

3. "To One or Another of These Parties Every Man Belongs"

*The American Political Experience from
Andrew Jackson to the Civil War*

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Collapsing prices, contracting markets, widespread bank failures, individual bankruptcy, loss of entrepreneurial nerve, rising unemployment, and significant rural dislocation—the detritus of a faltering capitalist economy—littered the American landscape in the year following the onset of the panic of 1819, which is the starting point for this exploration of the political dynamics of what scholars once called the “middle period” of American history. Explosive political tensions—from fierce local and state-level challenges to existing institutions through the congressional outburst over the admission of Missouri—added strength to growing expressions of uncertainty, even despair, about the nation’s present condition and future prospects.¹

Still, as dark as the picture seemed to be in 1820, to focus on only the downside of the American situation at that moment distorts reality. The panic of 1819 was a single aspect of a much larger national experience as the United States broke free from geographic and economic bonds rooted in the colonial era, bonds that had affected much of American life through the second war with Great Britain. The Appalachian Mountain barrier was breached, the population spread beyond previous borders, and Indian tribes in the way were removed. The nation’s economy, led by southern cotton, northern shipping and financial resources, and western wheat, plus the onset of significant manufacturing enterprise, grew exponentially. Newer areas became part of the equation as well. Texas, Oregon, and California were acquired in part to increase output, find new markets, and open up further economic opportunity. Significant transportation improvements followed, geographically linking all that was occurring into a rational national system.² It should not be surprising that politics, too, changed fundamentally.

Transforming the Political Realm

The years after 1820 were ones of extraordinary material growth and transformative change in both the economy and the society beyond, reshaping the United States into a geographically massive, increasingly diverse, always vibrant, and usually prosperous country. Older rural areas, whose previous connections to

larger economic processes were often uneven and erratic, if they existed at all, now moved toward commercial enterprise; others became sites of nascent industrialism. Although the effect of these socioeconomic changes was felt at different rates in different parts of the nation, their overall impact was clearly established from an early date as the restless, unsettling, often destabilizing stirrings of the market revolution kept increasing in magnitude and power.³

As these changes took hold, as investment skyrocketed, as new enterprises were essayed and new markets developed, economic boom and bust cycles appeared. But despite another serious economic setback in 1837, the pressures of growth never settled down, and by the mid-1840s, they demonstrated even more vigor than they had earlier. The powerful changes under way in this massive industrial and commercial revolution continued apace. The American economy, throughout the rest of the century, enjoyed a period of unprecedented overall expansion.

Unsurprisingly, this transforming experience in American life had a significant political dimension. The American political world was also in profound transition after 1820, rooted in the same pressures that roiled the socioeconomic landscape. Every society contains both consensual elements defining its basic nature and significant shards of conflict. There was no single American culture in these years, but there were many assumptions shared and values held in common among those inhabiting the political landscape. Americans basked in the consensual platitudes that permeated their political discourse at the outset of this era. Calls for civic virtue, to maintain and strengthen what everyone called republican values, to protect and preserve the nation and its singular virtues from its many enemies, foreign and domestic, remained commonplace—and, I suggest, revealed deep pockets of commitments and ideals that were shared by at least a significant portion of white America.⁴

These platitudes masked, however, another, more divisive quality. There was never much, if any, agreement at that level of public consciousness where shared values become policy agendas. Amid the nation's common notions, and the rhetoric that followed, lurked issues and politically charged interests growing out of both the force of rapid change and the hangover of long-standing ideological conflicts going back to the furious political battles of the 1790s, as well as ancient memories and hatreds that still retained meaning, even in the new world of transformative restructuring.⁵ Christopher Clark argued that, after 1820, "issues central to the development of markets and industrial capitalism were . . . placed largely outside the realm of politics," that is, basic stabilizing and promotional decisions occurred out of sight, in the world of the courts, legal processes, and legal culture, rather than in the more open air of election campaigns and legislative sessions. This is true enough. The judiciary played a crucial role in the "freeing" of American enterprise from restrictive rules left over from an earlier time and in promoting market-oriented practices.⁶

Beyond such judicial activity, however, there were still many matters remaining in those other, more open parts of the public sphere—enough to provoke a range of contentious confrontations and to stimulate institutional processes. The whole pattern of geographic growth, pursuit of advantage, and changes in lifestyles that were under way promoted political needs and political advocacy, not to mention sharp partisan conflict. Although political passions had cooled somewhat since 1815, all these matters sharply and relentlessly divided Americans as their world changed rapidly, giving strong impetus to an effort to find an institutional way to deal with the new realities they faced. Public action to cope with, advance, and protect the new society was considered a necessity by those caught up in the system and trying to take advantage of it, resist it, or just contend with its power.⁷

Critically, however, the long-standing political society in the United States, consisting of a range of established outlooks, well-understood approaches, and familiar institutions, quickly proved to be inadequate to deal with the forces now unleashed. At the same time, the great expansion of popular participation in the political world (though still largely restricted by gender and race) added to the tumult and the pressures on the existing system. “The science of politics,” to use a term from the *Federalist Papers*, demanded something beyond what was at hand—different ways of thinking about, organizing, and directing the political arena.⁸

The political world responded. The years after 1820 were a time of remarkable political innovation and energy in the United States. The ideological and cultural assumptions undergirding politics changed; new values and outlooks came to dominate the scene. And at its center were critical new forms of political organization, activity, and engagement—specifically, the popularly driven two-party system dominated first by Democrats and Whigs, then by Republicans and Democrats—evolving into deeply embedded permanence. Political parties shaped, clarified, and gave coherence to the socioeconomic forces so vigorously in play. Through careful organization, pointed articulation, advocacy and appeal, constant electoral mobilization, and the thousands of humdrum activities they engaged in during every campaign season and legislative session, the parties absorbed, embodied, represented, and channeled much of the external world and its array of needs and demands.⁹

Their triumph was remarkable. Political parties had been seen quite negatively in American civic society in the years up to 1820, even in the days of sharp confrontation between Federalists and Republicans in the 1790s. Many aspects of that long-standing anti-partyism continued to hang over the scene into the 1820s. But much was changing in terms of the nation’s political culture. The republican heritage—at least the part that feared the dangers of (and therefore sought to discourage) internal political conflict, particularly when organized by wily partisan leaders—became sorely tested ground in this new situation and

ultimately fell from its preeminence in American thought.¹⁰ John Quincy Adams, the last of the presidents of the old political style, urged Americans to “discard every element of rancor” and work together on behalf of universally held national interests. The new men emerging in national politics strongly disagreed. Whether they were fully aware of the transformation under way in the United States or not, New York’s Martin Van Buren and his like-minded colleagues were acutely aware of how different some things had become since 1815, particularly the renewed potential for sharply edged political warfare.¹¹

Unlike their predecessors, these men had come to believe that such political conflict was not aberrant, manufactured, or temporary but normal and unavoidable. They stressed that the United States was beset by deep ideological and political differences *and* threatened by a powerful group determined to push forward economic and political policies that were dangerous to a majority of Americans. Given those realities, wide-ranging management institutions were needed, they argued, to order and direct a fractious but purposive politics across a vast battlefield of contending groups, to organize those who were on the same side in the conflicts, and to set them against those on the other side of the policy-ideology dividing line. To these men, policy advancement, partisan organization, popular mobilization, and the art of management all went hand in hand.

The lesson of the presidential election of 1824 was particularly stark to this emerging political class, and it reinforced their determination to build a new politics. In a chaotic political situation, divisions among the majority had led to a minority victory, one that threatened many important interests as President Adams aggressively pushed for a revival of Federalism’s heresies of national power. In the face of these realities, Van Buren and his followers posed the question: how could local interests be protected, the nation’s liberties preserved, and the country’s development accomplished in ways compatible with its Jeffersonian liberal tradition? They understood what needed to be done. Between 1825 and 1828, Van Buren energized a movement among political leaders in the states and in Washington to establish structures that would guarantee that the will of the nation’s political majority would always triumph, along with its critical policy commitments.¹²

What happened was not foreordained, nor did the political development that was under way settle in all at once. The idea was there early in some state political arenas, but given the hangover of the cultural norms against political parties and the extraordinary number of cross-cutting local conflicts, sectional antagonisms, personal commitments and disagreements, group hatreds, and other potential cleavages, the four parts of the party system—leadership, organization, policies advocated, and committed supporters—matured into an all-encompassing form only at the end of the 1830s.

When the system finally settled into the soil, two-party-based political mobilization and management became a normal part of the American world and

received an enormous response from those brought under its wing. Americans involved in politics took to the teachings of party leaders with mounting awareness and increasing enthusiasm; growing numbers inhabiting the political nation became convinced that the major political parties served both their immediate and their long-range purposes. As a result, the growing power of the partisan imperative, the need—and wish—to join, support, and promote one's party, affected almost everyone who was abroad and active on the landscape.¹³

Ideology, Class, Clan, or Interest: Sources of Political Commitment in the Party Period

The development of political parties, the evolution of their institutional structures, and the hardening of partisan commitments into a permanent two-party system consolidated and made coherent an otherwise chaotic political world. The politics that this particular generation constructed had, at its center, the parties' sharply different perspectives about the nation and its needs, important differences that grew out of the expectations of each party's loyal supporters. Historians have never agreed about the primary animating impulses that shaped voter choice in this era. The best reading of the evidence suggests that the American voting universe was fired by an eclectic mix of enduring confrontations rooted in past experiences, as well as by aspects of the new socioeconomic forces coming into play.

This was always a politics driven by a variety of distinct impulses and revolving around different axes. These divided people within each section of the country and within rural and urban settings and crisscrossed class lines.¹⁴ A number of historians have stressed, in addition, the highly contextual nature of American voting behavior in this era, arguing that voters were affected by distinct local conditions that influenced how they reacted to specific stimuli when they went to the polls. Such widespread variety is not surprising, given the vastness, diversity, and uneven development of the nation, all of which provided room for different impulses to operate in different ways in different situations.¹⁵

It all added up to a complicated mix of voter concerns that were not always directly, or solely, driven by economic variables. The market revolution's influence, as profound as it was, was not as complete as some recent arguments claim. Its reach and influence were more like a patchwork, with room for other influences to operate as well. There may have been times when a single issue overcame these variations, localisms, and differences, such as reaction to the panic of 1837. But these were exceptions to the general rule of multiple operative sources and contextual differences from place to place and from time to time. The battles that erupted in the 1820s and 1830s over banks and tariffs, over the proper role of the national government, and over the reach and authority of the

president triggered a range of popular responses, rational and otherwise, that were marvelously variegated, offering persistent grist for subsequent historiographic disagreements over these matters.¹⁶

It is possible, however, to narrow these varieties into a more focused construction, a task that the party leaders of the day were engaged in unstintingly. Americans drew their political consciousness after 1820, first, from their commitment to the residue of existing ideologies about the nature of a good society and the role of the state, that is, from memories of past political conflicts that had long structured political notions in the United States, especially those between the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans, now infused with questions stemming from the forces unleashed by the economic revolution under way. In the many places where the market revolution was advancing rapidly, not everyone welcomed, benefited from, or adjusted readily to its vast changes and disruptions, nor did the benefits of commerce and credit appeal to all.¹⁷

Specifically, some of those who called themselves Jacksonian Democrats espoused a deep hostility to the emerging economy. They feared the vulnerabilities unleashed by market forces, believing that they corrupted the land and promoted greed, shady practices, and pressures on government to act narrowly and prejudicially. Speculative capitalism, in their view, made success the product of chance, ruse, or illegality, rather than the result of productive labor. Imbued with an "anti-commercial animus," in John Ashworth's words, they made their distress clear and sought to use political weapons to forestall further market penetration of their lives and livelihoods. Their nostalgia for a lost Arcadia, their hatred of what Andrew Jackson referred to as "the predatory portion of the community," with its replacement world of malicious intrigue, new inequalities shaped by the uncontrolled power of some, and the loss of individual autonomy, led them to support the like-minded Old Hickory and the political party forming around him.¹⁸

Many of those who became Whigs, in contrast, had an "orientation toward the commercial economy." Located in and fully caught up by the new world of extensive, deeply penetrating, and expanding commercial development, their ideology enthusiastically embraced this new world order and looked for ways, through government support and action, to promote, expand, and strengthen it—to make it the normal strain in American economic life, with all the beneficent rewards that would be reaped by individuals and by the nation as a whole. Unlike many of the Democrats, they did not look longingly back to a different world. The Arcadia that they celebrated was in the here and now, as well as stretching into the future.¹⁹

At the same time, however, there were some cold calculations involved in the party choices of many Americans. Lambasting capitalism had more complex meanings than simply revealing a deeply held ideological opposition to distortive market forces, and defending it often had more specific implications than a generally

positive notion of the new economics of the market revolution. In the decades after 1820, the economic dimensions of American politics took on the qualities that Theodore Lowi would later refer to as interest-group liberalism—battles over how government power would or would not be used in specific cases in the interest of particular groups fully caught up in market competition and values.²⁰

The pursuit of economic self-interest, new markets, and new opportunities caused people to look to the government, seeking policies useful to themselves. Their search helped to define political purposes, party stances, and specific agendas. To these people, the market revolution was not necessarily dangerous by itself, though its implementation led to activities that would have harmful consequences for some of the participants. A distributional policy state was always going to be divided over the specific details of government activities, because various groups would be convinced that one entrepreneur's attempts to foster economic development in a particular direction would be detrimental to the interests and well-being of others on the scene. One entrepreneur's vital national bank was another's obvious barrier to easy credit and initiative. Therefore, conflict over the concrete elements of the nation's political economy dominated much congressional and state legislative activity. The question always posed was: which particular interests would have priority in the political realm?²¹

Finally, the modernizing politics of economic development, with its different conceptions about the nature of the economy and different approaches to the use of state power, existed side by side and intertwined with a politics of social conflict, defined in many parts of the country by ethnic and religious differences and tensions. In an era such as the present, when identity politics has been reinvigorated and is recognized to be as American as apple pie, it may not be difficult for scholars to appreciate that ethnic and religious loyalties, differences, and prejudices, with roots deep in the primordial past of cultural confrontation, were such a large part of the American political scene and could shape voter choice—not always or exclusively, but reliably as a factor of some importance in an America seeking to determine which groups and cultural perspectives constituted the nation.²² Every social group had its own burdens, felt needs, claims, jealousies, and prejudices. Each developed relevant political perspectives out of these elements.

These ethnoreligious partisan identifications were widespread and intense. Daniel Walker Howe's formulation with regard to political conflict in the northern states seems particularly pertinent: The "most violent conflicts" in Jacksonian politics "involved racial and religious hostilities: white against black, abolitionist against anti abolitionist, Protestant against Catholic, Mormon against Gentile. Often they pitted workers against workers. In such cases, cultural conflict cut across economic class lines rather than coinciding with them." As Richard Cawardine argued, voter choice often turned on relationships with the religious establishment in different places. "Methodists' partisan allegiances," he wrote, "were neither accidental nor incidental. They were to a considerable degree

shaped by meaningful ideological conflict between competing religious groups." Other religious groups reacted similarly, all their anxieties stoked by an ongoing debate over the nature of America—the identity of its inhabitants, the elements constituting its core belief system, its heritage, and its specific values.²³

There were, then, several different *mentalities* and issue axes defining political confrontation, voter choice, and party stance. Never entirely separate from one another, these defining influences—cultural, economic, and ideological; market driven or otherwise—often interacted and came together as people defined themselves, confronted change, or just moved through the vicissitudes of everyday life. Voters had many concerns and much on their minds as they thought about and decided to join one party or the other, in light of their particular situations. Although there was some randomness and contextualism in the way that different groups sorted themselves out between the parties, the Whigs, the Democrats, and, later, the Republicans drew sustenance from and represented interests, groups, ideas, and policies drawn from distinct parts of the political spectrum.

The Culture of Political Commitment

Each of these partisan assemblages of the like-minded had an underlying unity. Although there was always the potential for disagreement within both coalitions as different blocs maneuvered for preference or fought with their party colleagues over specific policies, once the partisan system had settled in, the parties were neither ideologically unwieldy nor confused about where they stood. American voters recognized that clarity early on, and in the years after 1820, almost all of them linked themselves with one of the dominant political parties, because they believed that their well-being depended on their party's victory in the next (and every subsequent) election.²⁴ Yet a crucial issue remained: ensuring that there would always be full participation by these committed voters in the electoral process.

Whatever people's commitment to the cause, no one expected that there would be automatic, spontaneous, popular surges to participate in campaign activities or even to appear at the polls. Party meetings were often far away, as were polling stations. There was always something else to do. It was therefore necessary to rouse the troops in each new election campaign and get them to the starting line. Andrew Jackson's popularity and energizing conception of office drove the system in its early days. But this political era was also dominated by numerous middle-level organizers and managers in every state. Their burdensome task was to keep all Democrats and Whigs working effectively together, understanding what was at stake, and to move them to the polling stations so that each party would maximize its vote totals by pulling in all the support available.²⁵

The parties of this era were almost always led by those who had some social standing in the community, whatever the egalitarian claims of their populist rhetoric. In the years after 1820, lawyers and professional politicians took central stage in political affairs, replacing the long-dominant social and economic elites of an earlier age. Like those previous elites, the new men of politics were very conscious of the need to touch base with, and listen to, the people they were trying to mobilize. Earlier political leaders had used various means of winning the support of their flocks, from the mobilization of deference to persuasion to rum swilling and other rousing social activities. Post-1820 political leaders used various means to achieve similar results. But there was a major difference in their efforts, one emblematic of the new political system.²⁶

Whig, Democratic, and, later, Republican leaders always had much decisional leeway in party conventions and everyday campaign activities. They were rarely closely supervised by their supporters in these settings. Nevertheless, the leaders felt constrained in their actions by the realization that they could not go beyond, in their choices, activities, and advocacy, what their constituents would accept. Harry Watson is clearly correct when he suggests that despite their elite positions, these political leaders "sought to persuade the voters rather than command them." They were always concerned about grassroots responses to the way they went about their business. They worked hard to dominate the political scene but never forgot that they shared it with others.²⁷

The heart of these efforts to engage the voters lay in the public advocacy of each party, particularly the sharp and repetitive enunciation of the differences between them, and in the specific legislation and executive actions that were needed. The whole partisan process was glued together by a public idiom of intense combat between two warring armies. Each made its way through the political terrain by stridently producing competing images of themselves, their world, and their opponents, an endeavor that was constant, widespread, and relentlessly reinforcing. They let everyone in on the fact that each of them occupied a different part of the spectrum of ideologies, attitudes, and policy demands; that they were sharply polarized, both generally in their dream of the good society and in the specific legislation and executive actions that were needed to achieve each party's notion of what was best for America both domestically and abroad.²⁸

The earsplitting partisan noises they raised were never only sound and fury. The parties were deeply divided over both domestic matters and foreign policy, although the latter no longer commanded as much sustained attention as it had a generation before in the Federalist-Republican confrontation. Both Democrats and Whigs offered consistent lines of argument, anchored directly in the outlooks of each component group of supporters. Party leaders did this by reducing the many substantial issues into a number of generalized themes to which people would rally, perceiving in party rhetoric the way to achieve their more individual goals.

Both parties always enunciated their loyalty to the republican values of the founders, for example. Each made it clear that it "contend[ed] for our Constitution and our country." The particular arguments that followed revolved around general themes of liberty and power, freedom and equality, openness and elitism, linked together into general perspectives that sharply differentiated the parties from each other.²⁹ Democratic and Whig publicists each told a story of liberty, the quest for freedom, and their desire to protect and advance such cherished values within a prosperous nation. They began their tales in the past, with each emphasizing a distinct history of the nation and the lessons to be drawn from that history. These explorations culminated by turning from what had once been and toward the present and the future, with each party staking out its version of the particular highway that would lead to ever-greater national achievement.³⁰

Democrats, without stint or letup, expressed a fervent anti-statism in domestic affairs. They believed themselves to be the real nation: agricultural freeholders and village and town artisans—the producer classes, sturdy and independent, the backbone of the American experiment in liberty. They felt themselves at risk, however, due to the pressures of rapid change, capitalist power, and the prejudices of the host culture using the hand of government to misshape society and the economy on behalf of certain favored groups, applying its overweening strength to limit the rights of those outside the majority culture, thereby ignoring the pluralism inherent in the American landscape.

To Democrats, the central issue confronting Americans was the fragility of liberty if the federal government, in particular, intervened either in economic affairs or in the lives of adult white males. To them, a "splendid" government was always "built on the ruins of popular rights." The grand coalition of Democratic-Republicans of Jackson's time had originated, they reminded their audiences, in the fiery resistance of Jefferson and Madison to the liberty-threatening consolidationism and power surge of Federalism in the 1790s. That battle was not dead. All the parties that opposed Jeffersonian Republicanism were cut from the same cloth, and each one succeeded an earlier one with the same base intentions: each willing to destroy American liberty in pursuit of other purposes.³¹

"What else is Whigism," Democrats asked, "than the degenerate offspring of Federalism?" Their principles were the same, always consisting of "an unhallowed thirst for power arrayed against popular rights." They remained predators against the freedom and interests of the nation's producing classes and of its outsider religious and ethnic groups. Whigs would use the power of banks and the credit system to undermine those producers and force people into different relations with the economy. A national bank or a protective tariff was parochial and prejudicial and created hierarchies of power over popular rights. Similarly, social legislation about schools, alcohol consumption, or other social practices was limiting and threatening. Under the Whigs, many Americans

would be exploited and denied what was theirs: equal treatment under the law, equal treatment within the society, and equal opportunity in the economic realm.³²

The clamor that rose out of the Democrats' concerns was strongly populist in tone. Whatever the elite nature of their leadership, there was much rhetorical allegiance to an egalitarian dynamic that proclaimed that everything should reflect the popular will more closely than earlier generations had allowed. They exhibited enormous ideological hostility toward policies and institutions that they perceived to be promoting aristocracy or privilege. As part of their hostility, they equated bigness with such privilege. The anti-market elements among them resisted that kind of institution and its malevolent practices—from the Bank of the United States to the growth of corporations—in alliance with, and made possible by, the surge of illegitimate government power.³³

To forestall this, they believed that the producer and outsider classes, the country's majority, had to be organized into a permanent political army fighting on behalf of basic American economic and social institutions and ideals and against parochial privilege, inequality of treatment, and destructive federalist notions of national authority. As the *Democratic Review* put it, their party wanted to restore "the government of the country to its primitive simplicity." In addition, they proclaimed the democratic qualities of their own tribune of the people—Jackson and his successors—and their determination to resist the encroachments on American liberty that were under way from their opponents. The Democrats' tale was drawn directly from the glorious year 1776, with appropriate embellishments and revisions.³⁴

The Whigs inhabited a different world. While they ultimately learned to rabble-rouse in election campaigns as effectively as did their opponents, the arguments they offered were always on behalf of a different conception of government, one that stressed its benignity and necessity. As well as railing against the excessiveness and manipulative boisterousness of the Democrats, with their threat to societal stability and well-considered policies, the Whigs wanted to focus primary attention on the needs of a growing nation and the dangers posed by the Jacksonians' reactionary localism, which went far beyond any rational reason for forestalling the useful role of the national government in economic and social affairs. Whigs clearly attracted groups who believed that they personified the values that had produced the United States, those associated with the initiative and drive of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and all that that implied—initiative, imagination, and personal discipline, the elements that had established a prosperous Arcadia in the New World.³⁵

They sought, therefore, the fullest possible promotion of the market revolution in all its many industrial and commercial dimensions. At the same time, they went beyond the economic, calling on Americans to build a harmonious and united society using schools, the church, and the power of government to frame a direction

for the United States that would ensure its moral health and the correct behavior of its citizens; they wanted to maintain that moral health, along with the constant infusion of appropriate ideals for the same purpose, in generations to come.³⁶ These things could be achieved, they reiterated, only by the effective mobilization of both state and national authority. To the Whigs, governments were not automatically evil and oppressive and should not be seen that way. Liberty and power were intertwined, not opposites. "The hand of governance," one of their pamphlets argued, "never touches us, but to promote the general good." In the party's canon, there was nothing to fear from the more extensive use of government power that its members wished to deploy—quite the contrary, in fact.³⁷

Finally, the desirable ends they sought could be accomplished, the Whigs argued, only through a government run by tried and efficient managers, not by raw and untrained individuals unversed in the arts of civic leadership and finance, no matter how personally popular. Many Whigs were initially hesitant about the demands of a popular politics expressed through organized parties, along with the messiness, unpredictability, and emotion that such political organizations personified and promoted. These hesitations had to be overcome for the party's own electoral good, and for the most part, they were in time. Still, the Whigs never wavered in their view that leadership based on rabble-rousing and corrupt patronage was the road to national disaster. The United States needed the equivalent of a George Washington in every generation, not what the Democrats treasured instead: uncouth, undisciplined, and overly rash Indian fighters or manipulative partisan lawyers, skilled only in the backroom political arts. To the Whigs, unlike their opponents, civil experience counted.³⁸

A Government After All

These contrasting notions were expressed in the mountains of pamphlets issued, editorials written, fliers distributed, and speeches made, all constituting the basic coin of the realm of campaign activity—an exhausting and repetitive enterprise. The expansion of the post office in these years provided an important asset for the distribution of the growing number of party newspapers, franked legislative documents, and partisan tracts. The politics of mobilization expressed in these numerous publications was constant; the language in which it was framed was always extreme, often hair-raising, designed to paint pictures of the depravity of the other side and containing dire warnings of the collapse of the Republic if their opponents won. Negative campaigning was a standard of political discourse from the 1820s onward, involving personal, group, and party slanders as the norm. The Whigs, for example, as Harry Watson described their rhetoric, "linked Democrats to every variety of subversive doctrine in religion, family life, and class relations." The Democrats responded in kind. The ghosts of royal op-

pression, aristocratic depravity, and Hamiltonian greed filled their discourse. No holds were barred in this intense political warfare.³⁹

Civic ceremonies reinforced these political truths. Americans were accustomed to communal gatherings of various kinds—market days, religious meetings, militia musters, mass demonstrations on behalf of some cause—where the verities of the national culture were transmitted and reinforced. The two parties now infused these gatherings with a regularity and a systematic quality previously unknown. Elaborate partisan spectacles during campaigns became a normal aspect of political life and were used effectively to transmit the relevant partisan messages. Every campaign season was overrun with parades, “grand rallies of the faithful,” barbecues, and similar community events, drawing people at all social levels into the battle for America. All the gatherings were filled, as well, with oratory, appeals to each party’s foot soldiers, and all the other elements of public discourse. In these events, both parties pulled out all the stops to awaken and draw in the faithful in time for the next election, and the one after that.⁴⁰

This energetic activity paid large dividends. The leaders of both parties were quite successful in their efforts to unite their people behind an ideological, cultural, and self-interested perspective that they could all share. The constituent groups of both parties had been inculcated quite early, in their family and community settings, with the basic truths that they should hold. They now found something in a public argument, repeatedly offered, that they believed was relevant to them in such terms, and they responded as party leaders hoped they would. Given the high popular turnout at the polls and for other campaign activities and the strong, persistent support given to the two main parties, the partisan appeals and their singular idiom accomplished their purpose of knitting together the party system into its distinctive shape and turning its members into committed, even rabid, partisans who were mobilized, armed, and ready for civic war.⁴¹

The purpose of all this partisan combat was to push for, or energetically resist, the enactment of particular public policies, especially those revolving around what the government should do to preserve and protect the American people from forces in the environment beyond their individual control—largely domestic, but occasionally stemming from foreign sources as well. But because this era was largely Democratic before 1860, the resulting public policy dimension was unprepossessing, despite the extraordinary clamor about what was at stake on each election day. Historians have been struck by how much this system utilized its vast energies in the expressive politics of electoral mobilization and how little payoff there was in the governmental realm.⁴² Both the states and the national government engaged in some legislative and bureaucratic policy initiatives. State governments enacted a range of distributive initiatives from the 1820s onward—the granting of corporate charters, for example—and they financed transportation and other improvements in support of private as well as public efforts. At the national level, Congress passed a certain amount of legislation in the forty years before the Civil War.

Yet land distribution, Indian removal, tariff laws, and other desiderata of the distributive state joined with foreign policy to take up relatively little of the federal government's time. Moreover, there was not much administrative heft in the American system. Tocqueville's description remains accurate. "There are so few matters with which the [national] government is concerned," he wrote. "Its acts are important but rare." Or, as Heather Cox Richardson put it, "before the Civil War, the American national government's economic activities were as limited as one would expect from a country capital mired in a swamp." Americans, goes a familiar refrain, were largely ungoverned. Their politics saw to that.⁴³

Some recent research suggests that the nation's policy dimension may not have been as bare-bones as the conventional wisdom suggests, that there were more administrative and regulative activities by government at all levels than we usually credit. The Whigs sometimes had their day. Communications and tax policies by Congress, state legislatures, and local governments directed people into certain channels and shaped what they could do there, limiting their opportunities rather than simply allowing a mad rush of uncontrolled development. Beyond that, William Novak's description of the amount and breadth of local and state regulative activities goes far to challenge what he calls "the myth of [American] statelessness" in the first half of the nineteenth century. Such activities extended to the national government as well.⁴⁴

Such evidence of governmental vigor may constitute only a few fragments on the landscape and not add up to as much as some now claim. Nevertheless, however overexcited they may have been, the Democrats were not entirely wrong in their perception of what their opponents were up to. The Whigs did not always come away empty-handed when they pushed for a more energetic use of government power. The lineaments of a nascent American state were becoming somewhat more visible in this era than they had been at any time since the Federalist era.⁴⁵

At Odds

The founders of the partisan political nation wanted it to be all-embracing in its reach and all-powerful in its command of public affairs. They believed that their hopes had been realized. Not only had the size of the active and involved voter pool grown steadily, but in addition, the system often reached beyond the voters and pulled others into it at some level of engagement. Nevertheless, despite the reach of the partisan system, there were always contrary impulses in the nation that were never fully contained under the aegis of the two main parties.

Not everyone was part of, or accepted, their ways and definitions. Some Americans remained uninvolved in, unimpressed by, or hostile to the partisan culture. A range of voices articulated instead their commitment to older politi-

cal values and vented their continuing hostility to the new impulses. To be sure, some of this anti-party expression was brought forward for partisan purposes. Major Wilson has referred, for example, to "the antiparty pieties of the furiously partisan Whigs" during the Van Buren administration. Other such expressions were probably not partisan in intent but reflective of a persistent ideological resistance, in different places, to the emergent political assumptions of this era.⁴⁶

Beyond the skeptics about the party system as a whole, others tried to improve on the existing structure. Much about the political world remained exclusionary, for example, despite the triumph of all-but-universal white male suffrage by the 1830s. American society contained important areas of gender and racially defined restrictions and limits that were never faced in any sustained way by those engaged in political activity.⁴⁷ The formal political realm breathed both a strong exclusionary masculinity and a persistent commitment to whiteness. As Mary Ryan wrote, "by statute and pervasive prejudice, the majority of Americans were kept out of electoral procedures and representative government, the most important areas of civic engagement."⁴⁸

These restrictions created their own political dynamics in this era, much of it outside the two-party system and often outside formal politics entirely. There were many politically conscious Americans ready and eager to critique, with fiery intensity, the system's shortcomings in the areas of race, class, and gender, its exploitiveness, insensitivity, and failure to live up to its egalitarian claims. Middle-class women's groups, humanitarian critics, abolitionists, Anti-Masons, and nativists were all eager to expunge the evils rampant in American society. Similarly, craftsmen, displaced workers, and other members of the producer classes, under severe pressure from the capitalist intrusion into their lives, often fiercely resisted and sought political remedies for their plight: ten-hour workdays, the revival of anti-monopolistic commercial practices, and various kinds of guarantees for their security and their worth as productive members of the nation.⁴⁹

These movements enjoyed a rich historiography that emphasized the complexity of the roots of their protest, the complicated character of their political thought, and the problematic nature of their commitment to existing political notions and institutions. In particular, many of them saw the need for a political mentality that went beyond the pragmatic and electoral concerns of the Whigs and Democrats. To them, the Democrats—and even most Republicans, when they came onto the scene—were designed primarily to manage affairs as they were, not to change things for the better. Wrapped in their own parochial concerns, the major parties did nothing to correct and improve society.⁵⁰

Those at odds with the prevailing system proselytized incessantly—their clamor could be as harsh and as persistent as that of the main parties—and vigorously cut out their own political channels to achieve their ends. These took several forms. Some functioned as pressure groups on the major parties. Movements on behalf of women's political rights were an imposing feature of

alternative politics; some women, however, managed to operate within the formal political world despite their legal exclusion—as petitioners and pamphleteers, agenda setters, and participants in partisan campaign activities. Some efforts were also made, through advocacy and pressure, to end racial definitions of citizenship and political participation.⁵¹

Some of the constituent elements of these outsiders followed traditional patterns drawn from the majority's example. They organized numerous third parties. Between Jackson's original victory and the wartime race of 1864, no presidential election was limited to the two major parties. Dissatisfied with the thrust and nature of the main parties, Anti-Masons, American Republicans, Liberty men, Free-Soilers, the Workingman's Party, and the Know-Nothings, among similar efforts, fought to win office. Although these groups never garnered large numbers of votes, Whig and Democratic party managers, busily seeking to scrape together popular majorities in the many closely contested elections that occurred, had to think about the minor parties all the time and deal with them as best they could.⁵²

At the same time, this politics of impatience and challenge operated beyond the boundaries of the formal channels of elections, parties, legislatures, and government agencies, although its activities sought to influence those channels. Collective actions embodying public expression of discontent—street demonstrations, riots, and similar actions against perceived evils—were commonplace in American life (extending, it should be noted, to campaigns and even election days, as partisan mobs often engaged in brawls at rallies and near polling stations). Protest demonstrations by workingmen against their condition were widespread; several American cities saw repeated expressions of this tactic throughout the 1830s and 1840s. In rural areas, there were similar moments of collective action with a political purpose, protests against the inequitable conditions imposed on those living in the countryside. New York's anti-rent war of the mid-1840s, for one, underlined a stark and desperate challenge to the existing society, one that demanded political remedies before it was too late.⁵³

All this added another dimension to America's political life. There was impressive variety among the challengers at odds with the party system, different groups and individuals with different notions, strategies, and responses to the world around them. Some of those espousing alternative political impulses were middle or upper class; some were not. Some were part of the dominant American ethnoreligious culture; others were not. Some lived in fear, others in hope. Some of their demands were mildly reformist in tone and purpose, and some exuded a more radical perspective about society than that evidenced in conventional politics, one that constantly pushed against the system's boundaries.⁵⁴ Those at odds with the dominant partisan regime occupied their share of the public space of the time and considered themselves anything but peripheral to the political nation. Their expressions of discontent, demands for social and eco-

conomic change, constant mobilization efforts, impatience with and hostility toward the realm of ordinary politics as it had evolved, and expressions of political attitudes and aspirations outside the two-party system were certainly energetic and noticeable.

Some made occasional headway, and all were stimulants threatening the complacent attitudes of the majority about their society.⁵⁵ But did they significantly nuance the dominant force of the political world of that time or suggest to us, more than a century later, that some important revisions to the partisan-imperative narrative are in order because of their presence? Ronald Formisano argued that these exceptions to the majority mentality—the resisters to it, and those not incorporated in it—were numerous enough, the energy they expended important enough, and the directions they took askew enough to create serious questions about how far-reaching and dominant the partisan system really was in those years.⁵⁶

I am not so sure. Reformers spoke loudly and sometimes had influence. But whatever their “acute dissent from the political status quo,” the results they attained were disappointing.⁵⁷ Most of the time, adherents of alternative political mentalities were unable to strip away the basic structure of the dominant system or change its direction—with one gigantic exception: the sectional alternative to Van Buren’s political way. For the rest, their active numbers were small, and the number who supported them on election day was even smaller. Most voters showed their interest and their involvement by coming to the polls in record numbers and indicating their essential Whig or Democratic commitment on their ballots. As a result, the challengers to the system rarely achieved the kinds of policy victories they sought. Their efforts remained well bounded by the powerful political institutions on the scene that drew so many white male Americans into their embrace, dividing them, as voters, across class and sectional lines and making most of them indifferent to external challenges. The partisan center largely held against the various torments that beset it to continue its impressive sway over the American political nation.⁵⁸

Civil War in the Making

Sectional tensions were palpable and persistent in the United States after 1820. Frequent spasms of sectionally driven unrest and concern—in 1819–1820, again in 1831–1832, in the patterns of electoral support for Jackson, in the southern difficulties of Van Buren in 1836, in the growth of abolitionism, in the congressional petition controversy of the late 1830s, and in John C. Calhoun’s long campaign to arouse and unify the political South—attested to the presence of sensitivities of a high order rooted in the realities of important social, economic, and ideological differences between North and South.⁵⁹

Despite the fact that there were always those in both sections who believed (and acted on the notion) that sectional differences and tensions were not only inevitable but also central to public affairs, these advocates had to cope with the powerful inter-sectional forces shaping American society, including the partisan framework of national politics. The United States may have been half slave and half free, but politics within both North and South usually echoed the larger political trends of the nation as a whole. The party system developed in the slave South in the 1820s and 1830s. Both Whigs and Democrats attracted significant support throughout the region, albeit with patchiness and incompleteness in some places, especially in South Carolina—always the great exception in any exposition of the nature of American politics in this era.⁶⁰

Party builders were acutely sensitive to the sectional anxieties (and anger) present in their society. But to most of them, such impulses were largely diversionary of their main concerns. The inter-sectional political alliances that characterized both the Whig and the Democratic Parties were so potent not only because many feared the danger posed by the divisiveness of slavery and sought ways to dampen the issue but also because they believed that there were more compelling issues on the political agenda, issues that united people across sectional lines. To the Democrats, for example, resurgent Federalism was always the primary issue, everything else a diversion.⁶¹

Therefore, national party leaders responded to the alternative sectional perspectives as their culture, commitments, and self-interest dictated. They resisted strongly and acted within the formulation offered by John Ashworth: Whigs and Democrats subscribed “to different and opposing ideologies or world views, and the antagonism that this difference generated was sufficient to unite northerners and southerners within the same parties.” In short, “northerners and southerners divided over some fundamental questions that did not directly relate to slavery.” The result was that through the 1840s, whatever the difficult moments, there was a sense of being able to manage sectional confrontation and keep it within bounds. Whatever its occasional impact, it proved to have little staying power in the formal political world. Despite the intense commitment of some individuals on these matters, others were not caught up in them. To many Americans, sectional pressures remained another variable to be considered, not one that readily overwhelmed their political consciousness.⁶²

In the mid and late 1840s, the territorial issue disrupted the political landscape with unusual ferocity; sectional discord threatened to become more sustained than it had ever been. But the forces of partisan containment, marked by the compromise measures of 1850 and the parties' finality resolutions in 1852, took hold. They did so because of the determination of party leaders and the response of their followers. The sectionalized, hothouse atmosphere of the national capital did not penetrate into voter consciousness outside of Washington. At the electoral level, party commitment largely held and remained rooted in

the same matters that had always defined it. Once again, the existing intersectional political institutions effectively restrained the disruptive possibilities of the onrushing sectional tension.⁶³

To be sure, the situation was never as stable as it appeared to be. William Freehling convincingly demonstrated that the aggressive demands of southern rights leaders within the Democratic Party successfully pushed the party toward a stronger pro-southern stance as time passed. There was a continuing ideological impulse underlying this, however. With their fervent, all but religious, faith in local authority triumphing over all else, most Democrats had to agree that the role of the national government in limiting slave extension was, at best, problematic. As a result, they found themselves defending domestic slavery and its expansion. And that, when combined with other factors, ultimately brought them great trouble.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, whatever the partisan power displayed, things did change. The well-working system began to unravel and become dysfunctional in 1854, beginning with an explosive electoral disruption in a series of off-year contests for state and congressional offices. For the only time in our political experience, a voter realignment led to one major party replacing another—with far-reaching consequences for the nation. At its end, a sectional dynamic at last took hold in American politics. The sectionally exclusive Republicans replaced the intersectional Whigs, incorporating many of that party's previous commitments in their appeal but, critically, mixing them with other brews on the scene, to bite deeply into northern consciousness.⁶⁵

At the same time, one of the striking things about the wrenching political shift of the 1850s was how much it occurred within the existing institutional system of persistent partisan conflict. At first, the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party had the upper hand in the realignment that was under way, being seen for a time as the Democrats' major national competitor, in place of the fading Whigs. But the Know-Nothings slipped badly, and their rivals for anti-Democratic votes, the Republicans, were able to pick up the pieces as events unfolded to the latter's advantage. The violent battle for control of the Kansas territory, both on the scene and in the halls of Congress, demonstrated to many northern voters the truth of what the Republicans were claiming about the predatory, domineering nature of southern politicians. They had to be stopped.⁶⁶

That realization provoked an intense reaction that drew more voters into the Republican fold at the expense of both the Whigs and the stumbling Know-Nothings. The latter were not forgotten, however. In the best tradition of partisan coalitionism, Republican leaders moved to expand their support by incorporating as many Know-Nothings into the Republican complex as they could, integrating their anti-immigrant strain with the other elements in play in the mid-1850s. They established, as the bedrock of their appeal, that it was the surge of a ravaging southern power that accounted for the nation's discontents, which could be confronted only by a northern crusade to defeat the southern-dominated Democratic Party, always

aided in its premodern wrongheadedness by the votes of too many recently arrived Irish Catholics. In their appeal, the Republicans fully endorsed the society's modernizing impulses, most importantly, free labor capitalism, the Americanization of outsiders, and hostility to those in the system who were not part of the modernizing equation: certain immigrants, Democrats, and southerners.⁶⁷

The ideological, rhetorical, and behavioral framework in which Republicans cast these remarks was familiar, albeit overlaid now with the interpenetration of partisan and sectional impulses. The Democrats resisted in their traditional fashion, as their political understanding continued to dictate. They did not see themselves as too pro-southern or too pro-slavery. To them, those were not the issues of this (or any) moment in the partisan world they inhabited. The Republicans were, in their view, the latest reincarnation of the Federalists. Like their predecessors, they too would use the power of government to redo the nation in unacceptable ways. They had to be resisted, as they always had been, by the followers and successors of Thomas Jefferson.⁶⁸

Despite this resistance by the Democrats, the surge of popular support for the Republicans was impressive. As northerners began to take notice of the aggressive slavocracy, and as events unfolded that indicated the extent of southern aggression and power—all giving unredeemed force to the Republican perspective—the balance between the sectional argument and the substantive forces that had so long underpinned American political conflict shifted. Old sources of division remained and continued to stimulate confrontation. But they were increasingly embedded in the sectional construct that the Republicans so persuasively articulated and that brought them victory in 1860.⁶⁹

Southerners were horrified by the direction that northern politics was taking. Like their enemies, many of them relied at first on the party system to protect them, using the Democratic Party as their champion, insisting throughout the late 1850s on its full commitment to protecting slavery—a position that some northern Democrats accepted to the end and that others rejected, ultimately splitting the party. At the same time, internal partisan conflict continued in the South in the 1850s. There were always those—sometimes called Whigs; at other times, Americans, opposition, or Unionists—who fought hard against the increasingly dominant Democrats in the region. Infused as it was with sectional fears and distress, this intense combat echoed earlier themes and ways, even as it adopted the new perspectives present.⁷⁰

By 1860, the sectional and the partisan were fully intertwined in American political life. Martin Van Buren's plan for the permanent dominance of inter-sectional political dynamics had faltered in a manner that he had feared and that the system he had helped construct had forestalled for so long. Still, and ironically, the realigning experience of 1854–1860 also reinforced most of the tendencies already present in the American political nation. Conflict was, if anything, reinvigorated, and politics in all its dimensions flourished within the

structure of a party system bent out of shape but not broken—still the basic receptacle within which confrontation over the society's essential nature, and its growing pains, was organized and carried on.

Coda: The Civil War as a Confirming and Reinforcing Political Experience

Finally, there was an extraordinary unleashing of political energy after 1861, as a result of war-induced pressures that led to a critical redefinition of national authority, a change in the arc of government power, and a major transformation in economic life and in race, class, and gender relations, all of which had an impact far beyond the war that motivated them. In the name of defending the Union, northern Republican leaders undertook a policy offensive whose component legislative elements went well beyond what the Democrats would accept. The Democrats resisted in the long-established style of their political generation, because they took seriously the threat underscored in a Republican campaign pamphlet in 1864 that "the war has taught us some valuable lessons of constitutional law, which plain men who are not lawyers can understand. It has taught us that the government must have power to save the nation; that whatever is necessary to that end is constitutional . . . that the Constitution exists for the people . . . and we have a right to modify it to suit our needs according to our will."⁷¹

The Lincoln administration's policies certainly seemed to demonstrate the pertinence of that bravura statement. Both the legislative and the executive branches exercised power to the fullest extent of their abilities. Every policy realm, from economics to civil liberties, underscored the government's full commitment to the most nationalist perspective present in American political discourse—a protective tariff, a national banking system, conscription, and restrictions on civil liberties, all in the name of saving the nation. Never had the energies of national power been so fully stretched.⁷²

To the horrified Democrats, it was 1791—and 1825—all over again. The Federalists were on the prowl and had to be smashed once more. They tried mightily to do so throughout the war and beyond, engaging in all the traditional actions of a political party determined to challenge and overthrow the government in power. As they did, political passions were inflamed to unprecedented levels; policy arguments erupted, accompanied as always by extraordinary demonology between the two contending parties. Campaigns and elections were tense affairs, as they had always been. The howls on both sides were memorable—and familiar. Even as Americans engaged in bloody internecine warfare, little seemed to have changed in the nation's public arena.⁷³

The Confederacy did not show the same continuation of two well-organized parties locked in mortal conflict. Some Southerners expressed a great deal of

hostility toward ordinary political confrontation and the seeking of particularist advantage in the crisis situation in which they were caught. As these people saw it, politics should be adjourned until the war ended. Nevertheless, there was an intense and sustained political dialogue there throughout the war, as there had always been, between those espousing different notions of the nature and reach of government power. Political echoes of past battles were as prominent in the Southern air as they were in the Northern states, and, at the state level, there were occasional flurries of partisan activities and organization. Given their history, the possibility of national political organizations reviving in order to contest a presidential election, for example, was not unthinkable.⁷⁴

None of this was surprising, given the region's history in the partisan era. All of it, in both nations, was a fitting coda to an era of partisan inflammation rooted in the diversity, sprawl, and multidirections of a rapidly changing American society and economy, along with the very different fears, desires, hopes, and persistent conflicts spawned by the transformation under way—all expressed in a political arena dominated, as it had been for many years, by a conception of politics rooted in constant conflict between distinct perspectives, interests, and cultures and over the power, reach, and legitimacy of national political parties. Whatever its bending and recasting, the party period had not ended. Its essential dictates remained alive even in wartime, and in the North, at least, its institutional structure was as powerful as it had ever been. Americans remained unable and unwilling, as they had been for so long, to follow the advice of John Quincy Adams and “discard every element of rancor” in their politics, even amidst civil war, and certainly not in the vigorous confrontations that followed during Reconstruction and beyond. Martin Van Buren's template remained in place.

Acknowledgment

The quotation in the chapter title is from the *Nashville Union*, November 9, 1838.

Notes

1. On the panic of 1819, see Murray Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York, 1962).
2. Douglas North, *Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860* (New York, 1961); Peter Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy* (New York, 1969).
3. Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York, 1991).
4. There have been many attempts to describe an American ideological-values consensus. See, for example, Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955); Eric Foner, *The*

- Story of American Freedom* (New York, 1998); and, relevant to the early nineteenth century, Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore, 1987).
5. A good introduction to this is Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J., 1961).
 6. Christopher Clark, "The Consequences of the Market Revolution in the American North," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville, Va., 1996), 37. See also J. Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Madison, Wis., 1956); Harry Scheiber, *The Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820–1861* (Athens, Ohio, 1968).
 7. Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, Calif., 1991).
 8. As in Federalist No. 9.
 9. Silbey, *American Political Nation*. The current scholarly mood insists on broadening politics to include a wide range of activities, impulses, and power relationships, many of them outside the formal political arena, in family settings and in the workplace. Politics, of course, exists everywhere; there are power dynamics in every relationship. The politics of individual gender situations is real and plays an important role in American life, as do other such power realities embedded within workplace and other socioeconomic settings. These matters, it seems to me, are important areas of study and perhaps the rightful domain of social rather than political historians, except when they impinge on the formal political world and its realities. See my comments on these matters in "The State and Practice of American Political History: The Nineteenth Century as a Test Case," *Journal of Policy History* 11 (1999): 1–29.
 10. Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley, Calif., 1969); Michael Wallace, "Changing Concepts of Party in the United States: New York, 1815–1828," *American Historical Review* 74 (December 1968): 453–91. For its continuation, see Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York, 1986).
 11. Adams is quoted in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), 86. Van Buren's reactions and activities can be traced in Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1959), among other places.
 12. On 1824, see James F. Hopkins, "Election of 1824," in *The History of American Presidential Elections*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Fred I. Israel (New York, 1974), 1:349–409; Remini, *Van Buren and the Democratic Party*.
 13. Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1966); Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*; Silbey, *American Political Nation*.
 14. Ronald P. Formisano, "The New Political History and the Election of 1840," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (spring 1993): 661–82; Ronald P. Formisano, "The Invention of the Ethnocultural Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 99 (April 1994): 453–77.
 15. Formisano, "New Political History"; Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore, 1995); Donald J. Ratcliffe, "The Crisis of Commercialization: National Party Alignments and

- the Market Revolution, 1819–1844,” in Stokes and Conway, *Market Revolution in America*, 177–201.
16. Michael F. Holt, “The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jacksonian Voting Behavior,” in Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 151–91; Formisano, “New Political History”; Watson, *Liberty and Power*.
 17. There were many elements of what Sellers referred to as “democratic resistance to a stressful market revolution.” Charles G. Sellers, Jr., “Capitalism and Democracy in American Historical Mythology,” in Stokes and Conway, *Market Revolution in America*, 311.
 18. John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic* (Cambridge, 1995), 1, 494. The Jackson quotation is in Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 173; Sellers, *Market Revolution*.
 19. The quotation is from William Shade, “Society and Politics in Antebellum Virginia’s Southside,” *Journal of Southern History* 43 (May 1987): 178. The values and outlook of the Whig Party have received a great deal of attention from historians. See, for example, Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979); Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York, 1999); Gabor Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis, 1977).
 20. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority* (New York, 1969); Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J., 1957).
 21. Joel H. Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841–1852* (Pittsburgh, 1967); Herbert Ershkowitz and William Shade, “Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in State Legislatures during the Jacksonian Era,” *Journal of American History* 58 (December 1971): 591–622; Holt, *Rise and Fall of American Whig Party*.
 22. Robert Kelley, *The Cultural Pattern in American Politics: The First Century* (New York, 1979); Robert P. Swierenga, “Ethnoreligious Political Behavior in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Voting, Values, Cultures,” in *Religion and American Politics, from the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York, 1990), 146–71.
 23. Daniel Walker Howe, “The Market Revolution and the Shaping of Identity in Whig-Jacksonian America,” in Stokes and Conway, *Market Revolution in America*, 266; Richard Cawardine, “‘Antinomians’ and ‘Arminians’: Methodists and the Market Revolution,” in *ibid.*, 301. A number of scholars have suggested that with regard to ethnic antagonisms demonstrated in election campaigns and class-based and economically rooted confrontations, “ethnicity and class cannot be divorced.” I am not so sure. Obviously, some of these conflicts had roots in differential economic situations and opportunities and, to that degree, certainly reflected aspects of America’s political economy. But many of them lay outside the kind of economic interest-group politics and ideological confrontations over the nature of the nation’s economic core that structured so much of politics after 1820. The particular form they took suggests how deeply rooted they were. Why would some political perspectives take the particular shape of ethnoreligious identities and commitments unless they had meaning and power in people’s lives, a meaning and power that had some independence from economic forces and that remained rooted in historical memories and a group’s specific experience? See Sellers, “Capitalism and Democracy,” 320; Kelley, *Cultural Pattern*.

24. Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), introduces the theme of the political socialization of Americans in this era.
25. This process is described in Silbey, *American Political Nation*.
26. Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*; Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass., 1973); Whitman Ridgeway, *Community Leadership in Maryland, 1790–1840: A Comparative Analysis of Power in Society* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979); Ralph Wooster, *The People in Power: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Lower South, 1850–1860* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1969); and Charles Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1952), are a few of the studies that deal with the nature of political leadership and the way its members operated in the system.
27. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 90. In these remarks about the constant need to mobilize voters to do their duty and about how party leaders operated in caucuses and conventions, I am responding to a recent challenge to the partisan-dominant narrative of these years, offered by Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin in several articles and a new book. See "Where Is the Real America? Politics and Popular Consciousness in the Antebellum Era," *American Quarterly* 49 (June 1997): 225–67; "Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy," *Journal of American History* 84 (December 1997): 855–85; *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics, 1820–1890* (Princeton, N.J., 2000).
28. Joel H. Silbey, *The American Party Battle: Election Campaign Pamphlets, 1828–1876*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1999).
29. *Ibid.*, xvii, quoting "Speech of Mr. Bartlett at a meeting of citizens Opposed to the Re-Election of Andrew Jackson" (Portsmouth, N.H., 1832).
30. "Every election," Watson argues, "became an urgent referendum on the character of the future" (*Liberty and Power*, 15).
31. Silbey, *American Party Battle*, 1:16.
32. *Ibid.*, 7 et seq.
33. *Ibid.*, 154, lays out the ideological constructs of each party.
34. *United States Democratic Review* 40 (December 1857): 517.
35. Howe, *Political Culture of American Whigs*; Holt, *Rise and Fall of American Whig Party*.
36. *Ibid.*
37. "Proceedings and Address of the Convention of Delegates . . . to Nominate . . . John Quincy Adams" (Columbus, Ohio, 1827), 7, quoted in Silbey, *American Party Battle*, 1:14.
38. See the discussions in Howe, *Political Culture of American Whigs*, and Holt, *Rise and Fall of American Whig Party*.
39. On the post office expansion, see Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, 1995). The idiom of party warfare is discussed in Silbey, *American Party Battle*; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 223.
40. William Gienapp, "'Politics Seems to Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840–1860," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840–1860*, ed. Stephen E. Maizlish and John Kushma (College Station, Tex., 1982), 14–69; Baker, *Affairs of Party*.
41. See the discussion of party loyalty, voter turnout, and persistent partisanship in voting behavior in, among other places, Silbey, *American Political Nation*.

42. See McCormick, *Party Period and Public Policy*, and Ballard Campbell, *The Growth of American Government: Governance from the Cleveland Era to the Present* (Bloomington, Ind., 1995).
43. Tocqueville is quoted by Michael Kammen in his *Alexis de Tocqueville and Democracy in America* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 47; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997), 27.
44. William Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), 3; see also Richard R. John's useful review article "Governmental Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic, 1787-1835," *Studies in American Political Development* 11 (fall 1997): 347-80.
45. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, 1992); Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacity, 1877-1920* (Cambridge, 1982); Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge, 1990).
46. Major L. Wilson, *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren* (Lawrence, Kans., 1984), 132.
47. On the expansion of the electorate, Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage, from Property to Democracy* (Princeton, N.J., 1960), remains the essential introduction.
48. Mary P. Ryan, "Civil Society as Democratic Practice: North American Cities during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (spring 1999): 575. See also David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991). Some historians have stressed the many gendered qualities present in this political system as it evolved. In their robust determination to confront domestic enemies and pick at least rhetorical fights with foreign countries threatening the nation, the Democrats exuded what Watson refers to as "the raw masculine appeal of Jackson and his movement" (Harry Watson, *Andrew Jackson versus Henry Clay: Democracy and Development in Antebellum America* [Boston, 1998], 38), underscoring the pugnacious articulation of male values in much of that movement's rhetoric and understanding of the world they inhabited. At the same time, we appreciate from the work of Varon how much women were involved in Whig Party activities and in helping to shape that party's outlook and approach in certain matters. Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998). See also Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore, 1990).
49. Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York, 1978); Ellen DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (New York, 1978); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984).
50. The pamphlets, speeches, and platforms of these movements are filled with such denunciations of major-party culture and behavior. See, as one example, "Address of the Liberty Party of Pennsylvania to the People of the State" (Philadelphia, 1844), included in Silbey, *American Party Battle*, 1:178-207.
51. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*.
52. Mark Voss-Hubbard, "The 'Third Party Tradition' Reconsidered: Third Parties and American Public Life, 1830-1900," *Journal of American History* 86 (June 1999): 121-50. There are numerous studies of the individual third parties on the scene, many of which are included in preceding notes.

53. David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York, 1998); Reeve Huston, "Land and Freedom: The New York Anti-Rent Wars and the Construction of Free Labor in the Antebellum North," in *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working Class Experience*, ed. Erie Arnesen et al. (Urbana, Ill., 1998), 1944.
54. A useful study of a range of these parties is Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York, 1976).
55. Voss-Hubbard, "Third Party Tradition."
56. Ronald P. Formisano, "The 'Party Period' Revisited," *Journal of American History* 86 (June 1999): 93–120.
57. Voss-Hubbard, "Third Party Tradition," 150.
58. Silbey, *American Political Nation*. There are useful comments on this in Richard Oestreicher, "Urban Working Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870–1940," *Journal of American History* 74 (March 1988): 1257–86.
59. There is no shortage of intelligent historiography recounting the sectional story. Among the most recent, see William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990); John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. 1, *Commerce and Compromise, 1820–1850* (Cambridge, 1995); Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* (New York, 1992).
60. There are studies of the development of the party system in the individual southern states. See, among many, Marc Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836–1845* (Baton Rouge, 1983); M. Philip Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi, 1817–1846" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1984); J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978); William Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824–1861* (Charlottesville, Va., 1996).
61. This certainly was true of Martin Van Buren, whose fear of the return of Federalism shaped his attitudes toward sectional rumblings for much of his career.
62. Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics*, 368.
63. Michael F. Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1983); Silbey, *Shrine of Party*; Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997).
64. Freehling, *Road to Disunion*.
65. The best introductions to the voter realignment of the 1850s are William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York, 1987), and Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*.
66. Ibid.
67. Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*; Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York, 1985), 127–65.
68. The best introductions to the condition of the Democrats and Republicans in the late 1850s include Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*; David Potter, *The Impending Crisis* (New York, 1976); and Robert Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973).
69. Potter, *Impending Crisis*; Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*.
70. See, for example, Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*; Daniel Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989).
71. Philip Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence, Kans., 1994); "Address of the Union League Club of Philadelphia" (Philadelphia, 1864), 25.
72. Paludan, *Presidency of Lincoln*; Richardson, *Greatest Nation*.
73. On the northern Democrats, one can usefully begin with Joel H. Silbey, *A Re-*

spectable Minority: *The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York, 1977).

74. Although he and I disagree about its meaning, there is a wealth of useful information about politics in the Confederacy in George Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolt against Politics* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994). See also Thomas B. Alexander and Richard Beringer, *The Anatomy of the Confederate Congress: A Study of the Influences of Member Characteristics on Legislative Voting Behavior, 1861-1865* (Nashville, 1972).