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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I am delighted to introduce the first issue of the second volume of the *Notre Dame Historical Review*. This new installment arrives as we commemorate the 250th anniversary of American independence, and it features six articles from students across the nation whose research explores diverse periods and perspectives on the American past.

As with our first volume, this publication is the product of a hardworking editorial team and many dedicated contributors. The care of our student editors has been instrumental in bringing this journal to life. We are also deeply grateful to the faculty and staff of the History Department for their guidance and encouragement throughout the process. Their support ensures that the *Review* will continue to flourish as both an intellectual and creative endeavor for years to come.

This issue's essays offer fresh insights into America's past and American identities. From eighteenth-century demography to the populist ambition of Huey Long, these articles engage how Americans experienced different times and places. As you ponder the present United States in light of 1776 and the surrounding years, I invite you to consider this issue's cover, which includes part of Jeremiah Paul Jr.'s c. 1795 *Manumission of Dinah Nevil*, a painting examined in this issue's first article. Like the writing included in this issue, Paul's artwork engages with and interprets the past.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating this milestone in American history and in continuing the conversation between past and present.

Vincent Micheli

Editor-in-Chief

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About the Authors

Vivek Rallabandi graduated from Gettysburg College in May 2025, where he double majored in History and Religious Studies and minored in Public History. He is particularly interested in American and modern Indian history and is also fascinated by the intersection of religion and society. Vivek plans to apply to law school in the upcoming admissions cycle and hopes to pursue a career in criminal law. As an undergraduate, Vivek interned with the Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg College's Special Collections and College Archives, and a family court judge in the Superior Court of New Jersey.

Ethan Marcheselli is a senior at Boston College, majoring in Management and History, with Management concentrations in Finance and Business Analytics. His research interests include social remembrance and forgetting, particularly in the context of European cultural nationalism, as well as the 19th century phenomena of county seat wars in the American West and Midwest. In his spare time, he is an avid cyclist and serves as president of the BC Club Cycling Team. He will graduate in Spring 2026 and plans to pursue a career in data engineering.

Jack Steyer is a first-year law student at the University of Georgia School of Law. He recently graduated with honors from the University of Georgia, earning degrees in both History and Political Science. While at UGA, Jack studied abroad at Oxford where he discovered his interest in the history of the long nineteenth century. When Jack is not studying, he can typically be found watching UGA sports or spending time with his fiancé. Jack plans to pursue a career in civil litigation.

Charlie Davidow is a junior at Boston College majoring in Economics and History, with a minor in Environmental Studies. Coming from Stowe, Vermont, his academic interests are in environmental economics, environmental history & policy, and United States history more generally. Before spending a semester studying abroad at Charles University in Prague, he worked as an undergraduate research assistant in the Boston College History Department, aiding Professor Ángeles Picone in her research on Argentina's protected areas.

Simone Garber is a senior at Northwestern University majoring in Journalism and History. Originally from Chicago, her field reporting thus far has taken her from Wisconsin to Washington, D.C., to across the Atlantic in London, England, and Doha, Qatar. Simone is particularly focused on a narrative-based, impact-driven storytelling — and studying history has proven a valuable approach to centering compelling, often underrepresented voices in her daily work. Continuing her postgraduate career in multimedia journalism, Simone hopes to underpin contemporary systems of power with their appropriate historical context, helping audiences understand the through lines between past, present, and future.

James Baird graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2025 with a Bachelor's Degree in History and Political Science and a minor in Constitutional Studies. James loved Notre Dame so much that he is now attending Notre Dame Law School. His academic interests center around American political and legal history, with a focus on the Interwar period. Much of his undergraduate years revolved around elections and research, with involvement in organizations such as the Student Government, the Student Policy Network, and the Kellogg Developing Researchers program. After graduating, James hopes to continue his research as a lawyer.

Black, White, and Yellow: Mapping a Triracial History of Eighteenth-Century Greater Pennsylvania

Vivek Rallabandi
Gettysburg College

Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania's racial landscape, arguing that notions of Whiteness and Blackness that developed in the post-Revolutionary commonwealth are tied to a triracial web of interactions that occurred throughout the eighteenth century. Crucially, the paper observes that Indianness was an intermediate category between the extremes of Whiteness and Blackness and that the racial binary that would later emerge was necessarily constructed around notions of Indianness. Through exploring legislative enactments, runaway advertisements, and a manumission case, this paper brings out the stories of ordinary inhabitants of greater Pennsylvania whose lives have been largely obscured by the historical record. These stories illustrate the complexity and diversity of racial interactions on the Pennsylvania frontier and the ways in which a multiracial underclass defied the colonial government's control.

In 1722, the English colony of Virginia grappled with a persistent problem: runaway slaves. Colonial officials discovered that Indian tribes sheltered African slaves. Hoping to deter Indians within Pennsylvania's territorial jurisdiction from abetting runaway slaves, Alexander Spotswood, Virginia's lieutenant governor, decided to communicate with these native peoples through Pennsylvania's government. Spotswood's entreaty was part of a message that fur trader James Letort conveyed "[t]o the Chiefs of the Conestogoe, Delaware, Shawwanese & Ganawese Indians" at a meeting convened in the settlement of Conestoga:

I [William Keith, Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania] must also further inform you that the five Nations have agreed in the same Treaty, that neither they nor you shall receive or harbor any Negroes on any accot. whatsoever, but if any of them be found by the Indians in the woods, they shall be taken up and brought to the Governour that they may be returned to their masters, for you know the Negroes are Slaves. But now some of these Negroes having runaway from their masters in Virginia, are said to be entertained by some Shawanese on Patowmeck; Therefore, Colo. Spotswood sends a Belt which is now to be delivered to you that you may take up these Negroes, and he desires that they may be delivered to Colo. Mason, on Patowmeck in Virginia, who will give Persons who will bring them to him, one Good Gun and two Blankets for each Negro, and I have herewith sent you my Pass that you may safely carry them into Virginia without any danger, & receive that Reward; And the same value you will receive, from time to time, for every Runaway Negro that you shall take up & deliver in the like manner that they may be restored to their Master.¹

Though it was accompanied by the standard offering of elaborately beaded wampum belts, it is unclear whether Virginia authorities' plea had the desired effect on its Indian listeners. What is undisputed, though, is that Pennsylvania's Indians continued to shelter and aid African and mixed-race runaway slaves and servants throughout the eighteenth century. Interactions between Africans, Indians, and Whites on the Pennsylvania frontier, largely beyond the control of the colonial administration, contributed to the development of a complex tri-racial dynamic during this period.

¹ *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, from the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Jo. Severns and Co., 1852), 209, 211. Henceforth *MPCP*.

The historiographical discourse surrounding early Pennsylvania's racial history has focused primarily on how relationships between Native Americans and Europeans became circumscribed by rigid racial boundaries over time. This narrative has largely regarded Africans' role in shaping early Pennsylvania's racial contours as an afterthought, preferring instead to consider relations between colonists and the Indians.

Historians have broadly agreed that early interactions between Indians and Europeans in Pennsylvania did not occur along explicitly racial lines, insofar as we understand the concept of race today. Daniel Richter and William Pencak have noted that, though the two groups found some common ground, "underlying disparities in interests" necessarily created dissonance between them.² Jane Merritt also asserted that "racial divisiveness was not a foregone conclusion" in early Pennsylvania.³ Peter Rhoads Silver has described the mid-Atlantic frontier during this period as "a crazy patchwork of overlapping racial, linguistic, and religious zones."⁴ In particular, Silver pointed out that various European groups that immigrated to Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century became part of an "unhappily assorted new society" that was not, by any stretch, a model for inter-ethnic fraternity.⁵

A crucial element of this historiographical narrative is the question of when and how Europeans and Indians in Pennsylvania actually developed a distinctively racial identity.⁶ Jane Merritt has commented on the quandary that white Pennsylvanians faced at midcentury, namely how to distinguish "friends" from "enemies" among the Indians; the solution these settlers found was to view all Indians as a uniform enemy.⁷ Writing in *Friends and Indians*, Krista Camenzind identifies the Paxton Boys' 1763 Indian pogrom as an overtly racial act, indicating that racial distinctions between Europeans and Indians had become firmly established by this point.⁸ Peter Silver has contended that race, as it is understood today, was not a significant factor in shaping interactions between Europeans and Indians until the end of the American Revolution. Instead, Silver identified

² William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter, eds., "Introduction," in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), xi.

³ Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill and London: UNC Press Books, 2003), 4.

⁴ Peter Rhoads Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 14.

⁵ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 14.

⁶ Pencak and Richter, "Introduction," xix.

⁷ Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 190.

⁸ Krista Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," in *Friends and Enemies*, 202.

racial categories in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania as “providing a standard of loyalty against which individuals’ actions could be judged.” Specifically, these racial conceptions enabled European settlers to find fault with colonial administrators that they viewed as being unduly sympathetic to Indians.⁹

As the colonial period came to an end with the American Revolution and the establishment of a new American republic, the historiography reflects that racial boundaries became entrenched like never before. In *Friends and Enemies*, Gregory Knouff argued that African-Americans’ political ostracization in the early republic was fueled by the notion that Indians could not be considered “American.”¹⁰ As a corollary, Gregory Ablavsky’s analysis of Indian slavery suits in Revolutionary-era Virginia argued that the cases eschewed a “triracial” system, which included Indians, in favor of a “black/white” binary.¹¹

This final plank of the historiography represents the most explicit acknowledgement that Pennsylvania’s history is indeed triracial. This paper attempts to make a meaningful intervention in the existing historiography, arguing that the construction of both Whiteness and Blackness in Pennsylvania’s history developed around the intermediate category of Indianness. It is impossible to properly appreciate Pennsylvania’s racial history during the nineteenth century, which was principally defined by White and Black identities, without understanding the triracial landscape in eighteenth-century colonial Pennsylvania.

REGULATING AFRICAN AND INDIAN SLAVERY IN PENNSYLVANIA

Indian slavery was part of Pennsylvania’s history from the early colonial period; indeed, William Markham, who served as acting governor of the colony in William Penn’s stead in the late 1600s, owned an Indian slave born in 1700. Sir William Keith, the English official administering Pennsylvania in the early-to-mid eighteenth century, sold “an Indian and her son” in 1726 as part of a lot of seventeen slaves. Records from the Friends’ Yearly Meeting in 1719 also reflect that Quakers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey owned both Indian and African slaves. The question arises of how Indian slavery in the Pennsylvania region squared with the colony’s

⁹ Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, xxi-xxii.

¹⁰ Gregory T. Knouff, “Whiteness and Warfare on a Revolutionary Frontier,” in *Friends and Enemies*, 256-27.

¹¹ Gregory Ablavsky, “Making Indians White: The Judicial Abolition of Native Slavery in Revolutionary Virginia and Its Racial Legacy,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 159, no. 5 (April 1, 2011): 1463.

stated policy of ensuring friendly relations with the Indians.¹² In his treatise on Indian slavery in the United States, written in 1913, Almon Wheeler Lauber opined that, in Pennsylvania “[t]he Indian slaves used were brought in from other colonies.”¹³ However, Indian slavery in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania did not become a widespread institution due in part to the Quakers’ unwillingness to engage in military conquest to enslave Indians. This stands in contrast with Indian enslavement that occurred through the seventeenth-century Indian conflicts in New England—King Philip’s War and the Pequot War—and the Yamasee War in South Carolina, fought in 1715-16.¹⁴

Indian slavery was also less of a centerpiece of the Pennsylvania economy when juxtaposed with other Northern colonies, specifically in the New England region. Indians outside Pennsylvania viewed the colony as something of a safe haven in contrast to other English territories. At a 1710 meeting at Conestoga, representatives of the Tuscarora nation, native to North and South Carolina, made an appeal to representatives of Pennsylvania’s government for asylum. The interaction was facilitated by the Seneca nation, one of the member nations of the Iroquois confederacy, who shared ties with the Tuscarora. The Tuscaroras’ pleadings paint a dire picture of their situation in North Carolina, where they were being persecuted by English settlers itching to expand their land holdings at the natives’ expense. The Tuscarora sought a reprieve from colonists “murdering & taking them” and thought they could enjoy “a lasting peace with the Christians and Indians of this Govmt.” in Pennsylvania. The Tuscarora offered two wampum beaded belts of to the colonists on behalf of “their children born, & yet those in the womb” and “their young men fitt to Hunt,” who the Indians pleaded should be permitted to move freely “without danger of Slavery.” Per the Tuscarora account, the tribe’s young men were afraid “to leave their Towns, & seek Provision for their aged.” The visiting colonial representatives dispatched by the Provincial Council, John French and Henry Worley, recognized that the Tuscarora were “of the same race & Language with our Seneques” and could thus be trusted.¹⁵ Ultimately, however, tensions between the Tuscarora and the North

¹² Alton Lauber Wheeler, “Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States” (Ph.D. thesis: Columbia University, 1913), 115-16.

¹³ Wheeler, “Indian Slavery in Colonial Times within the Present Limits of the United States,” 115-16.

¹⁴ Alan Gallay, “Indian Slavery,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Mark M. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 324-25.

¹⁵ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 511-12.

Carolina colony came to a head with the outbreak of the Tuscarora War less than a year after the Conestoga meeting, and they never obtained asylum in Pennsylvania. The Tuscarora were badly defeated in the conflict and were displaced from their homelands, and they subsequently traveled northward to live with the other members of the Iroquois Confederacy.¹⁶

Early Pennsylvania's rulers were attuned to Indian concerns about enslavement even before the 1710 Iroquois delegation raised the issue at Conestoga. Though the Indians at Conestoga made their statements about slavery in the context of the Tuscarora's plight in the Carolinas, their comments can be read as an expression of Pennsylvania Indians' concerns about slavery as Europeans began to settle on their lands. The Tuscaroras' remonstrance before the Pennsylvania delegation, which the Seneca facilitated, served as a subtle reminder that Pennsylvania, too, would do well to prevent similar misadventures that could affect Indians living in its jurisdiction.¹⁷ Though Pennsylvania's government did not actively encourage Indian enslavement, white settlers on the frontier who resented the Indians' presence could have nonetheless captured and sold Indians into servitude. It is conceivable that these settlers could have acted in defiance of the colonial government, which, at this stage, strived to maintain a policy of amity and harmony with the Indians. Pennsylvania's Indians were likely aware of this threat, however remote, and wanted to make the colonial administration aware of their apprehensions.

In the early eighteenth century, Pennsylvania's officials became certainly attuned to Indians' worries about enslavement, and began to take action. The colony passed legislation five years prior to the Tuscarora visit to Conestoga "[t]o Prevent The Importation of Indian Slaves" from any American territory, with effect from March 25, 1706. Nodding explicitly to Indian concerns, the legislation acknowledged that "the importation of Indians from Carolina and other places hath been observed to give the Indians of this province some umbrage for suspicion and dissatisfaction."¹⁸ This statement assumes significance in light of the fact that Tuscarora slaves were probably being imported into Pennsylvania from the Carolinas, much to the chagrin of their influential Iroquois allies in Pennsylvania. This

¹⁶ Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 265-66. I also examined an online source (a brief primary source guide for grade school students) that discussed the Tuscaroras' outreach to the Pennsylvania government; this allowed me to understand some context related to the Tuscarora War.

¹⁷ Nicole Eustace, *Covered with Night: A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2021), 23-24.

¹⁸ James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, eds., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801*, Vol. 2 (Clarence M. Busch, State Printer of Pennsylvania, 1896), 236.

legislation was proposed by the Provincial Council in November 1705 as part of an array of laws concerning both Indians and Africans. The contrast between the legislation framed with respect to the two groups could not have been starker. While the package of Indian-related legislation included provisions that levied monetary penalties on settlers harassing the colony's indigenous inhabitants, the proposed legislation aimed at Africans was much more restrictive. One of the bills promulgated at the Provincial Council meeting was aimed at "preventing Negroes meeting on ye first days of the week."¹⁹ By forbidding African slaves from meeting on Sundays, which was set aside as a day of rest, colonial administrators wanted to forestall the possibility that slaves could come together to foment rebellion and threaten the infant colony's stability.

Colonial administrators undoubtedly saw the benefits of "maintaining a better Correspondence with the Indians" and extending them "the advantage of all our Laws," especially considering the vast tracts of land that Indians still controlled.²⁰ For the colony to succeed under William Penn's utopian model, coexistence and harmony with its native inhabitants was indispensable. Pennsylvania's leaders did not accord Africans, who were largely held as slaves, anywhere near the same degree of deference or kindness as they did to Indians. Rather, from the outset, their race effectively marked them as unfree laborers. This was the very racial categorization that Pennsylvania's Indians sought to eschew through their appeals to ban the importation of Indian slaves. A moratorium on the importation of Indian slaves would have set a precedent for delineating Indians writ large—as opposed to Africans—as a separate racial class that was immune from enslavement.

Seeing Tuscarora slaves in Pennsylvania hit too close to home for their Iroquois relatives in the colony. The Tuscarora were of the same "race & Language" as other Iroquois groups in Pennsylvania; if they were enslaved, it begs the question of what, if anything, would have stopped frontier settlers in Pennsylvania from capturing and enslaving locally based Native American groups such as the Seneca. No records exist of Pennsylvania Indians ever being enslaved in large numbers; however, the threat of bondage continued to loom large in native peoples' minds throughout the eighteenth century. The Delaware Indians, who were described by one period account as "dread[ing] slavery more than death," feared that colonists would "make slaves of them and their children as they

¹⁹ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 209-11.

²⁰ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 209-11.

did of the Negroes.”²¹ In other words, for the Delawares, the policy of peace and friendship that Pennsylvania’s leaders espoused increasingly brushed up against the harsh realities of White settlement and dispossession. The Walking Purchase of 1737 and subsequent treaties that alienated the Delawares from their ancestral territories without their consent introduced the possibility that William Penn’s lofty pronouncements in his 1681 Letter to the Indians may have been rendered empty words. James Logan, who was instrumental in negotiating the Walking Purchase, described the Delawares in a 1742 letter as “those vile ones from the forks of Del[aware].”²² Penn’s references to the Indians as brothers and friends were now replaced with terms of derogation and contempt.

This vocabulary of dehumanization, which tracks with the language White Pennsylvanians often used in reference to African slaves, could have been the first step in the slippage of Pennsylvania Indians’ status from independent cohabitants to unfree laborers. Indeed, it was Africans’ race that marked them as a class that needed to be regulated and monitored, as evidenced by the suite of 1705 legislation meant to restrict their activities and free movement. Particularly in the early eighteenth century, Pennsylvania’s colonial leaders were intent on ensuring that African slaves did not deviate from accepted standards of good order. Punishments for any lapse could be severe. In 1707, the Provincial Council considered a petition presented by two Philadelphia slaveowners, William Righton and Robert Grace, whose slaves were tried for burglary and sentenced to death. The slaveowners were aghast at the sentence because it would deprive them of their human property without any remuneration, and they appealed to the Provincial Council to modify the punishment such that their property interests would not be prejudiced. The Provincial Council relented and modified the death sentence to a sort of punishment that would have perhaps left the condemned slaves thinking that execution was preferable. The Provincial Council prescribed

[t]hat the Punishment shall be as follows: They shall be led from the Market place, up ye Second Street , & down thro' the front street to y Bridge, with their arms extended & tied to a pole across their Necks, a Cart going before them , and that they shall be severely Whipt all the way as they pass, upon the bare back and shoulders; this punishmt. shall be repeated for 3 market days successively; in the meantime

²¹ Jean R Soderlund, *Lenape Country: Delaware Valley Society before William Penn* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 197.

²² Merritt, *Crossroads*, 49.

they shall lie in Irons, in the prison , at the Owners Charge , until they have such an Opportunity as shall best please them for transportation; All which being duly perform'd, the Sentence of Death shall be intirely remitted.²³

The Provincial Council clearly intended to make a public spectacle out of the convicted slaves by inflicting severe punishment on them for all to see. The intention was “to make the Slaves Examples of Terror to others of their Complexion.”²⁴ Any crime committed by Africans, no matter how trivial, would be met with the strictest retribution.

Indians in Pennsylvania certainly bore witness to African slavery and interacted with African slaves.²⁵ One runaway advertisement placed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1733 records that two African slaves, one male and one female, absconded “from *John Petty*, Indian trader.”²⁶ Indian traders like Petty would likely have taken their slaves with them to assist them as they journeyed through the Pennsylvania frontier to conduct business dealings with native peoples. A 1775 advertisement in the *Gazette* placed in search of Bob, an African slave in Lancaster, speculated that “he is gone toward Fort-Pitt, as his former master Daniel Elliot followed the Indian trade, with whom he hath been frequently there.”²⁷

African slaves served as a constant and visible reminder for Pennsylvania Indians of what could become of their status in European-dominated Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Indians recognized that dispossession and slavery went hand in hand. As White settlers claimed larger tracts of land, they drew upon a labor force composed of Indian and African slaves and well as White indentured servants to farm it.²⁸ As Quaker idealism faded and was replaced by a ruthless pragmatism driven by a seemingly insatiable hunger for land, the exalted status that Indians held in the European imagination began to change. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Indians’ autonomy, which was intrinsically tied to their ownership of land where they could roam as they pleased, was largely what protected them from becoming slaves or wage laborers. Indians’ stated apprehensions of being enslaved must be understood in this context. For Pennsylvania’s

²³ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 406.

²⁴ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 406.

²⁵ Soderlund, *Lenape Country*, 197.

²⁶ Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, eds., *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 17.

²⁷ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 127.

²⁸ Soderlund, *Lenape Country*, 197.

Indians, slavery did not simply represent bonded labor of the African sort. Rather, being stripped of their lands, and, thus, their autonomy and distinctive way of life, also represented a sort of bondage for these native peoples.²⁹ By midcentury, Pennsylvania's Indians became more wary of colonists' activities on their lands, particularly in the case of religious missionaries. For instance, in 1751, the Delaware Indians expressed their willingness to allow native peoples who had been converted to Christianity onto their lands in the Susquehanna region. However, fearing that his arrival would open the floodgates for more colonists to occupy their territory, they refused to allow John Brainerd, a Presbyterian missionary, onto their lands.³⁰

The Delaware peoples' fear of slavery came through even more clearly in a Moravian account from 1749 chronicling the conversion narrative of a Delaware Indian family from New Jersey. The Moravians were a Christian group who proselytized among the Indians of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania and established mission settlements where Indian converts could reside. Telling the conversion story of Mattheus, a sixteen-year old Indian, the narrative explains that his "mother had been made fearful by our neighbors around Nazareth, that we would make a slave of him, and if she demanded to have him back, would take him to another country." The reference to the Moravians' neighbors evidently points to Delaware Indians who were cautioning Mattheus' mother against entrusting her son to the missionary group. This would indicate that, by this point, the Delaware Indians began to grow fearful that Europeans, as a unified group, would deprive them of their land and liberty. Even groups such as the Moravians, who attempted to foster friendly relations with the Indians while converting them to Christianity, became objects of suspicion. While Mattheus' mother eventually became "assured of the particular love that the Brethren had for the poor Indian people," her prior anxieties are nonetheless reflective of Indians' broader concerns about bondage and autonomy.³¹

The Provincial Council had at least one occasion to consider how to enforce the 1705 legislation barring the importation of Indian slaves. In September 1709, the Provincial Council was confronted with the dilemma of what to do with Mingo, a young Indian who was described as "an Indian boy [...] said to be imported into this Province, contrary to the Act of Assembly, intituled an act to prevent the Importation of Indian slaves, passed in the year 1705."³² The Council was subsequently approached by

²⁹ Soderlund, *Lenape Country*, 197.

³⁰ Soderlund, *Lenape Country*, 196.

³¹ Merritt, *Crossroads*, 312-13.

³² *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 489-90.

James Heaton, a resident of Bucks County, who claimed that he owned Mingo. Declining to adjudicate the dispute, the Council decided that Indian importation cases would more appropriately be handled by the Court of Common Pleas, which would determine Mingo's fate.³³ Mingo's name, which may have been a European appellation, denoted that he was probably of Iroquoian descent.³⁴ It is possible that he was a Tuscarora Indian captured and imported from the Carolinas into Pennsylvania as a slave, given that this was a known occurrence.

The 1705 legislation was not Pennsylvania's last word on Indian slavery. In 1712, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed legislation, entitled "An Act to Prevent the Importation of Negroes and Indians Into This Province," that modified the absolute prohibition on importing Indian slaves. The preamble to the legislation explains why the legislature intended to restrict the importation of these two racial groups as slaves. African slavery was dangerous, the legislature surmised, because "divers plots and insurrections have frequently happened, not only in the islands but on the mainland of America by negroes, which have been carried on so far that several of the inhabitants have been thereby barbarously murdered." The legislature was particularly alarmed by news from earlier in 1712 that African slaves had orchestrated a slave revolt in New York City, which killed nine Europeans and wounded six others. As for Indian slavery, the legislature repeated the rationale from the 1705 legislation nearly verbatim, explaining that Indians in Pennsylvania were aggrieved by Indian slaves being imported into the colony from the Carolinas and other locations.³⁵ Given that the Tuscarora War was raging when the law was passed, the Iroquois in Pennsylvania likely continued to be concerned by their allies being enslaved and sold.

The stated motivations for banning African and Indian slave imports, respectively, were diametrically opposed to one another. While Pennsylvania legislators feared that African slavery could pose an existential threat to the colony's peace and safety, they believed that Indian slavery imperiled friendly relations with Pennsylvania's Indian inhabitants. In other words, colonial administrators perceived too many African slaves in the colony as an inherent danger, while they feared that expanding Indian slavery would cause unease among their Indian partners.

³³ *MPCP*, Vol. 2, 509.

³⁴ I performed an online search, which yielded an encyclopedia article that commented on the Iroquoian connections to the term "Mingo."

³⁵ *Statutes at Large*, Vol. 2, 433; "New York Slave Rebellion of 1712," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 30, 2024.

The 1712 legislation's title was somewhat deceptive, though, given that it did not completely prohibit the importation of African and Indian slaves. Rather, the new law imposed a duty of twenty pounds on every African and Indian slave that was permanently brought into Pennsylvania, which was intended to disincentivize the slave trade. This proposed legislation never came to fruition because it was rejected in 1713 by the Queen's Council in London. The Solicitor-General, one of the Crown's chief legal officers, offered his views on the legislation and proposed that it be repealed. "How far this act may interfere with the British interests as to their trading in negroes, your Lordships are most proper judges," the Solicitor-General submitted before the Queen's Council. The Solicitor-General's primary concern with the legislation, though, was that it allowed colonial officials to search residential dwellings at any time if they suspected that smuggled slaves were sheltered in the premises.

Any mention of the Indian slavery provisions in the legislation was conspicuously absent from the Solicitor-General's comments.³⁶ Given that the Queen's Council approved the more stringent provisions contained in the 1705 legislation, as they pertained to Indian slaves, it appears that the Crown was more concerned with ensuring that African slavery was alive and well, considering the economic benefits that it offered. Ironically, the queen's decision to reject the 1712 legislation meant that the more stringent 1705 law banning all importation of Indian slaves remained in place.

RUNAWAYS OF ALL COLORS ON THE PENNSYLVANIA FRONTIER

The passage of the 1705 legislation and the Crown's rejection of the 1712 bill meant that the number of African slaves significantly exceeded the number of Indians in bondage.³⁷ The racial landscape in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania was dynamic, with interactions between Europeans, Indians, and Africans. Taken together, runaway advertisements published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and other Pennsylvania newspapers in the eighteenth century are valuable tools in any attempt to reconstruct early Pennsylvania's triracial history. Studying these advertisements leads to the unmistakable conclusion that Indians and those of Indian ancestry were held in bondage in the greater Pennsylvania region throughout the early-to-mid eighteenth century, though the number of Indian slaves was significantly lower than their African counterparts. The advertisements also yield insights about intermarriage and relationships between Europeans and Indians as well as between Indians and Africans. They further shed light on where Indian

³⁶ *Statutes at Large*, Vol. 2, 433; "New York Slave Rebellion of 1712," 552.

³⁷ I have encountered this idea in at least one of the sources I reviewed; it is evident that the scale of African slavery far eclipsed that of Indian slavery in Pennsylvania at nearly all points in the eighteenth century.

slaves hailed from and their plans to escape from bondage, which sometimes tapped into Indian networks and settlements.

Indian slaves made up only a small fraction of the total runaway slaves featured in advertisements in Pennsylvania newspapers. A quantitative analysis of runaway advertisements in the *American Weekly Mercury*, an eighteenth-century newspaper published from Philadelphia, revealed that only two percent of the total advertisements featured Indian fugitives.³⁸ However, this figure may obscure the number of slaves that had some degree of Indian descent, given that the term mulatto, used in many runaway advertisements, does not specify the nature of the interracial union that led to a slave's birth. As such, a slave's Indian ancestry can only be ascertained from runaway advertisements only when the advertisement explicitly makes that statement. In certain cases, a reasonable inference that a slave had some Indian ancestry may flow from advertisements that stated, for instance, that a slave "much resembles an Indian in Colour."³⁹

Runaway advertisements are instrumental to understanding the circumstances in which Africans and Indians in greater Pennsylvania came into contact and even had sexual relationships. Historians Billy Smith and Richard Wojtowicz have observed that, with the notable exception of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's capital and largest urban center, most eighteenth-century slaves in Pennsylvania "worked side by side with their white masters on small farms and often lived in their owner's home."⁴⁰ The small-scale nature of Pennsylvania slavery meant that African slaves were usually not surrounded by many others of their race. For example, a small farmer on the Pennsylvania frontier may have only owned one or two slaves to assist him with agricultural and household tasks. African slaves' "physical isolation from each other in the countryside undermined their ability to maintain distinct African languages, religions, or traditions." African slaves' isolation in Pennsylvania's heartland also made it more likely that, if they were desirous of having sexual intercourse, they would turn to local White or Indian populations to bring their wish to fruition.⁴¹ This state of affairs would explain some of the racial intermixture that occurred on the Pennsylvania frontier and is referenced in runaway advertisements.

³⁸ Jason Daniels, "Gone towards Philadelphia': Advertisements for Runaway Indentured Servants, Enslaved Africans, Enslaved American Indians, and Fugitives in the *American Weekly Mercury*, 1719-1745," *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 4, no. 3 (2023): 38.

³⁹ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 57-58.

⁴⁰ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 7-8.

⁴¹ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 7-9.

One of the most notable elements of runaway advertisements in Pennsylvania's newspapers is advertisers' desire to develop and use categories of racial classification to refer to their escaped bondspeople. On a basic level, these methods of classification, specifically as they referred to skin tone and appearance, served a practical purpose in clarifying for readers what the escaped slaves may have looked like. However, they also represent attempts by European-origin Pennsylvanians to come to grips with the dizzying racial conglomeration that the new colony was becoming.⁴² Of course, comments about complexion were not restricted to advertisements placed in search of African and Indian slaves alone; White indentured servants were also variously described as being "of very fair Complexion" or of a "dark" or "swarthy" complexion. However, particularly in the case of Indians and Africans, who increasingly began to take on the role of a collective other in the European understanding by 1750, descriptions in the runaway advertisements reflected a need to make sense of and categorize this non-European population. In his incisive analysis of runaway advertisements during the latter half of the eighteenth century, Jonathan Prude has observed that, "by reinforcing the subordination of unfree laborers, they were effectively used by all who purchased them to confirm prevailing hierarchies." Put differently, runaway advertisements, as visual representations of power and control, reified pre-existing racial conceptions and prejudices in the minds of their readers, many of whom belonged to "polite constituencies."⁴³

In this vein, depictions of Indians in runaway advertisements shaped Europeans' understandings of them and classified them as a race that was capable of being used as bound laborers in a White-dominated society. Even though Pennsylvania Indians themselves were not, for the most part, enslaved, the very fact that Indian slaves were featured in runaway advertisements continually awakened White Pennsylvanians to the possibility that they could be captured and enslaved. Advertisements for Indian slaves or slaves of some Indian ancestry in Pennsylvania newspapers began to use the term "yellow" to describe them. One 1773 advertisement, placed in the *Gazette* by a Delaware slaveowner, was written in search of "a lusty yellow fellow, part Indian and part Negroe."⁴⁴ Similarly, a 1741 advertisement in the *Gazette* referred to a "Spanish Indian man about 30

⁴² Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*.

⁴³ Jonathan Prude, "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (June 1, 1991): 134.

⁴⁴ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 111.

years of age, low stature, a very yellow Complexion.”⁴⁵ Yet another advertisement, published in *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, a Philadelphia newspaper, in 1782, described “a Yellow SLAVE, named LOT, appears to be one half Negro the other Indian.”⁴⁶ This term was used as a marker of racial classification to describe someone that resembled an Indian, even if they had no Indian ancestry. One 1757 advertisement in the *Gazette* placed in search of “Thomas Rogers, an English Convict” laborer, described his complexion as being “as yellow as an Indian or Mulatto.”⁴⁷ Europeans’ use of this term to describe Indians points to a desire to classify them within an emerging, but not completely solidified, racial order.

Though notions of a common Whiteness had yet to solidify by the 1750s in Pennsylvania, as various European ethnic groups were still starkly divided amongst themselves, Yellowness became a catch-all descriptor for Indians of various ethnic origins. Indian servants and slaves had varying origins; while some were the children of Pennsylvania Indian mothers, others descended from Indian populations in the Carolinas, Florida, or Barbados. White Pennsylvanians could not claim that Indians were White, like they were; the populations were too divergent in their customs, habits, and languages to classify the noble savages as part of their racial ranks, even if symbolically. To the extent that it occurred, such as within the Moravians’ ranks, Indians’ conversion to Christianity, too, failed to meaningfully and substantially dissolve the cultural barrier that separated the two groups. The story of Teedyuscung, a Delaware Indian who converted to the Moravians’ fold for a time but was ultimately killed in an attack by White settlers, is a tragic example of Christian conversion’s limitations as an assimilating force. Yet, these Europeans could not classify the Indians as Negroes, either, being that Indians’ complexion did not comport with that descriptor; they were usually not dark-complexioned like Africans and were not depicted as such in period art. Perhaps more importantly, though, Negroness assumed a peculiarly negative connotation in White Pennsylvanians’ milieu; to them, the African race was from the outset an inferior and incorrigible class that was imported into the colony for the explicit purpose of performing slave labor. Labeling Indians as Negroes would have been an affront to the former and a complete departure from how Europeans understood Indians. This proposition held true even as Europeans’ perceptions of Indians began to shift toward the middle of the eighteenth century amidst increasing tensions over land acquisition.

⁴⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 9, 1741.

⁴⁶ *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1782.

⁴⁷ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 42.

Yellowness, then, was a middle ground between Whiteness and Blackness, and it figuratively represented the unique position that Indians occupied in Pennsylvania's racial mosaic. It was a necessarily ambiguous category that persisted throughout the eighteenth century, and its disappearance from popular discourse is also indicative of a sea change in Pennsylvania's racial scene. An 1824 advertisement in the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* described a runaway slave who was "a mixture of the Indian and Negro, resembles a dark copper colored squaw."⁴⁸ A mention of yellowness, which was commonly used in eighteenth-century advertisements to describe slaves of mixed Indian and African descent, was conspicuously absent from this advertisement. Rather, the description of a "copper colored squaw" fits with a nineteenth-century view of Indians as a separate race of red people. Historian Nancy Shoemaker has noted that the practice of describing Indians as red was popular in the mid-eighteenth century Southeast but "was still a novelty in the Northeast" in the same period. The transition from yellowness to redness in describing Indians in Pennsylvania epitomized a paradigm shift from racial ambiguity to defined racial categorization, which was driven by the development of a composite White identity.⁴⁹

Descriptions of English language proficiency in runaway advertisements also served as barometers for how integrated into White Pennsylvania society unfree laborers, including Indians, had become. As the language of administration, English became Pennsylvania's *lingua franca*, becoming a common tongue that united the disparate White and non-White ethnic groups that dotted the colony. In his brief study of Indian runaway advertisements in the Northeast dating from 1705 to 1745, the linguist Allen Walker Read observed that it "is noteworthy that the Indians are almost invariably spoken of as using good English."⁵⁰ One of the examples that Read cites is an advertisement featured in the *Gazette*, published on October 17, 1734:

Run away, the 26 of June last, from *Samuel Leonard*, of *Perth-Amboy* in *New-Jersey*, a thick Short Fellow, having but one Eye, he is half Indian half Negro tho' as black as most Negroes; he had on when he went away a blue Coat; his name is Wan, he plays on the Fiddle and speaks good English and this Country Indian. Any Person bringing home

⁴⁸ *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, February 13, 1824.

⁴⁹ Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to Be Red," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 629-631.

⁵⁰ Allen Walker Read, "The English of Indians (1705-1745)," *American Speech* 16, no. 1 (February 1941): 73.

the said Fellow to his Master, shall have *Three Pounds*
Reward with reasonable Charges, paid by *Samuel Leonard*.

This advertisement is valuable in multiple ways in understanding the multiracial dynamics at play in early-eighteenth century Pennsylvania. First, the advertisement informs the reader that Wan was a mulatto slave, the product of a union between Indian and African parents. The statement that Wan was “as black as most Negroes” once again underscores how White Pennsylvanians were using complexion and race to comprehend and identify unfree people that they described in newspaper advertisements. Wan was also multilingual, given that he could speak both English and “this Country Indian.”⁵¹ Given that Wan’s master, who placed the advertisement, lived within the bounds of Delaware territory, it is reasonable to infer that Wan had Delaware Indian ancestry and, as a result, spoke one of the languages in the Delaware language family. Accepting the premise that Wan had Delaware ancestry, one of two conclusions would emerge. First, Wan’s mother could have been a Delaware Indian and his father an African slave. Though it is unlikely that a Pennsylvania-origin Delaware Indian was enslaved in the early eighteenth century, it is possible that Wan’s mother was in some sort of involuntary bondage and that her son, too, was born into slavery. This possibility can also be rationalized through the argument that some of the Delawares’ concerns about slavery were informed by anecdotal experiences of their peoples, such as Wan’s mother, being pulled into forms of involuntary servitude. Another possibility that arises from Wan’s parentage is that his father was a Delaware Indian and his mother an African slave. In this circumstance, his Indian father could have been free or unfree; of course, if Wan’s mother was an African slave, it follows that he, too, would have been born into slavery.

The exact details of Wan’s parentage are lost to time, and whether he was the child of a legitimate matrimonial union is questionable. Writing in the context of Delaware territory in northern New Jersey, Kirsten Sword has noted that matrimonial unions between African and Indian slaves were

⁵¹ This argument is based on the premise that Samuel Leonard, Wan’s master, wrote and placed the advertisement and that his reference to “this Country Indian” would have been a description of a Delaware language that would have been spoken by Delaware/Lenape peoples in the New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania region. Given that Leonard lived among the Delaware, he would have been able to identify their language and Leonard’s proficiency in it. It is also possible, though less probable, that “this Country” referred to greater Pennsylvania more broadly, in which case Wan could have spoken an Iroquian language instead. In that instance, it could follow that one of Wan’s parents was a Tuscarora Indian who was brought to Pennsylvania from the Carolinas, which was a known possibility.

rather common. “Masters encouraged such alliances,” Sword speculated, “probably because they helped undermine any potential bargaining power offered by tribal alliances or by recognition of a common Indian identity.”⁵² This hypothesis would certainly hold true in Wan’s case; in a region where the Delaware Indians still held substantial sway, prior to the Walking Purchase of 1737, Wan’s Delaware identity could have given him a legitimate defense against being enslaved. He could have drawn on support from local Delaware Indians who claimed him as one of their own and protested his enslavement. In fact, it is entirely possible that Wan escaped into a Delaware settlement after he fled from his master’s custody and was sheltered by his relatives from that tribe. Wan’s multilingual identity may have allowed him to forge bonds between colonists and Indians, which is similar to the interpretive role that Indian captives played in other regions, such as in New England. This may have been particularly relevant in Wan’s case because his master, Samuel Leonard, was a relatively prominent figure in early New Jersey history. Before Wan’s escape, Leonard was one of Perth Amboy’s first aldermen and was elected to the New Jersey Assembly. He subsequently “served as Commissioner of Highways of Middlesex and Somerset counties” in New Jersey.⁵³ Leonard’s service as a colonial administrator may have well required him to deal with Delaware Indians, and Wan’s knowledge of a Delaware language, in addition to English, may have assisted in this task. In this sense, Indian slaves and indentured servants, to the extent that they served as linguistic and cultural mediators, paralleled the role that White captives among the Indians played in facilitating European-Indian interactions.

Though there is no evidence to definitively indicate that Wan’s escape was abetted by his Delaware kin, the historical record reveals that the Delaware and other tribes in eighteenth-century greater Pennsylvania were likely involved in sheltering other escaped slaves and servants. One runaway advertisement, published in the *American Weekly Mercury* in 1720, informed readers that two bonded laborers, eighteen-year-old John Maccabee and twenty-three year-old Toby, had fled from their masters and were apparently traveling together. While John’s master was James Patterson, “an Indian trader at Pexton on *Susquehanna* River,” Toby was “an Indian Man belonging to *Andrew Radford* at *Amboy Ferry*.” While John’s race was not mentioned in the advertisement, the fact that his surname was provided—unlike Toby, who was referred to only by his first

⁵² Kirsten Sword, “Remembering Dinah Nevil: Strategic Deceptions in Eighteenth-Century Antislavery,” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (September 1, 2010): 319.

⁵³ O.B. Leonard, “The Leonard Family in New Jersey,” *Monmouth Inquirer*, November 1883.

name—indicates that he was likely a White indentured servant. The advertisement further noted that Maccabee “hath been at one Indian Town called *Pehoquellamen* on Delaware River.”⁵⁴ The Indian town referenced in the advertisement was a Shawnee settlement that may have been located in present-day Warren County, New Jersey or Bucks County, Pennsylvania.⁵⁵ Maccabee may have become familiar with the settlement while traveling with his master in the course of the latter’s trading interactions with Indians in the region. The Shawnee, who may have interacted with Maccabee during these prior visits, probably sheltered him for a time while he was in their territory. Perhaps Toby, Maccabee’s Indian counterpart, had kinship ties to the Shawnee, and his presence also inclined the Shawnee to assist the escaping duo. Readers of the *Mercury* were told that Toby, “speakes good English, he goes like the Natives.”

Like Wan, Toby straddled multiple worlds. Though he was fluent in English, he was not, from the European perspective, completely assimilated into European society; he still retained an Indian element about him. This seemingly stray comment reveals important assumptions that Europeans made about Indianness during the early eighteenth century. It indicates that they believed that Indians could become Europeanized and could become part of a European society. Indianness was, at this point, more of a cultural indicator than an unchanging racial label. Toby was not inclined to wait around to assimilate into European society. Rather, the advertisement indicated that the two runaways were thought to have “gone towards *Albany* or *New-England*.” Perhaps they would have been recaptured too easily if they stayed in New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. In any event, Maccabee and Toby’s collaborative effort to escape from bondage is a microcosm of the cross-racial connections that formed on the greater Pennsylvania frontier. Despite the fact that their ethnicities differed, they came together in opposition to the structures of class and racial hegemony that kept them in servitude. This was not a unique phenomenon; other examples of collaboration between White, Indian, and African bonded laborers abound in period runaway advertisements from the region.

Though Maccabee and Toby apparently chose not to remain there permanently, the eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey region was an attractive destination for runaways that were fleeing from other areas in the Northeast. It is probable that the Indian peoples that called the area home, particularly the Delaware and the Shawnee, developed a reputation for sheltering runaways temporarily and possibly integrating them into their

⁵⁴ *The American Weekly Mercury*, April 28, 1720.

⁵⁵ Charles Augustus Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1911), 142-43.

communities permanently. A 1730 advertisement in the *American Weekly Mercury*, published in 1730, was placed by Stephen Onion of Cecil County, Maryland, who was searching for “an *Indian* Ma[n], named *Pompey*, aged about Thirty Years, formerly belong’d to Sir *William Keith*.” Pompey “cross’d the River Delaware [...] at Marcus Hook” and likely entered New Jersey in the process.⁵⁶ Similarly, a 1763 advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, placed by Robert Darnall of Dorchester County, Maryland, sought the whereabouts of an escaped thirty-year-old “Mulattoe Waiting-man” named Jem. “I am informed,” Darnall explained, that “he intends to make for the Jerseys [...] pass for an Indian, and profess himself a Shoemaker.”⁵⁷ Yet another 1765 advertisement in the *Gazette* was placed in search of Daniel, “a Mullattoe Man Slave” who “resemble[d] an Indian, as his Father was one.” Daniel’s owner was Thomas Davis, a tavern-keeper in Frederick County, Maryland. By the time Davis had placed an advertisement in the *Gazette*, Daniel had already been at large for over two years. In the interim, Davis had received information that Daniel “was seen near Reading Town, and ha[d] since heard that he was at Hacket’s Iron-works, in West-Jersey.”⁵⁸

Unfree people of various races held captive in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey also sought out the Delaware for aid as they fled their masters. A 1751 advertisement in the *Gazette* was placed by Nicholas Everson, who resided near Perth Amboy, in search of “a mulatto Negroe, named Tom, about 37 years of age.”⁵⁹ Everson had been told, the advertisement recounted, that Tom “intends to cut his watchcoat, to make him Indian stockings, and to cut off his hair, and get a blanket, to pass for an Indian; that he enquired for one John and Thomas Nutus, Indians at Susquehanna, and about the Moravians, and the way there.”⁶⁰ This advertisement lends credence to the idea that, in this period, the Delaware

⁵⁶ *The American Weekly Mercury*, July 30, 1730.

⁵⁷ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 67.

⁵⁸ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 74.

⁵⁹ The repeated references to “mulatto” slaves and servants in runaway advertisements creates some ambiguity when the bonded laborers’ parentage is not explicitly stated. Mulattoes could have been the product of a White-African union, a White-Indian union, or, an Indian-African union. The term only indicates that there was some racial intermixture in the laborer’s parentage. In cases like Tom’s, the use of the term “mulatto,” without further details, makes it unclear whether the slave in question had any Indian ancestry.

⁶⁰ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 34. Several of the advertisements cited in this section were also cited by Jean Soderlund in her book, *Lenape Country*, to make the point that the Delaware were consistently abetting fugitives; I draw on her analysis in examining these advertisements. I also must acknowledge her role in drawing my attention to these advertisements, which I examined separately as primary sources.

in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were known to shelter escaping slaves and servants, whether they were of Indian descent or not. It is notable that Tom evidently knew of specific Indians in the Susquehanna River region that he could make contact with and that he believed could assist him. Perhaps the Nutuses were, by assisting and sheltering escaped slaves, running what would be a precursor to the Underground Railroad about fifty years later. The idea that Tom, like Robert Dornall's slave, Jem, could "pass for an Indian" by altering his appearance is also indicative of the fact that Delaware Indians in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were not implicitly associated with slavery and servitude. Even at midcentury, Indianness would allow an individual to travel freely in Pennsylvania without arousing suspicion, a privilege that was not accorded to those identified as Africans. The advertisement's mention of the Moravians also assumes significance in light of the religious group's efforts to minister to both Indians and African slaves, albeit separately. In addition to Indians and White Moravians, the Bethlehem settlement was home to some enslaved people in the eighteenth century who were, for the most part, gifted to the Moravians by their owners. The Bethlehem settlement's racial diversity may have, at the very least, inclined escaped slaves like Tom to believe that the Moravians may have been willing to aid them, particularly if they were supported by Delaware stakeholders.

Another telling example of the Delaware's willingness to shelter runaway slaves is a 1759 advertisement in the *Gazette*, which was placed in search of "one Mulatto, and three Negroe men" that had fled from Hopewell, New Jersey. "It is supposed," the slaves' owners wrote, "that they all went away and will travel together." Speculating on the fugitives' whereabouts, the advertisement reckoned "that they are gone to some of the Indian towns upon Sasquehannah, the Molatto, Bood, having been entertained by the Indians there several months, some years ago."⁶¹ This advertisement offers a snapshot of the interracial networks that bound peoples in greater Pennsylvania during this period. Perhaps Bood had some Indian ancestry, which is why he had previously spent time with the Delaware in one of their Susquehanna settlements. Now, when he returned to the Delawares' settlements, he did not come alone; instead, he brought African slaves with him that would also benefit from the Indians' hospitality. Bood acted as an interlocutor, bringing together disparate African and Indian worlds to defy and evade European systems of bondage.

In November 1763, in Berks County, the *Gazette* recounts that, "a Mulattoe Slave, named Joe," escaped from his master, who "supposed he is

⁶¹ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 45-46.

gone to join the Indians beyond the Mountain.”⁶² The mountain referenced in the advertisement was likely Blue Mountain, which is part of the Appalachian mountain chain and which marks Berks County’s northern boundary. In 1732, the Delaware, whose ancestral territory included Berks County, were moved north of Blue Mountain. Europeans occupied the territory that had become vacant owing to this “Retreat of Indians.”⁶³ In fact, in the decade prior to the Delawares’ departure, “a small colony of Germans had settled in the Tulpehocka Valley” even as the Indians protested this European incursion. Charming Forge, a center for iron production, was established in the Tulpehocka Valley region in 1749; in 1763, the year that the runaway advertisement in question was placed, Henry William Stiegel, a German immigrant, assumed ownership of Charming Forge. Apparently, Joe was an enslaved laborer owned by Steigel who worked at Charming Forge, and he had escaped from his worksite to the Indian settlement beyond the mountain. After the Delaware retreat, Blue Mountain was a natural buffer between European civilization and the Indian frontier; in Berks County’s early history, settlers found it difficult to access territory beyond the mountain. At midcentury, though, European settlers began to travel north of Blue Mountain into the Delaware’s lands.⁶⁴

By 1763, the Delaware realized that they were not secure amidst ever-increasing European settlement, even within their reduced territorial holdings. It is in this context that Joe crossed Blue Mountain and entered into Delaware lands. Both Joe and his Delaware hosts found common cause against expanding European settlement in eastern Pennsylvania, which affected them in different ways. Joe was an unfree laborer whose work helped keep Charming Forge, an early and important industrial center in Berks County, running. He was evidently not the only one; in 1780, Charming Forge’s owner was recorded as owning ten slaves, many of whom were likely involved in the iron production process. On the contrary, the Delaware were dispossessed of their ancestral lands due to ever-expanding European settlement, epitomized by large-scale and permanent constructions like Charming Forge. Put simply, Charming Forge situated both Joe, an African slave, and the Delaware Indians as marginal players with limited agency in a Pennsylvania that was increasingly being dominated by Europeans. Just a month after Steigel placed this advertisement in the *Gazette*, the Paxton Boys went on a murderous rampage, slaughtering innocent Indians in neighboring Lancaster County.

⁶² Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 66.

⁶³ Morton Luther Montgomery, *History of Berks County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts, Peck, and Richards, 1886), 61.

⁶⁴ Montgomery, *History of Berks County, Pennsylvania*, 50, 92-93.

At this stage, racial lines in Pennsylvania had become more solidified than ever as tensions between Indians and colonists loomed large.

DINAH NEVIL AND PENNSYLVANIA INDIANS: THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB
TO ABOLISH AFRICAN SLAVERY

A decade after Joe ventured past the Blue Mountains into Delaware territory in search of freedom, Pennsylvania was confronted with the quandary of how to handle a suit for an unfree laborer's manumission. This case implicated Pennsylvania's fragile tri-racial dynamics, particularly as the colony sought to carve out a distinctive identity for itself in the wake of brewing discontent with British rule. At the center of the dispute was Dinah Nevil, identified as a mulatto woman of Indian ancestry, who was held in some form of involuntary bondage in greater Pennsylvania in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Nevil had four children, including a four-year-old, Jane, and an eight-year-old, Bontury. Nevil was held in Flemington, New Jersey along with her children until she was sold in 1773 to "a Scots-Antiguan-Virginian adventurer who was collecting a cargo of slaves and servants in Philadelphia."⁶⁵ Nevil likely arrived in Philadelphia in 1773, at a time when the city's inhabitants were beset by economic difficulties.⁶⁶ The end of the French and Indian War did not usher in lasting economic prosperity, as was expected. Historian Gary Nash has observed that, in Philadelphia, "[u]nemployment spread again and the jails filled to overflowing with formerly respectable citizens who could not pay their debts." This grim economic situation led to slavery and indentured servitude becoming significantly less popular in Philadelphia; the percentage of working males in the city that were unfree dropped significantly between 1767 and 1775. Poor economic conditions in Philadelphia and other major colonial cities in this period also soured the laboring classes' opinion of bound laborers, whom they were forced to compete against.⁶⁷ In the decade prior to Nevil's arrival in Philadelphia, the city had also witnessed bitter disputes between Quaker and Anglican factions on the question of whether the Penn family, as opposed to the British crown, should continue to wield control of the Pennsylvania colony.⁶⁸ In the 1770s, Quakers, including in Philadelphia, had begun to advocate against slavery, and Nevil's case

⁶⁵ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 318.

⁶⁶ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 318.

⁶⁷ Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 319-21.

⁶⁸ Nash, *Urban Crucible*.

became a cause célèbre that anti-slavery campaigners could coalesce around.⁶⁹

Nevil's claim to freedom evidently lacked any legal merit. Barring the 1705 legislation that prohibited the importation of Indian slaves, Pennsylvania did not pass any laws that explicitly banned holding Indians in slavery or indentured servitude. To be clear, the 1705 legislation did not provide for the manumission of any Indian slaves imported before the law was passed. Though it is unclear which Indian tribe Nevil belonged to, this detail would have been largely inconsequential unless she could demonstrate that she was illegally enslaved or that her Indian ancestors were imported into Pennsylvania as slaves after the 1705 cutoff. Nevil was not able to demonstrate either of these elements, and as expected, her legal challenge to her enslavement fell flat.⁷⁰ So why and how did Nevil demand her freedom in the first place? The Indian slave was aided by Anthony Benezet and John Woolman, who were influential Quakers in the Philadelphia region striving to influence public opinion in favor of abolishing slavery. Quaker abolitionists like Benezet and Woolman seized upon momentum from a 1772 case in England, *James Somerset v. Charles Steuart*, which they interpreted as endorsing a legal theory that all slaves in English territories were free. This, too, was a flimsy legal proposition, but that was perhaps the point. Though Nevil's freedom suit failed legally and she was confined in a Philadelphia workhouse while it was pending, a Quaker eventually purchased her freedom and that of her surviving children. The dramatic legal showdown that Philadelphia Quakers had envisioned in Nevil's case ended with a whimper, though their efforts laid the groundwork for sustained advocacy through the establishment of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.⁷¹

For these Quaker abolitionists, the legal process was a front to generate momentum for abolition, even if the law was not on their side. Dinah Nevil's case offered them this opportunity, predominantly because of Nevil's Indian status. Nevil cut a more sympathetic profile than an African slave woman would have because of her proclaimed Indianness. During a period when Indians began to leave greater Pennsylvania in increasing numbers as they continued to be dispossessed from their remaining lands, Nevil's case evoked some nostalgia among Pennsylvania for the noble savages whose settlements once dotted the colony.⁷² The fact

⁶⁹ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions."

⁷⁰ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 319, 333.

⁷¹ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions." This is effectively a distilled summary of the key points that Sword makes in her article.

⁷² Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 319, 330.

that Nevil, despite her Indian status, was an unfree laborer in Philadelphia nods to the reality that Africans and Indians were collectively relegated to a marginal social underclass in late eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. Historian Jean Soderlund has observed that, despite his efforts to abolish slavery, John Woolman “failed to recognize the oppression of Native Americans through expropriation of land and decline in population until [...] 1763, during the conflict called Pontiac’s War.”⁷³

This belated recognition was too little, too late. The Paxton Boys’ massacre in 1763 represented the figurative straw that broke the camel’s back in terms of Indians’ degraded status in Pennsylvania. The process of Indians’ erasure in Pennsylvania was, by this point, virtually irreversible. Indians’ continued presence in Pennsylvania was a hindrance to achieving a completely European Pennsylvania because of their claims to at least some land in the colony. With their virtual removal, the colony’s expansion and development stood essentially unencumbered. At that point, when the colony’s growth trajectory stood secured, Pennsylvania’s Quakers had the luxury to turn to the moral issue that plagued their province, namely slavery. Whether they were slaves or free, Africans in Pennsylvania were second-class inhabitants of Pennsylvania from the outset; they never enjoyed the sort of autonomy that Indians in the colony did. Abolition, including Dinah Nevil’s case, presented Pennsylvania Quakers with the opportunity to assuage their collective consciences, which may have been troubled by the Indians’ tragic fate.⁷⁴ It was quite convenient to classify Indians as White rather than yellow after there were few practical risks, in terms of land ownership, that accompanied that designation; understanding Indians as White also obliterated their distinctive identity and contributed to the narrative of the disappearing Indian.⁷⁵ Jeremiah Paul, Jr., a Pennsylvania Quaker painter, depicted Dinah Nevil as “a white woman requiring protection from imminent sexual danger” in his 1795 painting, *Manumission of Dinah Nevil* (see detail on journal’s cover). Kirsten Sword, who has written on Nevil’s case, poignantly observed that, though “her costume marked her as Indian [...] her amply exposed pale flesh argued for similarity with her captors and benefactors.” In Paul’s painting, the

⁷³ Jean R. Soderlund, “The Delaware Indians and Poverty in Colonial New Jersey,” in *Down and out in Early America*, ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: Penn State Press, 2004), 289–312.

⁷⁴ In the context of Nevil’s case, Kirsten Sword notes “Woolman’s and Benezet’s pursuit of moral purity” (p. 324). As stated above, by the time John Woolman opened his eyes to the realities of Indian displacement, that trend had become virtually irreversible. Nevil’s case, therefore, offered the Quaker personages some possibility for moral redemption, however small, for their inaction in the face of Indians’ plight.

⁷⁵ Sword, “Strategic Deceptions,” 319.

whiteness of Nevil and the White men is juxtaposed with the blackness of the African onlookers.⁷⁶ Symbolically, the painting indicated that the manumission of Nevil, who had become putatively White, paved the way for Africans to also receive the same benefits. Pennsylvania's Indians were the proverbial sacrificial lambs for Africans to receive freedom from slavery.⁷⁷ That freedom came, rather underwhelmingly, in 1780 in the form of Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act. The Act refrained from freeing any slaves that were alive at the time the legislation came into effect but paved the way for their future children to be manumitted in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

In 1853, less than a decade before the outbreak of the American Civil War, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rendered a decision in a case that weighed the rights of African-Americans in the commonwealth. "The Court declared that until the 'white population, who settled this Commonwealth' decided to enfranchise nonwhites, 'the negro and the Indian must be content with the privileges extended to them, without aspiring to the exercise of the elective franchise, or to the right to become our legislators, judges, and governors.'"⁷⁸ By this point, there were few Indians left in Pennsylvania, and so the Court's mention of Indians along with African-Americans is curious. Though the racial landscape in antebellum Pennsylvania did not meaningfully include an Indian presence, the Court nonetheless called upon memories of Pennsylvania's past triracial history to affirm the primacy of the White population. Just as Indians' disappearance was the precursor to African slaves' freedom, the subjugation of Indians was the first step in affirming Africans' unequal status in the new American republic. The significance of the Court's pronouncement cannot be fully appreciated without understanding how Pennsylvania's triracial history in the eighteenth century evolved, specifically in the context of the region's native inhabitants.

⁷⁶ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 340-41.

⁷⁷ Sword, "Strategic Deceptions," 341.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Paul Finkelman, "Slavery and the Supreme Court: High Court Justices and the Problem of Fundamental Justice," in *The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania: Life and Law in the Commonwealth, 1684–2017* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2018), 339.

The Press as a Political Actor: The Campaign of Newspapers to Shape the 1854 New York City Mayoral Election

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Abstract:

In 1854, the New York City mayoral election emerged as an ideological flashpoint for the nation, with the press capturing the city's ongoing political transformation. The press portrayed New York City as a key battleground of ideological and political divisions, as the city's Democratic Party experienced its second major split in six years and the growing temperance and nativist movements introduced new parties into mainstream discourse. These divisions were reflected in the press, whose reporting became increasingly ideological, mirroring the broad spectrum of political views across the city.

In a mid-October overview of the New York City mayoral race, the *Litchfield Enquirer*, a Connecticut based newspaper, captured the turmoil present in the city's politics: "Confusion worse confounded reigns in the political camp here. For the mayoralty there 'are six Richards in the field'... who will come right side up out the chaos Rodipus [*sic*] himself could not guess."¹ Each "Richard" who hoped to claim the crown of New York City mayor drew extensive press coverage as each one presented his own solution to the fractures undermining the city's political structures. These fractures, however, were not isolated to New York alone. The city's political splintering reflected broader national tensions that were beginning to disrupt the traditional political order.²

Historians Judah B. Ginsberg and Mamie Meredith trace the city's political upheaval to deepening divisions within the Democratic Party, rooted in grievances from 1848 over the expansion of slavery into new territories and exacerbated by the Pierce administration's favoritism toward the party factions formed out of those rifts.³ The fragmentation of the Democratic Party occurred alongside the rupture of the city's political establishment. The introduction of new parties and outsider candidates, chief among them the Know Nothing Party and Reform Party, turned the election of 1854 into a divisive contest that captured intense public and press attention.

Dueling factions, which historian Mamie Meredith identifies as the Hard Shells and Soft Shells, fractured the New York Democratic Party in 1854. Both groups traced their origins to the Old Hunker Party of 1848, the pro-slavery faction in the New York presidential election of the same year. The 1854 rupture marked the second major division among the New York Democratic Party during mid-19th century. The first occurred in 1848, when the antislavery Barnburners broke away to help form the Free Soil Party, leaving behind the Hunkers who had supported Lewis Cass. From this remnant, the Hard Shells emerged as the more rigid heirs of the Cass-aligned Hunkers, while the Soft Shells drew from the more conciliatory faction associated with Martin Van Buren. As such, Meredith argues that the Softs were more welcoming to the return of the Barnburners to the Democratic Party.⁴

¹ "Matters and Things in New York," *Litchfield Enquirer*, 19 October 1854, 2. The newspapers used for this essay come from the Library of Congress's website, *Chronicling America*, at chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

² Judah B. Ginsberg, "Barnburners, Free Soilers, and the New York Republican Party," *New York History* 57:4 (October 1976): 475-500.

³ Ginsberg, "Barnburners, Free Soilers, and the New York Republican Party," 475-500

⁴ Mamie Meredith, "'Hards' and 'Softs' in American Politics," *American Speech* 5:5 (June 1930): 409-413.

Historian Judah B. Ginsberg's examination of the simmering tensions between the pro and antislavery factions in the Democratic Party emphasizes a key turning point in 1854 when Stephen A. Douglas reintroduced the issue of slavery through the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The volatile Democratic Party of New York was split again when the Hard Shells, who were the remnants of the ultra-Hunkers, strongly supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act while the Soft Shells were divided between the pro-Pierce Tammany Hall and the free soil contingent.⁵ Amid the chaos enveloping the New York City Democratic Party, Fernando Wood emerged as a political opportunist. Historian Jerome Mushkat cited Stephen Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska bill as a great help to Democratic candidate for mayor Fernando Wood, who used the issue to unite the Hard Shells and Soft Shells against the Free-Soil Democrats.⁶ Since the 1854 election for mayor rested at this period of turmoil in New York City politics, it is important to examine Wood's victory as well as the campaigns of his opponents who sought to take advantage of the Democratic Party's divisions.

The rise of new parties and the rupture of existing ones transformed the city's political landscape. Alongside being the key recorder of the 1854 election, the press also played a decisive role in shaping it. Newspapers in 1854 not only reported political speeches from party figures and organizations like Tammany Hall but also published opinion pieces that shaped public perceptions of candidates and major issues. While New York City papers dominated coverage, national outlets also followed the race, reflecting its broader national significance. Through their reporting, the press played a critical role in shaping the public image of Fernando Wood and his opponents during the 1854 New York City mayoral race, strategically framing candidates amid the factional divide between the Soft Shell and Hard Shell Democrats. Both Wood and his rivals used the press to advance their political positions, while newspapers pursued their own ideological interests in presenting each candidate. As a result, the press coverage, much like the political scheming of Wood and his rivals, reflected the competing ideological battles of the era rather than a monolithic perspective.

To understand how candidates capitalized on the political turmoil in New York City, one must first examine the central issues of the 1854

⁵ Ginsberg, "Barnburners, Free Soilers, and the New York Republican Party," 475-500.

⁶ Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography* (Kent State University Press, 1990), 32-33. For other works on Fernando Wood, see Leonard Chalmers, "Fernando Wood and Tammany Hall: The First Phase," *New York Historical Quarterly* 52:4 (1968): 379-402; Terry Golway, *Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), 36-40, 55; Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography* (Kent State University Press, 1990), 31-40.

mayoral race. The election marked a major disruption of the traditional party establishment, driven by the rise of the nativist Know Nothing Party and the emergence of reform as a political party platform. As the Know Nothing Party grew in influence, reactions by the New York City immigrant population and the opponents of the Know Nothing Party were disseminated in the press. The complexity of the New York City political scene only deepened as the Know Nothing Party's political power grew, and its membership and anti-immigrant sentiment seeped into the ranks of rival parties. The party's growing ubiquity forced various New York City Democratic wards to denounce the nominations of suspected Know Nothings. The First Ward, for instance, refused to support Fernando Wood and Chauncey Schaffer, the nominations for mayor and district attorney, declaring Schaffer in the *New York Herald* "a man fully identified with said Order of Know Nothings, and who has on different occasions, from the steps of the City Hall, in the courts, and other places, poured out his venom against all adopted citizens, Irish and German, but particularly Roman Catholics."⁷

Even as the Know Nothing Party expanded its influence across rival parties and gained political ground, it continued to operate under a veil of secrecy. *The Sun* described the party as a "Mysterious body of men" and cast doubt on their candidate's loyalties, remarking, "What his obligations are, and what he is pledged to do if elected, none but the initiated can tell; and, we presume, if asked, they would reply that they 'did not know.'"⁸ The party's secretive nature offered political cover, allowing public figures to embrace and promote anti-immigrant ideology without immediate accountability. In Fernando Wood's case, membership in the Know Nothing Party expanded both his political influence and his potential voter base.

As a result of the influence of the Know Nothing Party over the pool of mayoral candidates, the *New York Dispatch* opined, "That Wood belongs to this secret conclave there can be no doubt, and it is a curious fact that three out of the five candidates put up by the different parties and factions for this office are members of this fraternity of fanaticism."⁹ Accusations of affiliation with the nativist Know Nothing Party extended even to reform minded candidates. "We have the very best authority," asserted the *New York Dispatch*, "for saying that even Wilson G. Hunt has been proposed to the Know Nothing Council of the Eighteenth Ward."¹⁰ The candidate

⁷ "At a Meeting of the National Democrats," *New York Herald*, 29 October 1854, 5.

⁸ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁹ "Who Would Have Believed It?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

¹⁰ "Who Is to Be Our Next Mayor?," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

implicated here ran on the Reform Party's platform, which emphasized curbing crime and restoring order to New York City's streets. Hunt's alleged connection to the Know Nothing Party bespoke the reach of the new nativist party in the city's political scene.

By election day, the Know Nothing Party's influence overshadowed the campaigns of the entire mayoral field. Following its remark about Hunt, the *New York Dispatch* declared that "the fact that the other three candidates are members of this order, is no longer a matter of dispute."¹¹ The Know Nothing Party's shadow over the mayoral race reached its peak on the eve of the election, November 6, 1854, when the *New York Herald* sharply criticized the party's growing influence, remarking: "What cormorants these Know Nothings are! They have attempted to swallow nearly all the candidates brought out before the people this fall."¹² The *New York Herald* was even more incensed by the perceived hypocrisy of the Reform Party, which denounced its alleged Know Nothing ties at the top of the ticket while quietly embracing them in local contests, reporting "But it appears that the municipal reformers repudiate them on the Mayoralty ticket while they freely fraternize with the mysterious order in the ward contests."¹³ The Reform Party's denial of the *New York Dispatch*'s claim that their candidate, Wilson G. Hunt, had ties to the Know Nothing Party, even as they courted nativist support in ward elections, highlighted the duplicity among all the mayoral candidates and the influence of the Know Nothing Party's anti-immigrant agenda.

The Know Nothing Party's growing presence in New York City politics did not go unnoticed. Even before the revelations about the different candidates' affiliations with the party emerged, the *New York Dispatch* warned that "The Mayor should be a man popular with the masses, of no narrow prejudices, or illiberal views, that would bias his judgment, or control his action, should a crisis arise commanding prompt and decisive measures."¹⁴ Additionally, newspapers and political parties with ties to the different immigrant communities voiced their displeasure and condemned the Know Nothing Party. The press criticized the Know Nothing Party's ploy to link each candidate to their cause as a deliberate effort to disenfranchise immigrant voters. The *New York Dispatch* remarked, "The

¹¹ "Who Is to Be Our Next Mayor?," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

¹² "The Mayoralty," *New York Herald*, 6 November 1854, 4.

¹³ "The Mayoralty," *New York Herald*, 6 November 1854, 4.

¹⁴ "Outside Opinions—Actual Facts, and Sage Surmises of Politicians," *New York Dispatch*, 8 October 1854, 2.

Know Nothings have managed this business very adroitly, by driving adopted citizens up to the very eve of election without a candidate.”¹⁵

The nativist sentiments of the Know Nothing Party necessitated a response from the immigrant friendly Democratic Party. So when Fernando Wood drafted a resolution condemning the Know Nothing Party, the immigrant population approved as “These Irish and German citizens were of course opposed to any such prescriptive doctrines as were advanced by this offshoot of the old Native American party,” observed the *New York Dispatch*.¹⁶ As Wood’s alleged affiliation with Know Nothing Party came to light, the repudiation of the nativists became more common throughout the Democratic Party, including individual wards. The First Ward, for instance, supported a measure “That the national democrats of the First ward, in consonance with the declaration contained in the Constitution of the United States, will not support any man for office at the ensuing election who would if elected, proscribe any man from holding office... on account of his place of birth or religious opinions,” the *New York Herald* reported.¹⁷

The Know Nothing accusations against Wood affected his campaign negatively, but Democratic Party aligned newspapers granted him a slight reprieve. The *New York Dispatch* reprinted a pro-Wood piece from the *Irish American* who described themselves as a paper “who represent or essay to represent a large body of adopted citizens.”¹⁸ In their piece, the *Irish American* insisted Wood “is an educated gentleman, of cool head and ripe and matured judgment. His ideas and views of *Americanism* range high above the bigoted and intolerant atmosphere of Know Nothingism.”¹⁹ The support of immigrant newspapers proved fruitful for Wood as the *New York Dispatch* emphasized that “Wood is more fortunate the Germans, I see, have endorsed him, and it is said the Irish will do likewise, under the advice of the Irish-American newspaper.”²⁰ The allegiance of immigrant newspapers to the Democratic establishment proved to be very important to Wood’s response to the Know Nothing allegations.

In contrast to the pro-Wood response from the *Irish American*, immigrants and many voters condemned Wood’s association with the Know Nothing Party in the press. The press equally rebuked the *Irish American* and its editor’s defense of Wood. An Irishman in the *New York Dispatch* opined, “Permit me to say that I was taken all aback the other day

¹⁵ “Who is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

¹⁶ “How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft Was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

¹⁷ “At a Meeting of the National Democrats,” *New York Herald*, 29 October 1854, 5.

¹⁸ “Never Convict Before Trial?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

¹⁹ “Never Convict Before Trial?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

²⁰ “Who Would Have Believed It?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

by an article in the *Irish American* in favor of Fernando Wood for Mayor. I used to regard Mr. Lynch as an honest, wide awake Irishman, but this manoeuvre shakes my faith in his reliability.”²¹ The *New York Dispatch* continued its comments, comparing Wood’s duplicity to the history of anti-Irish sentiment: “Poor Ireland, it has always been your misfortune to fall by the traitor’s hand. What war and famine could not accomplish, golden arguments have achieved...It will be very funny, won’t it, to see poor Pat throw up his cap for one of the ringleaders of the Know Nothings.”²² As evidenced from the *New York Dispatch*’s writing, the New York City’s immigrant population’s situation elicited reactions of pity but also condescension. “From what motives they stultify themselves we do not care to surmise,” the *New York Daily Tribune* contended, “but their course supposes a degree of stupidity in the mass of German and Irish citizens which may not be surprising but is certainly not creditable to them.”²³

The discovery of ties between the majority of the mayoral candidates and the Know Nothing Party dominated the final weeks of the 1854 election. While revelations about nativist affiliations received wider press coverage, debates over municipal reform and temperance gained simultaneous traction. Public reaction to temperance was twofold: newspapers often criticized it as an overreach and an affront to American freedoms, while at the same time accusing temperance opponents of being in the pocket of grog shop owners. One of the critiques of the temperance movement in the press was its disproportionate effect on the immigrant population and working class in the city. *The Sun* noted, “Now, it is for our people who indulge in liberal sentiments, and who, after a day of toil and deprivation, require an hour’s rest and refreshment... to say whether they are prepared to place in office a man who will repay them... by refusing them the opportunity for harmless relaxation; and who... stands pledged to grant to no licenses for the sale of liquor, and to close every place of refreshment on the Sabbath day.”²⁴ The link between temperance and anti-immigrant sentiment proved to be an opportunity for candidates. Wood positioned himself as an opponent of the temperance movement, earning him the support of the “Liquor Dealers of the Eighth Ward,” who, according to the *New York Herald* stated “That the nomination of Fernando Wood meets with our entire approbation... and that we will use all honorable

²¹ “Who Would Have Believed It?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

²² “Who Would Have Believed It?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

²³ “Wood a Know-Nothing,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 3 November, 1854 4.

²⁴ “Never Convict Before Trial?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

means to secure his election.”²⁵ Wood’s opposition to temperance also earned him criticism in the press who claimed that he was beholden to the liquor sellers. “He is the regular Tammany Hall candidate. His supporters are... all or very nearly all of the naturalized voters, and all grog shop keepers,” asserted the *New York Herald*.²⁶ The criticism extended beyond Wood, implicating the Democratic Party as a whole and their candidate for governor, Horatio Seymour. In a meeting at Tammany Hall, the *New York Herald* reported the following: “It was stated last night that Governor Seymour was the candidate of the unlicensed rum sellers and rum drinkers... It puts us in the position of being the rotten, rum drinking, drunken party... You come to defend the principle that is attacked. It has been said that the issue is between Bronson and good liquor, Seymour and bad liquor, and Clark and no liquor at all.”²⁷

The reaction to temperance was not solely an immigrant or working class issue, but a nationalized one, framed as an infringement on American freedoms. The nationalization of the liquor question became a key platform for the New York Democratic Party in the 1854 election cycle. At a Soft Shell meeting in Tammany Hall, the *New York Herald* reported, “It not only violates the constitution, but it impairs also the sanctity, and saps the foundation of all other laws, by taking away the rights on which they rest, viz:— Security of person and property.”²⁸ The framing of temperance as a violation of American values extended beyond partisan talking points. At the same meeting, another speaker warned, the *New York Herald* noted, “Your city stands the highest in the world, your palatial hotels in Broadway have attracted the admiration of the world. If this liquor law is put in force, all this property will become valueless, and the taxes cannot be collected on it.”²⁹ The press’s reporting portrayed the temperance movement as a plague to the prosperity of New York City, localizing and making the issue more relevant to the New York City voter.

Temperance became a more salient issue as temperance laws from other parts of the country, namely the Maine Law, began to influence the discourse in New York. “The agitation on the liquor question with a Maine Law to be enforced, may be among the subjects of deep and earnest discussion,” contended the *New York Dispatch*.³⁰ The Maine Law became a touchpoint for the antithesis of the Democratic Party’s platform, wrapped

²⁵ “Liquor Dealers of the Eight Ward in the Field,” *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 3.

²⁶ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

²⁷ “The Soft Shells in Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 1.

²⁸ “The Soft Shells in Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 1.

²⁹ “The Soft Shells in Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 1.

³⁰ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Dispatch*, 8 October 1854, 2.

up in a tangle of national issues. In describing a convention attended by Wilson G. Hunt, the Reform Party candidate, *The Sun* remarked, "This conclave was Maine Liquor Law and Abolitionism, with a strong fusion of Know-Nothingism, and seasoned highly with anti-Nebraskaism."³¹ New York Temperance leaders, however, did embrace aspects of the Maine Law. *The New York Herald* indicated, "There are thousands of men in this city who will accept of nothing short of this reform—men who do not call themselves Maine law men, or at least who are not in favor of the extension of such a law to this city, but yet are for a stringent license system faithfully and rigidly carried out."³²

The Temperance movement's main proponent in the 1854 mayoral election was the Reform Party, as evidenced by the press labeling their candidate, Wilson G. Hunt, a supporter of the Maine Law. Simultaneously, the press characterized Hunt as unfit to lead the Reform Party ticket as his allegiance to the tenets of the temperance movement was lackluster. The *Litchfield Enquirer* emphasized, "Wilson G. Hunt, one of our most honored merchants is the standard bearer of the Reform party, but I fear he cannot be elected mayor. Party organization and discipline backed up by bad rum and big promises are more than a match for loosely combined elements of Reform."³³ Hunt did not face the press's ire alone; the press criticized his party as a whole, arguing that it was unfit to represent the temperance movement and implement real reform in the city. The *New York Herald* alleged, "The so-called reformers are for retaining men in office who are notoriously delinquent in enforcing the law against unlicensed grogeries and the Sunday liquor traffic... At this time, when murders, and stabbings, and shootings, and robberies, and burglaries, are succeeding each other with a rapidity never known before in this city."³⁴

The temperance movement and the Maine Law were not alone in nationalizing the 1854 mayoral contest. The Democratic Party in New York City closely mirrored the national party and sought to tie itself to the national issues of the time. Consequently, the New York City Democrats campaigned on a platform of self-government. Through the press, the Democrats' appeal to self-government was at times presented explicitly in connection to the issue of slavery, drawing on national debates to shape local politics. From a dispatch read at a Tammany Hall meeting, the *New York Herald* reported, "allow me, through this medium, to express my warmest sympathy with your movement in favor of the right of self-

³¹ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

³² "The Mayoralty," *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

³³ "Matters and Things in New York," *Litchfield Enquirer*, 26 October 1854, 2.

³⁴ "The Mayoralty," *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

government, and for the removal forever from the national arena—the Congress of the United States—the agitation of slavery... all honor to the democrats of New York for being the first to come to their support.”³⁵ Beyond explicit invocations of slavery, the Democratic Party’s defense of self-government also operated as a rhetorical veil, appealing to anti-intervention principles while quietly reinforcing pro-slavery sentiment. At times, slavery was deliberately omitted from the conversation. At a Hard Shell convention, for instance, Mr. Jonah Sutherland cautioned against introducing the issue altogether: “Mr. Jonah Sutherland hoped that the convention would not permit itself to be prostituted by mixing up with its proceedings any issues on the question of slavery. Can we not, said he, preserve our little band free from any vile addresses to popular prejudices, like those that have been made by the Whigs.”³⁶

Even when the public debates and forums omitted slavery, it often remained embedded in the rhetoric of self-government. During the same Tammany Hall meeting discussed above, a speaker declared, the *New York Herald* reported, “The right of self-government is an inherent right antecedent to the formation of government or the framing of any compromise... We mean to extend to every section of this country a perfect equality, so far as regards the formation of their government.”³⁷ For proponents of this view, “perfect equality” meant the unrestricted ability of each state to govern itself, including the right to permit slavery. As the speech concluded, the supporters of self-government made their stance clear. The *New York Herald* reported, “We will vindicate our rights at the cannon’s mouth, if necessary, if they are infringed; then, in the words of Andrew Jackson, ‘we must fight.’”³⁸

The New York City Democratic Party’s position on self-government expanded beyond the explicit and implicit references to slavery. It sought to tie itself to pertinent national issues, namely the Nebraska bill and its repudiation of the Missouri Compromise as the bill reopened the possibility of slave states above the boundary established in the Missouri Compromise. From a report on Tammany Hall’s assembly in support of the Nebraska bill, the *Eastern Times* explained, “Spirited resolves were adopted, recognizing the right of the people to frame their own laws, and repudiating the Missouri compromise as a violation of the principles of popular government.”³⁹ The *New York Herald* concurred, “It is useless to say that this question of the

³⁵ “The Nebraska Question in Old Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 17 March 1854, 7.

³⁶ “Hard Shell Mayoralty Convention,” *New York Herald*, 10 October 1854, 1.

³⁷ “The Nebraska Question in Old Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 17 March 1854, 7.

³⁸ “The Nebraska Question in Old Tammany,” *New York Herald*, 17 March 1854, 7.

³⁹ “Great Nebraska Meeting in New York,” *Eastern Times*, 30 March 1854, 2.

repeal of the Missouri compromise does not enter into our municipal election. It does enter. It is impossible that a city whose interests are so completely bound up in the peace of the Union should not have a feeling in regard to a transaction which has so deeply embroiled this country.”⁴⁰ It is evident that in its attempt to tie itself to the national Democratic Party platform, the New York City Democratic Party established the repudiation of the Missouri Compromise as an important party position.

The New York City Democrats mirrored their embrace of national politics by attempting to align their party with the administration of Franklin Pierce. One of the earliest signs of the New York Democrats’ courtship of the Pierce administration came in February of 1854, when Wood, seeking to revive his political career after his 1850 mayoral defeat, traveled to Washington D.C. with other prominent New York City Democrats. Although Wood was in Washington in support of Stephen A. Douglas’s new Nebraska bill, “Purdy, Wood, Delavan & Co. appear to feel considerably chagrined at the worse than cavalier treatment which they receive on all sides—nobody taking any more of them than if they were so many vendors of tooth-picks or pocket-combs,” the *Sunday Dispatch* remarked.⁴¹ A more direct alignment with the Pierce administration was evident in Tammany Hall’s endorsement of the Nebraska Bill. “The (soft) democratic party of Old Tammany, through thick and thin, in consideration of the spoils, and the great issue at stake, are determined to have a grand popular meeting in Tammany Hall on the 16th inst., in behalf of the Nebraska bill, the constitution, Douglas, and the administration. And it is expected that Douglas, the ‘little giant’ himself, large as life,...will be present to address the assembled democracy on that pretentious occasion,” reported the *New York Herald*.⁴² The *Herald*’s reporting highlights an important distinction: support for the Pierce administration came primarily from one faction of the New York City Democratic Party, the Soft Shells. As a result of the close link built by the Tammany Hall faction of the New York City Democrats, their candidates in the 1854 election cycle were portrayed as representative of the Pierce administration in the press. The *New York Herald* remarked, “With that view they have nominated... Fernando Wood for Mayor. If they are elected, it will be hailed throughout the land as an administration

⁴⁰ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

⁴¹ “Letter from Washington,” *Sunday Dispatch*, 12 February 1854, 2.

⁴² “Important Movements in Tammany Hall—Nebraska Among the Democracy,” *New York Herald*, 10 March 1854, 4.

triumph, and New York, it will be said, has approved its men, its policy and measures.”⁴³

Tammany Hall’s close relationship with the Pierce administration did cause a rift in New York City’s politics. The Hard Shells viewed the Soft Shells as beholden to an administration unrepresentative of what the Hard Shells viewed as the true Democratic Party. A Hard Shell in the *New York Herald*, speaking of Pierce, wrote, “When we saw, soon after his inauguration, that he had determined to build up a personal party, devoted to his own personal fortunes, composed of the free soilers of the North and the disunionists of the South, and others, kept together by the attractions of his patronage, we spurned the embrace of his corruption, and denounced his treachery to the principles upon which he was elevated to power.”⁴⁴ The *New York Herald*’s opinion piece outlined the Hard Shells’ key complaint against the Pierce administration: a patronage system and coalition unrepresentative of their interests in New York City. Pierce was unpopular and the press sought to highlight this. The piece from the *New York Herald* remarked, “Franklin Pierce stands therefore before the country as the second Tyler, with no one so poor as to do him reverence.”⁴⁵

The Democratic Party’s efforts to shape the political conversation were mirrored by the press’s attempts to define Wood in the lead-up to the 1854 election. The appraisals of Wood’s character were often derisive and highly critical. As the campaign intensified, newspapers offered sharp critiques of Wood’s morals, portraying the man as dishonest and self-serving. In a scathing rebuke of Wood’s moral fitness for office, the *New York Herald* stressed, “Both in character and antecedents, he is the very embodiment of the corrupt interests and corrupt systems which have in former times swayed our municipal affairs with such pernicious and disgraceful effect. He is the regular Tammany Hall candidate.”⁴⁶ In the press’s critiques of Wood’s moral fiber, dishonesty was a common attribute. “Either John J. Herrick or Fernando Wood must be our next Mayor, unless there is some immediate and harmonious movement started by the honest masses to arrest the calamity, by concentrating the honest vote of this city on some one good man,” lamented the *New York Dispatch*.⁴⁷ While the article from the *New York Dispatch* simply labelled Wood as dishonest,

⁴³ “The Address of the Democracy of the City of New York to their Fellow Citizens,” *New York Herald*, 2 November 1854, 1.

⁴⁴ “The Address of the Democracy of the City of New York to their Fellow Citizens,” *New York Herald*, 2 November 1854, 1.

⁴⁵ “The Address of the Democracy of the City of New York to their Fellow Citizens,” *New York Herald*, 2 November 1854, 1.

⁴⁶ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

⁴⁷ “City Politics,” *New York Dispatch*, 15 October 1854, 2.

other articles outlined examples of Wood's dishonesty in his business and political dealings. In a critique of Wood's handling of a fraud charge, the *New York Daily Tribune* commented, "The very fact of pleading the Statute of Limitations in a charge of fraud does not strike us favorably. An honest man, having done no act of a criminal nature, would not be likely to make such a plea. But that such a plea was set up in behalf of Mr. Wood, and sustained by the Recorder is beyond doubt... We are assured that a check of \$700, drawn by Mr. Wood in favor of the Recorder who made the decision, passed through a broker's hands and was cashed in bank about the same time; but that, of course, had no reference to the decision."⁴⁸ Wood's plea in the fraud case was only one example; throughout his campaign other instances of dishonesty in his business dealings surfaced.

The *New York Dispatch* offered a more detailed account of Wood's reliance on the statute of limitations to evade prosecution for fraud. The paper's investigation uncovered numerous inflated bills of sale and a forged letter. "When Wood was indicted on this transaction, he escaped by pleading the statute of limitations."⁴⁹ Accusations of dishonesty by Wood plagued the 1854 election cycle particularly concerning his political maneuvering in courting the Know Nothing Party and the broader nativist vote. "We are credibly informed that this gentleman... is also attempting to secure the Native Vote and that of the Adopted Citizens. ... Tammany Hall... passed a series of resolutions denouncing the Know Nothings... prepared or instigated by Fernando Wood for the purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of adopted citizens. He is himself a member of this mysterious order, and has taken a most solemn oath never to appoint a foreigner to office. ... But the character of Fernando Wood is so well known that this trick excites no surprise in this community," the *New York Dispatch* reported.⁵⁰

The criticism of Wood's moral fitness in the newspapers extended past examples of his dishonesty in his business and political dealings. The press often accused Wood of being a self-serving and selfish politician incapable of representing the common voter. The *New York Dispatch* echoed this sentiment: "He is no Democrat—but a demagogue of the worst and most dangerous class. He is a Soft Shell Spoilsman—one of that class of politicians whose principles are all centred in their own selfish schemes."⁵¹

⁴⁸ "Wood in 1851," *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 November 1854, 4.

⁴⁹ "Who is to be our Next Mayor?," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁵⁰ "Fernando Wood Trying to Sit on Two Stools!," *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁵¹ "How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor," *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

The label of spoilsman identified Wood as an insincere politician, a moniker that underscored his reputation for prioritizing personal gain over party principles or public service. Wood's selfishness was most evident in the Know Nothing accusations leveled against him during the course of his campaign. In an appeal to the Wood campaign, the *New York Daily Tribune* argued, "It may evince a creditable degree of moral sensibility in Mr. Wood to abandon the Order when he discovers that he cannot use it for his private purposes on the one hand, and that it may lose him a few Irish or German votes on the other."⁵²

The Know Nothing accusations against Wood intensified the press's criticism, shifting the narrative from mere selfishness to charges of dirty politics. Wood was frequently characterized as a two-faced politician in the press. The clearest example of his political maneuvering appeared in accusations reported by the *New York Daily Tribune*, which claimed "that he was a member of the Executive Council of the same order," a reference to the Know Nothing Party and had even sought its mayoral nomination, though he ultimately failed to secure enough votes.⁵³ Wood's attempt to obtain the Know Nothing Party nomination became ripe material in the press for exposing his dirty politicking, prompting widespread speculation about the political fallout. "Whether this will make a difference in the votes of foreign born citizens remains to be seen. Wood is evidently convinced that it will not, and as he had nothing to do in past time in managing that class of voters, and ought to know how far they can be humbugged, his calculation may, perhaps, prove to be correct," the *New York Daily Tribune* opined.⁵⁴ The press was not monolithic in its speculation though, with the *New York Dispatch* believing Wood's politicking to yield him little benefits. The *New York Dispatch* asserted, "The number of votes cast for Fernando Wood by adopted citizens, he will have but little difficulty in counting. His game was a very good one to gather all sorts of fish in his net, but unfortunately for him the snare was discovered before they were trapped!"⁵⁵

Wood's political maneuvering was not constrained to his efforts to obtain the Know Nothing nomination. Wood's political reputation was well established prior to the 1854 election; "As a politician he has always been tricky and evasive," the *New York Dispatch* pointed out.⁵⁶ His portrayal in the press emphasized his ideological inconsistency and opportunism,

⁵² "The Mayoralty," *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 November 1854, 4.

⁵³ "Wood Proved a Know-Nothing," *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 November 1854, 4.

⁵⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, 31 October 1854, 4.

⁵⁵ "How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor," *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁵⁶ "To Voters of All Parties Friendly to Reform," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

particularly in his successful bid to secure both the Soft Shell and Hard Shell nominations. The *New York Dispatch* argued, for instance, that “Wood, the Democratic candidate, is a politician of the same school, He is Hard, Soft, No-Party, Irish, German, American, a churchman, and anti-church, as occasion calls for. By working in the dark these men have great opportunities to humbug the people.”⁵⁷ In a separate article, the *New York Dispatch* further criticized Wood’s inclination for politicking: “Wood and his friends have been at work ever since the nominations of the two conventions, trying to bring about a perfect fusion by getting first one candidate to withdraw and then another so as to bring the fight down to a single ticket.”⁵⁸ Since Wood secured both Democratic nominations, his political leanings within the party were a mystery to the press, as the *New York Herald* remarked, “Wood is evidently a hard shell, though supposed to be a soft. In cracking a nut between your teeth always be sure of the shell.”⁵⁹

In response to the press’s character attacks, Wood used newspapers to defend himself, issuing denials and threatening litigation. As allegations mounted throughout his campaign, he increasingly turned to the press to respond. A notable instance occurred when allegations from his 1850 campaign for mayor resurfaced, causing Wood to threaten legal action against the *New York Sun* over accusations of corruption and fraud. The *New York Herald* reported, “Mr. Wood expresses his determination to prosecute, civilly and criminally, all persons who libel his character, having, as he says submitted long enough to this species of political warfare.”⁶⁰ At times, Wood directly utilized the press to shape the narrative and publicly deny allegations. In a letter he wrote to the *New York Daily Tribune*, he claimed, “Dear Sir... to the effect that I am a member of the Order of Know-Nothings, I state that there is no truth in it whatever. I am not a member of any secret society whatever. Very sincerely, Fernando Wood.”⁶¹ At other times, however, Wood backed away from direct confrontation. As the *New York Daily Tribune* remarked, “A few days ago Mr. Fernando Wood... invited the publication of the charges he said he understood were about to be made against him; and solicited... that they should not be delayed too long, as then they could not be replied to. This looked like a courageous meeting of the enemy... But we hear that he has since begged to have the

⁵⁷ “To What Base Uses has the Great Whig Party Come at Last!,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁵⁸ “How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁵⁹ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 6 November 1854, 4.

⁶⁰ “Complaint For Libel,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 1.

⁶¹ “Letter From Fernando Wood,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 November 1854, 5.

invitation withdrawn.”⁶² While Wood at times appeared eager to confront criticism in the press, his displays of courage were often short-lived, producing increased material for the newspapers.

Criticism of Wood in the press extended beyond his character and political maneuvering to the very foundation of his campaign. The press portrayed his nomination as illegitimate, unrepresentative, and marred by factional manipulation. It was often as simple as when the *Richmond Daily Whig* wrote, “The following candidates for Mayor have already been nominated in New York:—Hard Shell, (genuine) Augustus Schell; Hard Shell, (bogus,) Fernando Wood; Soft Shell, Fernando Wood;” casting Wood’s Hard Shell nomination as illegitimate.⁶³ The *New York Daily Tribune* agreed, calling “Fernando Wood, the sham Democratic candidate for Mayor.”⁶⁴ The *New York Dispatch* alleged, “a part of the Stuyvesant politicians have made an effort to earn their money by nominating him as a Hard Shell.”⁶⁵ The Stuyvesant Institute mentioned in the *New York Dispatch* was the Hard Shell political machine in direct opposition to the Soft Shell political machine of Tammany Hall. The *New York Dispatch* went further in a different article: “As to Fernando Wood, the verdict of the people is already on record against him, and we do not think intelligent men will change that verdict... The masses of these parties have no more sympathy with these candidates than they have with King Kamehamha [*sic*] of the Sandwich Islands.”⁶⁶ The press’s general displeasure toward the Wood nomination was manifested in its attempts to portray Wood as undeserving of the nomination and out of step with the electorate.

The press remained divided over Wood’s campaign and character, with not all newspapers joining the chorus of criticism. The harshness of the critiques prompted newspapers to pity Wood and defend his nomination. In a rebuke of resurfaced allegations from Wood’s 1850 mayoral campaign, the *New York Herald* commented, “the *Post* has seen fit to... rake up the ashes of the stale accusations which it had so energetically condemned. We do not know whether to pity most the unfortunate infirmity of our contemporary, or the hard fate of Mr. Wood, who has the misfortune at one time to be taken under the protection, and another to be visited with the hostility of the *Post*. His crime is that he continues consistent, whilst our contemporary finds it convenient to trim his sails according to the wind.”⁶⁷

⁶² “Wood’s Courage Oozing Out,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 October 1854, 2.

⁶³ “The following candidates for Mayor have already been nominated in New York,” *Richmond Daily Whig*, 18 October 1854, 2.

⁶⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, 31 October 1854, 4.

⁶⁵ “Who is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁶⁶ “City Politics,” *New York Dispatch*, 15 October 1854, 2.

⁶⁷ “Fernando Wood Posted,” *New York Herald*, 11 October 1854, 4.

Allegations from Wood's 1850 campaign were frequently revived to undermine his current bid for mayor, prompting a recurring defense that called for moving beyond the past. In an article from the *Irish American* published by the *New York Dispatch* closer to election day, the paper representative of the immigrant population rose to the defense of Wood against resurfaced allegations of election interference. The *Irish American* contended, "that the charges brought against him for electioneering purpose—for sectional, not party purposes—have been since then repudiated, and Mr. Wood's character as a man of honor and integrity has been fully and entirely vindicated."⁶⁸

The defenses of Wood were not always objective. The *New York Dispatch*, for instance, published an opinion piece from a self-proclaimed friend of Wood in opposition to the paper's own reporting on the Wood campaign. The friend of Wood wrote, "Now, Mr. Editor...I desire to say a word for a friend of mine, who, I think, has been more than once the object of attack, without, in my judgment, deserving it... Mr. Wood, though harshly treated by a part of the press, does not complain. He thinks that, so far as the *Dispatch* is concerned, its course towards him has been directed by none but pure motives."⁶⁹ By openly identifying as friends of Wood, these defenders revealed their bias, making the articles read less like objective journalism and more like orchestrated endorsements from political allies. Other writers used their personal relationship with Wood to provide support for their arguments. In an account of a speech at Tammany Hall, the *New York Herald* published an excerpt from Soft Shell Democrat, Col. Ming: "Look at Fernando Wood. In his early youth he was charged with drawing more money from a bank than was deposited in it, and that bank with its great money power has since pursued him... I have known him all his life, and believe him to be a true man."⁷⁰

The friendly press towards Wood operated in close alignment with his campaign, working to counter accusations of impropriety while promoting his character and leadership qualities. The *New York Dispatch*, for instance, reinforced Wood's image as a man of high character by harkening back to Wood's early years. "He was at the early age, being but thirteen years old, distinguished for learning and great assiduity in overcoming obstacles. He never failed in the accomplishment of an object, provided it was within the pale of possibilities. 'I'll try' was his motto, and already it was half done," the *New York Dispatch* insisted.⁷¹ The press's

⁶⁸ "An Old Personal Friend of Fernando Wood," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁶⁹ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁷⁰ "The Soft Shells in Tammany," *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 1.

⁷¹ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

support of Wood's campaign often relied on vague assertions rather than concrete examples. Similarly, an article from the *Irish American* bolstered Wood's liberal image through claims without factual support. The *Irish American* wrote, "This is the kind of man we want in this mixed community. We want a firm man. We want a liberal man. We want an educated man. We want a calm tempered man for Mayor; and we conscientiously believe Fernando Wood is such a man."⁷² The press's support of Wood's campaign often took the form of overtly subjective characterizations such as *The Sun*'s portrayal of Wood as an emblem of masculine virtue. *The Sun* commented that "He is in the prime and vigor of manhood—rich enough to be beyond the reach of temptation, and with no ambition but to deserve well of his fellow-citizens."⁷³

The press also cited Wood's patriotism, casting him as a steadfast defender of the nation's ideals and a true statesman. In an appraisal of the entire field of mayoral candidates, the *New York Herald* cast the mere action of running for office as an example of patriotism. The paper wrote, "If the public is not satisfied with this list, we do not know what can be done for them. Six men of such character and standing as the above, all willing to sacrifice their private ease for the public good: who says that patriotism is extinct after this?"⁷⁴ Other accounts of Wood's patriotism and public service were drawn from his short time in congress. *The Sun* remarked, "This gentleman was in Congress, from this City, in 1841, '2 and '3, and acquitted himself with great crest. Though not a professional man, he made some of the best and most effective speeches. His speech against the re-charter of the United States Bank was a masterly effort; and at the time received distinguished honors, of a high compliment, from Mr. Calhoun."⁷⁵ Amid the praise for Wood's effectiveness during his time in Congress, *The Sun* was able to portray him as a great statesman while emphasizing that he was not a career politician.

Newspapers also supported candidates beyond the Democratic Party, most notably the Whig Party's John J. Herrick. In an overview of his background, the *New York Dispatch* offered its support: "He started in business life some twenty years ago with little save his own energies and innate integrity to back him; and he has made his way along the straight path of honorable endeavor to the station of a leading merchant in the second commercial city of the world. ...if elected, he will use all the authority...to enforce the laws; lessen the burden of taxation; crush

⁷² "An Old Personal Friend of Fernando Wood," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁷³ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁷⁴ "Our Next Mayor," *New York Herald*, 14 October 1854, 4.

⁷⁵ "The Mayoralty Candidates," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

rowdiness; repress crime; check and punish corruption; give us clean streets; and purge the city of the innumerable public abuses.”⁷⁶ Similar to the press’s support for Wood, the newspapers projected Herrick’s image as an outsider and not an experienced politician. The press’s support for outsiders and businessmen continued in the positive coverage of the potential campaign of John N. Genin. Genin, a prominent businessman in New York City, eventually chose to not run in the mayoral race but was widely celebrated and projected to win by the press. The *New York Herald* reprinted an endorsement of a Genin mayoral campaign from the *Sunday Mercury* that proclaimed, “Should Mr. John N. Genin receive the endorsement of the democratic conventions, and be pitted against any of the Whig candidates except the two last named, he would sweep the political course as clean as the brooms of his sweepers swept Broadway.”⁷⁷ The pro-Genin predictions of a mayoral victory were not without substance. The *New York Herald*, reporting on Genin’s support among voters, commented, “John N. Genin is before the people of this city, backed by upwards of four thousand voters, who profess to be uncommitted to any party, as an independent candidate for Mayor, and a meeting is to be held on Tuesday evening to forward the movement.”⁷⁸

The speculative reporting on the potential Genin campaign for mayor emphasized an important element of the 1854 election: an embrace of non-politicians and new political parties. The most pronounced new political party was the Know Nothing Party who nominated James W. Barker as their candidate for mayor. The *New York Dispatch* told readers, “It has been intimated that James W. Barker, whose name appears above as the Temperance candidate, has been secretly nominated by the Know-Nothings. If so, he will be the next mayor of New York in spite of all opposition.”⁷⁹ The press applauded Barker’s campaign despite the Know Nothing Party’s secret nomination process, viewing his candidacy as a response to public disaffection with the political establishment. In observance of the growing support behind Barker, the *New York Dispatch* noted, “James W. Barker has been nominated by the Know Nothings, and having also been endorsed by the disaffected of all parties, has become a sort of ‘People’s Candidate.’”⁸⁰ The main obstacle Barker had to overcome was the negative connotations associated with the Know Nothing Party,

⁷⁶ “To Voters of All Parties Friendly to Reform,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁷⁷ “City Politics,” *New York Herald*, 4 September 1854, 8.

⁷⁸ “Political Affairs in the City,” *New York Herald*, 4 October 1854, 4.

⁷⁹ “City Politics,” *New York Dispatch*, 15 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁰ “Who Is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

namely their nativist and bigoted views towards immigrants. To alleviate these worries, the *New York Herald* asserted, “Mr. Barker, though a Know Nothing, is known to be without bigotry and intolerance. He is favorable to the utmost freedom of conscience. His liberality of sentiment in having contributed to the erection of a Roman Catholic church has in fact been used as an argument against him. We should have every confidence in his official impartiality and even handed justice.”⁸¹ The *New York Herald* continued, highlighting Barker as principled liberal: “He is a man of enlarged and liberal ideas, and one whose public spirit peculiarly fits him for the discharge of the duties that devolve upon the chief magistrate of a great and prosperous maritime city.”⁸²

Similar to the press’s response to Wood’s candidacy, the other candidates were judged harshly and portrayed in a negative light. Herrick’s campaign, for instance, received negative appraisals and accusations of illegitimacy surrounding his nomination by the press. The accusation of buying his nomination overshadowed his campaign with newspapers like the *New York Dispatch* observing, “What portion of the Whig masses ever heard of the name of John J. Herrick in connection with the Mayoralty, before the announcement of his nomination was published in the daily papers on Wednesday? The speculators and ‘professional delegates’ who make a business of carrying primaries to order, of course understood all about it.”⁸³ The *New York Dispatch* flatly asserted Herrick’s connection to moneyed men in the Whig Party: “It is now very generally conceded in Whig circles that the nomination of Herrick was brought about through the aid of rowdyism and money. It is also quite clear to me that Whig masses will not ratify that fraud at the ballet box in November.”⁸⁴ As a result of these accusations, views of his character in the press suffered. The *New York Dispatch* labeled him “an available candidate—a man who has money—and that is all you can say about him.”⁸⁵ The *New York Dispatch* summarized their critique of Herrick two days before the election: “John J. Herrick has managed to secure the Broadway House nomination, by the aid of arguments that seldom fail to succeed with the class of men who carry primary elections, for what they can make on the different delegations.”⁸⁶

The *New York Dispatch* continued their criticism of Herrick throughout the 1854 campaign, using their newspaper to portray Herrick as

⁸¹ “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 5.

⁸² “The Mayoralty,” *New York Herald*, 4 November 1854, 2.

⁸³ “City Politics,” *New York Dispatch*, 15 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁴ “Political Column for all Parties,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁵ “To What Base Uses Has the Great Whig Party Come at Last!,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁶ “Who Is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

a man of low quality and character. The pro-Whig paper went as far as to contend that the Reform Party candidate Wilson G. Hunt would perform better than Herrick. "As a Whig, and one who desires to see that party triumph where its success would produce beneficial results to the public interests and honor to itself, we must frankly say that we vastly prefer the election of Wilson G. Hunt to John J. Herrick," the *New York Dispatch* insisted.⁸⁷ *The Sun* concurred, "He has shown no executive ability whatever. An inattentive member, with limited intelligence and obstinate opinions, he has failed to give any evidence of the talent required for the office he now seeks."⁸⁸ *The Sun* continued its denunciation: "He has neither the talent for speaking or thinking required, and in our opinion, would totally fail when attempting to grasp the intricate and vast duties which must necessarily devolve upon him."⁸⁹ The disparagement of Herrick's quality as a candidate and a person in general extended beyond the criticisms of his Whig nomination process; the criticisms were very direct and personal, forming an image of Herrick as a man incapable of performing the duties required of the mayor of New York City.

The accusations of illegitimacy and low intelligence that Herrick leveled did not extend to the criticisms directed at Reform Party candidate Wilson G. Hunt. As Hunt originated from the breed of outsider candidates popular in the 1854 election, his inexperience hovered over his campaign. *The Sun* emphasized Hunt's inexperience: "We are without any evidence that he possesses talent or the energy necessary, and everybody knows that a man who has business of his own to attend to cannot devote the required time to the office of Mayor."⁹⁰ The *New York Dispatch* agreed with this line of attack on Hunt's campaign, remarking, "He lacks the stamina necessary for the faithful discharge of the duties of the office. He is wanting in the intelligence and suavity necessary to fill the post, with the dignity that ought to characterize the Mayor of a city like this."⁹¹

The press criticized both Hunt's inexperience and his party's insufficient platform, deriding it as out of touch with the average citizen. The *New York Dispatch* reported, "Wilson G. Hunt, through the aid of a few personal friends, has managed to get the endorsement of what is known as the Peter Cooper Reform Association, which meets at the University—a self-constituted body of men, who do not owe their election to the people, or

⁸⁷ "City Politics," *New York Dispatch*, 15 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁸ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁸⁹ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁹⁰ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁹¹ "Who is to be our Next Mayor?," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

have any particular feeling sympathy in common with them.”⁹² The lack of connection to the common voter was not isolated to the Reform Party’s allies but included the Reform Party itself according to the *New York Dispatch*: “But if they would only come out of their up-town palaces, and the back-rooms of their banking-offices, and mingle with the people, they would discover that their labors were entirely hopeless.”⁹³ The *New York Dispatch* repeated its disparagement of the Reform Party’s lack of connection to the voter by singling out Hunt’s disconnect from New York City: “Mr. Hunt is said to be one of the rich men of New York, where is his property? We are credibly informed that his name does not appear on the tax rolls of the city in connection with a single foot of ground.”⁹⁴

The principles of Hunt and the Reform Party, as recognized by the press, were described as a mixture of reform and the temperance movement. These principles were ridiculed in the press and labeled as a form of conservatism. *The Sun* emphasized the press’s characterization of Hunt and his platform in an article reprinted by the *New York Dispatch*: “His activity in getting up the late Saratoga Convention, a body of moral reformers, who were tainted with all the isms of the day, and whose proceedings were watched over and controlled by William H. Seward.”⁹⁵ As a result of Hunt’s associations with the temperance movement and broader moral reform efforts, the press labeled him a conservative. Most notably, the *New York Dispatch* remarked, “Wilson G. Hunt, I know to be a decided ‘foggy’ of the most ancient school.”⁹⁶ The press’s portrayal and critiques of Hunt presented him as an out of touch moral reformist, whose associations with temperance and the affluent alienated him from the broader electorate, showcasing the press’s intent to shape the public perception around candidates.

The press’s intent to shape the public perception extended to Know Nothing candidate Barkers as well, though with a more divided voice. While some outlets praised Barker as an outsider candidate untainted by the city’s political establishment, others sought to undermine his legitimacy by targeting both his personal qualifications and the broader ideology he represented. *The Sun*, writing in the *New York Dispatch*, attacked Barker’s intelligence, claiming, “He is deficient in the common rudiments of an English education, which is at all times shown in his conversation and writing.”⁹⁷ Beyond questioning Barker’s personal capabilities, the press

⁹² “Who is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁹³ “Who is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁹⁴ “Who is to be our Next Mayor?,” *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

⁹⁵ “Never Convict Before Trial?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁹⁶ “To What Base Uses Has the Great Whig Party Come at Last!,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

⁹⁷ “Never Convict Before Trial?,” *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

also cast the Know Nothing Party itself in a negative light, associating it with elitism and prejudice. *The Sun* warned, "It will be an evil day for the people of this city when a man of such principles and narrow prejudices, representing an exclusive class of men, shall be placed to rule over them."⁹⁸ Through these critiques, the press not only disparaged Barker individually but also worked to discredit the Know Nothing movement in the minds of the electorate.

The criticism leveled at the various candidates highlighted the instability of the political field, but it was the deepening fractures within the Democratic Party that the press's coverage focused on during the 1854 election. As factional tensions between the Soft Shell and Hard Shells intensified, the party's internal struggles became a central force in shaping both the race and the press coverage surrounding it. While the conflicts between the two Democratic Party factions existed prior to the 1854 election season, the nominating conventions for the two sides proved divisive. In its account of the Hard Shell convention, the *New York Herald* reported on accusations that the Hard Shells leveled against the Soft Shells during the nomination process: "Mr. Haskins made a few brief remarks in support of his resolutions, in the course of which he intimated that Tammany Hall had its wire pullers and its minions in the convention. ...They had no more business in this body that they would have at the Whig Convention in the Broadway House. ...Mr. Haskins reiterated the charge that the convention was under the control of the Custom House and called upon the hard shell delegates opposed to Mr. Wood to withdraw from the room, and hold a convention in the one adjoining."⁹⁹ The accusations of illegitimacy aimed at Wood's Hard Shell nomination split the factions further and called into question Wood as a unity candidate. The *Weekly National Intelligencer* echoed the sentiments of fervent Hard Shells: "The 'Softs' nominated Fernando Wood, and so did a 'Soft' majority of the 'Hards,' whereupon the 'Hards' proper bolted, and are yet without a candidate."¹⁰⁰ The paper's report underscored the important distinction made in the press between the "proper" Hard Shell Democrats, who rejected Wood, and the faction of Soft Shell leaning Hard Shells who sought to control the party. The *New York Dispatch* summarized the fragmentation of the Democratic Party over the nomination of Fernando Wood as follows: "Yet so adroitly had this conspiracy been managed and arranged, that the two Conventions met on the same evening and almost simultaneously—the name of Fernando appeared to have a majority of votes in the respective ballot-boxes of the

⁹⁸ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

⁹⁹ "Hard Shell Mayoralty Convention," *New York Herald*, 10 October 1854, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Weekly National Intelligencer*, 14 October 1854, 3.

two separate and antagonistic bodies! Will any National Democrat believe that this result was honestly brought about? Why, it bears the stamp of fraud and corruption on its very face.”¹⁰¹ The accusations of fraud during the nomination process carried over into the rest of the campaign, leaving a divided Democratic Party.

The consequence of the divide caused at the nominating conventions was the general antipathy toward the cast of candidates put forward by the Democratic Party. The candidates were regarded as illegitimate and moneyed men who bought their nominations. In a repudiation of the candidates put forward by the Democratic establishment, the *New York Dispatch* believed, “However desirable it may be for the Democratic party to triumph; for one do not wish to see the party to which I am proud to belong, held responsible for the election of any such candidates as are put forward by the spoilsmen who now have control of Tammany Hall—the chief of whom is Fernando Wood.”¹⁰² The voter apathy toward the Democratic Party and Wood caused a defection of voters to rival parties. The *New York Herald* described this occurrence: “We have men of every party supporting every one of the four candidates; and yet each candidate is presumed to be the champion of a distinct political organization; and of course this befogs the honest voter, and he wants more light.”¹⁰³

Irrespective of the discontent among the Hard Shells surrounding the Hard Shell nomination of Wood, many newspapers sought to portray Wood as a unity candidate for the Democratic Party. The newspapers who reported on Wood’s Hard Shell and Soft Shell nominations often portrayed the nomination conventions as unanimous and effortless affairs for the Wood campaign. Before the nominating conventions, the consensus had settled on Wood as the candidate contrasting sharply with the actual events of the Hard Shell convention. The *New York Herald* contended, “It is generally conceded that the Mayoralty convention elected is largely favorable to uniting on Fernando Wood for Mayor.”¹⁰⁴ The press’s attempts to shape the nominating process as well as the convention aftermath manifested in the Washington D.C. based newspaper, the *Daily Union*. “The ‘hards,’” the *Daily Union* reported, “have unanimously nominated Fernando Wood for the mayoralty.”¹⁰⁵ The paper failed to mention the

¹⁰¹ “How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

¹⁰² “How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor,” *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

¹⁰³ “The Candidates for Mayor—Proposition for a Grand Mass Meeting in the Park,” *New York Herald*, 5 November 1854, 4.

¹⁰⁴ “Political Affairs in the City,” *New York Herald*, 4 October 1854, 4.

¹⁰⁵ “By Telegraph,” *Daily Union*, 10 October 1854, 3.

dissenting Hard Shells who abandoned the convention as a result of Wood's nomination. Similar to this error, other accounts of Wood's nominations are devoid of the Hard Shells' fragmentation, presenting a unified Democratic Party. Most notably the paper representative of the immigrant population, the *Irish American* (whose article was reprinted in the *New York Dispatch*), commented in defense of Wood's character and popularity among the united Democratic party, "We believe the very best proof of this fact is his nomination by what are called the 'Hards and Softs,' after the regular usages of the party."¹⁰⁶ The press's positive reaction to Wood's nomination centered on the symbolic potential of his candidacy to reunify the Democratic Party. Reflecting this sentiment, a Tammany speech published in the *New York Herald* emphasized this point: "The Wood that we adopted was neither hard nor soft; it was democratic."¹⁰⁷

The rhetoric of unity in the press, however, obscured the more divided reality of reactions to Wood's nominations across New York City's Democratic factions, as the Wood portrayed in the Soft Shell friendly *Irish American* and the speeches of Tammany Hall did not provide the full picture. Other newspapers countered pro-Wood coverage by often presenting him as a divisive figure. This caused the Democratic nomination for mayor to be clouded in the days preceding the separate nomination meetings of the Soft Shell Tammany Hall and the Hard Shell Stuyvesant Institute, rather than the straightforward process portrayed in the pro-Wood newspaper articles. "The Paul Prys, or Knowing ones, or those to whom secrets will sometimes be revealed, say the Fernando Wood will be the Soft nominee for Mayor, and that if he is, there will be no possibility of a Union between them and the Hards" the *New York Dispatch* opined.¹⁰⁸ The exact details of the breakdown in agreement at the Hard Shell convention were given in the *New York Herald* who recorded the speeches and attitudes of the Hard Shells present. In an observation of the attendees at the Hard Shell convention, the *New York Herald* noted, "He came to the convention from the Eighteenth Ward, unbiased, and did not know Mr. Wood personally, but he knew that he had been a member of an organization which had always bitterly opposed the Stuyvesant Institute organization."¹⁰⁹ The *New York Herald* continued, mentioning a speech given by an anti-Wood Hard Shell, "In the midst of the excitement, Senator Barr arose and addressed the

¹⁰⁶ "Never Convict Before Trial?," *New York Dispatch*, 29 October 1854, 2.

¹⁰⁷ "Soft Shells in Tammany," *New York Herald*, 3 November 1854, 1.

¹⁰⁸ "Outside Opinions—Actual Facts, and Sage Surmises of Politicians," *New York Dispatch*, 8 October 1854, 2.

¹⁰⁹ "Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor by the Soft Shells," *New York Herald*, 10 October 1854, 1.

convention:—Mr. Wood don't belong to this organization, and the votes which have been cast for him are, therefore not in order in this convention."¹¹⁰

Through the press's reporting, Wood's campaign became a symbol of disunity contradicting the pro-Wood press's positive appraisals of his candidacy. Wood's Hard Shell nomination was a target of accusations of illegitimacy due to the belief promulgated by the press that Soft Shells had infiltrated the voting process of the Hard Shell convention. The *New York Herald* reported, "The softs, it was rumored, were there in large numbers, with the view of securing the nomination of Fernando Wood, and, as the result proved, they succeeded in their object."¹¹¹ As a result of the accusations and the fracture of the Hard Shells, the anti-Wood faction nominated a different candidate. "Those opposed to Mr. Wood refused to endorse the action of the majority of the convention, and thereupon nominated Mr. Liby to that office," the *Daily Union* wrote.¹¹² The animosity towards Wood and his campaign featured intense exchanges in the press that were present throughout the entire election season. The *New York Dispatch* actively campaigned against Wood's nomination, insisting, "Honest Hard Shells will no more follow the lead of Wood than the adopted citizens. They know just how their convention was packed and will of course promptly repudiate both its action and its candidate, even though Mr. James E. Cooley does allow his name to be daily paraded in the Herald as the sponsor for this bastard nomination. Our watchword is and will be 'No fusion with Tammany Hall spoilers—no union with traitors.'"¹¹³ As a consequence of the accusatory language towards Wood and the general antipathy aimed at the Democratic Party candidate, the *New York Dispatch* published, "Public forbearance has at last been exhausted, and party ties and political nominations will henceforth have no more binding force than if they had never been made."¹¹⁴ The *Dispatch*'s article that was published two days before election day represented the ensuing fallout from the Wood nomination. Wood, who was supposed to be a unity candidate, was connected too closely to the dirty politicking of Tammany Hall, the nemesis of the Hard Shell Stuyvesant Society. Thus, the press aimed to make the 1854 mayoral race appear available to the entire field of candidates,

¹¹⁰ "Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor by the Soft Shells," *New York Herald*, 10 October 1854, 1.

¹¹¹ "Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor by the Soft Shells," *New York Herald*, 10 October 1854, 1.

¹¹² "Political Nominations," *Daily Union*, 12 October 1854, 2.

¹¹³ "How the Fusion of the Hard and Soft Was Accomplished and Fernando Wood Nominated for Mayor," *New York Dispatch*, 22 October 1854, 2.

¹¹⁴ "Who Is to be our Next Mayor?," *New York Dispatch*, 5 November 1854, 2.

minimizing the establishment parties in the Democratic Party and Whig Party.

The 1854 New York City election was a reflection of its era, marked by deep divisions that the press vividly exposed and helped to shape. The culmination of nativist sentiments from the Know Nothing Party, the early stages of the temperance movement, and the overarching shadow of national politics came together in 1854 to deepen the divide already present in the splintering of the Democratic Party. Amidst the turmoil, Fernando Wood formed a coalition of Hard Shell and Soft Shell Democrats that the press either praised or denounced. Newspapers not only recorded these political currents and Wood's political maneuvers but also played an active role in framing the debates and influencing public perception. Ultimately, the press was not a passive recorder of history but an active agent that helped define the political landscape of New York City in 1854. In doing so, the different newspapers became instruments of partisanship, advancing ideologies and their corresponding candidates, while shaping a diverse spectrum of facts and opinions that reflected the contested political landscape of the era.

An Accommodationist Analysis of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition

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Abstract:

The Negro Building was an exhibition at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition designed by prominent African Americans in the South. Historians have asked why such an institution, which celebrated black ingenuity, existed in an emerging Jim Crow South defined by segregation and Black Codes. The prevailing historical explanation is that the building existed as a result of a political concession between the Exposition planners and Congress. According to this argument, the planners of the Exposition only included African Americans in the Exposition in return for Federal funding. This paper challenges that proposal and instead argues that the Negro Building reflected adamant work by prominent Black accommodationists to show that African Americans could be reliable workers in the rapidly developing idea of the “New South.” This interpretation challenges the passivity that is thrust upon Black actors according to the existing explanation and instead advances the idea that the planners of the Negro Building were active in challenging white hegemony in the South through the Negro Building itself.

INTRODUCTION

As the weather began to cool from September to December, flocks of visitors descended upon Atlanta to visit the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. As these visitors explored the Exposition grounds, they might have purchased the *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition* to orient themselves during their visit. After flipping through the book, one might have found themselves interested in visiting the Midway Heights to see attractions like the “Moorish Palace” or the “Mystic Maze.”¹ After seeking thrill on the Midway, visitors could then slow down and appreciate some of the cultural arts that the Exposition had to offer. As they explored the grounds, sorting themselves through the different sights, sounds, and smells, they would have begun to hear the sound of “jubilee singers and banjo players.”² As they thumbed through their guidebook to determine the cause of this sound, they would have read an advertisement for “The Negro Building” — described as “the only building ever erected for the sole purpose of demonstrating the progress of the negro race in the arts of civilization.”³

The existence of the Negro Building raises interesting questions for the historian. As scholar Paul Stob explains, “the Gilded Age and Progressive Era are generally considered the ‘nadir’ period of race relations in the U.S.”⁴ Why then did a building dedicated to African Americans appear in 1895 and, subsequently, why did an Exposition in the Jim Crow South support not only the building itself but subsequent honors like the making of “Negro Day?”⁵ Historians like Ruth Winton, Harvey Newman, and Nathon Cardon advance the argument that African American participation at the 1895 Exposition originated from a political concession. They argue that the planners of the Exposition, wrapped in the throes of the Panic of 1893, included African Americans in return for their help in procuring Federal funding for the event. However, this article disagrees with the passivity that is thrust upon African Americans in this interpretation. Instead, this article argues that the Negro Building was an expansion of a larger political strategy by Southern Black leaders called “accommodationism.” African Americans did not simply accept the Negro

¹ P.S. Dodge, *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition: Held at Atlanta, Ga., U.S.A., September 18 to December 31, 1895*, (Atlanta, Ga: Franklin Printing and Pub, 1895), 111.

² Dodge, *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition*, 61.

³ Dodge, *Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition*, 61.

⁴ Paul Stob, “Booker T. Washington, ‘Atlanta Exposition Address, Atlanta, GA (18 September 1895),” *Voices of Democracy* 16: (2021), 5.

⁵ “Negro Day,” *The Atlanta Journal* (Atlanta, Georgia), December 24, 1895.

Building as a gift from Southern whites; instead, prominent Black leaders were active in implementing an exhibit at the Exposition as a part of a larger strategy to combat Southern white hegemony.

UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT BEHIND THE NEGRO BUILDING

In order to understand the political environment that the Negro Building encompassed, it is necessary to describe the general history of the late 19th century South and Atlanta. The South emerged from the Civil War entirely decimated — especially in larger cities. This originated from Union and Confederate strategies of sieging and destroying cities.⁶ Setting fire to these cities not only destroyed important manufacturing centers that were vital for the war effort, but also damaged civilian morale.⁷ Atlanta was no stranger to this treatment. Subject to five weeks of bombardment during the siege of Atlanta, Union forces intentionally targeted buildings so that the flames could not be put out by Confederate soldiers.⁸ Dr. William Link describes the Atlanta that emerged from the Civil War as “a hollow shell [...] lacking a functioning government or post office [...] and almost devoid of stores and businesses.”⁹

Emerging from these devastated cities, prominent white Southerners attempted to redefine the area by creating the “New South” movement. The New South was an idea led by Henry W. Grady — editor of *The Atlanta Constitution* — that sought to spur investment in the South.¹⁰ Historian Harold Davis describes that the mission of the New South movement was to “industrialize the south,” “put southern agriculture on a better footing,” and “give justice to black southerners.”¹¹ This justice consisted only of racial peace and limited reforms, as Grady was a staunch white supremacist who argued that “the supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards—because the white race is the superior race.”¹²

Although the South would certainly not meet these ideals — particularly in regard to race relations — the ideas of the New South movement were foundational for the creation of the 1895 Exposition. For

⁶ Megan Nelson, “Urban Destruction during the Civil War.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, (2016), 2.

⁷ Megan Nelson, “Urban Destruction during the Civil War,” 2.

⁸ William Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 27.

⁹ Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South*, 46.

¹⁰ Harold Davis, *Henry Grady's New South: Atlanta, a Brave and Beautiful City*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 13.

¹¹ Davis, *Henry Grady's New South*, 13.

¹² Henry Grady, *The South and Her Problems* (Project Gutenberg, 1887), 99.

one, the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition was a part of a series of expositions in Atlanta started by Grady to advance New South ideas. Dr. Harvey Newman substantiates this claim, describing that the “primary purpose” of the 1881 International Cotton Exposition was “the promotion of New South industrialization.”¹³ Alongside this, leading political figures of the time framed the 1895 Exposition within New South terms — particularly when it came to the idea of the South becoming a new place for African Americans. Governor William Atkinson of Georgia described the 1895 Exposition as a reflection that “the negro has had his opportunity in every calling in life alongside of the white man.”¹⁴ Charles Collier, President of the 1895 Exposition, reiterated this in his opening statement for the event — claiming that the Negro Building demonstrated “the progresses [*sic*] they [African Americans] have made as free men.”¹⁵ The organizers of the Exposition — and proponents of the New South — were certain that African Americans had a new place in the New South; however, it is important to analyze African American perspectives about the South at the turn of the century — understanding that the fantasy of the New South hardly represented the realities they faced.

Despite the publicly lauded ideals of the New South, African Americans faced a staunchly different reality defined by racial violence and political intimidation. Even though white organizers of the 1895 Exposition argued the South had opportunities to offer African Americans, the reality was that white Southerners were intimidating African Americans and prohibiting them from using their newly given freedom. One tactic in this strategy of intimidation was lynching which, as historian Amy Wood explains, articulated “messages about racial hierarchy and the frightening consequences of transgressing that hierarchy.”¹⁶ Racial lynchings were prominent around the period of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. According to research studies, racial lynchings in former slave states peaked in 1893 — illustrating that the reality of the South did not

¹³ Harvey Newman, “Atlanta’s Hospitality Businesses in the New South Era, 1880-1900,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (1996), 55.

¹⁴ “Governor Atkinson on the Exposition,” *The Atlanta Journal* (Atlanta, Georgia), October 23, 1895.

¹⁵ “Was a Giant Task | President Collier Tells of the Difficulties that Beset the Exposition | Conceived in a Panicky Time It Took a Wonderful Degree of Pluck to Carry it Through | A High Tribute Paid to the Press | He Recognizes Every Factor That Has Helped To Make the Exposition What It Is.” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), September 19, 1895.

¹⁶ Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2.

meet the ideals of the New South.¹⁷ Why then did the Negro Building manifest itself in this society? In order to answer that question, it is important to understand the work of African American leaders in charting a path through this precarious situation.

African American leaders in the South, reacting to the social and political environment around them, formed the strategy of accommodationism to minimize the “threat” that African Americans posed to the white establishment. Leon Litwack, in his work *Trouble in Mind*, provides a great explanation of the accommodationist movement. Litwack writes, in reference to an address made by Isaiah Montgomery in 1890, that accommodationism was an “accommodation to white supremacy and withdrawal from politics (which had little to offer blacks) in favor of education, economic advancement, self-help, and racial solidarity.”¹⁸ Often, this would involve invoking the memory of slavery to placate white fears about any challenge African Americans posed to white supremacy. Litwack explains that accommodationism “could easily be viewed as groveling before ‘white massa’ for a handout” but that “the end justified the means.”¹⁹

This strategy, although seemingly problematic on the surface, seemed like the best course of action to Black leaders like Booker T. Washington — a prominent accommodationist himself.²⁰ Paul Stob’s analysis of Booker T. Washington’s speech “The Atlanta Compromise” — given at the opening of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition — provides valuable insight into accommodationism as a movement. Stob, writing about Booker T. Washington’s experience in Tuskegee, Alabama, tells of a time when Washington hid someone fleeing from a lynching mob. When the man arrived at his doorstep, Washington gave him refuge and then proceeded to lie to the mob about knowing the man’s whereabouts.²¹ This meeting, according to Stob, demonstrated Washington’s ability to “help people of his race and simultaneously assuage the violent white establishment.”²² In many ways, this insight from Stob can be expanded to the work of accommodationists at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition — placating the white hegemony in the South by advancing an industrial and economic image of African Americans. By doing this, these

¹⁷ Charles Seguin and David Rigby, “National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941,” *Socius* 5 (2019).

¹⁸ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1998), 353-354.

¹⁹ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 360-361.

²⁰ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 354.

²¹ Stob, “Booker T. Washington, ‘Atlanta Exposition Address,’ Atlanta, GA (18 September 1895),” 5.

²² Stob, “Booker T. Washington, ‘Atlanta Exposition Address,’ 5.

accommodationists hoped to carve out a space for African Americans in the South.

DISCUSSION OF THE “FEDERAL FUNDING ARGUMENT”

In consideration of the historical context, this article differs from the traditional historiographical interpretation of the Negro Building. There were certainly political aspects to the development of the building, but historians have ignored the active role played by Black accommodationists in its creation. They have ignored the complexity of the situation and argued that white Southerners bestowed the Negro Building as a gift to African Americans. However, the idea of a “negro exhibit” had originated far before the 1895 Exposition, and historians have failed to appreciate this complexity in their analyses of the Negro Building.

The first historical argument that presented African Americans as passive actors in the story of the Negro Building originated from Ruth Winton’s journal article “Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1894-1915.” Winton’s argument is as follows: in May of 1894, a group of Southern entrepreneurs traveled to Congress for a presentation on the 1895 Exposition to secure Federal funding from the House Appropriation Committee. According to Winton, it was during this trip that the idea for a “separate Negro building was born,” and Bishop Gaines, Bishop Grant, and Booker T. Washington — all prominent African American leaders of their time — were sent for by telegram to appear in front of the committee.²³ After the three men presented in front of the House, Congress altered the bill to mandate that the exposition “provide a separate Negro building instead of locating the exhibit in the government building.”²⁴ Winton argues that the “address of the Negro leaders had been of material assistance in the appropriation of federal funds” and that “in return for their assistance [rewarded] the Negroes [...] with their first real opportunity to display their achievements.”²⁵ Winton’s argument makes a clear assumption that the Negro Building was hastily thought of and only existed because of white interests in receiving Federal funds for the Exposition.

Harvey Newman expanded on this argument in his paper “Atlanta’s Hospitality Businesses in the New South Era, 1880-1900.” Newman explains that “Atlanta exposition planners decided federal support would be more likely if blacks were included” because of the Panic of 1863.²⁶ It digresses from Winton’s argument by supposing the exposition planners

²³ Ruth Winton, “Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1881-1915,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 1 (1947), 35.

²⁴ Winton, “Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1881-1915,” 36.

²⁵ Winton, “Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1881-1915,” 36.

²⁶ Newman, “Atlanta’s Hospitality Businesses in the New South Era, 1880-1900,” 69.

decided to include African Americans before the trip to Washington D.C., but it still maintains the idea that the Negro Building came through the philanthropic outreach of white men and not by the work of African Americans. A similar argument is presented in Nathon Cardon's *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fair*. Although Cardon does present a more complex argument — suggesting that the inclusion of African Americans at the Exposition also stemmed from a desire to portray a “supposed racial harmony” in the South — he still maintains the argument that the inclusion of African Americans was “aimed” at securing federal funding.²⁷

All three of these historians rely on the same source to support their argument — Walter G. Cooper's *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated: Including the Official History of the Exposition*. In this account of the Exposition, Cooper compares the trip made by Gaines, Washington, and Grant to the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. He explains, “[the opportunity] appeared before them with the suddenness of an apparition, as when the wandering Moses, brooding over the wrongs of Israel, was called to action by the voice from the burning bush.”²⁸ Cooper demonstrates a clear bias in the assumptions he makes with this comparison. For one, Cooper's comparison of the white man to the voice of God suggests that white Southerners were the holy and all-knowing force that stirred African Americans into action. Alongside this, the comparison of Washington, Grant, and Gaines to Moses carries certain assumptions about the role of African Americans in creating the idea for a “negro exhibit.” His comparison of African Americans to the “wandering Moses” implies that African Americans were lost in the South and could only be saved by by “God” or white Southerners. Furthermore, Cooper's depiction of African Americans “brooding over their wrongs” suggests that African Americans did not know how to solve their position in the Southern socioeconomic system. Only after the voice of white Southerners called out for them to present their case in Washington D.C. did African Americans have the opportunity to present the progress of their race. The reliance of historians on this source is troubling and shortsighted. The implementation of the Negro Building was the reflection of thoughtful and considerate planning by African American leaders in the South, and Cooper's account does not accurately capture the complexity of this process.

²⁷ Nathan Cardon, *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 44.

²⁸ Walter Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated: Including the Official History of the Exposition*, (Atlanta, Georgia: The Illustrator Company, 1896), 24.

REBUTTAL OF THE “FEDERAL FUNDING ARGUMENT”

The Negro Building was the culmination of a premeditated plan by Black accommodationists to present the progress of their race to Southern society. This argument is bolstered by the accounts of Irvine Garland Penn, the Chief Director of the Negro Department at the 1895 Exposition. According to documents circulated at the time, Penn’s role as Chief Director was a salaried position, illustrating that his role in the 1895 Exposition was not seen as cursory to the Exposition but a part of its central mission.²⁹ Penn was also an adamant accommodationist himself. Penn not only led a project dedicated to presenting accommodationism, but he was also close with Booker T. Washington and pushed for him to be the Black speaker at the opening day of the Exposition.³⁰ Therefore, Penn’s role as Chief Director improves the reliability of sources produced by him. He was actively involved with the planning of the Negro Building and his account should be considered the predominant source when attempting to understand the African American perspective on the Negro Building.

There are two sources where Penn describes the history of the Negro Building. The first comes from his book *The College of Life or Practical Self Educator: A Manual of Self Improvement for the Colored Race*. While Penn had planned to write a book titled “The History of the Negro Department at the Atlanta Exposition,” he never produced this book for unknown reasons.³¹ Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that this book ultimately evolved into *The College of Life* as Penn published the book in 1896, shortly after the Exposition. In concert with two other authors, Penn covered a wide array of African American history and dedicated a section to the history of the 1895 Exposition and the Negro Building. Interestingly, Penn recounted a different story than the one told by Walter Cooper. According to Penn, the idea of a “negro exhibit” came “shortly after it had been given to the public of Atlanta and the country in general that the South would try its hand on a great Fair.”³² Penn recalls a meeting where Bishop Gaines and Henry Rucker — two prominent African American leaders in Atlanta — met with Samuel Inman, “a wealthy philanthropic [white] citizen [and] the head of the greatest cotton house in the world,” to present an idea

²⁹ “To Their Colored Brothers | The Commissioners for the Colored Building Issue an Able Address,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 20, 1895.

³⁰ Stob, “Booker T. Washington, ‘Atlanta Exposition Address,’ Atlanta, GA (18 September 1895),” 7.

³¹ “His Work Is Done | Commissioner I. Garland Penn To Leave Atlanta Soon | What He Intends Doing | Says He Will Get Out a Book Covering the Work of the Negro at the Exposition,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 5, 1896.

³² Henry Northrup, Joseph Henry, and Irvine Penn, *The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator: A Manual of Self-Improvement for the Colored Race*, (1896), 91.

of including “a special exhibit of Afro-American progress” at the 1895 Exposition.³³ Penn shares that “the idea was well received by Mr. Inman and further attention [was] given [to] it by all concerned.”³⁴ According to Penn, this “resulted in an invitation to the colored population of America, the South particularly, to take part in the [...] exposition.”³⁵

Penn’s story presents African Americans as active participants in the planning of the Negro Building. As Cooper and Winton present the story, the idea of an established Negro Building was decided by white men behind closed doors — contradicting the interpretation that Penn presents. Although some might argue that Penn could have exaggerated the role African Americans played in the process — amplifying the role of African Americans in creating the idea for an exhibit — Penn’s belief in accommodationism would not support such a claim. As has been explained, accommodationists were concerned with placating white fears about African Americans. Considering this, Penn would not outwardly lie about the role of African Americans in creating the Negro Building lest he wanted to create an undue threat to the accommodationist mission. Furthermore, Penn assured — when talking about publishing a history of the Negro Building — that he would pay “just tribute to the benevolent and philanthropic white men who compose[d] the exposition company.”³⁶ Historians can safely assume that Penn presented an accurate telling of how Black men actively advocated for the idea of a “Negro Exhibit” in *The College of Life*. Although Winton does acknowledge the meeting between these three men in his paper, he ignores that African Americans played an active role in establishing the Negro Building as an idea — instead advancing the argument that the Negro Building was created by a political debate in Congress.

The active participation of African Americans in establishing the Negro Building is also supported by an article written by Penn in *The Atlanta Constitution* titled “Awakening of a Race: The Moral and Industrial Development of the Negro as Shown at the Exposition.” In this article, Penn reinforced the idea that Gaines and Rucker were active in presenting the Negro Building as an idea to Inman. Penn writes that Inman gave “the constituted representatives of a race in need a hearing which is now a result

³³ Northrup, Henry, and Penn, *The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator*; 91.

³⁴ Northrup, Henry, and Penn, *The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator*; 91

³⁵ Northrup, Henry, and Penn, *The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator*; 91

³⁶ “His Work Is Done,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 5, 1896.

of which he nor our representatives can for a moment be ashamed.”³⁷ Penn’s newspaper article continues the dialogue that Gaines, Rucker, and Inman were in active concert about implementing an exhibit of some sort at the Exposition. It goes against the account that Cooper describes and negates his reliability as a source. Alongside this, Penn recalls the trip made to Washington to secure federal funding and explains that “colored men having been incorporated as feature of the exposition were wisely and appropriately asked to visit congress [*sic*] as a part of the exposition committee in the interest of the appropriation.”³⁸ This describes that an active relationship had formed between the 1895 Exposition planners and African American leaders before going to Washington D.C., and further refutes Cooper as a reliable source. While this might seem similar to the argument that Newman and Cardon make, it differs in that it gives African Americans a much more active role in the story behind the Negro Building. Newman and Cardon present a passive version of African Americans who, only after being asked by white Southerners to join the Exposition, made the trip to Congress; nevertheless, primary sources reveal that African Americans were active in developing the idea for African American inclusion at the 1895 Exposition.

The active participation of African Americans in this process can also be extended far past the initial meeting between Rucker, Gaines, and Inman. Secondary literature reveals that the work to present African American ingenuity in the South originated far before the 1895 Exposition. Mabel O’Wilson explains that Joseph Gaines and Henry Rucker had been involved in raising funds for an entire fair “dedicated to Negro progress” in the fall of 1888.³⁹ This fair had been planned by two other prominent African Americans in the South — Philip Joseph and William Pledger.⁴⁰ Joseph and Pledger secured the good wishes of a white social club (The Driving Club) that owned Piedmont Park — the official site of the 1895 Exposition and a group that New South creator Henry Grady was a part of himself.⁴¹ According to O’Wilson, Joseph and Pledger took a trip to Congress to secure Federal funding for “The National Colored Convention”; however, unlike in 1894, the two men were denied any

³⁷ Irvine Garland Penn, “Awakening of a Race: The Moral and Industrial Development of the Negro as Shown at the Exposition,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), September 22, 1895.

³⁸ Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

³⁹ Mabel O’Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 44-45.

⁴⁰ O’Wilson, *Negro Building*, 44.

⁴¹ O’Wilson, *Negro Building*, 44.

Federal funding.⁴² O'Wilson credit this to the fact that "under the emerging class structure of the New South, white leaders wanted to make sure the 'black masses' [...] knew their place — that is, serving the interest of their white bosses and mistresses."⁴³ Whether O'Wilson's final claim is true or not — the 1895 Negro Building clearly showed a Black willingness to conform to the New South vision — her research is valuable in illustrating that Gaines and Rucker had attempted to procure Federal funding to illustrate Black ingenuity before 1894. As this article contends, African Americans were not picked by their white saviors to participate in the Exposition; instead, African Americans were active in working to establish an exhibit at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. Winton, Newman, and Cardon, by relying on Cooper as their primary source, do not account for the active work of African Americans in creating the Negro Building.

The explanation for why historians have reached a flawed conclusion about the Negro Building's existence can be explained by Conrad Russell's metaphor in "Parliamentary History in Perspective." Although Russell is not writing about the South or American history at all in his piece, he does explain the trap that historians studying the Negro Building have fallen into. Russell likens the work of the historian to that of a "man who sits down to read a detective story after beginning with the last chapter."⁴⁴ In doing this, Russell explains that the man wonders how anyone could ever doubt that the novel would end with a different solution. Russell then explains that the same issue afflicts historians. Cursed with knowing how the story ends, the historian looks for pieces of evidence that "point towards the solution which he knows ultimately emerged."⁴⁵ The greatest difference, Russell explains, is that "life is not a story written by an author who had decided on the ultimate solution before the story began."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Winton, Newman, and Cardon fall victim to this issue. Since the 19th century ended with the implementation of black codes and Jim Crow laws, they have found evidence to support that the existence of the Negro Building stemmed from white political interests. This interpretation of the Negro Building ignores the active partnership that had been forming between accommodationists and white Southerners in the late 19th century. Southerners might have extended the Negro Building to African Americans

⁴² O'Wilson, *Negro Building*, 46.

⁴³ O'Wilson, *Negro Building*, 46.

⁴⁴ Conrad Russell, "Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604-1629," *History* 61, no. 201 (1976), 1.

⁴⁵ Russell, "Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604-1629," 1.

⁴⁶ Russell, "Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604-1629," 1.

to “cleanse” the South of its popular perception, but Southern African Americans certainly worked with these men in power to acquire any help that would advance their accommodationist interests. African Americans were in a position of weakness under the thumb of white hegemony, and “accommodating” with the vision of these white men seemed like the most prudent course of action to some African American leaders. If historians recognize the active participation of African Americans in creating a space to serve their accommodationist interests, the answer to “What was the Negro Building?” becomes much clearer.

AN ACCOMMODATIONIST INTERPRETATION OF THE NEGRO BUILDING
As opening day approached for the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, newspapers published stories about the festival and the exhibits attendees would be able to visit. Alongside this general interest in the 1895 Exposition, newspapers began to become very intrigued by the Negro Building as both an idea and an institution. *The Rome Tribune* called the Negro Building “the most significant event in the history of the colored race since slavery was abolished.”⁴⁷ *The Atlanta Constitution* wrote, in reference to the Negro Building, that “this feature of the exposition [...] will be one of the most interesting.”⁴⁸ Alongside this, one African American newspaper claimed that the Negro Building had “enlisted more enthusiasm [...] among the colored people of the south than any other one thing since the passage of the fifteenth amendment to the constitution.”⁴⁹ From the historical database, it seems that there was widespread interest that spanned across racial lines about the work of the Negro Building. However, this enthusiasm from some African Americans dissipated as they began to realize the Negro Building reflected an accommodationist vision. Although supporters of accomaditionism considered the Negro Building successful, this victory did not come without some contentious debates about their mission.

The semantics of “accommodationism” suggests that there is something to accommodate towards, and some African American leaders in the South believed this meant placing African Americans within the industrial vision of the New South through the Negro Building. From the

⁴⁷ “Now the New Negro | Atlanta's Show Will Mark a New Era in the Race's Progress. | Display Illustrative of the Black Man's Development Since the War — The Chief Organizer a Brainy and Representative Man — Features of the Exhibit,” *Rome Tribune* (Rome, Georgia), July 24, 1895.

⁴⁸ “Out At The Grounds | How the Work of the Cotton States and International Exposition Progresses | Where the Crowds Will Gather | Visitors in Abundance Will Throng the Scene of the Great Work | What Has Already Been Done | Great Improvements Carried on During the Last Months — Something About the Various Buildings,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1895.

⁴⁹ “Negro Exposition,” *The Topics* (Kansas City, Kansas), August 8, 1895.

very onset, white men on the executive board of the Exposition appointed prominent accommodationists to the “board of colored commissioners of the exposition.”⁵⁰ This included men like Booker T. Washington, Isaiah Montgomery, and Irvine Garland Penn — the eventual Chief Director of the Negro Department.⁵¹ Furthermore, the exhibits displayed inside the Negro Building clearly demonstrate an accommodationist vision. Different states hosted exhibits that focused on highlighting how Southern Blacks could contribute to an industrial economy. The Virginia exhibit had a “department of literary and academic work, mechanical drawing, ecnsitisting [*sic*] of drawings on scale from objects, plans, and measurements of houses actually erected by students of the school.”⁵² The Arkansas exhibit displayed a “peach pitting machine” and the Alabama exhibit displayed “everything in the line of industry” including “wagons, buggies, carts, stoves, engines, tin pots, tubs, toilet sets, furniture of all sorts for bedroom, library, parlor, and kitchen.”⁵³ Each of these exhibits made a clear effort to demonstrate the industrial contribution that Black men and women could make to a modernizing New South.

The Negro Exhibit also took special care to highlight the work of young Black men — the demographic that organizers of the Negro Building hoped would assume an accommodationist life. Penn took special care to pay attention to one particular boy in his newspaper article “The Awakening of a Race: The Moral and Industrial Development of the Negro as Shown at the Exposition.” Penn tells the story of an unnamed Black boy who had a bicycle on display in the Virginia exhibit. When telling this story, Penn relied on the quotations of Mr. James Tate — the owner of the farm where this unnamed boy lived and worked on. According to Mr. Tate, the boy could “read fairly well, and write” and was “not fond of farm work.”⁵⁴ He would tinker with mechanical objects in an outhouse his father lived in, making “fancy woodwork,” “a fan to keep him cool while at work in the summer,” and a “wire [...] which operate[d] a churn for the making of butter.”⁵⁵ The bicycle on display was all self-constructed (except for the bicycle chain) by the young boy with “the most crude materials” that “in the ordinary course of time would be thrown aside as worthless on the farm.”⁵⁶ Penn did not randomly devote a significant portion of his

⁵⁰ “To Their Colored Brothers,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1895.

⁵¹ “To Their Colored Brothers,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 20, 1895.

⁵² Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

⁵³ Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

⁵⁴ Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

⁵⁵ Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

⁵⁶ Penn, “Awakening of a Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1895.

newspaper article, and an exhibit space for the bicycle, for no reason. Penn recognized that this boy represented the accommodationist ideal that Black youths would inherit in the New South. For one, the boy was educated — a hallmark of the work that accommodationists tried to achieve in the South. As will be discussed later in this article, the Negro Building strove to demonstrate what African Americans could achieve with some sort of an education, and the mention of the unnamed boy's education level was not random or done without thought. Alongside this, the young boy represented African Americans who were eager to contribute to an industrial economic landscape. The story of this boy demonstrated what the *Atlanta Constitution* labeled "The New Negro": a "brainy and capable representative of the younger generation of negroes, a well educated, broad minded and progressive young man, who sees in the work which he is carrying on grand responsibilities for the development of his people."⁵⁷ The correlation between how the "New Negro" was viewed in the "New South" and the image that Penn presented are not coincidental. The work of the Negro Building presented an image that conformed to this white expectation of African American roles in the New South — it was a concerted effort to accommodate to this vision to make strides, albeit tiny, in the prejudiced South.

The vision of "The New Negro" that Penn and other accommodationists presented did require a commitment to Black education. *Topics*, an African American newspaper based out of Kansas City, recognized this in their article "Negro Exposition." They paid attention to the fact that Penn was the "superintendent of the colored schools of Petersburg" and stated that "Mr. Penn, like Booker T. Washington, believes in education [...] as the surest solvent of the race problem."⁵⁸ They astutely recognized this commitment by Penn and other commissioners who paid special attention to demonstrate the strides made in education by African Americans at the Negro Building. In his role of collecting exhibits to display for Virginia, Penn requested "every superintendent of public instruction [...] to lend his aid in securing the services of the colored school teachers who are best qualified to appreciate the vast opportunity afforded their race."⁵⁹ The Chief Commissioner of the Florida exhibit enlisted the help of "The President of the Negro Normal and Agricultural College" in Tallahassee to "place an exhibit of the student's work in that institution."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "Now the New Negro," *Rome Tribune* (Rome, Georgia), July 24, 1895.

⁵⁸ "Negro Exposition," *The Topics* (Kansas City, Kansas), August 8, 1895.

⁵⁹ "The Negro Exhibit | Virginia Negroes Working Zealously for the Success of their State," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), December 23, 1894.

⁶⁰ *Savannah Tribune* (Savannah, Georgia), March 23, 1895.

John Howlett, placed in charge of a Kansas exhibit at the Negro Building, requested “all the colored teachers [...] to select the pupils’s [*sic*] best essays, stories. [*sic*] sentences, drwaings [*sic*], etc, and send them to me.”⁶¹ There is an overwhelming amount of historical evidence to suggest that demonstrating advances in education was central to the accommodationist mission of the Negro Building.

Accommodationists did not imply that investment into the next generation of Black Southerners meant that older generations could not adjust to the “New South.” In fact, the Negro Building attempted to demonstrate that older African Americans could immediately contribute to Southern industry. One such example of this was the physical Negro Building itself — with Penn and his fellow organizers going to great lengths to ensure that the Negro Building was an entirely Black project. The *Atlanta Journal* reported in October of 1895 that “when the building was first proposed a committee of negroes called on President Collier and asked that none but negro workmen be employed on the building.”⁶² The white organizers of the Exposition agreed with this vision and ultimately awarded the construction of the building to the Black contractors “J.T. King” and “J. W. Smith.” According to *The Atlanta Constitution*, Grant Wilkins — the “superintendent of construction” at the Exposition — “thought it proper that this firm should have the contract.”⁶³ Penn and his fellow leaders did not push for this without reason, they wanted to present the physical building itself as a sign of how African Americans could contribute to the Southern economy outside of agriculture. *The Atlanta Constitution* noticed this vision and reported on how the project was “built by negroes, under the supervision of negroes and filled with exhibits showing the progress of the colored race.”⁶⁴ They ultimately concluded that the Negro Building “[would] be of very great interest.”⁶⁵ The recognition by *The Atlanta Constitution* on the work of the Negro Building and Black workers should not go unnoticed — it is a complicit recognition of accommodationism at work. By recognizing Black ingenuity and workmanship, the newspaper also demonstrated a recognition of accommodationism and its principles.

The mission of the Negro Building is not a story of unlimited success as the building also invited critiques of the accommodationist

⁶¹ “Negro Exposition,” *The Topics* (Kansas City, Kansas), August 8, 1895.

⁶² “Negro Building Opening | It will be Formally Dedicated Monday with Ceremonies,” *The Atlanta Journal* (Atlanta, Georgia), October 10, 1895.

⁶³ “For and By Negroes | Contract for The Negro Building let to Colored Contractors,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 29, 1895.

⁶⁴ “For and By Negroes,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 29, 1895.

⁶⁵ “For and By Negroes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 29, 1895.

movement. Critics of accommodationism asked why African Americans were attempting to make a place for themselves in a society that was institutionally racist and discriminatory. A series of events that occurred in Kansas City in the lead up to the Exposition exemplified these concerns. As was mentioned earlier, Irvine Garland Penn enlisted John Howlett to secure a “Kansas” exhibit for the Negro Building. However, the work of the Negro Building depended on popular participation and belief in the project. Organizers of the Negro Building collected essays and stories — among many other things — from the general public. This work depended on people submitting these materials. Organizers of each state asked for objects from the general populace, and this was no different in the case of Kansas.

In August of 1895, John Howlett wrote “An Open Letter to Negroes” and asked for “many varieties of church, residence and school potographs [*sic*] [to be] prepared for the exhibit at once.”⁶⁶ Howlett knew that he depended on public investment in the project and noted that “the size and character of this dispaly [*sic*] [...] [would] depend very much upon the interest the Negroes take in the matter.”⁶⁷ Howlett would strike a different tone in the late weeks of August as Black Kansans failed to send in any material for an exhibit. *The Topics*, a Black newspaper in Kansas where Howlett was editor, quoted an excerpt from the *Kansas City Star* that reported “the prospects for a special exhibit at the cotton states exposition of the work of Kansas Negroes is rather dark.”⁶⁸ *The Topics* would go on to confirm “this statement is true” and report that “the Negroes of this state are not in the interest of the exposition or will not send a pair of old shoes there for exhibit.”⁶⁹ It continued:

They strongly hate the South and do not feel they want to go there because there is a jim crow [*sic*] car law and colorline. Not knowing that the Northern Negroes can be treated fair in the South. It is said that if the Negro exposition is located in the North they will be couraged [*sic*] to make their exhibit.⁷⁰

The reporting from *The Topics* reveals several things about how some African Americans perceived accommodationism and the Negro Building.

⁶⁶ John Howlett, “An Open Letter to Negroes,” *The Topics* (Kansas City, Kansas), August 8, 1895.

⁶⁷ Howlett, “An Open Letter to Negroes,” *The Topics*, August 8, 1895.

⁶⁸ “No Negro Exhibit” *The Topics* (Kansas City, Kansas), August 22, 1895.

⁶⁹ “No Negro Exhibit” *The Topics*, August 22, 1895.

⁷⁰ “No Negro Exhibit” *The Topics*, August 22, 1895.

For one, *The Topics* article demonstrates that the vision of accommodationism was not popular throughout the country. By suggesting a dichotomy between “Northern Negroes” and — on the contrary — Black Southerners, the article illustrates that there was little belief among Black Kansans about making a life for African Americans in the South. The North was seen as a much more preferred region of the country for African Americans to settle in the future— evidenced by the willingness of Black Kansans to provide material for an exhibit if it was held in the North. The article also reveals that, among states that were not in the Deep South, there were serious concerns about Jim Crow laws and racial segregation that impacted popular opinion on the Negro Building. Although not directly responding to these Kansans, the organizers of the Negro Building were aware of these criticisms. In fact, just four months before this crisis, a meeting had been held in Atlanta to address these concerns.

The meeting at Bethel Church among Southern Blacks in April of 1895 exemplifies the responses to critiques of accommodationism and the work of the Negro Department. At this meeting, supporters of the Negro Building were confronted with concerns about the “lack of space for the colored exhibit, jim-crow cars and of convict labor at the grounds.”⁷¹ These concerns were similar to those of Black Kansans, and it is reasonable to assume that these were common criticisms among the critics of the accommodationist Negro Building. “H. R. Butler” (Henry Rutherford Butler) was the first man to respond to the concerns of these dissenters at this meeting.⁷² Butler emphatically argued that “the people of the north — and I am sorry to have to use these words, north and south — the people of the north have looked down upon us.”⁷³ He continued to claim that the people of the North “have said that there is no good in us and that we were good for nothing but to hoe cotton and plant corn.”⁷⁴ Butler’s words can assist in understanding the unfavorable conditions that faced African Americans during the late 19th century. The North was no better than the South in terms of racist tendencies and relocating to the North did not mean an escape from the structural racism that existed in the late 19th century

⁷¹ “The Colored Exhibit | A Meeting Last Night at the Big Bethel Church | Some Fiery Speeches were Made | They Touch on Jim Crow Cars and the Objections Brought Out Against the Exposition by Some,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), April 3, 1895.

⁷² “The Colored Exhibit,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1895; Nicole Carmolingo, “Henry Rutherford Butler,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/science-medicine/henry-rutherford-butler-1862-1931/>.

⁷³ “The Colored Exhibit,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1895.

⁷⁴ “The Colored Exhibit,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1895.

United States. That harrowing reality can explain the existence of accommodationism. As Butler would go on to argue, the Negro Building could “show them [the North] that we, the colored people of the south, have accomplished something — that we are indeed a great people, and that we have future before us which very few of them dream of.”⁷⁵ In some ways, it demonstrates how accommodationism could inspire its supporters because it did, albeit in an extremely belittling way, provide a future path and role for Black Southerners.

Butler would also comment on his Southern pride and emphasize that he was “proud of the south” before going on to say, “I was born here, and naturally I have that pride which all should feel who claim it as their native country.”⁷⁶ This theme of “Southern pride” seemed to be prominent among accommodationists reacting to critics of the Negro Building. Irvine Garland Penn, when asked about Black emigration to the North, wrote, “I am content to stay in the south and work out our own salvation.”⁷⁷ We might question why there seemed to be so much pride among Black Southerners in a system that did not represent them and was structurally built against them; however, doing so would make us victim to the trap that Conrad Russell explains. To these men, the South was their home, and they were resolved to build a place for their race in the South through the Negro Building. One cannot help but look at the work of these accommodationists with pity. Although historians know about the development of race relations in the South, Penn and his contemporaries believed they could build a life for themselves in the South if they accommodated to white interests. They inherited a system that was structurally built against them and yet they still worked to find a place for themselves with their newly granted freedom. Penn himself wrote that “the mass of southern white men has been permitted to see more of the bad side than the good side of the negro” and believed that the 1895 Exposition would “show up the good side in an unmistakable way. God grant that he [white Southerners] will see it.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ “The Colored Exhibit,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1895.

⁷⁶ “The Colored Exhibit,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1895.

⁷⁷ Irvine Garland Penn, “Should Stay Here | Commissioner Penn Believes the South is the Place for the Negro | Writes a Letter on the Subject | He says The Best Representatives of the White People of the South are Friends of the Negro,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), April 7, 1895.

⁷⁸ Penn, “Should Stay Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1895.

CONCLUSION

On the historical timeline, the Negro Building at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition appears as a blip in the larger story of Southern race relations. Understanding that Atlanta, only 11 years after the Exposition, witnessed the worst race riots in Georgia History suggests that the Negro Building was a historical anomaly — a brief gasp of accommodationism. However, doing so would underappreciate the work of men like Irvine Garland Penn, Booker T. Washington, Isiah Montgomery, Bishop Gaines, Henry Rucker, and many more. They certainly subscribed to a flawed theory, but the theory originated as a reflection of their personal circumstances and political aspirations. These men wanted to stay in the South, with a sort of naïveté that they could fix the systematic racism that existed in the region, and they saw accommodationism as a means to an end. By using projects like the Negro Building, these men hoped to emphasize the industrial contributions that the “New Negro” could make to the “New South.” After viewing the Negro Building in this light, considering its existence as a historical anomaly seems shortsighted. The Negro Building reflects a concerted effort by Black accommodationists to place themselves within the New South rhetoric and vision. Although white interests certainly influenced the eventual inception of the 1895 Negro Building, Winton, Newman, and Cardon are misguided in arguing that the Negro Building was a gift bestowed upon African Americans only after securing Federal funding. Instead, it was the reflection of adamant work by accommodationists to establish a space that would demonstrate how their vision could correlate with an industrialized South. Rather than continuing a story of Black passivity, this interpretation of the Negro Building gives credit to the vigorous action taken by African Americans to build a place for themselves in the “New South.”

How Northern Newspapers Derailed the Presidential Campaign of “Lincoln’s Pathfinder,” John C. Frémont, in 1856

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Abstract:

The election of 1856 took place during a period of increasingly intense political polarization in the United States. In their first national election, the Republican Party nominated the politically inexperienced yet culturally renowned explorer John C. Frémont. The election’s results showed that voters were divided largely by the Mason-Dixon line, foreshadowing what was to come four years later. Frémont never stood a chance in the South, however, his 1856 campaign was unsuccessful in five highly-contested northern states. The Republican Party was generally popular in the North, and each of these five states voted for the next Republican nominee, Abraham Lincoln, in 1860 and fought with the Union in the Civil War. Utilizing the available scans of newspapers based in these five states during the 1856 election cycle, this essay analyzes how John C. Frémont’s opponents successfully attacked his campaign. Considering the American social and political context in the mid-nineteenth century, it finds the attacks on the background, character, and qualifications of John C. Frémont and the associations of his party with abolitionism and disunionism led to his defeat in the presidential election of 1856.

Despite the numerous counties, cities, and landmarks bearing his name, John C. Frémont is a relatively unknown figure in the United States today. Few people, though, led a more eventful life and were more celebrated than Frémont in the mid-nineteenth century. As the United States braced for a potentially union-splitting presidential election in 1856, it was Frémont who headed the newfound Republican Party in their first national campaign. Spurred by the heightened tensions of the sectional crisis, Frémont's opponents sought to stifle the up-and-coming antislavery party by any means necessary. Newspapers, the vast majority of voters' primary source of information, played an indispensable role in this objective. In September of 1856, less than two months to election day, *The Bradford Reporter* summarized the attacks made by Frémont's enemies: "they have asserted that [Frémont] was a Jesuit, a gambler, a sot, a thief, a swindler, a foreigner, a bully, a mutineer, and we know not what else, failing to produce any sensible effect upon the popular mind by any of these stories."¹ In defending their candidate, *The Bradford Reporter*, a Republican newspaper, affirmed that the public paid no mind to these falsehoods. However, time proved this claim to be incorrect.

Exacerbated by the controversial 1854 Kansas-Nebraska act, and the events known as "Bleeding Kansas," tensions over the institution of slavery and its expansion were approaching their peak leading up to the election of 1856. Running against Frémont for office was James Buchanan of the Democratic Party, and former President Millard Fillmore heading the short-lived nativist Know-Nothing Party. Many believed that a Frémont victory would lead to the dissolution of the United States, with the Republicans' opposition to the further expansion of slavery in the West to blame. That sentiment was reflected in the election's results, as James Buchanan defeated Frémont and Fillmore. Democrats won 19 states for 174 electoral votes and Buchanan received over 1.8 million votes nationwide. The Republicans won 11 states for 114 electoral votes and Frémont's name was chosen on over 1.3 million ballots. The Know-Nothings claimed only Maryland but had a significant impact on the election, winning over 870,000 votes.² The Republican platform was expectedly unpopular below the Mason-Dixon line, where Buchanan claimed every state. Notably, though, Frémont lost five free northern states, where Know-Nothingism swung a

¹ "Col Fremont's Government Contracts.," *The Bradford Reporter*, 11 September 1856, 1. The newspapers used in this paper can be accessed at the Library of Congress's website, *Chronicling America*, at chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

² *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "United States presidential election of 1856," accessed April 7, 2025, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/United-States-presidential-election-of-1856/477234>.

sizeable chunk of potential voters. Winning just two of these five states would have resulted in a Frémont presidency.³ In the next election, Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party claimed each of these five states— and the White House.⁴ Additionally, each of these states fought for the Union in the Civil War, making their decision to side with the pro-slavery Democrats just a few years prior all the more interesting. Focusing on newspaper coverage from these five states, this essay will argue that the attacks on the background, character, and qualifications of John C. Frémont and the associations of his party with abolitionism and disunionism led to his defeat in the presidential election of 1856.⁵

John C. Frémont (1813-1890), nicknamed the “Pathfinder,” rose to national prominence through his expeditions, surveys, and reports on the untamed western United States in the 1840s and early 1850s. An illegitimate child, Frémont was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1813 to a French-Canadian tutor and the wife of a prominent Virginian. Following the death of his father in 1818, the remaining Frémont family moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where Frémont grew up humbly. He attended the College of Charleston in 1829, where his excellence in mathematics gave him an opportunity to bond with politician Joel R. Poinsett. This connection aided his ascension to Second Lieutenant of topographical engineers in the U.S. Army in the early 1830s. In the ensuing decade, Frémont’s rising reputation as a skilled topographer brought him to the forefront of Manifest Destiny.

Before Frémont departed on any of his famed expeditions, he ran away with prominent Missouri Senator Col. Thomas Hart Benton’s daughter, Jessie Benton (later Jessie Benton Frémont). The two secretly married in 1841, leading to a tumultuous relationship between Frémont and his father-in-law.⁶ Despite their differences, Frémont’s relationship with his influential father-in-law further boosted his already rising stock. Through both his legitimate skills and influential connections, Frémont was nominated to lead five government-backed expeditions to conduct research and chart the American West. Frémont’s first two journeys in 1842 and

³ The five free northern states Frémont lost were California, New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. Listed are the number of electoral votes each of these states had in 1856: CA (4), NJ (7), IL (11), IN (13), PA (27). Frémont would have won the election if he claimed at least 31 of these electoral votes from Buchanan.

⁴ Lincoln won the majority of electoral votes in New Jersey in the election of 1860 (4 of 7), but not the entire state.

⁵ Due to a lack of available media from New Jersey, the quotations cited in this paper are drawn from Pennsylvania, Indiana, California, and Illinois.

⁶ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. “Jessie Ann Benton Frémont,” accessed April 7, 2025, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Jessie-Ann-Benton-Fr%C3%A9mont/125737>.

1843-1844 explored stretches of the Oregon Trail and the Rocky Mountains. In 1845, Frémont and his crew traveled through the Sierra Nevadas and into California as a part of his third expedition. From there, Frémont remained on the West Coast and served in the U.S. Army during the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1847, in which he became a key figure in California's independence-seeking "Bear Flag Revolt." Frémont temporarily acted as California's military governor but was court martialled over a dispute about who that position rightfully belonged to. Eventually, Frémont's sentence was commuted and he was reinstated by President James K. Polk. Severed relations, however, led him to resign from the Army and he permanently moved to California. In a life-changing stroke of fortune, Frémont discovered that the land he purchased in California contained an abundance of gold, and he became a multimillionaire. Frémont led his fourth expedition from 1848 to 1849, where he surveyed potential westward railroad routes. Afterwards, Frémont served as one of California's first elected senators from 1850 to 1851. After his brief stint in politics, Frémont led his fifth and final expedition from 1853 to 1854, with the similar goal of finding a railroad route through the Rocky Mountains. Jessie Benton Frémont, a skilled writer, turned her husband's expedition reports into stories about his explorations and discoveries that captivated the American public and made John C. Frémont an immensely popular figure. Frémont's celebrity status piqued the interest of all major political parties, yet it was the Republicans' opposition to the expansion of slavery that earned them his like-minded representation in 1856.⁷

Many scholars have written about the Republican Party's campaign in the election of 1856. Historian Matthew Karp argues that, despite defeat, the Republicans' performance showed that an anti-slavery, northern political majority was possible.⁸ Karp claims this was accomplished by a Republican embrace of populism, political activism, and even vigilantism in the name of northern states' rights. William E. Gienapp agrees with Karp, but further explores how Republicans captivated voters with nativist tendencies. Karp believes the nativist base played a significant role in the creation of the Republican northern political majority.⁹ Gerald Stanley paints a different picture of the early Republican Party by examining their

⁷ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "John C. Frémont," accessed April 7, 2025, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/John-C-Fr%C3%A9mont/35334>

⁸ Matthew Karp, "The People's Revolution of 1856: Antislavery Populism, National Politics, and the Emergence of the Republican Party," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 9:4 (December 2019): 524-545.

⁹ William E. Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War," *The Journal of American History* 72:3 (December 1985): 529-559.

unsuccessful campaign in California, where they finished with less support than Millard Fillmore. Stanley argues that the reason for this was that the Republicans were unable to distance themselves from their opponents falsely labelling them as abolitionists and pro-Black.¹⁰

While those scholars largely focused on the 1856 Republican campaign itself, others focused on John C. Frémont's public perception. Historian Tom Chaffin suggests that the Republican party, in their quest for a fresh face, made a poor choice in nominating the ill-qualified Frémont, a man with little political experience and a persona not built for the political world.¹¹ Scholar Lauren N. Haumesser focuses on the strategic use of gender politics by Democrat-backed newspapers to tear down Frémont, including attacks on his appearance and his marriage to— and the independence of— his wife Jessie Benton Frémont.¹² The most relevant work for this paper is John Bicknell's *Lincoln's Pathfinder: John C. Frémont and the Violent Election of 1856*. As inferred from the title, Bicknell's work covers the 1856 election as a whole— though he primarily examines the Republican Party. Bicknell analyzes John C. Frémont's campaign from its inception and how Frémont's performance allowed Lincoln to succeed in 1860.¹³ Scholars have not deeply explored how the newspaper coverage of John C. Frémont in the five Buchanan-voting free states cost Frémont and the Republican Party the 1856 election.

As they are essentially this essay's sole resource, it is important to consider the mid-nineteenth century context of United States newspapers. As mentioned earlier, newspapers were the primary source of political information in 1856, though word of mouth, public campaigning, and pamphleteering maintained a significant presence. This was possible because of strong efforts from the United States government to develop a literate population, with one estimate providing that over 95% of white northerners were literate in 1850.¹⁴ The emphasis on the white population is crucial because, due to America's racist and misogynist legal and social institutions, white men constituted nearly the entire voter base in 1856. By

¹⁰ Gerald Stanley, "Racism and the Early Republican Party: The 1856 Presidential Election in California," *Pacific Historical Review* 43:2 (May 1974): 171-187.

¹¹ Tom Chaffin, *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of the American Empire* (Hill and Wang, 2002), 433-455.

¹² Lauren N. Haumesser, *The Democratic Collapse: How Gender Politics Broke a Party and a Nation, 1856-1861* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 1-42.

¹³ John Bicknell, *Lincoln's Pathfinder: John C. Frémont and the Violent Election of 1856*, (Chicago Review Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Sokoloff, Kenneth & Engerman, Stanley. (2000). History Lessons: Institutions, Factor Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 14. 10.1257/jep.14.3.217.

extension, this means that this subset of the five aforementioned northern states' population was essentially the only group that could transform the information published in newspapers into votes. Furthermore, despite serving the primary function of being information providers, nineteenth-century newspapers often favored representing public opinion and adhering strongly to political biases. This constituted an era known as the "party period," where newspapers were incredibly politically biased.¹⁵ The election of 1856 certainly followed this definition, as newspapers made little to no effort to objectively portray the contents of the election and made their political allegiance explicitly known. Unabashedly pro-Buchanan sources are the most cited newspapers in this essay, and should be assumed to be the stated allegiance of a given newspaper unless otherwise noted. While there is little available information on the readership levels of these newspapers, nearly all of them operated for more than five years, with their average lifespan being nearly fifteen years.¹⁶ This suggests at least moderate levels of readership and sustainability. The majority of these politically polarized newspapers sprung up between 1849 and 1855, reflecting the contentious state of the union. Considering their importance to politics and the voting population's high levels of literacy, newspapers played a crucial role in both presenting information and reinforcing their public's perspectives in the election of 1856.

Given this, it is no surprise that Democratic and Know-Nothing newspapers scavenged every aspect of John C. Frémont's background in their attempts to discredit his presidential bid. Starting with the details of his illegitimate birth, these newspapers went so far as to question whether Frémont had been born on American soil. Ebensburg, Pennsylvania's *Democrat and Sentinel*, one of the many adamantly pro-Buchanan newspapers, informed readers that "there exists a strong probability that Fremont was not born in the United States, and, therefore is not

¹⁵ Nerone, J. (2011), Representing Public Opinion: US Newspapers and the News System in the Long Nineteenth Century. *History Compass*, 9: 743-759.

¹⁶ Of all the cited pro-Buchanan or pro-Fillmore papers in this essay, the true average lifespan of these papers was roughly 42 years, however, this number is drastically inflated by the *Bedford Gazette* (still operating, established in 1805) and *The Placer Herald* (1855-1991). The rest of the papers' operational dates are as follows, per the Library of Congress: *The Ottawa Free Trader* (1843-1916), *The Evansville Daily Journal* (1848-1862), *The Star of the North* (1849-1866), *The Empire County Argus* (1853-1857), *Butte Record* (1853-1858), *Democrat and Sentinel* (1853-1866), *The Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* (1853-1861), *The Nevada Democrat* (1854-1863), *Volcano Weekly Ledger* (1855-1857), *Marshall County Democrat* (1855-1859). Between the latter ten papers, the average operational lifespan is just under 15 years.

constitutionally eligible to the Presidency.”¹⁷ While this edition of the *Democrat and Sentinel* considered it possible that Frémont was a foreigner, an earlier publication attempted to cite more evidence. “Col. J. C Fremont was born in FRANCE, January, 1813,” wrote the newspaper, adding, “if this is true, Fremont is not eligible.”¹⁸ In this earlier publication, the *Democrat and Sentinel* cited, in their own words, a “black republican” newspaper, *The Boston Bee*, as their source. In doing so, the *Democrat and Sentinel* attempted to give the rumor legitimacy by quoting a pro-Frémont newspaper, which was, in reality, a pro-Fillmore, Know-Nothing paper.¹⁹ Regardless, both claims were made with the goal of disqualifying Frémont from the election in the eyes of the public, with the latter article concluding that, “every Hindoo who votes for him will violate ‘that awful oath’,” in reference to Article II of the Constitution.²⁰

The French-Canadian origin of Frémont’s father was a well-known fact, but John was an American—born on Georgian soil and raised in South Carolina. His father’s status as a foreigner was bound to be a point of contention; however, recognition of Frémont’s own American upbringing was also used against him. The *Democrat and Sentinel*, seemingly undetermined as to whether or not Frémont was in fact, an American, leveraged his southern reputations against his campaign. “John C. Fremont, several of his biographers say, was born in Georgia. In his native state HE WILL NOT GET A SINGLE VOTE,” and, “his youthful days were spent in South Carolina. He was educated there. Yet in that State HE WILL NOT GET A SINGLE VOTE,” emphasized the paper.²¹ The *Democrat and Sentinel* employed capital letters to ensure that the reader knew Frémont had no support in his home states. Ultimately, to his political opponents, it did not matter whether Frémont was born in France or born in Georgia, as either story could be used to discredit him.

Despite his service to the nation and general recognition as a war hero, John C. Frémont’s military record was not spared from his opponents’ attacks. His time in the U.S. Army was speculated about, including his experience in combat, rank, alleged crimes, and court martial. Indiana’s *Marshall County Democrat* reported on Frémont’s supposed lack of battlefield experience. “Fremont, in California, during the war with Mexico,” wrote the newspaper, “always arrived too late to take part in any

¹⁷ “Fremont not Eligible to the Presidential Office.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 29 October 1856, 3.

¹⁸ “FREMONT BORN IN FRANCE.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 01 October 1856, 3.

¹⁹ The Boston Daily Bee Boston, Mass. -1857.

²⁰ “FREMONT BORN IN FRANCE.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 01 October 1856, 3.

²¹ “Where He is Best Known,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 24 September 1856, 3.

conflict with the enemy, and, as Commodore Stockton says, never was in the right place at the right time.”²² The *Marshall County Democrat* cited Commodore Stockton, a senior military official, to support their claim that Frémont was an ineffective and cowardly military leader. This strategy was mirrored by California’s *Volcano Weekly Ledger*: “I [Commander Schenck] am further prepared to prove that in every engagement and every rout of the enemy which took place in California, Fremont was invariably too late to take part; and... that during the whole of his service in California, he was never within hearing distance of the enemy’s guns.”²³ Both of these newspapers referenced military officials with an equal to or higher rank than Frémont’s lieutenant colonel. Officials who labelled Frémont an illegitimate soldier. These newspapers understood that military backgrounds were typically beneficial to presidential candidates, and thus tried to discredit Frémont’s.

Others, such as the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, proposed that Frémont’s military rank of Lieutenant Colonel was unjustified: “promoted over the heads of his fellows older in experience and in service, to be a Lieut. Colonel in the Army, [Frémont] was tried by a court martial for insubordination, and dismissed [from] the service.”²⁴ This Indianapolis-based newspaper republished a speech from the Hon. James B. Clay, a Kentucky Representative and son of the renowned Henry Clay. In this excerpt, Clay questioned the merit of Frémont’s rank and misleadingly explained his court martial, which was published to elicit the reader’s judgement. Accusations from a name as prominent as “Clay” in the 1850s weakened the legitimacy of Frémont’s military background. Expectedly, so did his court martial. The *Marshall County Democrat* jumped on the opportunity, and, referring to the case, explained that “Fremont, in California, was guilty of mutiny and other military crimes, for which he was discharged from the U.S. army.”²⁵ These claims reflected poorly on Frémont’s military track record, despite the court martial originating largely through a communication breakdown and his presidential pardon.

Frémont’s military service was a prominent feature of his campaign, however, it was not the most important one. Instead, his reputation as an explorer was. It was what earned him the nomination of the Republican Party and the admiration of Americans across the continent. This reputation was necessarily attacked by anti-Frémont newspapers. “Kit Carson... who

²² “John C. Fremont.,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

²³ “Honor to whom Honor is Due.,” *Volcano Weekly Ledger*, 20 September 1856, 1.

²⁴ “Battle-Ground Convention. Speech of Hon. James B. Clay.,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 September 1856, 1.

²⁵ “John C. Fremont.,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

knows Fremont better than any living man, and who led him through the difficult passes, by which Fremont acquired his reputation, is not for him," California's *Butte Record* declared in early September 1856, adding that "he [thinks] Fremont is acting too much on borrowed or stolen notoriety."²⁶ The alleged opinion of Kit Carson, a leading guide on John C. Frémont's first three expeditions and a man who earned equal national recognition, undoubtedly carried significance due to his personal connection with Frémont.²⁷ The *Butte Record* utilized this relationship to discredit Frémont's expeditions multiple times, as in an article three weeks later, they referred to Carson as "the man on whose broad shoulders Fremont has been lifted into notoriety as an explorer."²⁸ It is highly unlikely that Kit Carson actually opposed his longtime partner, Frémont, during this election. Rather, it was another example of anti-Frémont newspapers deceiving readers to tarnish Frémont's image.

Other attempts at discrediting Frémont's expeditions included accusing his reports of being fabricated or simply arguing Frémont didn't do anything of note during his explorations. The *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* wished to call attention to "the monstrous fabrications that are got up by political knaves and palmed off upon an unsuspecting public as truthful biographies of Fremont."²⁹ *The Star of the North*, a Pennsylvanian paper, reported that, "when Col. Fremont stood upon the Rocky Mountains there, beyond the level of organic life, a beautiful bee lit upon his arm."³⁰ The former of the two quotes gave a general assertion that the reporting of Frémont's explorations were falsified, whereas the latter gave a specific example. *The Star of the North*'s story implied the reports of Frémont's expeditions were fraudulent by invoking skepticism about the existence of high-altitude bees. In the aforementioned speech published by the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, James B. Clay attacked Frémont's reputation as a "scientific man." Implying that the answer was zero, Clay questioned, "what discoveries in science did [Frémont] make?"³¹ Similarly, Pennsylvania's *Bedford Gazette* argued that Frémont's greatest

²⁶ *Butte Record*, 06 September 1856, 3.

²⁷ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Kit Carson," accessed April 8, 2025, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Kit-Carson/20525>.

²⁸ "Kit Carson Against Fremont.," *Butte Record*, 27 September 1856, 2.

²⁹ "Make Room for Bennett Again.," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 18 September 1856, 2.

³⁰ *The Star of the North*, 22 October 1856, 2.

³¹ "Battle-Ground Convention. Speech of Hon. James B. Clay.," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 September 1856, 1.

achievement was “the capturing of a ‘woolly horse.’”³² Each of the latter two articles proposed to readers that Frémont had done nothing worthwhile on his expeditions, thereby downplaying his efforts and dismissing his claim to fame.

To many, Frémont was hailed as one of the founders of California, but anti-Frémont newspapers dismissed his legacy in the Golden State. The *Bedford Gazette* ensured that readers understood that “the Fremont fraternity, among their many attempts at fraud and imposition on the people, have frequently put their candidate forward as the Conqueror of California, which has as often been denied by those who have a regard for the *truth* of history.”³³ As did the *Democrat and Sentinel*, citing a Californian named Mr. Wilson: “[Black Republicans] say Fremont had much to do with making California a free State. Mr. Wilson gives that story the *lie direct*.”³⁴ Both of these articles applied italics to enforce the idea that Frémont was *not* responsible for establishing California.

Arguably more important than other attacks on Frémont’s background in the election of 1856 were the allegations that he was a Catholic. This election of 1856 was the strongest, politically, that American nativism would ever be. Xenophobism’s popularity surged in the 1840s, giving the once secretive nativist political personalities enough confidence to form their own major political party— the Know-Nothings. The rise in xenophobism was propelled by a large wave of Irish- and German-Catholic immigration to the Northeastern U.S., causing many Americans to fear losing their jobs, the “death” of American culture, and/or Catholics being more loyal to the Pope than to the United States. The Know-Nothings ran on a platform that elevated nativist anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and it worked, as evidenced by Millard Fillmore claiming nearly 22% of the popular vote. Employing this knowledge, anti-Frémont newspapers persistently pushed the narrative that Frémont was a Catholic, though he was not, in order to draw anti-Catholic voters away from the Republican Party. In establishing these claims, the *Bedford Gazette* proclaimed in all capital letters that “COL. FREMONT WILL NOT DENY THAT HE WAS A CATHOLIC.”³⁵ The *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* was equally as confident in stating, “we do not believe that any further evidence of Col. Fremont’s being a member of the Roman Catholic church is

³² “Reasons for not Voting for John C. Fremont,” *Bedford Gazette*, 31 October 1856, 2.

³³ “WHO CONQUERED CALIFORNIA! The Question Settled,” *Bedford Gazette*, 03 October 1856, 1.

³⁴ “CALIFORNIA TESTIMONY,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 15 October 1856, 2.

³⁵ “Proving Fremont to be a Roman Catholic!!,” *Bedford Gazette*, 05 September 1856, 1.

necessary. To our satisfaction that fact has become clearly established.”³⁶ The *Democrat and Sentinel* proclaimed, “FREMONT A CATHOLIC.”³⁷ These three statements were general claims about Frémont’s Catholicism, though this was not to say that these newspapers lacked specific “evidence,” because they provided plenty.

Democratic papers pointed to specific events in Frémont’s life, the lack of denial from his peers, and eyewitness testimony to “prove” that he was a Catholic. A leader of this cause, the *Bedford Gazette* made continuous claims throughout the entire election season. Their evidence included, in early September 1856: “Fremont’s Catholicism has now been so tightly fastened upon him by the most indisputable testimony, that we can scarcely find one of his friends possessing the boldness and effrontery to deny it.”³⁸ A few days later the paper reported: “we conclude with assuring all concerned, on the fullest conviction and inquiry, that John C. Fremont did avow and adopt the Catholic belief, and the fact is so well known that many parties here have been astonished at the denials put forth.”³⁹ In early October they wrote: “Fremont... made no secret of his being a Catholic. He was married by a Catholic priest, he erected a cross on the summit of the Rocky Mountains, and in the most important acts of his life he passed himself off for a Catholic.”⁴⁰ Then in late October, just over a week before the election: “it can be no longer said that we have no positive evidence of Fremont’s Romanism... Colonel [Peter J. Sullivan] said:... ‘I KNEW [FRÉMONT]... TO BE AS FIRM AND AS STRONG A ROMAN CATHOLIC AS ANY MAN WHO NOW PROFESSES THAT FAITH!’”⁴¹ Pennsylvania’s *Bedford Gazette* unrelentingly promoted Frémont’s alleged Catholicism throughout the presidential campaign. Due to their efforts, Frémont’s religious beliefs became, at the very least, scrutinized by voters, potentially enough to steer the undecided away from even considering casting their ballot for the Republican nominee. Otherwise, nativist voters who took these newspapers’ word as truth surely voted against Frémont. This persistent narrative, along with all of the other claims made by newspapers about John C. Frémont’s background, though hard to quantify,

³⁶ “Fremont’s Religion,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 09 October 1856, 2.

³⁷ “FREMONT A CATHOLIC.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 29 October 1856, 2.

³⁸ “Proving Fremont to be a Roman Catholic!,” *Bedford Gazette*, 05 September 1856, 1.

³⁹ “Fremont A Catholic,” *Bedford Gazette*, 12 September 1856, 2.

⁴⁰ “Fremont’s Romanism—Interesting Testimony from St. Louis. — AWKWARD REVELATIONS,” *Bedford Gazette*, 03 October 1856, 1.

⁴¹ “Fremont’s Romanism and Veracity. Testimony to the Point. A Catholic who Worshipped with him on the Stand. Who will Longer Doubt.,” *Bedford Gazette*, 24 October 1856, 2.

likely hindered his support in the five free states that voted against him, costing the Republican Party the 1856 election.

Frémont's political opponents did more than just assault his background, they also targeted the man he was presently, in 1856. Frémont's famous explorations, outdoor ruggedness, and youth (he was 43 compared to a 65 year-old Buchanan) earned him a strong and masculine national reputation. Anti-Frémont newspapers did what they could to weaken his positive national image. In their attacks on his character, Frémont's opponents targeted his masculinity, his heart, his inconsistencies, and made assertions that he was a gambler, a speculator, and a fraud.

Through the widely popular reports on his adventures, Frémont was portrayed as a "new man" to the general public, one who was brave, firm, and heroic.⁴² Anti-Frémont newspapers needed to change this perception and thus emasculated him. In response to a rumor about Frémont assisting his wife in household chores, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* wrote to those wondering "who is John C. Fremont?" The newspaper's answer was to "thunder in their ears the overwhelming response—'he is the man who assisted in sweeping the rooms!'"⁴³ The *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* would go on to re-emphasize that Frémont "assisted in sweeping the rooms!" six more times in that article. *The Star of the North* also caught wind of this rumor and ascertained that Frémont "is in possession of certain housewifeish accomplishments which would be of eminent service in keeping the White House in a tidy condition." In response to their assertion, *The Star of the North* sarcastically concluded that "as an exemplification of the republican principles of our Government, what could be more gratifying to Americans visiting the National Mansion than to see their President sweeping a room, or changing a diaper?"⁴⁴ Both of these newspapers' responses to this rumor exemplified nineteenth century gender norms. Frémont's participation in womanly tasks, of which sweeping and diaper changing were explicitly reserved, was stressed to damage his campaign for the White House. This likely resonated with voters, considering that the eligible voting population in 1856 was almost entirely white men that perpetuated nineteenth century gender norms.

In other challenges to Frémont's masculine reputation, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* republished an excerpt from *The Toledo Commercial* that commented on his appearance: "[Frémont] parts his hair in the middle

⁴² John Bicknell, *Lincoln's Pathfinder: John C. Frémont and the Violent Election of 1856*, (Chicago Review Press, 2017), 35.

⁴³ "He Swept the Rooms," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 04 September 1856, 3.

⁴⁴ *The Star of the North*, 17 September 1856, 2.

and ‘iles’ it with California bear’s grease.”⁴⁵ While men wearing middle-parted hair may not seem out of the ordinary today, it was typically considered feminine in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ This, and an accusation from the *Marshall County Democrat* that Frémont “allowed the name of his wife to be used with the utmost familiarity by foul mouthed negro-worshipping brawlers,” further stripped the Republican nominee of his manhood.⁴⁷

While simultaneously emasculating him, Frémont’s opponents attempted to paint him as a man lacking basic human compassion. The *Bedford Gazette*’s recap of a Democratic county meeting gave two examples of this. First it was said that Frémont had voted against “appropriating a few dollars to relieve the distress of some five or six hundred negroes, composed principally of little boys and girls, rescued from a piratical vessel in which they had been confined for the purpose of *selling them into bondage*.” The newspaper elaborated, emphasizing: “these children had been landed on a desolate and friendless shore, destitute of either friends, food, or clothing, and yet John C. Fremont, who now professes such great love for the negro, steeled his heart for their cries for bread!” This was followed by the claim that “John C. Fremont had voted against a Bill extending the benefits of the Bounty Land Bill to the WIDOWS and *minor children* of deceased Soldiers of the War of 1812.”⁴⁸ The *Marshall County Democrat* told a story of Frémont’s heartlessness in a Rocky Mountain expedition, claiming he had “rashly disregarded the advice of experienced guides, placed his men in a position of the utmost peril, and then deserted them; leaving them to die of starvation and cold.”⁴⁹ Upon escaping to New Mexico, the newspaper continued, Frémont received rations for his company, but he “kept them himself, and started for California with them—not caring whether those whom he had so inhumanly deserted should perish or not.”⁵⁰ These stories gave vivid depictions painting Frémont as a self-serving and dangerously inconsiderate person. Discussing these newspapers’ aggressive and often deceitful tactics is not meant to imply that Frémont wasn’t a complicated figure. His legacy includes both his staunch and often radical abolitionism and his leading role in massacres of Native American peoples in the western United States (the

⁴⁵ “Reasons for Voting for Fremont,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 02 October 1856, 2.

⁴⁶ Lauren N. Haumesser, *The Democratic Collapse: How Gender Politics Broke a Party and a Nation, 1856-1861* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 14.

⁴⁷ “John C. Fremont,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

⁴⁸ “Democratic County Meeting,” *Bedford Gazette*, 05 September 1856, 2.

⁴⁹ “John C. Fremont,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

⁵⁰ “John C. Fremont,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

latter was not discussed by the available newspapers at the time).⁵¹ Rather, these newspapers' claims reflected the desire of northern Democratic newspapers to portray Frémont's candidacy as unattractively as possible.

As they continued toward this goal, anti-Frémont newspapers pointed to the many discrepancies in Frémont's political track record to show that he was spineless, or, at the very least, inconsistent—and ill-suited for the White House. Democrats argued that Frémont, the face of a party whose motto was “Free Speech, Free Press, Free Soil, Free Men, and Fremont,” did not always believe in these causes. The *Democrat and Sentinel* claimed that Frémont “never gave a vote in favor of Freedom in his life.”⁵² The *Bedford Gazette* revealed that he “voted with Atchison, Butler, and other Southern fire-eaters for Slavery and extreme Southern measures,” during his brief stint in Congress.⁵³ The *Marshall County Democrat* reinforced this notion and claimed that Frémont “voted always with the [ultra] southerners,” and later added that he was a slave owner, which he was not: “Fremont, professing to be an ultra free soiler, is the owner of slaves—good authority says seventy five.”⁵⁴ These newspapers' misleading and often fabricated discourse framing Frémont's two-facedness can be summed up by a pro-Buchanan paper from Illinois, *The Ottawa Free Trader*, that also tied in rumors surrounding his Catholicism: “Col. Fremont is an equally extraordinary animal, and quite as complex, being made up of slaveholder and abolitionist, Jesuit and Anti-Papist, Black Republicanism and Know Nothing, besides being like the cloud that Hamlet described, ‘humped like a Camel,’ and yet ‘very like a whale.’”⁵⁵ These attacks on Frémont's character depicted him as indecisive and shallow. A man lacking core values. Someone unappealing to the public and unfit for office.

⁵¹ In 1861, as a Major General in the Union Army and in command of the Western Department, Frémont declared martial law in Missouri and freed the enslaved people in the state, over a year before President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln, fearing the political and military consequences of such a drastic and radical action, determined that Frémont's emancipation order was premature, and ordered Frémont to rescind his order. Frémont, defending his position and refusing to rescind the order, lost his position as commander of the Western Department and his reputation as a respected military leader. His emancipation order was reversed after his removal. On the other hand, it is known that Frémont's expedition groups took part in multiple massacres of indigenous Californians, namely the Wintu and Klamath peoples. The Sacramento River massacre in 1846 witnessed Frémont's crew attack a large Wintu encampment, with estimates of the death toll ranging from the hundreds to one thousand, largely women and children (per the State of California at source).

⁵² “Canal Dover, O., Sept. 16, ‘56.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 08 October 1856, 3.

⁵³ “Reasons for not Voting for John C. Fremont.,” *Bedford Gazette*, 31 October 1856, 2.

⁵⁴ “John C. Fremont.,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

⁵⁵ “Col. Fremont.,” *Ottawa Free Trader*, 20 September 1856, 1.

Frémont's supposed habitual gambling was another vice his opponents reveled in pointing out. "Fremont was a profligate and a gambler at the time and all the time he was in California," published the state's *Butte Record*, adding that "he not only gambled highly, but refused to pay his debts contracted at the gambling tables in the State."⁵⁶ In Pennsylvania, the *Democrat and Sentinel* reported that, after he fled the country to escape his alleged financial crimes, "Fremont... expended twenty-five or thirty-thousand dollars in Europe, in a few months."⁵⁷ The *Marshall County Democrat* informed Illinoisans that Frémont was a habitual gambler who "was seen to lose \$4,000 (probably government money) in one night, in one of the most notorious 'hells' in San Francisco."⁵⁸ Finally, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* alleged two members of the California legislature "were entertained by Fremont with both card playing and liquors, in both which the host joined his guests."⁵⁹ On top of these accusations, evidence was provided to argue that Frémont was also a speculator. "[Frémont] who, by speculating in Cows, and otherwise," claimed the *Bedford Gazette*, "has sought to swindle the government out of hundreds of thousands of dollars."⁶⁰ All of these claims were made to show the public that Frémont was an untrustworthy man prone to taking great, ill-advised risks. That he was someone who should not hold any political office, much less the highest one.

In addition to the gambling claims, other attempts at demonstrating Frémont's untrustworthiness were directed at proving him to be corrupt and a fraud. "It cannot be successfully denied," wrote the *Democrat and Sentinel*, "that John C. Fremont, in various transactions with the United States Government and with the people of California has brought a dark shade of suspicion over his personal honesty and integrity."⁶¹ Some of the alluded to transactions were discussed by the *Marshall County Democrat*, which stated: "Fremont, in California, made loans of inhabitants, all of which he put in his own pocket, and with a portion of which he bought the Mariposa claim," the Mariposa claim being Frémont's vast estate in California.⁶² This accusation was followed by another: "Fremont, in California, while acting as Indian Agent, made the ignorant savages give receipts to his underlings for two and three times the amounts received by

⁵⁶ "Fremont A Gambler.," *Butte Record*, 25 October 1856, 1.

⁵⁷ "FREMONT AND HIS FRIENDS.," *Democrat and Sentinel*, 08 October 1856, 1.

⁵⁸ "John C. Fremont.," *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

⁵⁹ "Fremont the Immaculate.," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 16 October 1856, 2.

⁶⁰ "Reasons for not Voting for John C. Fremont.," *Bedford Gazette*, 31 October 1856, 2.

⁶¹ "The Contrast.," *Democrat and Sentinel*, 22 October 1856, 3.

⁶² "John C. Fremont.," *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

them, and pocketed the profits.”⁶³ An article from the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* pressed additional charges: “Col. Fremont has, either through gross negligence, or from corrupt and interested motives, certified, on his honor, that which is not true; that he had certified accounts against the Government amounting nearly to a million of dollars, when in fact the claims allowed amount to less than \$150,000.”⁶⁴ Together with the attacks on his masculinity, his compassion, and his inconsistencies, such criticism showcased how anti-Frémont newspapers across the Buchanan-voting northern states attacked Frémont’s character in order to delegitimize his political campaign.

Another major talking point that anti-Frémont newspapers cited was Frémont’s lack of political experience. Frémont served just twenty-one working days as California’s first senator after the state was admitted to the Union in 1850 before losing his reelection bid in 1851 due to his antislavery views.⁶⁵ His short, practically nonexistent, political track record was appealing to the Republican Party, who hoped to avoid nominating a divisive candidate, however, it was another soft spot in his campaign. In asserting that he was unqualified, Frémont’s political opponents cited his relationship with his father-in-law, how he was an adventurer and not a politician, his lack of significant political experience, and that established politicians and their families did not support him.

Frémont’s relationship with prominent Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, his father-in-law and a Democrat, was one of the most interesting in politics. Despite initial turmoil following he and Jessie Benton Frémont’s secret marriage, Benton supported Frémont in Congress to lead his state sponsored westward expeditions. Years later in 1856, however, Benton made no efforts to support his son-in-law in his bid for the White House, instead siding with his fellow party member, Buchanan, which was something Frémont’s opponents pounced on. An alleged statement from Benton spread across the nation, with the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* being one of many to report on it. The statement read: “Col. Benton had no hesitation in saying that Fremont was no more fit to be President of the United States than a child; that he was bold and adventurous, but that the

⁶³ “John C. Fremont,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

⁶⁴ “Fremont’s Cattle Frauds! Report of the Secretary of the Treasury Relative to John C. Fremont’s Accounts,” *Indiana Weekly State Sentinel*, 02 October 1856, 1.

⁶⁵ The reason Frémont’s term was so short was because he was appointed as a temporary Senator while California was being admitted to the Union, and then he subsequently lost his reelection bid just 175 days into his term due to his antislavery views. Frémont voted against the Fugitive Slave Act and in favor of abolishing slavery in Washington D.C., which made him unpopular among his constituents, and he was voted out for a pro-slavery Democrat.

caution and prudence so much required in that position, were no part of his nature; that Fremont had had no experience, and that no man whose antecedents were like those of Fremont, could be qualified to be President of the United States.”⁶⁶ Benton was a tenured and respected politician whose words held value. His personal relationship with his son-in-law, though, increased the power of his words, which were weaponized by Frémont's opponents as a part of their smear campaign. The passage that stated that Frémont was “no more fit to be the President of the United States than a child,” was particularly attention-grabbing.⁶⁷ It is easy to see why the entire quote was republished essentially verbatim in the *Democrat and Sentinel*, among others who loved employing Benton's support of Buchanan to discredit Frémont.⁶⁸ In other articles, Pennsylvania's *Democrat and Sentinel* pointed out that “Fremont's father-in-law. Col. Benton, and his brother-in-law, W. Carry Jones, are both supporting Buchanan,” and, in a later paper, emphasized “EVEN HIS FATHER-LAW WILL VOTE [AGAINST] HIM” in all capital letters.^{69,70}

Benton's political experience and relation to Frémont made his claims of ill-qualification especially detrimental to the Republican Party's chances. Too, did the labelling of Frémont as nothing more than an adventurer. “It is no time now for Rocky Mountain climbers and Mariposa claim owners,” opined *The Nevada Democrat*, a Californian paper, in reference to Frémont and the impending election.⁷¹ In contrasting Buchanan and Frémont, the *Democrat and Sentinel* wrote, “James Buchanan is a statesman. John C. Fremont is a mere adventurer, without the slightest claims to statesmanship.”⁷² Similarly, the *Bedford Gazette* cited that “the Black Republican party is supporting a ‘mere adventurer’ for President, whose whole life has been one of mutiny—who has not a single qualification for the position,” as a reason to vote against Frémont.⁷³ These newspapers argued that Frémont was nothing more than a leader of westward expeditions, something that, as has been seen, was also heavily scrutinized.

⁶⁶ “Benton on Fremont.,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 04 September 1856, 1.

⁶⁷ It is unknown whether Thomas Hart Benton actually spoke these words. Historian John Bicknell argues that Benton was never overly critical of Frémont out of respect for his daughter in *Lincoln's Pathfinder: John C. Frémont and the Violent Election of 1856*, (Chicago Review Press, 2017), 207-209., making it seem unlikely that the quote is true.

⁶⁸ “Col. Benton and Col. Fremont.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 08 October 1856, 2.

⁶⁹ *Democrat and Sentinel*, 17 September 1856, 3.

⁷⁰ “Where He is Best Known,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 24 September 1856, 3.

⁷¹ *The Nevada Democrat*, 17 September 1856, 1.

⁷² “The Contrast.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 22 October 1856, 3.

⁷³ “Reasons for not Voting for John C. Fremont.,” *Bedford Gazette*, 31 October 1856, 2.

They ensured that their readers knew that Frémont had no qualifications for public office, much less the presidency.

Other claims emphasized Frémont's lack of political experience more generally, without needing to demote the Republican nominee to "mere adventurer." In a call to voters three days before the election, the *Volcano Weekly Ledger* professed: "vote for John C. Fremont, and you lend your voice to elevate a man to the Presidency totally without Experience, Statesmanship, or Executive Qualification."⁷⁴ *The Evansville Daily Journal*, a Fillmore paper from Indiana argued that "too much is at stake to tolerate silence in any one who is informed as to the political histories of either Mr. Fillmore or Mr. Buchanan. Col. Fremont has none."⁷⁵ Another pro-Fillmore paper, California's *The Empire County Argus*, insisted that Frémont "is yet in no respect qualified for the position of President," and that he "is a flash candidate, running on the humbug, mock-heroic hobby which has inflicted on the country the only three Presidents who were not qualified for the position."⁷⁶ Though *The Empire County Argus* did not specify which three presidents they were referring to, the threat of an unqualified president appears to have loomed over the country. Until this point, this paper featured only pro-Buchanan papers. In the available media, these papers were more eager to delve into fringe conspiracies and report on derogatory rumors. However, Frémont's lack of political experience was a weakness that united the attacks of both Democrat and Know-Nothing newspapers on Frémont's presidential campaign.

Frémont, however, did have *some* political experience. As mentioned previously, he was one of California's first senators, though for a measly twenty-one working days. Despite the potential contradictions with the claims of his total inexperience, Frémont's remarkably short stint in politics was another piece of low hanging fruit for his opponents. "Mr. Fremont has had no political experience in the administration of the great interests of the Republic," reported the *Democrat and Sentinel*, eventually emphasizing that Frémont never served "in any civil capacity more than *twenty-one* days."⁷⁷ So too did the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* in their coverage of James B. Clay's speech, "[Frémont] became, for a total of twenty-one days, a Senator from the new and distant State of California. This is his whole record. In what part of it had he displayed that aptitude for the administration of civil affairs, those high qualities of statesmanship

⁷⁴ "Voters of California.," *Volcano Weekly Ledger*, 01 November 1856, 2.

⁷⁵ "Address of Thos, Hart Clay, President of American Council of Kentucky," *The Evansville Daily Journal*, 15 September 1856, 2.

⁷⁶ "Life of Fremont.," *The Empire County Argus*, 13 September 1856, 2.

⁷⁷ "Canal Dover, O., Sept. 16, '56.," *Democrat and Sentinel*, 08 October 1856, 3.

which ought to entitle him to the greatest reward on earth[?]"⁷⁸ A later *Democrat and Sentinel* article used the opinions of Californians to delegitimize Frémont, "John C. Fremont's civil service covers a period of *twenty-one [days]*, during which he represented the State of California in the Senate of the United States, and, that too, in a manner so unskilful [*sic*] and inefficient, that the people of California say, his seat 'would have been a much better vacant.'" ⁷⁹ Frémont's brief twenty-one working days as a senator was an easy and specific piece of evidence his opponents capitalized on to demonstrate his ill-qualification for the presidency.

Additionally, Frémont's opponents looked to former presidents, statesmen, military leaders and their families to highlight his political inexperience. "*Not a single member* of Gen. Harrison's cabinet supports Fremont, *and but one* of Gen. Taylor's," noted *The Ottawa Free Trader*, adding, "all the ex-presidents of the republic are against Fremont."⁸⁰ In a visually powerful article, the *Bedford Gazette* emphasized just how many established politicians and prominent figures opposed Frémont:

Ex-President Van Buren and sons support Buchanan.
 Ex-President Harrison's sons supports Fillmore or
 Buchanan.
 Ex-President Tyler and sons support Buchanan.
 Ex-President Fillmore opposes Fremont.
 President Pierce supports Buchanan.
 John C. Calhoun's sons support Buchanan.
 Daniel Webster's sons support Buchanan.
 Henry Clay's sons support Buchanan.
 Commodore Stewart (Old Ironsides) supports Buchanan.
 Commodore Perry support Buchanan.
 Commodore Stockton opposes Fremont.
 General Cadwalader supports Buchanan.
 General Scott opposes Fremont.
 Colonel Benton supports Buchanan.⁸¹

These two articles, though in different ways, emphasized the sheer number of prominent figures that were anti-Frémont. *The Ottawa Free Trader's* use of italics and the *Bedford Gazette's* use of structure were the strategies

⁷⁸ "Battle-Ground Convention. Speech of Hon. James B. Clay.," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 September 1856, 1.

⁷⁹ "The Contrast.," *Democrat and Sentinel*, 22 October 1856, 3.

⁸⁰ "Signs of the Campaign.," *The Ottawa Free Trader*, 06 September 1856, 2.

⁸¹ "Look on this Picture:," *Bedford Gazette*, 19 September 1856, 1.

employed to capture the reader's attention. A likely conclusion readers drew from these passages was that, because so many people with genuine political experience opposed him, Frémont was unqualified for office. The alleged harsh words of Frémont's father-in-law, labels of being a "mere adventurer," his lack of political experience, and prominent figures' opposition were used by Frémont's political opponents to argue he was unqualified for office.

The assertion that Frémont was ill-suited for office, along with the attacks on his background and his character were effective tactics employed by Democrat and Know-Nothing newspapers to hinder the anti-slavery campaign in the five Buchanan-voting free states. The attacks directed at Frémont, however, were not limited to just his person. The Republican Party and its members were also assaulted by their opponents, as they faced the damaging claims of being abolitionists and disunionists.

As already witnessed in this paper, the Republican Party and its supporters were often referred to as the "Black Republican Party" or "Black Republicans" by their rivals in attempts to firmly link republicanism with abolitionism in the public mind. A common strategy employed by anti-Frémont newspapers was to infer that abolitionist and African American support for Frémont meant that the Republican Party promoted abolition, though that was not the case at the time of this election. "The Radical Abolitionists," wrote the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, "as Gerrit Smith himself says, of ninety-nine of every hundred, have enrolled themselves under the Black Republican banner, and will vote for Fremont."⁸² Furthermore, Frémont's support from Frederick Douglass did not go unnoticed: "the Black Republicans have hailed with intense satisfaction, the open adhesion of Fred Douglass, the negro Editor, to the cause of Mr. Fremont."⁸³ Mentioning both Smith and Douglass, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* emphatically declared that "Gerrit Smith, the old line Abolition candidate for President, is out in a long letter in favor of the election of Fremont... Fred Douglass has hoisted Fremont's name... These are the supporters of Fremont, and yet the Fremont party is free from the taint of Abolitionism! Oh! yes, of course it is!"⁸⁴ Seemingly furious that someone would even attempt to deny that the Republican Party was abolitionist, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* pointed to the support of prominent abolitionists to prove they were. In another example, the *Bedford Gazette* argued the support of a Black orator for Frémont "affords but another

⁸² "Characteristic.," *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 September 1856, 2.

⁸³ "Read!! Black Republican Doctrine Boldly Avowed. (From the Philadelphia News.)," *Bedford Gazette*, 24 October 1856, 1.

⁸⁴ *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 04 September 1856, 3.

illustration of the truth of the charge that Black Republicanism is but another name for Abolitionism.”⁸⁵

Anti-Frémont newspapers utilized the racist beliefs held by so many Americans to steer voters away from the Republic Party, which they once labeled “emphatically and literally the n——r party.”⁸⁶ These newspapers employed race-baiting strategies to make the Republican party appear pro-Black and abolitionist, including allegations that Frémont was in favor of interracial friendships and relationships. A *Democrat and Sentinel* article claimed the sentiments of Frémonters included: “down with the foreigner, and up with the n——r,” and that “a n——r is as good as a Dutchman any day.”⁸⁷ Similarly, a *Bedford Gazette* article affirmed that a state elector on the Fremont ticket “regards the negro as his equal.”⁸⁸ Anti-Frémont newspapers further claimed that Republicans supported miscegenation. “One plank in the Black Republican platform,” noted the *Democrat and Sentinel*, “is... that there should be a practical amalgamation of the white and black races.”⁸⁹ This article further reported on two examples of white men failing to object to their daughters marrying Black men, stating “this is the way Fremont men talk.” The *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* argued that “Black Republicans advocate amalgamation of the negro and white races” and “not only the political equality of the negro with the white man, but also the *social* equality! Faugh!”⁹⁰ Evidently disgusted by such an idea, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* reflected how many white Americans felt about social equality. These claims would have outraged many white racists, and, exacerbated by the use of the n-word, likely steered many away from Frémont.

So too, would the inclusion of African Americans at Frémont rallies/meetings, which is why newspapers’ mention of it was notable. *The Star of the North* stressed that a Frémont meeting was “addressed by a NEGRO!”⁹¹ Another article from the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, using an exclamation point to stress the presence of Black people, reported that, at a Frémont meeting, “there were ten wagons in the procession loaded with

⁸⁵ “NEGRO FREMONTERS ON THE STUMP.,” *Bedford Gazette*, 26 September 1856, 1.

⁸⁶ “The N——r Party.,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 09 October 1856, 1. The *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* spelled out the racist slur. This essay does not.

⁸⁷ “Political Illustration of their Sentiments.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 24 September 1856, 3. The *Democrat and Sentinel* spelled out the racist slur. This essay does not.

⁸⁸ “THE DAUGHTER OF A FREMONT ELECTOR MARRIED TO A NEGRO.,” *Bedford Gazette*, 24 October 1856, 1.

⁸⁹ “Amalgamation and Republicans.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 03 September 1856, 3.

⁹⁰ “Advocating Amalgamation.,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 04 September 1856, 1.

⁹¹ “The Negroes at Work,” *The Star of the North*, 24 September 1856, 1.

negroes!”⁹² A *Marshall County Democrat* publication told the story of a disgruntled white Frémont supporter and his family being forced to sit on the ground while a group of Black women ate at a table during a Frémont barbecue.⁹³ This article concluded with the man tearing the Frémont badge from his vest and exclaiming that “although he was but a poor mechanic he was yet a little better than a negro.” All of these reports were deliberately and extraordinarily racist, ensuring firmly bigoted voters would not go for Frémont. Being regarded as an abolitionist party was such a threat to the Republicans’ political success in this period that Abraham Lincoln actively worked to distance himself from the cause in his 1860 campaign. In 1856, however, Frémont’s opponents successfully pinned the tail on the donkey, something that contributed to the Republican Party’s failed campaign in these five states.

If there was one thing that these anti-Frémont newspapers got correct, it was that a Republican victory would “bring about the dissolution of the American Confederacy of States,” as evidenced by the aftermath of Lincoln’s election in 1860.⁹⁴ These papers repeatedly asserted that Frémont’s victory would result in disunion, that he headed a purely sectional party, and that the goal of the Republican Party was to divide the states.

The *Democrat and Sentinel* guaranteed its readers that Frémont’s election would result in the dissolution of the United States countless times throughout the fall of 1856. In mid-September they argued: “Disunion, then, in the event of [Frémont’s] election, is inevitable,” and confidently predicted that “let no one indulge the fatal delusion that Fremont may be elected and yet the Union preserved. There is not one single possibility of such a result.”⁹⁵ In early October the paper asserted that even Millard Fillmore “has not hesitated to say that the Union cannot stand in case an Abolition President, like Fremont, be chosen,” referring to the former-President and Know-Nothing candidate to support their claim.⁹⁶ Then, in a passionate call to citizens just days before the election, they predicted: “if, which God forbid, through supineness, negligence, forgetfulness, or cowardice John C Fremont should be chosen President, then farewell Peace, farewell public confidence, and domestic security. From that moment the

⁹² “Coal Black Republicans,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 09 October 1856, 2.

⁹³ “White Folks Shoved Back to Make Room for N——s.,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 25 September 1856, 4.

⁹⁴ “Letter from Gov. Wise.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 10 September 1856, 2.

⁹⁵ “Fremont and Disunion,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 17 September 1856, 3.

⁹⁶ “Address to the People of Pennsylvania.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 01 October 1856, 1.

[land] will be in a State of war. It cannot be otherwise.”⁹⁷ By continuously repeating that Frémont’s victory would dissolve the United States, the *Democrat and Sentinel* ensured their rhetoric stayed in the minds of critical Pennsylvanian voters as they pondered the election.

Furthermore, newspapers in each of the northern free states that went for Buchanan referred to Frémont and his party as sectional and intentionally disunionist. In California, *The Nevada Democrat* labelled Frémont a “jug-handle candidate,” referring to his sectionalism and exclaimed “God preserve the country from a *jug handle* President!”⁹⁸ In Illinois, *The Ottawa Free Trader* questioned “who will dare to deny that the present northern sectional party is not a disunion party?”⁹⁹ In Indianapolis, the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*’s publication of James B. Clay’s speech argued that the Republican Party was “a sectional party— which has no existence South of Mason and Dixon’s line,” and sought to “at the risk of destroying the Union itself... force the Southern States in very self-defense to withdraw from the confederation.”¹⁰⁰ And, in Pennsylvania, the *Democrat and Sentinel* labelled “FREMONT—the *sectional* candidate of the advocats [*sic*] of DISSOLUTION”¹⁰¹ These newspapers made the threat of the Republican Party’s inherent sectionalism known to voters nationwide.

These newspapers further asserted that disunion was the Republican’s objective. The *Democrat and Sentinel* described the Republican candidate as: “JOHN C. FREMONT, whose *Principles* are calculated to dissolve the Union.”¹⁰² This newspaper used this messaging throughout the campaign, and, in another example, argued that “John C. Fremont is the chosen representative of a sectional party, which aims to array the North against the South, and to excite discord, hatred and strife between these two great sections of our common country.”¹⁰³ The *Marshall County Democrat* relayed a similar message: “Fremont is the nominee of the black republicans; a party whose aim is the dissolution of the Union.”¹⁰⁴ *The Placer Herald*, a democratic paper from California, agreed, stating:

⁹⁷ “One Fire More!,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 29 October 1856, 2.

⁹⁸ “A Veteran’s Prayer.,” *The Nevada Democrat*, 29 October 1856, 4.

⁹⁹ “Another Move for the Dissolution of the Union by the Abolitionists—Read it.,” *The Ottawa Free Trader*, 06 September 1856, 1.

¹⁰⁰ “Battle-Ground Convention. Speech of Hon. James B. Clay.,” *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, 11 September 1856, 1.

¹⁰¹ “LET THE PEOPLE REMEMBER.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 15 October 1856, 2.

¹⁰² “A Card. Carrollton, Cambria Co., September 25. 1856. To the Editors of the Democrat & Sentinel:” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 01 October 1856, 2.

¹⁰³ “The Contrast.,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, 22 October 1856, 3.

¹⁰⁴ “John C. Fremont.,” *Marshall County Democrat*, 11 September 1856, 4.

“the Black Republicans are bent on a dissolution of this glorious confederacy.”¹⁰⁵ These newspapers made it clear to readers that Frémont and the Republican Party were not sectional by circumstance, rather, it was their maliciously calculated plan to dissolve the United States. *The Placer Herald* related this plea to the widely-discussed events that had been unfolding in Kansas: “elect Fremont and the dun cloud of civil war, which now hovers over the blood stained fields of Kansas, will in all human probability over spread the land.”¹⁰⁶

The violent conflict taking place in Kansas showcased to the entire nation that the possibility of civil war over the question of slavery was entirely possible. Anti-Frémont newspapers used this to their advantage in labeling the anti-expansionist Republican Party as proponents of such union-dissolving conflict. This surely resonated in the minds of uneasy voters who feared the Union divided.

Frémont claimed eleven states in the election of 1856—no small feat for the infantile Republican party—though he was ultimately two short of victory. Frémont never stood a chance in the South, where his name scarcely appeared on ballots, but he lost tightly contested battles in California, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, all free states that elected Frémont’s Republican successor, Abraham Lincoln, four years later. Frémont, described by his opponents as “a husband without a wedding—a millionaire without a dollar—a statesman without a speech—a military chieftain without a battle,” and “the gentleman who is never in the right place at the right time,” headed a campaign poisoned by antagonistic newspapers’ onslaught of criticism, misleading claims, and outright lies.¹⁰⁷ These newspapers speculated on his birth, his military service and famed explorations, and asserted that he was a devout Roman Catholic in a period of intense nativism. These papers attacked his character, they emasculated him, called him steel-hearted and inconsistent, and claimed he was a prolific gambler, speculator, and slaveowner. They emphasized his lack of qualification to be a president. They tied Frémont and his party to abolitionism and sectionalism, often in an unapologetically racist manner, and threatened that he would dissolve the United States. They did all of these things in a manner that ultimately resonated with the voting population in California, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, preventing the Republican Party from claiming the White House in their

¹⁰⁵ “Fremont and his Friends.—The Disunion Party.,” *The Placer Herald*, 04 October 1856, 1.

¹⁰⁶ “A good report from the East—the Union men triumphant. (from the Sonora),” *The Placer Herald*, 20 September 1856, 3.

¹⁰⁷ “Col. Fremont.,” *Volcano Weekly Ledger*, 25 October 1856, 2.

first national election. Alas, Frémont's biographies refer to him as "The Pathfinder," not the president, a legacy due in large part to the strategies employed by adversarial newspapers in these five critical states.

Thursday Night Fever: A Tale of Extraordinary Violence in an Ordinary Place

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Abstract:

In 1930 Marion, Indiana, a white mob lynched two Black men in the town square. This essay includes an analysis of post-Reconstruction lynching historiography, a contextual overview of the Ku Klux Klan's influence in 1920s Indiana, and an in-depth look into the lynchings themselves, supplemented by newspaper archives, census data, and written records from the local NAACP chapter, among other primary sources. It argues the pervasiveness of extraordinary violence in everyday life, especially that committed by ordinary people.

There's nothing more ordinary in small-town America than an old-fashioned rebellion.

When an ordinary boy and an ordinary girl parked their car by a secluded Indiana riverbank in August of 1930, they probably had one mission in mind. For many young couples, the notorious Lover's Lane marked an escape from the stifling modesty that pervaded the sleepy, unassuming town of Marion. Perhaps Claude Deeter and Mary Ball were challenging a societal traditionalism that had dug its heels into the progressive culture of the early 20th century. More likely, they were simply young people looking for a good time – a time that was cut short.

Deeter and Ball were not alone on the riverbank for long. Soon, three Black teenagers – Thomas Shipp, Abram “Abe” Smith, and James Cameron – showed up with a gun and attempted to rob them. After a series of escalating altercations between the Black boys and the white couple, Shipp fired four shots, striking Deeter three times.¹ The boys fled the scene, and Deeter died the following afternoon. Ball claimed the boys had raped her.² Sleepy Marion was now wide awake: ordinary citizens talked – and extraordinary events followed.

Only hours after Deeter's death, on the night of Thursday, August 7, a white mob numbering several thousand abducted and lynched Shipp and Smith. Their lifeless bodies swung from a tree in the town square until dawn broke the next morning, when Marion's ordinary citizens were rising to another day. “Peace and order prevail in Marion,” reported a newspaper account, as residents went about their pursuits in a “calm and orderly fashion.”³ At a veterans' celebration two days later, American flags swayed proudly on the same branches on which mob violence had been flaunted. By Sunday night, the town was “enjoying normal peace and quiet.”⁴

Marion was ordinary once again.

The Confederates' defeat in the Civil War pushed lynching from the vigilante frontier to the racialized South. For white Southerners who had relied on chattel slavery to sustain their economy, the loss of this system marked the devolution of Southern society itself. Angered by postwar advancements in Black suffrage and political standings, they turned to terroristic mob violence to restore antebellum conceptions of white power.

¹ Walter White story draft, n.d. [c. August 1930], Reel 11, Section 7A, NAACP Papers [microfilm edition], Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

² “Bullet Wounds Prove Fatal to Holdup Victim,” *Marion Chronicle*, August 7, 1930, 1.

³ “Peace and Order Prevail in Marion,” *Indianapolis News*, August 8, 1930, 1.

⁴ “Lynching Inquiry Sought at Once,” *Indianapolis News*, August 11, 1930, 1.

The sadistic lynchings that characterized the half-century between the 1880s and 1930s, scholars of the phenomenon agree, became increasingly racialized. Spectacle lynchings in this period emerged from a crisis of white Southern confidence in a tenuous postwar climate, aided by intersecting social, economic, and political conditions that contributed to a regional culture of racial brutality.

White women were central to the rise of Black lynchings in the post-Reconstruction South. While rape allegations didn't account for the majority of lynchings in this period, the cultural discourse they engendered shaped white constructions of masculinity and personal reclamation. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall posits a connection between sexuality and violent spectacle in a racially charged landscape. She describes the rumor of rape as occupying a distinct "folk pornography" in the Bible Belt, with whites casting the Black man as a "ravenous brute, the victim a beautiful, frail, young virgin."⁵ The act of lynching not only identified Black men as scapegoats for unfounded sexual violence, but it also enabled white men to appear more virtuous. While they designated white women as objects of chivalry, white men confined them to the patriarchal system that terrorized Black men. The imposed identities of Black men and white women were linked, Hall explains, in reciprocal subjugation, for the "fear of rape, like the threat of lynching, served to keep a subordinate group in a state of anxiety and fear."⁶ Other lynching scholarship does not cast white women as victims of white Southern patriarchy – but rather as avid perpetrators of barbarity. Grace Hale describes one woman's preference for a "slow burning" of her alleged assailant, rendering her complicit in the violence as the "voice of the crime that set the elaborate ritual in motion."⁷ Still, the woman never bore witness to the lynching itself, nor did it occur near her home as she requested – underscoring how even expressions of white female vengeance operated within gendered expectations dictated by Southern honor culture.

Other scholarship on lynchings at the turn of the 20th century focuses on structural changes in labor systems following the abolition of slavery. Spectacle lynchings weren't equally prevalent across the South, argues W. Fitzhugh Brundage, but occurred most frequently in regions where sharecropping and tenantry replaced slavery. Racial tensions abounded when Black laborers posed potential threats to white monopolies

⁵ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 150.

⁶ Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, 153.

⁷ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1880-1940* (New York: Random House Inc., 1998), 211.

on production. In Georgia, specifically, lynchings were concentrated in areas where Black people made up the majority of the population and cotton cultivation constituted the main economic activity.⁸ Whereas white overseers once maintained the color line by whipping enslaved workers, white sharecroppers in the post-slavery period – who recognized the declining monetary value of Black bodies – substituted mob violence as a more lethal tactic of intimidation. Emboldened by resentment and uncertainty surrounding a vast and expanding Black workforce, white mobs transformed slavery's violence to terrorize Black men into submission.

The instigative party of this terrorism – the white mob – serves as a focus for lynching scholars in examining the spectacle's psychological foundations. Orlando Patterson argues that the mob's actions reflect lynching's sacrificial nature. In folkloric examples of blood sacrifice, the ritual solidified a "compact of fellowship" among the sacrificers, "strengthening the power of the community."⁹ With the Black man as modern victim, his white sacrificers – from those lighting the stake's torches to the children who looked on – rejoiced in a communal spirit, producing a sense of supremacist intragroup harmony. Hale, too, underscores the unified power of the white mob, arguing that it was "white participation, not white agreement, that empowered lynching as modern spectacle" through the simple act of bearing witness.¹⁰ While increasing white dissent to lynching revealed fault lines as the 20th century progressed, the mob – through collective memory and a cultural permanence ushered in by modernization – raged on.

It is this characterization of lynching as modern that brought the white desire to restore antebellum racial hierarchies through the codified white supremacy of the Jim Crow South. While Patterson sees lynchings as rooted in the deep past, Hale argues that they achieved a contemporary cultural power through increased newspaper publicity, photography, and postcard distribution. Twentieth-century racial radicals, too, launched lynching into the modern era, according to Joel Williamson. Espousing unfounded theories of Black retrogression, radicals morally defended lynching's brutality, proclaiming that the victim had "reaped what he had sown."¹¹ With lynching champions like Rebecca Felton and Thomas Dixon

⁸ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 106.

⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas/CounterPoint, 1998), 183.

¹⁰ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 220.

¹¹ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 126.

– who provided the blueprint for the film *The Birth of a Nation* – as white crusaders, Confederate nostalgists found renewed fervor in the violent affirmation of the color line. While spectacle lynchings abated after the 1930s, their impacts pervaded the race relations that followed: as one indelible phenomenon in a horrifically long line of histories of American violence.

In some ways, the lynchings of Thomas Shipp and Abe Smith do not fit the mold of Southern spectacle lynchings at the turn of the 20th century. For one, they didn't happen in the red clay of the Mississippi Delta or the fields of Georgia's Cotton Belt, but in a small Midwestern town that had never experienced Confederate slavery. And, contrary to Brundage's correlation between the density of Black laborers and lynching's frequency, Marion's Black population accounted for only 4.3 percent of the town's nearly 25,000 residents in 1930.¹²

But, for Marion whites, the allure of racialized vigilante justice crossed the Mason-Dixon line. While the Indiana Ku Klux Klan had largely died out by 1925, its normalization of white supremacy persisted in a place so steeped in Midwestern chivalry that a lynching seemed unfathomable to most.¹³ No longer masked by the Klan's populist front, ingrained expressions of bigotry entered a newly deadly sphere – a testament to Hale's confluence of modernity and violence. Whereas white supremacists marched for their cause in the early 1920s, they were ready to kill for it by the decade's end.

Under a guise of order that contrasted the routine brutality of the Jim Crow South, Marion, Indiana, in the late 1920s, seethed with white resentment. By August of 1930, it had reached its breaking point, the lynchings of Shipp and Smith a collective response to the transgression of a de facto racial hierarchy. In centering Mary Ball as its violated victim, the mob infused gender with spectacle violence, underscoring Hall's emphasis on white women as moral impetuses for lawlessness. Chiefly, the lynchings reaffirmed the color line, proliferating fear in surrounding Black communities like the Klan had in years past. This time, however, the mob's men, women, and children went without white hoods. Instead, they gazed comfortably into a camera lens as their ordinary selves.

¹² United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 716.

¹³ Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 145; Barbara J. Steveson, *An Oral History of African Americans in Grant County* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 96.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: SEGREGATION IN THE URBAN NORTH

Hundreds of miles from the agrarian Deep South, the Hoosier State presented an entirely different working landscape in the early 20th century. As white Southerners continued to wreak havoc through racial violence, thousands of Black laborers fled north as part of the Great Migration. They sought social refuge and economic stability in the industrialized Midwest, with many finding work in the steel mills of Indianapolis, Gary, and the Calumet region.¹⁴ Others headed to smaller cities in northeast and central Indiana where Black populations prior to the Great Migration were already sparse, such as Fort Wayne and Muncie.¹⁵

Virtually equidistant from these two cities, Marion in the 1920s was also overwhelmingly white. It shared demographic characteristics with Muncie, less than 40 miles to its south and the subject of sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd's 1924 ethnography. By immersing themselves in this industrial center, the Lynds uncovered a style of segregation that differed from the Jim Crow South in the letter of the law – but not in practice. In Muncie, Black residents were allowed only “under protest” in schools but not in movie theaters, civic organizations, churches, or parks.¹⁶ In most recreational spaces, they were relegated to separate Black spheres, if not barred from participating altogether.

While no equivalent ethnographic study exists for Marion, its regional proximity and the testimonies of its own Black community members indicate that many of the same segregationist practices applied. Weaver, a nearby rural community that was an Underground Railroad site in the antebellum era, was home to most of the area's Black population.¹⁷ In Marion proper, Black residents lived on the south side of the city, where patterns of de facto segregation curtailed white homeownership. Marion theaters seated moviegoers based on race, with whites occupying the main floor and Black people crammed into the “pigeon roof,” an upstairs section with decreased visibility.¹⁸ Interpersonal attitudes hinted even less at equality, as one Black woman discussed the racial epithets that white

¹⁴ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the 20th Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 35.

¹⁵ Thornbrough, “The Great Migration and the First World War,” 35.

¹⁶ Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1929), 480.

¹⁷ “Lynching Inquiry Sought at Once.”

¹⁸ Steveson, “Remarks on the 1930 Lynching,” 94.

children regularly hurled at her.¹⁹ Another called Marion the “most prejudice [*sic*] place in the state of Indiana.”²⁰

The statewide white supremacist culture that reached a zenith in the early 1920s did not solely arise out of an influx of Black Southerners to northern urban centers. In Evansville, the southwestern city in which the Indiana Ku Klux Klan first emerged, the small Black population declined between 1900 and 1910 and increased by a mere 2 percent between 1910 and 1920.²¹ Black people were no more of a threat to the labor industries of Kokomo, where more than 100,000 Klan members gathered for an Independence Day rally in 1923.²² White supremacy’s magnetic pull did not concern itself with statistical evidence. Rather, it nestled within a postwar society more willing to accept ideologies of division than confront the inevitable realities of a rapidly changing world.

FAITH, FAMILY, AND FOLK: THE MAKINGS OF A SUPREMACIST STATE
A minstrel show likely would have paled in shock value compared to the first movie ever screened in the White House. Featuring white actors in blackface and a glorified Klan on horseback defending its honor, *The Birth of a Nation* signified a turning point in 20th-century racial politics. Its screenwriter, racial radical Thomas Dixon, drew from his own upbringing in the Reconstruction South, where he believed whites – not Black people – were disenfranchised after the Civil War.²³ While it promoted the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, the 1915 film appealed just as ardently to Progressive Era–fueled white disgruntlement, triggering the advent of the second nationwide Ku Klux Klan movement. Moreover, with the endorsement of Dixon’s close friend and former President Woodrow Wilson, the film’s messaging found a shelf life in the highest executive branches of mainstream politics. Contrary to 19th-century vigilante connotations of whitecapping and nightriding – post-Reconstruction Klan tactics that terrorized Black communities – white supremacy was newly institutionalized.

By the Indiana Klan’s founding in 1920, the United States was actively reckoning with World War I’s unprecedented devastation. While the fallout from the Civil War had triggered a crisis of Southern confidence, World War I washed over the entire country, blurring regional lines as the public commiserated collectively. Under this facade of unity, however, lay

¹⁹ Steveson, “Remarks on the 1930 Lynching,” 100.

²⁰ Steveson, “Remarks on the 1930 Lynching,” 94.

²¹ Thornbrough, “The Great Migration and the First World War,” 35.

²² Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 19.

²³ Patterson, *A Rage for Order*, 98.

a disquieting air of vulnerability, as concerns over national security and foreign influence intensified. For many white Americans – especially war veterans who themselves had fought a foreign enemy – factions like the Klan were not merely proponents of racial hatred. Rather, they saw them as simply defending their own in-group against a threat, transforming civil society into a battlefield.

In Indiana, where white Protestantism visibly dominated public and private sectors alike, this threat was as powerfully imagined as it was real. While the Klan considered Christianity the “foundation for ethical behavior,” its aversion to Catholicism insisted that Christianity alone could not ensure the future of white America.²⁴ Klan members, instead, avowed themselves to a defensive form of ethnic nationalism – white Protestant nationalism – predicated on the unfounded belief that traditional Protestant values were “under attack.”²⁵ In order to isolate their sanctified struggles for an endangered social order, they resorted to ethnic scapegoating, targeting Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and Black people. While none of these sects could legitimately challenge the pervasive culture of Protestantism, the Klan adeptly allied itself with non-white-supremacist social movements to advance its own moral credibility – and diminish others’ by comparison. The women’s temperance movement, for example, supported Klan candidates for political office because of the hooded order’s stance on Prohibition. Not only was the Klan successful at tying rampant alcoholism to marginalized communities, but its altruism-masked bigotry was also “sanctioned by the social mainstream.”²⁶ Despite overt displays of racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance, the Klan enjoyed a perception of indifference – if not outright support – from members of white society who already benefited from the supremacy it was preaching.

Its strategic combination of non-violence and populist rhetoric drove the Indiana Klan to new heights of mass appeal. Unlike the Reconstruction-era first wave that threatened, lynched, and murdered Black people to maintain the color line, the second Klan functioned more like a political machine than a group of vigilante terrorists. The organization operated within the confines of the legal system itself, dissuading its supporters from breaking any laws as they campaigned for governmental offices across the state of Indiana.²⁷ They sought to capitalize on establishments that fell in line with Protestant nationalism – such as Valparaiso University, nicknamed the “poor man’s Harvard” – by transforming them into bastions of white

²⁴ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 28.

²⁵ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 22-23.

²⁶ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 27.

²⁷ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 32.

populism.²⁸ This deliberate appeal to the everyday white American – the one left behind by regimes of cultural progressivism – bolstered Klan support among members of Indiana’s middle and lower classes. To the economic elite, on the other hand, it was “still sensational, even ominous.”²⁹ The Klan’s social stratification was its greatest strength, attracting a flood of middle Americans who found validation in its recognition of their struggles.

As a tool of soft power, the Klan found an accommodating home within existing institutions of education and civic life. In Muncie, education was a “faith, a religion.”³⁰ Public schools zealously taught civic training in the 1920s, with history and civics accounting for 16 percent of students’ total learning hours.³¹ While the Klan advocated for compulsory public school attendance as an alternative to the Catholic parochial model, the public schools themselves were infused with a deep-seated sense of religious jingoism that dovetailed with white supremacy. In a questionnaire surveying over 500 social studies students, 66 and 75 percent of boys and girls, respectively, concurred that the white race was the “best race on Earth.”³² An even greater percentage of both genders answered that the United States was “unquestionably the best country in the world.”³³ As impressionable young people prepared to enter white Protestant citizenry, they seamlessly applied the tenets of their nationalist education to civic duty writ large.

In the Klan’s ideology, there was “nothing incompatible about prejudice and civic activism.”³⁴ Everyday Americans donned white hoods to march in rallies, attend fundraisers, and organize potluck meals at picnics. At Klan social gatherings, “spectacle mixed with ordinariness” as nuclear families exchanged pleasantries within the spatial comfort of an exclusively white environment.³⁵ These activities were more than just entertainment, however. They were acts of resistance to the overtly violent white supremacy of bygone eras, demonstrating how extremism was embedded in the very fabric of quotidian leisure.

²⁸ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 39.

²⁹ Moore, “The Klansmen: Occupation,” 64.

³⁰ Lynd and Lynd, “School Life,” 219.

³¹ Lynd and Lynd, “The Things Children Learn,” 197.

³² Lynd and Lynd, “The Things Children Learn,” 200.

³³ Lynd and Lynd, “The Things Children Learn,” 200.

³⁴ Moore, “White Protestant Nationalism,” 22.

³⁵ Kathleen M. Blee, “100% Cooperation,” in *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 166.

The Indiana Klan didn't manufacture seeds of division in a racially integrated society. Instead, it appealed to a white population that rarely – if ever – confronted lived realities outside of its Protestant echo chambers, nestling within the institutions and assumptions of ordinary life.³⁶ Modernization was rapidly transforming traditional ways of life in post-Industrial Revolution America. The “sacred institution” of the family was growing smaller and more secularized, and defiant younger generations, aided by the rise of the automobile, relentlessly pursued vices like alcohol and promiscuity.³⁷ Instead of resolving personal anxieties surrounding societal change, many Hoosiers projected outward, directing their panic toward ethnic scapegoats. White Indiana had always largely failed to challenge bigotry. The Klan simply provided a morally sanctioned outlet for these sentiments to rise to the surface.

By 1925, a series of personal scandals and government corruption had led to the near-total demise of the Indiana Klan. It disappeared from public view, “leaving in its wake wide areas of local bitterness.”³⁸ Stripped of channels for racist spectacles, ordinary citizens found themselves disillusioned. How could Indiana's white supremacists possibly band together without the mobilizing power of their beloved hooded order?

In 1930, Marion had an answer.

“IF IT WAS YOUR DAUGHTER...”

Marion theatrical manager Billy Connors was in the wrong place at the right time on August 7, 1930. In the early evening, he paid Sheriff Jake Campbell a business visit.³⁹ Only hours later, he was pinned between the wall of the Grant County Jail and an angry lynch mob.

“I think they were crazy enough to do anything,” Connors remarked later in a court deposition.⁴⁰ Another eyewitness referred to the mob as a pack of “wild wolves.”⁴¹

Connors recalled the mob consisting mostly of young people between 16 and 20 years old. According to him, they were “regular hoodlums,” certainly not upstanding members of the local community.⁴²

³⁶ Blee, “100% Cooperation,” 154.

³⁷ Lynd and Lynd, “The Houses in Which Middletown Lives,” 102.

³⁸ Lynd and Lynd, “Group Solidarity,” 485.

³⁹ Billy Connors testimony, August 13, 1930, “Original Depositions of the Lynching in Marion, Indiana, August 13, 14, 15, 1930,” Indiana History Room, Marion Public Library, Marion, IN.

⁴⁰ Billy Connors testimony, lynching deposition.

⁴¹ “Muncie Man is Lynching Witness,” *Muncie Evening Press*, August 8, 1930, 9.

⁴² Billy Connors testimony, lynching deposition.

But one face – belonging to an unemployed laborer and father of five – stood out from the rest.⁴³

Frank “Hoot” Ball, the mob’s “ringleader,” wasn’t just any father.⁴⁴ He was the father of a white 18-year-old girl – one who claimed she had been raped the night before by three Black boys. Bellowing before his followers, Hoot roused their sympathies with an emotional call to arms: “If it was your daughter, you would feel different about it.”⁴⁵

It was enough to send the mob behind him careening into the jail, desperate to exact revenge.

Male rage conjures up ideas of violence in the modern mind. Traditionally, it is men who fight, maim, and kill in the name of attention or valor. Beneath these displays of strength, however, a scorned woman often serves as a rallying cry. In historical lynching narratives, white men’s exploitation of both Black men and white women violently furthered their patriarchal order. In Marion, Claude Deeter’s death alone didn’t whip thousands into a lynching frenzy. It was white outrage surrounding Mary Ball’s alleged rape that sealed the deal.

Various judgments regarding Mary’s character floated throughout the tense atmosphere in the wake of the lynchings. Members of Marion’s Black community questioned her morality, calling her “trash” and even speculating that she played some role in the attempted robbery on Lover’s Lane.⁴⁶ Deeter’s parents, who denounced the lynchings, denied that their son was ever engaged to her.⁴⁷ As the cogs of the rumor mill turned, Mary emerged less as a virtuous paragon of white womanhood and more as a rebellious teenager who flagrantly violated taboos around interracial socializing. Hoot may have wanted to avenge his daughter’s dignity, but his followers were more intent on reminding themselves – and the people of color who dared to cross them – of their whiteness.

Ultimately, Mary’s own account of the events of August 6 – a truth only she could tell – was irrelevant. In chivalrous society, “women [had] to be morally better than men. It is they who pull[ed] men up and express[ed] their downfall.”⁴⁸ Regardless of what had actually transpired on Lover’s

⁴³ Frank Ball entry, 1930 U.S. census manuscript, Marion, Indiana, available on *Ancestry.com* [last accessed on December 12, 2025].

⁴⁴ Billy Connors testimony, lynching deposition.

⁴⁵ Billy Connors testimony, lynching deposition.

⁴⁶ Steveson, “Remarks on the 1930 Lynching,” 107.

⁴⁷ “Press Release: ‘N.A.A.C.P. Obtains Names of Lynchers: Gross Negligence Charges Made to Indiana Attorney General,’” August 22, 1930, NAACP Papers.

⁴⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 118.

Lane, Mary needed to be sacrosanct in the eyes of the lynchers to justify their violence. Her integrity may have been hazy – but her whiteness was all the mob needed to set its plan in motion.

AN ORDINARY MOB: FINDING RECREATIONAL RELEASE

“They had almost nothing to do with it other than the fact that they took part in it,” said Vaughn Treber, a Marion special police deputy, of the mob’s participants.⁴⁹

Much like how the Indiana Klan had warded off the wealthy, the more than two dozen identifiable members of the Marion lynch mob came from middle and lower economic backgrounds. Herman “Thin” Byrd, who boasted that he had “put the rope around one of the Black sons of bitches,” was a riveter in an auto dump factory who rented his home for eighteen dollars a month.⁵⁰ Arnold Wallers, who struck Abe Smith with a crowbar and crushed his frontal bone, made a modest living as a grocery store salesman.⁵¹ Herman Bailey, who bound and asphyxiated Smith, worked as a barber to support his wife and two young children.⁵²

Nearly three-quarters of the mob’s identified sample worked in factories, odd jobs, or some form of skilled labor.⁵³ The predominantly working-class composition of this mob provides some insight into its members’ social attitudes. In Muncie, the Lynds observed that a sense of belonging was growing more rapidly among members of the business class than the workers.⁵⁴ As the former attended social functions in their spare leisure time and spent their comfortable wages outside the home, the latter tended to live paycheck to paycheck, with neither time nor expendable income to engage in community building beyond making ends meet.

⁴⁹ Oral history interview of Vaughn Treber, March 23, 1977, <http://hdl.handle.net/2450/5112>, Ruth Lilly Library, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN.

⁵⁰ “Persons Reputed to have Participated in Lynching of Abraham Smith and Thomas Shipp at Marion, Indiana, August 7, 1930,” August 22, 1930, NAACP Papers; Herman Byrd entry, 1930 U.S. census, Marion, Indiana.

⁵¹ “Persons Reputed to have Participated in Lynching of Abraham Smith and Thomas Shipp at Marion, Indiana, August 7, 1930,” August 22, 1930; Arnold Wallers entry, 1930 U.S. census, Marion, Indiana.

⁵² “Persons Reputed to have Participated in Lynching of Abraham Smith and Thomas Shipp at Marion, Indiana, August 7, 1930,” August 22, 1930; Herman Bailey entry, 1930 U.S. census, Marion, Indiana.

⁵³ See the Census information available here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1lIUM0qtxUi3wdAexp9gkQd8nEp6fvIO3LYHb3wAQrs/edit?gid=0#gid=0>.

⁵⁴ Lynd and Lynd, “Group Solidarity,” 496.

Occupational variations in the Marion mob, as well as limited information on its members' lifestyles, prevent researchers from conclusively determining the extent of their financial constraints. However, for individuals that neither wallowed in poverty nor basked in luxury, the lynchings may have provided the very sense of belonging that catapulted them beyond their monotonous day jobs.

The mob didn't discriminate along gender lines, either. Newspapers reported that there were as many women as men in the crowd, with mob spirit inflamed by "cries of youths and young girls."⁵⁵ Women armed with clubs and hammers "tore with their fingernails" at Shipp and Smith.⁵⁶ A young woman climbed on the hood of a car and "screamed to the milling crowd for them to hang the colored youth."⁵⁷ Spanning several demographic walks of life, the mob reached far and wide in Marion's white sector. It could not be dismissed as the heinous actions of a few regular hoodlums. Rather, this particular brand of violence was carried out by the city's cab drivers, mechanics, and blacksmiths – in Treber's words, its "ordinary citizens."⁵⁸

In the 1920s, there was little that was more important to small-town Hoosiers than a sports game. The event combined two unfailing institutions in central Indiana: high school – the "hub of social life" – and basketball.⁵⁹ In a packed gymnasium on a Friday night, "more civic liberty" centered around high school sports than around "any other one thing."⁶⁰ Nagging worries were temporarily resolved and personal grievances set aside to cheer on the school's all-star athletes.

At the age of most high school quarterbacks, Black 16-year-old James Cameron was the most valuable player in the Marion lynch mob's arena. "It was like being at a ball game," the mob's third intended victim recalled decades later, "where the main player got off and hit a home run."⁶¹ After suspending Shipp and Smith's bodies from the courthouse tree, the

⁵⁵ "4,000 Raid Jail, Kill 2 Negroes in Indiana Town," *United Press*, August 7, 1930, 1; "Local Eyewitness Describes Lynching in Marion Courtyard," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, August 9, 1930, 3.

⁵⁶ "Indiana Troops Sent to Marion After Lynching," *Associated Press*, August 8, 1930, 1.

⁵⁷ "Slaying, Assault Suspects Dragged From Cells After Crowd Breaks Jail Locks," *Marion-Leader Tribune*, August 8, 1930, 6.

⁵⁸ Treber oral history interview, March 23, 1977.

⁵⁹ Lynd and Lynd, "Who Go to School?" 187.

⁶⁰ Lynd and Lynd, "Group Solidarity," 486.

⁶¹ "Sweet Messenger: The True Story of the Only Known Survivor of a Lynching, James Cameron," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTbjaJG-aVA> [last accessed on December 12, 2025].

lynchers turned to Cameron, their yells akin to “vicious snarls.”⁶² The teenager could hear the raucous chants for his death from his jailhouse cell. “It was the first time in my life I was afraid of white people,” he said.⁶³

To the Marion mob, a lynching was like a sports game – a recreational activity one looks forward to after a long, grueling workday. It was an opportunity to scream, chant, and revel in the company of neighbors, friends, and family that shared a common objective: to win. Victory brought pride to a like-minded group, bolstering a sense of civic purpose. When Sheriff Campbell cut the bodies down the following morning, a newspaper account reported that Marion whites swarmed in a “vulture-like scene,” collecting shreds of clothing, buttons, and rope.⁶⁴ A Black woman said the souvenirs taken extended to actual limbs, with fingers and toes mutilated.⁶⁵ In the lynchings’ aftermath – like in their buildup – the mob operated in the capacity of sports fans, with Black body parts substituted for trading cards of favorite players.

As a recreational release, the lynchings of Shipp and Smith were ritualistic, instilling a sense of community among their white perpetrators. Their barbarity, intensified by hundreds of photographs sold of the victims, was more reminiscent of the spectacle lynchings of the Deep South than of northern white supremacist gatherings.⁶⁶ Lynchings during the Indiana Klan’s heyday were non-existent due to the organization’s veneer of affability – something that was absent at the turn of the decade.⁶⁷ The Marion mob both retreated to the precedents set by the Southern lynching phenomenon and advanced an unprecedented caliber of violence in the state of Indiana. Thus, the 1930 lynchings functioned as both historically grounded and a newly modern turning point.

“THIS IS A WHITE MAN’S COUNTRY.”

As he was paraded out to the courtyard, Cameron pleaded for his life. His cries for mercy were answered by one dissenter, who shouted, “he’s not the

⁶² “Muncie Man is Lynching Witness.”

⁶³ “Sweet Messenger.”

⁶⁴ “Maddened Throng Batters Down Doors of Jail, Kills Prisoners,” *Indianapolis Times*, August 8, 1930, 11.

⁶⁵ Steveson, “Remarks on the 1930 Lynching,” 96.

⁶⁶ “Mob Violence in Marion Put Under Probe,” *Richmond Palladium & Sun-Telegram*, August 9, 1930, 10.

⁶⁷ Moore, “Introduction: Indiana and the Radical Interpretation of the Ku Klux Klan,” 10.

man.”⁶⁸ Spared for the time being, Cameron returned to Sheriff John Fryer’s custody.

“You’ve got the right fellows, boys,” Fryer told the crowd’s members, advising that they “don’t go making any mistakes.”⁶⁹

Exhausted and placated, the mob agreed: “Let’s go home.”⁷⁰

Marion’s ordinary citizens did eventually go home, but not until they had enjoyed the spectacle to its fullest. They reveled in the fruits of their labor, “unmistakable satisfaction written all over their faces.”⁷¹ From the first lynching until daybreak, neither the mob nor the on-duty police officers made any effort to cut down the bodies.

“The crowd seemed to want them to be left hanging,” a motor policeman remarked, “and left hanging they were.”⁷²

When the bodies lay at a Muncie mortuary that night, a “curious” crowd of 500 gathered for a chance to see them.⁷³ Even after the lynchings, the spectacle continued.

If they slept at all, the city’s Black residents woke up the morning after the lynchings to the likelihood of more violence. “Not a light was burning in a house in Marion’s colored section,” reported a newspaper account, while white threats to ransack Black neighborhoods loomed.⁷⁴ A white woman called the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) office, warning that taxi drivers “were going to attempt to get” its leaders.⁷⁵ Black business owners abandoned their posts, unwilling to leave their safety in the hands of white clientele.⁷⁶ Black women and children fled for Weaver as fears over arson attempts compounded.⁷⁷

As this close-knit community reeled from the deaths of two of its own, Marion whites on the other side of town worked tirelessly to distance

⁶⁸ “Lynching Rope and Victims’ Pants Cut by Marion Mob for Souvenirs,” *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, August 8, 1930, 2.

⁶⁹ “Lynching Rope and Victims’ Pants Cut by Marion Mob for Souvenirs.”

⁷⁰ “Lynching Rope and Victims’ Pants Cut by Marion Mob for Souvenirs.”

⁷¹ “Mob Watches Bodies Sway On Tree Limb,” *Herald Press*, August 8, 1930, 12.

⁷² “Police Tell of Scenes at Marion,” *Muncie Evening Press*, August 8, 1930, 9.

⁷³ “Populace Still in Frenzy Over Negro Hangings,” *Muncie Morning Star*, August 9, 1930, 2.

⁷⁴ “Local People Tell of Scene at Lynchings,” *Hartford City News*, August 8, 1930, 4.

⁷⁵ “Marion, Ind., Lyncher Acquitted Despite Positive Identification,” March 6, 1931, NAACP Papers.

⁷⁶ “Local People Tell of Scene at Lynchings.”

⁷⁷ “Lynching Inquiry Sought at Once.”

the violence of August 7 from its racialized nature. Grant County Prosecuting Attorney Harley Hardin denied that the lynchings were a “demonstration against the Negro race,” expressing that they may have occurred even had the two men been properly tried and sentenced to death.⁷⁸ An opinion piece stated that there was “no race question,” arguing that Black people have “no grievance in which the white people do not share.”⁷⁹ A joint letter from a coalition of white Hoosiers, however, shed this pretense of racial blindness. “This is a white man’s country,” they wrote: “Take the advice of those you know and stay at home, and cease making fools of yourselves, and you will best serve the cause of the thousands of colored people who behave themselves.”⁸⁰ This bold rhetoric reflected white majority opinion under its facade of equal opportunism: that self-righteous justice, however misguided, could overshadow a lynch mob’s lawlessness.

It is no surprise, in light of this consensus, that the local courts failed to charge any of the mob’s members. As of 1930, Indiana lynch law provided capital punishment for “persons convicted of participating in and contributing to the act.”⁸¹ It took 21 hours of deliberating for an all-white jury to return a verdict of not guilty, acquitting the only two participants who had initially been indicted.⁸² National attempts to reform lynching legislation in this period similarly collapsed when the Anti-Lynching Bill of 1937 failed in the U.S. Senate.⁸³ No government statute would recognize lynching as a federal hate crime until nearly one century later in 2022.⁸⁴

After the mob’s acquittal, no documented evidence suggests it prompted public commotion or violence. Marion was as ordinary as it had always been.

⁷⁸ “Populace Still in Frenzy Over Negro Hangings.”

⁷⁹ “No Race Question,” *Indianapolis News*, August 9, 1930.

⁸⁰ Citizens of Indiana to the NAACP, n.d., NAACP Papers.

⁸¹ “State and County Probe in Hanging of Negroes Opens,” *Evansville Courier and Journal*, August 10, 1930, 2.

⁸² Mrs. W.T. Bailey to William Pickens, March 3, 1931, NAACP Papers.

⁸³ Harris & Ewing, photographer. Senators in a huddle. Washington, D.C., Nov. 17. Senator Tom Connally, of Tex. Left; who started the filibuster aimed at the Anti-Lynching Bill confers with Senator George Norris, of Neb. right. 11/17/37. District of Columbia Washington D.C. United States Washington D.C., 1937. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016872612/>.

⁸⁴ “Lynching is now a federal hate crime after a century of blocked efforts,” *National Public Radio*, March 29, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/29/1086720579/lynching-is-now-a-federal-hate-crime-after-a-century-of-blocked-efforts>.

MORE THAN SURVIVAL

James Cameron escaped the death penalty, despite Hardin's demands for it.⁸⁵ After serving four years in a state prison for his involvement in Deeter's murder, he dedicated himself to studying the racial violence he had endured as a young boy. Cameron established two NAACP chapters in Indiana and one in Madison, Wisconsin.⁸⁶ In 1988, he founded America's Black Holocaust Museum, a Milwaukee-based educational center that charts the lived experiences of Black people in the United States, from slavery to contemporary struggles for equality.⁸⁷

As the only known survivor of a lynching, Cameron is no martyr. "He wasn't looking to be a hero," his friend and community activist Reuben Harpole said. "He was just looking to tell the story of what happened to us."⁸⁸ When an elderly Cameron met one of Deeter's brothers decades later, the two men were overcome with emotion. Still bearing a burn scar from the rope the mob tied around his neck, Cameron met the brother's plea for forgiveness with compassion.⁸⁹

The memory of a white crime lives on through Black resilience. The day after the Marion lynchings, 500 Black people gathered in the city's southern section to criticize police complicity in the violence.⁹⁰ During the last few days of the jury trial, Black Hoosiers attended in "unusually large numbers."⁹¹ Surrounded by throngs of white people – many of whom had participated in the lynchings – they stayed, determined to take up space in the mob's courtroom.

"Mobs are like dogs. They seize you when you run, but only bark or growl or snap at you when you stand," wrote NAACP activist William Pickens on the lynchings. "The Negroes decided to stand at all costs."⁹²

⁸⁵ "Populace Still in Frenzy Over Negro Hangings."

⁸⁶ "James Cameron, Holocaust Museum Founder," *African American Registry*, 2000-2013.

https://web.archive.org/web/20180105235036/http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/james-cameron-holocaust-museum-founder.

⁸⁷ "About America's Black Holocaust Museum: A Unique Experience For Visitors From Near and Far," *America's Black Holocaust Museum*, 2024.

<https://www.abhmuseum.org/about/>.

⁸⁸ "Sweet Messenger."

⁸⁹ "Man turns brush with death into his life's work," *Gainesville Sun*, February 16, 2003. <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2003/02/17/man-turns-brush-with-death-into-his-lifes-work/31628236007/>.

⁹⁰ "Colored Men Who Shot Boy and Assaulted Girl Were Beaten to Death," *The Anderson Daily Bulletin*, August 8, 1930, 1.

⁹¹ William Pickens, "Aftermath of a Lynching," *The Nation*, April 15, 1931.

⁹² Pickens, "Aftermath of a Lynching."

LIVING HISTORY: BLURRING PAST AND PRESENT

Examining the events of that fateful August night nearly 100 years later, it is all too easy to reduce their historical gravity to a relic of a bygone era. As Americans of color continue to shatter glass ceilings, resisting centuries' worth of systemic oppression, we cannot help but look back in pride at how far we have come as a society. Black progress is real, vulnerable, and justly recognized. But this is progress made in the face of continuous cycles of white supremacy that don't naturally recede at the end of every era of resistance.

The Marion lynchings of 1930 tell Americans as much about contemporary systems of white power as they do their historical antecedents.⁹³ We must observe this tragedy from a sociocultural lens, paying close attention to the contextual factors that led an entire community to orchestrate and condone the murders of two young men. We must approach it in its most intimate capacity as well, staring at the nonchalant faces of the mob's members as if we knew them personally. After all, it is within the ordinariness of this society that someone might see themselves reflected in its propensity for violence.

The most uncomfortable truths in human history can present the most valuable opportunities for change. By confronting the human cost of this spectacle, we take the first step in preventing yet another one from occurring.

⁹³ We might consider a historical parallel between the 1920s Ku Klux Klan and the 21st-century Tea Party political movement. While the postwar Klan in Indiana attacked the state's religious and ethnic minority groups, the Tea Party targeted the country's first Black president in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. As a fiscally conservative, libertarian organization, the Tea Party polled favorably with middle Americans, its populist nature masking the anti-immigrant, Islamophobic rhetoric that invigorated a disgruntled white constituency. For more on the Tea Party, see the following articles: Louis Edgar Esparza and Judith Blau, "Wired Nation: How the Tea Party Drove an Anti-Immigrant Campaign," *Societies Without Borders* 7, no. 4 (December 2012): 426-446. <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1079&context=swb>; Leon T. Hader, "Fearing a Muslim Planet," *Cato Institute*, December 13, 2010. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/fearing-muslim-planet>.

Populism Made Plausible: Understanding Huey Long's Opposition and Alternative to the New Deal

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Abstract:

This article examines the fascinating belief system of a veritable titan amongst American populist figures. Huey Pierce Long Jr., the infamous “Kingfish,” exhibited a seemingly contradictory ideology during his time as Governor and Senator of Louisiana. While decrying President Franklin Roosevelt’s remedy to the Great Depression as a bloated and ineffective infringement on the rights of the people, Long simultaneously demanded an unprecedented federal redistribution and limitation of wealth in America. The first half of this thesis, “The Deranged Alphabet,” examines Long’s religious and anti-monopolistic opposition to components of the New Deal, such as the Agricultural Adjustment and National Recovery Administrations. The second half, “Share Our Wealth,” explores Long’s alternative to the New Deal: the eponymous Share Our Wealth plan. The objective of this article is to synthesize the Kingfish’s anti-monopolism with his advocacy of wealth redistribution via the federal Share Our Wealth plan, ultimately producing a plausible explanation for Huey Long’s seemingly paradoxical populist philosophy. Understanding this brand of populism, with its bottom-up goals met through top-down means, can help us better define the ideological contours of modern American populism.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most embarrassing feelings in the world is to make a bold prediction, one substantiated by everything from impartial statistics to philosophical ruminations, and then be proven terribly wrong. While I have succumbed to that humiliation through presidential elections and football seasons, the embarrassment pales in comparison with the infamous claim by Francis Fukuyama in his 1989 article “The End of History?” that liberal democracy is the “end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution.”¹ No matter how many times Fukuyama pens op-eds to provide context or correct himself, the false promise of decades past will remain seared into political scientists and historians’ minds so long as the global political lexicon is dominated by a single word: populism. While enjoying a resurgence under the auspices of President Donald Trump, populism is far from a new phenomenon in American politics.² Seventy years before Donald Trump stepped off a golden escalator and into the history books, an equally blustering politician’s career came to an abrupt end in the halls of the Louisiana State Capitol, terminated by the bullet of an unassuming bespectacled assassin.

Most Americans first meet Huey Pierce Long Jr. in their high school history textbooks, which often make brief mention of the infamous demagogue as the foremost leftist critic of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. My first interaction with the famed populist was when my tour guide pointed out his statue in the Capitol’s National Statuary Hall, forever depicted giving a typically energetic speech on behalf of the impoverished masses. That is how Long would have preferred to be remembered: as a champion of the common people, fighting against Wall Street and its establishment cronies, and always voting in favor whenever Roosevelt had “gone to the left.”³ The flamboyant former Governor and Senator of Louisiana had ample reason to despise the corporations and politicians of his era. Born in 1893 in the small county of Winn Parish, Louisiana, Long grew up surrounded by poor white Baptists, although he himself lived comfortably, contrary to his later assertions of an impoverished “log cabin”

¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3.

² Populism even won Cambridge’s “Word of the Year” award in 2017. University of Cambridge, “‘Populism’ Revealed as 2017 Word of the Year by Cambridge University Press,” *University of Cambridge*, November 30, 2017. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/news/populism-revealed-as-2017-word-of-the-year-by-cambridge-university-press>

³ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 268.

childhood.⁴ Nevertheless, Long came from a part of Louisiana unaccustomed to being heard by its state politicians, and he exhibited a passion for helping them by tackling unchecked corporations during his time on the state's Public Service Commission. More importantly, Long displayed an equally remarkable self-serving ambition. At thirty-five years old, he rode a thundering wave of rural discontent into the Governor's Mansion with the help of campaign innovations like radio speeches and sound trucks.

The insurgent new governor, soon to be known as the "Kingfish," wasted no time in challenging the regime of the "Old Regulars," the urban conservative elite who had largely run the state since the end of Reconstruction. With the power of patronage, Long survived a vitriolic impeachment of fistfights and screaming matches, and by the time Franklin Roosevelt had moved into the White House, the now-Senator Long was running Louisiana as his personal fiefdom. While his hostile takeover of the state's Democratic Party mimicked other rural movements' efforts to control traditional party apparatuses, and his strongman tactics drew similarities to the domineering political bosses of cities north of the Mason-Dixon line, Long was unique in his complete and unabashed control of an entire state. More unparalleled was Long's influence outside Louisiana, attracting millions of supporters with his signature Share Our Wealth program (1934), which promised to alleviate the public's suffering through unprecedented wealth redistribution. Even after his untimely death in 1935 and the destruction of the Share Our Wealth organization, the Kingfish's memory lived on in the form of his son, six-term Senator Russell; his brother, three-term Governor Earl; and many other extended family members who held public office.

Scholarship on Long

Given his incredible influence and vibrant personality, Long has been the subject of numerous biographies and appeared as a supporting character in many more. Interestingly, interpretations of his beliefs and the morality of his actions vary between authors. Famed author and anti-fascist Sinclair Lewis was the first to write about Long, publishing *It Can't Happen Here* only one month after the Kingfish's demise. In his book, Lewis told the story of a fictitious demagogue rising to power and establishing a dictatorship, with clear parallels to Long's authoritarian style and populist appeal. Despite not intending to praise or criticize Long, Robert Warren expressed a similar concern for authoritarianism and corruption in his acclaimed 1946 book *All the King's Men*, telling the story of a Deep

⁴ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 25.

Southern populist who, although caring for his people, became corrupted by a lust for power.⁵ In his scholarly work from 1956, *Huey Long's Louisiana*, Allan Sindler, a former Cornell University and University of California Berkeley professor, was equally harsh on Long. He considered the Kingfish to be the “personalization of politics,” an egocentric and brazen dictator whose charitable instincts were consumed by a propensity for tyranny.⁶ Sindler examined Long's achievements at home, deeming the Governor's record as spotty with an “undue concentration on tangible and showy benefits.”⁷ Renowned historian Arthur Schlesinger, writing in the context of the Cold War and the shadow of McCarthyism, also harbored criticism for Long, the vulgar and opportunistic “Messiah of the Rednecks.”⁸ In his extraordinary 1957-1960 trilogy on the New Deal, *The Age of Roosevelt*, Schlesinger argued that Long was most reminiscent of a Latin American caudillo, employing the plight of the masses to accumulate and maintain power.

LSU professor Thomas Harry Williams' 1969 Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Huey Long* is regarded as the definitive biography of the Kingfish, encompassing Long's life in extraordinary detail across more than eight hundred pages. Williams is arguably apologetic in attempting to rationalize Long's authoritarian means with his generous end of helping the poor, ultimately portraying Long's nature and desires as complex. Historian Alan Brinkley, in his 1982 book *Voices of Protest*, agreed with the conclusion that Long was a complicated and paradoxical individual, mixing a passion for the impoverished with an insatiable appetite for power. However, Brinkley explored Long's philosophy in greater depth than the previously mentioned works, seeking to decipher what Long's populist worldview actually meant aside from vague promises to redistribute wealth and curtail corporate power. His conclusion was that Long embodied a nostalgia for the small-town America of yesteryear, with its “little banks” and “little independent businesses,” in stark contrast to the massive corporations and bureaucratic agencies that increasingly dominated the country in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ Long's support was not only a brief spark of Depression-related desperation, but also a deep fear in much of America that local institutions, customs, and autonomy were being subsumed by

⁵ Robert Warren, *All the King's Men* (Random House, 1953), 14.

⁶ Allan Sindler, *Huey Long's Louisiana* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 99.

⁷ Sindler, *Huey Long's Louisiana*, 107.

⁸ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval* (First Mariner Books, 1960), loc 779.

⁹ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 243.

everything from chain stores to nationwide newspapers.¹⁰ “Distant power centers,” those being the economic elite dwelling in America’s cities, were the culprits behind the destruction of traditional life.¹¹ Brinkley expanded on this analysis in his 1996 book *The End of Reform*, where he chronicled the evolution of the New Deal from its early days of energetic reformism to its wartime acquiescence of corporate capitalism.¹²

My thesis builds on Brinkley’s analysis and prior scholarship on Long, while relying largely on sources from LSU Special Collections.¹³ Through this research, I demonstrate how Long’s seemingly contradictory opposition to the New Deal for government overreach and his proposal to use the fullest extent of federal power for his Share Our Wealth program can be reconciled into one consistent strand of populism. However, in exploring this paradox, I disagree with Brinkley’s conclusion that the Kingfish’s top-down approach to his Share Our Wealth program prohibits it from constituting a “fundamental restructuring of American society.”¹⁴ Although Long distanced himself from the welfare statism of the New Deal or the state socialism espoused by leftists, his anti-monopolistic and redistributive populism still entailed a desire for and a will to enact deep societal change.

Defining Populism

While this study offers a history of populist thought and politics, it is helpful to begin with a working definition of populism. I am relying upon the work of several political scientists and historians, most importantly on renowned Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, whose investigations into

¹⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 245.

¹¹ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 250.

¹² Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996), 269.

¹³ I conducted research at the LSU Special Collections department in July of 2024 to examine several primary sources related to Long, his political machine, and the Democratic Party that had been collected and stored by his private secretary, H. Donald DeVol. Their collection included speeches, notes, private telegrams, an annotated Bible, Senate records, and copies of *The American Progress* (formerly *The Louisiana Progress*), which was a newspaper Long formed to increase his reach in the state and nationwide. The papers provided a critical look behind the scenes of Long’s political operation and beliefs, with particular importance placed upon Long’s research of famous American leaders, thinkers, and documents and their appearances in his speeches. I was greatly assisted in my endeavor by Caroline Ziegler of LSU Special Collections and a grant from the altruistic Quinn Family via the Notre Dame Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts. Lastly, I received some terrific reading recommendations and input from my thesis advisor, Professor Rebecca McKenna.

¹⁴ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 275.

the definition of populism were primarily derived from his study of American agrarian populism. In a chapter on populism in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (2013), Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser described populism as a perspective, or “mental map through which individuals...comprehend political reality,” as opposed to “a concrete ideological tradition.”¹⁵ Many other political scientists and historians concur with Mudde’s description, such as American historian Michael Kazin, who deemed populism as “more an impulse than an ideology” in his 1995 work *The Populist Persuasion*.¹⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, a German political scientist and philosopher, agreed in his 2014 article “Reflections on Populism,” conceptualizing populism as a “political phenomenon,” as opposed to an exclusive set of partisan cultural or economic values.¹⁷ Populism displays the same two characteristics wherever it has manifested across the political spectrum: anti-elitism and majoritarianism. The anti-elitism stems from the populist belief that society can be divided into “two homogeneous and antagonistic camps,” those being the general public and the perceived cultural or economic elite.¹⁸ Populists portray the people as “hard-working” and morally pure in this dichotomous society, whereas the elite are characterized as “corrupt” and unrepresentative of the nation.¹⁹ In addition, since the people’s desires are inherently good, the “general will” must be exercised and realized in politics.²⁰ This can lead to a decline in “horizontal accountability...and minority rights,” per political scientists Robert Huber and Christian Schimpf.²¹ Populists will argue they are the true representatives of the general will, leading to the assertion they should not be restrained by constitutional or social checks.

¹⁵ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden and Marc Stears, (Oxford Academic, 2013), 499.

¹⁶ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 3.

¹⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, “‘The People Must Be Extracted from within the People’: Reflections on Populism,” *Constellations* 21, no. 4 (2014): 483.

¹⁸ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (Oxford Academic, 2013), 499.

¹⁹ Müller, “‘The People Must Be Extracted from within the People,’” 484.

²⁰ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15-31.

²¹ Robert Huber and Christian Schimpf, “On the Distinct Effects of Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism on Democratic Quality,” *Politics and Governance* 5, no. 4 (2017): 147.

THE DERANGED ALPHABET: LONG'S OPPOSITION TO THE NEW DEAL

The New Deal was never an assured result of the Great Depression. After Woodrow Wilson's second term destroyed the appeal of progressives nationwide, the Democratic Party followed its Republican counterpart in moving decisively to the right. James Cox, John Davis, and Al Smith, the Democrats' three Presidential nominees in this era, all hailed from the conservative wing of the party. Their primary supporters were northeastern and midwestern urban residents, typically possessing immigrant backgrounds, who were stridently Wet on the issue of Prohibition, despised the Ku Klux Klan, and typically opposed government intervention aside from state labor laws.²² Their intraparty rivals were the progressive Wilsonians, usually found in the South and West, who dreamed of restoring the winning 1916 rural coalition and forever ignoring the whims of the industrial Northeast. The progressive wing sought to use government authority to reshape society, such as implementing Prohibition, restricting immigration, and ending child labor.²³ While the progressive Democrats' star had clearly fallen during the New Era, the ensuing Great Depression destroyed the country's adherence to conservatism. The Republicans' and conservative Democrats' belief in limited government and volunteerism no longer sufficed for millions of unemployed Americans, providing progressive Democrats with a generational opportunity to regain influence within their party and return to the White House. Their champion was the 1920 Vice Presidential nominee and then two-term Governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Roosevelt had attracted the attention of Wilsonians nationwide with a mildly progressive resumé from New York that he advertised with sweeping rhetoric. Advocates of public-owned utilities cheered the Governor's establishment of state-run hydroelectric energy power plants, a fact Roosevelt frequently boasted about on the campaign trail to demonstrate his progressive credentials.²⁴ Proponents of a more equitable society favored Roosevelt's creation of a New York old-age pension to individuals over seventy years old, and conservationists viewed the Governor's environmental advocacy as reminiscent of his famously outdoorsy Presidential uncle-in-law.²⁵ Most attractive to progressives,

²² Douglas Craig, *After Wilson: The Struggle for the Democratic Party, 1920-1934* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 6.

²³ Craig, *After Wilson*, 13.

²⁴ Franklin Roosevelt, "Campaign Address in Portland, Oregon on the Public Utilities and Development of Hydro-Electric Power," *The American Presidency Project*, September 21, 1932. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/campaign-address-portland-oregon-public-utilities-and-development-hydro-electric-power>

²⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order* (First Mariner Books, 1960), loc 4426.

however, was Roosevelt's rapid response to the Great Depression. The creation of the Temporary Emergency Relief Fund and the orchestration of a governor's conference to coordinate relief efforts painted Roosevelt as a decisive leader, one unafraid to use "state and national planning" to protect the public from economic disturbances or unscrupulous corporations.²⁶ While Roosevelt's progressive policies and endless charm accomplished the impossible, reconciling the rural upstate with the urban immigrant New York City, a Governor many miles south used state planning in a far different way to build his political base. Although expressing similar anti-corporate overtones in his rhetoric and deeds, Long went much further than Roosevelt, establishing a veritable dictatorship in Louisiana. As he delivered free textbooks, better roads, and lower utility prices to his rural supporters, the Kingfish systematically weeded out any opposition. While observers connected Roosevelt to the Progressive Era, Long's legendary feud with corporations and rustic rhetoric reminded Democrats of the Populists and their hero, the "Great Commoner," William Jennings Bryan. Nevertheless, the two Governors ostensibly shared the same goal: saving America from the Great Depression.

With their home states politically secure and their economic remedies bearing fruit, Roosevelt and Long turned their attention to the nation in 1932. As conservative Democrats were discredited by three consecutive landslide defeats, the progressive New Yorker was the obvious frontrunner for the nomination, but it would not be an easy victory. Conservative Democrats like National Chairman John Raskob still retained immense power and sought to use their waning influence to deadlock the upcoming convention, angling for a moderate compromise candidate to emerge when the dust had settled.²⁷ Although animosity would define their relationship in the history books, Long was originally a rabid supporter of Roosevelt at the 1932 Democratic National Convention, even meeting privately with campaign manager James Farley to plot a strategy for securing the necessary 2/3rds of the ballots.²⁸ The Governor of New York was ultimately successful on the fourth ballot, and Long remained involved in Roosevelt's campaign, traveling across the Plains to sell the idea of the quintessential east coast elitist as the greatest champion of the common man since Bryan. The Louisianan Senator saw the same anti-elitism and wealth

²⁶ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, loc 4474.

²⁷ Steve Neal, *Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, the Emergence of FDR - and How America Was Changed Forever* (Thorndike Press, 2004), 67.

²⁸ Postal Telegraph from James Farley to Huey Long, June 27, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folder 2, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

redistribution that defined his populism in Roosevelt's sweeping proclamations on the campaign trail, such as the candidate's acceptance speech vow to enact a better "distribution of national wealth."²⁹ After all, both men supported similar policies such as public-owned utilities, higher taxes on the rich, and public works programs for the jobless. Yet almost immediately upon Roosevelt's inauguration, newspapers and radio waves were flooded with bitter criticism from his erstwhile ally, particularly concerning the Agricultural Adjustment and National Recovery Administrations. This schism was the product of Long's brand of populism characterized by strict anti-elitism and anti-monopolism.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration

Discontent had been brewing for a decade amongst millions of western farmers before Wall Street imploded in October of 1929 and the 1930s droughts of the Dust Bowl began. The mass destruction of European farmland and conscription of farmers in the First World War resulted in a high demand for agricultural imports, and nobody was better prepared to fill this new economic niche than the American farmer. However, many American farmers were entirely unprepared for the sudden decline in demand following the end of the Great War and the subsequent European reconstruction. Prices for crops rapidly dropped, resulting in farmers failing to pay their wartime loans and mortgages.³⁰ Dreary auctions for homesteads became commonplace in the West, and although the national economy rebounded under the presidencies of Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge, many western farmers continued to suffer.³¹ Their frustration only grew during Congressional debates in the 1920s concerning farm relief, particularly surrounding the controversial McNary-Haugen Bill. Introduced by Senator Charles McNary of Oregon and Representative Gilbert Haugen of Iowa, the bill ordered the federal government to purchase crops from struggling farmers and sell them at a discounted price to other countries. Coolidge strongly vetoed the measure twice, and although economists now agree the bill would not have stemmed the bleeding, farmers predictably viewed the taciturn President's refusal as uncaring and callous.³²

Following the failure to pass the McNary-Haugen Bill and the onset of the Great Depression, there were two major attempts to address the

²⁹ John Moser, "Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention (1932)," *Teaching American History*, July 2, 1932.

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/acceptance-speech-at-the-democratic-convention-1932/>

³⁰ Robert Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (American Political Biography Press, 2000), 82-83.

³¹ Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Regnery, 2000), 275.

³² Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Regnery, 2000), 331.

stubborn agricultural crisis, both with an eye on decreasing yield to increase prices. In 1929, President Herbert Hoover created the Federal Farm Board, whose purpose was to purchase and store surplus crops.³³ However, the institution failed to halt overproduction given no production limit existed, allowing farmers to endlessly sell to the Farm Board until the agency's allotted funds ran dry.³⁴ Unlike proponents of the untried McNary-Haugen Act or the failed Federal Farm Board, Roosevelt was determined to implement an entirely different and seemingly counterproductive policy: the destruction of crops and land. Since the farmers' dilemma stemmed from overproduction during the First World War, Roosevelt and his Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, reasoned that decreasing domestic production was the only mechanism to increase crop prices.³⁵ Even if this measure went against "the soundest instincts of human nature," Wallace and Assistant Secretary Rexford Tugwell began enforcing artificial scarcity of crops in 1933 through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (A.A.A.).³⁶ Their means included payment-induced voluntary reduction, the manipulation of taxes, and the cooperation of agricultural processors.

Although Long voted in favor of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in the spring of 1933, the Louisianan soon expressed regret, declaring war on the A.A.A. in the name of the starving public and the social justice of Christ. Labelling Secretary Wallace as "Lord Corn Wallace" in reference to the famed British general, Long appealed to the "human nature" being ignored by the A.A.A.'s campaign to eliminate surplus crops and milk.³⁷ The argument was simple: if people were hungry and impoverished, it was objectively cruel to destroy crops. Almost the entirety of the Senator's criticism in a 1935 speech titled "Our Blundering Government" was devoted to portraying the federal government as heartlessly disregarding the fact that "millions have starved and gone naked" in its quest for curtailing production. Long also noted the decidedly un-Christian nature of this behavior. In a 1935 speech on the Senate floor fittingly titled "The Last Supper," Long used the Bible as his source, arguing that if one denied a person food, then they had likewise "starved the Lord."³⁸ Therefore, the

³³ Charles Rappleye, *Herbert Hoover in the White House: The Ordeal of the Presidency* (Simon & Schuster, 2017), 159.

³⁴ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

³⁵ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 144.

³⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal* (First Mariner Books, 1958), 61.

³⁷ Allan Sindler, *Huey Long's Louisiana* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 86.

³⁸ "The Last Supper" in the Congressional Record, July 23, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folders 12-13, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

federal government had a moral responsibility to reduce hunger. Furthermore, Long did not view decreased production as a viable method for improving the economy. He agreed with other populist politicians such as Wisconsin Governor Philip La Follette that the forced destruction of goods was counterproductive.³⁹

Perhaps most indicative of the populist tenor of Long's objections was the fact that the Louisianan never attributed Roosevelt's behavior to legitimate political-economic logic, instead portraying the federal government as simply corrupted by private interests. For instance, in his "Our Blundering Government" speech, Long chastised Roosevelt for listening to the "same set of cooks," those being the wealthy industrialists that had surrounded Hoover.⁴⁰ After all, in the Senator's mind, only the out-of-touch rich could afford to disregard the pleas of the impoverished masses. Likewise, in a 1935 telegram to the A.A.A. concerning Louisianan sugarcane restrictions, Long claimed the production limit was enforced "to help foreigners" rather than the country's own farmers.⁴¹ In denigrating "the foreigners," Long likely was referring to America's trading partners, implying the A.A.A.'s crop reduction was a program to encourage the purchase of foreign crops. Altogether, Long expressed his characteristic anti-elitist and religious populism in opposing the A.A.A., believing the federal government's meddling in agricultural production was immoral, unproductive, and irreligious. However, Long's ideological disagreements with Roosevelt would become far more pronounced in the struggle over another alphabet agency: the National Recovery Administration (N.R.A.).

The National Recovery Administration

While Long channeled his populist fury into attacking the A.A.A., the Louisianan demonstrated an even greater ideological difference with Roosevelt in his war against the N.R.A. The purpose of the N.R.A. was threefold: to "curb ruinous overproduction, allocate production quotas, and stabilize wages."⁴² The "chosen instrument" of the N.R.A. were codes, negotiated between the administration and businesses, and enforced by social pressure and even boycotts.⁴³ The blueprint for this massive

³⁹ Ronald Feinman, *Twilight of Progressivism: The Western Republican Senators and the New Deal* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 73.

⁴⁰ "The Last Supper" in the Congressional Record, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁴¹ Telegram from Huey Long to the Sugar Section of the A.A.A., 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folder 2, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

⁴² David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 179.

⁴³ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal* (First Mariner Books, 1958), 107.

intervention in the nation's economy stemmed from the Wilsonian activism of the First World War, with the pinnacle of this federal effort being the War Industries Board (W.I.B.). The W.I.B. was a wartime agency composed of prominent businessmen and military officers tasked with coordinating the purchase of supplies. The N.R.A. was a spiritual successor to the W.I.B., a fact made all the more apparent by its leader, the notoriously energetic and boisterous Brigadier General Hugh Johnson, a former member of the W.I.B. However, while the N.R.A. drew powerful inspiration from its wartime predecessor, there existed an immense gulf between the Wilsonianism of the Progressive Era and Roosevelt's New Deal beliefs. The W.I.B., while representing an unprecedented coordination between capital and government, was always intended to be a temporary measure. Roosevelt and his associates, on the other hand, had a very different idea for the lasting impact of the N.R.A. in America. In fact, through Johnson's vibrant public demeanor and ample advertising via the Blue Eagle campaign, the N.R.A. became the face of the New Deal.⁴⁴

Despite ostensibly accepting the mantle of Wilsonianism, Roosevelt was not a Wilsonian in the truest sense of the word. Members of the early New Deal Brain Trust who had the President's ear, such as Rexford Tugwell and Adolf Berle, pointedly distanced themselves from the "'Wilson-Brandeis philosophy' of trust-busting."⁴⁵ To those Brain Trusters, Wilsonianism represented a nostalgia for an archaic America of small towns and businesses, unfit to solve the catastrophe the nation now found itself embroiled in. Modern, interconnected America, with its global trade and growing corporations, required a "concentration of economic power" in government industrial planning.⁴⁶ This openness toward business cooperation and even cartelization, and thus the strong potential for a rift with the anti-monopolistic Long, was hinted at well before Roosevelt's ascendancy to the White House. In a 1922 Thomas Jefferson - Andrew Jackson Day speech, Roosevelt, then recovering from the illness that left him paralyzed, professed an allegiance to the progressives of the Democratic Party, but made a point to distance himself from the "more radical views...of the non-partisan league."⁴⁷ The Nonpartisan League preached the same agrarian populism that defined Long's worldview, including a hearty distrust of plutocracy in the banking and private sectors.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 177.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 121.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 120.

⁴⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order* (First Mariner Books, 1960), 375.

⁴⁸ Michael Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy: The Nonpartisan League in North American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 77.

Given the President's acceptance of cartelization, thin ties to the Wilsonianism of old, and faith in his Brain Trust's admiration for past wartime measures, the creation of the N.R.A. was understandable as one of Roosevelt's most valued New Deal measures.⁴⁹ Equally understandable, therefore, was Long's abject hatred of the scheme.

Having voted against the bill's passage in 1933, the raucous Louisianan opposed the N.R.A. from the outset, claiming the agency promoted plutocracy and trampled on individual rights. Echoing the sentiment of past populists like Weaver and Bryan, and invoking the names of Presidents such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Long charged Roosevelt with supporting the same trusts and diabolical centralization of wealth their forefathers had fought to prevent for decades.⁵⁰ With the N.R.A. piloted by "one of those satellites loaned by Wall Street," as Long referred to Johnson, the entire entity was surely designed solely to benefit the economic elite and their bureaucratic lackeys.⁵¹ Given Long's association with authoritarianism and fascism, thanks to works like Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*, it is ironic the Senator claimed the N.R.A. was a page taken from the textbook of fascist dictators Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler.⁵² One could argue the N.R.A. was reminiscent of the government-enforced cooperation between business and bureaucracy that was implemented by both dictators, but the accusation was rich coming from a man who had turned his state into a fiefdom. After all, Long controlled every aspect of Louisiana, from its state government to its public education system, from its workers to its poll watchers.⁵³

Since Long has also been labelled as a leftist critic of Roosevelt, it is likewise interesting that the Senator argued "Every fault of socialism is found in this bill, without one of its virtues," during the debate over the bill.⁵⁴ Long's opposition even placed him in the strange position of endorsing the conservative Supreme Court when it deemed the N.R.A.

⁴⁹ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 177.

⁵⁰ Congressional Record, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folders 12-13, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

⁵¹ "Our Blundering Government (And Its Spokesmen)," March 7, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 2, folder 2, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

⁵² "Our Blundering Government (And Its Spokesmen)," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁵³ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House, 2006), 356.

⁵⁴ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House, 2006), 269.

unconstitutional in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* (1935).⁵⁵ Long also took issue with the N.R.A.'s supposedly overzealous imposition of unjust regulations on the common American, a claim that mimicked the Senator's concurrent fight with the A.A.A. In his typically populist fashion, Long castigated the N.R.A. for producing indecipherable and infinite rules that regulated everything from peanut stands to shoe shiners, charging the lower and middle class with infractions while the corrupt elite escaped any punishment.⁵⁶ Once again, Long was portraying himself as the champion of the common American, engaged in a titanic struggle with the Roosevelt Administration's coddling of big businesses and unfair regulatory infringement on the public.

SHARE OUR WEALTH: LONG'S ALTERNATIVE TO THE NEW DEAL

This thesis has so far focused on Long's vehement disagreements with the course of the New Deal, exploring his accusations that the injustice and villainy of regulatory agencies were interfering with the lives of ordinary Americans and encouraging the economic elite to hoard wealth while millions starved. From this perspective, Long may appear to be no different from some other prominent populists of the era. Henry Ford, the anti-Semitic industrialist who idolized small-town America and despised Wall Street, believed curtailing unproductive monopolies like Wall Street or the federal bureaucracy would create a truly free country. It was an image indicative of the 1920s, with Ford mimicking the paternalism of welfare capitalism and the predominant belief that, if privatized and economized enough, the government could promote universal prosperity through maximized productivity. Many Deep Southern politicians also expressed dismay at the bureaucracy and the economic elite, occasionally equating a growth in the President's power with an increased possibility of federal action on civil rights. Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia, for instance, attacked the New Deal's bureaucracy and urged Roosevelt to lessen public works programs, arguing they competed with local businesses.⁵⁷ However, where men like Ford and Talmadge found the promise of prosperity in allowing the naturally gifted to act uninhibited, Long found the solution to the Great Depression and wealth disparity in the very mechanism many libertarian populists despised: the federal government. Long's alternative to

⁵⁵ "Our Blundering Government (And Its Spokesmen)," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁵⁶ "Our Blundering Government (And Its Spokesmen)," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁵⁷ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 351.

the New Deal was to enlarge the authority of the federal government but use it for the “good” of the people.

Share Our Wealth consisted of seven primary points: the limitation of work hours, an old-age pension, the balancing of agricultural production, free collegiate education and vocational training, bonuses for World War One veterans, the raising of taxes on the rich, and most importantly, the redistribution of wealth to produce guaranteed minimum incomes for every family in America. While components of this program included the curtailment of plutocratic power, the plan was generally designed to provide the common American with a better life, following the promise of the Declaration of Independence to give “a fair chance to life, liberty, and happiness.”⁵⁸ Long had criticized Roosevelt since 1933, and, one year later, Share Our Wealth was officially founded as a formal alternative to the New Deal. Despite the abnormally successful midterms for the Democrats, the economy was still in dire straits halfway into Roosevelt’s first term. Long was well aware of the attempts by other populists to create their own distinct anti-Roosevelt followings, such as Father Coughlin’s National Union for Social Justice. In a bid to keep his organization at the forefront of populist resistance to the President, the Kingfish incorporated components of rival populist movements, such as Dr. Francis Townsend’s increasingly popular old-age pension plan. Altogether, Long formed Share Our Wealth to provide a distinct and appealing alternative to the New Deal, ultimately aiming to secure the Democratic Presidential nomination in the future.

While Long’s advocacy for federal intervention distinguished him from libertarian populists whose only concern was “bigness” of any sort, his remedy was well aligned with the proposals of past populist movements that were explored in the Introduction. President Andrew Jackson, derisively referred to as “King Andrew” by his political opponents in the Whig Party, was no stranger to enhancing government authority. While he attacked the nation’s banks for their undue concentration of wealth, he drastically expanded his own authority in numerous ways, most egregiously by ignoring a Supreme Court ruling and expelling thousands of Native Americans. The People’s Party agreed with this populist notion of exercising governmental authority and limiting plutocratic power for the common good. Per the 1892 Omaha Platform, Populist delegates pledged to implement checks on the unfettered power of the corporate interests, those ranging from the big banks to the railroad companies. In the same breath, the platform claimed the federal government “should be expanded”

⁵⁸ “The Share Our Wealth Principles,” 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folder 11, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

to produce benefits like free rural postal delivery for the public.⁵⁹ William Jennings Bryan agreed in his 1896 “Cross of Gold” speech, declaring that, if the existing monetary system favored by the economic elite was demolished and one were to “legislate to make the masses prosperous,” then the country as a whole would benefit.⁶⁰ Woodrow Wilson partly followed this line of thinking with his New Freedom program, opting to fight the power of the trusts while improving the situation of the common American with new federal financial institutions, an income tax, and government wartime planning. Altogether, in advocating for limits on plutocratic interests while seeking to harness the power of the federal government, Long’s Share Our Wealth program was following a well-trodden populist path.

Although that particular strand of populism appeared several times throughout American history, it must be understood that Long’s beliefs originated from his surroundings. Like other agrarian movements in the 1920s and 1930s, Long had risen to power with the help of the rural poor in direct opposition to the economic elite - Louisiana’s plantation owners and urban businessmen. Louisiana was unique in the south for its large Catholic population and a powerful city political machine, but conditions were still ripe for a populist demagogue.⁶¹ Typically, a Deep Southern demagogue would be expected to heavily employ racist appeals to their poor white voter base, with examples such as Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi and Senator Tom Watson of Georgia.⁶² Long was certainly not immune from using racism in his campaigns. For instance, in the 1928 Presidential Election, Long encouraged his fellow Louisianans to vote against Hoover, claiming the Republican nominee would end the “white man’s country.”⁶³ Furthermore, several state campaigns included racist appeals to white voters, attempting to link opponents to the Kingfish as favorable to black residents.⁶⁴ Likewise, Long freely enlisted the help of racists and anti-Semites, such as Share Our Wealth national organizer Gerald Smith.

⁵⁹ The People’s Party of America, “Populist Party Platform of 1892,” *The American Presidency Project*, July 4, 1892. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/populist-party-platform-1892>

⁶⁰ Jason Jividen, “The ‘Cross of Gold’ Address by William Jennings Bryan,” *Teaching American History*, July 9, 1896. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/the-cross-of-gold-address/>

⁶¹ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 32.

⁶² Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House, 2006), 348.

⁶³ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House, 2006), 57.

⁶⁴ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 58.

However, on a national stage, there was never overarching racial or religious hatred in the Share Our Wealth plan. Regarding race, Long's national editorials "remained silent on the question."⁶⁵ Long himself almost always avoided mentioning race, focusing his appeals on "all poor men."⁶⁶ Concerning anti-Semitism, some of Long's allies were even Jewish, and Long was critical of Hitler, calling the dictator a "...plain God-damned fool" for ruling based on religious prejudice.⁶⁷ Altogether, despite his Deep Southern roots, the Senator's populism always placed class, not religion or race, at the forefront of the national scene.⁶⁸

Altogether, Long's frequent appeals to class and his Share Our Wealth program were designed to appeal to the masses regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. Furthermore, Long's own life, moving from a lowly traveling salesman to the country's most (in)famous Senator in a little more than a decade, demonstrated the ability of the common man to achieve success if provided the opportunity. The Share Our Wealth program, consisting of a guaranteed income, free education, bonuses to veterans, temporary public works jobs, and old-age pensions, was built to provide an equality of opportunity to the people. It should also be noted that Long's predisposition toward direct federal intervention may be indicative of a deeper change in American society: the implicit acceptance of "bigness." While Long championed the cause of small-town America against the corporate titans and bureaucratic overlords, he aimed to do so by enlarging the power of the central government. In other words, Share Our Wealth was a top-down, rather than bottom-up, political approach.

For the Farmers and Laborers

The Share Our Wealth plan incorporated some benefits for farmers and workers, specifically in the interest of balancing work and consumption, albeit in a different manner than intended by the Agricultural Adjustment and National Recovery Administrations. As described earlier, Long's frustration with the A.A.A. was directed toward the agency's restrictions on the number of crops that farmers could grow. The policy was enacted by Henry Wallace in an effort to stabilize the economy, but to the Louisianan Senator, the demands to curtail agricultural growth amounted to shadowy bureaucrats forcing the public to starve. By limiting supply in a time of want, not only was the federal government acting against the interests of the public, it was also disrespecting the teachings of Christ. Long instead advocated for the balancing of agricultural production "with what can be

⁶⁵ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 58.

⁶⁶ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 59.

⁶⁷ T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (Vintage, 1981), 761.

⁶⁸ White, *Kingfish*, 243.

consumed according to the laws of God,” per his 1935 speech “The Share Our Wealth Principles.”⁶⁹ This indicated an endorsement of “expanded production,” a view shared by progressives like Governor Phil La Follette of Wisconsin, who worried that forcibly reducing crop growth to influence prices would plunge millions into starvation.⁷⁰ Likewise, Long sought to protect labor from the undying greed of the big businesses, calling for a forty-hour work week. This was not an uncommon nor a recent proposal; it had been championed by labor in the 1880s and later by proponents of rugged individualism like Henry Ford in his book *My Life and Work* (1922). While a forty-hour work week would eventually be enshrined into law with Roosevelt’s signature on the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, one should remember that Long “enacted no pro-labor law of note” during his time as governor.⁷¹ Altogether, the planks in his platform represented typical political promises for farmers and workers rooted in popularity and Christian thought. They did not signal anything particularly substantial or groundbreaking.

For the Elderly

Another component of Share Our Wealth, although much less advertised, was the old-age pension plan. The concept of old-age pensions, like the push for forty-hour work weeks, had existed in the political discourse for many years. Roosevelt had even “begun to move toward a system of old-age pensions” with Frances Perkins when he was still Governor of New York.⁷² The greatest nationwide proponent of an old-age pension program was Dr. Francis Townsend, a Californian physician who garnered a devout following for proposing a plan of paying every American above the age of sixty years old a monthly stipend of \$200 (\$4,669 in 2025).⁷³ Long never implemented an old-age pension in Louisiana, and only added the proposal to the Share Our Wealth plan once it had achieved such high popularity to the point that politicians were being forced to speak on the issue. The vast majority of Long’s speeches and newsletters continued to focus on wealth redistribution, with the old-age pension plan often being afforded a measly single sentence in a sea of paragraphs devoted to the issues of wealth, agriculture, and education.⁷⁴ Perhaps the only reason this

⁶⁹ “The Share Our Wealth Principles,” H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁷⁰ John Miller, *Governor Philip F. La Follette, the Wisconsin Progressives, and the New Deal* (University of Missouri Press, 1982), 67.

⁷¹ Allan Sindler, *Huey Long’s Louisiana* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 105.

⁷² Arthur Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order* (First Mariner Books, 1960), 483.

⁷³ Edwin Amenta and Yvonne Zylan, “It Happened Here: Political Opportunity, the New Institutionalism, and the Townsend Movement,” *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 2 (1991): 250.

⁷⁴ “The Share Our Wealth Principles,” H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

plank was ever included at all, besides the plan's nationwide appeal, was the fact that Long and Townsend's movements overlapped in terms of supporters.⁷⁵ While the Social Security Act originally paid far less per month than Townsend envisioned, with the first recipient receiving \$22.54 in 1940 (\$514.88 in 2025), the legislation was a profound breakthrough for the burgeoning American welfare state.⁷⁶ Despite seeking higher payments for the elderly, Long voted in favor of the act, only one month before his demise. Nevertheless, while old-age pensions appeared in the Share Our Wealth plan, they were only present to take advantage of the Townsend movement and represented no deep-seated commitment on Long's part.

For the Veterans

Another important piece of Share Our Wealth was a call for the immediate payment of bonuses pledged to American veterans of the First World War in the World War Adjusted Compensation Act, otherwise known as the Bonus Act. Soldiers had received lower wages than domestic workers during the war, so Congress sought to rectify the discrepancy, creating legislation that provided for veterans owed \$50 or less to receive immediate compensation, and those owed more to receive an interest-bearing certificate to be redeemed in 1945.⁷⁷ Proponents of the act such as Long preferred the terminology "adjusted service wages," hoping to avoid the bill's association by the public with programs like the dole, as the country's antipathy to alleged freeriding remained deeply ingrained from the 1920s.⁷⁸ Although Presidents Harding and Coolidge vetoed the bill in the interest of balancing the budget, the latter's veto was overridden by Congress in 1924, demonstrating the act's bipartisan popularity.⁷⁹ The Great Depression reignited the debate, as thousands of veterans were plunged into poverty and thus sought the immediate payment of their bonuses. Their attempt to pressure Congress and President Hoover by camping outside Washington D.C., referred to as the Bonus Army March, was met with police and army brutality. Surprisingly, President Roosevelt was also opposed to an immediate payment due to budget concerns, but his

⁷⁵ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 364.

⁷⁶ Christopher Klein, "How Much Did the First-Ever Social Security Check Pay Out?" *History*, May 14, 2019. <https://www.history.com/articles/first-social-security-check>

⁷⁷ Senate Historical Office, "The Senate and the Bonus Expeditionary Force of 1932" *United States Senate*, November 9, 2023. <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/senate-stories/senate-and-the-bonus-expeditionary-force-of-1932.htm>

⁷⁸ "A Fair Deal for the Veterans," May 11, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folder 11, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

⁷⁹ Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Regnery, 2000), 269.

administration's horrific handling of Floridian veteran workers in the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane convinced Congress to override the President's veto one year later. While the immediate payment was ironically crucial to salvaging the country's GDP, helping to produce a 13% increase in 1936 alone, fiscal policy never appeared to be a factor in Long's support for the bill.⁸⁰ Residual wartime patriotism was not a factor either, given Long opposed American involvement in the First World War, believing the purpose of the intervention was to centralize American wealth "in the hands of the few."⁸¹ Instead, the reason can likely be traced back to Long's opposition to labeling the payment a bonus. To Long, the fact that a soldier in World War One who "took a chance of never coming back" was paid less than a wartime worker who "lived in comfort in his home" was despicable. The least the country could do for its veterans was immediately pay them in full what they were rightfully owed, finally making up for the wage discrepancy almost two decades later. Like the crops owed to the farmers, the textbooks owed to the uneducated, and the incomes owed to the poor, the Bonus Act was a moral "obligation" owed by the federal government to the veterans for their courage, and a conveniently popular obligation as well.⁸²

For the Uneducated

The next component of the Share Our Wealth Plan was Long's promise to provide free collegiate education and vocational training. As a relatively self-made man who passed the bar without finishing law school, Long professed to take a special interest in the state's educational system. He often boasted on the campaign trail and radio waves about the free school books provided to Louisianan children and the dramatic expansion of LSU, one of his most beloved pet projects. However, as with other accomplishments as Governor, such as his wealth taxes or infrastructure construction, the effort was more for political theater than systematic improvement. State funding for education actually declined from "14.4 per cent...to 9.7 per cent" under Long's governorship while "teachers' salaries...remained low," demonstrating a superficial commitment to true educational reform.⁸³ Meanwhile, LSU, the flagship of his state educational plan, was rife with corruption and gubernatorial interference. Dr. James Smith, who Long appointed as President of LSU in 1930, was later charged

⁸⁰ Joshua Hausman, "Fiscal Policy and Economic Recovery: The Case of the 1936 Veterans' Bonus," *The American Economic Review* 106 (2016): 1100-1143.

⁸¹ Congressional Record, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁸² "A Fair Deal for the Veterans," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁸³ Allan Sindler, *Huey Long's Louisiana* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 104.

with embezzlement and gambling school funds.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Long's support for education clearly did not include any commitment to the First Amendment, as the dictatorial Kingfish forced LSU to expel students who authored a school newspaper critical of him.⁸⁵ With this in mind, one is left to question the extent of Long's commitment to improve education nationwide. Given his actions in Louisiana, Share Our Wealth's education plank may very well have been confined solely to providing free textbooks, leaving deeper causes and solutions to illiteracy untouched. After all, while approximately 200,000 citizens were taught to read, "Louisiana remained next to last in literacy level" in the country.⁸⁶ While this still represented a major step toward combating illiteracy in the state, many New Deal agencies such as the National Youth Administration included additional programs such as free education and job training.⁸⁷ What should also be noted was Long's framing of his education plan. He labelled the push for free education and training as a desire to provide an equality of "opportunity" to the public, or in other words, democratize access to education.⁸⁸ Once again, Long characterized his plan as part of the American tradition inherent in documents like the Declaration of Independence; if "all men are created equal," then they deserve equal opportunities to succeed.⁸⁹ If the federal government needs to provide the tools to succeed, then that policy is right and just, given it only empowers individuals and does not confine them to certain jobs or outcomes.

The Redistribution of Wealth

The keystone of Share Our Wealth was Long's titular plan to redistribute the wealth of the economic elite and provide every struggling American family with a guaranteed yearly income of at least \$2,000 (\$46,686 in 2025).⁹⁰ The mechanism for this redistribution would be progressive taxation on the rich and the enforcement of a maximum limit

⁸⁴ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 177.

⁸⁵ Scott Rogers, "LSU Comes to West Monroe to Honor Man It Once Expelled for Standing Up to Huey Long," Daily Advertiser, December 10, 2013. <https://www.theadvertiser.com/story/news/local/2013/12/10/lsu-comes-to-west-monroe-to-honor-man-it-once-expelled-for-standing-up-to-huey-long/3977249/>

⁸⁶ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 359.

⁸⁷ Paula Fass, "The New Deal: Anticipating a Federal Education Policy," Stanford University, California, Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance (1981): 14.

⁸⁸ "The Share Our Wealth Principles," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁸⁹ "The Share Our Wealth Principles," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

⁹⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 117.

on income and inheritance, all enforced by the federal government. Once an individual's wealth exceeded one million, they would be taxed at an exponentially growing percentage. At eight million, an individual would be taxed 100%. Likewise, the government would confiscate any wealth made beyond one million in yearly income or in inheritances.⁹¹ This vision of decentralizing wealth and destroying plutocracy stood in stark contrast to the New Era veneration of businessmen. Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover all embodied this 1920s ethos. They promoted low taxation and limited government as the means to expand wealth in the nation, even if in practice, the rich garnered more wealth and influence in the process. Hoover's 1922 book *American Individualism* exemplified the dream that "greater invention, greater elimination of waste, greater production and better distribution of commodities and services" would end poverty in America, not populist and progressive practices of government interference in the market or visions of redistribution.⁹² In other words, by managing the federal government like a corporation, unnecessary spending could be curtailed, resulting in lower taxes and therefore greater prosperity for the country as a whole. The Secretary of the Treasury for the entirety of the New Era symbolized this commemoration of businessmen, as he was one of the richest men in the country: Pennsylvanian industrialist Andrew Mellon.⁹³ In his traditionally terse fashion, President Coolidge put the New Era ethos best: "the chief business of the American people is business."⁹⁴ Unless a cataclysmic event rocked the country's flourishing economy, this trust in corporate America and the continued concentration of wealth in the hands of the few would have continued, even if some progressive or populist naysayers remained critical of the status quo.

Ever since he entered the political field in 1918, Long heartily disagreed with the New Era's bipartisan conservative consensus, calling for the Democratic Party to harken back to its rural roots of anti-elitism and anti-monopolism. Long frequently quoted his hero, William Jennings Bryan, the three-time Democratic Presidential candidate who embodied the rural populism of southern and western America. Bryan, in his keynote speech at the 1896 Democratic National Convention, exemplified agrarian America's distrust of concentrated economic power. He lambasted the rich for their uncaring nature, claiming the average person was being crucified upon a "Cross of Gold," a reference to the conservative economic doctrine

⁹¹ Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 117.

⁹² Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1922), 32-33.

⁹³ Robert Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (American Political Biography Press, 2000), 100.

⁹⁴ Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Regnery, 2000), 313.

of adhering to the Gold Standard.⁹⁵ While many of Bryan's supporters moved to support Wilson in 1912 and 1916, their visions were not identical. Bryan's roots were in the populist progressivism of agrarian America, with a strong social conservatism, distrust of monopolies, and isolationist perspective. Wilson followed an academic progressivism, and his middle-class reformism appeared in everything from his expansion of public control of the financial sector through creating the Federal Reserve to his efforts to achieve a stable global organization for peace via the League of Nations. Both Wilson and Bryan would lose influence with the Republican landslide in 1920, resulting in the ascendancy of the conservative northeastern urban faction of the party. Several of those conservative Democrats accepted the New Era's belief in achievable universal prosperity and business optimism. Wealthy businessman John Raskob, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, claimed in his ill-timed 1929 book *Everybody Ought to be Rich* that, with proper investments in the stock market, any American could make a sizable fortune.⁹⁶

The Great Depression ignited the dormant progressive spark in the Democratic Party, allowing for the Wilsonian wing to regain traction. To demonstrate this changing tide, Franklin Roosevelt, the inheritor of the Wilsonian mantle, even attacked the "unscrupulous money changers" in his 1933 Inaugural Address.⁹⁷ Unlike some Democrats, Huey Long was consistent over his public career in his distrust of the upper echelon of America, despite counting among his friends wealthy Louisianan businessmen like Robert Maestri and Seymour Weiss. Even when he was on the strictly local Louisiana Railroad Commission, he found time to deliver a national message, castigating the country's corporations for their accumulation of wealth and power in tangent with the Republican-led government.⁹⁸ As Governor, one of Long's greatest priorities was tackling the influential Standard Oil Company, aiming to fill his political machine's coffers and fund his state program through increased taxation, a feat that nearly led to his impeachment only one year into office.⁹⁹ Once he reached Washington D.C., rich men such as Secretary Mellon, John Rockefeller, and the du Pont brothers all faced the fiery end of the Louisianan's scorching

⁹⁵ Jason Jividen, "The 'Cross of Gold' Address by William Jennings Bryan," *Teaching American History*, July 9, 1896. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/the-cross-of-gold-address/>

⁹⁶ David Farber, *Everybody Ought to be Rich: The Life and Times of John J. Raskob* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 260.

⁹⁷ Samuel Rosenman, *The Public Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume Two: The Year of Crisis, 1933*, (University of Michigan Library, 2005), 11–16.

⁹⁸ Allan Sindler, *Huey Long's Louisiana* (John Hopkins Press, 1956), 46–48.

⁹⁹ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House, 2006), 91.

rhetoric, whether that be on the Senate floor or in the radio station.¹⁰⁰ With the Great Depression, the country turned away from its veneration of the economic elite, and Long's longtime populist message received far more interest than ever before.

Long attacked the economic elite from three directions, declaring their greed to be contrary to the teachings of Christ, an impediment to economic recovery, and a dagger pointed at the heart of the country's cherished democracy. To the Senator and his supporters, the existence of the wealthy was a violation of Christian principles, since Christ said "it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a very rich man to go to Heaven."¹⁰¹ This appeal to religious imagery and parables appeared throughout Long's rhetoric, always with the intent of connecting to his rural and devout constituents. Furthermore, like in his Weberian crusade against the perceived excesses of the New Deal bureaucracy, Long hated the upper class for its plutocratic tendencies. He viewed their hoarding of capital as responsible for the "sad state of depression" that America found itself struggling in, and pointed toward a strict decentralization of that wealth through his Share Our Wealth program as the only remedy.¹⁰² Lastly, according to Long, the redistribution of wealth was favored by countless prominent American figures from President Thomas Jefferson to President Theodore Roosevelt, all of whom viewed concentrated wealth as the bane of democracy's existence.¹⁰³ One Long speech quoted James Madison, who claimed "Our republic will be an impossibility...because wealth will be concentrated in the hands of the few."¹⁰⁴ Long's idyllic America, one that lacked the overwhelming bigness of bureaucracy and businesses, was the country at its most democratic form. The accumulation of wealth, and therefore power, at the top only spelled doom for economic recovery and democracy in America. In the end, Long argued Share Our Wealth's promise of simultaneously demoting the plutocrats and elevating the common American was the only solution to the country's crisis.

While this proposal to radically redistribute wealth was clearly different from conservative orthodoxy, how did Long see it as different from the New Deal's social welfare state or state socialism? As described

¹⁰⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 248.

¹⁰¹ "'Congressional Opinion' Speaker Over CBS," March 31, 1935, Mss. 3653, box 1, folder 11, Louisiana State University, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long, Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

¹⁰² Congressional Record, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

¹⁰³ 'Congressional Opinion' Speaker Over CBS, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

¹⁰⁴ "The Share Our Wealth Principles," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

in “The Deranged Alphabet,” to Long, the patrician Roosevelt was doing nothing to address the plutocracy and in fact contributing to it through agencies like the National Recovery Administration. Share Our Wealth would act as a massive “capital levy tax,” whereby wealth would be moved from the upper class to the middle and lower classes. This, Long believed, would return America to prosperity while keeping the budget balanced.¹⁰⁵ Roosevelt eventually did implement a “soak the rich” progressive taxation program in the controversial 1935 Revenue Act, signed into law one month before Long’s death. The act included taxes on large corporations and the ultra-wealthy, all of which the Louisianan Senator had advocated for in his Share Our Wealth program. However, there was nothing remotely comparable to the massive federal taxation required to support Long’s guaranteed minimum income proposal, a scheme whose mechanisms were often left vague by the Kingfish and deemed unsound by contemporary economists.¹⁰⁶ Long also did not consider Share Our Wealth to be a socialist program, having debated with former Socialist Party Presidential candidate Norman Thomas in 1934. Long argued Share Our Wealth was a capitalist venture, protecting individuals from both the government and the corporations, whereas in the planned economy of socialism, one could not “even own his garters.”¹⁰⁷ The Kingfish’s vision of wealth redistribution stopped short of the abolition of private property or government-enforced production quotas. Instead, Share Our Wealth was equivalent to a one-time panacea to address the Great Depression and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite, with each plank, from old-age pensions to veterans’ bonuses to guaranteed incomes, designed to enrich the masses at the expense of the rich. Despite his calls for a radical redistribution of wealth, Long ultimately viewed Share Our Wealth as a plan to save capitalism from its own excesses, an argument also made by Roosevelt regarding the New Deal.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to decipher Long’s populist ideology by examining his opposition to the New Deal and his proposed alternative, the Share Our Wealth program. By exploring the roots and mechanisms of his populism, I have created a picture of a consistent belief system connected to past populist movements.

The first paradox to examine was Long’s opposition to President Franklin Roosevelt for both action and inaction. This opposition did not

¹⁰⁵ Congressional Record, H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

¹⁰⁶ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 238.

¹⁰⁷ “Long and Thomas Argue Capitalism,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1934.

simply stem from Long's claim to only support the New Deal when it went "to the left," given the Senator's opposition to agencies such as the A.A.A. and the N.R.A., both of which found support among leftists like Henry Wallace and Rexford Tugwell.¹⁰⁸ Instead, Long's anti-elitism and anti-monopolism determined his attitude to the President's economic recovery plan. To the Kingfish, the A.A.A.'s restriction of agricultural output and the N.R.A.'s promotion of collaboration between capital, labor, and the government were counterproductive measures that ran contrary to the social justice of Christ, the democratic tradition of America, and the proper capitalism of small businesses and farmers. These New Deal measures supposedly stemmed from the elitism and monopolism of the patrician Roosevelt administration, an administration Long claimed was being advised by the same wealthy cabal that had led President Hoover's inadequate response. Long's solution to solving the country's economic downturn was not to starve the public and coddle big business, as he alleged in his attacks on the A.A.A. and N.R.A. On the contrary, the Senator believed a radical and righteous redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor via Share Our Wealth was necessary to end the Great Depression. This redistribution would eliminate harmful monopolies, strengthen the average Americans' finances, and curtail the nefarious influence of the wealthy in the economic and governmental realms. A number of federal mechanisms would achieve this decentralization of wealth, including the establishment of old-age pensions, the payment of veterans' bonuses, and the guarantee of minimum incomes for every American family. A progressive taxation policy would provide these funds, essentially placing a cap on annual incomes at \$1 million (\$23.72 million in 2025) and limiting individual fortunes to \$100 million (\$2.372 billion in 2025).¹⁰⁹ These taxes would allow for the Share Our Wealth program to be enacted while keeping the budget balanced, thereby avoiding deficit spending. Interestingly, Roosevelt would implement measures similar to what Long advocated, such as the wealth tax in the 1935 Revenue Act and the pension plan of the Social Security Act, both of which passed one month before the Louisianan's death. Despite these measures, Long remained focused on disrupting the President's re-election, continuing to charge Roosevelt with either promoting counterproductive measures or not pushing hard enough to curtail the economic elite and their concentrations of wealth. Altogether, Long argued Roosevelt lacked the anti-monopolism of past populist and progressive figures like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, William

¹⁰⁸ Richard White, *Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long* (Random House Publishing Group, 2006), 268.

¹⁰⁹ "The Share Our Wealth Principles," H. Donald Devol Collection on Huey P. Long.

Jennings Bryan, and Theodore Roosevelt, and only the Share Our Wealth plan could effectively decentralize the wealth of the country.

Despite Long's lauding of past American thinkers and the small-town way of life, there was one more paradox contained within the Kingfish's populism. Although Long sought to turn back the clock on "bigness" in America, the Senator conceded that the use of the federal government was required to dramatically change society. Every plank of the Share Our Wealth program, from veterans' bonuses to free education, from old-age pensions to progressive taxation, required a robust executive state to be achieved. Long argued it was his fervent hatred of concentrations of economic power and his desire to eliminate the "corporate" aspect of America's burgeoning corporate capitalism that distinguished his top-down approach from the welfare statism of the New Deal and the state socialism espoused by the Socialist Party. Yet it was clear that, although sharing the appreciation of federal authority that the Populists exhibited in their quest for policies such as rural mail delivery, the Kingfish's populism differed in its lack of a "genuine belief in possibilities."¹¹⁰ Brinkley made this observation in his *Voices of Protest*, noting that, while Long exalted the small businesses and farms of America, he lacked the faith that former populists placed in those local communities to resist corporate capitalism and the growing concentration of wealth. The Share Our Wealth society may have constituted a mass mobilization effort, but it was only ever with an electoral purpose in mind and a desire to wield the federal government, forgoing the older populist objective of building local alternatives to monopolistic power. Brinkley made another crucial observation related to what constitutes substantial structural change, but in another book, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (1996). In this work, Brinkley argued that following the 1937 Recession and the wartime years, the New Deal turned away from the "reform liberalism" exhibited by populists and progressives and toward a "consumer-oriented liberalism" that worked hand-in-hand with corporate capitalism.¹¹¹ Were the Kingfish to be alive for that argument, he would presumably disagree with Brinkley's assessment and instead claim that the New Deal had abandoned its "reformist" zeal when the A.A.A. and N.R.A. began operations. In other words, Long believed that, by 1934, corporate capitalism had infected what was a promising new beginning for America under Roosevelt. After the

¹¹⁰ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (Random House, 1982), 275.

¹¹¹ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1996), 269.

A.A.A. and N.R.A.'s functions became evident, Long considered the idea of an anti-monopolistic New Dealer to be nothing more than an oxymoron.

While I agree with Brinkley's assessment of Long's populism and its relationship with the New Deal, there is one aspect that I cannot accept. Brinkley is correct in *Voices of Protest* with his description of Long's populism as a deviation from past populist and progressive movements given its idolization of local communities but lack of faith in their power. Furthermore, I agree with Brinkley's argument in *The End of Reform* that the New Deal was the end of a past anti-monopoly reformist project and the beginning of a new liberalism revolving around mass consumption and social welfarism. However, while Long may have shared the New Deal's nationwide outlook and proclivity to federal action, this did not compromise his vision in changing American capitalism. The Share Our Wealth plan was born in a time of great suffering, so it would only make sense that the program fixated on solving the country's economic crisis and strengthening the pocketbooks of the lower and middle class through a powerful federal government. Had Long entered the national political scene sooner, or had he escaped the bullet of his assassin and lived to challenge the postwar liberal consensus described in *The End of Reform*, then maybe the Share Our Wealth plan would have exhibited a greater interest in strengthening those local communities aside from improving their finances. That dream of a radical redistribution of wealth alone demonstrated a belief in possibilities, like the possibility of ending corporate influence in government or the possibility of every American family receiving a guaranteed income provided by the economic elite. We will never truly know, but what is for certain is that Huey Pierce Long Jr. was more than just a historical footnote in the saga of the Great Depression. The Kingfish embodied an American tradition of anti-elitist and anti-monopolistic populism, one that was subsumed by New Deal liberalism, but which may be experiencing a revival in the American political movements of today.