmakers dissented from the Jug Law on grounds that its licencing guidelines amounted to state endorsement of the liquor trade.⁸³

The constitutionality of unleashing the state’s police power on the manufacture and sale of liquor was never doubted by most Know Nothings. When it came to state-society relations in the sphere of public morals, most probably agreed with Stephen Miller: “When men have been led from the right, the hand of society must be interposed to preserve them.” Indeed, this formulation perfused the Know Nothing defense of state coercion over the consumption and distribution of liquor. The traditional options open to liquor reformers--moral suasion or local option or licensing-

-had failed to decrease Americans' appetite for liquor, and more important, to stem the social problems attendant upon the lucrative trade. Advocates of liquor regulation maintained that sweeping statewide laws were necessary to correct the abuses. Because the "making of money" was less "important than the morals, virtue and the peace of the community," the state's interest in promoting the public good trumped the private property rights of liquor dealers and manufacturers.⁸⁴

But not everyone shared this expansive view of the police power. Discretion over liquor historically lay with local communities, either through the piecemeal licensing regime erected by local governments, or more diffusely, the efforts of voluntary temperance societies to change informal custom. Statewide prohibition statutes, like blanket laws regulating the length of the workday, thus deviated in principle from traditional conceptions of where power and authority resided. As legal historian William Novak has written: "State prohibition involved a distinctively upward shift in the locus of public decision-making power in the American polity." Indeed, in more than one state supreme courts overturned prohibition statutes by moving towards the doctrine of absolute private property rights *and* a more vigorous insistence on judicial review of statutory police power. Like the efforts of early labor reformers, prohibitionists ironically helped produced a "new private rights orientation" in American public life.⁸⁵

The effects of opposition were felt most immediately in the spotty enforcement of these laws coupled with (at least in some states) important political reactions to them. Despite their sweeping implications for state-society relations, enforcement of

these laws again turned on the compliance, or at least acquiescence, of locally constituted authority. For a brief time, in localities where the prohibitionist movement was strong, vigilance committees organized to ensure local enforcement, but the zeal for such activity dissipated by the late 1850s and just about disappeared with the coming of the Civil War. In Pennsylvania, where the Jug Law seemed a duplicitous attack on the urban working class, and to a lesser extent in Massachusetts, the Democratic opposition seized on the Know Nothings' anti-liquor statutes to re-energize its rank and file. The reaction was strongest in Pennsylvania, where many Democrats who had joined the reformist Know Nothings in 1854 recoiled at the elitist Jug Law, returned to their old party, and helped elect a Democratic majority in 1856.⁸⁶

Just as the Jug Law exacerbated differences within the Pennsylvania Know Nothings, so too nativist extremism in Massachusetts. The proximate cause of public reaction in Massachusetts was the Nunnery Committee, whose shenanigans acted as a prism through which critics focused public attention on the disastrous consequences of Know Nothing government. After a Boston paper published an exposé of the Nunnery Committee's boorish behavior in a Catholic boarding school, the General Court determined to launch an official fact-finding investigation. It was quickly disclosed that Boston representative Joseph Hiss, the state party's Grand Worshipful Instructor, had made ribald remarks to the nuns, while his committee billed the state for an expensive champagne dinner.

The revelations prompted a broader probe into the committee's activities. Evidence surfaced that Hiss, after a day of chasing evil at a Lowell convent, had

charged the Commonwealth for an evening of smoking, drinking, and sex with a local prostitute. Hiss's debauch was splashed across the pages of newspapers throughout the state. Indeed, probably no single subject elicited more press coverage in Massachusetts during spring 1855 than the spectacular buffoonery of Hiss and the Nunnery Committee. For many the case involved far more than the rogue act of one misguided party patriarch. Critics used the affair to illustrate how secret political management inevitably led to public disaster. The analysis of the *Lynn News* was typical. The Know Nothings' manner of electioneering "compels the people to vote blindly, [and will] always result in the election of such men as Hiss...whose elevation to places for which they are morally and mentally so unfit has caused an ineffaceable stain upon the fair fame of Massachusetts." In Essex County, staunch Know Nothing editors at first tried to defend the Nunnery Committee, but fell silent when the report of the "Hiss Affair" broke. Critics interpreted the efforts of some house Know Nothings to prevent the story from going public as a sign of official party "whitewashing." It seemed the organization was more interested in the "*future prospects of Know-Nothingism*" than "the honor of Massachusetts." Under intense scrutiny the house, after prolonged debate, voted to expel Hiss.⁸⁷

While predictions of the order's imminent demise in the wake of the Hiss Affair were patently premature, there can be little doubt of its long-term negative impact upon the movement, at least in Massachusetts. Of course, the Know Nothings could and did point to a long record of "reform" achievements in 1855. But the Nunnery Committee seemed to be the unparalleled example among many instances of Know Nothing

hypocrisy in government. Further compounding the order's long-term difficulties were a series of conflicts over slavery-related issues in the 1855 legislatures.

While all but a fraction of Know Nothings in the three states opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill (the dissenters from this view were most Democrats and the few single-minded nativists), divisions existed as to the movement's proper course in the growing sectional controversy. By 1855 the climate of public opinion, though clearly in transition, was such that thoroughgoing assaults on slavery still tarred one with the abolitionist brush. The northern mainstream, especially outside the New England states, was far more comfortable with antisouthernism than antislavery per se. Certainly the fact that Slave Power imagery resonated so widely by 1855 was no insignificant development for the broader antislavery cause. And for that antislavery had political nativism to thank, for to the extent that the Know Nothings in 1854-5 framed the Kansas-Nebraska act as one of many examples of how special interests intruded on governance to the detriment of the public interest, it can be argued that Know Nothing populism in the North, far more than any previous insurgent expression, popularized one of the principal idioms of the first political abolitionists. Still the early Know Nothings' ubiquitous anti-Slave Power rhetoric, coupled with the more occasional gestures towards radical antislavery doctrine by the movement's loose free soil faction, left them vulnerable to charges of sectional extremism. This dynamic weighed heavily on some in the upper echelons of the movement who wished to temper the Know Nothing's antislavery edge. They eyed the 1856 presidential campaign, when the support of southern Know Nothings would obviously be crucial. Those

Know Nothings who wished to put antisouthernism (or antislavery) atop the movement's list of public priorities clashed with the putative leadership of the American party over both the symbolism and substance of its emergent position on sectional issues. The lines of battle over slavery both within and without the American party were first drawn in the 1855 legislatures.

Slavery and slavery-related issues occasioned the least discord among Connecticut Know Nothings, testifying to the breadth of free soil sentiment in the movement in that state. Nevertheless a radical free soil faction failed in an early attempt to commit the Connecticut Know Nothings to a more uncompromising position. The Joint Special Committee on Federal Relations, headed by Norwich's Edmund Perkins, drafted resolutions strongly condemning the Kansas-Nebraska Act and civil strife in the Kansas territory; insisting upon the Federal government's right to legislate policy in the territories; and declaring that "Connecticut will never consent to the extension of Slavery" over the western territories. To head-off expected criticisms, the committee also included two resolutions stressing the state's commitment to sectional harmony and its willingness to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, despite that law's "odious character" and the people of Connecticut's wish that it be repealed through lawful political means. The resolutions sailed through the house and senate along strict party lines. Few Know Nothings opposed them. Not satisfied with the timid language on the Fugitive Slave Act, New Haven senator James Babcock, editor/proprietor of the New Haven *Palladium*, led an abortive effort to replace the preamble to the resolution with much sterner antislavery language. Though defeated

two to one, Babcock's preamble attracted support from all three New London County senators, a sign of the more radical orientation of eastern Connecticut. More significant, Babcock would emerge as one of the state's architects of the Republican party; the Babcock preamble was an early test of the lengths to which Connecticut Know Nothingism would go on the slavery issue.⁸⁸

If the slavery issue in the Connecticut 1855 assembly prompted only a brief glimpse of the divisions that would soon confound the Know Nothings, it produced far more serious and immediate problems in the capitals of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. The question in Pennsylvania turned on the choice of a United States Senator, which ended in a hopelessly deadlocked General Assembly. On the surface, the election of a U.S. Senator should not have been a problem for the Know Nothings. Those in the know said the order controlled over 90 of the 133 votes on joint ballot. But party factionalism was especially strong among Pennsylvania Know Nothings. Longtime Democratic leader Simon Cameron was the choice of a substantial Democratic-Know Nothing faction in the assembly. With a reputation for self-aggrandizement and political intrigue that few Pennsylvania politicians could match, Cameron nonetheless emerged as an early front runner for the senate seat. He had solid nativist credentials and spent the fall and winter of 1854-5 quietly cultivating ties and trading favors with leading Democratic and straight Know Nothings. The case for Cameron grew when Governor Pollock, a Whig-Know Nothing, tacitly endorsed him. The vast majority of ex-Whigs and some straight Americans, however, opposed any candidate of Democratic antecedents because untrustworthy on the slavery issue,

though they failed to unite behind a single candidate in opposition to Cameron. Cameron's assurances that he opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Pierce Administration, and would work to overturn the Fugitive Slave Law were met with skepticism among the Whig-Know Nothings.⁸⁹

Complicating a Cameron scenario was a lack of support in his home base of Dauphin and Lancaster counties. Stephen Miller remained non-committal throughout, while other area Know Nothings wrote letters exposing Cameron's role in drafting a series of Lancaster County Democratic resolutions that pledged fealty to the Pierce Administration. Lancaster's Thaddeus Stevens, who had joined the Know Nothings more out of disgust with the local Whig machine than love of nativist politics, assiduously worked behind the scenes to defeat Cameron. Thus when the Know Nothings convened their legislative caucus to choose a senatorial candidate, few could predict the outcome.⁹⁰

In the end Cameron's questionable antislavery credentials combined with his supporters' heavy-handed maneuvers to prevent his election. At the Know Nothing caucus pro-Cameron forces improved their man's chances by admitting a handful of legislators of dubious Know Nothing connections and by winning approval of a secret-ballot procedure. The latter move particularly irked Cameron's opponents, for rumors of bribery and pay-offs by Cameron's friends abounded, the insurgents hoping that an open vote might expose the culprits. Cameron's opponents nevertheless succeeded in preventing his nomination over five ballots. On the next ballot Cameron seemed to win the nomination, but it was quickly discovered that an extra vote had been cast. The

anti-Cameron men moved to adjourn the caucus, only to be ruled out of order by the chair. Twenty-nine legislators then walked out in protest. The downsized caucus proceeded to nominate Cameron.

A few days before the joint session convened, the bolters drafted a public circular explaining their action and vowing to oppose Cameron's election. Citing "corruption...behind the throne," the circular recounted the events of the Know Nothing caucus. Calling Cameron "one of the most intriguing, if not the most corrupt politician in the State," they asked whether or not "the people of Pennsylvania expect something more of the present Legislature than the election of an old party hack?" The seceders painted Cameron as a pro-slavery man. Claiming his record as "an American and Anti-Slavery Man...speaks for itself," the circular reprinted the Lancaster County Democratic resolutions as evidence of Cameron's deception and unfitness for the senate seat.⁹¹ Amid allegations of bribery and with Cameron's sectional loyalties in doubt among antislavery Know Nothings, the joint session deadlocked. On three ballots, Cameron averaged about 8 votes shy of the necessary majority. The assembly's 37 national Democrats mainly backed Charles Buckalew and some other lesser candidate, while over thirty Know Nothings scattered their votes, thus preventing a Cameron victory. Two weeks later the legislature tried again, but with Cameron's friends refusing to withdraw his candidacy, the result was the same. Finally, lawmakers agreed to adjourn the joint session without electing a U.S. senator.⁹²

The failure to elect a U.S. senator was a serious blow to the credibility of the new party. Even Know Nothing loyalists upbraided the legislative leadership for

having wasted so much time on the issue, only to end with Pennsylvania without its full complement of representation in Washington. More important, the imbroglio revealed the extent to which previous partisan identifications remained salient among Pennsylvania Know Nothings. Many Whig and Democratic Know Nothings lined up on opposite sides of Cameron's candidacy, and in the end preferred that the position go unfilled than compromise or see their adversaries win. It was a portentous sign of the movement's severe factionalism over the slavery issue.⁹³

In this light it is important to recognize the *weakness* of antislavery forces in Pennsylvania in 1855. The question of the relative strength of antislavery among the Pennsylvania Know Nothings is a tricky one, because most Know Nothings were certainly agreed on opposition to the Pierce Administration and the Nebraska bill. It is equally clear, however, that only a fraction believed antislavery deserved equal billing with nativism and political reform, to say nothing of putting it above all else. Thus while antislavery forces could point to Cameron's defeat as a victory for their cause, it constituted the only strong evidence that even a minority of Pennsylvania Know Nothing legislators sought to follow the lead of their Connecticut brothers on the politically vexatious slavery issue. Indeed, where Connecticut's Know Nothings united behind resolutions adopting a firm non-extension position, a similar resolution failed adoption in the Pennsylvania House, dominated by Know Nothings.⁹⁴

The overall weakness of antislavery in the Pennsylvania Know Nothing movement comes into sharper relief in light of the preponderance of uncompromising free soil sentiment among the majority of Massachusetts Americans. The 1855 General

Court sent Henry Wilson to the U.S. Senate, a well-known antislavery man of Free Soil antecedents. In overwhelming fashion it enacted one the nation's most rigorous personal liberty laws that aimed to prevent slave claimants from seizing runaways (and free blacks) in Massachusetts under the Fugitive Slave Law. The 1855 legislature also voted easily to remove Judge Edward G. Loring from his position as Suffolk County Probate Judge. The previous year Loring had ordered runaway slave Anthony Burns back to slavery under the Fugitive Slave Act, and his removal had become a cause célèbre among Massachusetts Free Soilers and abolitionists alike. In fact, a broad-based movement of antislavery radicals and abolitionists coordinated two massive grassroots petitions for Loring's ouster and a stringent personal liberty bill, by far the two largest petitions to appear before the 1855 General Court. With good reason abolitionist doyen William Lloyd Garrison proclaimed that the 1855 General Court had "trampled in the dust the temptations of pro-slavery Nationalism."⁹⁵

Slavery-related policy did not, however, pass the General Court without controversy. The election of Wilson occasioned some opposition from more conservative Know Nothings who doubted his nativist convictions. And though Wilson's antislavery credentials were impeccable--he was nominated in 1854 by the old Free Soilers as Massachusetts' first Republican gubernatorial candidate--many of Boston's Free Soil patricians viewed the "Natick Cobbler" as a scheming upstart. Indeed, Wilson's core base, Middlesex County's middling petty producer class, lay outside the orbit of Boston's fashionable antislavery salons. Moreover Wilson's deal with the Know Nothing leadership to withdraw from the 1854 governor's race in return

for the U.S. senate seat had enraged many Free Soil nabobs who remained hostile to Know Nothingism. Even more indicative of the divisions among Massachusetts Americans were Governor Gardner's vetoes of the personal liberty law and the Loring removal order. His Excellency had national aspirations, and hoped the vetoes would send a signal of moderation to Americans outside of Massachusetts. The Know Nothing legislature easily overrode the veto of the personal liberty bill, but failed in a close vote to remove Loring. The vetoes presaged a protracted struggle between pro-Gardner forces and more radical antislavery elements.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The Know Nothings' took control of government by translating the social and demographic transformations of the late antebellum era into failures of politics and governance. They had campaigned as antiparty reformers determined to oust the special interests and their political puppets from the key institutions of American public life. Once in power they brought forward an array of political economic and cultural policies and in many instances produced significant "reform" legislation. Indeed, many Know Nothings assessed their leadership's performance in government in positive terms, echoing the conclusion offered by the *New Haven Journal* at the end of Connecticut's 1855 session: "We do not know of any Legislature which has manifested so much independence of party interests, or has accomplished so much positive reform." To varying degrees Know Nothings in all three states could point to

meaningful reform policies that many had surely expected from a populist movement which drew its inspiration from the nineteenth-century's nonpartisan framework of public life.⁹⁷

Yet contradictions and divisions also marked Know Nothing government. A few Know Nothing leaders publicly acknowledged as much, while many who began 1855 either critical or carefully non-committal wasted no time exposing glaring inconsistencies. The Norwich gas controversy, in which Know Nothing leaders threw their influence behind an economic monopoly; the sorry spectacle of the Nunnery Committee, in which Know Nothing public officials abused power and made a mockery of the movement's professed morality and piety; charges of bribery and wire-pulling in Pennsylvania; extravagant expenditures in Massachusetts; salary increases; failed political economic reform; a penchant for private lawmaking--for good reason commentators noted how general laws "do not find the support...which it was supposed they would" among Know Nothing legislators.⁹⁸ At the very least, such evidence illustrated that government under the secret, oath-bound Know Nothings did not significantly differ from previous regimes.

This picture clarified further when critics took aim at Know Nothing patronage. Ordinarily patronage provoked little public commentary, for spoils constituted the currency of politics. But Know Nothings had campaigned on the theme that theirs was no ordinary time. If Know Nothings justifiably viewed patronage as a vestigial right of office, opponents excoriated these selfless reformers who "have become aware of the urgent necessity which exists for routing present incumbents from their posts of profit,

by taking the chairs themselves.” Massachusetts Governor Henry Gardner was especially skilled at dispensing patronage, solidifying friendships and loyalty that quickly turned the antiparty Know Nothing movement into a formidable political machine--one run in the interest of His Excellency. Know Nothings maintained, not without cause, that their appointments proved their antipartyism--former Democrats, Whigs, Free Soilers, and Native Americans all found government positions as the Know Nothings set about replacing the old party hacks with the new patriots. Others looked upon the scramble for lucre as old-fashioned office chasing. What should have been a fairly routine turnover of government posts became evidence that the movement did not want for the personally and politically ambitious. And certainly the praetorian moves of a Gardner or Wilson or Cameron reinforced these perceptions.⁹⁹

What had happened? Under Know Nothing auspices a cacophony of voices laid claim to the public good. To the extent that the Know Nothings' legislative record reveals a broader commitment to reform, it is because certain historically under-represented or disadvantaged interests gained entrée to the state through the movement. This was no small achievement: viewed as a whole, Know Nothing government demonstrated the movement's roots in and responsiveness to the changing political economic and social circumstances of late antebellum society. Nevertheless a great variety of competing interests rode into power under the Know Nothing banner, pulling the people's revolution in many directions. In the end the prevailing culture of governance trumped the populist promise in the antiparty ideal. In the process of governing, Know Nothings for the most part engaged in distributive politics. They

responded to an incongruous assortment of particularistic constituencies with policies and patronage that satisfied some, angered others, and added to the overall confusion about the movement's integrity and efficacy. As leaders maneuvered among conflicting currents of opinion, deep divisions were exposed. The result was that tensions and contradictions stand out as the defining feature of Know Nothing government.

More important, through their own actions in government, the Know Nothings had shown unmistakable signs of the very failures and special interest solicitude that had originally turned political nativism into the most successful populist insurgency in the nation's history. This was not a good omen for a movement that had won control of government in the name of the white Protestant folk. From the start the exercise of power set in motion a ruinous dialectic within the movement, a centrifuge which accelerated as northerners turned increasingly to the sectional crisis. Slavery along with state and local issues provoked a debilitating factionalism, while the absence of institutionalized culture of loyalty and discipline eventually undid the incipient party. As is well known, the Republican party reassembled the fragmented pieces of northern Know Nothingism into a durable and disciplined political movement, one that put the nation on a collision course to civil war. It remains for us to trace that process at the grassroots.

Notes

1. William Goodwin, *Goodwin's Annual Legislative Statistics of State Officers, Senate and House of Representatives, of Connecticut* (New Haven: The Compiler, 1855); *Harrisburg Morning Herald* 24 October 1854; *Boston Daily Courier* 14 October 1854. See also Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings & the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 127-8; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 76; Robert D. Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966), 123-29.
2. *Norwich Examiner*, 18 May 1855; *New London Daily Morning Star*, 7 February 1855; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 10 January 1855; *ibid.*, 3 January 1855.
3. For a fuller discussion of these points, see Ballard C. Campbell, *Representative Democracy: Public Policy and Midwestern Legislatures in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 113-9; L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Public Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 57-143; Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 21-33; 42-51; Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History* 66 (September 1979), 279-98; William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law & Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
4. "Inaugural Address of Governor Pollock," in *Papers of the Governors, 1845-1858, Pennsylvania Archives Fourth Series, Vol. VII* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1902), 794.
5. *Pennsylvania Archives, Fourth Series, Vol. VII*, 787.
6. "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents 1855, No. 3*, (Boston: State Printer, 1855), 23. See also *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: State Printer, 1855), 16-32.
7. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 127-35; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 87-91; Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," 156-167, and "Connecticut's Know-Nothings: A Profile," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 31 (1966), 84-90; Virginia Cardwell Purdy, "Portrait of a Know-Nothing Legislature: The Massachusetts General Court of 1855," (Ph.D. dissertation, The George Washington

University, 1970), 148-62. Purdy also found that 1855 was something of a turning point regarding legislative experience, for between 1856 and 1862, neophytes continued to enjoy higher rates of entry into the General Court than they had in the seven years prior to 1855.

8. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 132-3; Purdy, "Portrait of a Know-Nothing Legislature," 118.

9. "Committee Report," Acts-1855 File, Chapter 444: Original Bills, Massachusetts State Archives (MSA). See also Newburyport *Herald*, 21 March 1855; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 129-31; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 88-9; Purdy, "Portrait of a Know-Nothing Legislature," 262-5.

10. See especially, Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*.

11. Figures derived from *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1840-1860, (Harrisburg: State Printers, 1840-1860); *Public Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut*, 1840-1860, (Hartford: State Printer, 1840-1860); *Resolutions and Private Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut*, 1840-1860, (Hartford: State Printer, 1840-1860); *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1840-1860 (Boston: State Printers, 1840-1860).

12. The policy spheres presented in the tables and in the analysis below are appropriated from Campbell, *Representative Democracy*. For a methodological explanation of party cohesion and disagreement scores, see Appendix A.

13. Lex Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), Table 3.24, 382. For example, average Rice Index of Party Cohesion scores for Connecticut's Know Nothing or Know Nothing-affiliated lawmakers on mores policy ranged between 75 and 100, for commercial policy, 38 and 63. Party Disagreement scores were highest on mores (85), weakest on commerce, (33).

14. See for example Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 80-107; Campbell, *Representative Democracy*; Herbert Ershkovitz and William G. Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures During the Jacksonian Era," *Journal of American History* 58 (December 1971), 591-621.

15. In the 1855 Connecticut House, three antislavery resolutions produced the following cohesion scores: Know Nothings=100; Democratic-Know Nothings=85; Whig-Know Nothings=97; Free Soil-Know Nothings=100. See Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," 382. For the

Massachusetts House, see *Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives*, 1855, Mss., MSA.

16. Of course, this does not mean that economic or governmental issues necessarily lack symbolic properties. We can readily see, for example, that throughout the nineteenth century the tariff issue mediated an array of economic, social, and nationalistic (re: cultural) concerns that crossed class and regional lines. The Know Nothings' antiparty attack on party government rested on a similar flexibility borne of a variety of specific political and cultural circumstances. In the end, however, nativism and especially slavery, quintessential mores issues, emerged *in the 1850s* as public problems with the greatest symbolic adaptability, enabling political elites to forge distinctive political identities that became broadly shared in the mass electorate.

17. *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania*, 1855, 46-9. On the growth and lobbying efforts of the state agricultural society, see *Telegraph*, 16 March 1853; *Whig State Journal*, 27 January 1853; Stevenson Whitcomb Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1840-1940* vol. II (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission), 450-1. In contrast, Governor Pollock's idea, to create a state agricultural bureau as a separate branch within the department of state, was ignored by lawmakers. See *Papers of the Governors*, 1845-1858, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 786-95.

18. *Lynn News*, 27 April 1855; *Salem Gazette*, 20 March 1855; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 4 April 1855. See also *Hartford Courant*, 17 May, 6 June 1855; Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 80-107.

19. Senate Petition Books, 1832-1915: 1855, in *Records of the General Assembly*, *Records of the Senate*, 1810-1932, *Pennsylvania State Archives* (PSA). For related discussions, see Lee Benson, *Merchants, Farmers and Railroads: Railroad Regulation and New York Politics, 1850-1887* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1955), *passim*; Campbell, *Representative Democracy*, 133-53.

20. *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1855, 493-9; 620-1; 628-33; *Journal of the Senate of Massachusetts*, 1855: 127; 135-6; 138-40, MSA; *Acts and Resolves of the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 549-50; 954-7; *Villager*, 10 May 1855. See also Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 105-6; Purdy, "Portrait of a Know-Nothing Legislature," 97. The final piece in the Coalition's demands for political reform--a fairer reapportionment scheme for senate and house districts--was finally addressed by the Know Nothing-Republican General Courts of 1856 and 1857.

21. For a convenient comparison of government spending in 1855 and 1854, see "Governor's Address," *Mass Senate Documents*, 1856, No. 3, 16-7. See also Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 111; Paul Goodman, "The Politics of

Industrialism: Massachusetts, 1830-1870," in Richard L. Bushman, et. al., eds., *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1979), 196-99.

22. *Lynn News*, 1 June 1855. See also *ibid.*, 11 May 1855; *Salem Gazette*, 16 January 1855.

23. On Connecticut, see Comptroller's Reports for 1840-1860 published annually in *Private Acts and Resolves of the State of Connecticut*; Henry F. Waldradt, *The Financial History of Connecticut, from 1789 to 1861* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912). On Pennsylvania, see *Legislative Record*, 26 April 1855; *Morning Herald*: 6 March, 8 May, 16 May 1855; Douglas E. Bowers, "The Pennsylvania Legislature, 1815-1860: A Study of Democracy at Work," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974, 52.

24. "Comptroller's Report," in *Private Acts and Resolves of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 253-5; Governor's Message, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 24-6; *Courant*: 9 June, 12 June 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 23 April 1853; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 330-2; Waldradt, *Financial History of Connecticut*, 125. In a related measure, lawmakers limited the tenure of supreme court judges to a single eight year term, a reform that had major symbolic significance for legislators wary of the judiciary's anti-democratic character. Under the old judicial system, county courts heard most civil and criminal cases as well as minor appeals. The 1855 judicial reform law abolished the county courts altogether, turning over most civil and criminal cases to the superior court. A single, nine member appellate division was created, of which three justices constituted the supreme court, which now heard capital cases and all final appeals; the other six justices served as superior court judges. The cornerstone of the new system was that both the superior and supreme courts would hold more sessions in each county. Lawmakers also sought to discourage financially burdensome appeals by empowering justices to impose quadruple costs upon losing claimants.

25. Governor's Address, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fourth Series, Vol. VII, 791.

26. *Morning Herald*, 5 January 1855. See also, *Telegraph*: 3 January, 20 January 1855; *Morning Herald*, 1 January 1855.

27. Quote from *Legislative Record*, 29 March 1855. See also *ibid.*: 12 January, 31 March, 7 April, 16 April, 19 April, 21 April, 3 May, 5 May 1855; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 164.

28. *Morning Herald*: 6 March 1855; 25 April 1855. See also *ibid.*: 15 March, 24 March, 29 March, 20 April, 8 May 1855; *Telegraph*: 10 March, 7 April 1855.

29. *Telegraph*, 9 May 1855; Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1905), I: 223. For the sale bill, see *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania*, 1855, 521-7. For the 1857 sale, see Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists*, 134-5; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 175-80; Peter Andrew Wallner, "Politics and the Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857," (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), 270-2. The terms of the 1857 sale arrangement--a price of \$9 million in exchange for a total exemption on all current and future state taxes--was challenged in court by the Canal Commission, which argued that the perpetual tax abatement was unconstitutional. In *Mott v. Pennsylvania Railroad Company* (1858) the state supreme court unanimously ruled against the tax exemption. Thompson defied the court for another three years, compiling over \$600,000 in back taxes. When the 1861 legislature moved to revoke the Pennsylvania Railroad's charter, Thompson struck a deal whereby the back taxes would be invested in several small railroads in the western part of the state.

30. *Laws of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania*, 1855: 431 (quotation); 238-9; 479-80; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 659-60; 757-8; 853-8; 710-11; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 96-8; 83-90; 47-8.

31. See for example Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists*; Goodman, "The Emergence of Homestead Exemption in the United States: Accommodation and Resistance to the Market Revolution, 1840-1880," *Journal of American History* 80 (September 1993), 470-98. Also Novak, *People's Welfare*, 83-114, and passim.

32. "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents* No.3, 29; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: State Printer, 1855), 424-8; 431. *Journal of the Senate of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: State Printer, 1855), 420.

33. "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents* 1855, No.3, 28; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855, 853-8.

34. Acts-1855 File, Chapter 431, Original Bills: Report of the House Judiciary Committee on the Mechanics' Lien Law, MSA; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855, 757-8. See also "Governor's Address," *Mass Senate Documents*, 1855, No.3, 29-30.

35. *Newburyport Herald*, 11 January 1855; *Norwich State Guard* 2 May 1855.

36. *Morning Herald*: 17-20 March 1855; Pennsylvania General Assembly, Senate File, 1855: Petitions, Box 47-48, PSA; Bills and Papers Relating to the Ten

Hour Law, Senate Unenacted File, 1855, MSA; Massachusetts Senate Journal, 1855: 401, 405, 417, 428, 503; Massachusetts House Journal, 1855: 937, 947, 961, 987, MSA; Records of the General Assembly, 1855-6, box 68: "Original Bills," Connecticut State Library (CSL).

37. Harrisburg *Legislative Record*, 3 May 1855. See also "Remonstrance of Henry Terry, and others" Records of the General Assembly, 1855-6, box 68: "Original Bills," CSL; *Legislative Record*, 11 April 1855; Massachusetts House Journal, 1855: 793, 875, 911, MSA.

38. "Resolutions adopted at a meeting of factory operatives and citizens," (Lancaster), Pennsylvania General Assembly, Senate File, 1855: Petitions, Box 47, folder 115, PSA; Report of the Massachusetts Joint Special Committee on the Hours of Labor, *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 80: 3; 5. For the earlier protests, see for example Harrisburg *Borough Item*: 20 October, 21 October 1853; Gerald G. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 273-5; Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 53-9; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 148-9.

39. *State Guard* 2 May 1855.

40. *Acts and Resolves passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 766-7; *Herald*, 11 January 1855; Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1855, 269, MSA; *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 226.

41. "Ten-Hour Petitions," Records of the General Assembly, 1855-6, box 68: "Original Bills," CSL; *Examiner* 12 October 1855; *State Guard* 2 May 1855.

42. Report of the Joint Committee on Hours of Labor, Records of the General Assembly, 1855-6, box 68: "Original Bills," CSL. For the 1842 law, see *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut*, 1842: 40-2.

43. "L.S.P." in *Courant* 5 February 1855; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 358; *Journal of the House of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 170, 391-2; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 49. The bill passed without a roll-call.

44. Harrisburg *Legislative Record*, 11 April; 3 May 1855; *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855: 472. The final votes were 58 to 15 in the house; 24 to 6 in the senate.

45. Report of the Massachusetts Joint Special Committee on the Hours of Labor, *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 80, 3.
46. Report of the Massachusetts Joint Special Committee on the Hours of Labor, *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 80, 2. See also Amesbury *Villager*, 5 March 1855. For the committee's bill and late revisions, which were scrawled in pencil after the draft, see Bill and Papers Relating to the Ten Hour Law, Senate Unenacted File, 1855, MSA.
47. Charles Cowley, *Illustrated History of Lowell* (Boston: Lee & Shephard, 1868), 149; *Villager*, 19 April 1855. See also *Herald*, 16 April 1855; Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855: 601, 606-7, MSA; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 112.
48. Bill in Addition to an Act Concerning the Manner of Voting at Certain Elections, Senate Unenacted File, 1855, MSA; *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 151; Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855, 619, 621, 625, 636, 650, MSA.
49. See in particular Novak, *The People's Welfare*.
50. *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855, 472; *Public Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 49; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855, 766-7.
51. *Examiner* 10 August 1855.
52. *Daily Morning Star*, 11 August 1855. Also see *ibid.*, 9 August 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 7 August 1855.
53. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 12 October 1855. See also *ibid.*, 21 September 1855.
54. *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 91, 2. See also *Mass. House Documents*, 1855, No 298; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 569-72; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 109-10.
55. *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 534, and passim; *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 188; Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1855: 400; 1170; 1468; 1434-60; 1649-53, MSA; Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855: 704; 714; 757; 777, MSA.
56. *Official Reports and Proceedings of the State Convention, Assembled May 4th, 1853, to Revise and Amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth of*

Massachusetts 2 vols. (Boston: White & Potter, 1853), II: 260; Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1855, 1461, MSA.

57. Report of the railroad commission is reprinted in *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 143. For the petitions of several railroads, see Acts File -1855, Chapter 452; Original Bills, MSA; *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855: 468-9; 749-51; 829-30.

58. See draft of a "Bill for the Protection of Life on Railroads and Railroad Crossings," Senate Unenacted File, 1855, MSA. Also, *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855, 666-8; Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1855: 184; 225; 506; 688; 704; 706; 715; 881; 914; 918; 1138; 1351; 1381, MSA; Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855: 129; 192; 276; 333; 553; 618; 623; 683; 794; 827, MSA.

59. *Annual Report of the General Railroad Commissioners of the State of Connecticut, for 1854-5* (Hartford: State Printer, 1855), 5-6. *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1855, 12-3; 116. For the creation of Connecticut's early banking and railroad commissions, see *Public Statute Laws of the State of Connecticut...1836 and 1837*, 17-21; *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1853, 132-45.

60. Bank Commissioners report reprinted in *Courant*, 31 May 1855. See also *Courant*, 11 May 1855. Figures on bank charters derived from *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1836 to 1857* vols. III & IV, (New Haven: 1857); *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1857 to 1865* vol. V (New Haven: 1871); *Resolutions and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut*, 1855.

61. Governor Henry Dutton, "Annual Speech," *Journal of the House of Representatives in the State of Connecticut* 1854, 20. See also *New London Daily Morning Star*, 16 June 1854; *Hartford Courant*, 22 June 1855. For the 1852 law, see *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1852, 23-35.

62. *Courant*, 11 May 1855. On cash shortages, see entry for February 1, 1855, in Diary of C.V. Peckham, 1841-1856, Connecticut Historical Society; *Courant*: 17 May, 22 June 1855; *Daily Morning Star*, 14 July 1854; *Examiner*, 13 May 1854.

63. *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1855: 10-2; 13-6. The vote in the house on the repeal bill was 97 for, 90 against: *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 233-4. See also *Courant*, 31 May 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 14 June 1855; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 335.

64. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 14 June 1855. *Public Acts of the State of Connecticut* 1855: 10-2; 13-6; 17.

65. Compare the 1833 charter of the Norwich-based Merchant Bank to the 1849 charter of the Farmers Bank of Bridgeport. As a condition for incorporation, the Merchant Bank provided \$30,000 to a project to deepen the shipping channel of the Thames River, an improvement considered vital to the region's coastal trade. See *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1789 to 1836* vol. I, 107-111. In contrast, the Farmers Bank was required to pay \$5,000 to the General Hospital Society of Connecticut. When the legislature authorized the Farmers Bank to increase its capital two years later, it included the condition that the bank pay bonuses amounting to \$6,000 to the State Normal School and the Bridgeport Library Association. See *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1836 to 1857* vol. I, 80; 83. Actually, more banks (12) were required to pay "charitable/social" bonuses between 1845 and 1854, than were required to pay "promotional" bonuses before 1837 (8). But, in terms of the percentage of banks required to pay bonuses, as well as the size of the typical bonus, the earlier period more frequent and much larger bonuses. Of the 77 private banks and insurance companies chartered before 1854, 20 were required to pay out some form of bonus. See *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1789 to 1836* vol. I; *Resolves and Private Acts of the State of Connecticut...1836 to 1857* vol. I.

66. See *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855, 506; *Telegraph*: 17 February, 14 April 1855; *Legislative Record*: 23 January, 25 January, 27 January, 29 January, 3 February, 8 February, 15 February, 23 February, 14 March, 16 March, 5 April, 6 April, 12 April, 14 April, 21 April, 1 May, 1855; Records of the General Assembly, Senate File, 1855: box 46, folder 48; box 49, folder 94, PSA.

67. "Inaugural Address," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 790; *Morning Herald*, 11 January 1855. See also *Morning Herald*: 16 January, 8 March 1855.

68. Figures derived from *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855. See also Bowers, "The Pennsylvania Legislature," 145.

69. Examples of such petitions fill the petition files of the 1855 General Assembly. By way of illustration, see "Petition of Citizens of Montgomery County for a Bank at Pottstown" and "Proceedings of a Meeting of Citizens of Montgomery County in favor of a Bank at Pottstown..." Records of the General Assembly, Senate File, 1855, box 46, folder 29, and "Petition of Citizens of Lehigh County for a Bank at Allentown," box 46, folder 11, PSA.

70. *Morning Herald*, 27 March 1855; *Telegraph*, 25 April 1855. See also *Telegraph*: 10 March, 14 March, 26 March, 1855.

71. *Norwich Aurora*, 4 July 1855. For the charter, see *Resolutions and Private Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 96-8.

72. A history of this episode is presented in *Chartered Monopolies: Or, Some Facts in the History of the Norwich Gas Controversy* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1855).

73. *Chartered Monopolies*, 10-22; *Norwich Examiner*, 15 September 1854; *Norwich Evening Courier*: 30 January, 27 February 1855; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 13 December 1854.

74. *Norwich Evening Courier*: 15 April, 2 June, 5 July 1855.

75. See *Chartered Monopolies*, passim; Petitions and Resolutions of the Common Council of Norwich, Records of the General Assembly, 1855-6, RG-2, box 67, CSL.

76. *Norwich Evening Courier*: 2 June 1855; *ibid.*, 5 June 1855. See also *ibid.*, 19 June 1855.

77. *Norwich Evening Courier*, 5 July 1855. See also *ibid.*: 12 June, 16 June, 19 June 1855; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 180-1; 198-200.

78. "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1855, No. 3, 5-6. See also "Annual Speech," *Journal of the house of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, esp. 28-32; Governor's Address, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fourth Series, Vol. VII, 786-8. See also Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 86-7.

79. *Public Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 22; 71-2; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 1855: 320-1; 266-7; 412-4; *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855, 328-33; *Hartford Courant*: 23 April, 30 May 1855; *New Haven Palladium*, 25 January 1855. These acts are summarized in Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 135-42; Parmet, "Know-Nothings in Connecticut," 131-41; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 327-29.

80. *Journal of the Massachusetts Senate*, 1855: 115; 139; 580-5; 620-1; 858-9; *Journal of the Massachusetts House*, 1855: 385; 564-5; 1012; 1398-1404; 1411-7, 1442; 1447; 1623-30, MSA; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 333; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 102-3.

81. *Acts and Resolves of the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855, 803-4; 843; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 101.

82. "Annual Speech," *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut*, 1855, 22; "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1855, No. 3, 22-3. See also Governor's Address, *Pennsylvania Archives*, Fourth Series, Vol. VII, 790.

83. *Acts and Resolves of the General Court of Massachusetts*, 1855; *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1855: 53; 225-8; *Telegraph*: 20 January, 24 January 1855; *Morning Herald*, 14 March 1855; *Legislative Record*: 7 March, 15 March, 23 March, 11 April 1855. See also *Newburyport Herald*, 21 March 1855; Asa Earl Martin, "The Temperance Movement in Pennsylvania Prior to the Civil War" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 49 (1925): 195-230; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 101.

84. *Morning Herald*, 17 April, 23 April 1855. See also for example "Remarks of Mr. Smith of Philadelphia County" in *Legislative Record*, 17 February 1855; *Report of the Committee on Vice and Immorality of the Senate of Pennsylvania, in Relation to the Manufacture and Sale of Spirituous Liquors* (Harrisburg: A.B. Hamilton, 1855); Eli K. Price, *Speech of Eli K. Price in the Pennsylvania Senate on the Bill to Restrain the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1855); *Norwich Examiner*, 1 June 1855; "Report of the Joint Special Committee [on] Intemperance," *Massachusetts Acts - 1855*, Chapter 215, Original Bills File, MSA.

85. Novak, *The People's Welfare*, 188 (quotes); 171-89; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 214-7.

86. *Examiner*: 12 August, 19 August, 1854, 2 March 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 8 March 1855; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 4 June 1856; *Newburyport Herald*, 21 May 1855; Handlin and Handlin, *Commonwealth*, 235; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, 311; James L. Huston, "The Demise of the Pennsylvania American Party, 1854-1858," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 109 (October 1985), 473-97; 478; Martin, "The Temperance Movement in Pennsylvania," 225-30; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 101-2.

87. *Lynn News*, 25 May 1855; *Haverhill Essex Banner*, 28 April 1855; *Salem Gazette*, 27 April 1855. See also *Newburyport Herald*, 30 April 1855; *Amesbury Villager*, 19 April 1855; *Lynn News*, 27 April 1855; *Salem & Marblehead The People's Advocate*, 14 April 1855; *Salem Gazette*, 3 April, 13 April, 20 April 1855; *Newburyport Saturday Evening Union and Essex North Record*, 21 April 1855; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 117-8.

88. *Journal of the House of Representatives of Connecticut*, 1855, 240; 238-48; *Journal of the Senate of Connecticut*, 1855, 170-76. See also Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 329. Intraparty division was also manifest on the question of black suffrage, a centerpiece of the old Free Soil and Liberty party platforms. A

constitutional amendment granting African-Americans the right to vote had won majority approval in the 1854 legislature. In 1855, as the state's constitution required, the amendment needed two-thirds support in both chambers before it could be turned over to voters for final passage. The amendment failed by thirteen votes, with Democratic-Know Nothings supplying the margin of defeat. Later, the black suffrage provision was added to the 21-year naturalization amendment initiated by the 1855 assembly, another indication of the strength of free soilism in the legislature. That amendment, requiring only a majority, passed easily. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 156; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 329.

89. The best account of this imbroglio is Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 150-4. See also Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 172-3.

90. *Morning Herald*: 11 January, 30 January, 8 February 1855. See also Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 151-2.

91. *Morning Herald*, 17 February 1855.

92. *Morning Herald*: 14 February, 23 February, 28 February 1855; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 153.

93. *Morning Herald*: 1 March, 2 March, 29 March 1855. See also Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 154-5; 160; Huston, "The Demise of the Pennsylvania American Party," 477; 486-7.

94. Joint Resolution, House File, 1855, Records of the General Assembly, box 14, PSA; *Morning Herald*, 27 January 1855; *Legislative Record*: 25 January, 14 April, 20 April 1855. My interpretation of the relative weakness of antislavery sentiment among the Pennsylvania Know Nothings *as a whole* differs from that of Tyler Anbinder, who asserts that "[m]any Pennsylvania Know Nothings" shared the strong antislavery views of Cameron's opponents in the legislature: *Nativism and Slavery*, 154. Of course the word "many" is a slippery one, but the thrust of Anbinder's argument is that antislavery was an equal partner to nativism and political reform among the Pennsylvania Know Nothings. In my opinion his interpretation overstates the case, at least where Pennsylvania is concerned.

95. *Liberator*, 1 June 1855; *Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court*, 1855: 506, 941-946-7; *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1855: No. 66, No. 162; *Massachusetts House Documents*, 1855, No. 93; Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1855: 1721-26; Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855, 855-8, MSA; Acts-1855 File, Chapter 489: Original Bills, MSA; *Speech of John L. Smith, Esq., of Boston, on the Removal of E.G. Loring, Esq., From the Office of Judge of Probate, for the County of Suffolk, Delivered in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Tuesday, April 10th, 1855* (Boston: William White, 1855). See also

Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 97-9; 104-5.

96. *Salem Gazette*, 23 January 1855; *Newburyport Herald*: 12 May, 22 May 1855; Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 31-2; Goodman, "Politics of Industrialism," 192-3; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 97-9.

97. *New Haven Journal*, as cited in *Hartford Courant*, 26 July 1855. See also for example, *Amesbury Villager*, 24 May 1855; *Newburyport Saturday Evening Union and Weekly Family Visitor* 21 April 1855; *Norwich Examiner*, 20 July 1855; *State Guard*, 22 August 1855.

98. *Newburyport Herald*, 7 March 1855.

99. *Salem Gazette*, 2 February 1855. See also for example *ibid.*, 23 January 1855; 27 February 1855; *Lynn News*, 17 January 1855; *Salem & Marblehead People's Advocate*, 10 March 1855; *Newburyport Herald*, 30 January 1830; *Morning Herald*, 8 January 1855; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 93.

CHAPTER VII

QUIETING THE POPULIST SPIRIT: *HERRENVOLK* ANTISLAVERY AND THE REPUBLICAN EMERGENCE, 1855-1858

Well before the adjournment of the 1855 assemblies the popular mood was shifting. Nativist editors who earlier had skillfully blended state and local and national issues into an antiparty indictment of the regime, now commenced a steady antislavery drumbeat. In late April 1855 Norwich's Andrew Stark proclaimed flatly that the "pressing curse and danger" to the nation "is not Popery, but Slavery." Most Know Nothings were as yet unwilling to go quite that far, but the gravitational pull of sectional politics was unmistakable in the spring and summer of 1855. Another Connecticut Know Nothing editor announced that "warfare upon Southern aggression, partially stilled for a time by the absorbing question of Americanism, will rise ere long, loudly and earnestly, from every quarter in the North." Political nativists in Essex and Dauphin counties aired similar hopes. Amesbury's William H. B. Currier catalogued recent Slave Power aggressions--the Fugitive Slave Act, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, border ruffianism in Kansas. "This places the argument in favor of a Republican movement upon the strongest possible ground. No man who regards the subject from an intelligent stand-point can fail to see...the necessity of union" of antislavery forces in the North. Harrisburg's Stephen Miller began 1855 condemning the "fierce fanaticism and base treachery of the advocates of slavery extension," and by

August was calling for a formal union of all factions “opposed to the present National Administration.”¹

As it turned out, of course, these appeals for a united political movement based explicitly on sectional identifications proved to be premature. The chain of events which finally produced a Republican majority in the North is familiar enough. The passage of the pro-Nebraska Section XII of the American party platform by the party’s National Council in June 1855 and the genesis of a North American splinter movement; the long factional struggle over the House Speakership in 1855-6; the reaffirmation of Section XII and the nomination of Millard Fillmore for president by the American party in 1856; the formal founding of a North American movement as a result of the Fillmore candidacy; the fusion of the North Americans with the Republican party behind their presidential candidate John C. Frémont; the strategic battles between North Americans and Republicans over the choice of Frémont’s running mate, state platform language, and the fusion label; the inexorable march of events--“Bleeding Kansas,” the caning of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, the Dred Scott decision, the Lecompton “fraud.” Against this backdrop, leadership cadres of the Republican and American parties waged intense “wars of maneuver” over who would take control of the anti-Democratic forces nationally and in each northern state. By the end of 1857 the Republicans had defeated their nativist rivals in Connecticut and Massachusetts, while it took them another year to do so in Pennsylvania. The politics of this process, and especially the factional struggles between Republican and American leaders at the

national and state level, have been the subject of a large and by now familiar corpus of scholarship.²

Therefore, rather than rehearse the familiar narrative, it seems more useful to probe the Republican ascendancy for what it reveals about the ongoing salience of populist antipartyism in the three counties. At the most basic level, the Republicans triumphed because the Slave Power supplanted the Irish immigrant as *the* key emotional referent of northern politics. This is clear enough. Behind this shift lay a Republican capture and elaboration of the antipartyism that the Know Nothings had constructed to politicize governance.

As late as Spring 1856 the Republican party was a weak, minority political movement in the three states. Much of the party's early impotence can be traced to the leadership of the movement and its unidimensional appeal. In its initial phase the movement was essentially a top-down operation staffed mostly by upstart ex-Free Soil and Liberty party men, whose stern and self-righteousness style, though admirable in hindsight, made many at the time squirm at the thought of working with them. More important, and not incidental to the early antislavery movement's political style, its message was a mixture of incendiary antislavery and antisouthern themes. In the first year or two of Republican party activism, the most popular association among the mass public was "abolitionism," a negative emotional referent forged over decades of experience with "disunionists" North and South. Political memory made the early Republicans difficult bedfellows, not only for ex-Whig or Democratic leaders and operatives, but the mass electorate as well.

The 1856 Presidential canvas changed everything. Coming on the heels of the populist eruptions of 1854-5, it gave the movement an opportunity to build a functionally integrated and more democratic party structure. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, most grassroots American leaders, operatives, and editors flocked to the movement under the Frémont ægis, and remained thereafter. In Pennsylvania, where antislavery sentiment was as weak as in any other northern state, factionalism and disunity marked the statewide Frémont campaign. In Dauphin County, however, the union movement proved more harmonious; a harbinger of better fortunes for fusion efforts across the state in the coming years. Where the Pennsylvania fusion movement was successful, it borrowed heavily from North Americanism, forging a platform that combined antislavery and antisouthernism, nativism, and state political reform.³ Likewise in Massachusetts the state fusion effort resulted in a Republican and American agreement on the reelection of Henry Gardner, who continued to stump on nativist themes. These were important concessions to both nativist ideals and leaders, gestures that would become central to formalizing the antislavery majority after the 1856 elections. But in Fall 1856 all eyes were on the presidential race, and the slavery question pushed to the forefront of politics.

Equally important, accompanying the resources and skills brought by this mass influx of North Americans was the reformist *Zeitgeist* so central to northern politics since the early 1850s. The Republican achievement was to harness the antiparty energy of Know Nothingism for antislavery, and eventually partisan, purposes. The Slave Power symbol figured crucially in this project, for it allowed the Republicans to

elaborate and popularize a meta-narrative of southern proslavery domination of government. The Republican promise was always to restore government's moral purpose by stopping Democratic-Slave Power aggressions on the public good. Deemphasizing the older moral argument of antislavery, the Frémont campaign adopted a *herrenvolk* appeal that stressed the plebeian theme that the Slave Power regime threatened white small producer freedom and independence.

Leavening the appeal was a gradual broadening of the social dimensions of the Democratic-Slave Power threat. Governance under Democratic-Slave Power auspices put the North's cherished values of *herrenvolk* economic independence and moral self-improvement at grave risk through the westward spread of slavery and the hegemony of doughface politicians in the northern states. The social implications of life under the thumb of the Slave Power were symbolically and emotionally proximate to the moral and social imagery that Know Nothings had constructed to "explain" both the immigrant threat and the failures of party governance. The result was that before the Civil War Republicans produced a series of sectional and anti-Democratic identifications, conflated with the public interest and, in turn, translated into a surrogate for partisanship. It was a powerful blend of the antiparty ideal of politics and governance with a proto-partisan appeal that, in the course of the Civil War and after, became a full blown party vernacular and institutional memory.

Transitions: The North American Blueprint

After their first season in control of state government, troubled loomed for the Know Nothings. Grassroots lodge membership declined, while factionalism dogged the movement. In New London County, for example, the charters of several lodges in New London, Lyme, Salem, and Colchester were either revoked by the state organization or given up by the membership in public protest of the movement's leadership. "Those who control and manage the affairs of this corrupt concern are in it for the spoils of offices!" exclaimed a letter signed by 68 members of Lyme Know Nothing Council No. 147 upon learning that the state council had rescinded their charter. At issue for the Connecticut American party hierarchy was a rumor that members of the Lyme Council had not voted the Know Nothing ticket in full in the April 1855 election, a charge never denied by the Lyme protesters. To the apostate Lyme Americans, the revocation of their charter demonstrated that "no person is permitted to hold an opinion which has no the sanction of the self-constituted mouth-pieces of the party." Across all three counties and states, the Know Nothing movement faced defections and a changing membership.⁴

No inconsiderable problem was mounting distrust of the "dark-lantern" tactics that had propelled the movement to stunning victories the year before. Opponents targeted the Know Nothings' secrecy as a principle reason for the special interests and political intrigues and scandals that seemed to follow the movement into power. For advocates of an open organization, therefore, the facts were in the fire; continuing

secrecy and oaths threatened to blow up in the Know Nothings' faces. "There is already a deep and very general feeling against the secret plottings which have been allowed to control elections," one Essex County editor wrote. "The people, particularly the American Mechanics," read a public letter by members of the Harrisburg Order of United American Mechanics, "are ready for an open, free and independent American party." In this context the Massachusetts Know Nothings, now formally the American party and controlled by Governor Henry Gardner, dropped secrecy in June 1855. The Connecticut Americans soon followed suit, while the Pennsylvania Americans pledged themselves to the National Council's more vague anti-secrecy language. Having largely abandoned secret oaths and dark-lantern tactics, the Americans were confident that "with our principles known and openly avowed, whoever sympathizes us in this matter of reform, can be and act with us."⁵

The "principles" to which this Know Nothing referred sharpened after the split in the American party National Council at Philadelphia. Across the counties, as indeed throughout much of the North, nativists hailed the northern delegates' protest of the tacitly pro-slavery Section XII plank. At their convention in Springfield, the Massachusetts American party voted to formally break from the national party, thereby establishing themselves as an official North American state movement, and adopted a platform combining antislavery, antiparty, and nativist themes. Connecticut and Pennsylvania Americans also embraced the multifaceted appeal. There was "no diversity of opinion in the Free States" on the matter of non-extension of slavery, insisted a Newburyport American. "But, under no circumstances, let American

principles be lost sight of.” “[T]he thing which has aroused the North is not the condition of the bondsman, but its own danger” wrote Andrew Stark after the Connecticut Americans officially incorporated antislavery into the state platform, “and the absolute necessity of self defense against the aggressions of the slave power.” Antislavery now figured crucially in the North American party appeal. Political nativism was by no means discarded; Know Nothings in all three counties devoted equal time to anti-immigrant and antislavery themes during the 1855 canvas. As Hartford’s Thomas Day put it: “Republicanism and Americanism were *brothers*, a smart pair of Yankee twins.” As Day understood it, the twin themes constituted the dominant frameworks of thought among the northern public. Republicanism was a “white man’s” cause “to preserve all” of the territories “from the pestilence of the black race.” Americanism advanced “the superiority of native Americans...over the mongrel agglomeration of all tribes, and religions, poured helter-skelter on our shores from Europe, Asia, and the far off Isles of the South Seas.”⁶

Day’s conceptualization was only unusual in the extent to which he systematized the *herrenvolk* ideal. Political nativists in the three counties shared his fundamental view that nativism and antislavery could be, indeed, were already synthesized in the North American movement. With this blend of issues and appeals, grassroots North Americans forged an early articulation of the *herrenvolk* free labor ideal that would become one cornerstone of the Republican ascendancy.

In the short term, however, the refurbished North American movement presented a major obstacle to a Republican breakthrough in the Fall 1855 and Spring

1856 state elections. At the state level, the movement crystallized in conventions that paid scant attention to issues and themes besides slavery. The Republican insistence on an unalloyed antislavery organization proved disastrous; a series of overtures among both Republicans and North Americans to unite behind fusion state tickets either fell by the wayside (Connecticut and Massachusetts), or failed because of the fusion candidate's radicalism (Pennsylvania's race for Canal Commissioner). Meanwhile, at the grassroots Republican organizing proceeded haltingly. Few political editors, at least in the three counties, adopted the straight-out Republican position that the "old issues are settled. The contest is between Freedom and Slavery." Those inclined to antislavery could remain comfortably in the North American party, at least for the time being; certainly the majority of the anti-Democratic electorate preferred the North American alternative to the widely scorned "black Republicanism."⁷

The essential weakness of early Republicanism was confirmed in the state elections in Fall 1855 and Spring 1856 (Connecticut). Only in Essex County did the Republicans run anything remotely resembling an effective campaign (Table B.3). There one of every four votes were cast for Republican gubernatorial candidate Julius Rockwell, while Republican candidates in four towns won election to the General Court. But overall the Republican influence was greatest in fusion with Americans in races for seats to the General Court. Even here, however, the Americans remained the dominant force. Demonstrating pockets of vitality in this most antislavery of the New England states, overall the Essex County Republicans were routed by the Americans, principally, it was said, because of that party's still considerable hold on antislavery

voters. In New London and Dauphin the results were worse still. Connecticut Republican candidate Gideon Welles actually polled a lower percentage in New London County (8.6%) than he did statewide (10.1%). In local races New London County Americans, fearing a Democratic surge, forged fusion tickets with the early Republicans in state senate races and several assembly contests, keeping the county in their control for another year. Straight Republican candidates carried only four towns. In Dauphin the Republican party remained so small and disorganized that it failed to run an independent ticket. However, a late insurgency running under the Whig party banner, formed in protest of the American party county machine's continued reliance on secret nominations, possibly drew some support from the area's tiny Republican movement. Consisting mainly of alienated Know Nothings, the Whig insurgents denied the Dauphin Americans a countywide majority.⁸

As distressing as the results looked, the Republicans could identify some positive signs in these early elections. For one thing, fusion at the grassroots worked much more smoothly than at the state level. Even if the Americans controlled most of these efforts, the candidates who emerged satisfied the Republican's antislavery *raison d'être*. Far more important were sure signs of American party transition and decline. In each county and state, the Americans polled less than a majority of the votes cast, a significant decrease from the previous election. Part of the reason lay in the Republican movement itself, which hived off the most thoroughgoing antislavery Know Nothings, at least in Essex and New London counties. But more significant were defections by former Democrats. Democratic-Know Nothings returned to their

old party in droves, precipitating a rebound for the northern Democracy in all three states. The Democratic campaign side-stepped the slavery issue, stressing instead state and local issues such as the Know Nothings' assaults on liquor and immigrant and working class lifestyle choices, and the movement's history of political corruption and intrigue. The Americans partially counter-balanced these defections by attracting more conservative old-line Whigs and new voters who saw the movement as a potential alternative to the extremism of both the Republicans and Democrats, but the disappointing popular vote suggested the American party was losing steam. The anti-Know Nothing message clearly resonated, raising turnout in New London, where low turnout had inflated the Know Nothing majority in 1855 (Table B.5). In Dauphin, the fact that 1855 was not a Governor's election sent turnout plummeting, but it was the Americans, not the Democrats, who suffered most.⁹ The Democratic surge was particularly noteworthy in Pennsylvania, where German anger at the Know Nothing Jug Law and widespread disgust with the 1855 General Assembly fueled a Democratic takeover of state government. In Connecticut, Democratic candidate Samuel Ingham shocked the Americans by winning a plurality over their incumbent Governor William Minor. As expected the straight American and American-Republican majority in the General Assembly reelected Minor to another term. Nevertheless, while the American party remained the most powerful anti-Democratic movement, momentum at the grassroots had clearly shifted away from them.¹⁰

Populism Into Antislavery

The resurgence of the northern Democracy put the Republicans and North Americans leadership on notice that unity of action would be of paramount importance in the upcoming presidential election. “We now see the *necessity* of a *complete union* of the Anti-Administration forces in order to succeed in the Presidential campaign,” wrote one Connecticut North American activist in the wake of Democratic gains. Stephen Miller, by Summer 1856 a virtual convert to Republicanism, reported to Simon Cameron that the sentiment in Dauphin County was now against “distinctive Republican and American meetings previous to the [state] election.”¹¹ Across the three counties, as throughout much of the North, the imperative of defeating the Democrats in the presidential race facilitated successful fusion efforts. Though a stubborn faction of the American party clung to the chimera of a Fillmore victory, and North Americans remained a strong independent force, even dominant in some states, including Pennsylvania, overall the Republicans emerged from the 1856 canvas as the indisputable leaders of the North’s anti-Democratic coalition.¹²

Republicans aggressively took their case to the people in 1856. Republicans and North Americans jointly sponsored “Frémont Clubs” and “Union” and “People’s” meetings in virtually every town and village, attesting to the significance that anti-Democratic political elites placed on the grassroots. Pennsylvania Republican Alexander McClure hinted at the movement culture that underlay the grassroots Frémont campaign. “Local mass meetings were held in schoolhouses and at the

crossroads where the country people could be gathered, and a class of stump speakers, unknown as a rule in previous campaigns, delivered able and impressive appeals to the masses.” Invariably appeal to voters echoed the antiparty theme of old: citizens “without respect to past or present political distinctions, who are opposed to...the extension of slavery...in favor of Free Speech, free territory, Free Labor, Free Kansas, Fremont and Dayton....” Of crucial import in focusing this effort were the summer’s formative political events--the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas, by pro-slavery settlers and the caning of Charles Sumner by South Carolina’s Preston Brooks in the U.S. Senate Chamber. In this context antislavery and Frémont meetings became occasions for expressing sectional loyalty and unity in the face of the Democratic-Slave Power threat. A massive “indignation meeting” at Amesbury and Salisbury, Massachusetts, called “without distinction to party” to condemn the Sumner caning, heard speeches from Whigs, Republicans, and Americans pledging to “forget, forgive and unite.” The Slave Power, said old Liberty activist John Greenleaf Whittier, “is only strong through our dissensions. It could do nothing against a united North. The one indispensable thing is Union.” Even if fusion proponents glossed over the considerable factionalism and horse-trading among the leadership, across the three counties the public facade of the Frémont movement was harmony and union. Antislavery and anti-Democratic activists of various stripes shared speaking and organizing duties and publicly buried party labels and divisions under the sectional Frémont banner. In the crucible of 1856 North Americans and Republicans, along with a smattering of ex-Whigs, and ex-Free

Democrats, started merging organizational networks into a single framework that would constitute the later Republican party.¹³

A crucial dimension of the anti-Buchanan appeal was the idea that the Frémont campaign spontaneously reflected the anti-Democratic interests and views of the northern public. Perhaps because of the persistence of factionalism within their own ranks, fusion leaders denied the key role played by political elites in orchestrating the Frémont campaign. Thus the union movement, in the words of one Essex County editor, was not the result of “party leaders, but of the PEOPLE themselves, breaking away from all party connections.” Buchanan and the Democrats, on the other hand, were mere political traders. The Union state convention in Pennsylvania, said one supporter, contrasted sharply with the Democratic Convention: “There were no borers to force favorites upon the ticket; but all seemed animated by the desire to select the very best candidates.” Framing the antislavery cause as a people’s uprising against the pro-slavery oligarchy, Frémont and later Republican activists tapped the antiparty politics that had been central to the Know Nothing eruption. Examples of Slave Power influence over the Democratic party were linked to special interest governance. A Buchanan victory would put “arrogant men” in control “of the Administration and the destinies of the nation.” The Democratic party had been “revolutionized, conquered from within” by a “rich slave-owning, haughty, labor-despising aristocracy.” The Slave Power, through the Democratic party, governed for purely political and selfish purposes--the promotion of slavery’s westward expansion. “Who does not forget petty party differences as he sees,” read another antislavery editorial, “under the rule of the

Democracy of the present day, a senator of Massachusetts...brutally beaten in the senate by a democratic representative of South Carolina, backed up by the administration?"¹⁴

Through the use of the Slave Power construct antislavery editors also brought social fears into play. Southerners had used governmental power to overturn the Missouri Compromise and extend slavery into previously free territory. Once there, it was argued by some, the degrading slave-master relationship might very well spread to the North. Antislavery editors seized on the most radical of southern pro-slavery arguments--that slavery was the natural condition of labor--to make the case that white northern workers could be next on the slave-holders' list of exploitable labor. In this way a racialized subtext imbricated the ideal of independent "free labor," and hence, the antislavery message itself. Appeals to the material self-interest of free laborers in the North implied a maintenance of the racial and ethnic prerogatives enjoyed by the North's Protestant white producing classes. Built on powerful traditions of culture and identity, the popular free labor appeal, no less than political nativism, inscribed American public life with the cultural indulgence of the white Protestant small producer.¹⁵

In certain contexts antislavery publicists were explicit. "It is not color alone, they say, that lays the foundation for slavery," essayed Hartford's Thomas Day. "*Slavery is the natural and normal condition of Society* in their estimation, and WHITE SLAVERY is as consistent and as proper as black slavery." "Kansas should be free," wrote another antislavery editor from Dauphin County, because with western migration growing, "this magnificent land will be the only locality open to the choice of the free

white settler.” Norwich Republican Lafayette Foster denied any “philanthropy...in regard to the black race.” In fighting the spread of slavery into the Kansas territory, Foster claimed to be speaking for “the white race, for their freedom of speech, for their freedom of press, for all those rights.” Even in Massachusetts, where popular racial attitudes were less severe and certainly not often crudely avowed, antislavery advocates occasionally framed the 1856 election as a struggle pitting “free white mechanics” against the despotism of “slave labor.”¹⁶

It should be stressed that there was an expedient dimension to the explicitly racialized antislavery appeal. *Direct* references to race invariably occurred only after Democrats or Fillmore Americans attacked the racial implications of antislavery. Indeed, a major component of both the Democratic and Fillmore American strategy was to paint Frémont supporters as “black Republicans” and “nigger worshipers.” Coupled with their emphasis on preserving national harmony through defeat of Frémont, Democrats and Fillmore Americans expressed the fears of many that antislavery government, such as the Frémonters wanted, constituted black solicitude. Harrisburg’s John J. Clyde, by 1856 a leading Dauphin County proponent of Fillmore, peppered his conservative unionism with stories of black activism on behalf of the Republican party to demonstrate the “workings of abolitionism.” Incredulous reports of Republican meetings being “addressed by a NEGRO!” and of white activists being “thrust back from a Frémont barbecue to give place [at the head table] to negroes” showed how “officious” blacks had become in the charged atmosphere of sectional politics. Clyde shamelessly ridiculed local “gemmen ob color” and “ladies ob color,”

members of Harrisburg's unusually large free black population, for attempting to sit in the front rows of theaters and for carrying on political conversations in public. Black public activism challenged the city's rigid racial caste system and signified to racists like Clyde the necessity of defeating Frémont.¹⁷

In light of the race-baiting of northern Democrats and Fillmore Americans, it is important to acknowledge the variation that existed on race matters between the opponents and proponents of antislavery politics. After all, Free Soilers, Know Nothings, and Republicans were the most consistent supporters of black suffrage and personal liberty laws in the North, not Democrats; Republicans would effect emancipation, the Freedman's Bureau, and the Reconstruction Amendments, not Democrats. While the racial implications of mass-based antislavery politics produced fears and anxieties among ordinary northerners regardless of political affiliation, Democrats and Fillmore Americans were far more explicit, direct, extreme. "As for Slavery's being a curse to the niggers," advised "H. W." in response to a series of antislavery editorials in the *Amesbury Villager*, "it is the only condition suited for them. By advocating the election of James Buchanan or Millard Fillmore, you might receive for your paper more influence than you will by joining the party of freedom shriekers."¹⁸

All understood the distinction that this writer drew. Very few Frémonters shared his extreme views; more than a few celebrated leaders of the Frémont campaign clearly embraced the role of "freedom shrieker" out of genuine aversion to African slavery and hope of eventual moral uplift of the enslaved.¹⁹ But in the end free labor

appeals, including those that made no mention of race, mediated the inferred racial prerogatives of whites. At stake in 1856 (as in 1860 and the Civil War) was nothing less than the freedoms and rights that people ascribed to their public life, and few antislavery supporters interpreted this to include blacks, slave or free. In this way the slave was both at the center and periphery of the mass-based antislavery movement. Slaveholders, and more broadly the South, derived unprecedented economic and political power from the enslavement of millions of Africans. To the masses who voted antislavery in 1856 and later, slavery constituted a threat to themselves, not the African slave.

And that threat manifested at the highest levels of government. The Frémont campaign folded free labor appeals into their overriding political theme of rescuing government from the clutches of the Slave Power. A vote for Frémont, according to antislavery proponents, was a vote to end the tyrannical control of the Slave Power over the nation's public life. Through its acquiescence in Slave Power aggression, the Buchanan Administration had shown itself to be run by "selfish and sectional politicians." Democratic leadership was thus "powerful for mischief, but feeble in the maintenance of laws for the protection of the people and honor of the country." The Frémont appeal was a patriotic imperative, supporters said, made necessary by the government's pro-slavery/pro-southern record. The Democratic platform "is set up for the sole purpose of giving the slave states the control of the government," thundered Lynn's J. F. Kimball. The caning of Charles Sumner proved "a conspiracy for the extension of slavery and for the subjugation of every opposing power, principle, and

sentiment throughout the land,” read an antislavery resolution adopted by Norwich residents. The caning of Sumner, Bleeding Kansas, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Fugitive Slave Act, the forcing of Section XII on the American party at Philadelphia--all illustrated the scheming Slave Power in action, Frémont publicists wrote time and again. As the Know Nothings had proved, demagogic conspiracy talk worked well in the unsettled political culture of the 1850s. But this was a conspiracy that seemed closer and more menacing (and certainly more evident) than anything the Vatican could pull off. In the end the Frémont movement rested its case on reclaiming government in the name of the people from the most dangerous of special interests. It was time “to give the government of the country into the hands of free white men than to leave it any longer to the owners of black slaves.”²⁰

In the three counties the Fall elections demonstrated the success of the Republican-American fusion movement. Republicans joined North Americans under the ægis of “Union” that blurred the Republican influence over the entire affair. “Union” candidates in state races easily carried Dauphin and Essex counties (Connecticut held its state elections in the spring), while Frémont gained nearly 69% of the vote in Essex and 56% in New London. More striking was the paltry total registered for Fillmore in New London and Essex. The presidential contest all but killed the independent American movement in New London County, where Fillmore attracted a mere 3.6%. Independent Americans could be only slightly less gloomy at results in Essex County, where Fillmore won barely 11%, about where he finished statewide. Republicans seized control of the Massachusetts General Court, though a

significant fraction of them were former Americans who ran on “American-Republican” fusion tickets. In Essex County, the number of straight Republican assemblymen elected (27) dwarfed both Fusionists (4) and independent Americans (3). In contrast, the results looked far less decisive for the Republican movement in Dauphin County. The Union state ticket carried the county, but Buchanan won a plurality in the presidential contest a month later. Part of the problem lay in the inability of the state’s Republican and American leaders to agree on a common “Union” slate of presidential electors. The deal struck allowed each party to run separate Frémont and Fillmore “Union” tickets. If the Union ticket had won the state, then Pennsylvania’s 27 electoral votes would be divided in proportion to each candidate’s popular vote. In the event that Pennsylvania’s electoral votes would decide the presidential election for either candidate, the entire slate would go to that candidate. The arrangement was moot, for Buchanan carried Pennsylvania, though by less than 1,000 votes. But it did provide a unique opportunity to read the relative strength of Americanism and Republicanism in the 1856 Union movement. In Dauphin, as across Pennsylvania, nominal Americans still held the upper hand in the fusion movement, as “Fillmore-Union” tickets accounted for over 59% of the Union total. On the other hand, the Straight Fillmore ticket gained only a mere 106 votes countywide, strongly suggesting that most Americans looked favorably upon alliance with the Republicans.²¹

Epilogue: "One and Indivisible:" Republicanism at the State Level

In the process of building a sectional majority, antislavery activists had imitated the antiparty style of the early Know Nothings. Mixing powerful social and cultural anxieties associated with slavery, the movement framed the Slave Power as a corrupt and menacing special interest in control of the Federal government. The Republican and North American merger infused the antislavery movement with antiparty themes that lifted the movement to majorities in 1856. Moreover the Frémont campaign had demonstrated conclusively the relative weakness of independent Americanism. Antislavery political elites now turned to the state elections of 1857 and 1858 to solidify their position, promising a continuation of the fusion movement. "If we prevail," reported a Frémont-American editor from New London, "we must not act merely as *allies*, but as a party, one and indivisible."²²

Republicans very much viewed the state contests as an extension of the 1856 presidential race. Yet in the wake of the 1856 election, sectional politics moved to the more complex rhythms of state and local issues. While never losing sight of their larger goal, defeat of the Slave Power, Republican forces in all three states faced more mundane issues and practical strategic problems. The ensuing state campaigns challenged Republicans to formalize their party structure, integrate their appeal, and link national politics to state and local concerns in ways that could crystallize their hold over the grassroots. *Herrenvolk* antislavery remained the core of the Republican agenda, brought into play through appeals to defeat the Slave Power's doughface tools

in state government. At the same time Republicanism self-consciously blended antislavery with nativism, protectionist labor doctrines, and state policies where the local context demanded. Their success at doing so can be measured in the dissipation of populist insurgency and a return to two-party stability by the late 1850s.

In Massachusetts the final transition to Republicanism proceeded swiftly, in large measure because of the Republicans' effective response to nativist pressure, and later, state fiscal issues. Die-hard Gardner Americans in the 1857 General Court, at the urging of His Excellency, brought forward a constitutional amendment to establish a 14 year waiting period for immigrant voting rights. Most Republicans rejected this proposal, but shrewdly kept their nativist credentials intact by offering a compromise two year waiting period. Under Gardner's influence, thoroughgoing nativist legislators blocked this milder bill, creating an impasse that potentially set up the issue for the 1857 election. Republicans, however, nominated Nathaniel P. Banks for governor, whose close ties to the American party warmed the hearts of political nativists. Most leading nativist newspapers--what was left of a once considerable network of Know Nothing organs throughout the state--foreswore their old warhorse Henry J. Gardner and endorsed Banks, who ran as an "American-Republican" mainly on the 1855 Springfield multi-issue platform of the state's North American party. "There was nothing more evident," claimed political nativists in 1857, than the fact "that the American party--as a party--is growing weaker and weaker by the year. But its principles may live and find expression long after the party becomes a mere faction.

They can only live, however, by that more powerful and dominant element of party action--Republicanism."²³

With the nomination of Banks, most nativists in effect conceded political leadership of the state to the Republicans, who mixed antislavery appeals with condemnations of fraudulent immigrant voting and calls to enforce the state's 1855 prohibition law. Meanwhile, Banks' supporters attacked Gardner and the Straight Americans for "routinely descending to the lowest extreme of the low standard of political action." Gardner was a force for proslavery "hunkerdom," more interested in his "personal and party ends" than in defending antislavery and American principles. To many, those principles reflected both antislavery and nativism, insofar as Banks and the Republican party stood for "the purity and principles of the government under our fathers." Linking the Gardner Americans to excessive political intrigue and pro-slavery government in Washington, and integrating nativism and antislavery, Banks defeated Gardner, the titular leader of independent Americanism in the Bay State, with a plurality in the three way race. A General Court dominated by Republicans then elected the Waltham "Bobbin Boy" governor by an overwhelming margin.²⁴

Once in office Republicans continued to respond to state and local issues. In his inaugural address, Banks indicated his support for "legislative safeguards...to maintain the purity of elections and to protect the rights of American citizens." The General Court responded by passing the two year waiting period amendment. The following year a Republican General Court again passed the amendment, sending it to voters, who promptly ratified it. Banks also satisfied antislavery zealots by ordering

the removal of Judge Edward G. Loring. Moderates on the slavery issue were appeased by a revision of the state's 1855 personal liberty law, said to have inflamed sectional discord. And in the context of the 1857 financial crisis, Banks and the Republicans turned to protectionist labor doctrines and clamored for retrenchment and reform in state government.²⁵

If Massachusetts Republicans responded decisively to political nativism, still salient in the Bay State despite Fillmore's abysmal showing, those in Connecticut could afford to be less solicitous of nativism. For one thing, the 1856 election showed how anemic independent Americanism was in Connecticut. Thus in Spring 1857 Connecticut Republicans, meeting in a "Union" convention with North Americans, refused to add a nativist plank to their antislavery and anti-Slave Power platform. Nevertheless, they did make crucial concessions to what was left of the Connecticut American party. Republicans agreed to nominate Alexander Holley for governor, the former Know Nothing Lieutenant Governor and the choice of North Americans. They also added other prominent Know Nothings to the state ticket. The Republican refusal to explicitly endorse nativism while agreeing to nominate well-known Americans reflected their master strategy that "the better portion" of former Know Nothings should receive "all the offices, but not under their name and platform." Despite the Holley nomination a small faction of Americans, irked by the silence of the Union platform on nativism, staged a rump convention and nominated a straight American ticket. In New London County the Straight Americans targeted "mechanics, poisoning their minds by the belief that they have been swallowed up by Republicanism." In

response, local Republican organizers placated the Americans by backing several ex-Know Nothings in state assembly and senate races on the Union ticket. As a result, boasted New London Republican Augustus Brandegee, “the large majority of the American party, and all its respectability, are with us.”²⁶

Connecticut Republicans reasoned that independent Americanism could be defeated through antislavery appeals and by opening their party organization to former Know Nothings at the local and state level. If there were any doubts the infamous Dred Scott decision dispersed them. Republicans assailed the divisive partisan aims of Americans who doggedly resisted fusion with the Republicans. The harmony of Union meetings across the county and state, wrote one, “demonstrate that the patriotic elements of political power have fused into one glowing mass [and] are not to be blown into fragments by the explosive mixtures of small politicians whose desire for office was only equaled by their unfitness for its duties.”²⁷

The results of this strategy were more mixed than Republicans had hoped. Holley gained a bare majority, though Union candidates swept into both branches of the General Assembly. With the independent Americans almost completely out of the picture, electoral lines resembled those of the 1840s, which is to say that the Democrats retained considerable potency in Connecticut. Running against the Republicans’ sectional extremism and profligacy in state government, the Connecticut Democracy remained very competitive in Connecticut throughout the late 1850s. Antislavery was central to Connecticut Republicanism, but the strength of the Democratic opposition, coupled with an intransigent cell of independent Americans, compelled them to expand

their appeals. In 1857 Governor Holley issued a plea to impose restrictions on immigrant voting, which the General Assembly ignored. The following year Republicans moved to pacify restive Americans by adding a literacy test to the “Union” state platform. In 1858 the Republican General Assembly passed constitutional amendments for a literacy test and a one year waiting period for immigrant voting rights. These amendments went down to overwhelming defeat in 1859 after the last remnants of independent Americanism disappeared. Probably more important to the Republicans was the banking crisis of 1857. The hard times facilitated new attacks on the National Democrats’ free trade policies, which “failed to discriminate in favor of American labor.” Protectionist labor doctrines blended with denunciations of the Lecompton constitution to keep Connecticut narrowly Republican.²⁸

Nowhere were protectionist labor doctrines more important in solidifying the Republican ascendance than in Pennsylvania. Statewide the American party still retained the nominal allegiance of the majority of anti-Democratic voters. But both Republicans and Americans realized that continued fusion was necessary in order to defeat the Democrats. In 1857 the Republicans and Americans again agreed to another “Union” anti-Democratic convention, adopting a multi-issue platform that stressed both antislavery and nativism. Republicans, the weaker of the two factions statewide but the controlling element at the convention, were able to nominate the old Free Soiler David Wilmot for governor. Popular among western antislavery people, Wilmot inspired few Americans from central and eastern Pennsylvania. With the “Union” movement thus controlled by Republicans, insurgent Americans held an independent convention that

nominated a straight American ticket. Locally, the Union movement carefully hewed to the multifaceted state platform, appealing to voters “without regard to past political distinctions, who are opposed to the extension of slavery [and] foreign influences in our elections...who are in favor of purifying the ballot box [and] excluding from our shores Foreign paupers and criminals.”²⁹

Despite blending antipartyism, nativism, and antislavery, Wilmot’s candidacy presented severe problems for the Union movement. Nativists across the state doubted Wilmot’s pledges to restrict immigrant voting rights, while his well-known radicalism on the slavery issue alienated conservative voters who in 1857 were less interested in sending an antislavery message. Democrats decisively carried the election, while only two of five voters backed Wilmot. In Dauphin County, Union forces attributed the defeat to apathy among anti-Democratic forces. Locally Wilmot gained only 67% of the combined Union total in 1856, while Democratic candidate William Packer actually outpolled Buchanan by 16 votes. The Republican’s strategy of forcing the nomination of a radical antislavery man in this conservative state had proved disastrous.

The financial panic struck late in the campaign, too late in fact to affect the outcome. But in the ensuing months the downturn ravaged the state’s textile, coal, and iron interests, throwing thousands out of work and putting the economy at the center of the state’s politics. Almost immediately the Union movement regrouped by striking populist themes of Democratic and Administration inaction in the face of economic crisis. Workers and mechanics in Philadelphia were urged to “throw off the trammels of party and unite together” for recovery policies like the protective tariff. Harrisburg’s

George Bergner, now editor of the Harrisburg *Telegraph* and leader of Dauphin County's Union-Republican faction, wrote a series of editorials anticipating the Union state convention, about to meet in Harrisburg. Bergner was convinced that protectionism would constitute the crucial issue in the campaign. "The masses of the people--farmers, mechanics and workingmen--the "bone and sinew" of the land who do the voting," he wrote, will "accomplish at the ballot box what has been denied them by their recreant Representatives and the powers at Washington. Their votes, at the coming election, will be cast with direct reference to this question." For Bergner and other Republican leaders of the splintered anti-Democratic movement, a focus on the economy enabled them to drive home the necessity of coordinated action against the Democrats. "This is a great national question," Bergner claimed, and the only certain way to establish the "protective principle is to defeat the party in power and to return to Congress such men as will give heed to the popular cry and minister to the public wants."³⁰

At their state convention, the Union movement recast itself the "People's party" and refurbished its platform. It added a strong protective tariff plank and ringing denunciations of the Democrats' handling of the economy. Gone was the strident antislavery language and specific denial of Congress's right to extend slavery in the territories. In their place was merely an attack on the Buchanan Administration's acceptance of the Lecompton constitution, said to violate principles of "popular sovereignty." The platform retained calls to restrict immigrant political rights and stop foreign-born election abuses, but the emphasis on protectionist labor policies and

Lecompton clearly set the tone for the 1858 People's party campaign. The Dauphin County "People's" convention embraced the new departure, excoriating the "criminal extravagance of the Buchanan Administration." Lecompton and protectionism together mediated a renewed emphasis on the *herrenvolk* ideal of small producer independence and security, undermined by National Democratic leadership. Through fraud and violence the Buchanan Administration had imposed "upon the white freemen of Kansas a constitution repugnant to their feelings and wishes." The tariff likewise ought to be revised so as to "afford protection to the free white labor of the nation." Combining *herrenvolk* Slave Power themes with protectionist economic appeals, the People's party state campaign repositioned political debate onto the national government.³¹

On election day the People's party carried the state in a startling reversal of political fortunes. One Republican activist called it a "sweeping revolution" in government. Indeed, where Democrats had controlled nearly two-thirds of the General Assembly in 1858, the 1859 Pennsylvania House would be two-thirds People's party. Democrats retained only 4 of their 15 Congressional seats (out of 25 statewide), and only 2 of those were held by openly pro-Lecompton men. It was a political lesson that the People's party leadership, made up almost entirely of Republican and old North American activists, did not soon forget. In 1859 and again in 1860 the state's anti-Democratic coalition retained the People's party label along with the successful combination of *herrenvolk* antislavery, nativist cultural and economic appeals, and producerist economic themes.³²

Conclusion

The Pennsylvania People's party bent to the logic of one activist, who observed in 1860 that the state "cannot be carried on the anti-slavery issue only. Frémont proved that."³³ And so, too, did anti-Democratic activists in Connecticut and Massachusetts, where the final transition to Republicanism was not merely an extension of the unalloyed *herrenvolk* antislavery that fueled the Frémont campaign. In all three counties and states, Republican activists opened antislavery politics to former Know Nothings and leavened the *herrenvolk* antislavery appeal as the local context demanded. Their flexibility and pragmatism, a style of leadership so noticeably absent in the early years of political antislavery, paved the final road to the Republican takeover of the North.

At the same time it cannot be said that the incorporation of protectionism and nativism diluted in any meaningful way the *herrenvolk* antislavery essence of Republicanism. At its core, Republicanism pivoted on anti-Democratic Slave Power demonology which, despite its reliance on white producer antisouthernism, led inexorably to antislavery. Republicans everywhere returned again and again to this central tenet of their politics, and demanded that statewide fusion movements do the same. Fears of Democratic-Slave Power domination of American public life, both its social values and political institutions, constituted the warp threads of the Republican appeal and subsequent potency. Formally spun during the Frémont canvas, this constituent element of the antislavery majority traced further back, to the northern

Know Nothings' popularization of the Slave Power construct during their antiparty campaign against the regime of party governance. *Herrenvolk* antislavery was styled on Know Nothing antipartyism, insofar as the Know Nothings had demonstrated that a focus on political, even conspiratorial, threats to governmental institutions could mediate broad social and cultural values with the nonpartisan ideal of governance. The Republicans politicized the Democratic-Slave Power as the single greatest threat to the public interest, defined largely in terms of the North's producerist mythology; a white, Protestant, middling way of life.

If Republicanism shared much with Know Nothingism, it also differed from that quintessential expression of populism in several crucial respects. In political terms Know Nothingism turned on an antiparty indictment of party governance and special interest politics. To be a Know Nothing meant not simply abiding the movement's ethnic prejudice, something most Protestant northerners had little trouble accommodating to. To be a Know Nothing one had to be an anti-partisan. One had to share the movement's anger at governance under the major parties, whose leaders seemed more interested in advancing the causes of wire-pullers and special interests than the public good.

Republicanism pivoted on a narrower and more disciplined appeal. Of course the Republican goal was the same--the public good in governance. No political movement goes very far without first framing itself as champion of some protean public, or nonpartisan purpose. The difference for Republicans was the enemy they identified and the way they went about combating it. Consistently and systematically,

the Republicans linked problems in American public life to the Slave Power and its northern Democratic allies. They trotted out example after example of tangible Democratic-Slave Power aggressions on the (white northern) public interest. They identified themselves and the antislavery mission crisply and definitively. They drew a sharp line of opposition to the Democratic-Slave Power, and demanded their followers accept it as a *sine qua non* of participation. During the wars of maneuver with others who shared their anti-Democratic animus but resented their leadership, the Republicans also set aside petty jealousies and compromised on secondary issues for the long-term good of the antislavery cause. Hardly antipartisans, Republicans proved themselves deft politicians indeed. Some, such as die-hard nativists, coveted the concessions that Republican tacticians made available. Most others gravitated to the Republicans simply because their leadership style and message, in the context of the mounting sectional crisis, appeared selfless and wholly attuned to the national good. The majority of northerners warmed to the project of Republican party-building because it seemed appropriately aimed at a larger moral purpose. And later, after the Republican-led North had finally defeated the Slave Power, the patriotic service of Grant and Sherman and countless other heroes, real and imagined, the trailblazing example of Frémont and the early antislavery activists, including the once-reviled abolitionists, and the vision, perseverance, and simple eloquence of that most mythic of American icons, Abraham Lincoln, provided a store of tropes and memories that propelled the Republican *party* into the next generation of politics and beyond. Learning to become a Republican partisan would never be easier.

Notes

1. Norwich *Examiner*, 27 April 1855; *Meriden Transcript*, 24 May 1855; *Amesbury Villager*, 6 September 1855; *Harrisburg Morning Herald*, 24 January 1855; *Telegraph*, 1 August 1855. See also *Telegraph*, 8 August 1855; *Lynn News*, 10 August 1855; *Hartford Courant*, 19 June 1855.
2. The wonderfully felicitous “wars of maneuver” was coined by Robert C. McMath, Jr., to describe the equally byzantine political history of the 1890s Populist party. See his *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 154. The transition to Republicanism nationally and in the three states under review here has not only generated copious scholarship but interpretive controversies as well. The basic issue boils down to what extent the Republicans made concessions to the Americans to draw them into the antislavery fold. Without presuming to answer this question for the three states nor wishing to engage what has developed into a stale, circular debate, it will become clear in the pages below that I believe concessions were made. Of the many works that treat the Republican ascendancy, the best include Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: the Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Bruce Collins, “The Democrats’ Loss in Pennsylvania in 1858,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 109 (October 1985), 499-536; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael F. Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), and *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Norton & Company, 1978); James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People’s Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); Robert Parmet, “The Know-Nothings in Connecticut,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): Chapter 8: ““The Undisguised Connection”: Know Nothings Into Republicans: New York as a Test Case.”
3. See *Telegraph*: 28 March, 7 August, 18 September 1856.

4. New London *Daily Morning Star*, 2 July 1855. See also *ibid.*: 3 July, 9 June 1855; *Hartford Times*, 21 June 1855; *Newburyport Saturday Evening Union and Essex North Record*, 10 March 1855; *Morning Herald*: 10 September, 11 September 1855, 24 September 1855; *Telegraph*, 19 September 1855; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 132-3.
5. *Lynn News*, 9 March 1855; *Morning Herald*, 17 March 1855; *Norwich State Guard*, 22 August 1855. See also *Morning Herald*, 15 March 1855; *Telegraph*, 17 March 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 28 June 1855; *State Guard*, 21 April 1855; *Newburyport Herald*, 30 April 1855; *Saturday Evening Union and Essex North Record*, 5 May 1855; *Constitution, Ritual and Platform of Principles of the American Party of the State of Connecticut, Adopted August, 1855* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Company, 1855); Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 170; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 122-3.
6. *Saturday Evening Union and Essex North Record*, 28 July 1855; *Norwich Examiner*, 31 August 1855; *Hartford Courant*, 8 March 1856. See also *Saturday Evening Union and Essex North Record*, 29 September 1855; *Lowell American Citizen*: 25 August, 16 November 1855; *Norwich Evening Courier*, 30 June 1855; *State Guard*, quoted in *Hartford Courant*, 25 June 1855; *Courant*: 16 June, 8 September 1855, 20 February 1856; *Meriden Transcript*, 2 March 1856; *Telegraph*, 16 May, 24 October 1855; *Morning Herald*: 6 July, 17 August, 7 September 1855.
7. *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 2 April 1856; *Freedom is National; Slavery is Sectional* [campaign flyer dated 2 April 1856] (Hartford: n.p. 1856); *Plan of Organization, Recommended by the Republican Convention Held at Hartford, March 12, 1856* (Hartford: n.p. 1856). Important exceptions were J. F. Kimball, editor/proprietor of the *Lynn News*, and D. E. Sykes, editor/proprietor of the *Norwich Courier*. See *Norwich Weekly Courier*: 12 March, 19 March, 26 March, 1856; *Lynn News*: 21 September, 12 October, 2 November 1855. For the Republicans at the state level, see for example Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 208-23, 274-8; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 162-5; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 115-35.
8. *Lynn News*, 9 November 1855; *Amesbury Villager*, 15 November 1855; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 2 April, 9 April 1856; *Telegraph*, 17 October 1855; *Morning Herald*, 11 October, 12 October 1855. See also Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 127-8; Lex Renda, "The Polity and the Party System: Connecticut and New Hampshire, 1840-1876," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1991), 368, 425.
9. The Democratic candidate for Canal Commissioner, the only statewide office up for grabs in 1855, received 91% of Bigler's 1854 vote. In contrast, the American, Republican, and Whig fusion candidate Thomas Nicholson polled only 75%

of Governor Pollock's fusion total in 1854. In Dauphin no votes were registered for Republican candidate Passmore Williamson, though in the western counties, where Republicans repudiated Nicholson, Williamson attracted pockets of support.

10. See for example *Hartford Times*, 8 March 1856; *Lynn Bay State*, 1 November 1855; *Newburyport Herald*, 30 October 1855; *Telegraph*: 22 August, 17 October 1855; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 180-3; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 212-3, 221-3, 277-8; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 166-8; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 131-2; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 368.

11. Dwight Loomis to Lucius Hendee, 12 April 1856, Lucius Hendee Correspondence, Connecticut Historical Society (CHS); Stephen Miller to Simon Cameron, 28 August 1856, Simon Cameron Papers, Dauphin County Historical Society (DCHS). See also George T. Hummel to Simon Cameron, 23 September 1856, Simon Cameron Papers, DCHS; *Telegraph*: 24 October 1855; 22 February 1856; *Lynn News*, 11 July 1856; *Amesbury Villager*, 28 February 1856.

12. For more on this process from a national and state perspective, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 194-245; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 278-448; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 178-208; Mulkern, *Know Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 137-173; Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," 190-237.

13. Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The John Winston Company, 1905), I: 265; *Telegraph*, 24 July 1856; *Amesbury Villager*, 5 June 1856. See also Learned Hebard to Lucius Hendee, 26 September 1856, Lucius Hendee Correspondence, CHS; *Telegraph*: 28 March, 14 August, 28 August 1856; *Lynn News*, 30 September 1856; *Andover Advertiser*: 2 February, 12 July, 20 September, 25 October 1856; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 11 June, 9 July, 8 October 1856; *Amesbury Villager*: 19 June, 16 October 1856.

14. *Amesbury Villager*, 18 September 1856; *Telegraph*, 1 April 1856; *Courant*, 16 October 1856; *Common Sense*, *The Crisis*, and *the Republican Ticket* [Connecticut campaign pamphlet] (n.p., 1856); *Lynn News*, 27 June 1856. See also *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 22 October 1856.

15. For more on this theme, see in particular David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso Press, 1991); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso Press, 1990).

16. *Hartford Courant*, 2 October 1856; *Telegraph*, 14 August 1856; Foster quoted in Lawrence Bruser, "Political Antislavery in Connecticut, 1844-1858," (Ph.D.

dissertation, Columbia University, 1974), 362; *Amesbury Villager*, 11 September 1856. See also *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 6 November 1856; *Hartford Courant*: 8 July, 20 October 1856; *Telegraph*: 11 September, 25 September 1856; *Lawrence Courier*, 17 July 1856; *Lynn News*, 22 February 1856.

17. *Hartford Courant*, 8 July 1856; *Harrisburg Morning Herald*: 26 September 1856; *ibid.*, 24 September 1856. See also *Morning Herald*: 30 September, 9 October 1856; Bruser, "Political Antislavery in Connecticut," 318, 421; John F. Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1975), 92-3; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 196-203.

18. *Amesbury Villager*, 7 August 1856.

19. A point also made by Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 261-300; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 321-36.

20. *Telegraph*, 28 March 1856; *Lynn News*, 18 July 1856; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 11 June 1856; *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 6 November 1856.

21. See *Telegraph*, 13 November 1856; *Amesbury Villager*, 5 November 1856; *Hartford Courant*, 7 November 1856. See also Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 413-48; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 151-3.

22. *New London Weekly Chronicle*, 11 December 1856.

23. *Lowell American Citizen*: 2 October 1857. Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 157-73.

24. *Lynn News*, 8 September 1857; *Lowell American Citizen*, 13 November 1857. See also *American Citizen*: 25 September, 6 November 1857; *Lynn News*: 22 September, 29 September 1857.

25. See for example "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1858, No. 1; "Governor's Address," *Massachusetts Senate Documents*, 1859 No.1; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 248-53; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 157-73.

26. James Babcock to Mark Howard, 3 December 1856, Mark Howard Papers, CHS; Augustus Brandegee to Joseph Hawley, 25 March 1857, Joseph Hawley Papers, Library of Congress (LC). See also George Bliss to Hawley, 16 March 1857, Joseph Hawley Papers, LC; *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 18 February 1857; Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," 239-68; Renda, "The Polity and the Party System," 457-65.

27. *Norwich Weekly Courier*, 14 January 1857. See also *ibid.*, 24 March 1857; *Hartford Courant*, 13 March 1857.
28. Governor William Buckingham, "Annual Speech," *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: State Printer, 1858), 21. See also *Norwich Weekly Courier*: 10 March, 24 March 1858; 12 March 1859; *Norwich Morning Bulletin*: 14 January, 11 February 1859; Parmet, "Know-Nothings in Connecticut," 303-9; Renda, "Polity and the Party System," 497-500; 518-22.
29. *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 23 September 1857. See also *ibid.*, 19 August, 30 September, 7 October 1857; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 261-2; Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, 106-109.
30. *Philadelphia North American*, 19 February 1858, as cited in Malcolm Eiselen, *the Rise of Pennsylvania Protectionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1922), 246; *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 14 July 1858. See also *ibid.*: 30 June, 7 July, 21 July 1858.
31. *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 4 August 1858. See also *ibid.*: 18 August, 22 September, 6 October 1858. For more on the crucial 1858 election, see Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, 110-8; Collins, "The Democrats' Loss of Pennsylvania in 1858;" Eiselen, *Rise of Pennsylvania Protectionism*, 246-9; Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War*, 143-57.
32. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I: 345. See also Coleman, *Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy*, 117-40; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 242-89.
33. *Philadelphia North American*, 30 March 1860, as cited in Eiselen, *Rise of Pennsylvania Protectionism*, 257.

CONCLUSION

The story of Know Nothingism's eclipse is a familiar one to scholars of American populist movements. Rising suddenly, with unusual energy and a thumping determination to change things, populist third party movements have suffered quick defeat throughout this nation's past. Depending upon their perspective commentators have expressed either relief or frustration at the seeming ease with which the political mainstream diffuses populist anger, coopts the third party agenda, beats back the heady promise of thoroughgoing change.

What the critics of populist insurgencies ignore, of course, is that defeat often yields important long-term victories. Without question third parties have served a crucial function within our political system, venting new issues and mobilizing new political demands which invariably have been met--if not on the populist's own terms. It is not exaggerating the point to say that whatever degree of responsiveness and innovation exists in our system of politics, the principal credit belongs to third parties.¹ Major parties represent vested interests who are naturally resistant to change; most major party leaders sensibly fear risking all on novel issues and demands that carry uncertain political consequences. While there was much that was reprehensible in the Know Nothing agenda, and no inconsiderable amount of facile demagoguery in Know Nothing political culture, the movement's millennial Protestantism infused the Republican party with a Pentecostal temper that it retained well after the Civil War.² And there was also a far more profound and historic legacy. For smashing the Whig party and framing an early popularization of the antislavery appeal, the northern Know

Nothings can take indirect credit for the election of Abraham Lincoln, the first President openly hostile to slavery.³ No other populist movement can boast of such a monumental impact on our history.

Just as we can probe the aftermath of Know Nothingism for signs of its long-term effects on American public life, so too we must examine public life prior to the populist eruption to fully grasp its origins and import. Northern Know Nothingism was a creature of the nineteenth-century's culture of politics and governance. Much the same may be said, I suggest, of all nineteenth-century populist movements. People's routine experiences with partisan politics and governance socialized them into two frameworks of public life, interrelated yet phenomenologically distinct. The values of partisanship--commitment to principles, selfless devotion to the cause--were ritualized during campaigns, celebrated at rallies, bruited about in homes and taverns, and expressed on election day when men who presumably personified a party's values stood for office. The values of nonpartisanship--commitment to the public good, search for a harmony of interest--guided governance, both state and local, on most matters that lay beyond people's learned partisan political differences. The broadly shared values and experiences of partisanship and nonpartisanship intertwined to shape popular political character and thought. Partisanship and nonpartisanship together formed the constitutive elements of nineteenth-century public life.

Know Nothing populism sprang from the interaction of these two frameworks of thought and experience with the disruptive economic and demographic changes of late antebellum society. Social change produced new problems of governance in public

life and, eventually, explicit political demands on the regime. Citizens expected their party leaders to respond in ways that advanced the public good, the objective that most people idealized in their public lives. Normally political elites succeed in harnessing what stands for the public good to party objectives, conflating the values of partisanship with public goals. To the extent that nineteenth-century partisan politics became one means of realizing the end, citizens enthusiastically received and remade the culture of partisanship and abided their leaders' partisan directives. But when leadership for party's sake interfered with the realization of the public good, when political elites seemed by their actions or inactions to have abandoned the public good for partisan or personal objectives, reformers had the opportunity to focus voter anger on governance.

Eventually the Know Nothings appropriated the reform mantle, directing themselves to issues of governance in public life by politicizing the nonpartisan ideal. Herein lay the political contribution of populism and its broader systemic significance. The regime's failure to respond to felt needs prompted an *antiparty* uprising to reconstitute nonpartisan governance. Know Nothing populism as both a process of political mobilization and oppositional culture created, however briefly, a politics bereft of the partisanship that under normal circumstances defined one dimension of the nineteenth-century's political public sphere. In the 1850s new issues of public life entered formal political space via the bridge that Know Nothingism provided between the cultures and traditions of governance and electoral politics.

This formulation of populism and public life should have applications beyond the 1850s. One argument of this dissertation has been that the style and conduct of leadership figured crucially in nineteenth-century politics, as of course it does today. For citizens who looked to third party alternatives in the 1850s, there reached a point at which the issues in play--liquor, immigration, political economic reform, slavery--by themselves mattered less than the perceived manner in which party leaders reacted to them. A leadership's partisan calculation, in certain contexts, could seem a betrayal of public trust, a design for special interest control over public life. Issues are the building blocs of politics. The analysis presented in this dissertation suggests that the manner in which political elites handle issues, their performance of the public's business, was of equal importance in determining the relationship between party leaders and mass publics in the nineteenth-century.⁴

Certainly the history of the Know Nothing movement and party attests to the salience of leadership questions in nineteenth-century politics. Despite some impressive "reform" achievements, the brief era of Know Nothing power was fraught with embarrassment, failure, and contradiction. Efforts by American party leaders to enlist political nativism for narrow personal and political objectives enabled competitors to portray the third party as a hobby horse for scheming politicians, precisely what the populists had promised to overcome. The early Republicans, deploying their own version of the popular antiparty vernacular, cast the leadership of the American movement as political traders, relying on the Slave Power threat to discipline the anti-Democratic electorate against the wire-pullers who ran things in the

American party. Know Nothing populism attracted a raft of operatives and hacks whose personal and political ambitions eventually steered it down political dead-ends. Of course, the quality and character of third party leadership varies from movement to movement. But the history of nineteenth-century third partyism strongly suggests that the Know Nothing movement and party differed only in degree, not in kind. To one extent or another, populist expressions always act as magnets for frustrated political aspirants whose pretensions for power poorly serve the populist rank and file.

The culture of nineteenth-century governance decisively impacted the trajectory of Know Nothing populism. In the context of emergent political issues and elite uncertainty regarding them, the regime's distributive mainsprings made it especially easy for the Know Nothings' to argue that politics and government was suddenly awash in special interests. Once in power, however, these champions of the people served so many interests and produced such ambiguous policy that it is difficult to nail down precisely what Know Nothing government stood for. This in itself is not unusual. The nineteenth-century's regime of distributive governance generated a similarly ambiguous pattern of particularistic policy outputs that *in the aggregate* served to modernize the American economy, despite the persistence of the police power in nineteenth-century statutory law and jurisprudence. What was unusual, however, and highly problematic for the Know Nothings' long-term fortunes, was that their behavior in power (governance) contradicted their intention to roust special interests from their perch atop the distributive regime. The Know Nothings served as a vehicle for a great variety of interests to enter government and exercise power and influence. To be sure,

some of these interests had been ignored or disadvantaged by the two major parties. But many other groups simply adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the “populist moment,” carrying on their vested interests in much the same manner and with much the same success as before.⁵ The culture of distributive politics and governance was far more stable and limiting than the populists had first imagined.

Limits from within also shaped Know Nothing populism once it achieved its first goal of winning a seat at the table of power. The Know Nothing movement lacked the materials necessary to fend off the dialectic which invariably defeats third parties. At the height of populist fury the Know Nothing movement seemed boundless in its potential for political change. Its appeal as an antiparty reform movement galvanized many fed up with the partisan truckling and maneuvering of the major parties around public issues that were felt to be above mere politics. Populism’s great attraction is this antiparty, democratic ethos. Yet by entering formal politics and government the antiparty uprising, in effect, sank to the level of mere politics. And mere politics was something the movement was ill-equipped to succeed at, for it requires long-term strategies and short-term accommodations and an institutional culture of loyalty of the sort which political parties rely upon to discipline their ranks and smooth over factionalism. Know Nothingism’s raging popularity rested in large measure on the presumed absence of such tactical and institutional imperatives. The movement’s transition to power, its ultimate metamorphosis into a formal party, compelled decisions and actions that contradicted the antiparty spirit at the center of its appeal. The Know Nothing party failed to escape the dialectic their triumph set in motion.

Their loss was history's gain, insofar as it permitted the Republican party to rise and strike at slavery. It is perhaps small consolation for third party movements that their demise is by no means as complete as their formal disappearance might suggest. But those interested in building the next third party movement may hold out optimism that defeat is not a foregone conclusion. The third party dialectic is not an iron cage, as the Republican breakthrough attests. Its transcendence requires unusual political and social circumstances, dedicated and gifted leaders, and most important, a rank and file sufficiently persuaded of the righteousness of the cause and their leaders' commitment to it and to them above all else. Such a confluence of political events and social forces, of grassroots pressure for genuine change and leadership responsive to that impulse, is neither particularly rare nor doomed from the start. Indeed, the depth of Americans' anger with the regime of politics and government today, their desire to transcend the partisanship and special interest politics that currently grips Washington, suggests another populist moment is near at hand, if not already upon us. However daunting the project of building and sustaining an independent reform politics, ultimately the outcome of the next populist moment will be, as always, in the movement's hands.

Notes

1. Ronald Formisano also makes this point: *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 342-3.
2. See for example Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Paul Kleppner, *The Third Party System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).
3. A point made by Michael Holt as well: "The Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of U.S. Political Parties* Vol. I (New York: Chelsea House Publishing, 1973), 575-620: 620.
4. The larger point here being that scholars too readily assume a straightforward relationship between issues, felt interests, and political behavior and thought in the nineteenth century. We know that today such a tidy relationship does not exist; to treat the nineteenth-century electorate differently simply because turnout was higher, because nineteenth-century parties and insurgent movements advanced broad policy orientations (can we not identify same in the twentieth?), and because the nineteenth-century's regime of "courts and parties" differs from our modern welfare state, sets up an arbitrary break in the development of American political culture. It is a question of degrees, but it is perhaps too easy (however convenient for purposes of periodization) to speak of nineteenth-century political behavior and thought and mean something utterly alien from "modern" politics.
5. The phrase of course belongs to Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This dissertation employs several modest statistical methods for arranging and describing election data and legislative behavior. In deciding to use statistical tools I have been cognizant of the recent trend in the historical profession away from them. Judging from the latest dissertations and monographs, the quantitative appendix, to say nothing of a tabular presentation within the body of the text itself, has become unfashionable. It seems the profession, after a rush to embrace social science methodology, is beginning to heed Disraeli's famous dictum.

This is a welcome trend: few historians, and this author is not among them, have the patience and attention level to wade through a monograph burdened by excessive quantitative presentations. It was precisely with this thought in mind that I decided to produce the tables that appear in Appendix B. Statistical methods do have many practical uses, the most important of which, for my purposes, is economy. I decided the most efficient way to present the electoral history of the three counties was to organize the empirical details into simple and easily comprehended tables. General trends in the data could then be summarized briefly in the text so as to get on with the larger human story. Whatever the merits of this dissertation, I hope that I have accomplished this goal.

Nonetheless I am now obliged to extend an already long dissertation with a few methodological explanations. For the estimates of voter turnout in Table B.5, I used the town level census of voters for Massachusetts in 1850 contained in *Massachusetts Senate Documents, No. 30* (1851), the town census of polls in the *Connecticut Register* for 1852, and the town census of polls and voters in the *Connecticut Register* for 1861. Unfortunately, no such data exists for Pennsylvania in the antebellum years. To determine the number of voters in New London County before the Civil War, I calculated the ratio of voters to polls in 1861 and multiplied that figure by the number of polls in 1852. The next step was to divide the number of voters by the total population of Essex and New London counties at 1850 and 1852 respectively. New London's population at 1852 was estimated logarithmically using federal census data for 1840, 1850, and 1860, as were county populations for all intervening years. The voters-to-population ratio was then multiplied by the annual county population estimates, producing an estimate of the eligible electorate for the years 1842 to 1857. The actual gubernatorial vote for each year was then divided by the estimated eligible electorate, producing the estimates of voter turnout in the table.

The correlations in Tables B.8 through B.18 are Kendall's tau rank order coefficients. As with the interyear correlations (Table B.4), the Kendall coefficients were produced using Stata 3 statistics software. Kendall's tau is simply a measurement of agreement between two or more sets of ordinal ranks, in this case, of party vote and

the social variables listed in the tables. It is a linear statistic, and does not weigh the influence of social variables on voting behavior. Rather, I intend Kendall's tau as a shorthand for countywide tendencies in party votes. The procedure constructs an ordinal ranking of every town's relative party vote and a similar ranking for the social variables given in the tables. The tau statistic signifies the number of agreeing and disagreeing pairs as a percentage of the total number of possible pairs. The percentage in parentheses is the probability that any two pairs among those ranked would produce the same relative order in a random sample.

The dedicated social science researcher may wonder why I did not choose a more powerful statistical tool, such as multiple regression. The answer is both methodological and epistemological. The small size of the universes here (counties ranging from 18 to 30 towns) rule out multiple regression. But even if the counties contained enough towns to safely warrant the application of ecological regression, I would not have employed this method. The impulse behind this dissertation was to explore people's political ideas and their interaction with the regime of nineteenth-century governance, not estimating the relative influence of social characteristics on voting behavior. We already have a small library's worth of such work, the basic findings of which are clearly suggested in my more modest rank order correlations.

Tables B.7 and B.8, presenting the Essex County vote during the Coalition years, also require explanation. Unfortunately, town-level voting data on races for the General Court, where the Coalition was operative, are not readily available; for those races, newspapers generally reported only the winners' names, place of residence, and party affiliation. Thus the data in the tables are based on official returns for gubernatorial elections. Nevertheless we can get some idea of the Coalition's base by merely reversing the correlations in the Whig column in Table B.8, or by combining the Free Soil and Democratic percentages in Table B.7. This is hardly ideal, but it represents the easiest way to limn the Coalition vote.

Finally, the Rice Index of Party Cohesion expresses the degree to which a political party is united on a particular legislative roll call, while the Index of Party Disagreement is a measure of partisan polarity on a given roll (Tables B.19-B.20). Both indices range from 0 to 100. The Rice Index of Cohesion is calculated by dividing the number of party members voting in a majority by the total number of party members voting, subtracting 50, and multiplying by 2. Hence if 75 of 100 Democrats vote yea on a bill, the cohesion score would be 50. The Index of Party Disagreement is computed simply by determining the percentage of two parties voting Yea on a given bill and subtracting the smaller percentage from the larger.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table B.1: New London and Essex County Churches, 1850-1860

<i>New London County</i>									
<i>1850</i>									
No. of churches	Cong	Bapt	Meth	Episc	Univ	Presb	Rom Cath	Other	
Accommodations	29	32	26	5	2	3	2	3	
	13,825	12,176	7,100	2,500	1,300	1,100	1,200	2,175	
<i>1860</i>									
No. of churches	33	37	20	7	2	1	4	1	
Accommodations	13,920	13,605	7,375	3,200	1,300	200	9,550	250	
<i>Essex County</i>									
<i>1850</i>									
No. of Churches	Cong	Unit	Bapt	Meth	Univer	Presb	Episc	Rom Cath	Others
Accommodations	60	16	32	24	24	2	7	5	9
	34,211	10,350	15,625	9,460	10,590	2,200	3,175	2,800	4,078
<i>1860</i>									
No. of Churches	65	13	34	31	23	3	11	11	14
Accommodations	38,535	10,650	16,485	13,675	10,500	2,100	6,130	10,486	5,050

Source: DeBow, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1853), 61-3, 85-6; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Statistics of the United States in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 360-1, 408-9.

Table B.2: Dauphin County Churches, 1850-1860

1850											
No. of Churches	Germ Ref	Germ Luth	Meth*	Presb	Menn	Morav	Bapt	Episc	Rom Cath	Other	
Accommodations	9	24	15	7	4	12	5	1	1	10	
	4,700	12,800	4,760	3,475	680	4,060	1,700	600	500	3,050	
1860											
No. of Churches											
Accommodations	21	24	35	7	0	NR	2	2	2	5	
	7,218	10,875	13,300	4,350	0	NR	950	1,100	800	2,600	

*Note: Census takers included Methodist-oriented United Brethren and Church of God (Winebrennarians) under the rubric Methodism. My own survey of each town's 1850 census of church accommodations found that these sects constituted 86 percent of this category: United Brethren 69%, Church of God 17%, Wesleyan and Methodist Episcopal, 14%. *Sources:* Federal Nonpopulation Schedules: Dauphin County, Social Statistics, 1850; DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*, 200-5; Kennedy, *Statistics of the United States in 1860*, 454-9.

Table B.3: Percentage of Party Vote for Governor in the Three Counties, 1840-1860

<i>Essex County</i>								
	Whig%	Dem%	Lib/FS%	NatAm%	KnNoth%	Rep%	Nat Dem%	Scat%
1840	58.3	40.7	.7					
1841	51.4	44.9	3.4					.2
1842	44.9	47.4	7.6					.3
1843	45.6	40.6	13.3					.1
1844	51.4	38.1	10.4					.5
1845	45.1	30.3	11.1	12.9				.1
1846	51.2	29.7	13.9	4.7				.5°
1847	47.2	36.9	10.2	3.8				.5
1848	49.5	18.6	31.9					.3
1849	50.6	27.2	21.9					1.5°
1850	47.5	30.3	18.2					.3
1851	48.4	32.2	19.2					.3
1852	42.9	29.2	26.9					.2
1853	45.5	26.3	23.2					.9
1854	18.8	6.6					4.6	.2
1855	9.6	21.5			66.9	5.7		1.6
1856	6.2	20.8			43.1	25.1		.1
1857		33.5			3.9	68.9 ²		.3
1858		26.3			18.9	47.0		.6
1859		31.4		12.7		61.5		
1860		18.8		14.8		55.7		.2
						62.9	3.5	

Nat Dem% = percentage of votes for National Democratic candidates Bradford Wales (1853) and Benjamin Butler (1860).

° includes percentage of vote for Workingmen’s party gubernatorial candidate Frederick Robinson.

² equals vote for American and Republican fusion candidate Henry J. Gardner.

Source: “Abstract of the Returns of Votes for Governor, 1820-1845, and 1846-1861” Microfilm Mss., Massachusetts State Archives.

Continued, next page.

Table B.3 cont.

New London County							Dauphin County						
	Whig%	Dem%	Lib/FS%	Temp%	KnNoth%	Rep%	Whig%	Dem%	NatAm%	Temp%	KnNoth%	Rep%	Scat%
1840							56.3	43.7					
1841	55.3	44.7					*54.1	45.9					
1842	45.8	51.6	2.6				48.8	48.0					3.2
1843	42.4	53.8	3.8				48.9	43.7					7.3
1844	48.1	48.4	3.5				*57.7	42.3					
1845	49.4	46.1	4.5				42.5	36.8	20.7				
1846	47.9	47.2	4.9				45.2	36.9	17.9				
1847	51.8	43.9	4.3				*57.2	38.4	4.3				
1848	48.8	48.0	3.3				*59.0	41.0					
1849	49.5	43.5	7.1				53.9	46.1					
1850	47.2	47.0	5.7				59.6	40.2					
1851	48.0	47.0	5.0				*57.9	42.1					.2
1852	46.1	46.3	7.6				47.7	46.3		6.1			
1853	24.9	47.5	27.6				35.3	37.0		27.8			
1854	24.8	42.8	6.3	26.0				*35.4			64.6§		
1855	9.4	32.0			58.7		12.7	38.1			49.2		
1856		46.3			45.1	8.6		47.2				52.8¥	
1857		47.6				52.4 ²		*48.8			9.4	41.7	
1858		43.6			.8	55.6		41.1				58.9	
1859		46.3			.1	53.6		41.8				58.2	
1860		47.4				52.6		*42.0				58.0	

² denotes percentage for “Union” party candidate Alexander Holley.
* denotes gubernatorial years. Party percentages for intervening years are for the office of Dauphin County state representative.
§ denotes vote for Know Nothing, Whig, and Free Soil gubernatorial candidate James Pollock.
¥ denotes vote for fusion “Union” candidates for state representative.

Source: Hartford Times and Hartford Courant, 1840 to 1860; Harrisburg Telegraph, 1840 to 1860.

Table B.4: Town Vote for Governor in the Three Counties,
Interyear Correlations, 1840-1853

	<i>Dauphin</i>		<i>Essex</i>		<i>New London</i>	
	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Democrat
1840/41	.94	.94	.89	.87		
1841/42	.96	.91	.01	.86		
1842/43	.82	.71	.20	.94	.88	.87
1843/44	.87	.79	.91	.92	.85	.88
1844/45	.44	.78	.82	.83	.73	.85
1845/46	.90	.66	.81	.89	.90	.91
1846/47	.66	.67	.93	.89	.94	.95
1847/48	.88	.85	.73	.85	.82	.84
1848/49	.87	.83	.93	.87	.87	.81
1849/50	.71	.64	.94	.87	.77	.75
1850/51	.85	.85	.84	.83	.77	.78
1851/52	.82	.92	.85	.77	.83	.84
1852/53	.86	.56	.86	.84	.56	.86
					.65	.79

Note: Correlations generated by Stata 3 statisitcs software. For sources on election returns, see Table B.3.

Table B.5: Estimated Voter Turnout, Essex and New London Counties, 1842-1857

	<i>Essex</i>		<i>New London</i>	
	Total Vote	Turnout	Total Vote	Turnout
1842	14,565	79.6	5,952	65.4
1843	14,479	76.1	6,210	67.2
1844	16,831	85.1	7,360	78.4
1845	12,380	60.3	7,121	74.7
1846	11,957	56.2	7,024	72.6
1847	12,711	57.7	7,248	73.8
1848	17,367	76.2	7,764	77.9
1849	14,071	59.8	7,324	72.4
1850	17,164	70.7	7,473	72.8
1851	18,882	75.5	7,778	74.4
1852	18,119	70.4	7,905	74.1
1853	17,397	66.4	7,425	69.8
1854	17,236	63.3	7,322	69.4
1855	17,573	62.9	7,721	73.5
1856	21,649	76.0	8,019	75.0
1857	17,817	61.1	7,350	67.5

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A. *Sources:* *Mass. Senate Documents*, 1851, No. 30 (Boston: State Printer, 1851), 3; *Connecticut Register...for 1862* (Hartford: State Printer, 1862), 34-6.

Table B.6: Percentage Difference Between Democrats and Whigs and Percentage of Third Party Vote, 1840-1853

	<i>Dauphin</i>		<i>Essex</i>		<i>New London</i>	
	%Diff	%3rdPar	%Diff	%3rdPar	%Diff	%3rdPar
1840	12.6	0.0	17.7	0.8		
1841	8.2	0.0	6.5	3.4	10.6	0.0
1842	.8	3.2	2.5	7.6	5.8	2.6
1843	5.2	7.3	5.0	13.3	11.4	3.8
1844	15.4	0.0	13.3	10.8	.3	3.5
1845	5.7	20.7	14.7	24.4	3.3	4.5
1846	8.3	17.9	21.5	18.6	.5	4.9
1847	18.8	4.3	12.3	13.7	7.9	4.3
1848	18.0	0.0	30.9	33.4	.8	3.3
1849	7.8	0.0	23.4	21.9	6.0	7.1
1850	19.4	.2	17.8	18.9	.2	5.7
1851	15.8	0.0	16.2	19.2	1.0	5.0
1852	1.4	6.1	7.8	25.5	.2	7.6
1853	1.8	27.8	19.3	27.8	22.6	27.6

Source: See source notes for Table B.3.

Table B.7: Percentage Essex County Vote by Types of Towns, 1850-1852

	1850			1851			1852		
	Governor			Governor			Governor		
	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS
Statewide	.468	.297	.226	.469	.319	.208	.449	.280	.265
Essex County	.475	.303	.182	.484	.322	.192	.429	.292	.269
N = ()									
Nonindustrial (5)									
towns	.599	.210	.191	.600	.233	.167	.525	.222	.253
Farming (2)									
towns	.520	.385	.095	.580	.296	.123	.510	.327	.164
Shoe (14)									
towns	.429	.324	.247	.440	.334	.225	.426	.268	.306
Factory (3)									
towns	.533	.258	.209	.495	.345	.160	.389	.389	.222
Mixed-Indus. (4)									
towns	.466	.322	.212	.531	.333	.136	.408	.356	.236
Fishing (2)									
towns	.453	.385	.162	.467	.367	.165	.345	.370	.285
Orthodox (18)									
towns	.560	.248	.192	.549	.288	.164	.470	.286	.244
Dissenting (4)									
towns	.416	.372	.211	.436	.379	.186	.349	.367	.283
Mixed Rel. (7)									
towns	.385	.359	.256	.430	.348	.222	.399	.294	.307

Note: Nonindustrial towns = towns with fewer than 15% of 1855 population employed in non-agricultural labor; Farming towns = those nonindustrial towns where the number of farmers exceeded numbers of non-farmers; Shoe towns = towns where over 50% of non-agricultural workforce employed in boot and shoemaking; Factory towns = towns where over 50% of non-agricultural workforce employed in textile factories; Mixed-Indus. = industrial towns characterized by a mixture of small and large manufacturing industries; Fishing towns = towns where over 50% of non-agricultural workforce employed in fishery; Orthodox towns = towns where over 60% of all church accommodations at 1850 were Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian churches; Dissenting towns = towns where over 60% of all church accommodations at 1850 were in Baptist, Methodist and Universalist churches; Mixed Rel. = towns where neither Orthodox or Dissenting churches dominated town, as defined by above.

Sources: "Abstract of the Returns of Votes for Governor, 1846-1861" Microfilm Mss., Massachusetts State Archives; Federal Nonpopulation Schedules, Essex County Agriculture; Social Statistics, 1850; DeWitt, *Statistical Information Relating to...Industry in Massachusetts...1855*, 111-72.

Table B.8: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Select Variables and Party Votes, Essex County, 1850-2

	1850 Governor			1851 Governor			1852 Governor		
	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS
Whig Vote	-	-.50	-.345	-	-.468	-.394	-	-.508	-.269
Prob Z> tau		(.000)	(.009)		(.000)	(.003)		(.000)	(.037)
Dem. Vote	-.50 (.000)	-	-.153 (.249)	-.468 (.000)	-	-.138 (.294)	-.508 (.000)	-	-.214 (.097)
Free Soil	-.345 (.009)	-.153 (.249)	-	-.394 (.003)	-.138 (.294)	-	-.269 (.037)	-.214 (.097)	-
Farming	+.222 (.097)	-.217 (.105)	-.042 (.75)	+.042 (.752)	-.153 (.154)	+.016 (.906)	+.122 (.364)	-.085 (.527)	-.127 (.343)
NonFarm.	-.138 (.294)	-.015 (.91)	+.172 (.189)	-.138 (.29)	+.099 (.453)	+.202 (.124)	-.044 (.736)	-.01 (.91)	+.237 (.072)
Indus.	-.084 (.524)	-.148 (.26)	+.256 (.051)	-.163 (.216)	+.015 (.91)	+.266 (.043)	-.009 (.94)	-.02 (.881)	+.183 (.165)
Valuation	+.611 (.000)	-.35 (.007)	-.26 (.047)	+.414 (.002)	-.187 (.154)	-.261 (.047)	+.458 (.001)	-.32 (.015)	-.217 (.099)
Dissent	-.316 (.016)	+.157 (.233)	+.246 (.061)	-.21 (.108)	+.191 (.145)	+.127 (.335)	-.271 (.039)	+.092 (.484)	+.152 (.248)
Orthodox	+.316 (.016)	-.157 (.233)	-.209 (.112)	+.149 (.256)	-.209 (.112)	-.09 (.495)	+.239 (.069)	-.129 (.325)	-.085 (.52)

Note: See methodological note, Appedix A. Farming = percentage of 1850 population that were farmers; NonFarm = percentage of 1855 population engaged in non-Agricultural employment; Industry = percentage of 1855 population engaged in industrial work only; Valuation = per capita valuation of each town at 1850; Dissent = percentage of 1850 church accommodations that were Baptist, Methodist, and Universalist; Orthodox = percentage of 1850 church accommodations that were Orthodox Congregationalist, Unitarian Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian. *Sources:* Federal Nonpopulation Schedules, Essex County Agriculture; Social Statistics, 1850; DeWitt, *Statistical Information Relating to...Industry in Massachusetts...1855*, 111-72, and *Abstract of the Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts...1855*, 13-9, 206-7.

Table B.9: Percentage New London County Party Vote by Types of Towns, 1852-1854

	1852			1853			1854			
	Governor			Governor			Governor			ML
	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS	Whg	Dem	FS	
Statewide	.45	.50	.05	.34	.51	.15	.32	.47	.04	.17
N.L. Cty	.46	.46	.08	.25	.47	.28	.25	.43	.06	.26
Farming (6) towns	.42	.53	.05	.28	.53	.19	.26	.49	.05	.20
Industrial (2) towns	.58	.48	.02	.32	.41	.27	.37	.40	.04	.19
Factory (3) towns	.43	.48	.08	.34	.49	.17	.28	.46	.06	.20
Fishing (2) towns	.48	.43	.09	.19	.44	.38	.19	.31	.07	.43
Mixed (5) economy	.34	.53	.13	.15	.53	.32	.14	.48	.09	.29
Orthodox (5) towns	.46	.49	.05	.35	.48	.16	.32	.46	.04	.18
Dissenting (6) towns	.40	.52	.08	.14	.50	.36	.16	.43	.08	.34
Mixed Rel.(7) towns	.50	.42	.08	.28	.46	.26	.28	.42	.06	.24

Note: Farming towns = those in which 5% or less of the 1850 population were employed in nonagricultural work; Industrial towns = those in which more than 15% of the population in 1850 engaged in industrial work other than in textiles; Factory = those in which over 50% of nonagricultural employees engaged in woolen or cotton mills; Fishing = those in which more than 10% of population engaged in fishing; Mixed = those in which less than 15% of the population employed in nonagricultural labor; Orthodox towns = those in which 60% + of the total church accommodations in 1850 were Orthodox Congregationalist, Unitarian, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian; Dissenting = those in which 60% + of the 1850 accommodations were Baptist, Methodist, Universalist, Christian, Seventh-Day Adventist. Mixed = those in which neither Orthodox or Dissenting congregations dominated town, as defined by above. **Sources:** Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules, Connecticut Industry: 1850; Agriculture: 1850; Social Statistics: 1850, Mss., Conn. State Archives; DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States...Compendium of the Seventh Census*; Kennedy, *Statistical View of the United States, 1860*; official election returns printed in the *Hartford Courant* and *Hartford Times*.

Table B.10: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Party Vote and Select Variables, New London County, 1853-1854

	1853			1854			
	Whig	Governor Dem	FS	Whig	Governor Dem	FS	ML
Whig Vote	-	-.281	-.608	-	-.255	+.132	-.673
Prob Z > tau		(.103)	(.000)		(.14)	(.444)	(.000)
Dem. Vote	-.281	-	-.11	-.255	-	-.343	+.007
	(.103)		(.52)	(.14)		(.047)	(.97)
Free Soil	-.608	-.11	-	+.132	-.343	-	-.185
	(.000)	(.52)		(.444)	(.047)		(.284)
Farming	+.02	+.281	-.203	+.085	+.45	-.132	-.281
	(.91)	(.103)	(.24)	(.622)	(.009)	(.444)	(.103)
NonFarm.	+.059	-.386	+.177	-.033	-.503	+.238	+.15
	(.733)	(.025)	(.307)	(.85)	(.004)	(.169)	(.384)
Indust.	+.124	-.32	+.085	+.059	-.307	+.14	+.059
	(.427)	(.064)	(.622)	(.733)	(.075)	(.417)	(.733)
Valuation	+.399	-.281	-.059	+.36	-.242	+.185	-.346
	(.021)	(.103)	(.733)	(.037)	(.161)	(.284)	(.045)
Dissent	-.223	+.079	+.197	-.446	-.013	+.04	+.393
	(.196)	(.648)	(.254)	(.01)	(.939)	(.818)	(.023)
Orthodox	+.307	-.163	-.203	+.451	-.046	-.04	-.333
	(.075)	(.344)	(.24)	(.009)	(.791)	(.818)	(.053)

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A. Farming = percentage of 1850 population that were farmers; NonFarm = percentage of 1850 population engaged in non-agricultural employment (e.g., industry, fishing); Indust. = percentage of 1850 population engaged in industrial work only (excludes fishing); Valuation = per capita wealth of each town at 1850; Dissent = percentage of 1850 church accommodations that were Baptist, Methodist, and Universalist; Orthodox = percentage of 1850 church accommodations that were Orthodox Congregationalist, Unitarian Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian. *Sources:* see source notes for Table B.9.

Table B.11: Percentage Dauphin County Party Vote by Types of Towns, 1851-1853

	1851 Governor		1852 State Rep			1853 State Rep		
	Whg	Dem	Whg	Dem	ML	Whg	Dem	ML
Dauphin County N = ()	.58	.42	.48	.46	.06	.35	.37	.28
Farming (16) towns:								
Dairy (6) farms	.67	.33	.57	.39	.04	.47	.27	.26
Mixed (6) dairy/wheat	.64	.36	.55	.40	.05	.45	.37	.18
Small (5) farms	.47	.53	.38	.59	.03	.28	.48	.24
Mixed (3) economy	.73	.27	.69	.29	.02	.57	.30	.13
Industrial (2) towns	.56	.46	.51	.39	.10	.38	.37	.26
Urban/ (1) Commercial	.46	.54	.31	.59	.10	.14	.39	.47
German (5) churches	.62	.38	.55	.43	.02	.47	.42	.11
Dissenting (4) churches	.79	.21	.72	.28	.01	.68	.20	.11
Mixed Rel.(12) churches	.53	.47	.42	.50	.08	.27	.38	.35

Note: Farming towns = those in which less than 5% of the 1850 population were employed in nonagricultural work; Dairy = farming towns in which avg. farm produced \$300 or more in dairy goods; Mixed dairy/wheat farms = farming towns in which avg. farm produced between \$250-\$299 in dairy goods; Small farms = farming towns in which avg. farm produced less than \$250 and owned less than \$100 worth of farm machinery; Industrial towns = more than 15% of the population in 1850 engaged in industrial work; Mixed economy = those in which less than 15% of the population employed in nonagricultural labor; Urban/Commercial = nonfarming towns with less than 15% of population employed in industry; German towns = those in which 60% + of the total church accommodations in 1850 were Lutheran, Reformed, or German Catholic; Dissenting = those in which 60% + of the 1850 accommodations were Moravian, Christian, Winebrennarian Baptist, Methodist; Mixed = those in which neither German nor Dissenting congregations dominated town, as defined by above. *Sources:* Federal Nonpopulation Census Schedules Pennsylvania Industry: 1850; Agriculture: 1850; Social Statistics: 1850, Mss., Pennsylvania State Archives; DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States...Compendium of the Seventh Census*; Kennedy, *Statistical View of the United States, 1860*; official election returns printed in the *Harrisburg Telegraph*.

Table B.12: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Select Variables and Party Votes, Dauphin County, 1851-53

	1851 Governor		1852 Assembly			1853 Assembly		
	Whg	Dem	Whg	Dem	ML	Whg	Dem	ML
Whig Vote Prob $Z > \tau $	-	-1.0 (.000)	-	-.834 (.000)	-.066 (.659)	-	-.567 (.000)	-.420 (.006)
Dem Vote	-1.0 (.000)	-	-.834 (.000)	-	-.107 (.473)	-.567 (.000)	-	-.013 (.933)
Maine Law	-	-	-.066 (.659)	-.107 (.473)	-	-.420 (.006)	-.013 (.933)	-
Industry	+.114 (.469)	-.114 (.469)	+.124 (.432)	-.200 (.205)	+.124 (.433)	+.095 (.546)	-.214 (.184)	+.133 (.398)
Valuation	+.37 (.019)	-.37 (.019)	+.200 (.205)	-.305 (.053)	+.342 (.03)	+.362 (.022)	-.400 (.011)	+.152 (.334)
ValFarm	+.483 (.001)	-.483 (.001)	+.420 (.005)	-.333 (.026)	-.062 (.679)	+.373 (.015)	-.391 (.001)	-.129 (.429)
MechAg	+.499 (.001)	-.499 (.001)	+.467 (.002)	-.396 (.008)	-.145 (.333)	+.512 (.001)	-.425 (.006)	-.226 (.142)
Dairy	+.356 (.017)	-.356 (.017)	+.404 (.007)	-.285 (.057)	-.137 (.362)	+.391 (.001)	-.356 (.021)	-.122 (.429)
Farms	+.261 (.081)	-.261 (.081)	+.246 (.101)	-.190 (.204)	-.261 (.082)	+.252 (.101)	-.13 (.397)	-.382 (.013)
Germ. Chrch	-.068 (.657)	+.068 (.657)	-.059 (.70)	+.041 (.79)	+.005 (.976)	-.114 (.459)	+.246 (.116)	-.014 (.929)
Dissent	+.534 (.001)	-.534 (.001)	+.543 (.000)	-.507 (.001)	+.009 (.952)	+.435 (.005)	-.561 (.000)	-.014 (.93)
Orthodox	0.00 (1.00)	0.00 (1.00)	-.119 (.439)	+.085 (.58)	+.264 (.086)	-.068 (.658)	-.119 (.439)	+.323 (.036)

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note for Table B.11.

Table B.13: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Party Vote and Select Variables, New London County, 1855

	1855		
	Whig	Governor Dem	KN
Whig Vote Prob Z > tau	-	-.137 (.426)	-.36 (.037)
Dem. Vote	-.137 (.426)	-	-.503 (.004)
Free Soil/ Kn Noth	-.36 (.037)	-.503 (.004)	-
Farming	+.072 (.677)	+.137 (.426)	-.294 (.088)
NonFarm.	-.02 (.91)	-.346 (.045)	+.399 (.021)
Indust.	-.02 (.91)	-.333 (.053)	+.333 (.053)
Valuation	+.373 (.031)	-.033 (.85)	-.307 (.075)
Dissent	-.262 (.129)	-.407 (.019)	+.485 (.005)
Orthodox	+.255 (.14)	+.32 (.064)	-.399 (.021)

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.10.

Table B.14: Percentage New London County Party Vote by Types of Towns, 1855

	1855		
	Governor		
	Whg	Dem	KN
Statewide	.14	.42	.44
N.L. County	.09	.32	.59
N = ()			
Farming (6)			
towns	.10	.38	.52
Industrial (2)			
towns	.11	.36	.53
Factory (3)			
towns	.10	.28	.62
Fishing (2)			
towns	.07	.25	.68
Mixed (5)			
economy	.07	.29	.64
Orthodox (5)			
towns	.15	.39	.46
Dissenting (6)			
towns	.07	.28	.65
Mixed Rel.(7)			
towns	.09	.32	.59

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.10.

Table B.15: Percentage Dauphin County Party Vote by Types of Towns, 1854

	1854 Governor		1854 Supreme Court			1854 Proh. Plebiscite	
	KN/Whg	Dem	Whg	Dem	KN	For	Against
Statewide	.550	.450	.215	.456	.329	.492	.508
Dauphin County	.646	.354	.224	.367	.409	.418	.582
N = ()							
Farming towns: (16)							
Dairy farms (6)	.716	.284	.350	.287	.363	.389	.611
Mixed dairy/wheat (6)	.592	.408	.335	.348	.317	.312	.688
Small farms (5)	.526	.474	.198	.493	.309	.322	.678
Mixed economy (3)	.738	.262	.262	.264	.474	.281	.719
Industrial towns (2)	.601	.399	.127	.355	.518	.379	.621
Urban/Commercial (1)	.619	.381	.112	.401	.487	.666	.334
German churches (5)	.594	.406	.273	.363	.364	.198	.802
Dissenting churches (4)	.733	.367	.417	.221	.362	.273	.727
Mixed Rel.churches (12)	.619	.381	.173	.392	.435	.506	.494

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.11.

Table B.16: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Select Variables and Party Vote, Dauphin County, 1854

	1854 Governor		1854 Supreme Court			1854 Proh. Plebiscite	
	KN/Whg	Dem	Whg	Dem	KN	For	Against
Governor: KN/Whg Vote Prob $Z > \tau $	-	-1.0 (.000)	+.115 (.444)	-.763 (.000)	+.467 (.002)	+.186 (.215)	-.186 (.215)
Dem Vote	-1.0 (.000)	-	-.13 (.384)	+.715 (.000)	-.42 (.005)	-.17 (.256)	+.17 (.256)
Supreme Court: Whig	+.115 (.444)	-.13 (.384)	-	-.225 (.132)	-.341 (.023)	-.178 (.235)	+.178 (.235)
Dem	-.763 (.000)	+.715 (.000)	-.225 (.132)	-	-.436 (.004)	-.138 (.355)	+.138 (.355)
Know Nothing	+.467 (.002)	-.42 (.005)	-.341 (.023)	-.436 (.004)	-	+.452 (.003)	-.452 (.003)
Industry	+.238 (.131)	-.238 (.131)	-.095 (.546)	-.152 (.334)	+.314 (.046)	+.191 (.227)	-.191 (.227)
Valuation	+.391 (.013)	-.391 (.013)	+.057 (.717)	-.352 (.025)	+.352 (.025)	+.314 (.046)	-.314 (.046)
ValFarm	+.475 (.002)	-.475 (.002)	+.293 (.05)	-.396 (.008)	+.194 (.194)	-.024 (.874)	+.024 (.874)
MechAg	+.380 (.011)	-.380 (.011)	+.388 (.01)	-.396 (.008)	+.083 (.578)	-.103 (.49)	+.103 (.49)
Dairy	+.364 (.015)	-.364 (.015)	+.436 (.004)	-.317 (.034)	+.02 (.895)	-.024 (.874)	+.024 (.874)
Farms	+.190 (.204)	-.190 (.204)	+.261 (.081)	-.19 (.20)	-.123 (.411)	-.325 (.03)	+.325 (.03)
Germ. Chrch	-.159 (.30)	+.159 (.30)	-.187 (.224)	+.05 (.744)	+.068 (.657)	+.005 (.976)	-.005 (.976)
Dissent	+.48 (.002)	-.48 (.002)	+.256 (.096)	-.426 (.006)	+.238 (.121)	+.049 (.748)	-.049 (.748)
Orthodox	+.272 (.077)	-.272 (.077)	-.323 (.036)	-.187 (.224)	+.374 (.015)	+.391 (.011)	-.391 (.011)

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.11.

Table B.17: Percentage Essex County Vote by Types of Towns, 1854

		1854			
		Governor			KN
		Whg	Dem	Rep	
Statewide		.211	.107	.05	.632
Essex County		.188	.066	.057	.669
N = ()					
Nonindustrial	(5)				
towns		.322	.034	.049	.595
Farming	(2)				
towns		.177	.09	.025	.709
Shoe	(14)				
towns		.183	.077	.073	.67
Factory	(3)				
towns		.139	.078	.036	.747
Mixed-Indus.	(4)				
towns		.158	.06	.047	.735
Fishing	(1)				
towns		.16	.067	.08	.693
Orthodox	(18)				
towns		.229	.059	.054	.658
Dissenting	(4)				
towns		.128	.104	.063	.705
Mixed Rel.	(7)				
towns		.161	.07	.064	.705

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.7.

Table B.18: Kendall’s Rank Order Correlation Coefficients for Select Variables and Party Vote, Essex County, 1854

	1854			
	Governor			
	Whig	Dem	Rep	KN
Whig Vote	-	-.267	+.046	-.522
Prob Z> tau		(.038)	(.721)	(.001)
Dem. Vote	-.267	-	-.113	+.018
	(.038)		(.381)	(.886)
Republican	+.046	-.113	-	-.313
	(.721)	(.381)		(.015)
Know Noth.	-.522	+.018	-.313	-
	(.000)	(.886)	(.015)	
Farming	-.084	+.037	-.066	-.123
	(.524)	(.778)	(.612)	(.348)
NonFarm.	-.154	+.175	+.051	+.108
	(.232)	(.175)	(.694)	(.402)
Indus.	-.136	+.157	+.023	+.081
	(.293)	(.225)	(.858)	(.533)
Valuation	+.421	-.239	-.198	-.117
	(.001)	(.063)	(.125)	(.363)
Dissent	-.181	+.07	+.081	+.111
	(.161)	(.589)	(.529)	(.388)
Orthodox	+.181	-.07	-.081	-.111

Note: See methodological note, Appendix A; source note Table B.7.

Table B.19: Party Voting in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 1855

Policy Sphere/N of Roll Calls	Rice Index of Cohesion					IPD
	K.N.	Dem.	Whig	Whig	Dem.	
	N=	(20)	(13)	(25)	(22)	(20)
MORES (5)		77	56	77	58	49
Nativism (1)		67	45	45	43	63
Liquor (3)		80	56	87	65	50
Schools (1)		75	67	79	53	33
COMMERCE (16)		53	38	50	42	23
Small Note Ban (2)		24	21	59	88	14
Child Ten Hour Law (1)		100	78	76	07	41
Bank Incorporations (13)		54	38	47	37	22
GOVERNMENT (8)		36	37	45	41	41
U.S. Senator (3)		43	38	28	00	12
Sale of Main Line (3)		23	42	68	100	28
County School Supt. (1)		38	33	05	05	76
Abolition of Canal Board (1)		53	27	65	26	67
FISCAL POLICY (4)		35	37	34	31	49
Bank Bonus Law (1)		08	56	29	50	25
Tax Cut on Real Prop. (1)		33	33	50	40	89
RR Tonnage Tax Repeal (1)		53	27	44	16	67
Salary Raise (1)		47	33	14	16	13

Sources: Roll calls taken from Harrisburg *Legislative Record*, 1855; Party affiliation from Harrisburg *Morning Herald*, 24 October 1854.

Table B.20: Party Voting in the Massachusetts Senate, 1855

Policy Sphere/N of Roll Calls	Rice Index of Cohesion	
	N=	K.N. (40)
MORES (9)		77
Nativism (5)		89
Billiard Rooms (1)		45
Antislavery (3)		67
COMMERCE (10)		44
Labor Reform (3)		50
Bank Incorporations (2)		24
Railroads (5)		48
Aid to (3)		55
Charter Extentions (2)		39
GOVERNMENT (6)		63
Popular election of Govt. Officials (3)		71
Election by Plurality (1)		66
Representation (1)		62
Auth. Town Agents to Sell Liquor for Certain Purposes (1)		33

Source: Journal of the Massachusetts Senate, 1855, Mss., Massachusetts State Archives.

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