CRISIS OF COMPROMISE

Generations and the Coming of the American Civil War

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Abstract

Crisis of Compromise examines how generations shaped United States politics and political culture in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Often this period is analysed through the lens of sectional division or party politics, where focus remains with the broader structural forces, or specific individuals and events, that shaped the United States' path toward conflict. This dissertation, by contrast, places generations at the heart of that story. The defining issues of the Antebellum Era - territorial expansion, immigration, slavery, sectionalism, and European revolution - were all conceptualised, contested, and ultimately clarified in generational terms.

Through the 1840s, competing generational identities, shaped by diverse formative experiences, promoted divergent attitudes to the extraordinary expansion of the nation's borders. These generational tensions subsequently mapped onto attitudes towards compromise, both as a foundational constitutional practice, and more specifically as a solution to tensions attendant to debates over slavery's place in the new territories. While compromise prevailed in 1850, divisions between generations remained, and became crucial in destabilising the two main political parties through the first half of the decade. Capitalising upon this instability, the Republican Party displaced the Whigs as the second party in US politics. It came to self-consciously identify as a party of young men, leveraging generational dynamics which inspired antislavery and antiorthodox politics; when Lincoln was elected in 1860, he relied upon the overwhelming support of a younger generation of Northern voters.

Building upon existing scholarship, *Crisis of Compromise* combines analysis of the generational concept as a rhetorical device, a sociological phenomenon, and as a prominent aspect of antebellum political thought. This tripartite analytical framework provides for the broadest possible examination of the concept's impact upon pre-war politics. After all, this

dissertation will assert that generations remain an underexamined, yet vital ancillary to the sectional and partisan foci of traditional Civil War causation narratives. Generationally defined attitudes to slavery and compromise, were crucial in creating the conditions for conflict in 1861.

Extended Abstract

Crisis of Compromise will examine how generations shaped United States politics and political culture in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Often this period is analysed through the lens of sectional division or party machinations. Historians focus upon the broader structural forces, or specific individuals and events, that shaped the United States' path toward conflict. This dissertation, by contrast, examines how generations – as rhetoric, a reality and an idea – defined both the pattern of specific political events, and the constitutional, moral and economic assumptions which underpinned them. Between 1840 and 1860, the United States was gripped by a political and institutional crisis over chattel slavery. While the Founding Generation assumed that economic and geographical limitations would render the institution ultimately moribund, subsequent technological advances and territorial acquisitions ensured that by the middle of the nineteenth century, slavery had become incurably bound up with the South's way of life. For a younger generation of Southerners, whose social position, economic prospects and political power derived almost exclusively from the institution, ideas of its eventual extinction were unconscionable. However, to guarantee its survival demanded a steady supply of fertile soil organised into new states, granting the federal representation necessary to protect a constitutional regime that provided unquestionable support for the legal claim to property in man. In the North, their generational contemporaries were increasingly unwilling to accept slavery's voracious appetite for land and power. Seemingly endless attempts to erode the presupposed boundaries of enslaved labour, coupled with the passage of offensive legislation which clarified Northern complicity

in the institution, provided firm evidence of the malign influence of a small cabal of pro-slavery ideologues on federal policy. Furthermore, their formative years had seen the maturation of organised abolition and increasing public exposure to the cruel realities of enslavement, which in turn had hardened moral opposition to the South's peculiar institution. Tensions over slavery therefore, were innately generational as well as sectional.

Between the Founding Generation, and those rising to political power in the 1840s and 50s, was a second generation of American statesmen, born during or shortly after the Revolution, who had come of age in a political world defined by veneration for the Founding moment. They had found their faith in the robustness of their political inheritance shaken by the Missouri Crisis, and the prospect of slavery tearing the Union apart. Chapter I will examine how this generation, instilled with a resultant cautiousness around territorial expansion, and a faith in Jacksonian Era partisanship as a balm for sectional tensions, clashed with younger elements in both sections, and within both major political parties. Within the Democracy, a Young America movement explicitly coupled replacement of the Party's traditional leaders with prospects of national progress. The sweeping economic and technological transformations of the mid-century compounded a sense that Americans were living through a period of fundamental change in the modes, processes, and ideas dictating political life. Capitalising upon these transformations, and in order to export the universal benefits of Republicanism to the world, the Party required new leadership. As the Whigs searched for a presidential candidate between 1846 and 48, they too fielded demands for new men and new ideas. A bi-sectional group of congressional moderates – the Young Indian Club – questioned whether the Party's repeated electoral failures demonstrated an outmoded platform and the diminished personal capacity of its elder statesmen. Simultaneously, a group of young Northern Whigs sought to redefine the Party in opposition to slavery, both morally and economically. Within both main parties therefore, generational divisions began to

destabilise existing structures of power. The 1840s marked the commencement of a generational rupture in US politics; older politicians desperately clung to Jacksonian orthodoxy while younger generational movements bristled for new political direction.

Chapter II will examine how into the 1850s, sectional crisis served to accelerate this political transformation. In perhaps the most acrimonious congressional debate in United States history, representatives across the political spectrum were forced to justify their support, or opposition, to Compromise proposals over slavery's fate in the vast new Mexican cession. Many reached for the idea of generations to do so. From the Founding to the Civil War, ideas surrounding generational belonging and intergenerational obligations changed in response to political events, in turn altering assumptions regarding the appropriate means of tempering political division and preserving the promises of the Constitution. In 1850, the Second Generation led by citing their filial obligations to the Founding and their desire to preserve their constitutional inheritance. Fulfilment of this duty depended upon compromise, defined by mutual concessions between competing (often sectional) interests. However, this mode of politics was antithetical to the assumptions of younger antislavery Northerners and Southern nationalists, elements of a Third Generation who instead lent upon their paternal obligations to future constituents to argue against further concessions. For Northern representatives like New York's William Seward, generational replacement would tend to a growing antislavery majority, and as such, any further compromise would be a betrayal of future Northern interests. Analogously in the South, concern for the political future of a rising generation led to equal reluctance for further conciliation. Increasingly outnumbered in the House, and under the looming threat of the admission of further free states in the Northwest, a younger generation of Southern representatives saw 1850 as a final opportunity to defend some semblance of political parity with the North. While Compromise measures would ultimately be signed into law in the autumn of 1850, the nature of their passing reflected the

absence of a congressional majority for the process of mutual concession so fundamental to the Second Generation's politics.

In the years that followed, the relative calming of interparty tensions on a national level was more than matched by the ratcheting of intraparty conflict. Chapter III will examine how the generational rhetoric that had emerged through the 1840s became fundamental to narrating divisions between opposition factions within both Whig and Democratic Parties. In the decades preceding the Civil War, the nation's newspapers, the appendices of the *Congressional Globe*, preacher's sermons, college lectures, and the private writings of both disaffected voters and conservative politicians became increasingly punctuated by generational rhetoric. This was often used to characterise insurgent ideologies, sow intra and inter party division, and to denigrate personal political rivals. Through the first years of the 1850s, New York's Silver Greys were pitched against Sewardites determined to unshackle the Party from its traditional political programme and pursue a more explicitly antislavery position. Besmirching their colleagues as 'superannuated… mummies' or 'clogs' on progress, antislavery Whigs sought to steer the party's direction by personally diminishing their ideological opponents. Within the Democracy, the same dynamic played out through the contest for the 1852 presidential nomination. Senior Jacksonians were maligned by Young America and its allies as "old fogies", a term deployed to create a particularly negative framing of older generations as fundamentally out of step with the political wants of mid-century Americans. In both parties therefore, rhetoric was indicative of generational divisions over the future direction of party leadership and policy.

When Stephen Douglas reignited sectional debate in 1854, the Republicans were quick to capitalise upon these divisions and attendant party instability. Chapter IV will explore how the Republican Party took antislavery politics from distant third-partydom into the political mainstream, and how it came to self-consciously define itself as 'a party of the

young men.' Young voters had come of age in an era shaped by increasing public moral opposition to slavery. A developing sense that abolition would be a multi-generational endeavour compelled abolitionists into recognising the imperative of integrating youth into their movement. Moreover, slavery's tightening grip on federal institutions obliged young Northerners to reexamine their relationship with both Whig and Democratic parties. Fraught debate over the institution's probable expansion into the Western territories had exposed the weakness of Northern leaders in both parties to preserve the sanctity of free-labour and free-soil. The Northwest, long seen as the reserve of free labour, now risked population by Southern enslavers, with Northern labourers displaced by the enslaved.

The result was clear support for the Republican Party among a younger generation of Americans, reflected in the private writings of younger voters, the very public demonstrations of the Young Fremont Clubs and Wide Awakes, and, as Chapter V demonstrates, in the 1860 election returns. Applying modern quantitative methods to newly available data, this final chapter reveals striking variations in Northern electoral support for the Republican Party, including opposition among young, white, non-immigrant groups concentrated in the North-East's urban heartlands. Nevertheless, it presents clear evidence that, across the North as a whole, young men did disproportionately vote Republican in 1860. Generations, therefore, were fundamental in shaping the course of political events that delivered Lincoln's election.

Generations remain an underexamined, yet vital ancillary to the sectional and partisan foci of traditional Civil War causation narratives. This dissertation, therefore, serves as the first truly generational history of the two decades preceding the American Civil War. It builds upon existing scholarship to combine analysis of the concept as a rhetorical device, a sociological phenomenon, and as a prominent aspect of antebellum political thought. It finds that the defining issues of this era - territorial expansion, immigration, slavery, sectionalism, and European revolution - could all be conceptualised, contested, and ultimately clarified in

generational terms; and more specifically, that generationally defined attitudes to slavery and compromise were crucial in creating the conditions for conflict in 1861.

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has shaped everything I have done as a historian. He has made me a better researcher, writer, and person.

Finally, the love and support of my partner, Catherine, remains my greatest strength. It is to her, that this dissertation is dedicated.

Abbreviations

AAS - American Abolition Society

AASS - American Anti-Slavery Society

AHR - *American Historical Review*

BMC - Boston Manufacturing Company

FSL - Fugitive Slave Law

ICPSR - Inter-university consortium for Political and Social Research

IPUMS - Integrated Public Use Microdata Series

MVB – Martin Van Buren

OUP - Oxford University Press

US – United States

UTC - *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

YMA - Young Men's Association

YMASS - Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society

YMCA - Young Men's Christian Association

Introduction

'Old things have passed away; all things are becoming new'
- William Alexander Duer

Antebellum Americans were fascinated by when and where they were born. From New York's St George's Church on December 12th 1850, as his parishioners sought shelter from the rather abrupt arrival of winter, the Reverend Stephen Higginson Tyng sought to expound the manifest fortune of the moment and location of their birth.[1] Their 'generation', Tyng argued, would define 'the direction and limits' of their course through life, indelibly shaping their 'responsibilities', both to their fellow Americans, and to God.[2]

For Tyng, mid-century Americans owed a peculiar debt to their generational position. Melding the powerful themes of religious and constitutional exceptionalism, with celebration of unbridled expansion, technological advancement and European revolution, Tyng detailed the myriad riches bestowed upon contemporary Americans. The United States was 'the object of a particular divine providence.'[3] Liberated from the 'Romish delusion' of Spanish and French occupation, the North American continent had been delivered unto Protestant nationhood to be 'preserved, hedged and fertilised by the hand of God.'[4] The subsequent virtue of their revolutionary fathers afforded mid-century Americans 'greater personal freedoms' than in any other 'civilised state'; the 'public order' and 'individual security' were guaranteed, not by the monarchical vestiges of 'tinselled robes or bristling guards', but by 'reverential consent and the united determined support of the vast organised majority.'[5]

[1] For reflections on the weather, see *The Evening Post*, New York, Friday 13, 1850.
[2] Stephen H. Tyng, *Duty to Our Own Generation: A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached in St. George's Church, New-York, December 12, 1850,* (New York: Vestry of St George's Church, 1850), 5.
[3] Ibid., 7.
[4] Ibid., 9.
[5] Ibid., 14.

Furthermore, recent political events – the annexation of Texas, conquest of Mexico and settlement of gold-rich California – served as a 'gift to this generation', granting limitless province and ample resources for the propagation of their just institutions.[6] Tyng looked across the Atlantic in expectation that the benefits of continental expansion at home could be conferred abroad; 'let the suffering inhabitants of the old world come…with this extending territory we may safely invite the hard-working men of all the earth.'[7] The 'present age' was, after all, striking for its 'universal agitation and excitement.'[8] The revolutions and counterrevolutions convulsing Europe at the mid-century were evidence that the 'whole moral and mental world of man is heaving and breaking loose from its former bonds and bounds'; everywhere, humanity was 'reaching after a new and a more perfect system of human government.'[9] In this context, the United States was to serve as an example: as 'master of the labors of generations' which preceded him, the mid-century American was divinely instructed to act 'for the benefit of his own generation, and those who are to come after him', to demonstrate to the whole world 'the possible peaceful self-government of men.'[10]

Tyng's sermon explains how and why so many Antebellum Americans leant upon "generations" to explain their contemporary moment; functioning as an idea, rhetorical category and reality, generations shaped, and were shaped by, contemporary notions of progress, constitutionalism, societal norms and moral standards. *Crisis of Compromise* will focus upon three successive generations, from those born shortly after the Revolution, to those who came of age during the political tumult of the 1850s, investigating how their formative experiences moulded assumptions regarding the United States' institutions,

[6] Ibid., 13.
[7] Ibid., 13.
[8] Ibid., 22.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

governing principles, and social fabric. It will examine "generational politics", identifying instances of generational division both internal and external to existing political movements, and exploring how these generational dynamics shaped the contours of partisanship in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Crucially, it will tie these overlapping questions to the broader historical problem of Civil War causation; specifically determining whether generationally defined attitudes to slavery and compromise created the conditions for conflict in 1861. At root, it will argue that antebellum political culture can only be understood through a generational lens. As Tyng asserted, while one's generation did not determine one's 'mental powers' or 'moral purposes', it did indelibly shape the nature of one's existence: 'birth a hundred years sooner or later in the history of the race, or in one national locality rather than another, may make all the difference to the same powers of mind, of success or failure, of *oblivion or renown*.'[11]

1 Generational Theory

In her recent work on the English Reformation, Alexandra Walsham has remarked that 'it is as hard to pin down a generation as it is to catch a cloud in a butterfly net.'[12] This simile speaks to the often-abstracted nature of generational analyses, and the difficulties in applying the concept to historical problems. In a recent *American Historical Review* conversation which addressed the potential pitfalls of generational history, the editor described how generations can, at least at first, appear 'gestural, anecdotal, synecdochal', raising questions about the historical 'sleight of hand' by which they are constructed, and their applicability beyond a modern, western context.[13] Some of the issues cited by AHR contributors include the 'erasure of diverse historical experiences'; a tendency 'to fixate on conflict and understate

[11] Ibid., 5.
[12] Alexandra Walsham, *Generations: Age, Ancestry, and Memory in the English Reformations*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 16.
[13] George Abosede, et al., 'AHR Conversation: Each Generation Writes its Own History of Generations', *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 5 (2018): 1505.

continuity'; and an over-eagerness to prioritise the 'political' over more 'subtle' indicators of identity such as 'values, sensibilities, and tastes.'[14] The following section will outline a theoretical framework for this dissertation, demonstrating how a careful reading of early twentieth century sociology can aid in allaying the methodological hazards associated with the generational concept.

Karl Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations* (1928) was a response to his contemporary moment. Mannheim (b.1893) came of age during a period of violent political, social, and intellectual upheaval. From Hungary, he lived through the brutal struggle of the First-World-War and the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy which followed.[15] His formative years, one historian has argued, lent themselves to a belief that 'a complete reorientation was necessary; a re-examination of all traditional ideas about reality… values…principles.'[16] As Mannheim set out to define Europe's inter-war reckoning, his intellectual world was buffeted by the post-war rise of Marxism, 'synthesis in the cultural sciences', and the advent of the Phenomenological School.[17] In light of this social and intellectual ferment, Mannheim imagined generations could serve as an 'indispensable guide' to understanding the 'structure of social and intellectual movements' and 'the accelerated pace of social change' characteristic of his time.[18]

His essay set out 'in formal sociological terms' all of the 'most elementary facts regarding the phenomenon of generations', which he supposed 'without elucidation… historical research cannot even begin.'[19] While Mannheim extensively probed the biological, social, and cultural foundations of generational theory, his findings can be summarised as

[14] Ibid., 1507-1546.
[15] Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, (Porirua Publishing, 2024), 9.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 10-14.
[18] Mannheim, *Essays*, 205.
[19] Ibid.

follows: the potential for the formation of a generation is defined by a similar 'location' in history and culture, such that individuals experience the same events, in the same way, at roughly the same stage in their life.[20] In this sense, youth matters: 'early impressions' tend to 'coalesce into a natural view of the world' thus informing 'all later experiences.'[21] However, a generation only becomes an actuality when this potential is realised through exposure 'to the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization.'[22] That is to say, when those of a similar age 'participate in a common destiny.'[23] Finally, Mannheim acknowledges that those of a similar age do not always act as one. He therefore argues that those 'which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways… constitute separate generational units.'[24] These units are aggregated by their formative experiences *and* a common response to historical events.

Mannheim's theory, webbed with impenetrable 'formal sociological terms', can appear abstracted and confusing. However, its usefulness is evident when viewed within the specific historical context of the mid-nineteenth century United States. Firstly, the concept of generational units is especially valuable when accounting for the variation within antebellum generations. Of the movements and individuals this thesis will consider, from Young Indians to Young Whigs, Young Americans to Young Fremonters, Wideawakes to Southern Secessionists, each reacted to the same historical stimuli in distinct and often contradictory ways. While I will suggest that throughout the 1840s and 50s, younger generations were united by an overarching tendency to reject prevailing political norms, my research will acknowledge that: a) contemporality does not a generation make; and b) even when generational identity is formed, it does not consign its members to a politically,

[20] Ibid., 206-210.
[21] Ibid., 212.
[22] Ibid., 215.
[23] Ibid., 217.
[24] Ibid., 215-217.

demographically, or geographically homogenous blob. Within generations different sub-groups presented alternative, and often competing, visions for the future direction of the polity.

Secondly, Mannheim acknowledges that older generations experience historical events concurrently with younger generations and that 'impulses particular to a generation may… also attract individual members of earlier or later age groups.'[25] For example, the term 'young fogy' – used to denote younger politicians devoted to older Jacksonian Democrats (as opposed to Young America) or older Cotton Whigs (as opposed to their young conscience contemporaries) speaks to the exceptions necessary for any rule which defines political support exclusively on the basis of age. Generational identities formed around specific issues, with individuals defying generational assumptions over certain policies and conforming in others; in the early 1850s, Lewis Cass who was often dismissed as a 'superannuated old fogy', nevertheless supported younger members of his party in advocating for further territorial expansion. Accepting that generational movements are more than simple age cohorts, and often successfully incorporate elements beyond their presupposed boundaries, is essential for understanding their role in mid-century US politics.

Thirdly, Mannheim argues that generational identity becomes particularly pertinent during periods of social, technological and political upheaval, which was as true of the two decades before the Civil War as it was of Mannheim's time. On the one hand, inventions including 'the printing press, the steam-engine, the telegraph and the coal beds', reinforced a sense of generational progress; these were 'pressing advances in the course of invention, discovery and settlement' which made 'no calculations for the future appear extravagant.'[26]

[25] Ibid., 217-218.
[26] Charles R. Tyng, *Record of the Life and Work of the Rev. Stephen Higginson Tyng and History of St. George's Church, New York: To the Close of His Rectorship* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1890), 668.

On the other, these advances were concomitant with an astonishing explosion in population, rapid industrialisation and sprawling urban growth; a trifecta which pulled at the threads of the United States' increasingly stretched social fabric. Between 1840 and 1860, population and land nearly doubled, while industrial production increased four-fold.[27] The percentage of Americans living in urban areas doubled too.[28] The United States' additional area and population was connected by 28,930 miles of railroad, a tenfold increase from 2,755 in 1840, while the invention of the telegraph reduced communication across this vast expanse from weeks to seconds.[29] As one prominent New York editor supposed, Americans were proceeding in a 'new electric age of the world – an age which will produce a greater revolution in society, government and religion, within the next fifty years, than has been created during the last fifty centuries.'[30] Walsham has suggested that one of the issues with generations is that they have often been considered an 'artifact of modernity', specifically the 'accelerating pace of temporal progression and historical change' associated with it.[31] While this poses challenges for scholars of earlier periods, the mid-nineteenth century United States was defined by perceptions of rapid and far-reaching change which placed generationally held assumptions of government, politics, and society under increasing pressure. In this context, conscious application of twentieth century theory need not be seen as anachronistic; rather it is an effective means of more precisely understanding how generations functioned during the United States' own period of 'accelerating change'.

Finally, recourse to sociological theory need not preclude deep engagement with contemporary generational discourse. Historians who have successfully used a generational

[27] Thomas Weiss, 'Economic Growth in the United States, 1790 to 1860', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Economics and Finance,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[30] *New York Daily Herald*, January 15, 1848.
[31] Abosede, et al., 'AHR Conversation', 1510.

lens have often embraced both the advantages of sociology's theoretical structures, and the generational concept's mutability in a historical context. As Morton Keller wrote in his own survey of generational literature, perhaps it is best just 'to accept the imprecision inherent in the concept of the historical generation, to treat it as a formulation with both an objective and a subjective social existence… and to explore its significance in an applied rather than a theoretical context.'[32] For example, Roy Foster when delineating a 'revolutionary generation' in early twentieth century Ireland, rejected 'simply defining a twenty-five or thirty year cohort', instead opting for a more 'fluid concept' whereby 'a group or groups, not necessarily made up of people born at the same time…conceive of themselves as bonded together by cultural mentality and social circumstance.'[33] The plasticity of this definition admits what Walsham has described as 'the fruitful ambiguities and porous boundaries' of the generational concept (particularly useful when writing about a pre-modern context).[34] Most recently, in his account of the 'Age of Revolutions', Nathan Pearl-Rosenthal also admits outliers to his generational categories, declaring that 'generational shifts always occur along a spectrum.'[35] For Pearl-Rosenthal, applying a 'generational frame' remains useful for revising our understanding of the tempo of revolutionary change, or challenging notions of revolutionary exceptionalism, even if a historian can cite individuals and groups that eschew easy categorisation. All three of these historians treat generational frameworks as a 'heuristic tool' (as opposed to an absolute model) for the social, political, or cultural change they are attempting to explain.[36]

[32] Morton Keller, 'Reflections on Politics and Generations in America', *Daedalus* 107, no. 4 (1978): 123.
[33] Robert F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923*, (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 6-7.
[34] Walsham, *Generations*, 13.
[35] Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, *The Age of Revolutions: And the Generations Who Made It*, (New York: Basic Books, 2024), 7.
[36] Walsham, *Generations*, 9.

Crisis of Compromise will build on this example. Using the concept of generations as a broadly defined analytical device, it will neither parcel the twisting and tumultuous course of antebellum politics into neat generational cycles, nor categorise groups of individuals purely on account of when they were born. Instead, it will study generations in their broadest sense: examining how formative moments informed political ideology and action among contemporaneous groups; exploring how the idea of generational responsibility shaped attitudes to constitutional change; and how generational rhetoric was used to prise open intra and inter party divisions. Ultimately, generations will serve as a lens onto the confounding political events which rocked the United States between 1840 and 1860, illuminating in some sense the path which led the country into conflict.

2 Generational Historiography

Why the United States collapsed into civil war in 1861 remains a central question for scholars of antebellum politics.[37] While the twenty-first century has seen a confluence of interpretations around the primacy of slavery in causing the War, this has rightly failed to stymie continued debate over the precise mechanisms which rendered slavery so intractable, and why it led to a conflict exactly when it did.[38] Since the turn of the century, Civil War scholars have leveraged the transnational and global turn, interrogated concepts of nationalism, sectionalism and conservatism with renewed vigour, and have more carefully

[37] The existing literature on Civil War causation can be broadly cleaved into two distinct schools. Neo-fundamentalists, including scholars such as Eric Foner, James McPherson and John Ashworth, place slavery front and centre of their interpretive framework; the Civil War was ultimately a consequence of essential differences between states north of the Mason Dixon Line, and those south of it. On the other hand, Revisionists such as Michael Holt, William Gienapp and Joel Silbey have sought to complicate that narrative, focussing on the 'contingencies, possibilities, and volatility of antebellum politics.' For a comprehensive account of the histories of Civil War causation, see Frank, Towers, 'Partisans, New History, and Modernization: The Historiography of the Civil War's Causes, 1861–2011', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 2 (2011): 237–64.

[38] Michael E. Woods, 'What Twenty-First-Century Historians Have Said about the Causes of Disunion: A Civil War Sesquicentennial Review of the Recent Literature', *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (2012): 415–439.

explored how gender, class, and religion shaped political divisions.[39] This scholarship has expanded the temporal and geographical boundaries of the causation story, encouraging a longer view of sectionalism and its roots.

Nevertheless, twenty-first century scholarship has largely aligned with older causation narratives in defining the late 1840s and early 1850s as a period of critical disjuncture, a "fork in the road" which placed the United States on the path to sectional conflict.[40] In the most recent survey of Civil War causation literature, Michael Woods has documented how the 1845-1850 period saw marked changes in attitudes to westward expansion, 'Southern race mythology', and sectional economic entanglement.[41] Furthermore, in the congressional wrangling over the Compromise of 1850, Woods identifies an 'intergenerational transfer of power' that he believes 'students of civil war causation would do well to probe.'[42] This dissertation answers that call. Building upon the innovative themes of twenty-first century scholarship, it will document how generational dynamics shaped economic and labour preferences; assumed gender roles; attitudes to enslavement; political rhetoric; and affinity to European revolutionaries. It will demonstrate how the introduction of a generational framework can (and does) serve as a useful additional lens for examining the multifaceted story of why the Civil War happened when it did.

Publication of James G. Randall's revisionist thesis – *The Blundering Generation* (1940) – marked an unfortunate introduction of the generational concept to Civil War scholarship.[43] Dismissing Beardian economic determinism, Randall pilloried 'small minorities' (particularly Northern radicals) for stirring an incompetent generation of

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 424.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 425.
[43] James G. Randall, 'The Blundering Generation' *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (1940): 3–28.

politicians into unnecessary conflict.[44] The structural forces of competing economic systems, conflicting cultures and climate were mere 'will o' the wisp.'[45] The War, Randall argued, was born of the 'fanaticism' and 'misunderstanding' of an unrepresentative few.[46] Randall's assertions reflect a strain of historiography, largely propagated by Southern historians, which argued that the Civil War was unnecessarily fought upon issues that could have been compromised. Completely at odds with the central premise of this dissertation, and the overwhelming weight of historiography since its publication, Randall's thesis will remain un-resuscitated. Rather than using generational language as a fig leaf for Southern apologism, this dissertation instead emphasises generational identity's capacity for shaping those broader structural forces which Randall so bluntly dismisses.

Post-Randall scholarship on the role of generations broadly fits into four categories, listed here in order of scale: ranging surveys of generational identity or language that trace its relevance from Revolution to Civil War; cohort studies which situate the generational alongside other vectors of identity within narrow geographical and temporal limits; studies which discuss generations as ancillary to a largely age-based analysis; and finally, studies which explore generational dynamics within a discrete political movement or organisation. The following section will document this existing diversity in application of the generational concept to histories of antebellum politics, and the ways in which *Crisis of Compromise* will augment this literature.

Generational Surveys

George Forgie's *Patricide in the House Divided* (1979) offers a fascinating exposition of generational consciousness and its role in defining the coming of the American Civil

[44] Ibid., 13.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 15.

War.[47] Forgie describes a 'post-heroic generation' who, having come of age in the afterglow of the Revolution and under the leadership of the Founding Generation, shared common psychological assumptions regarding the importance of their constitutional inheritance and the means of its preservation.[48] One such assumption was a 'ritualist tendency' to compromise on sectional disagreements, the abandonment of which triggered the chain of events culminating in War.[49] By delineating a preference for a specific type of political compromise as a component of generational identity, Forgie opened avenues for further research into the impact of generational turnover on the collapse of the Union. This dissertation will probe that relationship extensively, clarifying how attitudes to compromise changed in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War.

However, Forgie's work is not without issue; some of the more spurious aspects of his analysis have left historians wondering whether his findings were 'more speculative than conclusive.'[50] First, Forgie cites Clay and Douglas as 'post-heroic' generational contemporaries, despite the thirty-six years separating their births. Clay did indeed 'come of age' under the leadership of the Founding Generation, reading Law under George Wythe (a signatory of the Declaration of Independence), representing Vice President Burr in his treason trial, and ultimately winning election to the House of Representatives during James Madison's presidency. Douglas, by contrast, was only twelve when Monroe (the last Founding Generation president) left office, and thirteen in July 1826 when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died within hours of each other. Douglas' generational consciousness, therefore, owed far more to the Jacksonian Revolution of the 1820s than the Founding. The scope of Forgie's generational demarcation diminishes its analytical power by smoothing

[47] George Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age*, (New York: Norton, 1979).
[48] Ibid., 3-7.
[49] Ibid., 124-125.
[50] Richard H. Sewell, 'Lincoln and the "Postheroic" Generation', *Reviews in American History* 8, no. 1 (1980): 55.

over critical differences between prominent individuals.[51] This dissertation will specifically investigate how the formative experiences of Clay, Webster and Calhoun contrasted with those of Douglas, Davis and Lincoln, shaping divergent assumptions regarding how to confront the mid-century political crisis.

Second, throughout the monograph Forgie uses the term cohort and generation interchangeably; a conflation of distinct sociological terms which is neither unique in this field nor particularly surprising for historians more broadly.[52] Since the turn of the century, those who have periodically returned to generations have made similar methodological decisions. For example, Joyce Appleby's *Inheriting the Revolution* (2001) examines a so-called 'first generation' of Americans who came of age in the 1790s and predominated until around 1830.[53] For Appleby, this age-bound group of Americans came to define the cultural, social and economic meaning of their revolutionary inheritance. Appleby's decision to eschew the theoretical frameworks advanced by sociologists like Mannheim, speaks to a tendency among historians to imply that purely by chance of birth and common experience, individuals are destined to share a collective consciousness engendering common social, cultural and political assumptions. While this dissertation will define clear generational bounds, in part informed by birth cohorts, it will also clarify that the timing of an individual's birth, when viewed in isolation, is often deficient as a predictor of political ideology and action.

Glenn Wallach's *Obedient Sons* (1997) avoids many of the conceptual and classificatory tensions of Forgie's work, shifting the focus from the generations themselves to

[51] Shomer Zwelling, 'Patricide in a House Divided' [Review], *The Journal of Psychohistory 8,* no.3 (1981): 373-377.
[52] Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, 'The Third Age: Class, Cohort or Generation?', *Ageing and Society* 22, no. 3 (2002): 372–373.
[53] Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

the language used to describe and define them. Wallach 'rejects any self-evident qualities' to both generations and youth, instead choosing to analyse the 'idioms, rhetorics or paradigms' which shaped their appearance in contemporary discourse.[54] He starts by tracing use of generational and youth rhetoric from 1630 to 1800, before identifying how nineteenth century 'young men's organizations' – the 'most significant antebellum purveyors' of generational rhetoric – became crucial in shaping a more progressive vision for the United States than Forgie's post-heroic preservationism permits.[55] Finally, he concludes with an examination of the various usages of the Young America 'slogan', from progressive Democrats to literary nationalists.[56] Wallach's linguistic focus moves the bounds of generational analysis beyond the age and common experiences of individuals (or groups), encouraging us to consider more broadly how ideas about 'youth' and 'generations' shaped the way Americans 'saw, described, and understood their world.'[57] This dissertation will build upon Wallach's attention to language, analysing both the real and rhetorical significance of the generational concept to the problem of Civil War causation.

Identity Analyses

A second wave of generational studies of antebellum politics, published between 2005 and 2024, are more tightly targeted than Forgie or Wallach's ranging surveys. Limited in both temporal and demographic scope, they lean upon small samples of specific age-bounded groups. Consequently, they avoid sweeping conclusions regarding how generational identity shaped social, political, or economic change, instead treating the generational as complementary rather than primary. For example, both Victoria Ott and Peter Carmichael use a generational lens to explain support for secession and the Confederacy among young

[54] Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture, 1630-1860*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 118.
[57] Wallach, *Obedient Sons*, 4.

Southerners. Ott identifies a generation of white women, born in the latter half of the 1840s and coming of age during the War years, as a key component in the creation and sustenance of a Confederate 'nationhood'. She documents how their childhood saw them 'indoctrinated', at church, school, and home, in the ideals of 'Southern womanhood.'[58] Seeking to defend the 'cultural script' promised to them, these daughters of the Southern elite venerated the mores and institutions which assured their continued economic security and social prestige.[59] On account of the moment and conditions of their birth – specifically their class, and 'the growing regional strife' of the 1840s and 1850s into which they came of age – Ott argues that these young Southern women felt compelled to support secession and latterly the Confederate war effort to preserve their gilded futures.

While Ott focuses on young women, Peter Carmichael has conducted a similarly scaled analysis of young Southern men. Through analysis of the 'letters, speeches, master's thesis and published writings' of 121 Virginian men born between 1831 and 1843, *The Last Generation* (2005) identifies a group of young Southerners that, disillusioned with the older politicians they held responsible for Virginia's economic and social decline, became the States' most vehement supporters of secession.[60] Crucially, like Ott, Carmichael is keen to avoid 'generational determinism' in his analysis. He argues throughout that 'age does not become the universal explanation… that determines human motivation' rather it is a further 'category of analysis within the framework of race, class and gender.'[61] Carmichael emphasises the events of his generation's formative years (the Mexican War, sectional discord, the collapse of the two-party system), to contend that the unique circumstances of their birth indelibly shaped their attitudes to the Union, secession and sectional conflict. For

[58] Victoria E. Ott., *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).
[59] Ibid., 166.
[60] Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation*: *Young Virginians in Peace War and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 10.
[61] Ibid.

both Carmichael and Ott, gender, class and generational identity are examined in relation to a small, defined group of young Southerners, to explore how they conceived of, and supported, the emergence of a nation.

More recently, Sarah Gronningsater has identified a generation of black New Yorkers who, 'born between an enslaved past and a murky but promising future…fought both individually and collectively to determine the contours of freedom in their daily lives.'[62] Gronningsater eschews the narrow sampling of Ott and Carmichael, instead employing a staggering diversity of sources to reconstruct the political movements of a generation. The breadth of her work remains geographically limited – New York having overseen 'the largest emancipation on U.S. soil before the Civil War', and as 'the North's largest and most powerful state', was the perfect testing ground for her thesis – but the depth of her generational reconstruction efforts is astounding.[63] Letters, diaries and autobiographies comprise only a fraction of a towering source base including court, census and associational records, 'local directories', meeting minutes, petitions, legislative journals and newspapers.[64] On this firm foundation, Gronningsater powerfully argues that Black New Yorkers, born during the era of Northern gradual emancipation, ultimately shaped the 'contours' of their freedom throughout the Antebellum Period.[65] Noting the 1799 Act (for gradual abolition) and the 1817 Act (which promised universal emancipation within a decade), Gronningsater details how the formative experiences of Black New Yorkers defined a strain of 'generational consciousness' which galvanised into political action, specifically against slavery.[66]

[62] Sarah L. H. Gronningsater, *The Rising Generation: Gradual Abolition, Black Legal Culture, and the Making of National Freedom*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024), 1.
[63] Ibid., 12.
[64] Ibid., 13.
[65] Ibid., 1.
[66] Ibid., 3.

Ultimately, all three works centre formative experiences in shaping generational dispositions toward more *radical* political solutions. In all narratives, a younger generation react to – and capitalise upon – the unique moment of their birth to seek a fundamental alteration to the socio-political circumstances into which they had come of age. For Gronningsater, young Black New Yorkers built upon the limited progress of localised gradual emancipation to attack slavery nationally and to attain full citizenship.[67] In the case of Ott and Carmichel, young white Southern men and women leveraged their racial privilege to defend what they saw as their 'natural' rights to economic betterment through Southern institutions and culture.

These historians offer crucial methodological insights into how the generational lens can be effectively deployed alongside broader identity-led frameworks of historical analysis. They demonstrate how generational identity does not form or function apart from other modes of identity, but rather how it intersects in important and often confounding ways with the social, cultural, and political conditions of the historical subject. Moreover, while limited by design to narrow contexts, these historians speak to the salience of generational identity in shaping political preferences and actions throughout the Antebellum Era. It is this fundamental dynamic which underpins *Crisis of Compromise*. The link between generational turnover and radical political change, demonstrated by these self-contained histories, translates in the broadest sense to nineteenth century American politics. By probing this relationship across two decades, and in a diversity of contexts, this dissertation will create a more comprehensive narrative about the role of generational identity and division in shaping the United States' path to war.

[67] Gronningsater, 3-4.

Age-analysis

While age and generations are sociologically distinct concepts, often the two are partially conflated by historians.[68] Age is perhaps a more natural analytical lens; it is less prone to nebulous interpretation, and some sociologists have come to emphasise age derived 'life-cycle effects' as the only relevant aspect of generational analysis.[69] The publication of Corrine Field and Nicholas Syrett's edited volume – *Age in America* (2015) – has reengaged US historians with questions about how chronological age came to shape personal identities, patterns of labour, political engagement and constitutions of citizenship.[70] This builds upon older scholarship, which scrutinised the relevance of 'age consciousness' in the United States from the Colonial Era to the Civil War. In *Growing Old in America* (1978), David Hacket Fischer identified a 'revolution in age relations' commencing in 1770 and lasting until 1820; in Fischer's telling, the irregular introduction of mandatory retirement for public officials, changes in fashions to evoke youth, and the advent of language which denigrated the elderly, were all indicative of a 'great transition' in American attitudes towards age and ageing.[71] Fischer's findings however, stand in contrast to those of W. Andrew Achenbaum and Carole Haber, who maintained that prior to the Civil War, attitudes to old age appeared relatively stable and broadly positive. Through the early decades of the nineteenth-century, older members of society continued to be valued for their 'wisdom… experiences and expertise.'[72] Howard Chudacoff went even further, explicitly rejecting Fischer's theory while arguing that only after the introduction of age-graded schools in the late 1840s did age take on any

[68] Gosta Carlsson, and Katarina Karlsson, 'Age, Cohorts and the Generation of Generations', *American Sociological Review* 35, no. 4 (1970): 710–18.
[69] Sally Friedman and David Schultz, *Generational Politics in the United States, from the Silents to Gen Z and Beyond,* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2024), 15.
[70] Corinne T. Field, and Nicholas L. Syrett, *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 4.
[71] David H. Fischer, *Growing Old in America,* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1978), 77-112.
[72] W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 11; Carole, Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

material importance in the 'structure and organization of American society.'[73] This absence of historiographical consensus has provided fertile ground for twenty-first century scholars of antebellum political culture, both to probe the significance of age and ageing within specific communities, geographical areas, and political movements, and to explore the concept's broader intersection with the racial and gender dynamics of political power.[74] Recent studies have focussed on the physical and emotional characteristics associated with certain age ranges (most often youth), the economic or social pressures attendant to these life stages, and the subsequent impact of these factors upon community structures, political ideology and party identity.

David Doddington's *Old Age and American Slavery* (2024) examines 'perceptions of old age' in the Antebellum South, and specifically its implications for Southern slavery.[75] Doddington challenges scholars who have instinctively equated advanced age with 'reverence', 'communal support' or 'respect', arguing that old age was more often associated with 'physical decline' and 'weakened mental faculties.'[76] For the enslaved, this tended to greater 'social isolation' and an enhanced feeling of 'submission' to bondage.[77] Emphasizing important overlap with the generational, Doddington declares himself less interested in chronological age per se, than 'perceptions of the ageing process and intergenerational dynamics.'[78] For Doddington, age was a 'functional category, metaphor, and symbol', which

[73] Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 9-48.
[74] Corinne T. Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
[75] David S. Doddington, *Old Age and American Slavery*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 2. Doddington is just one of several scholars who have explored the effect of age and ageing within enslaved communities. For other relevant works see: Frederick Knight '*Black Elders: The Meaning of Age in American Slavery and Freedom*,' (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024); Stacey K Close, *Elderly Slaves of the Plantation South*, (Abingdon; New York: Routledge New York, 2014); Nathaniel Windon, 'Superannuated: Old Age on the Antebellum Plantation,' *American Quarterly* 71, no.3 (2019): 767–77.
[76] Ibid., 23.
[77] Ibid., 4.
[78] Ibid., 16.

fundamentally shaped power dynamics within communities and between individuals.[79] By probing both the 'representations' and the 'reality' of ageing, Doddington illuminates the 'complex web of relations that bound together enslavers and enslaved.'[80]

While Doddington's focus is age's impact upon the racialised power dynamics of Southern plantations, historians such as Patrick Kelleher, Richard Scott, Allan Horlick and Heather Curtis have explored how age — this time youth — intersected with class, gender and ethnicity within the United States' sprawling cities.[81] Each of these historians analyse how young men, migrating from across the Atlantic or from the rural periphery, came to fundamentally disrupt 'traditional patterns' of urban 'social, economic, political, and religious life.'[82] Each presents youth as an intermediary stage, a period of 'pending' adulthood where Americans became 'unmoored' from the familiarity of home, and anxious to establish themselves economically, socially and politically.[83] As such, they argued young men were ripe for interventions which offered 'control' or regulation, from the consumption of advice literature, to membership of Young Men's Associations (Christian or otherwise). This formulation speaks to the intrinsic links between age and generational analyses; while experiences can inform future political assumptions at any stage of life, evidently contemporaries perceived those on the cusp of adulthood as most susceptible to external influence, be that moral, social or political.

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[79] Ibid., 18.
[80] Ibid., 29.
[81] For works exploring age and class in the context of America's emerging cities see, Richard Briggs Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City,* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Patricia Kelleher, 'Class and Catholic Irish Masculinity in Antebellum America: Young Men on the make in Chicago', *Journal of American Ethnic History,* 28, no.4 (2009): 7-42. Heather D. Curtis, 'Visions of Self, Success, and Society among Young Men in Antebellum Boston', *Church History* 73, no.3 (2004-09): 613-634; Allan S Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975).
[82] Curtis, Visions, 613.
[83] Ibid., 618.

Jon Grinspan takes this conception of youth and deftly integrates it with generational concepts into an age-focussed analysis of Antebellum politics. His first monograph – The *Virgin Vote* (2016) – articulates the magnitude and importance of youth engagement in the nineteenth century political world. He details what politics could offer young men (notions of progress, a sense of manhood and opportunities for socialisation), while also emphasising the importance of voters first or 'virgin vote' in determining life-long partisan identity. Grinspan ultimately reaches the conclusion that, 'during this loudest… and least understood phase in our nation's democracy, young people played their greatest role.'[84] Building upon the themes of this monograph, and an earlier article, Grinspan's latest work – *Wide Awake* (2024) – documents the role of young Americans in securing Lincoln's election in 1860. The Wide Awakes were a largely nocturnal militaristic marching club which, owing to their immense popularity, were perceived to have flooded the streets of Northern cities in the run up to November 6th. For Grinspan, they were a crucial cog in Lincoln's electoral machine, leveraging their numbers and youthful vigour to stump, protect, and drive voters to the polls.

Crucially, while age remains the principal lens through which Grinspan seeks to understand the Wide Awakes, he is clear-eyed regarding the importance of this group of young men's formative experiences. For example, when seeking to explain the sudden proliferation of Wide Awake youth in the Summer of 1860, Grinspan hypothesised that 'if the average age Wide Awake was about 24, they had been born around 1836' and as such had grown up in an era of 'suppression, watching compromises break and parties crumble', and crucially 'watching Stephen Douglas and James Buchanan make atrocious concessions' to the Slave Power.[85] Grinspan's illumination of a politically disaffected youth, propelling Lincoln

[84] Jon Grinspan, *The Virgin Vote: How Young Americans Made Democracy Social, Politics Personal, and Voting Popular in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 5.
[85] Jon Grinspan, *Wide Awake: The Forgotten Force That Elected Lincoln and Spurred the Civil War*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024), 86-95.

to the presidency, speaks to the importance of events which shaped Americans' worldview in the years preceding the War. For Grinspan's Wide Awakes, age undoubtedly shaped the style of their political action, but a collective generational conscience gave it substance.

Generational Politics

In addition to examination of the role of generational identity in shaping the thoughts and actions of voting Americans, generations also functioned as an impulse for change at the top. In July 1856, as Democrats came to terms with the rapidly changing environment of party competition, Albert Talbott (Representative for Kentucky) rose in the House to denounce 'the erroneous, revolutionary, and suicidal… doctrines of Know Nothingism and Black Republicanism.'[86] Invoking the late Henry Clay, and the 'principles… [he] so nobly maintained', Talbott pledged himself to the Constitution and Union 'as it was.'[87] In hearkening back to the 'sage of Ashland', Talbott sought to repudiate those who would denounce 'the old Whig and old Democratic parties as odious, treacherous, and untrustworthy' and who would dismiss as '*old fogyism*… their time-honoured principles and policy.'[88] The 'new' parties, he remarked, had in less than two years 'shaken…to its foundations' a society which under the old system had 'withstood every storm for near three quarters of a century.'[89] Furnished with ample reverence for the past and a thinly veiled anxiety for the future, Talbott's speech represented just one of many accounts, ubiquitous in the records of Congress, that cast the ongoing transformation of American politics as a struggle between old and new.

As Michael Woods has pointed out, the mid-century saw a generational transition among America's political grandees, with those 'whose time already might have passed'

[86] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 25, 34th Congress, 1st Session, (1856), 1230.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

surrendering to 'a new generation whose time had yet to come.'[90] Emblematic of this 'changing of the guard' were the deaths of the then titans of Capitol Hill – Senators John Calhoun, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay – between March 1850 and 1852.[91] In the years which followed, Clay and Webster's Party would all but disappear, and the dominant voices in Congress would hail from a younger generation, including the likes of Robert Toombs, William Seward, Jefferson Davis and Stephen Douglas. This led some of Congress' more elderly members to concede that time had moved beyond them. In 1855, the sixty-year-old Whig senator George Badger felt he had been hauled into the 'class of fogyism' by his advancing years, acknowledging that in this 'age of steam and electricity' nothing could be 'done in the old-fashioned style of proceeding.'[92]

Generational Politics – defined here as the relationship between generational identity and political division – has been most obviously scrutinised by histories of "Young America". Yontan Eyal's *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (2007) served as the first book-length study of the movement, tracing how a coterie of 'politicians, editors and activists' sought to make the Democracy more 'progressive' through vigorous commitment to 'territorial expansion, an increase in the volume of trade and manufacturing, government involvement in social matters, and assertiveness in foreign policymaking.'[93] More recently, Mark Power Smith has expanded interpretations of the movement beyond the narrow confines of Democratic Party politics, exploring more broadly its effect upon pre-war political culture and the sectional crisis.[94] Crucially, both Eyal and

[90] Michael Green, *Politics and America in Crisis: the Coming of the Civil War*, (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010), 41.
[91] Ibid.
[92] *Congressional Globe*, Volume 24, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session, (1855), 901.
[93] Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828–1861*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[94] Mark Power Smith, *Young America: The Transformation of Nationalism before the Civil War*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022).

Power Smith have emphasised the generational nature of the movement.[95] Douglas, the movement's de facto leader, embodied its youthful appeal and willingness to vigorously prosecute its political agenda regardless of the 'old fogies' it might offend. Where Young America features in this thesis, the focus will remain upon how the generational identity of its leadership and supporters shaped the style and substance of its political program. Moreover, Young America will serve as a comparative to how other party (Whig, American, Republican) and non-party (abolitionists, temperance advocates, evangelicals) movements used the 'Young' label to define themselves, their ideologies and their actions.

3 Sources and Methodology

The preceding sections have defined the generational concept in relation to both sociological theory and existing historiography. They have exhibited the diversity in its application, from illumination of the internal dynamics of political factions, to sweeping surveys of antebellum political thought. What follows, is explanation of how this dissertation will use the concept. By leveraging a diverse source base, including both textual and quantitative data, this dissertation will explore generations in three distinct ways - as a rhetorical category, a reality and as an idea. This tripartite analytical framework will provide for the broadest possible examination of the concept's impact upon pre-war politics, and the coming of the conflict itself.

[95] Eyal, *Young America Movement*, 6-14; Smith, *Young America,* 1-14, 158-159.

Rhetoric

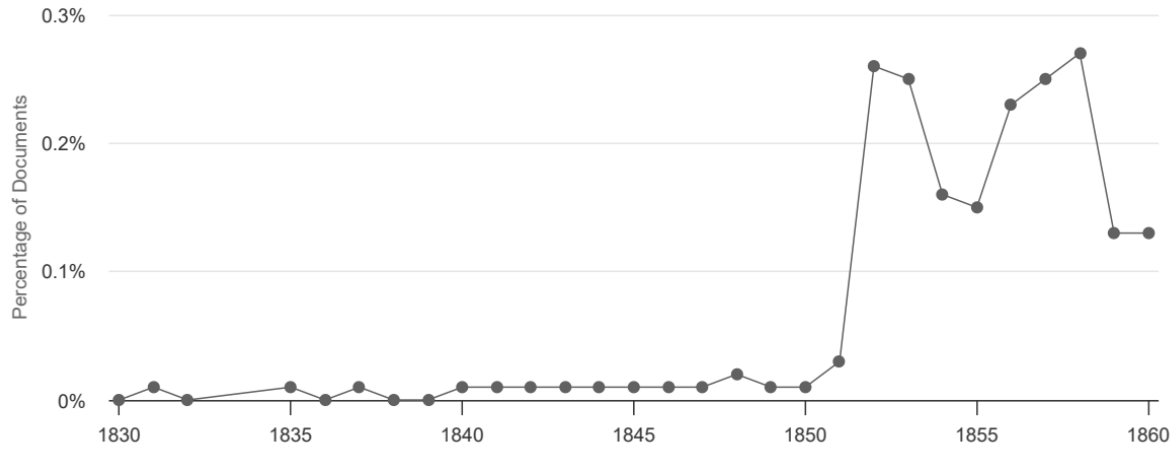

Figure 1: This figure shows the popularity of the terms "fogy", "fogie" and "fogey" as a percentage of the total number of newspaper articles in the GALE Nineteenth-Century Newspaper database. Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers. Gale (Firm).

First, this dissertation will recognise the salience of generational language in public and private political discourse; from 1840 to 1860, the nation's newspapers, the appendices of the *Congressional Globe*, preacher's sermons, college lectures, and the private diaries and correspondence of both disaffected voters and conservative politicians, became increasingly punctuated by generational rhetoric. This was often used to characterise insurgent political ideas and movements, sow intra and inter party division, and to denigrate personal political rivals. Historians such as Andrew Robertson and Kenneth Cmeil have emphasised the changing nature and increased importance of political rhetoric in a century of transition, from 'government by gentlemen… to government for, if not by, the people.'[96] The emergence of the Penny Press in the middle of the 1830s, coupled with the invention of the telegraph and improvements in transportation, transformed the way that news travelled both within and beyond the nation. As Wallach remarks, 'a debate in congress was a front-page telegraphic dispatch in New York the next day. A revolution in Europe could be a topic of conversation

[96] Andrew W. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy, Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain*, 1790-1900, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 1.

within weeks.'[97] Furthermore, astonishing literacy rates – exceeding ninety percent of white adults in 1850 – meant there was a large, national market for print; this underpinned what Robertson has termed a 'participatory political culture', where rhetoric served as a 'mobilising instrument' for voters.[98]

Exposed to generational rhetoric, voters would come to associate generational identity with particular ideas and values, that in turn shaped their attitudes to different politicians, parties, and ideologies. As Elizabeth Varon has suggested, 'language has a profound power to shape political reality.'[99] The use of the term 'fogie' or 'fogy' (Figure I), provides a good example of how growth of this rhetorical category shaped political change prior to the Civil War. Used in only a handful of articles prior to 1848, often to describe an ageing military commander, the salience of this 'disrespectful appellation' exploded in the early 1850s alongside the rise of political Young America.[100] While the use of this term within early 1850s Democratic Party politics is relatively well documented, what is often overlooked is quite how pervasive this language was later into the decade, and among alternative political groups. Both the election years of 1856 and 1860 saw marked usage of the term, and Whigs, Republicans and Nativists alike were not immune to this disparaging label. Fogies were, in a political sense, charged with embodying a regressive conservatism; characterised as barriers to progress who had 'too long figured' on the stage of politics, laughed at the innovations of youth, and tended to 'stick to their old mistakes' in the face of accelerating change.[101] Engendering conflict between politicians and political ideas situated within this category, and a younger, supposedly more "progressive" generation, this rhetoric would have a profound

[97] Wallach, *Obedient Sons*, 117.
[98] Robertson, *Language of Democracy,* 9.
[99] Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion, The Coming of the American Civil War*, 1789-1859, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4.
[100] *Mississippi Free Trader*, Natchez, August 18, 1847; David Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, (Oxford, 1978), 91.
[101] *The Weekly Standard*, Raleigh, North Carolina, January 19, 1848.

impact upon the course of political change through the mid-century, and ultimately the coming of the American Civil War.

The nature, and ubiquity of discourse praising the 'zeal' or 'vigour' of the 'young man' while denigrating the intransigent and outmoded 'fogy', serves as crucial evidence that in mid-century US politics, generational rhetoric mattered. Quantifying and qualifying its use across a diverse range of textual sources, close attention to generational rhetoric will prove invaluable to unpicking the precise mechanisms by which generations shaped politics at different levels, across different parties, and over multiple decades.

Reality

Second, this dissertation will recognise the real generational differences which informed this rhetoric, transforming attitudes to territorial expansion, economic development, party politics, slavery's constitutional protections and pronouncements on the institution's morality. To do so, it will be necessary to confront the thorny issue of generational classification. While avoiding undue attempts to homogenise individuals with often varied and confounding political attitudes, this dissertation will trace three main generational groupings. A "Second Generation", largely born prior to 1790, were the statesmen instrumental in shaping the political assumptions and partisan culture of the 1840s, defining terms of debate over slavery and territorial expansion. This included a series of prominent politicians born in (or around) 1782 — the "1782ers" — such as Daniel Webster, Lewis Cass, John C. Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton, Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay. Born after 1800 and before 1815, a "Third Generation" were the up-and-coming politicians crucial in challenging those assumptions and were central figures in the dramatic political transformations of the 1850s. Examples include William Seward, Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln. The final grouping will be those young American voters who

came of age at the mid-century. This "Fourth Generation" (born after 1830) defined a world view so utterly hostile to existing institutions and constitutional arrangements that they provoked a profound political crisis and, ultimately, a war. These generational classifications will afford examination of how generational identity and division functioned on two levels, both within the realms of high politics and among the voting public. While these generational groupings will remain intentionally flexible, integrating divergent generational units and permitting both ideological and temporal outliers, their analytical use depends upon lending them structure. This will necessitate recourse to both individual and aggregate biographical data.

To assess the creation and impact of generational identities among the political elite, this dissertation will lean on individual data. This will include analysis of the ages of individuals, their geography, and the identification of any formative experiences which shaped their political persuasions. This data is readily available, either curtesy of the numerous biographies written on political figures throughout this period, or in the politicians' personal papers. In addition, *The Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* provides detailed information on former members years of service, date of birth, position within government, and often further information regarding education and career history.[102] This facilitates fuller analysis of generational turnover within Congress, and its political impact.

Crucially, this dissertation recognises that to account for the full impact of generational dynamics among American voters, necessitates going beyond purely textual sources. Speeches, diaries and letters, while fundamental to understanding the political motivations and intentions of individual Americans, cannot reveal the extent to which distinct

[102] United States Congress, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, https://bioguide.congress.gov/search.*

groups supported a particular party. In a 2011 article tracing the mid-century political realignment of Illinois, James Huston suggested that historians had 'retreated from quantitative analysis too quickly', leaving interpretations of the 1850s with various 'holes and omissions.'[103] This dissertation will buck that historiographical trend. Using newly available data and modern statistical methodologies, it will provide fresh insight into the voting habits of younger Americans across the North. Through quantitative analysis of county-level election returns and demographic data, this dissertation will explore how age shaped voting patterns in the critical 1860 election. It will disaggregate age-effects from the more-often analysed predictors of religion, ethnicity, and occupation, revealing the true extent to which a younger generation of Americans supported Lincoln. Gauging this support, this dissertation will use age as a proxy, facilitating understanding of how generational identity shaped enthusiasm for more "radical" Republican politics.

Idea

Finally, this dissertation will examine engagement with the generational concept in contemporary political thought. It will explain how, from the Founding to the Civil War, ideas surrounding generational belonging and intergenerational obligations changed in response to political events, in turn altering assumptions regarding the appropriate means of tempering political division and preserving the promises of the Constitution. The historian Peter Knupfer, in seeking to unpick the meaning of constitutional unionism, has documented the generational roots of compromise's place at the heart of American political culture.[104] His work traces Forgie's identification of a Founding and Second Generation, the former introducing compromise as a basic 'prerequisite' for sustaining the Union, and the latter

[103] James L Huston., 'The Illinois Political Realignment of 1844–1860: Revisiting the Analysis', *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (2011): 506.
[104] Peter B. Knupfer, *The Union As It Is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

defining its execution as the barometer of effective statesmanship. In his conclusion, Knupfer suggests that compromise's demise after 1854 was the product of partisan forces. This dissertation will build upon Knupfer's analysis, identifying subtle yet crucial differences in ideas of intergenerational obligation, both as the potential cause for the breakdown of compromise in congressional politics *and* the eventual triumph of antislavery politics. Generational ideas were as central to justifying the adoption of radical political positions as maintaining adherence to compromise.

The United States itself was, after all, conceived as a generational project. From his headquarters in Wilmington Delaware, in the autumn of 1777, George Washington looked forward to a rapid close to the war. Trusting that his Northern forces would repel the British in upstate New York, they could secure their legacy as 'the procurers of peace and happiness to millions in the present and future generations.'[105] For Washington, the stakes of the Revolutionary War were innately generational, his Continental armies fighting for 'the essential rights and liberties of the present generation, & of millions yet unborn?'[106] Even after the fighting had ended, and with the Constitution continuing its uneven progress toward ratification, Washington reflected that the post-war political settlement would have profound generational implications. In a letter to Lafayette, he characterised the coming 'few short weeks' as those which would 'determine the political fate of America for the present generation, and probably… on the happiness of society through a long succession of ages to come.'[107] Hoping that the 'enlightened policy' of his age would 'lay the foundation of happiness for future generations', Washington saw his personal struggle for independence

[105] George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, 11, 19 August 1777–25 October 1777*, Philander D. Chase and Edward G. Lengel 'eds', (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 147–148.
[106] Ibid., 673–675.
[107] George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington*, *Confederation Series, vol. 6, 1 January 1788–23 September 1788*', W. W. Abbot 'ed', (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) 297–299.

and subsequent nation building as a duty, not just to his contemporaries but to posterity.[108] Washington was not alone in looking to the future for the fullest realisation of his political accomplishments. James Madison and John Adams among others regularly characterised a 'rising' or 'coming generation' as the intended beneficiaries of their revolutionary actions and the cornerstone of future American progress.[109]

Thomas Jefferson (perhaps unsurprisingly given his reputation for indulging in abstract political theory) appeared to think most seriously about inter-generational obligation and its implications for the US government. With Paris convulsing in revolution in September 1789, Jefferson urgently reflected on 'whether one generation of men' has a 'right to bind another', a question he argued had been neglected by French philosophes and the United States' enlightened statesmen alike.[110] This was a matter of such consequence, Jefferson argued, that it should feature 'among the fundamental principles of every government.'[111] Jefferson's central contention was that, in accordance with natural law, '*earth belongs in usufruct to the living.'*[112] He centred this argument on the matter of debt; 'no man can, by *natural right*, oblige the lands he occupied, or the persons who succeed him… to the paiment [sic] of debts contracted by him.'[113] A generation was defined by contemporality of birth, attaining maturity (around the age of twenty-one) and dying all together at approximately fifty-five.[114] Extrapolating from the Comte de Buffon's tables of mortality, Jefferson argued that because half of those above the age of maturity at any one time would likely be dead in approximately nineteen years, then this should serve as the limit beyond

[108] From George Washington to Thomas Paine, 6 May 1792, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-10-02-0225.
[109] 'From John Adams to American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 8 November 1797', *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-2215.
[110] 'To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 6 September 1789', *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-12-02-0248.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

which a nation could not 'validly' extend debt.[115] As the historian Adrienne Koch has summarised, Jefferson supposed one could 'guard the rights of posterity' by fixing the term of debt within the 'period of the life of the majority.'[116]

Crucially, Jefferson extended this logic, beyond debt, to the realm of law and government: 'no society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law.'[117] If earth truly belonged to the living, then it was their prerogative to construct their own constitution: the 'living generation… are masters too of their own persons, & consequently may govern them as they please.'[118] For Jefferson, 'persons & property make the sum of the objects of government', and as such the constitutions and laws they made were to be 'extinguished in their natural course, with those who gave them being.'[119] Following this logic, he concluded that 'every constitution then, & every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years.'[120] Jefferson's desire to limit the terms of laws, constitutions and debts to nineteen year periods was premised upon a belief that within this lay the roots of the Revolution in France; the Ancien Régime depended upon the interminable extension of privileges and obligations across generations which served to supress France's Third Estate. Jefferson hoped that, together with Madison, he might be able to make adjustments so as 'to exclude at the threshold of our government the contagious and ruinous errors' of Europe, 'which have armed despots with means… for binding in chains their fellow men.'[121]

Jefferson's rejection of intergenerational politics, Merrill Peterson has argued, reflected the 'speculative fervour' of the French Revolution.[122] Just a few months after

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Adrienne Koch., *Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1950), 67.
[117] To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 6 September 1789.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 382.

Jefferson sent his letter to Madison, his friend and fellow pro-revolutionary Thomas Paine would publish the *Rights of Man* (1791).[123] Here he would declare the 'vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave' the 'most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies.'[124] Echoing Jefferson, he argued that 'every generation must be as free to act, for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it.'[125] Paine's assertions were a direct response to the conservative thinker Edmund Burke, who in his critique of the French Revolution, railed against revolutionaries who, 'unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity', hazard 'to leave to those who come after them, a ruin instead of a habitation.'[126] For Burke, radical disregard for one's intergenerational obligations would render men 'little better than flies in the summer.'[127] While a full account of the intellectual struggle between these two thinkers lies beyond the confines of this dissertation, tensions in their understandings of intergenerational responsibility reflect a broader contemporary engagement with this issue, with profound implications for United States politics.

When Madison eventually replied, he rejected much of Jefferson's specific considerations, his 'scepticism' born of practicality; 'however applicable in Theory the doctrine may be to a constitution, in [*sic*] seems liable in practice to some very powerful objections.'[128] For Madison, through its upending with each succeeding generation, government would 'become too mutable to retain those prejudices in its favor which antiquity inspires', engendering 'pernicious factions', and in all likelihood raising the prospect of an

[123] For emphasis of the difference between Paine and Jefferson's thinking on generational responsibility, see Mario Feit, 'For the Living: Thomas Paine's Generational Democracy' *Polity* 48, no. 1 (2016): 55–81.
[124] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Common Sense; and Other Political Writings*, Mark Philp 'ed', (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 91-92.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Leslie G. Mitchell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95.
[127] Ibid.
[128] James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, February 4, 1790 in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. J. C. A. Stagg, Digital edition, (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 2010), 18-25.

anarchical 'interregnum' following each administration.[129] After raising these objections, Madison countered with his own theory of intergenerational obligation:
'the *improvements* made by the dead form a debt against the living who take the benefit of them.'[130] For Madison, the coming generation owed its forbears for the improvements in society and government they had brought about: 'This debt cannot be otherwise discharged than by a proportionate obedience to the will of the Authors of the improvements.'[131] Furthermore, Madison sought to clarify that the actions of the present generation could (and probably should) be conducted with the coming generation in mind: 'Debts may be incurred with a direct view to the interest of the unborn as well as of the living.'[132] Examples of such debts include 'repelling a Conquest, the evils of which descend through many generations', or financial 'debts…incurred principally for the benefit of posterity' such as those of the United States.[133] As Madison summarised:

> There seems then to be a foundation in the nature of things, in the relation which one generation bears to another, for the *descent* of obligations from one to another. Equity requires it. Mutual good is promoted by it.[134]

For Madison, all that is 'indispensable in adjusting the account between the dead & the living is to see that the debts against the latter do not exceed the advances made by the former.'[135]

Madison's Burkean conception of a 'descent of obligations' won out over Jefferson's more anarchic vision in defining antebellum assumptions regarding intergenerational responsibility. The majority of American statesmen, born during or after the revolution, considered themselves fundamentally indebted to their revolutionary predecessors. On March

[129] Ibid., 19.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 20.
[135] Ibid., 21.

4, 1825, John Quincy Adams succeeded James Monroe to become the first US president not of the Founding Generation. Reflecting a Madisonian sense of intergenerational responsibility, Adams defined the purpose of government as securing 'the blessings of liberty to the people… in their successive generations.'[136] He was quick to note that the political institutions he assumed leadership of were the 'work of our forefathers' and had thus far been 'administered by… the most eminent men.'[137] For Adams, grasping the reins of government was (quite literally in his case) akin to receiving a 'precious inheritance', one which rendered his generation 'doubly bound by the examples which they have left us…and the blessings which we have enjoyed as the fruits of their labors to transmit the same unimpaired to the succeeding generation.'[138] Adams' conception of an essentially conservative mandate was shared by his successors, despite profound political differences. Martin Van Buren demonstrated his own sense of inter-generational obligation in his inaugural address: 'The practice of all my predecessors imposes on me an obligation I cheerfully fulfil.'[139] Van Buren was conscious upon his accession to the presidency, that 'unlike all who have preceded [him], the Revolution that gave us existence as one people was achieved at the period of [his] birth' and that despite 'reverence' to it, he 'belong[ed] to a later age.'[140] As such, he was burdened with an even greater duty to preserve US institutions because he 'may not expect my countrymen to weigh' his 'actions with the same kind and partial hand.'[141]

For Van Buren, as for Adams and others of their generation, the only appropriate means of honouring their Madisonian obligations (both to their predecessors and to future Americans) was to preserve the government they had inherited; specifically, via 'principles of

[136] John Quincy Adams, Inaugural Address, in Sandi Patty, *U.S. Presidential Inaugural Addresses from Washington to Obama*, (Auckland, New Zealand: Floating Press, 2009), 57-64.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Martin Van Buren, Inaugural Address, in Patty, *U.S. Presidential Inaugural Addresses*, 73-82.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

reciprocal concession and equitable compromise.'[142] The constitution was itself 'a work of concession and compromise' which if 'administered in… true form, character, and spirit' was 'abundantly adequate to preserve to us and our children the rich blessings already derived from them.'[143] Across party and section, compromise attracted a broad and zealous band of adherents who would accept nothing else as a solution to the United States' domestic conflicts. It was supposed that, where disagreements arose, each section could always cede some ground in the interests of sectional harmony (or at least tolerant coexistence). This proved to be broadly true in 1789, 1820 and 1833, and shaped the Second Generation's understanding of how federal government functioned.

However, events between 1840 and 1860 took the compromise principle to breaking point. In the North, the maturation of organised abolition and increasing public exposure to the cruel realities of enslavement, hardened political and moral opposition to the South's peculiar institution. Furthermore, the passage of offensive legislation that clarified Northern complicity in that institution, coupled with seemingly endless attempts to erode the presupposed boundaries of enslaved labour, provided evidence of the malign influence of a small cabal of Southern pro-slavery ideologues on federal policy and the inherent weaknesses of the conciliatory and compromising centre ground. Meanwhile in the South, the tone of Northern opposition to slavery's expansion served as a reminder of their neighbours' fundamental hostility toward their way of life. Moreover, assumptions regarding the North's growing political power made these antagonisms appear existential. This context emboldened a younger generation of politician and their voters, both North and South, who considered it their generational obligation not simply to preserve their political inheritance through compromise, but to meet the demands of their future constituents. This either involved a

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

complete rejection of any further concessions to a "Slave Power", or to promote Southern federal protections and untrammelled movement of enslaved property more vigorously. Ultimately, this dissertation will address the following fundamental question: to what extent were competing ideas of intergenerational obligation crucial in precipitating the collapse of the United States Compromise tradition and the fashioning of more radical, sectional political coalitions on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line?

4 Chapter Overview

Crisis of Compromise follows a chronological structure, which best reveals how generational identity and division influenced, and was itself shaped by the course of political events. Chapter I will detail the real and imagined instances of generational division which characterised 1840s political debates over westward territorial expansion. It will explain how elements of the United States' Second Generation became increasingly cautious of expansion's sectional ramifications following the Missouri Crisis (1819-1821). It will then illuminate how, as territorial enlargement came to dominate 1840s political debate, so too did the derogation of those who sought to contain it. Dismissed as 'behind the times' or as 'old fogies', older politicians who feared sectional division attendant to America's westward march clashed with a younger generation(s) of Americans increasingly opposed to Jacksonian Era political orthodoxy. Within the Democracy, a Young America movement explicitly tied replacement of the Party's traditional leaders to hopes of national progress. The sweeping economic and technological transformations of the mid-century compounded a sense that Americans were living through a period of fundamental change in the modes, processes, and ideas dictating political life. Capitalising upon these transformations, and in order to export the universal benefits of Republicanism to the world, Young America demanded new leadership. Similarly, as the Whigs searched for a presidential candidate between 1846 and 1848, their own desire for new men and new ideas took shape. A bi-sectional group of

congressional moderates – the Young Indian Club – questioned whether the Party's repeated electoral failures demonstrated an outmoded platform and the diminished personal capacity of its elder statesmen. Simultaneously, a group of young Northern Whigs sought to redefine the Party in opposition to slavery, both morally and economically. For both parties therefore, divisions between the established Second, and rising Third Generation of politicians, began to destabilise existing structures of power. Within this context, the decade can be characterised as the beginning of a "generational pivot", where an older order began to give way to a new generation and style of politics.

Chapter II explores how politicians from across the sectional divide, and partisan spectrum, encouraged their contemporaries to consider their filial and paternal obligations in resolving the sectional crisis. An older generation conceived of statesmanship almost exclusively in these terms, their sole duty to preserve the Union and deliver it to posterity. This depended upon recourse to bi-partisan and intersectional compromise, as practiced in 1789, 1820 and 1833. However, younger generations, North and South, had fundamentally different conceptions of their inheritance and their obligations to future generations. In the North, a heightened moral disFdain for slavery, and the perceived menace of a "Slave Power", fuelled opposition to compromise. For representatives like New York's William Seward, generational replacement would tend to a growing antislavery majority. As such, any further compromise would be a betrayal of future generations. Analogously in the South, concern for the political future of a rising generation led to equal reluctance for further conciliation. As the Northern majority in the House continued to grow, and under the looming threat of the admission of further free states in the Northwest, a younger generation of Southerners saw 1850 as a final opportunity to defend some semblance of political parity with the North. At the start of the 1850s therefore, political orthodoxies (both the Second

Party System itself, and the compromise tradition upon which it rested) were increasingly challenged on the basis of generational concerns.

The second half of *Crisis of Compromise* documents how younger generations of Americans were integral to the radical transformation of the United States' political landscape through the 1850s, both within the existing parties (chapter III), and through the new Republican Party (chapter IV and V). Generational divisions shaped intraparty as much as interparty conflict, most evidently with the Democratic Young America faction and the Silver Grey faction of New York Whiggery. Here, generational schisms — articulated through cutting generational rhetoric — undermined partisanship and in the Whig case, accelerated its collapse. Emerging from this political instability, the new Republican Party sought to self-consciously define itself as 'a party of the young men.'[144] Firstly, Republicans leveraged heightened moral opposition to slavery to build their coalition. The abolitionist movement, already disproportionately youthful, increasingly recognised that the 'rising generation' would be the ones to deliver emancipation. As they turned to youth in search of sustainable support for their cause, so too did Republicans, whose unequivocal opposition to slavery and its expansion appealed to a preponderance of younger voters. Furthermore, the new Party lent upon generational rhetoric to demarcate their first presidential candidate (the young explorer John C. Fremont) from his elderly Democratic opponent (James Buchanan), and the nativists coalesced around Millard Fillmore. This tactic resonated with younger (Fourth Generation) voters whose private diaries and correspondence expressed clear distaste for political orthodoxy, specifically 'wire-pulling' politicians. Evidence of their enthusiasm for the new Party manifested in Young Men's Clubs, which became crucial in organising campaign events, protecting speakers, and driving turnout come polling day. Finally, the Republicans

[144] William Seward, Speech at Cleveland Ohio, October 4, 1860, in *The Campaign of 1860*, (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1860), 49.

sought to emphasise the economic threat posed by Democratic acquiescence in slavery's expansion. The Northwest, long seen as the reserve of free labour, now risked population by Southern enslavers, with Northern labourers displaced by the enslaved.

Chapter V will examine whether evidence of the Republican Party's generational appeal stands up to statistical scrutiny. If Lincoln's election was indicative of a 'generational shift' in US politics, then it is important to ask whether this manifested in that most fundamental unit of democracy – the vote. Applying modern quantitative methods to newly available data, it will reveal interesting variations in Northern electoral support for the Republican Party, including opposition among young, white, non-immigrant groups concentrated in the North-East's urban heartlands. Nevertheless, it will present clear evidence that, across the North as a whole, young men did disproportionately vote Republican in 1860. The thesis will conclude by summarising the reasons for, and implications of, young American's support for Lincoln. To what extent can Lincoln's election be summarised as a rejection of political norms, and crucially, to what extent was he and his Party's meteoric rise the product of a generational revolution in United States politics?

5 'You, my young friends, may live to see it'

This dissertation will demonstrate how the issues that defined politics between 1840 and 1860 – territorial expansion, immigration, slavery, sectionalism, and European revolution – could all be conceptualised, contested, and ultimately clarified in generational terms. The mid-century marked a moment where 'great questions' were being asked of the United States, both constitutionally and politically, and where an ageing generation of leaders were perceived as inadequate to answer them. This perception, and the reality lurking beneath it, remain an underexamined, yet vital ancillary to the sectional and partisan foci of traditional Civil War causation narratives. Operating within and between sectional, racial, partisan and

gender divides, generational division served as an engine of political change which fundamentally shaped the turmoil of the two decades preceding the American Civil War.

In 1848, William Duer addressed two literary societies in the chapel at Columbia University. Well attended by young students, faculty and members of the public, the former College President's address, much like Reverend Tyng's sermon, detailed his vision of the responsibilities and duties facing the 'rising generation' at the mid-century. Duer however, struck a far more ominous tone; rather than privileged by virtue of their birth, young Americans, he supposed, had 'fallen on portentous, if not evil times.'[145] While the dethroning of Kings and the discomfiture of their armies heralded the 'spread of liberal ideas' and 'principles', this did not come without risk; specifically the spectre of 'visionary theorists' peddling 'pestilent theories' disguised as 'philosophy.'[146] For Duer, these 'perils from abroad' clashed with others at home. The Mexican War, and the peace which followed, threatened to pull the government to pieces. Prophetically, Duer supposed that should the vast territory of the Mexican cession be admitted as states, 'the machinery of government' would 'fall to pieces from its own weight and unwieldiness.'[147] Moreover, should 'the peculiar institutions of the South be imposed' upon those same states, 'the equilibrium of the constitution would be destroyed, its spirit violated… its obligation impaired, if not annulled.'[148] The collapse of the Union, therefore, was a generational threat: 'this fearful catastrophe may not happen in my day, but you, my young friends, may live to see it.'[149]

Duer was of course correct. When he encouraged those before him to 'prepare then, to avert or meet' the coming crisis, and to 'watch the signs of the times and be ever ready to

[145] William Alexander Duer, *The Duties and Responsibilities of the Rising Generation: an Address Delivered Before the Literary Societies of Columbia College, At Their Anniversary Meeting*, *July 24, 1848*, (New-York: A.J. Townsend, 1848), 6.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 10.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

defend the bulwarks and soil of freedom', he could not have realised that so many of the young men before him would go on to fight and die in a Civil War. Of the six students who invited him to speak at least one – Cornelius Rea Agnew – is listed in the college register as having served in the Union Army. In total, 395 College graduates and students from Columbia served in the War, a tiny fraction of the thousands of young Americans who answered Lincoln's repeated calls for volunteers. The Union and Confederate Armies were both disproportionately drawn from the ranks of youth – the median age of the Union enlistee was 23.5 – and it was this 'young generation' who Ulysses S. Grant would later credit for the nation's salvation.[150] This thesis will explain not only why a younger generation of Americans came to see war as the solution to Americas political decay, but how their formative experiences steeled them to fight it.

[150] *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader,* Michael Barton and Larry Logue 'eds', (New York, London: New York University Press, 2002).

I

"Behind the Times": Generational Divergence in an Age of Progress

'Old politicians chew on wisdom past, and totter on in business to the last'
Alexander Pope

In the winter of 1847, as the leading figures of the Whig and Democratic parties engaged in a fraught contest for their respective presidential nominations, the *Lancaster Herald and Examiner* published an article entitled 'Behind the Age'.[1] Engaging with a common thread of national political discourse, the paper declared that 'a new world had arrived.'[2] With railways and telegraph lines stretching toward the nation's expanding frontiers, and 'steam and electricity' becoming the 'great driving powers of the day', Americans were forced to grapple with a period of fundamental change in the modes and processes that regulated society, from the movement of peoples and goods, to the transfer of news and ideas.[3] In this context, the *Examiner* documented an increasingly common assertion; that older 'statesman' who had 'grown gray in the service of the country', and who had until recently been revered 'as the lights and oracles of the Republic', should now be considered 'unworthy of… public service or tolerated as public advisers.'[4] Throughout the 1840s, older politicians across the political spectrum increasingly found themselves dismissed as "behind the times" to justify their exclusion from party leadership or public office. Newspaper editors and political colleagues would label them as 'tired old hacks', 'antiquated', 'superannuated', 'antediluvian' or 'fogyish', often proclaiming their inadequacy to the demands of contemporary political challenges. In tracing American politics from the first calls for "new men" in 1844, to the

[1] *Lancaster Herald and Examiner*, Pennsylvania, December 1, 1847.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

rejection of "old fogies" in 1848, this chapter will consider why certain politicians came to be perceived as behind the times, the impact of this upon their political fortunes, and the extent to which this was indicative of a broader generational shift in United States politics.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the issue of territorial expansion. It will examine how a particular generational unit — the "1782ers" — became increasingly cautious of expansion's sectional ramifications following the Missouri Crisis (1819-1821). The 1782er moniker denotes a group of politicians born of that year (or slightly earlier) who were reaching new heights of political power when Missouri's application for statehood threatened to derail their careers and dissolve the Union. This group would go on to define the Jacksonian era, submerging territorial ambitions beneath renewed party conflict orientated around banking, tariffs, and the distribution of federal revenues for internal improvements. By characterising the Missouri Crisis as a formative experience, I will argue that generational identity serves as a means of understanding why at least four of this group – Clay, Webster, Benton, and Van Buren – despite differing party and sectional identities, arrived at strikingly similar conclusions regarding the fatuity of annexation in the 1840s. When President John Tyler returned territorial expansion to the heart of the political agenda in the early 1840s (with attempts to expedite the annexation of Texas), most of the 1782ers feared a resumption of the threatening sectional divisions that attended Missouri's admission. Compounding matters was the rise of a new political force — Young America. This younger generation of Democrats pursued a 'progressive course' prioritising domestic economic growth, pro-democracy intervention abroad, and America's "manifest destiny" to expand across the North American continent.[5] The zealous expansionism of this younger generation clashed with the caution of an aging generation, particularly those who opposed Texas annexation as a needlessly divisive and

[5] Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party,* 1828-61, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

dangerous policy. This opposition critically damaged the 1782ers chances of electoral success in 1844, as Young America's espousal increasingly led public opinion and opened the door for the election of the nation's then youngest serving president.

The second half of this chapter will examine the Whig Party's presidential nomination in 1848, arguing that generational dynamics again informed the candidates who would go before the country in November. The frustration of younger Whigs with the Party's old guard led to the nomination of a politically inexperienced war hero and the bolt of many antislavery elements to a third party. Henry Clay's renewed drive for the presidency, his fifth since 1824, was stymied by his physical age and protracted political record; many Whigs sought to rule him out upon this basis, arguing that after three lost elections, the 'embodiment' of the Party could never be elected. Clay's accepted weakness afforded a younger generation the opportunity to advance what were often divergent visions for the future direction of the Party. Young Whigs in the North, particularly in Massachusetts, sought to transform Whiggery into a fundamentally antislavery force. These "conscience" Whigs confronted the complicity of their older "cotton" counterparts in what they perceived as a Southern plot to expand slavery, arguing that the only tolerable presidential candidate was one with a firm moral objection to the institution, who would not vacillate on opposing its expansion into the Mexican cession. Alternatively, a small bisectional group of younger congressional Whigs formed the "Young Indian Club." Advancing a moderate 'no-territory' stance and coalescing in support of General Zachary Taylor's bid for the presidential nomination, they determined that electoral success depended upon de-emphasizing partisanship and presenting a "new man" at the ballot box. While these groups differed regarding their preferred political direction for the Whig Party, both represented a younger generation who unequivocally rejected the status quo in terms of party policy and party leadership.

Ultimately, from 1840 to 1849, generational divisions shaped and reshaped US politics at the highest level. These divisions eschewed the bounds of any one party, movement, or section, rather they took form in response to the national issues of slavery and territorial expansion that confronted both parties and their leaders in the North and South. Examining the transformations of the 1840s through a generational lens, allows us to understand those figures and movements who confound traditional sectional or partisan histories. The perceived and real inadequacy of many older political leaders regarding their will to, and capacity for, facing up to the fundamental issues of the day contributed to a relative decline in their political power. This in turn opened the door for a younger generation whose divergent visions served both as a reaction to, and a stimulant of, the decline of their older counterpart's grasp of the national political agenda.

1 Young Hickory, Young America and the "1782ers"

Reflecting on the outcome of the 1844 presidential contest, the *New York Herald* adopted its customary contemptuous tone; if it had 'one good result', the paper declared, it was the 'general defeat of all the intriguing politicians of the day.'[6] The *Herald* identified, and then dismissed, a group of politicians including Henry Clay, John Calhoun, Martin Van Buren, Thomas Benton, Lewis Cass and Daniel Webster — all born in 1782, with the exception of the slightly older Clay — suggesting that they had merely 'kept the country in a stew… for years past.'[7] With the election of the younger James Polk (b.1795), these

[6] *New York Daily Herald*, November 6, 1844. The *Herald*, first issued in 1835, had by 1845 become 'the most popular and profitable newspaper in the United States.' Ostensibly a non-partisan paper, the *Herald* largely presented the opinions of its founder, James Gordon Bennet. A brief spell as assistant editor for the *Charleston Courier,* and a further position at the *New York Enquirer,* cemented his Southern sympathies and confirmed his Jacksonian leanings. His profound nationalism, premised upon a belief in the superiority of 'Anglo Saxon intelligence and culture' would shape the paper's editorials throughout the 1840s, and likely determined his contempt of older, Texas annexation sceptics like Clay and Van Buren. For a detailed account of the *Herald* and its editor, see James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).
[7] *New York Daily Herald,* November 6, 1844.

politicians could be considered 'effectually laid on a shelf… dead and buried…demolished by a *new man*.'[8]

The following section will explore the relationship between these 1782ers and territorial expansion. Specifically, it will examine how calculations regarding the desirability of Texas annexation altered in response to developing sectionalism after 1820, how this developed into a cautious aversion to further expansion, and how that caution in turn carried damaging electoral consequences.[9] Polk's course to becoming the nation's youngest serving president, from a position of relative obscurity when compared to his main rival for the Democratic nomination (Van Buren), and his Whig opponent (Clay), speaks to the changing nature of US politics in the first half of the decade; the dominant issues that had defined America's fragile Second Party System were superseded by renewed concern with territorial expansion. This fundamental shift in the core issues of political debate, which increasingly centred upon the Texas issue, disturbed established politicians like the Whig Clay and the Democrat Van Buren as they sought to maintain their grip upon the levers of power in their respective parties. Confidence in their electoral appeal – both personally and in terms of the politics and partisanship they embodied – was undermined when a younger, lesser-known politician was elected on the basis of an issue they had sought tirelessly to evade. Polk's triumph over Van Buren and then Clay was symptomatic of an emerging opposition to an

[8] Ibid.

[9] This chapter builds upon the work of historians who have identified the likes of Clay, Webster, Van Buren, Cass and Calhoun as belonging to a 'second generation' of US leadership who dominated political life between 1820 and 1850. For examples of this delineation see Donald B. Cole*, Martin Van Buren and the American Political System*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), H. W. Brands, *Heirs of the Founders: the Epic Rivalry of Henry Clay, John Calhoun and Daniel Webster, the Second Generation of American Giants*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2018), Peter B. Knupfer, *The Union as it is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

older generation of politicians in the 1840s; one that was, at heart, caused by fundamental disagreements over the future boundaries of the United States.

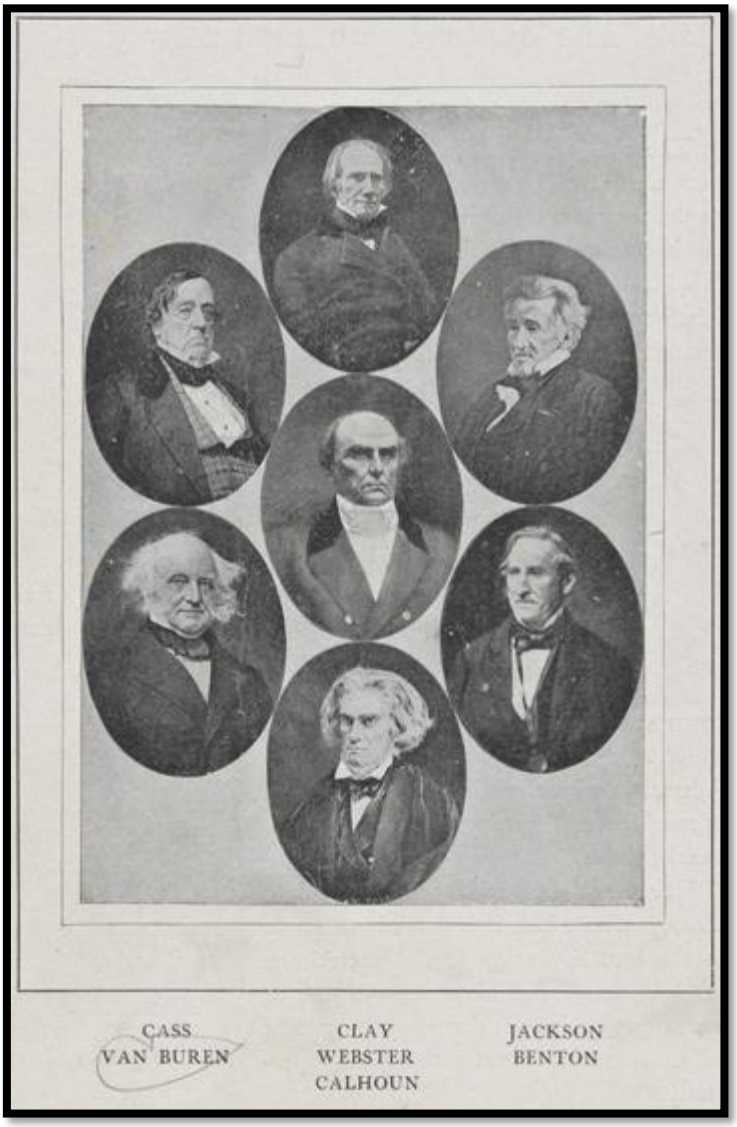

Figure 2: Collected Portraits of the 1782ers and Andrew Jackson. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. 'Cass Clay Jackson Van Buren Webster Benton Calhoun,' The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Expansionist Beginnings

As a young man, Henry Clay became a consummate Westerner and an unapologetic expansionist. Born on a small homestead in Virginia, Clay's early years were comprised of

intermittent formal education and farm labour.[10] Subsequent legal training courtesy of Virginia's Chancellor (George Wythe), and later the State's Attorney General (Robert Brooke), saw Clay admitted to the Bar in November 1797, aged just twenty.[11] At this juncture, the newly qualified lawyer, like so many of his contemporaries, understood that the East was more than supplied with sufficient legal practitioners. Clay's move to Lexington, Kentucky, marked the start of both a promising career and politically defining relationship with the Western United States. Successful legal practice, marriage, and a spell in the Kentucky Legislature followed before his first senatorial appointment to Washington in 1806.[12] Clay's rapid political ascent culminated in his assumption of the Speaker's chair in the 12th Congress (1811-12). Here, he joined other young Western and Southern representatives – fellow "war hawks" – in asserting his expansionist principles. These included the annexation of Canada, further expansion in both East and West Florida, and ultimately the acquisition of Texas.[13] Reflecting on Clay's early career, historian Thomas Jones has argued that there were few who could match Clay's 'aggressive insistence' on the expansion of trade and territory.[14]

However, among the 1782ers, Clay was not an outlier. Martin Van Buren and John C. Calhoun were both fellow 'war hawks'.[15] Calhoun particularly, having left Congress to accept the Secretary of War post in James Monroe's administration, used his position to solicit schemes which projected US influence westward, most notably an expedition up the Missouri River to the mouth of the Yellowstone.[16] Similarly, Lewis Cass (another frontiersman)

[10] Henry Clay, *The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay*, (Philadelphia: J. L. Gihon, 1854).
[11] Robert Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union*, (New York, London: Norton, 1991), 7-14.
[12] Ibid, 32-43.
[13] Thomas B. Jones, 'Henry Clay and Continental Expansion, 1820-1844', *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society,* 73, no.3 (1975): 242.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Donald B. Cole, *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 33.
[16] Cole, *Martin Van Buren,* 89.

continued to push at the western boundaries of his fiefdom; as serving Governor of Michigan Territory, he supported improvements in transportation and pushed for further Indian cessions in order to advance migration and settlement of the frontier.[17] Thomas Hart Benton, for his part, wrote a series of editorials in his newspaper – the St. Louis *Enquirer* – which advocated federal policies encouraging westward migration, settlement of 'Oregon Country' and Spanish Texas, and the admission of Missouri to the Union.[18] Even the New England Federalist Daniel Webster, who opposed the war of 1812, was not wholly opposed to the principle of further expansion (providing it was carefully limited).[19]

The 1782ers' initial enthusiasm for territorial enlargement, particularly those who considered themselves Republicans, was unsurprising. Since the founding, Americans had looked westward.[20] By 1809, Thomas Jefferson contemplated the realisation of an 'empire of liberty' such that had 'never [been] surveyed since the creation', believing 'that no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.'[21] His purchase of French Louisiana six years prior had been crucial to the United States' transition from coastal nation to continental empire, nearly doubling the size of territory claimed by the early Republic.[22] His successors, Madison and then Monroe, also strove to 'extend the sphere'; having dismissed any Montesquieuian notion that the Republic necessarily remain small in *Federalist 10*, Madison came to support the annexation of the independent Republic of West Florida, pursued Texas and East Florida, and even

[17] Williard Carl Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation*, (Kent, Ohio: State University Press, 2013), 25.
[18] William Nisbet Chambers, *Old Bullion Benton, Senator from the New West; Thomas Hart Benton, 1782-1858*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1956), 83-89.
[19] Clyde A. Duneway, 'Daniel Webster and the West,' *Minnesota History* 9, no.1 (1928): 3–15.
[20] Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1.
[21] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 27 April 1809, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-01-02-0140.
[22] John Bicknell, *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election that Transformed the Nation*, (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 42.

contemplated the occupation of Canada during the war of 1812. [23] While there was a providential quality to Madison and Jefferson's early pronouncements on expansion, their motives were eminently practical.[24] As the historian John Stagg has convincingly argued, early nineteenth century enthusiasm for territorial aggrandisement was premised upon the 18th century ideology of 'American continentalism.'[25] With the North American Continent still beset by European empire, geopolitical concerns were as significant as ideological fervour in promoting early political support for the purchase of Spanish and French territories, and the forced displacement of Native Americans.[26]

By the close of the 1810s, the United States seemed poised to extend across the whole expanse of the North American continent. The Treaty of Ghent (1815) saw Britain relinquish claims to territories in the Northwest and forced a series of cessions from Native Americans along the frontier.[27] A further treaty with Spain in 1819 brought about the acquisition of Florida, and formalised territorial claims stretching through Oregon Country to the Pacific Coast. The historian David Hendrickson has pin-pointed this as the 'crest' of 'American Nationalism.'[28] The Supreme Court's judgement in *McCulloch v. Maryland* — which clarified

[23] Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist: with Letters of "Brutus"*, Terence Ball 'ed', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40-46.
[24] Historians such as Paul Frymer and John Stagg have challenged those who anachronistically invoke notions of "manifest destiny" to understand the founding generation's expansionist ideology, in order to manufacture a false continuity to the story of American expansionism. Frymer underscores the 'contested and multifaceted nature of the expansionist project', in particular the 'hundreds of thousands of people indigenous to the continent', who 'lived on and were recognized as having property rights in' the land to which United States lay claim. Native American miliary power often matched or at times exceeded that of the Federal government, challenging any notions of inevitability to the Republic's westward march. See Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3.
[25] John C. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier*, 1776-1821, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2009), 5; Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth- Century America,* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2011), 33.
[26] Ibid., 6. Stagg argues that it was only after the signing of the Adams–Onís Treaty (1819) with Spain, that 'ideas about expansion' started to become 'romanticized as inevitable', 'largely uncontested' or 'manifest' among white American expansionists.
[27] John C. Stagg, *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 139-170.
[28] David C. Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941*, (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 118.

the Federal government's responsibilities for this vast and expanding Republic — was an example of 'stirring… nationalism', befitting an era which promised continued westward migration to the Pacific, the admission of dozens of new states, and their integration under the watchful eye of a strong central government. [29]

Missouri Crisis

The Missouri Crisis, above all else, would demonstrate the sectional explosivity of territorial admission and challenge the 1782ers assumptions regarding the ease (and appeal) of continued expansion. Missouri's application for statehood, issued in December 1818, was entirely ordinary. Three other portions of the Louisiana purchase had either already been admitted to the Union as slave states – Louisiana in 1812 and Mississippi in 1817 – or in the case of Alabama, were advanced in the process of admission.[30] Having reached the requisite population size, the final portion of the Louisiana Purchase's accession to the Union was the next logical step.[31] However, in early February, New York Representative James Tallmadge attempted to amend the Missouri Statehood Bill with an explicit prohibition of 'slavery and involuntary servitude', sparking a furious dispute over the power of Congress to regulate slavery in the territories, and the wisdom of doing so.[32] From the Speaker's chair, Henry Clay was powerless to prevent the debates which followed escalating from mild sectional disagreement to threats of dissolution and war.[33] As the 15th Congress came to a close, Missouri's status remained unresolved, and the issue was deferred to the following autumn. In the intervening summer, positions outside of Congress hardened. In the North particularly, antislavery sentiment crystallised at mass meetings, in newspaper editorials, and among state

[29] Ibid.
[30] Alabama would be admitted to the Union in December 1819 without issue.
[31] Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 33.
[32] Forbes, *Missouri Compromise*, 36-37.
[33] Henry Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay, Volume II: The Rising Statesman, 1815-1820,* James F. Hopkins and Mary W. M. Hargreaves 'eds', (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 670.

legislatures.[34] Missouri's admission would become the principal order of business for the 16th Congress, with Maine's long-awaited secession from Massachusetts becoming artificially bound to its fate. This ploy, which aimed to coax Representatives into dropping the Tallmadge amendment, served to inflame tensions further still.[35]

As debate progressed, politicians outside of Congress became conscious of being pulled into a damaging sectional vortex; New York Senator Nathan Sanford wrote to Martin Van Buren in February 1820, that the Missouri question(s) had become 'so momentous, and produce[d] so much agitation and anxiety, on all sides, that they absorb the attention of all; and not much business of public importance, will be done in Congress, until they shall be decided.'[36] Van Buren was careful to avoid intervening on either side of the restriction/anti-restriction debate. He prioritised continued development of his delicate New York coalition, which demanded keeping his New York constituents onside while courting Southern (specifically Virginian) support.[37] An example of Van Buren's deliberate equivocation came with his tacit support for a memorial to Congress opposing Missouri's admission; his correspondence reveals he agreed to be a part of the committee drafting the resolutions, failed to attend the subsequent meeting, and then refused to put his signature to the resulting memorial.[38] For Van Buren, aware that Missouri was likely to 'excite some warmth', it was politically expedient to remain above the fray.[39]

Indeed, while Clay was the most prominently involved of the 1782ers in settling the Missouri Crisis, his contemporaries outside of Congress demonstrated a deep interest in the

[34] Forbes, *Missouri*, *Compromise*, 54-58.
[35] Clay, as speaker, cited the concomitant admission of his home state of Kentucky and that of Vermont between March 1791 and June 1792 as evidence of previous precedence for the using statehood as a congressional bargaining chip. See Clay's Speech on the Admission of Maine: *The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 2,* 740-748.
[36] Nathan Sanford to Martin Van Buren, February 3, 1820, *The Papers of Martin Van Buren*, Series 3, DLC Library of Congress.
[37] Cole, *Martin Van Buren*, 59.
[38] Henry Jones to Martin Van Buren, January 19, 1820, MVB Papers.
[39] Smith Thompson to Martin Van Buren, December 5, 1819, MVB Papers.

nature and resolution of the issue. Calhoun's private correspondence document his fears of the potentially perilous consequences of the Missouri episode, principally that any 're-agitation of the… question' would tend to a belief among slaveholding states in a plot to 'undermine their property in their slaves.'[40] Calhoun supposed that 'should so dangerous a mode of believing once take root, no one can calculate the consequence.'[41] Following the first Compromise, in the autumn of 1820, he wrote to the former Georgian Senator Charles Tait arguing that the South ought not to 'assent easily to the belief that there is a conspiracy against our property or just weight in the Union.'[42] This 'belief' would lead to the most 'disastrous consequences… nothing would lead more directly to disunion, with all its horrors [*sic*].'[43] Instead, the South should continue to 'look to the country; and to support such measures and such men, without regard to sections, as are best calculated to advance the general interest.'[44] For Calhoun, it was imperative the South recommit to nationalism, rather than retreat into sectionalism.[45]

Similarly, Daniel Webster, despite having left Congress to tend to his private law practice in Massachusetts, spent considerable time in Washington throughout the Missouri affair. A regular feature of the galleries during key debates, Webster also made his presence felt through authorship of a memorial detailing congressional authority, and justifying congressional action, to restrict the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Webster's strong intervention on the side of restrictionists no-doubt rested upon partisan motivations, particularly his support for the Federalist, Rufus King. However, he also believed in the fundamental 'injustice of any toleration of slavery' and recognised that

[40] John C. Calhoun, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 'ed' Robert Lee Meriwether, William Edwin Hemphill, Clyde N Wilson and Shirley Bright Cook, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press for the South Caroliniana Society, 1959), 327.
[41] *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 327.
[42] Ibid., 412-414.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

congressional authority over the territories was not a 'question to be decided by a temporary expediency; a false step taken now cannot be retraced' and future generations – 'the happiness of unborn millions' – would be affected by the measures Congress would adopt.[46] Webster's interest in the Missouri Affair, in spite of his absence from the floors of Congress, reflected a keen awareness of its potential implications for the future of US politics.

Clay meanwhile, became increasingly anxious that the 'Missouri Question' was raised to 'array one portion of the United States against another'; in the winter of 1820, he had every reason 'to apprehend that this sinister design may be effected.'[47] Clay was shocked at how threats of 'civil war' and 'disunion', were 'uttered almost without emotion' among his fellow Representatives.[48] In early February, he talked wistfully of a potential 'compromise', suggesting that a failure to do so would 'lead to the construction of the worst of all parties. {sectional parties.}'[49] He recognised how 'ultras on both sides' were pushing the nation to dissolution: 'Aut Cesar aut nulus is the maxim of many. Mine is The Republic, one and indivisible.'[50]

Clay subsequently plunged into the congressional maelstrom in search of a compromise.[51] The shape of the settlement he envisaged included 'agreeing on a line in the inhabited territory' which would 'separate the Slave from the Free region.'[52] On March 3, the House finally passed a bill, the terms of which Clay set out as follows: 'Missouri came in unrestricted', while 'the introduction of slaves' was 'interdicted in the uninhabited territory west of the new state and north of the parallel of 36 1/2 .'[53] Having given 'his best exertions

[46] Daniel Webster, *A Memorial to the Congress of the United States, on the Subject of Restraining the Increase of Slavery in New States to be Admitted into the Union*, (Boston: Sewell Phelps, 1819), 4.
[47] Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 2,* 752.
[48] Ibid., 766.
[49] Ibid., 774.
[50] Ibid., 775.
[51] Remini, *Henry Clay,* 182.
[52] Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 2,* 775.
[53] Ibid., 788.

to produce this settlement', specifically using his powers as Speaker to resist efforts to reopen the debate, Clay hoped that he had 'thus put [the question] at rest.'[54] However, the constitution submitted by Missouri in the summer of 1820 included a clause seeking to bar all African-Americans from the state. Several Representatives supposed this directly contravened the Constitution, and a second compromise became necessary. [55] An 'unprecedented' joint Senate-House committee was appointed which Clay used to draft legislation written in sufficiently obfuscatory language so as to convince some Northerners to vote its passage; as the historian Robert Forbes argues, 'Clay's fuzzy language' gave legislators 'marginally sufficient pretext' to support a bill that, in essence, allowed Missouri to retain its barring clause.[56] While Clay's second compromise provided relief for the United States embattled legislators, the scars of the crisis became crucial in shaping the political calculations of Clay and his generation in the decades which followed.

The Missouri Crisis altered the risk-framework surrounding territorial expansion in the United States, while simultaneously reorientating the axis of sectional concern from east-west to north-south.[57] Instead of preoccupation with the potential breakaway of distant and poorly integrated western territories, the lines of division were redrawn between Virginia and Pennsylvania.[58] The threats of dissolution which defined the Missouri debates unnerved expansionists.[59] While Clay remained convinced by the Jeffersonian mission 'to cover this entire continent with prosperous states', he recognised that this could only be achieved by acknowledging 'our system' as 'one of compromise', where every 'jarring sentiment or

[54] Ibid.
[55] Forbes, *Missouri*, 108.
[56] Ibid., 118.
[57] Sexton, *Monroe Doctrine*, 35.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 36. The historian Jay Sexton has emphasised the impact of this experience upon President Monroe; while Monroe continued to believe in the interchangeability of 'North America' and the 'United States', he was forced to admit that further acquisitions involve 'difficulties of an internal nature which menace the Union itself.'

interest' could only be resolved in the 'spirit of… compromise', and that only through compromise could there be 'security… peace… and fraternal union.'[60] Post-Missouri, Clay commenced a career which was devoted to this principle, and above all else, to 'strengthening and preservation of the Union'; this would ultimately force a qualification of his own expansionist ideals when Texas later rose to the top of the political agenda.[61]

The Missouri Crisis was a formative political experience for a generation of politicians who, assuming political leadership in the wake of their revolutionary fathers, were tasked with preserving their inherited state without the authority and authenticity of having created it. In the depths of the Crisis, when the chances of resolution seemed remote, Thomas Jefferson wrote: 'I envy not the present generation the glory of throwing away the fruits of their fathers sacrifices…of rendering desperate the experiment which was to decide ultimately whether man is capable of self-government?'[62] For Jefferson, the Missouri Compromise could be a 'reprieve only, not a final sentence.'[63] The Crisis had fundamentally altered the established dynamics of United States politics, precisely at the moment when the 1782ers were reaching political maturity, underlining the potential for sectional forces to paralyse the national government, derail their careers, and even tend to the dissolution of the Union. The 1782ers were an ambitious group. With the exception of Benton, all would go on to contest the presidency; their political trajectories, including their ultimate failure in this aim, would be indelibly shaped by the looming threat of sectional rupture which had revealed itself to them between 1820 and 1821. Missouri was, therefore, a formative (if not

[60] William H. Sparks, 'The Memories of Fifty Years: Containing Brief Biographical Notes of Distinguished Americans, and Anecdotes of Remarkable Men,' (Philadelphia, 1872), 232, *The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 2*.
[61] Jones, *Clay and Continental Expansion*, 260-262.
[62] Thomas Jefferson to William Short, April 13, 1820, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition, James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney 'eds', (Charlottesville: Virginia, 2008–2025), 538.
[63] Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820, Thomas Jefferson Papers.

deterministic) experience in shaping this generation's understandings of the fragility of the Union, and the potential dangers posed by territorial expansion.

Texas

If Missouri shaped generational anxieties regarding the sectional forces attendant to territorial expansion, Texas promoted serious alarm. When John Tyler (b.1790) assumed the Presidency in 1841, following the death of William Henry Harrison, the future Lone Star State remained a self-proclaimed independent republic. The Adams-Onís Treaty had renounced the United States' claims to the territory, but Mexican Independence had followed shortly thereafter, and the new government actively encouraged foreign settlement of its sparsely populated regions.[64] Thousands of Americans moved west of Louisiana in the years which followed, and by 1830, they outnumbered their Hispanic counterparts by 'more than two to one.'[65] When tensions with the Mexican government spilled over into armed conflict, yet more Americans, overwhelmingly from the South, journeyed to Texas to join the struggle for independence. The decisive role of Southern men and materiel in winning that struggle, lent itself to assumptions that Texan nationhood was merely a stepping stone to statehood within the Union. However, the scars of the Missouri crisis served as a reminder to the Jacksonian leadership that annexing a vast swathe of slaveholding territory would portend a sectional crisis.

The Missouri Compromise had not fully subdued the sectional tensions unleashed in 1819. Throughout the 1830s, the 1782ers were continually reminded of the sectional threat posed by slavery; Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, the flooding of Congress with antislavery petitions in 1834, and the American Abolition Society's mail campaign in 1835, bound the

[64] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 658-659.
[65] Ibid.

South in suspicion of a concerted plot to undermine their slave-based society. Calhoun, whose nullification attempts in 1832-3 underscored both the hazards of state sovereignty and the demise of his own nationalism, increasingly sought to pursue sectional ends; he supposed that the most effective means of preserving the Union was explicit federal protection of the South's interests. In December 1837, he introduced six resolutions to the senate which called for full federal protection of slavery, and crucially, for any new territories or states to see no restriction in relation to the institution.[66] Seen as an attempt to promote Texas annexation, Calhoun's resolutions were met with opposition, particularly from Henry Clay, who also suspected an attempt to damage his own political position. Once again, Clay evoked the Missouri Crisis to underscore the sectional dangers of Calhoun's pronouncements. Following an interruption from Calhoun, Clay launched into a retelling of his role in settling the Missouri Crisis, emphasising the threat to the Union it had posed; Missouri's attempts to 'rid the state of free persons of color' had 'shook the Union with more alarm than anything I have ever seen, from that day to this' and had come 'nearer to hazarding the Union than any other event in our history.'[67]

With Missouri still looming large, those of the post-Founding Generation who continued to support the expansionist project, at the same time found themselves increasingly predisposed to caution. Seeking to preserve and protect the legacy of the Founders whom they venerated, preservation of the Union and an anxiety regarding sectional animosity was increasingly shaping their political calculations. [68] Martin Van Buren founded the Democratic Party, in part, as a means of blunting sectional animosities. In an 1827 letter to Thomas Ritchie — consummate "wirepuller" and editor of the influential *Richmond Enquirer* — Van

[66] Robert Elder, *Calhoun: American Heretic*, (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 353-355.
[67] Henry Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 9, The Whig Leader, January 1, 1837-December 31, 1843*, Melba Porter Hay and Robert Seager 'eds', (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 128.
[68] George B. Forgie, *Patricide*, *in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and his Age*, (New York: Norton, 1979), 10-12.

Buren argued that without division along party lines, 'divisions founded on local interest or… worse prejudices between free and slave holding states' would 'inevitably take their place.'[69] For Van Buren, 'party attachment' would furnish a 'complete antidote' for 'sectional prejudices.'[70] By 1829, Van Buren had built and steered this new political vessel to the White House, and was loath to let a sectional storm throw it off course. By 1836, Van Buren's personal political future depended upon an evasion of the Texas issue. Nearing the end of his final term, Andrew Jackson calculated that a careful treatment of Texas' request for US intervention was the surest means of securing his desired presidential succession.[71] Despite private support for annexation, in a statement delivered in December 1836, Jackson was clear that 'no steps [had] been taken by the Executive toward the acknowledgment of the independence of Texas', that such acknowledgement was a matter of 'great delicacy and responsibility', and that 'prudence' still seemed to 'dictate that we should… stand aloof and maintain our present attitude.'[72] Jackson proceeded to deny Texas official recognition until after the 1836 election, in order to avoid complicating Van Buren's route to the presidency.[73] When elected, Van Buren remained opposed to any immediate calls for annexation, sharing in a concern that extended across party lines regarding the implications of appending a large, slaveholding territory to the southwest.[74]

Tyler's determination to reignite debate over Texas — motivated by electoral calculation as much as by ideological drive — posed an existential threat to the "union-above-all" politics embodied by Van Buren and Clay. Tyler was an unpopular president with both public and party; Clay initially refused to accept his presidency as legitimate referring to

[69] Martin Van Buren to Thomas Ritchie, January 13, 1827, MVB Papers.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Michael A Morrison, 'Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party', *Journal of the Early Republic* 10, No.9 (1990): 225.
[72] Andrew Jackson, *Statement on the Independence of Texas*, December 21, 1836.
[73] Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, (New York: Random House, 2008), 324.
[74] Morrison, 'Westward the Curse of Empire', 225.

it as a 'regency.'[75] Successive presidential vetoes of Clay's efforts to establish a national bank brought the resignation of all but one of Tyler's cabinet, his expulsion from the Whig Party, and complete isolation from those he ostensibly represented.[76] To compound matters, the 1842 congressional elections saw the Democrats gain nearly fifty seats in the House.[77] By 1843, the embattled and isolated president sought to regain command of the political agenda by returning territorial expansion to the front and centre of America's political conversation. A principled expansionist, Tyler took seriously the Madisonian notion that 'continued territorial expansion… would preserve the Union and maintain the precarious balance between national and state power.'[78] However, perhaps more importantly, he also calculated that reintroducing Texas into the national political conversation would best advance his presidential ambitions.

Tyler's pursuit of Texas came much to the chagrin of established frontrunners. In a letter to William Hammet in April 1844, Van Buren cautioned that upon the matter of annexation, we could 'not promise ourselves that unanimity in opinions… so important when great national questions… are to be decided.'[79] Although he felt it could be achieved in accordance with constitutional law, this remained a 'question of intense interest to every part of the country', and Van Buren feared that supporting immediate annexation might threaten both the unity of national government, and his own appeal among Democrats.[80] Having resisted calls for action while president, Van Buren saw no material alteration in relations between the United States and Mexico, nor domestic politics, to justify a change of course. For Van Buren, immediate annexation would have amounted to 'a plain departure from the

[75] Remini, *Henry Clay,* 580.
[76] John Bicknell, *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation*, (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 3.
[77] Ibid., 42.
[78] Edward P. Crapol, *John Tyler: the Accidental President*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 177.
[79] Martin Van Buren to William Henry Hammet, April 20, 1844, MVB Papers.
[80] Ibid.

laws and usages of nations, and a violation of the principles to which we had avowed our adherence in the face of the world.'[81] Unwilling to assume any position on Texas that might impair his 'ability to discharge its duties impartially and usefully to *every portion* of [the] country', Van Buren dismissed annexation as neither politically expedient, nor justifiable as a means of personal 'political promotion.'[82]

In a letter from Lexington in December 1843, Clay similarly outlined his reasons for opposing annexation. Firstly, he agreed that Mexico still maintained a claim on Texas. Any immediate incorporation would unavoidably tip the United States into war, a position that in 1843, Clay supposed 'nobody would think… wise or proper.'[83] Secondly, Clay argued that the 'territory of the United States' was 'already large enough', and in many senses too large to be governed properly.[84] Clay rather hoped Americans 'might enjoy… what they have' anxious that any 'further acquisitions of territory [came] at the hazard of destroying all those great blessings.'[85] For Clay, the annexation of Texas would distract from the old Whig programme upon which he intended to win the coming election. Much like his rival, Clay hoped for a campaign fought upon traditional divisions between Democrats and Whigs, convinced that he could triumph based on the merits of his American System. Tyler's 'selfish purposes' had 'added to the other subjects of contention which exist in the country' forcing both Clay and Van Buren to recalibrate their electoral strategies.[86]

While electoral calculation provided an additional layer to Van Buren and Clay's opposition to Texas annexation, their foremost concern with sectional divisiveness was shared and voiced by other prominent members of their generation in the Senate. While the

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 9*, 897.
[84] Ibid., 898.
[85] Ibid., 899.
[86] Ibid., 897.

roll calls were undoubtedly shaped by sectional and partisan identity, it is telling that of the ten senators born prior to the signing of the Constitution, only one voted in the affirmative when Tyler's Bill was put forward in June 1844. As early as 1837, Massachusetts Whig Daniel Webster (b.1782) had expressed 'insurmountable objections' to annexation. Calling for his fellow Americans to 'stand by the Constitution as it is, and by our country as it is'; it was in the interests of the 'whole Union', he argued, 'to remain… without diminution and without addition.'[87] The 'accession of Texas… [was] not necessary to the full and complete enjoyment of all which we already possess.'[88] He particularly sought to address concerns over slavery, upon which he thought a 'great portion of the community is already strongly excited.'[89] While encouraging commitment to protections afforded by the Constitution to slavery in the Southern states, Webster feared that 'the explosion' which might follow annexation could endanger the Constitution or the Union itself.[90] By 1844, Webster's opinions remained 'entirely unaltered.'[91] It was his opinion that 'in this difference, between ardent speculations, and cautious fears…the truest wisdom [was] to abide by the present state of things.'[92]

Similarly to Webster, Missouri Democrat Thomas Hart Benton (b.1782) held early reservations about hasty annexation in 1836, citing the risk of conflict with Mexico and sectional concerns. By the summer of 1844, 'Old Bullion' was the only Southern Democrat who remained resolute in opposing the Administration's annexation plans. He rose in the Senate in early June to deliver a lengthy speech which denounced the 'long concealed Texas Machination' as a disunionist plot.[93] Explicitly harkening back to 1819, Benton contested that

[87] Daniel Webster, Reception at New York, March 15, 1837, *The Papers of Daniel Webster Digital Edition,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2018), 124 -131.
[88] Ibid., 130.
[89] Ibid., 131.
[90] Ibid., 131.
[91] Daniel Webster to Abijah Bigelow et al., January 2, 1844, *The Papers of Daniel Webster.*
[92] Ibid.
[93] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 13, 28th Congress, 1st session, (1844), 607-609.

'annexation… upon the avowed ground of laying it all out into slave states' was 'an open preparation for a Missouri question, and a dissolution of the Union.'[94] For Benton, Tyler and Calhoun were 'Atlantic politicians' who had seized Texas as 'a sectional question' for the purposes of their own 'ambition.'[95] Despite coming from vastly different political, cultural, and geographical groupings, Benton, Van Buren, Webster, and Clay shared in a concern regarding the sectional consequences of annexation. This alone, was seen as sufficient cause by these prominent statesmen to oppose Tyler's annexation scheme.

Of course, it is important to note that not all members of their generation shared in this concern. John C. Calhoun, as Tyler's serving secretary of state, was the very architect of the treaty Benton decried. Calhoun's journey from staunch nationalist to sectional ideologue has often fascinated historians. In a recent dual biography of Calhoun and Adams, William Hartford has noted how Calhoun's animus for the Adam's administration, coupled with opposition to an economic programme that he felt disadvantaged Southern planters, encouraged increasing cynicism of Federal authority.[96] For Hartford, the Nullification Crisis - where South Carolina unsuccessfully attempted to opt-out of Federal tariff laws - was the moment when Calhoun finally 'discarded most traces of his former nationalism.'[97] In the succeeding years, the threat of emerging abolitionism meant that by the time of his notorious Pakenham letter, the protection and promotion of slavery had become intimately bound with Calhoun's conception of Southern nationalism.[98] Calhoun viewed Texas' acquisition as a vital step in the protection of the South, and the promotion of his own political ambition. The threat of dissolution evidenced by the Missouri Crisis could only be fully neutralised by Southern strength; Southern expansion, to match the size and political power of the North,

[94] Ibid., 609.
[95] Ibid., 610.
[96] William Hartford, *Adams and Calhoun: From Shared Vision to Irreconcilable Conflict*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2023), 96-110.
[97] Ibid., 98.
[98] Meacham, *American Lion*, 420.

would prevent a further crisis tending to disunion, while opening a route for Calhoun to the presidency.

Lewis Cass was a similarly avid pro-expansion 1782er, although he arrived at that opinion from quite a different direction to Calhoun. For Cass, the popularity of annexation in the West, and his security fears, were sufficient to justify supporting the Administration's annexation efforts, and to challenge Van Buren for the Democratic nomination. Cass was a frontier Westerner who spent much of his formative career as Governor of Michigan Territory. He was subsequently tapped by the Jackson Administration as Secretary of War, where he carried out that government's infamous Indian removal policies, before leaving for France (as Ambassador) until 1842. Therefore, Cass' career stood in marked contrast to those of Benton, Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and Van Buren, who had instead all served extensive terms in Congress between 1819 and 1844. What demarked them from Cass, was immediate experience of the sectional menace infecting congressional politics from the Missouri Crisis onward.

The 1782ers were all undoubtedly shaped by their sense of responsibility to preserve the Founder's legacy. However, for all except Cass, their formative political experiences had lent them a heightened awareness of territorial expansion's capacity to frustrate their own political ambitions and promote disunion. Each of these men had been anticipating significant political power, at the precise moment the Union's fragility became most exposed. They had then been reminded of this fragility periodically for the succeeding twenty-five years. As such, their politics was defined by a desire to mitigate sectional antagonisms which threatened the Union and their own political aspirations — a position which lent itself, in the majority of cases, to opposing immediate annexation.

Young America

However, by the mid-1840s, the position assumed by the majority of the 1782ers became increasingly contested. Young America was the name adopted by a 'rising generation' of Democratic Party members who pursued 'a progressive course on a range of issues and felt comfortable moving away from the orthodoxies of Jackson's Democracy.'[99] They sought to expedite 'the construction of a newer, more flexible organization', and were fervent proponents of territorial expansion.[100] Prominent congressional representatives associated with this movement included William Allen (b.1803), John Wentworth (b.1815), Andrew Kennedy (b.1810), Edward Hannegan (b.1807), Jesse Bright (b.1812) and David Yulee (b.1810), placing this particular generational unit firmly within the bounds of the broader "Third Generation" of American statesmen post-Founding.[101] Central to this generation's assumptions regarding electoral politics was, as Jesse Bright wrote to a young William Hayden English (future Democratic Representative), that 'young men… more than old men [should] control elections.'[102]

The *Democratic Review*, first published in October 1837, served as this movement's nucleus. Sensing that the United States stood at a 'critical stage of… national progress', the *Review* sought a continued commitment to 'high and holy' Democratic principles.[103] In the introductory article to its first published volume, editor John L. O'Sullivan (b.1813) articulated the 'cardinal principles' of the movement's political faith: an 'abiding confidence in the… full capacity for self-government of the great mass of… people' and firm belief in 'the supremacy of the will of the majority.'[104] For O'Sullivan, the 'best government' was that

[99] Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 7.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 6; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 54.
[102] Jesse D. Bright to William H. English, April 21, 1843, *Indiana Magazine of History* 30, no. 4 (1934), 371
[103] John O'Sullivan., 'Introduction', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 1, no.1, (1838): 1.
[104] Ibid., *2.*

'which governs least' and did least to temper the will of the majority.[105] The *Review's* patrons saw its quest for limited democratic government as a long term multi-generational project: 'How many generations may yet be required before our theory and practice of government shall be sifted and analysed down to the lowest point of simplicity consistent with the preservation of some degree of national organisation?'[106]

For Young American and O'Sullivan, fulfilment of their national destiny necessitated "progress" – defined as a rejection of established politicians and political dogma as much as the adoption of new principles. While 'opposed to all precipitate radical changes in social institutions', O'Sullivan declared his concern regarding how 'old evils… perpetuate themselves by appealing to our veneration for the wisdom of our fathers, our inert love of present tranquillity, and our natural apprehension… [of] the untried and unknown.'[107] A man was, O'Sullivan argued, 'more likely to stumble and stray if he turns his face backward and keeps his looks fixed on the thoughts and things of the past.'[108] The 'great men of the nation', were objects of antiquity, 'the master spirits of their day' who had been too 'long accustomed to… affection' and had been 'seduced from the path of their early promise by the intrigues of party and the allurements of ambition' (specifically presidential ambition).[109] In railing against the 'influence of such men' upon the minds of the younger generation, O'Sullivan challenged the notion that formally 'great' politicians should necessarily be considered the arbiters of sound public policy, an intervention reflected most acutely in debates over territorial expansion throughout the 1840s.

[104] Ibid., 3.
[105] Ibid., 6.
[106] Ibid., 8.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 9.
[109] Ibid.

For Young Americans, confidence in the ability to, and the necessity for, American intervention beyond its borders was key. Their ideology was premised upon a belief in "Manifest Destiny"; the notion that it was the God-given right of the United States to expand over the entirety of the North American continent from sea to shining sea. The security anxieties that drove the Founding Generation's pursuit of new territories were displaced by a providential resolve; the United States, O'Sullivan argued, was 'destined to be the great nation of futurity.'[110] This 'nation of many nations [was]… to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated… Its floor shall be a hemisphere, its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation a Union of many Republics.'[111]

The confidence of Young America was augmented by contemporary scientific and economic developments. In an 1848 political portrait the *Review's* new editor, Thomas Kettle, detailed how over the past half-century science had scattered 'its blessings with a lavish bounty… giving motion to countless water-wheels and steam engines… sending intelligence with lighting speed along electric wires… entering in untold shapes into the daily pursuits of honest industry, and freeing them of their worst evils.'[112] The invention of 'electric telegraphy' in 1844, alongside 'improvements in printing, paper manufacturing, the multiplication of newspapers, magazines, and books', amounted to what Daniel Howe has termed a 'revolution of communication.'[113] In a letter to the editors of the *Public Ledger*, one correspondent, so impressed with the telegraph, contemplated its global extension as a means of projecting American ideals:

> It would be, as it were, uniting to the lightning's flash the thunder of our republican eloquence, transmitting it, with the power of magic and velocity of thought,

[110] John L. O'Sullivan, 'The Great Nation of Futurity', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 6, no.23 (1839): 426-430.
[111] Ibid., 426-430.
[112] Thomas P. Kettle, 'Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil: Henry Millar Shreve', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 22, no.115 (1848): 59.
[113] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 1-2.

> triumphant over the globe until earth's loneliest bounds and oceans wildest shore would become vocal with the shouts of liberty.[114]

This correspondent was unflinching in their observance of US exceptionalism, echoing the likes of O'Sullivan, who was himself convinced that no 'earthly power' could now 'set limits' to the United States' 'onwards march.'[115]

Young America's faith in expansion directly challenged those cautious elder statesmen who remained conscious of the threat it might pose to national unity.[116] The historian Joel Silbey has argued that Martin Van Buren would likely have been successful in seeking his Party's nomination had the election been contested over 'old issues' such as 'arguments for limited government, safeguarding individual liberty [and] local control of domestic affairs.'[117] Yet, what Silbey has termed 'Texas fever' gripped far more of the Democratic Party than its extreme Southern fringe; the majority of the Democratic Party, led increasingly by Young America, now saw Texas annexation as an essential policy goal.[118] The gulf between Van Buren's position on expansion, and that of the incipient Young America, doomed him to failure at the Party's national convention. Despite topping the first ballot when Democrats convened in Baltimore in May 1844, his lead would quickly dissipate as it became clear he would not be able to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority of delegates. Van Buren's presidential hopes shattered on the Texas question.

The response of the *Democratic Review* to the passing over of Van Buren bears attention. In July 1844, the *Review* dedicated the first section of its fifteenth volume to this 'great and good statesman.'[119] While denying that Van Buren was 'in any sense a fallen man',

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[114] *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 7, 1844.
[115] O'Sullivan, 'The Great Nation of Futurity', 426-430.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Joel H. Silbey, *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 169.
[118] Ibid., 172.
[119] John L. O'Sullivan, "Mr Van Buren", *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 15, no.72 (1844): 3.

the *Review* was quick to suggest that he had 'descended irrevocably from… the stage of public affairs' and that his 'career as a statesman [was] now, therefore closed.'[120] Implying a clear break with posterity, it was 'time now to turn overleaf', this article a final 'reverential homage' to the 'sunken sun of a day now for ever past.'[121] The nature of the *Review's* rhetoric here — reference to an older statesman as a 'sunken sun' necessarily retiring from public life — foreshadows literature that would consign older statesmen to political oblivion later in the decade. The gulf between Van Buren's position on expansion, and that of the incipient Young America, necessitated his writing out of the political narrative. Young America felt, as O'Sullivan stated in July 1845, that 'it [was] now time for the opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease.'[122] The Texas question should be elevated 'out of the lower region of our past party dissensions', so as not to check 'the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent, allotted by Providence, for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.'[123] The spirit of caution that had defined the ageing Van Buren's attitudes to national aggrandisement were irreconcilable with this belief. It was to be displaced by a new spirit within the Democracy, one that saw American expansion as essential to national progress.

Van Buren's failure to secure the party nomination did not go unnoticed by his erstwhile rival, Clay. Facing deadlock, Democrats had been forced to pursue a compromise candidate acceptable to both Van Buren and his opponents, settling on the lesser-known Polk. In a letter to fellow Southern Whig grandee, Willie Magnum, Clay speculated as to whether 'our Democratic friends [were] serious in the nomination they have made at Baltimore?' [124] Projecting continued confidence in his electoral success, Clay suggested the Democrats

[120] Ibid., 9.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] John L. O'Sullivan, 'Annexation', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 17, no.1 (1845): 5.
[124] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10: Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Stateman, January 1, 1844-June 29,* 1852, Melba Porter Hay and Carol Reardon 'eds', (Lexington, 1991), 66.

would be 'beat… with ease if we do one half of our duty.'[125] In a letter dated June 10th, he presumptuously suggested that his 'only regret' regarding the Democratic nominations is 'that persons more worthy of a contest with us had not been selected.'[126] Clay remained, despite the apparent 'excitement' regarding Texas, confident that his Whig principles would carry the day. However, there were elements within the press who were starting to question whether Clay himself was already too old for the presidency. Alred Burr's *Hartford Times,* a formerly anti-Federalist and now firmly Democratic paper*,* attacked Clay as an 'Old Hunker.'[127] Having failed in his bid for the presidency twenty years prior, at what the *Times* presumed was the 'zenith of his popularity', how could he expect victory in 1844; 'no one can mistake the fate which this broken-down old politician is to experience… the "old hunker" is done for.'[128]

By late November, as the final votes were tallied, Clay's hubris had been displaced by resignation and anxiety. Clay came up short, both in the electoral college and the popular vote, a loss which came as a genuine shock. In letters exchanged between November 1844 and January 1844, Clay's outlook on national affairs became increasingly bleak, while an increased consciousness of his own advancing age became evident. In a letter to Mary Bayard on November 18th, Clay admitted to the 'severity of that blow' which had struck him.[129] He went on, stating that 'much as [the] sad event' affected him personally, he feared much more 'for my country and my friends.'[130] He was, after all, 'a poor mortal, whose life [had] nearly reached the ordinary limit of human existence.'[131] In a letter to David Francis Bacon in January of 1845, author and Clay campaigner in New York, he remarked that while Bacon

[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 67.
[127] *Hartford Times*, Connecticut, July 24, 1844.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 149.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

was 'yet young; I am otherwise' and hoped that he 'may… live to see all the dangers which overhang our country dispelled.'[132] Only three days later, when pressing Justice Joseph Story to remain on the bench and protect the country from its uncertain future, Clay remarked that 'in early and middle life' he had 'desired to be preserved from the grumbling and murmuring incident of old age.'[133] And yet, now he struggled to 'avoid taking too desponding a view of…public affairs' and saw 'few glimpses of light and hope break through the darkness of the gloomy future.'[134] These instances of age consciousness were often interspersed with declarations that his public career was at an end. Clay, having thrice been defeated in presidential elections, and now aged sixty-seven, suggested to a delegation of friends that came to inform him of his defeat, that he wished to 'spend the remainder of [his] days in peace and quiet.'[135]

While an ageing Clay retired to Ashland, Tyler redoubled his efforts to affix Texas annexation to his legacy; on Saturday, March 3rd, 1845, he signed Congress' joint resolution on annexation before forwarding it onto Texas' government. In doing so, Tyler had successfully executed the central policy ambition of his term. However, his hopes of remaining in the White House had long since been extinguished. The following Tuesday, incoming President James Polk would deliver his inaugural address. Stressing the challenges facing the nation, he outlined his vision regarding a more prosperous, and crucially larger Republic. Asserting the primacy of the Constitution 'plainly written as it is', Polk described a federal government of 'delegated and limited powers', such that would 'endure for ages to come and dispense [its] blessings… to distant generations.'[136] The final third of his address was devoted to the key issue – Texas. For Polk, this 'independent' Republic' had every 'right

[132] Ibid., 187.
[133] Ibid., 188.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 145.
[136] James K. Polk, Inaugural Address, in Sandi Patty, *U.S. Presidential Inaugural Addresses from Washington to Obama*, (Auckland, New Zealand: Floating Press, 2009), 102-113.

to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory and to merge her sovereignty… in ours.'[137] Dismissing Clay and Van Buren's fears regarding war with Mexico, Polk claimed that annexation was an issue 'belonging exclusively to the United States and Texas' as 'independent powers competent to contract.'[138] Emphasising his belief in the efficacy of territorial expansion, Polk stated that 'as our boundaries have been enlarged and our agricultural population has been spread over a large surface, our federative system has acquired additional strength and security.'[139] Addressing any concerns regarding the Union, Polk stated his confidence that America could be 'safely extended to the utmost bounds of our territorial limits, and that as it shall be extended the bonds of our Union, so far from being weakened, will become stronger.'[140] As such, he committed to 'endeavour by all constitutional, honourable, and appropriate means to consummate the expressed will of the people and Government of the United States by the annexation of Texas… at the earliest practicable period.'[141] The thrust of Polk's inaugural address regarding territorial expansion marked a clear departure from the public pronouncements of his campaign rivals; confidence eclipsed caution as Polk subjugated sectional fears to national aggrandisement.

Crucially, Polk represented more than an ideological departure from his more established rivals. In 1845, Polk was the youngest individual inaugurated as President of the United States. He was certainly conscious of this, and within moments of opening his address, remarked that he was deeply impressed with gratitude' to be 'honoured with this distinguished consideration at an earlier period of life than any of my predecessors.'[142] Pointedly, he went on to ask 'if the more aged and experienced men who have filled the office of president… distrusted their ability to discharge the duties of that exalted station,

[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

what ought to be the apprehensions of one so much younger and less endowed', especially since the national 'domain extends from ocean to ocean, that our people have so greatly increased in numbers, and at a time when so great diversity of opinion prevails in regard to the principles and policy which should characterize the administration of our Government.'[143] Polk's recognition of his relative youth and the calibre of politician he defeated to win the presidency, speaks to the significance of a contested notion, emerging in the 1840s, that American politics demanded 'new men' and 'new issues'.[144] While Whig papers decried the defeat of Clay, their Democratic counterparts celebrated the victory of a party which sought 'new names, and search[ed] out new issues, when the old names has become odious by their bad practices, and the old issues found against them.'[145] For Ritchie's *Enquirer*, Polk was 'fortunately a new man' who had 'offended no rival, excited no prejudices' and 'commanded… confidence… by his sound principles.'[146] Polk's "new man" status, according to much of the Democratic press, was a crucial component in securing Democratic victory in November, facilitating the coalition of previously divided camps upon a popular pro-annexation platform.

The accession of the young president was indicative of a fundamental shift in American political life. Older issues, upon which the likes of Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay had led debate for over two decades, were displaced by renewed concerns regarding territorial expansion, and the place of slavery within any newly acquired territories. This change was shaped by economic transformation as much as by political ideology, as railways and telegraph wires extended into the South and West, and new industries emerged out of sprawling urban environments. Young America Democrats, with their fundamental belief in

[143] Ibid.
[144] *New Hampshire Statesman*, Concord, New Hampshire June 7, 1844.
[145] *Clarksville Jeffersonian*, Tennessee, November 23, 1844.
[146] *Richmond Enquirer*, Virginia, November 19, 1844.

"manifest destiny" and desire to exploit the forces of modernisation, were crucial in initiating and animating this political transformation. Their ideological zeal for expansion was fundamentally at odds with the position of politicians like Henry Clay, Van Buren and Webster, who after long tenures in Washington had a heightened anxiety regarding the sectional consequences of further territorial acquisition. With this in mind, Clay and Van Buren sought to keep political debate fixed upon older partisan divides. Certainly, the politics of the mid-century cannot be told as a straightforward story of handover, from one older outmoded set of politicians to a younger generation with a modernisation agenda. This oversimplification would belie the contested nature of this transition, where partisanship premised upon "traditional" issues remained remarkably robust. Despite losing out in 1844, both Clay and Van Buren would begin manoeuvring for the next election. Yet, having dictated the tenor of political debate for the past twenty years, their failure to do so in the election of 1844 provides evidence that their generation's grip on the political agenda was already starting to slip.

2 Young Whigs and Young Indians

In 1814, Thomas Jefferson penned a letter to fellow Virginian Edward Coles in which he placed the future of America's enslaved population in the hands of coming generations. His expressed hope was that 'the younger generation having received their early impressions after the flame of liberty had been kindled in every breast' and with the 'generous temperament of youth' would since 'have sympathized with oppression wherever found and proved their love of liberty beyond their own share.'[147] Emancipation was for Jefferson, an 'enterprise…for the young', one that he would 'give his prayers' as 'the only weapons of an old man.'[148] Jefferson's words here speak to what John Ashworth has termed the

[147] Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, 25 August 1814, Manuscript/Mixed Material. Library of Congress.
[148] Ibid.

'revolutionary generation's… cosy assumption' that slavery was ultimately 'moribund.'[149] Yet, thirty-four years later, emancipation remained a distant prospect. In the years preceding the election of 1848, American politicians confronted a deepening crisis with slavery at its heart. Polk's decision to manufacture a pretext for war on the nation's newly minted southern border unleashed a Pandora's box of hazards upon America's two national political parties. From the moment of the alleged spilling of 'American Blood on American soil' in April 1846, questions were raised regarding the legality, morality, and rationality of pursuing war against a militarily weak neighbouring nation. In the proceeding years, Polk's administration pursued unembarrassed territorial aggrandisement that incited sustained opposition, spearheaded by congressional Whigs, rooted in concern regarding the fate of any territories acquired. The settlement of slavery's expansion via the Compromise of 1820 had been shattered, and the prospect of vast tracts of land south of 36°30′ opening up for pro-slavery settlement threatened to destabilise the institutional balance between slave and free states. It was within this fraught, sectionally charged political environment, that politicians began manoeuvring for the impending presidential race.

Joel Silbey has characterised the contest of 1848 as 'a confrontation between the forces of tradition, and the powerful rise of a different way of thinking about the political world they all inhabited.'[150] Sectional issues certainly predominated, and candidates were forced to sharpen their stance on slavery and its expansion. Yet simultaneously, they needed to maintain bi-sectional and inter-factional support across the breadth of their politically polyglot parties; the late 1840s remained a period of 'intense partisanship', and "older" issues such as the tariff, or internal improvements, continued to be brought forward in an attempt to anchor the election to traditional lines of division. Joseph Rayback has noted that, much like

[149] John Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis,1848-1861*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.
[150] Joel H. Silbey*, Party over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009)*,* xii.

in 1844, 'older politicians accustomed to [this] past alignment, struggled to maintain… old political balances.'[151] This in turn, left 'younger politicians… to meet the new rising issues.'[152] Building upon Rayback's argument, this section will document why older Whig politicians, such as Clay and Webster, failed to secure the nomination in 1848. On the one hand, it was because they failed to provide a satisfactory solution to the territories problem which could unite their disparate party. On the other, it was because their advanced age and protracted political records were increasingly perceived as an electoral weakness; younger elements within the Whig Party, emboldened by this, demanded new candidates and new ideas. If 1844 had exposed the political weakness of Clay and his generation, 1848 revealed it was terminal to any future electoral success.

McLean, Corwin, and the Young Whigs of the North

As the Party out of power, Whigs were quick to begin manoeuvring for the coming campaign. Of the six candidates who would be put before the Party at the nominating convention in Philadelphia in 1848, one of the first to raise their heads above the parapet was John McLean. Born in March 1785, McLean had had a long and varied political career, having served in the House during Madison's Presidency, as Postmaster for Monroe, and as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court under Jackson. Among Whig newspaper editors, particularly in the Upper-South, he was viewed as a candidate of 'great uprightness of character… strong religious tendencies', and crucially, as a public servant and non-partisan figure perfectly separate 'from the vexed questions of the day.'[153] He had, in the eyes of one paper, 'proven himself true as steel… to the interests of… the *whole* country' and could therefore be trusted with the presidency.[154] By July 1846, it was said that the names of

[151] Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1970), vii.
[152] Ibid.
[153] *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Mississippi, Sep 29, 1846.
[154] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, Tennessee, April 26, 1846.

McLean and Mangum (a prominent North Carolinian planter politician) were 'spreading like wildfire all over the country' with 'people already…forming on this organisation.'[155] By the onset of winter, county meetings in North Carolina and Tennessee had already passed resolutions in favour of this ticket.[156]

McLean's candidacy appealed to what Michael Holt has identified as 'residual antiparty sentiment among some Whigs' and a concomitant 'jealousy of National Republican' leaders like Clay and Webster.[157] While McLean's inter-partisan political record left him open to charges of locofocoism, and to some Whigs 'tainted' him 'with the sin of Jacksonianism', several papers argued that McLean's nomination was likely to augur a large 'conservative vote' bringing much needed moderate Democrats into the Whig fold.[158] In a letter to John Dunlop in 1847, McLean demonstrated his conservative appeal in a discussion of patronage and the proper 'administration of government' rooted firmly in a prior political age.[159] Decrying party 'ultraism', McLean characterised the federal government as a 'corporation' with the people as 'stakeholders' for whom all affairs should be managed. Failure to direct the government as such would degrade the Republic, placing 'the power of the nation…in the hands of a few political jugglers.'[160] He cautioned that the 'Whig ascendency' could never be made 'permanent while it rested upon moral fervour' and, harking back to the Founders, argued that 'an elevated public sentiment should be inculcated in the defence of popular rights' such that the 'days of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe may be restored.'[161] The content of this letter, McLean admitted, was full of 'obsolete ideas' and 'antiquated notions.' In this

[155] *New York Daily Herald*, July 13, 1846.
[156] *The Baltimore Sun*, Maryland, November 11, 1846.
[157] Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press,1999), 261.
[158] *Detroit Free Press*, December 9, 1846; *Clinton Republican*, Wilmington Ohio, October 31, 1846.
[159] John McLean to James Dunlop, December 7, 1847, John McLean Papers, Library of Congress.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

sense, McLean was conscious of his candidacy's primary weakness – that he himself was 'very far behind the political progress of the day.'[162]

Indeed, that the sixty-one-year-old McLean's early momentum would be abruptly halted by a younger man supported by younger partisans is revealing of the generational dynamics which shaped the nomination contest. The fifty-three-year-old Thomas Corwin and the "young Whigs" that boomed him, promised a very different administration — one without compromise on the territory issue. In a letter of January 1848, one of McLean's correspondents documents the generational nature of the opposition presented by Corwin and his followers:

> Your particular opponents are bitter and unreasonable…abusive and vindictive. The manifest injustice of this course will prevent its effect upon men past 35 years of age. But there are many men, younger than this, that really know little of you. Your [present] position is one not calculated to place you much before the public and the present generation of young and controlling spirits have come upon the stage since you took your seat on the bench. While many of them look upon you as a … respectable old man… they yet have found you an "old hunker."[163]

In contrast to McLean, this correspondent suggests that Corwin was perceived to be a 'youth, or if not, young enough' to appeal to the 'young men', implying that Corwin's age offered him an electoral advantage over his older counterpart.[164] Corwin's appeal was further advanced by virtue of his searing speech in opposition to the Mexican War, delivered in the Senate in February 1847.[165] Here Corwin denounced the 'flagitious notion of fighting for [territorial] indemnity', dismissing as 'absurd and hypocritical' both the idea that President Polk had no expectation of holding Mexican territory after the war, or that an honourable

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[162] Ibid.
[163] Letter to John McLean, January 2, 1848, John McLean Papers, Library of Congress.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 291.

peace could be secured.[166] The speech provoked a firestorm in the press, where it was broadly 'condemned as… unpatriotic and anti-American.'[167] However, among younger Whigs, Corwin stock climbed precipitously. Ohio's Joshua Giddings felt certain Corwin was to become the champion of "Young Whiggery",[168] while the *Lima Argus* noted how the 'Young Whigs in New York and Ohio' were 'ready to burst their waistbands for Corwin.'[169] Rumours even abounded about a potential alliance with William Seward as a vice-presidential candidate, Seward himself being a member of a younger generation of antislavery Whigs in New York.

To understand Corwin's appeal in the North, it is vital to examine why younger Whigs were increasingly adopting antislavery positions. Nowhere was this truer than in Massachusetts, where a clash between an older "cotton" interest and a younger "conscience" faction offers the clearest example of how generational division over an appropriate treatment of slavery would come to fundamentally reshape Whig politics, on both a state and national level. Here, younger Whigs rejected established party orthodoxy and the older politicians of their state, instead advocating for a stronger moral opposition to slavery and its expansion. In Massachusetts, this generational divide necessarily intersected with the class structures that defined Boston's social-political landscape.

The founding of the Boston Manufacturing Company (BMC), and success of Francis Lowell's Waltham Factory, portended a revolution in Massachusetts' state economy.[170] From 1810 to 1837, the number of cotton manufacturers in the state ballooned from thirty-four to

[166] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 16, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, (1847), 216.
[167] *Indiana State Sentinel*, Indianapolis, March 18, 1847.
[168] Norman A. Graebner, 'Thomas Corwin and the Election of 1848: A Study in Conservative Politics, *'Journal of Southern History*, 17, no.2 (1951): 162-179.
[169] *Lima Argus*, Ohio, May 4, 1847.
[170] Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 8.

close to 200.[171] Those associated with the BMC rapidly accrued economic and social capital such that they were accepted into Boston's existing mercantile aristocracy, who in turn invested vast sums in the equipment and infrastructure necessary to fuel the cotton boom.[172] The ease with which the manufacturers entered the existing 'merchant-dominated aristocracy' can be accounted for by the complementary nature of their 'economic pursuits'; many were involved in the coastal trade of raw cotton and the export of finished textiles.[173] By the early 1830s, the majority of these former free-trade advocates were so heavily invested in cotton manufacture that they swung behind the National Republican Party and protectionism.[174] This cemented the State as an elite backed, nationalist Whig stronghold in the decades that followed.[175]

As Massachusetts became a leader in the cotton related industries, so too did it become a centre for organised abolitionism. In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* began publication out of Boston, and in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded, breaking what sympathetic contemporaries called 'the great conspiracy of silence'.[176] Yet among the States' newly amalgamated elite of 'merchant princes' and 'cotton kings', abolitionism became neither 'fashionable' nor 'acceptable.'[177] The likes of Abbot Lawrence (b.1792) and Nathan Appleton (b.1779) had what historian Kinley Brauer has identified as an 'immediate practical interest in promoting sectional harmony', given their 'dependence on Southern cotton and deep involvement in 'the lucrative coastal trade.'[178] Anxious of 'economic reprisals' from the South should they fail to distance themselves from

[171] John. L Myers, *Henry Wilson and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Lanham, Maryland; Oxford: University Press of America, 2005), 9.
[172] Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience*, 10.
[173] Ibid., 11.
[174] Thomas H. O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom: the Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 35.
[175] Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience*, 14.
[176] O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 43.
[177] Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience*, 5.
[178] Ibid., 18.

'abolitionist agitation', the cotton interest fell back on nationalist Whig constitutionalism to justify their non-interference in the slavery question: slavery was integral to the Constitution, and the Constitution was unassailable.[179] Economically and politically bound to the South and their institutions, the 'cotton' Whigs sought to avoid or obfuscate any questions regarding slavery's morality and its place in the United States.

Thus, Massachusetts' leading antislavery Whigs necessarily came from outside of this class. The likes of Henry Wilson, Charles Sumner, and Charles Francis Adams, born between 1807 and 1812, spearheaded a younger generation who, economically removed from the cotton interest, were willing to clash with their older counterparts over the issue of slavery.[180] Wilson, for example, having been born into relative poverty in New Hampshire, was released from his agricultural indenture at the age of twenty-one, before moving to Massachusetts in 1833 to pursue shoe making.[181] Despite some setbacks, most notably the loss of all of his savings in the Panic of 1837, Wilson found unrivalled success in the shoemaking business. By 1848, he had traded working late into the night constructing brogans at twenty dollars a day, for a business that employed sixty-eight people and produced 63,000 pairs of shoes.[182] While attaining a level of financial security such that he could afford a near full-time involvement in politics, Wilson remained removed from the cotton class. His contemporaries — Charles Sumner and Charles Francis Adams — hailed from less humble beginnings, having both attended Boston Latin School and Harvard College before establishing successful law practices, yet they too remained dislocated from Boston's mercantile-manufacturing elite.[183] All three men had the wrong father, and were in the wrong business,

[179] O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 45-51.
[180] The median birth year for the "conscience" Whig leaders was 1809, while their "cotton" counterparts had a median birth year of 1792.
[181] Myers, *Henry Wilson,* 14.
[182] Ibid., 27.
[183] David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Knopf, 1960), 39.

to be accepted by Boston's Brahmins. As such, when Sumner, Adams and Wilson entered politics, they were largely unburdened by the "cotton interest".

Crucially, all three harboured a strong antislavery impulse inculcated during their formative years in 1830s New England. Despite receiving no formal education, Wilson was a voracious reader and shortly after his arrival in Natick, he founded the town's first debating society.[184] Here, he and other young men came to deliberate over a host of contemporary issues, prominent among which were slavery and abolition. Whether by his close association with Lydia Maria Child in Natick, or a four-week sojourn to Washington where he saw first-hand debates over the "gag rule", Texas and the horrors of the William's Slave Pen, by the age of twenty-four, Wilson was vehemently opposed to the institution.[185] Sumner's antislavery stance was passed down from his father and only reinforced by his reading of Maria Child's 1833 publication, *An Appeal in Favour of that Class of Americans Called Africans*.[186] Similarly to Wilson, Sumner too was deeply impacted by his first experience of slavery on a trip to the capital in 1834 and a European tour from 1837-1840 only served to strengthen his opposition to the institution.[187] Much like Sumner, Charles Francis' increasingly close relationship with his father also informed his antislavery position. He was certainly no abolitionist, accepting the 'compromises' of Constitution which protected the South's peculiar institution. Nevertheless, between 1835 and 1838 his stance against slavery, and particularly what he saw as the pro-slavery agitation of Southern politicians and the incumbent Democratic administration, hardened considerably. Thus, by the turn of the decade, all three young men held firm antislavery beliefs.

[184] Myers, *Henry Wilson*, 16.
[185] Ibid., 20.
[186] Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 131.
[187] Ibid.

Throughout the 1840s, this younger generation clashed with the likes of Abbot Lawrence (b.1792), Amos Lawrence (b.1786), Nathan Appleton (b.1779), and a demographic outlier of the cotton class — Robert Winthrop (b.1809) — over the Mexican War and the strength of the Massachusetts's Whig Party in its stand against slavery's expansion. In all instances, the young Whigs advocated for a tougher moral abrogation of slavery, drawing the ire of their State's established leaders.[188] As politicians began manoeuvring for the decades final presidential contest, divisions between cotton and conscience ran deep. In an article of October 1847, *The Liberator* covered the Whig convention for the gubernational nomination, documenting how the 'old Whigs', despite succeeding in nominating their preferred candidate by acclamation, had become horrified 'at the youthful antislavery escapades of the juvenile wing of the party.'[189] When it came to nominating a candidate for the coming presidential election, it was increasingly clear that the two factions were unlikely to coalesce around any one candidate. Thomas Corwin's denunciation of the war was instantly appealing to the young Whigs. One Massachusetts paper hailed Corwin's speech as 'the most thrilling and eloquent… ever delivered.'[190] Henry Wilson, in a letter to Giddings, suggested that Corwin's speech had 'touched the popular heart' in New England and stated his immediate preference to 'vote for him [Corwin] and some good non-slaveholder for vice-president in 1848.'[191] Charles Francis Adams also foresaw a 'groundswell for him', and Sumner was confident that the young Whigs had their man.[192] Their desire to see a man of antislavery principles nominated to the head of a Whig ticket reflected their initial hope of transforming the Whig Party from within, rather than influencing politics from a new organisation.

[188] O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 65.
[189] *The Liberator*, October 8, 1847.
[190] Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience*, 5.
[191] Graebner, *Corwin and the election of 1848*, 163.
[192] Ibid.

Ultimately, Corwin would lose the favour of the Young Whigs as quickly as he had gained it. Demonstrating his lack of commitment to the antislavery cause, he had decried abolitionists, and declared the Wilmot Proviso a 'dangerous question' in a speech delivered in Carthage, Ohio in September.[193] From this speech, and a letter published shortly thereafter, it was clear that he advocated no-territory on the basis of preserving the Union (more like the conservative Whigs of Massachusetts) as opposed to any irrepressible moral objection to the institution. Nevertheless, the Corwin boom demonstrated the potential appeal of an antislavery candidate among a younger generation of Whigs. Less cautious regarding placing slavery's morality at the centre of national politics, this generation would have a transformative effect during the 1850s. Furthermore, while neither Corwin nor McLean were ultimately serious prospects for the Whig nomination, their role in the nomination process lends evidence to the assertion that, in the run up to 1848, generational identity mattered. Corwin's relative youth, his ability to be presented as a fresh face in national politics, and his apparent firmness on slavery, appealed to a younger generation of Whigs in states such as New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts, where McLean's old fashioned political pragmatism fell flat.

The Young Indian Club

As McLean's candidacy stagnated, and Corwin was abandoned by his early proponents, it became increasingly apparent that the 1848 Whig National Convention would see a straight contest between Henry Clay and General Zachary Taylor.[194] Historians have described in various metaphor the precipitous rise in support for Taylor's candidacy following his victory at the battle of Buena Vista in February 1847; while it is often noted that it was his officers, more than he, who snatched an unlikely victory against overwhelming numbers and

[193] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 267.
[194] Ibid., 285.

odds, this did nothing to prevent the Taylor 'eruption', 'tidal wave' or 'tsunami' from sweeping the nation.[195] In April, the *Louisville Journal* hailed the unprecedented 'manifestations of enthusiasm… exhibited all over the country in favour of Gen. Taylor', citing no less than eighteen other papers that boomed his candidacy.[196] His military successes saw him hailed as 'the greatest captain of the age' by the *Washington City Whig,* while the *Philadelphia Chronicle* suggested that 'the glorious battle at Buena Vista' had 'thrown a halo of glory around the name of old Zacy.'[197] His attachment to a string of victories in Mexico — all covered extensively in the national press — lent Taylor remarkable public popularity. Furthermore, the Whigs had won their only other election when fielding another military hero, and many believed that a Taylor candidacy could yield similar success.

Crucial in augmenting party support for Taylor's candidacy was a young band of congressional devotees who formed the 'Young Indian Club.' This bi-sectional group of Whig congressmen set about promoting Taylor's candidacy in December 1847.[198] Georgia's Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs, Virginia's Thomas Flourey, William Preston, and John Pendleton, Connecticut's Truman Smith and Illinois' Abraham Lincoln, represented a younger generation of Whig congressmen that, despite disagreeing on many matters of policy, all concurred that Taylor was their man. [199] While Stephens and Toombs supported Taylor as a means of challenging their states senior (and elderly) Senator, John Berrien, whom they felt was blocking their advancement, they too were conscious that Taylor's status as a military hero might lend them some much needed Democratic votes to carry the state

[195] Rayback, *Freesoil,* 54.
[196] *Louisville Journal*, Kentucky, April 19, 1847.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Rachel A. Shelden, *Washington Brotherhood Politics, Social Life and the Coming of the Civil War,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 43-45.
[199] The "Young Indians" as a whole had a median average age in 1848 of 39, over 5 years lower than the 30th Congress' average of 44. Four of the members were aged under 40, and the only real demographic outlier is Truman Smith, aged 57 in 1848.

legislature and governorship.[200] Similarly, the three Virginian congressmen faced the fact that the Whigs had never won a presidential election in their state, while the young Lincoln was the only Whig representative for Congress from a Democrat dominated Illinois; with no previous service in government and no voting record, these Young Indians saw an opportunity to present Taylor as a "new", legitimately nonpartisan candidate.[201] Casting aside party principles, the Young Indians hoped a strategy that harnessed Taylor's personal appeal and emphasised his abstraction from traditional Whig leadership, might bolster their election hopes.

On the other hand, as Lincoln admitted in a letter from Washington in December 1847, there were 'a great many Whigs here who do not wish to go for Taylor', and some he feared could 'not be brought to do it.'[202] The historian Michael Holt has suggested that 'Taylor's refusal to commit himself exclusively to a Whig nomination, his apparent ignorance of Whig principles, and his preference for a nonpartisan administration of government…aroused visceral suspicions among many Whigs.'[203] For these Whigs, Clay represented the ideal Taylor antidote; an embodiment of party orthodoxy whose own personal determination not to contest the election had quickly evaporated. His partisans had begun manoeuvring for another run as early as the winter of 1846-7, and even at the age of seventy, Clay's presidential ambitions were little dimmed. While he did not formally enter the race until the Spring of 1848, his Lexington Speech in November 1847 set out his stall. Clay did not shy away from his advancing years, rather contending that despite being in the 'autumn of life' and feeling the 'frost of age', the times called for his steady hand.[204] 'No ordinary occasion would have drawn [him] from retirement', yet Clay forcefully contended that the

[200] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 287-288.
[201] Ibid., 270.
[202] Abraham Lincoln to Richard Yates, December 10, 1847*, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 419.
[203] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 273.
[204] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10*, 362.

Mexican War had unleashed questions which menaced 'the harmony, if not the existence, of our Union.'[205] For Clay, the Mexican War was an example of 'unnecessary and… offensive aggression' for which the incumbent Democracy was entirely accountable.[206] The future prosecution of the conflict should have been conducted within strict confines imposed by Congress, where Clay believed 'the principal power' in regard to war to be located.[207] He argued that the 'national territory of Mexico' should remain undisturbed, suggesting any annexation might 'prove a fatal acquisition, producing distractions, dissensions, divisions [and] possibly disunion.'[208] Clay, recognising the increasingly antislavery character of Whiggery and despite being an enslaver himself, sought to emphasise both his political opposition to slavery's extension and his conviction that it was a 'great evil' and 'irremediable wrong.'[209]

Despite Clay's renewed efforts to win over younger antislavery Northerners and immigrants while retaining old-line Southern votes, by the winter of 1848, it was evident that 'favour for General Taylor' was 'widening and deepening.'[210] Clay and his 'adherents', while 'greeted with enthusiasm…by his old friends', belonged 'rather to the past than the present.'[211] Identifying him with 'antiquated ideas, national banks, protective tariffs… and defeats upon defeats', the *New York Journal of Commerce* stated that the people could not be 'rallied forever upon old and rejected' ideas.[212] The journal declared that a '*new generation'* was 'upon the stage', and knowing 'nothing of these old things except historically', it argued that 'no smothered fires' could be 'blowen into flame' on the basis of these issues.[213] In the

[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 371.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., 374.
[210] *New York Journal of Commerce* reprinted in *The Louisville Daily Courier*, Feb 28, 1848.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.

last presidential campaign of his life, the ageing Clay could not hope to be nominated or elected. When Whig partisans convened in Philadelphia in June, the *Commerce's* article proved prophetic. On the first ballot, Taylor assumed an early lead before sealing the nomination at the fourth vote. Letters poured into Ashland from Clay's allies alleging 'malign influence', 'pernicious' delegates and 'vile treachery.'[214] Clay himself focussed his ire on the Ohio delegation, claiming he had received 'numerous assurances' that they were for him, only to find out that all but one went for Taylor; this, and the definitive result of the convention, left 'no other alternative but quiet submission.'[215]

While Clay bemoaned Taylor for being a Whig in name only, for many, this was exactly the point.[216] The Young Indian from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, documented the excitement that followed Taylor's nomination. Writing to his law partner and close friend, William Herndon, Lincoln predicted 'a most overwhelming, glorious, triumph' in the coming election; people were 'fast falling in' including the 'odds and ends… Barnburners, Native Americans, Tyler men and disappointed office seeking locofocos.'[217] In the weeks that followed Philadelphia, young Whigs across the nation were called forth to organise for the coming campaign, convening meetings, forming 'rough and ready clubs' and raising 'liberty poles.'[218] Examination of contemporary newspapers portrays a genuine excitement for Taylor's candidacy that would seem unimaginable had Clay once again been given the nod. When the ballot came, Taylor failed to rout the Democrats in the same manner as General Harrison eight years prior, but he nevertheless outperformed Lewis Cass comfortably in the popular vote and gathered 163 electoral college votes to Cass' 127.

[214] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume* 10, 480-482.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 490.
[217] Abraham Lincoln to William H. Herndon, June 12, 1848, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln.*
[218] *New Hampshire Statesman*, Concord, New Hampshire, July 7, 1848.

Celebrating not only the capturing of the presidency, but also the victory of the paper's preferred senatorial prospect and Whig manager (Truman Smith), The *Buffalo Morning Express* characterised Taylor's triumph as a victory for "new" men. For the paper's Whig editor, Almon Clapp (b.1811), there was 'no wiser politician in the country', Smith having eschewed 'chimerical schemes or obsolete issues… [and] professing no extraordinary reverence for names of merely traditionary greatness.'[219] Smith was, and commendably so in the eyes of the *Express*, 'not willing to accord present perfection to any man merely because he was able to make a brilliant speech thirty years ago.'[220] This appealed to Clapp, who felt that the Whig Party had hitherto 'been oppressed and borne down… by fanatical devotion to a few leaders.'[221] This was 'a progressive age' which necessitated jettisoning proven losers such as the ageing Clay. A changing of the guard was needed; one carried through when politicians such as Smith threw their weight behind Taylor's candidacy. Crucially, for Smith and Clapp among others, it was time to subject 'the destinies of the country to the control of a "new" set of men. A transition that they hoped would provoke 'a terrible mortality among politicians of the old fogy school.'[222] The sentiments of the *Express* are emulated in a letter to the editor of the *Washington Union* published in May of the following year. While the purpose of the letter was to decry the patronage appointments of the incoming administration, a short passage reveals the Democratic paper's perceptions of Taylor's nomination and subsequent electoral triumph. The author argues that, prior to the election 'very many… young Whigs tired with defeat under the guidance of veteran Whigs.'[223] Taylor's victory was consequent of a hope among these younger voters that 'uniting under the banner of a new,

[219] *Buffalo Morning Express*, New York, November 21, 1848.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] *The Washington Union*, May 30, 1849.

popular chivalrous leader' would herald victory and crucially, commit 'the "fogies"' of the party to 'political oblivion.'[224]

Taylor's victory marked a period of fundamental change for the Whig Party. While the stubbornness of party loyalties had done much to secure his election, the fact that the 'Young Indians' had stimulated the Whig majority into accepting a general of no former political experience, and no prior pronouncements of Whig principles, was indicative of a fundamental departure from 'traditional' modes of partisanship. The Party would certainly change under Taylor's leadership. With a "new man" as President, the offices of the administration opened to a younger generation; Michael Holt has suggested that while Clay might have 'rewarded his aged, blue-stocking loyalists with federal jobs', Taylor gave 'younger Whigs a crack at the spoils…'[225] Taylor's nomination also accelerated the partial dissolution of the Northern wing of the Party. Dissatisfied with the nomination of yet another Southern slaveholder, many of the firmest antislavery Whigs, including Sumner, Wilson and Adams, bolted. Joining with like-minded Democrats, a third explicitly antislavery 'Free-Soil' party was born, ironically led by the consummate Jacksonian and Clay contemporary, Martin Van Buren. Securing some ten per cent of the vote, a record for a third party, the Free-Soilers, as Joel Silbey put it, 'caused a stir.'[226] That a younger generation of Northern Whigs felt compelled to abandon their party in order to pursue their antislavery politics was indicative of the fundamental weakness of the two major parties and their traditional leadership. The 1848 election therefore, and the role of a younger generation of Whigs in determining the Party's nomination, speaks to the increasing importance of generational dynamics in shaping partisan politics during this era of profound political change. The Young Indians, in their call for "new men", were successful in prising the party leadership from an older generation of political

[224] Ibid.
[225] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 324.
[226] Silbey, 148.

leaders such as Crittenden, McLean and most pertinently, Clay. Meanwhile, the Young Whigs of the North, while failing to influence the Party from within, felt sufficiently emboldened to steer the direction of politics from without. Their decision to break from one of the dominant parties over slavery, demonstrated the waning strength of party attachment, and foreshadowed the realignment of the political system in the following decade.

3 Conclusion

In the eight years and eleven months between John Tyler's ascension to the presidency and Zachary Taylor's inauguration, American politics changed dramatically. The Whig and Democratic parties remained, yet any suppositions of their infallibility or universal appeal had rightly vanished. The leading figures of the Jacksonian Era – Clay, Benton, Van Buren, Webster, Cass, and Calhoun – had all seen presidential hopes dashed or political contests lost. A discourse which dismissed these men as "behind the times" was becoming ever more prevalent in contemporary newspapers, and a younger generation of politicians increasingly used this language to attack their older rivals. This amounted to more than mere rhetoric for the purposes of political manoeuvre, rather it was indicative of the first phase in a substantive generational shift in United States politics.

Having come of age under the political pupillage of the Founding Generation, the 1782ers (as members of a Second Generation of American statesmen) were steeped in a responsibility to preserve and protect the nation they had inherited. Unionism was their lode star, and having reached the heights of political leadership at a time of tremendous threat to that Union, their political instincts often tended to supress or avert entirely any cause for sectional division. Despite largely favouring the Founder's expansionist designs, they increasingly adopted cautious positions upon any further extension which might risk a Missouri style crisis or foreign war. This was particularly applicable to Texas annexation,

where Clay, Van Buren, Webster, and Benton, despite differences in party and sectional identity, all argued against immediate annexation. This stance sat directly at odds with Young America Democrats, who viewed continued territorial expansion as the only appropriate course – a "manifest destiny" for the American project. This rising generation carried much of the Democratic Party with it, torpedoing the ageing Van Buren's nomination in 1844 and catapulting Polk over Clay to become the nation's youngest ever president.

The evident weakness of Clay and his generation in 1844 carried through to 1848, where younger Whigs were emboldened to present two divergent visions for the future of their Party. The Young Indians successfully shaped the Party's presidential nomination, securing the candidacy of a so-called "new man" with tenuous Whig principles in the hope that abandoning party orthodoxy would occasion electoral success. This stunning rebuke of Clayite Whiggery was only trumped by a younger generation of Whigs who felt sufficiently confident to abandon the Party altogether. They did so in favour of a third, exclusively and explicitly antislavery political movement, in a move that perhaps best illustrates the direction US politics was heading.

Prompted by the ubiquity of generational language in contemporary newspapers, and political papers, this chapter has examined the rather familiar landscape of the 1844 and 1848 elections through a generational lens. In turn, it has revealed the very real impact of generational identities and concerns in shaping and reshaping American politics in this decade. Specifically, it has exposed how the most prominent politicians of the Jacksonian Era lost their grasp of the political agenda, as new issues, principally regarding territorial expansion and slavery, came to supersede divisions between Whigs and Democrats over banks, tariffs, and internal improvements. Stimulating and capitalising upon this political transformation were elements of a younger Third Generation of US politicians — exemplified by Young America, the Young Whigs of the North, and the Young Indians —

who presented new and divergent visions regarding the future of their parties and American politics more broadly. Their positions, as opposed to the cautious unionism of the 1782ers, would come to shape United States politics in the following decade.

II

"The institutions they inherited": Generational Responsibility and the Crisis of 1850

> *'A great crisis presents itself in the path of the republic. Interests of incalculable consequence are involved in it – to you, to myself, to every citizen – consequences not limited to our times, but extending onward to all future generations.'*
>
> New York Herald, April 1850

Less than eighteen months prior to his death, in May 1851, Daniel Webster accepted the invitation of the Young Men of Albany to address both 'public affairs and the general condition of the country.'[1] After a morning receiving private calls, Webster mounted a platform hastily erected in the courtyard of his hotel to address a swelling crowd.[2] Here, he would spend over an hour orating the litany of perils which had confronted legislators through the spring and summer of 1850.[3] Conscious of his advanced age, and that this was perhaps one of few remaining occasions in which 'he would appear before any great number', he sought to address not only the 'state of the nation' but his own political legacy.[4] Webster's speech turned upon a specific conception of statesmanship; analogous to the 'wise and prudent shipmaster', a statesman's principal duty was the preservation of 'the ship which carries him.'[5] This entailed defending the series of compromises and 'spirit of conciliation', which Webster perceived as the fundamental basis of the Constitution, in order 'to carry it on unharmed for the benefit of the present and future generation.'[6] Conscious that he, and others of his generation, would soon grow too old for the vicissitudes of national politics, Webster specifically emphasised the so-called 'rising' generation's role in sustaining this mode of

[1] Speech of Hon. Daniel Webster, to the Young Men of Albany, Wednesday, May 28, 1851, (District of Columbia: Gideon & co. printers, 1851), 3.
[2] *The Springfield Daily Republican*, May 30, 1851.
[3] *The Buffalo Commercial*, May 30, 1851; *New York Daily Herald*, May 30, 1851.
[4] Webster Speech Young Men of Albany, May 28, 1851, 8.
[5] Ibid., 20.
[6] Ibid.

governance; those in 'early manhood' would be 'the chief prop and support, the reliance and hope, for the preservation of public liberty and the institutions of the land.'[7]

Webster's reflections speak to the importance of contemporary understandings of "intergenerational obligation" - defined as a political responsibility to your predecessors and the interests of your successors - in shaping responses to the mid-century political crisis.[8] This chapter will document how distinct generationally defined positions, paired with powerful generational rhetoric, characterised debates regarding the appropriate legislative solution to sectional tensions. It will argue that for three divergent political coalitions – Compromisers, Antislavery Northerners, and Southern Nationalists – marginal differences in conception of intergenerational obligation led to vastly different preferences for congressional action. For these three groups, the 1850 Compromise was an opportunity to articulate their own definitions about what they had inherited, what their obligations were in the present, and what they hoped to pass down to future generations.

Traditional histories of the 1850 Compromise were judgemental about the 31st Congress.[9] Michael Woods has categorised historians as 'critical', 'celebratory', or 'sceptical', based on whether they saw the Compromisers as patriotic statesmen or cowardly appeasers, and the Compromise measures as a legislative triumph or evidence of the fundamental limits of congressional power.[10] While Woods' literature review probes this particular debate in search of a 'useable past', he also identifies an alternative strain of historiography which successfully 'illuminates antebellum politics, without directly judging

[7] Ibid., 7.
[8] For roots of his concept in US political culture, see Introduction. For a sociologist's take on this concept, see Janna Thompson, 'Identity and Obligation in a Transgenerational Polity' in Axel Gosseries and Lukas H Meyer 'Intergenerational Justice,' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25-49; Janna Thompson, 'Birthright Entitlements and Obligations in an Intergenerational Political Society,' *The Monist* 106, no. 2 (2023): 132-144. While conscious of this literature, this chapter draws on contemporary understandings of the concept.
[9] Michael Woods, 'The Compromise of 1850 and the Search for a Usable Past,' *Journal of the Civil War Era,* 9, no.3 (2019): 438-456.
[10] Ibid., 439.

the Compromisers.'[11] From economic developments to local constituency pressures, and fragile partisanship to private Washington alliances, these historians have documented the myriad motives which shaped 1850 debates over compromise.[12] By examining competing models of intergenerational obligation, this chapter offers an additional dimension to this historiography. It demonstrates how subtle differences in ideological assumptions shaped distinct positions on the territory question. Ultimately, it will argue that both the *idea of* intergenerational obligation and *reality* of generational change, functioned alongside partisan and sectional stimuli in shaping the resolution of the 1850 Crisis.

The first section of this chapter will examine the position of Compromisers – Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and their congressional allies – who believed that sectional tensions arising out of westward expansion could only be assuaged through mutual concession. Particularly for the 1782ers, political experience convinced them that compromise could avert radical departures from political norms, while simultaneously quashing threats of Southern disunion. In addition, they anticipated that the particularly portentous nature of disunion rhetoric in 1850, would compel parties to accept a more comprehensive package of measures than hitherto possible. By settling all present and foreseeable causes of sectional tension, advocates of compromise hoped to lend this effort a degree of finality which had eluded them in 1821 and 1833. Underpinning their compromising convictions, I will argue, was a particular formulation of intergenerational obligation. This defined a statesman's principal duty as the preservation of their national inheritance, and the passing of that inheritance unencumbered (and unaltered) to the next generation. This formulation, coupled with the generational transfer of congressional power attendant to the mid-century, indelibly shaped both the style and substance of the Compromiser's interventions. Clay and Webster's

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 440.

generational identity shaped their assumptions about how best to alleviate sectional tensions, and their advanced age no doubt lent urgency to their efforts. Having spent much of their political lives wrestling with the sectionalism resulting from territorial expansion, both were clearly conscious that this was one of their last opportunities to settle the issue.

The second half of this chapter will examine opposition to compromise. It will document how, despite universal reverence for the 'Founding Moment,' alternative congressional coalitions contested the precise nature of their political inheritance, and their associated political obligations. Northern Whigs and Free-Soilers, coalesced around New York Senator William Seward, determined that their generational responsibility was not to maintain the status quo through cross-sectional conciliation, but rather to shift American politics permanently onto an antislavery footing. Moving with the 'spirit of the times,' meant ensuring slavery's gradual demise by starving it of additional territory. In fact, taking a firm stance against any further expansion of slavery was the only political direction which would avoid 'embarrassment' upon reflection by future generations. By contrast, Southern Nationalists aligned with Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis, came to see the 1850 compromise as a final chance to mount an effective defence of Southern political power. Already a sectional minority in the House of Representatives, 1850 marked one of the last times the South would have sufficient political capital to secure equal partnership in the national polity. Failure in this regard, would defer to future generations the evil of subjugation by a Northern majority.

1 The Roots of the Crisis, 1846-1849

As the 31st Congress assembled in Washington in autumn of 1849, the Nation faced what many at the time considered to be a profound 'crisis'.[13] The winter of the previous year

[13] *Morning Daily True Democrat*, Cleveland, Ohio, October 17, 1849; *The Semi-Weekly Advocate*, Belleville, Illinois, October 18, 1849.

had seen the acquisition of vast swathes of formerly Mexican land to the South and West, and the near simultaneous discovery of gold in the western most portion of those lands — California.[14] How to organise this new territory was an explosive issue, made increasingly pressing as thousands poured into the unorganised territories in hope of making their fortune.[15] David Wilmot's ill-fated proviso, brought before the House in August 1846, attempted to pre-emptively bar slavery from the entire future Mexican cession, but only served to demonstrate the depths of sectional division that would come to strain both partisan and national ties. Northern Representatives were almost unanimous in their support of the legislation, and Southerners similarly united in opposition.[16] Initial Senate attempts at a compromise – most notably from a bi-partisan, cross-sectional "committee of eight" headed by Delaware Senator John M. Clayton – saw their legislative output killed in an increasingly fractious House.[17]

Subsequently, further contentious solutions were proposed by Stephen Douglas in the Senate in December 1848 and William B. Preston in the House in 1849, both of whom sought the admission of the entire Mexican Cession as one enormous state.[18] Responding to the scheme, Southern Representatives such as Alabama Whig William Hillard, questioned whether those living in the San Francisco Bay area should dictate the government of the entire cession, depriving 'future settlers of their right of establishing a government for themselves.'[19] Mississippi's Albert G. Brown surmised that the urgency to hoist into the Union this 'vast country…sparsely settled with a foreign population knowing nothing of our

[14] Elliott West, 'California, Coincidence, and Empire,' in *A Global History of Gold Rushes Volume 25,* Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell 'eds'*,* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 42.
[15] William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion. Volume 1 Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854,* (Oxford University Press USA, 1990), 487.
[16] Ibid., 458.
[17] Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 337.
[18] Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: the Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 100-101.
[19] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 18, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, (1849), 105.

laws', was a disguised attempt to exclude slavery from the territories.[20] Free-Soiler Robert McClelland also feared an 'evil lurking' beneath Douglas' and Preston's legislation, but rather than a restrictionist plot, he saw an 'ingeniously devised scheme for the extension of slavery.'[21] Whichever direction congressional fixers turned on the territory issue, they were greeted by cries of malfeasance.

As a divided Congress clamoured for legislative solutions, speeches on both sides of the debate became increasingly incendiary. Particularly concerning were the now almost deafening cries for Southern nationhood. As analysis of one newspaper database shows, references to 'Southern rights' and 'secession' rose precipitously between 1849 and 1851, to levels that would not be reached again until the winter of 1860.[22] The apogee of this increasingly dangerous sectionalism came in late January 1849, when John C. Calhoun's *Southern Address* was published in the *Washington Union*.[23] With the signed support of 50 Southern politicians, the *Address* detailed a litany of supposed 'aggressions' upon the South; these included personal liberty laws (which undermined the Constitution's fugitive slave provision), increasing abolitionist agitation, and Northern attempts to deny all Southern rights in the territories.[24] For Calhoun, it was only a matter of time before the South itself would be under threat: 'aggression has followed aggression, and encroachment encroachment, until they have reached a point when a regard for your peace and safety will not permit us to remain longer silent.' [25] In October, Mississippi slaveholders convened in Jackson in response

[20] Ibid., 121.
[21] Ibid., 137.
[22] Instances of the phrase "Southern rights" in one newspaper data base remain low (appearing in between 10 and 100 newspapers per year), until 1849, when this rate doubles. In 1850, 596 newspapers feature the phrase and by 1851 that figure is 1036 (or 1 percent of the total volume of newspapers). By 1854, usage of the term had fallen back, restricted to just 119 newspapers. The next peak in usage unsurprisingly comes between 1859 and 1861. GALE Nineteenth-Century Newspaper database. Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers. Gale (Firm).
[23] *The Springfield Daily Republican*, January 30, 1849.
[24] John C Calhoun, *Mr. Calhoun's Address to the People of the Southern States*, (Fort Hill, 1849), 3-15.
[25] John C. Calhoun, *The Works of John C. Calhoun Volume VI*, Richard K Crallé 'ed', (Columbia, South Carolina, 1851), 290-313.

to Calhoun's Address, proceeding to call for a broader Southern convention to be held in Nashville the following June. Here, they promised to devise a collective Southern strategy to resist Northern aggression.[26]

With sectional tensions at fever pitch, and the secessionist threat looming large, the administration entered the fray. Eschewing his initial legislative deference, Zachary Taylor pivoted to throwing his administration's muscle behind the rapid admission of California (and ultimately New Mexico) as states.[27] Bypassing the territory stage, Taylor surmised, would evade the sectionally poisonous Wilmot Proviso, avoid congressional intervention on slavery, and facilitate the quick admission of two new free states.[28] However, as Michael Holt has noted, Taylor's plan was 'doomed' from the outset; the lukewarm support of Southern Whigs, the opposition (particularly fierce in the South) of Democrats, and the frustration of Free-Soilers who saw it as a concession to slaveocracy, rendered the whole scheme a dead letter.[29]

Historians have often emphasised the personal and political divides between Taylor and Clay in their concurrent efforts to resolve the sectional crisis.[30] However, the principles which motivated them to seek a resolution were remarkably similar. The underlying assumptions sketched out in the President's first annual message track those of forthcoming speeches by Clay, Webster, and their fellow Compromisers. Taylor opened his address with a tripartite characterisation of congressional duty. First, he declared American government truly exceptional; 'the United States of America at this moment presents to the world the most stable and permanent government on earth.'[31] Second, he emphasised that this government

[26] William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*: *Volume I,* (Oxford, 1990), 481.
[27] Joel H. Silbey, *Party over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848*, (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 150.
[28] Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*: *Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 437.
[29] Ibid., 475-76.
[30] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 460.
[31] Zachary Taylor, *First Annual Message to Congress*, December 4, 1849.

was inherited, as the 'result of the labors of those who have gone before.'[32] Finally, he reminded Congress of their responsibility for 'the future maintenance' of that government.[33] Leaning upon the concept of intergenerational responsibility, Taylor closed his address by urging Congress to circumvent sectional strife out of 'respect and love for the Union of the States which our fathers cherished and enjoined upon their children.'[34] For Taylor, as for the Compromisers, only preservation of this inheritance could guarantee 'our own happiness and that of countless generations to come.'[35]

2 Clay and the Compromisers

When an ageing Henry Clay returned to the Senate after a seven-year absence, he did so for the first time without presidential ambitions.[36] A veteran of sectional disputes over the admission of Missouri and Nullification, Clay instead hoped a resolution would cement his legacy as the 'great pacificator.'[37] Instinctively, he reached for his own well-worn political leaver – bi-partisan, cross-sectional, union-saving compromise. In late January 1850, following a meeting in which he secured Webster's support, Clay presented a series of eight measures he hoped could 'settle all the controverted questions arising out of the subject of slavery.'[38] These comprised the admission of California as a state; the organisation of territories in the rest of the Mexican Cession 'without the adoption of any restriction or condition on the subject of slavery'; the fixing of the western border of Texas; the assumption of Texas' public debt; declaration of the 'inexpedience' of abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia; declaration of the 'expediency' of prohibiting the slave trade in the District; the introduction of a 'more effectual provision… for the restitution and delivery of persons

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10,* 661.
[37] *The News-Chronicle*, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, February 21, 1850.
[38] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10,* 661.

bound to service or labor' (a new Fugitive Slave law); and finally, a resolution that repudiated congressional authority to 'prohibit or obstruct' the inter-state slave trade.[39] These proposals, Clay felt, offered enough and demanded sufficiently little of each section to bring politics back from the 'precipice.'[40]

While the details of Clay's solution differed to the President's, he couched his primary justification for it in indistinguishable terms: to preserve the Constitution and Union not 'merely for the generation that then existed, but for posterity, undefined, unlimited, permanent, and perpetual.'[41] For Clay, congressional compromise would satisfy his personal obligation to protect, preserve, and transmit the blessings of the Union to future generations. He shared in this aim with fellow Compromisers, including Daniel Webster, who on March 7th 1850, delivered an impassioned plea for his colleagues to understand their own generational responsibilities: 'never did there devolve on any generation of men higher trusts than now devolve upon us, for the preservation of this Constitution and the harmony and peace of all who are destined to live under it.'[42] For Webster, as for Clay, the emerging and increasingly concerning tensions over slavery's expansion amounted to a generational test; the South's threats of disunion were real, and alarm was heightened by an increasing Northern reluctance to bend to Southern demands. Breaking the congressional impasse demanded statesmen who could, through full comprehension of 'the magnitude and importance' of their 'duties', make their 'generation one of the strongest and brightest links in

[39] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 115.
[40] Sarah Bischoff Paulus, 'America's Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1854–58', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no.1 (2014): 28–52. Paulus has argued that Clay's 1850 legislation was just another example of a specific strain of Compromise which he himself embodied. For Paulus, Clay's method rested upon 'constructing a negotiated compromise fair to the principles expressed by both sides of the debate' rather than defining the principles themselves. This involved complementary concessions rather than, as Paulus suggests Stephen Douglas favoured, getting both sides to 'coalesce around a middle ground.' Central to Clay's idea was that his measures be passed as one package, allowing for the mutual and complementary concessions that lasting compromise demanded. As this chapter will show, the legislation which passed, piecemeal in the early autumn of 1850 does not meet Paulus' definition of an authentic Clay compromise.
[41] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 127.
[42] *The Daily Republic*, Mitchell, South Dakota, March 8, 1850; *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 276.

that golden chain' which tied America's diverse people and disparate states to the Constitution.[43] The Compromisers hoped that when choosing whether to accept Clay's proposals, their fellow congressmen would look in two directions: to their filial responsibilities for preserving their exceptional constitutional inheritance, and to their paternal responsibility for delivering that inheritance, unaltered, to the 'rising generation.'[44]

The Compromiser's particular formulation, and emphasis, of intergenerational responsibility served two interrelated purposes. First, by simultaneously leveraging contemporary notions of US exceptionalism and generational duty, they encouraged preservation of the Union *as it was*. In his March 7 speech, Webster described the United States government as 'great, popular, constitutional… guarded by law' and 'defended by the whole affections of the people'[45] Here, he lent his voice to a congressional cacophony of exceptionalist accounts which touted the 'prosperity, happiness, personal security, personal liberty and security for private property' afforded by their peculiar polity.[46] These unique benefits were often tied by the Compromisers to an explicitly "national", as opposed to "sectional" interpretation of the Constitution. For example, Maryland's William Hamilton saw compromise as a defence of the Constitution 'in its purity,' as neither an anti- or pro-slavery document, but rather 'national' and 'perpetual.' It was, he argued, something 'our fathers made… for a great and growing people, to found national character, supply national wants…insure national unity' and 'anticipated to contribute its virtue and benefits to…

[43] Ibid.
[44] George B Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and his Age,* (New York: Norton, 1979). Forgie has argued that the generation succeeding the Founders (what he termed a 'post-heroic' generation) saw their 'historical position generally as similar to that of inheritors of paternal property.' He therefore defined the relationships between politicians as disparate as Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas as 'fraternal,' arguing that it was this brotherly 'solidarity that prevented disunion is 1850.' However, by further delineating generational identities it becomes clear that the compromise majority that Forgie argues existed until 1854, had already collapsed by 1850.
[45] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 276.
[46] Ibid., 689.

generations added to generations.'[47] Hamilton drew the intellectual links between exceptionalism, nationalism, intergenerational responsibility, and deference to the Founding when he asserted that: only if Congress met its 'duty', through recourse to the 'necessities', 'concessions', 'compromises' and 'virtues' which had fashioned the Constitution, could 'this Union, secure in the comprehensive and durable achievement of the past', be 'consecrated to the high aspiring hopes of coming and unnumbered generations.'[48]

Second, the combination of intergenerational responsibility and constitutional exceptionalism was peculiarly powerful within the mid-century international context. As historians such as Andrew Lang and Timothy Roberts have argued, the failure of the European revolutions only served to strengthen resolutions that the United States held exclusive capacity for free and fair government; contemporary Americans increasingly looked to the Founding to understand their apparent political inimitability.[49] For Lewis Cass — a generational contemporary of Clay and Webster, and fellow Compromiser — the Union and its agents had been charged with a great mission: to serve as a 'light of knowledge and freedom' for nations mired in a despotic gloom.[50] Referring to the 'spirit of mutual regard' and 'affinity of… sympathies' set out in Washington's Farewell Address, Cass suggested that his Senatorial colleagues could only avert sectional catastrophe and fulfil their global mission by following Washington's advice. Preventing disunion, demanded 'that [the] same spirit of compromise and of concession… which animated our fathers', continued to 'animate us and our children.'[51]

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[47] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 890-894.
[48] Ibid., 894.
[49] Andrew Lang, *A Contest of Civilizations: Exposing the Crisis of American Exceptionalism in the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 3. Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 44.
[50] Lewis Cass, *Territorial Governments: Speech of Hon. Lewis Cass, of Michigan, in Senate of the United States, January 21 and 22, 1850, on the Government of the Territories, and on the Constitutionality and Expediency of the Wilmot Proviso*, (Washington, D.C. Printed at the *Congressional Globe* Office: 1850), 30.
[51] Ibid.

The Compromisers framed resolution of the mid-century crisis as an opportunity to preserve an exceptional political inheritance. Leaning on notions of intergenerational obligation, they encouraged fellow congressmen to pursue that objective through recourse to a political spirit and constitutional construction which subsumed competing interests beneath a national whole. Texas's Sam Houston (b.1793) — who was one of only five Senators to support every one of Clay's original measures when they eventually made it to a vote — summarised this position as follows: only by 'cultivation' of the Founding spirit, which placed the 'will of the nation' above the 'will of a party' or faction, could the 'Union be perpetuated… jarring interests… reconciled, and [the] millions yet unborn… enjoy the happiness of institutions which it is our duty to transmit to them unimpaired.'[52]

Unfortunately for the Compromisers, the introduction of Clay's resolutions in late January 1850 failed to precipitate a quick end to the sectional conflict. As winter turned to spring, various parts of Clay's plan were picked apart, amended, or out-right demolished by a host of sectional and partisan forces. In early April, a so-called "Committee of Thirteen", the invention of the *Enquirer's* Thomas Ritchie and Mississippi Senator Henry Foote, instructed a sectionally balanced delegation of Senators to 'procure a compromise embracing all the questions now arising out of the institution of slavery.'[53] Arguing that the weeks of debate which followed Clay's initial resolutions had been unproductive and inflammatory, Foote reasoned that by sending 'thirteen of the more discreet members of this body into a private room, there to confer with each other calmly and cooly, in the absence of all the excitement',

[52] Sam Houston, *Speech of Hon. Sam Houston, of Texas, on the Subject of Compromise. In the Senate of the United States, February 8*, 1850, (Washington, Towers, Printer, 1850).
[53] Hamilton Holman, 'The Cave of the Winds' and the Compromise of 1850', *The Journal of Southern History* 23, no. 3 (1957): 341. *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 417.

a compromise could be crafted that would 'settle this question forever…'[54] These men were to be 'the wise men of this body… patriotic men… of high character, weight and influence.'[55]

However, when Clay delivered the Committee's report to the Senate in early May, it was clear that these 'discreet members,' even removed from the chaotic machinations of the Senate chamber, had failed to reach a unanimous position on the territory question. Following the first reading of its thirty-nine separate sections, members of the Committee immediately set about undermining any sense of unity behind its creation. First Clemens, then Phelps, Mason, and Berrien set out their opposition to different aspects of the report.[56] Assailed by Northern men (Phelps, Cooper) and Southern men alike (Berrien, Clemens, Downs, Davis, Yulee, Borland), the *Enquirer* correctly prophesised that the Compromise would likely be defeated, and that the question of slavery would once again 'be thrown upon the broad sea of agitation.'[57] The *Buffalo Daily Republic* opted for a rather more dramatic headline - "The Compromise Exploded" - stating that Henry Clay had 'fallen', his 'great scheme… collapsed.'[58] As debate over the committee's findings dragged on, Clay was compelled to abandon Washington in early August exhausted. Addressing a crowd in New York City as he transferred to a boat bound for Newport, the ageing senator begged reprieve from speech making. Ravaged by repeated colds, Clay professed to be 'fatigued and broken down' from

[54] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 419.
[55] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session; *The Portsmouth Inquirer*, April 22, 1850. The committee consisted of Webster, Phelps, Cooper, Cass, Dickson, Bright, Magnum, Bell, Mason, Berrien, King and Davis.
[56] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress,1st Session, (1850), 944-950; John MacPherson, Berrien, Speech of Mr Berrien, of Georgia, on the Slavery Question. Delivered in the Senate of the U.S. Feb. 11 & 12, 1850., pamphlet, 1850; (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth498159/: accessed January 30, 2025), University of North Texas Libraries; John MacPherson Berrien, Remarks of Mr. Berrien, of Georgia, on the Compromise Bill: In the Senate of the United States, June 16, 1850., pamphlet, June 14, 1850; Washington D.C. (https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth395246/: accessed January 30, 2025), University of North Texas Libraries.
[57] *Richmond Enquirer*, Virginia, May 14, 1850.
[58] *The Buffalo Daily Republic*, New York, May 11, 1850.

'endeavouring to serve you in the councils of the nation.'[59] His journey north was necessary for recovering his 'health and strength.'[60]

Generational Transition

Clay's failure to drive his legislation through Congress raises questions regarding the extent to which elder statesman shaped the sectional crisis. Michael Woods has noted how the 'oratory' of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun, 'dominate many accounts of the compromise.'[61] This is understandable given contemporary descriptions of packed Senate galleries and collegial deference to the three men as they delivered their famous speeches in the spring of 1850. However, in his review of recent literature on Civil War causation, Woods has also suggested that greater attention be paid to the 'intergenerational transfer of power' evident to contemporaries and historians of mid-century congressional politics.[62] It was plain to see that the three titans of antebellum congressional life were reaching (or had reached) the end of their careers by the end of 1850. Calhoun had his last Senate speech read for him by James Mason on March 4, before succumbing to consumption less than three weeks later. Webster admitted feeling 'touched' at the prospect of Calhoun's death, given his 'own age' and that it had been 'more than thirty years' since they met in Congress.[63] Clay's reflections upon his seniority were encouraged by increasingly frequent episodes of ill-health.[64] In February, he

[59] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10,* 790-791.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Michael E. Woods, 'The Compromise of 1850 and the Search for a Usable Past', *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, 9, no.3 (2019): 441.
[62] Michael E. Woods 'What Twenty-First-Century Historians Have Said about the Causes of Disunion: A Civil War Sesquicentennial Review of the Recent Literature,' *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (2012): 425.
[63] *The Papers of Daniel Webster Digital Edition,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2018).
[64] Clay suffered from ill-health throughout his senate term. For example, when he was preparing his report of the Committee of Thirteen, he wrote to Lucretia Clay regarding 'bad colds' which had left him 'debilitated.' *The Papers of Henry Clay*, *Volume 10*, 709.

noted that should dissolution occur, he 'may not survive to behold the sad and heart-rending spectacle.'[65]

Webster and Clay's age undoubtedly affected perceptions of the viability of their political solutions. When Major James Garland – a former Virginian congressman and consummate conservative – wrote a letter for publication in the *Enquirer* in support of the Committee's resolutions, he was dismayed at how those with 'heads… frosted by the white of years' were increasingly sneered at as 'antiquated' or 'broken down.'[66] Men of the patriotic, sober minded, middle ground, were increasingly under siege from Northern 'fanatics' and Southern 'ultraists.'[67] The *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* for example, launched a tirade against Webster's 'Union' speech and Clay's proposals which dismissed both men as 'dormant old fogies… wakened and brought to light, with ideas and principles as naturally antediluvian as those of toads split out of granite.'[68] Even Thomas Benton, a generational contemporary of Webster and Clay but also a staunch anti-compromiser, felt that attacks on Clay's age could undermine his position; the Kentuckian, Benton argued, was an 'old organist' who had gone 'dreadfully out of tune.'[69] With broken stings and loose screws, he was now 'past his best' and 'discoursing the most woeful music.'[70] For those seeking to attack Clay and Webster, attacking their age and presenting them as behind the times was a common strategy.

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[65] Henry Clay, *The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay Volume 2*, Daniel Mallory 'ed', (Philadelphia: Leary, Getz & Company, 1860), 664
[66] *Richmond Enquirer*, Virgina, June 12, 1850.
[67] Ibid.
[68] *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, New York, March 21, 1850.
[69] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 683.
[70] Ibid. Benton's opposition to compromise was noteworthy, particularly given he was a staunch unionist, Southern enslaver, and generational contemporary of Clay and Webster. Following the conclusion of the Mexican War, Benton had turned radically against the institution of slavery, and now neither accepted the substance of, nor premise for, any compromising measures. His particular objection was to the packaging of the measures, which he feared was unnecessarily frustrating California's path to statehood.

Peter Knupfer has characterised the Senate debates over the Compromise as a game of two halves; while an older generation (Clay and Webster) were instrumental in shaping the 'scope…strategy' and 'design' of the legislation, it required a younger generation (Douglas and Fillmore) to manoeuvre it through Congress.[71] This bifurcation of the compromise narrative illuminates how generations, as an *idea* and a *reality*, shaped United States politics at the mid-century. An ageing Clay had returned to Congress seeking to 'let no one who is not above the frailties of our common nature disdain compromises.'[72] Yet, events demonstrated there was no longer a majority for his favoured mode of conciliatory action. This was, in part, a function of a generational divergence in understandings of the Constitution and associated concepts of intergenerational obligation. Clay and Webster's political psychology was shaped by over thirty years of congressional experience, which, from the Missouri Crisis onwards, had nourished an increasing concern regarding territorial expansion's Union rending capacity.[73] Furthermore, as direct successors of the Founding Generation, and having cut their political teeth during a period of rising nationalism, both shared in an unwavering commitment to a national interpretation of the Constitution. This tended to an instinctively preservationist understanding of intergenerational political obligation, which in turn justified congressional action that maintained the status quo. However, the 31st congress was notably young; it had an average age of just forty-four, and only two members (King and Clay), had served in both the 31st (1849-1851) and the 16th Congress (1819-1821) which dealt with the Missouri Crisis. In addition, the 1840s had seen an older generation of political leadership increasingly dismissed as "behind the times", and a new generation seize control of the

[71] Peter Knupfer, *Union as it is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 161.
[72] Henry Clay, The Life, Correspondence, and Speeches of Henry Clay Volume 3, Calvin Cotton 'ed', (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co, 1857),
[73] Idea of a pre-sectional politics pre-1820, which, coupled with heightened sense of nationalism post-1814 (Treaty of Ghent) defined a politics with unique attachment to constitutional unionism. Politicians who came into the system post-1820 came of age in a sectional world.

political agenda. This new (Third) generation, who entered politics after the Missouri Crisis, increasingly read sectional principles into the Founding story.[74] By emphasising the anti- or pro-slavery dimensions of the Constitution, as opposed to its national elements, this generation formulated fundamentally sectional conceptions of intergenerational political obligation which tended to anti-compromise positions.

3 The Antislavery Whigs and Free-Soilers

Shortly after the introduction of Preston's Bill in February 1849, Ohio Free-Soiler Joshua Giddings delivered an address in which he judged Southerners to be guilty of a 'fundamental error.'[75] Demands for slavery's expansion ran contrary to founding principles; 'no class of men, at any period in the world, were more inveterately opposed to slavery than were the Founders.'[76] Furthermore, the winds of political progress were against them: 'the foundations of the mighty deep of popular sentiment are broken up' and 'a moral and political revolution' was sweeping the United States. For Giddings, it was time that the United States' 'whole legislation… be in favour of freedom,' and the Nation be 'redeemed and purified from the contagion of slavery.'[77]

Giddings' speech illustrates the depths of opposition toward slavery's expansion among free-soil representatives and a portion of Northern Whiggery. This translated into a firm opposition to Clay's compromise proposals, which many saw as an unnecessary and immoral concession.[78] This section will examine how two key assumptions regarding their own intergenerational political obligations shaped antislavery Northern opposition to compromise. First, for these antislavery representatives, respect for the Founding did not

[74] Knupfer, *Union*, 158-160.
[75] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 18, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, (1849) 124.
[76] Ibid., 125.
[77] Ibid., 129.
[78] *The Papers of Henry Clay*, *Volume* VII, 34.

preclude opposition to slavery's expansion, rather encouraged it: slavery was 'an accepted evil' that while recognised by the Constitution, was never intended to be fostered by it.[79] Second, while respecting the past, the interests of future Northerners required consideration when entertaining any further concession to the South: the 'slave interest', particularly the expansion of slavery into free soil, was inconsistent with the so-called 'progressive spirit of the age.'[80] Free-Soilers and antislavery Whigs thought the North was likely to become increasingly opposed to slavery in the years after 1850. This assumption steeled antislavery Northern representatives and senators to eschew compromise in favour of 'a bold, decided stand in favor of freedom,' 'moral and political progress,' and staying slavery's 'further spread.'[81]

Seward's leadership

A freshman in 1850, New York Senator William H. Seward (b.1801) belonged to a different generation to Clay and Webster. He first rose to prominence in state politics in August 1828, where at just twenty-seven years of age he presided over a young men's convention in support of John Quincy Adams's bid for the Presidency.[82] His formal debut came with his anti-masonic appointment to the New York Senate in January 1831.[83] During his term, he focussed on local issues, spearheading opposition to Van Buren's political machine - the Albany Regency. A failed bid for the governorship in 1836 did not prevent a second (successful) attempt two years later. At just thirty-eight years of age, he triumphed over the experienced Democrat, William Marcy (b.1786), becoming New York's first Whig Governor. During the campaign, he had sought to avoid explicit engagement with the slavery issue, then salient on account of the prospect of Texas annexation. However, when safely

[79] *Eastern Times*, Bath, Maine, April 4, 1850.
[80] *Eastern Times*, Bath Maine, April 4, 1850.
[81] Ibid., April 4, 1850.
[82] *The Life of William H. Seward*, xxvi.
[83] Ibid., xxviii.

ensconced in office, Seward supported several laws which improved the material and political position of free African Americans in the Empire State; including legislation securing jury rights, liberation of enslaved transiting the State, and universal public education.[84]

Seward's biographers suggest that his antislavery stance stemmed from periods teaching in the South during his formative years, where he had experienced firsthand the 'horrors of slavery.'[85] Whatever the root, throughout the 1840s Seward continued to express steadfast opposition to the institution of slavery, and its expansion via the acquisition of Mexican land. In a speech delivered in Cleveland in 1848, Seward described 'freedom and slavery' as 'two antagonistic elements of society in America.'[86] While declaring freedom in 'harmony with our system of government and with the spirit of the age', slavery 'was in conflict with that system, with justice…[and] with humanity.'[87] Seward's advanced antislavery position left him fundamentally at odds with the conservative Clay. Frances Miller Seward, in a letter to her husband dated May 19th , emphasised the personal nature of the break; referring to a Senate speech of Clay's which had subtly admonished Seward, she argued that 'whether it was so intended or not, it was utterly unworthy of any man for whom I can feel deference.'[88] Attacking Clay on the basis of his age, Frances argued that he 'who wished to be venerated in old age must withdraw himself from a situation so conspicuous before he is seventy years old.'[89] Seward's break with Clay over compromise reflected his belief that the Whig Party needed to change in order to remain an electoral force.[90] For Seward and his allies in New York, while Clay demanded respect, he was not (and could not)

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[84] George Baker and Paul Finkelman 'eds' *The Life of William H. Seward with Selections from his Works*, (Redfield: NY, 1860), 82-84. Paul Finkelman, 'The Protection of Black Rights in Seward's New York' *Civil War History*, 34, no.3. (1988): 213.
[85] Frederic Bancroft, *The Life of William H. Seward Volume 1,* (Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1967), 57.
[86] *The Life of William H. Seward*, 126.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Letter from Frances Miller Seward to William Henry Seward, May 19, 1850.
[89] Ibid. For Clay's part, in mid-March he penned a letter to James Harlen, suggesting that Seward's abolitionism had 'eradicated the respect of almost all men for him.' *The Papers of Henry Clay*, 689.
[90] *The Life of William H. Seward,* 269.

be the future of the Party. In 1848, Seward had indeed favoured Taylor over Clay for the Party's nomination largely because Taylor was a "new man". The issue in 1850 was not the spirit of party, as Clay suggested in his February speech, rather it was their 'paralysis' in the face of a 'moral question.'[91] For Seward, the parties themselves were overdue a transformation, 'with new elements of health and vigor…. imbibed from that spirit of the age… Progress.'[92]

Progress

By 1850, Seward's politics revolved around an unshakeable confidence in the interminable march of Northern antislavery opinion. This was premised upon both his own electoral success, and the particular prominence of younger Northerners in the burgeoning antislavery movement.[93] As early as his gubernatorial race in 1838, Seward had received the endorsement of the Albany Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society (YMASS), who believed that his triumph over the older Democrat William Marcy (b.1786) would best 'promote the cause of Universal emancipation.'[94] Similar to other YMASS taking root across the Northern states, Albany's young men took inspiration from the American Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1833. As the 1830s progressed, further YMASS were organised both in larger cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia, as well as smaller conurbations in Utica, Portland, Concord and West Amesbury.[95] These YMASS, much like the larger national association, encouraged the petitioning of Congress, specifically on the abolition of the interstate slave trade, and the outright abolition of slavery in D.C and the territories.[96] Latterly, their

[91] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 266.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Finkelman, 'The Protection of Black Rights,' *Civil War History,* no. 3 (1988), 212-213.
[94] *The Washington Union*, November 6, 1838.
[95] *Vermont Telegraph*, August 9, 1837.
[96] *The Liberator*, Boston Mass., November 29, 1834, and *Emancipator and Free American*, Boston, February 24, 1835.

resolutions included opposition to Texas annexation, opposition to Executive acquiescence in pro-slavery policy, and even disavowals of Northern racial prejudice.[97]

In addition, college based antislavery associations began to emerge, taunting trustees with the spectre of student radicalism.[98] One professor at Ohio's Marion College was forced to publicly deny accusations that his institution harboured an abolitionist movement, admitted Black students, or that 'abolitionist tracts' had even been on site.[99] By contrast, in June 1836, Schenectady's Union College followed Dartmouth, South Hanover, Western Reserve, Williams and Amherst Colleges in establishing a student Anti-Slavery Society. The association grew rapidly, soon attracting over fifty members from the student body.[100] In its opening address, the committee called upon their fellow students to 'restore this lost world from its degradation and it woe', and commit to the 'entire abolition of slavery from our land.'[101] For the committee, students were uniquely placed to lead in the abolitionist cause; a 'generation… in a course of special moral training', and soon to succeed those currently 'active on the stage', their educated minds were naturally disposed to 'the consideration of all subjects tending to the melioration of man.'[102] Fulfilling their obligations would entail cooperating with the AASS, and distributing their periodicals and tracts in order to effect a change in the public mind.[103]

The editor of the *Herald of Freedom*, New Hampshire lawyer Nathaniel Peabody Rodgers, emphasised the importance of bringing young men into the antislavery fold:

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[97] *The Liberator*, September 1, 1837.
[98] *The Liberator*, Boston, April 23, 1836, and *The Liberator*, September 1, 1837.
[99] *The Evening Post*, New York, June 18, 1836.
[100] Samuel J. May 'First Annual Report of the Union College Anti-Slavery Society: with an Address to Students, and an Appendix,' *Anti-Slavery Pamphlet Collection,* (Schenectady, N.Y: Printed by S.S. Riggs, 1836), Cornell University Library, 3.
[101] Ibid., 5-6.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

> We are full of hope for the young men. We expect everything of them. We want to see them moving in a distinct phalanx – every head shining with the gloss of youth – not a grey hair in all the line.[104]

Setting up a generational contrast, he argued that a 'Young Men's Anti-Slavery society' was necessary because those of advanced age were inherently 'conservative – slow – timid', likely afraid of any radical antislavery position and naturally prejudiced against African Americans.[105] These 'old men are not wanted for counsel' nor 'fight', instead, it is the 'ardor, generosity of soul and fervor of spirt [of young men] that is wanted... not caution and policy.'[106] Documenting the resolutions of these YMASSs, and the associated coverage of their actions, reveals an awareness within the abolitionist movement of the importance of younger elements in driving their cause.[107]

The third annual report of the YMASS of New York City explains what young men themselves felt was at stake when they adopted antislavery politics.[108] While acknowledging moral opposition to slavery, the report demonstrated young men's recognition that this was also a political matter that necessitated political engagement: 'we depend upon moral means as the moving principle of abolition, while we expect that a political act will seal the fate of slavery.'[109] It then went on to describe indignation at the 'jeers of the whole civilised world in relation to American liberty', directed on account of how the British in particular, having 'far

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[104] *The Liberator*, August 10, 1838.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Lois W. Banner, 'Religion and Reform in the Early Republic: The Role of Youth', *American Quarterly*, 23, no.5 (1971): 677–95. In this essay Banner seeks to add 'youth' to traditional interpretations of reform motivation such as 'social ideology, individual psychology and geographic origins.' She notes contemporary associations between youth and certain characteristics, specifically vigour, optimism, and idealism. Banner also documents the litany of young men who seem central to existing histories of the reform movement, for example, Garrison, who established the famed antislavery *Liberator* at just 26. She notes that motivation for reform involvement often extended beyond moral zeal, rather she notes how reform was often a career, fulfilling a sense of individual advancement which in many respects matched peers in business or politics. Banner even identifies a generational division within the reform movement itself, which account for the turn away from colonisation as an adequate end point to the abolitionist endeavour. On reform therefore, she argues that 'here the contingencies of age and generational perspective were crucial in affecting action.'
[108] *Emancipator and Free American*, Boston, May 25, 1837.
[109] Ibid.

outstripped us in practical freedom' (abolition) consider 'our republic a confederation of tyrants.'[110] Characterising America as an international pariah reinforced young men's desire to 'wipe the foul stain of slavery from our nation's escutcheon.'[111] The report was clear that for this purpose, 'the young men of America, and they only, are competent.'[112] Acknowledging that 'our seniors are wiser, more learned, more influential'…the report suggests that 'their wisdom, learning and influence are vastly more compromitted with the evil in question.'[113] It was 'peculiarly the province of young men' to 'form the character of the age in which they live.'[114] More 'susceptible of impressions' and more 'unbiased' in 'a plain subject of right and wrong', it would fall upon young men to 'carry forward the work of reformation' and to 'augment' the antislavery ranks.[115] The notion that younger Americans – on account of their energies and moral purity – were likely to hold an outsized role in the future abolition of slavery, was a common thread of the abolitionist press and the guiding principle of these deliberately named "Young Men's" associations. This assured politicians such as Seward that future generations of Northern voters were likely to be inclined to antislavery policies. Consequently, 'concessions today' would only increase 'the evils and embarrassments of tomorrow.'[116]

'The soil you hold and trust for us, give it to us free'

Seward's proclamation of a "Higher Law", delivered before the Senate on March 11, summarises his reasons for opposing 'any Compromise, in any and all the forms in which' it was proposed.[117] Seward considered compromise, unless absolutely necessary, 'radically

[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 262.

wrong and essentially vicious.'[118] Following a Jeffersonian-Paineite conception of generational political responsibility, he reflected that a 'relinquishment of the right to reconsider in the future the decisions of the present' was a 'usurpation… of the province of future legislators.'[119] Certain that Northern opinion was advancing toward an antislavery position, Seward felt that accession to a "final settlement" of the slavery question, as this shift in opinion was occurring, would be a disservice to future generations of Americans.

Furthermore, Seward considered compromise over slavery as contrary to Founding principles. Referring to 'our revolutionary predecessors', Seward cited the Northwest Ordinance as evidence that the Founding Generation 'would not have hesitated an hour' in removing slavery if they had the means to do so.[120] He thus saw the current debate as 'alarming evidence of degeneracy' in public life, a retrograde step which undermined the United States from within and without.[121] Abolition in Britain, France and Mexico, had demonstrated that 'no Christian nation' founded on the principle of freedom could rightly entertain slavery as just.[122] It was incompatible with 'the security of natural rights, the diffusion of knowledge… the freedom of industry' and the 'principle of democracy.'[123]

The final passage of Seward's speech echoed the rhetoric of generational responsibility used by the Compromisers, but instead deployed it to buttress an unbending commitment to free soil. Stating that he would vote for the admission of California as a free state in its own right, without prejudice to the other agitating questions, Seward looked not to 'the verdict of the passing hour', rather to 'that period… not far distant, when the vast regions over which we are now legislating shall have received their destined inhabitants.'[124] The

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 265.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 268.

'countless generations seem to me to be rising up, and passing in dim and shadowy review before us… the soil you hold and trust for us, give it to us free…'[125] Seward felt his responsibility, and the responsibility of his generation, was to ensure that the new territories remained 'unencumbered, and free from the calamities and sorrows of human bondage.'[126] For Seward, his duties as a legislator pertained not to the past, but to 'this generation, which is living, and to the generations which are to come to life'; 'it is a living faith, and not a dead one, that yields beneficent fruits.'[127] Seward, therefore, justifies his staunch opposition to compromise through the lens of a generational obligation which extended beyond the immediate concerns of party, or indeed section. Rather, his position was vindicated not only by his own constituents, but by the wants and need of all the future inhabitants of the United States western territories.

Seward's position was not unique. Throughout the month of June, several Northern Whigs and Free-Soilers delivered speeches in the House and Senate which evidenced the same bifurcated concern as Seward, seeking to emphasise both the Founding Generation's fundamental opposition to slavery, and their responsibility to acknowledge public sentiment by guaranteeing freedom to future generations. Henry Halleck, the military Secretary of State at the California Constitutional Convention, implored his fellow delegates to consider that 'we are not legislating for a single day, or a single generation, but for ages and generations yet in the womb of time.'[128] This notion was taken up by politicians in Washington, such as Walter Booth, Free-Soil Representative from Connecticut, who emphasised that extension of slavery would be contrary to the 'spirit of the age.'[129] Posing the rhetorical question as to what the 'growing sentiment' of the times was, he answered that 'freedom is the spirt of this

[125] Ibid.
[126] Seward, *Freedom in the New Territories*, Library of Congress, 318.
[127] Ibid, 123.
[128] John R. Browne, *Report of The Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution*, (Washington, 1850), 434.
[129] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 657.

age', a 'sentiment bursting from heart to heart, spreading from city to city and from country to country.'[130] Slavery's extension would only serve as a guarantee of future embarrassment; 'were we now to enlarge the area of slavery… how will the history read fifty years hence… how will it read twenty or even ten years hence, when the public mind shall have conformed to the spirit of the age.'[131] Again, elevating the question beyond the present political crisis, Booth argues that to 'stop the progress of slavery' would be to 'save our own character in the eyes of our children.'[132] For Booth, as with Halleck and Seward, future judgement was held in at least equal, if not greater regard than contemporary threats of sectional rupture.

For representatives such as Kingsley Bingham, or David Wilmot, the issue was that their Southern counterparts failed to see their actions in this longer view. Both former Democrats turned Free-Soilers specifically targeted the present generation of Southern statesmen. Bingham determined that the Founding Generation were united in admonishing slavery as an 'evil' or 'sin', citing Washington's famous 1786 letter to Robert Morris, alongside similar antislavery pronouncements from Madison, Jefferson, and George Mason.[133] Unfortunately, 'one after another the founders of the nation have passed away; a new generation has succeeded them' who, having be born into a 'life of luxurious indolence' consider it 'easier to appropriate the proceeds of the labor of others than to earn, by honest industry.'[134] For Bingham, the second generation of Southern statesmen were fundamentally out of step with their predecessors, and contemporary public opinion. They were therefore liable to challenge from Northern politicians who, acknowledging that fiat of the people was

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 729. Washington's letter to Robert Morris, dated April 12, 1786, was one of several letters written by his hand in the middle of the 1780s which expressed positive sentiment for abolition. This particular letter contained a sentence pronouncing that 'there is not a man living who wished more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it [slavery].' For an account of Washington's complex relationship with slavery, see Philip D. Morgan, 'To Get Quit of Negroes: George Washington and Slavery,'*Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2005): 403–29.
[134] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 729.

for ‘no new slave territory and no new slave states’, adopted firm free-soil positions in line with ‘the progressive spirit of the age.’[135] For Wilmot, the rapid increase in human capital in the South had blinded Southern politicians from ‘the early and settled policy of government.’[136] Wilmot, in opposing any extension of slavery, and any compromise measure that packaged California statehood alongside concessions to slavery, stated: ‘I stand upon this question where Jefferson, Madison and Henry stood sixty years ago. They did so in their day and generation. They would do so now.’[137]

For Northern opponents of the compromise measures, including those who favoured the Administration’s policy, their principal opposition was to any further unnecessary concessions to the slave interest. These concessions were unnecessary because the Founders had made it clear that slavery was a geographically limited institution *and* because the march of progress was in the direction of free over enslaved labour; the Northern public, particularly its younger portion, had since the mid-1830s demonstrated a clear and increasing hostility toward slavery as a moral and economic wrong. While antislavery Northern representatives conceptualised their political duty in terms of intergenerational obligation, they did so based on fundamentally different assumptions regarding both the nature of their inheritance, and their responsibility to the rising generation; differences which informed their divergent position on the most appropriate solution to mid-century sectionalism.

4 Southern Nationalists

Long the figurehead of Southern nationalism, by the spring of 1850 Calhoun had been rendered a shadow of his former self. Tuberculosis left him increasingly breathless, habitually coughing, and incapable of raising his voice for the purposes of addressing the Senate

[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 943.
[137] Ibid.

Chamber.[138] Nevertheless, his final address was crucial in shaping debates regarding Clay's proposed compromise measures, and the threat they purported to the South. Calhoun's argument hinged on an acknowledgement that the Southern states were, within the next decade, likely to cede significant power in the federal government. Through the early decades of the Nineteenth Century, the slave-holding states leant upon Article I, Section Two of the Constitution (the so-called "three fifths clause"), Senate parity and the Electoral college to maintain, at a minimum, federal political equality with the North.[139] However, by the mid-century, these constitutional advantages were under increasing strain. Citing the census, Calhoun contended that going forward, the South was likely doomed to further minority in the House of Representatives, and effective exclusion from the White House by virtue of additional Northern electoral college votes. Most concerningly, the admission of new territories such as Oregon, Minnesota, and those likely to arise out of the Mexican Cession, would shatter the last vestige of sectional equilibrium in the Senate. Calhoun surmised that this was not merely a natural consequence of 'the operation of time', rather the result of three categories of egregious 'government legislation': firstly, exclusion from the new territories, specifically three quarters of the nearly 2.4 million square miles acquired since independence; secondly an 'undue proportion of the burden of taxation' (specifically on exports) which had

[138] John Niven, *John C. Calhoun, and the Price of Union: A Biography*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 1.

[139] Michael F. Conlin, *The Constitutional Origins of the American Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 82-133. The extent to which the Constitution was pro-, or antislavery remained/remains a point of contention, both among antebellum Americans and today's historians. For example, Sean Wilentz argues that the Constitution's many concessions to slaveholders belied a fundamentally antislavery character, revealed by a deliberate exclusion of 'validation of property in man.' See, Sean Wilentz, *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 1-2. Wilentz's position runs contrary to the assumptions of David Waldstreicher, Kenneth Morgan and Paul Finkelman among others, who view the Constitution as fundamentally pro-slavery. See, David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009); Kenneth Morgan, 'A Slaveowners' Constitution', *Reviews in American History* 39, no. 2 (2011): 254-260; Paul Finkleman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2015), 3-45. Such is the difficulty of this question, historians have even been known to change their minds. See James Oakes, 'Frederick Douglass Changed My Mind About the Constitution', *Social Education 72,* no.5 (2008): 251-252. Of course, for the purposes of this chapter, it is precisely this ambiguity over their constitutional inheritance that allowed contemporary Americans to come to such different conclusions about their inter-generational obligations.

lined Northern coffers attracting higher levels of immigration; and finally, a 'radical' adjustment of the 'original character of government', notably by those who at best considered slavery a 'stain on the character of the nation' or at worst a 'sin.'[140] When taken together, these elements led Southerners to believe they could not remain 'with honour and safety in the Union.'[141] For Calhoun, as for Clay and Webster, the safety of the Union rested in an enduring accommodation between the North and South: 'a full and final settlement, on the principle of justice, of all the questions at issue between the two sections.'[142] However, Calhoun did not favour mutual compromise, rather Northern concession. Southern honour (and therefore willingness to remain in the Union) could only be restored by Northern admission 'of equal right in the acquired territory,' adequate 'stipulations relative to fugitive slaves,' and a constitutional provision ensuring the equilibrium of political power between sections.[143]

Calhoun's address closed with a thinly veiled recognition of his mortality; with his opinions on the present crisis adequately expressed to the chamber, regardless of what was 'to come', he felt himself 'free of all responsibility.'[144] Within a month, Calhoun succumbed to his disease, leaving others to take up the mantle of leading Southern opposition to the compromise measures. A 'new generation' of Southern nationalists, including Jeremiah Clemens, James Murray Mason, David Yulee, Robert Hunter and Jefferson Davis, followed Calhoun's example in advocating for Southern political unity against perceived Northern aggressions.[145] These men, all born between 1808 and 1814 with the exception of Mason (b.1798) were significantly younger than Calhoun and would become central to the fortunes of the Secessionist Movement in the proceeding decade. This section will detail how, contrary

[140] Niven, *Calhoun*, 191-197.
[141] Ibid., 189.
[142] Ibid., 209.
[143] Ibid., 210.
[144] Ibid., 211.
[145] Peter Knupfer, *Union as It Is*, 164.

to the assertions of Free-Soilers such as Bingham, a younger generation of Southern representatives leant upon a common framework of intergenerational obligation and inheritance preservation (as deployed by antislavery Northern factions and traditional compromisers alike) to justify a distinct Southern opposition to Clay's measures. Their opposition was premised upon a definition of their constitutional inheritance which expressly protected slavery and Southern political power. This conviction was buttressed by a sense that the South's rising generation was committed to preserving said power. As such, their obligations to future generations of Southerners entailed preventing Northern dominance in any future polity.

Southern representatives such as Texas's David Kaufman (b.1813) were clear-eyed regarding the generational implications of his, and his colleagues' actions on the 'Slavery Question.' As one of nine members of the House Committee on Territories, he felt uniquely placed to inform the chamber of the North's 'unjust designs' upon the Mexican Cession. Similarly to the Compromisers and the Free-Soilers, Kaufman leaned on notions of US exceptionalism when explicating the sectional crisis. Specifically, he used it to expound Calhoun's delineation of an 'unnatural struggle', propagated by Northern extremists (specifically Seward) who professed support for the Constitution in name only.[146] When Europeans were 'struggling to break the shackles of despotism', attempts to undermine 'the only free government on earth' could only be the result of a 'misunderstanding.'[147] While addressing the House, Kaufman recounted the key aspects of Calhoun's argument: the loss of Southern political power, Northern encroachment upon the protections of slave property afforded by the Constitution, unfair taxation, and equal rights over the territories.[148] Advocating for leaving Texas' boundary untouched and slavery unrestricted in such terms,

[146] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 936.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

Kaufman closed his speech by chiding his contemporaries, asking whether they considered themselves 'superior' in both wisdom and virtue to 'our fathers who formed [the Union].'[149] Emphasising the historical significance of the political moment, he suggested that 'Clio, the Muse of History…pen in hand…[was] averting her face from the page of the present' as 'unworthy of record.'[150] He urged his fellow congressmen to ensure their actions 'be such that she will be enabled, out of the events of this session, to fill the brightest page of human history.'[151] Looking to the future he declared that 'our acts and conduct here will not pass unnoticed', rather they would be 'transmitted to distant generations, and ages after we have passed.'[152] For Kaufman, congressional action regarding the territories of the Mexican Cession could only be seen through the prism of American exceptionalism, Southern nationhood and, crucially, a generational obligation to preserve both.

Similarly to Kaufman, Jefferson Davis was acutely aware of the generational significance of the 1850 moment. For Davis, dwindling Southern political power lent urgency to a need to prevent any further territorial restrictions being imposed by the increasingly dominant, and antislavery North. In August 1849, he declared to Malcom Haynes (editor of the Lexington *Equal Rights*) that the 'time was at hand, when we [the South] should take our position', warning that 'to the next generation, the evil will be the same, but their power to meet it will be diminished.'[153] Conscious of the truth behind Northern pronouncements of an interminable increase in antislavery sentiment, and hardening desire to preserve the western territories for free-labour, Davis feared that if his 'generation…avoids its responsibility, by

[149] Ibid., 940.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Jefferson Davis, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis Volume 4*, Lynda Crist, Mary Dix and Richard Beringer 'eds', 44.

permitting the claim of the North to all the territory possessed or to be acquired' they 'will have sown the wind and left to their children the harvest of the whirlwind.'[154]

In January, Davis declared that the South would never abandon the Constitution: 'the present generation, sir, will maintain the character their fathers won.'[155] However, he noted that in order to avoid the ire of future generations, his contemporaries would accept disunion if necessary: 'they well know how to sustain the institutions they inherited, even by civil war, if that be provoked… they will march up to this issue, and meet it face to face.'[156] A major speech in February served to fully explicate Davis' position. Clay's compromise resolutions were evidence that he 'had chosen to throw his influence into the scale of the preponderating aggressive majority.'[157] Like Seward, Davis disagreed with Clay that the present crisis was the result of party, rather arguing that if party organisation had 'preserved its integrity', then there would have been 'no place for a third party and no danger from it.'[158] He again made the case that the South had to act immediately, namely because compromise thus far had proved 'delusive' and it was becoming increasingly likely that the 'ultimate end' – constitutional abolition – was coming down the track.[159] For Davis, it was incumbent upon 'the men of the present generation' to meet this threat; they had 'no right to postpone to posterity the danger which is laid at their own doors.'[160] Throughout debates over the Compromise, Davis continually sought to maintain the 'balance of power' between the Southern and Northern States, arguing that this was the peculiar responsibility of his generation, as they had been the ones to allow sectional agitation to take hold; in an August speech he claimed, this sectional agitation is 'the growth of a subsequent generation to that

[154] Ibid.
[155] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 137.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 149.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid., 150.
[160] Ibid.

which formed the constitution. The danger is one of our own times, and it is that sectional division of the people which has created the necessity of looking to the question of the balance… which carries with it, when that balance is disturbed, the danger of disunion.'[161] For Davis therefore, a firm stance against Clay's Compromise did not evince a lack of reverence for the Constitution. Instead, it reflected an understanding of that Constitution as an instrument for maintaining the sectional balance of power.

Davis, hailing from the South, was certainly more readily exposed to the depths of Southern opposition to Northern pronouncements of non-extension and the pitch of disunion sentiment. Unlike Northern Whigs and Free-Soilers, who saw little evidence that secession was imminent, Davis' rhetoric was premised upon an assumption that secession was both realistic, and perhaps even necessary.[162] Take for example a speech from Virginian Representative Richard Kidder Meade Jr. on June 6th: for Meade, the South was engaged in a 'death struggle', its 'race and country' threatened. The only means of protection was the acquisition of an 'Empire' such that they could project equality of strength to their Northern neighbours.[163] He explicitly dismissed those who argued 'that this Union is the greatest of blessings, and its destruction the greatest of evils.'[164] Specifically, he singled out the elderly class of statesmen that were so often associated with this sentiment:

> Sir, in times like these I warn my countrymen against the counsels of superannuated statesmen. They are not equal to the occasion – their cravings and wants are rest and quiet. Our revolutionary movements were conducted by men not even in the prime of life, and they built up the monuments of their imperishable fame while young, bold, ardent. Had they resorted to octogenarian counsels, there would have been no revolution, no independence.[165]

[161] Ibid., 1539.
[162] John Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis,1848-1861*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 57.
[163] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 19, 31st Congress, 1st Session, (1850), 702.
[164] Ibid., 706.
[165] Ibid.

For a younger generation of Southern representatives, 1850 served as an opportunity to leverage their sections residual power in the executive branch and recalibrate a political system which was slipping from their grasp.

Again, much like Seward's coalition in the North, members of the Davis clique took heart from apparent increases in support among young men for "Southern rights." The *Hartford Courant* urged its fellow Northern papers to consider that 'the plan for a great Southern Confederacy' was 'not a mere chimera, but a contemplated reality', suggesting that it was the 'aspiring, ambitious young men of the South' who were driving for disunion.[166] The historian, Peter Carmichael, has documented an explosion of sectional sentiment among young Virginians in response to the 1850 crisis. Specifically, the founding of Southern Rights Associations across the State, which encouraged students to collectively oppose perceived Northern extremism.[167] Carmichael explains that this opposition was rooted in fears of Southern stagnation; attempts to bar slavery from the Western territories were often conflated with an alleged Northern hostility to any Southern westward migration. Restriction from these new territories would deprive young Southerners of economic opportunities in the West and increase pressures on land and employment at home.[168]

To promote this growing sense of Southern national identity among the Section's rising generation, nationalists advocated local education for "Southern sons." This would instil sympathetic values and prevent ideological radicalisation in Northern colleges. One Southern paper for instance, described a wax-work exhibition in Boston seeking to display the horrors of slavery as a prime example of the 'cruel, criminal and cowardly' policy of 'speculative abolitionists', who through 'institutions of learning' were bent on 'infusing into

[166] *Hartford Courant*, February 9, 1850.
[167] Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation*: *Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 116.
[168] Ibid.

the Northern youth a hatred of their Southern cousins, preparatory to depriving them of the property which they have inherited under the constitution.'[169] Northern education 'impressed with all the fervor of religious denunciation' would 'do more to destroy the Union than the united armies of the world.'[170] Another sought to emphasise the damage done when sending Southern sons north for their education: the South had been 'seriously injured by this dependence upon the North' for education; 'our young men return with many ideas, feelings, and tastes quite foreign to those which prevail here', not to mention 'objectionable constitutional principles.'[171] South Carolinian paper, the *Camden Journal*, cheered Columbia Medical students who at a meeting in the autumn of 1850, 'resolved to patronise Southern colleges exclusively.'[172] Similarly, the Alabamian *Democrat* promoted the university at Tuscaloosa, stating that 'now, of all periods…is not the time for Southern youth to be trained up in the political and fanatical influences of Northern colleges'; Southern youth 'should be educated at home… the young men of the South should become more southernized.'[173]

Southern opponents of compromise conceived of their constitutional inheritance as having expressly protected the institution of slavery and guaranteed the balance of political power between sections. Thus, any restriction on its future expansion into the Mexican Cession would be a desecration of that inheritance. Their obligation was to rebuff these perceived violations of established principle, and to ensure that they could pass on to the next generation a thriving and expanding empire for enslaved labour. In addition, there was a temporal imperative for objecting to further compromise in 1850, as they became increasingly conscious of the South's waning political power in the national government. For

[169] *Alexandria Gazette*, Virginia, December 16, 1850.
[170] Ibid.
[171] *Camden Journal*, South Carolina, April 26, 1850.
[172] *Camden Journal*, October 18, 1850.
[173] *The Democrat*, Huntsville, Alabama, June 6, 1850.

Southern nationalists, it was time to take a stand lest they be unable to adequately defend their rights in the future.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has determined how three congressional coalitions – Compromisers, antislavery Northerners, and Southern Nationalists – depended upon a common, generationally defined framework of constitutional inheritance and paternal-filial responsibility, to justify divergent solutions to the sectional crisis. All three groups resolved that their responsibility was to preserve the United States' peculiar mode of government, and to pass that on to posterity. Where they differed however, was in defining the form and function of that government, and the nature of their obligation to future generations. For the Compromisers, their duty was preservation not just of the Constitution (nationally defined), but the tradition of political compromise that created it. The generational identity of the architects of the 1850 compromise (Clay and Webster) was shaped by a reverence for the politics and politicians of the Founding, a deep-rooted nationalism, and political careers characterised by fear over the potential union-rending consequences of territorial expansion. This instilled a political psychology which venerated mutual concessions between competing interests. Compromise — conceding the sectional in favour of the national — would ensure that Americans, regardless of class or section, could continue to enjoy the economic opportunity and personal freedoms afforded by the Union.

Conversely, both Northern and Southern opponents of the compromise viewed it as a form of delaying tactic which shirked their political duties. The *Buffalo Daily Republic* best summarised this argument in February, as debate regarding Clay's initial resolutions raged in the Senate. Alluding to the Slave Power, and warning of the pending 'dark legions of slavery', the paper suggested that the issue had been merely 'dodged in the Missouri

Compromise', and that the greatest threat was a 'compromise' which would 'leave the constitutional question undecided, and throw upon another generation all the evils and misfortunes of dissolution…'[174] For the *New York Herald*, 'compromise after compromise' had been made and 'had proved… only the means of postponing, rather than settling the question.'[175]

For a younger generation of Southern nationalists, the South had nothing left to compromise. To acquiesce in further restrictions upon their rights to the Mexican Cession, would be to seal a fate of subordination to the North. They had inherited a Nation and Constitution which, in their view, obviously protected their right to property in humans *and* which offered political parity with the North. Both elements of this inheritance were under threat from extremists wielding growing Northern political and economic power. Meanwhile, antislavery Northern opposition to compromise turned on an assumption that public opinion was destined to find slavery morally repugnant, and that free soil was the economically superior socio-economic system. As such, any further concession of territorial freedoms would be contrary to both sectional and national interest.

A technical compromise would eventually prevail in the autumn of 1850, although not packaged as a single package of legislation, but rather piecemeal, such that representatives and senators could vote for each constituent element in accordance with their principles. This mode of delivery was antithetical to the notion of mutual concession favoured by traditional compromisers. A pragmatic approach, it underscored an absence of will to sacrifice sectional interests for national ends. It was only after the successful passage of each individual piece of legislation that claims of a broad sectional compromise were made. It was then up to a younger generation of Southerner unionists — Howell Cobb, Alexander Stephens, Robert

[174] *The Buffalo Daily Republic*, New York, February 16, 1850.
[175] *New York Herald*, April 12, 1850.

Toombs and Henry Foote — to muster sufficient support in their section for the respective measures, and to ensure continued unionism after the fact.[176] The chief architect of the parliamentary manoeuvring which delivered compromise was Stephen Douglas, who used his youthful energies to corral his fellow congressmen into legislative action. That the thirty-seven-year-old Douglas succeeded where an ageing Clay did not, serves as a powerful indicator of how generational dynamics shaped the mid-century sectional crisis. Henry Clay and his allies failed because their mode of politics was rejected by a younger generation of politicians, North and South, who viewed further sectional compromise as violent to their political inheritance and contrary to their obligations as legislators, both to their current constituents and those of generations to come.

[176] James L. Huston, 'Southerners Against Secession: The Arguments of the Constitutional Unionists in 1850–51' *Civil War History* 46, no. 4 (2000), 284.

III

"Drive the Old Fogies Out": Generations and the collapse of the Second Party System

By the autumn of 1853, one Ohio newspaper felt that any 'observer of the signs of the times' could see that 'the old parties are undergoing a rapid process of decomposition.'[1] While the Whig Party appeared 'more defunct' on account of its spectacular loss in the 1852 presidential election, the triumphant Democrats also demonstrated 'little muscular animation.'[2] Papers across the country echoed the *Cleveland Leader*'s claim that both main parties were 'effete', and could no longer 'command the public confidence.'[3] North Carolina's *Spirit of the Age* supposed that old party ties had been 'severed', with new ones yet to be 'knit'; the *New York Herald* penned an editorial titled 'Old Parties Broken Down – What Comes Next?'; and Vermont's *Freeman* declared 'The Dissolution of the Old Parties Inevitable.'[4]

Historians have often characterised the political transformations of these years as product of a broader systemic failure; a Second Party System – defined by competition between Whigs and Democrats – was undermined as differences between them became increasingly blurred. Michael Holt's *Political Crisis* (1978), William Gienapp's *Origins of the Republican Party* (1987), and Joel Sibley's *The American Political Nation* (1991) typify this formulation.[5] Holt argues that 'during the administrations of Taylor and Fillmore, the clear party lines on sectional, territorial, reform, economic, and ethnocultural issues disappeared

[1] *The Cleveland Leader*, Ohio, November 22, 1853.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] *The Spirit of the Age*, Raleigh, North Carolina, November 9, 1853; *New York Herald*, October 27, 1853; *Green-Mountain Freeman*, Montpelier, Vermont, July 14, 1853.
[5] William E Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Michael F Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

almost entirely.'[6] Partisan loyalty depended upon 'popular perception' of these differences, as it convinced those hostile to the government that they had a 'real alternative' at elections.[7] The absence of this difference led to a collapse of faith in both parties as an effective political force.[8]

However, recent historiographical pushback against rigid applications of this two-party schema has brought opportunities for new narratives of political contestation and change. Emphasising the fluidity of antebellum politics, Rachel Shelden and Erik Alexander have contended that the 'partisan landscape', far from a straight two-party fight, was 'constantly shifting'; coalitions formed around specific people, issues and ideas at different levels (local, state, national); party ideology and policy evolved quickly, and often without consistency; no-party candidates continued to perform well, even in presidential elections; and anti-partyism remained a potent force.[9] In most cases, Shelden and Alexander argue, 'political and constitutional conflict shaped partisan politics, not the other way around.'[10]

This chapter capitalises upon this historiographical turn, exploring how generationally defined coalitions functioned within and between both main parties. While not wholly abandoning the two-party lens — Democrats and Whigs, after all, continued to fill the majority of public offices — this chapter will nevertheless trace two moments in which generational rhetoric, stoking both personal animosities and ideological rifts, served as a centrifugal force which exceeded existing bonds of partisanship. The first section will focus on the factional struggle which engulfed the New York Whig Party from September 1850. It will unpick the intricate ties between competing conceptions of intergenerational obligation,

[6] Holt, *Political Crisis*, 105.
[7] Ibid., 103.
[8] Ibid., 102.
[9] Rachel A. Shelden and Erik B. Alexander, 'Dismantling the Party System: Party Fluidity and the Mechanisms of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Politics,' *The Journal of American History,* 110, no. 3 (2023): 428-435.
[10] Ibid., 422.

Whig conservatism, and the liberal use of generational rhetoric even in the absence of real generational stratification. For New York Whigs, perception of generational attachment to an older class of politician and politics was as important as age itself in defining division between antislavery Sewardites and so-called Silver Greys. Detailed examination of this factional rift lends insight into how generational dynamics shaped conflict both within and beyond the Party through the early 1850s.

The second section of this chapter will explore similar factional rifts within the opposing Democratic Party. Again, focussing primarily on rhetoric, it will examine the substance and style of Young America's challenge to the traditional Democratic leadership after 1850. Competing generational identities, specifically those articulated by George Sanders in the *Democratic Review*, were crucial in shaping the Party's nomination contest for the 1852 election. As with their Whig counterparts, debates over progress, party orthodoxy and political expediency were shaped by generational dynamics and communicated in generational terms. For Young America, both the Democracy's leadership, and its political program, demanded broad reconsideration in view of what contemporaries referred to as the 'spirit of the age.' If, as the previous chapter documented, the 1850 Compromise debates brought tacit recognition that a generational transition was underway among the United States' political leadership, the years up to 1853 demonstrated how this transition would be realised in political discourse and party policy.

1 Seward Whigs & Sliver Greys

On September 28th, 1850, Francis Granger lay down his gavel and, following thirty-nine other delegates, walked out of the New York State Whig Convention at Syracuse. Granger – the convention chairman – had bolted, confirming a schism within New York Whiggery that would scar the party until its eventual collapse. For Granger, his actions bore a

sense of personal loss; 'no political defeat… had caused him the pain which he experienced at that moment.'[11] Nevertheless, the adoption by a healthy majority of delegates, of resolutions which included an expressed endorsement of William Seward, proved too much to bear for a specific subset of New York Whig. To understand why this commendation of their State and Party's own United States senator proved so offensive to a minority of delegates, speaks to the challenges of understanding the division and ultimate collapse of the Party in the early part of the 1850s.

Whether it was Granger's shock of silver-grey hair, or a reference to the superannuated military companies of 1812, the Bolters' "silver grey" designation is suggestive of the generational dynamics which marked this mid-century party fracture.[12] Building upon the previous chapter, this section will first document the role of competing understandings of intergenerational obligation *and* inconsistent attachment to a previous generation of politicians and politics, in shaping divisions within (and secession from) the New York Whig Party. Second, it will explain how these factors tended to different attitudes towards the Fugitive Slave Law, and broader divisions over the future direction of Whig ideology and policy. Finally, it will demonstrate how the rhetoric of generational division intersected with personal rivalry and political expediency at a state level, contributing to the broader collapse of the national Whig Party between 1852 and 1854.

Context: The Fugitive Slave Law

Coming at the end of September 1850, the Syracuse Convention saw the disparate elements of the Party come together at a time of increasing pressure. The Whig Party was, as with other antebellum parties, necessarily a broad church; a loose and often confounding coalition of competing interests that combined rather inconsistently around a range of specific

[11] *Southern Press*, Washington D.C., October 1, 1850.
[12] Lee Howland Warner, *The Silver Grays: New York State Conservatives Whigs 1846-1856*, (1971), 358.

ideological and administrative agendas. What bound them together, more than anything else, was an opposition to Jacksonian Democracy.[13] But by the early 1850s, competing local, sectional and national imperatives increasingly tugged at the threads which tied this disparate political force together. On a national level, the Party faced the usual struggles over patronage that accompanied executive power, only this time in the fraught circumstances of a sitting Whig president's abrupt and unexpected death. Furthermore, the Compromise legislation, which held the broad support of Northern Democrats and Millard Fillmore's Whig administration, diluted the perceived difference between the two parties from which they drew their electoral strength.[14] Most pressingly, Syracuse came less than ten days after the President had signed the final (and most controversial) element of the 1850 Compromise into law.

The new Fugitive Slave Law effectively cleaved Northern Whiggery in two. For those who had spent the past nine months strenuously pursuing a resolution of the sectional crisis, the successful passage of this measure proffered a period of relative calm in national politics. Henry Clay for example, was 'confident… that the system of measures' would be 'acquiesced in by the great body of the people', and that this would lead to a period of 'quiet and tranquillity.'[15] Webster meanwhile, was also certain that compromise would affect the 'softening of political animosities.'[16] Citing Democrats such as Cass, Dickson, Bridge and Rusk, he considered that, having acted together to resolve 'this great crisis', they could 'never again feel sharp asperities towards one another.'[17] In the words of one sympathetic newspaper editor, the 'Whigs and Democrats have united to avert a common danger, to ward off a

[13] Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xiii-xiv.
[14] Ibid., 553.
[15] *The Papers of Henry Clay. Volume 10, Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Stateman: January 1, 1844-June 29, 1852*, Melba Porter Hay and Carol Reardon, 'eds', (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 820.
[16] Daniel Webster to Peter Harvey, October 2, 1850, *The Papers of Daniel Webster Digital Edition.*
[17] Ibid.

common calamity. The strife of party has been hushed, and the love of the country has stilled the turmoil of mere partisan contention, for higher and nobler aims.'[18]

However, for many Northern Whigs, the new Fugitive Slave Law simply confirmed the South's malign influence on national policy. Northern opposition to Article IV Section II of the Constitution — which declared that enslaved African Americans who crossed state lines would not be liberated, but rather 'delivered up' on claim of their enslaver — was as old as the document itself.[19] A subsequent dispute over the fate of Thomas Mifflin, an African American freed under Pennsylvania law but later kidnapped by Virginian enslavers, forced further clarification of inter-state obligations with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793.[20] This imposed stricter requirements upon Northern states, specifically by placing their enforcement, judicial apparatus, and citizens at the disposal of those seeking the return of so-called "fugitives". Again, Northern antislavery elements found new ways to evade their responsibilities; vigilance committees which assisted formerly enslaved escapees, and personal liberty laws which proffered various legal rights, continued to frustrate the South.[21] A new version of the Fugitive Slave Law therefore, was a precondition of Southern support for the passage of other elements of the 1850 Compromise.[22] The new law placed enforcement in federal hands, threatened fines for marshals (and citizens) who failed to comply or aided fugitives, eroded their legal protections, and provided financial incentive for commissioners to rule in favour of enslavers.[23] The *Evening Post* perhaps best articulated the terrifying consequences of this new legislation when it wrote:

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[18] *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky, September 16, 1850.
[19] Spencer R. Crew, 'When the Victims of Oppression Stand Up Manfully for Themselves': The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and the Role of African Americans in Obstructing Its Enforcement', *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, 'eds' Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 122.
[20] Ibid., 123.
[21] Ibid., 126-128.
[22] Richard J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Resistance to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law,* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 6-14.
[23] Ibid., 129.

> No man whose complexion is darker than usual, and whose standing in the community is not such as to make the attempt an act of manifest temerity, can feel certain, when he goes out of doors, that he will not, before noon, be on his way to the slave pens in some Southern city.[24]

The consequences of this law's passage in the North were quickly felt. Several Northern congressmen from both parties refused to attend the vote for the legislation, due either to moral objection or a recognition of the damaging electoral consequences of supporting it. As papers such as the *Post* made clear, 'public opinion will not endure the law.'[25]

Intergenerational Obligations and Political Reality

William Seward went further than most in spearheading opposition to the Compromise measures, and particularly its Fugitive Slave component, through the spring and summer of 1850. This tracked with a long history of opposition to the institution and its attendant political influence. In 1841, then Governor Seward resisted Virginian demands that ships bound for New York be stopped and checked for fugitives; only the legislature of New York could decide 'whether trial by jury shall be relinquished, and whether a State which acknowledges no natural inequality of man… shall wrest that precious shield from those whose freedom is assailed, not for any wrong doing of their own, but because the greatest of all crimes was committed against their ancestors.'[26] Nearly a decade later, in March 1850, he reaffirmed this stance: 'we are not slaveholders, we cannot, in our judgment, be either true Christians or real freemen, if we impose on another a chain that we defy all human power to fasten on ourselves.'[27]

[24] *The Evening Post*, New York, October 2, 1850.
[25] Ibid.
[26] James Whelpley, 'William H. Seward', *The American Whig Review* 5-9, no. 30 (1850): 632.
[27] William H. Seward, *The Works of William H. Seward Volume 1*, George E. Baker 'ed', (New York: Redfield, 1853), 67.

As the previous chapter argued, one element shaping Seward's long-standing opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law was his particular understanding of intergenerational political obligation. For Seward, mid-century legislators bore a responsibility to their future constituents and, certainly by 1850, it was clear that the Northern public was trending toward moral and economic opposition to the institution of slavery. A host of personal correspondence applauding his course in both state and national politics likely served to strengthen his resolve. For Daniel Henshaw, Seward's determined opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law was 'honest, patriotic and fearless.'[28] Noting the 'division in the New York Whig Convention', Henshaw indeed hoped that it would be cause for 'all Northern men, who are opposed to the extension of slavery, to unite and form a party on that basis.'[29] Similarly, Clark Wheeler (b.1819), a young lawyer who claimed that 'ever since he had been of age to read newspapers he had been in principle a [Clay] Whig', wrote to confess that he found the party increasingly difficult to support in light of the Compromise.[30] He had been 'disgusted' at the course Clay had taken since 1848 and, since the death of Calhoun, felt that he had morphed into 'the great champion of that abominable institution.'[31] Wheeler hoped that in the coming election, the 'free-soilers and abolitionists' would unite behind the Whig ticket such that a 'good antislavery Whig might be sent to the Senate who would vote for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law.[32]

Wheeler's letter reinforced Seward's contention that confronting slavery was a generational obligation. While urging Seward to remain for 'the cause of humanity and freedom', Wheeler 'predicted that in less than five years the tone of public sentiment on the

[28] Daniel Henshaw to William Seward, October 7, 1850, *The Papers of William H. Seward,* Microfilm Collection, Vere Harmsworth Library.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Clark B. Wheeler to William Seward, October 11, 1850, *Seward Papers*.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

slavery question in this state will have materially changed.'[33] Such would be the political power of the North and the strength of opposition to slavery therein, Wheeler contended, that the Lord would 'heap the richest of heaven's helpings' (the Presidency) upon Seward.[34] Another correspondent, the Presbyterian minister Eliphalet Nott, summed up the generational implications of the Law when he declared that the 'triumph' of the antislavery cause was inescapable; in the future those who 'cowered before the slave power' would be 'forgotten or remembered only to be condemned.'[35] By contrast, Seward's staunch opposition would appear glorious and just, both before God, and 'the eye of the coming generation.'[36]

Of course, in addition to these generational concerns Seward remained reactive to political reality. His fraught contest with Fillmore for control of the New York Whig Party in many respects determined the political consequences of his anti-compromise position. Having risen to prominence under the tutelage of Thurlow Weed, both Seward and Fillmore had sought the Governorship in 1838. Weed's preference for Seward in that race sparked a rift between the two men which only widened in the years that followed. Seward would go on to snub Fillmore in his pursuit of the Vice-Chancellorship, fail to support Fillmore's friend (Francis Granger) in pursuit of a position in Harrison's Cabinet, and frustrate Fillmore's ambitions for the vice-presidential nomination in 1844.[37] By the turn of the mid-century, there was no doubt where the real power of New York Whiggery lay. Seward and Weed, allied with the New York Tribune's editor, Horace Greely, commanded nearly every arm of the State government and the great majority of delegates who would convene at Syracuse in September.

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Eliphalet Nott to William Seward, November 1850, *Seward Papers*.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man,* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2013).

However, Zachary Taylor's untimely death in July 1850 complicated matters for Seward. Having relished going over Fillmore's head in extracting favour from the President, Fillmore's accession left Seward politically vulnerable.[38] Fillmore could now leverage his status as the nation's premier political force to more efficiently mobilise existing support in Buffalo and New York City and effectively challenge Seward-Weed control. While many of Fillmore's allies relished the prospect of retribution, the President ultimately opted for a conciliatory strategy, restraining himself from 'wielding the axe' upon Seward's patronage appointments.[39] Despite their stark ideological and personal differences, neither Seward nor Fillmore actively sought to force a split at Syracuse; political expediency demanded presenting a united ticket. Just two weeks prior, the Democratic State Convention had seen "Hunkers" and free-soil "Barnburners" seemingly resolve their differences, advancing a unifying ticket headed by Horatio Seymour and backed by former Free-Soilers, Sandford Church, John Mather, Charles Benton and William Angel. Whig papers such as the *Evening Post* confessed that the nominations had a reasonable chance of 'finding favour with the people', while the Albany *Express* conceded that the Democratic ticket would 'poll a heavy vote.'[40] The Democrats themselves were bullish; 'a ticket thus commanding the united support of the Democratic Party, and extorting commendation even from the mouths of its enemies, goes into the canvass with the brightest prospects of success.'[41]

Confronted with the twin threats of a resurgent Democratic Party and the damaging consequences of the Law, both sought, above all else, to win the November elections.[42] Fillmore's strategy rest upon his delegates postponing 'all hostilities toward Seward and Weed' and concentrating on the 'greater objective' – showing that New York was willing to

[38] Ibid., 169.
[39] Robert J. Rayback, *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President*, (Buffalo: Published for the Buffalo Historical Society by H. Stewart, 1959), 256-7.
[40] *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 18, 1850.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Warner, *The Silver Grays*, 103.

'forsake its slavery agitation for the general welfare of the nation.'[43] Washington Hunt was settled upon as an appropriate compromise candidate, and the nomination of his ticket proceeded largely unimpeded.[44] However, debates regarding the convention resolutions dashed hopes of factional reconciliation. Two proposed substitute resolutions offered up by William Cornwell — one which proposed a recommitment to the Wilmot Proviso, and another which singled out Seward for particular commendation — provoked significant backlash from the Fillmorite faction. Unable to reach an agreement on these resolutions, and with the enlarged sixteen member resolutions committee hopelessly divided at eight to eight, a vote of the whole body was called. Cornwell's substitutions were carried with a majority of 74 Yays to 42 Nays. A separate vote was held with regard to Seward, which carried 75 to 40. Outraged and embarrassed, the Nays duly bolted: 'driven to the alternative of approval or withdrawal… they chose the latter course' having found 'that the voice of the young and unterrified Whigs could not be stifled.'[45]

The Utica Convention and the Silver Grey Minority

The Syracuse split illustrates the generational component of Whig factionalism post-1850. While Seward's politics rest upon forward-looking assumptions of an antislavery constituency, at the heart of the Bolters justifications was an innate attachment to a previous generation of Whig statesman, and their associated principles and policies.[46] Reconvening, on October 17th and 18th, at Utica's Mechanics Hall, the Bolters would declare that only by 'adherence to its nationality' could the 'purity, integrity and usefulness' of the Whig Party be preserved.[47] Crucially, this 'nationality' was defined in view of the Party's past: 'through a long series of years, in days of darkness and trial, through alternate seasons of prosperity and

[43] Rayback, *Millard Fillmore*, 258-260.
[44] *New York Tribune*, September 28, 1850.
[45] *The Buffalo Daily Republic*, September 30, 1850.
[46] *Utica Daily Observer*, New York, October 17, 1850.
[47] *The Daily Republic*, Washington D.C., October 22, 1850.

adversity, the Whig Party… had united in common cause against their Democratic adversaries.'[48] The basis of the Party's success, they argued, lay in the ranks of 'time honoured veterans' who had 'borne the burden and brunt of many a contest.'[49] While wholeheartedly endorsing Millard Fillmore's administration, it was the 'eminent statesmen who compose[d] his cabinet' for whom the Bolters reserved most praise.[50] They would serve as the fundamental guides of administration policy, ensuring its conduct remained 'soundly Whig and eminently conservative.'[51] Associated with Fillmore were 'statesmen and leaders whom the Whig Party have long been accustomed to follow, and who have done nothing to forfeit, and much to increase their confidence and admiration.'[52] Citing Second Generation veterans like 'Clay and Webster, Corwin and Crittenden', the address saw 'no cause to discard our long tired and faithful leaders, and substitute others in their places.'[53]

For the Silver Greys, these older Whigs were considered as fundamental to the integrity of both Party and Union. In his Utica address, Hiram Ketchum credited 'the oldest men at Washington… men who have been the most trusted by parties on both sides' for restoring 'peace to the councils of the country.'[54] In a subsequent oration, Ketchum delivered a potted history of the congressional debate over the Compromise which likened the whole affair to a parent preventing their young children from needless squabbling: 'in Congress there were some old men – some able men of all sides and all political parties' who 'conferred together; they said come, let us compromise this difference, this talking – this incessant irritation.'[55] This reverence to 'old men' extended beyond party lines; his Utica

[48] Ibid.
[49] *The Daily Republic*, October 22, 1850.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] *The Buffalo Commercial*, October 23, 1850.
[55] Hiram Ketchum, *An Oration, Delivered on the Public Square at New Haven: at the Request of its Citizens, July 4,* (New Haven: T.J. Stafford, 1851).

address cited his admiration for Clay and Webster, but also singled-out Lewis Cass, who although he admitted 'differed… politically', was an 'old man' whom he applauded for his 'service' to his country.[56]

The Bolters unwavering commitment to these elder statesmen was intrinsic to the principles they embodied. The esprit de corps of Utica was that of 'compromise, concession and conciliation.'[57] They had, 'no higher object in view than the preservation of the Union.'[58] Echoing the rhetoric which had characterised congressional debate for the past ten months, the Bolters challenged Seward's interpretation of intergenerational obligation, presenting their actions as the only means of preserving their 'inherited institutions'; by standing fast to the Compromise and Union, they conserved 'the best hopes of ourselves and our children, and the only hopes of the down-trodden and oppressed of other nations.'[59] Expressly endorsing all elements of the Compromise measures, they considered it both 'dangerous and improper' to renew questions over slavery.[60]

Through unequivocal endorsement of the Compromise measures and orthodox Whiggery, Bolters hoped to curry favour among a swathe of voters who placed national cohesion and political stability above any moral objections to the new fugitive bill. However, this left them open to attack from Sewardites who, capitalising upon the Bolter's professed admiration for the Whig Party's eldest class, lent upon generational rhetoric to denigrate, disparage and ultimately dismiss them. When Horace Greely was accused of attempting to 'drive the old fogies out of the Whig Party' and 'compensate for their loss with free-soilers', he argued that this policy would have been an unmitigated success had the fogies themselves

[56] *The Buffalo Commercial*, October 23, 1850.
[57] *The Daily Republic*, Washington, District of Columbia, October 22, 1850.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

not 'hung on to the party' and 'kept the progressives out.'[61] For Greely, seeing conservative Whigs abandon the state convention was not necessarily an unwarranted risk; instead it would allow for an uncontested re-alignment of the Whig Party along desired antislavery lines. For many Sewardites, the Silver Greys no longer belonged within the party. They were the 'advocate[s] of all time-honoured abuses' and 'violent opponent[s] of everything looking to the improvement and happiness of the masses'; having neither 'sagacity, liberality or toleration', those who sought to supress criticism of the Fugitive Slave Bill would rather 'reign in hell than serve in heaven.'[62]

Age was fundamental to Sewardite attempts to undermine the Bolters. The *Courier Express*, for example, claimed that the Silver Grey faction comprised 'all the superannuated politicians – the old fogies and mummies of the party.'[63] Their advanced age and consequently outmoded ideology served as a barrier to the Party's advancement: when their 'advice had been listened to', it had only served as a 'clog' upon the Whig Party's movements and 'thwarted its success.'[64] Given their age and infirmity, 'the effective force of the Silver Greys is in a ratio much less than their comparative numbers suggest.'[65] Paradoxically, behind the generational rhetoric, contested attachment to Whig orthodoxy, and competing conceptions of intergenerational obligation, the real generational split in the New York Whig Party appears trivial. Fillmore was only eighteen months Seward's senior and his allies less than seven years older on average. This rather small difference, coupled with the genuine mix of ages within both factions, could encourage us to dismiss age as inconsequential. Crucially however, the Seward faction lacked a particular old guard; Weed at the age of fifty-three was as old as they got. By contrast, several of the most prominent Silver Greys were

[61] *Tribune*, New York, November 9, 1850.
[62] Ibid.
[63] *Buffalo Courier Express*, New York, November 27, 1850.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

sexagenarians (the decade upon which charges of 'fogyism' were most often levelled), including Hugh Maxwell, George Wood, John Colier, Phillips Phoenix and Gideon Ostrander. The Seward press capitalised on the relative prominence of this old guard to lend weight to rhetorical criticisms of Silver Greys as elderly, outmoded partisans.

Of course, the Silver Greys were keenly aware of the potency of Sewardite attacks and devised a strategy of bending this generational rhetoric to their own advantage. Going beyond endorsement of older politicians, they sought to present a universal link between advanced age and sensible, conservative politics. When the *Express* presented the new 'nicknames' of the two Whig factions, the Silver Greys were admitted as hailing from the 'older…grayer portion of the Whig Party', but crucially, their age ensured they had been cured of their 'isms', and were therefore of sound conservative mind.[66] The historian Michael Conlin has described how these 'dangerous isms' were regarded by many conservatives as part of a broader 'modernist attack on traditional American values'; rather than a rational reaction to domestic modernisation, the 'isms' were imports from revolutionary Europe which 'posed an existential threat to the American Republic.'[67] By explicitly and repeatedly tying Seward and his allies to this radical threat, the Silver Greys sought to flip the script against Sewardites and win plaudits for their own conservative unionism.

The *New York Herald* for example, railed against the 'Demagogical lawyers and political parsons' (Seward) 'led on by political printers' (Weed and Greely) who 'seize on every little incident of the day to invoke at one moment anti-masonry, at another anti-rentism… at another socialism and at last abolitionism.'[68] By 'crowding them all into one prodigious dose of fanaticism and folly', the *Herald* supposed that Sewardites endeavoured

[66] *Gettysburg Compiler*, December 23, 1850.
[67] Michael F. Conlin, 'The Dangerous *Isms* and the Fanatical *Ists:* Antebellum Conservatives in the South and the North Confront the Modernity Conspiracy,' *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 2 (2014): 205–33.
[68] *New York Daily Herald*, October 31, 1850.

'to produce on the public mind the necessity of that kind of interference with this Union and this republic that tends to break it into a thousand pieces.'[69] Similarly, the *Buffalo Commercial* dismissed 'the common argument…of every shallow-minded newspaper scribbler or flippant speechmaker' who labelled the seceders as 'the superannuated, the lame and the blind, who in time of war are only fit to stay home and take care of the women and children.'[70] Calling for 'common sense', the paper dismissed Seward's 'romancing reformers' and the notion that they were 'capable of remodelling human nature by jumbling together ever political "ism" that may strike their fancy.'[71] Finally, the *Buffalo Daily Republic* suggested that those who had remained at Syracuse constituted a 'sectional political abolition party', dangerous on account of 'their affinities to all the outlandish ites and isms of the day'; their 'principles', the *Republic* argued, struck 'directly at the Constitution and the Union.'[72]

Ultimately, despite the ideological divisions over slavery and compromise, the split at Syracuse was orchestrated in such a fashion as to limit the electoral impact come November. While the convention at Utica adopted a short series of resolutions which fully endorsed the Compromise measures and effusively praised Fillmore's ascendance to the presidency, it also endorsed the same slate of candidates as the original convention. This was borne of recognition that splitting the Whig vote would hand victory to newly reunified Democrats. As Lee H. Warner describes them in his unpublished doctoral dissertation (to date the only extended treatment of this group), the Silver Greys were a complex coalition of Buffalo Fillmorites, New York commercial interests, 'Binghamton area conservatives' and 'anti-Weed dissidents.'[73] This was not an organised political movement, and it lacked official leadership or structure. It is unsurprising therefore, that Utica served more as a protest meeting rather

[69] Ibid.
[70] *The Buffalo Commercial*, October 23, 1850.
[71] Ibid.
[72] *The Buffalo Daily Republic*, October 2, 1850.
[73] Warner, *Silver Grays*, 145.

than a nexus for any dramatic political realignment. Nevertheless, the Bolter's justification for their actions, and the generationally charged press confrontation that followed, demonstrate the extent to which generational dynamics overlapped with running ideological divisions over slavery and compromise to define intraparty conflict.

National Whiggery and the Cotton Party

Thus far, this chapter has treated the Silver Greys as synonymous with the forty representatives that bolted the Syracuse convention and reconvened at Utica. However, the relevance of the group and the broader implications of its generational characterisation can only be fully understood when examined within a national context; divisions over compromise, slavery and the future of the Party extended beyond the boundaries of state politics. The Silver Greys shared their political ideology with so-called "National Whigs", a moniker for those across the North and South who eschewed sectional politics in favour of preserving the status quo. *The American Whig Review,* a New York City periodical edited by James D. Whepley, would ably serve as their mouthpiece, publishing a series of articles between 1848 and 1851 which set out a conservative Whig ideology predicated upon an aversion to constitutional change and suspicion of so-called "isms" (excepting, a devout Unionism). For national Whigs, agitation over slavery posed an existential threat to the Union: neither 'illusionary' nor 'confined merely within the narrow limits of party contrivances', the danger was imminent.[74]

Crucially, they contended that it was within their gift to avert the crisis. As opposed to any irretractable socio-political differences between North and South, the present danger was consequent of nefarious actors: 'the impulsiveness of some, the bad influence of others, and the selfish ambition of many, have wrought the public mind to a degree of excitements that

[74] 'The True Issue between Parties in the South: Union or Disunion', *The American Whig Review 6,* no.65 (1850), 587.

bodes dire and permanent mischief.'[75] Quelling this excitement necessitated acquiescing in the Compromise legislation, including the Fugitive Slave Law, opposition to which was as unacceptable as any other law regardless of moral qualms: 'whether the method advised by Congress for the recovery of fugitive slaves is thoroughly the best and most agreeable to the spirt of our fundamental laws, it is, nevertheless, held to be absolutely necessary for the peace of the Union.'[76] Ultimately, "National Whigs" conceived of themselves as bulwarks against 'two powerful factions… labouring to destroy the Republic', the abolitionists of the North, 'small in numbers but loud and active and influential' and a faction in the South, 'also small in numbers' but 'still louder and more dangerous.'[77]

National Whiggery served as a compelling ideological home for Whigs, including the majority of New York's Silver Greys, who supported the Compromise measures, cherished orthodox policies and politicians, but remained willing to cooperate with their antislavery colleagues in order to win elections. This was the position of Millard Fillmore, informing his restraint in removing Taylor's patronage appointees, and his decision to support Hunt for the governorship.[78] However, the levels of condemnation raised in response to the Utica convention evidences a third strand of Northern Whiggery which placed the Union (and often political or economic self-interest) above party loyalty.

For the *New York Herald*, Utica was a 'ridiculous exhibition of weakness, imbecility and timidity' which confirmed the death of the Party as a national entity.[79] The passage of 'a few milk-and-water resolutions' was farcical, and it was clear that 'abolition of the worst and most diabolical character' had become 'the distinctive characteristic of the Whig Party of

[75] Ibid.
[76] 'Political Motives for 1851-2', *The American Whig Review* 7, no.1 (1851): 7.
[77] 'Hints Toward Conciliation,' Lisbon Ohio, *The American Whig Review* 6, no.2 (1850): 114.
[78] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 598-599.
[79] *New York Daily Herald*, October 18, 1850.

New York', one 'ruled by demagogues.'[80] The failure of the Utica convention to nominate its own separate ticket encouraged those who sought the creation of an entirely new party, comprised of conservative Whigs and Democrats. Advocates of this realignment hoped to attract those who, aware of the dangers of sectionalism, stood steadfast behind the Compromise legislation without any qualification or embarrassment. Daniel Webster was the most prominent Whig to favour this action.[81] Following the split at Syracuse, and while reflecting on the relative calm in national politics proffered by the Compromise, Webster argued that a 'remodelling of the Parties' was not 'altogether improbable.'[82] In fact, he argued that if 'any considerable body of the Whigs of the North should act in the spirit of the [Sewardite] majority' at Syracuse, a 'new arrangement of parties is unavoidable.'[83] Specifically, Webster argued that those who continued to 'talk about Wilmot provisos, and to resist, or seek to repeal, the Fugitive Slave Bill, or use any other means to disturb the quiet of the Country' would have 'no right to consider themselves either as Whigs, or as friends to this Administration.'[84]

Webster's dismay with the growing fractures in New York Whiggery reflected dissatisfaction with politics in his native state. In a letter to Edward Everett in late September, as the Compromise legislation underwent its final readings in Congress, Webster bemoaned the Massachusetts state central committee's opposition, asserting that they 'pursued a miserable cause' on account of being 'one half inclined to abolitionism.'[85] He argued that 'when you deduct that, & also what belongs to them of other *isms,* there is very little of true, broad, just & liberal Whig principles left.'[86] In a subsequent letter to Fillmore, he described

[80] Ibid.
[81] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 606-607.
[82] Daniel Webster to Peter Harvey, October 2, 1850, *The Papers of Daniel Webster Digital Edition,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2018).
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, September 26, 1850, *The Papers of Daniel Webster.*
[86] Ibid.

how ‘all true Whigs’ and the ‘respectable portion of the Democratic party’ were satisfied with the course of the Administration, while decrying the ‘furious’ abolitionists and ‘quasi-abolitionists’ whose conduct in regard to the Fugitive Slave Law was ‘wicked and abominable in the extreme.’[87] He singled out the traditionally Whig *Boston Atlas* and the *Albany Evening Journal* as little better than the abolition presses, for encouraging ‘resistance, by force and to the death’ to any arrests under the law.[88] In January 1851, Webster confirmed the extent of his break with Massachusetts Whiggery when, in a letter to Boston Merchant, Thomas Buckminster Curtis, he argued that the duty of all the true Whigs in the legislature was to ‘join with honest and conservative democrats, & elect any good man of either party.’[89] He himself would ‘not hesitate to give [his vote] for a sound, sensible Union man of the Democratic Party.’[90] Webster sensed a growing appetite for a new Union Party, both in his native Boston and in nearly every major city along the Eastern Seaboard with economic ties to the South; with age failing to dim his presidential ambitions, Webster was prepared to take advantage.[91]

Accounting for some of the oldest, and most emphatic Silver Greys, wealthy New York City merchants were under sustained pressure from their Southern customers to demonstrate fealty to the Union (and the South); ‘the dry goods jobbers and merchants have been threatened… a call has been carried round… those whose names are not subscribed [to the new Union Party] are to have their Southern Trade withdrawn.’[92] Washington Hunt’s published acquiescence in the Utica platform, designed to head off efforts at establishing an alternative ticket, ultimately did little to sway those who feared economic repercussions of

[87] Daniel Webster to Millard Fillmore, October 14, 1850, *The Papers of Daniel Webster.*
[88] Ibid.
[89] Daniel Webster to Thomas Buckminster Curtis, January 20, 1851, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 636.
[92] *The National Era*, Washington D.C, October 31, 1850.

the growing influence of antislavery ideology in New York.[93] New York City's economy (and the balance sheets of prominent New York City Silver Greys such as Hugh Maxwell and Hiram Ketchum) were intrinsically linked to the success of the New York City Port.[94] Representing the northern tip of the "cotton triangle", in 1850 the port still served as a vital export node, where packets of cotton product brought up the coast from Charleston, Savannah or New Orleans were unloaded, and then reloaded onto new vessels before they were shipped directly across the Atlantic to Liverpool or Le Havre.[95] In addition, New York businesses played a vital role in financing any direct exports of cotton from Southern ports to Europe. While these ships did not carry their product through New York, the City still profited from the interest accrued on loans lent to Southern planters. As one historian of the port has summarised, 'in interest, commissions, freight, insurance, and from other similar sources, New York took its toll even on the cotton which never came past Sandy Hook.'[96] Any disruption of the political union which founded New York's intimate involvement in the cotton trade would come with huge personal financial risk to a host of prominent New York City Whigs and Democrats.

At Castle Garden on the evening of October 30, the venue's 'vast area and spacious galleries' were 'thronged by an immense multitude.'[97] Just over a month prior, 5,000 excited New Yorkers had packed its stalls to see Jenny Lind's first US concert, but now the hall had been adorned with all the trimmings of a patriotic rally; a portrait of Washington hung above the stage enshrouded in the stars and stripes, a myriad of patriotic slogans covered banners strung around the balcony, and over the entrance was emblazoned the meeting's rallying cry

[93] *The Fredonia Censor*, October 22, 1850.
[94] Warner, *The Silver Grays*, 152. Maxwell was the Port Collector, an office paid by a proportion of the customs and duties collected. Ketchum was a 'wholesale merchant.
[95] Between 1850 and 1853, 94,000 bales of cotton flowed through New York, compared with 982,000 bales that were exported directly from the South. Robert Greenhalgh Albion; with the collaboration of Jennie Barnes Pope, *The Rise of New York Port [1815-1860],* (New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), 116.
[96] Ibid., 114.
[97] *New York Tribune*, October 31, 1850.

— 'The Union: It must and shall be preserved.'[98] According to the *Express*, the meeting could easily boast to match the numbers of Lind's operatic premier.[99] It was, according to the paper, the 'most imposing public meeting' the City had ever seen and even Greely's *Tribune* confessed that it 'drew a crowd of considerable magnitude.'[100]

In his opening remarks, Nicholas Dean, President of New York City's Croton Aqueduct Department, justified the meeting by arguing that despite settlement in Congress, the country remained in a 'perilous period.'[101] This peril was inflicted upon the nation by a band of 'fanatics', 'visionary theorists' and 'disunionists', who continued to assail the Constitution through sustained opposition to the new Fugitive Slave Law.[102] After hailing the 'conservatives of all parties', Dean formalised George Wood's instalment as president of a new Union Safety Committee.[103] In his opening address, Wood echoed Dean in asserting the grave threat posed by abolitionism, a doctrine he argued threatened to 'terminate in the dissolution of our Union.'[104] Seeking to balance the increasingly antislavery colour of Northern public opinion, with a desire not to alienate Southern observers, he conceded that while ultimately, the 'progress of society' would tend to its abolition, the South ought to be 'allowed to judge for themselves' when that might be, without interference or pressure (economic, cultural, moral or political) from the North.[105] In fact, Wood sought to take aim at "morality politics"; rejecting the notion that slavery was in and of itself 'sinful', Wood cautioned of the dangers attendant to any excessive 'zeal and wild enthusiasm' for a

[98] *New York Tribune*, October 31, 1850.
[99] *New York Express* reprinted in the *Buffalo Commercial*, November 2, 1850.
[100] *New York Tribune*, October 31, 1850.
[101] *The Proceedings of the Union Meeting, Held at Castle Garden*. (New York: Published by the order of the Union Safety Committee, 1850), 5.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 6.
[105] Ibid., 7.

particular cause borne of conscience.[106] The sudden abolition of slavery would no doubt cause tremendous harm, raising the spectre of a 'servile insurrection' and Civil War.[107]

To avoid these calamities, Wood called upon attendees not only to actively oppose elements within their own parties who continued to agitate the slavery question, but to 'rise above the billows of party spirit' altogether, looking only to 'the Union, and the great interests which the Union involves.'[108] By supporting a new Party, which Webster no doubt hoped to lead, conservatives in both sections could seriously diminish the political power of antislavery or pro-session radicals, guarantee continued leadership in national politics, and preserve the security of the Union (with all its economic benefits). Indeed, any notion that the meeting at Castle Garden was a straightforward expression of devout unionism was undermined almost as soon as the delegates had left the hall. Suspicions that the new Committee could shape the November election by the introduction of a new ticket were confirmed on November 2nd. Led by Democrat Horatio Seymour, Whig George J. Cornell was offered up for Lieutenant Governor, Democrat John Cotton Mather for Canal Commissioner and Whig Wessel S. Smith for Clerk of the Court of Appeals.[109] This bi-partisan ticket was barely concealed realpolitik; by syphoning off Whig votes in the November election, it would serve as a boon for Democrat Daniel Dickinson's Senate bid. Indeed, the *Williamsburg Daily Gazette* in an article pointedly titled 'Cotton Party', suggested that the Union meeting had been 'got up' by a blend of 'men whose pecuniary interests are involved in the Southern trade, and by others, who wish to see D. S. Dickinson re-elected.'[110] The *National Era* similarly labelled it both a 'meeting of citizens… friendly to Daniel

[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 8.
[108] Ibid., 9.
[109] *The Evening Post*, New York, November 2, 1850.
[110] *Williamsburg Daily Gazette*, Brooklyn, New York, October 31, 1850.

Webster and Daniel Dickinson' and of 'those anxious to secure the custom of the Cotton Planters by anathematizing Abolitionists, and avowing devotion to the new Fugitive Law.'[111]

With the exception of the *Commercial Advertiser* and the *Herald*, the majority of the New York press were eager to expose the Castle Garden affair as yet another example of older partisans leveraging their wire-pulling nous to cling to power. Generational rhetoric, akin to that used after Utica, defined attacks upon the meeting. *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* for example, suggested that the notion of the 'hunkers of the two old parties' standing together on the same platform was 'more natural than strange.'[112] It mocked the question of which of the two old fogies, Webster or Cass, would run for the presidency, suggesting it was something only 'expert compromisers' could settle.[113] For the *Bugle*, the formation of the new Party was the result of personal ambition; the old parties were dying of 'delirium' and in particular, the Northern Whig Party was 'broken.'[114] The only route to the presidency therefore, for any Whig 'old fogie', was through an alliance of 'hunkerdom.'[115] Similarly, the *Buffalo Morning Express* suggested that the "Union Safety Committee" spawned at Castle Garden was the most 'remarkable aggregation of old fogies' while the *Evening Post* declared its president, George Wood an 'old fashioned cocked hat federalist.'[116] Finally, the *Buffalo Courier* dismissed those scheming for Dickinson as a 'collection of political fosils [sic]' or 'an impotent, helpless band of old fogies.'[117]

[111] *The National Era*, Washington D.C. November 7, 1850.
[112] *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, Lisbon, Ohio, November 30, 1850.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] *Buffalo Courier Express*, February 15, 1851; *The Evening Post*, October 31, 1850.
[117] *Buffalo Courier Express*, October 30, 1851.

A New Era?

For the editor of the *New York Tribune*, the 1852 presidential election heralded a 'new era in politics.'[118] The Scott-led Whig Party won in just four states, gained 42 out of a potential 296 electoral college votes, and trailed in the popular vote by seven percentage points (or 214,000 votes). Seeking to explain this catastrophic collapse in the face of a resurgent Democracy, Horace Greely suggested that it was not because of a 'popular aversion to its principles or its leaders, but [to] the ever-increasing and ultimately absorbing importance acquired by questions to which those principles bore no direct relation.'[119] For Greely, time had simply moved on; 'the veterans who had fought their best campaigns under the lead of Clay, Harrison or Webster…might persist in holding conventions, framing platforms [and] nominating candidates… [but] the young, the ambitious, the unprejudiced, had already perceived by instinct that the party… was so paralysed by divisions and defections founded on new or alien issues' that it 'could hardly be expected ever to carry the country again.'[120] The Whig Party died not because it was unpopular, but because a great proportion of its leaders were speaking to a bygone age.

Often the divisions within New York Whiggery, and the broader struggle between the administration and the antislavery elements across the Northern Whig Party, are presented in one of two ways. Either as the product of personal animosity, or as a sectional issue where, as Michael Holt suggests, the debate was whether the 'campaign needs of local Whigs should be placed ahead of intersectional comity within the nation and the national party.'[121] What both of these interpretations largely overlook, and what Greely's analysis points towards, are the generational differences which shaped Whig factionalism between 1850 and 1852. As the

[118] Horace Greeley, *The Autobiography of Horace Greeley, or Recollections of a Busy Life to Which Are Added Miscellaneous Essays and Papers,* (New York, 1872), 289.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 554.

previous chapter demonstrated, the Compromise of 1850 was often conceptualised in terms of generational obligation: either to preserve a peculiar constitutional inheritance which guaranteed the Southern states federal protection of their enslaved property, *or* alternatively, to challenge that right so as to spare future generations the sectional strife and moral bankruptcy of an enslaving polity. Sewardites and Fillmore's Silver Greys broadly adopted these two countervailing positions which became increasingly difficult to rationalise under the broad tent of a bi-sectional party; particularly in the absence of alternative distracting issues, when under pressure from a newly unified Democratic Party, and where existing personal animosities between Fillmore and Seward functioned as pre-existing fault lines. Even in the absence of any real generational gap between these two coalitions, the Silver Grey's attachment to traditional Whig leaders and policy invited accusations of fogyism and broader generationally defined rhetorical attacks which sought to diminish them personally and politically. As the subsequent half of this chapter will demonstrate, the pertinence of this generational rhetoric was not uniquely Whig and speaks to broader attempts to characterise the political transformations of the early 1850s as a struggle between old and new.

2 The Democratic Party: Fogyism and Young America

Following the passage of the Compromise legislation and the supposed quietening of the sectional agitation, most Democrats sought to return to the important business of winning elections. Sensing weakness in their Whig opponents, and dissatisfied with opposition, the election of 1852 *had* to yield a Democratic victory. However, a younger, self-consciously "progressive", and arguably radical element of the Party saw the turn of the decade as an opportunity to fundamentally alter Democratic ideology and leadership. Drawing on the generational posturing of their European namesakes, Young America challenged the traditional Jacksonians who continued to dominate the upper echelons of the Party and who felt they would be best placed to lead into the coming Presidential campaign. This section

will document the factors that propelled Young America to the forefront of both Democratic and national debates over territorial expansion, democracy and international intervention. It will then examine the generational (and highly derogatory) rhetoric which, originating in the *Review*, increasingly came to pervade the House and Senate chamber, serving both as a means of dismissing older politicians, and binding assumptions of progress with youth.

Historians have debated the extent to which the early 1850s marked a break within the Young American movement – what Widmer has termed 'Young America II' – and indeed this section will examine some of the discontinuities arising out of George Sanders' stewardship of the *Review*.[122] It will argue that the intra-party conflict of the early 1850s was the product of a shift in Young America's objectives and tone: while the movement of the mid-1840s (examined in Chapter I) sought to bend Democratic politics towards its expansionist vision, Sanders' early articles indicate a more aggressive attempt to displace the remaining Jackson-era leadership and to put Young America in the White House. As with the Whigs in New York, generational rhetoric was a primary tool used to stigmatise prevailing political norms and instigate political change. First, it was used to imply that "progress" (including territorial expansion, democratisation and the leveraging of new technological advances), could only be reached for by a new 'greatest generation', who by virtue of their modern education, lack of entrenched preconceptions, and youthful vigour (both mentally and physically) would be best placed to lead America in the coming decade. Second, it was used to make the case that, by opting for Young America, voters could avert the petty squabbling, factionalism, sectionalism and disunion proffered by traditional partisanship. Older politicians were presented as kleptocrats and party hacks, whose distended careers owed as much to ambitions for personal aggrandisement as devotion to the United States and its citizens.

[122] Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City'*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 185.

Democratic (re)Union

As the new decade commenced, the political skies looked increasingly sunny for the Democracy. While the Whigs forged ahead along the path to political oblivion, the Democratic Party was happy to capitalise on their erstwhile rival's travails. The breach which precipitated Lewis Cass' calamitous defeat in 1848 had been largely filled and across the North, Free Soilers increasingly coalesced with their old line Democratic counterparts in senatorial, congressional and state legislature campaigns.[123] In New York — the epicentre of the Free Soil revolt — prominent figures such as Preston King and even Henry Stanton (a former Liberty Party member and *Liberator* contributor) proffered reunion with their former Democratic peers, sensing that they stood a better chance of promoting the antislavery cause from government.[124] Even when that illusion was shattered by the State Party's full-throated support for the Compromise measures in 1850, the majority of the reconciled Barnburners chose to bite their tongues.[125] While tensions remained, across the Northern States, the Democracy increasingly presented a (re)united front to the electorate.

Furthermore, prevailing economic winds increasingly strengthened the Democrats' hand. Michael Holt has convincingly argued that several of the conditions which served to destabilise the Whig coalition were far less impactful, if not marginally beneficial for the Democratic Party.[126] Firstly, a burgeoning money supply (the product of California gold and increased British investment) rendered Whig calls for the liberal distribution of government capital moot.[127] Secondly, rising wages and profits among many of the North's most

[123] Jonathan Halperin Earle; *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 182-187.
[124] Corey M. Brooks; '*Liberty Power: Antislavery Third Parties and the Transformation of American Politics*, (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 173. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 187-190.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, (New York: W.W. Norton 1978), 111-122.
[127] Ibid., 111.

prominent manufacturers undermined the argument for protective tariffs.[128] Finally, bi-partisan support for the expansion of the United States rail network, to capitalise on the western land bounty, undermined Whig dominance of voters favouring internal improvements.[129] In summary, Holt has argued that the economic direction of the United States between 1848 to 1852, coupled with the positions of their incumbent presidents, essentially vindicated the Democratic economic program, rendering the last vestiges of Clay's 'American System' moribund.[130]

Within this favourable political climate, Young America seized the advantage. Its vision for an outward-looking continental empire, built upon the promise of manifest destiny and the unique capacity of the white male American for self-government, seemed closer than ever in the early 1850s.[131] In July 1849, the *Review* led with an article which explicitly tied Young America's generational understandings of the United States polity to the 'alembic of popular sovereignty and local rights.'[132] Pre-empting the political turmoil of 1850, the *Review* was plain in reasserting that 'every formidable question of government' had been, or would be solved by the 'test of popular sovereignty.'[133] The 1787 Northwest Ordinance, which antislavery politicians regularly cited as sacred, was dismissed as mere 'idle abstraction'; an undemocratic product of the Confederation which sought to 'bind future generations "forever".'[134] For the Review, the Revolution's 'cardinal principle' was that 'every generation [had] a right to govern themselves in their own way.'[135] As such, the 'the only possible solution' for the organisation of the Mexican territory was to 'recognise the sovereignty of the

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 272.
[131] Mark Power Smith, *Young America: The Transformation of Nationalism before the Civil War,* (Charlottesville, London: University of Virginia Press, 2022), 12, 25-51.
[132] 'Popular Sovereignty and States Rights', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 25, no.133 (1849): 4.
[133] Ibid., 5.
[134] Ibid., 7-10.
[135] Ibid., 7.

people of the new states as equal to that of the old', and to let them decide for themselves the fate of slavery therein.[136]

Ideology aside, political pragmatism also encouraged support for popular sovereignty. Given the climatic conditions in New Mexico and Utah, the *Review* considered it 'absurd' that politicians in Washington should 'dictate to a people that we know will do right' (meaning excluding slavery).[137] When Henry Clay introduced his compromise resolutions in January 1850 — which proposed the organisation of territorial governments in New Mexico and Utah without any federally imposed restrictions on slavery — Young Americans could see the outlines of their own policy. Clay too understood that, in addition to pre-existing Mexican Law, slavery depended 'upon the character of the climate'; the 'nature of the soil in New Mexico' forbade 'the expectation that slavery would ever be planted there.'[138] For Young America, Clay's position lent weight to the notion that popular sovereignty was not a partisan imperative, rather a rational (and natural) adjunct to the United States' democratic system.

In addition, the vital signs of the communication and transportation revolutions which underpinned visions of an integrated continental republic remained strong. The gold discovered in California in early 1848, and the acceleration of westward migration it induced, demonstrated the potential economic bounties promised by westward expansion. Through the use of popular sovereignty to ensure rapid organisation without congressional interference, California's gold would serve as a 'great instrument of… national progress.'[139] If well administered, an article in the *Review* even posited that it could fund the Federal Government, allow for the abolition of taxes on imports and the shrinking of the bloated federal payroll.[140]

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[136] Ibid., 10.
[137] Ibid.
[138] *The Papers of Henry Clay Volume 10*, 776.
[139] 'California Gold', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review 24*, no. 127 (1849): 3.
[140] Ibid., 13.

The tyranny of distance presented the only serious obstacle to Young America's Californian ambitions, and the 'Great Pacific Railroad' offered the solution. Facilitating a proper integration of California's gold wealth, furnishing industry with access to the burgeoning Chinese market, and even allowing the United States to serve as a trade conduit between Europe and Asia, the railroad was being actively lobbied for in Congress by the New York Merchant, Asa Whitney.[141] Summarising Young American assumptions, Illinois Representative Richard Yates (b.1815) declared in April 1852, that 'when we travel by steam, print by electricity, and talk by lightning', the United States could 'look forward, fearless of disunion, to… [a] magnificent destiny.'[142]

European Revolution

While the domestic situation was undeniably favourable to Young Americans, the movement also drew increasing strength and inspiration from events across the Atlantic.[143] The revolutionary movements of 1848 only served to reinforce confidence in the validity and 'global potency' of the United States' 'democratic institutions.'[144] Despite the two-week latency as news was steamed across the Atlantic, Americans maintained a voracious appetite for coverage of European affairs; enthusiasm for events saw solidarity demonstrations arranged, towns and counties renamed, and academic assignments set in secondary schools and universities, all of which considered and broadly celebrated European events within the reference framework of America's own revolutionary experience.[145]

[141] 'The Great Pacific Railroad', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 25, no. 19, (1849): 67-79.
[142] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 476.
[143] Smith, *Young America*, 81-110.
[144] Patrick J. Kelly, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Transnational Turn in Civil War History' *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 3 (2014), 435.
[144] Ibid., 434; Timothy M, Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 43.
[145] Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, 43.

However, in late June the 'transatlantic revolutionary community' that Americans celebrated, and that promised to 'draw the United States and Europe closer together in republican partnership', collapsed into violence.[146] Upwards of 1,500 Parisian workers would be killed, and over 12,000 arrested in the suppression of protests against the government of the Second Republic. Known as the "June Days", these events would pave the way for the election and subsequent coup of Napoleon III. Subsequently, the revolutionary movements of Hungary, Germany and Italy would all collapse in the face of autocratic and monarchical counter-revolution. While the total failure of the European revolutionary movements tempered enthusiasm among swathes of the US public and political class, Young America went undeterred.[147] The *Review* sought to draw a parallel between these regressive counter revolutions and America's contemporaneous Whig administration. As the French Republic was 'deceived' in 1848, so too, had been 'the American people… duped into the worship' of Taylor, 'a name merely victorious on the battlefield… who preferred personal ambition to the triumph of democracy.'[148] For the *Review*, 'the trampled or the cheated, the people outraged by a foreign conqueror, by an usurper or by an unfaithful government emulative of monarchic passions, whether in France or in America, look[ed] to '52 for redemption and redress.'[149] It was time that American foreign policy shifted from questions not of whether 'foreign despots… should beard us here' but to whether 'their impious practices shall for an hour longer be tolerated' in Europe itself.[150] Even without the deployment of any military force (although many favoured this course), Young America sensed that the United States could materially benefit the cause of Democracy in Europe.[151] With just a 'few emissaries', backed

[146] Ibid., 44.
[147] Smith, *Young America*, 81-82.
[148] 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 30, no.163 (1852): 2.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid., 5.
[151] Smith, *Young America*, 86-87.

by ‘the prestige of our Republican Flag’, the ‘sanctity of American soil’ and ‘the sanctity of mankind against every monarchy and oligarchy’ could be secured.[152]

Young America’s zeal for direct European intervention drew inspiration from its continental namesakes. In 1831, Giuseppe Mazzini had founded Young Italy, which through recourse to a deliberately youthful nationalism, opposed conservative bastions such as the Hapsburg Empire and the Papacy in seeking the unification of the Italian peninsular.[153] Then in 1834, young movements from Germany and Poland joined in association with Mazzini forming Young Europe in the hope of fostering a ‘European-wide revolutionary movement.’[154] Finally, in the early 1840s, Young Ireland emerged; similarly organised around a print organ – *The Nation* – the movement sought to accelerate the Irish towards independence through direct (and if necessary, violent) action. An attempted rebellion in 1848 ultimately saw many of the movement’s leaders imprisoned or deported, several across the Atlantic. Thomas Reilly, a Young Irelander who had regularly contributed to the *Nation*, would go on to co-edit the *Review* with Sanders.[155] Frequent in its denunciation of British rule and keen to emphasise the suffering of the Irish, *The Review* regularly touted Young Ireland’s independence efforts. In an article reviewing Michael Doheny’s *Felon’s Track* (an account of the events leading up to the ill-fated 1848 rebellion) the *Review* lauded Young Ireland as a ‘party destined to shed a glory on their era’ whose ‘name is since worldwide... synonymous with genius.’[156] Comprised of ‘young spirits, full of enthusiasm and sincerity’, Young Ireland was destined for triumph.[157]

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[152] ‘Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency’, 6.
[153] Eugenio F. Biagini et al., *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 276.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Smith, *Young America*, 84.
[156] ‘Young Ireland – The Felon’s Track’, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 26, no. 140, (1850): 133-142.
[157] Ibid., 136.

Historians such as Nial Whelehan and Roy Foster have emphasised how movements such as Young Italy and Ireland deliberately 'projected a generational struggle with the Old Order.'[158] They served as catalysts for young men who, disillusioned with existing political structures, sought new routes to maturity through revolutionary action. By setting age limitations on membership (like Mazzini), appealing to young men's desire for economic independence, or simply emphasising the patriotism or heroism of their cause, these groups successfully appealed to vast numbers of young men; Whelehan's figures suggest the average Fenian or Risorgimento volunteer was in his early twenties.[159] Of course, a crucial concern of these movements was demonstrating how the previous generation's failings justified their impatience for revolutionary action. One example was the dismissal of the '"milk-and-water men" of constitutional nationalism' in Ireland, for their years of successive failure in achieving independence via parliamentary action.[160]

Young America followed this template, defining itself as a progressive nationalist project which marked a distinct break from a previous generation of politics and politicians. Part of this was rejecting what many Young Americans viewed as excessive partisanship of the previous era, itself a barrier to national progress. The *Review* derided the 'constant scheming on the part of ambitious leaders to get up issues with which to agitate the public mind.'[161] These issues were used as little more than 'rallying cries at elections… to concentrate suffrages upon a candidate, or to draw off support.'[162] Supposing that as the size of the electorate increased, so too did the diversity of interests which defined the body politic, the *Review* foresaw that the magnitude of the agitating issue would always have to increase proportionally, driving the nation to its destruction. The slavery issue illustrated this danger:

[158] Niall Whelehan, 'Youth, Generations, and Collective Action in Nineteenth Century Ireland and Italy,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 4 (2014): 934–66.
[159] Ibid., 937-949.
[160] Ibid., 948.
[161] 'Popular Sovereignty and States Rights', 6.
[162] Ibid.

'driven from national questions, unscrupulous men seek in sectional jealousies to make themselves formidable as enemies when no longer trusted as friends.'[163] For the *Review*, agitation of the slavery question was the product of 'demagogues', 'apostate politicians' and 'reprobate parsons.'[164] Young America sought, particularly after 1850, to disentangle the Democratic Party from this version of politics.

In this vein, Young America also sought to undermine the other self-perceived progressive element within the Democratic Party. The *Review* metered particular disdain upon Van Buren and the 'free-soil chimera' who it saw as bearing responsibility for the Party's calamitous defeat in 1848 and the subsequent years in the political wilderness.[165] Rather than any virtuous principle, the *Review* declared the free-soil secession as product of the 'caprice of would-be leaders… plunder seeking politicians' and 'Kinderhook wirepullers' who placed 'individual aggrandisement' above 'national welfare.'[166] Reflecting on the defeat, the *Review* supposed those who had succeeded the Party were victims of 'clamour and misrepresentation', led astray by 'altogether disreputable [political] associates' like John Van Buren.[167] Bearing no antislavery streak (the *Review*'s contents and the majority of its contributors were profoundly racist, even by mid-century standards), Young America saw no reason to jeopardise the Democracy's political chances by unnecessarily antagonising the South. It stood firmly behind the Compromise measures of 1850 and the new Fugitive Slave Law. The slavery issue, and the party fracture it had created, had only served to distract from Young America's own "progressive" ambitions. Ultimately, an emboldened Young America would need to return the Democratic Party to the White House to fully institute its

[163] Ibid.
[164] 'Political', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 29, no. 162 (1851): 567.
[165] 'The Defeat', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 23, no 126 (1848): 451-452.
[166] Ibid., 452.
[167] 'Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 29, no.160 (October 1851), 368. 'Speech of Mr. Van Buren', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 29, no.157 (July 1851): 76.

progressive-democratic ideals. Young America's exceptionalist vision of the United States and its place in the world demanded 'a democratic administration', but crucially, one 'more progressive that we have hitherto been content with.'[168]

Rhetoric, The *Review*, and 1852

In March 1852 Edward C. Marshall (b.1821), a young Democratic Representative from California, stood in the House to comment upon 'the presidency, American progress, and in defence of judge Douglas.'[169] He sought to challenge a speech made by his contemporary, John Breckenridge (b.1821), then a Representative for Kentucky, which he considered an 'attack… upon the individual who is the favourite of the people' (Douglas) and 'upon those principles' he regarded 'as the life blood of American Democracy' (Young America).[170] Breckenridge was not surprised to be challenged in this way from his side of the House; his exchange with Marshall reflected an emerging, generationally defined schism within the Congressional Party over the Democracy's future political direction and leadership. Breckenridge himself had delivered a speech earlier that month defending his older friend and House colleague William O. Butler (b.1791) from attacks from a 'Democratic Source.'[171] That 'source' which incited this generational spat was the *Review,* and its latest editor, George Sanders.

Sanders (b.1812) joined the Democracy in 1844 as one of a new generation of partisans who favoured territorial expansion and, most pressingly, immediate Texas annexation.[172] He worked hard to ensure Polk's nomination at the Democratic convention and

[168] 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency', 6.
[169] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 383.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., 302.
[172] Melinda J. Senters, *George N. Sanders: A Political Confidence Man,* (PhD, University of Kentucky, 2006), 1-2.

success in the subsequent national campaign.[173] In the years that followed, he continued to embroil himself in expansionist schemes from Oregon to Cuba, while satisfying his revolutionary sympathies by dabbling in materiel exports to Europe.[174] By the turn of the decade, Sanders had established himself as a formidable political organiser; he assumed ownership of the *Review* courtesy of financial assistance from Stephen Douglas, and set about promoting the Little Giant's presidential bid. Historians have debated the extent to which Sanders' stewardship of the *Review* marked commencement of a second Young America, but there is no question that the rhetoric produced during the build up to the 1852 presidential election was the periodical's most incendiary.

In *Eighteen-Fifty-Two And The Presidency*, Sanders unleashed a wholesale attack on the failings of the Democratic Party, and in particular, its ageing Jacksonian leadership; 'if it were impossible for the old politicians, the surviving lieutenants of the days of Jackson to agree in 1848… it is then ten times more impossible for them to agree on the nomination of any one of themselves as a successful candidate now.'[175] For Sanders, this generation bore responsibility for the victory of America's 'Caesar'; Cass and Van Buren were equated with France's Cavaignac and Rollin as democrats who, by their own petty divisions, had 'permitted the power of the state to fall into the hands of... an imperialist faction.'[176] Old party leaders had brought 'feuds so galling, antipathies so irreconcilable, envy so unscrupulous' into the 1848 campaign that they had squandered the strong hand dealt to them by Polk (who Sanders gushed was 'brilliant and successful without parallel').[177] The failings of these old politicians left the door open for Taylor, rendering both the Democratic Party and

[173] Yonatan Eyal, 'A Romantic Realist: George Nicholas Sanders and the Dilemmas of Southern International Engagement' *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 1 (2012), 109.
[174] Ibid., 112.
[175] 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and The Presidency', 9.
[176] Ibid., 3.
[177] Ibid., 9.

the nation 'disgracefully defeated.'[178] To compound matters, in the succeeding four years these same politicians then 'intrigued with Abolitionists, "Unionists," or the Whigs', permitting all sorts of evils against the Constitution and the Republic.[179]

To emphasise that this was primarily a generational, rather than solely ideological attack upon the Democratic leadership, Sanders declared that even if, among 'the gentlemen of the past age', you could find 'clean hands' who had not cooperated with contemptable forces or placed personal gain above national comity, they would likely be incapable of 'grasping the difficulties of the present.'[180] In his view, existing party leaders were men out of their time; 'by their lack of statesmanship, lack of temper, lack of discretion and, most of all, by lack of progress' the previous generation had left the Democracy a 'mutinous wreck.'[181] Echoing Seward-Whig rhetoric, Sanders used a later article to double-down, describing them as 'clogs upon…progress and Republican advancement', 'individually deficient' in all except 'a questionable mediocrity.'[182] For Sanders, it was vital to impart that 'Progress' could only be delivered by a Young American. The next election, and the challenges the nation faced, demanded a change of leadership; age was to be 'honored' but 'senility [was] pitiable'[183] and 'the statesmen of [the] previous generation… must get out of the way.'[184] The 'presidential chain' had to be 'filled by a man not of the last generation, but of this, of the very time in which we live.'[185] By bringing 'young blood, young ideas, and young hearts to the councils of the Republic', the nation could better meet the challenges wrought by 'foreign intrigues' and 'sectional strife.'[186]

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[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] 'Congress, the Presidency and the Review', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 30, no.165 (1850), 203.
[183] 'Eighteen-fifty-two', *The Review,* 9.
[184] Ibid., 6.
[185] Ibid., 5.
[186] Ibid., 12.

The congressional clashes that followed Sanders' sensational article underline the pervasiveness of this generational formulation within mainstream Democratic politics; by 1852 the *Review* had a large and committed readership with significant power to influence congressional discourse.[187] Several Democrats echoed the *Review* in attacking older Democrats as intriguing and outmoded malcontents while simultaneously presenting 'progress' as contingent upon Young American leadership. When Edward Marshall launched his attack on Breckenridge, he mused that at only thirty-one-years-old, Breckenridge by virtue of his 'age… ought to be a friend of progress.'[188] Instead, his defence of Butler rendered him a 'young fogy', who had been manipulated by these seasoned politicians to argue their cause; for Marshall it was a 'high tribute to young blood and young energy, when an old and rotten course leans upon it for support.'[189] Parroting the *Review*, Marshall told Congress that the presidential candidate of the Democracy 'should personify the idea of national progress' and he characterised the coming nomination contest as an 'open war between Young America, with its progressive doctrines, and "Old Fogyism" and beaten candidates with retrogression as their motto.'[190]

Of course, orthodox Democrats did not fail to answer the taunts of Sanders and his congressional allies. Breckenridge's defence of Butler served as a full-throated rebuttal both of the tone of the *Review*'s rhetoric and the substance of its political program. Starting with the former, Breckenridge dismissed as absurd the premise of *Eighteen-fifty-two* — 'that no man who has been long distinguished either for his services or character is fit to be president.'[191] Exposing the *Review*'s seditious nature, he argued that the 'grossly personal and abusive' articles such as *Eighteen-fifty-two* and a further piece attacking William Butler,

[187] Power Smith, *Young America*, 16.
[188] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 383-384.
[189] Ibid., 383-384.
[190] Ibid., 385.
[191] Ibid., 302.

demonstrated that the periodical which was 'supposed to represent the interests of the whole party' was instead 'attempting to promote particular interests by traducing the most honoured names in our ranks.'[192] Democratic partisans sympathetic to Breckenridge and his allies lined up to challenge Sanders' generational vitriol on these grounds: for Robert Stockton, Democratic Senator for New Jersey, the term fogy was an 'ungracious phrase' which he could not utter out of personal respect and highest admiration' for those of 'long and faithful public services'[193]; the editor of the *Raleigh Register* dismissed Young America's 'language of ridicule and contempt' as 'ominous of disaster'[194]; and New York's Gilbert Dean decried the 'malice' of speeches which risked 'ostracising' half the Party.[195]

In addition to contesting this personal vitriol, Democrats like Breckenridge joined Whigs in challenging Young American ideology; self-professed 'progressivism' was dismissed as reckless radicalism or worse. While Breckenridge declared himself 'in favour of progress', he intended 'no wild and visionary' action 'that would sweep away all the immortal principles of our forefathers'; to 'hunt up some imaginary genius, place him on a new policy [and] give him "young America" as a fulcrum' would be to 'turn the world upside down.'[196] Breckenridge sought progress 'in line with the principles of our fathers… steady, rational' and 'not beyond the limits of the Federal Constitution.'[197] Above all, it was crucial that the 'Democratic Party adhere with immovable fidelity to the ancient and distinguishing land-marks of its policy.'[198] Aligning himself firmly within the bounds of party orthodoxy, Breckenridge sought to present the likes of Sanders as reckless, and their rhetoric as needlessly disrespectful and divisive. In denigrating the Democrats most famous statesmen as

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid., 1325.
[194] *Weekly Raleigh Register*, North Carolina, March 24, 1852.
[195] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 449.
[196] Ibid., 302.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.

'old fogies', many like Breckenridge felt that Young America was doing the Party irrevocable reputational damage. The course of the *Review*, was 'a course as fatal to the Democratic Party as it is false and unfair.'[199]

In addition to rebuffing the personal attacks on older politicians and challenging the *Review*'s conception of Progress, a further strategy was to deflect the generational rhetoric from intra to inter-party contestation. As New York's Gilbert Dean quipped, 'any kind of "fogies" suit me better than *whig fogies*.'[200] A new (and remarkably popular) campaign weekly published by a group of young New York Democrats called the *Jefferson Union* adopted this strategy when it sought to diminish Young America and the Whigs in one publication:

> 'Fogiedom is the territory of the Whigs, and we grieve to see some novel, but rash and careless spirits of our own Young America think of adding that barren waste to our domain. Foegies and Fogiedom belong to the Whigs and we covet nothing that is legitimately theirs… Young America should recollect that this miserable province of Fogiedom is not, and cannot be within the fertile limits of Democracy, and that it is most unkind, most unwise and most ungrateful to banish to its dreary solitude the old and faithful champions of the party, who bravely battled for the right over the cradles of these young standard-bearers.'[201]

For the *Jefferson Union*, rhetoric describing Democrats as 'old fogies' and 'spavined politicians' was the product of 'cliques' and 'malcontents'; fanatics who schemes were 'sure to come to nothing in the end.'[202]

Finally, there were those within the Young America movement who recognised the divisiveness of Sanders' publications and sought to qualify their attachment to the periodical.

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[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., 449.
[201] 'True Democratic Progress', *Papers for the People. To be Issued Weekly During the Campaign, Under the Patronage of the Entire Democratic Delegation in Congress, no*. 1-18 (New York: The Jefferson Union,1852), 37.
[202] Ibid., 3.

Stephen Douglas, sensing the threat posed by Sanders' venom, deployed Illinois Representative William Richardson to explicitly deny his attachment to the review in the House.[203] Even zealous Young Americans like William Smith, who when debating the introduction of a Homestead Bill described Young America as 'the living, breathing, energised action of the greatest generation the world has ever seen', saw the risks attendant to persistent application of generational derogations.[204] Smith rejected the 'epithet "old fogy" from his political vocabulary', regretting 'that it has been applied to… prominent members of the Party… who have covered themselves and their country with glory and honor, both upon the battle-fields, and in the councils of the nation.'[205] The phrase, Smith felt, was 'cruel, ungenerous, and heartless' and he questioned whether anyone was to be denounced as a Fogy upon arriving at 'the age of sixty or seventy years?'[206] For Smith, Young America encompassed 'all those intellectual persons… with laudable ambition, whether they are twenty, forty or sixty.'[207] It was 'all this glorious and growing generation, excluding the worn-out politicians and grannies in pantaloons' but not excluding 'old men because of their age.'[208]

Sanders' article and the congressional reaction it provoked highlight the salience of generational discourse in contemporary debates over Democratic Party ideology and leadership. 'Fogyism' became a rhetorical catalyst for defining and enforcing animosity between countervailing factions within the Democracy. In many respects, this reflects the rhetorical relationship between Sewardites and Silver Greys; in both parties, the push and pull between self-defined conservative and progressive elements was narrated in the language of

[203] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 711; Power Smith, *Young America*, 90.
[204] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 517.
[205] Ibid., 169.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 370.
[208] Ibid.

generations. However, as the following section will demonstrate, the overwhelming prominence and strength of Democratic engagement with this language reflected a genuine generational divide between candidates contesting the 1852 nomination, with profound consequences for the future of the Party and US politics more broadly.

The Baltimore Convention

The Democratic National Convention, held at Baltimore at the beginning of June, marked the climax of a generational struggle for the levers of party and government. On one side were the political stalwarts – Lewis Cass, James Buchanan and William Marcy, all comfortably in excess of sixty – and on the other was Young America. For the *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, 'the great fight' would be for 'power', pitching the 'young and progressive… against the "old fogies" who have had the control of the political wires for the last thirty years.'[209] Citing the desired qualities of a prospective Young America candidate, Sanders demanded youth: a 'man of mental capacity sufficient to grasp the exigencies of the nation', with 'education sufficiently modern to know the wishes and sympathies of the people, and…mental energy and physical vigour equal to his position and its emergencies.'[210] At just thirty-nine years of age in 1852, Stephen A. Douglas fit this brief, with his personal successes, western antecedents and expansionist record further strengthening his appeal.

Douglas' rise was nothing short of extraordinary. Having migrated west to Illinois at the age of twenty, by the age of twenty-one Douglas had obtained a license to practice law in Illinois, an achievement that would have taken upwards of ten years in New York or his native Vermont.[211] Soon after, he was engaged in Illinois state politics, first as a state attorney (1835-36) and then as a Representative in the Legislature (1836), before resigning his seat to

[209] *The New Orleans Weekly Delta*, December 1, 1851.
[210] 'Eighteen-fifty-two', *The Review*, 10.
[211] Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37-41.

accept his first federal appointment in 1837.[212] While he lost his first congressional campaign in 1838, by 1843 the then twenty-nine-year-old Douglas would take up a seat in the House.[213] His attraction, particularly among Illinois' younger voters, was in many ways a product of this meteoric ascent. Douglas had achieved something that most antebellum young men could only dream of; he had migrated west independently of family, established a profitable business, and launched a successful political career. As the historian Martin Quitt summarised, 'his long, solitary, perilous and ultimately successful journey from his family in New York to economic independence in Jacksonville charted a course to manhood they could all admire.'[214]

In the months leading up to the nomination convention, a host of young correspondents proclaimed theirs and their contemporary's support for the Little Giant; William A. Cave, a self-described 'humble citizen and young man', supposed that should Douglas be the Democracy's standard bearer a 'youth legion' could be raised to carry him to the Presidency.[215] Similarly, Indiana's A.F Chaplin and W. J. A. Roberts of Pennsylvania, both declared that the 'young Democracy' of their state would 'work with more zeal' with Douglas at the head of the ticket.[216] As a candidate drawn straight from the ranks of youth; Douglas held unique appeal at a time when, as Jean Baker has stated, the party was 'geriatric in its control and composition.'[217] As the *Illinois State Register* efficiently summarised, Douglas was 'a young man… mainly supported by young men.'[218]

[212] Ibid., 66.
[213] Ibid., 96.
[214] Ibid., 70.
[215] Stephen A. Douglas Papers, [Box 2, Folder 9], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.
[216] Ibid, [Box 2, Folder 12].
[217] Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 72.
[218] *Illinois State Register*, Springfield, February 19, 1852.

Douglas' youth paired with his self-made credentials lent him a unique class appeal; enthusiastic partisans could characterise him as a politician 'sprung from the masses' rather than one imposed upon them by party elites.[219] The *Semi-Weekly Standard* supposed that in an era of broad dissatisfaction with the traditional political parties, the 'young men of our country and the laboring classes' would 'flock to the standard of the man who was once an apprentice boy, but who by toil opened his way to distinction.'[220] Compared to Buchanan and Cass — who had attended relatively elite schools, amassed significant wealth, and had over the course of their extended careers settled into the nation's political elite — Douglas, 'brought up by a ground swell from the Young Democracy', could successfully be presented as something of an everyman.[221]

Lending further power to Douglas' candidacy was his particular strength in the West. As a biographical sketch from the *San Joaquin Republican* noted, there could be no doubt that 'the "Empire of the Pacific" prefers the "Young Giant of the West".'[222] In many respects this was again a product of his youth. Western states saw themselves as part and parcel of a renewal of the American nation; 'the country in which we live is a young country; the age in which we move is a new age', the paper declared, as it suggested that those in California were particularly aware that 'if there was a time when this country needed a young man as its chief executive, that time is the present.'[223] It was the 'young men of the country who have given to the west its mighty impetus and its creative power' and Douglas, 'not only as a young man, but a western man' who understood 'the wants, the spirit and genius of the west',

[219] *The Weekly Standard*, Raleigh, North Carolina, April 7, 1852.
[220] Ibid.
[221] *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, November 19, 1851.
[222] *San Joaquin Republican* reprinted in the *Illinois State Register*, February 12, 1852.
[223] Ibid.

was the perfect candidate to bring to the executive office the necessary 'zeal and vigor… enterprise and energy.'[224]

Finally, Douglas' political record placed him squarely in the Young America mould. Having been chair of the committee on territories in both House and Senate since 1845, he had a convincing record in support of territorial expansion, favouring Texas annexation, maximalist claims in Oregon, and even Cuban intervention.[225] Coupled with his solid support for a transcontinental railroad and a Homestead Act, Douglas was seen by one correspondent as the 'great originator' of schemes for 'opening up the resources of our Western country.'[226] While Douglas' expansionism would eventually render him one of the United States' most infamous politicians, in 1852, his personal strengths, congressional experience and political energy combined to make him a remarkable presidential candidate.

Of course, Young America's candidate faced stiff opposition. When the journalist, Francis J. Grund, surveyed the upcoming presidential race in 1851, he noted that 'the friends of the old fogies' were in the ascendency; while 'every young man under fifty… expresses a preference for Douglas', the 'old fogies' were sure to combine against Douglas so as to 'keep government in the hands of the sexagenarians.'[227] Lewis Cass, who returned for a second attempt at the presidency, was the most prominent of this class. His unsuccessful first campaign certainly curbed his draw, with Democratic papers dismissing him as an 'abortive statesman', a 'counterfeit' or 'feeble.'[228] However, as William Klunder has argued, 'Cass' moderate positions on controversial issues had widespread national appeal' and meant he retained the favour of conservative Democrats.[229]

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[224] *Illinois State Register*, Springfield, February 12, 1852.
[225] Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas,* 107.
[226] Stephen A. Douglas Papers, [Box 2, Folder 11].
[227] *Times-Picayune,* November 19, 1851.
[228] *The Old North State*, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, April 3, 1852.
[229] William C Klunder., *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation*, (The Kent State University Press, 2013), 255.

Much like their Whig counterparts, Democratic fogies tended to turn to history, as opposed to an imagined future, for their solutions to the United States mid-century political challenges. Embracing a phrase often used by his Young American colleagues, James Buchanan declared that if he had rightly 'read the signs of the times', there had 'seldom been a period when the Democratic Party…. was in greater danger.'[230] Recognising that the issues which formerly divided Whig and Democrats had largely been settled, Buchanan admitted that aversion of 'catastrophe' demanded that the Democracy and its candidates 'commence a new career.'[231] However, rather than turning to the 'mad schemes' of Young America – unfettered expansionism at home or reckless intervention abroad – Buchanan sought to revive debate over issues which had, nearly half a century prior, divided Federalists and Democratic-Republicans; the Democratic Party must turn to 'ancient and long-established landmarks of the party.'[232] This included 'a sacred regard for the reserved rights of the States — a strict construction of the Constitution — a denial to Congress of all powers not clearly granted by that instrument, and a rigid economy in public expenditures.'[233] In harkening back to these fundamental political issues, Buchanan sought to re-root the Democratic Party firmly in the traditional Jacksonian and pre-Jacksonian mould for which older, more politically experienced candidates would naturally take a leading role.

Cass broadly aligned with Buchanan in this instinct but was more open to meeting Young America on their own terms. Conscious of the generational dynamics shaping the nomination race, and keen to pre-empt some of Young America's harshest criticisms, Cass would lean on his expansionist record to emphasise that his physical age need not necessarily render him politically obsolete. On March 18, 1852, when discussing the prospect of

[230] Buchanan to Mr. Nelson, February 3, 1852, *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence Volume 8, ed. John Bassett Moore*, (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 433.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., 434.
[233] Ibid.

European intervention on behalf of Louis Kossuth, Cass acknowledged that even though he supported the Hungarian exile, he was unlikely to avoid being 'irretrievably passed into the category of "old fogyism".'[234] Accepting this, he sought to disaggregate his age and political instincts, qualifying his remarkable self-admission with assertions of what he called 'a lingering attachment to the progress of the age.'[235] This refers to his overarching support for territorial expansion and sympathy with European revolutionary movements.[236] Cass closed his remarks by likening himself to Thomas Jefferson, whom he argued had 'at the extremity of a long life, preserved all that attachment to human rights and freedom which had marked his earlier career…with convictions as strong, as the most energetic, efficient, care-for-nothing, stop-at-nothing, dare-everything young fogey of our day.'[237] In permitting charges of fogydom, while simultaneously emphasising his support for the likes of Kossuth, Cass sought to neuter the force of Young America's generational critique. There is some evidence this worked; shortly following his speech, the *Cincinnati Gazette* suggested that Cass' chances of the nomination had been enhanced on account of his support for what it termed the '"young idea" of intervention.'[238]

Ultimately however, whatever strategy the old fogies sought to apply, relentless criticism from the Young America sympathetic press continued to embattle their nomination campaigns. The *Gazette* immediately reneged on its tepid support for Cass by citing his failure to vote in favour of financing Kossuth's exploits; this action, despite numerous pronouncements of support, betrayed Cass' 'desperation of character' which left him 'wholly unsuited to these troublesome times.'[239] Whatever principles they claimed to represent, Young America simply could not trust a "fogie" to lead the Democracy in the coming decade.

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[234] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 310.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.
[238] *Cincinnati Gazette* reprinted in the *Buffalo Commercial*, March 26, 1852.
[239] Ibid.

Echoing a host of similarly minded papers, the *Gazette* wrote: 'the fate of the "old fogies" does, indeed, seem sealed; "young men" and "young ideas" are the present "democratic fashion" and these venerable gentlemen who have spent so many sweet years at the treasury tea, must at last yield the delightful post to those who have heretofore been content to live upon their bounty.'[240] Indeed, William Smith who opposed the use of fogy rhetoric to dismiss elderly statesmen, still felt it 'the duty of the friends of General Cass… to advise him to retire from the field'; Cass was, in Smith's words, 'evidently in the decline of life-physically, not intellectually.'[241] Even Buchanan rather ironically attacked Cass for his age: 'He is now three score and ten – beyond which, the good book says, if human life be extended, it is "labour and sorrow."'[242]

As the convention in Baltimore progressed, it became clear that the divisions within the Democratic Party were such that neither the Old Fogies nor Douglas could accumulate the two-thirds of the delegates required for the nomination; each would lead only to come short of the necessary 196 votes. Introduced on the thirty-fifth ballot, forty-nine-year-old Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, who had not held federal office since he resigned from the Senate in 1842, would be nominated to lead the Party in the coming election. Pierce represented a compromise candidate; older than Douglas by nine years, he nevertheless supported many of Young America's policy positions as an advocate of economic modernisation and territorial expansion. However, he was distant from the acerbic rhetoric of the *Review* that had riven the Party and ultimately would appoint a number of "old fogies" to his cabinet.[243] This compromise served to cool intraparty tension sufficiently to carry a deeply divided party to a crushing victory over the hapless Whigs.

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[240] Ibid.
[241] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 21, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (1852), 370.
[242] Buchanan to Mr. Johnson, May 20, 1852. *The Works of James Buchanan*, 450.
[243] David B. Danbom, 'The Young America Movement', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society,* 67, no. 3 (1974): 294-306.

Conclusion

Between 1850 and 1853 the generational dimension of United States politics moved in from the margins, assuming a central role in characterising political identities, and shaping political divisions. Daniel Webster and Lewis Cass might have hoped that their prominent part in averting disunion would have extended their generation's supremacy in national politics; the reality was that the partisan instability engendered by the Compromise debates only served to accelerate a generationally defined realignment of United States politics. The salience of generational rhetoric in shaping factional splits within, and between, the two main parties spoke to this reality. As one 1852 Douglas campaign pamphlet made clear, a generational transition was genuinely under way:

> The second generation of eminent American statesman is rapidly passing away. A few years and not one of them will be left among us. They themselves succeeded to the men of the early days of the Republic, and now in their turn they must give way to new men, not because they have failed to perform their work, not because they have lacked the power necessary in those men who are the leaders of the world in the great career of progress and improvement, but because it is the order of nature that they should give place to others. There is hardly one of the eminent men of this second generation, who is not either past the three score years and ten ordinarily allotted to man, or near upon that interesting period of human life.[244]

Among New York Whigs, those that admitted their admiration for this previous generation and hoped for continued guidance under their leadership, were levelled with charges of "fogyism". These so-called Silver Greys favoured a "conservative" policy defined by suppression of the slavery issue through Compromise and a continued adherence to the orthodox tenets of Whig policy. Sewardites by contrast, demanded political leaders who were

[244] 'Biographical Sketch of Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois', pamphlet printed by Towers, 1852 Presidential Campaign, Stephen A. Douglas. Papers, [Box 43, Folder 2], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

conscious that times had changed, specifically that the North was moving toward an antislavery majority, and who recognised their responsibility to challenge legislation – like the new Fugitive Slave Act – which would prove outrageous to their future constituents.

For Democrats, those of the Second Generation who sought the presidency faced similar rhetorical attacks. The articles of the *Review,* and the congressional interventions they inspired, identified and then emphasised a generational split within the Democratic Party. On the one hand, stubbornly conservative old fogies were reflexively cautious about engaging in Europe's revolutions, favoured strict constructionism and were sceptical of the rapidity with which Young America sought change. On the other, Young America was anxious to remove any barriers to their self-defined Progressive agenda. In both parties therefore, at a state and national level, generational divisions were crucial in shaping debates over the future of party leadership and policy direction. Through these debates, a distinctly negative framing of an older generation in politics became commonplace, laying the foundations of a political discourse which the Republican Party would leverage so effectively in the second half of the decade. Increasingly, it seemed there was simply no room for old men in politics; 'to expect that they can be much longer with us, or that, if spared, they can continue to guide the national councils with the same vigor as ever, would be a vain dream.'[245]

[245] Ibid.

IV

"A Party Chiefly of the Young Men": Generations and the Rise of the Republican Party

Between 1840 and 1850, debates over the morality, economics, and geographical limits of slavery assumed hitherto unrealised prominence in national political discourse. The preceding chapters have examined the generational dimensions of these debates, including analysis of how select Northern politicians came to view slavery's expansion as an intergenerational threat. Nevertheless, throughout the 1840s, nominally antislavery parties had demonstrated limited capacity for electoral success. The ten percent of the popular vote secured by Van-Buren at the head of the Free-Soil Party in 1848 had been their most significant accomplishment, but this came without a single vote in the electoral college. By 1852, that popular vote share had halved, with several of the Party's leading figures folded back into their respective Democratic or Whig coalitions; as one paper declared, the November returns suggested the 'rapid dying out of free soilism.'[1] Therefore, when the dust settled from the 1856 election, there could be no question of the seismic nature of the result. The Republicans claimed over three times Van-Buren's 1848 vote share, and a significant minority of electoral college votes (114). For the first time, an antislavery party had finished second in the presidential race, accruing sufficient support in the North so as to prove the electoral viability of a sectional party.

This crucial development has rightly commanded the attention of historians of antebellum politics and Civil War causation. After all, it was Lincoln's election without the support of a single Southern state that triggered secession.[2] This chapter will examine whether the conditions which catapulted antislavery politics from third-party purgatory to

[1] *The Pittsfield Sun*, Massachusetts, November 25, 1852.
[2] *Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union; and the Ordinance of Secession*, (Evans & Cogswell: printers to the Convention, 1860).

legitimate presidential challenger can be attributed to generational dynamics within the broader electorate. Historians tend to agree that the Republicans' relative success in 1856 was the result of an apparent 'special appeal to young men', however where there is less clarity, is on the precise causes and consequences of that appeal.[3] Modern associations between youth and radical politics invite historical scrutiny of that relationship within an antebellum context, specifically as a wellspring for the Republican Party's development.

The historian Matthew Karp has characterised the Republicans of 1856 as both 'revolutionary' and 'populist', directed toward the triumph of 'antislavery agitation in national politics', as opposed to any 'defensive' action against the Slave Power.[4] The extra-legal actions of vigilance committees, and congressional Republicans' contentious amendments to the army appropriations bill (which threatened to 'defund' the military), are cited as just two examples of how the new Party leveraged the supposed 'authority of the people' to justify a fundamentally radical policy platform and to deliver a seismic electoral result.[5] While Karp does not explicitly define Republican populism as an artifact of generational dynamics, his frequent reference to younger partisans like the 'brash young Anson Burlingame' or Owen Lovejoy's 'younger anti-slavery ally' John F. Farnsworth, implicitly centralise youth in the Party's attempts to cut 'through the old interests, institutions and intricacies that had long shielded bondage from popular opinion.'[6]

This chapter will build upon Karp's argument, examining the gendered generational dynamics of nineteenth century organised abolition. It will demonstrate how from the 1830s onwards, there came increasing recognition of younger Americans centrality to any future sustainable antislavery coalition. This was particularly true after 1850, when evidence of the

[3] William Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 435.
[4] Matthew Karp, 'The People's Revolution of 1856: Antislavery Populism, National Politics, and the Emergence of the Republican Party', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 9, no. 4 (2019), 524.
[5] Ibid., 537.
[6] Ibid., 533.

relative prominence of youth engagement in antislavery politics revealed them as the cause's most vigorous proponents. Crucial to shaping this relationship were young women. The writings of female abolitionists demonstrate a deftness in capitalising upon mid- nineteenth century gendered understandings of morality. Women were said to be uniquely placed to guide their male counterparts in matters of religious or moral concern, and this was particularly true with regard to the "rising generation". Through their specific role as mothers, women could shape young American's moral frameworks, defining future voters' assumptions regarding slavery and its place in the Union.

In a sense, this chapter builds upon the historiographical foundations of so-called "fundamentalist" historians including Dwight Dumond, Don Fehrenbacher and Richard Sewell, who each placed a growing Northern moral opposition to slavery at the heart of the Republican Party's origin story.[7] Sewell, for example, was unambiguous: 'there can be no question that hostility toward slavery lay at the very core of Republican ideology, that nearly everywhere it overshadowed and subsumed all other issues.'[8] More recently, James Oakes has taken up the fundamentalist mantle, arguing that the Republican Party's primary objective was slavery's 'ultimate extinction'; an absolute commitment to freedom in the territories combined with the withdrawal of federal protections for enslaved property, would serve as a

[7] Fundamentalist historians are often pitched against neo-revisionist, a distinction premised upon contrasting assumptions regarding the authenticity of the new Party's antislavery antecedents, the strength of Northern opposition to slavery versus the "Slave Power", and the importance of alternative political issues (specifically Irish immigration). William Gienapp's *Origins of the Republican Party* for example, argues that the intensification of ethnocultural issues in the early part of the decade, namely Nativism and Temperance, precipitated a serious disruption of existing party lines. Antislavery politicians subsequently capitalised upon this disorganisation and, aided by the sectional ructions triggered by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, successfully made 'anti-slavery-extension' the primary opposition to the Democracy. Gienapp's emphasis on Republican politicking echoes historians who unequivocally dismissed 'popular disagreements' over slavery as the cause of politics sectional turn. Michael Holt, for example, argued that Republican success was born from a cunning exploitation of 'sectional grievances', convincing the majority of the Northern electorate that they were the only possible defence against the nefarious power of Southern slavocrats.

[8] Richard H. Sewell., *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 7.

tightening noose on the institution.[9] Oakes' position has been fortified by more tightly scoped works from Corey Brooks, whose analysis of antislavery third-parties designated the Republican Party as the first 'viable vehicle' for 'political abolitionists' revolutionary ambition and John Brooke, who argued that 'Republican mobilisation was embedded in the new antislavery culture forged over the previous years.'[10] While accepting slavery's place at the heart of the Republican Party's origin story, this chapter will argue that to a large extent, the links between antislavery and Republican success were generational in character.

However, as the latter half of this chapter will acknowledge, a laser-like focus on the more radical antislavery elements of the new Party can obscure the complexity of its coalition. A further strand of historiography both accepts slavery's centrality to the Republican movement while granting that its rise cannot be entirely explained by Northern radicalisation. Citing the public statements of former Whig Senators Thedore Frelinghuysen and Hamilton Fish, Party conventions which stressed the new movement's Founding roots, the editorial interventions of Henry Raymond's *Times* and (perhaps most surprisingly) Bennet's *Herald,* Adam I.P. Smith has made a compelling case for the Republican Party's fundamental conservatism.[11] If anything, charges of fanaticism were as likely to be levelled at Democrats by Republicans as the other way around; the notion that the Republican movement – 'eminently national and conservative' – would serve as a bulwark against an increasingly 'radical pro-slavery Democracy' became a common thread of political discourse.[12] In Smith's telling, the success of the Republican Party was not necessarily the

[9] James Oakes., '*The Scorpion's Sting': Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 33.
[10] Corey Brooks, *Liberty Power: Antislavery Third Parties and the Transformation of American Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 214-216; John L. Brooke, *"There Is a North": Fugitive Slaves, Political Crisis, and Cultural Transformation in the Coming of the Civil War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), 282.
[11] Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846–1865,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 92–99.
[12] *Vermont Phoenix*, April 17, 1858; Smith, *Stormy Present*, 95-99.

product of Northern radicalisation, but a 'gradual recognition that stern, disciplined violence was the necessary means of securing the Union and preserving freedom.'[13]

Smith's analysis speaks to the multi-dimensional nature of the Party's generational appeal. To the extent that Republicans did deliberately court younger voters, it is important to assess how much of that was premised upon moral opposition to slavery, and how much owed to broader dissatisfaction with existing political orthodoxy. The generational elements of candidate selection in 1856 - and to a lesser extent in 1860 - reveal the degree to which the Party's novelty buttressed its stock with younger voters. Furthermore, as the private correspondence and published campaign literature of younger partisans document, Republican's proposed economic policies and constitutional outlook were themselves crucial to attracting a broader spectrum of younger voters. Ultimately, the central objective of this chapter is to determine the precise nature of the relationship between the emerging Republican Party and voters who, born after 1830, came of age in the late 1840s and 1850s at a time when sectional politics threatened the social, economic and institutional stability of the United States. By elucidating the relationship between this "Fourth Generation" and the new party, this chapter will form a crucial component in answering one fundamental question of this dissertation; the extent to which generational identity and division shaped the coming of the American Civil War.

1 Generational Replacement, Abolition, and the Formation of an Anti-Slavery Majority

In its second annual report, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) declared young men the 'hope of our country'; with their 'souls' yet to grow 'callous under the influence of time-serving expediency', it was young men who had 'taken the side of the

[13] Smith, *Stormy Present,* 99.

slave' and were ready to render 'justice upon the soil.'[14] Here, the AASS spelled out a commonly held assumption among antebellum abolitionists: that abolition itself was an enterprise of youth.[15] William Lloyd Garrison was just twenty-six when, along with the twenty-seven-year-old Isaac Knapp, he published the first issue of *The Liberator*. Nearly three years later, Garrison would assemble sixty delegates in Philadelphia to establish the AASS, at least a third of whom were under the age of thirty.[16] Of the forty-seven delegates for which birth years are available, their average age was just thirty-four. Other prominent abolitionists were similarly youthful; Frederick Douglass was even younger than Garrison when he addressed his first antislavery convention in Nantucket in the summer of 1841. Reflecting in his biography, he described his twenty-three-year-old self as 'young, ardent and hopeful', entering 'upon his new life in the full gush of unsuspecting enthusiasm.'[17] It was this enthusiasm, and youthful vigour, that drove the movement in its earliest years. The inception of organised antislavery in the Northern United States was defined and directed disproportionately by a younger generation.

This pattern of youth engagement became a central feature of the movement in the succeeding decades. This dissertation has already examined contemporary perceptions of an association between young Americans and antislavery sentiment in the Northern states; specifically, how certain Northern Whigs considered it a generational obligation to oppose

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[14] *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society with the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, Held in the City of New-York on the 12th May, 1835: And the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business,* (New-York: Printed by William S. Dorr, 1835).
[15] Historians too have increasingly recognised the association between youth and abolition. Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause* declared it a 'young people's movement' while Michaël Roy's *Young Abolitionists* goes further, examining how abolitionists increasingly brought children into the fold. See Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017) and Michaël Roy, *Young Abolitionists: Children of the Antislavery Movement,* (New York: NYU Press, 2024).
[16] Anti-slavery Convention, *Declaration of Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled in Philadelphia, December 4, 1833.* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Anti-Slavery Society, 1844).
[17] David W. Blight, (contributor James Brewer Stewart), *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: His Radicalism and His Legacy for Our Time,* (United States: Yale University Press, 2008), 6. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written by Himself* 'eds' Celeste Marie Bernier and Andrew Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

further concession to the slave interest. Their assumptions rest upon an expectation that generational replacement would result in an antislavery Northern majority. This section offers a fuller examination of contemporary perceptions (and the realities of) the relationship between youth and antislavery as it developed through the 1850s, specifically examining women's essential role in shaping the moral assumptions of America's "rising generation".

In August 1850, Sallie Holley (b.1818) was invited to address an audience at Ohio's Oberlin College. The first college to accept both African Americans and women, Oberlin was a hotbed of abolition, with students and faculty regularly lending their pen to pages of Garrison's *Liberator*. Holley had been exposed to antislavery politics from childhood; the daughter of Myron Holley, a founding member of the Liberty Party, Myron's understanding of abolition as a political action shaped Sallie's own brand of antislavery activism.[18] When devising her address, she made clear student abolitionist's responsibility to consider and steer events in the political sphere: 'the duty of antislavery women [was] to keep informed as to the progress and mode of the antislavery reform in our nation, to be ready to counteract the pernicious influence of such speeches as Clay's and Webster's on the plastic minds of all our young men and women.'[19] Congressional efforts to leverage fears of disunion to impress compromises over slavery had to be challenged, and abolitionists like Holley sought to be in the vanguard.

Holley's diary speaks to the critical importance of young women as arbiters of future generation's moral stance on slavery. Historians have been unequivocal in staking out women's centrality to the antislavery movement; for example Manisha Sinah has described women as 'abolition's most effective foot soldiers.'[20] Their 'political activism' has often been

[18] Sallie Holley, *A Life for Liberty, Anti- Slavery and Other Letters of Sallie Holley*, John White Chadwick 'ed', (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 42.
[19] Holley, *Life for Liberty*, 68.
[20] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 266.

explained by citing contemporary understandings of their discriminating religiosity and associated moral superiority, which rendered them natural allies of reformist movements.[21] The prominent transcendentalist, Theodore Parker for instance, justified his argument for women's involvement in government by asserting their lead in 'moral, affectional and religious intuitions.'[22] He explicitly tied his argument to the slavery issue questioning whether women, if given administrative power, 'would have spent three or four thousand dollars to kidnap a poor man' or 'drilled three hundred men, armed with bludgeons and cutlasses, to steal a man and carry him back to slavery?'[23]

Women's unique role in shaping the so-called rising generation – as mothers – has seen particularly prominent treatment. In a series of lectures on the *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, Unitarian minister George Washington Burnap declared women 'the mistress of the fortunes of the world.'[24] By 'holding in her plastic hand the minds and hearts of those who are to mould the coming age, at that decisive period when the character is determined and fixed for good', women presided 'at the very fountain head of power.'[25] Indeed, as the historian Barbara Welter has argued, women's authority in this regard was absolute; while men were out 'chasing the dollar', women bore full responsibility in the domestic sphere for the 'inculcating of virtue' among their children.[26]

However, as Julie Roy Jeffery has noted, the boundaries of that sphere were 'permeable.'[27] While Burnap was in the majority, viewing women's involvement in public lectures as likely to 'unsex and degrade', reformists like Parker were relieved to see women

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Thedore Parker, *A Sermon of the Public Function of Woman: Preached at the Music Hall, March 27, 1853, by Theodore Parker,* (Massachusetts: Robert F. Wallcut, 1853).
[23] Ibid., 16.
[24] George Washington Burnap, *The Sphere and Duties of Woman: a Course of Lectures* (Maryland: J Murphy; Kay & Troutman, 1851).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 171.
[27] Julie Roy Jeffrey, 'Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres' *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (2001): 79–93.

successfully 'pressing in' to the New England public lecture scene.[28] Through the 1830s, a host of specific female antislavery societies had sprung up alongside their male-dominated counterparts amid questions regarding the limits of women's involvement within the new movement.[29] By the end of the decade, women were progressively integrated into national and local abolitionist societies, and recognised as key assets in shaping Northern opinion. As public activists, their writings and orations were seen as particularly effective in provoking moral concern with the brutality of human bondage. Holley herself formed part of a 'travelling party' of antislavery lecturers, comprised of other young women including Caroline Putnam (b.1826) and Josephine Griffing (b.1814), who delivered at hundreds of engagements through the early 1850s. As their oratorical careers took off, even churches initially sceptical of female lecturers were impressed by how they related such 'thrilling and affecting facts' that 'big tears coursed down many a cheek… stirring sympathy and awakening interest in the cause of the oppressed and crushed slave.'[30]

Women played a vital role in shaping younger American's antislavery moral framework both within the domestic and public spheres. Seventeen years after the formation of the AASS, slavery remained a seemingly untouchable institution. Rather than expediting its collapse, organised abolition compelled enslavers to lean upon the federal government as a shield against encroachment. As Frederick Douglass' *North Star* stated, by the mid-century abolitionists had fair 'reason to believe that to the young of this day, the slave and this country are to be indebted for emancipation.'[31] Up to 1848, that paper felt that 'in our impatience to see the result of our labours, in the destruction of slavery' abolitionists had 'hitherto devoted little time to impressing the young with antislavery sentiments and

[28] Parker, *A Sermon of the Public Function of Woman,* 14.
[29] Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 170-177.
[30] Holley, *Life for Liberty*, 71-72.
[31] *North Star*, Rochester, December 8, 1848.

principle.'[32] By identifying the 'plastic minds' of youth as her principal audience, Holley followed other abolitionists in recognising their cause would likely depend upon the 'rising generation', and the centrality of women's role in ensuring their support. In an 1847 speech to the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, the formerly enslaved abolitionist William Wells Brown was plain: 'the older ones have got their old prejudices and their old associations, and they cling to them, and seem not to look at the slave or to care anything about them…. I look to the rising generation. I expect that the rising generation will liberate the Slave.'[33]

With the allegiance of America's youth a primary concern for abolitionists, 1850 offered a valuable opportunity. Several historians have detailed the role of the Fugitive Slave Law, and the array of cultural productions which followed, in baring Northerners to the cruel realities of enslavement.[34] Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*UTC*) is the foremost example of this; with its first chapters published in Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era* in the Spring of 1851, the work became an instant sensation. John Jewett, the Boston publisher responsible for the two-volume novel, boasted of selling 50,000 copies in just eight weeks.[35] Leaning upon existing slave narratives, thousands of Americans were captivated by the apparent authenticity of Tom's story, and appalled by the abhorrent details of Simon Legree's brutality.[36] Crucially, both its advocates and critics recognised the profound impact of Stowe's work upon America's youth. In its review of *Uncle Tom*, Garrison's *Liberator* emphasised 'the effect of such a work upon the intelligent and humane minds coming into contact with it… especially among the rising generation.'[37] Exposure to Stowe's narrative in

[32] Ibid.
[33] William Wells Brown, 'A Lecture Delivered Before the Female Antislavery Society of Salem: at Lyceum Hall, Nov. 14, / By William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave; Reported by Henry M Parkhurst' *Slavery Abolition and Social Justice, 1490-2007,* (Boston, 1847), 22.
[34] Brooke, *'There is a North',* 116-201.
[35] Claire Parfait, *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852-2002*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 55.
[36] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or: Life Among the Lowly*, (Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions, A division of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc. 2014); Sinah, *The Slave's Cause*, 441.
[37] *The Liberator,* March 26, 1852.

these formative years would 'awaken the strongest compassion for the oppressed and the utmost abhorrence of the system which grinds [African Americans]… to the dust.'[38] Similarly, an alarmed Southern columnist decried *UTC* as a literary attempt to 'fasten upon the mind of the rising generation of the North, the belief that the whole South is filled up with a company of unmitigated monsters and libertines.'[39]

The sentiment stimulated by works such as *UTC* was increasingly channelled into organised expressions of resentment and action. Indignation meetings and vigilance committees proliferated across the North and here again, young Americans played a prominent role. The arrests of supposed 'fugitives' became scenes of 'great excitement and agitation.'[40] Ellen Birdseye Wheaton (b.1816), another young abolitionist from Syracuse, describes the 'angry' crowds that swelled around the police offices, and the multiple, often violent, attempts at rescue pursued by members of the public. For Wheaton, it was cheering to see the 'number of persons who, having never felt any interest in the cause of the slave before, now seem to have all their feelings roused, and their sympathies awakened, in his behalf.'[41] One such unlikely convert was William Chaucey Langdon (b.1831), the founder of Washington D.C's Young Men's Christian Association. Langdon, who often hailed Clay and Webster as the nation's 'two greatest men', was ordinarily disposed to moderate politics.[42] His YMCA had passed motions which explicitly 'prohibited' any 'discussions of a sectarian (or political) character calculated to impain the association.'[43] Its committee preferred to eschew any direct involvement with temperance or comment on slavery, in favour of the

[38] *The Liberator,* March 26, 1852.
[39] *Saint Paul Weekly Minnesotian*, February 23, 1856.
[40] Ellen D. Birdseye Wheaton, *The Diary of Ellen Birdseye Wheaton*, 'ed' Donald Gordon, (Boston: [s.n.]:1923), 120.
[41] Wheaton, *Diary of Ellen Birdseye Wheaton*, 123.
[42] William Langdon, Diary, October 22, 1852, *William Chauncy Langdon papers*, 1600-1903, Library of Congress.
[43] Young Men's Christian Association Minute Book, Washington, D.C., records, 1852-1903, Library of Congress.

promotion of 'fraternal sympathy.'[44] And yet, when one of his servants – Linette – informed him of the seizure of her fiancé and his imminent delivery into bondage, Langdon was appalled. In his diary he recorded his efforts to ensure Linette would see her fiancé again, stating that Linette's story had 'cut him to the quick.'[45] For the seemingly moderate Langdon, 'such occurrences were enough to make one turn abolitionist at once.'[46]

The reaction to the Fugitive Slave Law reinvigorated associations between youth and abolition that had existed since the formal organisation of the movement in the 1830s. Shortly preceding the 1852 presidential election, a writer for the pro-slavery *Jacksonville Republican* mused on the abolitionist's strategy. While their cause was 'not yet strong enough to overcome party attachment or organisation', their work to 'prepare the minds of the Rising Generation' was as dangerous to Southern men as 'all the Wilmot provisos ever formed.'[47] Supposing that on 'every drawing room table of the North' lay illustrations of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin or the horrors of slavery', the writer pictured children, clustered of an evening around the pictures, 'their tender minds drinking in the poison.'[48] The North's 'youth… whose ardent nature and romantic susceptibility make him capable of early impressions', inhabited a world where the 'Southern tyrants name is used to terrify, or the negroes lament sung to soothe.'[49] This Southern writer's concerns were well founded; abolitionists ensured that the moral injuries inflicted by the Fugitive Slave Law upon Northern states did not go unnoticed by the rising generation. Through the mid-century, abolitionist associations, lectures, literature and press were increasingly aimed at inculcating America's youth with an unmoving moral

[44] Ibid.
[45] Langdon, Diary, September 3, 1853, *William Chauncey Langdon Papers*.
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Jacksonville Republican*, October 26, 1852.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

opposition to a fundamentally cruel institution. The efficacy of this strategy would form a crucial pillar of Republican success in the years that followed.

2 Kansas-Nebraska: Generational Failure or Opportunity?

As the Fugitive Slave Law continued to provoke grassroots opposition to slavery through the early 1850s, the façade of sectional calm that the Compromise fostered in congressional politics would also come to an abrupt end. In January 1854, Stephen Douglas added new fuel to the sectional fire. Determined to continue the United States' westward march and to reap the (personal) financial rewards of a Pacific railroad routed through Chicago, Douglas proposed the organisation of Nebraska territory, 'with or without slavery, as their constitutions may prescribe.'[50] For many this was concerning enough, raising the prospect of further agitation in Congress over the slavery issue that the 1850 Compromise (and both main parties) promised to silence. However, Douglas then had his hand forced by a coterie of Southern senators into including an explicit repeal of the Missouri Compromise Line, so as to remove any confusion over the legality of slavery's potential expansion into the new territories.[51] Douglas' new bill, introduced in late January, has been described by Adam I.P. Smith as 'the most ill-judged piece of legislation in the history of the Republic.'[52] The public backlash to it was instant and violent, Douglas famously quipping that he 'could travel from Washington to Chicago by the light of [his] own effigy.'

The Nebraska Bill reinvigorated generationally charged division regarding compromise, slavery and its place within both the Western territories and the United States more broadly. Accelerating the dramatic realignment of US politics initiated by the Whig Party's dismal showing in 1852, it reopened sectional wounds which had not long healed

[50] *Congressional Globe*, Volume 23, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, (1854), 295.
[51] Alice Elizabeth Malavasic, *The F Street Mess: How Southern Senators Rewrote the Kansas-Nebraska Act*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
[52] Adam I.P. Smith, *The American Civil War*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2007), 40.

from the political traumas of 1850.[53] Among rhetoric which painted the Act as the death knell of Northern liberty, several politicians and press commentators focussed upon the generational stakes of its passage. Characterising the 1850s as a period of generational transition, several reasoned that a purported third generation of Americans faced the same fundamental choice between 1854 and 1856 – regarding slavery and its place in the Union – as their forebears had between 1819 and 1821, and 1787 and 1789. In situating the crisis over Kansas within a generational framework, contemporaries on both sides of the Mason Dixon line sought to justify their opposition or support for slavery in the territories in terms of respect for both an imagined past, and implications for an unknown future.

In August 1854, Montgomery's *Advertiser and Gazette* reprinted a report from the *Charleston Courier* on proposals for a Southern Pacific Railroad. Edited by the Massachusetts born Aaron S. Willington, the *Courier* had long been a moderating voice against the Southern nationalism espoused by the *Charleston Mercury,* often electing to focus on the City's commercial interests over political machinations.[54] Nevertheless, the *Courier* felt obliged to report on the memoir of a recent commercial convention, which argued that the necessity of a Southern route derived from a need to temper the increasing power of the Northern States. The paper lamented the ostensibly inevitable demographic trends that would lend the North 'a continually increasing majority in both branches of the National Legislature.'[55] Articulating a deep-rooted concern among Southerners regarding the Northern states accumulating influence, the authors ominously declared that 'power has never dwelt long anywhere without first being used and afterwards abused.'[56] While acknowledging that

[53] The Kansas-Nebraska Act, introduced by Stephen A. Douglas sought to organise the United States territories of Kansas and Nebraska based on popular sovereignty, whereby the settlers in each territory would elect a territorial government which would then draft a constitution either permitting or outlawing enslavement as the local settlers saw fit.
[54] Herbert R. Sass, *Outspoken: 150 Years of the News and Courier*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958), 14-16
[55] *The Weekly Advertiser and Gazette*, Montgomery, Alabama, August 30, 1854.
[56] Ibid.

the majority of the Northern population remained 'sincerely and from patriotic considerations attached to the Constitution and Union', it feared this feeling did 'not gain strength as generation follows generation.'[57] Native born and foreign immigrants both bore responsibility for this lack of faith in the constitutional order: 'the children do not revere the constitution as their fathers did.'[58] The memoir supposed that as these younger Americans flowed 'into the open and inviting north-west, the most skilful analysis would scarcely detect a trace of veneration for the constitution or love and affection for the Union.'[59] Here, the authors defined a generational risk to Southern interests, and by extension the Union, mirroring Northern rhetoric which characterized generational replacement as central to redefining the United States' relationship with slavery.[60] Younger generations in the North bore fewer constitutional attachments; as their number grew in the West, so would the risk to the Southern states of an overbearing Northern majority.

However, Northern opponents of the Nebraska Bill used similar generational arguments to imply that it was the South who promoted divergence from the preordained constitutional order. The young Whig William M. Evarts (b.1818), in addressing a host of New York fusionists, essentially inverted the argument presented in the *Courier.* Succeeding generations, rather than losing reverence for the Union and its founding principles, were those most likely to return to them. In Evarts' history of federal policy, at 'the very outset of our government, the common territory, unoccupied by any state jurisdiction, was all devoted by a solemn ordinance to Freedom forever'; here he referred to the Northwest Ordinance, specifically Section 14 Article 6, which declared that 'there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude' in territories northwest of the Ohio.[61] In this context, Evarts rejects the

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States North-West of the River Ohio, (New York, 1787).

Missouri Compromise as a mere ransom, paid out to the South after they had taken hostage the federal government. Forced into carving further slave states out of the Louisiana Purchase, the North had been compelled to relinquish half of that previously guaranteed by the "ordinance for freedom". Moving forward a further thirty-three years, Evarts exclaimed that the remaining half was now under threat. The Nebraska Bill represented a further intrusion by Southern interests upon land originally intended for free labour. By sketching out a history of backsliding, Evarts supposed that in a further thirty years it was likely a 'solemn declaration' be taken that would nationalise slavery in perpetuity, thereby completely reversing the principles of policy set out in 1787.

For Evarts, 'no succeeding generation had corrected the error or retraced the step of its predecessors', and this failure increasingly lent itself to slavery's perpetual expansion. Thus, it was the rising generation at the mid-century that bore responsibility for the national future. The cure for the United States' gradual slide into despotism was not the 'old men', who hitherto inhabited the political arena and who 'acquiesce' in the present 'degradation of politics', but the 'educated, intelligent, public spirited *young men* of the North.'[62] These men, Evarts argued, would 'have studied, and will study' anything but politics which teaches them their 'degradation' and were the generation best placed to arrest slavery's interminable creep.[63]

Evarts' notion, that the younger generation of the mid-1850s were uniquely placed to correct the course on the issue of slavery, was widely disseminated and encouraged by contemporary papers sympathetic with the incipient Republican cause. For instance, the *Belmont Chronicle* when seeking to encourage free-soil voting in October 1855, issued a generational call to arms. It demanded that free men 'Awake!', that they 'slumber not while

[62] *The National Era*, Washington D.C., May 8, 1856.
[63] Ibid.

this black nightmare of slavery rests upon the bosom of liberty.'[64] Harkening to the past, but with a keen eye to the future, the paper declared that the freemen of Ohio stood 'upon the Lexington of a great Revolution! Our blood stains the green fields consecrated by our fathers to Liberty!'[65] For the *Chronicle*, victory in this 'contest' would ensure that 'the army of our descendants will shout your praises down the long lines of the coming generations.'[66] Failure would see 'the clock of Human Progress… turned back a Century!'[67]

As the 1856 presidential election approached, politicians and editors continued to paint the Nebraska Bill as a moment which reflected generational failure and/or opportunity. More moderate opponents of the Nebraska Bill continued to see its main fault in the abandonment of traditional compromise. In a speech titled 'Southern Slavery Reduces Northern Wages', the former newspaper editor George Melville Weston of Maine delivered a significantly more sympathetic account of the Missouri Compromise than Evarts. For Weston, Douglas' 1854 repeal marked a frightful lapse of respect for a prior generation of political leaders; the Compromise was 'a solemn and memorable settlement' brought forward by the 'men of 1820' which for an 'entire generation' had commanded the 'universal assent of all men and all parties.'[68] Its repeal was to 'reverse this judgement of our fathers, to undo their work, and to carry the system of slavery into the North.'[69] Young Republican Representative Henry Waldron of Michigan (b.1819) used similar rhetoric when expressing his dismay at the Missouri Compromise's repeal – he decried the fact that 'before a single

[64] *Belmont Chronicle*, Ohio, October 18, 1855.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] George M. Weston, *An Address: Southern Slavery reduced Northern Wages*, (Washington D.C, 1856), 1-2.
[69] Ibid., 2.

generation has passed away, while many of the makers of that compromise are still on the stage of action, the compact [was] violated and the seal torn from the bond.'[70]

However, like his generational contemporary Evarts, Waldron was sceptical of the real force of the 1820 Compromise. For Waldron, it was a temporary fix masquerading as a permanent solution, a legislative deceit with which the Second Generation of American statesmen were entirely complicit. For Waldron, as for Evarts, hope lay in the young men of his own state who had migrated to Kansas to 'plant the institutions of freedom.'[71] This young generation was comprised of men who have 'breathed the free air of the Northwest' since 'childhood', who in their formative years experienced 'the blessings that flow from the policy of slavery prohibition', and who 'in the space of one generation' have seen the 'wilderness reclaimed and subdued under the genial influences of free institutions.'[72] These men recognised their indebtedness, not to the Second Generation, but to the Founders who had authored the Northwest ordinance — the so-called 'corner-stone of their prosperity.'[73] They had come of age secure in the knowledge that the ample territory was designated for free labour, and 'naturally demand for themselves and their children the same guarantees of prosperity in the new homes they make' further west.[74] Waldron's speech closed with a powerful rebuff to Southern attempts to swing Kansas to slavery – any attempt to 'wrest from them the right to self-government' or 'impose on them institutions against their will' would 'meet the issue as becomes men who were born and nurtured amid the institutions of

[70] Henry Waldron, *Kansas Affairs: Speech of Hon. Henry Waldron, of Michigan, in the House of Representatives, April 8, 1856, in committee of the whole on the State of the Union*, (District of Columbia: Buell & Blanchard, 1856), 8.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

Freedom.'[75] For Waldron, young Americans would not readily acquiesce in slavery's aggressive expansion.[76]

Generational dynamics shaped debates regarding slavery's place within the United States. At the mid-century, younger Americans were both primary drivers, and key targets of the abolitionist movement; moral opposition to slavery, therefore, became a prominent feature of their politics. The Nebraska Bill then exposed the limits of former Compromises, specifically their capacity to restrain slavery's expansion and the threat it posed to young Northerner's economic prospects. Long considered the reserve of free-labour, and a necessary outlet for the densely populated and increasingly urbanised Northeastern Seaboard, younger Northerners expected that the unorganised territory of the Northwest would remain their gift. Douglas' repeal of the Missouri Compromise placed this in jeopardy. Younger Northerners were forced to seek alternative political solutions that better matched either their moral disdain for enslavement or their socio-economic concerns. In this context, the Republican Party born of this crisis over Kansas, held unique generational appeal.

3 1856 Election: "Young America" or "Old Buck"

In September 1856, Connecticut's *Hartford Courant* declared John C. Frémont 'emphatically the Young Men's Candidate.'[77] Possessing 'just that energy, decision, fortitude, and perseverance that please... young men' the paper argued they supported him 'with an enthusiasm unprecedented in political contests.'[78] They did so out of a determination to drive from political life the 'old fogies, superannuated politicians [and] the broken-winded jacks' of former campaigns.[79] The *Courant's* derogation reflects an increasingly prominent thread of

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] *Pennsylvania Weekly Telegraph,* August 28, 1856.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

party discourse in the run up to the election of 1856 which characterised the contest as a generational struggle. The former Party of Young America was now ageing, corrupt, and out-of-touch. Striving to maintain a vice-like grip upon the executive power, the Democracy was facing down a broadly younger party that better reflected the changing persuasions of the majority of the electorate (at least in the North).

The generational nature of political division in 1856 is perhaps most clearly evidenced by candidate selection. Frémont, at the age of forty-three, would have been the youngest president in United States history had he secured victory in November 1856. An admired explorer and colonel, Frémont was better known for his exploits carving through the Rocky Mountains and skirmishing with Mexican soldiers in Sacramento than any serious politicking.[80] As one supporter admitted in the *Tribune,* Frémont's nomination was 'inexplicable', in the sense that the convention had 'taken up, apparently without consideration, a man who [had] no political antecedents.'[81] The nomination of such a political neophyte even caused some ructions within the Party itself; the historian John Bicknell has identified a 'generational gap' between younger partisans who 'enthusiastically supported' Frémont and those over forty, such as Horace Greely, who remained 'suspect.'[82] While Greely publicly endorsed Frémont in the *Tribune*, privately he had sent a letter to Schuyler Colfax stating that 'all would be well if F[remont] were not the merest baby in politics.'[83]

[80] Portraits of Frémont prior to the 1856 election do not consider his treatment of Native Americans. It was scarcely reported in the contemporary press, neither did it feature in his own account of his expeditions published after the fact. For accounts of Frémont's attitudes towards Native Americans, and his involvement in several massacres, see Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 43-51; Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder state: California's native American genocide, 1846-1873*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 84-98.
[81] *New York Tribune*, June 26, 1856.
[82] John Bicknell, *Lincoln's Pathfinder: John C Frémont and the Violent Election of 1856*, (Chicago, Il.: Chicago Review Press, 2017), 168.
[83] *Letters of Jesse Benton Frémont*, Pamela Herr and Mary Lee Spence 'eds', (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1993), 107.

Nevertheless, it was precisely his lack of experience that many younger Republicans found so appealing. Placing Frémont squarely under the "new man" classification, one supporter sought to emphasise what Frémont had *not* done, as much as what he had: 'he has had no hand in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise… no hand in the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill' nor the 'Ostend Manifesto'.[84] Through this current crisis, Frémont as 'the representative of Young America', was 'better calculated than any old politicians to lead.'[85] One prominent campaign biography, authored by Thomas Bigelow and extensively edited by Jessie, equally addressed Frémont's relative lack of political experience, arguing it was a 'rare advantage' liberating him of association 'with any of the lateral issues to which that institution [slavery] has given rise'; for Bigelow, 'though never a politician, and with little experience as a statesman, no man of [Fremont's] age was so universally, and, at the same time, so favourably known to the whole country, when his name was suggested as the leader of the Party of Freedom.'[86] Despite the Party being comprised almost entirely of former Whigs and Democrats, eschewing experience and opting for Frémont ensured that the Republicans could cement their status as a brand new political force. Frémont was a clear break from the politicians and political system that had delivered the Fugitive Slave and Nebraska Bills.

Furthermore, Frémont's physical characteristics and personal life were central to strengthening his position. 'Gracefully proportioned and eminently prepossessing in his appearance', Republicans leaned on Frémont's youth, handsome figure, reputation for adventure and, perhaps most crucially, his marriage to Jessie Hart Benton, to buttress his

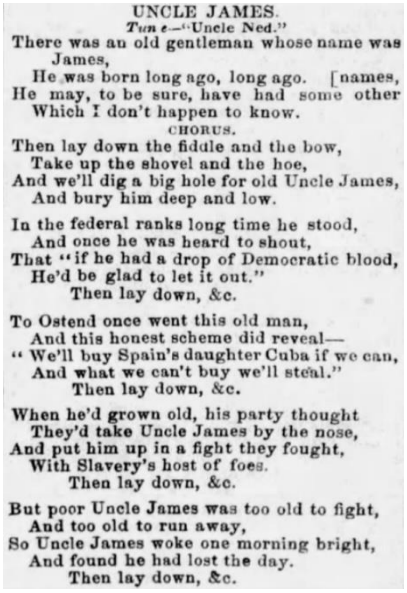
[84] *Weekly Hawk-Eye and Telegraph*, Burlington, Iowa, July 9, 1856. For explanation of "new man" classification, see Chapter 1.
[85] *New York Tribune*, June 26, 1856.
[86] John Bigelow, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of John Charles Frémont*, (New York, Derby & Jackson: Cincinnati: H W Derby & Co. 1856), 465.

"new man" appeal.[87] Addressing Frémont's age in its concluding statements, the Bigelow biography noted that 'Col. Frémont' at just 'forty-three years of age', was 'in the prime of his life.'[88] 'Already eminent', Frémont 'before he was thirty-five… had emancipated an empire from Mexican tyranny', been 'unanimously elected governor' and by age thirty-seven, been 'elected to the highest legislative dignity in the American Republic.'[89] Thus, Bigelow concludes, 'his nomination at Philadelphia gave symmetry and completeness to a career which is more commended by its results to the American people than that of any man, at his years, whom the country has produced.'[90]

The dichotomy drawn between the candidates naturally extended to presentations of the political parties themselves. The *New York Herald* described a 'political revolution sweeping like a tornado over the country against all the old factions of the last twenty years… favouring new parties, new principles and new men more suitable to the times.'[91] Writing in March, the *Boston Atlas* sought to define the boundary between the Democrats and the Republicans as a struggle between an old political world and the new. The Democracy was a 'mere thing of routine', its lack of new ideas rendering it 'effete, unprincipled and dissolute.'[92] The Republican Party, by contrast, was 'emphatically a new party – not merely new in name, but new in the vigour and enthusiasm which animate it – new in its high aims and intelligent purposes – new in its appreciation of the wants of the time.'[93] Crucially for this paper, the novelty of the Republican Party was often intimated to hold an inherent appeal

[87] Jesse Frémont's extraordinary popularity, and her extensive influence in guiding John's presidential campaign are well-documented. See Bicknell, *Lincoln's Pathfinder,* 188-192. For description of Frémont's appearance, see Bigelow*, Frémont, 461.*
[88] Ibid., 465.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *New York Daily Herald*, July 28, 1856.
[92] *Boston Atlas*, March 27, 1856.
[93] *Boston Atlas*, March 27, 1856.

to younger voters. The Republicans were, the paper mused, the Party 'with which the young men of the country would gladly ally themselves.'[94]



UNCLE JAMES.

Tune—"Uncle Ned."

There was an old gentleman whose name was James,
He was born long ago, long ago. [names,
He may, to be sure, have had some other
Which I don't happen to know.

CHORUS.

Then lay down the fiddle and the bow,
Take up the shovel and the hoe,
And we'll dig a big hole for old Uncle James,
And bury him deep and low.

In the federal ranks long time he stood,
And once he was heard to shout,
That "if he had a drop of Democratic blood,
He'd be glad to let it out."
Then lay down, &c.

To Ostend once went this old man,
And this honest scheme did reveal—
"We'll buy Spain's daughter Cuba if we can,
And what we can't buy we'll steal."
Then lay down, &c.

When he'd grown old, his party thought
They'd take Uncle James by the nose,
And put him up in a fight they fought,
With Slavery's host of foes.
Then lay down, &c.

But poor Uncle James was too old to fight,
And too old to run away,
So Uncle James woke one morning bright,
And found he had lost the day.
Then lay down, &c.

Figure 3: "Uncle James" Song. Pennsylvania Weekly Telegraph, August 28, 1856.

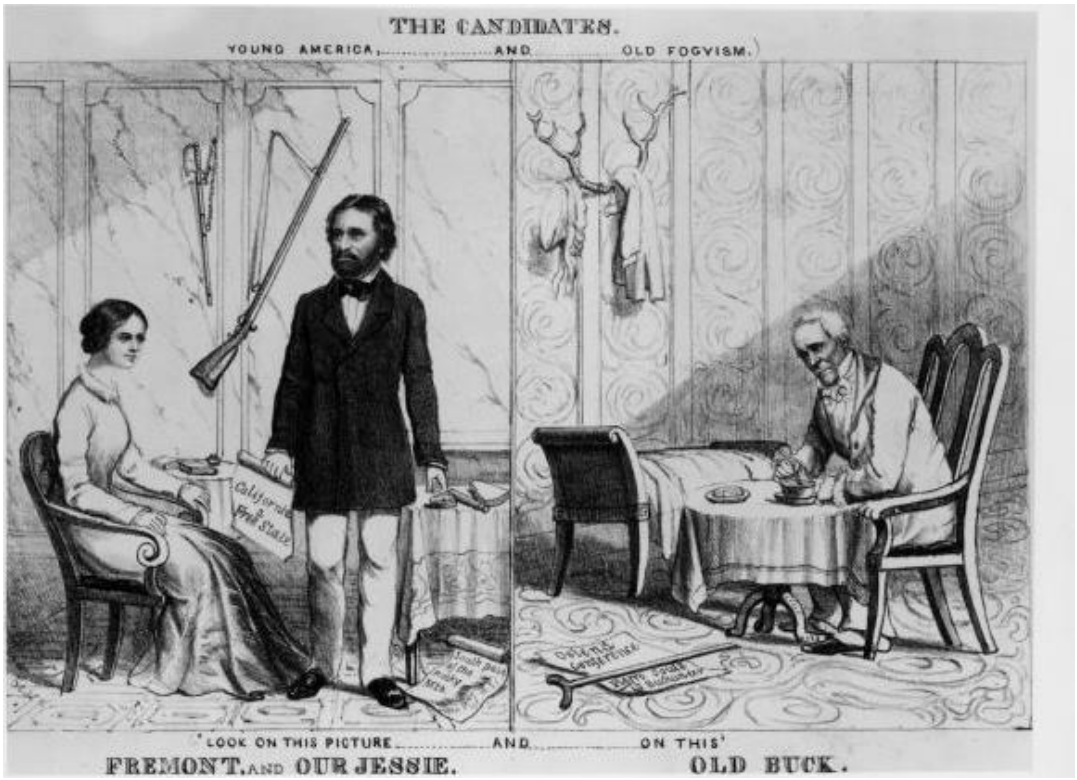


Figure 4: "The Candidates: Young America and Old Fogyism (1856). Wisconsin Historical Society, Presidential Campaign Cartoon, 56967.

[94] Ibid.

In contrast to their Republican opponents, the Democrats overlooked their own relatively young incumbent Franklin Pierce, and the even younger Stephen Douglas, in favour of James Buchanan. At sixty-five, personal attacks on Buchanan's age became a regular feature of the Republican press. A song written by the Republican Association of Pennsylvania to the tune of "Uncle Ned" (Figure 3) presented Buchanan as a hopeless fiddle of nefarious actors. Born 'long long ago' Buchanan was, the song suggests, a helpless 'old man' put up to fight 'slavery's host of foes' while being both 'too old to fight' and too old to run away.'[95] This derogation of Buchanan's age continued in visual form with *The Candidates: Young America and Old Fogyism* (Figure 4). Above all else, this illustration encapsulates the stark generational differences between Frémont and Buchanan. First it instructs you to look upon the picture on the left; Frémont stands erect, his long dark hair and beard flash against the pale backdrop, weapons adorn the wall behind him evoking his military position and to his right, Jessie is sat to emphasise his marital status. As the viewer is invited to look upon the right-hand side of the picture, they see Buchanan stooped in his chair, his pale grey hair and clothing fading into the background, his nightgown and cap slung on the antlers behind, and a walking stick strewn across the floor. These are just two examples of instances where Buchanan's age was negatively politicised through the spring and summer of 1856.[96] As the *Washington Sentinel* bluntly surmised, 'Old Buck… is too old for a long or a swift race.'[97] The paper was surprised that the party of Young America 'should think of curtailing its giant strides to the mincing hobble of an octogenarian.'[98] In contrasting Frémont's virility with the 'starched up old fogy bachelor', Republicans both in Congress,

[95] "Uncle James" first published in the *Saturday Express*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, June 28, 1856.
[96] *Wisconsin Tribune*, August 12, 1856; *The Candidates: Young America and Old Fogyism* (1856)
[97] *The Triweekly Washington Sentinel*, April 8, 1856.
[98] Ibid.

and in the contemporary press, sought to undermine perceptions of his fitness for the presidency.[99]

Politically, Buchanan also offered a serious contrast to Frémont. Old Buck had started his political career as a Federalist in Pennsylvania, before being elected to the House of Representatives in 1820 and moving to support Andrew Jackson in 1824. Firmly ensconced in the Democracy by 1828, he remained in the House until 1831. A brief spell as Minister to Russia in the Jackson administration was followed by over ten years in the Senate before he was once again asked to serve in government, this time as Secretary of State under Polk. He then escaped the fallout of the Mexican War by serving as President Pierce's ambassador to the United Kingdom. With a political career spanning more than four decades, Buchanan's nomination was, in many respects, a harkening to a former political world; the historian Joshua Lynn has argued that 'Democrats employed Buchanan's longevity to attract those who yearned for a mythologised past when national and conservative statesmen condemned fanaticism.'[100] Buchanan himself declared shortly after his nomination that his objective was 'to overthrow all sectional parties, and restore the peace, friendship, and mutual confidence which prevailed in the good old time…'[101] For Republicans such as Representative Charles Billinghurst, 'Federal…conservative and… eminently an old fogy', Buchanan was 'in every respect' the best candidate for a party and executive who 'stigmatize as fanatics, agitators [and] disturbers of the peace… all those who love freedom better than slavery, the prosperity of the country better than their own indolent ease, and who believe that the Constitution was

[99] *Weekly Minnesotan*, August 2, 1856.
[100] Joshua Lynn, 'A Manly Doughface: James Buchanan and the Sectional Politics of Gender', *The Journal of the Civil War era* 8, no. 4 (2018): 597.
[101] James Buchanan to the Committee of Notification, June 16, 1856, *The Works of* James *Buchanan Volume 10*, 83-84.

framed and intended to secure the blessings of liberty, and would defend the Territories against the blighting curse of slavery.'[102]

One correspondent of Stephen Douglas, John Pettit of Indiana, suggested that Buchanan secured the nomination on account of his 'age and experience' because of its appeal to the 'large infusion of national Whigs who agreed with 'our' platform & will vote with us.'[103] These former Whigs, demoralised by the loss of their party and dismayed at the perceived radicalism of the new Republicans, 'begged that we should give them a man of the older times… one in whose conservative sentiments they had confidence.'[104] Enclosed in an article entitled *The Old line Whigs for Buchanan*, letters from Rufus Choate and George T. Curtis claim that true Whigs 'first duty' was to 'defeat and dissolve the new geographical party calling itself Republican.'[105] The guiding question for National Whigs such as Choate and Curtis was not one of candidate strengths or party platforms, rather 'by what vote can I do most to prevent the madness of the times from working its maddest act… the triumph of a party which knows one half of America only to hate and dread it.'[106] For Choate, Buchanan — with 'large experience in public affairs' — more completely than any other candidate represented 'the sentiment of nationality' so crucial to 'restore and keep that peace, within our borders and without.'[107] For Curtis, the Republican Party's sectionalism made support for Buchanan the only viable choice. Summing up his political view in 1856 he stated that 'when I cease to be national, I cease to be anything.'[108] Ultimately the selection of Frémont likely sealed the loss of the most conservative and old-line ends of Whiggery, but Republicans were nevertheless confident that their places could be amply supplied by other constituents. In

[102] *Congressional Globe Appendix*, Volume 22, 34th Congress, 1st Session, (1856), 1279.
[103] John Pettit to Stephen Douglas, June 10, 1856, Douglas Papers, [Box 2, Folder 9].
[104] Ibid.
[105] Rufus Choate *The Old-Line Whigs for Buchanan! Letters of Rufus Choate and James B Clay [ie Feo. T Curtis*, (1856), 1.
[106] Ibid., 2.
[107] Ibid., 5.
[108] Ibid., 7.

placing a young, politically inexperienced explorer at the head of a brand-new political party, running them on a radical antislavery platform and pitching them against a far older, politically experienced contemporary of Clay and Webster, Republicans were happy to set the stage for a clash between youthful radicalism and aged conservatism.

For those young men who had maintained a thoughtful dissatisfaction with politics under the Second Party System, many seemed captivated by this new party and its youthful figurehead. For example, future president James A. Garfield (b.1831) was only twenty-four when Frémont secured the nomination. As recently as 1848 he had described Joshua Gidding's antislavery cause as a 'carnal one' and, despite the furore over the Fugitive Slave Law, Garfield remained distinctly disinterested in politics throughout the early 1850s. [109] In a journal entry of August 17, 1852, Garfield noted:

> Politics are now raging with great violence. I am profoundly ignorant of its multifarious phases and I am not inclined to study it. I am exceedingly disgusted with the wire pulling of politicians and the total disregard for truth in all their operations. Miserable, low, ungentlemanly trash fills the columns of the political press, unfit for refined feelings, tended consciouses or kind hearts.[110]

His antipathy for politicians and politics, however, began to thaw as events in Kansas unfolded. In November 1855 he wrote:

> I have just been listening to stump speeches from the Hon Mr Goodrich of Stockbridge and Mr J. H. Patterson of Kansas Territory. The latter gentleman has been outraged, has had his press thrown into the Missouri River and his life threatened for speaking and writing his sentiments in reference to slavery and the election outrage in that territory…. I have been instructed tonight on the political condition of our country … at such hours as this I feel like throwing the whole current of my life into

[109] Theodore Clarke Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield Volume l* (1831-1877), (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1925), 39.
[110] *The Diary of James A. Garfield. Vol.1*, Harry J. Brown and Frederick D. Williams 'eds', (East Lansing**:** Michigan University Press, 1967), 150.

> the work of opposing this giant evil. I don't know but the religion of Christ demands action.[111]

And act he did; Garfield's disdain for politics was displaced by a renewed sense of purpose. A more than capable public speaker, he delivered his first public political speech at a Frémont ratification meeting in the summer of 1856. From there, he went on to participate in three debates, delivered twenty-six lectures before his school and made a further eleven in churches amounting to forty engagements in all.[112] In a matter of years, Garfield had gone from disinterested and disillusioned to an energetic and industrious political campaigner. Between 1856 and 1860, Garfield continued to demonstrate a keen interest in Republican Party politics. In 1857, a diary entry cheered Republican results in state races across Iowa, Minnesota and Ohio. By 1859, his antipathy for slavery even extended to support for more radical action. John Brown's hanging, following his doomed attempt to ferment a slave insurrection at Harper's Ferry, was in Garfield's view a 'dark day for our country.'[113]

Thomas Bradford Drew (b.1834) was even younger than Garfield when Frémont was nominated for the presidency. Schooled in Kingston he moved to Plymouth to practice dentistry in 1856. Speaking of his first week alone in his new surroundings and his attempts to avoid becoming 'homesick', the young man sought out familiar comforts including local Unitarian Church meetings and also the sorts of political lectures he had regularly attended with friends back in Kingston.[114] Drew's regular attendance of political events and his developing sympathy for the Republican cause stemmed from his teenage years; one particular event detailed in his diary helps explain his politicisation at such a young age. On Friday June 2nd, 1854, he commenced his entry with the usual accounts of his movements and

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Thomas Bradford Drew, June, 1856, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries, 1849-1898, Massachusetts Historical Society.

the weather before a sudden page break and an exclamation, underlined several times and centred on the page, that the "The Deed is done!!" Beneath, Drew explained that 'at nine o'clock commissioner Edward Greely Loving decided that the fugitive slave Anthony Burns should be given up to his master and returned to Virginia.'[115] The Anthony Burns case, perhaps the most infamous instance of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law in action, had caused Boston to come alive with both 'excitement and indignation' at what Drew, like many other Bostonians felt, was an 'outrageous villainy.'[116]

At just nineteen years of age Drew was already incandescent at the political machinations that undermined freedoms in his home state; first he lamented the 1850 Compromise's 'accursed Fugitive Slave Law', questioning whether it would 'always disgrace the Republic', and wondering how 'other nations…trying to throw off the yoke of tyranny must have… gazed when the people of this "Glorious Republic"… passed that infernal slave bill.'[117] For Drew, echoing much of the discourse surrounding the Fugitive Slave law, what was most disturbing about this 'relapse into the shades of barbarism' was that it happened in Massachusetts, 'within sight of Bunker Hill.'[118] That an individual living freely in the Bay State, could, at any moment, be 'taken and plunged into the hell of Southern slavery' was the product of both the execrable growth of Southern slavery and Northern vacillation; 'Slavery is King ever since the formation of the Constitution…it had been steadily marching onward grasping at everything in its reach and the North have quietly acquiesced.'[119] He then cites the Nebraska Bill, and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, as further evidence of Northern weakness. The actions of Congress, Drew felt, were contrary to his own

[115] Bradford Drew, June 2, 1854, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries, 1849-1898, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

understandings of the Republic and the Founding; he cited the notion that 'all men are born free and equal' and he repeatedly questioned what the Founders, if they were alive in 1854, would have made of Burns' fate.[120]

For Drew, his formative political experiences were defined by anger and indignation at the direction of politics. The Fugitive Slave Law, the Burns case, and the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, steeled him for a confrontation with the South. For the young man from Massachusetts, the answer to the interminable creep of slavery was to dispense with compromise, something clearly associated with Northern weakness, and for the North to 'do their duty and say to the monster, thus far hast thou gone, but no farther shall thou go.'[121] In remaining steadfast against slavery's further expansion Drew envisioned, the 'slave power would crumble and fall never to rise again', 'a final blow' would be 'struck and liberty will rule.'[122] It is unsurprising therefore, that when Frémont was nominated on a platform which explicitly resolved to 'oppose the repeal of the Missouri Compromise' and 'the extension of slavery into free territory', Drew was encouraged. His support for Frémont was likely hardened when, as he noted in a diary entry of May 22nd 1856, his own Senator, Charles Sumner was 'assaulted at his desk in the Senate chamber by hon. Preston S. Brooks of S.C.'[123] This 'outrageous affair' whereby 'Sumner was severely injured' caused 'great excitement' in Massachusetts and some distress for Drew.[124]

Between antislavery meetings, such as that celebrating the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, and attending public lectures from Bostonian abolitionists like Wendell Phillips, Samuel May and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Drew

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Bradford Drew, May 22, 1856, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries, 1849-1898, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[124] Ibid.

threw himself into the Republican campaign. On October 29th he described his exhaustion after attending the 'Frémont Torch Light Procession' in Boston. This 'Great Frémont Gathering', was mooted to comprise a 'cavalcade of 2,000 horsemen and 20,000 men on foot' thus eclipsing 'anything that ever occurred on this continent.'[125] The election, for Drew, was likely to be 'the most exciting time ever known in this country and as one of 'the friends of freedom' he was 'anxious that John C. Frémont be elected.'[126] For the night of November 4th itself, Drew stayed in Plymouth's Frémont Club 'late into the evening hearing telegraphic dispatches' of results from across the state.[127]

Drew's involvement with his local Frémont Club and participation in their organised processions provides insight into the nature of the relationship between young men and the new Party. In July, the *Boston Atlas* despatched a correspondent to St Johnsbury, Vermont. With a population of just 3,000, the town was accustomed to political stability; since 1840, it had remained a Whig stronghold. However, upon their arrival the correspondent found the 'largest room in the village…filled by a crowd of eager, enthusiastic men.'[128] 'In the full vigour of early manhood', these men were in the view of the correspondent, certain to 'devote their energies' not to the Whigs, but 'to the election of the "Young Men's" ticket' – that of John C. Frémont and the new Republican Party.[129] What happened in St Johnsbury was emulated across the North as so-called Young Men's Frémont Clubs proliferated. These clubs demonstrated extraordinary enthusiasm for the Republican campaign. While there is no systematic record of their locations or their memberships, analysis of just one newspaper database evinces their prodigious geographical reach. Clubs are reported in at least ten northern states and often with multiple branches in multiple cities across those states. In

[125] *Fall River Monitor*, Boston, October 25, 1856.
[126] Bradford Drew, November 4, 1856, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries, 1849-1898, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[127] Bradford Drew, November 5, 1856, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries.
[128] *Boston Atlas*, July 1, 1856.
[129] Ibid.

Massachusetts, Frémont clubs were reported in Fitchburg, Springfield, Pittsfield and Boston, while in New York, clubs were reported in Schenectady, Poughkeepsie, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Buffalo. Some clubs, such as that of Chicago, boasted over 800 members.

Where it is possible to identify the origin of these clubs, it appears that they were grass roots creations, organised by local young men as opposed to party operatives. The Young Men's Frémont club of Providence was presided over by James Madison Ripley, a recent graduate of Albany Law School who was just twenty-one years of age and had recently set up his legal practice in the city.[130] Similarly, George Menzel (an immigrant from Prussian Silesia) was twenty-nine when he helped organise and was subsequently elected president of the Milwaukee YMFC, which he did alongside his job manufacturing threshing machines.[131] Byron M. Cutcheon, twenty, was preparing for his future studies at the University of Michigan and teaching in a Washtenaw County school when he assumed the presidency of the Ypsilanti's YMFC while Alfred Russel, twenty-six, assumed presidency of the larger statewide Michigan Republican Club.[132] When averaging the ages of all of the YMFC presidents listed in newspapers, they had a median age of just twenty-six. [133] The partisan press was keen to emphasise and praise young men's contributions to the campaign. By August the *Cleveland Herald* suggested that 'everywhere the mercury seems to be rising in the political thermometer', but particularly among young men, who 'entering the canvass with the warmest zeal… were organising clubs, printing and circulating documents, and advocating in counting-rooms, stores, shops, offices and on ferry boats, the principles of the

[130] William Richard Cutter, *New England families, Genealogical and Memorial; a Record of the Achievements of her People in the Making of Commonwealths and the Founding of a Nation; comp. under the editorial supervision of William Richard Cutter. v.4,* (New York: Lewis historical Pub. Co., 1913), 1019.
[131] *History of the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. v.1,* (Massachusetts: Munsell, 1893), 648.
[132] William Livingstone, *Livingstone's History of the Republican Party: A History of the Republican Party from its Foundation to the Close of the Campaign of 1900, Including Incidents of Michigan Campaigns and Biographical Sketches,* (Detroit, Mich: W. Livingstone, 1900), 130 and 332.
[133] Due to the difficulty in finding age data for individuals in the 19th century, the sample size is relatively small, comprising of just six YMFC presidents, ranging in age between 20 and 34.

Republican party.'[134] The *Buffalo Courier Express* found it 'gratifying that the young men' were 'becoming alive to their political duties' and taking steps to form their own YMFC:

Much depends upon the young men of the country… give us the vigor and energy of Young America in this campaign, and we will give a quitclaim deed of all the relics of political antiquity in this country. The Republican issues are live issues, and live men must fight their battles with any hope of success.[135]

For Republicans the engagement of younger voters was increasingly seen as a necessary success. To win in November against the long-established Democratic machine would require the tireless energies and enthusiasm associated with youth.

The writings of both Drew and Garfield demonstrate a profound dissatisfaction with the political status quo – particularly directed at those in Congress who had condoned the Fugitive Slave Law and the Nebraska Act, with all their associated violence. Born from this dissatisfaction was a clear incentive to support the new Republican Party, as a means of challenging existing political orthodoxy and, most crucially for Drew, dislodging the Slave Power. On this basis, the Republican Party captured and sustained the support of young men. By 1858, the *New Hampshire Statemen* suggested the Republicans had 'captured the politics of the masses', particularly the 'great proportion of 'young men', and as such were likely to gain and hold political offices long into the future.[136]

> After one or two more handsome defeats… the Democratic Party cannot rise. It will then have become the party, which is without the prestige of success, like the old Whig Party. The young men will be looking for success through the Republican Party, both for principles more in accordance with the natural sympathies… and for its reputation as the successful party of state.[137]

[134] *Cleveland Daily Herald*, August 26, 1856.
[135] *Buffalo Courier Express*, July 2, 1856.
[136] *New Hampshire Statesman*, April 17, 1858.
[137] Ibid.

For the *Statesman*, young support manifested in a sustainable voting bloc at both a state and national level.[138] Referencing the mid-term elections, the paper suggested that 'the Black Democratic papers are unable to account for the increased vote of the Republicans at the election on the 9th, and intimate that we cheat' but that 'our increase is easily accounted for… a great majority of the young men who in recent years reached 21 have voted for the Republican ticket.'[139]

In 1857, in a debate with his friend over the coming Massachusetts' Gubernatorial election, district attorney Daniel Alvord summarised the intricate ties between the Republican Party and youth. Alvord rightly assumed that to build upon the Party's national success in 1856, demanded continued progress at a state level. For Alvord, this could only be achieved by nominating candidates 'in full sympathy with young America – No gentleman who fixes an old fashioned belt to his pantaloons… no old fogy… no one of the old Whig clique.'[140] In Massachusetts, Alvord hoped for a 'successful straight Republican nomination' but cautioned that should the Party nominate 'some old fogy whig', and the nativist American Party nominate Nathanial Banks, the young Republican Speaker's victory would be assured. Bank's 'personal popularly and identification with young America' lent him extraordinary electoral advantaged.[141] For Alvord, the last State legislature had been 'an old-fashioned Whig legislature', and like many young Republicans, he simply wanted 'no more of that.'[142] Into the 1860 election, younger voters at a state and national level, were rejecting the older parties in favour of a Republican party full of 'vigor.'[143]

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[138] For sense that the Republican Party performed extraordinarily well among younger voters in 1856, see Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*.
[139] *New Hampshire Statesman*, April 17, 1858.
[140] Daniel Alvord to Francis Bird, June 30, 1857, [Box, 2, Folder 1], *Francis William Bird Papers, 1826-1924*, Houghton Library, Harvard.
[141] Daniel Alvord to Francis Bird, June 4, 1857, [Box, 2, Folder 1], *Francis William Bird Papers, 1826-1924*, Houghton Library, Harvard.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

4 Toward 1860: Generational Appeal Beyond Slavery

The Frémont Clubs of 1856 were superseded by the Wide Awakes, who, Horace Greely, editor of the *New York Tribune,* considered perhaps 'the most powerful political movement of the nation.'[144] The historian Jon Grinspan has effectively examined this movement, emphasising its 'generational' origins and arguing for its centrality, both to Lincoln's election and in precipitating the war that followed. He details how prominent Republicans, including William Seward, Hanibal Hamlin, and even Lincoln himself, addressed the cape wearing, torch brandishing crowds and processions. Seward, in addressing one particular gathering of enthusiastic Wide Awakes, even went as far as declaring the Republican Party a 'party chiefly of the young men.'[145] It is unsurprising that the likes of Seward were captivated and intrigued by the sudden and outstanding presence of the Wide Awakes. Grinspan notes that, through the autumn of 1860, the Wide Awakes' could purportedly boast upwards of half a million members across the North.[146] While he acknowledges that realistically, that figure was closer to 100,000, contemporary overestimates reflect the fact that when the Wide Awakes did march, it was an unmissable spectacle.[147] To take just one example, several papers reported that on August 8th, 1860, 20,000 to 40,000 people had lined the streets of Springfield Illinois to hear campaign speeches from prominent state Republicans such as Lyman Trumbell and Orville Browning.[148] Lincoln himself — the passage of his carriage frustrated by 'the blockade of the immense crowd' — was supposedly 'seized upon' and forced to give a speech to 'a throng

[144] *Mississippian,* September 28, 1860.
[145] William H. Seward, *Speeches of William H. Seward at Detroit, St. Paul, Dubuque, Lansing, St. Louis in the presidential campaign of 1860*, (Albany, New York: 1860), 49.
[146] Jon Grinspan, "Young Men for War": The Wide Awakes and Lincoln's 1860 Presidential Campaign *The Journal of American History, 96, no. 2* (2009), 360.
[147] Ibid.
[148] *Franklin Repository and Transcript*, August 15, 1860; *West Chester Village Record*, August 14, 1860; *New York Herald*, August 12, 1860.

wild with enthusiasm.'[149] Notably, the demonstration 'surpassed the expectations of the most sanguine… the square about the State House' resembling 'a sea of fire through which the solid ranks of Wide Awakes march and counter march by the thousand.'[150] According to this paper, the meeting amounted to 'the greatest political carnival ever witnessed in Illinois.'[151] Greater in number and grander in spectacle than the Frémont Clubs which preceded them, the Wide Awakes undoubtedly played a central role in energising Lincoln's campaign.

However, the marches and mass-gatherings organised by the Wide Awakes were more than just political theatre or a chance for young men to don costume and carry through their militaristic fantasies. These extraordinary expressions of enthusiasm were founded upon firm political motivations. Critical to assessing the voting behaviour of young Americans in the run up to Lincoln's election is understanding why so many came out in active and visible support of the Republican Party. The speeches of campaigners and politicians delivered to the Wide Awakes explain how the Republican Party appealed to young Americans at the turn of the decade. In October, William T. Coggeshall, the Ohio state librarian, delivered a speech to the Tiffin Wide Awakes simply titled *An Address to Young Men*. Here he sought to underscore both the enormous stakes of the election, and to detail what the Republican Party could offer younger voters.[152] For those 'whose political careers lie in the future', Republican victory promised a myriad of advantages; Coggeshall's speech focused on three central points of appeal, each reflecting a strand of Republican campaign strategy in development since 1856.

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[149] *Franklin Repository and Transcript*, August 15, 1860.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] William T. Coggeshall, *The Issue of the November Election. An address to Young Men: by William T Coggeshall Delivered Before the Wide- Awakes of Tiffin, Ohio, Oct.18,1860,* (Ohio: 1860). Coggeshall's speech is a good example of a host of orations directed at young men, often at meetings organised by the Wide Awakes, which made similar arguments about how and why the Republican party appealed to this demographic. See also: Seward, *Speeches of William H. Seward at Detroit, St. Paul, Dubuque, Lansing, St. Louis in the presidential campaign of 1860*, (Albany: 1860).

First, Coggeshall focussed on economic prospects; he emphasised that Republicans would protect 'the right of each state to order and control its domestic institutions' thereby encouraging 'free labour and the protection of home industry' while simultaneously recognising that 'involuntary servitude' was 'a cruel wrong.'[153] The Republican Party was fundamentally an antislavery party, but this opposition was premised upon *both* moral concern *and* an interest in securing economic opportunity for the North's young citizens. Republican government would protect 'educated free labour…support profitable manufacturers… open rivers and lakes for prosperous navigation' and make 'all men workers and every worker a citizen.'[154] Specific policies cited include Republican support for the Homestead Act, the improvement of rivers and harbours, and the Pacific railroad.[155]

The Homestead Act in particular — which promised cheap land for western settlement — likely held special appeal in an era where the population was increasing exponentially and opportunities in the eastern rural communities of the US were diminishing.[156] From its inception, the Republicans sought to tread a fine line with younger voters, recognising a plurality were increasingly hostile to slavery, but that this hostility stemmed from economic as well as moral concerns regarding the institution and its expansion. In his acceptance speech for the nomination in 1856, Frémont had emphasised the importance of ensuring that the 'only genial region of the middle latitudes left to the emigrants of the Northern states for homes cannot be conquered from free labourers who have long considered it set apart for them in our inheritance.'[157] This sought to allay the fears of those who, through the press, expressed concerns regarding the potential confinement of free labour. The *True American* encapsulated the generational dynamics of free labour

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 3
[156] Allan Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men In New York* (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 11.
[157] *Buffalo Courier Express*, July 11, 1856.

ideology when it posed the simple question: 'Where will homes be provided for the rising generation of farmers, when the present free territory is all taken up for slave occupancy?'[158] In 1860, the *Hartford Courant* specifically addressed 'Young men' asking whether support for the Democrat Seymour in Connecticut 'would add to your comfort to reflect that you had been the means of introducing the blighting withering curse of slavery in the territories' knowing that 'neither you nor your laboring friends will settle those territories without bringing your labor into competition with the slave holders capital.'[159] As the *Wellsboro Gazette* argued, the 'ranks of freedom and free labor' are supplied by crowds of young men – young working men – who love the principle under which we rally.'[160]

Secondly, Coggeshall sought to underscore the importance of young men in politics. Historians have identified a mid-century 'crisis of American Manhood' shaped by the 'emasculations of the market economy, and conflicts over class, ethnicity, race and sectional politics.'[161] Young men, particularly in the Northeast, were increasingly forced by economic circumstance to forgo the Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian independence in favour of paid employment.[162] Anthony Rotundo has described this transition as one from 'communal' to 'self-made' manhood, where masculine identity was more intricately tied to a 'man's work role' (in business or in industry), as opposed to his position as the 'head of the household.'[163] Concomitant with this transition was the proliferation of associations, fraternities and lyceums particularly in urban areas; these served as outlets where young men dislocated from family sought social connection, entertainment, education and self-improvement.[164] With the

[158] *True American*, Lexington, October 29, 1856.
[159] *Harford Courant*, March 28, 1860.
[160] *The Wellsboro Gazette Combined with Mansfield Advertiser,* September 25, 1856.
[161] Bryan C. Rindfleisch, "What It Means to Be a Man": Contested Masculinity in the Early Republic and Antebellum America, *History Compass* 10, no. 11 (2012): 852.
[162] Ibid, 852-853.
[163] Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 3.
[164] Ibid., 56-74.

emphasis on individual success and the pseudo-presidential structures adopted by many of these institutions, it is unsurprising that political action became a crucial part of mid-century notions of male citizenship.

The early-nineteenth century move to near universal male suffrage meant that by the 1850s, any young man who could cultivate a convincing beard would likely be granted access to the polls. Jon Grinspan has detailed how young men 'perform[ed] their masculinity' in the political realm, 'waving torches, hollering slogans and strutting ostentatiously.'[165] By joining political associations such as the Wide Awakes, or casting their 'virgin vote', young men affirmed their independence of thought and action. For Coggeshall, it was through the power of political association that young men became the ultimate arbiters of public policy. If 'our young men are not misled', he argued, then 'the Northern states' would 'follow in the hopeful example of Pennsylvania, Indiana and Ohio' in securing Republican victory.[166] 'No element' in the campaign was more significant than the 'wholesome' and 'energetic service' of the companies of young men who joined the Wide-Awake organisation.[167] Most important for Coggeshall, was ensuring that the expressions of enthusiasm exhibited in Wide Awake demonstrations were converted into votes in November. As Coggeshall noted, 'a LARGE number of young men, in all of our Northern states' were to 'for the first time cast their ballots' and this was the 'highest responsibility of a citizen', a 'duty which no good citizen will willingly fail to discharge.'[168] The next administration, he noted, was 'what the young men of 1860 choose to make them.'[169] Americans between the ages of twenty-one and

[165] Jon Grinspan, *The Virgin Vote How Young Americans Made Democracy Social, Politics Personal, and Voting Popular in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 59.
[166] Coggeshall, *The Issue of the November Election, 14.*
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.

twenty-nine represented the largest pool of potential voters. [170] As such, Coggeshall was correct in asserting that young men held 'the destiny of the nation.'[171]

Finally, to support the Republican Party was to guarantee 'the Union'. Crucially, this would not be pursued through compromise, which 'like the gentle breath, which fans a spark into a devouring flame', had led the nation to the precipice upon which it stood. Instead, Coggeshall argued, the 'conquests of freedom' would come from 'the expression of popular will.'[172] A convincing enough Republican victory in November would be 'regarded as expressing the people's exposition of the Federal Constitution' which could then be instituted by an 'honest administration… true to the political doctrines' of the people.[173] Coggeshall here articulates a US constitutional order which prejudices popular will above all else, overriding both textual dogma and the need for compromise between sections. It reflects a strand of Republican thinking perhaps best summarised by Charles Sumner, who during a campaign speech at Worcester, described the 'people' as the 'main spring of democratic institutions'; a 'principle' which, if 'properly understood in its simplicity and just limitations, must find welcome in every Republican breast.'[174] For Sumner, as for Coggeshall, the results of the presidential election alone would determine slavery's future in the territories and the balance of power between the Northern and Southern states. A convincing electoral triumph delivering a strong Republican majority would make slavery's expansion impossible, and in the face of this overwhelming expression of the popular will, the South would be forced to

[170] For the states used in the following Chapter's analysis of the 1860 election, the 20-29 cohort (3313882) is twice as large as the 40-49 cohort (1623390) and more than 3 times as large as the 50-59 cohort (1019207). While turnout was marginally lower among these younger cohorts, they still likely made up the largest share of the electorate.
[171] Coggeshall, *The Issue of the November Election,* 15.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Charles Sumner, *The Works of Charles Sumner Volume 5*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1880), 311.

fall back into line. In so doing, it would nullify calls for further compromise with the South, a policy which held little appeal among younger Northern voters.

Coggeshall was no doubt aware of the radical implications of his populist conception and followed a well-trodden path in suggesting that his Party would best guarantee the political ideals of the Founding Generation. Young men, in supporting the Republicans and making 'freedom national', were merely 'obeying the counsels of Hamilton… Madison and Monroe'; the 'encouragement of the noblest statesmen of the past' was solely theirs.[175] In framing the stakes of the election for young men in this manner, Republicans could guarantee the sanctity of the Union, while at the same time ruling out further destabilising compromise. This would have the dual effect of encouraging young men to vote while allaying concerns among a demographic who, having just gained independence from hearth and home, were preoccupied by their future prosperity in case of secession or conflict.

5 Conclusion

From the foundation of organised abolition in the early 1830s, to the eve of Lincoln's election as president, generational dynamics shaped the fortunes of the United States' antislavery political movement. The American Anti-Slavery Society was conceived and animated by those whose youthful vigour facilitated a near ceaseless campaign of publications, lectures, public meetings and petitions, with the aim of immediate and unconditional abolition. By the mid-century however, it was clear that despite these efforts, both abolition and its more moderate party-political adjunct had failed to make any lasting inroads into slavery's dominance of Southern society. In fact, the 1850 Compromise and the election of 1852, demonstrated the extent to which the incumbent political class were willing to facilitate the Federal government's use as a shield against the institution's adversaries.

[175] Coggeshall, *The Issue of the November Election,* 15.

Within this context, the antislavery movement looked to generational replacement as the surest means of eradicating the institution. For young Northerners, whose formative years were defined by heightened political tensions over slavery's potential expansion into new territory, moral concerns overlapped with increasingly convincing socio-economic arguments against the institution. The new Fugitive Slave Law, and the Kansas Nebraska Act, highlighted the host of threats that slavery posed outside of the South. The brutality of (re)enslavement became a Northern responsibility under federal law. While the horrors of the institution were increasingly relayed through cultural production, young Northerners remained liable to impressment into "slave catching parties" and were largely powerless to prevent local law enforcement remanding free African Americans into bondage. Meanwhile national politicians, preoccupied with preventing sectional rupture, appeared willing to sacrifice the North's longstanding freedoms on the altar of compromise. The Northwest, long seen as the reserve of free labour and a land of opportunity for many young Northern men, was now open to population by masters and the enslaved.

As this chapter has documented, the new Republican Party, following the lead of abolitionists and antislavery Whigs, was particularly effective at baring these interconnected moral, political and socio-economic threats to America's youth. Recognising that younger voters represented a key election winning constituency, Republican partisans were clear eyed in seeing the power of winning over the United States' "rising generation". By presenting themselves as a fundamentally "new" political force and running a young candidate on a platform calibrated to young American's 'wants', the Republicans successfully garnered a unique generational appeal. This appeal was evidenced through the relentless speechifying of young individuals like Garfield, Drew and Coggeshall, and through the collective action of the Frémont Clubs and then the Wide Awakes, whose organised marches and parades animated a growing generational movement for Republican political success.

However, between 1856 and 1860, the Republicans were facing the long-serving and elderly political figure of James Buchanan, who could neither match Frémont's energy nor generate equivalent enthusiasm among younger voters. By the summer of 1860, the Republicans faced an altogether different challenge. In his late forties, Stephen Douglas was not quite as fresh-faced as when he burst onto the national stage at the turn of the decade, but the Little Giant remained an industrious, and energetic campaigner. As Young America's former figurehead, and friendly to both tariff and homestead legislation, Douglas still held a unique appeal among young Northern Democrats. In 1860, younger voters were to represent a pivotal and highly contested constituency. Republicans needed to retain their perceived strength among this demographic in order to carry sufficient Northern states to win the election. Republican perceptions of the importance of younger voters, coupled with the ample qualitative evidence of enthusiasm among this group for the Republican cause, reinforced assumptions that younger voters were correlated with an increase in the Republican vote. The following chapter will seek to test that hypothesis.

V

Lincoln or Douglas' Generation? Young Americans and the Coming of the American Civil War

In the summer of 1984, at a conference concerning 'Lincoln and the American Political Tradition', historian William Gienapp presented a paper straightforwardly titled 'Who voted for Lincoln?' Here, he tried to make sense of the varied and often competing historical interpretations of the United States' most consequential election. By means of the statistical methods of ecological and multiple regression, popular with the "New Political" historians of his era, Gienapp convincingly argued that 'overwhelming backing' among the Know Nothing voters who had supported Millard Fillmore in 1856 was 'the most important shift' that delivered Abraham Lincoln's victory in the 1860 presidential election.[1] He went further however, in outlining two other major reasons for the Republican Party's success: the abandonment of the Democratic Party by an increasing proportion of 'non-Catholic immigrants' and, most crucially, 'disproportionate strength among younger native-born voters.'[2] Gienapp's argument was based upon the results of his ecological regressions; models which estimated the number of 'new voters' (those who were too young to vote *or* who had not yet been naturalised) that moved into the Republican column between 1856 and 1860. Given Republican success among this group, Gienapp concluded that those who had been too young to vote in 1856 had, in the majority, settled on Lincoln.

That Gienapp turned to data in his attempts to resolve the outstanding enigmas of 1860 electoral dynamics speaks not only to his (and his era's) methodological proclivities, but

[1] William Gienapp, 'Who Voted for Lincoln.' *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political Tradition*, John Thomas 'ed', (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 77.
[2] Ibid., 77-78.

also to what Alan Nevins has termed the 'inscrutable' nature of the election itself.[3] Historians continue to debate the causes and consequences of Lincoln's victory in November 1860, not least because of its role in triggering the wave of secession ordinances that followed throughout the succeeding winter, but also because it marked the culmination of a decade of profound political crisis and party realignment. As this dissertation has shown, voting behaviour was particularly variable in the 1850s; Whigs saw their party completely collapse, Democrats wrestled with charges of corruption and "dough faced" leadership, and new parties such as the Know Nothings and Republicans emerged to challenge them. Throughout this realignment, the parties scrambled to assemble viable electoral coalitions. As the previous chapter documented, younger Americans became recognised as an increasingly important constituency.[4] In 1860, the way younger voters swung would have profound implications for the election's results, and by extension, the fate of the Union.

Nevertheless, age's relationship with voting behaviour is notoriously problematic for empirical assessment; as Gienapp himself cautioned, its relation 'to occupation, wealth and ethnicity (a higher proportion of immigrants being young males)' made it 'very difficult to determine the extent to which younger men backed Lincoln.'[5] Despite this, subsequent historians have cited Gienapp's statistical analysis alongside their own qualitative research to build a consensus regarding the role of younger voters in promoting Lincoln's election. For example, Jon Grinspan's aforementioned account of the Wide Awakes culminated in

[3] Douglas G. Gardner, 'An Inscrutable Election?': The Historiography of the Election of 1860, James Fuller 'ed' *The Election of 1860 Reconsidered*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2013), 245.
[4] Jon Grinspan, *The Virgin Vote: How Young Americans Made Democracy Social, Politics Personal, and Voting Popular in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). This work is the most comprehensive study of young Americans vital role in shaping nineteenth century US political culture.
[5] Gienapp, 'Who Voted for Lincoln'. This reflection is born out in the chapter's multiple regression analysis, where when controlling for variables such as ethnicity and occupation, there was no indication of a youth Republican vote. While Gienapp did not address this in this particular essay, he would address it in his later work - *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, (Oxford, 1987) - where he argued that regression was not a suitable method for analysing the effect of age on voting behaviour. For full explanation of my own use of regression, see Statistical Appendix.

identification of a 'Wide-Awake generation' – their formative years shaped by political crisis, violence and instability – who delivered Lincoln's presidency.[6] Recent book length accounts of the 1860 election have amplified Grinspan's argument. Michael S. Green's *Lincoln and the Election of 1860* (2011) and Michael Holt's *A Campaign Fraught with Consequences* (2017) cite Grinspan and Gienapp when arguing for younger voters' importance to Lincoln's victory. For Green, the Wide Awakes 'youth' was key to Lincoln's success, exciting 'participation and involvement among younger voters' that otherwise might not have happened.[7] For Holt, those who had reached voting age since 1856 represented a 'potential cornucopia' of new voters whom Wide Awake organisers were vital in recruiting.[8] The works of Grinspan, Green, and Holt together reflect a historical consensus that, to a significant degree, rests upon the foundation of Gienapp's 1984 conference paper.

In reviving and refining the quantitative methodologies of the New Political History – popular in the 1970s and 1980s but since largely abandoned – this chapter will provide a modern statistical assessment of this consensus. Using data made available since 2019 — including birthplace microdata unavailable in the 1980s — the analysis herein will largely confirm assumptions regarding younger voter's positive relationship with the Republican Party across much of the North. The Republican's generational appeal was not illusionary, rather it was a crucial factor in promoting its success.

However, as this chapter will demonstrate, the significance of young Americans as an electoral entity cut across party lines. Discovering regional inversions in the relationship between age and voting intention, particularly in the Northeastern states, the statistical

[6] Jon Grinspan, 'Young Men for War': The Wide Awakes and Lincoln's 1860 Presidential Campaign, *The Journal of American History*, 96, no. 2 (2009): 357–78.
[7] Michael S. Green, *Lincoln and the Election of 1860*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), 108.
[8] Michael F. Holt, *The Election of 1860: A Campaign Fraught with Consequences*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 137.

analysis herein forces further investigation of the Douglas Democracy's relationship with younger voters. In certain states, the Democratic Party outperformed the Republicans with this demographic to a remarkable degree. Specifically, these indications demand examination of generational politics in Eastern cities. Here, the peculiarity of urban moral and economic concerns dominated the associations guiding young men. Tempering urban vice often took precedence over inculcating moral concern for the enslaved. In addition, the cities' economies remained intricately bound with Southern capital and cotton product; as such, the Republican's unwavering promotion of 'free labour' appeared less appealing to younger Americans seeking financial security through commercial employment. Ultimately, across the Free States, age held a strong and statistically significant relationship with voting behaviour. While this tended to favour the Republican Party, it was not a given. Nevertheless, age's clear impact on voting patterns supports assertions that generational division was a crucial engine of political change in the mid-nineteenth century United States. This chapter confirms that to understand Lincoln's election, and therefore the coming of the American Civil War, we must take age and generational identity seriously.

1 Method

In a 2011 article tracing the mid-century political realignment of Illinois, James L. Huston argued that historians had 'retreated from quantitative analysis too quickly', leaving interpretations of the 1850s with various 'holes and omissions.'[9] Since the 1980s few historians have turned to electoral and socio-economic data in order to explain the political transformations of the two decades preceding the American Civil War.[10] Huston's article did little to shift prevailing historiographical trends, despite increasing access to the requisite

[9] James L. Huston, 'The Illinois Political Realignment of 1844–1860: Revisiting the Analysis', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (2011): 506.
[10] Ibid.

computational power, statistical tools and methodological schema. However, when considering where younger Americans cast their ballots, it seems wholly inadequate to rely solely on newspapers and contemporary speeches. These sources, while fundamental to understanding *why* young Americans may (or may not) have voted, cannot tell us *how* they did so. Data allows us to go beyond the explanatory limits of qualitative sources.

Through recourse to multiple regression (which facilitates analysis of specific explanatory variables while controlling for others), this chapter delivers a modern statistical assessment of the composition of Lincoln and Douglas' electorate in the Northern states. The results reflect three layers of investigation: the first considers the whole data set, specifically every United States county in the Free States where Lincoln and Douglas constituted the principal candidates (See Table I).[11] Subsequent analysis was conducted for defined geographical regions within the Northern states, including New England (Table II), the Mid-Atlantic (Table III), the Northeast (a compound of the Mid-Atlantic and New England, Table IV) and the Northwest (Table V). The larger models with more observations tended to provide more consistent and useful regression outputs. More limited models were created for the 1860 election's key states, including Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York (Tables VI-X). However, often with fewer than eighty observations, these models were less useful, and few variables met the threshold for statistical significance.

[11] As this study focuses primarily on the North, and specifically on how Lincoln performed relative to Douglas among younger voters, counties included in the analysis were those where the Lincoln and Douglas vote combined exceeded 90 per cent. States included in the analysis are as follows: Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. Notable omissions included California and Oregon. Both elected Lincoln by fine margins after hotly contested 3 or 4-way elections. The absence of two clear front-running parties, relatively small populations and few counties made these new states unsuitable for inclusion.

2 Results

The results of the analyses were reassuringly consistent with theoretical expectations, in many instances confirming assumptions regarding the relationship between the Lincoln vote and various demographic characteristics. Place of birth (both within and beyond the borders of the United States) and religious affiliation both exhibited a clear relationship with voting behaviour. Crucially, age also demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with voting behaviour in the majority of models, even when controlling for the aforementioned variables. The following section will seek to explain these relationships, and how they inform our understanding of the Republican and Douglas-Democrat coalition.

Place of Birth

Historians have often considered place of birth a crucial predictor of antebellum voting behaviour. The United States was, after all, a nation of immigrants. Between 1787 and 1860, upwards of five million foreign born individuals came to the Republic fleeing famine, war and political persecution, or simply seeking the economic opportunities promised by the United States' richly resourced and growing territory. Furthermore, despite surging nativist sentiment through the 1840s, a substantial number of these immigrants remained able to vote in elections, either because they had become citizens via the naturalisation process, or because voting laws allowed 'aliens' to cast ballots.[12] This made immigrants a crucial constituent, particularly in the Northern states where the majority resided. Through the 1850s, electoral politics increasingly revolved around the nativist issue; emerging in the early part of the decade by successfully cannibalising elements of the shattered Whigs, the American or "Know Nothing" Party came to define anti-immigrant politics. In 1856, they had won over twenty-two percent of the popular vote on a platform proposing a twenty-year residency

[12] Alan H. Kennedy, 'Voters in a Foreign Land: Alien Suffrage in the United States, 1704-1926', *Journal of Policy History*, 34, No.2 (2022): 245-275.

requirement for naturalisation and demanding that only native-born citizens hold elected office. In 1860, Republicans had the unenviable task of trying to secure a substantive share of the half a million 1856 Northern Know Nothing voters, capturing German immigrants in the Midwest, and tempering the Democratic Party's dominance among Irish immigrants in the urban centres of the Eastern Seaboard. The results of this analysis confirm that immigration continued to shape the electoral fortunes of both major parties in 1860, while suggesting that within immigrant communities, age also played a key role in shaping voting behaviour.

Regarding the German-born population, a one standard deviation increase was associated with a significant reduction in the Republican vote share (-2.41 per cent) across the Free States (Table I).[13] This relationship was particularly pronounced in New England (Table II) but was also evident in both the Northeastern and Northwestern models (Table IV and V), and in several of the individual state models, including Illinois, Indiana and Ohio (Tables VI-VIII). The extent to which Germans supported the Republican Party has been a matter of intense historical debate. Early studies characterised Germans, particularly in the Northwest, as a crucial Republican constituent. Led by prominent forty-eighters such as Carl Schurz, who opposed slavery's expansion, they encouraged votes for Lincoln through German-language newspapers and speeches.[14] However, more recently historians have criticised such interpretations as premised upon 'scant evidence' or 'crudely employed statistics.'[15] More recent studies have taken proper notice of the pluralistic religious composition of the German population (Lutheran, German Reformed and German Catholic),

[13] Use of standardised regression coefficients is essential when comparing variables that are measured on different scales.
[14] William Dodd, 'The Fight for the Northwest, 1860', *American Historical Review*, 16 (1911). Donnal V. Smith, 'The Influence of the Foreign-Born of the Northwest in the Election of 1860', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, (September 1932).
[15] Frederick C. Luebke 'ed' *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln*, (Lincoln, 1971), xiii. Walter D. Kampfhoefner quoted in Kenneth Allen Shafer, *The German Immigrants of Missouri and the Presidential Election of 1860*, (2015), 29.

local variations in the Republican Party's perceived association with nativism, and crucially, the differing generational identity of German immigrants.[16] Lesley Ann Kawaguchi in a study of Philadelphia Germans, has argued that older immigrants, who had been resident in the city for the longest period, were often more likely to maintain their loyalty to the Democratic Party.[17] This argument emphasises the heterogeneity of immigrant populations and suggests that even if, as the data suggests, German Americans largely voted Democratic, younger Germans, particularly in the West, could have been crucial in bolstering the Republican vote among younger cohorts. Although a comprehensive analysis of the German vote remains beyond the parameters of this study, these figures are no doubt useful in contributing to the existing literature.

Less historiographically contentious has been the perceived role of Irish voters in Lincoln's election. After 1840, Irish immigrants were overwhelmingly Catholic, and the majority were classified as 'unskilled labourers', a trend only accelerated by the famine of 1845-52.[18] Tyler Anbinder has described those arriving in the United States during these years as 'the most impoverished, destitute, unskilled group ever to arrive in the United States.'[19] Organised nativism emerged in reaction to this vast movement of people, and the political field was often divided between Whigs, who regularly exhibited nativist leanings, and Democrats, who 'assiduously cultivated the Irish vote.'[20] Indeed, historians have often characterised the Irish population as having an unshakable commitment to the Democratic Party, an assumption which is born out in my own analysis. Across the Free States a one standard deviation increase in the Irish born population is associated with a 2.51 percent

[16] Lesley Ann Kawaguchi, 'Diverging Political Affiliations and Ethnic Perspectives: Philadelphia Germans and Antebellum Politics,' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 2 (1994), 14.
[17] Ibid., 15.
[18] Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery the Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850's*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5-7.
[19] Ibid., 7.
[20] Kevin Kenny, 'Abraham Lincoln and the American Irish,' *American Journal of Irish Studies*, 10 (2013): 42.

decline in the Republican vote (I). This strong negative relationship is evident in the Mid-Atlantic (III), the Northeast and the Northwest (IV and V), and in the state models for Illinois, Indiana and New York (VI, VII and X). The geographical spread of Irish immigration is also apparent in the analysis, with the strongest negative correlations between the percentage of the population born in Ireland and the Republican vote observed in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. As the historian Kevin Kenny notes, the Irish were 'urban pioneers', who 'despite the hardships of urban life… stayed in towns and cities, in sharp contrast to the Germans, who scattered throughout the country'; New York, Boston and Philadelphia, held the highest concentrations of Irish immigrants and saw significant Democratic vote shares as a result.[21]

In addition to foreign immigration, internal migration played an essential role in shaping patterns of voting behaviour across the United States. As the historian Kenneth Winkle has argued in his analysis of antebellum Ohio, 'migration of some kind was a nearly universal experience before the Civil War.'[22] He cites territorial expansion, economic growth, improvements in transportation and urbanisation as just some of the factors that made antebellum Americans a uniquely mobile people.[23] Table I shows how counties with high percentages born in the South (both upper and lower) saw relatively large declines in the Republican vote. Familial ties, financial links with the slave economy, and likely exposure to Southern discourse strongly prejudiced against 'Black Republicanism', all served to diminish Republican chances among this cohort. By contrast, reflecting contemporary newspapers saturated with reports characterising the states of New England as the 'hot-bed of Republicanism', in areas where there were higher percentages of Yankees, the Republican vote was bolstered (III and V).[24] New England had long been the nerve centre of the United

[21] Ibid., 41.
[22] Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1988), 11.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *The Mountain Democrat*, Placerville California, August 18, 1860; *Portland Press Herald*, Maine, July 25, 1860; *Montgomery Weekly Post,* Alabama, August 15, 1860.

States reform movements, including organised abolition, and had continually demonstrated the greatest support for antislavery third parties. Given the deepening sectional division of United States politics by 1860, and the Republican's particular strength in the Northeast as early as 1856, these results are unsurprising.

Wealth and Occupation

Wealth variables often failed to meet the threshold for statistical significance and therefore inclusion in the majority of the models for this dissertation. Exceptions to this include property wealth (value in dollars per head of population), which holds a strong positive relationship with the Republican vote in the Northwestern model (V), and in the state models for Indiana and Illinois (VI and VII). This likely reflects the strength of the Republican vote in rural areas, where wealth was often tied to land as opposed to personal effects. For example, in the models for Illinois, a negative relationship between the number of farm acres per head of population and the Democratic vote can be interpreted alongside the clear negative relationship between the percentage of the population employed in manufacturing and the Republican vote. Together, these two figures strengthen existing historiographical claims of a rural-urban divide in voting patterns, where the Democrats dominated in the cities and the Republicans the surrounding countryside.[25] Often collinearity between the wealth, occupation, and urbanity variables prevented their simultaneous inclusion in models.

Religion

Regarding religious affiliation, these models largely confirm existing historiographical understandings of denominational politics. Richard Carwardine has deftly

[25] Douglas R. Egerton, *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln and the Election that Brought on the Civil War*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 210.

substantiated the intimate ties between Republican antislavery and Northern evangelicalism; the Party's main achievement was the unprecedented harnessing of the 'moral energies of evangelical churches', and securing the 'disproportionate commitment of the churches' ministers, editors and lay leaders.'[26] Republicans were especially strong in areas where New England culture and religion dominated, and it is unsurprising therefore, that demonstrating the strongest and clearest positive relationship to the Republican vote was the percentage of a county's population that belonged to the Congregational Church.[27] A similarly positive, although weaker relationship is evident between the other main Protestant denominations – Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians – and the Republican vote. The Episcopalian and Catholic denominations largely held a negative relationship to the Republican vote, or a positive relationship with the Democratic vote. This lends credence to the notion that the more ritualistic denominations tended Democratic, while those who promoted piety and 'adult conversion' tended Republican.[28]

Age

Age, intimately tied to the generational lens of this dissertation, was included in every model. Age effects on voting behaviour remained clear even when controlling for the variables discussed above. The complete models displayed in Table I reveal a strong, and statistically significant relationship between the relative youthfulness of a county's population and the Republican vote. More specifically a single standard deviation increase in the percentage of the county population aged 20-29 was associated with a near 2.9 percent increase in the Republican vote share. At the regional level, this relationship remains clear in the western states (IV), particularly in Ohio (VIII). The tables for Illinois (VI) and Indiana

[26] Richard Carwardine*, Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 307.
[27] Ibid., 268-277.
[28] Kawaguchi, 'Diverging Political Affiliations and Ethnic Perspectives,' 3.

(VII) also suggest a positive relationship between the 20-29 cohort and the Republican vote, however, in neither case do these meet the threshold for statistical significance. In contrast to the West, in the Northeast the relationship between age and voting is variable. In New England, where there are fewer counties (N=67) and it is significantly more challenging to construct an effective regression model, there is an apparent significant negative relationship between the 20-29 cohort and the Republican vote even when controlling for the Irish and German immigrant populations.[29] In the Mid-Atlantic (III), the results are varied. For Pennsylvania (IX) and New York (X) independently, age does not appear to have a statistically significant impact upon the Republican, nor Democratic vote.[30] When these two states are analysed alongside New England, a negative relationship between age and the Republican vote can be observed. In the Northeast as a whole (IV), a single standard deviation increase in the percentage of the population aged 20-29 is associated with a 2.42 per cent decrease in the Republican vote, however this fails to reach the threshold for statistical significance (p=0.158).

The divergence between New England and the Northwestern states regarding the relationship between younger demographics and the Republican vote complicates the existing historical consensus. In order to better understand the reasons for this variance, I constructed further models including different combinations of states, even omitting/including specific counties on the basis of their demographic characteristics. What emerges from this more rigorous exploration of the available data is a clear negative relationship between young urban voters and the Republican Party. A regression model based upon Massachusetts and New York for example, reveals a -4.0867 negative coefficient for the 20-29 cohort which meets the threshold for statistical significance (p<0.05), implying significant negative

[30] In both models, P>0.5 meaning there is a greater than 50 percent chance that the actual correlation is 0.

correlation between younger voters and the Republican Party in these states (Table XI). If I run the same regression again but remove just the two counties with the largest urban populations (Suffolk County and New York City), the negative relationship is significantly smaller and no longer statistically significant.

These results, therefore, only partially confirm existing historical interpretations of the younger voter's impact on Republican (and Democratic) support. The following section will offer some potential explanations for why the age 20-29 cohort is positively related to the Republican vote in the complete Free State model and the Northwestern States, while demonstrating a negative relationship in the Northeast, specifically in New York and Massachusetts.

3 Democratic Youth

At Palace Gardens in October 1858, on the eve of New York's gubernational election, Mississippi's Democratic Senator Jefferson Davis launched into a well-rehearsed argument regarding the limitations of Congress' power. Davis was offering what he called a 'few reflections' upon questions belonging 'to the memories of our fathers and linked with the hopes of our children', an intergenerational framing of his remarks which seemed all the more pertinent when he was loudly interrupted by the entrance of 'the Young Men's Democratic National Club.'[31] Bearing 'transparencies and flags' these youthful politicos stunned the speaker, demanding his response. Davis, addressing the young men, exclaimed that in 'every severe political struggle…where the contest on the one side was for principle, and on the other for spoils… it had been the gray-haired father and the boy with the peach bloom upon his cheek upon whom principles had to rely for support.'[32] Davis' 'own generation', he regretted, seemed 'too deeply steeped in the trickery of politics to be able to

[31] *Greenfield Democrat*, Massachusetts, August 3, 1860.
[32] Ibid.

rise above the influence of personal and political gain into the pure field of patriotism.'[33] Instead, he argued, it was upon 'young men' that the fate of the nation relied.[34]

Davis' oration speaks both to the salience of generational rhetoric in characterising late 1850s disputes over US territories, and the extent to which Democratic politicians shared in the Republican's belief that younger voters were crucial to the success of party and cause. This section will explain the Republican Party's apparent struggles to secure the youth vote in America's Northeast, first acknowledging instances of Democratic success in courting young Americans votes there, before exploring how the powerful explanatory factors of immigration and urbanisation complicated electoral dynamics in three urban case studies: New York, Boston and Chicago.

In 1860, the Republican Party did not have a complete monopoly of the young man's vote. The relative success of Frémont in 1856 forced Democrats like Davis to reacknowledge the importance of younger voters in sustaining political power. Stephen A. Douglas, Young America's former figurehead, was an ideal candidate for a Democratic Party bent on securing more youthful constituents, those who might otherwise have considered new opposition parties. He had been just thirty-seven years of age when thrust into the highest echelons of US politics and was backed vigorously (and at times, viscously) by his loyal acolytes – particularly George Sanders and his *Democratic Review*. A tour de force of factional politicking, Douglas' rise characterised, and in many ways reflected a very real generational transfer of political power both within the Democratic Party, and in United States politics more broadly. His first "national" success – the guiding of Henry Clay's compromise legislation through Congress in 1850 – saw the young Westerner apparently destined for the presidency.

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

However, his career in the following decade was beset by frustration and controversy. In November 1860 he could no longer assume the guise of the "new man", having had a guiding hand in the most contentious political actions of the decade, and having lost out on the presidential nomination twice in 1852 and 1856. In addition, Douglas had drawn derision from elements of his own party when challenging Buchanan's heavy handed Kansas policy and the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision (1857). By declaring that a 'citizen has a right to take with him into [any] Territory any article of property which the Constitution of the United States recognises', and declaring unambiguously that slaves constituted such property, Chief Justice Taney had wrought a legislative hammer blow to Douglas' conception of popular sovereignty. Douglas' argument — that an explicit congressional ban on slavery in the territories was unnecessary, because territorial legislatures could simply outlaw the institution as their local populations saw fit — was central to his personal appeal in the North. Recognising this, Douglas' response to the Supreme Court ruling was to render their judgement moot; arguing that if a territory did not pass the necessary positive laws that slavery required, particularly surrounding enforcement, then it could not take root. This "Freeport doctrine" only served to further ostracise Douglas from the Southern and pro-slavery Northern factions of the Democracy.

Despite this, many of his supporters, which still included a preponderance of younger men, were unwilling to countenance another near miss for the nomination. The moniker of Young America remained powerful and as one Western paper described it, Douglas was 'a prominent living representative and an exponent of the principles of Young America', a 'young man who…by his indomitable perseverance and untiring energies' had 'earned the appellation of the "young Democratic Giant of the West" and who, 'by the spontaneous demand of young men' had been nominated for the highest office.[35] His advancing age and

[35] *The Manitowoc Pilot*, Wisconsin, September 28, 1860.

extensive political baggage did little to dent the Little Giant's formidable political energies, and he remained backed by a devoted network of (broadly younger) supporters. Throughout April and May, as Democrats anticipated an especially contentious convention, letters flooded in urging Douglas and his closest advisors to yield nothing to the Party's Southern wing. One letter sent from a supporter in Boston pleaded with Douglas to stand as 'an independent candidate' as it was his 'fate' to do so, regardless of the outcome of the convention.[36] Similar letters urged him to 'never withdraw' his name, with one partisan stating that he would 'vote for no man for president but yourself' having been his choice for the past eight years.[37] For this supporter, the stakes were clear – the nomination of a 'Buchanan candidate' by a cabal of Southern 'fire-eaters' and 'Northern doughfaces' would ensure 'black Republican rule.'[38] This 'Douglas or nobody' attitude characterised much of his correspondence through May and June 1860, likely informing the bullish and uncompromising nature of the Douglas campaign after the Democratic Party's split at Baltimore.

Once Douglas was certain to run, loyal partisans wasted no time in organising for the election. Much like the Young Men's Frémont Clubs of 1856, the summer of 1860 saw Young Men's Douglas Clubs, spring up across the North. Newspaper reports indicate these concentrated in the Eastern States, particularly in New York. Through the raising of hickory polls, public meetings and stump speeches, these organisations were vital in generating enthusiasm for the Douglas ticket, particularly in states where the existing party machinery had splintered. The most enthusiastic of these young partisans formed companies of "Little Giants", the Douglas equivalent of Lincoln's Wide Awakes. In late September 1860, between

[36] Stephen A. Douglas. Papers, [Box 33, Folder 1], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

'6 and 7000 Little Giants' from across the state of New York gathered in Albany to participate in a torchlit procession; similarly to the Wide Awakes, the marchers sought to demonstrate 'their superiority of drill, dress and numbers.'[39] The *Pittsfield Sun* described how the march could have been that much larger had the 'Clubs of Hudson, Catskill and others' not ran aground on the Hudson just below the city, depriving 'at least 700 young Democrats… the pleasure of participating.'[40]

Ultimately, in contrast to the Wide Awakes (where there is ample evidence of their sheer numerosity and the scale of their torchlit processions), Douglas' Little Giants did appear relatively scarce. Certainly the Republican press was successful in its attempts to diminish perceptions of the Douglas men's efforts; the *Buffalo Courier Express* for instance, mocked New York's 'Little giants', for coming up 'eight hundred short' in their attempts to match the Wide Awake procession held a week prior.[41] Several papers in fact made the point of comparing the relatively small number of Little Giants with the abundance of Wide Awakes.[42] One paper described a Little Giant display as 'nothing to speak of' while another, the Republican *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* dismissed them as an 'imitation of the Wide Awakes' that had 'turned out so little that none of them have been visible to the naked eye.'[43] Wide Awakes too were themselves scornful of their Democratic imitators; a young Thomas Bradford Drew described one such 'Douglas and Johnson… torchlight procession' in Boston as a 'miserable affair' comprised largely of 'Irish and Dutch.'[44] Perhaps, as Michael Holt suggests, the 'anti-Lincoln marching clubs were never as numerous or imposing as the Wide Awakes in the North', however they were significant enough to arrange 'one of the most

[39] *The Pittsfield Sun*, Massachusetts, October 4, 1860.
[40] Ibid.
[41] *Buffalo Courier Express*, September 29, 1860.
[42] *Buffalo Weekly Express*, September 25, 1860.
[43] *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, Iowa, September 1, 1860; *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 29, 1860.
[44] Thomas Bradford Drew, November 1, 1860, Diary Entry, Thomas Bradford Drew diaries, 1849-1898. Massachusetts Historical Society.

magnificent displays ever witnessed in the Empire State.'[45] Their relative strength is indicative of the Democratic Party's willingness and capacity to pursue younger voters in similar fashion to their Republican opposition. The qualitative evidence available suggests that Democrats were most successful in this regard in the Northeast, perhaps lending some explanation for the absence of a positive statistical relationship between younger voters and the Republican Party in this region.

4 Urban Weakness

In addition to the attempts of Democratic partisans to court the younger generation's vote, the relative weakness of the Republican Party among the 20-29 cohort in the most populus Northeastern cities can perhaps also be explained by the extent, and nature of urban development in this region. The years succeeding the war of 1812 saw the immense growth of America's Eastern cities, with urbanisation rates peaking for much of the Northeastern and Middle Atlantic states between 1840 and 1860.[46] By 1850, over a quarter of the Northeast's population lived in a handful of major conurbations.[47] Much has been made of the urban disruption wrought by the upwards of five million immigrants, largely from Germany and Ireland, that landed on America's Eastern Seaboard in the 1840s and 1850s. However, several historians have noted that as rural work declined in the Eastern states, their cities were infused with a near equal portion of young 'country boys' in search of steady employment with significant consequences for those cities socio-political complexion.[48] What follows is a

[45] Michael Holt, *A Campaign Fraught with Consequences*, 141. *The Pittsfield Sun*, October 4, 1860.
[46] Jeffery G. Williamson, "Antebellum Urbanization in the American Northeast." *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1965, 599; Joseph P. Ferrie, *"How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm [When They've Seen Schenectady]?:Rural-to-Urban Migration in 19 Century America, 1850-70",* NU Manuscript.
[47] Frank Towers, "Urban and Rural America in the Civil War" in *The Cambridge History of the American Civil War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 269.
[48] Allan S. Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men In New York* (1975). The population of the northern states urban areas (those with a total population of over 25,000) tended younger than the whole. The 20-29 cohort comprised 19.46129 per cent of the total population in large urban areas, whereas the average for the northern states included in this study was 18.179 per cent.

close analysis of youth association and political engagement in three cities, two in the Northeast (New York and Boston) and, for the purposes of comparison, one in the Northwest (Chicago). These case studies will serve as a lens through which to explore in detail the interconnected relationship between youth, urbanisation and the Republican vote, perhaps shedding light on why, particularly in the Northeast, Republican's often positive relationship with younger voters was turned on its head.

First, it is vital to underscore the scale and pace of change that was stretching and pulling at the urban fabric of the United States through the first half of the nineteenth-century. Urbanisation was most pronounced in the Northeast, with the regions three largest conurbations (New York, Boston and Philadelphia) collectively absorbing over 1.1 million citizens.[49] Between 1800 and 1850, Boston's population swelled to nearly 140,000, half of whom were of foreign birth or foreign parentage and 25,000 who had migrated from the surrounding countryside.[50] This influx, comprised of 'rural youths' alongside Irish immigrants, 'transformed the city's 'traditional patterns of social, economic, political and religious life.'[51] Similarly in New York, the population had ballooned from a modest 60,515 in 1800 to over 813,669 in 1860; historian Allan S. Horlick has described 1850s New York as a city 'changing with disruptive speed… becoming strange where it had been familiar, and mysterious where it had been predictable.'[52] In 1830, Chicago could not even call itself a town and it was not even incorporated as a city until 1837. In the 1840 census, the first to include Chicago, the city boasted a population of just 4470; by 1860, this figure had increased by a factor of sixty, to 298,977. The pace and extent of urbanisation in the antebellum United states was unprecedented.

[49] ICPSR Social data.
[50] Heather D. Curtis, "Visions of Self, Success, and Society among Young Men in Antebellum Boston", *Church History* 73, no. 3 (2004), 613.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes*, 45.

As these cities grew, so too did anxieties about their magnetism for vice. Antebellum cities were, according to one historian, 'turbulent, crime-ridden hotbeds of "popery" … places of desperate poverty where thousands endured a barely human existence in decaying tenements, stinking hovels and damp cellars.'[53] Advice literature, often aimed directly at this mass of newly urbanised youth, articulated the urban sprawl's myriad moral antagonisms. Congregationalist preacher Joel Hawes, for instance, suggested that while the 'great numbers of youth' which, 'every season… come from the country to our larger towns and cities' come from 'Christian families and bring with them the loveliness of a fair, unsullied character', they are often ignorant to the 'temptations and vices' of their 'new place of residence.'[54] Naturally drawn into 'fellowship' with those that have gone before them, they are 'an easy prey to the corrupt and corrupting examples by which they are surrounded', lacking the fortitude to resist 'the mass of corruption around them.'[55] As such, without appropriate guidance, young men were destined to 'swell the monstrous tide of depravity and dissipations, which is rolling, as a mighty desolation, over the cities of our land.'[56] Similarly, Reverend Samuel Ware Fisher warned of the 'three monstrous sirens' which faced newly arriving young men 'whose seductive melody attracts thousands to their fatal embrace... the wine-cup, the harlot's chamber and the card table.'[57] As rural innocents arrived on mass to the city, without gainful employment, prior associations, or pre-arranged accommodations, it was supposed that they were more susceptible to the cities less palatable lures. For concerned

[53] Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA., 1978).
[54] Joel Hawes, *Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character: originally addressed to the young men of Hartford and New Haven, and published at their request, with two additional lectures not before published with an introduction by Richard S. Storrs*, 35.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Samuel W. Fisher, *The Three Great Temptations of Young Men with Several Lectures Addressed to Business and Professional Men*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Moore & Anderson, 1852), 14.

clergymen and moral reformers such as Hawes and Fisher, to convey their advice to the young, they depended upon two particular institutions.

The concomitant rise of the Young Men's Associations and the creation of the Young Men's Christian Association were vital in serving to regulate the integration of youth into urban society.[58] Imported from Britain, the first YMCA opened in 1851 in Boston, and would be followed by New York in 1852, and Chicago in 1858. These YMCA's joined an existing network of associations for young men, including the secular Young Men's Associations, Lyceums and Mechanics Associations. These organizations welcomed newly arriving young men, encouraging kinship, intellectual development, and in the case of the YMCAs, a strict adherence to evangelical Protestant moral and social norms. Taking rooms, often at significant financial risk, was a means of providing young men with a physical space to socialise; an appealing alternative to the murky street corner, the tavern or the brothel.[59] The New York Association, operating out of Clinton Hall, furnished a reading room with upwards of 'eight daily papers, fifty weekly and semi-weekly, thirty-two monthly, and twelve quarterly publications.'[60] In addition, it hosted bi-weekly prayer meetings and a winter lecture series delivered by 'prominent clergymen' of different denominations.[61] As the president of the YMCA stated, 'The young men of a mighty commercial city, surrounded by the deceitful attractions of wealth, and by the powerful seductions of vice in a thousand forms, we are endeavouring to grasp, in the name of one… who offers an everlasting refuge from the ensnarement's of sin.'[62]

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America*, 1830-1870, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 1-2. Halttunen has explored how the nefarious figure of the 'confidence man' – he who 'seduces' the young man first arriving in the city with drink, cards or sex – summarised city elite fears of urban corruption and moral decay.
[60] *Reminiscences of the City of New York and its Vicinity*, (New York, 1855), 314.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

It may be assumed, accounting for the tremendous political engagement of young men throughout the Antebellum Era, that analysis of these associations would provide some insight into the way the younger generation voted. However, it is striking how little partisan politics factors feature in the declared purposes and records of action of these associations. There principal concern was, at least most explicitly, the 'protection' of young men from urban vice. While these associations sought to instil a sense of civic virtue and moral duty to one's fellow citizens, party politics was largely shunned. There is clear evidence that the sectional tensions pervading national politics were evaded and there is almost no evidence of any clear consensus among the young men who comprised these groups regarding slavery. While Heather Curtis notes that the Mount Vernon Association of Young Men (affiliated with the local Congregational church) eventually came to resolve to 'resist all further encroachments of the Slave Power, even at the expense of the dissolution of the union', she notes the lack of unanimity on that issue and that on multiple occasions 'a significant majority held that Roman Catholicism was a "greater evil" than slavery.'[63] In addition, William B. Whiteside has noted how the Boston YMCA nearly split on account of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s admission to the library, an act which precipitated a further argument over whether to 'take a stand against slavery during and after the Buchanan-Frémont campaign.'[64] While not in the Northeast, my own examination of the D.C YMCA minute book reflects a broader concerted effort from all associations to appeal across the political spectrum. Adverts for the association were placed in all three major District newspapers (the *Union*, the *Intelligencer* and the *Republic*). In an early Board of Managers meeting the association's Vice President ordered that 'no papers be taken by the library committee without the approval of the board and that no political or partisan papers be admitted.'[65] A further debate in a meeting

[63] Curtis, *Visions of Self*, 634.
[64] William B. Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A and Community Need, A Century's Evolution*, 1851-1951, (New York: Associated Press, 1951), 37.
[65] Young Men's Christian Association, Washington, D.C., records, 1852-1903, Library of Congress.

of November 8 1852, yielded a resolution recommending that discussions of a sectarian character calculated to impair the association be prohibited'; this was later amended to include the word 'political.'[66] The primary object of the D.C YMCA was the moral, spiritual and mental improvement of young Protestant men, regardless of party association. The mass of advice literature which grew up alongside the YMCAs also scarcely strayed into partisan debates. Instead, it encouraged placing the 'public interest' and the 'country's prosperity and glory' above your own.[67] Political participation was to be encouraged, but 'petty and party politics' eschewed.[68] Of the partisan press, one advice manual urged young me to 'shun' its 'corrupting portions and parts' as they would 'shun the plague or cholera.'[69] Crucially, this manual suggest that as 'Young men are prone to extreme views… with regard to politics' they 'would do well to seek council from older men.'[70]

Cities such as Boston and New York promised opportunity, particularly in the mercantile businesses that surrounded their bustling ports. The Panic of 1857 likely only compounded the trend of the Northeast's industrialisation, as the price of agricultural product fell in response to abundant supply and simultaneous reduction in demand from Europe.[71] Indeed, economic opportunity appeared to be the principal motivation for younger rural-urban migrants. As Horlick states, at a time when the portion of young people in American society was at its greatest, and opportunities in rural communities diminished, young men entered these cities with 'little regard for the canons of propriety that once governed mercantile life', rather their 'principal object was to make money.'[72] Operating out of the

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Joel Hawes, *Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character: Originally Addressed to the Young men of Hartford and New Haven, and Published at their Request, with Two Additional Lectures not Before Published*, (1856).
[68] Ibid.
[69] William Alcott, *Familiar Letters to Young Men on Various Subjects. Designed as a companion to The Young Man's guide* (1850).
[70] Ibid.
[71] James Huston, 'Western Grains and the Panic of 1857', *Agricultural History* 57, no.1 (1983): 15.
[72] Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes*, 67.

same premises as the New York YMCA, the Mercantile Library Association was established out of what it deemed a 'very obvious public necessity' – the 'mental training' of young men.[73] Given the early age at which Americans entered the mercantile business, they were deprived the advantages of school precisely at that stage of life it was 'likely' they 'passed into slothful indifference', a fact particularly true in a city with 'innumerable inducements for recreation and amusements.'[74] The association therefore, provided not only a well-stocked library, but classes in 'languages, book-keeping, penmanship, chemistry, music, elocution, drawing, mathematics and phonography.'[75] Its goal was not to shape young men through spiritual or moral improvement, but simply to render them a more efficient and rational worker.

The evidence afforded by studies of young men's associations (Christian or otherwise) that proliferated in light of the rapid urbanisation of the antebellum period, fails to lend itself to any wholesale implication of antislavery sentiment among the native-born youth of America's northeastern cities. Of course, Boston remained the epicentre of the United States' abolitionist movement, but even so, it retained substantial economic ties to the South. In both New York and Boston, the majority of young Americans were perhaps more concerned with making a living in the mercantile economy, an economy which depended upon the import and re-export of cotton and textiles, than they were about the plight of the enslaved. The Republican Party did hold some appeal beyond its antislavery credentials, but its support for a Homestead Act, which promised to promote western settlement, and for a Pacific railroad, likely did little to sway the undecided young New Yorker or Bostonian.

[73] *Reminiscences of the City of New York*, 298.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid, 300.

By contrast, antebellum Chicago was, as the historian Christopher Reed points out, 'neither a slave society nor a city supportive of the economy of slavery.'[76] Unlike its peers on the East Coast, its economy held far more significant ties with Canada than the American South. Rather than cotton, the City's main business lay in serving as a commercial hub, through which imported manufactured goods crossed paths with the West's agricultural exports.[77] While Chicagoans could expect to find some employment in the railroad industry, the main drivers of the economy were the Merchant class. These 'boosters', as the economic historians John Jentz and Richard Schneirov describe them, were mainly invested in land and the transfer of grain and lumber.[78] In addition, the rural to urban migration so commonplace in the Northeast through the mid- nineteenth century was not matched around Chicago; in the West, agricultural land remained relatively plentiful and as such, the majority of the city's working population were foreign born immigrants (German, British and Irish).[79] Often, this rendered the city short of workers, making Republican policies which encouraged westward migration and the improvement of East-West transportation, highly attractive to Chicagoans.

Further to these crucial economic differences, a review of the literature provides a sense that the Chicago's working population was in some respects 'more enlightened' than its Eastern equivalents; Reed has pointed out that while cities like New York often 'rioted against the presence of African Americans… in Chicago, whites and blacks rioted together against slave catchers.'[80] The city also served as the terminus of the Underground Railroad, and Chicagoans regularly defended the liberties of the formerly enslaved.[81] Historians have mapped the extensive links between the City and the United States antislavery movement,

[76] Christopher R. Reed, 'The Early African American Settlement of Chicago, 1833-1870', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 108, no. 3–4 (2015): 212.
[77] John B. Jentz and Richard Schneirov, *Chicago in the Age of Capital: Class, Politics, and Democracy during the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 1st ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 12-20.
[78] Ibid., 14-16.
[79] Ibid., 17-18.
[80] Reed, *Chicago*, 228.
[81] Ibid., 231.

and it is perhaps unsurprising that in 1860, the Republican Party's national convention (held in a 10,000 capacity Wigwam) attracted crowds in excess of 40,000 partisans.[82] As the *Chicago Tribune* effused after Lincoln's nomination, buildings across the metropolis were illuminated in celebration and 'the enthusiasm was universal, demonstrated by the music, cheering, speaking, parading and… liberal display of fence rails.'[83] Chicago was economically fundamentally different to both Boston and New York, and in many respects its population exceeded their Bay State counterpart in a commitment to antislavery. As such, it is unsurprising that Chicago diverged in terms of younger voter's support for the Republican Party, despite its urban classification.

Returning to the East, in many instances both younger native immigrants and their merchant employers were more concerned about the dangers of Catholicism – an immediate and local concern – than the institution of slavery.[84] The vast number of Catholic immigrants (both Irish and German) who landed on America's eastern shores between 1840 and 1860 were significant in shaping the models for the Republican and Democratic vote in the election of 1860. In both New York County and Suffolk County (Boston) Irish born represented over twenty-five per cent of the total population, nearly all of whom were Catholic.[85] While Chicago had a substantial Irish population, it was relatively smaller and longer established. As has been noted, the free state and regional models clearly indicate a negative relationship between the Republican vote and the Irish population. In addition, as a Pearson correlation between the size of the 20-29 cohort and the Irish and German immigrant population indicates, these immigrant populations were broadly (although not significantly) younger

[82] Tom Campbell, *Fighting Slavery in Chicago: Abolitionists, the Law of Slavery and Lincoln*, (Ampersand, 2009); Holt, *Election of 1860*, 102-103.
[83] *Chicago Tribune*, May 19, 1860.
[84] Curtis, *Visions of Self*, 634.
[85] There were 207, 557 Irish born in New York and 48, 515 in Suffolk County.

than the population as a whole.[86] The Northeast includes a plurality of counties where there are relatively young populations, comprised primarily of Irish born, which voted heavily for Douglas. However, the inclusion of both the percentage Irish born and the 20-29 cohort in a multiple regression model should isolate these two factors. There is no evidence of a high degree of multicollinearity between these variables, and as such, we can be confident that the negative relationship between the 20-29 cohort and the Republican vote is independent of nativity factors. The only significant limitation of multiple regression analysis that may have impacted the results for the Northeastern states and particular for New England are the relatively fewer counties, and therefore observations from which to build models for the region. This somewhat reduces the confidence we can have in the models for determining population age effects on voting behaviour.

Nevertheless, conducting a compound analysis of the East's most populus states delivers a clear and statistically significant positive relationship between the 20-29 cohort and the Democratic presidential vote (and an attendant negative, although not statistically significant, relationship with the Republican vote) even when controlling for immigrant populations. This supports the arguments outlined above regarding the relative weakness of the Republican Party, their economic policies and their antislavery credentials, among the metropolitan young Americans of the Northeast.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has objectively assessed the assumed positive relationship between young Americans and Republican voting in the 1860 election, providing a further test for this dissertation's assessment of generational division as an engine of political change in mid-

[86] The Pearson Correlation coefficient for the percentage of the total population aged 20 to 39 and the percentage of the population born in Germany and Ireland was +0.113 compared to -0.191 for the percentage of the total population aged 50 to 69.

nineteenth century US politics. The previous chapter examined an array of qualitative evidence, from contemporary newspapers to personal diaries, which detailed the extent and nature of young American's relationship with the Republican Party. It demonstrated how, from efforts to emphasise the stark generational contrasts between John C. Frémont and James Buchanan in 1856, to the spectacular enthusiasm expressed and engendered by the Wide Awakes companies of 1860, the Republicans (press, politicians and campaign operatives) successfully presented themselves as a fundamentally "new" movement, with a style of politics and policies uniquely appealing to young men. The Party appealed to these younger voters on three levels. First, it attracted those who felt that existing parties, in particular the Democrats, were either corrupt, in thrall to the Slave Power, out of step with increasing moral opposition to slavery, or simply ambivalent to their own interests as young men. Second, in defining the Party's opposition to slavery's extension as a moral *and* economic concern, they captured a broad spectrum of young men who, while perhaps concerned for the enslaved, were preoccupied with securing their own financial and social independence. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the Party affirmed the importance of younger voters, recognising them as a potentially decisive constituency and the arbiters of the United States' political future. Taken together, the qualitative evidence provided a convincing foundation for defining Republican victory in 1860 as the product of a younger generation's votes.

This chapter tested this hypothesis against the available quantitative evidence for the election. Recourse to quantitative methods was justified in that in could provide a far more comprehensive analysis of young American's voting behaviour than a sample of qualitative sources alone. In addition, quantitative analysis can cut through the partisan "noise" which defines newspapers and campaign literature. Through the inclusion of newly available data, it also delivered an up-to-date contribution to existing statistical analyses of the election. The

results of the analysis largely confirmed prevailing historical assumptions about the strength of the Republican Party among younger voters: Republicans performed well across the Free States, but particularly in the Northwest. However, in the Northeast, the analysis demonstrated that the relationship between younger Americans and the Republican Party was more complicated, either failing to meet the threshold for statistical significance or, in the case of the Eastern state model and the New England model, being entirely negative.

The remaining half of this chapter detailed three probable explanations for this regional variation in the voting behaviour of younger Americans. First, it documented Democratic recognition of the importance of younger voters. Candidate selection again played a crucial role; part of Stephen Douglas' appeal to Northern Democrats was his Young American roots. The expressions of enthusiasm for his candidacy on the part of younger partisans – through private correspondence or public demonstration – challenge any notions of a Republican monopoly of the youth vote. Second, it explored some of the "push" factors that may have deterred younger voters – particularly those moving from the Northeast's rural periphery into its rapidly expanding cities – from supporting the Republican Party. Examination of the young men's associations (Christian or otherwise) and associated advice literature that emerged in response to the large-scale migration of young men to Northern cities, reveals an absence of any clear consensus on the matter of slavery. Active attempts to discourage more 'radical' political positions, and even encouragement to avoid party politics altogether, suggest that for a significant portion of young men the Republican Party probably held limited appeal. Thirdly, it argued that the western centric nature of the Republican Party's economic policies was unlikely to appeal to young men who had moved to the cities of America's Northeast to capitalise on commercial opportunities.

Ultimately, this chapter uses data to demonstrate unequivocally that across party lines, and beyond ethnic, religious, financial and occupational divisions, age played a central role in

shaping voting behaviour in 1860. By centring young voters in examination of the nineteenth century's most consequential election, it reinforces assumptions of generational identities importance to Civil War causation. While not absolute, Lincoln (and his Party's) grasp of younger American voters was a crucial element of their electoral success. This fact, when viewed alongside the findings of the previous chapter, are indicative of a generational rejection of existing modes of politics. Premised upon a heightened moral disdain for slavery, political dissatisfaction with existing parties, and the perceived menace of a "Slave Power", this rejection would ultimately hasten the nation's descent into war.

Conclusion

At nine o'clock on November 23, 1860, Charleston's Young Men's Secession Club set out from Citadel Green 'amid the full blaze of rockets, torches, roman candles and colored lanterns.'[1] Brandishing a host of transparencies and banners, the young men sought to convey their preparedness to meet the Republican threat. Declaring their trust in God, their strength of 'hearts and arms', and crucially their desire to do 'away with compromise', Charleston's youth joined a growing secessionist movement defined by military organisation. By November 10, less than four days after Lincoln's election, New York's *Evening Post* declared that 'several hundred thousand' so-called 'Minute Men' had been enrolled across the South.[2] In Georgia's Chatham County, local businessman Charles Lamar was granted gubernatorial authorisation to 'arm and equip 100 men with the latest and most approved weapons', particularly those 'young men' who 'favor equality in the Union, or independence out of it.'[3] In Virginia, a great proportion of young men began wearing cockades, indicative of their 'fighting spirit' and readiness for war.[4]

By joining these movements, young Southern men, at least implicitly, and often explicitly, rejected the possibility of compromise with the new administration. Peter Carmichael has documented how younger Virginians, those who had grown up with slavery, held long-established ties to the planter class, and where exposed to the political tumult of the 1850s, were especially vigorous in their lobbying 'for secession while their conservative elders preached union.'[5] For twenty-five year-old Georgian, George Anderson Mercer, the passage of South Carolina's secession ordinance was cause for celebration. The state led in

[1] *The Charleston Mercury*, November 23, 1860.
[2] *Evening Post*, New York, November 10, 1860.
[3] *Daily Nashville Patriot*, November 10, 1860.
[4] *The Baltimore Sun*, November 14, 1860.
[5] Peter Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War and Reunion*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

freeing the South from its ties to a North gripped by civic decay; its businesses 'terribly depressed', its press vandalised, its officials corrupt, and its public mind possessed by fanaticism.[6] Scornful of congressional attempts at compromise, which he described as 'nothing but talk', and weary of 'blood thirsty' Republican's penchant for coercion, Mercer joined fellow young men from his state in seizing Fort Pulaski on January 11, 1861.[7] Just eight days later, delegates to his states' own convention would vote in favour of secession.

Southern unionists pleaded with young men to count the hazards attendant to their uncompromising zeal. One Kentuckian political stalwart, the sixty-two-year old Charles Wickliffe, described it as painful 'to hear how so many of the promising young men' of his state dismissed further political engagement with the North in favour of admitting the right of secession.[8] Calling for the 'prompt exercise of reason, unclouded by passion and unbiased by prejudice', he sought to rally 'loyal citizens… to rebuke sectionalism.' [9] Similarly, the conservative Whig editor of the *Alabama State Sentinel* implored the 'young men, who are full of blood, in the full vigor of manhood', to 'consider well what they are doing... to understand the consequences of their course.[10] However, these calls often fell on deaf ears.

The eagerness with which Southern youth martialled reflected anxieties agitated by their generational contemporaries in the North. Wide Awakes continued to operate in the aftermath of Lincoln's election, and both Southerners and Northern Democrats speculated as to the intentions of these well drilled Republican partisans. For Texan Senator Louis Wigfall, impending secession would be the consequence of 'the teachings of [Seward], the preaching of the pretended followers of Christ, and by teaching in your schools even your children to

[6] George Anderson Mercer Diary, Folder 503, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
[7] Ibid.
[8] *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville Kentucky, November 12, 1860.
[9] Ibid.
[10] *Alabama State Sentinel*, November 14, 1860.

hate us.'[11] These children had grown up to become 'half a million uniformed men, well drilled' whose purpose was 'to sweep the [South] with fire and sword.'[12] One Northern Democratic Paper despaired at how that 'band of Republican incendiaries… jubilate and illuminate torches and transparencies and rejoice over the success of a sectional candidate', favouring a cause that 'is fast producing ruin.'[13] Wide Awakes, of course, felt justified in celebrating Lincoln's triumph, but there is no doubt that their actions were conducted with one eye toward the South. The organisation and militarisation of youth in the period directly following Lincoln's election reflected a sense among younger generations, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, that this time there could be no concessions.

1 Crisis of Compromise

Of course, there were attempts to broker Compromise after November 6th. Both the House and Senate commissioned bi-partisan and bi-sectional committees tasked with devising legislation which could prevent secession. The most serious proposal came from the Senate's Committee of Thirteen, and specifically John J. Crittenden — heir apparent to Henry Clay. Crittenden (b.1787) was a generational contemporary of Clay and Webster, and like them, had served in either state or federal government in some capacity since before the War of 1812. Like Clay, his commitment to compromise stemmed from an unflinching faith in the timeless wisdom of the Founding Generation, and a belief that his own generation shared in a responsibility to transfer that legacy unaltered to future Americans. In a December 18 speech to the Senate setting out the substance of his proposals, Crittenden declared it 'the highest duty of Congress' to 'preserve' and 'perpetuate' the Union such that 'we may hand down the

[11] *Journal and* Courier, Lafayette Indiana, December 13, 1860.
[12] Ibid.
[13] *The Morning Democrat*, Davenport Iowa, November 19, 1860.

glories which we have received to our children and to our posterity, and to generations far beyond us.'[14]

Crittenden's proposals were intended to adhere to the Clay formula of sectional balance through equal concession. However, reviewing the substance of the Compromise, contemporary critics were quick to question the one-sided nature of the measures on offer. The North would be expected to concede imposition of the Fugitive Slave Law and guarantees of its faithful execution; personal liberty laws would need to be abolished; and a constitutional amendment passed which ceded Congress' right to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Congress would also be required to cede any right to abolish slavery in places of federal jurisdiction within the Southern states. Finally, the North would have to accept the reinstitution (and extension) of the Missouri Compromise line to the eastern border of California. While slavery would be prohibited in all territory north of that line, it would be explicitly recognised and protected south of it. The South by contrast, merely had to allow for some minor amendments to the Fugitive Slave Law which reduced the power of marshals to impress Northerners into slave catching parties.

Crittenden's proposals were met with particular enthusiasm by those who, like him, had campaigned under the banner of the Constitutional Unionist Party in November. This political movement had been founded to preserve 'the Union as it is'; the hope was that a conservative majority fearful of the consequences of electing sectional candidates like Breckenridge, Lincoln or the ostracised Douglas, would be willing to place their faith in an older political tradition with a proven track record of keeping the Union together at times of sectional crisis. The issue this new movement faced was that outside of the border states of Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, there was no majority for this kind of politics.

[14] *The Life of John J. Crittenden with Selection from his Correspondence and Speeches*, *Volume 1*, 'ed' Chapman Coleman, (Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott & Co., 1873), 231.

Furthermore, with its sexagenarian ticket of John Bell and Edward Everett, this political movement struggled to generate enthusiasm in the same manner as their much younger opponents. The Party was regularly dismissed on account of its geriatric composition. In January 1860, Senator Alfred Iverson, a prominent future secessionist, had labelled this band of former old-line Whigs as mere 'fossils and fogies'; 'Old, inert, useless' they were 'never to control a vote' nor 'give form or shape to any [future] political movement.'[15]

Despite the backing of his own party, Stephen Douglas, and even moderate Republicans like William Seward, Crittenden's proposals were ultimately thwarted by the same arithmetic that decided the election. As the historian Frank Towers has argued, the November returns already revealed that there was not a majority for the 'compromise vison of the Union.'[16] The combined vote share of Douglas and Bell (the two candidates that broadly adhered to the notion of the "Union as it is") only secured a majority of votes in the Upper South.[17] Everywhere else, either Lincoln or Breckenridge triumphed. After the election, the majority of Lower South representatives were unwilling to countenance anything other than explicit constitutional protections for slavery in the territories. This ran contrary to the Republican platform, and any concession on this free-soil position called into question the sustainability of US democracy. Republicans were rightly wary of conceding any ground to the South when staring down the barrel of secession; a dangerous precedent would be set should an outraged minority shape government policy through threats of disunion and violence.

One last gasp at compromise came in February 1861. Virginia's John Tyler was chosen to preside over his states' proposed 'Peace Conference', which would see delegates

[15] The *Congressional Globe*, Volume 29, 36th Congress, 1st Session, (1860), 384.
[16] Frank Towers, 'Another Look at Inevitability: The Upper South and the Limits of Compromise in the Secession Crisis,' *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2011): 121.
[17] Ibid.

from twenty-one states gather in Washington in early February.[18] Opening proceedings, Tyler again encouraged attendees to conceptualise compromise in generational terms: 'If you reach the height of this great occasion your children's children will rise up and call you blessed.'[19] Tyler too, was concerned for his own legacy: 'I confess myself to be ambitious of sharing in the glory of accomplishing this grand and magnificent result. To have our names enrolled in the Capitol, to be repeated by future generations with grateful applause.'[20] The basis of proceedings would be Crittenden's original proposals, and by mid-February, the Committee on Resolutions had devised seven constitutional amendments which it hoped could stem the tide of Secession. These would scrape through convention voting (owing to the fortuitous absence of a New York delegate) before Tyler presented them to Congress on February 26.[21]

Reflecting on renewed attempts at Compromise through constitutional amendment, the *New York Times* questioned the capacity of the United States current crop of statesmen to, as Tyler demanded, 'reach the height' of the occasion:

> We doubt the ability of the present generation to frame a better constitution in any respect than the one bequeathed to us by our fathers. It lacks that calm wisdom, that profound self-sacrificing devotion to the general good which they have derived from the long War of independence, and which governed and guided all their actions.[22]

The *Times* was in some sense correct. The Conference's proposals would be met with firm opposition from Republicans in both Houses, who could only admit the portion denying the right to interfere with slavery where it already existed. Yet it is ultimately clear that the failure of compromise in 1860 was less a story of generational deficiency, rather an absence of generational will. For young Southerners who had come of age in the era of organised

[18] Douglas R. Egerton, *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and the Election That Brought on the Civil War*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 309.
[19] Proceedings of the Conference Convention, February 4, 1861, (Washington D.C, 1861), 4-6.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 313.
[22] *The New York Times*, February 21, 1861.

abolition, the growth of antislavery politics, and repeated congressional clashes over the expansion of slave territory, the North appeared to be an existential and growing threat to their way of life. Failure to face up to that threat now, where there remained the possibility of rallying a number of states for secession, risked a slow and painful degradation of Southern social, political and economic power.

For young Northerners, a similar case could be made to reject concession. Moral opposition to slavery had hardened, a product of the strengthening appeals of abolitionists and moderate antislavery politicians. Furthermore, Northern freedoms, including in the territories of the Northwest, had through the 1840s and 1850s come under increasing threat from a Federal Government dominated by the Slave Power. Political chaos had incapacitated the government while serial compromises had seen slavery permitted in an increasing proportion of Federal territories. Finally, the Supreme Court's ruling in Dred Scott v. Sanford undermined the notion that slavery could legally be excluded anywhere in the United States. Having finally wrested the Federal Government from this Power, the concept of throwing away the platform which promised to finally stem slavery's expansion seemed absurd. On January 4th 1861, future President Rutherford B. Hayes (b.1822) wrote in his diary:

> South Carolina has passed a secession ordinance - Federal laws are set at naught in the State. Overt acts enough have been committed. Forts and arsenal taken, a revenue cutter seized, and Major Anderson besieged in Fort Sumter. Other cotton States are about to follow. Disunion and civil war are at hand.[23]

Despite this rather dramatic, if entirely accurate depiction of the situation in the so-called secession winter of 1861, the young Hayes was actually rather optimistic. He did 'not feel gloomy when looking forward' declaring that the free States alone, if they must go on alone,

[23] T*he Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States,* Volume 2, Charles Richard Williams 'ed', (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1922), 3.

would make a glorious nation.'[24] Hayes feared 'disunion and war far less than compromise' – quoting the late Whig statesmen, William Windham, he felt 'the danger of invasion was by no means equal to that of peace. A man may escape a pistol however near his head, but not a dose of poison.'[25]

2 Generations

The purpose of this dissertation was to demonstrate the centrality of generational dynamics to United States' political culture in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Commencing in the 1840s, it has traced how increasingly fractious debates over the nation's geographical limits, and the place of enslaved labour therein, were defined by real generational divisions which cut across party lines. A Second Generation of American statesmen, born during or shortly after the Revolution, had come of age in a political world defined by veneration for the Founding moment. They found their faith in the robustness of their political inheritance shaken by the Missouri Crisis, and the prospect of slavery tearing the Union apart. Instilled with a resultant cautiousness around territorial expansion, and a faith in traditional Jacksonian partisanship as a balm for sectional tensions, this generation clashed with younger elements within both Whig and Democratic parties. Among Democrats, a nascent progressivism premised upon renewed notions of national exceptionalism, fuelled a desire for ever further expansion. Within Northern Whiggery, fractures began to emerge over the Party's appeal to younger voters and its ties with the institution of slavery. The 1840s therefore, marked the commencement of a generational rupture in US politics; older politicians desperately clung to Jacksonians norms and younger generational movements advocated for new political programmes led by new political representatives.

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Into the 1850s, sectional crisis served to accelerate this political transformation. In perhaps the most acrimonious congressional debate in United States history, representatives across the political spectrum were forced to justify their support or opposition to compromise proposals over slavery's fate in the Mexican cession. Many reached for the idea of generations to do so. Second Generation statesmen led by citing their filial obligations to the Founding Generation, and their desire to preserve their constitutional inheritance. Meanwhile, Third Generation antislavery Northerners and Southern nationalists lent upon their paternal obligations to future generations, who, they supposed, would be unlikely to forgive further concessions. While Compromise measures would ultimately be signed into law in the autumn of 1850, the nature of their passing reflected the absence of a congressional majority for the process of mutual concession so fundamental to the Second Generation's politics.

In the years that followed, the relative calming of interparty tensions on a national level was more than matched by the ratcheting of intraparty conflict. Here, the generational rhetoric that had emerged through the 1840s became fundamental to narrating divisions between opposition factions within both Whig and Democratic Parties. New York's Silver Greys were pitched against Sewardites determined to unshackle the Party from its traditional political programme and pursue a more explicitly antislavery position. Besmirching their colleagues as 'superannuated… mummies' or 'clogs' on progress, antislavery Whigs sought to steer the Party's direction by personally diminishing their ideological opponents. Within the Democracy, the same dynamic played out through the contest for the 1852 presidential nomination. Senior Jacksonians were denigrated by Young America and its allies as "old fogies", a term deployed to create a particularly negative framing of older generations as fundamentally out of step with the political wants of mid-century Americans. In both parties therefore, rhetoric was indicative of generational divisions over the future direction of party leadership and policy.

When Stephen Douglas reignited sectional debate in 1854, the Republicans were quick to capitalise on upon these divisions and attendant party instability. Actively courting the support of younger American voters and relying upon their youthful energies for their campaign strength, the Party was successful in taking antislavery politics from distant third-partydom into the political mainstream. Young voters had come of age in an era shaped by increasing public moral opposition to slavery. A developing sense that abolition would be a multi-generational endeavour compelled abolitionists into recognising the imperative of integrating youth into their movement. Moreover, slavery's tightening grip on federal institutions obliged young Northerners to re-examine their relationship with both Whig and Democratic parties. Fraught debate over the institution's probable expansion into the Western territories had exposed the weakness of Northern leaders in both parties to preserve the sanctity of free-labour and free-soil. The result was clear support for the Republican Party among a younger generation of Americans, reflected in the very public demonstrations of the Wide Awakes, and in the November returns themselves. Generations — as rhetoric, reality and idea — were fundamental in shaping the course of political events that delivered Lincoln's election.

In the months that followed, Americans clamoured for concepts which could make sense of the seriousness of their contemporary moment. Again, generational ideas served as a powerful nexus; responsibility to future or past Americans could justify any number of responses to Lincoln's victory, from renewed efforts to compromise to Southern secession. Such contrasting understandings were themselves a product of competing generational identities, shaped by formative experiences that reflected the rapidly changing moral, economic and social fabric of the antebellum United States. Generational rhetoric narrated this tension, itself becoming firmly embedded in US political culture, and a central feature of political division within and beyond the realms of Party. For the historian therefore,

application of the generational lens is essential for understanding the Antebellum Era and the coming of the American Civil War. Different visions for the United States - its social structure, economic arrangements and political institutions – were conceptualised through, defined by, and described in generational terms.

3 War

In July 1861, an anonymous Northern essayist penned a letter underlining the centrality of younger generations to the prosecution of the War.

> In years gone by, in the days of our unmolested prosperity, it might have been doubted by some whether our young and rising generation were as patriotic and jealous to maintain and preserve the freedom and liberties of our country as our forefathers were. But fellow citizens, the uprising, the powerful demonstrations of military discipline and responses to the call of our government… shows the same patriotic blood flows in their veins as did in their ancestors.[26]

Young men answered Lincoln's call for volunteers in unprecedented numbers. From farm boys to city clerks, Northern youth sacrificed the comforts and economic security of home in order to join the Union Army in its purpose of stamping out the rebellion. In the South, a similar zeal among younger men swelled the ranks of Beauregard's Army of Northern Virginia as it prepared for its first major engagement in defence of Richmond. That a younger generation, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, were so willing to take up arms reflects the nature of the political crisis which preceded it. The Civil War was the consequence of generational division over constitutional norms and political expectations. Those who would go on to fight it did so conscious that they were participants in a generational struggle. On September 4, 1863, the young private Francis L. Berry (b.1836) penned a letter to his cousin, Cyrus Berry, while encamped near Culpeper in Northern Virginia. Seeking to explain his

[26] War Between the States Essay, 1861. Civil War Diaries and Letters, University of Iowa Accessed June 18, 2025. https://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/node/499926.

willingness to face 'the booming of canon and rattle of musketry', Francis reached not for God (as so often Civil War soldiers did), but to generations: 'it is not for ourselves alone that we suffer want and privation… but for our dear friends, [our] relatives we have left at home, and for the rising generation. We have had one of the noblest republicks [sic] the sun ever shone on and by perseverance and industry we can regain our liberties again.'[27] For young Americans, military service was a generational obligation, not to blindly preserve, but to restore the promise of the United States, for their own future, and for generations yet to come.

[27] Francis L. Berry to Cyrus Berry, September 4, 1863, George L. Berry Papers, Auburn University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.

Statistical Appendix

What follows is a methodology for testing the assumed positive relationship between young Americans and the Republican Party, as part of a larger, more comprehensive analysis of voting behaviour during the 1860 election. I will be clear in where my methodology has diverged from historians such as William Gienapp, and the potential advantages and disadvantages of this divergence.

This analysis relies upon the collation of several new data sets: two studies conducted by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) provide county level election data for every United States congressional and presidential election between 1840 and 1972, and similar county-level demographic, economic and social data between 1790 and 2002.[1] This includes revised census statistics detailing the population of various age cohorts, ethnicity, occupation, wealth and the percentages of urban/non-urban dwellers. For precise birthplace figures, I have used the full-count census statistics provided by the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS).[2] This newly tabulated person-level birthplace data removes the need for imputing nativity from the 1870 census as prior studies have done. The population of the mid-nineteenth century United States was incredibly mobile; industrialisation, urbanisation, the railroad, and the prospect of landownership in the West ensured that a 'typical community might retain only five to ten per cent of its electorate between census years.'[3] Removing the need for imputation across a decade punctuated by

[1] Clubb, Flanigan and Zingale, Electoral Data for Counties in the United States: Presidential and Congressional Races, 1840-1972, ICPSR (2006); Michael R. Haines, and ICPSR, Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-2002, (2010)
[2] Steven Ruggles, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Matt A. Nelson, Evan Roberts, Megan Schouweiler, and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 3.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021.
[3] Kenneth J Winkle, 'The Voters of Lincoln's Springfield: Migration and Political Participation in an Antebellum City,' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1992, 596.

bloody civil war and mass movement marks a significant development in the accuracy of this analysis.[4] Of course, historians cognisant of the deeply religious nature of US society in the nineteenth century will note the absence of denominational membership statistics in these data sets.[5] The 1860 census recorded the number of churches, value of church property, and 'accommodations' (physical pew seats) for each denomination, with actual membership statistics not documented until 1890. While historians have often relied upon the accommodations figure as a substitute for church membership, religious historians dispute the accuracy of this method. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, in their article titled *Turning Pews into People* (1986), cautioned that 'the ratio between pew seats and membership varied greatly by denomination' with the Roman Catholic church often having significantly more members than seats, and Protestant churches having about three seats for every member.[6] Finke and Stark instead advocate for modelling membership statistics upon the basis of 1890 data (where membership was recorded alongside accommodations, value and property). For the analysis that follows, I have applied Finke and Stark's method to my own data to estimate denominational membership in 1860.[7]

The primary statistical technique used to analyse the data for this paper is multiple regression. This is a multivariate analysis which allows for the exploration of the relationship between different age-cohorts and the vote for a specific party, when controlling for other potential explanatory variables. While Gienapp deployed multiple regression analysis in his major works on the Republican Party, his arguments regarding younger voters were drawn from ecological regression, which estimates the number of voters which change party

[4] Kenneth J. Winkle, 'A Social Analysis of Voter Turnout in Ohio, 1850-1860,' *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1983, 423.
[5] Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xv.
[6] Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 'Turning Pews into People,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 25, 2 (1986), 180–9.
[7] The regression model used to predict Baptist membership is as follows: $M = -29.33092 + -20.62522X + 0.3883651Y + 0.0023851Z$. Where X is churches, Y is accommodations, and Z is church property.

between elections.[8] While this is undoubtedly useful, new voters are not necessarily young voters; in fact, significant numbers of first-time voters in 1860 would have been recently naturalised immigrants or those that had elected not to vote in 1856. Furthermore, ecological regression does not allow for the isolation of age as an explanatory variable in the same way that multiple regression does; there is no indication with ecological regression as to the extent to which new voters religion, ethnicity, or occupation impacted their voting behaviour.

When Gienapp used multiple regression to explore the relationship between 'men aged twenty-one to twenty-nine' and the vote in 1856, he found that regression coefficients for this age group were 'generally negative for all parties and positive for the proportion not voting.'[9] This, he argues 'basically reflects the lower turnout among young voters rather than their opposition to the Republican Party.'[10] This theory is born out in analysis of voter turnout and the 20-29 age cohort in 1860 when controlling for other independent variables.[11] However, this fact in and of itself is not prohibitive to the use of multiple regression analysis. Even assuming a base negative relationship between voting and age, my analysis revealed marked differences between parties in how younger cohorts voted. In most instances, a positive regression coefficient for younger age cohorts and the Republican vote was observed. As such, I argue that multiple regression is a suitable means of testing assumptions regarding young Americans voting behaviour.

One further methodological divergence with Gienapp concerns model construction.[12] Ideally, models should obtain a high level of predictive power while using only those

[8] Gienapp, 'Who Voted for Lincoln,' 65-76.
[9] Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856,* (New York, 1987), 436.
[10] Ibid. Gienapp justified this argument by stating that multiple regression was a less reliable 'guide to the voting behaviour of young men' than ecological regression.
[11] A regression analysis with election turnout as the dependent variable reveals that for every percentage increase in the proportion of the total population aged 20 to 29 there is a 0.32 percent decrease in voter turnout.
[12] Gienapp's 1986 analysis includes variables that have limited theoretical justification for inclusion. For example, his model for Pennsylvania includes "farms 10-100 acres" which itself tells us neither the proportion of the population working in agriculture nor the nature of agricultural production in Pennsylvania; as such, it should have limited theoretical value for predicting voting behaviour. Furthermore, the variable contributing the

explanatory variables that have a theoretical justification for inclusion; they should remain as simple as possible.[13] The models that underpin the following analysis were refined on a theoretical basis, with reference to the existing historiography and contemporary qualitative evidence. The independent variables considered were those most likely to shape voting behaviour; this included the three largest immigrant populations (German, Irish and British), levels of internal immigration (born in the upper South, lower South, and New England), wealth (personal and property), occupation (manufacturing and agriculture) and affiliation with the six largest religious denominations (Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, Episcopalian and Catholic). Because this is primarily a study about age and its effect on voting (an explanatory, as opposed to an exploratory analysis), the percentage of a county's population belonging to the 20-29 cohort was included in every model. For ease of interpretation, standardised independent variables were used; as such, the coefficients for the explanatory variables can be directly compared, regardless of units.

Of course, there are some limitations to multiple regression that required attention. Firstly, multicollinearity (where independent variables are highly correlated) can lead to erroneous regression coefficients; to mitigate this, a simple test (vif command) for multicollinearity was conducted for each model and if two variables were highly correlated, one was removed. Secondly, the so-called ecological fallacy cautions against the use of group data to infer individual behaviour.[14] As Allan Lichtman notes, historians (including those of antebellum presidential elections) often only have access to this 'aggregate-level data', and

most to the explanatory power of his model is the membership of the Union Free Bethel Church; a tiny denomination, with only 11 churches in the state (by contrast, there were 194 Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania in 1860). The existence of these 11 churches cannot explain such a significant portion of the variation in the Republican vote. While I cannot surmise exactly how Gienapp selected variables for analysis, I can state that the selection of explanatory or independent variables has profound implications for the results of any regression analysis and a theory-first approach should be taken.

[13]Agresti, Alan, *Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences*, Fifth edition, Global edition, (Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited, 2018), 432.

[14] W. S. Robinson, 'Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals', *American Sociological Review* 15, no. 3 (1950): 351–57.

yet just because 'a particular quantitative relationship is found among aggregate level variables does not mean that the same relationship actually prevails among the corresponding individual-level variables.'[15] This disconnect he calls 'aggregation bias.'[16] Fortunately, historians like Lichtman do not dismiss the use of aggregate-data out of hand, rather advance methods to mitigate the potential issues; for example, he emphasises the advantages of multivariate analysis (like multiple regression) in controlling some aggregation bias.[17] Gienapp himself considered the reaction against the use of aggregate data as 'far too extreme', and cited an article by Eric Hanushek, John Jackson and John Kain which he felt 'convincingly demonstrate[ed] the value of aggregate data analysis.'[18] Ultimately, while this dissertation remains cautious regarding the use of historical group level data, it maintains that analysis of such data is a valuable historical endeavour.

The following tables show the results of multiple regression analysis of 1860 presidential election returns paired with demographic data from ICPSR and IPUMS. The dependent variables are the Republican presidential vote percentage, and the Douglas Democratic presidential vote percentage. The explanatory variables use standardised coefficients so can be directly compared. Observations (N, numbers of counties) and R-Squared (which measures the amount of variance in the dependent variable that can be accounted for by the independent variable) are listed for each model. P Values (indicative of statistical significance) are denoted by asterisks.

[15] Allan J. Lichtman, "Correlation, Regression, and the Ecological Fallacy: A Critique." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 3 (1974): 417.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 430.
[18] Gienapp, Origins, 477; Eric A. Hanushek, John E. Jackson, and John F. Kain, "Model Specification, Use of Aggregate Data, and the Ecological Correlation Fallacy," *Political Methodology 1* (1974), 87-107.

Table I - Free States

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	2.87***	-2.58***
	(0.61)	(0.62)
Born Upper South	-6.04***	4.61***
	(0.51)	(0.53)
Born Germany	-2.41***	2.14***
	(0.39)	(0.40)
Congregational	3.11***	-3.75***
	(0.42)	(0.43)
Born Ireland	-2.51***	3.15***
	(0.47)	(0.43)
Born Britain	2.08***	-1.87***
	(0.42)	(0.44)
Born Lower South	-1.44***	1.49***
	(0.42)	(0.43)
Employed Manufacturing	-1.63***	
	(0.52)	
Observations (N)	633	633
R-squared	0.43	0.38

Table II - New England

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	-4.81**	1.23
	(2.38)	(3.22)
Born Germany	-30.97***	-2.57
	(10.16)	(13.72)
Congregational	2.13***	-1.83*
	(0.77)	(1.04)
Born Ireland	0.93	-1.03
	(1.28)	(1.73)
Born Upper South	30.79	-2.37
	(47.06)	(63.56)
Observations (N)	67	67
R-squared	0.31	0.12

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table III - Mid-Atlantic

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	-1.70	0.79
	(1.97)	(2.09)
Born New England	37.68***	-39.50***
	(5.29)	(5.85)
Born Ireland	-4.41***	4.26***
	(0.85)	(0.92)
Employed Manufacturing	1.70*	-2.57**
	(0.96)	(1.01)
Born Upper South		-8.16**
		(3.93)
Episcopalian		1.41*
		(0.79)
Born Britain	1.82*	-1.72*
	(0.99)	(1.04)
Observations (N)	144	144
R-squared	0.45	0.42

Table IV - Northeastern States

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	-2.42	2.50*
	(1.71)	(1.34)
Born New England	1.13*	-2.35***
	(0.66)	(0.72)
Born Germany	-3.16***	4.72***
	(1.09)	(1.23)
Congregational	1.72***	-2.84***
	(0.65)	(0.70)
Personal Wealth/pop.	-0.95	
	(0.62)	
Born Britain	2.43**	
	(0.97)	
Born Ireland	-1.73**	
	(0.82)	
Catholic		-2.05**
		(1.02)
Observations (N)	210	210
R-squared	0.37	0.50

Table V – Northwestern States

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	1.51***	-1.82***
	(0.56)	(0.63)
Born Upper South	-3.10***	2.35***
	(0.66)	(0.73)
Born Germany	-1.24***	1.33***
	(0.43)	(0.48)
Born New England	26.27***	-24.87***
	(3.24)	(3.61)
Born Lower South	-3.74***	3.25***
	(0.60)	(0.67)
Property Wealth/pop.	2.28***	-1.87***
	(0.44)	(0.51)
Catholic	-1.46***	1.12**
	(0.45)	(0.47)
Born Britain	1.28***	
	(0.47)	
Born Ireland	-1.49**	
	(0.74)	
Methodist		-0.93*
		(0.50)
Baptist		-1.27***
		(0.48)
Constant	62.91***	34.09***
	(1.03)	(1.11)
Observations (N)	481	481
R-squared	0.57	0.42

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table VI – Illinois

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	0.26	-0.39
	(1.29)	(1.28)
Born Upper South	-7.85***	6.20***
	(0.98)	(1.05)
Born New England		-30.45***
		(8.57)
Catholic		1.22*
		(0.62)
Born Lower South		1.03
		(0.65)
Episcopalian		2.14**
		(0.90)
Property Wealth/pop.	4.66***	-3.34***
	(1.12)	(1.04)
Farm Acres/pop.		-4.87***
		(1.76)
Born Illinois	-7.71***	3.91**
	(1.60)	(1.66)
Born Germany	-1.51**	
	(0.60)	
Born Ireland	-4.72***	
	(1.29)	
Born Britain	4.13***	
	(1.20)	
Employed Manufacturing	-7.80**	
	(3.48)	
Observations (N)	93	93
R-squared	0.90	0.89

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table VII – Indiana

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	3.46	-0.53
	(2.44)	(2.26)
Born Indiana	-4.18**	
	(1.73)	
Property Wealth/pop.	5.94***	-4.02***
	(1.33)	(1.26)
Born Ireland	-8.27**	
	(3.67)	
Baptist	-1.44**	1.35**
	(0.60)	(0.58)
Born New England	93.86***	-157.96***
	(32.38)	(30.95)
Born Upper South	3.10**	-3.94***
	(1.49)	(1.44)
Born Germany		2.49**
		(0.96)
Observations (N)	71	71
R-squared	0.55	0.55

Table VIII – Ohio

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	4.79**	-5.18***
	(1.86)	(1.90)
Born New England	49.39***	-48.02***
	(7.21)	(7.35)
Born Germany	-4.92***	5.66***
	(0.85)	(0.86)
Born Britain	4.96***	-5.68***
	(1.11)	(1.14)
Congregational	-4.74***	5.27***
	(1.58)	(1.61)
Observations (N)	78	78
R-squared	0.70	0.71

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table IX – Pennsylvania

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	0.24	-4.05
	(2.56)	(2.57)
Born New England	64.16***	-56.02***
	(15.56)	(15.60)
Presbyterian	2.59**	-2.52**
	(1.01)	(1.01)
Observations (N)	65	65
R-squared	0.27	0.24

Table X - New York

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	-0.98	1.00
	(1.97)	(1.97)
Born New England	39.87***	-39.86***
	(4.73)	(4.74)
Born Ireland	-3.66***	3.65***
	(0.69)	(0.69)
Born Britain	1.83**	-1.83**
	(0.83)	(0.83)
Episcopalian	-2.36***	2.36***
	(0.75)	(0.76)
Personal Wealth/pop.	2.04**	-2.04**
	(0.82)	(0.82)
Observations (N)	58	58
R-squared	0.84	0.84

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table XI – Massachusetts & New York

Explanatory Variables	Republican Presidential Vote	Douglas Democratic Presidential Vote
Age 20-29	-4.09**	-1.27
	(1.99)	(1.87)
Born New England	3.64***	-8.44***
	(0.80)	(0.91)
Born Ireland	-3.14***	5.00***
	(1.01)	(0.97)
Born Germany	-2.86**	4.14***
	(1.10)	(1.06)
Methodist	-6.85***	6.48***
	(2.21)	(2.08)
Born Britain	4.10***	-2.97***
	(1.06)	(1.02)
Episcopalian	-1.85**	2.74***
	(0.81)	(0.85)
Catholic		-2.72**
		(1.22)
Employed Manufacturing		1.65**
		(0.76)
Personal Wealth/pop.		-1.31*
		(0.72)
Farm Acres/pop.	4.04	
	(2.74)	
Baptist	1.98	
	(1.22)	
Constant	61.69***	36.17***
	(2.05)	(1.45)
Observations (N)	72	72
R-squared	0.79	0.89

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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