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Jacksonian Antislavery & the Politics of Free Soil, 1824–1854

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> It is the Duty of the Federal Government to Relieve itself from all Responsibility for the Existence or Continuance of Slavery wherever that Government Possess Constitutional Power to Legislate on that Subject, and is thus Responsible for its Existence. [Leggett]
>
> The Free Grant to Actual Settlers, in consideration of the expenses they incur in making settlements in the wilderness . . . and of the public benefits resulting therefrom, of reasonable portions of the public lands, under suitable limitations, is a wise and just measure of public policy, which will promote . . . the interest of all the States of this Union. [Evans][72]

When the platform was read aloud to the crowd in the tent, Charles Francis Adams reported, "every sentence, every paragraph was cheered into its legal existence."[73]

Many historians have judged Joshua Leavitt's Buffalo pronouncement that the Liberty Party was "not dead, but TRANSLATED" as naive at best and cynical at worst.[74] The usual indictment is that in order to win more votes, the antislavery movement ignobly sacrificed black equality as its central goal. While it is certainly true that slavery restriction was substituted for direct abolition and that the Free Soil Party platform ignored the issues of racism and fugitive slaves, the Free Soil Party represented the culmination of Morris, Bailey, and Chase's goal to found a True Democratic party. With the national Democratic party firmly in the hands of its southern wing, Free Soilers were able to create an entirely new antislavery party with distinctly Jacksonian accents. To the dismay of many former Whigs, these Democratic overtones extended most obviously to the party's presidential candidate, Martin Van Buren. With the creation of the True Democratic Party, the antislavery movement was transformed. But instead of weakening the political abolitionist movement by truckling to northern racists (as some historians have charged), Chase and his Free Soil allies placed it on an entirely different course—one with considerably more political appeal than Birney's Liberty Party.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Speech, and Free Men

The Election of 1848

One of the most enthusiastic of the 20,000 delegates to descend on Buffalo for the Free Soil Convention was Walt Whitman, who no doubt reveled in the sweaty, multitudinous throng of the main tent and the joyous antislavery singalongs led by the famous Hutchinson family. The convention—which at times resembled a P. T. Barnum circus, an outdoor revival meeting, and a torchlit Workingmen's rally such as those Whitman attended with his father in the 1820s—was a physical manifestation of the democracy he had written about in the *Eagle* and his private notebooks. The year 1848 was an eventful one for Whitman. In January he had been fired from the *Eagle* by its Hunker owner for refusing to rethink his antislavery views. He spent much of the spring in New Orleans, writing for the *Crescent* and waiting for a new chance to become an influential New York editor like his hero William Cullen Bryant. The day after the Barnburners bolted the Democratic convention in Baltimore, Whitman resigned from the *Crescent* to join the Free Soil cause. The *New York Advertiser* announced his return to the city on June 28 and described the graying scribe as "large as life, but quite as vain, and more radical than ever."[1]

As a bona fide Barnburner martyr, Whitman was easily chosen to be a delegate to the Buffalo convention on August 5, about the same time he agreed to edit a new Free Soil paper in Brooklyn to compete with the Hunker *Eagle*. In the first issue of his new *Brooklyn Freeman*, published September 9, 1848, Whitman promised to "oppose, under all circumstances, the addition to the Union, in the future, of a single inch of *slave land*, whether in the form of state or territory." He also devoted considerable space in that first issue to an editorial on the views of Thomas Jefferson, whom, in a feverish attempt to reconcile his antislavery and Democratic ideologies, Whitman reimagined

as an abolitionist. "How he hated slavery!" Whitman wrote of the slaveholding sage of Monticello. "He was, in the literal sense of the world, an *abolitionist*; and properly and usefully so, because he was a southerner, and the evil lay at his own door." More even than for David Wilmot, who frequently called his proviso "Jefferson's Proviso," Whitman's mythical Jefferson was the font for the antislavery flood the would-be poet saw sweeping across the northern states in the late summer of 1848.[2]

Like many Free Soil papers published in the weeks after the Buffalo meeting, Whitman's exuded confidence that its candidates and cause would emerge triumphant at the ballot box. The enthusiastic and successful union of antislavery forces forged in Buffalo, he believed, ensured that containment of slavery would be the central issue in the 1848 campaign. Yet the weeks immediately following the Buffalo convention were undoubtedly the high point of the new Free Soil Party's existence. Free Soilers of every political stripe issued predictions of the party's inevitable electoral triumph throughout August and September. This optimism may seem grandiose and unrealistic today, judging from the election's final results, but in the early weeks of the campaign, both northern Whigs and Democrats were thrown on the defensive. Support for the Wilmot Proviso continued to unify antislavery advocates from every party; enthusiastic Free Soil "ratification" meetings sprouted from Ohio to New Hampshire; and in the *National Era*, Gamaliel Bailey reported that northerners were flocking to the cause by the thousands.[3]

In Cincinnati on August 25, a Free Soil meeting organized by former Democrats and Liberty men brought out 1,000 people to cheer for Van Buren and "Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Speech and Free Men." That same week the Liberty Party's candidate John P. Hale officially withdrew from the race and pledged his "hearty, energetic, and unanimous support" for the ticket of Van Buren and Adams.[4] Salmon P. Chase, campaigning in Ohio's Western Reserve, predicted a regional Free Soil sweep in excess of 13,000 votes, enough to gain all the state's electoral votes.[5] Shrewd politicians from both major parties predicted that the new party might well take New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont as well as Ohio.[6]

In Brooklyn, Whitman's luck took a turn for the worse. The same night he published the first issue of his new paper, a fire broke out on Fulton Street that destroyed nearly twenty downtown acres—including the *Freeman*'s office on Orange Street. The fire might as well have been an omen for the Free Soil Party's prospects in the fall campaign. As Whitman went door-to-door seeking financial support to restart his paper, problems emerged that

threatened the new party's potential electoral strength. First and most damaging was the co-optation by the major parties of the Free Soilers' main issue: slavery restriction. The Wilmot Proviso was immensely popular across the North, and the Free Soil Party was the only party to endorse it. Whigs and Democrats, however, were quick to co-opt the issue as their own, even if it meant broadcasting markedly different messages to voters in the North and South. Ohio Whig Tom Corwin, for example, crisscrossed his state promising that, if elected, Zachary Taylor would never veto the proviso. Democrats emphasized Lewis Cass's northern pioneer background to distance him from his prosouthern pronouncements. "[Cass] is as strongly opposed to the further extension of slavery as we are," trumpeted the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.[7] Chicago editor "Long John" Wentworth went so far as to hoist Cass's name above the masthead while still running daily Free Soil editorials.[8] Despite an energetic and surprisingly cooperative alliance between antislavery Democrats, Whigs, and Liberty men, the major parties' tactics sapped more Free Soil votes with every passing day. "Suppose the mists which the arts of politicians have raised to obscure the positions of Generals Taylor and Cass could be this hour dispelled," wrote an increasingly desperate Bailey from Washington. "[If] the People could see them in their true light as the pledged guardians of the Slave Interest and the opponents of the policy of Slavery Restriction," he continued, "we do not believe that either of them could carry a single free state."[9]

Another structural defect in the Free Soil edifice was its presidential candidate. While Van Buren was the overwhelming choice of Barnburners, radical Democrats, and even Chase's camp (who thought the former president could win the most votes), Free Soil Whigs had trouble stomaching the Little Magician. One paper in the Northwest made the Whig distaste for Van Buren abundantly clear: "The members of the [Buffalo] Convention know full well that the Whig party is the true antislavery party. . . . To ask a Whig to vote for Martin Van Buren is an insult."[10] In Ohio, at least, Hale or McLean would likely have polled far more votes than Van Buren. From Washington, Gamaliel Bailey urged opponents of slavery to ignore the candidate's past record and focus on his latest incarnation. "Van Buren was subservient to the Slave Power in 1836, you say—well, he is not, like Gen. Cass, a vassal to it, or like Gen. Taylor, its embodiment in 1848," Bailey wrote. "On the contrary, he is its open, direct antagonist."[11]

Other key northern Democrats of Van Buren's generation were unusually tepid toward the Free Soil Party, even if they were declared supporters of the Wilmot Proviso. Marcus Morton, while endorsing Van Buren, declined to

FIGURE 7

"The Modern Colossus" (1848).
This cartoon shows Free Soil candidate Martin Van Buren's difficulty bridging the gap between the Free Soil (here called Whig-Abolition) and Democratic party platforms. As abolitionist icon Abby Fulsom beckons, Van Buren attempts to stretch over Salt River, a symbol of political ruin, without "splitting asunder." (Library of Congress)

campaign actively for the party, citing certain retribution for his Democratic subordinates in the Boston Customs House.[12] Former Kitchen Cabinet fixture Francis Blair initially supported the Free Soil ticket and, citing an 1845 letter, suggested Andrew Jackson, were he alive, would throw his support to its presidential candidate as well. "I cannot hope to be alive and witness the acclamation with which the people of the United States will call Mr. Van Buren to the Presidency at the expiration of Mr. Polk's term," Jackson had written just before his death. Still, while admitting his heart was with Van Buren, Blair later reversed course and voted for Cass.[13] Other old Jacksonians such as Thomas Hart Benton (who favored the proviso) and George Bancroft (who did not) also remained with the Democrats.[14]

The Campaign

Despite problems stemming from the Free Soil Party's lack of a national political organization, its partisans conducted an energetic campaign. David Wilmot, fresh from his October reelection to Congress, stumped across New York state. Joshua Giddings, who finally abandoned the Whig Party after years of agonized loyalty, canvassed the counties of southern Ohio, while Chase toured Gidding's Western Reserve. By far the most effective Free Soil campaign speaker, however, was "Prince John" Van Buren. The candidate's son enthusiastically took up the Buffalo convention's plank that invited him to "stump the United States generally."[15] Between August and November, the younger Van Buren delivered at least thirty major addresses in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and all the New England states. He was especially effective with urban working-class audiences. In his speeches he took Jacksonian antislavery arguments to new rhetorical heights, excoriating the slave conspirators, ridiculing compromising doughfaces and meddlesome Whigs, and above all, emphasizing the degrading influence of slavery on free labor.[16]

Scholars have commented frequently about the Free Soilers' use of racist antislavery arguments, especially those made by former Barnburners like Van Buren, to win support in 1848.[17] But while Free Soilers (and especially Barnburners) were often filled with racial prejudice—and trumpeted these views on the campaign trail—the Jacksonian antislavery arguments used in the campaign were more than simple pandering to northern racism. As Richard Sewell has observed, the Barnburners' primary concern was for whites; yet at the same time they believed that slavery encouraged sloth, degraded free labor, and, as had the national bank, favored an aristocratic elite. These evils were far more pressing to them than the potential presence in the territories of people they viewed as "inferior."[18]

If, for example, Van Buren and the Free Soilers had stopped with the Wilmot Proviso and declared that its necessity was based simply on the need to reserve western lands for white people, the party would have represented a clear step backward from the Liberty Party. But the Free Soil Party was indebted to a far wider constellation of antislavery arguments than the creation of a lily-white West. As its platform and the stories of its creators proved, the Free Soil Party was about more than the sum of racist parts. Central to this "new" direction for political antislavery was the platform's call for free farms.[19]

John Van Buren often stressed the new party's plank calling for free

homesteads in his appeals to workingmen and freeholders, reminding them that reserving the public lands for settlers kept them out of the hands of speculators and land monopolists, as well as slaveholders. Most northerners were familiar with the notion of the free grant. In 1846 George Henry Evans had printed a popular pamphlet (called *Vote Yourself a Farm*) that spurred a massive petition drive from New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.[20] But he also repeatedly said that "to buy and sell human beings . . . is revolting not only to a freeman and a democrat, but to a philanthropist and a christian."[21]

Free Blacks and Free Soil

The 1848 campaign forced the North's free blacks to make a difficult decision: whether to support the Free Soil Party. On one hand, Free Soilers had backed away from the black community's demands for racial equality and the abolition of slavery everywhere. Yet several black abolitionists had attended the Buffalo convention (including Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Samuel Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, and Charles Remond), and Douglass and Bibb had addressed the meeting from the main stage. Both were, for the most part, received warmly.[22] Certainly, there was no black participation at the major parties' conventions. During the campaign, however, the Free Soilers neglected to solicit the support of free blacks. In the *North Star*, Douglass initially declared his preference for abolitionist candidate Gerrit Smith but later endorsed Van Buren because he believed the ex-president had a better chance to win. Ward refused to endorse Free Soil, arguing that Barnburners by any name intended to "rob black men of their rights."[23]

A small group of black leaders who billed themselves as the National Negro Convention met in Cleveland in September 1848 to formulate a unified set of views. Douglass was elected chair of the meeting, which stopped short of endorsing Free Soil candidates. Instead, they passed resolutions recognizing the goal of the Free Soilers to "increase the interest now felt in behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed" and stating that "while we heartily engage in recommending to our people the Free Soil movement, and the support of the Buffalo convention . . . we claim and are determined to maintain the higher standard and the more liberal views which have heretofore characterized us as abolitionists."[24] Free blacks understood that the Free Soil Party had backed away from some of their most deeply held demands, while at the same time holding out a potential for larger success. Most gave it qualified support.

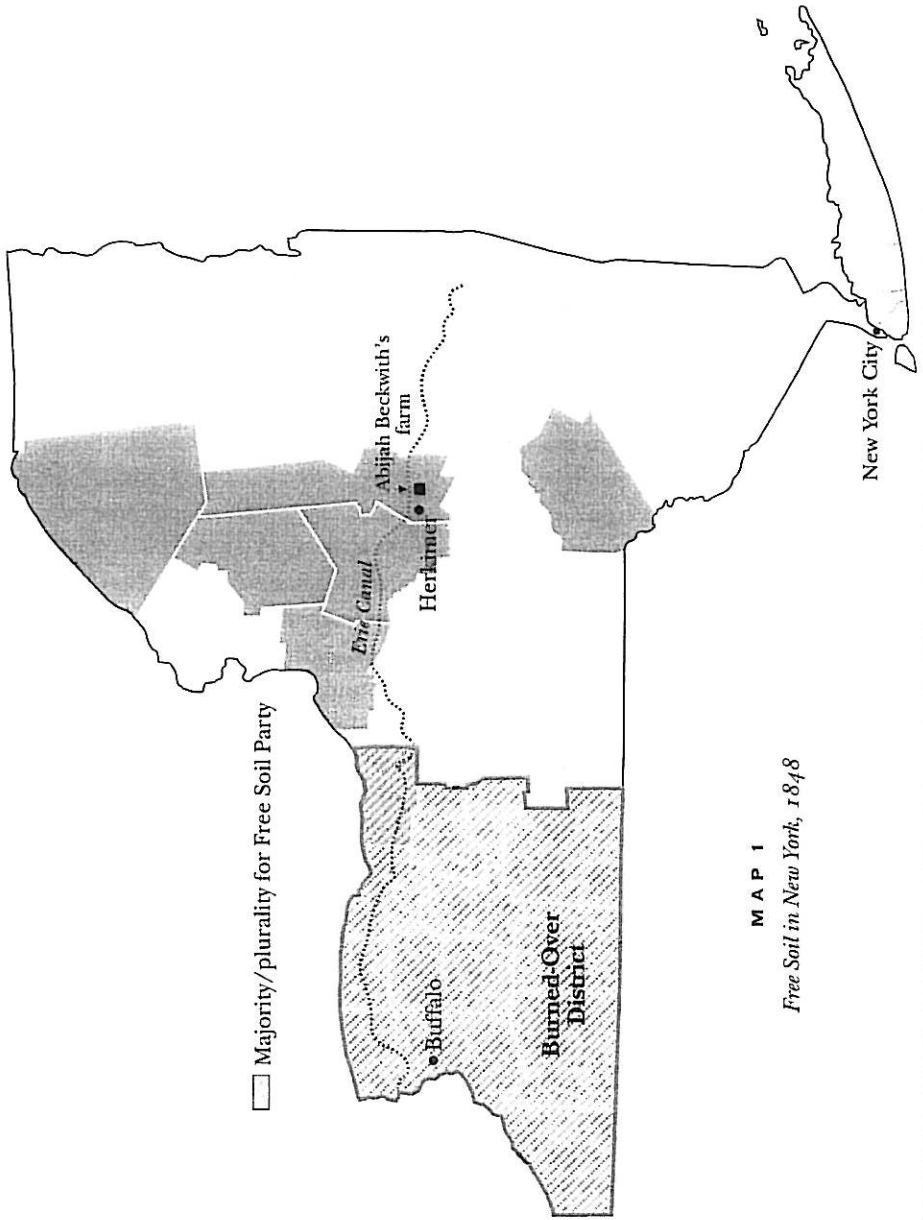
George Henry Evans, another potentially effective Free Soil publicist, refused to join the new party in 1848. Despite Free Soilers' endorsement of his concept of free homesteads (by far the largest organization to do so), Evans urged supporters to vote instead for Gerrit Smith. He called Smith and his Liberty League the "true" Free Soil party: "those who first used that term, not as a bait, a lure, a cheat, a gull-trap, but as an honest expression of a great idea."[25] Many of Evans's former followers in upstate New York disagreed. In Delaware County, for example, tenant leaders like Dr. Jonathan Allaben forged Free Soil coalitions with county Barnburners in 1847–48. Allaben chaired the county's Jeffersonian League and Free Soil Club, which held rallies for Van Buren and gubernatorial candidate John Dix as early as June 1848.[26] As one Delaware anti-renter recalled, "the Free-Soilers carried everything before them" in the coming election.[27]

The Results

On election day, Van Buren failed to win a single state, although his candidacy cost Cass New York and Taylor Ohio. Taylor eked out a narrow victory built on his success in the South, in which he won eight of fifteen slave states and increased the Whig proportion in the section by 10 percent over 1844. Taylor also carried the northern states of New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Cass swept the Old Northwest and won the other seven slave states, but Van Buren finished ahead of him in New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Cass's dismal showing in the Empire State, in fact, cost him the election; the difference between Cass's and Taylor's votes was 140,000, approximately equal to Van Buren's New York total.[28]

Although organizational weakness and a lack of campaign money hampered the Free Soil effort, the election results illustrate a striking political realignment within the North's Democratic Party. Analysis of the towns, counties, and states that produced a significant Free Soil vote suggests that a lion's share of third party supporters were former Democrats. The election of 1848, then, was more than a political campaign; it was a watershed for northern politics, representing party realignments at local, state, and national levels. The coalitions built in 1848 paved the way for the anti-Nebraska Republican coalition in 1854.[29]

New York's returns indicate the most substantial and long-standing political shifts. Van Buren received more than 42 percent of his 291,804 votes in his home state and won pluralities in St. Lawrence, Herkimer, Oswego, Wayne, Delaware, Chemung, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Lewis



MAP 1
Free Soil in New York, 1848

counties. Democratic votes declined 24 percent from their 1844 levels; the Whig percentage remained unchanged. Binding these Free Soil counties together was their previously strong support for Democratic candidates. Except for Cortland County in the Finger Lakes region, Democrat James K. Polk, a Tennessee slaveholder, had carried every one of the Van Buren counties four years earlier.[30]

Nor were a majority of these counties in areas with strong Liberty Party traditions. The Liberty Party won only slightly more than 3 percent of the statewide vote in 1844, while the Free Soil Party polled 27 percent in 1848. Only Madison County (home of Liberty League candidate Gerrit Smith) and neighboring Cortland gave more than 10 percent of their 1844 totals to Liberty candidate James G. Birney. St. Lawrence, Herkimer, Wayne, and Delaware counties had given just 4 percent, 8 percent, 7 percent, and 3 percent, respectively, of their votes to Birney.[31]

Geographically, New York's Free Soil vote does not correspond to the Burned-Over District and Greater New England maps usually trotted out by scholars to show the sources of antislavery votes.[32] Instead of an east-west nexus paralleling the Erie Canal, the Free Soil counties better correspond to a north-south line drawn through the middle of the state (see map 1). This north-south line connects the St. Lawrence River with the southern tip of the Catskill Mountains, extending into the northern tier of Pennsylvania. Thus not simply ex-Democrats voted for Van Buren in 1848 but, rather, a particular kind of former Jacksonian. As discussed above, Democrats from remote rural regions (like Preston King of St. Lawrence, Abijah Beckwith of Herkimer, and Jonathan Allaben of Delaware) were more likely to enter free-soil coalitions. These were the same regions that had led the charge against banks and government-financed internal improvements in the 1830s and early 1840s.[33]

Shifts in Democratic vote percentages from 1844–48 against those in the Liberty–Free Soil vote percentages over the same years show an extremely strong inverse correlation (−.938) between Democratic and Free Soil voters.[34] (A coefficient of −1.00 would indicate a perfect negative relationship between variables, suggesting that all Free Soil votes came from Democrats; a perfect +1.00 would be impossible, since this coefficient is measuring a loss of votes in one column and a gain in another.)[35] This not only suggests that a striking number of Free Soil voters were former Democrats but that antislavery Whigs had refused to support Van Buren.[36] Also telling is the strength with which these former Jacksonian, Free Soil counties entered the Republican Party. In 1844, for example, St. Lawrence County voters (who

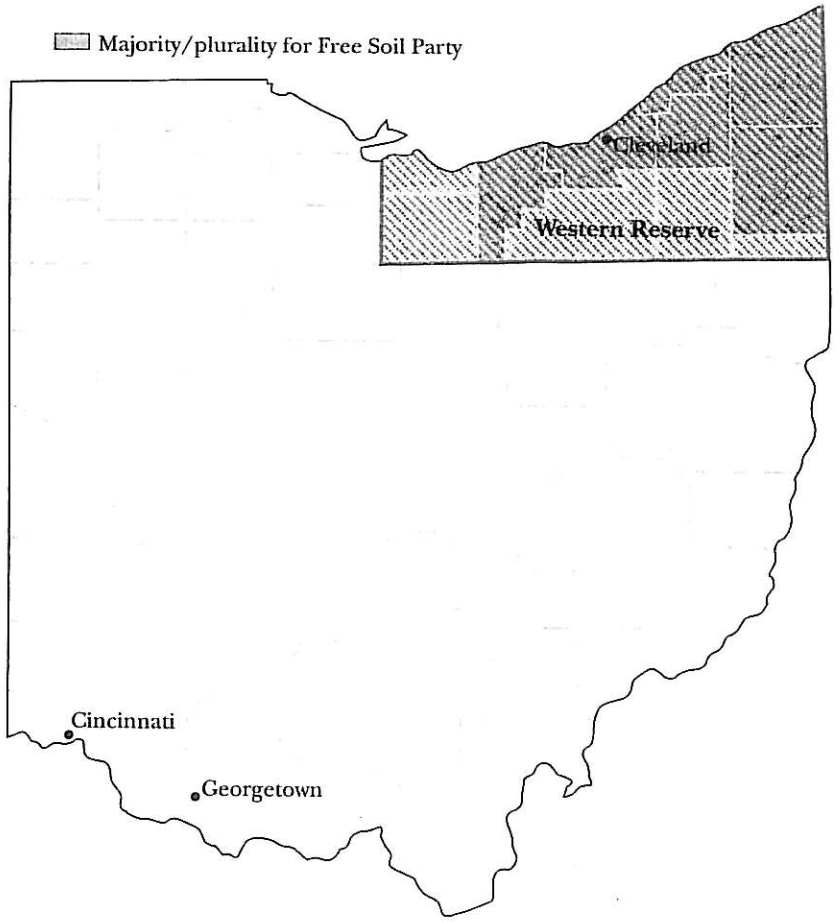
gave Van Buren a resounding 56 percent in 1848) chose Polk over Clay 54 percent to 41 percent. Twelve years later, the county gave 75 percent to John C. Frémont, and in 1860 Abraham Lincoln won 74 percent of the county's votes. In anti-rent Delaware County, the results were similar. In 1844 Polk won 56 percent; sixteen years later the former Jacksonian stronghold gave Lincoln 60 percent of the vote.[37] Between the start of the anti-rent movement and Van Buren's candidacy in 1848, a sizable number of New York's radical Democrats had become Free Soilers; in the 1850s almost all of them entered the Republican Party.

Democrats and Free Soil

Nationally, the correlation between former Jacksonians and Free Soilers was also quite strong, though not as definitive as the shift in New York. A correlation measuring Democratic votes in 1844–48 and Liberty and Free Soil votes in 1844–48 in the eighty-two counties where Van Buren polled more than 20 percent showed a coefficient of −.664. When the same correlation was done comparing Whig and Free Soil votes, the resulting coefficient was a statistically insignificant −.122.[38]

When the eleven counties in Ohio (all in the Whiggish northeast corner of the state; see map 2) that polled more than 20 percent for Van Buren are factored out, the coefficient of correlation jumps to −.836.[39] In Ohio, state-level politics helped to thwart Chase's optimistic predictions for Free Soil success. The Free Soil Party ran no state ticket but was assumed to hold the balance of power in the state because of the large number of potential antislavery voters on the Western Reserve and in and around Cincinnati. Observers throughout the North expected Whig gubernatorial candidate Seabury Ford, who held mild antislavery views, to win easily over the avowedly proslavery Democrat J. B. Weller.[40] Though neither man actively courted the Free Soil vote, Ohio's Free Soil papers generally praised Ford. When the election was over, however, the expected Whig landslide failed to materialize; in fact, Ford barely eked out a 300-vote victory from nearly 300,000 cast.[41]

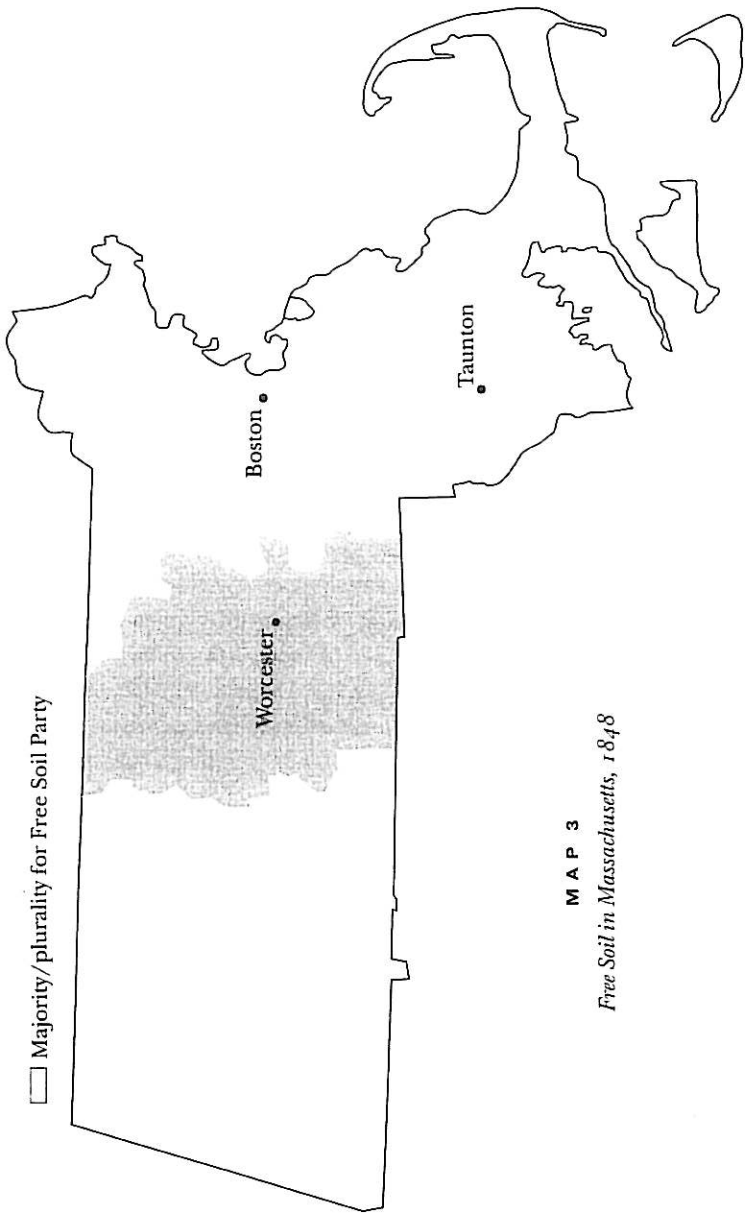
Apparently Ford, who never formally endorsed the Wilmot Proviso, had not given Free Soil Democrats enough reasons to overlook his probank, high-tariff economic positions, and they stuck with Weller. The results of the state election precipitated a national Whig panic. Whig politicians and orators crisscrossed the state, urging antislavery supporters to stick with Taylor. According to Bailey, "Powerful efforts are being made [by such antislavery



MAP 2
Free Soil in Ohio, 1848

Whigs as Seward and Horace Greeley] to break down the Free Soil movement in Ohio . . . [by] appealing with weeping and wailing and lamentation to the Buckeyes to come to the help of 'Old Zach."[42] The effect of this internecine strife was to reinforce traditional party allegiances. Despite Giddings's heroic delivery of the Western Reserve for Van Buren (the correlation between Whigs and Free Soilers was −.964, showing a very strong match), the net effect of the Free Soil election in Ohio was to deliver the state to Cass.[43]

Chase and the Cincinnati clique were only able to muster about 9.1



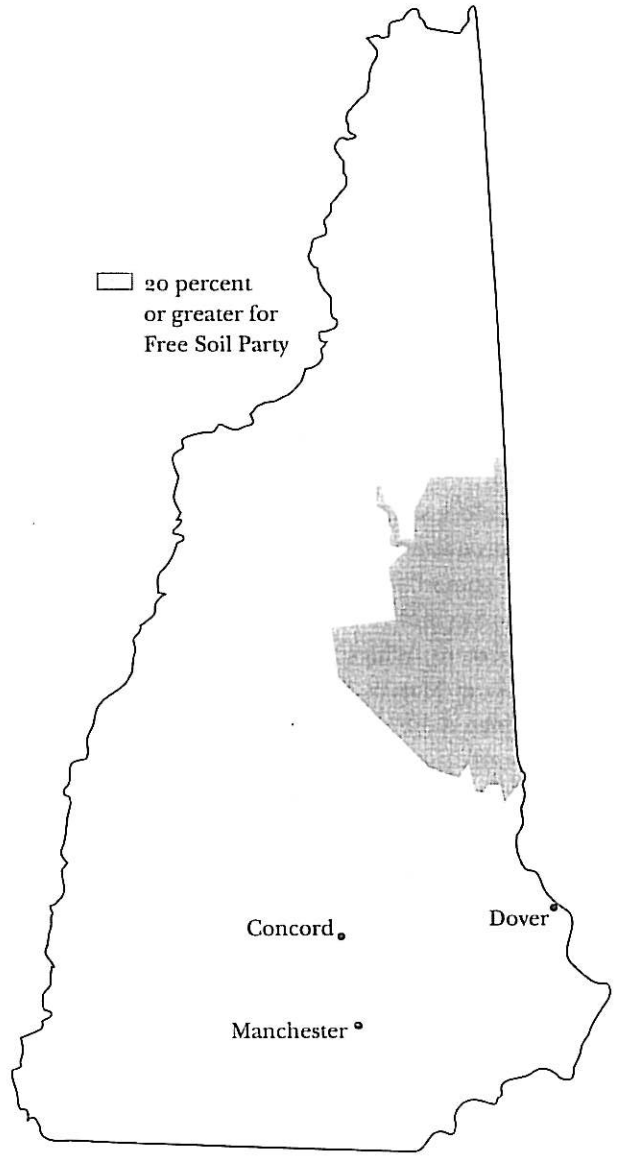
MAP 3
Free Soil in Massachusetts, 1848

percent of the vote in their home county of Hamilton. Jacob Brinkerhoff's Richland County polled barely 3.5 percent for Van Buren (although turnout plummeted by 40 percent), and the late Thomas Morris's home county of Clermont only mustered 7.4 percent for Free Soil.[44] These counties remained heavily Democratic. Still, Chase engineered a Senate seat for himself in early 1849, adding to the state's Free Soil congressional delegation composed of Representatives Joseph Root and Giddings.

The results in Massachusetts were mixed. Despite the addition of important antislavery Democrats like Marcus Morton, Amasa Walker, and Amos Phelps to the state's Free Soil coalition, a majority of the party's votes appear to have come from Conscience Whigs. The correlation coefficient between the change in Whig votes between 1844 and 1848 and the change in Liberty–Free Soil votes is a significant −.769, while the Democrat–Free Soil coefficient is an insignificant −.375.[45] But other evidence suggests Democrats played a more significant role. For example, between the 1844 and 1848 gubernatorial votes, the Democrats lost 16, the Whigs lost 2, and the Free Soil Party gained 17 percent from the previous Liberty totals. Comparisons of the 1844 and 1848 presidential tallies reveal a similar trend (Democrats: −13 percent; Whigs: −6 percent; Free Soil: +19 percent).[46] These findings back up Marcus Morton's repeated complaints that Conscience Whigs dominated the Massachusetts Free Soil organization. "Nearly all the committees and candidates have been taken from the whig section of the party," Morton told B. V. French in 1850, "[yet] a majority of the Free-soil party are democrats. [Henry] Wilson . . . asserted that in '48 30,000 of the 40,000 Free-soil votes came from democrats. Shall one-quarter control three quarters?"[47]

In 1848 Free Soilers won their only Bay State plurality in Worcester County (see map 3), where Conscience Whigs and Jacksonian workers united to support Van Buren and Phillips and to send Charles Allen, the grandson of Sam Adams, to Congress. Twelve years later, Worcester voters polled 76 percent for Frémont and 70 percent for Lincoln.[48] Both major parties were disrupted by the Free Soil campaign, and the weak Democratic Party never recovered. The second party system in Massachusetts completely collapsed immediately following the 1848 election.

In New Hampshire, one of the birthplaces of Free Soil coalition making, the regular Democrats were able to retain control of the state. In eastern Carroll County, Van Buren won almost 21 percent of the vote, his highest total in the state (see map 4). Van Buren hurt Taylor more than Cass in New Hampshire; the correlation coefficient between Whig and Free Soil voters is



MAP 4

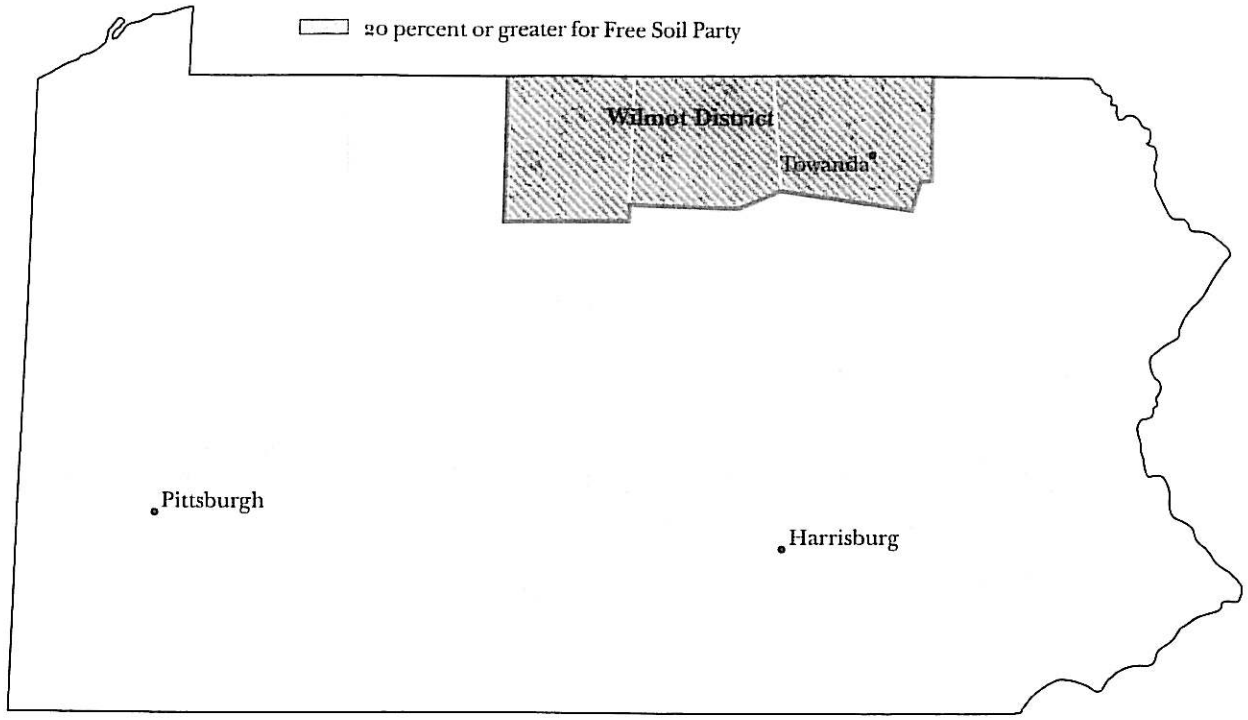
Free Soil in New Hampshire, 1848

−.668, while the Democrat–Free Soil coefficient is −.485.[49] Still, Hale's Independent Democracy continued to gather strength, while George G. Fogg's *Independent Democrat* editorialized for Free Soil, free homesteads, and an end to the expansion of slavery. After the 1852 election of favorite son Franklin Pierce to the presidency, three antislavery factions emerged in the state: Hale's Independent Democrats, Whigs, and Know-Nothings. All three factions nominated identical tickets in 1854–55, and by the next fall New Hampshire's political realignment was completed. In 1856 New Hampshire joined the Republican column, and it tenaciously remained Republican for the rest of the century and beyond.[50]

Excepting Wilmot's district, Free Soil was much less of a key issue in Pennsylvania than in New York, Ohio, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.[51] Whigs, many of whom had endorsed the Wilmot Proviso, were successful in reviving the issue of the free-trade Walker Tariff in the Keystone State, which had cost every congressional Democrat save Wilmot his seat in 1846.[52] This was enough to overcome the formidable Democratic organization headed by James Buchanan. The Free Soil votes in the Wilmot district's counties of Bradford, Potter, and Tioga came overwhelmingly from Democrats but made little difference in the statewide race (see map 5).[53]

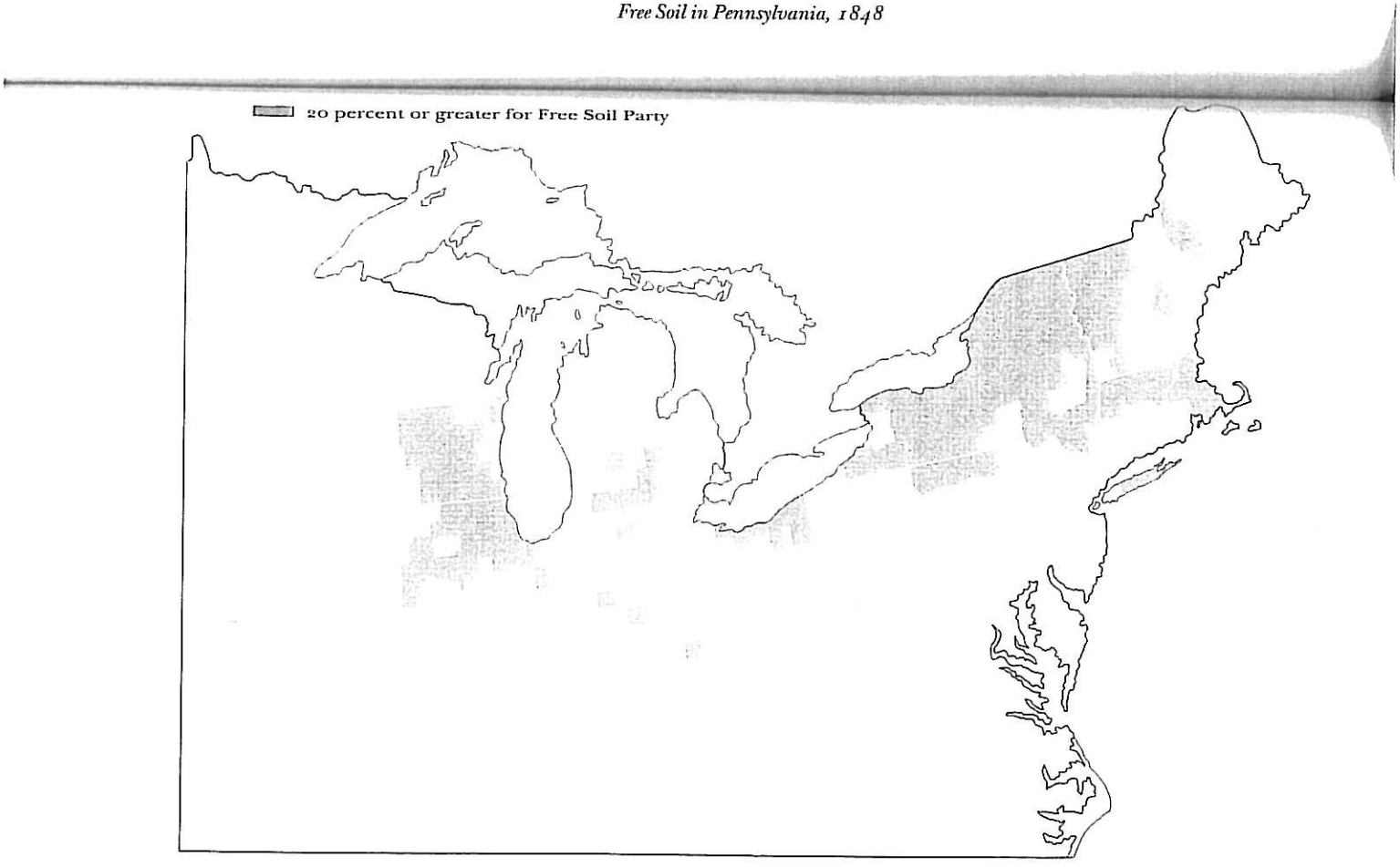
In Vermont, Van Buren received 29 percent of the vote, his highest percentage in the nation. In this Whig stronghold, Van Buren's candidacy seems to have dampened what could have been a full-scale political revolution in the state. Antislavery Whig governor William Slade backed the Free Soil Party, but most of the ticket's support came from the state's Democrats. The coefficient of correlation between Democratic and Free Soil voting is a strong −.847.[54] Democrats also lost more votes than Whigs from the 1844 election.[55] In May 1849 the state's Democrats and Free Soilers formed the Free Democracy, based on a moratorium on new slave states, cheap postage, free education, and free homesteads.[56]

In the Midwest, the Free Soil Party was most successful in northeast Illinois and southeast Wisconsin (see map 6). Here Free Soilers mixed their antiextensionist arguments with support of their plank for federal improvements. The improvements plank was definitely overlooked in rural New York or eastern cities. Wisconsin was a new state in 1848, and it is inconclusive as to whether Illinois Free Soil votes came more from Democrats or Whigs. What is clear, however, is that Free Soil totals would have been much larger had popular editor and congressman "Long John" Wentworth of Chicago gone beyond his endorsement of the Wilmot Proviso and supported the Free Soil Party.[57]



MAP 5

Free Soil in Pennsylvania, 1848



MAP 6

Election of 1848: Free Soil Vote by Counties

The Evolution of Jacksonian Antislavery

Jacksonian antislavery had evolved from the isolated grumblings of a small group of dissidents into a powerful ideology and movement. By 1848, Jacksonian arguments against slavery had provoked political convulsions in nearly every northern state and, at the same time, taken the existing antislavery movement in new, uncharted directions. By the end of the Civil War, the political power (as well as the severe limits) of these Free Soil arguments would be clear. Not until after secession would the twin goals of Free Soil—emancipation and the Homestead Act—be enacted. Yet while Democrats who became Republicans generally supported both measures by 1862–63, it was often as far as they were willing to go. Racial equality, though embraced by a few Free Soilers, was still anathema to many ex-Democrats; similarly, the 1862 Homestead Act was not tailored to unemployed workers and freed slaves, the way George Henry Evans had urged back in the 1840s. If the Free Soilers had lived up to their most lofty pronouncements, the post–Civil War era might well have been altogether different.

CONCLUSION

Free Soilers, Republicans, and the Third Party System, 1848–1854

Even though the results of the 1848 election were disappointing for Free Soilers, supporters throughout the North remained optimistic—even giddy—about the future of their movement. "With our righteous cause the free soil men are invincible," wrote Preston King, who won another term in Congress, this time as a Free Soiler. "The late election is only the Bunker Hill of the moral & political revolution which can terminate only in success to the side of freedom."[1] The new party had disrupted the party system, affected the outcome of a presidential canvass, elected twelve members to Congress, and gained the balance of power in several state capitols, including Ohio and Massachusetts. Moreover, Free Soilers had every reason to believe they had momentum on their side. They viewed their ideology as destined to prevail; once the rest of the electorate of the free states came around to the idea that the expansion of slavery threatened northerners, the Constitution, and even the Union itself, the party could not help but gain in influence and stature.

Even anti–Free Soil satirists accepted the idea of the electoral genies contained in the Wilmot Proviso and the Buffalo bottles. A short-lived humor magazine *The John-Donkey* published a poem titled "Wilmot, the Wizard" that poked fun at the congressman but spoke with awe of the proviso's popular power:

> For straightway he did introduce
> A monster weird and spunkey,
> With hair like fire, a head like a goose,
> And ears like a huge John-donkey. . . .

He swallowed the South at a gulp, with all
Its niggers and other people;
He took down a church by way of *bonne bouche,*
And tickled its nose with the steeple.[2]

A crude illustration accompanying the doggerel (see fig. 6) shows the portly congressman riding his dragonlike "monster," ready to trample those who favored popular sovereignty, Whiggery, or any other solution to the territorial problem.

Yet despite all the Free Soilers' thunder, the fact remained that third parties had an extremely poor track record over the course of the nation's political history. Most had been absorbed into one of the major parties or had merely evaporated for lack of electoral success. Between 1848 and 1854, the year the Kansas-Nebraska Act reawakened the antiextensionist movement and flooded it with new allies, the future of the political movement initiated by Leggett and brought to the public's attention by men like David Wilmot and Salmon Chase was profoundly uncertain. During those pivotal six years, in which a seemingly endless series of cataclysmic events stunned, numbed, and, finally, provoked the American public, Free Soilers scrambled to keep their party intact and their message coherent. For two years after the 1848 election, Free Soilers debated whether or not to form temporary coalitions with regular Democrats. In this concluding chapter I will briefly examine three of these coalitions—in Ohio, Massachusetts, and New York—and assess their mixed records. I will then turn to the new challenges that faced the movement in the aftermath of the Compromise of 1850, which attempted to settle the question of slavery in the territories once and for all. Many northerners, including Martin Van Buren, chose to accept the compromise as a flawed but politically necessary expedient to end a careening sectional crisis. But one measure of the compromise—the South's long-demanded Fugitive Slave Act, which compelled northerners actively to assist in the return of runaway slaves—propelled still more men and women into the Free Soil camp. By 1854 the stage was set for a permanent political realignment with the birth of a new party based on Free Soil goals and principles.

Free Soil–Democratic Coalitions

Two opposing strategic views emerged from the 1848 election, each enunciated by an Ohio Free Soiler, one from the Whig antislavery tradition and

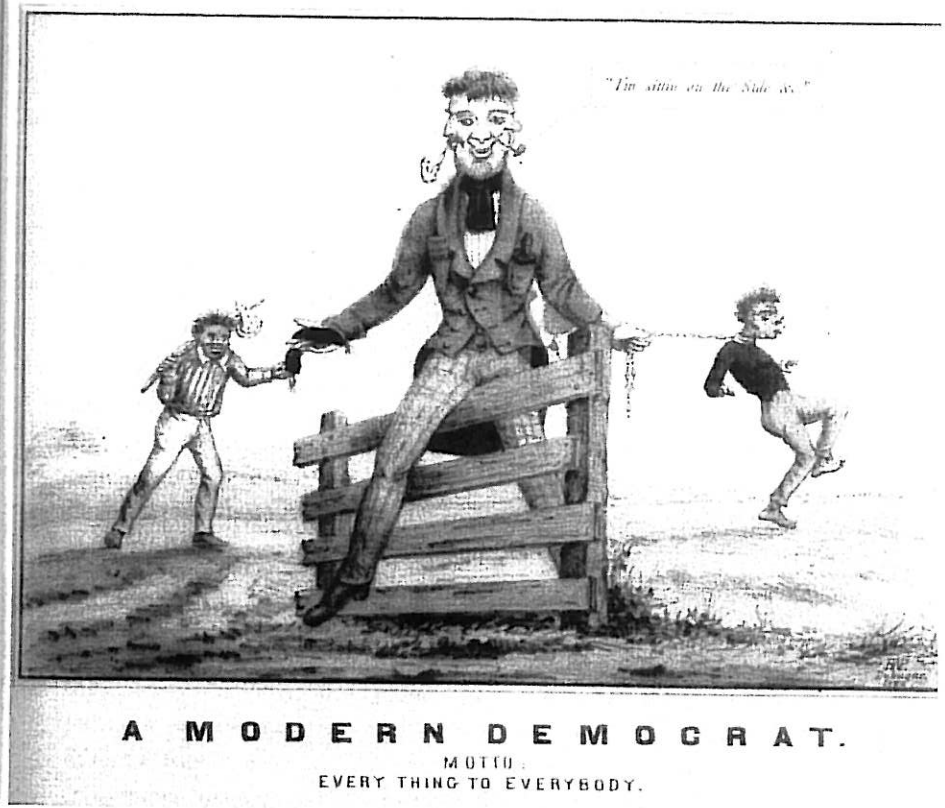


FIGURE 8

"A Modern Democrat" (1850s). This rendering by an Iowa cartoonist depicts the difficulties a split northern Democratic Party faced after the Compromise of 1850. The Janus-faced center figure has one foot on either side of a fence; one hand helps a runaway slave, while the other yanks a chained slave by the neck. To make the hypocrisy of the party more explicit, the artist depicted the figure with a whisky bottle in his "proslavery" pocket (and a stereotypical "Irish"-featured face on this side), while in his "antislavery" pocket he holds a signed teetotaler's pledge. (Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.)

another from the Jacksonian. Joshua Giddings, a social reformer and evangelical congressman from the Western Reserve, had bolted the Whig Party as soon as it nominated slaveholder Zachary Taylor for president. After Taylor's victory, Giddings insisted that the Free Soil Party remain independent of the other parties so as to "*correct public opinion,* not . . . control political action." On the opposite side stood Salmon P. Chase, who urged immediate

union at both the state and national levels with northern Democrats. His Buffalo platform was, after all, a potent combination of traditional Democratic programs and free-soil ideas that would have made William Leggett proud. Applying the Jacksonians' "cardinal doctrine of equal rights" to slavery containment was, as Chase had argued since 1844, a logical step for the northern Democracy. Coalitions with willing Democrats were, for Chase, the surest path to achieving antislavery goals.[3]

Chase wasted no time making his plan a reality in Ohio, leaving the Giddings faction to lick its wounds in silence. With Free Soil legislators holding the balance of power in the legislature, Chase took advantage of a dispute over district boundaries to secure for himself a choice political plum: a seat in the U.S. Senate. In a breathtaking example of backroom maneuvering, Chase traded Free Soil support for Democratic control in the state's lower house for the Jacksonians' support of Chase for the Senate seat and the repeal of Ohio's repressive black laws.[4] Ohio Free Soilers even adopted Chase's preferred name—Free Democrats—in 1849 and in county after county broke bread with regular Democratic organizations.

A Bay State Coalition

Eyeing with envy the tangible successes of fusion with Democrats in Ohio, Free Soil organizations in other states attempted to mimic Chase's model throughout the North in 1849. In Wisconsin Free Soilers and Democrats met in March to issue a series of Jacksonian resolutions and plan for a formal alliance in the fall elections, but Democrats loyal to Lewis Cass double-crossed the Free Soilers and engineered a slate of antiproviso candidates. Wisconsin's Free Soil Party virtually ceased to exist.[5] In New Hampshire and Maine, Democrats and Free Soilers continued to work together, sending Amos Tuck back to Congress and Hannibal Hamlin to the U.S. Senate for a second term. A temporary coalition in Connecticut resulted in three new antislavery congressional representatives and a majority in the state house.

Yet it was a combination of Free Soilers and Democrats from Massachusetts that became the envy of antislavery parties across the North. After the 1848 election—with prosouthern Cotton Whigs in firm control of the party and the state house and slaveholding Whig Zachary Taylor in the White House—Free Soilers and Democrats spoke frequently about uniting on a platform of equal rights. Only by uniting with Bay State Democrats, declared ardent coalitionist Amasa Walker, would Free Soilers be able to defeat the twin aristocracies personified by the northern Money Power and the southern Slave Power. "We are bound to regard the interests of the not-over-paid laborer of the North, as truly as those of the entirely unpaid laborer of the South," he told his fifty-two fellow Free Soil legislators in April 1849. The best way to achieve this, he said, was to meld with the state's Democrats.[6] Walker was joined in this project by the similarly coalition-minded "Natick Cobbler" Henry Wilson and Harvard-educated Free Soiler Charles Sumner. Like his political mentor Salmon Chase, Sumner kept company with Whigs but personally held hard-money Jacksonian beliefs on a broad range of issues. The ambitious Sumner also hoped to follow Chase's path into national politics, a journey that for both men began with Free Soil–Democratic coalitions.

Massachusetts Democrats made the task easier when they adopted a strong slate of antislavery resolutions at their 1849 convention. They were met more than halfway by the Free Soilers, who tapped Sumner to compose a party platform that relied heavily on Jacksonian programs such as cheap postage, free homesteads, and election reform—issues that were lifted straight from former governor Marcus Morton's old gubernatorial addresses. Still, no formal coalition was struck in time for the 1849 elections, in which the Whigs swept the statewide offices.

While the Whig Party in Massachusetts withstood the flirtations between the state's Free Soilers and Democrats in 1849, it could not survive the buffetings caused by the Compromise of 1850. Conceived and shepherded through the Congress by Whig statesman Henry Clay, the compromise attempted to resolve issues as disparate as the boundaries of Texas, the status of the territories of California and New Mexico, the legality of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and the necessity of a strong fugitive slave law. The compromise gained a significant supporter when the Bay State's own Whig senator, the "godlike" Daniel Webster, famously rose in the Senate on March 7, 1850, to urge northerners not to "taunt or reproach" the South with further antislavery measures. Until the "Seventh of March" speech, Webster had publicly supported the Wilmot Proviso. Generations of Americans would be forced to memorize the oration for its lofty pro-Union rhetoric, but it yoked the Massachusetts Whig Party forevermore to the compromise and its most divisive provision, the Fugitive Slave Law. Almost immediately Free Soilers with Whig backgrounds abandoned their previous opposition to a formal union with Massachusetts's Democracy. In a stunning reversal of a decade of Whig electoral dominance, Democrats and Free Soilers combined to win a majority of seats in the state legislature in the 1850 elections and, since no statewide candidates won a clear majority, the power to choose the next governor, lieutenant governor, and U.S. senator.

When the time came to divvy up the offices, antislavery Democrat George Boutwell was elected governor while Sumner, like his mentor in Ohio, was sent to the U.S. Senate as a Free Soiler. "Laus Deo!" an ecstatic Chase wrote to his new partner in the Senate. "Now I feel as if I had a brother colleague—one with whom I shall sympathize and be able fully to act."[7] Although the Democratic–Free Soil union was always a difficult one, it continued to bear political fruit in the year ahead. Free Soilers and Democrats joined to regulate the state's banks and corporations, introduce a secret ballot for elections, and place Harvard College under more state control. For the moment, however, a strong personal liberty law to thwart the Fugitive Slave Act was blocked by prosouthern Democrats.[8]

Yet the compromise precipitated the conversion to antislavery of one the Bay State's most doughfaced Jacksonian politicians. Like many of the free-soil dissidents referred to in earlier chapters, Robert Rantoul Jr. of Essex County was a steadfast hard-money Democrat during the 1830s; yet during the 1840s he eschewed the Van Buren wing of the party and became a key northern supporter of proslavery stalwarts like John C. Calhoun and President John Tyler. True, he had developed a close friendship with John Greenleaf Whittier while rooming with the abolitionist poet during the 1835 session of the Massachusetts legislature, and he had long defended abolitionists' rights of petition and speech. But when the chance came to bolt the party and support the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 and the Free Soil ticket in 1848, Rantoul remained an antiproviso Cass Democrat. Sounding suspiciously like Martin Van Buren in the 1820s, Rantoul continued to insist (somewhat absurdly) that slavery had nothing to do with the 1848 election—the real issue was the free-trade Walker Tariff.[9]

But the combination of the Fugitive Slave Act, which forced northerners for the first time to deal directly with slavery on their own streets, and Massachusetts's unique three party system after 1849 precipitated a dramatic transformation. In 1850 the former doughface suddenly emerged as one of the North's leading antislavery Democrats. Once Rantoul accepted that slavery was an issue—that slaveholders were, indeed, a threat to northern workers and farmers on a par with New England's textile barons—it became for him the only issue, swallowing up all others in a matter of days or weeks. Rantoul excoriated the Fugitive Slave Act (and the compromise in general) as an attempt by aristocratic southerners to dictate policy to the rest of the country and to make northerners confront what he believed was, once, a strictly southern concern. "Is one third of the white people of the

United States to dictate to the other two thirds," he asked in a speech in Lynn in April 1851 "and call their submission 'peace'?"[10]

Soon after this speech criticizing the compromise, Rantoul unexpectedly became a defense attorney for Thomas Sims, an accused fugitive, in a trial that received significant national attention. Although Rantoul failed in his effort to stop federal authorities from returning Sims to slavery, his performance at the trial ingratiated him to Essex County's Free Soilers, and they nominated him as their candidate for Congress. With the backing of both Free Soilers and the county's regular Democrats, he won handily. Surprisingly, during the last months of his life—he died suddenly in August 1852—Rantoul became a proponent of rapid abolition, declaring that there would be no "finality" for the slavery issue other than universal emancipation.[11] But his reasoning continued to be that of a radical, hard-money, and states' rights Jacksonian. "The man who thinks he is a democrat," he told the local Democratic district convention a month before his death, "and seeks to produce that state of society which builds up great accumulations of property in a few hands . . . who dares to sacrifice liberty (whether in the person of his white brother, or his colored brother, I care not) who is willing to sacrifice or endanger liberty because it will make a tenth of a cent's difference in the price of cotton goods, is no democrat."[12] Using reasoning similar to William Leggett's a decade and a half earlier, in his conversion Rantoul exemplified Jacksonian antislavery in the postcompromise era. For Rantoul, southern slaveholders, previously his closest political allies, had with the compromise renounced the essential principles of the Democratic Party. They had used their power as slaveholders to stomp on the liberties of slaves and their power in Washington to stomp on the liberties of northerners.

A New York Reunion

The desertion of Jacksonian stalwarts like Rantoul from the Democratic Party presaged the success of the Republican coalition half a decade later. But events in New York during the same years told a different story. Free Soilers in the Empire State, primarily former Democrats, craved less a coalition with their old party than a full-scale reunion. Given their recent successes as electoral spoilers, they assumed they would not have to sacrifice their antislavery principles if a reconciliation should occur. While Ohio and Massachusetts defectors most often considered their 1848 break with the

party of Jackson to be final, many Barnburners-turned-Free-Soilers could not resist the urge to return to the Democratic Party many of them had helped to found. William Cullen Bryant, who had broken with his Jacksonian brethren over slavery and expansion as far back as 1840, was a telling example. The 1848 election, he bragged, "so disturbed the composition of the democratic party of the north, that it will compel it to reorganize with the principle of free soil in its creed as a settled doctrine."[13] With the Slave Power's hold on the party supposedly broken, many New York Free Soilers reasoned, the Democratic Party, at least in the North, had been redeemed.

As in 1847, a generational rift seemed to separate older Free Soilers who craved reunion and younger ones who wanted to continue to function as a separate party. Henry S. Randall, speaking for what he called the "class of young, able and educated men who have led in the Free-Soil movement," wrote to Martin Van Buren to urge that the new party remain independent. "[Free Soilers] will, *if led boldly on*, become the dominant party throughout the West. I give my vote to go the full length."[14] Yet the ex-president, at age sixty-five, was ready to return to the Democratic fold. His son John at first tried to stake out intergenerational middle ground but ended up siding with his father on the matter. "We expect," he told Free Soilers at Utica in 1849, "to make the democratic party of this state the great anti-slavery party of this state, and through it to make the democratic party of the United States the great anti-slavery party of the United States. Those who do not contemplate this result will do well to get out of the way."[15]

With leaders of both factions hoping for quick reconciliation, Free Soilers and Hunkers gathered separately but concurrently in Rome, New York, in August 1849. The Hunkers passed resolutions calling slavery an evil and opposing its extension into free territory, but the Free Soilers insisted they add provisions detailing Congress's authority to interfere with slavery—an implied endorsement of the Wilmot Proviso. When Hunkers William Marcy and Horatio Seymour balked, hopes for a quick reunion were scuttled. The next month the Hunkers nominated their own ticket but authorized the state committee to replace four of the candidates with Free Soilers should the latter group acquiesce and withdraw their previous ultimatum. They did. More radical antislavery stalwarts like Abijah Beckwith could not believe the new party would so quickly compromise on basic Free Soil principles like the Wilmot Proviso. Compromiser John Van Buren tried to soften the blow: "We are asked to compromise our principles," he said, but "the day of compromise is past. . . . We will unite with our late antagonists, and will hold them as we hold the rest of mankind—enemies in war, in peace, friends."[16] Voters were not assuaged. Whigs defeated every fusion candidate but one in the fall elections. Still, the taste of reconciliation remained in the air.

Even Preston King, the single Free Soiler elected to Congress from New York, supported a rapprochement with the regular Democratic Party. Nine-tenths of northern Democratic congressmen, he wrote in the *National Era*, were ready to back the intentions of the Wilmot Proviso—"if not, I should not desire this union [with Democrats]."[17] Three days later, antislavery editor Gamaliel Bailey chose to look on the bright side. Since Free Soil luminaries like King and abolitionist Henry B. Stanton were among those urging a reunion with the Democrats, the enterprise should be given the benefit of the doubt. "They meant well," he wrote to the suspicious Joshua Giddings. "Why cast them off and denounce them?" Besides, he concluded to his ex-Whig correspondent, "the essential principle of Democracy, is direct antagonism to slavery. . . . He is no Democrat who would compromise with the oppressors of the human race."[18] Not all observers saw the impending reunion as a capitulation. Southern commentators and conservative Hunkers like editor James Gordon Bennett viewed the New York rapprochement as a complete and "dangerous" surrender to the Free Soilers' "amalgamationist views."[19]

After favoring a reunion in 1849, King suddenly reversed course, deciding that Free Soilers had bargained away too much in their attempts at reunification. In increasingly panicked letters to Azariah Flagg, in the winter of 1849–50 King tried to head off a final pact.[20] But it was too late. Predicting "cloudiness" for those intent on preserving the proviso as the party's "cornerstone," King admitted he and his fellow radicals had viewed the overtures of the Hunkers through rose-colored glasses. "The democratic party cannot in my opinion live without known and fixed principles," he wrote to John Bigelow of the *Evening Post*. He feared the party, which had just nominated Hunker Horatio Seymour for governor over Barnburner James Wadsworth, would quickly become "a mere combination to put men in office without regard to their principles, [making] it precisely what we have always charged the whig party to be."[21]

Once again a national issue—the Compromise of 1850—intruded upon New York and precipitated a wholesale reshuffling of the composition of the factions of the state's Democratic Party. Instead of Barnburners and Hunkers, in 1850 the party split into pro-compromise Hards and less doctrinaire Softs, with former Barnburners included in both new groups (though clustered overwhelmingly in the latter). When one Hard introduced a reso-

lution offering congratulations on the recent compromise at the joint Democratic Party convention, John Van Buren vigorously protested; after he was shouted down, the measure passed with only twenty "nays" heard in opposition. Yet instead of walking out with chins held high (as had happened three years earlier), former Free Soilers instead kicked the floor and muttered under their breath. In the dark year of 1850, when faced with a choice over keeping faith with the proviso or returning to a united Democratic Party, the once proud Barnburners chose the latter. Preston King's longtime ally Jabez D. Hammond wrote that he was "sick, sick, sick of this vain political world"; one year later David Dudley Field's "cornerstone" resolution from 1847 declaring uncompromising opposition to more slave states was quietly removed from the masthead of the *Albany Atlas*.[22]

From Compromise to Kansas

The months following the introduction of the Compromise of 1850 were dark ones for Free Soil politicians like Preston King. He was powerless to derail the reunion with the New York Hunkers, a coalition he himself had championed during the previous year. As the compromise measures wended their way through Congress, King watched impotently as mass "Union" meetings supplanted rallies that earlier that year had gathered to support Free Soil. When in Washington, King continued to board with David Wilmot at Mrs. Scott's rooming house, but increasingly he spent his free time at the home of Gamaliel and Margaret Bailey, dining and conversing about the day's events. Each Saturday evening when Congress was in session the Baileys held an informal salon for the city's Free Soilers. In addition to King and Wilmot, the gatherings typically included Senators John P. Hale, Salmon P. Chase, and Charles Sumner and Congressmen Joshua Giddings, Hannibal Hamlin, Henry Wilson, William Slade, Horace Mann, and Robert Rantoul Jr. Other frequent guests were those who, if not Free Soilers themselves, "were tending in that direction," such as Thomas Hart Benton, William Seward, Thaddeus Stevens, and Horace Greeley. Visiting abolitionists including Joshua Leavitt, Henry Ward Beecher, Moncure Conway, and John Greenleaf Whittier often joined in for evenings of conversation, coffee drinking (the Baileys were teetotalers), and "blind man's bluff."[23] Many Free Soilers later recalled that the evenings at the Baileys' lightened their moods during the months that Clay's Compromise snaked its way through Congress, serving "to unite and strengthen all who participated in them . . . cheering the resolute and determining in opinion the timid."[24] The social scene at the Baileys' was vital in keeping Free Soilers from various backgrounds talking and planning their next move.

After six long years of full-bore agitation on the slavery issue, both politicians and voters showed signs of fatigue. Exhausted Americans in both North and South were ready to declare a metaphoric cease-fire and, for the moment at least, accept the tenets of the Compromise of 1850. Endorsing this view, Hunker Democrat William Marcy wrote in his diary how he believed that, with the compromise safely passed, "the agitating & dangerous questions were settled," even if he felt compelled to add that they may not have been concluded in "the best possible way." Without the lifeblood of constant agitation to nourish its ranks, the Free Soil movement languished in the years between the compromise and the Kansas-Nebraska Act.[25]

Free Soilers such as Chase who still hoped to manufacture a large-scale coalition with the Democratic Party were despondent when the party of Jackson nominated New Hampshire doughface Franklin Pierce for president on the forty-ninth ballot at its 1852 convention. In contrast to the carnivalesque atmosphere at Buffalo four short years earlier, the 1852 Free Soil convention in Pittsburgh was a grim affair. Mutual distrust ruled between those who continued to favor coalition with Democrats and those intent on purifying the party of all but the most proven political abolitionists. Coalitionists carried the day on most points. Henry Wilson chaired the convention, and the delegates voted to change their name from Free Soil to Free Democratic. Finally, New Hampshire senator John P. Hale was selected as the presidential nominee on the first ballot. Although Hale was a former Jacksonian, his nomination pleased most noncoalitionists as well, since he had been the candidate of the Liberty Party in 1847. For vice president, the convention tapped a westerner known for his diatribes against the compromise in Congress, former Whig George W. Julian.[26] Coalitionists did not, however, control the resolutions committee, which was chaired by Joshua Giddings and was packed with abolitionists like Gerrit Smith. The 1852 Free Soil platform was a far cry from the "big tent" of 1848. In addition to the usual planks calling for the divorce of the federal government from slavery, new ones forbade cooperation, under any circumstances, with Whigs or Democrats and called slavery "a sin against God and a crime against man."[27]

When the 1852 votes were counted, the Free Democrats were pummeled in every quarter, even where they had done well four years before. With the exhausted David Wilmot in retirement, voters in Pennsylvania's 12th Congressional District voted overwhelmingly for Pierce, who cleverly managed *not* to offend either northern Democrats or southern fire-eaters during

the campaign. In New York, Martin Van Buren supported Pierce wholeheartedly, while Preston King surprised his fellow Free Democrats by railing against his former party's platform but sparing its candidate. The few votes Hale received in New York state were from a determined coterie of ex-Liberty men. In all, he won just 156,000 votes, and the only Free Democrat elected to Congress was Gerrit Smith. At the state level, the party's collapse was also evident: in no northern state did the spoiler party of 1848 win enough seats to hold the balance of power.

Mass Defections, 1854–1856

For fourteen months after the 1852 election, Free Soil—as a movement, an ideology, and a party—was practically moribund. Then on January 4, 1854, the diminutive Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas introduced a bill to organize the territories of the Louisiana Purchase from north of 36°30′ all the way to the Canadian border. Despite the Missouri Compromise's unequivocal ban on slavery there, Douglas's bill granted the residents of the territory's future states the ability to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery. Douglas was no mere doughface, however. As Michael Morrison's recent analysis of the Kansas-Nebraska Act points out, Douglas was a leader of a growing group within the Democratic Party, centered in the Old Northwest, that valued both geographic expansion (a concept that harkened back to Jefferson) and internal improvements (a policy long championed by Whigs and Hunkers). Douglas hoped to use the Kansas-Nebraska Act, as Van Buren had used Andrew Jackson's candidacy in the 1820s, to revive and restore order to the Democratic Party. At the same time, he saw the act's potential to assure his own wealth—any railroad that crossed the new territory would likely terminate near his vast holdings south of Chicago—and, with the southern support it virtually guaranteed, ensure his future political success.

Douglas's brand of popular sovereignty, then, emerged in 1854 as the side of the Democratic coin opposite Free Soil. Both came out of Jacksonian antipathy for centralized authority and aristocracy in any form. Yet while Free Soilers, based in the eastern states at the center of this study, channeled these ideas into a position opposing slaveholders' expansion, Douglas's allies, strongest in the Midwest, fashioned their opposition to concentrated power into popular sovereignty. Similarly, adherents to both ideologies claimed theirs carried Democratic principles to their logical conclusion. By replicating Jefferson's Northwest Ordinance, in which Congress outlawed slavery in a territory, Free Soilers claimed to be the true Democrats. Their opponents countercharged that Free Soilers were bent on strengthening the federal government against the rights and liberties of the residents of a territory who, in a republican society, had the right to choose their own way of life.

Not surprisingly, both sides also clung to the same 1830s-vintage Jacksonian rhetoric. Both Free Soilers and popular sovereignty advocates invariably accused their opponents of being "aristocrats" and "federalists." For Iowa's Augustus Dodge, "never was there a question which revived more thoroughly the distinctive differences between federalism and democracy, States' rights and consolidation, than does the 'Nebraska-Kansas' bill."[28] Conversely, Free Soilers saw Kansas-Nebraska and popular sovereignty as but the latest example in a long series of attempts to place the government and its people in the service of conspiring and antidemocratic slaveholders. Just days after Douglas introduced his bill, Free Soilers Salmon Chase and Joshua Giddings (with help from Charles Sumner and Gerrit Smith) composed an influential pamphlet titled *Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the People of the United States.* Published in Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era* on January 24, the day after the introduction of the final Kansas-Nebraska bill, the appeal convincingly grafted older Free Soil arguments to the issues of the day. The authors indicted Douglas's bill on several levels: as "a gross violation of a sacred pledge; as a criminal betrayal of precious rights; as part and parcel of an atrocious plot to exclude from a vast unoccupied region immigrants from the Old World and free laborers from our own States, and convert it into a dreary region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves."[29]

Chase later referred to the *Appeal* as the "*most valuable* of my works"; certainly it was the most effective piece of political propaganda he ever produced. More than any other document, it crystallized precisely why Free Soilers so opposed Douglas and his arguments for the Kansas-Nebraska bill. By knuckling under to slave state senators' demands for the outright repeal of the Missouri Compromise, Douglas had disturbed an agreement that had been "canonized in the hearts of the American people" for the preceding thirty years. The bill also cut directly to the heart of the restrictionist ideas Free Soilers traced all the way back to Jefferson's Northwest Ordinance. Finally, it made explicit the ideological differences dividing the two northern wings of the Democratic Party into Free Soil and Popular Sovereignty camps. Whereas Douglas claimed his bill left the issue of slavery extension up to "the people" (who, Jacksonians continued to believe, could only be

wrong if deceived), Free Soilers saw only a crass bargain with aristocrats who would bypass democracy to infect millions of acres with the stain of slavery.[30]

In the weeks after Douglas's bill was introduced, stunned Free Soilers—joined by antislavery Democrats and Whigs—focused on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a symbol of a newly energized Slave Power's rapacious disregard for legality and fairness. Gone were the days of John C. Calhoun's defensiveness on the issue; his successors were aggressive in the extreme. "It was understood at the time the Missouri compact passed," wrote farmer and Free Soiler Abijah Beckwith in the *Albany Atlas*, "that the South dictated the terms, and they had the best of the bargain . . . [but] it produced quiet and was ratified by the passage of solemn law." Now slaveholders were plainly using "bad faith . . . to try and prevent the future benefit of the North" long expected to derive from the compact. The result, as Beckwith noted, was once again a radicalization of northern antislavery attitudes. Not only was compromise with the Slave Power unwise; it was, history had proven, impossible.[31] One Ohio Democrat who later served as a Republican congressman summed up the bitterness and surprise caused by this latest "broken promise": "We have submitted to slavery long enough, and must not stand it any longer. . . . I am done catching negroes for the South."[32]

It was not just Douglas's bill that convinced many Democrats, including several New York Free Soilers who had drifted back to the party of Jackson after 1848, that the age of compromise was gone forever. The Pierce administration's decision to make the bill a "test of Democratic orthodoxy" was also a powerful factor. Even with the full weight of the administration behind it, northern Democratic congressmen split down the middle on the bill, with forty-four voting in favor and forty-three voting against.[33] Democrats' refusal to tolerate even minor differences of opinion over Kansas-Nebraska forced many longtime Jacksonians out of the party for good. With the exception of old-line Barnburners like Martin Van Buren and Azariah C. Flagg, most of the leading 1840s dissidents, such as William Cullen Bryant, David Dudley Field, David Wilmot, and Preston King, left the Democracy almost immediately after the Kansas-Nebraska Act became law. King led more than 100 New York Jacksonians out of their party as soon as the state convention voted down an anti-Nebraska plank in September 1854. For this group, the brief reunion with the state's Hunkers was the aberration in what was otherwise an unbroken antislavery allegiance after 1847. The year 1854 was, in many ways, a continuation of the free-soil revolt that had begun seven years earlier.[34]

For these defectors and the thousands that followed them in 1855–56, the violence in Kansas Territory after Douglas's bill dramatized how significantly the Pierce administration was in thrall to the Slave Power. One Illinois editor who called himself a "Democrat of the Jeffersonian, Jacksonian stamp" moved to Kansas to halt what he described as the imposition of aristocracy there by both slaveholders and rich abolitionists from New England. "We come not, then, as the peculiar advocate of any section," Josiah Miller wrote in his new *Kansas Free State*. "We disavow all connection with Emigrant Aid Companies. . . . We intend [to] advocate the freedom of white men, as well as that of negroes."[35] For Miller and his readers—who tended to oppose the abolitionist leanings of the *Herald of Freedom* as well as the proslavery bombast of the *Squatter Sovereign*—allowing slaveholders to move into Kansas permanently tilted the playing field in favor of wealthy tyrants from both the North and the South. One *Free State* correspondent wrote that he read the paper because it condemned oppression of all sorts, "not only of the slaveholder toward the slave, but of the *capitalist* towards the *poor man*."[36]

In each northern state, ex-Democrats were key members of the widening anti-Nebraska movement. In Michigan a party of "Free Democrats" nominated the "Free Soil Cass Man" Kingsley Bingham for governor almost a week before a similar gathering in Ripon, Wisconsin, first used the name "Republican" for their new party of restrictionists. It was in New York, however, that the largest defections came, in torchlit parades, from the old Barnburner strongholds upstate. Abijah Beckwith's Herkimer County, which had voted for Van Buren in 1848 and then given Pierce and the Democrats a 1,000-vote majority in 1852, awarded Republican candidate John C. Frémont 63 percent of the vote in 1856. Frémont won Preston King's home of St. Lawrence County with an astonishing 75 percent of the votes cast there. More than 7,700 voters chose him over James Buchanan in what had been one of the North's most dependable Democratic strongholds. As Eric Foner points out, in the sixteen New York counties where Van Buren ran either first or second in 1848, Republican majorities totaled more than 56,000.[37]

In *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, Foner rightly suggests that ex-Democrats' influence in the early Republican Party far exceeded their numbers, which he estimates at about 25 percent of their membership. In a nation where people were often born into political parties the way they were born into religions, it was easier for ex-Democrats to vote for Republicans with Jack-

sonian backgrounds. To succeed, Republicans needed both Democratic candidates and voters. Foner estimates that eleven of the twenty-six Republican congressmen elected in 1858 were ex-Jacksonians, as were half of Republican state candidates between 1855 and 1861.[38] After all, unlike the Whigs—who after 1854 had no party—Democrats who voted Republican did so by choice. Both the state and national Republican platforms from 1854–56 were remarkable in their similarities to those drafted by the Free Soil and Free Democratic parties in 1848 and 1852. Congressional containment of slavery, an end to new slave states or slave territory, abolition in the District of Columbia, and the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law were, first and foremost, Free Soil planks.[39]

Part of the genius of the early Republican Party was its ability to avoid the pitfalls experienced by earlier unions of antislavery Whigs and Jacksonians. The Republicans' early state platforms are notable for their conspicuous avoidance of any issue besides slavery. Michigan's anti-Nebraskans, for example, explicitly stated in their 1854 platform that they were "postponing and suspending all differences with regard to political or administrative policy."[40] This was especially critical since, as noted in this study, so many of the Democratic defectors in the 1840s and 1850s were hard-money radicals. The only way to smooth the way for party harmony (while keeping the Republicans competitive in protectionist states like Pennsylvania and pro-railroad states like Illinois) was to focus obsessively on the issue of slavery containment.[41] This is not to say former Jacksonian radicals abandoned their strong hard-money economic views. In March 1860 William Cullen Bryant presciently worried that there was a "conspiracy . . . to pervert the Republican party to the purposes of the owners of coal and iron mines." At the same time, many of the ex–hard money Democrats pushed for the nomination of like-minded Salmon Chase at the 1860 Republican convention. Such activity not only added weight to Chase's long-shot candidacy but also advanced another goal for many ex-Jacksonians: sabotaging ex-Whig William Seward's chances to capture the nomination.[42]

Ex-Democrats who appear in this study figured prominently in the nomination and election of Republican standard-bearer Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln won the new party's 1860 nomination on the third ballot at the Chicago convention, David Wilmot presided. Former Jacksonians were extremely pleased with the resulting ticket, which included one of their own, Hannibal Hamlin, as the candidate for vice president.[43] Walt Whitman, who in 1855 had shed his partisan editor's persona for that of the poet, had by the fall of 1860 already embarked on what would become a special five-year

relationship with the new Republican nominee: "Lincoln is particularly my man," he wrote to Horace Traubel. "[He] particularly belongs to me; yes, and by the same token, I am Lincoln's man. We are afloat in the same stream,—we are rooted in the same ground."[44] Finally, Abijah Beckwith, the elderly farmer and Free Soil "hotspur" who did not expect to live much beyond the 1848 election, was chosen—at age seventy-six—to serve as one of Lincoln's New York electors. The card with which he cast his presidential ballot in the Electoral College on December 4, 1860, remains glued to the final page of the handwritten autobiography Beckwith began for his grandson and namesake in 1847, at the height of the Barnburner revolt.[45]

For the hundreds of thousands of Jacksonian Democrats who turned against slavery in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, the Democratic Party they had once embraced had become, in the words of another old Barnburner, a "tool of the slaveholding oligarchy." They had developed arguments against slavery that owed little to the evangelical morality of abolitionists and substantially widened the antislavery movement, illustrating how the enslavement of any human being threatened Americans white and black. They had brought to the new Republican Party a die-hard Jacksonian unionism that ensured a large number would view the South's secession claims as treasonous. And they had linked the issue of slavery with the issue of land distribution and reform, which allowed one antislavery Democratic paper in territorial Kansas to announce its intention to "advocate the freedom of white men, as well as that of negroes." This appeal, it is important to note, was made on behalf of both black and white Americans, at the expense of an aristocracy of slaveholders and not in the herrenvolk terms recently identified with antislavery Democrats.[46] "To occupy its present ground," wrote Preston King in 1858, "the democratic party has changed its members, its principles, its purposes, its character. Everything but its name is changed." It was thus the job of a new party, stocked with former Democrats and opponents of slavery from all parties, to enact the twin goals of free soil after the southern states had left the union: the Homestead Act and emancipation. These mainstays of the Republican ideology were instrumental to bringing an end to slavery in the United States.[47]

What would the history of the postbellum United States have been if, as one early proponent had envisioned, inalienable homesteads on the public lands had been granted to every head of household—Indian, black, and white? Certainly 1830s Jacksonian dissident George Henry Evans's concept of freedom—a definition that was, significantly, shared by the 4 million freedpeople—differed mightily from the liberal, middle-class description

offered by free laborites and even most abolitionists: self-ownership.[48] As Eric Foner asked a quarter-century ago, "Did not freedom suggest more than simply the end of slavery, perhaps even a right on the part of blacks to the land they had cleared and tilled?" Evans and many of his fellow Jacksonian opponents of aristocracy, land monopoly, and slavery saw yeoman farming and inalienable landownership as the true opposites of servitude. Self-ownership, for them, offered little more than a chance to be exploited by bosses, landlords, or capitalists unless it was supplemented by the benefits and natural rights conferred by landownership. A truly democratic and egalitarian future depended on it. "The black as well as the white must, in my opinion, have his right to *land* restored to him before he can be free," Evans wrote to abolitionist Gerrit Smith in 1844. If each head of household were granted enough land to support a family, he continued, "there would be no fear of Indian wars, our standing army might be abolished, and our peaceful example would prevail in other nations." Evans's utopian vision of a West populated by free people and landowners of all races was not one that was shared by most members of the free-soil coalition. Yet neither did the democratic and egalitarian ideas that gave birth to Jacksonian antislavery preclude a future where equality of condition was as much of a concern as equality of opportunity.[49]

APPENDIX

Table 1

Massachusetts Gubernatorial Returns, 1828–1843 (percentage)

	Democrat (Morton)	National Republican / Whig	Anti-mason	Working-men	Liberty	Scattered	Morton's change
1828	12.89	81.53	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.58	—
1829	19.50	71.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.87	6.61
1830	30.61	65.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.87	11.11
1831	25.96	65.19	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.85	−4.65
1831	20.55	53.92	25.01	0.00	0.00	0.52	−5.42
1832	23.66	52.85	22.97	0.00	0.00	0.51	3.12
1833	24.84	40.32	29.30	5.55	0.00	0.00	1.18
1834	24.81	57.72	13.91	3.35	0.00	0.22	−0.03
1835	38.87	57.86	2.93	0.00	0.00	0.34	14.06
1836	45.91	53.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30	7.05
1837	39.38	60.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.34	−6.54
1838	44.49	54.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.54	5.11
1839	50.00	49.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30	5.51
1840	43.33	55.68	0.00	0.00	0.85	0.14	−6.67
1841	46.25	50.40	0.00	0.00	3.14	0.21	2.92
1842	47.88	46.56	0.00	0.00	5.41	0.15	1.63
1843	44.72	47.74	0.00	0.00	7.34	0.20	−3.16

Source: *Official Returns: Massachusetts State Archives.*