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**Resurrecting the Democracy: The Democratic Party during
the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860–1884**

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Doctor of Philosophy in American Studies

University of Sussex

Submitted June 2017

Work not submitted elsewhere for examination

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

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Alexander Robert Page

Doctor of Philosophy in American Studies

‘Resurrecting the Democracy: The Democratic Party during the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1860–1884’

This thesis places the Democratic party at the centre of the Reconstruction narrative and investigates the transformation of the antebellum Democracy into its postbellum form. In doing so, it addresses the relative scarcity of scholarship on the postwar Democrats, and provides an original contribution to knowledge by (a) explaining how the party survived the Civil War and (b) providing a comprehensive analysis of an extended process of internal conflict over the Democracy’s future. This research concludes that while the Civil War caused a crisis in partisanship that lasted until the mid-1870s, it was Democrats’ underlying devotion to their party, and flexibility over party principle that allowed the Democracy to survive and reestablish itself as a strong national party.

Rather than extensively investigating state-level or grassroots politics, this thesis focuses on the party’s national leadership. It finds that public memories of the party’s wartime course constituted the most significant barrier to rebuilding the Democratic national coalition. Following an overview of the fractures exposed by civil war, the extent of these splits is assessed through an investigation of sectional reconciliation during Presidential and Radical Reconstruction. The analysis then shifts to explore competing visions of the party’s future during the late 1860s and early 1870s when public confidence in the Democracy hit its lowest point. While the early years of Reconstruction opened the party to the possibility of disintegration, by the mid-1870s Democrats had begun to adopt a stronger national party organisation. Through a coherent national strategy that turned national politics away from issues of race and loyalty and towards those of economic development and political reform, while simultaneously appealing to the party’s history, national Democratic leaders restored public confidence in the Democracy, silenced advocates of the creation of a new national party, and propelled the party back to power in 1884.

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Introduction

On June 3, 1861, the Democratic senator Stephen Douglas lost his brief but painful struggle with typhoid fever in his Chicago home. In the nation's capital, Secretary of War Simon Cameron eulogised the northern Democracy's favourite son in a statement that praised 'a man who nobly discharged party for country; a Senator who forgot all prejudice in an earnest desire to serve the public ... a patriot who defended, with equal zest and ability, the constitution as it came to us from our fathers, and whose last mission upon earth was that of rallying the people of his own State of Illinois ... around the glorious flag of the Union.'¹ Out of respect for Douglas, Cameron called for 'the colors of the republic to be draped in mourning [sic.] the honor of the illustrious dead.'² Throughout the North, the flag of the Union was hung at half-mast to mourn the death of the pre-eminent Democrat. For the Democrats, Douglas's death could not have fallen at a worse time. Just three months earlier Confederate shore batteries had fired on Fort Sumter tearing the nation apart, and the party stood fractured, leaderless and with little hope of reuniting the divided nation. On July 9, Ohio Representative Samuel Sullivan Cox proclaimed that Douglas's death was 'painfully palpable, since it makes more obscure the path by which our alienated brethren may return.'³

Not only was the Democracy divided across the Mason-Dixon line, but northern Democrats had been engaged in a deeply damaging debate about the role of an opposition party in civil war. Some previously unflinchingly partisan Democrats such as former New York senator Daniel S. Dickinson identified party loyalty as an evil during sectional strife, and argued that the nation would be saved 'not by political parties ... nor time-serving politicians, but by the patriotic pulsations of the great popular heart.'⁴ Dickinson was not alone in his belief that partisanship should be suppressed in favour of a patriotic devotion to the Union, and was joined by leading Democrats such as former Secretary of the Treasury, John A. Dix, Senator Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, and Massachusetts

¹ *New York Herald*, June 5, 1861.

² Ibid.

³ Chapman Coleman, *The Life of John J. Crittenden, with Selections from his Correspondence and Speeches. Volume II* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1871), p. 324.

⁴ *Speeches; Correspondence Etc., of the late Daniel S. Dickinson of New York. Including: Addresses on Important Topics; Speeches in the State and United States Senate, and in Support of the Government during the Rebellion; Correspondence, Private and Political (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Dickinson), Poems (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Mygatt), Etc. Edited, with a Biography, by his Brother, John R. Dickinson. In Two Volumes. Volume II* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Son, 1867), p. 4.

congressman, Benjamin F. Butler, in joining the wartime Union party. As historians have shown, by no means did the Democrats unanimously denounce secession. Rather, a vocal faction of Democratic dissenters assailed the Republican administration for launching an attack on ‘white man’s government,’ and desperately tried to broker a peace settlement with the South.⁵ By the war’s end, the Democratic party had become deeply factionalised, embittered, and inherently weak, and seemed on the verge of collapse.

This thesis explains how a party shattered by the Civil War and blamed by many northerners for its complicity in secession and wartime disloyalty (a) reunited across the sectional dividing line and (b) went on to regain national power by 1884. It does so by explaining how Democrats reacted to the dissolution of the Union, and how, despite the intensity of anti-partisanship, the party was able to survive civil war. Secondly, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the party’s path through Reconstruction to its return to the White House in 1884. Using the letters of leading Democrats, newspapers, and pamphlets, this thesis delineates the protracted internal conflict over the Democratic party’s future in the aftermath of secession. It finds that the myriad problems caused by the Civil War threatened the survival of the Democracy to a greater degree than historians have acknowledged.⁶ In the ten years following the national crisis uncertainty dominated the mindset of Democrats. Their party had been decimated by wartime political conflict behind Union lines, and party members were divided over whether the party would ever be able to throw off its synonymy with treason and disloyalty. These doubts about the future partisan composition of the nation pushed Democrats to embrace a wide array of strategies to combat the uncertainty of Reconstruction, and it was not until the mid-1870s that Democrats’ underlying devotion to their party would bring an end to this crisis in partisanship.

Unlike their Republican rivals, the Democrats of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras have rarely been afforded a central position in historiography. While recently some scholars have turned their attention to the influence of the Young America movement in promoting a more interventionist view of government among leading

⁵ *Peekskill Highland Democrat*, October 12, 1861; *Peekskill Highland Democrat*, August 26, 1861.

⁶ This has been a key contention of scholars since the so-called New Political History emerged in the 1970s. See, for example, Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

antebellum Democrats, little has been written on the postbellum Democrats.⁷ Historians have written a few select biographies of leading Democrats that have investigated the persistence of Jacksonianism and the impact of the Civil War on individuals, but no attempt has been made to explain the process of the reunification and resurgence of the national Democratic party.⁸ This thesis builds upon the relatively sparse literature on the postbellum Democrats by incorporating recent historiographical interest in sectional reconciliation, partisanship, and Civil War memory to provide a fresh interpretation of the national process of Democratic resurgence.

Since the scholars of the so-called New Political History of the 1970s broadened the study of nineteenth century politics by investigating the cultural dimensions of party politics, traditional political history has waned in its popularity amongst historians. The work of scholars such as Paul Kleppner and Richard Jensen comprehensively used quantitative analysis to explain the ethnocultural dimensions of partisanship in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and have provided invaluable insights into the relationship between voters and political parties.⁹ Building upon the work of Kleppner and Jensen to argue that partisanship was central to the lives of nineteenth century Americans, Joel H. Silbey and Jean Baker's studies of Civil War-era Democrats asserted that partisan commitment 'did more to shape the behaviour of the Democracy ... than any single event, no matter how dramatic,' and that 'through their [Democrats] partisan activities, members learned roles that they repeated as Americans.'¹⁰ In the final analysis, Silbey found that

⁷ Of the relative few recent studies on the antebellum Democrats, see Yonathan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828–1861* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁸ For examples of recent biographies on Democrats that explore the postbellum period, see Thomas Mach, *'Gentleman George' Hunt Pendleton: Party Politics and Ideological Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007); Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990); William E. Parrish, *Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998); Roy Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁹ Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 144; Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850–1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970); Richard J. Jensen, 'Quantitative Collective Biography: An Application to Metropolitan Elites,' in Robert P. Swierenga (ed.), *Quantification in American History: Theory and Research* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Richard J. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888–96* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). For other works of the New Political History that emphasised ethnocultural factors to explain voter behaviour, see Richard L. McCormick, 'Ethno-cultural Interpretations of American Voting Behaviour,' *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 89, No. 2 (June, 1974), pp. 351–77; Melvyn Hammarberg, *The Indiana Voter: The Historical Dynamics of Party Allegiance during the 1870s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), p. 240; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 24. For

the party's most substantial success during the Civil War era – its ability to survive – demonstrated the partisan continuity between the antebellum and postbellum periods.¹¹ Since then, the study of political culture has thrived and historians have argued that the expansion of the political sphere in the crucible of Civil War pushed parties to professionalise their organisations, and move away from the spectacle of antebellum campaigns and to a more concerted policy-driven canvass.¹² It is the contention of this thesis that while politics was a central concern of Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction, partisanship itself was not as rigid as the scholars of political culture have found. Ethnocultural groups certainly identified with some parties more than others, and the parties themselves made concerted efforts to consolidate their support among such groups, but partisanship itself was a fluid concept. By focusing on the Democracy's leading politicians, this study provides insights into a group of Americans who have been largely maligned by historians since the Cultural Turn.

Since the Cultural Turn of the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a decline in scholarly interest in traditional political history. This has largely been the result of the blending of political development with the struggle of freed slaves in the postwar world in Eric Foner's magisterial *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (1988). Since, historians such as Steven Hahn have placed the experience of African Americans at the centre of the Reconstruction narrative and have written compelling accounts of the struggle of former slaves in their journey from bondage to freedom.¹³ Simultaneously, scholars have broadened the study of Reconstruction by integrating stories from the West and North into the Reconstruction narrative to aptly characterise the period as one of national redevelopment.¹⁴ In doing so, scholars have opened new

further exploration of the centrality of partisanship to nineteenth century Americans, see Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy*; Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893*; Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative*; Jean H. Baker, *The Politics of Continuity: Maryland Political Parties from 1858 to 1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

¹¹ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, p. 240.

¹² Glenn C. Altschuler & Stuart Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 152–232. On the expansion of the political sphere in the Civil War era see, Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹³ For example, see, Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013).

¹⁴ For example, see Nicolas Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom: The Political Economy of Reconstruction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Eugene H. Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction*

perspectives from which to view Reconstruction. Of these, the most promising body of literature for understanding political history has been that on reunion and reconciliation.¹⁵ Since David Blight contended in his influential *Race and Reunion* (2001) that white supremacy was the driving force behind the reconciliation of white northerners and southerners following the Civil War, scholars have reasserted the centrality of the process of reunion in postwar America. Historians such as Caroline Janney have been able to demonstrate that achieving a genuine reconciliation between northerners and southerners was elusive for Americans.¹⁶ For postbellum Democrats a genuine reconciliation between northern and southerners was the central aim of Reconstruction and was critical to the party's resurrection, but has been overlooked by historians who have eschewed an investigation of the national Democracy in favour of state parties, northern Democrats, southern Democrats, or individuals.¹⁷

On the eve of the Civil War, the Democratic party was the only truly national party; not only did it appeal to northerners, southerners, and westerners, but Democrats viewed the party as a defender of divergent sectional interests. When southern Democrats walked out of the party's convention in Charleston in April 1860, they publicly announced that they had lost faith in the Democratic party to act as a national institution. Despite the enduring strength of Democratic partisanship, the results of the Civil War posed significant obstacles to the remaking of the party. Firstly, the Democracy faced the challenge of reconciling the northern and southern wings of the party. To heal the intra-

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Heather Cox Richardson, *West From Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ The growing literature on reunion and reconciliation is vast, and scholars have demonstrated the contested memory of the Civil War through investigations of the Lost Cause, the Union Cause, and the use of white supremacy in healing the wounds of the conflict. See, for example, David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); David Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory and the American Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); William A. Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*. For an example of how scholars are placing reunion at the centre of the Reconstruction narrative, see Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁷ For example, see, Edward Gambill, *Conservative Ordeal: Northern Democrats and Reconstruction, 1865–1868* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981); Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy, 1861–1874* (New York: Associated Press, 1981); Wallace Hettle, *A Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Patrick G. Williams, *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007); A. J. Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874–1890* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1951); Baker, *Affairs of Party*; Silber, *A Respectable Minority*.

party wounds, northern Democratic leaders frequently espoused white supremacist rhetoric to differentiate themselves from their Republican opponents. Secondly, northern Democrats had to find common ground to cooperate with each other following the damaging split between War and Peace Democrats. While Republicans had praised many War Democrats for their support of the Union, Peace Democrats had been constantly chastised as traitors throughout the North. As the two factions prepared to engage in peacetime politics, both were confronted with the difficult task of reviving the Democracy amid its tainted, treasonous reputation.¹⁸

This thesis is based on a wide range of public and private sources. The collections at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Huntington Library, and the New York Public Library provided the foundation for this study, and the insights found in the private letters of Democrats have been invaluable in tracing the reactions of leading party members to the Civil War and Reconstruction. To capture how Democrats appealed to American citizens, a variety of public sources were used. These included the influential Democratic newspapers of the time, notably the *New York World*, *Baltimore Sun*, and New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, as well as pamphlets, and the speeches of Democrats in the *Congressional Globe* and *Congressional Record*.

Chapter One investigates the extent to which the experience of Civil War divided the party. Focusing on northern Democrats, it highlights the fractures between War and Peace Democrats and introduces the critically important issues of treason and loyalty that significantly influenced politics in the postbellum United States. It identifies the emergence of a politics of Unionism in which War Democrats embraced an antiparty rhetoric that was rejected by the Peace Democrats in favour of a distinctly partisan assault on the Republican administration. It was through these two reactions to civil war that the roots of division within the party were to be found. The chapter demonstrates that by 1865, a fundamental uncertainty about the future of the Democratic party was deeply embedded across the nation.

¹⁸ In recent years a number of scholars have stressed the centrality of loyalty to the political culture of the Civil War-era United States. The best of these are William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Disloyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Chapter Two assesses the impact of wartime Unionism on the attempts of Democrats during Presidential Reconstruction to reunify their party. In the aftermath of the Civil War, two competing visions of party strategy emerged. Accommodationist Democrats, most of whom were former War Democrats, sought to create bipartisan alliances with conservative Republicans and believed that a new middle party would be created. In opposition, ‘straight-out’ Democrats advocated a return to Jacksonianism, appealing to white supremacy to reconcile northern with southern Democrats and consolidate support among Catholics and white workers. The chapter details the failure of the accommodationist National Union Movement and how, subsequently, the straight-out Democrats gained control of the party’s direction. It then demonstrates how the Democracy drew support largely from southern whites and northern urban working classes through a white supremacist platform, and how the defeat of Horatio Seymour in the 1868 presidential election created a rift between Democrats over the role of racism in their electoral strategy.

The next two chapters focus on the continuation of factional conflict between accommodationist and straight-out Democrats. Chapter Three explores the emergence of the ‘New Departure’ strategy that urged Democrats to accept the Reconstruction settlement, and how competing Democratic factions utilised it as a rhetorical tool. Ultimately, factional disputes over the party’s future pushed the party into an alliance with dissident Liberal Republicans. Chapter Four demonstrates how, between 1872 and 1874, national party leaders guided the emergence of a coherent national strategy that merged accommodationism with straight-out obstructionism, and delivered the party its first congressional majority since before the war. The years between 1868 and 1874 were chaotic for most Americans, and the turn of Democrats towards the issues of civil service reform and financial policy was crucial to the eventual return of the party to the White House. These two chapters therefore show how, out of the chaotic push and pulls of Democratic factionalism in the late 1860s and early 1870s, bipartisanship, corruption and reform, and financial debates created a new ground for Democrats to exploit.

The party’s return to power did not come for another ten years, however. Chapter Five shows that despite the gains made by the Democracy between 1874 and 1876, the election of 1876 demonstrated that the persistence of sectional bitterness remained a barrier to national resurgence. While calls for reform and a reversal of the centralising tendencies of the postwar Republican administrations resonated with American voters, memories of the Democracy’s perceived disloyalty during the Civil War were deeply

embedded in the American consciousness. Moreover, while 1876 would signal the end of Reconstruction, the willingness of congressional Democrats to acquiesce in the inauguration of another Republican president shook the faith of many party supporters. What followed the so-called 'Compromise of 1877' was a period of uncertainty for Democrats who were forced to confront the growing rifts over currency reform that led to a significant third-party challenge in the 1878 elections.

Chapter Six assesses the Democracy's ability to finally escape the negative stigma associated with their conduct during the War of the Rebellion. Despite Democrats' relative success in overcoming the challenge of the Greenback party in the late 1870s, Republicans waved the bloody shirt once more in 1880 to secure another presidential victory. By 1884, however, the perceived evil of corruption trumped Civil War memory. In the aftermath of the assassination of President Garfield by a disgruntled office seeker, the Democracy's message of reform, reconciliation, and limited government appealed to voters, and Mugwumps, and trumped the Republican's familiar message of 'Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion.'

For the Democrats, the enduring legacy of the Civil War had been the single largest barrier to their return to power. Over the course of twenty years, the Democrats struggled to portray their party as one that could govern responsibly and protect the interests of southerners who had abandoned the party in 1860. After struggling to balance the forces of sectionalism, and conflicting views on the future of party politics in the United States, Democrats combined the experiences of their failures in the early Reconstruction years to reconcile their party behind a common desire for reform. This thesis demonstrates that reform was not simply an issue that related to their opposition to Republican patronage, but was in fact a far more expansive concept that coalesced with sectional reconciliation to create a coherent national strategy. Without viewing the Democratic return to power in 1884 across this chronological span, scholars have, until now, been unable to appreciate the complex and protracted process of reunifying the Democracy. This thesis readdresses this balance and in doing so uncovers the perilous and fractious journey of the Democratic party from secession to the White House.

Chapter One

‘A Question Too Great for Party’: The Fracture of the Democratic Party, 1860-1865

As delegates to the Democratic National Convention piled through the doors and filled the seats of the South Carolina Institute Hall in Charleston on April 23, 1860, Americans waited eagerly in anticipation of the proceedings. For days, Democrats had staged a mass exodus from state assemblies, local party headquarters, and the Capitol, and ‘like a horde of irregular troops *en route* to the scene of war’ made their way to the Palmetto State for a showdown over their party’s future.¹ Following the slow disintegration of relations between northerners and southerners over the expansion of slavery, Democrats hoped that the convention would be ‘the reunion and consolidation of the Democracy.’² Desperate to ease the tension between northern and southern delegates, the temporary president of the convention Francis B. Flourney urged the attendees to ‘recollect that we have a common destiny and a common fame,’ that ‘you should regard each other as brothers, not hostile forces,’ and that ‘the Democratic party has but one flag – the flag of our common country – and that teaches fraternal love and unity ... Let us talk no more about sections ... We come here to consider the good of the great Democratic party. It is our duty to meet all our brethren most cordially, and so combine all interests as to secure the effect and advantages of a concentration of effort.’³

With an imposing reputation as a forceful speaker and a shrewd tactician, Illinoisan Stephen A. Douglas, the aptly named ‘Little Giant’ due to his slender height of five foot four inches, was the preeminent politician of the Democracy when the convention met, and clear favourite for the party’s nomination.⁴ While Democrats longed

¹ *New York Herald*, April 21, 1860.

² *Ibid.*, April 23, 1860.

³ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held in 1860, At Charleston and Baltimore. Proceedings at Charleston, April 23–May 3* (Cleveland: Nevins’ Print, Plain Dealer Job Office, 1860), p. 16.

⁴ For a background on Stephen Douglas and his position in the Democratic party in 1860, see, Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Robert W. Johannsen, *The Frontier, The Union, and Stephen A. Douglas* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Yonathan Eyal, *The Young America Movement*; James L. Huston, *Stephen A. Douglas and the Dilemmas of Democratic Equality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); William Brindle to Jeremiah S. Black, April 20, 1860, Jeremiah S. Black Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington D.C. (Hereafter LOC).

for the convention to reunite the party, deep divisions quickly overflowed onto the convention floor. Disagreements over the presidential nomination and the platform's stance on popular sovereignty tore deep chasms between Democratic factions.⁵ Wounds that had been temporarily healed were exposed, and on April 30, after a week of heated debate, fifty southern delegates left the convention in protest of the adoption of a platform they believed provided no guarantees for the future of slavery in the western territories. For the first time in its history, the Democratic party was unable to nominate a presidential candidate at its national convention, and was forced to adjourn proceedings.

Examining the course that Democrats took during the Civil War provides important insights into both the nature of partisanship on the northern home front, and the severity of the divisions that emerged in wartime America. The Democracy's fracture at Charleston highlighted the disintegration of sectional relations in the American political nation. While an opposition to abolitionism had unified the party during the 1850s, by 1860 this proved inadequate to hold the party together.⁶ The responses of Democrats to war were diverse and demonstrated that more was wrong with the party than a breakdown between its northern and southern wings. Rather, the unique partisan culture that had once entrenched notions of civic loyalty and nationalism at the centre of the Union's political culture, fractured northern Democrats and forced them to reassess their relationship with the party.⁷ Instead of simply pushing Democrats into either a pro-war, anti-war, or anti-partisan stance, the Civil War created a crisis in partisanship that required them to reevaluate the place of Jacksonian Democracy in an industrialised, free nation.⁸

⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 25, 1860; *New York Herald*, April 24, 1860; Levi K. Bowell to Black, April 27, 1860, Black Papers, LOC; Douglas W. Jaenicke, 'The Rupture of the Antebellum Democratic Party: Prelude to Southern Secession from the Union,' *Party Politics* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1995), pp. 252–3.

⁶ Landis, *Northern Men With Southern Loyalties*, pp. 7–9.

⁷ Recent scholarship has paid significant attention to the intimate relationship between partisanship and nationalism during the Civil War. See, Smith, *No Party Now*; Adam I. P. Smith, 'Partisan Politics and the Public Sphere: The Civil War North,' *American Nineteenth-Century History* Vol. 2, No. 2 (2001), pp. 82–103; Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*; Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013); Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); J. Matthew Gallman, *Defining Duty in the Civil War: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Michael T. Smith, *The Enemy Within: Fears of Corruption in the Civil War North* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

⁸ On wartime Democratic factionalism, see, Joanna D. Cowden, *'Heaven Will Frown on Such a Cause as This': Six Democrats Who Opposed Lincoln's War* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001); Christopher Dell, *Lincoln and the War Democrats: The Grand Erosion of Conservative Tradition* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975); Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The*

The Path to Secession

The dramatic events of the last week of April 1860 were the culmination of over a decade of political instability and conflict. The debate over the peculiar institution's future had resulted in armed conflict in Kansas, physical violence in Congress, an abolitionist-led slave insurrection in Virginia, and the capitulation of one major political party. Throughout this time the Democracy had demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive as a national party, yet compromise in 1860 proved a step too far. Following the stalemate of the Charleston convention, the Democratic party sought to reconcile its northern and southern wings before it reconvened at Front Street Theatre in Baltimore on June 18. In the Senate on May 8, the North Carolinian senator, Thomas L. Clingman, appealed to southern Democrats to embrace the platform adopted at Charleston, and avoid a schism that would 'make a purely sectional party ... [and] the most insane party that could be adopted.'⁹ Southern Democrats however, were adamant that their northern brethren were not doing enough to guarantee the protection of slavery in the territories. While Douglas Democrats agreed with southern Democrats that the Dred Scott decision of 1857 made it unconstitutional for Congress to exclude slavery from the territories, they disagreed over the implications the decision had for the constitutional powers of a territorial legislature. Thus, when Douglas and his supporters refused to acquiesce in the southern Democratic interpretation of Dred Scott, and instead advocated the principle of popular sovereignty, Douglas and the northern Democrats lost the trust of the southern wing of their party.¹⁰

Story of the Copperheads (New York: Viking Press, 1942); Wallace Hettle, *A Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Frank L. Klement, *Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads of the North* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1999); Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*; Mushkat, *Fernando Wood*; Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*; Silbey, *The American Political Nation*; Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mach, 'Gentleman George'.

⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d session, May 8, 1860, p. 1965.

¹⁰ *Defence of the National Democracy Against the Attack of Judge Douglas- Constitutional Rights of the States. Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin of Louisiana, Delivered in the Senate of the United States, May 22, 1860* (Washington D.C.: L. Towers & Co., 1860), p. 21; James A. Bayard to Samuel L. M. Barlow, June 1, 1860, Samuel L. M. Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino (hereafter HL); William Brindle to Black, May 21, 1860. Black Papers, LOC; Jaenicke, 'The Rupture of the Antebellum Democracy,' pp. 356–8.

After the South Carolina debacle, Democrats hoped that the Baltimore convention would yield a compromise.¹¹ Any chance of this, however, was quickly dashed as the reconvened delegation refused to readmit Louisianans and Alabamans who had bolted in Charleston, and instead seated Douglas Democrats in their place. Dismayed by the actions of the convention, southern delegates staged a second withdrawal, and walked out of the Front Street Theatre.¹² Without the presence of the southern Democrats, Douglas was nominated on a platform that made popular sovereignty its central plank. Seeing the depth of the fracture, many Democrats began to prepare themselves for a Republican victory in November.¹³

Appalled by the actions of their northern co-partisans in the two conventions, southern Democrats nominated a second Democratic ticket that put its faith in the incumbent vice president, Kentuckian John C. Breckinridge, and committed the party to a legislative defence of the future of slavery in the West. For northern Democrats, the result was a disaster. The party had long depended upon its national appeal to win elections and, with the party divided, little hope was held for a Democratic victory in 1860. The rupture demonstrated a distinct lack of trust and understanding between the northern and southern wings of the party, and, to worsen matters for the Democracy, the newly established Constitutional Union party threw a fourth hat into the presidential ring.¹⁴

The 1860 campaign was a deeply divisive, and bitter campaign for the Democrats. Despite the claims of northern Democratic papers that the party's split was the result of the 'presumption and arrogance' of the 'ultra men of the South,' the reluctance of Douglas Democrats to compromise was equally at fault for the schism.¹⁵ The northern Democratic press highlighted the party's past struggles to preserve the Union, drawing on the memory of Andrew Jackson and his 'lofty stand which he maintained against the nullifiers of

¹¹ John A. Alie to Black, May 28, 1860, Black Papers, LOC.

¹² *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held in 1860*, pp. 130–52.

¹³ Horatio Seymour to Barlow, May 15, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL; Sylvester Mowny to Samuel L. M. Barlow, June 24, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁴ The Constitutional Union party was composed primarily of former Whigs who opposed secession, and gained support from more moderate southern Democrats. In 1860 the party ran two former Whigs on its ticket; John Bell from Tennessee for president alongside the Massachusetts native Edward Everett. On the Constitutional Union party's Whig roots and attempts to avoid the slavery issue, see Barry A. Couch, 'Amos A. Lawrence and the Formation of the Constitutional Union Party: The Conservative Failure in 1860,' *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Vol. 8, No. 2 (April, 1980), pp. 46–58; Thomas Brown, 'Edward Everett and the Constitutional Union Party of 1860,' *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Vol. 11, No. 2 (Oct., 1983), pp. 69–81; Don Green, 'Constitutional Unionists: The Party that Tried to Stop Lincoln and Save the Union,' *Historian* Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 231–53

¹⁵ *Buffalo Daily Courier*, July 2, 1860.

South Carolina,’ calling on southern Democrats to ‘bear aloft the flag of their country, and stand by the noble sentiment of Douglas’ letter of acceptance: ‘The Union Must Be Preserved. The Constitution Must Be Maintained In All Its Parts.’¹⁶ Despite the escalation of tensions between northern and southern Democrats as rumours of secession began to spread, few party members completely lost hope of blocking Lincoln’s election, or brokering a pre-election reconciliation.¹⁷

While Breckinridge held little hope of winning any northern state, Douglas still had widespread support in New York, Pennsylvania, and the midwestern states. Bolstered by strong support in his home state of Illinois and confident of support from immigrant voters, Douglas Democrats hoped that the Little Giant could take enough Electoral College votes away from Lincoln to block the accession of the Republican to the presidential chair.¹⁸ Yet as October progressed, the outlook for the Democrats grew increasingly bleak. Anticipating defeat, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* urged restraint in response to a Lincoln victory, and not plunge the South into ‘a waste over which shall brood the silence of another and hopeless desolation.’¹⁹

As news of the results spread, Democrats frantically tried to quell the fears of southerners and avert a national crisis. Leading party members attacked the legality of secession and claimed that northern congressional Democrats could protect southern interests by blocking any legislative attacks on slavery.²⁰ Despite the efforts of Douglas Democrats to appease their southern counterparts through their support of the Crittenden Compromise, little they said or did resonated with southerners.²¹ As southern Democrats

¹⁶ National Democratic Club, *The Conspiracy to break up the Union: the Plot and its development; Breckinridge and Lane the candidates of a Disunion Party; let the masses read and ponder* (Washington D.C.: L. Towers & Co., 1860), p. 11.

¹⁷ New Orleans *True Delta*, May 14, 1860; Robert W. Johannsen, ‘The Douglas Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,’ *Civil War History* Vol. 9, No. 3 (Sept., 1963), p. 235; John T. Hubbell, ‘The Douglas Democrats and the Election of 1860,’ *Mid-America* Vol. 55 (1973) pp. 109–21; James T. Brady to Barlow, Sept. 29, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL; William M. Browne to Barlow, June 29, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁸ On immigrant voters and the Democratic party see, Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System*, esp. pp. 145–70; Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture*; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. pp. 72–105; James A. Bayard to Barlow, Oct. 4, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁹ New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 4, 1860.

²⁰ John A. Dix to Manton Marble, Nov. 10, 1860, Manton Marble Papers, LOC; ‘Stephen Douglas to Ninety-Six New Orleans Citizens, Nov. 13, 1860,’ from Robert W. Johannsen (ed.), *The Letters of Stephen Douglas* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 499–502; James A. Bayard to Barlow, Nov. 29, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL.

²¹ On December 18, 1860, Kentucky Constitutional Unionist John J. Crittenden proposed a series of compromise resolutions into the Senate that proposed to reinstate and extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Coast, protected slavery in the District of Columbia, uphold the Fugitive Slave Act but limit northerners’ duties in aiding marshals in fugitives’ capture, protect the interstate slave trade, and ban any future Constitutional Amendment from abolishing slavery. On the efforts of Douglas Democrats in

wrote to their northern friends that ‘the southern people are... exasperated [sic]’ and that ‘it is quite certain that South Carolina will secede,’ hopes for the Union’s future began to fade.²²

Following the news of South Carolina’s decision to secede on December 20, Democrats reflected on the momentous moment. In a letter to August Belmont on Christmas Day, Stephen Douglas pre-empted the reaction many Democrats would have during the war by writing that he was ‘ready to make any reasonable sacrifice of party tenets to save the country.’²³ Leaving the Union proved no easy task for southern Democrats who had spent their entire lives as members of a party and a nation that they believed had brought them prosperity. As the southern states steadily seceded through January 1861, southern Democrats contemplated their relationships with their northern co-partisans. On January 20, Jefferson Davis wrote to the former Democratic president Franklin Pierce, that while ‘Civil war has only horror for me,’ he hoped the president would ‘not be ashamed of our former connection or cease to be my friend.’²⁴ Despite the sectional bitterness evidenced during the secession crisis, Davis’ letter demonstrated the complexity of feeling felt by southern Democrats leaving the Union. While he was willing to execute his duty to his state, Davis nonetheless held fond memories of his time in the nation and regarded many Democrats as his close friends. Davis was not alone in feeling this way. During their farewell addresses in the Senate, John Slidell and Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana articulated fond memories they shared with their northern colleagues, and left Washington with ‘mixed feelings of admiration and regret,’ but hoped nonetheless that secession would usher in ‘a new era of triumph for the Democratic party of the North.’²⁵

Congress to avoid civil war, and their support of the Crittenden Compromise see, Johannsen, *Stephen Douglas*, pp. 808–74.

²² Herschel Johnson to August Belmont, Nov. 29, 1860, Belmont Family Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University (Hereafter CU). Also, James A. Bayard to Barlow, January 3, 1861, Barlow Papers, HL.

²³ Johannsen (ed.), *The Letters of Stephen Douglas*, p. 505. For similar reactions from northern Democrats, see, John A. Dix to Horatio King, Dec. 14, 1860, Horatio King Papers, LOC; King to Jeremiah Black, Dec. 14, 1860, King Papers, LOC; James Buchanan to Royal Phelps, Dec. 22, 1860, King Papers, LOC; John A. Logan to I. N. Haynie, Jan. 1 1861, John A. Logan Papers, LOC; Henry Douglas Bacon to Barlow, Dec. 2, 1860, Barlow Papers, HL.

²⁴ Lynda L. Crist and Mary S. Dix (eds.), *Papers of Jefferson Davis: Volume VII* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), p. 18.

²⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2d Session, Feb. 4, 1861, p. 721.

War or Peace: Democratic Factionalism, 1861

On April 20, Daniel S. Dickinson, a former Democratic senator from New York, spoke at length to a large congregation in Union Square in the Empire City. An avowed Unionist who had supported Breckinridge the previous year, Dickinson proclaimed to the crowd that ‘it is no time for crimination or recrimination, or for reviving partisan issues ... the only inquiry should be, Does [Lincoln] propose to steer the good Ship of State according to the chart of the constitution, between the Scylla and Charybdis which threaten her pathway.’²⁶ If Lincoln acted through the Constitution and for the preservation of the Union, Dickinson argued that ‘he should be ... triumphantly sustained; not by political parties extant or obsolete, nor time-serving politicians, but by the patriotic pulsations of the great popular heart.’²⁷ For the New Yorker, the war was ‘not a question of administration but of government; not of politics, but of patriotism; not of policy, but of principles which uphold us all; a question too great for party.’²⁸

The response of northern Democrats to civil war varied greatly and did not follow distinct patterns. While anti-war protestors found pockets of individual strength across the Midwest, disagreements between Democrats characterised nearly all towns, cities, and states that remained in the Union. Dickinson’s remarks highlighted the concerns of many northern Democrats who embraced the belief that partisanship, and more specifically oppositional politics, held no place in a nation that was struggling for its survival. While the secession crisis itself did not shake Democrats’ conviction in their party, the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter changed their views. Many Democrats turned away from a hatred of Republican ‘radicalism,’ and instead adhered to the view that nationalism and loyalty was incompatible with partisanship.²⁹ Against this backdrop, the first major faction of the wartime Democracy emerged in the form of the War Democrats.

The War Democrats would play a vital role in upholding the Lincoln Administration against the voices of dissent in the Peace Democratic camp. War Democrats such as Andrew Johnson, Edwin M. Stanton, John Adams Dix, and John A. Logan became vocal supporters of Lincoln’s war policies, and were crucial in

²⁶ *Speeches, Correspondence, etc., of Daniel S. Dickinson of New York*, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

²⁹ Dell, *Lincoln and the War Democrats*, pp. 17–19, 31, 52; Smith, *No Party Now*, p. 25.

engendering widespread support among Democrats for the wartime Union party.³⁰ Yet despite the willingness of War Democrats to support a Republican administration, they remained committed to Democratic ideology. While they accepted the need for the federal government to expand its powers through the printing of paper money, the creation of new offices, and even the confiscation of Confederate property, War Democrats were adamant that such actions should only be taken through constitutional means.³¹ In fact, while scholars have asserted that the war polarised the views of Democrats and created irreconcilable rifts in the party, most northern Democrats held remarkably similar ideological attitudes towards wartime government.³² War Democrats, like their anti-war opponents, continued to adhere to a Jacksonian ideology that emphasised states' rights and individual liberty, white supremacy, and a strict construction of the Constitution, and while they were more willing to temper their views for wartime exigencies than Peace Democrats, they did not lose their partisan identity.

If the War Democrats subscribed to a conception of nationalism and loyalty that required Americans to rise above party, the Peace Democrats' interpretation of wartime partisanship directly contradicted such notions.³³ Chastised by Republicans and War Democrats as 'Copperheads' who were traitors to the Union, the Peace Democrats split between conditionals, who advocated a peace settlement on terms that would restore the Union, and unconditionals, who sought an immediate cessation of hostilities regardless of southern reintegration, the Peace Democracy rejected the consensual anti-partisan culture that emerged in the North throughout 1861. Rather, Peace Democrats viewed parties as essential to the political promises of the United States, and crucial to patriotism. Peace Democrats incessantly defended their continued party adherence, claiming that 'it is a misguided zeal which supposes a man, in order to be loyal to his country, must give up all his political views,' that 'we believe that we can best promote the interests of our country by preserving our time-honored organization,' and that 'there is nothing

³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³¹ On the expansion of the federal government during the Civil War see, Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1869* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); William J. Novak, 'The Myth of the 'Weak' American State,' *American Historical Review* Vol. 115, No. 3 (June, 2008), pp. 752–72.

³² Weber, *Copperheads*.

³³ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, p. 55; Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative*, p. 99.

incompatible between politics and patriotism.’³⁴ Moreover, the Copperheads viewed secession as a legitimate protest against an increasingly aggressive, and sectional, anti-slavery Republican party. Because of this, the Peace Democrats regarded the Civil War as a conflict that should be resolved through peaceful negotiation and a guarantee of the future of slavery.

In May 1861, T. J. Barnett, a peace advocate and a Democratic insider in the Department of the Interior, wrote to Samuel L. M. Barlow, a New York lawyer and leading Democratic party strategist, to shed light on how he viewed the conflict. As a typical conditional, Barnett believed that ‘whilst I see war before us, I have an unfaltering faith that its only result will be that which would now be accomplished by peaceful’ means. Under no illusions about the strength of the peace movement however, Barnett stressed that there was an irresistible pressure across the North to ‘crush out the Rebellion,’ and only through a concerted Democratic assault on public opinion could peace be brought about.³⁵ He believed that while the North supported the war in the aftermath of Fort Sumter, public opinion would soon turn against the conflict, and ‘an opposition which shall appeal to the conservatism of the nation in aid of measures’ different from those pursued in the early stages of the war, would be able to bring about an honourable peace agreement.³⁶ As Barnett rightly gauged, public opinion in 1861 made peace impossible so soon after the outbreak of war and, for the moment, the Peace Democrats would have to acquiesce in the War Democracy.

The onset of civil war initiated a conflict within the Democracy for control of the national party. The exodus of southern Democrats who had long dominated the party, started a scramble for power among northern Democrats, which has been overlooked by scholars. The forces unleashed by secession fundamentally fractured the Democratic party, and brought about a temporary partisan realignment that was manifested within a struggle over loyalty and nationalism. Moving forward, War and Peace Democrats would experience war in contrasting ways that not only forced them to reevaluate their partisanship, but began a twenty-year struggle for the party to return to power.

³⁴ Peekskill *Highland Democrat*, August 26, 1861; Thomas M. Cook and Thomas W. Knox (eds), *Public Record: including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and Other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour; From the Campaign of 1856 to the Present Time* (New York: I. W. England, 1868), p. 4.

³⁵ T. J. Barnett to Barlow, May 27, 1861, Barlow Papers, HL.

³⁶ Barnett to Barlow, May 30, 1861, Barlow Papers, HL; Barnett to Barlow, June 17, 1861, Barlow Papers, HL.

Greenbacks, Emancipation, and Individual Liberty, 1861–1863

Political conflict in the North during the Civil War was characterised by two overarching debates. Firstly, Americans wrestled with the role of partisan politics during the war, and secondly, over the conduct of the war. Amidst the patriotic outpouring of anger at the Confederacy's revolution against the Union, the anti-partisan Unionism espoused by War Democrats was intimately connected to the success of the Union armies. In the first year of the Civil War, the arguments of these War Democrats and their new Republican allies undoubtedly trumped the Peace Democrats' calls for conciliation. When confronted by the economic and physical costs of waging a protracted war however, northern citizens were drawn to the scepticism of the Peace Democracy.

Despite the vast material resources of the Union, the federal government received limited revenue from taxation, and as the costs of the war spiralled, Congress was forced to look for alternative means to fund the war. Despite having introduced the first ever income tax, raised customs duties, and placed regressive taxes on goods throughout the North, it soon became clear that Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase's assessment of the costs of war would need to be amended.³⁷ With New York Democrat August Belmont in London, Chase hoped that the banker could help him to secure funds for the war. While Belmont was the Rothschild's' American agent, the New Yorker was unable to persuade the British to grant an American loan.³⁸ As specie reserves dwindled and popular sentiment grew against further tax increases, by December 1861 the Lincoln administration was forced to look for alternative methods to cover the ever-increasing costs of war.³⁹ In this volatile situation, the Lincoln administration took an unprecedented step and printed paper money to remedy the Union's financial woes.

When Congress passed the First Legal Tender Act on February 25, 1862, issuing \$150 million of United States notes to cover the war bill, Democrats did not see eye-to-eye about the measure. While the majority of Democrats accepted the need for the nation to resort to such measures to ensure the future of the Union, many Peace Democrats and

³⁷ Throughout 1861, at the bidding of Secretary Chase, the Thirty-Seventh Congress passed numerous laws to cover the costs of war, including the Morrill Tariff, and later the Internal Revenue Act in 1862. See, Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Policy Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837–1873* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 82–4; Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), p. 134.

³⁸ Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, pp. 85–7.

³⁹ Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 45–6.

eastern hard-money advocates regarded the act as ‘wrong in principle and fraught with the most pernicious consequences.’⁴⁰ During the war, most Democrats largely viewed greenbacks as an unfortunate necessity, but come 1865, the party would become severely split over the future of paper money in the nation. Unbacked by specie, greenbacks caused major divisions within the party and opened a debate both about the future of American currency and economy, and whether Democrats would conform to Jacksonianism after the war.⁴¹

Racism had always been a defining feature of the Democratic party. As racial prejudice became more acute among nineteenth-century Americans, the Democracy’s virulent racism had become a haven for those who believed that African Americans were naturally incapable of citizenship.⁴² This Democratic ideology, as Jean Baker called ‘conservative naturalism,’ dictated Democrats’ opposition to any and all measures that threatened to change the legal status of black Americans.⁴³ The onset of civil war raised the spectre of emancipation, and when the Republicans took their first steps towards legal interference with slavery, the Democrats’ appeals to northern racism took on an added resonance.

On April 16, 1862, President Lincoln signed the Immediate Compensated Emancipation Act ending slavery in the District of Columbia. Prior to this the administration had endorsed a policy of confiscating Rebel slaves as a military necessity, while leaving slavery untouched in the loyal states. Congress’ decision to end slavery in the Capital would, however, change the meaning of the war forever. In the House of

⁴⁰ Weber, *Copperheads*, p. 37; *New York World*, Feb. 7, 1862; *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 6, 1862; Bryant to Marble, May, 1862, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁴¹ The debate over the use of paper money has received comprehensive attention by scholars. See, Bray Hammond, *Sovereignty and an Empty Purse: Banks and Politics in the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 140–42; Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865–1897* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); Wesley Clair Mitchell, *A History of the Greenbacks, with Special Reference to the Economic Consequences of their Issue, 1862–1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903); Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865–1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*; Ralph Andreano, *The Economic Impact of the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1967); Don C. Barrett, *The Greenbacks and Resumption of Specie Payments, 1862–1879* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

⁴² On antebellum racism, see Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Gary Nash and Richard Weiss, *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990); Baker, *Affairs of Party*.

⁴³ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, pp. 210, 244–9.

Representatives, Democratic Congressman William A. Richardson of Illinois proclaimed:

there is a manifest anxiety, an overweening desire, a persistent purpose upon the part of the prominent members of the dominant party in this Government, to place upon terms of equality and make participants with us in the rights of American citizenship an inferior race. The negro race, which is incapable of either comprehending or maintaining any form of government- by whom liberty is interpreted as licentiousness- is sought to be exalted, even at the cost of the degradation of our own flesh and blood.⁴⁴

An avowed white supremacist and Peace Democrat, Richardson drew upon a long history of embedded racial ideology and political discourse that, during the antebellum era, had designated liberty and citizenship as strictly the domain of white men. Richardson's response to the Lincoln administration's moves towards emancipation was typical of Peace Democrats who felt that the Republicans' true intentions were coming to the surface. The attitudes of War Democrats towards the administration's action were, however, worrying for the president.

While War Democrats were willing to support Lincoln's policies to save the Union, many were unable to compromise over questions of race. In New York City, where the party had not had a prominent party organ since 1860, Manton Marble, a conditional Peace Democrat, established a new Democratic newspaper, the *New York World*. Marble represented the majority of Democrats in supporting the administration as long as the war was prosecuted through constitutional means, and was quick to rebuke the anti-war assertions of unconditionals such as Richardson, Clement Vallandigham, and George H. Pendleton. 'Rebel at Heart should be printed on their brow,' he averred 'so that they should be known to all men for just what they are.'⁴⁵ Yet Marble by no means supported moves towards emancipation. On August 19, he lambasted the abolitionists, insisting that 'what the country needs in the present emergency is not that the President shall descend into the same arena with Greeley and Phillips, but he shall act the part of a firm and far seeing statesman.'⁴⁶ The prospect of emancipation aroused not only hostility from Democrats based on conceptions of the relationship between race and citizenship, but also raised questions about the future of labour in the North. Democrats argued that freedom

⁴⁴ *Speech of Hon. W. A. Richardson, of Illinois. Delivered in the House of Representatives, May 19, 1862.* (Washington, D. C.: L. Towers & Co., 1862), p. 1.

⁴⁵ *New York World*, August 5, 1862.

⁴⁶ *New York World*, August 19, 1862.

for slaves would disrupt the whole American economic system, undermining the role of white wage labourers in the North. The Democratic press gorged upon fears of abolition in the hope that the prospect of northward migration of freedmen would ramp up feelings of ‘negrophobia’ among the white working classes, and dissuade the Lincoln administration from pursuing the abolitionist agenda.⁴⁷

For many conditionals, the president was dangerously overstepping his constitutional remit and electoral mandate by interfering with slavery in the District of Columbia. Lincoln had, after all, run on a platform in 1860 that committed him to a policy of non-interference where slavery currently existed, and this new move was a gamble. By turning the war for the Union into a war for emancipation, Lincoln pushed many War Democrats away from the wartime Union party alliance, and back into the rank-and-file of the Democracy. As rumours of a pending proclamation of emancipation spread in the aftermath of the Compensated Emancipation Act, commitment to the conflict began to wane, and Democratic fortunes started to turn. Despite their anger at southern Confederates in seceding from the Union, most northerners held racial prejudices that the Democrats were quick to exploit during the 1862 midterms.⁴⁸ In early September, the Democratic nominee for governor of New York, Horatio Seymour, addressed a crowd in Albany. He argued that the abolitionism of the Lincoln administration strengthened the Rebels, and kept ‘alive the flames of civil war.’⁴⁹ In the face of a stalling Union military campaign and the ever-increasing likelihood of emancipation, public support for the war dropped considerably as the nation entered the fall.

As the 1862 elections rapidly approached, the Democrats found themselves in a far stronger position than many could have anticipated at the start of the year. Rising inflation coupled with high taxes increased economic stress on northerners who saw little progress in the Union war effort. Rumours of a federal draft were met with disdain by

⁴⁷ *Illinois State Register*, August 6, 1862; *Rock Island Argus*, Oct. 20, 1862; Bruce Tap, ‘Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,’ *Civil War History* 39.2 (June, 1993), p. 105; V. Jacques Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Dell, *Lincoln and the War Democrats*, p. 165.

⁴⁸ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, esp. pp. 212–61; George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Gary Nash and Richard Weiss (eds.), *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970); Forrest W. Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Mach, ‘Gentleman George’. Throughout the Civil War, the Democrats published a wealth of pamphlets that appealed to racial prejudice. See, for example, John H. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro ‘Slavery:’ The First an Inferior Race: The Latter its Normal Condition* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton & Co., 1861).

⁴⁹ *Public Record: Including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour; From the Campaign of 1856 to the Present Time* (New York, 1868), pp. 52–4.

many white northerners who were not willing to fight a war to abolish slavery. Moreover, the rise in political arrests amid the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus casted serious doubts over the Lincoln administration's handling of the war.⁵⁰ Capitalising on the drift of public opinion against the administration, and with the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation announced on September 22, Democratic charges that the Republicans needlessly endangered the civil liberties and lives of American soldiers gained traction. When Americans made their way to the polls, many were deeply disenchanted by the war. The Democrats overturned many of their congressional defeats of 1860, and gained seats from the Republicans across the Midwest where the Copperhead movement was notoriously strong. In the disgruntled urban centres of New York and Philadelphia, Democrats did equally well and even ousted the House's incumbent speaker, Galusha A. Grow, from Congress. To Democrats, the results confirmed that the coming of the Emancipation Proclamation would be the death-knell of the Republican party in the North.⁵¹ As the year ended, the Republican party had taken a serious blow, and with emancipation on the horizon, the country appeared to enter a state of 'political frenzy.'⁵²

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, changed the nature and legacy of the war forever. Democrats immediately attacked the proclamation, claiming that the 'pretense put forth by Mr. Lincoln's apologists to screen him in this violation of the Constitution is that the proclamation is a belligerent act and finds its justification in the laws of war.' To them, by subverting states' rights to federal domination, the proclamation was 'equivalent to a dissolution of the Union.'⁵³ In announcing emancipation, Lincoln created a much stronger and unified peace movement than had existed before, and this became apparent almost immediately. The divisive impact of the proclamation paved the way for an exodus of Democrats and Republicans from their parties' ranks. The anti-war assertions of Peace Democrats had already pushed many Democrats, such as Benjamin Butler and John A. Logan, into the Republican camp, and the proclamation forced many others to reconsider their partisanship.⁵⁴ While the realities of this partisan reconfiguration would not be fully realised until well into the

⁵⁰ Jamie L. Carson et. al, 'The Impact of National Tides and District-Level Effects on Electoral Outcomes: The U. S. Congressional Elections of 1862–63,' *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 45, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), pp. 888–9.

⁵¹ Samuel Butterworth to Barlow, Sept. 23, 1862, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁵² Dell, *Lincoln and the War Democrats*, p. 195.

⁵³ *New York World*, January 1, 1863; *Illinois State Register*, January 6, 1863; *Illinois State Register*, April 22, 1863; April 1, 1863.

⁵⁴ John A. Logan to 'Fellow Soldiers', Feb. 12, 1863, John A. Logan Papers, LOC; Speech of John A. Logan, Aug. 10, 1863, Logan Papers, LOC; John D. Caldwell to Logan, Aug. 3, 1863, Logan Papers, LOC.

Reconstruction period, the experience of war and emancipation was crucial to the newly emerging partisan landscape.

Anti-administration Democrats were able to increase their support by connecting Republican policies to a wider attempt of the Radicals to impose racial equality on the nation. Democratic charges against the Lincoln administration had changed little following the announcement of emancipation, but that proclamation seemed to give the charges greater weight. Publications such as a pamphlet entitled ‘Emancipation and its Results’ argued that emancipation would lead to ‘crime, pauperism, immorality, poverty, and misery.’⁵⁵ Democratic assertions that the administration’s real intent was abolition were legitimised, and rendered more plausible.

Democratic activity undoubtedly changed after Lincoln’s proclamation of emancipation. Fearing the prospect of racial integration, Democrats furiously attacked the Republican administration for transforming a war to save the Union into a war to end slavery.⁵⁶ As northern party competition over the conflict’s nature intensified, Republican charges of Democratic disloyalty became even more vociferous than before, and defending one’s patriotism became a particularly laborious task.⁵⁷ On February 7, Samuel J. Tilden, a lawyer from New York who had served as a Democrat in the state assembly in the 1840s, rejected as inaccurate the New York *Evening Post*’s report of a Democratic meeting in the city. In his letter to the paper, Tilden bemoaned the fact that ‘there are few journals in this city in whose columns, during the present civil war, can not be found invocations to violence against dissentients from their opinion.’⁵⁸ Tilden had become tired of the persistent accusations of treason and disloyalty on both sides during the war. While he opposed the administration, he believed strongly that an opposition party had a crucial role to play in any war and that the sensation created by journalists continued to serve no positive purpose to the situation.⁵⁹ The New Yorker’s views perfectly encapsulated the attitude of northern wartime Democrats who refused to sideline their partisanship. For these Democrats, loyalty to the Union and loyalty to the administration were not mutually exclusive. In opposing Lincoln’s wartime policies, Democrats believed that they were acting as loyal citizens by holding a president to account who, they argued, was

⁵⁵ John H. Van Evrie, *Emancipation and Its Results* (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge, 1863), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Clement L. Vallandigham to Marble, Oct. 4, 1863, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁵⁷ *Illinois State Journal*, January 26, 1863.

⁵⁸ Democratic Central Executive Campaign Committee, *Hand-Book of the Democracy for 1863 & 1864* (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge, 1863), p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

subverting the Constitution. By acting as defenders of the Constitution, Democrats argued that it was through their partisanship that they were protecting the civil liberties of Americans who would otherwise be blinded by a dishonest Republican administration that was willing to subvert the Constitution.⁶⁰

The Democratic press campaigned vociferously against what they viewed as arbitrary arrests and the spread of a 'military despotism' across the North that deliberately attacked Democrats.⁶¹ In September, Marble bemoaned the suspension of habeas corpus that had led to the arbitrary arrest of many Democrats, including himself, who had written against the Lincoln administration. He asserted that 'the abuses of power to which the administration resorted ... made a loyal man fear that they who are for the time the custodians of our liberties were faithless to those liberties, and needed themselves to be guarded and watched.'⁶² The endurance of the Jacksonian commitment to a strict construction of the Constitution and the protection of personal liberties, informed the Democratic response to the suppression of the press and anti-war demonstrators. It proved to be a rallying cry for the party throughout 1862 and 1863.⁶³ For Marble, and other Democrats, the unconstitutional methods to which Lincoln had resorted had justified their decision to turn against the Union party. They now urged northerners to place their faith in the Democracy, as the only 'legitimate, orderly, constitutional method by which these follies and crimes ... could be checked, and the government saved in its integrity, in its freedom and purity.'⁶⁴

Anxiety over the suspension of personal rights reached a climax in the first half of 1863. On May 5, Clement L. Vallandigham, an Ohio congressman widely regarded as the leader of the Copperhead faction of the Democracy, was arrested by the US military for expressing sympathy for the rebellion. Responding to Vallandigham's arrest, Senator George E. Pugh of Ohio averred that while he did not agree with Vallandigham, it was important to allow open debate among the people to hold the administration to account.⁶⁵ While Pugh's appeal was ignored, and Vallandigham was subsequently exiled to the

⁶⁰ *Illinois State Register*, April 1, 1863; *New York Times*, March 29, 1863.

⁶¹ *Quincy Herald*, Nov. 8, 1862; *Illinois State Register*, Oct. 22, 1862; *Rock Island Argus*, Oct. 19, 1862; *Rock Island Argus*, Oct. 20, 1862; George to Marble, Nov. 10, 1862, Marble Papers, LOC; Peter J. Barry, 'Amos Green, Paris, Illinois: Civil War Lawyer, Editorialist, and Copperhead,' *Journal of Illinois History* 11. 1 (Spring, 2008), pp. 40-3.

⁶² *New York World*, Sept. 30, 1862.

⁶³ Cass to Marble, Nov. 10, 1862, Marble Papers, LOC; Vallandigham to Marble, Oct. 4, 1863, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁶⁴ *New York World*, Sept. 30, 1862;

⁶⁵ *Hand-Book of the Democracy*, p. 134.

Confederacy, the Ohio Senator had voiced the concerns of many Democrats. Through the Vallandigham case, the issues of loyalty, freedom of speech, and government centralism all converged to show how divided the northern home front had become. In a turn of fortunes for Vallandigham, the Ohio Democratic Convention nominated him as their candidate for Governor in July. In his acceptance letter, Vallandigham claimed it was in ‘vain to invite the states and people of the South to return to a Union without a constitution, and dishonored and polluted by repeated and most aggravated exactions of tyrannic power.’⁶⁶ The Ohioan believed that the Republicans, through their support of Lincoln, had ‘justified his outrages upon liberty and the Constitution; and whoever gives his vote to the candidates of that party commits himself to every act of violence and wrong on part of the administration which he upholds.’⁶⁷

Democrats undoubtedly regarded political conflict on the home front as a partisan war, and this was no more evident than in the administration’s use of arbitrary arrests. Democrats bemoaned the fact that ‘the only sufferers, so far, have been Democrats. Indeed, the very purpose for which the establishment of martial law is sought ... is to destroy the Democratic party.’⁶⁸ Furthermore, they lamented the fact that for all those Democrats who had joined the army, and devoted themselves to saving the Union, the party was constantly disparaged as unpatriotic. They argued that it was not they who had desecrated the constitutional rights of citizens, but that the Republican administration through the use of ‘lawless violence’ and ‘unconstitutional and arbitrary acts’ had disregarded the nation’s founding principles.⁶⁹

In July, opposition to the administration spilled out onto the streets in New York City, as Irish citizens protested the commencement of the federal conscription act. While the riots highlighted popular discontent with the administration’s policies, Republicans cast the violence as a Democratic plot to attack the buildings of leading Republican newspapers and intimidate supporters of emancipation.⁷⁰ The *Daily Illinois State Journal* insisted that the violence had been ‘the legitimate results of the teachings of such

⁶⁶ *New York World*, July 21, 1863; Rathburg to Marble, Oct. 22, 1862, Marble Papers, LOC; S. G. Arnold to Marble, Oct. 24, 1862, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *New York World*, June 9, 1863.

⁶⁹ *New York World*, July 10, 1863.

⁷⁰ The New York City Draft Riots and the reasons for its outbreak are comprehensively dealt with in, Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Politics and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

unpatriotic and disloyal men as Fernando and Ben Wood.’⁷¹ Angered by these accusations, the *New York World* asserted that such attempts ‘to infect the public mind with the idea that the recent riots were in pursuance of a deliberate plot, secretly concocted between the rebel government and northern Democratic leaders... [are] doing their malignant utmost [sic] to hector and provoke the Democratic party, and especially the Irish population, into violent opposition to the federal government, and to incite the government and the soldiery to shoot them with as little compunction as they would mad dogs in the streets.’⁷² The *World* denied Republican charges that Democratic Governor Horatio Seymour had wrongly ordered the militia out of the city at the request of Abraham Lincoln, and that their charges that New York City stood at the centre of a ‘Democratic plot against the national cause,’ were simply a partisan ploy to weaken a resurgent Democracy.⁷³

The reality was that the draft riots were not part of an elaborate Democratic plot against the administration, and were a disaster for Peace Democrats whose depiction as traitors to the Union was further consolidated in the aftermath of the disorder. The New York violence had spontaneously occurred as the reaction of working class New Yorkers against the provisions of the Enrollment Act, but leading Peace Democrats had contributed to popular discontent with the draft through their incessant attack on emancipation. In fact, Democrats lamented the extent of violence in the city. In a letter to Ohio congressman Samuel Sullivan Cox on July 14, George B. McClellan deplored the fact that ‘no one seems to know whether the disturbance is at an end or not – God help our poor country! I sometimes almost despair when I see so few who really comprehend the state of affairs! The Govt must come back to the true & original issues before it can hope to have the support of the great mass of the people – & without their cordial support I see but little hope for ultimate success.’⁷⁴

If partisanship had been suppressed during 1861 and 1862 by an antiparty nationalism, this trend had been reversed by 1863. While pro-administration Democrats continued to exalt that ‘Party names and political designations ... should never be heard of in a moment in civil warfare,’ partisanship became the outwards basis of politics after

⁷¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, July 15, 1863.

⁷² *New York World*, July 28, 1863,

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Stephen W. Sears (ed.), *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan, Selected Correspondence, 1860–1865* (New York: De Capo Press), p. 552.

emancipation.⁷⁵ This was a fact embraced by many Democrats who had attempted to avoid party politics during the national crisis. In a letter to Pennsylvanian Democrat Charles J. Biddle of October 12, 1862, McClellan wrote that ‘It has been my earnest endeavor, heretofore, to avoid participation in party politics & I had determined to adhere to this course ... but it is obvious that I cannot long maintain silence under such misrepresentations.’⁷⁶ With eyes turning to the presidential election due to take place in November the following year, partisan activity started to supersede antiparty action as both Republicans and Democrats sought electoral victory.

Reconstruction and the Election of 1864

In the House of Representatives on February 27, 1864, Congressman John R. Eden of Illinois gave reasons for opposing the plan outlined by Abraham Lincoln in his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 8, 1863. The president had declared that once ten percent of a state’s voters had taken an oath of allegiance to the Union, and elected a loyal state government, the latter would ‘be recognized as the true government of the State.’⁷⁷ Eden denounced the requirement for Confederates to take an oath of allegiance, and attacked the administration’s policy of arbitrary arrests, the suspension of habeas corpus, and unprecedented taxation, and questioned that ‘If you [Republicans] are not for the Union as it was, what sort of Union are you for? Is it the Union as it ought to be for which you are fighting? Pray tell the country, ye pure and unconditional Unionists, who can’t endure the Union as our fathers formed it, what sort of Union you will form? Is it a Union without States, without *habeas corpus*, without trial by jury, without free speech, without a free ballot!’⁷⁸ Eden saw the Reconstruction proclamation as an attempt to erect unnecessary barriers to reunion that would only serve to create hostility between the North and South. In contrast, he stressed that despite their disagreements over the conflict, Democrats all remained dedicated to the preservation of the Constitution as it existed before the war. To Eden, the approaching presidential election would decide whether the Union would ‘compel the entire population of the

⁷⁵ *Speeches, Correspondence, etc., of Daniel S. Dickinson of New York*, p. 242.

⁷⁶ *New York Times*, October 13, 1863.

⁷⁷ ‘The Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction,’ from *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, Vol. 13 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1866), pp. 737–39.

⁷⁸ *Speech of Hon. John R. Eden, of Illinois, Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 27, 1864* (Washington, D.C.: Constitutional Union Office, 1864), pp.4–5, 12.

South to surrender all rights of person and property into the hands of the Abolitionists, or whether, under Democratic rule ... the Southern people shall ... return to the Union upon fair and equitable terms under the Constitution.⁷⁹

The year 1864 began with a sense of reflection for many Democrats. Faced with the prospect of a presidential election, party members could not help but be reminded of the devastation of their party's last national convention. Believing that little had happened since to strengthen Democratic supporters' faith in the party's ability to defeat the Republicans, one depressed New Yorker described the Democracy as being 'in a state of hopeless disintegration.'⁸⁰ Yet party members had reasons to feel positive. Public opinion of the Lincoln Administration had been in steady decline throughout 1863 and as a result Democratic assertions that the war could have been avoided had Republican leaders been 'larger men than they are,' resonated with voters.⁸¹

With Reconstruction on the horizon, the Republicans, under the guise of the Union party, nominated Tennessee War Democrat, Andrew Johnson, as President Lincoln's running mate. Johnson, renowned for his stubborn and tactless political style, perfectly fit the Union party's aspirations to appeal to dissatisfied Democrats to begin the process of reconciliation. Upon receiving the nomination, Johnson hoped to win over Democrats who were simultaneously reluctant to endorse Lincoln's Reconstruction plans, and disillusioned by the Peace Democrats. Johnson claimed that:

In accepting this nomination ... I cannot forego the opportunity of saying to my old friends of the democratic party *proper*, with whom I have so long and pleasantly been associated, that the hour has now come, when that great party can justly vindicate its devotion to true Democratic policy and measures of expediency. The war is a war of great principles. It involves the supremacy and life of the Government itself ... In a great contest like this for the existence of free government, the path of duty is patriotism and principle.⁸²

By appealing to patriotism, Johnson echoed the declarations of other War Democrats throughout the war. In July, Johnson 'called upon his hearers to bear witness to the course he had pursued – he had been a Democrat – was still a Democrat – believed this was, and ever would be a great Democratic Government, while there was a patriot's arm left to raise in its defense – a Government

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁰ H. G. Stefius to Barlow, Jan. 23, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁸¹ James A. Bayard to Barlow, Feb. 4, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁸² LeRoy P. Graf (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson Volume 7, 1864–1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), pp. 10–11.

established by the apostle of freedom and liberty, Thomas Jefferson, and upheld by the unswerving sage and true patriot, Andrew Jackson.’⁸³ Like his pro-war Democratic supporters, Johnson had not forgotten to make his partisan affiliation known. Democrats who supported the administration found it necessary not simply to stress that their loyalty lay with the Union via an antiparty nationalism, but also to aver that this action did not make them Republicans.

In response, anti-administration Democrats scoured their ranks for a candidate to take the fight to the Republicans. A frontrunner soon emerged. While Horatio Seymour’s success in being elected governor of New York put him in the national spotlight, most Democrats believed that ‘no name is mentioned in connection with the Democratic nomination ... save that of Gen. McClellan.’⁸⁴ In spite of the over-caution that led to Little Mac’s dismissal as commander of the Army of the Potomac in late 1862, McClellan’s concern for his troops made him popular with many soldiers, and his belief that a peaceful solution to the war could be found elevated his stock among Democrats. While rumours circulated of an attempt by the Copperheads to pass a peace platform with a peace candidate, the bulk of the party recognised the importance of the army vote and the political capital that a War Democrat brought to the party.⁸⁵ As the Democratic convention approached, however, rumours began to emerge that party managers intended to delay the meeting until later in the summer.

Since General Ulysses S. Grant had been named general-in-chief, the Union army had made significant progress and by late spring talk had turned to the possibility of an early surrender of Confederate forces. Hoping to capitalise on the swelling popularity of the general, many Democrats suggested delaying the party’s convention until late August to keep open the possibility of a Grant Democratic candidacy.⁸⁶ When the decision was made public in late June, Democrats split over the decision. While many believed it to be an astute political move that allowed the party to remain flexible in its approach to the upcoming presidential contest, not all felt similarly.⁸⁷ Dean Richmond, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee believed that the whole party was united against the

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸⁴ William Bigler to Barlow, March 15, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Samuel Sullivan Cox to Barlow, March 10, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁸⁵ Fernando Wood to Barlow, Barlow Papers, HL; Josiah Randall to Barlow, Barlow Papers, HL; David H. Williams to Barlow, Barlow Papers, HL; Barlow to Marble, Aug. 21, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁸⁶ George Washington Cass to Barlow, June 10, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁸⁷ William Cassidy to Marble, June 25, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC; John V. L. Pruyn to Barlow, June 18, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Pruyn to Barlow, June 24, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

Lincoln administration and that the longer the campaign progressed without a Democratic candidate in the field, the wider splits would grow.⁸⁸

The convention's delay appeared to yield some benefits for the Democrats. The Overland Campaign, that saw Grant pitted against General Robert E. Lee, had stagnated at Petersburg claiming over 80,000 lives in the process, raising doubts over the likelihood of a swift Union victory.⁸⁹ Yet Democratic acclamations for peace discussions were quelled by Republican attacks on the Democracy's so-called disloyalty. Republicans asserted that prominent Democrats were members of pro-Confederate organisations like the Knights of the Golden Circle that sought to undermine the Union war effort.⁹⁰ Despite this, Democrats remained positive over the prospects for the coming election. They observed that 'Old Abe is quite in trouble right now,' and that the Democracy, by nominating a 'strong Union man' had a real opportunity to defeat the Republicans and take charge of Reconstruction.⁹¹ To do so, however, it was critical for the Democrats to secure the correct candidate. With Grant fully committed to the Union war effort, McClellan became the overwhelming favourite for the Democratic nomination. Leading party strategists highlighted the critical role the army vote would play in the election. They believed that Little Mac's influence and standing among the soldiers meant that 'no one but McClellan can control any large portion of the army vote,' and with any other nominee 'we lose the support of tens of thousands of honest Republicans who will support him.'⁹² With McClellan at the head of the ticket, therefore, War Democrats and moderate Peace Democrats, believed that the party would be able to ensure the support not only of Union soldiers and the unity of their party, but a measure of bipartisan support that, without the votes of a solid Democratic South, was essential to electoral victory.

When delegates to the Democratic National Convention met at the Amphitheatre in Chicago on August 29, they exuded optimism. Confident that a McClellan nomination

⁸⁸ Dean Richmond to Marble, June 16, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC; David H. Williams to Barlow, June 23, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Fernando Wood to Barlow, June 15, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁸⁹ Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), pp. 359–62.

⁹⁰ George W. Bickley to Marble, Aug. 1, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC. On the Knights of the Golden Circle, see, David C. Keehn, *Knights of the Golden Circle: Secret Empire, Secession and Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

⁹¹ Cyrus H. McCormick to Marble, Aug. 17, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC; J. W. Rathburn to Marble, Aug. 11, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁹² Barlow to Marble, Aug. 21, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC; David H. Williams to Barlow, Aug. 27, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Benjamin Stark to Barlow, Aug. 21, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Barlow to Marble, Aug. 24, 1864, Marble Papers, LOC; Joel Parker to George B. McClellan, Aug. 27, 1864, George B. McClellan Papers, LOC.

would secure victory in November, party delegates hoped that factionalism would not ruin the party's chances. Calling the convention to order, August Belmont addressed the Democratic assemblage saying that 'four years of misrule, by a sectional, fanatical and corrupt party, have brought our country to the very verge of ruin.' He asserted that 'We are here not as war democrats, nor as peace democrats, but as citizens of the great Republic, which we will strive to bring back to its former greatness and prosperity, without one single star taken from the brilliant constellation that once encircled its youthful brow.'⁹³ Hope for a united convention, however, quickly dissipated. In the days leading up to the meeting, rumours had spread of a movement among Copperheads to place a peace man at the head of the ticket. When New York governor Horatio Seymour declined the opportunity, the Peace Democrats rallied behind former Connecticut governor Thomas H. Seymour. An ardent peace advocate who had become a leading voice against the Republican administration in his state, Seymour held little realistic possibility of securing the nomination. Leading War Democrats however were worried about the rising peace sentiment among the delegation, noting that 'the Vollandigham spirit is rampant.'⁹⁴ Their fears were finally realised when Vollandigham was placed on the Committee of Resolutions, condemning any hopes of a moderate platform to the past.

With Vollandigham its scribe, the Chicago Platform of 1864 was a concoction of disparate Democratic ideals that highlighted the fractured nature of the wartime Democracy. While the platform reflected the general discontent felt by Democrats towards the Republican administration and its use of 'extraordinary and dangerous powers not granted by the Constitution,' the hard-line stance that demanded 'immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities,' went further than most Democrats, including McClellan, were willing to accept.⁹⁵ When coupled with the convention's choice of Ohioan Peace Democrat, George H. Pendleton as McClellan's running mate, spirits were dampened even further. Pendleton, a typical midwestern Jacksonian Democrat, had been an advocate of peace and held a particular distaste for the industrialists of the East.⁹⁶ His

⁹³ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held in 1864 at Chicago* (Chicago: Times Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1864), pp. 3–4.

⁹⁴ Joanna D. Cowden, 'The Politics of Dissent: Civil War Democrats in Connecticut,' *New England Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 4 (1983), pp. 538–54; John E. Talmadge, 'A Peace Movement in Civil War Connecticut,' *New England Quarterly* (1964), pp. 306–21; Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Belmont to Barlow, Aug. 29, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁹⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1984: Vol. III* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 1179–80.

⁹⁶ Thomas Mach, 'Gentleman George' Hunt Pendleton, p. 7.

inclusion on the ticket was a major setback for Democrats who hoped to create bridges between the party and conservative Republicans, and it was only because of an even greater discontent with the Lincoln administration's domestic policies, that the party endorsed the East-West ticket.

Democrats across the nation deplored the outcome of the convention, and stressed that if McClellan were to accept the nomination based on the adopted resolutions, it would give currency to 'the standard of [his] enemies.'⁹⁷ Most took aim directly at the cessation of hostilities clause that would cut off support from conservative Republicans, and hoped that McClellan could address some of these concerns in his letter of acceptance.⁹⁸ Moreover, delegates who had attended the convention noted the difficulty they had in creating the platform. Amasa Parker, a delegate from New York, wrote to Barlow in early September that 'you do not know the difficulty we had in modifying [the platform] to its present shape ... but the whole thing can be made right by Gen. McClellan's letter of acceptance.'⁹⁹ Similarly, William Cassidy wrote that 'we may have altered the platform at Chicago ... but it would have involved a fight and probable rupture.'¹⁰⁰ Thus, while many Democrats were angered by the platform, its passage was the result of attempts to hold the party together. The party had entered the convention optimistic about the upcoming election, yet the events that transpired in Chicago clearly demonstrated to Democrats how fractured their party had become.

Having eagerly awaited McClellan's letter of acceptance, Little Mac's response to the nomination split unconditional and conditional Peace Democrats.¹⁰¹ In the letter, McClellan acknowledged that as 'soon as it is clear, or even possible, that our present adversaries are ready for peace upon the basis of the Union, we should exhaust all the resources of statesmanship practiced by civilized nations, and taught by the traditions of the American people, consistent with the honor and interests of the country, to secure such peace, reestablish the Union, and guarantee for the future the Constitutional rights of every State.'¹⁰² The general made no mention of emancipation, and noted that 'The Union is the one condition of peace. We ask no more,' pleasing the conditionals who were

⁹⁷ George T. Curtis to McClellan, Sept. 1, 1864, McClellan Papers, LOC.

⁹⁸ Andrew Mowny to Barlow, Sept. 2, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL; Rathburn to Barlow, Aug. 31, 1863, Barlow Papers, HL; A. Stephens to McClellan, Sept. 2, 1864, McClellan Papers, LOC.

⁹⁹ Amasa Parker to Barlow, Sept. 5, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁰⁰ William Cassidy to Barlow, Sept. 5, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁰¹ William B. Reed to McClellan, Sept. 4, 1864, Barlow Papers, HL.

¹⁰² Stephen W. Sears (ed.), *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 595.

insistent on reunification.¹⁰³ The Republicans immediately jumped on the inconsistencies in McClellan's and the Democracy's nomination and platform, and urged voters not to endorse the contradictory patchwork of policies that the party had created at Chicago (see Figure 1.1).

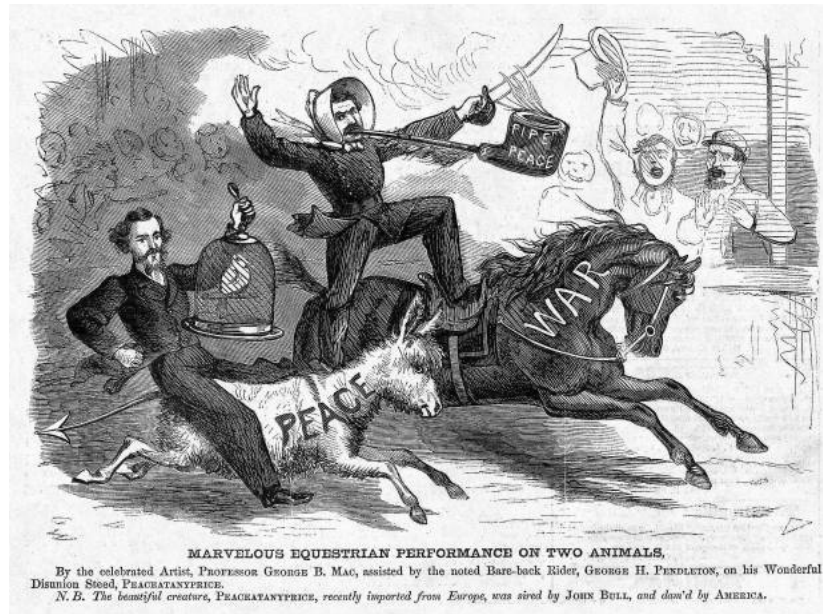


Figure 1.1– ‘Marvelous Equestrian Performance on Two Animals,’ *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 8, 1864

Throughout the canvass, Union party members attacked the Democrats’ loyalty. In July, Andrew Johnson denounced the Democrats for being ‘nothing more nor less than sympathizers with the rebellion – men who would not hesitate to unite with our enemies to destroy our Government. In words and deeds they are the most dastardly cowards the world ever knew. They must and will be put down, and the stigma of infamy will rest upon them.’¹⁰⁴ In response, Democrats sought to turn the tables on their opponents by casting Lincoln and the Republicans as ‘disunionists of the North’ who were only interested in freeing the slaves and not saving the Union.¹⁰⁵ More than anything else, the Democrats appealed to white supremacy to bolster support for the party. They made frequent racial appeals to voters ‘who believe that this is a white man’s government – that white men shall rule it, and that a white man, no matter how poor or low his condition ... is as good as any negro in the land, will vote for McClellan and Pendleton on the white

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Leroy P. Graf (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson. Volume VII, 1864–1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ *New York World*, Sept. 6, 1864.

man's ticket.'¹⁰⁶ Referencing what would later be uncovered as a hoax by two Democratic journalists, Democrats accused the Republicans of advocating 'miscegenation.'¹⁰⁷ In the *Columbia Democrat*, a poem was published that made allusions to a future under the Republicans in which white daughters would be used to breed a new race. The poem read:

Duty to God and to civilization,
Calls for a social reorganization,
Give us a race with a little more vigor,
Give us a race with a little more nigger ...
Give up your darling to some negro beauty;
Give your fair daughters like angels that are
Beautiful, lovely, for black men to share.¹⁰⁸

Democrats further argued that emancipation would lead to the loss of northern white workers' jobs as former slaves would move North to search for work. They claimed that the Republicans had no interest in improving the lives of white northerners, and were instead seeking to 'rob the white man of his property and bestow it on the negro.'¹⁰⁹ The Democratic appeal to northern racism could not, however, trump the Republicans ability to cast the Democracy as the party of treason.

By mid-late 1864 the election had become a referendum on whether the war would be prosecuted to its end. The high hopes with which the Democracy had entered 1864 faded as the General William T. Sherman pressed home his advantage in Atlanta. In the final analysis, the Democratic pursuit for peace was wholly dependent upon the fortunes of the Union armies. With defeats and large losses of life, the Democratic opposition did well, but by the end of 1864, the Democrats saw their support wane. The party lacked control of its own destiny and the results of the election showed this.¹¹⁰ Lincoln won the presidency by 212 Electoral College votes to just 21, and George McClellan garnered just 45% of the popular vote, a figure that would only be lower during the catastrophic Democratic campaign of 1872. Upon hearing of the defeat, McClellan wrote to Samuel

¹⁰⁶ *New York Daily News*, Sept. 16, 1864.

¹⁰⁷ The two Democratic journalists in question were David Groly and George Wakeman, and in late 1863 they had anonymously published a pamphlet that had suggested that leading abolitionists had endorsed interracial relationships. For the pamphlet itself, see, David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton & Co., 1864). On the Hoax's impact on the 1864 election, see, Sidney Kaplan, 'The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,' *Journal of Negro History* Vol. 34, No. 3 (July, 1949), pp. 274–343.

¹⁰⁸ *Columbia Democrat*, May 7, 1864.

¹⁰⁹ *The Daily Age*, June 27, 1864; Weber, *Copperheads*, p. 185.

¹¹⁰ Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads*, p. 74.

L. M. Barlow, ‘For my country’s sake,’ he said, ‘I deplore the result ... I have sent my resignation and have abandoned public life forever – I can imagine no combination of circumstances that can ever induce me to enter it again ... I am sure that when the future has made things more clear & has applied the sad test of experience to the principles of the two parties, that our position in defeat will be more enviable than that of our antagonists in success.’¹¹¹ In defeat, the Democracy seemed shattered. The party had to shake itself off and consider what direction it would take next.

With the end of the war and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the Democracy was given an unlikely and unforeseen lifeline in the shape of a new president, Andrew Johnson. Partisans sensed the opportunity and began to lay their plans in anticipation of the reconciliation of the northern and southern wings of the party. On April 21, 1865, a week after John Wilkes Booth had shot Abraham Lincoln, Harry C. Page of the New York State Committee of the War Democracy wrote to Andrew Johnson about his hopes for the Tennessean’s presidency. Page suggested appointing more War Democrats to his cabinet, pointing to John A. Dix, Edwards Pierrepont, and Francis B. Cutting as prime candidates, stating that ‘[a]s our leader and standard bearer we look to you to guide the political future, confident that your abilities, policy and statesmanship will not only guide the country safely on its road to great prosperity, but that a regenerated, liberty-loving and redeemed Democracy, with you as their chosen chieftain, will control the destinies of the Republic for years to come.’¹¹² The Democrats hoped that in Andrew Johnson, they had found a ‘second Andrew Jackson,’ who could lead the party into a new era of political dominance.¹¹³ Whether they had, only time would tell. Despite the Democracy’s poor showing in the November election, the party entered Reconstruction with a rejuvenated sense of optimism in their new president and the return of their southern brethren to the national party.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 618–9.

¹¹² Graf (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson Volume 7*, p. 606.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 586.

Chapter Two

‘One Country, One Flag, One Union of Equal States’: Andrew Johnson, National Unionism, and the Politics of Reconciliation, 1865–1868

As soldiers from across the Union began the long journey home from the amphitheatres of war, Americans witnessed first-hand the devastation of the conflict. Hundreds of thousands of young men lay in unmarked graves, once prosperous cities stood in ruin, and the nation mourned for the loss of their president. With the end of the war came the realisation that somehow, out of this bleak and desolate landscape, the Union would have to be rebuilt. How this would happen, however, only time would tell. After the tragic death of Abraham Lincoln, the task of Reconstruction fell at the feet of Andrew Johnson, a southern Democrat who had been born into poverty in North Carolina, and was the only southern senator who had not resigned his seat to join the Confederacy in 1860. Despite his staunch Unionist past, many northerners felt uneasy about how Johnson would reconcile the former Confederate states with the Union, and what form Reconstruction would take.

The transition from civil war to peace was a chaotic, and often violent process that simultaneously threatened the survival of both political parties and challenged the fundamental principles of the American republic. Scholars of the early Reconstruction period have characterised the Democratic party as principally concerned with ending Republican military rule in the South, and restoring ‘white man’s government,’ yet they have been unable to sufficiently explain the inconsistencies and developments of Democratic ideology and policy between 1865 and 1868.¹ Rather than remaining rooted solely in white supremacy and anti-centralisation, the Democratic party passed through a turbulent period of uncertainty and inconsistency that answered few questions about the party’s future. Amidst a genuine belief that a major partisan realignment was on the horizon, Democrats wrestled with their partisanship and struggled to create a coherent

¹ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*; Gambill, *Conservative Ordeal*; Lawrence Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro: Northern and National Politics, 1868–1892* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Mach, ‘Gentleman George’; Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Charles Coleman, *The Election of 1868: The Democratic Effort to Regain Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933); Schlesinger Jr. (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. III* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985).

vision for the party in post-emancipation America. The Democracy that fought the 1868 election was one that appeared remarkably backwards and unchanged by the upheaval of civil war; however, Democrats learned crucial lessons about the political uses of white supremacy, the power of Civil War memory to undermine their message, and the binding force of the institutional memory of their own party. Each of these lessons would serve the party until the end of the century.

In recent years, scholars have shed light on the development of sectionalism and the intricacies of reunion and reconciliation in the postbellum world, but have not yet grasped the complexities Democrats faced throughout this process.² During the early years of Reconstruction, Democratic strategy was far from a straightforward espousal of white supremacist ideology. While racism helped to bind Democrats together, it was not enough to repair the trauma of the Civil War. Rather, the party's dedication to ensure a lasting reunion of North and South produced diverse visions of party strategy among Democrats. While race became crucial to electoral strategy, it was reconciliation with southern whites that was the central object of the party. Race and reconciliation had an intimate relationship with the Democratic party during Reconstruction, and directed party policy between 1865 and 1868. In 1866 this desire for reconciliation pushed Democrats into an alliance with Andrew Johnson and conservative Republicans and, following its demise, Democrats attempted to utilise white supremacy to restore the party to its antebellum dominance. Ultimately, neither of these strategies would prove successful for Democratic resurgence, but laid the foundations of the party's future course. Democrats rarely saw eye-to-eye over how the party should address Reconstruction, yet nearly all believed that reconciling northern and southern Democrats would pave the way for a return to national ascendancy.

Presidential Reconstruction and the Birth of National Unionism

When Andrew Johnson took over from his predecessor on April 15, 1865, the Tennessean remained guarded about his views on Reconstruction. Rather than provide a clear indication of his intentions, the new president cryptically declared that 'any policy

² See, Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*; Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*; Michael Perman, *Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction, 1865–1868* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973); David Blight, *Race and Reunion*.

which may be pursued by me in the administration of the Government ... must be made by the acts as they transpire. The only assurance that I can give now of the future, is by reference to the past.’³ In the immediate aftermath of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination by a southern Confederate, and at a moment when reunion was at the top of the nation’s political agenda, Johnson’s candid approach was no surprise. Sectional animosity had reached a crescendo in April as northern Democrats and Republicans stood united in grief. Newspapers reported that ‘it is clear as day that the real origin of this dreadful act [Lincoln’s assassination] is to be found in the fiendish and malignant spirit developed and fostered by the rebel press,’ and that ‘the demand for the punishment of the rebel leads will be too strong for resistance.’⁴ In this environment, and as a southern Democrat, Johnson’s decision not to announce his plans for Reconstruction was predictable. The assassination of a northern president by a Confederate sympathiser did not exhibit the existence of a reconciliatory spirit among southerners, and this greatly conflicted with Johnson’s desire for a speedy restoration of home-rule and congressional representation to the former Confederate states.⁵

Having spent the last four years ferociously undermining the wartime Republican administration, Peace Democrats were forced to consider the consequences of their wartime actions. The Republicans had been able to cast them as traitors to the Union and Democrats carried this branding into Reconstruction. Democratic defeats in 1864 and the subsequent passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in January 1865 had settled any doubts about the future of slavery in the United States, and northern Democrats now faced the daunting task of repairing their broken party. Of the few positives the Democracy could take from the events of the last year, the accession of a Jacksonian Democrat from Tennessee to the presidency was the most prominent. Johnson’s inauguration filled many party members with a renewed sense of hope that a swift and lenient Reconstruction policy could lead to the ‘restoration of the “Era of good feeling”’ among Democrats.⁶ Yet,

³ Graf (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Volume 7*, p. 554.

⁴ *New York Herald*, April 16, 21, 1865; *Trenton State Gazette*, April 17, 1865; *New York World*, April 18, 1865.

⁵ Eric McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Harold Beale, *The Critical Year: A Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1930); Paul H. Bergeron, *Andrew Johnson’s Civil War and Reconstruction* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011); Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863–1869* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974); Foner, *Reconstruction*; John Cox and LaWanda Cox, *Politics, Principle and Prejudice, 1865–1866* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

⁶ Leroy P. Graf (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Volume 8, May – August 1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 31.

the presence of a Democrat in the White House was not sufficient to unify the party, and wartime resentments between War and Peace Democrats stood firmly in the way of consolidation. In an editorial in *The Old Guard*, a Peace Democratic magazine, Charles Chauncey Burr advocated the exodus of War Democrats from the party organisation, arguing they should ‘drop the name of Democrat altogether, and to go over in *name* where he has gone in *sympathy and acts*.’⁷ Burr, like many former Peace Democrats, was unwilling to forgive War Democrats who supported a Republican administration that had, in their eyes, disregarded the Constitution through their support of an abolitionist crusade that suppressed free speech and undermined civil liberties. With no civil war to define factions, Democrats split between straight-out Democrats (composed principally of former-Peace Democrats) and accommodationist Democrats (composed of former-War Democrats, and ex-conservative Republicans who had switched allegiance to the Democracy).

Regardless of factional alignment, Democrats recognised Andrew Johnson’s strategic value and wrestled for the ear of a ‘second Andrew Jackson,’ who could secure a lenient policy for southern restoration.⁸ Determined to marginalise the influence of straight-out Democrats on Johnson, however, accommodationists sought to ensure the president would continue his wartime affiliation with the Union party and ‘look upon [Reconstruction] as a question for the Legislative power exclusively.’⁹ What Democrats did not account for, was that while the president was eager to avoid a programme of Radical Reconstruction that seemingly threatened an amicable restoration of the Union, he felt equal contempt for former-Peace Democrats who he believed had betrayed the nation during the Civil War.

On May 29, President Johnson announced his plans for southern restoration by signing the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. Informed by Lincoln’s Ten Percent Plan, the proclamation reflected Johnson’s belief that the abolition of slavery would not usher in a new era of American citizenship. Rather than allowing the Radical Republicans to dictate the terms of surrender and southern restoration that would invariably give the freed-slaves political rights and representation, Johnson was determined to ensure that white men would retain control of government in the South.

⁷ *The Old Guard*, Vol. 3, Issue 4 (April, 1865), p. 185.

⁸ Graf (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson Vol. 7*, p. 586; Nat Tyler to Barlow, July 21, 1865. Barlow Papers, HL; Montgomery Blair to Barlow, June 14, 1865. Barlow Papers, HL.

⁹ *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 8*, pp. 75, 80, 83–4; *New York Herald*, April 16, 1865.

The proclamation granted amnesty to all persons who participated in the rebellion, barring high-ranking Confederate officials, restored all rights of property except slaves, and appointed provisional governors to overlook the process of southern reintegration. Johnson wanted to ensure the leaders of the rebellion were held to account, but his overarching desire to ‘ameliorate and alleviate the condition of the great mass of the American people,’ meant that he would not endorse black equality at the expense of risking the loyalty of the southern masses to the Union.¹⁰

Two days later, Johnson met with General John A. Logan to secure the support of a figurehead of the Union war effort. Much to Johnson’s relief, Logan immediately congratulated the President on his conservative policy, claiming that with the end of the war, a period of ‘reason and conciliation’ had opened.¹¹ While Radical Republicans were angered by the president’s lenience, Logan agreed with Johnson’s opinion that ‘there is no such thing as reconstruction. These States have not gone out of the Union, therefore reconstruction is not necessary. I do not mean to treat them as inchoate States, but merely as existing under a temporary suspension of their government, provided always they elect loyal men.’¹² That Logan represented a significant cohort of former Democrats who had converted to Republicanism during the war was no coincidence. Johnson appealed to converted Democrats who had become influential among conservative Republicans in order to create a bridge between what he saw as natural allies; the accommodationist Democrats and conservative Republicans. Johnson believed black equality would be a barrier to reconciliation, and sought to avoid a Reconstruction that would inaugurate racial equality and force ‘*revenge revenge revenge*’ to take root in the hearts of southern whites.¹³ Instead, the president hoped to create a new party situated in the middle-ground of politics that would sideline both the Radical Republicans and former Peace Democrats.

During the summer of 1865, the desire for the creation of a new national coalition dominated the strategy of accommodationist Democrats. While recovering from a particularly energy-sapping bout of typhoid fever, the now sixty-five-year-old Daniel S. Dickinson wrote to Andrew Johnson on the condition of parties in postbellum America. Dickinson claimed that ‘For all practical political purposes, in the next national campaign, the *present* organizations are of little consequence. They will, or rather the popular

¹⁰ *Papers of Andrew Johnson Vol. 7*, p. 554.

¹¹ *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 8*, p. 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

elements of which they are composed will, be disintegrated and *reformed*.¹⁴ The *New Yorker* believed that old-line Whigs in the Republican ranks would seek to ensure the survival of the Union party, while the War Democracy would look for ‘a new healthy organization.’¹⁵ This, however, would not be the present Democratic party, which would ‘fall from inherent weakness’ as ‘the memories of the last four years are too vivid’ for it to be resurrected.¹⁶ The sentiments of Dickinson confirmed Johnson’s view of party politics in the postwar Union. The issue of loyalty had conditioned the political culture of the Civil War-era United States, and this continued to echo throughout the Reconstruction era.

At the same time, former Peace Democrats such as Clement Vallandigham, Horatio Seymour, and Benjamin Wood hoped that the new president could revive the broken Democracy. The enduring memories of the treasonous action of the party during the war, however, rendered such a path untenable.¹⁷ Despite the attempts of Democrats to distance themselves from the war, the Republicans hastened to remind the public of their opponents’ treachery. The *New York Times* noted that ‘unfortunately for the Democratic party, *character* does not change with circumstance ... The Democratic party was false to the country during the war for its salvation. Because of that unfaithfulness, the people threw it to the dust ... It cannot regain the public confidence short of the impossible feat of resolving itself out of its personal identity.’¹⁸ Irrespective of claims of Democratic organs that ‘The loyalty of the Democratic party needs no defence,’ embedded memories of the war continued to lend saliency to Republican attacks.¹⁹ Northerners had just fought and died for the Union and they would need convincing that Democrats who had opposed the war would not try to reverse the military results of their sacrifice.

After a summer that had seen the new president issue an unprecedented number of pardons to former-Confederates, embittered Republicans denounced Johnson’s lenience and latched upon the president’s ties to the Democracy. In October, Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch delivered a speech in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and claimed that ‘It will thus be seen that President Johnson’s views upon the deep lying, fundamental question on which a policy of reconstruction must be built, are precisely those of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

¹⁷ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, pp. 184–5; Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, p. 116.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1865.

¹⁹ *New York World*, Nov. 7, 1865.

Democratic party.²⁰ Moreover, the Radicals were wary of the new president's attempts to create working coalitions between conservative Republicans and the Democrats. In June, Charles Sumner expressed his concern to Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase that Johnson's attempts to bridge the parties were 'splitting our party' and warned that 'if he does not stop soon, he cannot stop this side of the democrats.'²¹ What Sumner did not account for, however, was the extent to which Democrats were split over Johnson's Reconstruction policy, and how this would hamper the potential primacy of the Democratic party. While some Democrats urged the president to 'not flinch a hairs breadth from his policy of restoration,' and stand on the 'patriotic ground' that would carry the country in future elections, others were wary of Johnson's intentions.²²

In July, George Ticknor Cutis, a lawyer, author, and Democrat from Boston, warned Manton Marble that if Johnson were to ally with the Democracy, it would lead to 'the sacrifice of great principles' as the president was 'entirely in the hands' of Republicans like Stanton and Seward.²³ By the end of 1865, therefore, the president stood on hazardous ground. While he hoped to create a bridge between disaffected conservative Republicans and moderate Democrats, two points of dissension stood in his way. While his lenience towards former Confederates attracted Democrats eager for their former partisans to rejoin the party, conservative Republicans were uneasy with the support that former Peace Democrats gave Johnson. Conversely, straight-out Democrats were wary of Johnson's wartime support of the Republicans, and this hindered any formal alliance between themselves and the new president.

In late 1865 and early 1866, the reconvened Republican-dominated Congress moved to put an end to Johnson's liberal use of presidential pardons that had brought many leading former Confederates back into public life. Under the president's May proclamation, southern legislatures had passed 'Black Codes' that sought to restrict the movement of freedmen through vagrancy laws, control black property-owning rights, prevent African-American weapon possession, and stop former slaves from assembling in public. In essence, southern whites were able to reinstate white supremacy.²⁴ In

²⁰ *New York World*, October 17, 1865.

²¹ Charles Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, June 28, 1865, Salmon P. Chase Papers, LOC.

²² Horatio Seymour to Montgomery Blair, Jan. 3, 1866. Blair Papers, LOC; Thomas B. Carroll to Blair, Nov. 20, 1866. Blair Papers, LOC.

²³ George T. Curtis to Marble, July 19, 1865. Marble Papers, LOC.

²⁴ On the black codes, the return of southern Confederates to power under Presidential Reconstruction, see, Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 187–227; Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Dan T. Carter, *When the War was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865–1867* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Theodore

response, Radical Republicans pushed through Congress an updated Freedmen's Bureau Bill that extended the life of the agency and protected former slaves' rights to land ownership and contract negotiation, and a new Civil Rights Bill that granted citizenship to freed blacks. Together, these two bills represented the Republican vision of Reconstruction that Johnson had been determined to avoid. Democrats immediately denounced the Republican party as a '*sectional, party machine*, which loses [sic] sight of the interests of the whole country.'²⁵ The president swiftly vetoed both bills, and claimed that 'it is unwise and dangerous to pursue a course of measures which will unite any large section of the country against another section of the country.'²⁶ While Radical and many moderate Republicans put a premium on securing freedmen's rights that would lay the foundations for a southern Republican party, conservative Republicans and accommodationist Democrats were unwilling to extend the suffrage if it threatened the peaceful restoration of the Union.²⁷ Democrats such as Jeremiah Black and Orville H. Browning exalted that the Freedmen's Bureau veto 'has made millions of good hearts glad and grateful for it has saved the nation,' and that had the bill 'been put into operation, the restoration of the unity and harmony of our unhappy Country would, thereby, have been made impossible' by substituting 'a military despotism for constitutional government.'²⁸ While Congress overrode the president's vetoes, Johnson's actions allayed the doubts of many Democrats.

By the summer of 1866 the Democrats had reached a pivotal moment in deciding what role they would play in supporting the president's reconciliatory National Unionism. Accommodationist August Belmont wrote to Samuel Barlow that 'the Union Club takes the wind out of our sails and it is now for us to decide, whether we will join in their action and then give up the National Democratic organization ... For my own part I want only to do what is best for our country and what will most effectively kill the Radicals in and out of Congress and ... restore the Union.'²⁹ Democrats displayed a varying degree of

B. Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1965); William Cohen, 'Negro Involuntary Servitude in the South, 1865–1940: A Preliminary Analysis,' *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 42 (Feb., 1976), pp. 35–50; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 71–7; Perman, *Reunion without Compromise*; Mark Bradley, *Bluecoats and Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet*, pp. 215–64.

²⁵ *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 10, p. 173.

²⁶ Lilian Foster, *Andrew Johnson, President of the United States: His Life and Speeches* (New York: Richardson & Co., 1866), p. 239.

²⁷ R. L. Barber to James R. Doolittle, Feb. 28, 1866, Doolittle Papers, LOC.

²⁸ *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 10, p. 131, 140.

²⁹ Belmont to Barlow, June 26, 1866, Barlow Papers, HL.

willingness to work with conservative Republicans to subdue Radicalism. Accommodationists were willing to form a new party under the National Union banner, as long as it remained conservative in its appeal and principles, while straight-out Democrats viewed National Unionism as a rhetorical tool that could rebrand the Democracy, ensure a lenient Reconstruction, and propel the Democrats back to power. Throughout June, Johnson held two meetings to organize a National Union convention in the build-up to the fall congressional elections. Present at the meetings were leading conservative Republicans and Democrats, including James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin, Orville Browning of Illinois, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, Edgar Cowan of Pennsylvania, James Dixon of Connecticut, Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch, and Thomas A. Hendricks of Indiana.³⁰ This bipartisan gathering set the date for the convention as August 14, and the National Union movement seemed well placed, with its strong support among Democrats and Republicans, to establish a working electoral alliance to curtail the Radical Republicans.

The Failure of the National Union Movement

In July, National Unionists gathered in conventions across the nation to appoint delegates to represent the states at the planned National Union Convention in Philadelphia. Despite Johnson's appeal for the selection of conservative Republicans and former War Democrats, a few troublesome selections were made that held the potential to disrupt the proceedings and moderate image of National Unionism. From New York, Fernando Wood was chosen as a delegate, while in Ohio Clement Vallandigham was also selected. As two archetypal Peace Democrats during the war, Wood and Vallandigham represented everything that Johnson had tried to distance the National Union movement from. Regarded as two of the most despised Democrats by Republicans, Vallandigham and Wood held the potential to dissuade conservative Republicans from both attending the Philadelphia Convention and endorsing any moves towards creating a new party.³¹

As the convention drew closer, concerns about Vallandigham continued to grow. Alexander Randall, a former Whig from Maryland, remarked that 'our people shrink from contact with him ... The fellows doctrines now are not so bad, but his name is damnation

³⁰ Thomas Wagstaff, 'The Arm-in-Arm Convention' *Civil War History* Vol. 14, No. 2 (June, 1968), p. 103.

³¹ Pratt to Welles, July 19, 1866, Welles Papers, LOC.

... The only importance his being here can have is to frighten off, at the fall elections, men whose votes we want.’³² The threat Vallandigham and Wood posed to the National Union movement highlighted the difficulty the Democratic party had in throwing off its wartime stigma as a band of treasonous Confederate sympathisers. And while National Unionists were aware that Johnson would ‘rely mainly upon the support of the Democratic party in its contest with the Radicals,’ the success of the movement depended on its branding as a Unionist coalition.³³ Yet National Unionists had more than rogue Democrats to worry about. As news of Clement Vallandigham and Fernando Wood’s selection as delegates to the National Union Convention spread, racial violence erupted in New Orleans.

In the Crescent City in May 1866, Republican Governor James Madison Wells reconvened the 1864 Louisiana constitutional convention in July at the Mechanics Institute. The Republicans hoped to introduce a black suffrage clause into the state constitution, but the convention quickly descended into anarchy. In the days leading up to the meeting, funeral notices had been posted around the city declaring that ‘niggers and half niggers should be wiped out’ and that ‘No man should come out the convention alive.’³⁴ As a large, predominantly black crowd congregated outside the Mechanics Institute on July 30, the newly elected Democratic mayor, John T. Monroe, ordered the city police to break up the Radical convention.³⁵ By the time federal troops were finally deployed to quell the violence, forty-four blacks and three whites lay dead in the street.

The rosy picture that the National Union movement painted of the postwar world was greatly eroded by the events that unfolded across the South during 1866. Mayor Monroe’s actions were dictated by his hatred for Republican wishes for black suffrage. His dispatch of white policemen against the Republican convention not only rekindled memories of the barbarity of war, but also highlighted the continuing partisan conflict over Reconstruction policy. Reports of southern violence clearly demonstrated the

³² Paul H. Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Volume 11, August 1866 – January 1867* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), ‘From Joseph H. Geiger, Aug. 2, 1866,’ p. 8 and ‘From Alexander Randall, Aug. 12, 1866,’ p. 66.

³³ Edmund Burke to Blair, July 30, 1866, Blair Papers, LOC.

³⁴ U. S. Congress, House Select Committee on New Orleans Riot, *Reports of the select committee on the New Orleans Riot* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), p. 17.

³⁵ Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 67; Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 23–6; Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana, 1862–1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), pp. 106–7.

partisan and sectional basis of the violence: ‘Hays’s brigade [the city police] will all be there, and will clean out those damned Yankees.’³⁶ To worsen matters for reconciliatory National Unionists, many New Orleans citizens had walked around the city wearing badges and cheering in support of Jefferson Davis and Andrew Johnson.³⁷ The violence and proclamations of New Orleans’ citizens not only exemplified the continuing sectional animosity in the postwar United States, but the conflation of pro-Davis and pro-Johnson chants tainted National Unionism with the same treasonous image of the Confederacy.

On August 14, the National Union project came to its climax. As delegates paraded through the streets of Philadelphia, the spirit of reconciliation with which the movement had been born was evident to all there to witness it. As they entered the convention hall, Union General Darius N. Couch of Massachusetts linked arms with South Carolina Governor James L. Orr in a spectacle truly representative of the spirit of National Unionism. As Orr and Couch entered the hall, the audience rose to their feet in rapturous applause as simultaneous renditions of the Star Spangled Banner and Dixie rang out.³⁸

Once the delegates returned to their seats, the Democratic Chairman of the Convention John A. Dix rose to deliver his opening address. Beginning with the bold claim that ‘no body of men has met on this continent under circumstances so momentous and so delicate since the year 1787,’ Dix laid out the central aims of the National Union movement.³⁹ Committed to a firm stance on states’ rights, and the execution of President Johnson’s Reconstruction policy, Dix called upon the delegates to ‘present to the world an example worthy of imitation, not a mere Utopian vision of good Government, but the grand old reality of better times ... *one country, one flag, one Union of equal States!*’⁴⁰ Following Dix’s lead, James R. Doolittle claimed that ‘If [the citizens of the United States] could have seen – as we saw – Massachusetts and South Carolina, by their full delegations, coming arm in arm into this great Convention, if they could have seen this body ... melting to tears of joy and gratitude to witness this commingling, there could be no struggle at the polls in the coming election.’⁴¹ Celebrations of sectional reconciliation saturated the proceedings of the Philadelphia convention, and echoed the policies put

³⁶ *Reports of the select committee on the New Orleans Riot*, p. 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 11, p. 77.

³⁹ *Proceedings of the National Union Convention, held at Philadelphia, August 14, 1866* (Washington D.C.: National Union Executive Committee, 1866), p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

forward by Andrew Johnson over the preceding months. The delegates claimed that Congress had denied white southerners of their right to be represented by refusing to allow southern representatives elected in late 1865 to take their seats, and hoped that National Unionism would play a vital role in the new postbellum political order.⁴²

In the aftermath of the convention, the grand display of sectional reconciliation filled Democrats with the enthusiastic belief that National Unionism would be a success. As convention delegates returned to Washington, President Johnson ‘hailed their work as the “Second Declaration of Independence from the tyranny of an oligarchy,”’ as ‘the whole country was electrified by accounts with which the papers teemed of a reconciliation and paternal embrace in the City of Brotherly Love between South Carolina and Massachusetts.’⁴³ The success of the National Union Convention was, however, evidently limited. While the Republican *New York Tribune* incorrectly claimed that there was ‘absolutely *no* popular support for the ... Convention outside the ranks of the Rebellion of the South and the Peace Democracy of the North,’ the paper provided some remarkable insight into the limiting effect of partisanship on the National Union movement.⁴⁴ The *Tribune* reported that ‘the leaders of the movement, both Democratic and Republican, hesitate at’ the creation of a third party, and it was this inability to create a new national party that underpinned the eventual failure of the National Union strategy.⁴⁵ With a substantial amount of bipartisan support, the creation of a new national party would have made sense for the majority of delegates at the convention. Unfortunately for the National Unionists, however, this bridge never materialised. Rather, it was the leadership of Andrew Johnson that the National Union coalition placed its faith – faith that would soon become evident, was misplaced.

Following the reconciliatory acclamations of the National Union Convention, Andrew Johnson sought to capitalise on what he perceived to be a widespread desire for a swift Reconstruction. Having been invited to Chicago to lay the cornerstone of a monument dedicated to the late Democratic senator Stephen Douglas, Johnson extended his visit to campaign in the fall elections. Despite the appeals of many Democrats to reconsider his decision to take part in the Douglas dedication due to the ‘bad passions of many disaffected’ towards the President’s administration, Johnson ignored the warnings

⁴² Ibid., esp., pp. 9, 16–7.

⁴³ Wagstaff, ‘The Arm-in-Arm Convention,’ p. 118.

⁴⁴ *New York Tribune*, Aug. 13, 1866.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and left Washington for the Northeast.⁴⁶ Johnson's 'Swing Around the Circle' began with a resoundingly successful tour of New York. Throughout the state, crowds responded to the president's reconciliatory speeches with rapturous applause. Combining strong Democratic support in New York City with moderate Republicans in upstate areas, New York was in the heartland of National Unionist support, and the success of his tour came as no surprise.⁴⁷ As the President and his entourage composed of National Unionists James Doolittle, William Seward, and John A. Dix, entered the Midwest however, the tour took a turn for the worse.

On September 3, Johnson delivered the same speech in Cleveland that he had given throughout New York. Instead of enthusiasm the president was met by heckles and remarks about the violence in New Orleans.⁴⁸ While outbursts by the crowd were insignificant, Johnson was dragged into a deeply damaging public debate. In a remarkable exchange over calls to 'Hang Jeff Davis,' Johnson replied 'Hang Jeff. Davis? Hang Jeff. Davis? Why don't you? ... I have heard the remark made in this crowd to-night, "Traitor! Traitor!" ... I want to know when, where and under what circumstances Andrew Johnson, either as Chief Executive, or in any other capacity ever violated the Constitution of his country?'⁴⁹ Johnson's anger continued to grow. Unable to control himself, he proclaimed that:

If I was disposed to play orator, and deal in declamation, here to-night, I would imitate one of the ancient tragedies we have such account of – I would take William H. Seward, and open to you the scars he has received. I would exhibit his bloody garments and show the rents caused by the assassin's knife ... Yes, I would unfold his bloody garments here to-night and ask who has committed treason? I would ask why Jeff. Davis was not hung? Why don't you hang Thad. Stevens and Wendell Phillips?⁵⁰

Johnson had not only spoken in a way that was regarded as distinctly un-presidential, but his attack on leading Radical Republicans highlighted both his Democratic background and his commitment to white supremacy. At the centre of Johnson's Reconstruction were not loyal freedmen but treasonous whites: 'there are many

⁴⁶ Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 11*, pp. 84–5.

⁴⁷ Garry Boulard, *The Swing Around the Circle: Andrew Johnson and the Train Ride that Destroyed a Presidency* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2008), p. 113.

⁴⁸ Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 11*, p. 176–80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

white people in this country that need emancipation. Let the work of emancipation go on. Let white men stand erect and free.’⁵¹ Johnson’s racial prejudice was no surprise to Americans, but the animosity and indignity of the president’s actions severely undermined the fraternal and conciliatory spirit of National Unionism. The Tennessean’s outburst in Cleveland made him grossly unpopular with the Republicans, and with this dramatic loss in popularity, the National Union movement crumbled.

As the fall elections approached, Democrats hoped to hijack National Unionism and use its emphasis on reconciliation and bipartisanship for their own gain. New York Democrats called for a Conservative Union state convention to be held in Albany to provide nominations for the state elections. Held on September 11 and 12, the convention was composed of nearly equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, including Thurlow Weed and the Chairman of the National Union Convention, John A. Dix. Similar to the National Union Convention, matters of state policy were not put on the New York meeting’s agenda, and the construction of the platform was placed under the guidance of Democrats Samuel J. Tilden, Sanford E. Church, and Manton Marble.⁵² Under the guise of National Unionism, the New York Democracy fiercely advocated the nomination of Democrats to all major state offices, and despite the efforts of Republicans to secure the nomination of the more moderate former-War Democrat John A. Dix as governor, the Democratic majority secured the nomination of the straight-out Sanford E. Church.⁵³ While the National Union Convention in Philadelphia had been marked by apparently genuine bipartisan action, the Albany Convention showed Democrats’ enduring devotion to their party.⁵⁴ On October 6, the *New York Times* disparaged the actions of New York Democrats, stating that ‘the whole spirit and purpose of the Philadelphia Convention was repudiated and condemned,’ and that delegates to the Albany Convention ‘deliberately sacrificed the principles of the [Philadelphia] Convention ... [and] made every interest and every principle subordinate and secondary to the reorganization and reconstruction of the Democratic Party ... in spite of their pretended adherence to the National Union movement.’⁵⁵

When the fall elections arrived, one thing had become clear: for most northern Democrats the perpetuation of their party was a superior cause to National Unionism.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵² *New York Times*, Sept. 11, 1866.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Edward Gambill, *Conservative Ordeal*, p. 74.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1866.

Andrew Johnson's catastrophic 'Swing Around the Circle' campaign brought the National Union Movement to a sudden and abrupt end. As conservative Republicans lost faith in the movement, Democratic strategists came to the fore and dictated National Union nominating conventions across the North. Despite the flexibility of Democrats, National Union-endorsed Democratic candidates fared poorly in the fall elections. The Republicans trounced the Democrats, increasing their majority in the House of Representatives from 97 to 126 and in the Senate from 28 to 46. John A. Dix, War Democrat and Chairman of the National Union Convention in Philadelphia, wrote to Andrew Johnson and blamed defeat in New York on the 'selfishness and folly of the democratic managers.'⁵⁶ With Andrew Johnson's fall from grace, and the subsequent demolition of National Unionism, wartime antiparty rhetoric began to dissipate, partisan divisions solidified, and the accommodationist Democrats found their dominance in the party leadership under threat.

The Emergence of the Straight-Out Democrats, 1867–1868

Looking back at the 1866 elections, Democrats were conflicted over the future course of the party. While straight-out Democrats claimed that 'the cause of the defeat of the Democratic party ... is because it has not been true to the Democratic principle,' accommodationists believed that further obstruction to Radical Reconstruction would spell disaster for reconciliation and that it would be 'wiser not to stem an overwhelming current but rather to use it, and control it ... for the welfare of the country.'⁵⁷ James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald* and supporter of the National Union strategy, adhered to the latter view. By accepting congressional Reconstruction, and with a Democratic Unionist at the head of the party, Bennett argued that the Democrats would stand a good chance of winning the presidency in 1868. For Bennett, the Democratic party stood at a crossroads, that if negotiated incorrectly, would see it 'gone like the old whig party, never to rise again.'⁵⁸

The defeat of National Unionism diminished the influence of accommodationists in the Democracy's national leadership, and legitimised the assertions of straight-out

⁵⁶ Bergeron (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Johnson, Volume 11*, p. 430.

⁵⁷ *The Democratic Almanac and Political Compendium for 1867* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton & Co., 1866), p. 20; Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. XI*, p. 439.

⁵⁸ *New York Herald*, December 22, 1866.

Democrats who contended that only by remaining committed to the party's founding principles could the Democracy end Radical rule. Democrats turned from the bipartisanship that had dominated the recent campaign, and embraced a racialised policy of restoration. The annual *Democratic Almanac* reflected this turn from accommodationism, and asserted that the 'future task of the Democracy is to undo all the work of the negro party ... It can restore State sovereignty and White supremacy. It can restore law to its powers over military despotism ... In a word, it can restore the government to the free foundations from which it has been dragged by the Abolitionists.'⁵⁹ Over the following two years obstructionism would become the standard Democratic response to congressional politics. Advocates of obstructionism and accommodationism continued to battle over Reconstruction policy but by 1868, party unity was dependent on a shared commitment to the reestablishment of white supremacy in the South.

After their widespread victories in 1866, the Republican majority believed that Johnson had no mandate to block congressional Reconstruction, and Democrats had little faith that the president would stand in the Radicals' way. In a letter to Barlow, John Nugent wrote that 'should the President stand absolutely in the way of the Radicals in hindering the accomplishment of any measure they should deem necessary to the perpetuation of their power, then they would certainly get rid of him. But at present the President is powerless ... as long as this state of things continues, I don't think they will seriously trouble Johnson.'⁶⁰ Regardless of Johnson's loss of popularity since September, Democrats still hoped that the president could stop what they viewed as a vengeful policy on the part of the Republicans. On January 4, 1867 Democratic Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland urged Congress to embrace a reconciliatory stance towards the South and lamented that the spirit of the Republicans showed that 'generosity, forgiveness, mercy, pardon are no longer to be our policy.'⁶¹ He hoped that by appealing to a congressional desire to finalise Reconstruction the country could avoid a destabilising policy. Northern Democrats had frequently used symbolic gestures of reconciliation to argue that the South had accepted the military results of the war, and the Maryland senator was no exception. Johnson claimed that at a dinner he had attended, Robert E. Lee's son had refused a toast to the fallen Confederacy. Instead, the young man had stood up and eagerly proclaimed, 'we now have but one flag, and that is the flag of the whole country, the glorious old Stars

⁵⁹ *The Democratic Almanac and Political Compendium for 1867*, p. 23.

⁶⁰ John Nugent to Barlow, Jan. 10, 1867, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁶¹ *Congressional Globe*, 39th Congress, 2d session, p. 270.

and Stripes. I can recognize no other, fight for no other, and drink to no other.’⁶² Democrats such as Johnson were acutely aware of the importance of reintegrating white southerners into the party and regain supremacy in the South, and hoped to promote this objective through a strategy that propagandized southern Unionism.

The day after the Maryland senator’s impassioned speech, President Johnson vetoed the District of Columbia Franchise Law. Ignoring the advice of accommodationist Democrats, the president declared that the bill was an ‘arbitrary exercise of power’ that ‘would engender a feeling of opposition and hatred between the two races, which ... would prevent them from living together in a state of mutual friendliness.’⁶³ While the bill was restricted to the capital, it would set a precedent for black suffrage throughout the nation. Johnson argued that bestowing the ballot upon a class of citizens ‘wholly unprepared by previous habits and opportunities to perform the trust which it demands’ would reduce the country to a state of ‘anarchy and despotism’ where the black vote would be controlled by the corrupt.⁶⁴ For Johnson and the straight-out Democrats, the only way to ensure a lasting reunion was for them to take a stand against Republican Reconstruction in order to restore the faith of southern Democrats in the party’s ability to safeguard white supremacy.

In February 1867 congressional Republicans embarked on a legislative programme that laid the foundations of an expansive reconstruction of southern politics and government. The Military Reconstruction bill proposed to divide the South into five districts, each under the control of a military governor. From the moment the bill hit the floors of the Senate and House of Representatives, Democrats scoffed at the measure, viewing it as a Republican attempt to place the South under a military despotism. They denounced it for showing no desire for restoration or harmony, and insisted that it originated from ‘the desire of gain, the desire of power, or the spirit of revenge.’⁶⁵ Yet despite almost unanimous opposition to the bill, Democrats showed little unity over how their party should reassert its antebellum dominance.

On February 15, Senator Thomas Hendricks of Indiana proposed an amendment to the Reconstruction bill. Focusing on the question of black male suffrage, Hendricks advocated removing the universal suffrage clause from the bill, and replacing it with an

⁶² Ibid., p. 270.

⁶³ Bergeron (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. 11, pp. 581–2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 583, 588.

⁶⁵ *Cong. Globe*, 39th Congress, 2d sess., pp. 1389, 1447.

impartial suffrage provision that would decrease the number of black voters.⁶⁶ Not only did this proposition appeal to accommodationist Democrats who hoped that a flexible approach would enable the southern states to regain their congressional representation and Electoral College votes before 1868, but it also gained the support of conservative Republicans.⁶⁷ However, not all Democrats endorsed this course of action. Willard Saulsbury Sr. of Delaware declared that he was so ‘utterly opposed to this bill ... that I cannot allow myself to vote for any of the proposed amendments to it ... The passage of this bill ... is in my judgment, as we heard this afternoon, the death-knell, not only of the Republic, but of civil and constitutional liberty in this country. I cannot touch it in any shape, form, or fashion, or have anything to do with trying to amend it.’⁶⁸

Despite the differing strategies of accommodation and obstruction, a desire for restoration and reconciliation underpinned the behaviour of all Democrats. Those who urged accommodation hoped that Reconstruction would be palatable both to southerners who sought a quick reintegration into the Union, and to northerners who demanded the South paid for their treason. That a desire for reconciliation dictated the actions of congressional Democrats was exemplified by Reverdy Johnson’s last minute decision to support the bill. Despite having been strongly opposed to the measure, Johnson belatedly declared his willingness to ‘acquiesce with the majority in anything that held out a hope, however faint, of accomplishing that object [restoration].’⁶⁹ In this way, northern Democrats viewed themselves not simply as ‘defenders of the South’ during Reconstruction, but also as the true protectors of the Constitution and reunion.⁷⁰

When Congress voted to override Andrew Johnson’s veto of the Military Reconstruction Act on March 2, 1867, Sanford E. Church, a New York congressman, wrote to Samuel J. Tilden to express his concerns over Johnson’s leadership. He wrote that Johnson ‘now trembles for fear of impeachment, and will ... give the radicals all the offices in hopes thereby to propitiate them and prevent impeachment. But they will impeach him ... They know that he is cowardly and will not fight, and they will for that

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 1368.

⁶⁷ James Buchanan to Marble, March 4, 1867, Marble Papers, LOC; Cyrus McCormick to Barlow, Feb. 4, 1867, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 1370–75.

⁶⁹ *New York Herald*, February 22, 1867.

⁷⁰ Albert V. House Jr., ‘Northern Congressional Democrats as Defenders of the South During Reconstruction,’ *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (February, 1940), pp. 47–8.

reason go to the extreme.’⁷¹ As congressional Reconstruction was rolled out into the South, underlying factional struggles over party leadership began to bubble over.

Believing that the capital-poor Midwest and South shared common interests on economic policies, George H. Pendleton saw an opportunity to push influential hard-money advocates such as Belmont and Seymour out of the national leadership, and propel the emergent soft-money leaders, including himself, into these vacant positions. With failing harvests and a spiraling economy, the Midwest and South faced distinctly different problems from the industrial centres of the Northeast. To ease the pressure of rising transportation costs, Pendleton suggested that the government-issued wartime bonds should be repaid in greenbacks. In turn, the national banks could withhold \$400 million of these bonds to accumulate interest that would be used to repay the federal debt over the following sixteen years. By also continuing high tax rates and decreasing federal spending, the resulting inflation could help to rebuild the southern economy.⁷² Eastern Democrats, however, believed the plan was anathema. For hard-money men such as Belmont, the federal government had a moral responsibility to repay wartime bonds in gold. These hard-money Democrats despised inflationary measures and campaigned vociferously for specie payments to be resumed as soon as possible. This sectional division between East and West over finance not only split the 1868 Democratic National Convention, but also remained a major influence on Democratic politics until the end of the century.⁷³ With state elections looming the national party buried splits over financial issues and focused on the connected issues of white supremacy and reconciliation.

By the summer of 1867, moderate and conservative Republicans had begun to clash with the Radical leadership over the growing centralising tendencies of the party, to which Democrats reacted by emphasising their Jacksonian commitment to limited federal government. In early 1867, moderate William Pitt Fessenden and Radical Charles Sumner squared off over the Military Reconstruction Act. Fessenden believed the Republican party should have been trying to admit the South through a policy that ‘sustained the North’s wartime triumph without excluding the embittered ex-Confederates.’⁷⁴ Despite the senator’s eventual support of the bill, continuing factional

⁷¹ John Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden, Volume I* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1908), p. 208.

⁷² Thomas Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, p. 117, 128–9.

⁷³ Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, p. 239.

⁷⁴ Cook, *Civil War Senator*, pp. 213–5.

disputes among the Republicans over black suffrage and Reconstruction policy weakened the party and would have major political consequences by the end of the decade.

Throughout the 1867 state campaigns, Democrats successfully appealed to white supremacy and opposition to centralisation in order to exploit the growing tensions within the Republican ranks and deliver much-needed electoral victories for the party. In Ohio, a referendum on African American suffrage rights was rejected by the people, and the Republicans were quick to blame the defeat on the Democracy's ability to play upon the racial fears of the population.⁷⁵ Confidence in the party's racial strategy was further bolstered as reports of Democratic gains in Connecticut, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in October quickly spread to the delight of Democratic supporters who rejoiced that the results showed that 'the People intend this to be a White Man's Government.'⁷⁶ In quick succession, Democratic victories were also declared in New York, New Jersey, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and were promptly hailed as evidence that the party's appeal to racial fears would return the party to national power. In the South, the Democratic press exalted that the 'conservative good sense of the Anglo Saxon ... have at length come to the rescue,' and that 'the white race is to govern the American Union ... It means that the recent elections of radicals and negroes in the South are a fraud and an outrage, and that the whole infamous farce will be set aside.'⁷⁷ The results bolstered the ex-Confederates' belief that 1868 would deliver the Democracy to power and bring an end to Republican rule. Straight-out Democrats hoped that their adoption of a less accommodating approach to Reconstruction following the disaster of National Unionism would restore the faith of white southerners in the party's ability to protect their interests. Their obstructionism had built the foundations for the party's reunion, but they needed a presidential candidate who could rally the support of the East, the West, and the South.

To nominate a unifying candidate, Democrats would have to negotiate the tricky factional disputes that had split the party for eight years. Leading straight-out Democrats asserted that former-War Democrats 'may divide ... those who stood together in the years of trial and of trouble,' but that the party 'must [now] associate without reference to their position during the war' and that 'if we are to have harmony at all, the war and all

⁷⁵ On the Ohio suffrage amendment see, Robert D. Sawrey, *Dubious Victory: The Reconstruction Debate in Ohio* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp. 116–8; Hanes Walton Jr., Sherman Puckett, and Donald R. Deskins Jr., *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), pp. 157–8; Hugh Davis, *We Will be Satisfied with Nothing Less: The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North during Reconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 52–4.

⁷⁶ *The Home Journal*, October 17, 1867.

⁷⁷ *Charleston Mercury* (South Carolina), November 8, 1867; *Augusta Constitutionalist*, November 7, 1867

questions relating to it ... must be absolutely ignored.’⁷⁸ For the party to be successful in 1868, straight-out Democrats believed that the party had to nominate someone who had stuck with the party throughout the crisis.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Seymour was worried about the threat that came from Pendleton, who he believed was betraying the party’s Jacksonian heritage by campaigning for the continued circulation of paper money. In response, he organised a meeting of New York’s leading Democrats, including Sanford E. Church, William Tweed, and John T. Hoffman, that solidified the state party against Pendleton in an attempt to block the Ohioan’s bid for the presidency and to stop the national party from standing on a heretical soft-money platform.⁸⁰

Instead, eastern Democrats sought to make the restoration of the South to Congress and opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment the foundation of the party’s 1868 bid for the presidency. Governor William Bigler of Pennsylvania wrote to Tilden in February 1868 suggesting that Seymour stood a good chance of the presidential nomination, but the party had to avoid economic issues. Bigler was not alone in his fear that Pendleton had ‘started an issue on which we cannot unite ... [and] cannot be made a leading issue.’⁸¹ Other northeastern Democrats agreed with the governor, and regarded the currency question as a ‘sharp double edged affair’ that threatened party unity and undermined their ability to oppose ‘ultra radicalism.’⁸² Rather, Bigler contended that ‘[t]he restoration of the ten absent States to the Union, with the rights and privileges of the other States, and with their local governments in the hands of their white population, must be the absorbing question. All else must be subordinate and secondary.’⁸³ Tilden felt similarly. He believed that the restoration of white supremacy was the key issue in the coming election and that ‘[o]n no other question can we [the Democratic party] be so unanimous,’ and that the party’s position ‘must be *condemnation and reversal of negro supremacy*.’⁸⁴ Rather than drag the party into a factional dispute over hard and soft money, Tilden advocated ‘a general attack on the prodigality and corruption of the present

⁷⁸ Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 214; Vallandigham to Montgomery Blair, June 13, 1868, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁷⁹ Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 214.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁸¹ Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 217.

⁸² Bryant to Marble, Jan. 16, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; R. W. Clelland to Marble, Jan. 24, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; Joseph Warren to Marble, Jan. 28, 1868; James F. Noble to Marble, Feb. 11, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁸³ Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 217.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20.

governing power' that could help the Democrats regain the respectability they had lost through the Civil War.⁸⁵

By March 1868, the Democracy stood in a precarious position. Despite the party's gains in state-level elections in 1867, translating these into national victories was a much more difficult prospect. Tilden and Seymour hoped that New York Democrats would take the lead in opposing soft-money Pendletonians, but fellow New Yorker Francis Kernan urged the state convention to not 'lay down anything like a platform of principles; leave this to the national convention.'⁸⁶ Kernan's strategy to delay the announcement of the New York Democracy's policies showed the perilous state of the party and the growing rifts between eastern hard-money men and midwestern soft-money advocates. What the party could agree on, however, was that Republican misrule had plunged the country into a crisis where constitutional liberty and the peace and prosperity of the nation were being subverted to ensure black civil and political rights.

The Election of 1868

Having lost faith in the ability of Andrew Johnson to unite the party and deliver it to power in 1868, Democrats nonetheless supported the president against Republicans who were becoming angered by his obstructionist stance towards Reconstruction. Republican opposition to Johnson had been steadily growing since 1866 and after he suspended Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in the summer of 1867 and attempted to bypass the Command of the Army Act, Congress initiated impeachment proceedings.⁸⁷ Johnson, however, adhering to his Democratic beliefs in state power and white supremacy, despised what he saw as a despotic attempt to enforce black equality on the people of the South. Impeachment proceedings however brought to an abrupt end any distant hope the president had of re-election in November. Out of the impeachment crisis, however, rose an unlikely candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, a Republican who had campaigned vociferously for freedmen's rights his whole career, had been instrumental in President Johnson's acquittal. Hopeful that Chase could lure Republicans who had stood against impeachment, accommodationist Democrats believed that the Chief Justice's support of black political

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 220-1.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

⁸⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 334-5.

equality would blunt Republican attacks on their party. By adopting a plank in the Democratic platform that gave the states power on the black suffrage question, moderate Democrats hoped to attract Chase to the party.⁸⁸

Numerous prominent Democrats, from both straight-out and accommodationist factions, backed Chase's bid for the nomination, and with Seymour publicly vowing that he would not accept the party's nomination, Chase appeared to be a viable option. In May, Hiram Barney, a lawyer and Democrat from New York, wrote to the Chief Justice that neither the midwestern soft-money Democrats nor eastern hard-money Democrats 'would submit to a candidate from the other,' and that a Chase nomination would make the Democratic ticket more attractive to Republican supporters.⁸⁹ Gerrit Smith, a prominent former abolitionist who had become a prominent supporter of sectional reconciliation and had helped Horace Greeley to put up the bail for Jefferson Davis's release from Fortress Monroe, wrote on June 12 that he would 'rejoice to see the Chief Justice in the Presidency ... if contrary to my expectations, the Democrats shall have the wisdom to nominate the Chief Justice. I shall prefer to vote for the Democratic Candidates.'⁹⁰ Like other northerners, Smith clamoured for a speedy end to Reconstruction and blamed continued sectional conflict on partisan politics and argued that in their eagerness to keep the Democrats out of power, the Republicans had lost sight of the true aim of Reconstruction.⁹¹ More surprisingly, however, former Confederate General John B. Gordon backed Chase. While Gordon believed that the Chief Justice was 'not by any means the favorite of our people ... The South can't afford to go into the contest, with the sole object of saving honor. We must get rid of military Gov't, without bringing upon us a worse one.'⁹² The former general's willingness to acquiescence in the choice of the northern Democracy was an accurate reflection of the state of the party. Both southern and northern Democrats had come to terms with the shift of power in the party, and the national leadership expected southern whites to fall in line behind whatever candidate they chose.⁹³

On an 'intensely hot' July Saturday in New York, Tammany Hall was packed full of spectators eager to find out who would face General Ulysses S. Grant in November. A

⁸⁸ Bigelow (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 227.

⁸⁹ Hiram Barney to Chase, May 25, 1868, Chase Papers, LOC.

⁹⁰ *Speeches and Letters of Gerrit Smith, 1843–1873* (n.d.), p. 25.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² John B. Gordon to Barlow, June 5, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁹³ Gordon to Barlow, April 6, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL; Montgomery Blair to Barlow, April 19, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL.

large crowd stood outside trying to gain admittance to the convention and the city police guarded the doors to keep order in the street. At twelve minutes past noon, August Belmont called the convention to order and said

the American people will no longer remain deaf to the teachings of the past. They will remember that it was under successive democratic administrations ... that our country rose to a prosperity and greatness unsurpassed in the annals of history ... they will not calmly stand by to see their liberties subverted, the greatness of their country undermined, and institutions bequeathed to them by the fathers of the republic wrested before them. They must see that conservative and national principles of liberal progressive democracy are the only safeguards of the republic.⁹⁴

Democrats hoped that the Committee on Resolutions led by Manton Marble could compose a platform that would appease both accommodationists and straight-outs. While the platform accepted that ‘the questions of slavery and secession’ had been answered and appealed to all conservatives ‘to whatever party they may have heretofore belonged’ to help end Radicalism, it also demanded the ‘immediate restoration of all the States to their rights in the Union,’ a thorough reform of the administration, universal amnesty, state control of suffrage laws, and ‘the abolition of ... all political instrumentalities designed to secure negro supremacy.’⁹⁵ The platform reflected how straight-out Democrats had stolen the initiative from accommodationists after the 1867 victories and made overthrowing the Radicals and reinstating white men’s government the cornerstone of the Democracy.⁹⁶

With the victory of the straight-out Democrats in establishing the party’s platform, attention turned to the presidential nomination. While the hard-money men had managed to keep Pendleton’s Ohio Plan out of the platform, stopping his nomination proved a more difficult task. Democrats had speculated over the party’s candidate for nearly a year by the time the convention arrived, and the party seemed no closer to uniting behind a candidate in 1868. While many accommodationists favoured Chase, straight-out Democrats scorned the idea as ‘not only ... a crime, but a blunder that would ensure the election of Grant.’ Conversely, soft-money midwesterners urged hard-money

⁹⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, July 6, 1868.

⁹⁵ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. III*, p. 1272.

⁹⁶ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, pp. 206–7.

northeasterners to ‘yield [their] prejudices’ and accept Pendleton, while a minority of delegates even advocated the nomination of George McClellan.⁹⁷

Bolstered by his solid support among midwestern delegates, Pendleton emerged as the frontrunner during the early ballots as northeastern Democrats fractured. New York delegates supported Sanford E. Church, the Pennsylvania delegation chose Asa Packer, while General Winfield Scott Hancock, James Doolittle, and James E. English received some disparate support.⁹⁸ As the convention progressed, however, the party split between Pendleton, Thomas A. Hendricks, and General Hancock, with none able to garner the two-thirds required for the nomination. Following the eighteenth ballot, Pendleton finally threw in the towel, leaving it a two horse race between Hendricks and Hancock. Still the party could not reach a decision. During the twenty-second ballot, General Alexander McDowell McCook of Ohio rose and called for the nomination of Horatio Seymour, ‘a man whom the Presidency has sought, but a man who has not sought the Presidency ... I believe it is the solution which will drive from power the Vandals who now possess the Capitol of the nation.’⁹⁹ Seymour rose in response, thanked the Ohioan for his kindness, but replied saying ‘I could not receive the nomination without placing, not only myself, but the great Democratic party, in a false position.’¹⁰⁰ Following Seymour’s refusal, Clement Vallandigham rose and passionately announced that ‘in times of great public exigency, and especially in times of great public calamity, every personal consideration must be yielded to the public good ... Ohio will not accept his declination, and her twenty-one votes still stand recorded in his name.’¹⁰¹

One after the other, all state delegations rose and changed their vote to Seymour. In a dramatic turn of events, the New Yorker received the unanimous consent of all Democrats. He was joined by Missourian and former general Francis P. Blair, Jr., a wartime conservative Republican who had gained notoriety for suggesting that the only way to restore constitutional government was to void the Reconstruction acts, remove the military presence from the South, and ‘disperse the carpetbag Southern governments, and

⁹⁷ James A. Bayard to Barlow, May 29, 31, June 10, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL; McLean to Barlow, Jan 14, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL; M. Blair to Barlow, June 10, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL; James Noble to Barlow, July 1, 1868; Joseph Warren to Marble, Nov. 9, 1867, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁹⁸ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held at New York, July 4–9, 1868* (Boston: Rockwell & Rollins, 1868), pp. 66–81.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152–3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

allow the white people to reorganize their own governments.’¹⁰² The 1868 Democratic convention clearly showed that the party had shifted from the pragmatic accommodationism that had directed efforts to align the party with National Unionism in 1866. The party’s hard stance on questions about black citizenship and voting rights made the restoration of white supremacy central to its electoral strategy, and this was bolstered by attacking the supposed corruption and military despotism of the Republicans. Heading into the 1868 contest, the Democratic message was a clear one: white man’s government and constitutional government.

In late August at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, Union General William S. Rosecrans met with Robert E. Lee to discuss southern restoration. Former leading Confederates, including Alexander Stephens and P. G. T. Beauregard, accompanied the two generals who wanted to convince northerners that the South was ready to return to Congress and to end Reconstruction. Rosecrans, a plain-spoken Democrat from Ohio with a disdain of Grant, wrote to Lee that ‘We know that the interests of the people of the South are for law and order ... I believe ... that if the people of the Southern States could be at peace, and their energy and good will heartily applied to repair the wastes of war ... they would soon ... establish public confidence in our political stability ... and assure for themselves and the whole Nation a most happy and prosperous future.’¹⁰³ Rosecrans hoped that the former leaders of the Confederacy would be restored to positions in the South’s political elite, from where they could ‘employ, protect, educate, and elevate the poor freedmen.’¹⁰⁴ The Union general asked Lee to respond by expressing the views of leading men of the South on the proposition he made. Rather, Lee wrote that ‘The great want of the South is peace. The people earnestly desire tranquility, and the restoration of the Union ... They desire relief from oppressive rule. Above all they would appeal to their countrymen for the reestablishment in the Southern States of that which has justly been regarded as the birthright of every American – the right of self-government.’¹⁰⁵

The meeting of two high-profile Democrats, one northern and one southern, exemplified the Democratic focus on reconciliation during the 1868 canvass. Hoping to induce a groundswell of popular calls for the immediate restoration of the South to

¹⁰² Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, p. 208; Parrish, *Frank Blair*, p. 254; Elbert E. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), pp. 411–12.

¹⁰³ David G. Moore, *William S. Rosecrans and the Union Victory: A Civil War Biography* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2014), p. 189; *New York Tribune*, September 5, 1868, Rosecrans to Lee, August 26, 1868.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Congress, the White Sulphur meeting was hailed throughout the North by the Democratic press, but derided by Republicans. Wary of the true purpose of the meeting, the *Massachusetts Spy* wrote that ‘there is mischief in this gathering’ and that those present would ‘undoubtedly discuss treason.’¹⁰⁶ Gerrit Smith wrote to Lee in September with a sense of regret that two men who he had held in high regard both advocated a return to a racially oppressive society.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the *New York Tribune* attacked Rosecrans for having ‘no hesitation in saying that the negroes should not vote’ and that the so-called White Sulphur Manifesto was an ‘anti-negro, Copperhead production, intended to bolster up Seymour and Blair, defeat Grant, and float the ex-Rebels of the North and the South into power.’¹⁰⁸ The meeting reverberated with Democrats, but its desire for a restoration of ex-Confederates to leading political positions undermined the message of reconciliation. In the lead up to the presidential election this spectacle swelled support for the Democracy in its traditional base, but made the party appear dangerously unresponsive to the altered political and social realities wrought by the Civil War.

The campaign run by the Democracy in 1868 was one of the most overtly racist in American history. As the Democratic press lambasted the Republicans for seeking to impose ‘negro supremacy,’ horrific racial violence tore through the South. Coinciding with the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee, violent white supremacist groups formed throughout the ex-Confederate States, all with the intention of murdering African Americans and their white allies who supported black equality. Organisations such as the Knights of the White Camelia of Louisiana targeted Republicans, black and white, forced freedmen to vote the Democratic ticket, and brutally attacked African American women throughout the South.¹⁰⁹ The violent actions of southern whites dramatically reduced the chances of Democratic victory in November. Reports of southern violence saturated the northern Republican press, giving the lie to Democratic assurances that southerners had accepted the military results of the war. Republicans chastised the ‘Ku-Klux Democracy’ whose ‘mission is to secure Democratic victory by the murder of Union men,’ and insisted that the failure to impeach Johnson had ‘encouraged them [Democratic terrorists] to come

¹⁰⁶ *Massachusetts Spy*, August 28, 1868.

¹⁰⁷ *Speeches and Letters of Gerrit Smith*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ *New York Tribune*, August 29, 1868.

¹⁰⁹ George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction*, esp. pp. 61–8, 75–9; James G. Dauphine, ‘The Knights of the White Camelia and the Election of 1868: Louisiana’s White Terrorists: A Benighting Legacy,’ *Louisiana History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 1989), pp. 173–90.

out boldly and murder Union men in open daylight!’¹¹⁰ The Republican press further sought to link all northern violence with the Ku Klux Klan, casting such attacks as evidence of the Democracy’s and Seymour’s treason.¹¹¹ The claims of the Democracy that the South held no resentment over the outcome of the war and the end of slavery paled before the racial violence that beset southern freedmen. Peace and reconciliation to many northerners seemed a distant dream.

Utilising ‘Bloody Shirt’ rhetoric, the Republican press successfully characterised the Democratic campaign as a desperate attempt to return to antebellum race relations and reinstate as leaders the men who had torn the Union apart.¹¹² Accompanied by the overt racism that vice presidential candidate Frank Blair espoused on the campaign trail, the Democratic reconciliatory focus was blurred, and by mid-October many Democrats had lost faith in the ability of the Seymour-Blair ticket to deliver victory. As the campaign stalled, Marble of the *New York World* wrote that mistakes had been made in the adoption of the party platform and that the party should replace Seymour.¹¹³ Yet the editor’s suggestion to change candidates did not receive unanimous support from all party members, who believed ‘changing the candidates will only make defeat more certain and more terrible,’ and that ‘if we back down our candidates, or withdraw of their own accord, our party is utterly ruined.’¹¹⁴ The call for Seymour’s replacement never materialised, but the cataclysmic decline of the Democratic campaign highlighted the weakness of the party in the early years of Reconstruction. Despite its ability to survive and unify behind a desire for reconciliation, the resilience of Civil War memories in the northern public mind had a debilitating impact upon the Democracy’s strength at the national level. Victories in the state elections of 1867 showed the party could compete locally, but when the nation was called to choose a new leader, the Democracy’s tainted past held it back. Republican bloody shirt rhetoric was a strong tool: memories of Democratic wartime treason and the Confederacy’s strong Democratic links made party recovery a long way off. Despite this, the Seymour-Blair ticket ran surprisingly well, accumulating 45% of the popular vote and

¹¹⁰ Dauphine, ‘The Knights of the White Camelia,’ p. 174; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, July 13, 1868; *Troy Weekly Times* (NY), July 11, 1868; J. W. Sumner to C. P. Kirkland, July 24, 1868, Horace Greeley Papers, LOC.

¹¹¹ *New York Tribune*, August 19, 1868.

¹¹² See, *New York Tribune*, August 4, 1868; *New York Tribune*, August 20, 1868.

¹¹³ C. W. M. to Marble, Oct. 14, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; James F. Noble to Marble, Oct. 16, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; *New York World* October 15, 1868; *New York Times*, October 16, 1868.

¹¹⁴ Brinton Cox to Marble, Oct. 16, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; Edward Hamilton to Marble, Oct. 16, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC; Charles J. Rogers, Oct. 17, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC.

improving on the party's showing in 1864.¹¹⁵ The Democratic party had taken steps towards recovery, but this was only the start of a long, and arduous journey back to national ascendancy.

¹¹⁵ In comparison to the party's defeat in the Electoral College count of 1864 by 212–21, in 1868, the Seymour ticket was defeated by 214–80. See, *History of Presidential Elections*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997), pp. 42–3.

Chapter Three

‘A Remarkable Sacrifice of Prejudice’?: The New Departure and the Failure of Liberal Republicanism, 1868–1872

In mid-December 1868, a little over a month after Ulysses S. Grant was elected president, the Democratic Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, John B. Baldwin wrote to his friend and regular correspondent, former Confederate general Jubal A. Early, that he had felt ‘badly cheated by the Northern Democrats.’¹ Baldwin had supported the Constitutional Union party in 1860, and despite his displeasure with the Democracy’s campaign in 1868, he did not ‘believe in third parties, or conservative parties, or built parties ... [but] I am disposed to hold on to the Democracy now that I have joined them.’² While leading Democrats such as Samuel J. Tilden and Augustus Schell believed that the course the party had taken in 1868 had ‘vindicated its principles, preserved its honor and won the respect and confidence of the people of the United States,’ the manner of Seymour’s defeat posed challenges to the party leadership.³

If Grant’s election demonstrated the Democracy’s need to legitimise itself in the eyes of northern voters, the party’s response to defeat took a variety of forms that nonetheless followed distinct patterns of behaviour established in the Johnson years. All northern Democrats agreed firstly, that, due to the strength of the Republicans in reviving the loyalty issue, they could not be successful if Reconstruction and freedmen’s rights continued to dominate political debate. Secondly, they agreed that the ‘living’ issues of amnesty, civil service reform, and economics were crucial to the party’s resurgence. Nationally, however, Democrats remained deeply divided over how the party should end Reconstruction. Attitudes towards developing a national strategy to combat Radical Republicanism did not follow sectional lines, but rather reflected individuals’ willingness to sacrifice party principle for political expediency. In this context, the emergence of the Liberal Republicans highlighted the underlying conservatism of the middle ground of American politics in the late 1860s. Scholars have, however, sidelined Democrats in favour of exploring Republican factional conflict and the waning of Radical

¹ John B. Baldwin to Jubal A. Early, Early Papers, LOC.

² Ibid.

³ Order of the Union Democracy, Dec. 1, 1868, Marble Papers, LOC.

Reconstruction.⁴ Of the historians who have assessed the reasons Democrats joined with the Liberal Republicans, most have asserted that while desires for sectional reconciliation and a shared hatred of Grantism pushed some northern Democrats to support Horace Greeley in 1872, the vast majority of Democrats were unwilling to vote for the well-known antislavery editor.⁵ The significance of the Liberal Republican years to the Democracy's resurrection, however, has been either undervalued or overstated.⁶ Lingering doubts among conservative Republicans and former War Democrats about the future composition of the American party system continued to shake public confidence in the Democracy, and pushed the party into its coalition with the Liberal Republicans. Paradoxically, it was the strength of partisan identity and memories of past party conflict severely undermined the potential success of the Democrats' fusion strategy. While the outcome of the 1868 election placed accommodationist Democrats in a strong position to succeed in creating a bipartisan alliance, 1872 would mark the beginning of the Democracy's move away from accommodation as a political strategy and towards a reconfiguration of the party to fit the realities of post-war America.

⁴ Andrew Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction: Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); John G. Sproat, *"The Best Men:" Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Yonathan Eyal, 'Charles Eliot Norton, E. L. Godkin, and the Liberal Republicans of 1872,' *American Nineteenth-Century History* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 53–75; Wilbert H. Ehern, 'Laissez Faire vs. Equal Rights: Liberal Republicans and Limits to Reconstruction,' *Phylon* Vol. 40, No. 1 (1979), pp. 52–65; Richard A. Gerber, 'The Liberal Republicans of 1872 in Historiographical Perspective,' *Journal of American History* Vol. 62, No. 1 (July, 1975), pp. 40–73; Paul Douglas Casdorph, 'The 1872 Liberal Republican Campaign in West Virginia,' *West Virginia History* Vol. 29, No. 4 (July, 1968), pp. 292–302; Richard A. Gerber, 'Carl Schurz's Journey from Radical to Liberal Republican: A Problem in Ideological Consistency,' *Mid America* Vol. 82 No. 1 (2000), pp. 71–99; Donald B. Marti, 'Francis William Bird: A Radical's Progress through the Republican Party,' *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Vol. 11, No. 2 (Oct., 1983), pp. 82–93; Patrick W. Riddleberger, 'The Break in the Radical Ranks: Liberals vs. Stalwarts in the Election of 1872,' *Journal of Negro History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (1959), pp. 136–57; Richard A. Gerber, 'Liberal Republicanism, Reconstruction and Social Order: Samuel Bowles as a Test Case,' *New England Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 1973), pp. 393–407; Erik S. Lunde, 'The Ambiguity of the National Idea: The Presidential Campaign of 1872,' *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1978), pp. 1–23; Patrick W. Riddleberger, 'The Radicals' Abandonment of the Negro During Reconstruction,' *Journal of Negro History* Vol. 45, No. 2 (1960), pp. 88–102; James McPherson, 'Grant or Greeley? The Abolitionist Dilemma in the Election of 1872,' *American Historical Review* Vol. 71, No. 1 (Oct., 1965), pp. 43–61; Robert W. Burg, 'Amnesty, Civil Rights, and the Meaning of Liberal Republicanism, 1862–1872,' *American Nineteenth-Century History* Vol. 4, No. 3 (October, 2003), pp. 29–60.

⁵ Douglass C. Dailey, 'The Elections of 1872 in North Carolina,' *North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 40, No. 3 (July, 1963), pp. 338–60; Daniel E. Sutherland, 'Edwin DeLeon and Liberal Republicanism in Georgia: Horace Greeley's Campaign for President in a Southern State,' *Historian* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 38–57; Mach 'Gentleman George', p. 157.

⁶ Mach, 'Gentleman George', pp. 155–7; Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, pp. 208–11.

The New Departure

Following Grant's landslide victory, few knew what stance the Union commander would take on Reconstruction. On January 7, 1869, James Gordon Bennett voiced the concerns of Republicans and Democrats alike when he wrote in his *New York Herald* that Grant 'gives no opinions and answers no questions concerning his Cabinet or his policy ... His resistance excites suspicion, and his political antecedents are conservative.'⁷ The incoming president's campaign message of 'Let Us Have Peace' in fact led many Democrats to believe that Grant's administration would not be radical, but would usher in a 'real and true conservative era.'⁸ Democratic and proto-Conservative newspapers hoped the new administration would usher in a 'New Departure' for the nation.⁹ But rather than being the conservative that Democrats hoped he would be, Grant strictly upheld the southern Republican governments and proved to be a perennial thorn in the side of the party.

Armed with the knowledge that the incoming Fortieth Congress would bring a greater proportion of Democrats to the House of Representatives, the Republican majority introduced a new constitutional amendment to secure black voting rights.¹⁰ Republicans viewed African American suffrage as the final step of Reconstruction; they expected enfranchised blacks to protect their own civil liberties without needing further federal military intervention. For the Democrats however, federal control of suffrage rights subverted the Constitution. In the Senate on February 6, 1869, the former Republican James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin condemned the amendment as a dangerous attack on the nation's federal system.¹¹ He argued that congressional Republicans' attempts to dictate voter qualification made the amendment 'a proposition not to amend, but to revolutionize. It is not in the way of improving and upholding, but in the way of upturning the foundations of the system, and of destroying the very spirit which gives it life.'¹² James A. Bayard resolutely supported Doolittle's attack on the Republicans' proposal. If adopted, he said the amendment 'subverts the system of government organized by our

⁷ *New York Herald*, Jan. 7, 1869.

⁸ T. J. Barnett to Barlow, Nov. 6, 1868, Barlow Papers, HL.

⁹ *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Jan. 15, 1869; *Richmond Whig and Advertiser*, Jan. 12, 1869; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, Jan. 9, 1869.

¹⁰ In the House of Representatives, the Democrats gained 22 seats as the Republicans lost 4 seats. While many Democratic gains came from southern States reintegrated into the Union, the larger proportion of Democratic gains came in the Midwest in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and in the border-state Missouri.

¹¹ Michael C. Kerr to Marble, Jan. 29, 1869, Marble Papers, LOC

¹² *Congressional Globe*, 40th Congress, 3rd Session, Feb. 6, 1869, pp. 151–2.

ancestors, and converts a confederated Republic into an elective despotism.’¹³ In doing so, Bayard suggested that the proposed amendment threatened electoral meltdown by conferring the vote on an ‘inferior race’:

It will be a dangerous experiment to make upon the patience of the country through an amendment to the Federal Constitution which abrogates the constitutions of at least ten States of the Union against the Consent of their people by the faithless betrayal of trust by their representatives. Though this great wrong may be perpetrated those faithless representatives both here and in the State Legislatures may yet find that it is the last drop in the cup which will cause the waters of bitterness to overflow.¹⁴

Echoing the sentiments of congressional Democrats, the Democratic press denounced the amendment as an attempt to ‘revolutionize the government’ and to ‘place the white people under the domination of persons of color’ – one that would succeed only in agitating the South further and prevent ‘co-operation between the two races which is so essential to the success of industrial enterprises in the Southern States.’¹⁵ The majority of southerners believed suffrage should only be granted to freedmen if it was accompanied by universal amnesty and the re-enfranchisement of ex-Confederates. Yet, when the amendment made no mention of amnesty or re-enfranchisement, they were outraged that ‘no effort is made to repeal the obnoxious laws which deny the right of suffrage to thousands of the best men in the country,’ and that ‘the enfranchisement of the white man is to be a subject for future consideration, to be granted only in case it shall not interfere with Radical and negro supremacy.’¹⁶

Despite southerners’ anger at the amendment, the response of northern Democrats to the measure failed to bolster the faith of white southerners in the party. Southern Democratic newspapers continued to remind their readers that many northern Democrats during the war had ‘sustained and cheered on the ruin [of the South] ... applauded the illogical and unprincipled course of the radical party [and] could not see that a war of coercion waged against free States was a breach of the Constitution.’¹⁷ Furthermore, the southern press argued that northern voters had shown no willingness to reach across the bloody chasm the previous November, when ‘They had it in their power ... by the

¹³ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁵ *Columbian Register* (CT), Feb. 20, 1869; *The Camden Journal* (S.C.), Dec. 17, 1868; *Baltimore Sun*, Feb. 22, 1869; *Providence Journal*, Feb. 20, 1869; *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1869.

¹⁶ *The Louisiana Democrat*, Feb. 24, 1869.

¹⁷ *The Camden Journal* (S.C.), Feb. 25, 1869.

peaceful instrumentality of the ballot, to place the safety of the nation in the hands of those, who, whatever may have otherwise tarnished the reputation of the Democratic party, had always respected the Constitution.’¹⁸

Despite the relative success of the unifying message of white supremacy in the 1868 canvass, Democrats across the nation were disappointed with the party’s showing in the election. The straight-out Democrats who had taken control of the party following the downfall of National Unionism in 1866, had been instrumental in directing the 1868 campaign, yet their failure to devise a successful national strategy provided the accommodationists with another opportunity. It was, however, at the state level that moves towards a new Democratic strategy were first made. At the Connecticut Democratic State Convention in January 1869, incumbent governor James E. English was renominated at the head of the state ticket on a platform that marked the state party’s break from past strategy. While not a typical accommodationist platform that sought to create a bipartisan coalition, the Connecticut platform called for the acceptance of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments as the final basis of Reconstruction.¹⁹ In the aftermath of the 1868 defeats, Connecticut Democrats saw little benefit in pursuing a policy that continued to oppose Reconstruction. Rather, they acquiesced in the Reconstruction settlement in the hope that their party could end military involvement in the South.

Shortly after the announcement of the Connecticut platform, Virginia Democrats put forward their vision of a New Departure. Since 1865, Democrats in the Old Dominion had managed to avoid the Republican governments typical of the former Confederate states by unifying the conservative elements of the state in bipartisan alliances. In doing so, Virginia had a unique experience of Reconstruction. The strength of the antebellum Whigs there became immediately apparent between 1865 and 1867, and the success of Democrats in working with conservative Republicans and former Whigs demonstrated the viability of the fusionist strategy.²⁰ On February 12, 1869, however, the *Richmond Whig and Advertiser* advocated a new direction for state politics, claiming that ‘We have tried to mend our condition by opposing negro suffrage, by braving Congress, by trying to re-establish and reinstate the Federal Constitution, as it stood before the war, by raising

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *New York Herald*, Jan. 29, 1869.

²⁰ Jack Maddex, Jr., ‘Virginia: The Persistence of Centrist Hegemony,’ in Otto H. Olsen (ed.), *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), pp. 113–5.

up a native white party to array itself against all other parties ... What have we gained by all this?' The editorial concluded that 'We have spent four years in beating the air, and it is time that our talents and energies were turned upon other and more useful objects.'²¹

The *Whig* was an advocate of the recently inaugurated 'New Movement' in Virginia, a coalition of Republicans, ex-Whigs, and Democrats that was firmly in line with the partisan flexibility that characterised the early Reconstruction years. Virginia Democrats such as ex-Confederate general William T. Mahone, George W. Bolling, and J. F. Slaughter viewed the New Movement as an opportunity to seize the middle ground of Virginia politics and avoid 'negro rule on one side or military rule on the other' by maligning conservative Democrats and Radicals in the state.²² Democratic advocates of the New Movement tended to hold interests in the industrial economy of Virginia, most commonly through railroads; Mahone himself was the president of the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad, and believed that disenchanted Democrats could exploit Republican factionalism to shed the state of radicalism.²³

In early 1869, however, the New Movement only consisted of a small cadre of individuals who had little hope of defeating the incumbent Governor Wells. Factional conflicts within the Virginia Democracy split the state's white vote between the accommodationists' candidate, the conservative Republican Gilbert C. Walker, and the straight-out nominee, former Confederate Colonel Robert E. Withers. With both Withers and Walker in the race, the New Movement had little hope of piecing together a majority among the electorate. Mahone believed that there was a good chance of defeating the Republican Wells if the straight-out ticket was removed from the race, and held the potential to negotiate an alliance. Due to his Democratic antecedents, Mahone held influence within the party as a friend of the chairman of the Democratic State Committee, Robert Ould. Moreover, during his time as president of the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad, Mahone had become friends with many of the state's leading conservative Republicans. In April 1869, he discussed the idea of removing the Withers ticket from the race. By the end of the month Ould and the state committee had acquiesced, despite

²¹ *Richmond Whig and Advertiser*, Feb. 12, 1869.

²² Charles C. Pearson, *The Readjuster Movement in Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), p.20.

²³ Randall S. Gooden, "'Neither War nor Peace': West Virginia's Reconstruction Experience," in Andrew L. Slap (ed.), *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), pp. 224–7.

the opposition of conservative Democrats. With Withers out of the race, the fusionist New Movement carried the gubernatorial race in July and elected Walker.²⁴

As 1869 progressed, the fusionist strategy employed by Virginia Conservatives spread through Mississippi, Texas, and Tennessee. In each of these southern states, fusionist Democrats created alliances with moderate and conservative Republicans to elect generally conservative Republican candidates to end Radicalism.²⁵ Inspired by the actions of Mahone and his innovative Democratic allies in Virginia, Ohio Democrats embarked on their own New Departure, albeit not through bipartisan alliances. Entering election season in 1869, the Ohio Democracy sought to shed the burden of disloyalty and simultaneously promote the sectional reconciliation for which so many northerners yearned. In July the party nominated ex-Union general William S. Rosecrans for governor. While Rosecrans did not carry the same gravitas as a Grant or a Hancock, he nevertheless fulfilled the criterion of loyalty having handed Clement Vallandigham over to the Confederacy for exile and had worked tirelessly for sectional reconciliation since Appomattox.²⁶ Rosecrans proved to be an astute nomination. The *New York Herald* proclaimed ‘a great step forward by the Ohio Democracy,’ ‘a stroke so bold as to be startling,’ and a ‘remarkable sacrifice of prejudice. Democrats hoped his nomination would provide ‘a bridge on which tens of thousands of Ohio citizens can easily pass over into the Democratic party.’²⁷ As momentum gathered for the New Departure it appeared that the Democracy had stumbled upon a viable electoral strategy.

Hoping that the Pennsylvania Democracy would follow Ohio’s lead by adopting New Departure politics, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* appealed to Democrats of the Keystone State to ‘display equal flexibility and wisdom’ by ‘taking advantage of the widespread dissatisfaction with the new administration which prevails among the Pennsylvania Republicans.’²⁸ Against the will of the growing influence of the New Departure Democrats, however, the Pennsylvania Democracy adopted a platform that ‘might have been accepted by the Party before a gun had been fired by Southern Confederates.’²⁹ Democratic hopes were further dampened when Rosecrans declined the

²⁴ Eckenrode, *Political History of Virginia*, p. 122–5; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 413–5.

²⁵ Gooden, ““Neither Love Nor Peace”” in Slap (ed.), *Reconstructing Appalachia*, pp. 227–9.

²⁶ David G. Moore, *William S. Rosecrans and the Union Victory*; Frank P. Varney, *General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of General William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War* (El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie, 2013).

²⁷ *New York Herald*, July 9, 1869; *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, July 13, 1869.

²⁸ *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, July 13, 1869.

²⁹ *Albany Evening Journal*, July 15, 1869.

nomination for governor of Ohio. While the general was in agreement with the principles of the Ohio platform, Rosecrans could not ‘in justice to his creditors’ afford the canvass, and nor was he a resident of the state since he had moved to California.³⁰ Instead of finding a similar replacement, however, Ohio Democrats replaced the general with George Pendleton. In doing so, the Ohio Democracy made it clear that their ‘new departure’ was purely rhetorical and fundamentally different from the attempts of accommodationists to create bipartisan alliances. In this context, the New Departure took two forms: firstly, through the guidance of accommodationists, it sought to create genuine working relationships with conservative Republicans to overturn Reconstruction; secondly, under the rhetorical guise of the New Departure, straight-out Democrats nominated symbolic candidates to stand on Democratic platforms that avoided the issue of race. The transitional state of national politics in the late 1860s afforded the Democracy an opportunity to push politics in a new direction away from Reconstruction and towards economic issues and civil service reform. Yet the refusal of many Democratic leaders to accept universal manhood suffrage and civil equality for African Americans contributed significantly to the party’s lengthy stay in political limbo. The nomination of candidates such as Pendleton not only demonstrated the party’s inability to move forward, but also helped Republicans by reviving ‘the political issues of the past ten years.’³¹

Political Violence and African American Suffrage, 1870–1871

To complicate matters for New Departure Democrats who insisted the party had accepted the results of the war, the violent actions of southern whites contradicted such claims. Southern white terrorism was characterised by its distinctive targeting of freedmen and white Republicans who sought to prop up Reconstruction governments in the South. While Klan-like groups had no official ties to the Democracy, their victims held a distinct political loyalty. Remembering the violence that terrorized Rutherfordton, North Carolina, J. B. Carpenter, the clerk of the superior county court and newspaper editor, remarked that in a county where the Republicans held two to three hundred majority, every instance of reported violence was perpetrated ‘because they [the victims] were republicans, and they must quit voting the republican ticket.’³² The widespread

³⁰ *The Ottawa Free Trader*, Aug. 14, 1869; *The Conservative*, Aug. 13, 1869.

³¹ *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, August 15, 18, 1869.

³² *Ku Klux Klan Reports: North Carolina*, pp. 28–9.

disenfranchisement of former Confederates was a point of deep frustration for southern whites. They regarded federal control of suffrage laws both as an affront to the constitutional rights of the states, and an example of Republican partisan manipulation. In the face of humiliating black and Yankee rule, southern whites turned to extra-legal violence to redeem their section by restoring their dominance over the recently emancipated slaves.³³

While southern violence clashed with the professions of New Departure Democrats that the party had turned over a new leaf, lack of faith in the national Democracy and growing dissatisfaction among moderate and conservative Republicans with Grantism, had created an environment in which belief in genuine party realignment was widespread. Yet despite the growing influence of the accommodationists, many Democrats still retained their strict constructionist sentiments and opposed suggestions that the federal government had the authority to legislate on suffrage rights. If the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment was not bad enough for Democrats, federal intervention in the South continued as the Republican Congress passed three ‘Enforcement Acts’ throughout 1870 and 1871 to subdue southern racial violence.³⁴ The passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and the Enforcement Acts only added to the Democrats’ conviction that the Republic was in danger of being overthrown by power-hungry Republicans in Washington.

Pennsylvanian Richard Vaux expressed his views on the political situation to John White Stevenson soon after the passage of the Enforcement Acts. Clearly angered by the acquiescence of accommodationist Democrats, Vaux deplored the attempts to reorganise the party and was particularly angered by how ‘some weak kneed filles talked about the “Colored Vote.” I never will agree to take it, never ... Military despotism and congressional usurpation, and the frauds used to pass their so called amendment can never be accepted by the Democracy – never!’³⁵

But while straight-out Democrats such as Richard Vaux remained staunchly opposed to black suffrage, others were increasingly convinced that the party had to accept the Fifteenth Amendment and its consequences to ensure the Democracy’s return to power. In June, Montgomery Blair, a recent convert to the party, wrote to his friend and

³³ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, pp. 96–99.

³⁴ The Enforcement Acts of 1870–1871 authorised the use of federal troops in the South to stop election fraud, voter intimidation, and bribery.

³⁵ Vaux to Stevenson, June 7, 1870, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

regular correspondent, William Lockhart, on the issue of freedmen's suffrage. Blair noted that the freedmen's 'vote in our elections is decreed by a power we cannot resist and it must tell in political results for good or for evil.'³⁶ While Blair believed that '[t]he African race will never attain equality ... because this is our natural clime, and that superiority is confirmed by possessions and by immemorial inheritances of civilization, of systems of government and of education,' he also recognised that a 'refusal on our part to acquiesce, is precisely what the opponents of free government desire. It will produce a Union of the freed race with the minority of the white race, enabling that minority to govern the whole country and ... this will prove fatal to the South and to the Constitution.'³⁷ Although Blair considered African Americans to be racially inferior, he believed the Democracy had to try to harness their votes for political advantage. If they could not, Republican despotism was sure to continue to subordinate southern whites.

The conflict within the Democratic ranks over the issue of African American suffrage highlighted the fractured nature of the party and the divergence of opinion on the party's future. While Democrats retained a distinctly white supremacist ideology throughout Reconstruction, the party demonstrated an attitude towards race that was more variegated than historians have previously suggested.³⁸ Racism was undoubtedly an important ideological glue that held the party together in the postwar years, but the difference of opinion highlighted by Blair and Vaux was typical of Democratic divergence over the future of the freedmen in the nation.

The Missouri Plan and the Emergence of the Liberal Republicans, 1869–1871

Throughout Reconstruction, the 'convergence' of conservative Republicans and accommodationist Democrats had presented a number of opportunities for bipartisan action, but the reluctance of both factions to set aside their partisan identities was an ever-present barrier to such coalitions. By 1870 growing opposition to Grant's administration within the Republican ranks had led to the emergence of a dissident faction of 'Liberal' Republicans. Angered by the president's reluctance to advocate universal amnesty and

³⁶ Montgomery Blair to William Lockhart, June 11, 1870, Blair Papers, LOC.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 425.

restore suffrage rights to the former Confederates, the Liberal Republicans had grown particularly tired of a Republican administration that appeared increasingly corrupt.³⁹

As Secretary of the Treasury George S. Boutwell sold government holdings in gold to reduce the American debt over the summer of 1869, two New Yorkers, Jay Gould and James Fisk, set about a scheme to corner the gold market. With the help of Grant's brother-in-law, Abel Corbin, Gould manipulated Grant into appointing Daniel Butterfield as Assistant Treasurer. Butterfield subsequently provided the speculators with information and influence over the price of gold. With the price of gold skyrocketing as Gould and Fisk cornered the market, Grant ordered Boutwell to sell gold holdings in September and burst the monopoly.⁴⁰ While Grant was cleared of any wrongdoing, Liberals were uneasy about the president's connection to the scandal. To make matters worse, reports of corruption among southern representatives who sold appointments to office-seekers, and of the New York Custom House officials who accepted bribes from whiskey distillers, all painted a picture of the declining morality of American politics.

In Missouri in 1870, Liberal Republicans under the leadership of the German-born Carl Schurz saw the fall elections as an opportunity to take control of the party and rid it of corrupt Grantism.⁴¹ The Missouri Democrats, however, believed that although they shared a common desire with the Liberals to rid the state of Radicalism, the Liberals would remain committed to their party as long as they risked losing control of state offices to Democrats. In an attempt to bring Republican fractures to the fore in Missouri, Democrats across the state endorsed a policy of neutrality in the hope of electing a Liberal Republican ticket. The Democratic paper, *The Weekly Caucasian*, reported that while it had opposed political neutrality before, by 1870 it was 'the only policy that is left us!' The paper elaborated on its decision to support neutrality by asking its readers, 'What chance have we of electing a Democratic ticket in the State? Ninety-thousand of our citizens, the wealth, the intelligence, the decency of Missouri, utterly disenfranchised ... Let them [Republicans] alone; and each wing will have a ticket in the field. Then support the best; and there's hope ahead! Nominate Democratic tickets; and you drive together ... all the jarring, hostile elements of Radicalism.'⁴² In doing so, Missouri Democrats

³⁹ Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, p. xiii; Burg, 'Amnesty, Civil Rights, and the Meaning of Liberal Republicanism,' pp. 30–1.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Ackerman, *The Gold Ring: Jim Fisk, Jay Gould, and Black Friday, 1869* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988); Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 151–2.

⁴¹ See, Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 565–66; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 282–4.

⁴² *Weekly Caucasian*, July 9, 1870.

hoped that by removing themselves from the race, nothing would stand in the way of a purge of Radicals.

Much to the Democrats' delight, the Liberals and Radicals arrived at the Republican State Convention in St. Louis with a renewed sense of conviction in their faction's principles. And as the convention began, it quickly became apparent that the Republicans were bitterly divided over disenfranchisement and amnesty. While the Radicals sought to protect black rights and supported the incumbent Joseph W. McClurg, the Liberal faction, led by Carl Schurz, hoped that Benjamin Gratz Brown could defeat McClurg by placing reconciliation at the centre of the canvass. Despite the reforming message of the Liberals, the issue that ultimately split the party at the convention was that of the abolition of disenfranchisement measures in the state's constitution. The Liberal *Westliche Post* reported that 'By a vote of 439 against 342 they [Radicals] voted down the Republican principle of equal political rights of the *whites* and *blacks*. It followed necessarily that the Liberal Republicans in the convention separated themselves from the "clique" that has outraged the principles of our party.'⁴³ As a result of the Republican fracture at the state convention, the Liberal Republicans assembled the following week, nominated Benjamin Gratz Brown for governor, and adopted a platform committed to ending corrupt Grantism and abolishing disenfranchisement measures in the state constitution.

Remarkably, the Democrats' policy of neutrality in Missouri had produced their desired result. Without the unifying factor of an opposing Democratic ticket, the Republicans had fractured at their state convention, handing the Democracy the chance to end the disenfranchisement of ex-Confederates in the state. The move had been particularly astute. Realising that their involvement in state races only led to a campaign that brought the memory of the party's wartime record to the fore, Missouri Democrats' refusal to run for key offices in 1870 fundamentally altered the nature of the campaign. By identifying a growing middle-ground in state politics, neutrality allowed the issues of amnesty, disenfranchisement, and corruption to dominate the campaign without raising the spectre of the Democracy's war record.

The Democrats therefore entered the election full of confidence that Liberal candidates would be elected in early November, and they were not disappointed. Brown comfortably defeated McClurg for the governorship by gaining over sixty percent of the

⁴³ *Westliche Post*, reprinted in *Weekly Caucasian*, Sept. 10, 1870.

vote. In the congressional races, two Liberal Republican candidates were also elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and the results were a significant victory for both the Democrats and the Liberal Republicans. In the aftermath of victory, the *Weekly Caucasian* proclaimed that,

The result of our State election has given the final proof, if it was ever needed, of the sagacity of the Democracy in choosing the particular part that it should take in the State canvass ... Every phrase of the canvass vindicated the prudence of the decision, and now the result of the election reveals the immense advantages that are traceable to it. The Passive Democracy won the triumph at every stage of the controversy between Brown and McClurg.⁴⁴

The Democracy fared well in the 1870 midterms outside Missouri, gaining 41 seats in the House and 6 in the Senate. While the results owed to emerging charges of corruption surrounding the Grant administration, the Democracy's focus upon issues of civil service reform, economics, and amnesty lent credence to the suggestions of accommodationist Democrats that an alliance with the Liberal Republicans would deliver national victories. Nationally, the Liberal Republican leaders' turn against the protectionist policies of the Republican rank-and-file was critically important in bridging the gap between themselves and the Democrats. Many of them had joined the American Free Trade League in the years after the war, and there was a clear ideological crossover between hard-money Democrats and Liberals such as David Ames Wells, E. L. Godkin, and Charles Eliot Norton.⁴⁵ While Democratic opposition to congressional Reconstruction had caused many Liberals to remain stout defenders of the Republican administration, the Democrats' acceptance of the new constitutional amendments under the New Departure allayed their fears.

Democratic Factionalism and the Tweed Ring, 1871

The success of the Missouri Liberal Republicans in 1870 gave the movement national exposure. For both anti-Grant Republicans and accommodationist Democrats, a Liberal-Democratic alliance offered the promise of an end to Radical rule, a reformed

⁴⁴ *Weekly Caucasian*, Nov. 12, 1870.

⁴⁵ On the Liberal Republican promotion of free trade and hard money, see, Sproat, *'The Best Men'*, pp. 72–3; McGerr, *'The Meaning of Liberal Republicanism,'* p. 30; Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 81–2.

federal government, and amnesty to former Confederates. Despite the success of political neutrality in Missouri, the Democrats remained bitterly divided over national strategy. The election of Frank P. Blair to the Senate in early 1871 bolstered the claims of straight-out Democrats that an alliance with the Liberal Republicans would provide no significant political advantage and revitalised hopes of a 'straight-out' nomination in 1872. In January 1871 Alexander H. Stephens, a Whig before the war who would be elected to Congress as an Independent Democrat and a Democrat during Reconstruction, told Montgomery Blair that Frank Blair was 'the man of the right gut and nerve as well as principles for a leader at this time of the true Democracy of our States.'⁴⁶ Similarly, ex-Secretary of War Gideon Welles noted that it 'is a strong indication that the country is coming right.'⁴⁷ For accommodationists, however, the election of a Democrat who had recently advocated the repeal of congressional Reconstruction and the return of political power to former Confederate leaders diminished the chances of a Liberal alliance. Manton Marble wrote that he did not 'like to hear [Blair] magnify his Brodhead issues at the expense of the winning or at least adjutant issues of free trade and revenue reform.'⁴⁸ Similarly, William H. Bryant wrote to Manton Marble that while the New Departure was 'wise,' loyalty to the party 'is a difficult duty, when you can neither respect or admire the [legislative] men who hold power.'⁴⁹ In an environment where many Liberal Republicans were increasingly worried that their party was 'drifting into great dangers,' the continued prominence of unreconstructed Democrats like Blair diminished the chance of a Liberal-Democratic alliance.

The fractious money debate provided even more potential to squander the chance of cooperation with the Liberals. The Liberals were ardent hard-money advocates and had recoiled at Pendleton's recklessly inflationary 'Ohio Idea' in 1867.⁵⁰ Regardless of the former-Copperhead Clement Vallandigham's public acceptance of the Reconstruction settlement as the only logical course for the party, the Ohio Democracy's reaffirmed commitment to soft-money angered northeastern hard-money Democrats who were aware of the Liberals' disenchantment with Republicanism. Shortly after the announcement of the Ohio platform, August Belmont wrote to Marble that the 'fearful greenback plank' of the midwestern Democracy 'was a fatal mistake in 1868 ... but now it is actual suicide

⁴⁶ Alexander H. Stephens to Montgomery Blair, Jan. 24, 1871, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁴⁷ Welles to Montgomery Blair, Jan. 21, 1871, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁴⁸ Marble to Montgomery Blair, Feb. 21, 1871, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁴⁹ William H. Bryant to Marble, May, 29, 1871, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁵⁰ Sproat, *The Best Men*, p. 75.

[and] ... if persisted in it will lose Ohio and the Presidency.’⁵¹ Attentive to Belmont’s fears, Marble quickly sent a dispatch to Ohio Democrat and ex-Union general, Alexander McCook, saying that he was ‘delighted with the platform of the “new departure” as a return of reason and sound common sense.’ However, he urged McCook to distance the party from greenbackism by writing that ‘unless we can prove to the American people that we intend to accept the Government as it will be handed to us, without disturbing the political and financial situation, otherwise than by placing them on a sounder basis through the reduction of taxes, the establishment of a Revenue tariff, and the strict limitation of federal power under the Constitution as it stands now, we can never hope for their votes.’⁵² Democrats agreed that no other economic issues than the repayment of the national debt and the currency issue were ‘of such vital importance to the people of the South, and West,’ but they could not unite over how to solve the question of resumption, and this planted seeds of doubt among the Liberals.⁵³

The New Departure fractured the Democrats over more than currency, and opened conflicts within the party over their public stance on the Reconstruction amendments. Party members unanimously accepted that the Thirteenth Amendment had settled the future of slavery in the Union, but they were much less unified in their response to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. Despite the severe fractures over economic policy, however, there still existed issues that all Democrats could agree on. When the Pennsylvania and Ohio State Executive Committees committed themselves to protecting ‘equal rights to all persons under [the Constitution], without distinction of race, color, or condition,’ it became clear that the New Departure would not have a unifying influence on the party.⁵⁴ Democrats immediately deplored that accepting the Fifteenth Amendment was ‘a bitter pill’ to swallow that had ‘greatly disorganized our party in many localities.’⁵⁵ The praise that New Departure Democrats heaped on the adoption of state platforms that accepted the constitutional amendments was a miscalculation. The mass of Democratic voters remained deeply opposed to black suffrage, and saw the New Departure as an abandonment of the party’s stand over the past six years for ‘white man’s government.’ While northern Democrats were split over the proposed new direction, southern

⁵¹ Belmont to Marble, June 4, 6, 7, 1871, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁵² Marble to Alexander McCook, June 5, 1871, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁵³ John McClernand to Greeley, Jan. 24, 1870, Greeley Papers, LOC; Mach, ‘*Gentleman George*’, pp. 135–40; Unger, *The Greenback Era*, pp. 120–1; Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 159–63.

⁵⁴ *Washington Reporter* (PA), June 28, 1871.

⁵⁵ John A. McClelland to Randall, July 6, 1871, Randall Papers, HSP; R. Emmet Monaghan to Randall, July 25, 1871, Randall Papers, HSP.

Democrats were more unified in their condemnation of their northern brethren's willingness to acquiesce in the Fifteenth Amendment. The Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor of Kentucky, John G. Carlisle, disparaged the reasoning behind the New Departure that by accepting the amendments, issues of race would be left in the past. Rather, Carlisle argued that 'instead of withdrawing them as subjects of political discussion, it will give them far more prominence than they ever had heretofore.' He claimed that the New Departure would not allow the party to move beyond 'dead' issues of suffrage and civil rights because 'they present real living issues, in which the people feel a very deep interest.'⁵⁶

If Republicans faced difficult questions over corruption, the Democrats were by no means clean themselves. By 1871 William 'Boss' Tweed's notorious New York machine held most of the chief positions in the city, including the mayoralty, superintendent of police, and city comptroller. The Tweed Ring had long been accused of widespread corruption, but had become an institution in the city, with prominent Democrats such as Samuel J. Tilden, John T. Hoffman, A. Oakley Hall, and Peter B. Sweeny, all having been key members of Tammany Hall. By mid-1871, the Tammany machine showed no signs of slowing down and continued to spread its influence over the city, making millions of dollars by selling construction contracts, inflating rental costs for government buildings, and through building public works. But revelations of Tammany's fraudulent actions and its reluctance to risk alienating its Irish Catholic supporters were about to trigger the machine's decline.⁵⁷

On July 8 the Republican *New York Times* published the first of two exposés of the ring that claimed that 'the facts [this article] contains will be treasured up as a part of the accumulated mass of official corruption which is being piled up against the Tammany Ring, and which is destined, at no distant day, to descend like an avalanche upon their heads and crush them beneath its weight.'⁵⁸ The article made various charges against the Ring's use of public funds in construction, and the inflation of rental costs for armouries throughout the city at the expense of the taxpayer.⁵⁹ Accusations of this ilk were nothing

⁵⁶ *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 5, 1871. For evidence that other leading southern Democrats supported Carlisle's view of the New Departure, see Alexander H. Stephens to Francis P. Blair, May 8, 1871, Carl Schurz Papers, LOC; *Washington Reporter*, June 21, 1871.

⁵⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 491; Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, pp. 178–81;

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, July, 8, 1871.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

new to New Yorkers, but as the scale of the frauds were uncovered throughout a series of editions, it became clear that Tweed would be unable to escape reprisal.

The timing of the *Times*' exposé was critical. At the beginning of July, New Yorkers were preparing for the annual parade of Irish Protestants' celebration of William of Orange's victory at the Battle of the Boyne. In the 1870 parade, Irish Catholics had interrupted the celebrations by attacking the Protestants and killing eight in what the *New York Evening Post* remembered as 'one of the most brutal and inexcusable riots New York has ever seen.'⁶⁰ New York authorities were worried about a similar recurrence in 1871. In the days running up to the Orange Day Parade, the Superintendent of the Police, James Kelso, cancelled the march ostensibly out of concern for the safety of Irish Protestants. The local press immediately condemned the action. The *New York Herald* proclaimed that Superintendent of Police James Kelso had 'dragged the magnanimity of the metropolis into the dust' and had 'violated the rights of the innocent' by cancelling the parade.⁶¹ Bowing to increasing pressure, the ban was lifted, and when the parade began, 1500 policemen and five regiments of the National Guard protected it.

As the parade set off from Lamartine Hall on July 12, the streets were full of expectant onlookers. Almost immediately the Protestant paraders were pelted with bricks thrown from the crowd, and the police and National Guard reacted by charging the rioters and violently dispersing the rioting Catholics. By the time the violence was quelled, sixty people lay dead in the streets of New York. In the days that followed the Irish Catholics were resoundly condemned by Republican organs such as *The Nation* and *Harper's Weekly*, and the anti-Tammany Apollo Hall Democrats who called for the city to stop pandering to Irish Catholics.⁶² Tammany and Tweed, however, were aware of the importance of the Irish vote to electoral success and refused to denounce the riot. Further diminishing Tweed's position in New York on July 29, the *New York Times* released a special supplement that detailed all the corrupt dealings of Tammany, including records of millions of dollars' worth of repairs and alterations to the city's new courthouse. The paper distributed hundreds of thousands of copies and Tweed's corruption quickly became a national scandal. As public opinion turned against Tweed, Democrats began to distance themselves from the coming storm.

⁶⁰ *New York Evening Post*, July 10, 1871.

⁶¹ *New York Herald*, July 11, 1871.

⁶² Terry Golway, *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics* (New York: Liveright, 2014), pp. 98–104; Mushkat, *Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, pp. 173–89.

Samuel J. Tilden, the chairman of the New York Democratic State Committee, was the lead player in the ring's downfall, and this propelled him into the national spotlight. As a business-oriented Democrat with a penchant for reform who had contacts in the railroad industry from his time as a lawyer, Tilden would come to have a profound influence on the national Democracy in the mid-1870s. His advocacy of the antebellum Democratic Young America movement demonstrated his commitment to industrial development, but his break in national politics came in 1871, when he was instrumental in exposing the Tweed Ring.⁶³ On September 7, the Committee of Seventy, a body appointed following a meeting of the city's elite at the Cooper Union in August, met to begin the investigation into Tweed and his accomplices. Typical of the pro-reform sentiment that was bringing the Democrats together with the Liberal Republicans, the Committee appealed to 'citizens of both parties to save us and the State from the possibility of another such degradation as has fallen on all of us ... No private business, no partisan end, can be so important to any right-minded citizen as the plain duties that are thrown on him by recent deplorable revelations.'⁶⁴ Almost immediately, the Committee, led by Tilden and his reliable Democratic allies, began to purge the city's government of its corrupt individuals, replacing them with elites whom they trusted to restore the respectability of City Hall.⁶⁵

In the immediate aftermath of the Tweed scandal, the Democratic party leadership recognised the profound impact of the events of July 1871 on national politics. The revelations of Tammany's corruption solidified reform as the key issue in the 1872 election, playing into the hands of New Departure Democrats who looked to the Liberal Republicans to form an alliance. With just over a year until the presidential election, Democrats turned their attention to who would lead the party in 1872.

⁶³ Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, pp. 71, 172–4, 212; Mushkat, *Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, pp. 189–90; Thomas J. Archdeacon, 'The Erie Canal Ring, Samuel J. Tilden, and the Democratic Party' *New York History* Vol. 59, No. 4 (Oct., 1978), pp. 409–29; Robert Kelley, 'The Thought and Character of Samuel J. Tilden: The Democrat as Inheritor,' *Historian* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring, 1964), pp. 176–205; Mark D. Hirsch, 'Samuel J. Tilden: The Story of a Lost Opportunity,' *American Historical Review* Vol. 56, No. 4 (June, 1951), pp. 788–802.

⁶⁴ *New York Tribune*, September, 25, 1871.

⁶⁵ Golway, *Machine Made*, p. 101; Mushkat, *Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, pp. 182–5.

The Failure of Liberal Republicanism, 1871–1872

Preliminary discussions about the party's presidential nomination suggested that General Winfield Scott Hancock was the favourite to lead the Democracy in 1872. As the Union general who had repulsed Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg in 1863, Hancock was not only immune to Republican accusations of disloyalty, but he appealed to the considerable veteran vote that had exerted a significant influence in propelling Grant to the presidency in 1868. Hancock's war record was undoubtedly important to Democratic supporters. In July 1871 W.W.H. Davis, the publisher of the Pennsylvanian *Doyleston Democrat*, noted that 'if we run a candidate on his military record alone, Grant will not overshadow him ... I know of no other man, civilian or otherwise, whom I could support with greater pleasure than Hancock.'⁶⁶

Continued factional conflict between accommodationist and straight-out Democrats, however, ensured that the party struggled to find any consensus over candidates for the nomination. While both accommodationists and straight-outs used New Departure rhetoric, the conflict over the party's presidential nomination highlighted the conflicting interpretations over party strategy. Straight-outs such as Gideon Welles viewed the New Departure as less a sacrifice of party principle, than a necessary change in candidates. Rather than running former Peace Democrats such as Seymour for office, Welles argued in favour of Unionists such as Hancock. Writing to Montgomery Blair, Welles explained that '[in] n most cases they [accommodationists] raise points of difference among friends instead of uniting them. Some of the old politicians – Seymour and Pendleton and others –, fancy they can strengthen themselves, and gather new followers by erecting a new standard, creating new tests, which tend to promote factions, often at the expense of principle.'⁶⁷ Welles argued that the New Departure should 'be on the candidate rather than the question,' to ensure the party remained rooted in its Jacksonian ideals.⁶⁸ Welles was not alone in stressing the party's need to remain true to its Jacksonian past. Alexander Stephens insisted that 'it is a matter of the utmost importance that the Democracy at the North ... shall not commit themselves to' a new doctrine, but rather 'take no step backwards. Let them not lower their flag in the face of

⁶⁶ W. W. H. Davis to Randall, July 10, 1871, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁶⁷ Welles to Montgomery Blair, Aug. 26, 1871, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the enemy – this is the great point. Let them present a bold front against centralism and usurpations of all sorts without specifications.’⁶⁹

Not only did the party face difficulties in finding a candidate who could bring northern accommodationists and straight-outs together, but Democrats also had to find a candidate who could bring the northerners and southerners together. In March, William H. Worthington, the editor of the Mississippi *Columbus Democrat*, wrote to potential Democratic candidate William Allen of Ohio, noting that ‘Mr. Pendleton was a favorite with us Southern Democrats,’ but his yielding to the New Departure was emblematic of the ‘main cause of our present weakness and demoralization.’⁷⁰ Worthington added that Mississippi Democrats would not ‘under any circumstances, support a “new departure” Democrat.’⁷¹ Manton Marble told Montgomery Blair that while there appeared to be no model candidate available for the Democracy in 1872, the real problem lay in the lack of the ‘courage’ of the Liberals ‘to cut loose and burn the bridges’ with the main body of the Republican party.⁷² The struggle for control of the Democratic party continued well into 1872, when, at long last, the Liberal Republicans began to show more willingness to split with the Republican party.⁷³ As a result, and with the Democrats unable to reach consensus over their presidential nomination, the Democracy looked to the Liberal Republican convention to decide how it would move forward.

In early 1872 the Liberal Republicans went into their national convention with the hope of nominating a candidate who would meet their reform credentials and appeal to the Democrats. Because the brains behind the Liberal Republican movement, Carl Schurz, was unable to run for the nomination due to his German birth, the Liberals hoped that Charles Francis Adams, son of ex-President John Quincy Adams, could secure the nomination. Factional disputes, however, coupled with Adams’s reluctance to be put forward for the nomination, resulted in the surprise nomination of New York *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley with Missouri governor Benjamin Gratz Brown as his running mate.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Alexander H. Stephens to Gen. Francis P. Blair, May 8, 1871, Schurz Papers, LOC.

⁷⁰ W. H. Worthington to Allen, March 4, 1872, Allen Papers, LOC.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Marble to Montgomery Blair, Nov. 28, 1871, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁷³ On the fracture between the Liberal Republicans and the Republican party, see Andrew Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 126–64; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 486–500; Mario R. DiNunzio, ‘Lyman Trumbull, the States’ Rights Issue, and the Liberal Republican Revolt,’ *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* Vol. 66, No. 4 (Dec., 1973), pp. 364–75; McPherson, ‘Grant or Greeley,’ pp. 43–61.

⁷⁴ For a detailed account of the Liberal Republican convention, see, Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*, pp. 154–62; Donald W. Curl, ‘The Cincinnati Convention of the Liberal Republican Party,’ *Cincinnati*

Greeley's nomination was a catastrophe for the Liberals. The editor had been a long-time adversary of the Democratic party and upon hearing of Greeley's nomination, Manton Marble noted despairingly that 'of course no Democrat can or will endorse Greeley ... If Greeley accepts and Democrats nominate Adams it [an Adams-headed Liberal Republican ticket] might win, but a straight out Democratic nomination is inevitable.'⁷⁵ Other Democrats agreed, believing that endorsing the nomination would be 'unwise and dishonest.'⁷⁶ Not only did Greeley's past record alienate the Democrats, but his support of a protectionist tariff contradicted the views of leading Liberals such as Wells, Godkin and Schurz.⁷⁷ Any hope the Liberals had in gaining the support of the Democrats therefore rested solely on Greeley's postwar efforts to engender sectional reconciliation including having helped pay Jefferson Davis' \$100,000 bail. Whether the Democrats would endorse Greeley at their national convention at Baltimore was a different question.

On July 4 in Baltimore, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, August Belmont, opened the proceedings of the National Convention with an assessment of the previous four years. He declared that his prediction at the party's last national gathering in 1868, that 'the election of General Grant would result in the gradual usurpation of all the functions of the Government by the Executive and by Congress, to be enforced by the bayonets of a military despotism,' had been clearly demonstrated by the Enforcement Acts, southern corruption, and the continued disenfranchisement of white southerners.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Belmont urged delegates to accept Greeley as the party's candidate. Despite the *Tribune* editor's past opposition to the Democracy, Belmont concluded that Greeley represented 'the national and constitutional principles of the Cincinnati platform ... and ... if elected, he means to carry them out honestly and faithfully.'⁷⁹ Belmont continued that 'However much you might desire to fight the coming battle for our rights and liberties under one of the trusted leaders of the Democratic party, it will become your duty to discard all considerations of party tradition

Historical Society Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 2 (1966), pp. 150–63; Matthew T. Downey, 'Horace Greeley and the Politicians: The Liberal Republican Convention in 1872,' *Journal of American History* Vol. 53, No. 4 (March, 1967), pp. 727–50; James G. Smart, 'Whitelaw Reid and the Nomination of Horace Greeley,' *Mid America* Vol. 49, No. 4 (1967), pp. 227–43.

⁷⁵ Marble to I. C., May 3, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁷⁶ D. S. C. to Marble, May 10, 1872, and Benjamin Croly to Marble, June 12, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁷⁷ Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, p. 191; Sproat, 'The Best Men', pp. 84–5.

⁷⁸ *Reconciliation: Baltimore Convention. Speeches of Mr. Belmont and Mr. Doolittle. Platform. Mr. Greeley's Letters* (Washington D. C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1872), p. 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

... You must remember that you are here not only as Democrats, but as citizens of our common country, and that no sacrifice can be too great which she demands at your hands.⁸⁰ With Belmont's appeals to the delegates to acquiesce in the accommodationist strategy, the convention nominated James R. Doolittle to serve as the president of the convention.

Doolittle began his speech by describing the Liberal Republican success in Missouri, the movement's spread nationally and the nomination of Greeley on the Cincinnati platform.⁸¹ Like Belmont, Doolittle urged Democrats to accept the Liberal Republican nomination and platform. This action, he said, meant:

no abandonment of what is true, of what is just, of what is good in human government ... It means, no union of dead upon dead issues, but a union of the living upon the living issues of the present ... It means justice, liberty, peace, loyalty, and good will; and gentlemen, for our whole country, East, West, North, and South, it means, instead of a war President, trained only in a military school ... it means a peace President ... trained in the ideas, acts, blessings, and republican simplicity of peace and universal freedom.⁸²

The accommodationist rhetoric of Belmont and Doolittle won over significant support at the convention. The Democrats nominated Greeley and adopted a platform that acquiesced in both the Missouri method and the New Departure. Their platform accepted the 'equality of all men before the law', the Reconstruction amendments, and demanded the removal of disabilities placed on ex-Confederates and a return to local self-government.⁸³

Greeley's nomination sent shock waves through the Democratic party. Democrats bitterly divided over the nomination of the editor, and many party members were astounded that the party would 'commit such a contemptible, ignominious [sic] and disgusting suicide' by nominating Greeley.⁸⁴ More than anywhere else, Democrats in the South were repulsed by the nomination. While the convention had placed a premium on Greeley's reconciliationist credentials, southern Democrats simply responded with 'I would like to know when he has shown it ... Thousands and thousands of Democrats

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 2–4.

⁸² Ibid., p. 4.

⁸³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1968: Volume IV: 1872–1888* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), pp. 1331–2.

⁸⁴ A. D. Chester to Marble, July 4, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

throughout the nation will not vote for him.’⁸⁵ While Greeley’s role in helping to free Jefferson Davis had won over some southerners, most could not accept that the party had endorsed its antebellum enemy.⁸⁶ Rather than uniting the party, Greeley’s nomination only seemed to exacerbate divisions within the Democratic party. Opponents of Greeley blamed his nomination on the work of ‘Democrats who are cooperating to destroy the creed of Democracy,’ and that the attitudes of these “‘Renegade Democrats’” was ‘monstrous’ and ‘not comprehensible except upon grounds alike mercenary.’⁸⁷

Upon hearing the news of Greeley’s nomination at Baltimore, Thomas F. Bayard echoed the accommodationist argument that,

Whether I approve Mr. Greeley personally or no, whether he had or not been the steady and violent opponent of the political principles and measures which ... I have been upholding ... yet if he has become, with or against our action or wishes, the most likely or practical means of restoring a better condition of feeling in the North toward the South, and restoring security and justice to that oppressed region, I should feel myself as an American, without regard to the name of my party ... compelled to assist in placing him in power.⁸⁸

Despite the acclamations of straight-out Democrats over the previous years, the most burning desire of the party was to ensure Grantism and Republican rule in the South were ended. In August 1872 Michael C. Kerr, the House minority leader in Washington, told Manton Marble that ‘if we secure victory this year, the future of the Democratic party and of true Democratic ideas may be fortunate and successful. If we succeed now, I think the effect will quite certainly be to enable us to absorb, to consolidate with ourselves ... the great majority of the Liberal Republican element.’⁸⁹ For men such as Kerr and Bayard, another defeat in 1872, ‘notwithstanding the sacrifices’ the party had already made, would be catastrophic for the nation.⁹⁰ A full and final reconciliation between the sections was critical to the health of the party, and for many Democrats, sacrificing certain political principles to achieve this end was a necessary sacrifice.

⁸⁵ T. S. Winder to Early, June 21, 1872, Early Papers, LOC.

⁸⁶ Sutherland, ‘Edwin DeLeon and Liberal Republicanism in Georgia,’ *Historian*, pp. 38–57; Dailey, ‘The Elections of 1872 in North Carolina,’ pp. 338–60.

⁸⁷ Wise to Early, July 4, 1872, Early Papers, LOC.

⁸⁸ From Bayard, July 11, 1872, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁸⁹ Michael C. Kerr to Marble, Aug. 26, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Just as they had done at the time of the National Union Movement, Democrats hoped to use a third party movement as cover to return to power. In 1866 the fusion movement failed dramatically, but the legacy of the Democratic party's involvement in National Unionism had left an impression that scholars have not yet acknowledged.⁹¹ Six years later many of the same Democrats who had been earnest supporters of National Unionism hoped that a growing desire for sectional reconciliation would allow Liberal Republicanism to be a success.⁹² Using the rhetoric of North-South amity that had been so prevalent in the National Union movement in 1866, the 1872 campaign adopted a similarly reconciliatory tone. While Democrats were quick to remind voters of the charges of corruption that plagued the Grant administration, Greeley's campaign was permeated with the language of reconciliation. In many ways, the 1872 contest became cast as a conflict between two opposing personalities. Democrats emphasised Grant's military background as one that conflicted with reconciliation. He was a war leader and Democrats pointed to federal intervention in the South over the previous four years to demonstrate his inability to achieve a genuine reconciliation. More positively, Democrats painted Greeley as a 'philosopher' who had worked for reconciliation since the war ended and highlighted his payment of Jefferson Davis' bail bond to demonstrate that he was perfectly suited to peacetime leadership.⁹³

Greeley embarked on a nationwide tour in support of his candidacy. He delivered numerous speeches in which he discussed issues of reform, the tariff, and currency at length, but at the centre of all his appearances was his desire for reconciliation. Greeley often referred to the need to bury the issues of the past to achieve a genuine reconciliation, and 'Let hatred and bitterness, contention and jealous perish forever.'⁹⁴ Like Greeley, Democrats placed reconciliation at the forefront of their campaign. Speeches delivered by members of the national Democratic leadership stressed that the 'reconciliation of all our people ... must precede all other reforms' and that a change of government in

⁹¹ Historians have reasoned that the Democratic alliance was the direct result of the New Departure and in doing so, have ignored the influence of the rhetoric of National Unionism during the 1872 Democratic Convention and, in the strategy in appealing across the partisan divide itself. See, for example, Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 181–93; Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*; Sproat, *The Best Men*, pp. 75–87.

⁹² Democrats who were influential in the National Union Movement and the Liberal-Democratic alliance included Montgomery Blair, August Belmont, Manton Marble and Michael C. Kerr. Amongst the Republican attendees at Philadelphia was also Horace Greeley.

⁹³ *Times-Picayune*, October 10, 1872.

⁹⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, September 25, 1872; *Baltimore Sun*, October 14, 1872.

Washington was necessary for ‘safety, for justice, for peace, for reconciliation in the South.’⁹⁵

As the October elections in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania approached, Democrats and Liberal Republicans looked forward to testing the success of their alliance amid reports of the growing strength of the Liberal ticket in Pennsylvania.⁹⁶ But fusion candidates did poorly in all the early elections. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* blamed the Ohio defeat on the inability to bring ‘a large number of the Greeley Republicans to the support of a ticket which they regarded as a Democratic one,’ while William Allen, a former United States senator, claimed that ‘thousands of Democrats absented from the polls ... because a “straight-out” Democrat was not nominated.’⁹⁷ Whatever reason Democrats gave for losses in October, the elections were a foreshadowing of what was to come.

When election day arrived in November, many Democrats chose to remain at home. Despite Greeley’s busy campaign to emphasise his reconciliatory credentials, Democrats across the nation could not forget his Republican antecedents.⁹⁸ In New York, Greeley received over 50,000 votes less than Seymour had in 1868, and in Pennsylvania this drop totalled more than 100,000 votes.⁹⁹ Moreover, while Greeley managed to defeat Grant in Missouri, the margins of the New Yorker’s victories in Kentucky and Georgia were much narrower than four years earlier and he lost the key northern states of New York and New Jersey.¹⁰⁰ In the end, Greeley suffered a convincing defeat, garnering just 43.8 percent of the popular vote and carrying just six states. Underlying popular Democratic resentment towards Greeley however, was a resistance to acquiesce in New Departure politics. The *New York Tribune* editor and the Liberal Republicans monopolise the literature on the 1872 election while the Democrats are too often portrayed as reluctant participants with no strong candidate of their own.¹⁰¹ Instead, fusion-minded Democrats played an active role in creating the conditions for a Liberal-Democratic alliance by focusing on the reform issue, rhetorically accepting the Reconstruction settlement, and

⁹⁵ *Times-Picayune*, October 9, 1872; *New York Herald*, Sept. 5, 1872.

⁹⁶ *New York Herald*, Sept. 29, 1872.

⁹⁷ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 11, 1872; Allen to James J. Farnau, Oct. 12, 1872, Allen Papers, LOC.

⁹⁸ This is a view shared by Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*, pp. 192–3; Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, pp. 155–7; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 510–11; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 314–6; Sproat, ‘The Best Men’, pp. 85–7.

⁹⁹ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections Vol. IV*, pp. 1300, 1374.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Mach, ‘Gentleman George,’ pp. 155–7; Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction*; Sproat, ‘The Best Men’; Burg, ‘Amnesty, Civil Rights, and the Meaning of Liberal Republicanism, 1862–1872,’ pp. 29–60; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 510–11.

emphasising reconciliation. Too many of the rank-and-file, however, were unwilling to accept African American suffrage. Across the North and the South, Democrats fractured over the party leadership's adoption of accommodationism as the only way to overthrow Republican rule. Seen through this light, the defeat was as much the result of a popular rejection of the moderation of the Democracy's leadership, as it was Democratic revulsion of Greeley. Looking back at the catastrophic campaign, Richard Vaux despaired for the future of a party that was fractured and broken. In a letter to the newly elected Kentucky senator John White Stevenson, he had one question: 'What is to become of the Democratic party?'¹⁰²

¹⁰² Vaux to Stevenson, December 17, 1872, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

Chapter Four

Reorganisation, Resurgence, and Reconciliation: The Failure of Partisan Realignment and the Revival of the Democratic Party, 1872–1874

As news of Grant's re-election spread across the nation, accommodationists and straight-outs took different lessons from the election's results. Straight-out Democrats were not surprised by the extent of Greeley's defeat and hoped that the election would 'teach our friends a lesson' about the viability of fusion.¹ Typically, the northern Democratic press argued that the reasons for Grant's victory lay in the fact that Democrats had been reluctant to vote as a result of the party's decision to support the Liberal Republicans, and this had doomed the party to defeat.² Yet many party supporters, among them New Yorker William H. Bryant saw the defeat in a positive light. Bryant had been angered by the Liberal-Democratic coalition and believed that the defeat warranted no mourning. Rather, he asserted that the Democracy 'retains a greater strength than all who saw our shipwreck could have believed.'³ The view that the party had not suffered as a result of the Liberal Republican fiasco, however, was not one commonly held by Democrats.

On December 2, 1872 former Secretary of War Gideon Welles wrote to the accommodationist, Montgomery Blair, expressing his concern about the future of the Democratic party. Welles identified the Liberals as an important swing group in national politics and hoped that they could be incorporated into the Democracy but he worried that 'it will be difficult to say what will be the course of the shattered Democratic organization.'⁴ In the aftermath of the 1872 defeat, Democrats typically demonstrated a concern for the future of their party, and in December, Richard Vaux, wrote to Kentucky senator and former governor, John White Stevenson, and called for the national party to 'organize in defence of the doctrines of the fathers.'⁵ This feeling of pessimism was not unique to the North. The southern Democratic press reported that 'the party of the Constitution, of Reconciliation and Reform has been routed ... The Democracy made a

¹ Benjamin Rush to Marble, Nov. 14, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC; William H. Bryant to Marble, Nov. 26, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

² *New York World*, Nov. 6, 1872; *New York Sun*, Nov. 6, 1872; *New York Herald*, Nov. 6, 1872; *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 6, 7, 1872.

³ Bryant to Marble, Nov. 26, 1872, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁴ Welles to Montgomery Blair, Dec. 2, 1872, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁵ Vaux to John White Stevenson, Dec. 17, 1872. Andrew Stevenson and J. W. Stevenson Papers, LOC.

good fight; but ... the political morning that broke bright and rosy, is over cast at midday by the clouds of disaster in the present, and the mists and doubts of forebodings for the future.’⁶

Regardless of Democrats’ disappointment at the result, the party’s national leadership recognised that the party stood at a crossroads. Their failure at the last two presidential contests had demonstrated the weaknesses of the party’s two leading postwar electoral strategies. The defeat in 1868 highlighted that running a campaign founded in white supremacy would raise questions about the party’s disloyalty during the Civil War, while the accommodationist approach taken in 1872 had ignored the inherent strength of the Democracy’s partisan appeal. Henceforth party leaders would develop a coherent national strategy that capitalised on a turn in the fortunes of the nation’s economy, and laid the foundations for the party’s resurgence.

The years of 1872–1874 were of critical importance to the re-emergence of a strong national Democratic party. Scholars such as Heather Cox Richardson, Eric Foner, and David Blight have all pointed to the nation’s fall into an economic depression as critical to undermining the Republican government’s commitment to Reconstruction.⁷ The Panic of 1873 fundamentally changed the political scene of the 1870s, and historians have rightly demonstrated that the economic depression allowed Democrats to exploit a public perception that African Americans were unwilling to work for their own prosperity, instead relying on government handouts.⁸ The assertions of scholars that the defeat of Liberal Republicanism and the Panic of 1873 combined to convince Democrats to return to the white-line strategy of the late 1860s, however, simplifies the Democratic response to these events. Rather than abandoning the lessons of the failure of their accommodation strategy, Democrats avoided formal alliances with the Liberal Republicans, but made the issues of civil service reform and free trade the central pillars of their party. In doing so, northern Democrats hoped that the similarities in worldviews between themselves and Liberals would help them to secure victories in northern states. In the South, however, white-line politics did become critical to Democratic success,

⁶ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, Nov. 7, 1872; *Louisiana Democrat*, Nov. 20, 1872; *The Weekly Clarion*, Nov. 14, 1872.

⁷ Richardson, *West from Appomattox*, pp. 141–50; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 514–23; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 129–30; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 347–8; Nicholas Barreyre, ‘The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics,’ *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Oct., 2011), p. 410; Barreyre, *Gold and Freedom*.

⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 548–9; Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, p. 137; White-line politics.

albeit through a different rhetoric than the late 1860s. Through the articulation of a sophisticated reconciliationist ideology that drew both upon the burgeoning Lost Cause movement in the South and northern Unionism, the Democrats were able to appropriate Civil War memory to their own advantage in the mid-1870s. This chapter examines how the Democratic party brought together the remnants of Liberal Republicanism and created a coherent national strategy between 1873 and 1874 that would end accommodationism and be the driving force behind the party's eventual return to the White House in 1884.

Southern Strategies and the Panic of 1873

In the aftermath of the defeat of Liberal Republicanism and the death of Horace Greeley just three weeks after the election, Democrats responded to the reality of facing another four years of life under President Grant in different ways. To most northern Democrats, Greeley's defeat demonstrated the party's need to 'resolutely clear away all the recent rubbish, and commence rebuilding the Democratic edifice ... from the foundations so successfully laid in the days of the old Whig opposition.'⁹ Southern Democrats, however, did not so readily abandon fusion. In Louisiana and Mississippi during 1873, Democrats continued to actively pursue bipartisan alliances to overthrow Republican rule. In the Liberal Republicans, the Democrats had a natural ally to work with to attack Grantism and, could ill afford to cast aside a group of politicians who could appeal across the partisan divide.

In New Orleans, the staunchly Democratic newspaper the *Times-Picayune* proclaimed that 'no party ever arose in any country more completely justified by events than the Liberal Republican party of the North.'¹⁰ Rather than abandoning the Liberals, the paper proposed that Liberal Republicans and Democrats coordinate and place their desire to rid the country of corrupt Grantism above their partisan differences. The *Times-Picayune* praised the Liberal Republican movement for having 'seen the imperialism to which [centralisation] leads,' and instead of blaming the Liberals for the defeat, the paper claimed that their loss in 1872 had been the result of 'tricksters' who had undermined the movement's attack on consolidation.¹¹ Instead, the Liberal Republicans and Democrats were encouraged to unite to 'restore honest and economical government.' In a bold

⁹ *New York World*, Nov. 19, 1872.

¹⁰ *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 3, 1873.

¹¹ *Times-Picayune*, April 17, 1873.

statement that underscored the *Times-Picayune*'s willingness to work with the Liberals, the paper asserted, 'there can be no redemption without success; and those good intentions [of reform] ... might as well be sold out wholesale to the boss contractor for completing the paving of a certain locality as to fight in the ranks of a minority.'¹²

Writing to the ex-Confederate general and Democrat, Jubal A. Early, in 1873, P.G.T. Beauregard, a former general of the Confederacy asserted that 'Like many others you think that we have time to wait and allow matters to adjust themselves ... but I can assure you that we [ex-Confederates] have been "driven to the wall" and are now "on our last legs."' ¹³ Beauregard added that 'No one can realize our sad distress unless he witnesses our condition; it makes one's heart bleed to think of the poverty and ruin which are actually staring in the face most of our best people.'¹⁴ For both the *Times-Picayune* and Beauregard, the Democratic party was moving too slowly towards regaining power in the state. Supporters of fusion in the Pelican State tended to be business-minded conservatives who believed little progress was being made to cut taxation and ease the burdens of federal interventionism in Louisiana.¹⁵ And despite their continued adherence to the principles and doctrines of the Democracy, they believed that 'neither the Democratic party nor any of its offshoots will do to rely on as a means of placing the political control of the State in the hands of its better class of citizens.'¹⁶

The *Times-Picayune*'s rationale for fusion was significant due to its placement of party principles over institutional organisation. The paper wrote that 'The Democratic party, must never yield its principles, or abandon its Party organization in maintaining them. It may waive the assertion of its principles, while acting with others on important measures of policy. It may join with others, in another Party organization, to accomplish great reforms ... but it cannot abandon its principles, because without their predominance, there can be no permanent Government – no political liberty in the land.'¹⁷ Many Democrats in New Orleans believed that the overthrow of Radical Republicanism demanded immediate attention and that only by constructing a temporary fusion party could they overthrow Republican rule. Once this end was achieved however, many

¹² *Times-Picayune*, July 13, 1873.

¹³ P. G. T. Beauregard to Jubal A. Early, July 17, 1873, Early Papers, LOC.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, p. 347.

¹⁶ *Times-Picayune*, July 13, 1873.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1873.

envisaged that the Democracy would return to state power and constitutional government would be reinstated.

Many southern states witnessed moves towards fusion in the aftermath of the Liberal Republican fiasco. After twelve years of electoral defeats, Mississippi Democrats coalesced under a new banner in the summer of 1873: the Conservative-Democratic Party. Supporters of the new party highlighted the diminishing influence of the Democracy in New England and the Midwest as a sign that it was in ‘too feeble a minority to entitle its acts to consideration.’¹⁸ They further pointed to declining Democratic majorities in Kentucky and Virginia as ‘signs of decay and disintegration of the Democratic organization’ to prove the Democracy’s incapacity to overthrow Republican rule.¹⁹ Crucially, like their Louisianan counterparts, these proponents of the Conservative-Democratic party did not believe that Democratic principles had become outdated. Rather, they argued that a misplaced common belief resulting from Republican propaganda – that ‘the main purpose of the Democratic leaders is to undo the results of the war’ – was the main barrier to Democratic success.²⁰ To combat this, the Conservative-Democrats sought to replace the tarnished brand of the Democracy and revive Democratic doctrines under the guise of a new party that could bring Liberal Republicans and former Whigs into the party’s ranks. The new banner called for the strict construction of constitutional powers, home rule for the states, the supremacy of civil over military authority, the decrease of taxes, retrenchment, the end of federal land grants, and an end to corruption. It also accepted the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments.²¹ In essence, the Conservative-Democratic Party was a reorganized, rebranded Democracy.

The failure of Liberal Republicanism had a significant impact on how Democrats viewed the future of their party. While many southern Democrats looked to new party labels to overthrow Radical rule, most northerners believed that the result had taught them a different lesson. Defeat in 1872 revitalized the assertions of straight-out Democrats that the party could only return to power by adhering to long-held principles of strict constructionism, limited government, home rule, and most significantly, to the Democratic organisation itself. Yet no dogmatic programme had been established by

¹⁸ Jackson *Weekly Clarion*, Aug. 21, 1873.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

early 1873 for the party to implement on a national level. As a result, the 1873 electoral races held important consequences for the strategy of the party moving forward.

In the Ohio State Democratic Convention, the party's delegates nominated William Allen for governor and adopted a platform that attacked Republican corruption and attempted to make the return of home rule the central issue of the campaign.²² Allen, an old-line Jacksonian Democrat, represented everything that the Ohio Democracy wanted in a leader for the party. Born in North Carolina, he had moved to Ohio after his parents' death in 1819, serving in the state legislature between 1833 and 1849.²³ A supporter of popular sovereignty during the antebellum era and a Peace Democrat during the war, Allen's return to politics after nearly twenty-five years symbolized the party's attempts to return to the golden age of Democratic dominance. The Ohio return to Jacksonianism was hailed throughout the country as a sign that a 'new morning has dawned for the organization ... It is the only power, already organized and in readiness for action, to which the people can hopefully appeal for help in executing an urgent reform and rescuing the free institutions from ruin.'²⁴

The *New York World* claimed that the Democratic 'party gives no symptoms of a voluntary dissolution,' and that 'the defence of the Democratic policy is, not that it is strikingly new, but that it is *wise*, that it is *timely*, that it is *necessary*.'²⁵ Straight-out Democrats hoped that the party could harness the memory of its antebellum success to end the excesses incurred by the continuation of Republican rule. For them, widespread corruption, carpetbag rule, and continued federal intervention in the South placed not only personal liberties at risk, but also threatened the very existence of free government in the United States. At the heart of the issue were the disturbing centralising and consolidating elements of the Republican party. Yet, the biggest problem facing the Democrats in 1873 was the 'apathy' of many Democratic voters following the 1872 calamity.²⁶ To overcome this, northern straight-out Democrats urged a vigorous reorganisation of the party at the grassroots level and fell back upon traditional Jacksonian principles that invoked the institutional memory of the party.

²² *New York World*, Aug. 8, 1873.

²³ Reginald C. McGrane, *William Allen: A Study in Western Democracy* (Columbus, OH: F. J. Heer Printing Company, 1925), pp. 11–2, 43–52.

²⁴ *Boston Post*, Aug. 19, 1873.

²⁵ *New York World*, Aug. 15, 1873.

²⁶ W. W. Hutchinson to Randall, April 29, 1873, Randall Papers, HSP.

Following the announcement of the Ohio platform, the Democratic State Committee of Pennsylvania rejoiced that ‘The Democracy all over the country are rallying for the old standard principles of the party’ and that ‘all that is now required to secure these triumphs and return to pure government, is a prudent and speedy organization of our party.’²⁷ Party leaders urged county conventions to be called early and stressed the importance of appealing to conservative Republicans to bolster the Democratic vote. Having recognised the shared interests of free trade and reform between themselves and the Liberal Republicans, leading Pennsylvania Democrats encouraged party activists to be more assertive on the local level, to visit the homes of ‘every Democrat and Liberal Republican in their Townships respectively, urging each as far as possible to take an interest in the approaching contest on behalf of the Democracy’, and to ‘[e]ncourage those who temporarily left our ranks to return to our fold, and be especially attentive to such Radical Republicans as have become discontented with the wide-spread corruptions of the hour.’²⁸

Similar appeals to the Liberal Republicans were made throughout the country, from the calls of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* for the formation of a fusion party to the New York *World*’s assertion that the party ‘holds out the right hand of a hearty fellowship to the Liberal allies who ... are at one with us upon the living issues of the present hour.’²⁹ In the end, the Democratic leaders hoped to reorganise the party ‘not by scattering and disbanding its elements, but by excluding foreign substances, attracting homogenous ones, and crystallizing them into a purer form with a cutting edge.’³⁰ At its core, the Democratic reorganisation aimed to secure its traditional white, working class supporters, while also bringing the Liberal Republican element into a more consolidated party organisation.

Democratic attempts to reverse voter apathy relied heavily upon appeals to the party’s institutional memory. Leading party organs made frequent references to the principles they argued were embodied by the nation’s greatest men. Democrats deplored the rampant corruption that characterised government and urged a return to Jacksonian and Jeffersonian principles to solve the crisis. The *Boston Post* claimed that ‘Never more than now has the assertion and application of the old Constitutional principles supported

²⁷ Democratic State Committee of Pennsylvania Dispatch, June 27, 1873, Randall Papers, HSP.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Times-Picayune*, April 17, 1873; *New York World*, Oct. 7, 1873.

³⁰ *New York World*, Oct. 7, 1873.

by Jefferson and Madison and the Democratic party in the zenith of its fame been demanded for the healing of the wounds of the nation.³¹ Similarly, the New York *World* made explicit links between the party's struggle with the consolidating Republicans, and the 'monarchy-men, the centralizers, the corruptionists and the consolidationists whom Jefferson and his party encountered.'³²

Democrats highlighted the threat that corruption posed to the nation, a point that became even more pertinent in the aftermath of the *Crédit Mobilier* and *Salary Grab* scandals that came to light in September 1873. Party members campaigned against the circulation of an irredeemable currency, advocated the end of the National Bank System, the reduction of the protective tariff, the need for equal taxation, and the termination of government subsidies to private corporations.³³ By focusing on issues that putatively demonstrated Republican consolidation, Democrats appealed both to their traditional working-class constituents, and middle-class Liberal Republicans to bolster their support. They identified governmental land grants to railroad corporations and taxation that placed a heavy burden on workers as class legislation that only benefitted the industrialists. With Democrats in both the North and South advocating principles and policies that focused on the Republicans' allegedly unequal treatment of classes in the lead up to the 1873 elections, there seemed to be a growing cohesion within the party. Voters, however, remained reluctant to place their faith in the Democracy.

Despite the regularity of Democratic assaults on the allegedly rampant corruption and excessive spending that characterised the post-war Republican administrations, the nation had entered an economic boom following the Civil War and this diminished the impact of such accusations. Government subsidies since the end of the war had doubled the size of the country's railways, significantly improving prospects for internal trade, opening up markets for western farmers, and filling the deep pockets of the nation's leading industrialists. Fuelled largely by European investors, the railroad boom of the 1860s and early 1870s had created a consensus among Americans that the burgeoning industrial economy of the United States would continue. This faith in the capitalist system, however, quickly came under heavy scrutiny.

During the autumn of every year, currency held in the nation's largest banks contracted quickly and significantly. Many local banks throughout the country deposited

³¹ *Boston Post*, Sept. 4, 1873.

³² *New York World*, Oct. 7, 1873.

³³ *Boston Post*, Sept. 4, 1873; *New York World*, Oct. 7, 1873.

their reserves in the New York banks year-round, yet annually recalled their deposited capital to aid the movement of crops harvested in the Midwest. This was usually of little consequence, but in 1873 European investors were losing confidence in the American railroad boom and choosing to invest elsewhere instead. When September arrived that year and the country's local banks demanded the release of their reserves from New York, the surplus capital did not exist to cover the recall. Almost immediately banks began to fail to meet these seasonal demands, and on September 17, the largest bank in the country, Jay Cooke & Company, announced that it was suspending payments. Cooke's banks closed in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C., causing the failure of numerous other banks to fulfil payments. Soon after, the stock exchange plummeted and closed on September 20 for ten days. As the money markets plunged, some banks refused to accept greenbacks and insisted on payment in gold.³⁴ The crash started the longest depression in U.S. history that, for many onlookers, cast significant doubt over the future of industrial capitalism in the United States.

Scholars have posited that the financial crisis of 1873 not only turned the focus of many northerners away from Reconstruction in the South, but also held long-term consequences for the relationship between labour and capital.³⁵ For Democrats, the Panic provided a reference point to demonstrate the outcome of Republican misgovernment and could be used to turn public opinion against Republican rule.³⁶ They charged that consolidation of the National Bank System and the profligacy of Republican financial aid to railroad corporations lay at the core of the financial crisis. Democrats were quick to cast themselves as the party of reform. They depicted themselves as the only politicians dedicated to the reduction of a bloated federal government that had plunged the country into an economic depression, one that, unbeknown to them, would last until 1878.

In the aftermath of the Panic of 1873, the Democracy won significant victories in New York, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, and Illinois. The *New York World* rejoiced, claiming that the successes were the result of a 'steadfast adherence to the organisation, unflinching fidelity to the principles of the Democratic party,' and that the secret to future success lay in the continuation of this strategy.³⁷ While these victories had exposed weaknesses in the Republican party, continued success was not

³⁴ Nicholas Barreyre, 'The Politics of Economic Crises, p. 410.

³⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 512–8; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 129–30; Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, pp. 106–7; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 335–50.

³⁶ This is an assertion also held in, Mach, 'Gentleman George', p. 158.

³⁷ *New York World*, Nov. 11, 1873, and Dec. 26, 1873.

guaranteed. Not only did the Democracy remain split over organisational strategy, but the Panic itself also threw the most significant division between Democrats into the open: the conflict over hard and soft money. Furthermore, the Democracy had still not formulated a cohesive or successful strategy to combat Republican ‘bloody shirt’ rhetoric. While the return of old-line Democrats such as George H. Pendleton and William Allen to the fore showed a willingness to invoke memories of the party’s Jacksonian heritage, Democrats were forced to confront the economic crisis in new terms, and create an equally potent political use of the enduring memory of the Civil War.³⁸

The Currency Question in Democratic Politics

Ever since the passage of the first Legal Tender Act in 1862, Americans had clashed over the role of greenbacks in the national financial system. Introduced as an attempt to finance the ever-increasing expense of civil war, debates over when the nation would return to specie payments became more intense as each year of Reconstruction passed. Divisions over financial policy were never solely along partisan lines and consensus on the currency issue within the Democracy became particularly elusive. As a result, the real surprise of the 1870s was not that the currency issue led to the emergence of a significant third party in the American political system, but that a more fundamental partisan realignment did not occur.

When Congress reconvened in December 1873, the economic crisis brought about by the banking crash was propelled to the centre of the national political landscape. For the rest of the 1870s, economic recovery would be the primary concern of Congress, and on January 20, 1874, John B. Gordon, Democratic senator from Georgia and one of Robert E. Lee’s principal commanders at the end of the war, delivered a speech in the Senate on the progress of agricultural development in his home state. Gordon spoke of the burdens placed upon farmers by their inability to acquire capital as ‘profits are year by year absorbed by others than the tillers of the soil.’³⁹ The Georgian took aim at ‘*concentrated money*’ held by a small number of capitalists that had led to high interest and a desperate lack of capital in the agricultural sector of the economy.⁴⁰ For Gordon,

³⁸ Mach, ‘*Gentleman George*’, pp. 158–9.

³⁹ *Appendix to the Congressional Record*, Senate, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13; see also, Fanny Cholared to Thomas F. Bayard, Apr. 20, 1874, Bayard Papers, LOC, J. A. Lee to Stevenson, March 4, 1874, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

the central problem in the American financial system was the concentration of capital in the hands of a few wealthy citizens. He further linked his antimonopolist outlook to the Panic of 1873, claiming that the financial collapse was ‘but the legitimate outgrowth of the same fundamental evil [monopoly] which has bred and fostered all the other evils of which I have spoken’ and that ‘whatever loss of confidence there has been sir, has been the loss of confidence in the *quantity* and not in the quality of the money. If greenbacks had been as plentiful as confidence in greenbacks, we should have had far less of panic.’⁴¹ Americans in the South and Midwest often complained about the lack of availability of specie, especially in rural areas. Typical of these complaints, A. Stolkly wrote to Thomas Bayard that ‘We must have currency, and enough of it to supply the requirements of business ... Coin is out of the question ... The want of a currency of equal value in all parts of the Union would, until the resumption of coin payments, be best supplied by the issues of the Govt (legal tenders).’⁴²

Congressman William S. Holman, a Democratic representative from Indiana, reinforced Gordon’s anti-monopolist outlook by claiming that ‘We are at the mercy of a few great capitalists ... To reduce the currency to increase its value to that of gold would be a heartless despotism to which the country would not and could not submit.’⁴³ Holman added that ‘I regret to reach the conclusion that the resumption of specie payments in this country is now at least impossible. It is not a question of money so much as it is a question of the weight of the public debt upon our industries.’⁴⁴ Holman attempted to bolster confidence in paper money, stating that ‘The greenback is money in the sense in which a gold dollar is money, and both are made money by the same high authority, the only authority that in this country can make anything money, the law of the land ... An act of Congress declares what is money; it stamps the money quality, the representative value, upon a bit of gold just as it does upon paper. There is no difference in that respect.’⁴⁵ For soft-money Democrats such as Holman, it was not the physical representation of money that mattered, but simply that the correct legislation was enacted to make it legal tender. Moreover, the economic realities of the largely agrarian Midwest were pushing the Democrats into advocating for soft-money. In response to the economic depression, a new farmers’ organisation, the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange as it would

⁴¹ *Appendix*, pp. 12–3.

⁴² A. Stolkly to Thomas F. Bayard, Dec. 17, 1873. Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁴³ *Appendix*, p. 183.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

come to be known, had established itself across the region. The Grangers' principal aims were to reduce the costs of transporting crops, reducing interest, and more generally relieve the economic burdens that the Panic of 1873 had wrought on farmers.⁴⁶ As a result, they supported calls for increases in greenback circulation, and this gained traction among farmers, firstly in the Midwest, but also in the South. Amidst a growing support for the regulating of railroad rates and an expansion of the money supply, midwestern Democrats had little option but adopt a soft-money stance or risk losing the support of their worker-constituents.⁴⁷ The appeal of soft money Democrats like Holman and Gordon to those who had restricted access to capital drew upon a remarkably forward-thinking conception of money at a time when all major global powers adhered to the gold standard. These soft-money men held that the only way to ease the burdens of taxation and economic depression on their constituents was to curb the monopoly of interest of the industrial capitalists by improving access to physical capital.

Hard-money Democrats had long viewed proponents of soft money as irresponsible and immoral, and to a significant degree the reason for their defeat in the presidential races of 1864 and 1868.⁴⁸ While these hard-money men still tied their economic arguments to currents of antimonopoly and class rhetoric to appeal to their traditional demographic constituents, they relied heavily on appeals to the institutional memory of the party to engender support for their financial vision for America.

Hard-money Democrats regarded the institutional memory of their party as not just a potent political tool, but an important point of reference when discussing the Democracy's future. Leading party activists lamented the inability of Democratic leaders to live up to the mantle of the party's antebellum leaders. They had actively searched for a 'second Andrew Jackson' who would propel the party back to power for the first time since the war, and in the 1870s many continued to believe that 'what most is wanting in the Democratic party is a bold, intrepid, wise and patriotic leader.'⁴⁹ Yet attempts to

⁴⁶ Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Allen J. Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874–1890* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1951); Peter H. Argersinger and Jo Ann E. Argersinger, 'The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change in the Rural Midwest of the 1870s,' *Agricultural History* Vol. 58, No. 3 (Jul., 1984), pp. 393–6; Thomas A. Woods, *Knights of the Plow: Oliver H. Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991); Samuel DeCanio and Corwin D. Schmidt, 'Mass Electoral Support for the Grange and Greenback Parties,' *Party Politics* Vol. 19, No. 5 (Sept., 2013), pp. 798–820; Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, pp. 259–70.

⁴⁸ Belmont to Marble, June 4, 1871, Marble Papers, LOC.

⁴⁹ *Boston Post*, Feb. 2, 1874.

invoke memories of Jackson and Jefferson went far beyond simply trying to cast the next leader of the party in relation to these men. Rather, Democrats tried to make sense of the party's fracture in 1860 and its current course. An editorial in the *New York World* in August 1873 claimed that it was the Douglas-Breckinridge split that was the point of the party's disintegration and that this 'should be borne in mind in any discussion of reorganization.'⁵⁰ In discourse typical of the Reconstruction-era Democracy, the *World* asserted that 'We must take the party as it existed in the days of Jackson and Van Buren, consider the causes of the split in 1860, and compare notes with facts as they now exist.'⁵¹ In conclusion, the editorial called for Democrats not to forget the Liberal Republican disaster, but to 'bid all wandering Democrats welcome – not asking where they have been ... [and] bid all honest Republicans' to 'come under one head ... the broad banner of Jefferson and a party that has a purpose higher than the greed of office.'⁵² As Democrats came to terms with the 1872 defeat, local factional disputes created a conflict between men who believed that the party needed to 'return to the faith of its fathers,' and those who sought to create temporary parties to defeat Radicalism. At the same time, the national Democratic leadership created a coherent narrative of a party that 'by the sacred name and memory of Jefferson will repel the present assaults at the very root of our most cherished rights.'⁵³ In doing so, Democrats hoped to draw upon their party's past commitment to a limited federal government and laissez-faire economics in order to cast the party as one that favoured honest government.⁵⁴

During 1873 and 1874, Democrats frequently imagined how men such as Jackson and Jefferson would have reacted to the economic crisis. For hard-money advocates, this presented a clear opportunity; Jackson's opposition to a centralized national banking system and advocacy of specie was a prime example of how Old Hickory's legacy could be appropriated for the present political climate. Hard-money Democrats reminded their constituents that the 'traditional policy of the Democrats is that of a currency redeemable in hard money' and that any professed party member who did not proscribe to this view 'are not the party, and misrepresent its well-known and hitherto universally admitted tenets.'⁵⁵ Moreover, they urged party supporters to become more active in their support

⁵⁰ *New York World*, Aug. 19, 1873.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, Feb. 24, 1874; *New York World*, Oct. 31, 1873.

⁵⁴ *New York World*, Nov. 19, 1872; *New York World*, Aug. 26, 1873.

⁵⁵ Elijah Ward, *The Principles and Policy of the Democratic Party: A Letter from the Hon. Elijah Ward on the First Duty of the Government and People; Comprehensive Review of our Recent Financial History;*

of the Democracy as ‘the grand fundamental principles of the Democratic creed [are] as vital now to the life of the republican as when first spoken by Jefferson,’ and stressed that ‘the mission of the party of Jefferson, of Madison, and of Jackson has been to guard the people against the encroachments of unlicensed power.’⁵⁶ By mid-1874, many believed that their appropriation of antebellum Democratic principles were having their desired effect, as ‘Jeffersonian Democrats’ had begun to exert more influence in Congress than the ‘weak backed [accommodationist] Democrats’ who had been so influential throughout Reconstruction.⁵⁷

The conflict within the Democratic party over financial policy was a deep-seated problem that many party leaders believed penetrated to the core of what the party represented. References to the party’s history were as much the result of factional conflict over leadership of the party than they were attempts to draw voters away from the Republican ranks. While Democrats in the postbellum era did seek a return to the principles of Jacksonian Democracy, the simultaneous desire of party leaders to move past dead issues and become the party of the future ensured that the party would not be able to return fully to its Jacksonian roots.⁵⁸

Desperate to ease the financial burdens on his constituents in the Midwest, George H. Pendleton was an ardent advocate of the greenback as a solution to the nation’s problems. Pendleton had long hankered for the presidency and hoped to achieve this goal through a thorough reorganisation of his party’s power base. With the advent of the money question to national prominence in 1873, he returned to the fray in the hope that he could shunt hard-money northeasterners from the party leadership and reestablish the national leadership under his directive in the Midwest.⁵⁹ Pendleton’s attempts to remodel the Democracy on the foundations of the money question, while by no means unachievable, largely failed due to the party’s reluctance to clash publicly over the issue.⁶⁰ After fourteen years of deep factional conflict, sectionalism, and failed attempts at third

Errors of the Administration; Striking Contrast in France; The Law of Financial Panics; Necessity of a Fixed Standard of Value; When and How to Resume; Benefits of a Revenue Tariff; An American Commercial System; Pacification and Prosperity in the South; Republicans Tried by their Acts and Found Wanting; Popularity of Democratic Principles; All Who Think Alike Should Vote Alike, Etc. Etc. (New York: F. B. Patterson, 1875), p. 16.

⁵⁶ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, Feb 25, 1874; *Boston Post*, July 27, 1874.

⁵⁷ Vaux to Stevenson, May 6, 1874, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

⁵⁸ The assertion that the Democracy’s postbellum life was dictated by a reinterpreted Jacksonianism is posited in Mach ‘Gentleman George’, pp. 4–5.

⁵⁹ Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, pp. 232–3.

⁶⁰ Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks*, pp. 29–30.

party movements, most Democrats sought party regularity and electoral success over the continuation of internal power struggles and any more Pendletonian ‘New Departures.’

Reorganisation, Resurgence, and Reconciliation: The Elections of 1874

Following Democratic successes in the 1873 elections, party leaders turned their attention to the upcoming midterms in 1874. While the party had seen a remarkable reversal of its fortunes since the Liberal Republican disaster of 1872, reorganisation remained the prime focus moving forward. Central to Democratic resurgence was the ‘redemption’ of southern states from Republican rule. The party devised various strategies to achieve this goal, from continuing its criticism of unjust Republican military despotism to the creation of White Leagues aimed at intimidating and discouraging the overwhelmingly Republican freedmen’s vote.⁶¹ Yet northern Democrats also faced tasks of their own. While the party was resurgent in crucial swing states such as New York and Ohio, Democrats in Republican strongholds such as Massachusetts sought a total realignment of party strategy at the grassroots level. Scholars have been reluctant to assess these local shifts, focusing more on southern ‘redemption’, Bourbonism, and the emergence of national leaders such as Samuel J. Tilden.⁶² Yet, the actions of Democrats in places such as Boston provide significant insights into the professionalisation of politics in the late nineteenth century.⁶³ Moreover, understanding how Democrats were able to secure victories in Republican strongholds can provide a better sense of the success of different strategies.

Despite the optimistic outlook of Massachusetts Democrats in 1873, widespread defeats that year forced the party to re-evaluate its strategy. Party leaders were disappointed by their failure to secure victories in Boston where, due to the significant

⁶¹ See, Roy Andrew Jr., *Wade Hampton*; Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2008); William Gilette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869–1879* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); R. L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists: Tennessee, 1870–1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975); Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Rable, *But There Was No Peace*; Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Patrick G. Williams, *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007).

⁶² A. J. Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874–1890* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1951); H. S. Merrill, *Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West, 1865–1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953).

⁶³ Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*, pp. 184–6.

working-class and Irish-American population, they had hoped to run well. At a meeting of the Boston Democratic City and Ward Committee, called in February 1874 to reorganise the party, prominent lawyer and Democrat, A. O. Brewster, proclaimed that ‘the Democratic party in Boston has come to be a byword of reproach ... Instead of fidelity to the truth and honor to principle, instead of manliness and straightforward dealing, it has from time to time gone off and allied itself with Liberal Republicans, who have cheated and defrauded it.’⁶⁴ The root of Brewster’s disappointment with the party lay in the accommodationist arguments of the New Departure Democrats, and he urged a return to party antecedents. Brewster stressed the need for independent thought among Democrats that, coupled with party unity, would ensure the Democracy would ‘keep pace with the spirit of the age; to adhere with fidelity and honor to those acknowledged principles which Jefferson enunciated, and which will stand the test of party criticism for ages yet to come.’⁶⁵ Brewster’s arguments were not strikingly new to the party in 1874. He appealed to the common feelings of unity and honor that were held together by a typical appeal to Democratic institutional memory. But it was in the words of Boston Democrat, Patrick A. Collins, that a new approach to local party organisation was to be found.

Collins felt deeply aggrieved that the Republicans had managed to obtain control of Boston. For Collins, the reason for Democratic losses lay in the lack of grassroots organisation and activism in comparison to the more vigorous Republican local machinery. Collins noted that the city’s Democracy had ‘No headquarters; no continuous unity’ and that it was ‘every man for himself.’⁶⁶ The result of this system, Collins argued, was ‘demoralization and defeat.’⁶⁷ Instead, he suggested that,

What we need is an organization comprising the best men in our party, with rooms open all year ... I want an organization of our party right here in Boston that will crucify traitors, and not permit them to play false year after year; one that will work in the Wards not six weeks, not ten weeks, but fifty-two weeks in the year, if necessary.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Boston Post*, Feb. 2, 1874.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Collins' vision for the Democracy reflected the growing professionalisation in politics during the nineteenth century that recognised the need for more centralised, rigorously organised parties that could no longer simply rely on the enthusiasm of constituents to race to the polls. He recognised that it was not simply newspapers that could engage the public and that a more concerted effort by the party hierarchy was needed to ensure party unity, discipline, and public enthusiasm.

Over the following months, the Massachusetts Democratic party engaged in a vigorous reform of its organisation, establishing headquarters throughout the Boston wards, attacking the local and national Republican administration for widespread corruption, and appealing to constituents with hard-money arguments. The result was remarkable, with widespread Democratic victories in the congressional races and even the election of the first Democratic governor of Massachusetts since 1851. Speaking about the victory, Leverett Saltonstall, a victorious Democrat, said that 'This is the proudest day of my life ... It is a day for our country, it is a day for Massachusetts. It is almost too good ... I feel that the party in possession, the Republican party, is gone; it is no use to talk of it in the future; its work is done and its day is gone, its own best men are disgruntled with it.'⁶⁹

Saltonstall's assertion was shared by Collins, who went even further in predicting the future of party politics in the United States. He remarked that the victory 'was something more than a Democratic victory. It was a revolt of conscience of the people of Massachusetts.'⁷⁰ Collins recognised the limitations of the victory in that 'the most we can do ... for the next two years is to check bad legislation,' but the ability of Democrats to win such significant victories in a Republican stronghold could not be ignored:

[o]ur work is that of creating a new and irresistible party. The Republican party is broken up and destroyed beyond reconstruction ... The question some time since was, what party should succeed it? There is no longer any question of that kind. The Democratic party is, beyond a doubt, to form the nucleus of the great reform party of the future which is to rule for twenty years to come.⁷¹

On April 27, 1874 Congressman Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar of Mississippi delivered a eulogy in the House of Representatives for the late Massachusetts

⁶⁹ *Boston Post*, Nov. 6, 1874.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

senator, Charles Sumner. Lamar grew up in Georgia where he graduated from Emory College before moving to Mississippi to practice law. An ardent southern nationalist and earnest Democrat in his early years, Lamar was soon drawn into a career in politics, being elected to the House of Representatives in 1856 before becoming one of the most promising southern leaders of the Democracy and drafting Georgia's ordinance of secession. Following the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter, Lamar raised and funded the 19th Mississippi Infantry Regiment, served as a lieutenant colonel, and was later appointed by Jefferson Davis as the Confederate minister to Russia. On his return to the South, he was disenfranchised under the Republicans' Reconstruction measures, but continued to enjoy an active role in Democratic and southern politics, being a member of the Mississippi Constitutional Conventions in 1865 and 1868.⁷² By the mid-1870s, Lamar had become one of the most eloquent southern Democratic leaders. Despite his southern nationalist antecedents, he was at the forefront of attempts to ensure lasting reconciliation between North and South.⁷³ In the aftermath of the Panic of 1873, and amidst the growing strength of the Democrats, Lamar used his eulogy on Sumner as an opportunity to further the aims of reconciliation. He claimed that southerners did not want to wipe out memories of the war, but 'would rather that both sections should gather up the glories won by each section, not envious, but proud of each other, and regard them a common heritage of American valor.'⁷⁴ The Mississippian hoped that future generations would speak 'not of northern prowess or southern courage, but of the heroism, fortitude and courage of Americans in a war of ideas.'⁷⁵ By invoking memories of the war in broad national terms that celebrated the sacrifices of both North and South, Lamar avoided raising differences between the sections that would threaten the return of Democratic power to the southern states.

Lamar's attempt to create a unifying message of reconciliation had mixed success. Both Republican and Democratic newspapers from Sumner's home-state of Massachusetts praised the 'progressive' and 'real reconstructionist' Lamar for delivering not just a 'generous and tender' eulogy, but 'the most significant and hopeful utterance' from the South since the war's end that demonstrated that 'the war is indeed over, and

⁷² Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South Barbee & Smith, Agents, 1896); James B. Murphy, *L. Q. C. Lamar: Pragmatic Patriot* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

⁷³ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, pp. 147–152.

⁷⁴ Mayo W. Hazeltine (ed.), *Orations from Homer to McKinley: Volume XXI* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1902), p. 8802.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

that universal amnesty is in order.’⁷⁶ Despite receiving praise from some leading southern Democratic editors for the speech being ‘not merely a merited compliment to Massachusetts ... but a peace offering from the South to the North’ that ‘will do much towards bridging the bloody chasm which has separated the two sections,’ Lamar’s praise of a man who had assailed the South his whole life angered as many southerners as it did reassure northerners.⁷⁷ The *Ouachita Telegraph* condemned Lamar for celebrating a man who had ‘nothing ... left on record ... to show that he was even human in his feelings, unless it be that he was the champion of negro equality.’⁷⁸ The response to Lamar’s eulogy demonstrated two important political realities to Democrats: firstly, that the rhetoric of reconciliation was growing in potency and that southern leaders such as Lamar were being successful in convincing northerners of the South’s willingness to place the conflict over slavery in the past; secondly, that reinstating white supremacy would be a crucial part of the South’s future. Southern Democrats, and northern Democrats for that matter, viewed America as a white man’s democracy. Even if the party emphasised matters of economy and reform, underlying these arguments was a deep commitment to racial inequality.

While Lamar’s eulogy gained the praise of northerners and southerners for its reconciliatory message, violence across the South contradicted the congressman’s claims. After the massacre of 150 blacks, some of whom were Union veterans, by an armed band of southern Democrats led by the former Confederate Captain C. C. Nash at Colfax, Louisiana, in April 1873, Republicans’ waved the bloody shirt with extra vigour.⁷⁹ Despite the actions of southern Democrats however, the northern press sought to distance the party from the actions. The *New York World* denounced the ‘excesses and outrages committed by the Radical negroes’ and claimed that the freedmen had ‘committed immeasurable outrages’ against local whites.⁸⁰ Moreover, Democrats condemned southern Republicans who had ‘relied upon Federal bayonets to protect them in their outrages and robberies in the South.’⁸¹ Scholars have shown meticulously how southern Democrats increasingly relied on the violent suppression of the Republican vote throughout the 1870s, but less attention has been given to the party’s northern editors

⁷⁶ *Boston Herald*, Dec. 16, 1875; *Boston Advertiser*, May 6, 1874; *Springfield Republican*, May 6, 1874; *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1874.

⁷⁷ *American Citizen*, May 16, 1874; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, May 5, 1874; *Weekly Clarion*, May 7, 1874; *Times-Picayune*, May 14, 1874; *Opelousas Journal*, May 15, 1874.

⁷⁸ *Ouachita Telegraph*, May 15, 1874.

⁷⁹ LeeAnna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror, and the Death of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ *New York World*, April 18, 1873.

⁸¹ *New York World*, Jan., 13, 1874.

manipulated reports of southern violence to see them as Republican ploys. They argued that Republicans continually recounted ‘the imaginary outrages of the white leaguers,’ that were ‘paid by the secret fund of the republican party,’ and were influential in turning northern public opinion against Reconstruction and the Republicans.⁸²

With popular discontent growing towards Reconstruction, Democrats believed that ‘the time has come for us to be bold, [and] attack.’⁸³ The main strength of the party lay in eroding public confidence in Republican rule. Democrats were quick to expose the pitfalls of extravagant Republican spending, while new corruption scandals seemed to be uncovered every week across the nation. In the House of Representatives on June 9, 1874, R. Milton Speer of Pennsylvania detailed the results of ‘carpetbag’ rule in Arkansas. Speer argued that the low level of violence there meant that there was ‘no ground ... for plundering the Government ... under the pretense of preserving the peace and protecting the negroes.’⁸⁴ Speer detailed the situation in Arkansas where corrupt district court judges granted bail to prisoners who had committed capital offences and accepted bribes to include *nolle prosequi* in certain cases.⁸⁵ Moreover, the congressman explained how US Marshal William A. Britton was able to claim over \$100,000 for court costs between August 12 and November 9, 1872 for taking prisoners on Native-American land and using fake identities for deputies who would be paid for their work.⁸⁶ Accusations of Republican misgovernment were commonplace in Democratic speeches, editorials, and pamphlets throughout 1874. They had a significant impact in the aftermath of the crash of 1873 and national scandals.

The campaign of 1874 marked a distinctive change in grassroots politics in the postbellum United States. Scholars have traced the emergence of southern White Leagues, local militias, and Red Shirts throughout the mid-1870s. The 1874 midterms are regarded as an important transition between the federal suppression of violence that had characterised southern Reconstruction up to that point and the decline of federal intervention in southern affairs as Reconstruction was dismantled.⁸⁷ While ‘Redemption’

⁸² *Baltimore Sun*, May 11, 1874; *New York Herald*, Oct. 9, 1874.

⁸³ Vaux to Stevenson, May 6, 1874, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

⁸⁴ *Appendix to the Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, p. 447.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 447. *Nolle prosequi* is the legal “unwilling to pursue” clause that would allow judges to voluntarily discontinue criminal charges either before trial or before a verdict was announced.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 447–51.

⁸⁷ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, esp. pp. 147–58; Charles Lane, *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, The Supreme Court, and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008); Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Gilles Vandal, *Rethinking*

varied to some degree in each state, nearly all followed a remarkably similar pattern: newspapers and Taxpayers' Conventions stressed the need to overthrow an oppressive Republican regime; this resulted in the creation of white-line organizations throughout the state; Democrats then publicly professed their peaceful intentions while simultaneously violently intimidating black and white Republican supporters; finally, with a federal administration reluctant to deploy troops, violence would spread across the state with impunity resulting in Democratic victories.⁸⁸

Outside the South Democrats used similar condemnations of the Grant administration to secure victories. Party organs attacked the administration's taxation policy on the grounds that it placed an unfair burden on the working classes. They also assailed excessive spending and support of private corporations, unconstitutional intervention in southern affairs, widespread corruption, and blamed the Panic of 1873 on Republican economic mismanagement. Congressional Democrats repeated the same accusations as party organs, claiming that the Republican 'party has ceased to govern wisely, to advance; it is no longer progressive ... and will surely die.'⁸⁹ All these proved successful points of attack for the party as Democrats sought to turn public opinion away from the Republicans' waving of the bloody shirt and towards examples of Republican misgovernment.

In their state platforms, Democrats assailed the Republicans for inflaming racial relations, claiming that the new civil rights bill under discussion in Congress made a 'war of the races' imminent.⁹⁰ Furthermore, they highlighted the familiar tropes of Republican corruption, the need to decrease taxation to ease burdens of the working classes, and the necessity of the protective tariff to be repealed.⁹¹ One issue that the party still could not agree on, however, was that of specie resumption. While Democrats such as Richard Vaux, Samuel J. Tilden, and Allen G. Thurman worked tirelessly to ensure hard-money

Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866–1884 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*; James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War*; Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); Bradley, *Bluecoats and Tar Heels*; Edward J. Harcourt, 'Who Were the Pale Faces? New Perspectives on the Tennessee Ku Klux,' *Civil War History* Vol. 51, No. 1 (2005), pp. 23–66; Patrick A. Lewis, 'The Democratic Partisan Militia and the Black Peril: The Kentucky Militia, Racial Violence, and the Fifteenth Amendment, 1870–1873,' *Civil War History* Vol. 56, No. 2 (June, 2010), pp. 145–74.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸⁹ *Appendix to the Congressional Record*, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, p. 484.

⁹⁰ Opposition to the Civil Rights Bill was present in northern and southern state platforms, including Pennsylvania, Alabama, Missouri and Ohio. See, *Indiana State Sentinel*, July 21, 1874; *Weekly Clarion*, Sept. 24, 1874; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 31, 1874.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

platforms were drawn up across the North, greenbackers led by George H. Pendleton sought the opposite. Vaux, in particular, was worried about the Midwest where leading Democrats including Pendleton, Thurman, Hendricks, and Voorhees were unable to ‘harmonize either on principle or in effort.’⁹²

The 1874 elections demonstrated how far the Democracy had come in two years, but also raised warnings about the coherence of the national party. While Democrats managed to gain eight seats in the Senate, it was the House that saw the most dramatic change in its membership. When the 43rd Congress opened on December 1, 1873, the Democrats could claim just 83 congressmen in comparison to 200 Republicans. But by the time the 44th Congress began, 176 Democrats took their seats, 118 of whom did so for the first time.⁹³ While the party saw significant gains in the South, picking up net gains in every southern state apart from Kentucky, it was in the North that the party saw its most significant swings.⁹⁴ More important than *how many* seats the Democrats gained in 1874, was *where* they saw dramatic turnarounds in their electoral results. Firstly, not only was the party resurgent in states where it had historically been strong, for example in New Jersey where they gained four seats, but Democrats also made meaningful gains in Republican strongholds such as Massachusetts. Secondly, the party picked up its largest numerical gains in the strategically important states of national significance, in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In New York, not only did the Democrats gain a senator in Francis Kernan, but the party also picked up seven seats in the House of Representatives, a feat that was matched in Ohio. In Pennsylvania, however, where the Democrats’ alliance with the Liberal Republicans had resulted in the party’s largest defeat across the North in 1872, the Democracy gained thirteen seats in the House; the party’s biggest gain nationally.⁹⁵

For the Democratic party, these results were of national significance. The gradual return of southern states to Democratic control highlighted the growing confidence of the South in the national party to end Reconstruction and return white man’s rule. Over the following months, southern Democrats would call for the party to put up a united front. State-level fusion parties, such as the Conservative parties of Virginia, and the Conservative-Democrats of Mississippi, would continue to endure but, all fought for the

⁹² Vaux to Stevenson, Aug. 11, 1874, Stevenson Papers, LOC; Vaux to Stevenson, Aug. 25, 1874, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

⁹³ Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*, pp. 228, 235.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

redemption of southern states from Republican rule, and the reinstating of the Democratic party and white man's rule. Rather than pursuing fusion strategies, southern Democrats called for 'a distinctive line of policy, Democratic in tone and tendency.' They believed that the Liberal Republicans' natural place was in the Democratic ranks, and that 'they will go there inevitably, if the Democratic party presents an unbroken front and genuine evidences of practical reform.'⁹⁶ Crucially, for the first time since before the Civil War, the Democracy was also able to secure significant victories in the northern states. With three resounding victories in the key states of New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, northern Democrats demonstrated that the Republicans were vulnerable to attacks on economic policy in the aftermath of the Panic of 1873, that northern voters were convinced by the Democratic portrayal of Republicanism as corrupt and in need of reform, and most significantly, that the party's central message of the need for sectional reconciliation resonated with voters as never before. The Democrats were fortunate in 1874 in that the economic depression lent credence to their arguments surrounding Republican misgovernment, but their castigation of the Republicans as corrupt partisans who were willing to defraud the American people and obstruct sectional reconciliation in order to hold onto power was a powerful message. The question remained whether the party could turn a midterm victory into a presidential success in 1876.

⁹⁶ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 10, 1875.

Chapter Five

A Democratic Crisis: The Disputed Centennial Election and the Third Party

Challenge, 1875–1878

On February 10, 1875 Congressman William M. Robbins of North Carolina reflected on the Democratic electoral victories of the past autumn. Proud that his party had managed to secure its first majority in the House since before the Civil War, he proclaimed that,

The great North has seen through the mists of misrepresentation with which radicalism has so long hid the truth respecting the affairs of the South, and in the fall elections pronounced her emphatic condemnation of the men in power. We in the South understand what this means. It means that our fellow-countrymen of the Northern States are willing to trust our patriotic fidelity to the common country ... and we look forward with confident anticipations to the achievement of a glorious victory by the conservative and Democratic voters of the North and South in the great contest of 1876, when a President who reveres the Constitution and respects popular rights shall take control of affairs, and the centennial of American Independence shall dawn upon our country happy and united, and our free Government rescued from the perils which now threaten it.¹

With this dramatic shift in electoral fortunes, Democrats viewed the 1876 election as an opportunity for the party to win back the White House. Yet, these hopes would not be realised and contested results led many to advocate armed resistance to the inauguration of another Republican president. While the centennial election did not lead to the outbreak of a second civil war, the actions of Democrats throughout the electoral crisis had significant repercussions for the party. The crisis of 1876–1877 kept the issue of civil service reform firmly in the national political arena, but the role played by leading Democrats such as Samuel Randall in enabling the Republican party to retain control of the presidency shook party supporters' faith in the organisation, and resulted in widespread support for third-party movements.

Michael Holt's *By One Vote* remains the most comprehensive study of Democratic and Republican factionalism and the role of party leaders in solving the

¹ *Congressional Record* 43rd Congress, Second Session, p. 37.

crisis.² His central contention is that the Republicans' victory in 1876 was a remarkable reversal in the party's fortunes in the aftermath of the Democratic victories of 1874. According to Holt, the Democrats were well positioned for a return to the presidency in 1876, but party leaders' decision to focus on Republican corruption and civil service reform rather than providing an effective plan to solve the economic crisis was a strategic error.³ Contrary to the assertions of C. Vann Woodward that economic bargaining was at the core of the so-called Compromise of 1877, Holt joins Keith Polakoff, Michael Les Benedict, and Charles W. Calhoun in being sceptical of this thesis.⁴ Holt adroitly demonstrates that it was northern congressional Democrats who helped to settle the electoral crisis of 1876-1877 rather than southern Democrats striking a bargain with Republicans for the promise of a southern railroad.⁵ Holt's assessment of the disputed election is convincing but undervalues the importance of reform to the Democrats' postbellum electoral strategy and the transitional moment during which the 1876 canvass took place. Economic policy had been a constant sticking point to Democrats who were enduring a deep-seated struggle over their party's commitment to laissez-faire. Reform became emblematic of the Democracy's opposition to Republican government and in 1876 was the only issue that Democrats could create a coherent narrative around to portray their partisan enemies as obstructing sectional reconciliation and national prosperity. Other studies have paid attention to state-level contested electoral returns, and have placed the centennial election in the context of the end of Reconstruction and the return of white supremacist rule to the South.⁶ While it has been demonstrated that the

² Michael Holt, *By One Vote: The Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951); Keith Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

⁵ Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 237-41.

⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 576-81; Michael Bellesiles, *1877: America's Year of Living Violently* (New York and London: The New Press, 2010); Roy Morris Jr., *Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia*; Robert E. Smith, 'Thomas M. Patterson, Colorado Statehood, and the Presidential Election of 1876,' *Colorado Magazine* Vol. 53, No. 2 (1976), pp. 153-62; Jerrell H. Shofner, 'Florida Courts and the Disputed Election of 1876,' *Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 1 (July, 1969), pp. 26-46; Michael S. Green, 'Campaigning on the Comstock: Virginia City and the Hayes-Tilden Election,' *Hayes Historical Journal* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1987), pp. 7-26; Jerry Purvis Sanson, 'Rapides Parish, Louisiana, During the End of Reconstruction,' *Louisiana History* Vol. 27, No. 2 (April, 1986), pp. 167-182; Brooks D. Simpson, 'Ulysses S. Grant and the Electoral Crisis of 1876-1877,' *Hayes Historical Journal* Vol. 11, No. 2 (1992), pp. 5-22; Derrell Roberts, 'Joseph E. Brown and the Florida Election of 1876,' *Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jan., 1962), pp. 217-25; Leonard Schlup, 'Adlai E. Stevenson and the

presidential election was a crucial moment in the downfall of Reconstruction and the return of 'home rule', the treatment of how 1876 influenced national party politics during the Gilded Age has suffered. However, scholars who have moved beyond 1877 have provided some significant insights into late-nineteenth century politics. Jerome Mushkat's biography of New York Democrat and former mayor of the empire city, Fernando Wood, has shown how similar factional conflicts continued within the Democracy following 1877.⁷ Thomas Mach's recent biography of George H. Pendleton has further stressed the idea of continuity through a focus on Pendleton's aim of currency and civil service reform.⁸ This chapter views the events of 1876–1877 in the context of the Democracy's transitional state, and demonstrates that the Democrats' focus on reform in the centennial election was the logical result of the party's postbellum crusade to overthrow Republicanism. Moreover, it asserts that the northern Democrats' acquiescence in the decision of the Electoral Commission that found Hayes to be the victor, had detrimental consequences for the Democratic party that have not yet been addressed by historians.

Race, Reconciliation and the Civil Rights Act of 1875

The resounding success of the party in the 1874 contests galvanised Democratic assaults on Republican southern policy. Democrats hoped to use contested Louisiana results to help push the South towards a full 'redemption.'⁹ They had seen great success in branding themselves as the 'party of financial honor and financial integrity' and the Republicans as the party of 'corruption, fraud[,] ... chicanery' and 'financial Ruin,' and Democrats argued that federal intervention in the Louisiana elections was a desperate partisan attempt to unconstitutionally hold onto power in the Pelican State.¹⁰ Like the rest of the South, black and white Republicans in Louisiana had been the victims of violent

Presidential Election Commission of 1876 and 1877,' *International Review of History & Political Science* Vol. 26, No. 3 (1989), pp. 38–52; Lee Scott Theisen, 'A "Fair Count" in Florida: General Lew Wallace and the Contested Presidential Election of 1876,' *Hayes Historical Journal* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1978), pp. 20–30; John C. Reid, 'The New York Times and the Theft of the 1876 Presidential Election,' *Journal of American Culture* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1987), pp. 35–41.

⁷ Mushkat, *Fernando Wood*, pp. 215–23.

⁸ Mach, 'Gentleman George.'

⁹ Harry T. Williams, 'The Louisiana Unification Movement of 1873,' *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 11, No. 3 (Aug, 1945), pp. 349–69; Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 137–8; Hogue, *Uncivil War*, pp. 116–43.

¹⁰ *Boston Post*, Nov. 6, 1874; *New York World*, March 27, 1874.

intimidation by Democratic paramilitary organisations, but during the 1874 contests a pitched battle between the Crescent City White League and New Orleans' police erupted. The Battle of Liberty Place was the result of the contested gubernatorial election of 1872 between Republican William Kellogg and Democrat John McEnery that still remained unsettled in 1874. When federal troops were deployed to quell the violence, the White Leaguers retreated from the city and a regiment of US soldiers would remain in the Crescent City until the end of Reconstruction.

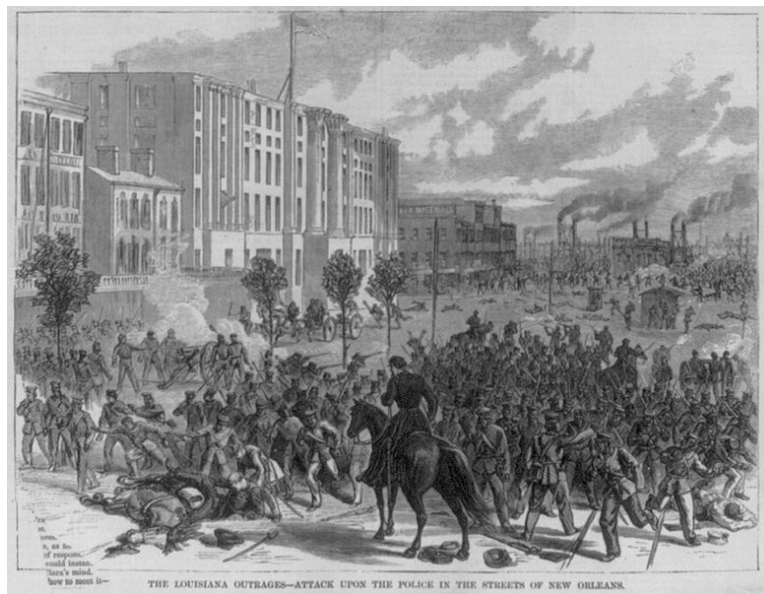


Figure 5.1 'The Louisiana Outrages – Attack upon the Police in the Streets of New Orleans,' *Harper's Weekly*, October 3, 1874

When Congress reconvened in early 1875, southern Democrats immediately attacked the administration's continued determination to deploy the military during election season. In the House of Representatives, William Robbins attacked the 'selfish ambitions of the radical leaders' that had made the South 'full of violence, disorder, and bloodshed.'¹¹ Robbins was not the sole Democrat to voice his anger at the Republicans' southern policy in early 1875, as James M. Leach (D-NC), Matt W. Ransom (D-NC), and John W. Stevenson (D-KY), all condemned an administration that they believed had 'ceased to govern wisely,' and created a 'people so lost, so blind ... as the people of the South are.'¹² Violence in New Orleans reflected a wider trend toward organised violence during southern elections. Despite the presence of armed troops focused on ensuring

¹¹ *Congressional Record*, p. 34–6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 192, 61–7, 128.

freedmen's voting rights by 'suppressing banditti,' White Leagues had proved effective in helping to return political power in the South to the Democracy.¹³

Throughout 1874, Mississippians had witnessed widespread racial and political violence that had left hundreds dead. Most firmly in the minds of the state's citizens were the riots that had pervaded Vicksburg in December and driven the African-American Sheriff Peter Crosby from the city. The violence had left dozens of blacks dead and was only quelled by the deployment of federal troops.¹⁴ With the fracture of the Republicans over the nomination of Governor Adelbert Ames in 1875, however, Democrats sensed a return to power in the state. Under pressure from Ames, the state legislature passed a new Militia Act in the spring that empowered the governor to organise militia to put down violence. In response, Mississippi Democrats reasoned the new legislation 'had the effect of inducing the conservatives and democrats ... who desired a change of administration ... to think that [the bill demonstrated] the determination to carry the election by force or intimidation, and by military violence if necessary.'¹⁵ A particular grievance of Mississippi Democrats was the racial composition of militias. Just as General James Longstreet, the only high-ranking former-Confederate to join the Republican party, had commanded the alliance of metropolitan police and African American militiamen at the Battle of Liberty Place, the Mississippi militia act allowed for the recruitment and deployment of former-slaves to suppress white electoral violence. Democrats deplored the arming and recruitment of blacks as not only a desperate partisan attempt to sustain Republican rule, but as an attempt to humiliate and disempower whites in Mississippi. As they had done in Louisiana, whites banded together in White Leagues, gathered weapons, and began a systematic programme of violence and intimidation to keep Republican voters away from the polls in the autumn. White paramilitary groups broke up Republican meetings, threatened black families with violence, and intimidated white Republicans on the pretext that Ames was willing to use his own militia to do the same to Democrats.¹⁶ When the systematic attacks on Republican voters degenerated into massacres in the streets of southern cities, southern Democrats refused to acknowledge any involvement

¹³ J. N. Todd to Thomas F. Bayard, Jan. 7, 1875, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹⁴ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, pp. 148–51.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, *Mississippi in 1875. Report of the Select Committee to Enquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875 with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence in Two Volumes. Vol. I* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. LV.

¹⁶ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, p. 159.

in the fracas, claiming that the violence was either the result of private disputes, newly-armed blacks, or ‘entirely unpremeditated.’¹⁷

Insistent that the Republicans were obstructing sectional reconciliation, congressional Democrats vilified Ames for having ‘conjured up a spirit of despair and anxiety upon the part of the unhappy people over whom he had been placed to rule which threatened to wrap that State in flame and blood.’¹⁸ Democrats had found it difficult to adapt to a political environment in which African Americans were part of the political nation, but by the mid-1870s their condemnation of Republicans as obstructers of sectional reconciliation began to undermine northerners’ support for federal intervention in the South. The Democrats’ attack on southern Republican governance was not simply the continued repetition of the well-worn tropes of ‘tyranny’ and ‘despotism,’ but was deeply embedded within a reconciliatory tone. Confederate veteran Matt Ransom spoke at length in the Senate in February, fusing memories of the Lost Cause and wartime Unionism. He said that General Lee’s name:

now inspires me with higher and purer devotion to my country. It elevates me above sectional lines, it lifts me over local and temporary prejudices ... It was my fortune to be at Appomattox Court House to see General Lee and General Grant side by side. That scene can never fade from my memory ... Instead of sectional passions, divisions, strifes, let the blood, the tears, the affections of American soldiers, be they from the North or from the South, form a bow of peace that shall stand forever as the bond and arch of a united people. Upon it there will be drops of sorrow, but it will be radiant with honor and patriotic duty and hope.¹⁹

Congressional Democrats frequently came to the defence of the violent attacks perpetrated by southern whites, blaming Republicans for African American dependence on federal protection. They claimed Republican intervention had instead ‘of teaching [the freedman] to use wisely the gifts he has received ... keep him pining for some great imaginary blessing still ahead, some El Dorado ... to which your legislation is to transport him.’²⁰ In fact, Democrats argued that there was no hatred between southern whites and freedmen, and that Republicans had fabricated this for the ‘partisan purposes’ of justifying the use of military force during southern elections.²¹ By making explicit links

¹⁷ *Mississippi in 1875*, pp. LIV, 395, 409.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. LXXII.

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, 44th Cong., 2d Session, pp. 62–3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

between Republican misgovernment, ongoing violence, and racial tension, Democrats argued that only by overthrowing Republican rule could sectional reconciliation and racial cooperation become reality.

Five years before being signed into law in 1875, Charles Sumner's Civil Rights Act had been introduced into the Senate. It proposed to protect equal treatment in public accommodations, transportation, and education, alongside guaranteeing jury service for African Americans. Co-sponsored by the former Democrat, Benjamin Butler, Sumner's bill provided the legal grounds for racial integration in public accommodation and services. By the time it was passed in the aftermath of Sumner's death in 1874, the lofty ambitions of its author had been curtailed by dwindling northern public commitment to racial equality. Despite the bill's watering down, the Democratic press latched onto the bill as another example of unwarranted federal intervention that forced racial equality upon an unwilling white population and endangered sectional reconciliation.²² The *Indiana State Sentinel* claimed that 'the passage of the civil rights bill has loosened the floodgates of hate as they were never loosened before.'²³ Democratic newspapers across the nation reported widespread opposition to the bill, citing the examples of a manager of the Louisville Public Library refusing admission to a black barber, and of New York and Cincinnati hotels turning away black customers.²⁴ Democrats were uniformly opposed to the Civil Rights Bill, and sought to utilise white-line politics to suppress freedmen's rights and undermine Reconstruction.

Violent intimidation played an important role in ensuring black and white Republicans stayed away from the polls, but Democrats knew the importance of avoiding disturbances on election day. Had reports flooded in of a 'reign of terror' in the South, party leaders knew what the outcome would be – the election would be voided by Republicans' interventionism and home rule would once again slip from their grasp.²⁵ Instead, by conducting peaceful elections, Democratic leaders believed that northern onlookers would be unable to deny the legitimacy of any contest and Republicans would be forced to accept the result. The chairman of the state Democratic Executive Committee of Mississippi, James Z. George, sent telegrams to county level Democratic committees that read, 'Tell our people to use every effort to secure a peaceful election and prevent

²² *The Anderson Intelligencier* (S.C.), March 25, 1875.

²³ *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 1, 1875.

²⁴ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 6, 1875; *New York World*, March 4, 1875; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 5, 1875.

²⁵ *Inter Ocean*, July 13, 1875.

disorder. This must be done, if possible, so far as we are concerned. Faith must be kept in the peace agreement.²⁶ In Mississippi, Democrats disparaged reports of violence as election day approached, claiming that ‘It is entirely false that armed men are patrolling the streets and roads of Yazoo, with ropes at their saddles,’ and that when violence had erupted Democrats were quick to claim that ‘Negroes were, beyond question, the first to exhibit guns ... all our acts incident to a more vigorous campaign are misrepresented by the party seeking to hold power.’²⁷

Violence and intimidation would become a central theme in southern elections in 1876, and the Republicans hoped to use testimony from the Senate’s investigation of the Mississippi election for political gain in 1876.²⁸ Yet by the end of 1875, the conflation of racial and reconciliatory rhetoric had become a powerful tool for the Democrats. Public support of a continued federal presence in the South had begun to wane and so had commitment to racial equality. Despite this, the Democracy still had one barrier to overcome to ensure its return to the White House. Because many northerners feared the return of the ex-Rebels to national power, the bloody shirt remained a potent political tool for the Republicans. The Democrats had yet to think of a viable strategy to distance their party from its wartime taint of disloyalty, but with the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence just around the corner, however, Democratic leaders hoped to reinvigorate the party’s patriotic appeal.

1876: A Centennial Crisis

Democrats began the nation’s centennial year with a profound sense of optimism. Despite dissension over currency reform, many Democrats interpreted the party’s recent electoral success as a sign that they would soon be returning to the White House. On April 1, 1876, ex-Governor William Dorsheimer of New York proclaimed that, ‘I don’t believe that [the Republican] party which has become so corrupt can be reformed, while it remains in power.’²⁹ Despite Democratic hopes of riding the reform issue to the White House, the centennial contest threw both the Democratic party and the nation into another major crisis. Disputed electoral returns in Louisiana, Florida and Oregon threatened to

²⁶ Ibid., p. 397.

²⁷ *Mississippi in 1875*, pp. 391, 395.

²⁸ William Coker, ‘The United States Senate Investigation of the Mississippi Election of 1875,’ *Journal of Mississippi History* Vol. 37, No. 2 (June, 1975), pp. 143–63.

²⁹ Speech of William Dorsheimer, April 1, 1876. Montgomery Blair Papers, LOC.

plunge the country into renewed civil war, yet the Republicans and Democrats were able to reach a compromise over the winter of 1876–1877 to resolve the unprecedented situation. Following a series of bargains between southern Democrats and Republicans, and some dramatic u-turns from northern Democrats, the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was sworn into office and Reconstruction was effectively ended.

On March 13, 1876, the *New York Herald* claimed that the country had been ‘afflicted with a “Centennial” mania,’ and that American life was being consumed by the commemoration.³⁰ The paper wrote that ‘we have “Centennial coffee” for breakfast and take a morning stroll with a “Centennial cigar,” that ‘Fashion demands a “Centennial hat” and a “Centennial scarf,”’ and that ‘politicians already talk about a “Centennial canvass” in which there shall be no candidate in whose veins do not run the blue blood of the Revolution.’³¹ To many Democrats, the centennial offered an opportunity to demonstrate how far the nation had come since the Civil War. Much has been written by scholars about African American involvement in the Centennial as an exercise in constructing usable pasts, how relations with Native Americans deteriorated as a result of the exhibition, and how the Philadelphia celebrations were used to forward sectional reconciliation.³² Despite the clear plans of politicians to use the Centennial for party gain, little has been written on the partisan dimensions of the Centennial celebration.³³ For northern Democrats the Centennial presented an opportunity to demonstrate that the South had accepted the military results of the war. In turn, they hoped that by emphasising their party’s nationalism they could blunt Republican bloody shirt rhetoric, ensure the restoration of home rule and return the South to Democratic control. The *Baltimore Sun*, the city’s leading Democratic newspaper, predicted a ‘year full of incident,’ in which for ‘the first time in many years there is a considerable change in the political complexion at Washington.’³⁴

³⁰ *New York Herald*, March 13, 1876.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Mitch Kachun, ‘Before the Eyes of All Nations: African-American Identity and Historical Memory at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876,’ *Pennsylvania History* Vol. 65, No. 3 (June, 1998), pp. 300–23; Robert A. Trennert, ‘Popular Imagery and the American Indian: A Centennial View,’ *New Mexico Historical Review* Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer, 1976), pp. 215–32; Jack Noe, ‘Representative Men: The Post-Civil War Political Struggle over Texas’s Commissioners to the 1876 Centennial Exhibition,’ *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Vol. 120, No. 2 (October, 2016), pp. 162–87; Jack Noe, “‘Everybody is Centennializing”: White Southerners and the 1876 Centennial,’ *American Nineteenth Century History* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Dec., 2016), pp. 325–43; Susanna W. Gold, “‘Fighting It Over Again”: The Battle of Gettysburg at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition,’ *Civil War History* Vol. 54, No. 3 (Sep., 2008), pp. 277–310.

³³ May 8, 1875, Jubal A. Early Papers, LOC; March 17, 20, 28, Stevenson Papers, LOC.

³⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, February 2, 1876.

No matter how deeply thoughts about the Centennial pervaded the nation, not all Americans felt optimistic about the celebrations. Southerners felt particularly aggrieved that rather than finding an answer to the economic crisis, northerners were more concerned about canonising the Union war effort. The *New Orleans Democrat* asked its readership, ‘What has the hundredth anniversary of American independence given us but degradation for our State and these bitter and shameful things?’³⁵ The paper claimed that if Louisiana attended the Centennial celebrations, ‘she is there ... in rags and chains, and because she has been driven there by the whips and kicks of those who rule over and disgrace her. Louisiana at the Centennial is indeed a bitter, burning, infamous lie.’³⁶ For northern Democrats, this posed a problem. While they hoped to use the Centennial to solidify the relationship between the northern and southern wings of their party, the bitterness felt by some southern whites at their treatment during Reconstruction did not project the reconciliatory spirit that northern Democrats had hoped for. Yet, while some southern Democrats disowned the Centennial, their northern co-partisans proved ready to embrace it, at least cautiously.

While the *New York Herald* claimed that the ‘Centennial is perhaps the most remarkable event that will happen in our day,’ the paper also tried to manage public expectations of the celebration.³⁷ According to the paper, Philadelphia was ‘in an ecstasy of anticipation and preparation,’ but the *Herald* warned that similar celebrations in Europe had shown ‘the results of centuries of civilization,’ and that in comparison, ‘America will show the results of one century of hard work ... We shall learn, if we apply the lesson aright, that we are not the greatest of nations; that, with our strength and wealth, we may sit at the feet of the elder world and see how we have been surpassed in the achievements of human genius and skill.’³⁸ As the Centennial approached, managing expectations became increasingly difficult. Baltimore newspapers reported that ‘on no other former occasion has the gala display of flags been so universal in the city.’³⁹ Focus on the nation’s future became a principal theme during the Centennial, and Democrats hoped to appropriate it in order to repair sectional relations within their party and parry the Republicans’ efforts to keep Civil War memories alive. Newspaper editors made

³⁵ *New Orleans Democrat*, May 14, 1876.

³⁶ *Ibid*; On the Louisiana response to the Centennial, see Burlie W. Brown, ‘Louisiana and the Nation’s First One-Hundredth Birthday,’ *Louisiana History* Vol. 18, No. 3 (July, 1977), pp. 261–75.

³⁷ *New York Herald*, March 13, 1876.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ *Baltimore Sun*, July 4, 1876.

comparisons between the Revolution and the Civil War in Unionist rhetoric that they hoped would appeal to embittered southerners and patriotic northern voters alike. The *New York Herald* claimed that if ‘any one event in this century shows that we have not fallen from the standard of our fathers it is the war for the Union ... That war is far enough off for both sides to see that any other result than the integrity of the Union would have been a calamity. What a sad, sad day this would be if instead of one Union, one Flag, one confederation of States, if instead of one common memory we should celebrate our independence as a rent Republic! It would indeed be the centennial of humiliation and shame.’⁴⁰

Despite the hopes of many Democrats that the Centennial would provide the country with some much-needed unity, the celebrations in Philadelphia were limited in their ability to reconcile North and South. The Civil War had a central position in the Centennial, with northerners celebrating Union victories at Gettysburg, and without a prominent southern presence, the Philadelphia convention appeared more a chastisement of the Confederacy than an attempt to further sectional reconciliation.⁴¹ In the midst of the ‘Centennial mania’ that gripped the nation, Democrats collided over the nomination of their presidential candidate. Democrats clearly intended to portray themselves as reformers, and in April former New York governor Dorsheimer presented the election as a question about ‘whether the American people have virtue enough to drive the money changers out of their temple, and to give to the country that honest, prudent and economical government which it used to have.’⁴² In doing so, Democrats hoped to capitalise on the scandals that had been uncovered during Grant’s presidency by portraying their party as the only institution able to end rampant corruption of the administration.

When the party’s leaders arrived in St. Louis to choose their presidential nominee, it soon became clear that the decision would be made based upon the two great questions of the time: ending corrupt Republican Reconstruction and currency reform. Democrats hoped they could nominate a ticket that not only unified their party for the upcoming contest, but also appealed to the numerous independent voters, many of whom were reform-minded Liberal Republicans. But nominating a ticket that could reconcile hard-

⁴⁰ *New York Herald*, July 4, 1876.

⁴¹ On the central position of the Battle of Gettysburg at the Centennial, see, Gold, “‘Fighting It Over Again,’” pp. 277–310.

⁴² William Dorsheimer Speech, April 1, 1876, Blair Papers, LOC.

money northeasterners with soft-money midwesterners would be a strenuous task. While many northern Democrats felt positive about the party's chances, claiming they could 'scarcely conceive of our defeat under any circumstances,' the difficulty of unifying the party did not point to such a clear-cut success.⁴³

On May 2, former Confederate general and incumbent governor of Virginia, James L. Kemper, wrote to Montgomery Blair on the state of the Democracy and the role of the southern delegates in the convention. Kemper asserted that if it were his choice, 'the South would give no vote at St. Louis as between competing Democrats, but would simply ratify the ultimate choice of the North.'⁴⁴ Kemper's suggestion reflected the postwar dominance of northern Democrats in the party and how fragile public opinion in the South was towards sectional relations. Kemper did not share the views of many of his northern brethren that the party was strong and on the verge of returning to national supremacy, but rather that it was 'in the midst of many difficulties which some of its leaders don't see.'⁴⁵ The Virginian believed that sectional animosity was still ingrained in northerners to such an extent that 'any false step on the part of the South will be the explosion of a mine which will blow up the Democracy ... Any zealous activity of ours in any direction is made to mean renewed secession either open or disguised.'⁴⁶

With uncertainty rife within Democratic ranks over the presidential election, party leaders pondered who in their ranks could defeat Rutherford B. Hayes and his running mate, William A. Wheeler. Democrats claimed that Republicans' insistence to continue to wave the bloody shirt obstructed sectional reconciliation and the national prosperity that would follow it.⁴⁷ Republican suggestions that it was too soon to trust the Democracy with the control of the national government, due to its large southern element, had long been a successful rhetorical tool that Democrats hoped to blunt by portraying the Republicans as greedy partisans who were so desperate to hold on to their offices that they were willing to stand in the way of economic resurgence.⁴⁸

On June 24, the hotels of St. Louis were filled with Democrats who were excited at the prospect of the party's approaching convention. A heavy downpour that night cooled the air, making for a humid opening day as 'rivers of perspiration ran down the

⁴³ Martin H. Bouce to Randall, April 7, 1876, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁴⁴ James L. Kemper to Montgomery Blair, May 2, 1876, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ John B. Read to Randall, April 1, 1876., Randall Papers, HSP.

⁴⁸ James J. Fanau to Allen, Feb. 3, 1876, Allen Papers, LOC.

faces of the fierce democracy.⁴⁹ The delegates hoped to wrap up proceedings and adjourn in two days, but division over the party's presidential nomination made this outcome unlikely. Having carried the New York governorship by fifty thousand votes in 1874, and with a staunch reformist background, Samuel J. Tilden appeared to have the necessary credentials. But the New Yorker split opinion within the Democratic ranks. According to his supporters Tilden's role in dismantling the Tweed ring in 1871 was clear evidence that he would 'use all his energies to restore the government to its ancient honor and dignity,' but to those who were unconvinced by his dedication to reform, he was seen as little more than 'a political trickster.'⁵⁰

As the convention opened, the Chairman of the National Democratic Committee, Augustus Schell, and the Temporary Chairman to the Convention, Henry M. Watterson, latched straight onto the issue of reform as 'the inexorable demand of the American people' that could not be 'underestimated, overlooked, [or] avoided,' lest 'we shall lose the poor man's last hope – civil liberty itself.'⁵¹ The opening speeches of the convention focused clearly upon the question of 'whether honest government, administered by honest men, shall be restored to the American people.'⁵² As they had done in the years preceding the convention, Democrats relentlessly claimed how closely related the issues of reform, reconciliation, and the end of Reconstruction were. Before reading the party's platform to the delegation, August Belmont proclaimed that the election 'will decide whether the corrupt and sectional party ... is to be fastened upon us for four years more, or whether the Democratic party will be able to regain the reins of government in order to guide us back to peace, union, and prosperity.' Belmont argued that 'in order to escape the indignation of an outraged people, whose confidence they [Republicans] have so shamefully betrayed, they appeal to sectional and sectarian prejudices in order to sow the seeds of discord between North and South, Protestant and Catholic.'⁵³ While reform and opposition to the Republicans' refusal to provide funds for Catholic public schooling, the underlying tensions over economic and financial policy came to dictate the proceedings. In closing the discussions on the first day of the convention, Samuel 'Sunset' Cox urged

⁴⁹ *Baltimore Sun*, June 26, 1876.

⁵⁰ Samuel B. Churchill to Montgomery Blair, May 6, 1876, Blair Papers, LOC; Sanford E. Church to Belmont, June 12, 1876, CU; Rian N. Raneche to Montgomery Blair, May 9, 1876, Blair Papers, LOC; *Times-Picayune*, June 26, 1876; *Times-Picayune*, June 28, 1876; *Baltimore Sun*, June 23, 1876.

⁵¹ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in St. Louis, Mo., June 27th, 28th and 29th, 1876. With an Appendix Containing the Letters of Acceptance of Gov. Tilden and Gov. Hendricks* (St. Louis: Woodward, Tiernan & Hale, Printers and Binders, 1876), pp. 18–20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.

his fellow co-partisans to forego the money question that he saw as a minor issue that could be patiently resolved by curing ‘the body politic from all its cancers.’ He argued that ‘it is not on these mere fiscal or temporary questions that we are to win this contest altogether. We have fundamental principles of government as old as the revolution, which have marked parties from the beginning; the idea of home rule, self-government, express and granted powers. Stand by them.’⁵⁴

When it came to candidates, the Democrats had a number of strong options to choose from in 1876. Former Union general Winfield Scott Hancock appealed greatly to many Democrats across the nation due to his ability to combat Republican bloody shirt rhetoric; Thomas A. Hendricks’ conversion to the soft-money cause engendered him to many Midwesterners; and Bayard held considerable appeal in the South and among Northeasterners who opposed Tilden. For the influential hard-money delegates from the northeast, Tilden was the logical choice. He had developed a popular reputation as a leading reformer, had strong hard-money credentials, a measure of personal wealth that could be used during the canvass, and he had demonstrated his ability to secure his home state of New York by sweeping the race for governor in 1874 by a plurality of 50,000 votes.

Ultimately, the party compromised over the money question and planted itself firmly upon reform and Republican corruption as its campaign message. Tilden, as the candidate with the strongest reform credentials headed up the ticket, and Thomas A. Hendricks, a soft-money advocate from Indiana, was nominated as his running mate. Despite clear divisions in the convention, with Daniel Voorhees clashing with Belmont over resumption, the strong appeals made by Belmont and the President of the Convention, former Union general, John A. McClelland, for the party to ‘guide us back to peace, union and prosperity,’ struck a chord with delegates.⁵⁵ And despite conflicts over currency, delegates tried to put sectionalism behind them. On the second day of the convention, former vice president and Confederate general, John Breckinridge, addressed the delegation and proclaimed,

I do not like to hear so much in this Convention of the East, of the West, and of the South. We talk as if we were three separate governments, or three separate countries, under some unknown and intangible treat of

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 72–3.

⁵⁵ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in St. Louis, Mo., June 27th, 28th and 29th, 1876.*, pp. 60–73, 102–4.

alliance ... Where does the West and the East begin? Where is the South of which we hear so much? We are not here as Eastern men, or as Southern men, but we are here as Democrats and Americans.⁵⁶

The platform itself, penned by August Belmont, stressed the need to protect the people 'from a corrupt centralism which, after inflicting upon ten States the rapacity of carpet-bag tyrannies, has honeycombed the offices of the Federal Government itself with incapacity, waste and fraud; infected States and municipalities with the contagion of misrule, and locked fast the prosperity of an industrious people in the paralysis of hard times.'⁵⁷ On the money question, the party's stance reflected the fissure between soft and hard money Democrats. While, to the delight of hard-money advocates, the platform committed the party to a return to specie payments, the simultaneous pledge to repeal the Resumption Act of 1875 equated to an effectual dodge of the greenback question.⁵⁸

While the party attempted to paper over financial policy disputes, consensus was easier to achieve over the catch-all issue of government reform which appealed not only to Democrats across the country but also to many independent voters previously aligned with the Liberal Republican movement.⁵⁹ As the nation entered the campaign, the battle-lines had been drawn: the reformist Democracy aligned against the 'reckless, selfish, and aggressive' Republicans.⁶⁰

Drawing from the experience of the 1874 congressional midterms, Democrats focused tightly upon the reform issue, and highlighted the corrupt nature of Republican government. They frequently referred to Tilden as the 'ring-breaker' and attacked the Republicans for the vast expenditure of the Grant presidency that had 'furnished food for the corrupt manipulators of political machinery.'⁶¹ The Republicans hoped to exploit anti-Catholic sentiment by making a congressional debate about public schooling a central issue in the campaign. In December 1875, Republican congressman James G. Blaine had introduced a proposed amendment to the Constitution to settle growing agitation over the use of public funds in education. The public schooling issue had first reared its head in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War when Charles Sumner had proposed to only

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵⁷ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of Presidential Elections, Vol. IV*, pp. 1437–8.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Liberal Republicans present at the Democratic National Convention included the 1872 vice presidential nominee, Benjamin Gratz-Brown.

⁶⁰ *Official Proceedings, 1876*, p. 65.

⁶¹ *Why the People Want a Change: The Republican Party Reviewed: Its Sins of Commission and Omission. A Summary of the Leading Events in our History Under Republican Administration* (New York: National Democratic Committee, 1876), pp. 30–1, 36–7.

readmit southern states to Congress once public schools had been established. Though this was not adopted, the Department of Education was established in 1867, and the funding of public schools became a particularly divisive issue. In New York, the Democratic Tammany Hall had supported a provision to ensure that one-fifth of state funds for education be used to support non-public schools, and in New York, this invariably meant to Catholic ones. By the mid-1870s, funding for schools had become a national issue, and the Republicans were determined to capitalise on anti-Catholic sentiment that was opposed to the use of public money on Catholic schools. Blaine's Amendment proposed to prohibit the use of public money for sectarian schools, and while it was defeated in the Senate, the Republicans hoped to use the issue to rouse anti-Catholic sentiment among its predominantly Protestant voter base.⁶² Democrats resoundingly condemned the Republicans for sowing 'the seeds of religious discord where now for more than a century every religion has been tolerated' and for encroaching once more on the rights of the states by trying to centralise more power in Washington.⁶³ The Democrats further pledged their opposition to the Blaine Amendment in their platform by attacking the 'false issue by which they [Republicans] would enkindle sectarian strife' in order to solidify their support among Catholic communities, and, in practice the issue lost the Democrats few votes.⁶⁴

Beyond the debate over public schooling, the Republicans predictably played upon popular memories of the War of the Rebellion, disparaged southern violence and furiously waved the bloody shirt. Worsening violence across the southern states had put an end to the fusionist strategies of many moderate southern Democrats and played into the hands of the Republicans. In Hamburg, South Carolina, in July, a paramilitary band of Democrats called the Red Shirts descended on a Republican meeting and massacred six freedmen. Northern Republicans immediately condemned the brutality of southern Democrats and made links between the reform message of northern Democrats and the white supremacist violence of southerners (see Figure 5.2).

⁶² On the public schooling issue, see Ward McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Summers, *Ordeal of the Reunion*, pp. 230–49; Holt, *By One Vote*, pp. 121–3; Benjamin Justice, 'Thomas Nast and the Public School of the 1870s,' *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 45, No.2 (June, 2005), pp. 171–206.

⁶³ Speech of William Dorsheimer, April 1, 1876, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁶⁴ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. IV*, p. 1439.



THE HAMBURG RIOT, JULY, 1876

Figure 5.2 Thomas Nast, 'The Hamburg Riot, July, 1876,' *Harper's Weekly*

With widespread southern racial violence directed at Republican supporters, bloody shirt rhetoric resonated with northern voters. As the nation neared election day, the feeling was reminiscent of 1860–61. On September 15, Thomas F. Bayard wrote to August Belmont that 'sometimes it seems to me that the red glare of the Civil War, and the whirl of excitement and wild success have destroyed all capacity for calm and just reflection and decision' and that the solid opposition to Republican rule among southern whites could only result in 'general disaster – and a [sic] estimation of that want of confidence in the future which is today an ... obstacle to restored prosperity.'⁶⁵ Similarly, James J. Farnau told his fellow Ohioan William Allen that 'we are in the midst of another heated campaign, which will leave its mark on the country, as permanently as that of 1860.'⁶⁶ Not only did Democrats highlight this widespread fracture in the national political landscape, but they also feared for the future of the party if they could not secure victory. Democrats moaned that 'since the rebellion the Republicans think they have the exclusive right to the United States, and that the Democratic party have no lot or part in

⁶⁵ Thomas F. Bayard to Belmont, Sept. 15, 1876, Belmont Papers, CU.

⁶⁶ James J. Farnau to Allen, Sept. 17, 1876., Allen Papers, LOC.

it,' and worried that 'if the Democracy cannot carry the election this year ... it will never be able to push the party in power, from its place.'⁶⁷

As October arrived, the outlook appeared good for Democrats.⁶⁸ In the South, the violent suppression of voters by White Leagues and Red Shirts kept many Republicans away from the polls, and the Democracy's reform message gained traction in states across the North, including Tilden's home state of New York. After turnout had dwindled in 1872 to just 72%, American voters turned out in much higher numbers in 1876. And as the results flooded in, Democrats began to celebrate a victory. Alongside securing New York, the Tilden ticket obtained a narrow victory in Indiana, and redeemed the majority of the southern states, and needed just one more Electoral College vote. As Democratic newspapers exalted that Tilden was to be inaugurated however, Republican papers began to declare Hayes the victor.⁶⁹ With both sides claiming victories and accusing the other party of fraud in Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Oregon, the nation soon descended into a crisis that pushed the Union to the brink of renewed civil war.

The Compromise of 1877: A Democratic Crisis

As the country waited with baited breath for news of the identity of their next president, Democrats hardened their belief that the Republicans were attempting to steal the election. Both parties had been equally fraudulent in their attempts to secure victory in 1876, but they also professed innocence and demanded justice for their party and Americans. Throughout November and December, Democrats continually worried about how the election would be settled, but believed that as Tilden had carried the popular vote, he was the rightful president.⁷⁰ Party leaders received frequent correspondence that claimed that 'nothing but justice will satisfy an aggrieved and outraged people,' that 'if three states can be counted out to such pleasure of the dominant party to-day – what of the morrow?'⁷¹ Democratic supporters hoped that 'our trusted leaders will not tell us, that the coming years will right this wrong. We believe it not. We are not clamoring for a

⁶⁷ Ibid.; Alfred Gilmour to Belmont, Nov. 1, 1876, Belmont Papers, CU.

⁶⁸ M. H. Flaney to Randall, Oct. 16, 1876, Randall Papers, HSP; R. S. Gibson to Randall, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁶⁹ *New York Sun*, Nov. 9, 1876; *New York Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1876.

⁷⁰ In the popular vote, Tilden secured 4,285,992 (50.9%) votes to Hayes's 4,033,768 (47.9%). Results taken from Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. IV*, p. 1487.

⁷¹ Heles Neleter to Thomas F. Bayard, Dec. 12, 1876, Bayard Papers, LOC. Also see, John T. Hoffman to Thomas F. Bayard, Dec. 8, 1876, Bayard Papers, LOC; George Lunt to Thomas F. Bayard, Dec. 3, 1876, Bayard Papers, LOC.

triumph of party – we simply ask that right should triumph over wrong – that principle and manhood shall once again be allowed to come to the surface.⁷² The debate over the election result therefore became a question of more significance than just party politics. Rather, it reflected the deep-seated worries of Americans for the implications of a fraudulently carried election. Having witnessed the downfall of the Tweed Ring in 1871, Americans could scarcely comprehend the consequences of the presidency being stolen by political tricksters. As the party that had cast itself as the saviours of honest government during the campaign, the Democracy's commitment to these claims came under close scrutiny during the winter of 1876–1877.

As the new year passed with no resolution to the crisis, Democrats took a firm stance on the dispute. On January 8, 1877, Gideon Welles wrote to Montgomery Blair that 'it is sad to see so many ... good men, demoralized by these abominable proceedings – willing to have party triumph by fraud and violence regardless of consequence.'⁷³ This stance would become the public position of the Democrats who cast the Republicans as enemies of the republic.⁷⁴ With no resolution in sight and the inauguration rapidly approaching, Congress agreed for a commission to be established to decide the outcome of the election. When the Electoral Commission Bill passed, Democrats felt positive about the situation. The commission would consist of 15 members, equally split between Republicans and Democrats, with the intention that the independent Supreme Court justice, Illinoisan David Davis, would have the deciding vote. Democrats reasoned that as Tilden had polled the majority of the public vote that Davis's independence would lead him to side with the New Yorker. Convinced of this outcome, Thomas F. Bayard wrote to August Belmont that that he believed the commission would 'not only a present bridge over threatened disaster – but a firm highway for continuous travel ... I believe Mr. Tilden's induction to office is by this made not only possible but probable.'⁷⁵ Senator Bayard's optimism would, however, prove short-lived.

In the midst of the electoral crisis, Davis had been in the running to be elected as an Illinois senator. Knowing this, Tilden's nephew, William T. Pelton had worked with Cyrus McCormick to fraudulently sway the election in Davis' favour to endear the support of the justice on the Electoral Commission. Pelton and McCormick's strategy had

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Welles to Montgomery Blair, Jan. 8, 1877, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁷⁴ Ferdinand Hiller to Montgomery Blair, Jan. 25, 1877, Blair Papers, LOC.

⁷⁵ Thomas F. Bayard to Jan. 27, 1877. Belmont Family Papers, CU.

worked, but backfired when Davis immediately refused to serve on the commission once he learned of his election. In his place, Republican justice Joseph Bradley was appointed to the commission. With the Republicans now outnumbering the Democrats eight to seven, Democratic opinion split. Pennsylvania Democrat, Joseph Nelson, immediately claimed that it was ‘so evident that the Republicans on this Commission are so biased by party prejudices that ... would it not be better for every Democratic member to resign forthwith, and then let affairs take another course.’⁷⁶ Others noted that while ‘some of our people are gloomy over the matter ... I have hope that all will be well in the end. [But] if the panel to which the question has been submitted fails its duty, through party fear or favor ... certainly we are amidst evil times, and the hopes of a free Republic being long contained in this country are fast fading out.’⁷⁷ However Democrats felt about the likely success of the commission, most party supporters simply hoped that ‘nothing will be proposed or done by the democrats that will compromise the high integrity taught by democracy.’⁷⁸ If the commission ruled in favour of Hayes, therefore, Democrats were faced with a tough decision that threatened to alienate their supporters; resist or acquiesce.

When the Electoral Commission reached its verdict, granting Hayes the victory by eight to seven in a vote dictated by partisanship, Democrats were outraged. Across the nation, party supporters ‘gave up all hope of having justice done us by mortal man.’⁷⁹ Congressional Democrats were bombarded by letters from their constituents urging the party to ‘adopt a firm and courageous policy – one that we can fight to the bitter end.’⁸⁰ W.W.H. Davis, editor of the Pennsylvanian newspaper, the *Doylestown Democrat*, wrote to Speaker of the House Samuel Randall suggesting that ‘it becomes very important for the Democratic party to fix upon a policy, which should be followed without deviation to the end of Hayes’ term. It will never do for the party to ... submit to this monstrous usurpation and outrage. Our policy should be peaceful, but bitter, aggressive, and unyielding.’⁸¹ Boston Democrat, Hiram Caper went even further in his opposition, claiming that a ‘more infamous record cannot be found in history – and it should be boldly

⁷⁶ Joseph Nelson to Randall, Feb. 10, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP. Also see, Joseph Hemphill to Randall, Feb. 11, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁷⁷ R. E. Monaghan to Randall, Feb. 10, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁷⁸ Hahum Caper to Thomas F. Bayard, Feb. 11, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁷⁹ Louis B. Lynch to Thomas F. Bayard, Feb. 19, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁸⁰ W. W. H. Davis to Randall, Feb. 17, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP. Also see, Samuel Ingersoll to Randall, Feb. 17, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP; Perry H. Smith to Randall, Feb. 17, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP; John M. Pierce to Randall, Feb. 17, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP; D. W. Raland to Randall, Feb. 19, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP; Charles House to Thomas F. Bayard, Feb. 14, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁸¹ W. W. H. Davis to Randall, Feb. 15, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

met by the Democracy. Nothing the Democrats can do will be so bad as the submission to such fraud and revolution.’⁸² Democratic newspapers denounced the decision of the Commission, claiming that ‘[t]he game is played out. Our elective monarch for the Olympiad beginning next 4th of March will be a person elected by a minority of the nation only, and set up against the will of the majority by the effective agencies of fraud, forgery, bribery, partisan sharp practices.’⁸³

With public pressure and attention fixed firmly upon Washington, the national leadership initiated a policy to stop the passage of the bill authorizing Hayes’ election. Led by the filibusters and delaying strategies of Senator Bayard, Fernando Wood, and Samuel J. Randall, the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, supported by the Democratic minority in the Senate, set out with the intention of stopping Hayes’ inauguration. With a Republican majority in the Senate, however, the battleground emerged in the Democratic-controlled House, where party supporters nationwide hoped that their representatives’ integrity would hold. It was in these critical stages that the presidential crisis became more than a simple question of whether Hayes would be inaugurated or not; rather, for the Democracy, it became a question of whether party supporters would be able to trust the party in the future.

With the Democratic House holding firm after nearly a week of deliberations, and the inauguration drawing closer, Americans began to contemplate the implications of having no definitive answer to who would assume the presidency and what impact this would have on the nation. Republicans urged congressional Democrats to support the commission’s conclusion, claiming that it was their patriotic duty to ensure the nation had a leader come March. Democrats however, dismissed such reasoning by asserting that ‘We fought in 1776 for the right of choosing our rulers and shall we give up this right in 1877?’⁸⁴ The uncertainty of the nation’s future security with no president-elect caused divisions within the Democratic ranks at Washington. Party activists worried that ‘low murmurings of discontent in reference to the settlement of the Presidential Question, has assumed proportions that portend evil to the future harmony of the Democratic Party.’⁸⁵ Party supporters continued to flood congressional Democrats with messages of support. They urged Speaker Randall ‘to stand fast in [your] present attitude’ as ‘our future

⁸² Hiram Caper to Randall, Feb. 17, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁸³ *Lawrence Daily Journal*, Feb. 24, 1877.

⁸⁴ John Maynard to Randall, Feb. 20, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁸⁵ H. G. Smitcher to Randall, Feb. 23, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

prosperity, our reputation among foreign nations – yea our very liberties demand men to grapple with and throttle those Republican demons in their den of iniquity.’⁸⁶ But correctly sensing that many southern Democrats who were eager to secure investment in the region were being persuaded by Republicans to support Hayes’ inauguration in return for federal aid for a planned Texas & Pacific Railroad, Randall began to turn his back on the filibustering Democrats.⁸⁷

Despite the appeals of rank-and-file Democrats ‘for justice’s sake, for decency’s sake, for our children’s sake prevent this most damnable fraud from being consummated if possible,’ Randall and Fernando Wood turned against the obstructionist sentiment of the Democratic masses.⁸⁸ Believing that the nation had to avoid a renewed civil war at all costs, Randall helped to ensure Hayes’s inauguration.⁸⁹ Against this backdrop, the u-turn of Randall, Wood and the Democratic leadership in the House took on new significance. Despite the emphasis scholars have placed on the bargaining success of southern Bourbon Democrats with northern Republicans, it was the actions of leading Democrats that held the most significance for the party moving forward.⁹⁰ Having heard rumours that the southern Democrats were preparing to back Hayes’s claim to the presidency, these leading Democrats saw little benefit in preventing a seemingly inevitable outcome. Rather than returning to the obstructionist tactics of the late-1860s, Randall and Wood believed that accepting the result, however damaging in the short-term, would provide long-term benefits to the party. In their eyes, peacefully acquiescing in Hayes’s election, would show that Democrats were not blinded by partisanship and in turn would damage the potency of Republican attacks on their nationalism and sense of patriotic responsibility. In light of the intense partisanship of 1876, and the burning desire of Democrats to return to the White House, the willingness of leading Democrats to acquiesce was remarkable helped to pave the way for victory in 1884.

With Rutherford B. Hayes’ inauguration on March 4, 1877, Americans breathed a hefty sigh of relief. As a result of the reversals of leading Democrats such as Randall and Wood, alongside a substantial backing by southern congressional Democrats, the country retreated from the threat of renewed civil war. Yet for the Democrats who now faced the consequences of their decision to support the compromise, the crisis had only

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 580–1.

⁸⁸ W. R. Richardson to Randall, Feb. 23, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁸⁹ Mushkat, *Fernando Wood* p. 219.

⁹⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 580–1.

just begun – a crisis that scholars have not yet fully addressed. Despite losing 26 seats in the House, the Democracy still retained its majority in that chamber. It also reduced the Republicans' Senate majority to just 5. Many northern and southern Democratic supporters felt betrayed by the actions of many party leaders in allowing the Republicans to regain the White House. They bemoaned the fact that the 'people of this country have been deceived and cheated' and that the 'Democratic party has been murdered, the dead cannot be restored to life.'⁹¹ The *Lawrence Daily Journal* deplored the 'infamous dirt-eating' of the congressional Democrats who supported the compromise, and warned that '[t]hey may appeal to the people; but the appeal will be in vain. The "democratic" party dog is dead.'⁹² The rank-and-file Democrats, who were deeply angered by the party leadership's cowardice, were not cognisant that they were acting in the party's long-term interests. Samuel Barlow recognised this fact when, in March, he wrote to Thomas Bayard 'I can say, notwithstanding the result, that it is much better than war or even any long delayed settlement and what we have lost at home we have more than gained abroad, as the whole world is astounded at our ability to settle such a question without a resort to arms.'⁹³

Labour and the Third Party Challenge, 1877–1878

With the electoral crisis settled and Hayes inaugurated president, Americans returned to the critical issue of rejuvenating the failing economy. Southern Democrats had supported the compromise partly because of the promise of a major new southern railroad that would provide the region with a desperately needed economic boost. This, coupled with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South to their barracks, seemed to signal a new dawn for southern whites who had been anxious to 'redeem' the region from carpetbag rule. In solving one question however, another raised its head to confront the Democrats.

Following the third wage cut in the space of a year, employees of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Martinsburg, West Virginia, began a strike in July 1877 that would last into September. Railroad workers refused to allow trains to move until the corporation

⁹¹ Belmont to Thomas F. Bayard, March 9, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC; John C. Gordon to Thomas F. Bayard, March 24, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC; William R. Richardson to Randall, March 1, 1877, Randall Papers, HSP.

⁹² *Lawrence Daily Journal*, Feb. 24, 1877.

⁹³ Barlow to Thomas F. Bayard, March 8, 1877, Bayard Papers, LOC.

guaranteed to increase wages. As news of the Martinsburg strike spread, labourers in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, St. Louis, New York, Albany, Buffalo, and Chicago joined the West Virginians in their stand against the railroaders. The strike became more than a localised dispute over wages – a nationwide protest against monopolisation, embodied by the railroads and the inequality brought about by industrial capitalism. While the Democratic press did not denounce the strike immediately, as it spread, causing millions of dollars in damage to property, the *New York Herald* condemned strikers for ‘aiming a savage and ruthless blow at the public peace and order.’⁹⁴ The Great Strike highlighted issues that the party was yet to solve. The increasingly business-oriented Bourbon party leadership was slowly but surely disenchanting working class supporters of the party. The consolidation of class structures during the Civil War and Reconstruction had not only increased class divisions, but also changed expectations of the role of the American state. Industrial workers expected the government not simply to bow to the wishes of monopolists, but to protect the working classes from exploitation. Throughout Reconstruction, the Democracy had been trying to reconcile this expectation to protect the working class with its belief in laissez-faire. With the Great Strike, the party leadership was forced to confront how committed they were to the well being of their working-class supporters.

Labour unrest, coupled with ongoing divisions over the currency question, put the Democracy in a precarious position. In the wake of the fractious Electoral Commission proceedings, Democrats hoped to find unifying issues to heal the party’s rifts. Since 1871, the Democracy had made civil service reform the cornerstone of the party’s national strategy, and in the aftermath of the presidential crisis, the reformist message of the party continued to resonate with the public. At the Mississippi Democratic convention in August 1877, Lucius Q. C. Lamar spoke on the state of national politics and stressed the Democracy’s importance to the South. Lamar said that ‘there can be no disputing the proposition that ... the Democratic party is entitled to the credit of having rescued the South from oppression, and the whole country from the despotism in which corrupt Radicalism sought to plunge it.’⁹⁵ The Mississippi senator hoped to heal the wounds inflicted upon the party earlier that year by stressing its continuing opposition to tyranny. He hoped that by claiming that ‘it is on duty now guarding against the encroachments of

⁹⁴ *New York Herald*, July 19, 22, 23, 1877.

⁹⁵ *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 14, 1877.

monopolies and the threats of centralization' that the party could consolidate its support among working-class Americans.

Despite the claims of the partisan press that the 'Democratic party is the best friend of the working man' and that should 'he desire a better state of affairs, more labor and better pay, it would be well for him to spurn all the delusions of a "Greenback" party, "National" party or any other organization save the true and tried Democratic party,' division within the party ranks over currency undermined these assertions.⁹⁶ Since 1876, the Democrats had tried to galvanise faith in the party by effectively repealing the Resumption Act, and stopping further contraction of paper currency. They had also moved towards the abolition of the National banks and pushed for tariff reform to aid agricultural and labouring interests, but the party remained 'hopelessly divided' over currency issues and lacked a coherent financial creed.⁹⁷ Many Americans were disappointed that unemployment among the working classes had seen little improvement, and the Democratic-controlled House had 'done little or nothing ... to relieve the suffering of the laboring classes.'⁹⁸ The growth of support for the new Greenback party was more than the result of a discussion over the theoretical basis of money. Rather, it was the result of widespread disillusionment with the Democrats and the Republicans. The two major parties had provided little respite from poverty to the working classes, and had instead endorsed policies that helped commerce and business flourish in the belief that the fruits of profit would improve the lives of labouring citizens.⁹⁹ In this environment, the Greenback challenge was the outcome of the two-party system's inability to reflect the needs of working-class voters, and provided an opportunity for a natural alliance between supporters of soft-money and disillusioned labourers.¹⁰⁰

On July 15, 1878 Frank Gibbs, a Massachusetts resident, wrote to the former Union general, Benjamin F. Butler, to commend his stance on the currency question. Gibbs called for a new party 'with new issues, new principles, and a new name' to be established with Butler as its standard-bearer. He claimed that 'the parties had killed their

⁹⁶ *Arkansas Gazette*, Jan. 26, 1878.

⁹⁷ *Arkansas Gazette*, May 30, 1878; *Baltimore Sun*, Jan. 30, 1878.

⁹⁸ *New York World*, June 11, 1878.

⁹⁹ *New York World*, August 28, 1878.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon B. McKinney, 'The Politics of Protest: The Labor Reform and Greenback Parties in New Hampshire,' *Historical New Hampshire* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 149–50; John D. French, "'Reaping the Whirlwind": The Origins of the Allegheny County Greenback Labor Party in 1877,' *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* Vol. 64, No. 2 (April, 1981), pp. 97–119; John M. Wenger, 'Remembering the "Rag Baby": Toledo and the Greenback-National Movement in the 1870s,' *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* Vol. 67, No. 3 (1995), pp. 118–45.

names and the names had killed the parties' and that he 'did not believe the turbulent political waters of the country could or would be soothed under the watch word of Republicanism or Democracy.'¹⁰¹ Butler, a former Democrat, had a controversial past, having gained the nickname 'The Beast' during his wartime occupation of New Orleans.¹⁰² Throughout July and August, Butler received further correspondence that highlighted the diminishing appeal of the Democratic party across the nation. Correspondents noted the party's disorganisation, that it had become 'arbitrary, [and] dictatorial,' and had 'lost its charm among the whites of the poorer and laboring classes.'¹⁰³

To hard-money Democrats, the espousals of Thurman, Voorhees, and Butler in support of paper money were nothing short of heresy. Many deplored the speeches made by such leading Democrats, and attacked them for turning national attention away from the more immediate labour question and towards that of greenbacks.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the very success of greenbackers' appeals was due to the class-infused rhetoric that they employed. New York Democrat M. H. Winder wrote to Randall claiming that 'if now the Democratic party will boldly accept the greenback principle ... the great mass of the "National Party" would promptly flock to its standard to such an extent that it would be disbanded.'¹⁰⁵ Moreover, reports from the South showed how greenbackism had become more than a midwestern phenomenon. The German-born, former Confederate Gustav Schleicher, a Texas congressman, wrote to Bayard detailing the views of Democrats in the state. Schleicher claimed to be the only Democrat standing against soft money, when all others 'from fear of the Greenbackers, has taken up a Greenback mongrel platform.'¹⁰⁶ His stand against soft-money Texas Democrats received attention throughout the national party, with Louis Shade, the editor of the *Wilmington Sentinel*, praising the congressman for not

¹⁰¹ Frank Gibbs to Benjamin F. Butler, July 15, 1878, Benjamin F. Butler Papers, LOC.

¹⁰² On Butler's wartime occupation of New Orleans, see Kristen Brill, "'I had the Men from the Start': General Benjamin Butler's Occupation of New Orleans," *Women's History Review* Vol. 26, No. 3 (June, 2017), pp. 319–28; Michael T. Smith, 'The Beast Unleashed: Benjamin F. Butler and Conceptions of Masculinity in the Civil War North,' *New England Quarterly* Vol. 79, No. 2 (June, 2006), pp. 248–76; Michael D. Pierson, "'He Helped the Poor and Snubbed the Rich": Benjamin F. Butler and Class Politics in Lowell and New Orleans,' *Massachusetts Historical Review* Vol. 7 (2005), pp. 36–68.

¹⁰³ John Nicholls to Butler, Aug. 30, 1878, Butler Papers, LOC; J. B. Elliott to Butler, Aug. 3, 1878, Butler Papers, LOC; E. North Cullom to Butler, Aug. 11, 1878, Butler Papers, LOC; Alfred Taylor to Butler, Aug. 11, 1878, Butler Papers, LOC; Sumner P. Parker to Butler, Aug. 7, 1878, Butler Papers, LOC.

¹⁰⁴ P. Gatch to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 16, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC; Gustav Schleicher to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 19, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹⁰⁵ M. H. Winder to Randall, May 15, 1878, Randall Papers, HSP.

¹⁰⁶ Gustav Schleicher to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 19, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

yielding an ‘iota of the old Democratic faith.’¹⁰⁷ Shade, alongside other Democrats, viewed the conflict over currency as crucial to the 1880 presidential campaign and hoped to push soft-money men from the national leadership. Yet the refusal of hard-money Democrats to embrace soft-money principles only demonstrated their misunderstanding of labourers’ conditions. New Orleans Greenbacker, E. North Cullom, highlighted the discontent felt within the working classes in a letter to Randall, claiming that ‘the Democracy has lost its charm among the whites of the poorer and laboring classes ... The fact is, pauperism and absolute destitution are so widespread and keenly felt that no choice is left but change.’¹⁰⁸

While hard-money men claimed that reductions in taxes and federal expenditure, coupled with the development of foreign commerce to expand markets for the nation’s agricultural and industrial interests, would curtail the depression, such arguments held little traction with regular voters and failed to stem the growing threat posed by the Greenbackers.¹⁰⁹ With the 1878 election rapidly approaching, Butler held a remarkably strong position with his soft-money appeals targeted towards typically Democratic-voting labourers. Hard-money Democrats despaired at the growing appeal of inflationary greenbackism. They commented on the ‘fruitlessness of our efforts to stand out against the widespread political and economical heresies of the day.’¹¹⁰ Many feared for the future of the party, believing that Bayard remained the ‘only hope in 1880,’ as previously stalwart Democrats such as Thurman, Voorhees, and Hendricks had ‘yielded to the clamor of the hour.’¹¹¹

With little cohesion over financial policy, Democrats hoped to harness other issues to counter the Greenback assault. While Democratic newspaper editors praised electoral success in Indiana, Iowa, and West Virginia, the situation in Massachusetts and New York presented a different picture. Under Butler’s lead in Massachusetts, the Greenbackers threatened to take supporters from ‘the rank and file of the Democratic party.’¹¹² By November, Democrats such as Charles T. Russell were noting that the

¹⁰⁷ Louis Shade to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 31, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹⁰⁸ E. North Cullom to Randall, Aug. 11, 1878, Randall Papers, HSP. Also, see Alfred Taylor to Randall, Aug. 11, 1878, Randall Papers, HSP.

¹⁰⁹ Gatch to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 16, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹¹⁰ John M. Galloway to Thomas F. Bayard, Sept. 9, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹¹¹ Francis Kernan to Thomas F. Bayard, Sept. 3, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC; *News and Courier*, Sept. 7, 1878; Louis Shade to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 31, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC; Barlow to Thomas F. Bayard, Sept. 3, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC; John M. Galloway to Thomas F. Bayard, Sept. 9, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹¹² Charles T. Russell to Thomas F. Bayard, Sept. 3, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

Greenbackers in Massachusetts had decimated the Democracy to the extent that ‘many Democrats, to defeat [Butler], will vote for the Republican candidate,’ such was the belief amongst Democrats that a Butler victory would spell the end for the party.¹¹³ In New York, August Belmont felt similarly when he received word that the Greenbackers had defeated the Republican ticket in Maine. In a letter to Bayard, Belmont wrote that ‘the success of the Greenback movement in that region bodes no good to the Country, and I fear it will make the demagogues of our party more reckless in their cowardice ... If these doctrines of dishonesty & ignorance prevail, the very foundations of our political existence are endangered & self government becomes a failure ... The idea that inflation by an additional issue of irredeemable paper money will raise prices and give better remuneration to labor is so preposterous ... that it is incomprehensible to me how the masses can be misled by such absurdities.’¹¹⁴

The results of the 1878 midterms clearly demonstrated how the events of 1876 and 1877 had shaken public confidence in the Democracy. As class tensions reached boiling point in the Great Strike of 1877, the Greenback party capitalised on the growing disenchantment with an elite Democratic party leadership felt within working class circles, and received over a million votes in the 1878 elections, gaining eleven congressmen in the process.¹¹⁵ Not only did Greenbackers run well in the Midwest and the South, where soft-money policies had gained traction among voters, but they also picked up surprise congressional seats in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maine.¹¹⁶ Writing to August Belmont in the aftermath of the Greenback successes, Thomas Bayard expressed his worry that ‘how parties will be organized in two years hence can scarcely be conjectured.’¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Charles T. Russell to Thomas F. Bayard, Nov. 2, 1878, Bayard Papers, LOC.

¹¹⁴ Belmont to Bayard, Sept. 15, 1878, Belmont Papers, CU.

¹¹⁵ Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*, pp. 243–8; Richard M. Doolen, ““Brick” Pomeroy and the Greenback Clubs,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1972), pp. 434–50.

¹¹⁶ The Greenback party secured one congressional seat in Alabama, Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, and New Jersey, and three in Pennsylvania, in Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections*, pp. 434–50.

¹¹⁷ Thomas F. Bayard to Belmont, Aug. 31, 1878, Belmont Papers, CU.

Chapter Six

“Partisan Spoilsmen and Impetuous Reformers:” Civil Service Reform and the Democracy’s Return to Power, 1878–1884

On December 3, 1878 the *New York World* published an editorial that reflected the confusion within Democratic ranks over the outcome of the recent midterm elections. The paper concluded that it was impossible to ‘tabulate the votes in any symmetrical and satisfactory form’ owing to the distinctiveness of local conditions during the canvass.¹ Despite this, the return of a nearly solidly Democratic South was an important moment in the resurrection of the party and would be an ever-present pattern for the rest of the century. Less sure, was whether they could achieve victories in the North, with New York, New Jersey, and Indiana being the party’s only realistic opportunities. To combat this, Democrats urged a more rigorous local organisation of the party to ensure high levels of voter turnout, and to let ‘the Democratic principles of which Jefferson was the apostle, prevail.’² In the years that followed, the Bourbons would provide some much needed unity for the party. In the environment that would emerge in the aftermath of another presidential assassination, the Bourbon Democrats’ message of civil service reform, decentralisation, and honest government, epitomised by Washington-outsider Grover Cleveland, secured the Democracy’s first presidential election victory since 1856.

Rampant corruption, fat-cat industrial capitalists, widespread economic and social upheaval, and political mudslinging underlined the murkiness of the Gilded Age. In recent years, scholars of Gilded Age politics have moved away from the characterisation of the era by Matthew Josephson and Ray Ginger as one devoid of any issues capable of dividing Republicans and Democrats.³ While they agree that the last thirty years of the nineteenth century was a period in which the disparity between the rich and poor grew substantially and corrupt politicians fraudulently stuffed ballot boxes to win elections, historians including Charles Calhoun have argued that the Republicans and the Democrats

¹ *New York World*, Dec. 3, 1878.

² Thomas F. Bayard to Belmont, May 11, 1879. Belmont Papers, CU.

³ Matthew Josephson, *The Politicos, 1865–1895* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938); Ray Ginger, *Age of Excess: The United States from 1877 to 1914* (New York: MacMillan, 1965); Ray Ginger, *Altgeld’s America: The Lincoln Ideal versus Changing Realities* (New York: Funk & Wagnall’s Co., 1958).

maintained distinctly different ideological positions over the role of the government.⁴ To dismiss the Gilded Age as an era lacking partisan distinctiveness overlooks the complexities of the era and diminishes the ongoing debate over the Civil War's legacy. The 1880 canvass had all the hallmarks of a Reconstruction-era presidential election – the Republicans furiously waved the bloody shirt, both candidates were Union veterans, and the Democrats lambasted the corrupt nature of Republican government. As such, the choice presented to Americans in 1880 was similar to those of the 1868 and 1876 elections: 'corrupt' Republicans or 'disloyal' Democrats. The 1884 contest would be the first postwar election that was not fought primarily over the legacy of the Civil War, but this did not mean that voters found it hard to distinguish between the two parties. In fact, Democrats and Republicans presented distinctive visions for the future that moved away from the Civil War. This chapter demonstrates how the early 1880s allowed for a break from the past ushered in a new era in American political conflict.

The Presidential Election of 1880

In early 1879 congressional Democrats took what they hoped would be the final step towards ending federal intervention in southern elections. Emboldened by their success across the South in the 1878 midterm elections, they attached a series of riders to appropriations bills to prohibit the army from protecting voters from violent intimidation and federal officers from overseeing elections. In doing so, the Democrats sought to repeal the Enforcement Acts of 1870–1871 and guarantee a Solid South in 1880. With Congress split between a Democratically-controlled House and a Republican Senate, however, the appropriations bills with their new riders failed to pass. As a result, when Congress adjourned in February and \$45,000,000 of the federal budget remained unallocated, the nation faced the possibility of a government shutdown.⁵

To bring an end to the crisis, President Rutherford B. Hayes called for a special session of Congress to be convened on March 18. Unfortunately for Hayes, this first

⁴ Charles W. Calhoun, *From Bloody Shirt to Full Dinner Pail: The Transformation of Politics and Governance in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010); Mark W. Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Joanne Reitano, *The Tariff Question in the Gilded Age: The Great Debate of 1888* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁵ Hans L. Trefousse, *Rutherford B. Hayes* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), pp. 111–4; Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior and President* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pp. 392–402.

seating of the forty-sixth Congress would have Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate. As a result, the appropriations bills were passed with all their riders attached, prohibiting the use of federal troops and officers in southern elections. On April 29, President Hayes vetoed the bill on the grounds that '[n]ational legislation to provide safeguards for free and honest elections is necessary ... not only to secure the right to vote to the enfranchised race at the South, but also to prevent fraudulent voting in the large cities of the North.'⁶ Dismayed by Hayes's veto and their failure to obtain the two-thirds majority necessary to pass a congressional override, the Democrats reintroduced and passed the bill with riders attached, and were immediately faced with another presidential veto. The *New York Sun* immediately attacked the 'Fraudulent President' for vetoing provisions that were 'wise, necessary, [and] indispensable' and that any Democrat who accepted the veto was 'foolish, unpatriotic, ridiculous.'⁷

The contest over the Army Appropriations bill proved to be a disaster for the Democrats who were unable to defeat the obstructionist tactics of Hayes and the Republican congressional minority. For the Republicans, however, it led to the emergence of a potential presidential nominee. Looking forward to the 1880 presidential race, the Republicans had few options because of Hayes's refusal to run for a second term. As a result, many had been sounding out Grant for a potential third-term, but this proved controversial. With the Democrats hammering the reform question, Grant's connection with Reconstruction-era corruption alienated a number of reform-minded Republicans.

The Democrats, however, faced problems of their own. Straight-out party newspapers highlighted the troubling trend of fusionism during the 1878 elections. The strength of the Greenback appeal had pushed many northeastern Democrats to support fusion candidates. Looking forward, the Democratic press urged the party to 'let the Jeffersonian doctrines prevail' and reunite behind the principles of laissez-faire, hard money, civil service reform, and anti-centralisation.⁸ While fusionism had proved successful in maintaining their congressional majority, the lack of a clear party identity posed problems in a national race. Democrats realised that being 'silent partners' in the presidential election would not solve the 'puzzle' of the Democracy's political identity and the press urged the party to rally around its increasingly powerful Bourbon element.⁹

⁶ Veto of Army Appropriations Bill, April 29, 1879. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-29-1879-veto-army-appropriations-bill>. Accessed May 4, 2017.

⁷ *New York Sun*, April 30, 1879.

⁸ *New York Herald*, July 28, 1879; *New York Sun*, July 29, 1879.

⁹ *New York Sun*, Sept., 15, 1879.

Moreover, the *World* urged Democrats to be vigilant in their approach to politics, saying that ‘Democrats everywhere should inform themselves carefully alike of the action of their party throughout the country and of the movements of their Republican opponents’ and that ‘failure to do this in 1876 contributed greatly to the loss by the Democracy of the fruits of the victory fairly won at the polls.’¹⁰

While leading congressional Democrats’ role in the 1877 compromise had led to internal friction, the contested election ultimately proved to be a rallying point for the party. Democrats latched onto claims that Tilden had been fraudulently counted out in 1876 and that ‘any true Democrat should support the nomination of Tilden to right the wrong of four years earlier.’ Yet, Tilden did not hold the same appeal in 1880 as he had done in 1876. Many believed that he could not neither ensure the independent vote, nor a Solid South for the party.¹¹

In June 1879 the *New York Sun* asked its readers whether ‘a Democratic Convention [could] consistently denounce the Electoral Commission Fraud and turn its back on the man who represents the real issues of the campaign.’¹² The paper called for ‘the grand old Jeffersonian Democrat as our Standard Bearer ... the great Ring Smasher’ to lead the party back to the White House.¹³ Yet soon after the *Sun* called for Tilden to lead the party’s ticket, he announced that he would not accept the party’s nomination.¹⁴ In declining, Tilden projected a sense of disdain for and demoralisation with politics that showed how deeply he was affected by the 1876 loss. He wrote that,

I desire nothing so much as an honorable discharge ... [and] seek the repose of private life ... To those who think my renomination and reelection indispensable to an effectual vindication of the right of the people to elect their rulers violated in my person, I have accorded as long a reserve of decision as possible, but I cannot overcome my repugnance to enter into a new engagement which involves four years of ceaseless toil.¹⁵

With Tilden out of the running, the usual suspects came into the spotlight. As in 1876, Thomas F. Bayard, Samuel J. Randall, Winfield Scott Hancock and Thomas Hendricks battled for the party’s nomination. While Randall’s position as Speaker of the

¹⁰ *New York World*, Jan. 16, 1880.

¹¹ Charles Nordhoff to Belmont, Feb. 23, 1879, Belmont Papers, CU.

¹² *New York Sun*, June 22, 1880.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *New York World*, June 22, 1880.

¹⁵ *New York Sun*, June 21, 1880.

House endeared him to many of Tilden's former supporters, his protectionist beliefs made him unpalatable to free traders. Similarly, Hendricks' soft-money tendencies alienated the party's significant hard-money element. Conversely, Bayard's considerable experience as a leading Democratic voice in the Senate, consistent support of hard-money policies, denunciation of Radical Republicanism, and lenient voice on secession gave him a national appeal.¹⁶ Hancock, on the other hand, had been sounded out at every convention since 1868, and the hero of Gettysburg's support for sectional reconciliation and opposition to Radicalism rendered him attractive to southern Democrats.

As Democrats from across the nation descended on Cincinnati for their national convention in June 1880, the city was brimming with activity. Democrats paraded through the streets in support of their desired candidate. Braving the intense June heat, a column of three thousand Hendricks men entered the city, cheering and shouting, while Randall clubs stood on every corner, wearing white blue badges in support of the Pennsylvanian.¹⁷ Tilden's declination had caused a stir among Democrats who hoped to seize the opportunity to make their man the next president. After three years of discord in the Democratic ranks, delegates made distinct attempts to heal the rifts in the party. Speakers frequently referred to the party's last successful presidential canvass in 1856 that had also held its convention in Cincinnati, and urged their fellow partisans to put division behind them. On the convention's second day, Governor Richard B. Hubbard of Texas disparaged the petty factionalism of northern Democrats that put the nation at risk. He said that,

we [southerners] have come up here with the olive branch, forgetting the memories of the past, burying in a common grave the discords of the great war, honorable alike to both sections of this country ... We are men who go into the race from principle and not for men; Tilden will die, and Kelly will die, and Hendricks will die ... [but] Their memories will live, and the principles of the Democratic party will live ... We [the South] ask for no Presidents, no Vice-Presidents. We do not even ask an organization in your Convention. And when we come upon bended knees and ask you among yourselves to bury the hatchet, and to save us from a future of tyranny that we have endured in the past, then we hope, and we have the right to expect, that the great Democratic party will place its foot on schism and discord wherever it may be.¹⁸

¹⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1984, Vol. IV*, p.1500.

¹⁷ *New York Sun*, June 22, 1880.

¹⁸ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati, O., June 22d, 23d, and 24th, 1880. With an Appendix Containing the Organization of the National Democratic Committee, the Proceedings of the Notification Committee in New York, and the Letters of Acceptance of Gen. Winfield S.*

After the preliminary organisation of the convention, candidates for the presidential nomination started to be sounded out. Bayard's name promptly entered the fold as his fellow Delawarean delegate, George Gray, emphatically proclaimed, 'His is no sectional fame ... Who, more than he, will, as a candidate, appeal to the best traditions of our party and of our country? ... His very name will be a platform. It will fire every Democratic heart with new zeal, and will place a sword in the hands of every honest man to drive from place and power the reckless men who have held for four years against the expressed will of the American people.'¹⁹ As each state's delegates were allowed to make nominations numerous strong candidates such as Thomas A. Hendricks and Colonel William R. Morrisson emerged, but it was Pennsylvanian Daniel Dougherty who ignited the battle between Bayard and Hancock. In addressing the convention, Dougherty immediately reminded the delegates that Hancock's first act as a military governor in Louisiana and Texas was 'to salute the [C]onstitution! by proclaiming amid the joyous greetings of an oppressed people that the military, save in actual war, shall be subservient to the civil power.'²⁰ The Pennsylvanian sustained his focus on sectional reconciliation in nominating Hancock, and claimed that his nomination would 'thrill the land from end to end, crush the last embers of sectional strife' and that 'with him as our chieftain the bloody banner of the Republicans will fall from their palsied grasp.'²¹ As the southern delegates stepped forward to make their nominations, it was clear that they would acquiesce in the choice of the northern Democratic leadership on the party's candidate. While South Carolinian Wade Hampton expressed his preference for Bayard due to his ability to attract more conservative Republican votes, his purpose in addressing the convention was to express that southerners asked 'for no place, for no position; for no pledges, for no patronage, no promise. We come simply as Democrats to sustain the great Democratic party.'²²

After the first round of ballots were cast, Bayard and Hancock emerged as the clear favourites, with both candidates picking up votes from northern and southern states. With little to pick between the two candidates, the convention adjourned and reassembled

Hancock and Hon. William H. English (Dayton, OH: Daily Journal Book and Job Rooms, 1882), pp. 37–9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

the following day. With New York's seventy votes being cast for an also-ran candidate, Samuel J. Randall, it was clear that the Empire State would have the decisive say on the party's nominee. After a second ballot was held and with Randall out of the running, the New York delegation conferred their votes to Hancock, initiating a cascade of reversals to support Hancock. In the end, Bayard and Randall's hard stances on hard money and tariff legislation pushed delegates to support the more agreeable Hancock. The general's wartime record and widespread support among southerners made his nomination a formality. In support of Hancock's nomination, the party's platform focused on its reformist message of the past decade, opposed government centralisation, took a hard-money stance on finance, denounced the 'great fraud' of 1876, and proposed an anti-Chinese immigration bill, while declaring itself 'the friend of labor and the laboring man.'²³ Bayard's supporters were disappointed by the result, but the inclusion of a hard-money plank in the party's platform eased their worries, and Hancock's appeal to the Union veteran vote was undoubtedly a significant step forward for a party that had struggled to distance itself from wartime accusations of treason. Even Bayard himself noted that Hancock's nomination was 'under all circumstances ... the best thing ... for the party and the Country ... he is in conflict with no one [and] he silences absolutely [Republican] appeals to sectional animosities and war prejudices.'²⁴

Hancock's nomination was well received and party supporters believed it had put the Democracy on the path back to the White House. The *Mobile Register* wrote that Hancock's 'record, as a citizen and a soldier, is unassailable by the Republican party,' while the *Times-Picayune* proclaimed that the 'boys in blue and the boys in gray have one leader now.'²⁵ The focus of Democrats on sectional reconciliation became a crucial theme throughout the 1880 campaign. Even the Republican press recognised the strength of the nomination. The *Philadelphia Press* declared that Hancock's 'candidacy strips the contest of the last vestige of sectionalism, and leaves the Republicans with no attribute outside the inherent merits of their candidate and present record that can appeal to patriotism.'²⁶ With the hero of Gettysburg as their standard bearer, the jubilant *Baltimore Gazette* proclaimed that 'on the 4th of March 1881, the new *regime* will begin, and under the wise

²³ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. IV*, pp. 1517–8.

²⁴ Thomas F. Bayard to Belmont, July 2, 1880, Belmont Papers, CU.

²⁵ *Mobile Register*, June 24, 1880; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1880.

²⁶ *Philadelphia Press*, June 25, 1880.

and patriotic administration of Hancock the land we love will enter upon a new career of prosperity and glory.²⁷

As the campaign began in earnest, Democrats and Republicans fell into the well-worn rhetorical tropes of Reconstruction-era elections. Despite Hancock's candidacy, the Republicans again waved the bloody shirt, and argued that a vote for Hancock was a vote for the suppression of the black vote and the reversal of all the gains of Reconstruction (see Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 'Only Waiting for the Signal,' *Harper's Weekly*, Oct. 30, 1880

Democrats expected to return a solid South, but knew that the party would have to secure victories in key northern states to win the presidency. To combat the working-class appeal of the Greenbackers, the Democrats claimed to protect the interests of labour by endorsing the anti-Chinese immigration bill that would protect white workers from being undercut by cheap Chinese labour. Moreover, early reports suggested that Hancock

²⁷ *Baltimore Gazette*, June 25, 1880.

was drawing support from Republicans. In July, the *New York Times* and *New York World* noted that formerly Republican-voting Union veterans and conservative Republicans were joining Hancock Clubs and expressing distrust of the Garfield-Arthur ticket.²⁸ Yet despite Hancock's candidacy, memories of the Civil War still pervaded the post-Reconstruction North and hampered the Democrats' chances. The Greenback movement had significantly blunted their claim to be the party of the labouring classes, while disunity over the currency issue had opened up deep fractures within the party.

In the final count, Hancock received just 2,000 popular votes less than Garfield, but his critical failure was his inability to secure enough Electoral College votes in the North. The party's support of anti-Chinese immigration laws helped the Democrats win California, and Democratic stronghold of New Jersey summarily returned their votes for Hancock, but the Democrats witnessed narrow defeats in the northern states that were so critical to its success. Moreover, while party leaders hoped the vice presidential nominee, William H. English, could secure his home state of Indiana but when he failed to do so, the party was unable to make any meaningful inroads into the Republicans' northern strength. Hancock lost New York by just 20,000 votes, while in Indiana the margin was even slimmer at a mere 7,000 votes.²⁹ While the return of a solid South to the Democrats for the first time since before the Civil War was an important step forward for the party, the 1880 canvass demonstrated the continued resonance of Unionist Civil War memory in the North and condemned the Democrats to defeat by 214 electoral college votes to 155.³⁰

The Assassination of President Garfield and the Unification of the Democrats

On March 4, 1881, President James A. Garfield delivered his inaugural address to expectant onlookers. The new commander-in-chief advocated universal free education, voting reform, religious freedom, yet opposition to polygamy under the Mormon Church, and committed his party to civil service reform. He remarked that the 'civil service can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until it is regulated by law ... I shall at the proper time ask Congress to fix the tenure of the minor offices of the several Executive Departments and prescribe the grounds upon which removals shall be made during the

²⁸ *New York Times*, July 14, 1880; *New York World*, July 13, 1880.

²⁹ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. IV*, p. 1558.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

terms for which incumbents have been appointed.’³¹ The Democrats would need some convincing that the Republicans would follow through on Garfield’s promise but on July 2, 1881 the movement for civil service reform was given new impetus.

Walking arm-in-arm with Secretary of State James G. Blaine, the president was crossing the ladies’ waiting room of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station in Washington when suddenly two shots rang out. Garfield slumped to the floor.³² As reports of the assassination hit the presses of the nation’s leading newspapers, Americans reeled upon hearing that their president had been shot. The press reported that the attempt on Garfield’s life had ‘shocked the national mind and ... overwhelmed the hearts of the entire people,’ and that ‘political divisions are lost sight of.’³³ As details of the identity of the would-be assassin emerged, Democrats pointed to the spoils system as the root of evil in the American political nation. The assassin, Charles Guiteau, had become angered by his failure to secure a civil service appointment under the new administration. Having applied almost daily for an office, Guiteau had grown furious and finally snapped. Hoping to use the assassination to give the party a boost following the Democrats’ defeat in 1880, the *Baltimore Sun* took aim at the spoils system. The paper proclaimed that the president had fallen ‘to a debased and corrupt civil-service system.’³⁴ Other Democrats, including Wade Hampton, had no intentions of ignoring the partisan potential of the assassination. Instead, he blamed it on stalwartism and factionalism within the Republican party itself.³⁵ The Democratic press quickly rallied behind Hampton’s attack on the Republicans and opposed any suggestion that Guiteau was “‘simply and absolutely mad”” as it seemed to belittle the crime and overlook the corruption of the Republican party.³⁶

While scandals had plagued Republican administrations since the end of the Civil War, none had been able to dethrone the party. Yet, after Garfield’s eventual death in September, Democrats sensed an opportunity. On October 4, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the New York Civil Service Reform Association, Everett P. Wheeler, wrote to Thomas Bayard that Garfield’s death had ‘aroused the sympathy of the

³¹ James A. Garfield: "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1881. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25823>.

³² *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 3, 1881.

³³ *New York World*, July 5, 1881; *Louisiana Democrat*, July 6, 1881.

³⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, July 3, 1881; *Baltimore Sun*, July 9, 1881.

³⁵ Wade Hampton III to Thomas F. Bayard, July 24, 1881, Bayard Papers, LOC.

³⁶ *Times-Picayune*, Oct. 4, 1881; *Clarkesville Standard*, Oct. 21, 1881; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, Sept. 21, 1881.

whole country and ... [has] drawn special attention to the cause of Civil Service Reform.³⁷ In light of the death of President Garfield after a two-month struggle, public faith in politics and politicians hit a low point.³⁸ Reform was elevated to the top of the nation's agenda. This was critical for the Democrats who, over the next three years, would capitalise on their decade-long crusade for civil service reform.

In Buffalo in late 1881, the incumbent Republican mayor, Alexander Brush, lost his bid for re-election to a local Democrat, Grover Cleveland. Cleveland had been born in New Jersey, but relocated to New York where, in 1854, he took a clerical job before studying law and being admitted to the bar in 1859. Despite being born into a family of Whigs and Republicans, Cleveland had identified with the decentralising tendencies of the Democratic party from a young age. During the Civil War he had avoided military service by using his personal wealth to pay for a replacement and had gained a reputation for attacking corrupt officials and opposing the spoils system during his time as a public official during Reconstruction. After serving as the Sheriff of Erie County in 1871, Cleveland was chosen as the Democrats' mayoral nominee based on his clean public record.³⁹ Upon accepting the mayoral nomination, he ran a campaign grounded in his reform credentials, promising to 'relieve our citizens from their present load of taxation ... [and] a more rigid scrutiny of all public expenditures.'⁴⁰ Through his typically conservative Democratic campaign message, Cleveland secured a comfortable victory in 1881 and began his term the following year. While not a nationally significant result, Cleveland's election signaled to the New York Democracy that reform was becoming instrumental to electoral victory. The powerful Tammany machine was quick to take notice. In fact, the result immediately threw Democratic politics in the Empire State into a stand-off between reform advocates and the Tammanyites of New York City. While the election of a pro-reform mayor of Buffalo appeared insignificant, Cleveland's rapid rise through the Democratic ranks in the early 1880s was instrumental in the party's return to power in 1884.

³⁷ Everett P. Wheeler to Thomas F. Bayard, Oct. 4, 1881. Bayard Papers, LOC.

³⁸ *Louisiana Democrat*, Sept. 28, 1881.

³⁹ Alyn Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1933); Geoffrey Blodgett, 'The Emergence of Grover Cleveland: A Fresh Appraisal,' *New York History* Vol. 73, No. 2 (April, 1992), pp. 134-9; Mark W. Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Elections of 1884* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Schlesinger Jr. (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968: Vol. IV, 1872-1888* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), pp. 1567-9.

⁴⁰ George F. Parker (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Grover Cleveland* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1892), pp. 1-2.

The Democrats sought to capitalise on the return of the reform cause to the forefront of national politics by casting themselves as the arbiters of honest government. Closely linked to civil service reform was the ongoing debate over currency. While the Democrats seemed no closer to compromising over the use of paper money, a group of inflationary free silver advocates were gaining traction in national economic debate.⁴¹ Almost immediately, hard money Democrats attacked what they viewed as an affront to honest government and sound economic practice. In December 1881 the *Brooklyn Eagle* published an editorial that attempted to expose the problems of using coinage made of different metals. The paper wrote that to ‘make two legal tenders of different metals, varying continually in value, at the same time, is beyond human power. Whichever metal is cheaper ... debtors will be sure to pay in.’⁴² While conflicts over currency within the party continued, Democrats remained much less divided over the repayment of the public debt, tariff reform, and the reduction of taxation.⁴³ The hard-money Democrats, led by the Bourbon element of the party, sought to entwine economic responsibility with reform to portray the party as the party of respectability, sound money, and honest government. The message was not only a strong one, but it was also logical. Republican attacks on the Democracy since the war had focused on belittling the Democrats’ suitability to govern the Republic. The decentralising, reformist message of the Bourbons therefore, was an attempt to diminish such attacks and plot a path back to the presidency.

The party’s commitment to laissez-faire and hard money had pushed many white labourers to support various third-parties, including the Greenbackers and Midwestern Grangers, but growing anti-Chinese sentiment provided the foundation for the Democracy to re-establish its resonance with working class Americans. While agitation in California over Chinese immigration had failed to provide a binding issue for the Democrats in 1880, it spilled over into national politics soon after. The labour movement of Irish-American Californian Dennis Kearney had steadily gained traction nationally since his attempt to boost opposition to Chinese immigration in Boston in 1878. Four years later it prompted a fractious debate in Congress. For the Democrats, the entrance of Chinese immigration into a national debate on the relationship between immigration, labour, and race, presented a much-needed opportunity to unify the working classes behind the party. The Democratic press immediately and uniformly supported the

⁴¹ Belmont to Thomas F. Bayard, Dec. 15, 1881, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁴² *Brooklyn Eagle*, Dec. 29, 1881.

⁴³ *Wheeling Register*, Oct. 6, 1881; *Louisiana Democrat*, June 21, 1882; *Baltimore Sun*, August 26, 1882.

proposed bill to suspend Chinese immigration and played upon anti-Chinese sentiment to portray the party as protecting American jobs and wages. In November 1880 the Angell commission sent by President Hayes to negotiate the modification of the Burlingame Treaty in order to enable Congress to regulate, limit, or suspend Chinese immigration into the United States, and the Democrats ardently supported the measure.⁴⁴ Across the nation, journalists investigated the merits of Chinese immigration and, on the Democratic side, seemed unanimous in their findings. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* commented that despite the hard-working and cheap nature of Chinese labour, the problem was that ‘they come here in herds ... they do not settle here [sic] as immigrants, but take their earnings, sooner or later, with them to their own country ... Scarcely any of them are women, and ninety-nine hundredths of these are prostitutes.’⁴⁵ The arguments of Democratic papers focused not on the work of Chinese immigrants themselves, but on the moral impact on society and the sheer volume of workers: ‘China has 400,000,000 people, and glad enough it is to pour out upon us its degraded and starving scum.’⁴⁶ Democrats argued that white American workers who intended to remain in the country and contribute to society fell victim to depressed wages and spiraling unemployment. They added that any party member who would vote against the suspension of Chinese immigration for twenty-five years was ‘an unfathomable sort of a Democrat.’⁴⁷

The Republicans, however, were less united over the issue of Chinese immigration, and many rebelled against the Hayes administration’s support of amending the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. For them, to support a measure that seemingly acknowledged a key distinction between races in terms of superiority, contradicted the path the party had taken since its inception in 1854. As the *Times-Picayune* noted, ‘if passed, that bill would fix, as a consummation of public opinion, a distinction of races at war with the very *raison d’être* of the Republican party.’⁴⁸ On March 1, Senator, George F. Hoar, a Massachusetts Republican, rose to condemn the unjust bill. He asserted that ‘to rescue humanity from ... degradation is, we are taught to believe, the great object of God’s moral government on earth ... It is not by Chinese policies that China is to be

⁴⁴ *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 26, 1882. On the issue of Chinese immigration, see, Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), esp. pp. 21–30, 68–91, 104–9; Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), pp. 206–230.

⁴⁵ *Times-Picayune*, March 18, 1882.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Louisiana Democrat*, March 29, 1882.

⁴⁸ *Times-Picayune*, April 5, 1882.

civilized.’ Rather, Hoar argued, the principles of the Declaration of Independence would help to spread and secure civilization across the Earth.⁴⁹ When the Chinese Exclusion Act came to a vote in Congress, only three Democratic congressmen and no Democratic senators voted against it.⁵⁰ While Republicans split over the notion of racial equality, Democrats remained consistent advocates of white supremacy and the enforcement of racial separation. The racial dimensions of class politics were crucial to solidifying the Democracy’s working-class appeal. As Reconstruction ended, conflicts between ethnic and racial minorities consolidated into ‘white’ and ‘non-white.’⁵¹ By supporting the Chinese Exclusion Act, Democrats sought to strengthen their working class appeal, and simultaneously draw conservative Republicans who supported the measure into their ranks.

Reform At Last: The Pendleton Civil Service Act

On December 6, 1881 Ohio senator George H. Pendleton introduced a civil service reform bill in the Senate that sought to bring an end to the spoils system. Pendleton advocated the establishment of a new Civil Service Commission that would ensure that appointments would be based on qualifications and capability, rather than partisan alignment. The bill would prohibit the removal of civil servants based on political affiliation, and instead, removals from office demanded just cause based on the performance of civil servants.⁵² Despite Pendleton’s intention to address concerns over patronage in the federal government, his proposed bill did not receive unanimous support from fellow Democrats. Debate over the bill produced numerous clashes between congressional Democrats throughout 1882. Typical of congressional Democrats who opposed the Pendleton bill, Senator John Stuart Williams of Kentucky argued that rotation in office was crucial to the success of the spoils system. Republicans, Williams argued, had abused the spoils system as no other party had done before by bloating the federal government and abusing public money. The key to reform, according to the

⁴⁹ *Chinese Immigration: Speech of Hon. Geo. F. Hoar of Massachusetts, delivered in the Senate of the United States, Wednesday, March 1, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), pp. 27-8.

⁵⁰ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/47-1/h83>; <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/47-1/s370>.

⁵¹ On whiteness studies, see David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

⁵² Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, p. 181; Sean M. Theriault, ‘Patronage, the Pendleton Act, and the Power of the People,’ *Journal of Politics* Vol. 65, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 59-60; Ari Hoogenboom, ‘The Pendleton Act and the Civil Service,’ *American Historical Review* Vol. 64, No. 2 (Jan., 1959), pp. 310-2.

Kentuckian, was not through legislation, but ‘to put a good, honest Democratic President in 1884.’⁵³

When Pendleton faced re-election late in 1882, the canvass became a referendum over the senator’s reform bill, and the weakness of Republican opposition appeared to give him the advantage. The *Louisiana Democrat* noted that it could ‘not conceive a worse position for [the Republicans] to be in’ and that if the Democracy could not win in Ohio ‘there is hardly any imaginable combination of circumstances from which victory would ensue.’⁵⁴ The challenge Pendleton faced, however, came not from the Republicans, but from within his party. John R. McLean, the editor of the Democratic *Cincinnati Gazette*, sought to rid the state party of its old leadership, embodied by Pendleton and John G. Thompson, and launched an attack against Pendleton and his reform agenda. McLean proclaimed with conviction that there would be an ‘overwhelming declaration in favour of a change of party control in November 1884’ and that Democrats could not afford ‘to abandon broad Democratic principles for the benefit of aristocratic paragons who demand a Civil Service “reform” which shall protect Senators and Congressmen from the solicitations of their aspiring constituents.’⁵⁵ McLean believed, like senators Benjamin H. Hill and Williams that the Democracy stood on the verge of returning to power and that to stop themselves from taking the spoils of victory would only ensure the entrenchment of corrupt civil servants.⁵⁶ Despite McLean’s success in blocking Thompson’s election to the state central committee, Pendleton was named chairman of the Democratic state convention and reform was made a central plank in the contest.⁵⁷ In the final count, Pendleton was triumphantly returned to the Senate and the Democrats won resounding victories across the state.

Elsewhere in 1882 the Democrats fared particularly well. Placing reform at the centre of the campaign, they won significant victories across the Midwest, California, Pennsylvania, and the South, propelling the party to a majority in the House of Representatives. The midterm results highlighted the strength of the party’s reform message. Since the Democracy’s alliance with the Liberal Republicans in 1872, party

⁵³ *Congressional Record*, Dec. 21, 1882; Jackson *Clarion*, Jan. 10, 1883. Williams was supported by Senator Benjamin H. Hill. On Hill’s response, see, Sageser, *Pendleton Act*, pp. 43-5; Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils*, p. 219.

⁵⁴ *Louisiana Democrat*, Aug. 30, 1882; Louis Schade to Thomas F. Bayard, Aug. 21, 1882, Bayard Papers, LOC.

⁵⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 19, 1882.

⁵⁶ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 26, 1882.

⁵⁷ Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, pp. 186-7.

leaders had recognised the importance of securing the support of pro-reform Republicans to win northern states.⁵⁸ Despite the extent of Republican defeat in 1882, Democrats were cautious about their success. The *Baltimore Sun* reminded its readers that in 1872, the *Nation* had proclaimed that the Democratic party was dead. Ten years later, the *Sun* warned that the Democracy could not allow the Republicans to recover and stressed that the Democrats had it ‘in their power to incorporate their new allies [Independent Republicans] in their ranks. They have before them two years in which by making themselves a good record for reform they may gain the confidence of the people.’⁵⁹

As the conflict over Pendleton’s civil service bill came to a head over the winter of 1882-1883, little cohesion among Democrats emerged over reform. Former Indiana governor and vice-presidential nominee, Thomas A. Hendricks, toed the anti-Pendleton bill line, claiming that the proposed amendments to the appointment system would mean that ‘frauds will become more secure and reform more difficult.’⁶⁰ Similarly, the Jackson *Clarion* derided the bill for not going far enough, in that it only applied to less than ten percent of offices, with most of those of minor significance, and argued that ‘what is wanted is reform that will operate impartially; a reform that will strike the giant oaks as well as the slender saplings.’⁶¹ Pendleton continued to be lambasted in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, but not all was doom and gloom for the senator. Advocates of the bill, such as former Ohio State Treasurer Anthony Howells, claimed that Pendleton was acting according to the platform of the Ohio Democracy that had just won a landslide victory in the fall, and Pendleton believed the results had given him a mandate to push the bill through Congress.⁶² Civil service reform had just helped to propel the party to nationwide victories. The Democrats needed to show the public that they were willing to change a system that they had derided as having been corrupted by Republicans for over a decade. After over a decade of campaigning for change, turning their back on reform at a moment when it appeared to be beneficial to the party would have cast them in the same light as Republicans eager to fill patronage positions with men from their own party.

Despite the divisive nature of the bill among Democrats, Pendleton received near-unanimous support from the Republicans. Following the results of the 1882 midterms, the Republicans decided against opposing the bill. By all accounts, Pendleton’s proposed

⁵⁸ Tilden to Daniel Manning, Oct. 20, 1882. Grover Cleveland Papers, LOC.

⁵⁹ *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 15, 1882.

⁶⁰ *Baltimore Sun*, Jan. 12, 1883.

⁶¹ Jackson *Clarion*, Jan 10. 1883.

⁶² *Stark County Democrat*, Jan. 27, 1883; Mach, ‘Gentleman George’, pp. 187-8.

reforms were not only mild, but allowed Republicans the opportunity to keep a number of their own appointees in office. In the final roll call, the measure passed both houses comfortably, by 39-5 in the Senate, and 155-46 in the House, yet the voting patterns clearly demonstrated how split the Democrats were over the issue. In the House, the Democrats split 48-38, with 42 abstentions, in support of the bill, and in the Senate, they split 14-5, with 18 not voting.⁶³ Democratic opposition to the Pendleton bill was most widespread among southern and midwestern congressmen, while it received strong support in areas such as New York where the Independent vote would be critical to securing the state in 1884. In these latter areas, it became crucial for Democrats to present themselves as advocates of reform to gain the support of increasingly dissident reform-minded Republicans. More significantly, however, the results demonstrated the increasing dominance within the national Democratic party of Bourbon Democrats. The bill's most ardent Democratic backing came largely from Bourbons, such as John Carlisle of Kentucky, Lucius Q. C. Lamar of Mississippi, and Thomas Bayard, all of whom had become leading members of the party. Following the 1882 midterms, Carlisle had become the first southern leader of the House since the Civil War, while Lamar held a prominent position as a leading advocate of the New South. Similarly, Bayard had been leader of the Senate briefly in 1881 and was many Democrats' pick for the presidential nomination in 1884.⁶⁴ With the downfall of Reconstruction in the South, civil service reform helped to promote Bourbons to leading roles in the national party and was crucial to the Democracy's return to power by 1884. Not only did their emphasis on reform and decentralisation resonate with voters in the wake of Garfield's assassination, but their efforts to modernise the party and blunted the potency of Republican attacks on the Democracy's tainted past.

⁶³ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/47-2/h272>; <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/47-2/s646>.

⁶⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); E. L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (2007); P. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (1970); Horace Samuel Merrill, *Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West, 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953); Allen J. Goings, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1951); J. T. Moore, 'Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South, 1870-1900,' *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 44 (August, 1978), pp. 357-78.

The Democracy's Return to Power, 1884

With the passage of Pendleton's civil service bill, thoughts quickly turned to the presidential election of 1884. While the contest remained over eighteen months away, the Democrats felt positive about their chances for victory. The midterms had demonstrated the appeal of reform and, having passed the civil service act, the lines of battle for the 1884 race had been outlined by early 1883. In the following months Democrats not only began jostling for position in anticipation of the national convention, but they also hoped to maintain a degree of unity within the party. Conflicts in the past over currency reform had openly fractured the party. Democrats therefore had to work hard to smooth over any signs of division within the party's ranks throughout 1883.

The central challenge to party unity in 1883 came from the continued emergence of independent movements. Following the success of independents across the South, the spread of similar organisations to northern states such as Massachusetts provided some concern for Democrats. In March, the *Baltimore Sun* wrote of the growing Massachusetts movement that 'every little new scheme or feature in political warfare is introduced to agitate the public mind. The latest idea is an independent movement, distinct and separate from affiliation or connection with either of the prominent political parties.'⁶⁵ While Massachusetts had a history of being a staunch Republican stronghold, political developments in the state still held significant national considerations for the Democrats moving forward.

After his conversion to the Greenback party in the 1870s, Benjamin Butler proved a major thorn in the side of the northern Democracy. When the former Union general rejoined the Democrats in 1880, party leaders hoped that Butler's influence on national politics had waned. Yet, with the emergence of a new independent movement in his home state, Butler moved again to put himself on the presidential map. While in 1883 Butler was a member of the Democratic party, his soft-money views and shady past on reform ensured that he did not endear himself to the growing influence of the Bourbons within the party. Moreover, the rank-and-file Democrats who expected their presidential candidate to be Bayard, Cleveland, or Randall worried about the potential for the maverick Butler to make an independent run for the presidency.⁶⁶ Thus, when Butler was

⁶⁵ *Baltimore Sun*, March 7, 1883.

⁶⁶ Moorfield Storey to Carl Schurz, Oct. 17, 1883. Carl Schurz Papers, LOC.

convincingly defeated in the race for Massachusetts governor by Republican George D. Robinson, few Democrats felt particularly aggrieved.

As the Bourbons grew in strength, they hoped to consolidate their hold over the national party leadership through the speakership contest. With reform now regarded as a central tenet of the national Democracy, the contest focused upon the issue of the tariff. The two candidates, Samuel J. Randall and John G. Carlisle, took different stances on the issue. Carlisle, a Kentuckian, was an advocate of a tariff for revenue only and thus drew the support of the party's leading Bourbon element. Conversely, Randall's support of a more moderate reduction of internal taxation and lower tariffs, put him at odds with the party's mainstream.⁶⁷ With the growing strength of the free trade Bourbons, Randall was ousted from the speakership and Carlisle's election as the House's new speaker clearly demonstrated that control of the party now lay firmly in the hands of the Bourbons.

With Carlisle elected to the Speakership, the nation turned towards the presidential election. Reform was clearly the main issue of the campaign and Democrats wasted no time in casting the Republicans as corrupt. The *New York Sun* alleged that their opponents had become so corrupt that 'a Republican Congress deemed it necessary to put the party into the hands of a Commission to insure good behavior.'⁶⁸ Democrats viewed 1884 as their opportunity to regain the presidency for the first time in nearly thirty years. The *Baltimore Sun* proclaimed that there 'never was a time when boldness and a definite policy were more needed in the declarations and actions of the [D]emocratic party than at present. The last congressional election indicated that the country was growing weary of Republican rule. The old sectional issues were worn out. Bitter antagonisms were splitting the [R]epublican party into factions.'⁶⁹ With Democratic organs pressing home the view of the Republican party as hopelessly corrupt, the Democracy began to consider its options for the presidential nomination.

Unlike the Republicans who had few stand-out candidates for the presidential nomination, the Democrats appeared spoilt for choice in their search for a new president. Among the leading candidates were Bayard and Randall but, as in 1880, many northern Democrats discussed the possibility of the nomination of 'the old ticket' of Tilden and Hendricks. Others, however, were not so convinced of the viability of a renewal of the

⁶⁷ Jeffrey A. Jenkins, Charles Stewart III, *Fighting for the Speakership: The House and the Rise of Party Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 265.

⁶⁸ *New York Sun*, Feb. 4, 1884.

⁶⁹ *Baltimore Sun*, April 15, 1884.

1876 ticket. Bayard himself, who had made his presidential aspirations clear, remarked on the action of the West Virginia Democratic convention in April, which had declared in favour of a Tilden nomination, that ‘I do not want, nor can I logically or reasonably expect to receive a nomination at the hands of a set of delegates, who ... approve of the nomination of Mr. Tilden ... I am unable to believe that Mr. Tilden’s physical condition renders it possible for him even to contemplate the assumption of the labor of the canvass, much less the duties of the Chief Magistracy.’⁷⁰ Yet, it would not be from the Democrats’ pool of experienced national leaders that the party’s presidential hopeful would be chosen. Instead, it would be a Washington outsider from New York, Grover Cleveland, who would burst onto the national scene in 1884.

Since his election as Buffalo mayor in 1881, Cleveland had gained a reputation for the strict deployment of his veto power against any action that he deemed against the public interest and an unwarranted use of public funds. His view of executive power was clear and uncompromising at a time when Americans had become used to the liberal use of patronage appointments and a murky style of politics.⁷¹ His strong stance on reform and willingness to take on machine politics in Buffalo quickly enhanced his reputation across the state, and in 1882 he was elected governor off the back of his success on Buffalo. In the political environment of the 1880s, Cleveland was a rarity: a politician with a clean public record, untainted by the corruption of the federal government. After his election Cleveland continued his stand against machine politics, much to the disgust of ‘Honest’ John Kelly and Tammany Hall. In his inaugural address, he had made his intentions clear when he called for ‘vigilance on the part of the citizen ... [to] take part in the regulation and administration of the government of our State, and thus become, not only the keepers of our own interests, but contributors to the progress and prosperity which will await us.’⁷² Despite losing support from Democratic Tammanyites, he gained plaudits from the Independent Republicans and reformers of the Empire State, and this would be a major source of his strength in the forthcoming presidential canvass. In 1884 then, the country seemed ready for a Grover Cleveland to step forward; a Washington outsider with a clean public record and a penchant for reform who was also capable of winning the crucial New York Electoral College votes to propel the party back to the

⁷⁰ Bayard to Davis, April 9, 1884.

⁷¹ Blodgett, ‘The Emergence of Grover Cleveland,’ pp. 141-2.

⁷² George F. Parker (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Grover Cleveland* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1892), p. 31.

White House. Moreover, to the leading Bourbon element, Cleveland had sound views on other issues. He believed in hard money and opposed bimetallism, high tariffs and inflation; in essence, Cleveland was the quintessential eastern Bourbon that the Democracy had been searching for.

As supporters of Bayard, Randall, Tilden, and Cleveland began jostling in anticipation of the party's Chicago convention, the Republicans met in the city's Exposition Hall where two candidates emerged from the pack: James G. Blaine of Maine and incumbent president Chester A. Arthur. Blaine, Secretary of State under Garfield, was vulnerable to the Democratic castigation of the party as corrupt but he quickly emerged as the favourite for the nomination. This, however, posed a problem for Republicans who were worried that a significant number of their party would bolt if he secured the nomination. Reformers in the party despised the Maine Senator and hoped to secure Arthur's nomination over the somewhat shady Blaine. Yet the influence of Blaine's opponents in the convention failed to materialise and after four rounds of voting Blaine was nominated on a ticket completed by former Union general John A. Logan for vice president. If Blaine alienated the significant independent classes, the choice of Logan for vice president did little to give the Republicans a chance for victory in any southern states. Logan, a former Union general, had gained a reputation for being 'an exponent of sectional hatred' and was despised throughout the South.⁷³ The Blaine-Logan nomination of 1884 aimed to secure victory solely through the northern states. It proved to be a serious miscalculation by the Republicans.

When news of Blaine's nomination spread across the country, it became clear that the reform-minded Independents would not support his candidacy. As they had done in 1872 as Liberal Republicans, the 'Mugwumps' of 1884 reluctantly rebelled against a candidate they viewed as corrupt. Carl Schurz remarked that 'it was by no means with a light heart that I declared myself against [Blaine]. But I could not conscientiously do otherwise. The Republican party has been called the party of moral law. It once deserved that ... We have now a question of political ethics to deal with in which the character of the Republican party is directly involved.'⁷⁴ Despite this stance, Schurz still regarded Blaine as a strong candidate. In a letter to Bayard, Schurz warned the senator that 'the revolt in the Republican party is at this moment very strong. But it would be a mistake to

⁷³ *Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 1884.

⁷⁴ Carl Schurz to G. W. W. Pittman, June 15, 1884. Schurz Papers, LOC.

consider Blaine a weak candidate. He is weak in his own party, but he will have the support of the Irish dynamite faction, and the speculators ... He will have a large campaign fund.⁷⁵ Schurz added that the ‘Democratic candidate ... will, therefore, need the support of the Independent Republicans to make up for desertions and to furnish the necessary majority’ and ‘[Republicans] will undoubtedly cast a more than sufficient number of votes, if the character of the Democratic candidate, be such as to overcome this disinclination to “vote for a Democrat!”’⁷⁶ The Mugwumps were clearly disappointed with Blaine’s nomination, but Democrats needed to proceed with caution. In the canvass, Blaine would be vulnerable on the reform issue, and Democrats recognised this. While Hancock’s selection as the party’s candidate in 1880 had been the result of a focus on sectional reconciliation rather than reform, the Democrats recognised the necessity of the party to nominate a reform-minded candidate to defeat Blaine.⁷⁷

As delegates to the Democratic National Convention made their way through Chicago towards Exposition Hall on a cool, misty morning, an air of confidence abounded. With Blaine the candidate for the Republicans, Democrats were convinced that any nomination that placed Bayard, Randall, or Cleveland at the head of the ticket was sure of victory.⁷⁸ On the surface, it appeared that securing a majority of ballots would be difficult for the candidates.⁷⁹ Yet in the political landscape of 1884 Cleveland’s appeal as a reformer outshone the political experience of Bayard and secured the nomination for the New Yorker. Reflecting on the close defeat of the Hancock-English ticket four years earlier, the party nominated Indianan Thomas A. Hendricks for vice president; the Republican victories in New York and Indiana had swung the election for them in 1880 and the Democrats clearly responded to this in 1884. Aware of the strength of the Mugwumps in New York, the Democratic party’s 1884 platform intentionally appealed to reform-minded Republicans who they had previous dealings with in 1872. It noted that ‘the Government should not always be controlled by one political party ... Otherwise abuses grow, and the Government, instead of being carried on for the general welfare, becomes an instrumentality for imposing heavy burdens on the many who are governed,

⁷⁵ Schurz to Bayard, June 28, 1884. Schurz Papers, LOC; Schurz to Henry C. Bowen, Aug 6, 1884. Schurz Papers, LOC.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Charlotte Home-Democrat*, June 13, 1884; *Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 1884.

⁷⁸ *Times-Picayune*, July 9, 1884.

⁷⁹ *Times-Picayune*, July 8, 1884.

for the benefit of the few who govern.’⁸⁰ Beyond civil service reform, the platform reflected the accession of the Bourbons to the forefront of the national Democratic leadership. It demonstrated the fiscal conservatism of the Bourbons, adhering to hard money, opposition to government grants to railroads, monopolies, the importation of foreign labour, and the reduction of ‘taxation to the lowest limit consistent with due regard to the preservation of the faith of the Nation to its creditors.’⁸¹ In doing so, the Bourbons were able to create the bridge between the Democrats and sceptical Republicans that the party had attempted to establish since the early years of Reconstruction. The Democrats saw their mission as one to stop the spread of the centralising tendency in American politics. In this regard, the ideological crossover between themselves and Republican reformers made an alliance logical, but it had been particularly elusive until this point. In 1884 however, the Democrats made a particularly astute nomination in Cleveland, and was able to craft a platform to match. Reflecting on the political situation in 1884, James R. Doolittle, the former Republican, told Hendricks that his old party had ‘become the party of centralisation’ and that ‘when I call all these things to mind, words fail to express the necessity to overthrow that party; and to place the administration in the hands of the true Democratic Republican party, regenerated as it now seems to be, and to bring true and genuine reform with it, into every branch of the government.’⁸²

The canvass that followed was one of the dirtiest in American history, with personal attacks at the centre of mudslinging in the contest. From the outset, the Democrats had the upper hand. In 1876, Blaine had been accused of receiving \$64,000 from the Union Pacific Railroad in 1871 as collateral for bonds he held in the company. Known as the Mulligan letters, the scandal had resulted in a public denial by Blaine on April 24, 1876, and Democrats latched onto it to cast the Maine Senator as dishonest and morally repugnant (see Figure 6.2). Despite his clean political record, reports that Cleveland had fathered an illegitimate child surfaced in Buffalo. Immediately, the Republican press jumped on the reports in an attempt to call into question Cleveland’s character (see Figure 6.3). When Cleveland publicly admitted to claims that he had been financially supporting the mother, Maria Crofts Halpin, public opinion did not shift against the New Yorker. Instead, people identified with him, believing that ‘there is

⁸⁰ *The Political Reformation of 1884. A Democratic Campaign Book* (New York: National Democratic Committee, 1884), p. 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Doolittle to Thomas A. Hendricks, June 19, 1884, Doolittle Papers, LOC; Also see, *The Political Reformation of 1884*, pp. 129-30.

something in a manly confession which clears the air, and gives assurance' to the public.⁸³ In a letter to Schurz, Reginald H. Williams wrote that 'Mr. Blaine's faults are those by which governments are overthrown and republics wrecked and ruined; his crimes are public crimes ... The errors of Gov. Cleveland, on the other hand, are purely private and personal, with which the public have nothing to do.'⁸⁴

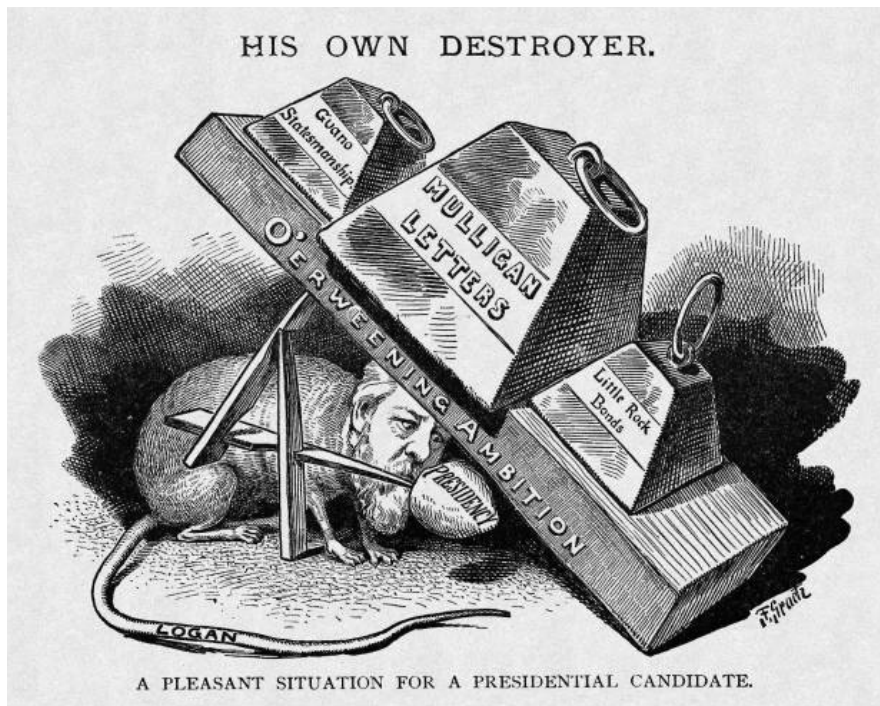


Figure 6.2 'His Own Destroyer – A Pleasant Situation for a Presidential Candidate,' *Puck*, Sept. 24, 1884

Against Cleveland's record of successfully overhauling corruption in Buffalo, Blaine's past immediately put the Republicans on the back foot. Their attacks on Cleveland for being relatively new to public affairs largely fell flat. In August the *Cincinnati Gazette* wrote that the 'attacks upon Blaine have been arraignments of his public career, and [the] absence of any weak point in the official life of Cleveland has seriously embarrassed the Republican journalists.'⁸⁵ Moreover, the *Gazette* asserted that the 'successful fight made by Cleveland against a gigantic ring of corruptionists in Buffalo has satisfied the people of his ability as a reformer as well as his probity.'⁸⁶ In response, the Republicans hoped their vice-presidential nominee John A. Logan could rekindle public memories of the Civil War, and stressed that the general had given

⁸³ James Freeman Clarke to Grover Cleveland, Sept. 1, 1884, Cleveland Papers, LOC.

⁸⁴ Reginald H. Williams to Schurz, Aug. 6, 1884, Schurz Papers, LOC.

⁸⁵ *Cincinnati Gazette*, Aug. 7, 1884.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

‘courage in the hour of fear, and kindled fires of devout patriotism when the embers were growing weak and low.’⁸⁷ Yet, with the battleground of the canvass firmly fixed on reform, Republican attempts to revive sectionalism were blurred by the profligacy of their presidential candidate.



Figure 6.3 ‘Another Voice for Cleveland,’ *The Judge*, Sept. 27, 1884

By mid-August the Cleveland campaign was running strong. While some Democrats doubted his ability to appeal to white industrial workers, the *New Yorker* addressed the issue in his acceptance letter. He echoed his intentions to reform the federal government, but also promoted improved welfare for the working class and showed his support for the labour movement by writing that ‘a true American sentiment recognizes the dignity of labor and the fact that honor lies in honest toil. Contented labor is an element of national prosperity ... Our workingmen are not asking unreasonable indulgence, but ... they seek the same consideration which those demand who have other interests at stake.’⁸⁸ While the Democrats hoped that Cleveland’s letter would ensure the support of the working classes, the announcement that Benjamin Butler would run for the presidency

⁸⁷ *A Review of the Presidential Battlefield: with John A. Logan as the Republican Standard Bearer in 1884* (Washington D.C.: [s.n.], 1884), p. 9.

⁸⁸ *Writing and Speeches of Grover Cleveland*, p. 11.

on the Anti-Monopoly and Greenback parties' tickets held the potential to draw votes away from Blaine and Cleveland.⁸⁹ The Republicans, however, had more to worry about than simply losing votes to a Greenback candidate who would steal votes from both parties. The growth of the cause of moral reform had resulted in the rapid rise of the Prohibitionist party in the early 1880s. Led by Kansas native John St. John, the Prohibitionists drew their support heavily from the Republican ranks. Advocates of temperance had castigated the Democrats for appealing to European immigrants, primarily the Irish, who they regarded as habitual drunkards, and thus held little appeal to typical Democratic voters.⁹⁰ While scholars such as Emil Pocock have argued that the Prohibition appeal in New York swung the state in Cleveland's favour, it was Blaine himself who helped to bolster Democratic support among European immigrants when, in New York in October, Presbyterian minister Samuel D. Buchard pledged his support for the Republicans by saying 'We are Republicans, and don't propose to leave our party and identify ourselves with the party whose antecedents have been Rum, Romanism and Rebellion. We are loyal to our flag, we are loyal to you.'⁹¹ Instead of repudiating the statement, Blaine allowed the comment to fester, and pushed possible Republican-voting Catholics and Irish firmly into the Democratic camp.

Heavy rain hit the eastern seaboard on election day, drenching states such as New York. As the results began to be reported, it once again appeared that the 1884 election would be a tight race. Scholars have advanced various reasons for the outcome of the 1884 election, pointing to the influence of the Mugwump vote, the weather, Blaine's blunders during the canvass, and the influence of prohibition as defining causes for the Democracy's return to the White House in 1884.⁹² Undoubtedly the torrential rain caused many rural Republicans to stay at home, just as the significant Independent vote contributed to Cleveland's slim victory in New York. Yet however the intricacies of the

⁸⁹ *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 8, 1884.

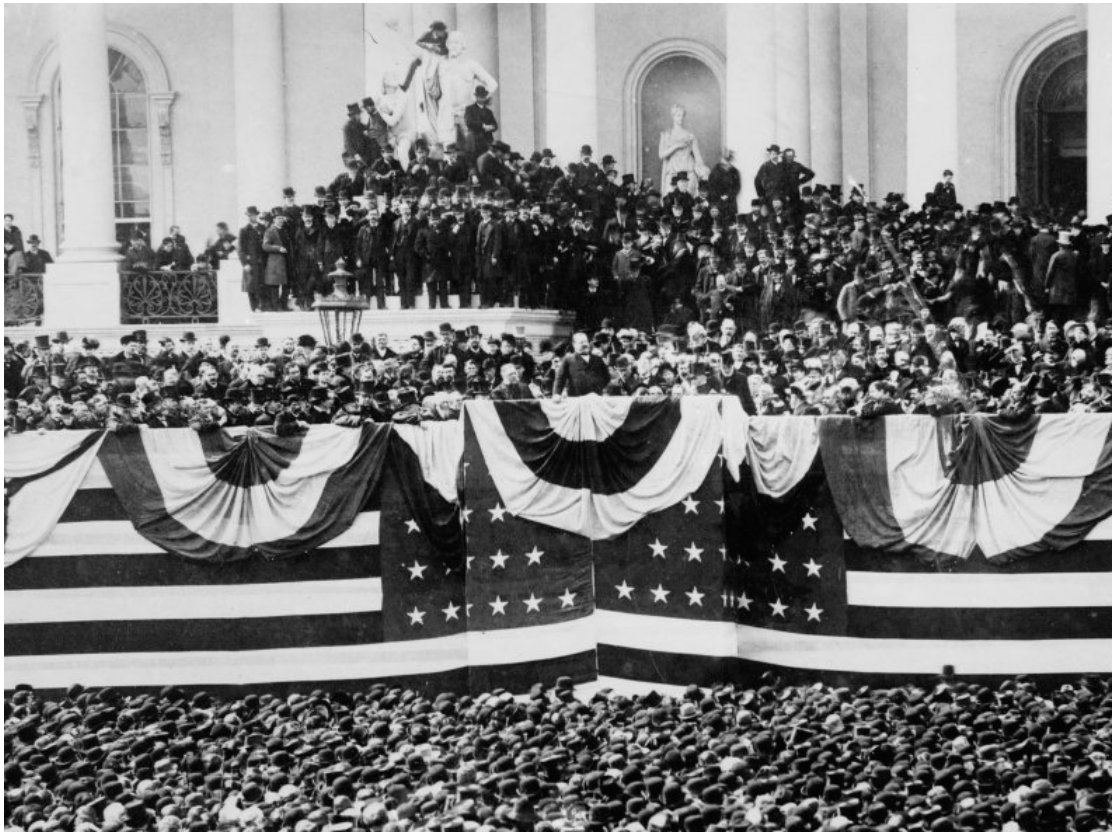
⁹⁰ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections*, Vol. IV, pp. 1575–6; Emil Pocock, 'Wet or Dry? The Presidential Election of 1884 in Upstate New York,' *New York History* Vol. 54, No. 2 (April, 1973), pp. 174–90; Anastasia Sims, "'The Sword of the Spirit': The WCTU and Moral Reform in North Carolina, 1883–1933,' *North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 64, No. 4 (October, 1987), pp. 394–415; Lisa M. F. Andersen, *The Politics of Prohibition: American Governance and the Prohibition Party, 1869–1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁹¹ Schlesinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections*, Vol. IV, p. 1578.

⁹² Summers, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion*; Harrison Cook Thomas, *The Return of the Democratic Party to Power in 1884* (New York: Longman, 1919); Pocock, 'Wet or Dry?'; Dale Baum, "'Noisy but not Numerous": The Revolt of the Massachusetts Mugwumps,' *Historian* Vol. 41, No. 2 (Winter, 1979), pp. 241–56; Geoffrey Blodgett, 'The Mugwump Reputation, 1870 to the Present,' *Journal of American History* Vol. 66, No. 4 (March, 1980), pp. 867–87; Gerald W. McFarland, 'The New York Mugwumps of 1884,' *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring, 1963), pp. 40–58.

campaign itself influenced the outcome, this was the election that Democrats had waited for since reform had become a rallying cry for the party in the early 1870s. Against the backdrop of constant Republican derision of their party's unsuitability to govern due to its synonymy with rebellion and disloyalty, the Democrats had dedicated themselves to changing the public perceptions of their party. Thus, when the 1884 election became a mudslinging contest over honesty and morality, the Democrats' long-established rhetoric of providing honest government made it difficult for their Republican adversaries, who had been constantly attacked as corrupt men only seeking partisan gain, to provide a strong enough riposte. Moreover, the decision to run a Washington outsider and New Yorker with a candidate who had a past record of securing the Electoral College votes of Indiana was particularly astute. Cleveland emerged just as the reform debate reached a crescendo. His outsider status had kept him removed from the murkiness of federal politics, so that by 1884 he was the right man at the right time for the Democratic party. He had a clean public record and was amenable to the national Democratic leadership. With the solid South secured, the Democracy still needed a significant northern state to secure the election. In Cleveland they found the means to do so. In the final analysis, therefore, only by placing the 1884 campaign in the context of the Democratic party's struggle with the legacy of the Civil War can its return to power be fully understood. Blaine may have made political miscalculations and the weather may have stopped Republican voters from turning out, but it was the ability of the Democracy to resurrect itself as a party that stood for honesty and respectability that gave its members the victory they so desperately wanted.

Conclusion



‘U.S. President Grover Cleveland Inauguration, Capitol Building, Washington D.C., USA,’ *Bain New Service*, March 4, 1885

On an unseasonably warm day in March 1885, 50,000 Americans gathered to witness the inauguration of the first Democratic president since 1856. As the president-elect made his way through the Capitol to the East Portico, Democrats jostled for position to catch a glimpse of ‘The Man Who Has Been Waited For Twenty-four Years.’¹ Unlike his predecessors, Cleveland departed from the custom of reading from a script and delivered his inaugural from memory with ‘iron-clad self-profession, in a firm, clear voice.’² Flanked by leading members of the party including Samuel J. Randall, and a small cadre of Union veterans, Cleveland addressed the vast crowd that had assembled before him. ‘To-day the executive brand of the Government is transferred to new keeping,’ he declared, ‘but this is still the Government of all the people, and it should be none the less an object of their affectionate solicitude ... if from this hour we cheerfully

¹ *New York World*, March 4, 1885.

² *Ibid.*, March 5, 1885.

and honestly abandon all sectional prejudice and distrust, and determine, with manly confidence in one another, to work out harmoniously the achievements of our national destiny, we shall deserve to realize all the benefits which our happy form of government can bestow.’³ While Cleveland’s speech lacked the verve of many of his contemporaries, the *New Yorker* delivered it with a firm conviction that the return of the Democratic party to the White House had finally closed the books on the Civil War.

Having endured the longest period of single party dominance since the Democratic-Republican victories that placed Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe and John Quincy Adams in the White House, Democrats were relieved that their party had not faded into obscurity. Cleveland’s election in 1884 was an important moment for a party that had become deeply conflicted over the party’s future in the aftermath of slavery, and put an end to any lingering doubts about the Democracy’s central place in the nation’s partisan landscape. By tracing the postbellum path of the Democratic party, this thesis has brought the previously unstudied process of Democratic reunification and resurgence to the forefront of the Reconstruction narrative. In doing so, it has demonstrated that, firstly, the Civil War caused a crisis in partisanship that pushed Democrats into seeking alternative party organisations. Secondly, that the institutional memory of the Democratic party provided a foundation for sectional reconciliation. And finally, that the endurance of public memories of the civil crisis was the most significant barrier to the party’s postbellum resurgence.

During the Civil War, the Democratic party fractured along a myriad of fault-lines that went far beyond the North-South sectional divide. Consumed by an anti-partisan culture that demonised oppositional politics, the War Democrats joined their former enemies in denouncing the Peace Democratic dissenters of the Union war effort. When the nation emerged from the crucible of war in 1865, the Democracy was in a state of flux. Wary of the stigma of disloyalty that clung to their Democratic allies, now former-War Democrats surveyed the political landscape uncertain of the future of their party.

The Democracy’s return to power can be understood as being significantly influenced by its bipartisan interactions. Through their involvement in the wartime Union party, National Unionism in 1866, and the Liberal Republican movement in 1872, Democrats set a precedent for working across the partisan divide that would be influential in their party’s return to the White House in 1884. Conventional scholarly wisdom

³ *New York World*, March 5, 1885.

characterises nineteenth-century partisanship as a less malleable concept than the Democracy's path back to the presidency suggests.⁴ Although the antiparty rhetoric commonplace during the Civil War subsided in the aftermath of Appomattox, the wartime experience of bipartisanship helped to narrow the imagined distance between the Republicans and the Democrats. Contrary to the observation that the Civil War strengthened the two-party system, the early years of Reconstruction were characterised by active attempts by accommodationist Democrats to construct a new national party that would render the Democracy untenable. Until 1874, the future of the Democratic party was uncertain. These attempts to create bipartisan alliances severely hindered the unity of the party, and it was only in the aftermath of the catastrophic Liberal Republican campaign of 1872 that the future of the party was set in stone. By the time the next opportunity for a bipartisan alliance arrived in 1884, the Democrats effectively exploited the precedent that had been set early in Reconstruction. For all the factional conflicts within the Democracy over national party strategy and the economic legacies of the war, reform provided a constant point of unity for the party. Reform had been the grounds for the Liberal-Democratic alliance in 1872, and the Democrats had been incessantly campaigning on the issue since, hoping to draw discontented Republicans into the party fold. Consistency was the key for the Democrats, and by placing reform at the centre of their party's image they managed to cast themselves as the party of honest government.

The Democratic party also played an important role in achieving sectional reconciliation. Reconciliation was a central theme to the resurgence of the Democracy in the postbellum era, and this builds upon recent scholarship that has emphasised the limits of reconciliation, by asserting that the institutional memory of the Democratic party was central to reunifying white northerners and southerners.⁵ Before the Democrats' fracture at Charleston in 1860, their party had been dependent on its appeal across the sectional dividing line to secure national ascendancy. During the early years of Reconstruction, Democrats coalesced behind a virulent racism that stood opposed to racial equality and the Republican Reconstruction settlement. In an attempt to restore southern faith in the party, northern Democrats rarely condemned the barbarous acts of violence perpetrated

⁴ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*; Silbey, *The American Political Nation*; Baker, *Affairs of Party*; McCormick, *The Party Period*. In challenging this view, this thesis has been more in line with the recent interpretation of the fluidity of partisanship as discussed in, Smith, *No Party Now*; Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵ Principally, this argument responds to Caroline Janney's argument that race alone was not enough to engender a genuine reconciliation across the sectional divide. See, Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*.

across the South. Rather, northern Democrats frequently played upon the racial fears of white labourers in order to solidify their appeal for white man's government. While white supremacy provided an important ideological glue to unite northern and southern Democrats, racial prejudice alone was not sufficient to bridge the bloody chasm during Reconstruction. Grandiose public displays of reconciliation that celebrated the return of the South to the Union attempted to restore fraternal feelings between northerners and southerners, but most of these were unable to achieve their aims. However, this thesis contends that the Democracy itself was crucial in reconciling northerners and southerners, and scholars have overlooked the role it played. Democrats regularly made appeals to the institutional memory of their party to reconcile its northern and southern wings, and acted as a rallying cry against Republican corruption, centralisation, and racial equality. They frequently referenced Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson to rekindle shared memories of a fraternal past that both northerners and southerners could rally behind. In doing so, postbellum Democrats were, by 1884, able to put the legacy of Charleston behind them and join hands across the bloody chasm within the Democratic organisation.

Despite the attempts of Democrats to use the institutional memory of their party to ensure the unity of their party, and bipartisanship to create electoral majorities, the single biggest barrier to the Democracy's return to power was the lingering legacy of the Civil War. Both in the North and the South, the wartime actions of Peace Democrats and Confederates were chastised as treasonous, and the party struggled to shake itself of the stigma of disloyalty. As long as Reconstruction dominated the national political debate, the Republicans continued to furiously wave the bloody shirt and the Democracy stood little chance of overthrowing Radical rule. To a certain extent, therefore, the party was dependent upon external factors to propel the party back to power. Undoubtedly, the economic depression initiated by the Panic of 1873 shifted the political landscape of Reconstruction, but scholars have too readily assumed that the Democracy would inevitably return to the White House.⁶ Rather, this thesis has shown that the endurance of the divergent legacies of the Civil War did not just disappear, but the Democrats themselves played a crucial role in shifting the national political landscape away from Reconstruction and towards economics and reform. The path of the Democracy from 1860 through to 1884, therefore, was not simply a process of being rigid in its views, policies, and actions. Nor was it a matter of pulling down the central pillars of the party

⁶ Summers, *Ordeal of the Reunion*, p. 347.

and forming a new one in its place. Rather, the Democrats learned from their experiences of wartime partisan conflict by appealing to the middle ground of American politics, harnessed the forces of centralisation unleashed by the Civil War through civil service reform, and refashioned itself behind a unifying banner: white man's democracy and honest government.

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