

**The 'Young America' movement: nationalism and the natural law tradition in  
Jacksonian political thought, 1844-61**

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I, Mark Power Smith, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis

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## Abstract

My PhD thesis explores a nationalist movement from the Northern United States known as ‘Young America’; a group of Jacksonian politicians and writers associated with a publication based in New York City called the *Democratic Review*. I argue that their political ideology was defined by a new – more cosmopolitan – conception of American nationalism; one based on the idea that ‘popular sovereignty’ at the local level was a ‘natural law,’ or universal right, which would thrive in the absence of government intervention, whether by federal authority in the United States, or the imperial powers of Europe. This central belief shaped four aspects of the ‘Young Americans’ worldview. Firstly, they assigned the federal government a very limited domestic role, promoting states’ rights and free trade. Secondly, they advanced an interventionist foreign policy to defend universal rights beyond American borders. Thirdly, they championed intellectuals as the supreme arbiters of a ‘natural order’ discernible only through reason. Finally, ‘Young Americans’ believed that the ‘natural laws,’ which formed the bedrock of a democratic society, degraded the black race whilst they uplifted the white. However, this view did not translate into a purely pro or anti-slavery stance. Rather, ‘Young Americans’ made a white supremacist case for popular sovereignty and free labor, which called for the extermination or deportation of blacks to tropical regions. Although the movement was ultimately divided between the Democratic and Republican parties, their advocacy of Jacksonian nationalism continued to shape their conflicting views on the sectional crisis. Thus, my thesis highlights the continuing importance of Jacksonian ideology during a decade usually defined in terms of ‘sectional’ tensions over slavery. In the process, it shows that concepts like ‘natural law’ and social progress had wider - and more unexpected - meanings for antebellum Americans than historians have appreciated so far.

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## Introduction

By the time Andrew Jackson died in 1845, the party antebellum Americans termed ‘the Democracy’ had undergone a subtle but significant ideological shift. Having settled many domestic disputes of the 1830s in the party’s favor, a new generation of Democrats emerged in the following decade with different priorities, known as the ‘Young America’ movement. Still following the ideological contours mapped out by the great patriarchs of the party, these Democrats nonetheless sought to renew the Jacksonian agenda. At the center of their worldview was a desire to reshape the international order according to the same ‘Democratic principles’ of state sovereignty and local self-government which had proved so popular within the United States. To fulfil these ends, the ‘Young America’ Democrats pushed for territorial expansion on the American continent, the promotion of democratic, independent nation states in Europe, the spread of free trade around the world, and the advancement of a ‘Democratic’ intellectual culture. Moreover, what tied these different agendas together was the idea that ‘natural laws’ would regulate society in the absence of government intervention, particularly ‘popular sovereignty’ for local white communities.<sup>1</sup> When slavery became an intractable issue during the 1850s, ‘Young America’ Democrats did become politically divided between the Republican and Democratic parties. Nevertheless, a shared commitment to Jacksonian ideology persisted despite these new divisions, and continued to provide a broader framework for the political choices of these seemingly diverse figures, formerly united under the Democratic banner. Of course, this set of interrelated concerns had informed Democratic ideology since the administration of Thomas Jefferson. Nevertheless, two factors – one domestic and one foreign – heightened the cosmopolitan character of both the policies and the ideology of the party from 1837 to 1861: the success of the Democratic agenda within the United States and the influence of liberal nationalism in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> When I refer to ‘popular sovereignty,’ I mean both the term as it was applied to the slavery debate, and – more generally - to the exercise of the ‘people’s will’ at the state level, as it was used in debates over the Dorr Rebellion (1841)

In some respects, the very success of Andrew Jackson's Democratic Party made a change in ideological orientation unavoidable. Since Jackson's election to the Presidency in 1828, the Democrats had waged an unrelenting war against the Second Bank of the United States. Preserving the sovereignty of individual states against federal encroachment was a central component of the Jacksonian political tradition. With one fifth of its deposits owned by the federal government, Jackson's followers believed the dominance of the bank by centralized authorities was economically unstable and politically unconstitutional. After a protracted political struggle known as the 'Bank War,' Jackson vetoed a bill for the bank's re-charter in 1832 and withdrew its federal funds in 1833, destroying its character as a mixed corporation. Jackson's heavy-handed economic strategy and liberal use of the executive order contributed to economic downturn in 1837, and earned him the name 'King Andrew' among his political opponents. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade, the Democrats had been largely successful in turning the public against a national bank. As Pennsylvania Democrat George Dallas pointed out in 1847, 'the Bank of the United States' has 'intellectually descended to the Tomb of the Capulets. It is not now necessary to conjure up its ghost.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in 1852, Illinois' James Shields counted 'the great struggle against a national bank' as one of the Democrats' victories against the 'impediments' to national progress.<sup>3</sup> Having severed the link between finance and the federal government, Democrats sought new avenues for the melioration of the struggling masses, who, in truth, were white working men. Whilst jealously guarding the independence of the states at home, Democrats set about extending self-government in the American hemisphere and beyond.

As well as the shifting priorities of domestic politics, huge transformations in the global order shaped the Democrats' more internationalist worldview. Across Europe, calls for reform among the middle and working classes reached their apex in the 1840s, with liberal and radical groups demanding political representation, increased liberal freedoms and economic opportunities. In February 1848, the French overthrew their constitutional monarch, King Louis Phillippe, and established the short-lived Second Republic. That year, uprisings followed in Ireland, Hungary and

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<sup>2</sup> *Great speech of Hon. George M. Dallas upon the leading topics of the day, delivered at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 18 1847* (Philadelphia: Time and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Letter of the Hon. James Shields addressed to a committee of his fellow citizens, delivered at Galena, Illinois, August 5 1852.* (Washington D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1852), 3.



Italy. Closer to American shores, Cuban creoles chafed under Spanish rule, with Latin American revolutionaries like Narciso Lopez attempting to instigate uprisings during the 1850s. These revolutions in Europe and Latin America mostly ended in failure, with none managing to establish the social stability necessary to maintain republican government. As the late Victorian historian G.M. Trevelyan pointed out, ‘1848 was the turning point at which modern history failed to turn.’<sup>4</sup> But despite the evanescent nature of these uprisings, the revolutionary agitation that marked European politics during the 1840s and 50s gave new impetus to American political culture. Just as democracy became a real prospect in Europe, technological innovations such as the telegraph and the steamship, drew Americans into a closer union with the transatlantic world. During the 1840s, newspapers and periodicals detailed events in Europe with incredible precision, and distributed new issues to a larger readership in the United States with alarming rapidity. This flow of ideas was matched by the movement of people. Steamships carried dispossessed political refugees to American shores; many of whom had been exiled for their incendiary political ideas and writings. Between 1841 to 1850, the rate of immigration was almost triple that of the previous decade.<sup>5</sup> Safe in the United States, but marked by their tumultuous experiences at home, immigrants from Ireland, Germany and Hungary began to shape public life in the United States, entering journalism and higher education, as well as serving in both chambers of Congress.

In this context, it was almost impossible for Americans to ignore the tumultuous state of European affairs. The Democrats, in particular, turned their attention to an international order fizzing with possibilities. A movement emerged within their ranks which took its very name from the revolutionary groups transforming Europe. Joining the ranks of ‘Young Ireland’ and ‘Young Italy,’ ‘Young America’ stepped onto the political scene. This was a group of Democratic politicians and writers pushing to reform the international order through America’s political, cultural and intellectual influence. After fighting for decades to promote state-sovereignty, free trade and universal suffrage

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<sup>4</sup> G.M. Trevelyan quoted in C. Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution: 1848 in Ireland*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolph Vecoli observes that the 1840s saw the beginning of the ‘first wave’ of European immigration to the United States, which lasted from 1841 to 1890; a time in which a total of almost 15 million new arrivals were recorded. R. Vecoli, ‘The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of an American Identity,’ *The History Teacher*, Vol. 30, (1996), 11.

for white men in America, Jackson's ideological heirs looked to do the same beyond the nation's borders. At the same time, they wanted the United States to have its own revolution: to promote a more 'democratic' intellectual life, no longer enthralled to European standards.

The ideological foundations for this new Democratic movement were laid in the pages of a periodical based in New York City entitled the *Democratic Review*. From its establishment in 1837 to the early 1850s, the publication was edited by its founder, John O'Sullivan; a man of Irish descent with close ties to the Democratic President Martin Van Buren. In 1852, the Kentuckian George Sanders assumed the editorship until the periodical disbanded in 1859; sources also credit Thomas P. Kettell as editor from 1847-51 and the Irish revolutionary, Thomas D. Reilly, from 1852-53.<sup>6</sup> As well as politics, the *Review* published more broadly on intellectual culture, commenting on fields such as literature, political economy, history and international law. During its two-decade existence, the periodical published numerous articles by Democratic political thinkers, politicians and literary critics such as William A. Jones, Henry Gilpin and Alexander Everett, as well as European revolutionaries, like Victor Hugo and Thomas F. Meagher.<sup>7</sup> The *Review* was the most widely circulated Democratic periodical in the country with a truly national reach, which extended into both the Northern and Southern sections of the Union. Fellow Democrats at the *New York Evening Post* estimated that the number of subscribers exceeded 5,000 after the first issue, although this is almost certainly an exaggeration.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent historians have estimated the total to be in the region of 2-3,000. During the 1840s, the *Review's* readers increased still further. One hyperbolic article from January 1840 claimed that 140,000 copies had been distributed (an average of 6,000 per issue), although O'Sullivan

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<sup>6</sup> The first issue which lists Thomas P. Kettell as editor is *Democratic Review*, Vol. 21, (July 1847) and the last is *Democratic Review*, Vol. 29, (July 1851). In his *Memoir of Thomas D. Reilly*, Irish revolutionary John Savage wrote that in 1852 Reilly 'finally found his true place as editor of the *Democratic Review* in connection with his friend George Sanders.' In 1853, he began editing the official Democratic organ the *Union* in Washington D.C. before dying from a stroke the following year. J. Savage, *Memoir of Thomas D. Reilly: a lecture delivered in the tabernacle New York*, (New York: P.M. Haverty, 1857), 27.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example 'Chicago Convention. Speech of David Dudley Field,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 21, (September 1847) and T. F. Meagher, 'Ireland and the Holy Alliance,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 31, (July 1852).

<sup>8</sup> *New York Evening Post*, (January 22 1838) quoted in E. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.

privately estimated the figure at 3,500.<sup>9</sup> Other Jacksonian papers certainly approved. The *Boston Post* said of the publication that ‘no review in the country is conducted with so much ability.’<sup>10</sup>

John O’Sullivan, and his brother-in-law Samuel Langtree, founded the *Democratic Review* in 1837 to counter British influence in American intellectual life. Although the nation had declared political independence in 1776, O’Sullivan still believed the Union suffered from Britain’s overbearing influence in culture and thought. In an introduction to the first edition in 1837, he wrote ‘all history has to be re-written; and the whole scope of moral truth...considered and illustrated in the light of the Democratic principle.’<sup>11</sup> Always disparaging of the past, he claimed ‘we have no interest in the scenes of antiquity, only as lessons of avoidance of nearly all their examples.’<sup>12</sup> The *Review* set out to reform international law, political theory and political economy according to the ‘Democratic principle’ of local self-government, and in opposition to federal interference. Similarly, the magazine believed literature could promote democratic mentalities in America and Europe. Books with sympathetic depictions of the struggling masses were important vehicles for democratic reform at home and abroad. Fundamentally, the Democrats could only popularize their political agenda of popular sovereignty, localism and free trade by transforming the different components of American thought.

However, literary elites within in the United States presented a huge obstacle to democratic reform. From their heartland in New England, former Federalists, and later Whigs, dominated literary culture in the United States during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century through a publication called the *North American Review*. As Marshall Foletta has demonstrated, conservatives in New England sought to sustain their political influence through the magazine’s cultural and political output after the demise of the Federalist Party.<sup>13</sup> The *North American Review* published a mixture of literary, philosophical and political articles, which opposed Democratic ideology. Politically, the publication wanted to strengthen the federal government, protect the National Bank, and preserve neutrality in foreign

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<sup>9</sup> For these figures see E. Widmer, *Young America*, 228.

<sup>10</sup> The *Boston Post* quoted in E. Widmer, *Young America*, 47.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Introduction,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 1, (October 1837).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 427.

<sup>13</sup> M. Foletta, *Coming to Terms with Democracy: Federalist Intellectuals and the Shaping of American Culture, 1800-1828*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001)

policy, as outlined in Washington's Farewell Address. Culturally, it argued that Protestant values would steadily promote social progress through discipline and self-restraint. Mindful of the nation's historical lineage, it celebrated the Union's intellectual ties with Great Britain, praising England's literature and common law. Lastly, as I shall explore, the publication upheld a Burkean vision of the Union as an interrelated 'organism,' mediated by an interventionist federal government. Taking aim at this worldview, O'Sullivan complained in 1839 'why cannot our literati comprehend the matchless sublimity of our position amongst the nations of the world – our high destiny – and cease bending the knee to foreign idolatry, false tastes, false doctrines, false principles?'<sup>14</sup> He bemoaned the 'tendency to imitativeness, prevailing among our professional and literary men, subversive of originality of thought, and wholly unfavorable to progress.'<sup>15</sup>

The *Democratic Review* matched this nationalism in intellectual culture with a more assertive foreign policy both in Europe and on the American continent. After the 1848 Revolutions, Democratic writers were eager for Congress to offer congratulations and official recognition to the struggling nations of Europe. When the forces of reaction set in, the publication argued that America had a responsibility to redress the situation. Just as the despots of Europe banded together in the Holy Alliance, it proposed that America should adopt a policy of 'intervention for non-intervention' to ensure the success of democratic nation states against their better organized and more powerful oppressors. When the matter of intervening in the Hungarian Revolution arose in 1851, the *Review* opposed the policy of neutrality that Washington advocated in his 'Farewell Address.' 'A declaration of neutrality would add nothing to our security, and lower us in the estimation of those powers whom such a course is intended to conciliate,' it said.<sup>16</sup> Rather, the *Review* wanted the Union to 'declare the *right*' to intervention and 'let absolutism know that we shall *act* on it, whenever our own polity, our own self-respect, and the changes of success are in our favor.'<sup>17</sup> As they turned their sights to Europe, 'Young America' Democrats also sought to build on the territorial gains they had acquired during the Mexican War. When the end came to end, one writer anticipated further territorial expansion on the

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Great Nation of Futurity,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 6, (November 1839), 228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 427.

<sup>16</sup> 'Intervention,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 30, (January 1852), 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

continent: 'the eagle has scarcely spread his wings over California and Oregon yet already Canada on the North and Cuba on the South, seek the shelter of his plumage.'<sup>18</sup> This interventionist foreign policy and internationalist ideology, combined with a strategy to revolutionize intellectual culture, formed the core of the *Democratic Review's* political agenda.

As well as providing ideological heft for the Democratic administration, the periodical was associated with several high-ranking politicians within the party. Personal associations and shared political convictions drew Democratic politicians and writers at the *Review* into a common project. As well as publishing articles and speeches by significant Democratic politicians, the *Review* singled out vital allies through a regular column which outlined the lives of contemporary statesmen. In 1847, the publication lauded New Hampshire's Edmund Burke not only for his commitment to popular sovereignty and free trade, but also for the intellectual labor he performed on behalf of the Democracy. The *Review* described the congressman as a 'progressive democrat,' and a much-needed political theorist for this later period. Notably, the congressman's work on the Rhode Island revolt established, for the first time, a 'link in the chain of finished essays on the theory of the American government, in all its parts, which may be said to have been forged by Jefferson.'<sup>19</sup> 'Very few private libraries in New England' could apparently 'compare in usefulness' with Burke's writing because of its 'uncompromising hostility to everything aristocratic or un-American.' In its 'Political Portrait' of George Dallas in 1842, the *Review* also emphasized the Pennsylvania Democrat's potential to produce something of enduring intellectual value. The publication first praised Dallas' qualities as a statesman, holding up his 'brilliancy of genius' and 'spotless personal life.' Ultimately, however, it hoped he would withdraw from 'participation in public affairs' so that 'literature may yet receive from his pen many of those contributions, in which genius and taste are brought to illustrate the dictates of a judgement always enlightened, and the honest sentiments of a generous heart.'<sup>20</sup>

In turn, political figures associated with the *Review* praised its efforts to articulate and popularize Democratic ideology. California's Edward C. Marshall, for example, boasted of his loyalty

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<sup>18</sup> 'Popular sovereignty and states' rights,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 25, (July 1849), 5

<sup>19</sup> 'Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil. Hon. Edmund Burke,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 20, (January 1847), 75.

<sup>20</sup> 'Political Portraits With Pen and Pencil: George Dallas' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 10, (February 1842), 166.

to ‘Young America,’ and proudly and publicly allied himself with the *Democratic Review*. In 1853 Marshall told the House of Representatives he supported the annexation of Cuba ‘in behalf of Young America and the progressives with whose opinion I sympathize.’<sup>21</sup> In another speech that year, he explicitly defended the *Democratic Review* against the charges of more conservative Democrats like John C. Breckenridge, who denounced the radicalism periodical’s politics.<sup>22</sup> Marshall’s loyalty did not go unnoticed by the editor of the *Democratic Review*. According to his wife’s diary, George Sanders, was ‘delayed’ in returning home ‘for Ned Marshall of California’s speech in reply to Breckenridge of Kentucky,’ which sought to ‘to defend Mr. Sanders and the *Review*.’<sup>23</sup>

This dissertation defines ‘Young America’ as both the contributors to the *Democratic Review*, and the politicians associated with the periodical, who were united by a common Jacksonian ideology. Although these figures did not always self-consciously define as a movement, they did share the same political project: to defend the principles of state-sovereignty, local self-government and free trade at home, and promote them abroad. Moreover, these Democrats formed a loose political network which centered around the *Review*, and was often termed ‘Young America.’ At times, I will refer to ‘Young America’ Democrats as ‘Jacksonians’ since their politics were - self-consciously - derived from Andrew Jackson and his supporters. Free trade, federal ‘non-intervention’ in the states, territorial expansion and popular sovereignty were all staples of the ‘Young America’ program. Furthermore, like the descriptor ‘Young American,’ the term ‘Jacksonian’ allows historians to describe a political tradition which - increasingly – was not tethered to a particular party. Nevertheless, as historian Leslie Butler acknowledges, the term ‘Jacksonian’ has distinctively domestic connotations: it will not, therefore, be the primary lens through which I study the ‘Young Americans’; a group whose ideology and cultural identity was so closely modelled on the European revolutions.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, scholars successfully deploy the term ‘Young America’ to subtly distinguish between different generations of

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<sup>21</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 243 (1853).

<sup>22</sup> As William Richardson had done before him, Marshall attacked Breckenridge for ‘denouncing the editor of the *Review* and the whole character of the publication, without measure or moderation.’ Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 723 (1852).

<sup>23</sup> Journal of Anna J. Sanders, March 9 1852, George N. Sanders Family Papers, LOC.

<sup>24</sup> L. Butler, ‘Anti-slavery, Liberalism and Empire Building in Transatlantic Perspective,’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crsjD0A0Fd4&t=49s>), accessed 20/09/17.

Democrat. Although Jackson remained a towering political and cultural influence for Stephen Douglas' generation, the latter had a stronger internationalist consciousness, and were readier to embrace the market revolution. As Stewart Winger writes, 'by the 1850s, Young America had replaced the Jacksonians as Lincoln's chief ideological opponents.'<sup>25</sup>

In the period from 1844 to 1861, 'Young Americans' did not view their main antagonists as the more conservative factions within their own party. As Chapter One will explore, 'Young Americans' primarily defined themselves in opposition to their Whig opponents from 1844 to 1854, particularly those associated with the conservative periodical, *The American Review*. And, as Chapter Four explains, Whig-Republicans became their main rivals after 1854. The figure of the 'Old Fogey,' which the 'Young Americans' rallied against, was usually a Whig, or one of their alleged British allies. However, there were discernible distinctions between 'Young Americans' and more conservative Democrats. Many of the latter did not accept either the political ideas or the policy prescriptions of the movement. Democrat John C. Calhoun, for example, disdained both the notion of 'natural rights,' and the idea that the United States should intervene in faraway revolutions.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, although some Southerners such as R.J. Walker and Pierre Soulé joined 'Young America,' it was often pro-slavery Democrats who took the dimmest view of the prospects of republicanism in Europe, and feared the consequences of a crusade for liberty abroad on the security of slavery at home. Even in the case of Cuban annexation, which seemed so beneficial to the South, many Southerners did not support the policy on the same grounds as 'Young America.' John Breckenridge, for example, might have wanted to strengthen slavery in the tropics, but he also modelled American expansion on the imperial projects of European powers, and disparaged the emancipatory rhetoric of the movement.<sup>27</sup> Other Democrats, such as William Marcy and James Buchanan, were more sympathetic to 'Young

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<sup>25</sup> S. Winger, 'Lincoln's Economics and the American Dream: A Reappraisal,' *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 22, (winter, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Southern suspicion of the 1848 Revolutions is outlined in T.M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism*, (University of Virginia Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> The Southern transition towards seeing the imperial powers of Europe as allies who recognized the necessity of bound labor is explored in M. Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

America,' but did not advocate the program of territorial expansion forcefully enough; calling, for example, for the annexation of Cuba to be done gradually, so as not to inflame European powers.

There were moments of heightened tension when these fissures within the party would flair up. As Democrats jostled for control before a presidential nomination, 'Young Americans' often lashed out at older members for not embracing their 'progressive' ethos, and truckling to their Whig opponents. In the run-up to the presidential nomination of 1852, for example, George Sanders published a series of articles denouncing the candidates Lewis Cass and James Buchanan, in favor of the nominee who most vociferously supported the 'Young America' program, Stephen Douglas.<sup>28</sup> In the 1856 nominating convention, further tensions developed between Douglas and the more conservative candidate James Buchanan; a conflict which resurfaced again when Douglas broke with Buchanan over the Lecompton Constitution in 1857. However, these flashpoints of inter-party conflict were not the primary battlegrounds for 'Young America' throughout this period. Most often, ideological temper and priorities for policy, rather than intractable differences in political belief, distinguished 'Young Americans' from their Democratic colleagues. Furthermore, 'Young Americans' portrayed the Whig Party as such a stark antagonist that this division frequently overshadowed even fairly significant differences within the party.

In contrast to the one full-length study of the politics of 'Young America,' this dissertation will contend that the real significance of the movement did not just lie in their break with a previous generation of Democratic politicians, or with other Democrats within the party.<sup>29</sup> By examining 'Young America' within antebellum political culture at large, I argue that the movement advanced a novel conception of American nationalism; one that combined politics and intellectual culture by

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<sup>28</sup> 'Eighteen Fifty-two, and the "Coming Man,"' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 30, (January 1852).

<sup>29</sup> For the only book-length study of the politics of 'Young America,' see Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Eyal primarily examines how the 'Young America' movement transformed the internal politics of the Democratic Party. Building on this contribution, my dissertation focuses on the role of 'Young America' within the broader political culture, with a particular focus on its critics, and the extent of its influence beyond the Democratic ranks. Moreover, Eyal's sources are almost entirely political whilst my dissertation seeks to examine how and why political figures drew on intellectual culture so extensively during this period. Also see M. Curti, 'Young America,' *American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, (October, 1926), Like Eyal, Curti does not trace the way 'Young America' Democrats in the political arena drew on intellectual and literary culture, nor does he examine 'Young America' ideology during the sectional crisis, particularly how it relates to the policy of 'popular sovereignty.' Also see D. Danborn, 'The Young America Movement,' *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. 67, (June, 1974).



drawing on the liberal tradition of ‘natural law.’ This dissertation certainly focuses on the politics of ‘Young America.’ It does not primarily analyze the better-known literary side of the movement, led by the critics Cornelius Matthews and Evert Duyckinck.<sup>30</sup> However, I do examine how these political figures drew on intellectual and literary culture to articulate a distinctive ideological orientation, which transcended more conventional sources of political authority.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, ‘Young Americans’ based their laissez-faire political program on one fundamental opposition: between the ‘natural laws’ of human activity and the artificial restraints of centralized political power. As such, these Democrats advanced a vision of national politics based on the transcendent authority of reason and nature. Shunning the notion of the ‘balance of power,’ ‘Young America’ Democrats criticized a conventional conception of politics rooted in the idea of competing interests. Turning to arts and sciences for guidance, they saw ‘democracy’ as an objective political principle, transcending partisan concerns; a set of natural laws which emerged spontaneously in the absence of federal or imperial intervention. For ‘Young America,’ politics could be best derived from the irreducible principles of political theory, rather a struggle for power. These Democrats articulated a vision of the American nation governed by timeless principles; thereby transforming politics from a struggle between opposition parties into a debate over the liberal political tradition, and the proper foundations of the international order. This distinct vision of American nationalism will form the basis of my four chapters: Chapter One will examine the intellectual authorities which provided the basis for ‘Young Americans’ view of the ‘natural law’ tradition; Chapter Two will examine how ‘Young

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<sup>30</sup> For the literary culture of the ‘Young America’ movement see P. Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956).

<sup>31</sup> Edward Widmer also acknowledges the importance of studying the literary and political elements of ‘Young America’ together. However, ultimately, he separates the movement into ‘Young America I’ and Young America II,’ which William Kerrigan has termed an ‘unconvincing distinction.’ In this interpretation, ‘Young America I’ denotes the literary movement associated with Cornelius Matthews and Evert Duyckinck whilst ‘Young America II’ refers to the political movement pushing for territorial expansion, which is presented as a fig leaf for Southern interests. This argument falls prey to two weaknesses common in the broader swathes of Jacksonian historiography, which I will explain later on: firstly, it separates the militaristic and racist aspects of the ‘Young America’ program from their intellectual and ideological roots, by dismissing Northern Democrats as mere ‘doughfaces’ after the Mexican War. Secondly, Widmer does not extend his analysis of Jacksonian political culture beyond 1854, assuming the movement had irrevocably split, when – in fact – a common commitment to Democratic principles still shaped the politics of the two major Northern parties. E. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). W.T. Kerrigan, ‘Review: E. Widmer, “The Flowering of Democracy in New York City,”’ *H-Net Reviews*, (November 1999), (<https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=3605>), accessed 10/09/17.

America's universalist vision shaped their support for the 1848 Revolutions in Europe; Chapter Three will look at the relationship between territorial expansion, free labor and intellectual culture. Chapter Four will trace 'Young America's' distinctly 'Jacksonian' response to the sectional crisis after 1854.

Natural law was an idea first developed in the philosophy of 17<sup>th</sup> century liberal thinkers such as John Locke. It asserts that certain rights are inherent in human beings irrespective of time and place; rights granted by a transcendent source, such as God or nature, and comprehensible through reason. Historians of American political thought have explored this concept in the early republic, particularly in relation to the drafting of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.<sup>32</sup> However, very few scholars have noted its significance in antebellum political culture, despite the central role it played at the time. And – surprisingly – no scholar has subjected the natural law tradition in the pre-Civil War period to a book length study. When it does arise in the literature, the idea is almost always associated with Lincoln and efforts to end slavery.<sup>33</sup> For example, historian Herman Belz writes that 'when Abraham Lincoln said in 1858 that the real issue in the slavery controversy was the eternal struggle between right and wrong throughout the world, he spoke the language of natural law,' since 'the natural law tradition posits the existence of an objective and universal moral order external to subjective human intellect.'<sup>34</sup> However, the fact that Abraham Lincoln's political speeches and writings do not reference the most important American document in that tradition – the Declaration of Independence – before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 should complicate this interpretation. Looking forward to the triumph of emancipation during the Civil War, historians of the antebellum era miss the party most concerned with 'natural law': the Democracy, particularly the more progressive 'Young America' faction, associated with the

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<sup>32</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment, Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton University Press, 2003). B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>33</sup> For an examination of anti-slavery politics and the natural law tradition see J. Dyer, *Natural Law and the Antislavery Constitutional Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Indeed, Democrats like Stephen Douglas are usually presented as non-ideological compromisers, motivated purely by material interests and inherently opposed to Lincoln's universalist political position, rooted in natural law. See H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: American Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> H. Belz, 'Abraham Lincoln and the Natural Law Tradition,' *Natural Law, Natural Right and American Constitutionalism*, (<http://www.nlnrac.org/american/lincoln>), accessed 10/09/17, 1.

*Democratic Review*. And that the ‘natural rights’ most important to them were not – as we might hope – to do with slavery, but the morally ambiguous cause of popular sovereignty and freedom from the federal government.

It is important to note that antebellum Americans did not derive the authority of ‘natural law’ and ‘natural rights’ from the concept of the ‘state of nature.’ In the Revolutionary Era, Jeffersonians defined ‘natural rights’ in relation to an abstract notion of man’s pre-social past, which they termed his ‘natural state.’ Both Democrats and Whigs tended to reject this concept as fictitious. More concerned with the ‘nation’ as a whole, the *Democratic* and *Whig Reviews* wrote about the nature of man *within* society – a state they saw as the only natural and eternal one. In addition, writers of both Whig and Democratic persuasions did not tend to draw on ‘social contract’ theory, since this was a political compact derived from the ‘state of nature.’<sup>35</sup> That said, their reasons for avoiding it were very different. Whigs were horrified at the idea that society could be dissolved by the will of the majority, even if the sovereign infringed upon ‘natural rights.’ Democrats disdained the notion that people surrendered their rights upon entering society; they believed ‘natural rights’ were wholly compatible with a true democratic order.<sup>36</sup>

Although they both rejected the concept of the ‘state of nature,’ we can still distinguish between the Whig and ‘Young Americans’ attitudes towards ‘natural law’; an area I will explore in Chapter One on the intellectual culture and political theory of the ‘Young America’ movement. The *Democratic Review* defined democracy as the ‘natural laws’ which existed independent of the state, whether at the federal or local level, whilst the Whigs saw it as a set of institutions that made up a particular political system. As O’Sullivan wrote in 1840, ‘man’s only truly natural state is when he conforms to all those natural laws, which the creator has instituted in that physical, intellectual and

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<sup>35</sup> The *North American Review* wrote ‘the social compact was made only in the imagination of the philosophers’; society was not ‘made’ but ‘grew...by kinship, not contract.’ The Democratic View of Democracy’ *North American Review*, Vol. 101, (July 1865) 107. Similarly, Daniel Howe writes of Rufus Choate ‘the source of the pollution he found in the doctrine of “Rousseau and Locke, and our own revolutionary age...that the state is nothing but a contract.”’ Choate quote in D. Howe, *The Political Culture of the Antebellum Whigs*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> O’Sullivan wrote in 1839, for example, ‘so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political and national life we may confidently assume that our nation is to be the great nation of futurity.’ ‘The Great Nation of Futurity,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 6, (November 1839). He also wrote ‘man surrenders none of his rights on entrance into society,’ as long as the state does not intervene unduly with his affairs,’ ‘Democracy,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 7, (March 1840), 223.

moral economy in which he is placed.’<sup>37</sup> These included popular sovereignty, but also the independence of states, free trade and – frequently – the extinction of ‘inferior’ peoples’ which might block the white man’s untrammelled will.

This debate about the relationship between democracy and the natural law tradition essentially revolved around two factors: what Americans believed about the origins of democratic government, and the ultimate location of sovereignty. ‘Young Americans’ argued that democracy emerged spontaneously in the absence of federal intervention and restrictive state constitutions. Conversely, Whigs viewed democracy as the product of these very same political institutions, as well as the nation’s specific cultural, legal and religious inheritance from Great Britain.

For ‘Young America,’ democracy, or ‘popular sovereignty’ as they often termed it, was a fundamental and inalienable principle, just like the rights contained in the Declaration of Independence. Sovereignty ultimately lay with a unified and morally righteous popular will, which existed independent and prior to formal political institutions, such as congressional representation and state constitutions. Instead of requiring protection from majoritarian rule, ‘Young Americans’ believed universal rights were wholly consistent with popular government. O’Sullivan wrote that ‘though the majority is not always right probability is in its favor.’<sup>38</sup> Although he admitted ‘that men may be deceived, misled, prejudiced, corrupted by flattery, inflamed by eloquence,’ ultimately ‘in the conflict of free thought and free discussion, the evil will cure itself.’<sup>39</sup> As such, democracy generated political progress on its own accord, neither tending towards majority tyranny nor social stagnation.

Conversely, Whigs believed democracy was a contingent political system based on specific historical and cultural circumstances, as well as the moral development of the individual. The conservative *Whig Review*, edited by George Colton, traced ‘Young America’s’ egregious view of popular sovereignty to a generation of Democrats who rose to prominence in light of the Mexican War. Although ‘the Democracy of 1844 make great pretensions to antiquity,’ Colton said, they are

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 223

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 224.

emphatically *modern*.<sup>40</sup> It was this group that ‘exclusively appropriate’ ‘the title of Democrat’ ‘to themselves.’<sup>41</sup> The *Whig Review* called these Democrats the ‘Dallas and Dorr type,’ and linked them to a rival publication called the *Democratic Review*.<sup>42</sup> It was these Democrats who had misinterpreted the principles at the heart of national existence: ‘to talk...of an inalienable, not to be surrendered right of suffrage, is in itself absolute nonsense; just as absurd as when the equally insane ranters, on the other extreme, talk of the natural, inalienable right of the crown’ (sic).<sup>43</sup>

For ‘Young Americans,’ then, democracy was not just a process of voting, a system of representation or the policies drafted by congressional representatives, but a more ‘authentic’ expression of the people’s will, which existed independent of these formal processes. It could, therefore, find expression outside conventional arenas, for example, in literary and intellectual culture. For ‘Young Americans,’ the popular will could be articulated by poets and novelists as well as statesmen. Chapter One will explore the movement’s wide-ranging intellectual ambitions, as well as the opposition they faced from conservative Whigs, from 1844-54.

Furthermore, for ‘Young Americans,’ sovereignty did not lie in the state or federal institutions which granted political rights to the people. Rather, white people possessed the right to popular sovereignty by virtue of their nature; they formed democratic communities spontaneously, wherever federal intervention did not subvert them. As Chapter Two will explore, this view of democracy as a transcendent principle, informed ‘Young America’s’ optimistic attitude towards the Revolutions of 1848. Even when the revolutions faltered in the early 1850s, ‘Young Americans’ saw democracy in Europe as immanently attainable, particularly with the inspiration of America’s increasingly democratic culture explored in Chapter One. Chapter Two will also explore ‘Young Americans’ policy of ‘intervention for non-intervention’; a more interventionist foreign policy, designed to guarantee the natural right of European nations to exist as independent states.

Chapter Three will look at how the ‘natural law’ tradition shaped the policy of territorial expansion, particularly the annexation of Cuba. Although historians are keen to characterize it as a

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<sup>40</sup> ‘The Position of the Parties’ *Whig Review* Vol. 1, (January 1845), 6. Italics in the original.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Human Rights,’ *The Whig Review*, Vol. 2, (November 1845), 450.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

Southern power grab, the ideology of ‘Young Americans’ helps explain why annexation in the tropics appealed to Northern Democrats.<sup>44</sup> In particular, their view of democracy as a universal principle shaped their optimism about self-government in Cuba, and, ultimately, its potential as a cite for free labor. By rooting ‘Young America’s’ territorial ambitions in their larger worldview, I will challenge the idea that the movement abandoned its intellectual ambitions to become merely a vehicle for the promotion of slavery through military force. Buchanan captured the idea that Union’s natural laws would destroy imperial authority in Cuba when he declared ‘you might as well command the Niagara not to flow,’ then arrest the Union’s growth.<sup>45</sup>

My final chapter will trace ‘Young America’ Democrats after 1854 to understand the role of Jacksonian ideology during the sectional crisis, particularly in the Northern States; an area of study absent from both the scholarship on ‘Young America,’ and Jacksonian ideology more broadly. Although the politics of ‘Young America’ did not change dramatically in this period, their role in political culture certainly did. As the American political scene experienced perhaps its most radical transformation, ‘Young Americans’ found themselves occupying an increasingly conservative political position; however, one that retained its roots in the natural law tradition and commitment to free labor. In order to understand the salience of the ‘Young America’ movement during this period, I examine how its ideology permeated both Democratic and Republican parties. Although historians generally argue that Jacksonian ideology faded away, and was replaced by sectional loyalties after 1854, I argue that a common commitment to the principles of ‘Young America’ spanned both the Republican and Northern Democratic parties from 1854-61.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> As I will explore later in this introduction, historians tend to focus on the Southern actors who advocated territorial expansion in the tropics. Although the desire to extend slavery was undoubtedly the primary motive behind territorial expansion, it was not the only one. As Chapter Three will explore, anti-slavery politicians in the North also argued that the extension of democratic government into tropical regions would help end slavery and the slave trade. For studies of territorial expansion from the Southern perspective see M. Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). The literature on territorial expansionism will be discussed in more detail later in this introduction.

<sup>45</sup> J. Buchanan quoted in P.S. Klein, *President James Buchanan, a biography*, (Connecticut: American Political Biography Press, 1962), 147.

<sup>46</sup> The tendency to ‘sectionalize’ American politics, particularly Jacksonian ideology, is discussed in more detail below; as is the tendency of most studies of Jacksonian political to end in the 1840s, despite the political tradition permeating the politics of both major Northern parties throughout the 1850s and 60s.

A more radical anti-slavery ideology posed a real threat to 'Young America' after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Eager to develop the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, Illinois' Stephen Douglas legislated for their swift incorporation as states under the principle of 'popular sovereignty,' first proposed by Democrats George Dallas and Daniel Dickinson. Douglas hoped the Act would have sufficient appeal to both Northern and Southern politicians to break the congressional stalemate delaying the territories' entry into the Union. But opposition proved fiercer than he expected. Crucially, the Act overturned the Missouri Compromise of 1820 which prohibited slavery north of the 36°30' parallel. Since popular sovereignty did not guarantee the exclusion of slavery in Kansas and Nebraska, the Act facilitated the extension of slavery into areas it had previously been excluded. Many Northerners – both Democrats and Whigs – considered the Missouri Compromise sacrosanct, and despaired at what they saw as a Southern plot to extend the power and influence of their section. Many Whigs and a good number of Democrats joined the rising Republican Party, which proposed to exclude slavery from the territories.

Like 'Young America' had before them, the new Republicans Party also spoke the language of 'natural rights.' Where before they had adhered to Whiggish compromise, now men like Lincoln and Seward argued that the 'higher law' and 'natural rights' should determine the status of slavery in the territories. For Republicans like Lincoln, however, this 'higher law' was not popular sovereignty, as it was for Douglas. Rather, it denoted peoples' right to the fruits of their own labor. Furthermore, Lincoln did not weld his conception of natural rights to whites' experience of democracy in the United States. In fact, he drew a sharp – sometimes oppositional – distinction between the natural rights contained in the liberal tradition and the political imperative of popular sovereignty. Despite this new radicalism, such a distinction could be compatible with the stance of conservative Whigs from the 1840s. Indeed, Whig-Republicans like Lincoln still considered popular sovereignty a political prerogative rather than natural right. But, unlike more conservative Whigs, they put forward an alternative view of the rights inherent in human nature: namely, the right to the fruit of one's labor, regardless of race or sex, in territories where positive law did not forbid it.

Essentially, Lincoln drew a sharp distinction between the *natural* right to the fruits of labor and the *political* right to popular sovereignty. Whilst blacks might not be suited to the latter, Lincoln

argued that the former cut across racial boundaries. Furthermore, Lincoln's natural rights referred to individuals rather than groups. Unlike Douglas, Lincoln did not see racially homogenous communities as the only guarantor of natural rights. Instead, individual rights constituted a distinct source of political authority; one independent of majority rule, distinct from the wishes of the white population and enforced by the federal government. These natural rights were applicable to any 'new' territories where government had not extended, irrespective of the racial make-up of the community. Whether in Kansas, Nebraska, or any other territory on earth, where positive law did not forbid it, people should be allowed to enjoy the fruit of their labor as a universal right.

Faced with this rival interpretation of the 'natural law' tradition, the 'Young America' movement did undergo a real discursive shift. In the 1840s, it was common for 'Young America' Democrats to justify their political project as an essentially radical one. Democrats took a favorable view of the previous century's most polarizing event, the French Revolution, including the Jacobins.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, they frequently used the term 'philanthropy' in a positive context.<sup>48</sup> Up against the conservative Whig Party, this stance was an appropriate one. The Republicans, however, presented a very different threat. As an explicitly anti-slavery party, they attacked the Democrats for not extending their conception of natural rights beyond the white race. In this context, the Democrats became the party of the 'common good' as they tried to preserve racially homogeneous communities, and maintain the stability of the Union. Where they had championed individual freedoms against the claims of the collective, the Democrats now sought to preserve the stability of white communities against a push for black rights. Although they continued to use the phrase 'natural law,' Democrats did use terms like 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' more frequently in their political discourse. After 1854, there was a discernible shift in their political rhetoric to accommodate the demands of common life; a transformation I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four on 'Young America's' role in the sectional crisis, from 1854-61.

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<sup>47</sup> For the Democrats' favorable interpretation of the French Revolution see E. Burke, *Rhode Island – interference of the executive in the affairs of*, Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., Rep. No. 546, (1844) (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1845), 50.

<sup>48</sup> The *Democratic Review* termed 'patriotism' a 'false bond,' preferring the recognition of 'expanded philanthropy.' 'The East and West,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 22, (May 1848), 401.



This real discursive shift, however, did not amount to an abandonment of the Democrats' own conception of the natural law tradition, nor their ultimate concern for free labor. The *Democratic Review* certainly opposed the Republican Party for infringing on Southern property rights. The magazine was the mouthpiece of the Democratic Party at the national level. A significant proportion of its readers and contributors were Southerners, for whom the Republican Party posed a real threat. Moreover, 'popular sovereignty' was, of course, designed to placate both North and South. There is no avoiding the ambiguity at the heart of Lewis Cass' Nicholson Letter, for example, which was purposefully silent on the question of when settlers could legislate for or against slavery.<sup>49</sup> But the *Review* also believed the measure protected the rights of settlers in the territories. Democratic writers believed self-government was an inalienable right for white men, which resisted congressional dictation, except on issues that directly contravened the Constitution. Despite equivocating over slavery, I argue that the Kanas-Nebraska Act should be considered a highly ideological policy, which emerged from the 'Young America' movement's wider political program. Republicans might have been keen to present the policy as a fig-leaf for Southern interests, or a mere compromise measure, but we should not take these pronouncements for the whole story. Many Northern Democrats believed popular sovereignty was fully compatible with universal liberal values, and would lead to the triumph of free labor. Furthermore, as Chapter 1 will explore, the racism that distinguished 'Young America' Democrats from Republicans like Lincoln often came as much from their Jacksonian worldview as an allegiance to the slaveholding South. Even as racial divides came to dominate Northern politics, these owed as much to older political ideologies, associated with the 'Second Party System,' as they did sectional divides.

Once we appreciate the wider relationship between popular sovereignty and the natural law tradition, it is possible to see the policy as the Democrats themselves did: as a principled route to extinguishing slavery on the American mainland. As popular and state-sovereignty were universal rights for white men, Democrats believed they would produce inherently moral outcomes. Ultimately,

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of the political ambiguity at the heart of the Nicholson letter see W.C. Klunder, 'Lewis Cass and Slavery Expansion: "The Father of Popular Sovereignty" and ideological infanticide,' *Civil War History*, Vol. 32, (December 1986).

for these Democrats, withdrawing federal intervention was its own moral test: whatever local communities decreed would spontaneously drive social progress. However racist, naïve or useful to the Slave Power this ideology proved to be, it was nonetheless believed by its adherents to be a deeply principled solution to the problem of slavery, and a genuine root to a free labor society.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, this was compromise of a very peculiar kind. Firstly, it was based on the consistent application of a universal principle – ‘popular sovereignty’ - rather than the balance of competing interests. Secondly, ‘popular sovereignty,’ especially at first, was steeped in the bombastic rhetoric of ‘Young America’ expansion and western nationalism. And lastly, it rested on the unbridled application of a principle, which had only recently received widespread acceptance in antebellum America. Although ‘Young Americans’ drew on increasingly conservative language, the principle of ‘popular sovereignty’ as a solution to the slavery crisis, had unmistakably radical origins.

Committed to both popular sovereignty and free labor, many Jacksonians eventually found a home in the anti-slavery Republican Party, which had cut its ties to the slave South. Democrats did not defect to the Republicans because their view of slavery changed substantially, or because they were becoming more racially tolerant. Rather, they believed the Republican Party was the best outlet for their Jacksonian beliefs, which marked out popular sovereignty as the surest route to a free labor society. By 1854, the actions of the Slave Power suggested the Southern Democrats were actively subverting the principle of popular sovereignty. At this point, slavery and the federal government seemed so closely entwined that they required active uncoupling. Thus, it was within the new Republican ranks that many ‘Young Americans’ pushed for a Jacksonian solution to the sectional crisis that was consistent with free labor. My dissertation aims to bridge this gap by foregrounding the shared Jacksonian ideology which transcended partisan division during the sectional crisis. As we learn from such correspondence as Samuel Tilden and William C. Bryant, Jacksonians within the Republican Party maintained strong ideological and personal ties to the Democracy.<sup>51</sup> Even when the

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<sup>50</sup> The tendency to view aspects of the Jacksonian program, such as popular sovereignty or territorial expansion as purely Southern phenomenon, or merely compromise measures is discussed at length later in this introduction.

<sup>51</sup> Requesting that the *Evening Post* publish one of the speeches he delivered at the Cooper Institute in 1860, Tilden told the editors that he would be glad to address himself to the ‘many cultivated intellects and some friends of my earlier years.’ Samuel J. Tilden to the Editors of the *Evening Post*, October 3, 1860, *Letters and*

*Democratic Review* increasingly alienated its Northern writers, the publication continued to acknowledge ideological similarities across sectional divisions.<sup>52</sup> Lastly, Jacksonians in both parties maintained a commitment to at least the theory of popular sovereignty, as well as free labor. Disagreements turned on points of interpretation, rather than broad ideological questions.

That said, there was an apparent inconsistency at the heart of the Jacksonian idea that popular sovereignty constituted a ‘natural right.’ As people at the time pointed out, the essential characteristic of ‘natural rights’ was their consistent application across time and space. But, even if we accept their faith in free labor, ‘Young Americans’ like Stephen Douglas certainly did not want blacks to vote. How, then, could ‘Young Americans’ draw on the language of liberal universalism – in particular, the natural law tradition – when they outlawed a whole segment of the United States’ population from their political vision? As Abraham Lincoln argued, Douglas debased the humanity of black people when he denied their natural rights.<sup>53</sup> If popular sovereignty was a principle common to human nature, Douglas had to admit to one of the following things: either blacks should be permitted to exercise popular sovereignty, or they were not fully human.

In the end, ‘Young Americans’ believed that ‘natural laws’ applied to the white and black races in two very different ways: for whites, they created democratic communities, whilst, for blacks, they tended towards degeneration and extermination. Brought to the US by British imperialists, ‘Young Americans’ believed black people should not have been in the United States in the first place. Democratic historian George Bancroft summarized the prevailing view when he argued that the slave trade was a product of European imperialism.<sup>54</sup> If popular sovereignty had prevailed in the 18<sup>th</sup>

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*Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. J. Bigelow, 2 Vols., (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1908), 1:132. Before publishing this speech, the *Evening Post* ran an editorial that said “‘the readers of the *Evening Post* know...that Mr Tilden never writes or speaks without having something to say worth hearing, though they have not lately been unfortunate enough to agree with him on Federal politics.’” *Letters and Literary Memorials*, 1:132.

<sup>52</sup> The *Democratic Review* said of former contributor John Bigelow, ‘Mr Bigelow has frequently been before our readers as a contributor to this Review. He is a gentleman of great attainments, and uprightness of purpose.’ However, it pointed out that ‘we are of opinion that his ultra free soil tendencies are calculated to impair his judgement upon the slave question.’ ‘Notice of New Books: “Jamaica in 1850: or, the effects of 16 years of freedom in a slave colony,” by John Bigelow.’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 27, (November 1850), 474.

<sup>53</sup> Abraham Lincoln’s critique of Stephen Douglas for denying the essential humanity of black men is explored in D. Ross, ‘Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation: Universalism Nationalism, Exceptionalism,’ *Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, (September, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Bancroft’s view that Spanish imperialists were responsible for spreading slavery to the United States can be found in G. Bancroft, *History of the United States of America from the discovering of the continent*, 10 vols.

century, slavery would never have taken root in the United States, nor would a black population exist within the Union. In the Jacksonian imagination, imperial power, slavery and racial mixing were three components of the same political project.

As 'Young America' Democrats made sense of natural rights within the context of local communities, they did not know what to do with a population that should not be there in the first place. If slaves were emancipated and permitted to settle in white communities, they would not be able to compete for wages or participate in political debate. In this context, blacks would either die out, as they struggled for subsistence wages among a superior population, or they would commit violent acts in the community and undermine its stability. Racial miscegenation was also a constant fear. The steady degeneration of the white race, through breeding with an 'inferior' stock, plagued the Democratic imagination. Hence, the presence of free blacks within the Union was as 'unnatural' as enslaved ones. These political figures were caught between two scenarios which both violated 'natural law': the continued existence of slavery within the United States, on the one hand, and the presence of free blacks in white communities, on the other. In sum, 'Young Americans' disapproved of slavery but believed free blacks could not integrate within white areas. If they were to be neither free nor slave, where were blacks to go?

The only future 'Young Americans' did frequently envisage was either deportation or extinction, sometimes labelled 'extermination.' In the case of deportation, some writers did draw on a vision of 'manifest destiny' for the black race. These 'Young America' Democrats believed that in these warmer climates, blacks would outcompete whites, creating their own 'free labor' communities.<sup>55</sup> Others looked forward to the total extinction of the black race; a destiny comparable

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(New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 1:159-64. Bancroft's view of the relationship between slavery and European imperialism led him to believe that the chattel slavery was incompatible with a truly democratic society. For Bancroft, the fact that slavery still existed in the United States only proved the extent to which the Union had not escaped its European past. Even whilst rallying against abolitionism as a British plot, Bancroft saw the steady expulsion of slavery as a way of cleansing America of the lingering influence of European monarchism. In the historian's words, 'slavery was an anomaly in a Democratic society.' See George Bancroft to Dean Milman, August 15, 1861, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1908), 2:133.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of black 'manifest destiny,' and the efficiency of black labor in tropical climates see Chapter Four, especially Philadelphia Democrat Thomas L. Kane, 'Transportation, Extermination, Fusion,' XI, TLK Papers, BYU.

to the Indians who were supposedly receding before white civilization.<sup>56</sup> For this group, blacks would fare no better in Africa than they did the United States. Left to themselves, blacks would die out on the African continent just as they would in America; war and famine would inevitably plague a race, which lacked the intelligence required for sustainable agriculture and a stable political process. ‘Young Americans’ therefore did draw a fundamental divide between inferior and superior races, each with its own innate and inalienable characteristics.

However, as Chapter One explores, the white supremacy of ‘Young America’ Democrats was consistent with their long-standing commitment to Jacksonian ideology. It should not, therefore, be considered a blind spot in their otherwise liberal rhetoric, nor a solely a product of their increasingly strong ties to the Slave Power.<sup>57</sup> Since they viewed popular sovereignty as an inherent right and a universal human characteristic, ‘Young America’ Democrats tended to see non-democratic people as an inherently inferior class of beings, for whom no amount of education or moral guidance could help them form political communities. Furthermore, unlike Whig-Republicans, ‘Young Americans’ rejected the idea that there was a class of natural rights that applied to individuals, independent and prior to democratic government; a divide which would come to frame the Lincoln Douglas debates.<sup>58</sup> This Jacksonian view of racial inferiority should be distinguished from mere support for the slave South, particularly since it was often deployed in support of free labor. Indeed, the Jacksonian commitment to white supremacy straddled the Republican and Northern Democratic parties, as

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<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of the ‘extinction’ of the black race see Chapter One, particularly ‘Slaves and Slavery,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 19, (October 1846), 254. For extinction through racial mixing see G. Goepf and T. Poesche, *The New Rome; or, the United States of the World*, (G.P. Putnam & Co, 1853). Goepf anticipated a “‘white washing’ process’ whereby white males have children with black females would ‘eventually...efface all traces of the black race not capable of adventurous admixture with the white,’ 55.

<sup>57</sup> These two interpretations of the Democrats, particularly the ‘Young Americans’ from the free states, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. The historians who see ‘Young Americans’ as essentially liberal but for blind spots on race tend to massively underestimate the Jacksonian commitment to white supremacy. See Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement*; R. Sampson, *John O’Sullivan and His Times*, (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003). Another group of historians tends to reduce racism in Jacksonian political culture purely to the influence of the Slave Power, or they focus exclusively on the racist ideology of the Democrats, at the expense of its relationship with their liberal values. See M. T. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties, the Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*, (Cornell University Press, 2015); R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*. Both interpretations fail to appreciate racism’s symbiotic relationship with Jacksonian Democracy. Perhaps the best encapsulation of this tendency is Edward Widmer’s study which divided ‘Young America’ starkly into a liberal and more racist phase, in which they were beholden to the Slave Power See E. Widmer, *Young America*.

<sup>58</sup> The division between ‘Young America’ Democrats and Whig-Republicans on the issue of race, as exemplified in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

‘Young Americans’ who defected to the Republican Party took this view of racial homogeneity with them. If Northern Democrats were ‘doughfaces’ for their skeptical attitude toward black freedom, many found a home within the Republican Party too. Even the Jacksonians who remained in the Northern Democratic Party were more likely to advocate extinction, colonization or ‘white washing’ through interbreeding as the means of protecting the homogeneity of white communities, rather than the perpetuation of the institution of slavery, particularly on the American mainland, but also – in many cases – in the tropics.<sup>59</sup> ‘Young Americans’ predicted that democratic, white communities would dominate the global order, as the ‘natural laws’ of their libertarian social order worked on the different races in distinct ways. Whether advocating a ‘manifest destiny’ for blacks in Africa, or the total extinction of the black race, these Jacksonians wanted white communities to exercise their natural right to self-government on the frontier, unencumbered by racial divisions. This worldview cannot be called ‘Northern’ or ‘Southern,’ but a combination of white supremacy, popular sovereignty and free labor ideology, united within the Jacksonian tradition.

In terms of existing historiography, my thesis will relate to two main areas – Jacksonian political culture and ‘liberal nationalism.’ It will challenge three assumptions in the literature on Jacksonian politics: the notion that Democratic political culture died with the ‘Second Party System’ in 1854; the idea that Northern Democrats were mere ‘doughfaces’; and the projection of anti-intellectualism or pragmatism onto Jackson’s followers. It will hopefully enlarge the scholarship on ‘nationalism’ in the antebellum era by moving beyond a ‘North’ v. ‘South’ binary, and showing how nationalism was as much a product of competing political theories as allegiance to place. I also suggest that more historians should broaden their understanding of the theory of nationalism. Just as much as an imagined past, liberal nationalists in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century looked to a fictitious image of the future, tied to the present through the working of providential laws.

Firstly, in terms of literature on the antebellum Democracy, most histories of Jacksonian political culture end with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. As Democrats lost votes in

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<sup>59</sup> The calls for territorial expansion into Cuba and Central America to make way for communities of white free laborers is underappreciated in the historiography; a topic discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. For the process of ‘white washing’ see C Goepf & T. Poersche, *The New Rome; or, The United States of the World*, (G.P. Putnam & Co, New York: 1853), 55.

the Northern states to an ascendant Republican Party, we assume the ‘Second Party System’ collapsed, and politics became ‘sectionalized.’ Arthur Schlesinger’s magisterial *Age of Jackson* ends in the 1840s, Sean Wilentz’s *Chants Democratic* in 1850 and Daniel Feller’s *The Jacksonian Promise* in 1840.<sup>60</sup> When Jacksonian ideology is studied in this later period, historians tend to draw on a sectional framework. Conscious of widening tensions over slavery, they either present Jacksonian ideology as a Southern phenomenon, or a means of restoring sectional harmony. In this interpretation, Northern Democrats are either non-ideological compromisers, or agents of the Slave Power.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, my dissertation argues that Jacksonian nationalism constituted its own ideology, which drew on distinct intellectual authorities, and cannot be reduced to Northern or Southern sectionalism.

Firstly, historians generally underemphasize the ideological nature of the Northern Democrats’ agenda because they view the party as ‘backward,’ ‘folkloric’ or ‘anti-intellectual.’<sup>62</sup> To be sure, historians like Daniel Feller have complicated this characterization, with accounts of the optimistic, progressive ethos of the Democracy, such as *The Jacksonian Promise*.<sup>63</sup> However, this stereotype of the Democratic Party, and Jacksonian culture more broadly, still exerts a powerful grip over both scholarly and popular writing on the subject. In particular, the idea that Jackson’s supporters were anti-intellectual retains a stubborn hold. This is apparent in the whole genre of articles which have emerged in the last two decades, comparing Republican Presidents George W. Bush and Donald

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<sup>60</sup> A. Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, (Mentor Books, 1959); S. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic, New York City and the rise of the American working class, 1788-18510*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); D. Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise; America, 1815 to 1840*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); The exception to this rule is J. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983). Nevertheless, my analysis is very different to Baker’s. Whilst I focus on ‘Young America’s universalist vision, even in the midst of their conservative turn during the 1850s, Baker sees Northern Democrats, particularly Stephen Douglas as pragmatic, and Burkean in their commitment to local community. She writes ‘like many Democrats, Douglas wished to replace moral judgements on good and evil with what he considered an effective policy,’ 192.

<sup>61</sup> These two perspectives are discussed in more detail below. The former can be found in M. T. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties*. For the Democrats as non-ideological or pragmatic see H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*.

<sup>62</sup> W. R. Meade refers to the ‘folk ideology of Jacksonian America,’ W.R. Meade, *Donald Trump’s Jacksonian Revolt*, September 9 2014, (<https://www.hudson.org/research/13010-donald-trump-s-jacksonian-revolt>), accessed 10/09/17. Similarly, Jean Baker suggests the Democrats were reactionary and anti-intellectual, citing ‘the casual intermixing of means and ends, the priority given to the past (other things being equal), the acceptance of the people’s right to decide local politics and the reliance on the constitution.’ J. Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 191.

<sup>63</sup> D. Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise*.

Trump to Andrew Jackson.<sup>64</sup> Implicit in these pieces is the idea that Trump and Bush share the disdain for intellectual achievement which marked the Democracy during the 1840s and 50s. Both supposedly drew on an ‘instinctive’ style of politics, hostile to expert knowledge and immigrants in equal measure, and committed to maintaining the nation’s homogenous geographical boundaries.

Whilst ‘Young America’ did resent intellectual and religious elites, they also had model thinkers of their own, and were committed to fostering learning and ‘enlightenment’ among the common people. Democratic congressmen were instrumental in the creation of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Academy of Science, whilst the *Democratic Review* rallied around the Party’s favored political thinkers.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, the Democrats drew their ideology of ‘natural law’ from intellectual authorities, including literature and the social and natural sciences. Moreover, the ethos of white supremacy that saturated the party’s every pore owed more to the latest development in phrenology, which was – itself – on the cutting-edge of scientific development.

The view that Democrats were anti-intellectual has perhaps also shaped our view of the Democrats’ supposedly pragmatic response to the ‘sectional crisis,’ from 1854 to 1861. According to this interpretation, ‘Young America’ Democrats like Stephen Douglas supported the policy of ‘popular sovereignty’ to unite the party, and the nation at large, during a period of ideological polarization.<sup>66</sup> However, as I will explore in Chapter Four, Douglas’ Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 was framed in terms of the forward-looking rhetoric of ‘Young America,’ and often associated with that term. Furthermore, the principle of popular sovereignty, which provided its foundations, was

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<sup>64</sup> W. R. Meade writes ‘Mr Trump’s strongest supporters are the 21<sup>st</sup> century heirs of a political tendency that coalesced in the early 1820s around Andrew Jackson.’ W.R. Meade, *Donald Trump’s Jacksonian Revolt*, September 9 2014, (<https://www.hudson.org/research/13010-donald-trump-s-jacksonian-revolt>), accessed 10/09/17.

<sup>65</sup> Several Democrats were instrumental in the founding of the Smithsonian Institution, which was established during the Presidency of James K. Polk. See P.H. Ochser, *The Story of the Smithsonian Institution and its Leaders*, (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949).

<sup>66</sup> This interpretation pervades historian Harry Jaffa’s interpretation of the sectional crisis. See H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom* and H. Jaffa, *A Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Jaffa contrasts Lincoln’s faith in the ‘natural law’ tradition with Douglas’ supposedly pragmatic and materialist concerns. Similarly, Stewart Winger argues ‘it was Douglas, not Lincoln who wanted Americans to put economic development (and political compromise) above morality.’ S. Winger, ‘Lincoln’s Economics and the American Dream,’ *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 22, (Winter 2001). Also see J. Baker, *Affairs of Party*. Similarly, Yonatan Eyal argues that ‘Young America’ Democrats used ideological rhetoric in a purely instrumental fashion - to unite a Democratic Party fracturing over slavery. Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement*.



deeply ideological: not only had it only very recently received widespread acceptance in the United States, but it was designed to be universally applicable to white men, both on the American and European continents. If this was compromise or pragmatism, it was of a very peculiar type, utterly opposed to the notion of competing interest groups, or the balance of power.

Another common mischaracterization of the Democratic Party in the free states is that its supporters were merely agents of the Slave Power. Assuming that politics became ‘sectionalized’ after 1854, most historians argue that Northern Democrats ‘were ‘doughfaces,’ at the mercy of a Southern takeover of the party. Republicans, on the other hand, were committed to ‘free labor’ ideology and the total destruction of slavery. The most strident example of this approach is Michael T. Landis’ *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties*, who claims the Democracy became an active agent of the planter class.<sup>67</sup> But other histories make a similar argument, albeit in a more qualified way. William Freehling, for example, argues that Jeffersonian economics and slavery had become ‘intermeshed’ by the time of the Nullification Crisis (1833-34).<sup>68</sup> The problem is really one of framing. Almost always, Northern Democrats are examined in the context of Southern politics; an understandable focus given how their ambitions dovetailed with those south of the Mason Dixon line.<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately, however, we receive a distorted and reductionist view of Northern politics, with Northern Democrats and Republicans standing in for the ‘Southern’ and ‘Northern’ sections. Too few historians study the Democrats as part of the political tradition from which they emerged: Northern, free labor society. Indeed, Northern Democrats drew on the same free labor ideology as the

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<sup>67</sup> M. T. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties*.

<sup>68</sup> W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1996), 225. Much of the literature on the ‘Young America’ movement argues that they were merely providing cover to the Slave Power. Edward Widmer, for example, claims that the movement had morphed into its second incarnation – Young America II – by the 1850s, which merely provided an ideological smokescreen for the extension of slavery. E. Widmer, *Young America*.

<sup>69</sup> As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this problem becomes particularly acute in the literature on individual components of the Jacksonian program, such as territorial expansion and popular sovereignty. As I have alluded to, territorial expansion is almost always narrated from the Southern perspective. See M. Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire* and R. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; a historiography I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. As I explore in Chapter Four, the few published histories of ‘popular sovereignty’ miss an opportunity to explore the considerable appeal which the principle had for members of the anti-slavery Republican Party. See C. Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny and the Radicalization of Southern Politics*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2012).

Republican Party, meaning the concept does not definitively account for the divisions within Northern society.<sup>70</sup> My thesis will argue that – if anything – ‘Young America’ Democrats were more forceful in their articulation of ‘free labor’ than their Republican counterparts. They supported ‘popular sovereignty,’ for example, on the grounds that free labor would naturally trump slave labor in the absence of federal interference. Their antipathy towards centralization was premised on the natural dynamism of workers in a free society. There was clearly more than one way to envisage a free labor society, and destroy the blight of chattel slavery.

Some historians have cautioned against the reductive idea that Democratic ideology was purely a means of advancing Southern interests. Jennifer Greene, for example, calls for historians to ‘reframe the Democratic mainstream.’<sup>71</sup> Examining the career of ‘Young America’ diplomat, Pierre Soulé, she argues that Soulé’s views were more consistent with Jacksonian nationalism than scholars have allowed. Eager to portray him as a Southern extremist, we have neglected the fact that Soulé advocated fundamental aspects of Jacksonian political thought throughout the 1850s, with cross-sectional appeal. As this dissertation will explore, this framing could be applied to other ‘Young America’ Democrats often considered ‘Southern’ in their political leanings. Despite their reputation for actively defending slavery, Mississippi’s Robert J. Walker and Kentucky’s George Sanders, for example, both supported Illinois’ ‘Young America’ statesman Stephen Douglas in the presidential election of 1860. Indeed, Robert J. Walker fought for the Union when Civil War broke out in 1861, despite hailing from Mississippi.

By examining Democrats within a Southern context, we also neglect the numerous Jacksonian politicians who found a home within the Republican Party. Throughout the 1850s, Northern Democrats defected to the Republicans, outraged at attempts by the Slave Power to subvert Democratic ideals, particularly ‘popular sovereignty.’ But, just as we should not ascribe Northern

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<sup>70</sup> G. A. Peck, Abraham Lincoln and the Triumph of an Anti-Slavery Nationalism, *Journal of the American Lincoln Association*, Vol. 28, (summer 2007). Peck perceptively observes that the concept of free labor does not account for distinctions between the Republican and Northern Democratic parties. For an exploration of the relationship between ‘free labor’ and the rise of the Republican Party see E. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor and Free Men: the Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> J. Greene and P.M. Kirkwood, ‘Reframing the Antebellum Democratic Mainstream: Transatlantic Diplomacy and the Career of Pierre Soulé,’ *Civil War History*, Vol. 61, (September, 2015).

Democrats ‘Southern loyalties,’ we should not primarily define Jacksonian-Republicans by their anti-slavery ideals.<sup>72</sup> Stressing the ‘free labor’ ideology that united the Republican Party belies the ideological divisions which cut across the organization. Moreover, it fails to properly account for the Jacksonians who defected from the Democratic to Republican parties during the 1850s, whose view on the future of slavery remained exactly the same.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, although the rise of the Republic Party helps us understand growing sectional tensions, it does little to address divisions within Northern society; many of which adhered to the older divide between Whigs and Democrats, which characterized the ‘Second Party System.’ As scholars like Marc William Palen have shown, the coalition of political forces attracted to the Republican banner was a fragile one: Northern Democrats and former Whigs joined forces within the same party, with little in common but opposition to slavery.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Democrats who defected to the Republic Party, maintained strong ties with their old Democratic colleagues, even after 1854. Numerous Republicans re-joined the Democratic Party after the Civil War, suggesting they maintained substantial links to their former party. Furthermore, Jacksonian political figures still formed a close network in the late 1850s. Samuel Tilden and John O’Sullivan’s private correspondence over secession, for example, acknowledges a shared commitment to the values of the Democracy, across the ‘sectional’ divisions we usually use to define this period.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Works that characterize *either* the Northern Democratic or Republican parties as exclusively pro or anti-slavery project sectional concerns back onto a Northern political culture, which was still more concerned with resisting centralized power, than it was ending or preserving slavery. In our rush to frame Northern politics in sectional terms, we miss how Jacksonians in both the Republican and Democratic parties interpreted the issue of slavery within an older Jacksonian framework, which focused on resistance to federal authority. In this way, recent works by Manisha Sinha and James Oakes are mirror images of Michael Landis and Edward Widmer, since all of them try to sectionalize Northern politics, completely flattening out Jacksonian ideology. See J. Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865*, (W.W. Norton and Company, 2012); M. Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>73</sup> Here I not only refer to the morality of slavery but also plans for its eventual extinction. As Chapter Four will explore, many Northern Democrats continued to support for the policy of ‘popular sovereignty’ after they had defected to the Republican Party.

<sup>74</sup> M. W. Palen, *The ‘Conspiracy’ of Free Trade, The Anglo-American Struggle Over Empire and Economic Globalisation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Palen argues ‘the newly formed Republican party’s rally around antislavery...temporarily overshadowed the Republican coalition’s conflicting free trade and protectionist ideologies.’ 31.

<sup>75</sup> Despite taking different sides in the Civil War, the Confederate supporting John O’Sullivan reached out to Samuel Tilden’s Jacksonian sensibilities. He rallied against the ‘Republicans and old Federalists and Whigs’ within northern society and warned Tilden about the centralizing tendencies of the Lincoln administration. John O’Sullivan to Samuel Tilden, August 1 1861; June 5 1861; Tilden Collection, Mss. Division, New York Public Library.

This dissertation foregrounds Jacksonian ideology in order to understand how the older political traditions of Jacksonianism and Whiggery - associated with the 'Second Party System' - continued to shape peoples' responses to the sectional crisis. I examine how Jacksonian political figures in both the Democratic and Republican parties navigated sectional tensions according to their formative political beliefs. Ultimately, I argue that Jacksonians within both Republican and Democratic parties understood the sectional crisis in terms of a struggle against centralized power and federal overreach. By foregrounding Jacksonian nationalism, I hope to recover some of the ways antebellum Americans understood the ideological struggles that defined their own time; slavery certainly was not the only 'intractable conflict' which marked this tumultuous decade for 19<sup>th</sup> century observers in the Jacksonian tradition. For many Jacksonians, slavery was subsumed within a larger project of rolling back the federal government in order to promote local self-government for white working men.

In addition to the literature on 'Young America' and Jacksonian political culture, my work relates to the historiography on 'nationalism' in the United States. With the transnational turn in Civil War historiography, scholars are beginning to see the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as a period of unprecedented global violence, driven by an ideology of 'liberal,' or 'progressive nationalism.' As Patrick Kelley explains, the 'period between 1840-1880' was one of 'extraordinary violence,' driven by 'economic development, national unification and democratic government, a nineteenth century ideology Enrique Dal Lago has termed "progressive nationalism;" one that connected "concurrent rebellions occurring in China, Europe and South America."' <sup>76</sup> Similarly, Jorg Nagler sees the Civil War as 'one part' of the 'relationship between war and nation building' that existed between 1850-1871 – from the Taiping Rebellion to the Franco Prussian War. <sup>77</sup> Scholars have begun to look at the development of 'progressive nationalism' in the antebellum era, and have started to place the US within this wider global context. Thus far, some studies have concentrated on the development of 'sectional nationalisms,' with Susan-Mary Grant and Paul Quigley looking at 'Northern' and 'Southern'

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<sup>76</sup> P. Kelley, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Transnational Turn in Civil War History,' *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4, (September, 2014), 432.

<sup>77</sup> J. Nagler in 'Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War,' *The Journal of American History*, (September 2011), 457.

identities respectively, whilst others, such as Timothy M. Roberts arguing that antebellum Americans looked to the 1848 Revolutions to define their national identity.<sup>78</sup> But, in my view, these two approaches make two main mistakes: they assume nationalism was defined in terms of place, and that the places which mattered were the ones dividing the nation in 1861.

Historians eager to uncover how people ‘identified’ with the 1848 Revolutions, or rallied around their particular ‘sections,’ do not acknowledge that the ‘progressive nationalism’ they take for granted rests on a very specific conception of the Union; one that was highly contested throughout the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Recently, historians have written entire books about the high-minded rhetoric that informed US nationalism, occasionally scorning it for being idealistic, and unmindful of the structural forces driving historical change.<sup>79</sup> But, as of yet, no one has traced the intellectual authorities which shaped how Americans thought about the nation, particularly the liberal tradition of ‘natural law.’ Those intellectuals who theorized about the function of the Union, in a dialogue with European philosophical traditions, have gone unnoticed. Focusing on the antebellum North, my thesis will illuminate how the conception of ‘progressive’ nationalism emerged during the two decades prior to the conflict, by examining the intellectual influences on the ‘Young America’ movement.

The Revolutions of 1848 played an invaluable role in shaping the way Americans thought about the ‘nation’ in this period. However, to foreground ‘place’ in histories of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism is misguided. Of course, references to other nations in Europe and on the American continent pervade the sources if scholars care to look. It would be strange if they did not. What is more important is to ask why an internationalist consciousness developed at this particular time in American history, and what ideas provided its foundations. As such, we should formulate our questions a little differently: why did the 1848 Revolutions matter so much to 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>78</sup> S.M. Grant, *North Over South*; P. Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South: 1848-1865*, (OUP USA, 2011); D. Doyle, *Cause of all Nations, An International History of the Civil War*, (Basic Books, 2013); T. M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*.

<sup>79</sup> For an account of the high-minded, internationalist rhetoric which informed American nationalism during the antebellum era see D. Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations: An International history of the American Civil War*, (New York: Basic Books, 2013). Historian Robert Nelson writes ‘there was little substantive engagement with either the ideas or politics of the Revolutions of 1848 in the United States.’ R. Nelson ‘Review: T.M. Roberts, “Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism,” (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009),’ *H-SHEAR Review Session*, May 2010, (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-shear&month=1005&week=a&msg=EsycmNIFojw5GkhyO79oaw&user=&pw=>), accessed 25/01/2018.

Americans? What ideas bound this cosmopolitan community together? What were its common political aims? Too much of an emphasis on place also leads us away from the conceptual discussions in which theorists of American nationalism were engaged. Although we are accustomed to thinking of nationalism as an instinctual response, most popular among those set against intellectual pursuits, the reality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was very different.

For many antebellum Americans, nationalism was a ‘progressive’ phenomenon, with its origins in liberal political thought. If this was an age of ‘progressive’ nationalism, a focus on geography only gets us so far: it does not explain how Americans thought they could bring about social progress. Many political thinkers explicitly denied geography had anything to do with nationalism in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: Tocqueville referred to an ‘intellectual homeland’ replacing the nation as a cite of political belonging, whilst George W. Curtis made the case that intellectuals who contemplated ‘eternal’ concerns should assume a more active role in shaping national identity.<sup>80</sup> Even racial thinkers’ emphasis on phrenological science did not map neatly onto national boundaries.<sup>81</sup> To fixate on ‘Europe,’ ‘North,’ or ‘South’ is simply not the best way to understand the form of nationalism dominant at this time. Indeed, Paul Quigley also points out that – at the very moment when they turned against each other – the Northern and Southern sections actually subscribed to similar conceptions of the nation, with each one providing a blueprint for international order.<sup>82</sup> The story of the ‘Young America’ movement provides an important precursor to the universalist formulations which the sections’ adopted.

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<sup>80</sup> A. Tocqueville, *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 25; G.W. Curtis, *The Duty of the American Scholar to Politics and the Times.: An oration, delivered on Tuesday August 5, 1856, before the literary societies of Wesleyan University, Middleton., Conn.* (New York: Dix Edwards, & co, 1856), 14.

<sup>81</sup> As Rogers Smith points out in his work, *Civic Ideals*, Democrats often opposed birth right citizenship not only because it allowed them to champion the cause of immigrants, but also because it ensured Native Americans and blacks born within the Union could not achieve the status of citizens. In this way, a universalist stance towards immigration, which cut across territorial boundaries, was compatible with, and even reinforced, white supremacy. As Smith observes, ‘the Jacksonians’ consensualist posture served racially exclusive purposes, even as it allowed them to champion the cause of immigrants.’ R. B. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 230.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Quigley in ‘Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War,’ *The Journal of American History*, (September 2011). Quigley writes that, although it is ‘tempting’ to contrast Lincoln vision of the Union with Alexander Stephens ‘cornerstone’ speech but that, in fact, ‘both men drew on a nation-wide antebellum faith that America’s historic mission was to model self-government for the rest of the world,’ 468.

Some historians acknowledge that the intellectual origins of liberal nationalism require further study in the United States. Stewart Winger, for example, makes a convincing case for looking at Lincoln's political thought within the context of George Bancroft's histories. In his own work, Winger analyses how politicians like Lincoln both incorporated, modified and rejected different strains of what he calls Bancroft's 'Romantic' vision.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, James Kloppenberg argues 'attachment to the Union is easier to understand when placed alongside the nationalism of Benjamin Constant and Francois Guizot in France, William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, and Thomas Babington Macaulay in England, John Gottfried Herder in Germany and Giuseppe Mazzini in Italy, as well as that of historians George Bancroft and Francis Parkman in the US' footnoting Winger himself.<sup>84</sup> That Stewart Winger is Kloppenberg's only reference suggests there is room for further study of the intellectual origins of American nationalism.

Acknowledging the lack of scholarship on nationalism in the antebellum era, Michael Bernath has termed this field the 'future of Civil War studies,' pointing out that 'nationalism in the civil war north' is 'ironically a field less developed than its confederate counterpart.'<sup>85</sup> Bernath calls for more historians to acknowledge the constructed nature of antebellum nationalism; not to analyze the relative strength of nationalism in the North, but to explore its intellectual substance. Bernath asks more scholars to appreciate that antebellum Americans 'drew, wrote, painted' 'with their eyes open.'<sup>86</sup> By focusing on a group who were actively involved in theorizing about the 'nation,' my study of 'Young America' will play a vital role in filling this gap.

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<sup>83</sup> S. Winger, 'Lincoln's Economics and the American Dream: a reappraisal,' *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 22, (winter 2001).

<sup>84</sup> Kloppenberg, James T. *Toward Democracy: The Struggle for Self-Rule in European and American Thought*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, July 2016), 664.

<sup>85</sup> M. Bernath, 'Nationalism: the future of Civil War studies,' *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 2, (March 2012), 3. Similarly, Susan-Mary Grant notes that due to 'the absence of much interest in American nationalism, its southern variant is virtually all that scholars do recognize.' S.M. Grant, *North Over South, Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000). Grant has gone some way to addressing this gap with her study of Northern nationalism in the antebellum era. However, in her study of anti-Southern sectionalists within the North, she neglects the prevalence of Jacksonian nationalism in the free states, which jostled for supremacy with Grant's Northern sectionalism throughout the antebellum era and even the Civil War.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Bernath also notes that the existing literature does not distinguish between nationalisms within the antebellum North. By making the ‘North’ and ‘South’ our primary analytical categories, we fail to understand the different forms of nationalism within the free states. As Bernath explains:

We (historians) understand that disagreements are permissible, that there is no single vision or platform of nationalism, and that it is not required that everyone march in lockstep for nationalism to exist. Yet we often seem to apply these standards to Civil War Americans, and this has allowed us to draw lines too readily. It can cause us to overlook the nationalism of Democrats in the North for instance.<sup>87</sup>

As a movement consisting mainly of Northern Democrats, my study of ‘Young America’ enhances our understanding of an ideology which does not slot into a strict sectional framework. Looking at ‘Northern’ or ‘Southern’ loyalties is to adopt a teleological approach: it assumes that the sectional fissures, which caused the Civil War, were the only ones that shaped Northern society during the 1850s. But, quite as much as ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ divisions, antebellum Democrats defined themselves as ‘western’ or Union men. Furthermore, the ‘Young America’ movement might have faded from the national scene after the Civil War. Indeed, Jacksonian ambitions for decentralized local government were obliterated by the leviathan state that the conflict created.<sup>88</sup> But this should not stop us documenting their ambitions, and unfulfilled visions, in the period from 1844-61. As Bernath points out, ‘histories of nationalism’ have been ‘primarily concerned with the outcome of the conflict. Similar assumptions...inform our understanding of nationalism in the North...we are looking for what American nationalism will become’ – we have taken a ‘primarily instrumentalist approach to nationalism.’<sup>89</sup>

As a political group that does not fit neatly into sectional camps, ‘Young America’ Democrats constitute a group which historians have trouble situating within a coherent narrative of antebellum politics. Historian Jay Sexton, for example, suggests that Robert J. Walker’s support for the Union

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>88</sup> For an account of the impact of the American Civil War on the growth of central state authority see R.F. Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority, 1859-1877*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>89</sup> M. Bernath, ‘Nationalism,’ 5.



during the Civil War was something of a contradiction because of his ‘pro-Southern past.’<sup>90</sup> However, situated in the context of ‘Young America’s’ Jacksonian nationalism, which transcended sectional differences, Walker’s trajectory appears less anomalous: like Stephen Douglas, John Forney, John Haskin and Isaac Walker, he pushed for territorial expansion throughout the 1840s and 1850s, only to find the Slave Power had turned against the values of ‘popular sovereignty’ in 1857, by insisting on the Lecompton Constitution. The idea of Walker switching sides assumes a Civil War will break out in 1861: Walker held no such assumptions, and his views were consistent with a tepid form of anti-slavery Jacksonianism – at least if we take his worldview on its own terms.

Lastly, Michael Bernath – together with Susan Mary Grant – calls for historians to consider how the American example might inform our theory of nationalism more broadly. As Bernath argues:

We all know that we are supposed to cite Benedict Anderson when talking about nationalism (and we almost always do in our introductions) ...but relatively few Civil War era historians have undertaken the task of engaging and challenging these theories. This is a missed opportunity not simply to bring parity to the American side of the story but to advance the overall discussion about the workings of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century generally.<sup>91</sup>

Or as Susan-Mary Grant has observed, ‘in light of the fact that several of the most prolific writers on the subject of nationalism – including Walker Connor and Benedict Anderson – work in the United States, it is difficult to understand why the process of national construction in America remains relatively neglected.’<sup>92</sup>

The ideology of ‘Young America’ ultimately departs from the conception of the ‘nation’ outlined in the landmark studies of European nationalism by the likes of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Geller and Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>93</sup> These historians argued that the nation was an ‘imagined community,’

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<sup>90</sup> J. Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010), 115-116.

<sup>91</sup> M. Bernath, *Nationalism*, 6. Or as Mark Neely asked in 2009, ‘Lincoln was America’s most important nationalist, but what does his career mean when measured’ by the ideas of Ernest Geller, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm?’ M. E. Neely, ‘Lincoln, Slavery and the Nation,’ *Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, (September 2009), 456-458.

<sup>92</sup> S.M. Grant, *North Over South*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> For the theoretical literature on antebellum nationalism see B. Anderson, *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso Revised Edition, 2006); E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Although it was mostly written during the 1980s, and focused

based on the construction of a collective memory which tied people to a particular place. ‘Young America’ Democrats, on the other hand, created intellectual foundations for the American nation, which were universal in scope, and pointed forward to an imagined future, rather than a fictitious past. It is this new conception of the ‘nation’ that provides the crucial context for understand how nationalism was formulated in a specifically American milieu.

More broadly, ‘Young America’ suggests how we might apply Benedict Anderson’s conception of an ‘imagined community’ to cosmopolitanism as much as nationalism.<sup>94</sup> Often historians are all too aware of the ‘constructed’ nature of the nation, but are attached to universal standards of international justice. As the global order creaks in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is the nation which seems the more enduring force. Perhaps it is time to shift our focus, recognizing that nationalism can be a powerful, tangible power in peoples’ lives, in contrast to the shifting and amorphous standards of liberal internationalism. Precisely because historians are liable to downplay ‘particularist ethical theories,’ Dorothy Ross argues they need to pay special attention to the powerful appeal of nationalism.<sup>95</sup> But they also need to be aware of the contingent nature of cosmopolitanism. Studying the world orders which never came to pass reminds us that many ‘universalist’ or progressive ways of thinking lead only to conflict or dead ends.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘Young America’s’ particular version of imagined cosmopolitanism faded quickly from the political scene. Despite its power and influence in the early 1850s, ‘Young America’s’ ambitions were largely frustrated by the Civil War. Split between two rival factions, Northern Democrats found their vision of progress far from satisfied in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unbeknownst to them, the Democrats’ vision had reached its height in 1854, only to be undermined by legislation like the Morrill Tariff in 1861 and, later, by the consolidation of the federal apparatus during war time. Fortunately, enough ‘Young America’ Democrats came to believe the federal government was needed to abolish slavery. And, luckily, there were sufficient numbers of

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entirely on the European experience, historians of the antebellum United States continue to rely on this literature.

<sup>94</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>95</sup> D. Ross, ‘The Ethics of Emancipation.’

Whig-Republicans who never subscribed to the libertarian fantasy of popular sovereignty in the first place.

## Chapter One: The intellectual culture of the ‘Young America’ movement, 1844-1854

This chapter will argue that ‘Young Americans’ used intellectual culture to justify their conception of democracy as a ‘natural law.’ To make the case that democracy was a universal principle, ‘Young Americans’ drew on intellectual authorities, which transcended both ‘partisanship’ and allegiance to the ‘nation.’ Before the emergence of the *Democratic Review*, national identity was generally based on characteristics and values peculiar to the United States, not common to humanity in general. As historian Frank Towers argues, ‘by the 1820s...officials in most post-revolutionary states had de-emphasized natural rights as the distinguishing marker of their respective national values in favor of cultural markers like folklore.’<sup>96</sup> There were, of course, universal rights applicable to white men, in particular. However, these were distinguished from the democratic political system which made the nation distinct. Far from being a transcendent ideal, self-government was rooted in an artificial social contract, which revolved around competition between different powers, and the mediating force of representative government.<sup>97</sup> The primary units for political participation were parties, which were necessary to balance competing interests without resorting to open conflict. This perspective, with its roots in the Federalists’ view of ‘faction,’ was especially popular in the Federalist and later Whig Party. However, it also had its adherents among antebellum Democrats. Andrew Jackson’s political strategist, Martin Van Buren, who earned the nickname the ‘Little Magician,’ argued that the two-party system was essential to create stability in a democratic society. Certainly, people embraced parties after 1824 to a much greater extent than in the early republic, when a culture of deference to political superiors prevailed. But during the entire period from the Revolution to the

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<sup>96</sup> F. Towers, *Looking Past the Lower North: Republicans, Natural Rights and the Election of 1860*, Paper Presentation for the Historical Society, Baltimore, June 5-8, 2008, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Although political theorists during the early republic, such as Thomas Paine, did advocate universal rights, these did not refer to direct democracy at the local level. As historian Robert Lamb writes, ‘Paine’s commitment to democracy, though explicit, is not to its pure, direct Athenian form. In the late eighteenth century, the idea of democracy suffered a poor reputation: it was regarded even by many radical thinkers as an essentially dangerous idea, one to be associated with mob rule and the “swinish multitude” of which Burke is fearful. This worry is visible even in the new world that Paine lauded.’ In response, Paine shied away from the idea that popular sovereignty was a natural right, advocating instead for the mediating effects of representative government. R. Lamb, *Thomas Paine and the Idea of Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 77. The Whigs certainly saw ‘Young America’s’ transcendent democracy as a novel phenomenon, associated with a new generation. See Introduction, 18.

Civil War, Americans were keen to mediate majority rule through representative institutions, and to balance competing interests within the republic.<sup>98</sup> Thus, American politics primarily operated on two levels: citizens were divided around partisan competition whilst being united around allegiance to the ‘nation’ as a particular cultural and ethnic community. Whatever different views Americans might take on issues like the national bank, they could unite in Christian values, the Union’s common history and its cultural output.

With the advent of ‘Young America,’ a very different narrative of national development came to prominence: one which argued that the nation, and its political system, was not a distinct entity, based on specific cultural and historical circumstances, but a universal system based on ‘natural laws.’ ‘Young Americans’ political discourse did not treat the Democratic Party as one component of a larger political community. Rather, they believed the Democrats’ political program would harmonize the different interests within the nation according to ‘democratic principles.’ For ‘Young Americans,’ the Democrats’ policy proposals would not only transform the nation but also reform the global order. Their political outlook was essentially internationalist, as the Democratic program applied across the world, with little concern for geographical boundaries. Rather than focusing on the balance of power, ‘Young Americans’ drew on principles which would overcome the struggle between competing interests. This chapter will examine how intellectual authorities like political science and literature enabled them to do this: by extracting ‘innate’ or ‘natural’ qualities, these disciplines provided the grounds for a universal order, defined against the overbearing power of the state.

By tracing the development of nationalism in the *Democratic Review*, I hope to capture the transformative nature of the ideology of ‘Young America,’ as well as the competing conceptions of the ‘nation’ with which it clashed. Given the chronological bounds of this chapter, I will focus on ‘Young America’s’ relationship with the more conservative vision of nationalism advocated by the Whigs. However, later on, particularly in Chapter Four, I will explore the rival conception of

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<sup>98</sup> As one historian points out, ‘whatever differences exist between the views of the Founders and Van Buren...they both accepted the premise that the electoral process should be considered as an institution that controlled candidate behavior.’ J.W. Caeser, ‘Political Parties and Presidential Ambition,’ *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 40, (1978), 9.

nationalism advocated by the Republican Party, which, like ‘Young America,’ had its own universalist foundations.

This chapter will examine the intellectual culture of the ‘Young America’ movement in two sections. The first half will analyze how both conservative periodicals in New England, and John O’Sullivan’s *Democratic Review*, interpreted three major disciplines in antebellum intellectual life: political science, literature and the racial pseudo-science of phrenology. The *Democratic Review* argued that these arts and sciences should provide the foundations for a more democratic social order. The publication praised works which they deemed sufficiently ‘democratic,’ such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novels and Elisha Hurlbut’s political theory, and encouraged more writers to produce similar output. The *Whig Review*, on the other hand, was much warier of using intellectuals as a guide to political life, particularly if they subscribed to abstract values based on the authority of natural law. When the *Whig Review* did praise authors and political thinkers, it was for criticizing the universalist outlook that was a hallmark of ‘Young American’ ideology.

Behind these two views of intellectual culture were contrasting theories about the nature and function of democracy. ‘Young Americans’ tried to root democracy in political science and literature because these disciplines were arbiters of the ‘natural’ order, or the universal values common to the white race as a whole. By ‘democratizing’ these intellectual authorities, ‘Young Americans’ could argue that democracy was a quality ‘innate’ to the white race, which would emerge spontaneously in the absence of federal intervention. This perspective also paved the way for a much broader understanding of democracy than the Whigs’ more institutionalized view. ‘Young Americans’ ‘naturalized’ the actions of white communities, independent of their participation in Congress. Whether engaging in trade or producing literature, whites were acting ‘democratically’ if they were free to exist without the intrusion of centralized power. In short, for ‘Young America,’ political science and literature proved that man was a democratic being, who would gravitate towards self-government without external coercion. However, these communities would also tend towards the extermination of blacks and Indians; a fact demonstrated by phrenology and racial pseudo-science, but also political science and even literature, properly conceived. Long before the natural law tradition was used to attack slavery, ‘Young Americans’ defined it in opposition to federal interference, to

naturalize their own political program of states' rights, popular sovereignty, and white supremacy, whilst also pushing for territorial expansion and free trade, as later chapters will explore.

Conversely, although Whigs valued literature and political theory, they did not believe that intellectual culture could be essentially 'democratic.' For Whigs, democracy was a political system which was contingent, rather than universal. They argued that the nation's positive laws, structures of government and cultural development facilitated the growth of democracy, as well as the peoples' evangelical faith. Popular government was therefore one political system among many which emerged from conditions specific to a particular territory. Democracy was not a universal authority, inherent in nature; a characteristic of human thought which would create self-governing communities wherever unwarranted force was taken away. In other words, the arts and science, with their interpretation of universal laws, could not provide the foundation for democracy. Rather, Whigs argued that evangelical culture, respect for positive law and an awareness of the nation's cultural inheritance were the only solid basis for self-government; for Whigs, the grounds for self-government lay in particularist ethical theories, rather than the universal axioms of natural law.

The second section will focus on the congressional debates about a report on the Dorr Rebellion, compiled by the Democratic senator from New Hampshire, Edmund Burke. I will argue that the contrasting views of democracy outlined in the first half of the chapter shaped Whig and Democratic interpretations of Dorr's actions. 'Young Americans' argued that Dorr's rebellion was just because the revolutionaries were seizing their 'natural right' to self-government; one that existed prior to external restraints embodied in the outdated colonial charter. Conversely, Whigs argued that the colonial charter should be reformed, rather than overthrown, on the grounds that the state constitution was the instrument through which Rhode Island gained right of suffrage in the first place. For Whigs, democracy was dependent on positive law, the institutions of state and federal government and the religious history and culture of the United States. Governments like Dorr's, based on the claim to democracy as a 'natural law,' were worthless, since they misunderstood the nature and origins of democratic government. An appeal to the state of nature, as Dorr and his congressional supporters urged, would only result in the anarchy of conflicting interests. Thus, this chapter will show that 'Young America' congressmen, like the *Democratic Review*, drew on the political theory

that self-government was a ‘natural right,’ which would emerge without external coercion. In doing so, I not only draw attention to the political affinities between ‘Young America’ politicians and the *Democratic Review*, but I also show that both sides of the movement articulated a universalist vision of politics rooted in intellectual authorities.

### **‘Young America’ and Political Science**

Although the antebellum Democracy has earned a reputation for parochialism, ‘Young America’ Democrats combined politics and intellectual culture in order to articulate a distinctly progressive worldview. The ideology of ‘Young America’ depended on two fundamental assumptions. Firstly, they believed that ‘natural laws’ would govern the social order in the absence of an overbearing central government. Secondly, they believed that these laws tended towards democracy for white men and the degradation of ‘inferior’ races. These two assumptions amounted to a view of democracy as a universal political principle. As a product of the natural law, popular sovereignty existed independent and prior to the formation of the state; it did not depend on social and political conditions to survive. Although only applicable to the white race, democracy was still a product of natural laws, which operated across time and space. As such, self-government – properly conceived – was an axiom of political science, intrinsic to the white race in general. Democracy did not find expression through institutions of representation or political organization, but through a conception of the ‘people’s will,’ which existed prior to the formation of the state. In this scheme, self-government encompassed much more than the act of voting. It was, instead, the untrammelled expression of popular opinion, which found expression in literature and trade, as much as voting.

The *Democratic Review* had spoken the language of natural law since its inception. Writers at the magazine deployed the concept in service of their libertarian ideology. John O’Sullivan argued that the natural laws would create both a stable and progressive social order when federal authority was withdrawn. In the very first volume of the magazine, readers found John O’Sullivan’s ‘Introductory Statement’ 1837 arguing that ‘natural laws’ would emerge in the absence of an



overbearing central government.<sup>99</sup> Another article O’Sullivan wrote in 1840, entitled ‘Democracy,’ said of popular sovereignty: ‘so far from demanding, in order to its enjoyment, the sacrifice of any natural right, it is in itself a great natural right, serving to secure and strengthen others, while it reveals the only limitation the deity has put on unrestricted freedom.’<sup>100</sup> O’Sullivan used the discourse of natural law to legitimize the libertarian social order he envisaged in the United States : ‘man’s only truly natural state is when he conforms to all those natural laws, which the creator has instituted in that physical, intellectual and moral economy in which he is placed.’<sup>101</sup> In this view, the positive laws of the federal government were not a necessary means of ensuring social stability. In a decentralized republic, the divine order of nature would replace the arbitrary legislation laid down by federal elites. The people formed a political unit independent of the state, with a unified moral will, which only required to be let alone to form thriving democratic communities. As the *Review* summarized, the people will ‘grow and flourish and expand from causes as powerful and irresistible as the law of nature.’<sup>102</sup>

Since democracy did not depend on the institutions of government, ‘Young Americans’ did not see voting as the sum total of democratic activity. These political thinkers believed that the ‘people’s will’ existed independent of systems of representation, or the drawing up of election districts through positive law. The only essential foundation for a democratic society was the absence of external interference. Wherever federal or imperial authority did not intervene, popular sovereignty could be found. As such, expressions of the ‘people’s will’ were not solely articulated through political institutions like the Senate and House of Representatives. For example, the laws of supply and demand also expressed the people’s will, and formed as important a part of democratic life as voting. O’Sullivan wrote that ‘we may rest assured that labor will put forth...and capital will be applied where it will command the best return. The agency of government is obviously not required here...it is an infringement of natural rights.’<sup>103</sup> Since they interfered with the ‘natural’ relationship

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<sup>99</sup> J. O’Sullivan, ‘Introductory Statement,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 1, (October 1837).

<sup>100</sup> J. O’Sullivan, ‘Democracy,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 7, (March 1840).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Compromises,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 34, (July 1854), 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

between labor and capital, tariffs curbed peoples' inherent rights. Similarly, as I shall explore below, literary figures could express a unified popular will independent of political institutions like Congress. As the literary critic at the *Democratic Review*, William Jones put it, 'it is poetry where we must look for the purest expression of the popular feeling...it is in poetry that the national spirit is most faithfully evolved.'<sup>104</sup>

'Young America,' believed 'democracy' was not tied to national – American - institutions, but understood as a natural and universal principle, rooted in scientific authority. As historian Dorothy Ross has shown, social sciences were gaining influence in the United States during the antebellum period.<sup>105</sup> Disciplines such as political economy, political science and history applied a methodology drawn from the natural sciences to the moral and social world. These new disciplines rested on assumptions which gave rise to the notion of 'natural law' in the first place: that society followed a discernible pattern driven by universal laws, just like nature itself. As Ross argues, such a worldview buttressed the ideology of American exceptionalism.<sup>106</sup> The social sciences could drive social progress through the interpretation of irrevocable laws. Since society rested on a set of harmonious principles, the trade-offs and competing interests, which defined European statecraft, would become increasingly irrelevant to political life.

For 'Young America,' the withdrawal of federal interference enabled the natural law to flourish, creating a society which escaped the trappings of European power politics. O'Sullivan also frequently used the term 'political science' to describe these universal authorities which should provide the basis for any proper national existence: 'the inquiry into human rights is the fundamental preliminary question of political science.' Or elsewhere, 'it embraces the great doctrines of science, the first truths of government.'<sup>107</sup> Similarly, tariffs were 'an infringement of the first principles of

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<sup>104</sup> 'Poetry for the People,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 13, (September 1843), 267.

<sup>105</sup> D. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Historian Stewart Winger writes that Ross misses an opportunity to examine Democratic social scientists, as well as Whigs. He argues that Whigs such as Henry Carey certainly made the case that 'governmental activity was not necessarily at odds with the working of the natural order.' However, he also notes 'contrary to Dorothy Ross' analysis...the economic tenets of the Democratic party were exceptionalist in the extreme, and that in general it was the Whigs who questioned American exceptionalism.' See S. Winger, 'Lincoln's Economics and the American Dream: A Reappraisal,' *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 22, (Winter 2001).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 228.

social union, perversion of the clearest doctrines of science.’<sup>108</sup> For ‘Young Americans,’ democracy was properly understood as a ‘philosophical,’ or ‘scientific’ principle which transcended the whims of party; it was another ‘natural right’ which liberal thinkers had omitted from their canon. In O’Sullivan’s words, these are principles which ‘ever wield, under every sky...influence over the human will’ – democracy marked ‘a clear region of philosophic inquiry above the clouds of party strife.’<sup>109</sup>

Writers and politicians associated with the *Democratic Review* were enthusiasts for a new ‘democratic’ political science. In one issue of the periodical, New Hampshire’s Edmund Burke praised a political theorist from Boston called Nahum Capen, for his labor on behalf of ‘moral science.’<sup>110</sup> In 1849, Capen published his most famous work, *The History of Democracy*, which, according to Burke, was devoured by ‘eminent Democrats,’ including Robert J. Walker, George Dallas and Isaac Toucey.<sup>111</sup> In a number of seemingly diverse works of political theory, history and phrenology, which were nonetheless united in their enthusiasm for popular sovereignty, Capen offered himself up as a social scientist. In an account of the late Mexican War published in 1848, he explained ‘it is become the true province of science to investigate not only the laws of inanimate matter, of the unmeasured regions of space, but of the immortal soul itself, in the recesses of its intellectual, moral and religious nature.’<sup>112</sup> Capen saw his own role as discovering the universal principles that shaped human activity, much as they did inanimate matter. Adopting the role of social engineer, he could discover those ‘eternal laws of right which in the process of moral change will give equal freedom to the prince and to the slave.’<sup>113</sup> In his *History of Democracy*, Capen acknowledged his debt to scientific method, explaining ‘it is only by the aid of science that knowledge is made useful.’<sup>114</sup> Knowledge might be acquired, but only science could interpret the progressive or

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 217

<sup>110</sup> Edmund Burke wrote an entire article in the *Democratic Review* praising Capen for his ‘labors as an investigator and writer in the fields of science, politics and literature.’ ‘Nahum Capen,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 41, (May 1858), 399.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 402.

<sup>112</sup> N. Capen, *The Republic of the United States of America: its duties to itself and its responsible relations to other countries*, (New York: 1848), 5.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>114</sup> N. Capen, *The History of Democracy, or, Political Progress, Historically Illustrated from the Earliest to the Latest periods*, (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1875), xvii.

providential dynamics in social life. According to Capen, ‘science not only combines the knowledge of things and principles, but the supreme skill of the understanding in discovering the natural system of their development.’<sup>115</sup>

Other politicians with close ties to the *Review* explicitly supported its efforts to democratize political science. Philadelphia Democrat Henry Gilpin, who had written brief articles for the publication shortly after its inception in 1837, advocated the extension of scientific method to moral questions.<sup>116</sup> In one of his many addresses before universities and literary societies, Gilpin praised Newton for applying his mind not just to the study of ‘the laws of physical nature’ but to religion ‘by means so purely abstract and scientific.’<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, ‘there is no one science – there is no one range of inquiry or of thought – that does not aid and illustrate every other.’<sup>118</sup> Although scholars have focused on the literary ambitions of ‘Young Americans,’ the ‘science’ of politics was also an important component of their intellectual ambitions.<sup>119</sup>

The more conservative Whig periodicals, which were O’Sullivan’s chief ideological rivals, rejected the scientism of the *Democratic Review*, and the idea of ‘natural law.’ First founded in Boston in 1815, the *North American Review* had long dominated intellectual life in the United States. Although historians of ‘Young America’ tend to focus exclusively on the *Democratic Review*, the ideological contours of Jacksonian nationalism become clearer in relation to rival publications.<sup>120</sup> Provoking accusations of ‘literary Toryism’ from Democratic writers, the *North American Review* took a firm stance against the influence of intellectuals in the political sphere.<sup>121</sup>

The *Review* was particularly uncomfortable with men of letters who justified their political outlook according to universal principles. After the French revolution of 1848, the periodical’s editor, Francis Bowen wrote an article entitled ‘French ideas about democracy and the community of goods,’

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>116</sup> For Gilpin’s involvement in the early life of the *Democratic Review* see E. Widmer, *Young America*, 37.

<sup>117</sup> H. Gilpin, *Address delivered at the University of Pennsylvania before the society of alumni, on the occasion of their annual celebration, November 13 1851*, (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1851), 13.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>119</sup> For the classic account of the literary culture of ‘Young America’ see P. Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*.

<sup>120</sup> See E. Widmer, *Young America* and Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement*. Neither book discuss O’Sullivan’s publication in relation to its conservative counterparts with which it was in constant dialogue.

<sup>121</sup> W.A. Jones, ‘Criticism in America,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 15, (September 1844), 244.

which blamed the failures of the revolution on the prominent role intellectuals played in the political process.<sup>122</sup> Bowen pointed out that ‘literary men’ had exercised ‘disproportionate’ influence in the Provisional Government established in 1848: Marrat, Flocon and Louis Blanc were editors of newspapers, Lamartine was a poet and historian and Arago a prominent scientist. The secretary of this ‘remarkable association of men of letters’ was Pagnerre, a bookseller, and the epicene novelist George Sand wrote the dispatches for the Secretary of the Interior.<sup>123</sup> The article conceded that these talents flourished in the political environment of the republic because it recognized talent ‘wherever it is found,’ in contrast to the monarchical policy of suppressing subversive scholarship.<sup>124</sup> However, the *Review* cautioned against giving these figures a significant role in government, since the ‘sanctity of letters’ was ‘profaned by false gods.’<sup>125</sup> Just as Demosthenes made a ‘sorry figure’ as a general, Lamartine failed ‘behind the barricades’ in June’ and Louis Blanc became a terrible foreign minister: by attempting to ‘reduce their utopian theories to practice’ these scholarly figures soon ‘excited the scorn of Parisians.’<sup>126</sup> In contrast, England was not blighted by this pernicious tendency to glorify abstract ideals. In the United Kingdom, Macaulay and Lord Brougham were the only two Cabinet ministers hailing from the literary world.

Bowen went on to exempt the American Revolution from the abstractions that blighted European politics in 1848. Unlike the French Revolution, history and tradition laid the foundations of the new order in 1776, meaning intellectuals played a more modest political role. The Revolution was not a ‘Quixotic crusade in favor of human rights in general, nor a war undertaken to show that all men are created free and equal’ but a fight to ‘restore old privileges.’<sup>127</sup> Thus, it refrained from glorifying those ‘phantoms,’ which inspired the French poet and politician, Alphonse de Lamartine, to proclaim ‘“the French revolution was the only practical attempt a nation ever made to realize the doctrines of Christianity.”’<sup>128</sup> The article finished by appealing to intellectuals to adopt a more measured role in

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<sup>122</sup> ‘French ideas of Democracy and a Community of Goods,’ *North American Review*, Vol. 69, (October 1849).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 299.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 299.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 309.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

political life: to explain the ‘truths of political economy and civil polity’ with some ‘higher purpose than the hope of affecting the party politics of the hour.’<sup>129</sup> Instead of following the changing winds of public opinion, they should take the lead in educating the masses, so progress could occur organically, within a stable political order. Thus, the ‘educated’ ‘should not wait, as the members of the French academy did, till they are reminded by the thunder of the cannon against the barricades...that they also have work to do for the preservation of society and the interests of truth.’<sup>130</sup>

Francis Bowen also took a very different view of the ‘natural law’ to John O’Sullivan. Unlike the Democratic editor, Bowen rejected the idea that the natural order was a desirable model for political life. Without the ‘wheels of government,’ he wrote that men must ‘go back to the state of nature and live in caverns and forests.’<sup>131</sup> Whilst ‘Young America’ politicians drew on liberal political thinkers like Vattel and Adam Smith, Bowen turned to Thomas Hobbes, saying there would be ‘no art, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, “solitary, nasty, brutish and short.”’<sup>132</sup> Francis Bowen denied that even the founding fathers had broken ties with Great Britain only to turn back to the ‘state of nature.’ ‘When the connection between Great Britain and her North American colonies was broken by the Declaration of Independence,’ he said, ‘the people of this country did not at once abandon all their civil institutions, and fall back into a state of nature.’<sup>133</sup> Implicitly criticizing the Jacksonians for being *too* intellectual, he pointed out that American institutions ‘were not made by philosophers and theorists but by practical men.’<sup>134</sup>

By the mid-1850s, conservative periodicals continued to argue that political and social traditions exerted a more beneficial influence over the national mind than scholars, literary figures and political scientists. In a review of a work of political science entitled ‘The Theory of Human Progression’ *The American Review* said, ‘we have begun to despair of man’s social regeneration by

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>131</sup> F. Bowen, ‘The Recent Contest in Rhode Island,’ *North American Review*, (April 1844), 55.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 5.

any system of political truth superimposed ab absentia and not developed by himself.’<sup>135</sup> The publication dismissed the claim that ‘the multitude are moved in mind’ because they ‘imbibed the theories of former speculators’ taking a more dour view of human nature, and political change. Accordingly, ‘the axioms of equality’ were ‘invaluable as goals of political progress’ but ‘men with flesh and blood’ prove that ‘some nations ought to be more restrained in their enjoyment of natural rights than others.’<sup>136</sup> Although Democrats and radical Whigs might appeal to ‘natural rights,’ the publication argued ‘the real nature will have her way’ in due course.<sup>137</sup>

Another conservative literary periodical, the *American Whig Review*, was equally critical of the role of intellectuals in political life. Whig writer George H. Colton established the *Review* in October 1844 to counter the influence of O’Sullivan’s Democratic periodical, particularly in the upcoming presidential election between James K. Polk and Henry Clay. Historian Robert Scholnick has argued that, together with the *Democratic Review*, the ‘two monthlies,’ ‘served as the competing ideological centers for the parties,’ which ‘engaged in an ongoing dialogue.’<sup>138</sup> Like Francis Bowen’s *American Review*, the *Whig Review* criticized a form of politics based on intellectual abstractions. In particular, it provided a coherent critique of the Democrats’ notion that popular sovereignty was a natural right that should provide the foundation of a new international order.

In 1849, one article on ‘The Presidential Veto’ lamented that because ‘the greater number of questions are determined by the will of the majority’ in America ‘a large class of our politicians, seldom accustomed to look beneath the surface...conclude that the majority have a natural right to govern.’<sup>139</sup> For these Democrats, ‘whatever tends to find free and full expression’ of the majority ‘will’ ‘is contrary to natural law and smells of usurpation.’<sup>140</sup> The article caustically noted that ‘these sage politicians would be well to remember that the right of the majority to rule is a civil not a natural right, and exists only by virtue of positive law.’<sup>141</sup> The problem for this writer lay in the fact that the

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<sup>135</sup> ‘The Science of Politics,’ *North American Review*, Vol. 80, (April 1855), 367.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 368.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 367.

<sup>138</sup> R. Scholnick, ‘Whigs and Democrats, the Past and the Future; The Political Emerson and Whitman’s 1855 Preface,’ *American Periodicals: A Journal of History and Criticism*, Vol. 26, (2016), 72.

<sup>139</sup> ‘The Presidential Veto,’ *Whig Review*, Vol. 10, (August, 1849), 113.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

abstract notion of a 'majority' had no meaning on its own. Without civil law, political institutions and territorial boundaries, there could be no popular will. As the article explained, 'civil society must be constituted before you can even conceive the existence of a political majority.'<sup>142</sup> Positive law must prevail over the majority's fictitious 'natural right' to govern: 'if... a given constitutional provision should restrain the majority, prevent them from making their will prevail, that is no just cause of complaint; for no law is broken, no right is violated.'<sup>143</sup> Another article in 1848, 'The Future Policy of the Whigs,' outlined the difference between the main parties as follows: 'the one side holds that this very decision by majorities is not established by any merely natural law but by a constitutional regulation; while the other side contends that the majority assembling when and where they please can assume power over individuals - to govern the few by the many.'<sup>144</sup>

The *Whig Review* fundamentally disagreed with attempts to make popular sovereignty an abstract right, rather than a privilege for those capable of exercising it properly. In 'Human Rights,' the magazine argued 'suffrage is no indefeasible or abstract right, independent of a wise expediency, but a question of fact to be decided by all the lights of reason and experience.'<sup>145</sup> The article saw the idea of the right of suffrage as proof of the corrupt intellectual culture of the American nation, complaining 'the public mind in our country has been utterly perverted by this doctrine of natural rights.'<sup>146</sup> It contrasted Thomas Dorr and George Dallas, with conservative thinkers 'Burke, Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold': 'did not these men know something of the art and power of reasoning? Was a light withheld from their minds that has revealed itself to Dallas and Dorr?'<sup>147</sup> The Whig writer went on to blame 'natural rights nationalism' for the policy of national expansion advanced by the *Democratic Review*, tying the publication's 'perverted' political philosophy to its wrongheaded program of territorial aggrandizement. Apparently, by claiming the 'inalienable rights of man in nullifying all its existing institutions...man comes into society' 'demanding free trade,' and

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>144</sup> 'The Future Policy of the Whigs,' *Whig Review*, Vol 7, (April 1848), 330

<sup>145</sup> 'Human Rights,' *Whig Review*, Vol. 2, (November 1845), 443.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 443.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 450.



‘proposing to obtain California and even all of Mexico.’<sup>148</sup> As we shall explore in Chapters Two and Three, ‘Young Americans’ conception of natural rights did shape their confidence about the prospects of democracy in Europe and Latin America.

Given their different interpretations of political science, it is unsurprising that the *Whig and Democratic Reviews* came to clash over the merits of works in this discipline. The two publications disagreed most vociferously over a book by Jacksonian political theorist Elisha P. Hurlbut published in 1844, *On Human Rights and their Political Guarantees*.<sup>149</sup> Hurlbut’s book was Jacksonian to the core, forcefully advocating self-government as a natural right, denying the nation was an ‘organic community’ and rallying against the government’s authority to intervene in matters of trade. Hurlbut emphatically denied the fact that human beings ‘depart’ with any of their ‘natural rights’ upon entry into society, dismissing this notion as an ‘apology to tyrants.’<sup>150</sup> He argued it was wrong to look up to written constitutions with the kind of ‘profound reverence’ that Americans were used to. Instead, ‘the first exhortation should be to bring the written constitution to the test of natural laws.’<sup>151</sup> Drawing on the Swiss theorist of international law Emer de Vattel, who, as we shall see, was very popular among Democrats, Hurlbut wrote that ‘“no engagement can oblige or even authorize man to violate the laws of nature.”’<sup>152</sup> As an axiom of international law – based, in Vattel’s interpretation, on the ‘laws of nature,’ - ‘popular sovereignty’ was universally applicable across the international community. It might be excluded by virtue of local law, but nations could not overturn ‘popular sovereignty’ in places where it already existed; in those territories that were already governed according to the laws of nature. As well as drawing on Vattel’s international law, Hurlbut also ascertained these ‘natural laws,’ (those which did not ‘obstruct the true course of humanity’) from the science of political economy: ‘man,’ Hurlbut wrote, ‘comes into society with the capital which God has given him and demands free trade.’<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 447.

<sup>149</sup> E.P. Hurlbut, *On Human Rights and their Political Guarantees*, (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1845).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 36.

The *Democratic Review* praised Hurlbut's publication as one of first works of the 'new' 'American' political science, which it had advocated for so long. In an article of 1845 entitled 'Hurlbut's Essays on Government' the *Review* lauded Hurlbut for writing 'boldly' about man's 'capacity for self-government.'<sup>154</sup> Ever aware of what foreign observers thought about the United States, the *Review* hoped that a copy of *Human Rights* would find its way to the French political theorist, Alexis de Tocqueville. Conscious that Tocqueville had praised the 'conservative' elements of American society in his recent work *Democracy in America*, the *Review* believed that Hurlbut could remind him of the nation's radical promise. The *Review* was particularly troubled by Tocqueville's view of the American bar as an 'aristocratic' class, promoting stability in a restless nation. The *Review* did not agree, labelling Tocqueville's beloved lawyers 'worshippers of precedent' who 'quoted bad Latin.'<sup>155</sup> However, it argued that Hurlbut's work proved not all legal minds were apologists for the status quo. The *Review* told its readers 'there hath not been in seen, no not in America such bold championship of the largest political liberty as the ten essays of Mr Hurlbut exhibit.'<sup>156</sup> Yet, 'he is a lawyer in full practice at the New York bar.' 'Perhaps,' the publication tentatively suggested, 'an accomplished lawyer can be a philosophical democrat.'<sup>157</sup>

The one aspect of Hurlbut's work which was met with ambivalence in the *Review* was his argument that the franchise should be extended to women. The article reported that 'the principle is boldly asserted that women are unjustly and unwisely excluded from its enjoyment, more particularly those who have not yet been called to share their social and political responsibilities with the sterner sex by marriage.'<sup>158</sup> In an otherwise unequivocally positive assessment, the *Review* struck an uncertain note, saying 'of this view we can only say at present that the argument both for and against' is 'stated with great force and fairness.'<sup>159</sup> The *Review's* rejection of this aspect of Hurlbut's politics taps into a wider tension between 'Young America' Democrats associated with O'Sullivan's periodical, and some of the more radical supporters of the Dorr Rebellion, among whom were

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<sup>154</sup> 'Hurlbut's Essays on Government,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 17, (September 1845), 190.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

socialists, abolitionists and campaigners for women's rights. As I shall explore, 'Young America' Democrats were only too happy to exclude women and African Americans from the natural right to popular sovereignty.

However, we should be careful not to label 'Young America' Democrats 'conservative' for this reason. They drew political hierarchies on the basis of cutting edge phrenological theories about white man's 'superior nature,' – according to the very same scientific standard of 'natural law' which they used to justify democracy. Despite the efforts of some historians today to make antebellum radicals conform to their own – contemporary - standard of morality, the exclusion of women and non-whites was an intrinsic, and wholly consistent, component of the most 'progressive' Democratic thought.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, the ideologies of progressive democracy and racial hierarchy were often found in the same texts, and promoted by the same people. Just as political scientists believed society was governed by universal laws, they were drawn to pseudo-scientific theories which explained political behavior with reference to the innate qualities of different races. Both the Jacksonian political theorists Nahum Capen and Elisha Hurlbut were vocal advocates of phrenology, and subscribed to deeply racist worldviews.

Calvin Colton's *Whig Review* took for granted the fact that phrenology and radical democracy were two components of a broader progressive ideology; one that rooted politics in the innate and universal authority of nature, rather than individual moral development or social cohesion. The periodical published a particularly unfavorable assessment of Elisha P. Hurlbut's book. The *Review* classed Hurlbut's work with an entire field of erroneous social sciences which had emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It mocked 'this famous modern doctrine of the inalienable and indefensible right of majorities to rule minorities' that 'so utterly escaped the notice of all philosophers, legislators and theologians.'<sup>161</sup> This was an earlier, ignorant time, the publication said sarcastically, when

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<sup>160</sup> For two books which argue that the Northern Democrats were 'reactionary' because of their defense of racial hierarchy, whilst anti-slavery Republicans were 'progressive' because they defended the rights of African Americans see J. Oakes, *Freedom National* and Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that 'Young Americans'' defense of racial hierarchy was drawn from the same 'scientific' sources as their conception of democracy as a natural right. Rather than standing in tension with another, these were two conceptions of a universalist and progressive worldview.

<sup>161</sup> 'Human rights according to modern philosophy,' *The American Whig Review*, Vo. 2 (October 1845), 332.

‘phrenology had not been discovered – Combe and Fowler had not lectured - Dorr had not fought for human rights, and Counsellor Hulbert had not written’ (sic).<sup>162</sup> Like many critics of ‘Young America,’ the *Whig Review* rejected the idea that ‘nature’ should become the highest arbiter of political affairs. The article was profoundly uncomfortable with what it saw Hurlbut’s view that ‘the duty of the legislator is most plain – it is simply to conform to natural truth.’ Or, as the writer pointed out elsewhere, ‘the legislator is but the minister of nature.’<sup>163</sup> As a substitute for religion, Hurlbut could only offer the unreliable science of phrenology as the foundation of political authority. But as the *Whig Review* pointed out, this secular vision left no theological guide to political progress, nor a moral ideal to strive towards.

Should any however ask, what do you mean by natural truth? How is the great question which Christ left unanswered when interrogated by Pilate rendered more easy by the insertion of the word natural? In reply to all such queries, the simple inquirer is referred at once to the map of the skull. There you have it – all marked out in black and white, and as plain as the boundaries of Texas... There you see the whole of man in this *democratic* collection of patterns and sentiments.<sup>164</sup>

The periodical criticized Hurlbut’s argument that the psychology of the white man made him uniquely suited to democratic government, just as the black man was inherently unsuited to it. Both these perspectives ignored the fact that the moral development of the individual was a prerequisite for majority rule. Since democracy was the ‘natural law’ for white communities, ‘Young Americans’ argued that the popular will contained an inherent morality when left unshackled by federal interference. However, the *Whig Review* did not believe popular sovereignty was necessarily a moral good, in and of itself. The periodical pointed out that the voice of the majority was based on nothing more than a collection of wants and desires contained in the brain. Without religious authority, the unrestrained exercise of these impulses through majoritarian decision-making would not produce social progress. A political order based purely on the secular authority of nature would indulge the worst appetites of the community, resulting in military conquest and material acquisition. For Whigs,

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 334.

the ‘Young Americans’ idealization of an unrestrained ‘natural order,’ which treated the wants and desires of local communities as inherent moral goods, was already turning the Union into an imperial power. As the *Whig Review* pointed out ‘if it desires the instant occupation of Oregon, or the annexation of Texas, or California, then the national combativeness is will, law and constitution, and the very soul of the body politic.’<sup>165</sup>

This was not an inaccurate characterization of the politics of ‘Young America.’ As the historian Stewart Winger explains, the Democratic historian George Bancroft did believe that ‘Vox Populi, Vox Dei’ – that the voice of the people was the voice of God. Indeed, several Jacksonians called for territorial expansion as an expression of the people’s will.<sup>166</sup> In place of the radical democracy of ‘Young America,’ we have seen that Whigs appealed to two political authorities: one more conservative, and one progressive. Firstly, they urged respect for the positive laws and constitutional restraints which made democratic government possible. Secondly, they argued that the moral development of the individual could direct social progress along the lines of evangelical Protestantism. Behind this perspective lay a very different conception of democracy to the one advanced by ‘Young Americans’: that democracy was a contingent, man-made system of government, which relied on the moral development of individual citizens to survive.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 340.

<sup>166</sup> S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*, 149. Winger writes that Bancroft had a ‘transcendental view of democracy’ and believed that ‘the will of the people really was the will of God.’ ‘Young American,’ John McClernand told his constituents in 1848 that he supported the annexation of Texas because he believed it to be ‘their wish.’ *Address of John A. McClernand to his constituents*, (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1848), 4.

<sup>167</sup> Howe draws attention to the status of the nation as artifice in Whig political culture in D. Howe, *The Political Culture of the Antebellum Whigs*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). Howe argues ‘Whigs were much more concerned than Democrats with providing conscious direction to the forces of change. For them real progress was not likely to occur automatically; it required careful, purposeful planning...careful cultivation.’ 21; Describing the conservative Whig Rufus Choate, Daniel Howe writes ‘For all his talk of “organic forms,” he admitted that American nationality and American institutions were manufactured. Our national consciousness “is, to an extraordinary degree, not a growth, but a production.”’ 230. He also writes that conservative Whigs tried to create ‘artificial constraints – prescriptive, legal, historical, cultural – for America.’ 235. The Irish political thinker Edmund Burke also talked of society as an ‘organism,’ whilst rejecting the idea that it was a ‘natural’ order. Burke satirizes the latter view, particularly as it was held by Lord Bolingbroke in E. Burke, ‘A Vindication of Natural Society’, 1756 in E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley, (London: Penguin, 1998).

## **‘Young America’ and Literary Culture**

Political scientists and natural law theorists were not the only class of intellectuals which shaped the political ideology of ‘Young America.’ Writers at the *Democratic Review* also argued that authors and literary figures should use their role as ‘interpreters of nature’ to exert political influence. Like political science, ‘Young Americans’ exploited literary culture to present their partisan agenda as a set of universal values. In the process, they transformed the meaning of nationalism from loyalty to a particular place to transcendent ‘natural laws.’ This section will explore the movement’s relationship with literary culture by analyzing the reception of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s campaign biography of Franklin Pierce in the *Democratic Review*. But first I will explore the role of literary figures in the politics of ‘Young America.’

For ‘Young Americans,’ the role of the literary figure was to articulate the voice of the masses and the ‘spirit’ of self-government. In Democratic literary culture, the author or artist depicted universal values to audiences irrespective of social status, or the formal trappings of polite society. As the Democratic historian George Bancroft pointed out, art appealed to a universal aesthetic sense which made people conscious of abstract rights, existing outside time ‘in every age and every country.’<sup>168</sup> Bancroft wrote that we cannot perceive what is ‘just and right without feeling within ourselves a consciousness that there exists something in the abstract as right’ through intellectual or aesthetic attainment.<sup>169</sup> For Bancroft, literature and art were so well suited to democratic society precisely because they communicated universal values irrespective of rank or position. And, for ‘Young Americans’ like Bancroft, it was democracy itself, embodied in the people’s unified moral will, which constituted the highest moral law. Indeed, Bancroft himself was a strident ‘Young American,’ beloved by both the *Democratic Review*, and the movement’s congressional leader, Stephen Douglas.<sup>170</sup> In the words of O’Sullivan’s publication, Bancroft could ‘stir the heart of man’

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<sup>168</sup> ‘The Culture, the Support and the Objects of Art in a Republic, A Lecture by George Bancroft,’ *New York Times*, December 10 1852.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Bancroft’s place in the network of ‘Young American’ Democrats should become apparent in the course of the dissertation but particularly in chapters 2 and 4.

through his histories because they expressed ‘the spirit of free institutions and of human progress.’<sup>171</sup> As the previous section demonstrated, ‘Young Americans’ saw democracy as a transcendent ‘natural law,’ based on the unified will of the majority. Because it existed prior to political institutions like Congress, it could be articulated by artists and intellectuals with a universal moral sense.

Like Bancroft, America’s most famous tragedian, Edwin Forrest, was beloved of ‘Young America’ Democrats because he expressed the voice of the masses, and the spirit of self-government. The *Review* argued that he was a ‘very palpable and obvious’ ‘embodiment’ of the national spirit.<sup>172</sup> During his theatre tours of England, the periodical believed Forrest promoted self-government. By personifying the masses, Forrest showed ‘the people’ had the intelligence and moral character to rule themselves.<sup>173</sup> As a representative of universal democracy, Forrest was not only a national hero but a great figure in world history. Despite the venom it came to attach to the term, the *Review* labelled the actor ‘philanthropic’: he could liberate men’s minds from the ‘mysterious influence of caste,’ even in the ‘remotest corners of the earth.’<sup>174</sup> These cultural icons were closely associated with ‘Young America’s’ political wing in the popular press. One newspaper, for example, published a cartoon of Illinois Democrat Douglas in the guise of a ‘gladiator’ with the recognizably muscular legs of Edwin Forrest.<sup>175</sup>

The *Democratic Review* frequently argued that more literary figures should enter political life. One writer claimed, ‘the remark is often heard that poets should never become politicians because

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Nationality of Literature,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 20, (April 1847), 317.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Mr Forrest’s Second Reception in England,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 16, (April 1845), 385.

<sup>173</sup> The belief that literary figures could promote self-government abroad because they understood and expressed democratic principles better than most is one of the reasons so many authors and artists were promoted to diplomatic positions during the two administrations most influenced by ‘Young America’ - those of James Polk and Franklin Pierce. The two most notable examples were George Bancroft (United Kingdom under Polk), and Nathaniel Hawthorne (United Kingdom under Pierce), but the editors of the *Democratic Review*, John O’Sullivan and George Sanders also served under Franklin Pierce (Portugal and the United Kingdom). In 1853, the *Spirit of the Times* wrote “we must have diplomats” “not only well versed in the law of nations but who are thoroughly imbued with the idea of Young Europe and Young America.”” The paper singled out the historian George Bancroft as someone who ‘exemplified’ ‘the beauty and sublimity of the institutions of freedom.’ *The Spirit of the Times*, April 5 1853. Philadelphia Democrat William D. Kelley went further: ‘so admirably have our foggy diplomatists kept our light under a bushel, and our republicanism odious to courts, our institutions and our very existence out of sight, that popular astonishment’ is expressed on the continent ‘that we are even white.’ Kelley quoted in ‘Our Mission – Diplomacy and Navy,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 31, (July 1852).

<sup>174</sup> ‘Mr Forrest’s Ovation,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 3, (September, 1833), 56. The turn away from ‘philanthropy’ towards more conservative language, which is explored in Chapter 4.

<sup>175</sup> A.I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 104.

politics is a business...yet we find the greatest poets have been uniformly the greatest partisans.’<sup>176</sup> But, at the same time, the *Review* maintained that literary figures were ‘unlike ordinary political hacks’ since they uniformly supported the Democrats.<sup>177</sup> This rhetorical strategy was designed to universalize Democratic ideology by making it synonymous with enlightened thought. Just as democracy was a scientific principle, literary figures were ‘necessarily republican’ because they recognized that ‘Young America’s’ political program adhered to human nature itself. An author’s ‘constitution of...intellect’ and ‘conscious moral sense’ meant he could only support the antebellum Democracy; a party whose values were based on a correct interpretation of the laws of nature.<sup>178</sup> ‘Young Americans’ allied themselves with literary culture for the same reason they had political science: to argue that their policies were based on innate human qualities of a ‘natural order.’ Authors who understood the workings of man would therefore gravitate towards the Democrats, whilst Democratic values could find their expression in great literature.

Other publications described the literary culture of the Democratic Party in similar terms. James Gordon Greene’s *Boston Post*, for example, said the party was ‘made up of two parts’ – ‘hard working farmers and laborers’ and ‘intellectuals,’ claiming that with ‘few exceptions’ ‘our first class literary men belong to the Democratic Party.’<sup>179</sup> Like the *Review*, the paper drew on the status of literary culture to make the claim that the Democratic Party embodied universal laws. Being ‘deeper reader(s) in human nature than others,’ and familiar with the ‘vast resources of the human soul,’ authors and poets were supposedly natural democrats. ‘They had ‘more confidence in the capacity of man for self-government’ because they were more perceptive readers of human nature. The important support literary figures lent to the Democracy, therefore, testified to the universalism of the party’s political program. The *Post* argued ‘it is no small evidence of the truth of democratic principles that men of the highest order of talent generally embrace them.’<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> ‘Democracy and Literature,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 11, (August, 1842), 199

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 199. The article pointed out ‘hardly with one exception, our writers of the first class have not only spoken out freely their belief in the stability and integrity of the republic but have expressed themselves plainly in terms of the democratic creed.’

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Federalism and Democracy,’ *Boston Post*, October 11, 1838, 1-2.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.



The *Democratic Review* drew attention to the novelists, historians and poets who supported the Democrats to reinforce the party's image as the true representative of universal values, particularly Hawthorne, Bancroft, Channing and Bryant. Literary critics at the *Review* were keen to single out these writers for the most hyperbolic praise, saying the nation's 'prose poet' Nathaniel Hawthorne could be 'paralleled only in Germany.'<sup>181</sup> Hawthorne's role in elevating the party from the political into the national sphere is apparent in several pieces. One contrasted the timeless nature of his political essays with the 'political speeches,' by 'little men,' which are 'laid up for the most part in oblivion in fat, spongy volumes of the Congressional Globe.'<sup>182</sup> Hawthorne's essays, on the other hand, were truly national in character, rooted on the firm foundation of the democratic principle. This view of democracy was typical of 'Young America': that there was a unified 'people's will' which existed prior to systems of political representation. And that this could be best expressed not by congressmen or politicians, but intellectuals and literary figures.

Indeed, the *Democratic Review* praised Hawthorne's biography of Democratic President Franklin Pierce as proof that the great author recognized the universalism of the party's political program. Most scholars assume that the author wrote Pierce's biography as a favor to a friend, since the two men had been college friends at Bowdoin. Bereft of money, Hawthorne was also undoubtedly holding out for a political appointment. It was not uncommon for writers to receive diplomatic posts; a useful source income in the absence of steady salary from writing. Nevertheless, I would add that Hawthorne's campaign biography also enabled the party to stake a claim to the universal ideals portrayed in great literature. As Hawthorne himself acknowledged in the *Scarlet Letter*, he could often be 'inactive in political affairs' due to a tendency to 'roam at will in that broad and quiet land where all mankind may meet.'<sup>183</sup> By employing Hawthorne to write Pierce's biography, the Democrats claimed to encapsulate these broader, innate aspects of human nature. Indeed, in its reception of Hawthorne's *Life of Pierce*, the *Democratic Review* suggested this was no ordinary campaign

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<sup>181</sup> 'Horne's New Spirit of the Age,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 15, (July 1844), 61.

<sup>182</sup> 'Nathaniel Hawthorne,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 16, (April 1845), 376.

<sup>183</sup> N. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 5.

biography: it offered voters not just specific policy proposals, but also a larger vision of the American nation as a ‘progressive democracy,’ above party politics.

After its publication in September 1852, the *Democratic Review* praised the *Life of Franklin Pierce* for promoting universal principles over partisanship. One reviewer saw it as a welcome departure from the current state of ‘biographies of great men’ which ‘have been all but thrown into the hands of lawyers, disposed of as goods and chattels to the executioner.’<sup>184</sup> Instead, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* signaled a ‘new era’ in which authors would begin to address political subjects. Since the ‘determination of the contest’ between the ‘Federal’ and ‘Democratic’ parties, the *Review* noted that ‘the chief minds of our country’ have ‘abstained from the field of political writing.’<sup>185</sup> Hawthorne’s biography indicated that, once again, authors sympathetic to the Democratic cause would promote the ‘broad principles,’ which characterized American nationality. Whilst ‘selfish vanity’ motivated the ‘feeders’ who contributed to the *Congressional Globe*, the *Review* argued that Hawthorne could write about Pierce more accurately with the ‘power of giving that exact and full representation of a great man.’<sup>186</sup>

Since it was written by an eminent American author, the *Review* also claimed that the biography should satisfy a bipartisan audience. It claimed that ‘not even the most envious Whig critic’ could possibly class Hawthorne’s work among the ‘campaign lives’ and other ‘ephemeral publications’ of bygone ages.<sup>187</sup> However, unsurprisingly, the critic praised the parts of Hawthorne’s work that portrayed Pierce in the image of ‘Young America.’ He noted, for example, that ‘in his blood’, Pierce was a ‘progressive Democrat’; a positive characteristic since the ‘broader and more enduring conservatism of democratic principle in all things’ could protect the republic without ‘adding thereto the immobility of brain which is characteristic of men of old ideas.’<sup>188</sup> In its analysis of Hawthorne’s campaign biography, then, the *Review* argued that a new era was at hand, in which literary figures would play a more active role in political life, especially by promoting the ‘democratic

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<sup>184</sup> ‘Hawthorne’s Life of Pierce – Perspective,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 31, (September 1852), 276.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 276.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

principles' that characterized the nation. The magazine's review of *The Life of Franklin Pierce* proceeded to explain how these same principles would drive the administration's more expansive foreign policy. It predicted that Pierce would dedicate himself to 'the extension of the Democratic system wherever possible,' to 'form and maintain an American and Democratic law of nations' and also 'to enlarge its diplomatic force and place in diplomatic positions...men of republican principles.'<sup>189</sup>

The interpretation of the *Whig Review* was, of course, very different. Colton's periodical was outraged that a 'national' author, whom they claimed to have conservative inclinations, could lower himself to the status of a political hack. One critic accused Hawthorne of becoming a 'mere party tool,' no doubt responding to the 'vivid inspiration of some promised office.'<sup>190</sup> Apparently, the author had 'brought forth a book which will bring him neither fame nor credit.'<sup>191</sup> Rather than bolstering national principles, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* only showed the depths to which intellectuals could fall in the present age: it was 'doubly disgusting...in an age of freedom to see a man of ability voluntarily prostitute his pen for the paltry object of some government salary...there are hacks enough, heaven knows, infesting every city.'<sup>192</sup> Here, the *Whig Review* deliberately tried to break Hawthorne's ties to the Democratic Party by re-establishing the author's role as a figure above party politics. Instead of Hawthorne enhancing the Democrats' reputation, the Whigs argued that the Democratic Party had debased that of the author. In trying to raise their political program above partisan concerns, 'Young America' had ground down the proper role of literary culture in the antebellum republic.

Furthermore, Whig writers made the case that the Democrats had co-opted the author's reputation unfairly; in fact, they claimed, Hawthorne disdained the very universal outlook the Democratic Party represented. The *American Whig Review*, for example, criticized Hawthorne's association with the Democrats, claiming that, in truth, he did not belong to a political party. He was

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>190</sup> *The American Whig Review* quoted in S. Casper, 'The Two Lives of Franklin Pierce,' *American Literary History*, Vol. 5, (1993), 213.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 213.

‘national – national in subject, treatment and manner...he has never damned himself to the obese body of party...he belongs to all of them!’<sup>193</sup> Indeed, the writer went further, arguing that the conservative aspects of Hawthorne’s fiction proved that he was – if anything - a natural Whig. Apparently, Hawthorne’s short story, ‘The Earth’s Holocaust,’ published in 1844, ‘embodied a fundamental thought of Higher Conservatism...upon the eternal base of which all wise and true Whigs have planted their feet.’<sup>194</sup>

It is not difficult to see why this story appealed to conservative literary critics at the *Whig Review*. Indeed, the narrative might be read as an elaborate satire on the ‘Young America’ nationalists who were so eager to appropriate the author’s legacy. In it, Hawthorne describes an attempt to build a vast bonfire to burn ‘the accumulation of worn-out trumpery.’<sup>195</sup> The hallmarks of monarchical society, including ‘coates of arms, badges of knighthood, crowns and scepters’ as well as vices like liquor and tobacco and weapons of war are thrown into the flames in the name of social progress. When everything has been incinerated, a group of bystanders strike up a conversation, including an executioner, some criminals and a mysterious visitor. Unhappy that there are no evils left in which to indulge, the executioner offers to help the criminals to a ‘comfortable end on the nearest tree.’ But, the ‘dark complexioned’ visitor tells them not to worry since there is one last thing the people forgot to throw onto the fire – the human heart itself. ‘Without purifying that foul cavern,’ the stranger says, ‘it will be the old world yet.’<sup>196</sup> In this satire of antebellum reform, the *Whig Review* saw the same profoundly conservative message which they believed was at the center of their party’s ideology. By reasserting the primacy of original sin, the publication said that the story reminded readers that ‘political creeds’ ‘cannot be separated’ from the ‘Ethical and Religious’ – ‘one always has to grow out of the other.’<sup>197</sup>

The equally conservative *American Review* also chose to emphasize the aspects of Hawthorne’s literary work, which were skeptical of social progress. In this case, the publication

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne,’ *Whig Review*, Vol. 4, (September 1846), 304.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>195</sup> N. Hawthorne, ‘Earth’s Holocaust,’ *Mosses from an Old Manse*, (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9231/9231-h/9231-h.htm>), accessed 06/08/16.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

championed the ‘Celestial Railroad,’ a satire of antebellum reform movements, about a vainglorious attempt to build a railroad to heaven, which is accidentally directed straight to hell. The story has similar implications to ‘The Earth’s Holocaust,’ with most critics, then and now, reading it as a comment on the futility of elaborate schemes aimed at human melioration. The *American Review* praised Hawthorne’s final image, where ‘onward the car rolls over the Slough of Despond, on a shaky causeway built of books of German rationalism and Transcendental Divinity.’<sup>198</sup> As an assault on the notion that moral progress would inevitably accompany technological change, the *Review* believed the story ridiculed the type of ‘Young America’ nationalism that the *Democratic Review* stood for. For both conservative publications and the *Democratic Review*, then, Hawthorne’s work contained a political message that transcended partisanship. But, Whigs argued his stories reaffirmed conservative principles, whilst Democrats claimed he was one of their own, well-versed in the laws of nature.

Far from being backward or anti-intellectual, literary culture and political science were important components of Democratic political thought. The *Democratic Review* drew on both disciplines to emphasize the inalienable and universal character of their political program. Before the emergence of O’Sullivan’s publication, Whigs dominated intellectual life in the United States through their New England magazine, *The North American Review*. Most political theorists subscribed to the idea that America’s democratic form of government grew out of the specific history and culture of the United States. Some Democratic and Republican writers, such as Thomas Paine and William Leggett, did promote what they saw as the Union’s international mission. However, they usually referred to man’s fundamental right to liberty when they talked about those ‘natural rights’ which were common to humanity as a whole.<sup>199</sup> Even when arguing that the world was tending towards self-government, these earlier thinkers emphasized the specific conditions required for a thriving democracy, particularly if they were Whigs.

Turning away from the nation as a territorial unit, ‘Young Americans’ based their political ideology on the universal foundations of ‘natural law.’ Rather than tying Americans together through their loyalty to a particular place, or a shared vision of history, these Democrats emphasized the

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<sup>198</sup> ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne,’ *The North American Review*, Vol. 76, (January 1853), 23.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Lamb, *Thomas Paine and the Idea of Human Rights*, 74-78.

transcendent authority of 'nature.' In this vision, religious teaching and cultural homogeneity became less integral to the success of the nation. In their place 'Young Americans' stressed the authority of literary figures and political scientists, precisely because they had the capacity to interpret universal principles. It was these intellectuals who could envisage the 'natural' social order which would thrive in the absence of external intervention by the state. However, there was a colossal flaw at the heart of 'Young America's' Jacksonian ideology: as they argued democracy was a 'natural law,' the ideological heirs to Andrew Jackson permanently excluded non-whites from their political vision.

### **'Young America' and Race**

Like other aspects of its political program, the racial ideology of the *Democratic Review* did not fit neatly into pro or anti-slavery camps. It was a combination of rampant liberal universalism and deep-seated white supremacy, often drawn from the same 'scientific' sources. This way of thinking resists a strict 'sectional' interpretation, and should not be dismissed as either belonging to 'Northern' or 'Southern' mindsets. Racism cannot be written off as a mere 'inconsistency' in 'Young America's' otherwise liberal rhetoric since it was compatible with many parts of their larger worldview.<sup>200</sup> But neither should liberal rhetoric be dismissed as a shallow 'smokescreen' for Southern interests.<sup>201</sup> By ascribing scientific defenses of racial hierarchy to the South, we cleanse the free states of their constitutive role in creating the politics of white supremacy. Indeed, despite their apparent rivalry, the prevailing interpretations of the Northern Democrats actually share the same pitfall. Whether one argues that 'Young Americans' were essentially liberal, but for blind-spots on race, or whether

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<sup>200</sup> The argument that the 'Young America' movement were essentially liberal but for blind-spots on race can be found in Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement* and R. Sampson, *John O'Sullivan and His Times*. Both authors are right to stress the free labor credentials of 'Young Americans,' and their emancipatory rhetoric, but do not focus on its relationship with white supremacy. Indeed, without focusing on their racial politics, Eyal's characterization of 'Young Americans' as 'anti-slavery' and 'forward-looking' is misleading, since it makes them out to be proto-abolitionists, or at least more racially egalitarian than they were.

<sup>201</sup> For the interpretation that 'Young America' became a vehicle for the Slave Power see the role of 'Young America II' in E. Widmer, *Young America*. Also see M.T. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Sympathies*. For the view that racism was the driver behind Jacksonian ideology, whilst liberal rhetoric provided a mere smokescreen, see R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*. Part of the problem is one of framing – historians such as Horsman focus exclusively on race, whilst Eyal and Sampson examine the movement's liberal philosophy. My study aims to explore how racial hierarchy might function within a broader liberal worldview.

Democrats become mere agents of the Slave Power, both perspectives rely on a simplistic moral distinction between an egalitarian ‘North’ and racist ‘South,’ and ignore the mutually reinforcing relationship between liberalism and racism. Rather, we need to recognize that racial extermination and hernevolk democracy were core aspects of Jacksonian, rather than ‘Southern,’ political culture. In the process, we can understand how the emancipatory rhetoric of Jacksonian political thought enjoyed a complementary relationship with its stark racial hierarchies. Ultimately, for many ‘Young Americans,’ ethnic cleansing was the path to a free labor society.

One of the reasons behind the *Democratic Review*’s virulent racism was its broad Southern readership. Just like the Democratic Party at large, the periodical had to satisfy slaveowners in the South as well as supporters of free labor in the North. As O’Sullivan pointed out in 1844, the *Review* was ‘national in its character and aims.’ As such, the editor explained that it ‘abstains from the discussion of a topic...necessarily excluded from a work circulating equal in the South as in the North.’<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, the periodical received contributions from Northern and Southern writers. The Southerner Thomas P. Kettell, who assumed co-editorship with John O’Sullivan in 1847, had a clear opinion on the inferiority of the black race: ‘it is sufficiently proved by the world’s experience,’ that they ‘will not work at all if he can help it...the vis inertia of the black blood is so great that even a large mixture of white blood will overcome it only so far as to induce the individual to perform menial offices, clinging to the skirts of white society.’<sup>203</sup> However, it was not primarily pressure from the Southern states which encouraged white supremacy in the pages of the *Review*. As O’Sullivan’s article highlighted, slavery was a contentious topic in the nation at large, but the inherent inferiority of non-white races was certainly not; particularly in Jacksonian circles. Indeed, the *Democratic Review* was part of a network of Northern publications and writers who made white supremacy an integral aspect of Jacksonian democracy; one which slotted African Americans into a larger social hierarchy that also subordinated Native Americans to the white race.

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<sup>202</sup> ‘Annexation,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 17, (July-August 1845), 8.

<sup>203</sup> T.P. Kettell, *Southern Wealth and Northern Profits, as exhibited in statistical facts and official figures showing the necessity of Union to the future prosperity and welfare of the republic*, (New York: George W. and John A. Wood, 1860), 101.

Indeed, racial pseudo-science was more consistent with ‘Young America’s’ broader political ideology than that of the Whig Party. Of course, white supremacy was not an inevitable consequence of the ideology of ‘Young America.’ One could imagine a movement dedicated to the ideal that communities of any color had the natural right to self-government, free from federal interference. However, once we understand Jacksonian political thought, it becomes clear why ‘Young Americans’ rejected two central tenets of Whig thinking on race: firstly, the idea that non-whites could ‘progress’ towards self-government, and, secondly, the idea that ‘inferior’ races should have rights independent of majoritarian decision-making.

To defend the idea that democracy was a universal human trait, ‘Young Americans’ argued that people who did not aspire to democratic government were less than fully human. Since Democrats started from the assumption that democracy was an inherent right, the absence of self-government in Native American and black communities was evidence of their inferior nature. By making nature, rather than circumstance, the criterion for democratic government, ‘Young Americans’ argued that the failure of Native American and black people to govern themselves was based on inherent moral defects. Conversely, the Whigs subscribed to a more contingent view of democracy. In the Whig tradition, democracy was not a universal law, but one system of government among many, which depended on specific cultural and historical factors to survive. Thus, Whigs found it easier to salvage the essential humanity of non-whites from their failure to exercise popular sovereignty. Furthermore, they believed that the individual – like government itself – was the product of nurture, not nature. Thus, the apparent degradation of blacks and Native Americans, even when they were free from federal restraints and subject to natural law, was not emblematic of their sub-human status.

Furthermore, the ‘Young Americans’ view of democracy as an inherent right did not allow for a set of civil or human rights independent of majoritarian decision-making. For ‘Young Americans,’ democracy was the ‘natural law’ for white people; all civil and human rights were understood within the context of the communities which made them possible. Since Democrats could not conceive of human flourishing outside of popular sovereignty, they condemned those ‘undemocratic’ - non-white - races to perpetual anarchy, and eventual extinction. In their total



conflation of the political and natural order, 'Young Americans' could not conceive of a middle stratum of civil or human rights, distinct from local democracy. Worse still, these Democrats believed that inferior races would threaten the stability of the Union if they were granted civil rights. For 'Young Americans,' the uplift of non-white races was incompatible with the health of self-governing, white communities, and frequently associated with a British or 'federal' plot to undermine democracy. As 'Young Americans' had no conception of individual rights independent of democratic communities, the rights of non-whites people would have to be propped up 'artificially' through the use of federal power. Just as 'federalists' sought to extract value from white Democrats through the central state, 'inferior' populations required the government for survival; a process of intervention which amounted to undue interference with white communities.

One of the most contentious racial theories of the 1850s illustrates the difference between Whig and Democratic attitudes to race starkly: that of polygenesis. Although the *Democratic Review* had initially remained wary of the idea of separate creation myths, it had always subscribed to more fixed racial hierarchies than its Whig counterpart. Certainly, in 1842, one writer at the *Democratic Review* defended the idea that all the races were descended from Adam and Eve in response to the publication of 'Crania America' by Samuel Morton; a text which made the case for separate creation stories.<sup>204</sup> The article, however, still maintained the inferiority of non-white races, and highlighted inherent differences in the construction of the brain.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, when polygenesis became more popular during the late 1840s, the *Review* came to embrace the theory, and began to argue passionately in its favor.<sup>206</sup> What appealed to the *Review* about this more rigid form of racial hierarchy was that it made innate, natural factors the only criteria for democratic government; a belief which chimed with their broader view that popular sovereignty was an innate characteristic of the white race.

If the *Democratic Review* held fast to the notion that the innate quality of whiteness was the only criterion for democratic government, the *Whig Review* argued that environmental factors, such as

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<sup>204</sup> 'Do the Various Races of Man Constitute a Single Species?' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 11, (August 1842).

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-139.

<sup>206</sup> The *Review* maintained that 'all the evidences of our senses' pointed to the fact that the black and white races were separate and distinct. 'Notices of New Books: "The Unity of the Human Races proved to be the Doctrine of Scripture, Reason and Science, with a Review of the Present Position and Theory of Professor Agassiz."' By Rev. Thomas Smyth, D.D., *Democratic Review*, Vol. 26, (June 1850), 570.

evangelical culture and education, made people more suited to self-government; a perspective in line with their view of democracy as a contingent political system. Indeed, critics of polygenesis often hailed from a Whig background. These theorists threatened not only the Democrats' rigid perspective on race, but their larger worldview. The Christian preacher Thomas Smyth, for example, became a favorite at the *Whig Review*, for arguing that the new theory of polygenesis was incompatible with the account of man's creation found in the Bible. On top of this, Smyth argued that polygenesis was wrong to attribute social success to inherent racial categories found in nature, rather than Christian civilization and moral uplift. In this account, we not only find an assault on the faulty science of 'separate creation myths,' but also a critique of 'Young America's' broader theory of political progress. Smyth's larger point was that the natural laws of laissez faire government would not – on their own – be enough to uplift the white race. Rather, Smyth emphasized the environmental factors which shaped the emergence of democracy, in accordance with the *Whig Review's* larger political perspective. It was not democracy that caused white man to thrive, but the moral development of man which contributed to the success of self-government. Without moral improvement along the lines of evangelical Protestantism, democracy would remain a distant prospect.

This perspective, however, presented a real threat to the ideology of the *Democratic Review*. The argument that political progress should not be attributed to inherent racial categories, but environmental factors, certainly left open the possibility of social progress for non-whites. But, it also gave rise to a larger, more dangerous assumption: that democracy was a contingent, rather than 'natural,' system of government. If blacks' failure to establish self-government was due to their social, religious and natural environment, then whites' successful implementation of popular sovereignty might be reduced to these factors too, rather than the universal authority of natural law. The *Democratic Review* was therefore unsparing in its denunciation of Smyth's work. In particular, it was at pains to point out that Smyth's biblical account of political progress could not account for those 'Pagan whites' who 'recovered from barbarism to a high degree of civilization without external aid.' In shutting Smyth down, the *Democratic Review* was closing down an argument that had the potential

to undermine their entire worldview: that man's social development – rather than inherent qualities – made him suited to democratic government.<sup>207</sup>

Rather than Smyth's environmental explanations, the *Review* supported a different class of racial theorists. Just as it used political science and literature to justify democracy for white men, the *Review* drew on both these disciplines to exclude 'inferior' races from the body politic. In terms of science, the publication lauded works of phrenology, which permanently barred inferior races from the benefits of democracy. In terms of literature, they argued that non-whites were incapable of producing great work, and encouraged white authors to portray 'inferior' races according to their debased natures. The writing on race in the *Democratic Review*, mirrored its writing on democracy. Just as the periodical used literature and political science to present democracy as a universal political system, it also ensured these disciplines constructed humanity so as to exclude 'inferior' races.

One of the most cited writers in the *Democratic Review* was New York's John Van Evrie, who argued for the exclusion of blacks because of their innate qualities. Significantly, Van Evrie claimed that blacks were inferior by 'nature'; an argument which mirrored political scientists, like Elisha Hurlbut, who claimed that democracy was a 'natural law' for white men. Both Van Evrie and Hurlbut made 'scientific' laws the basis of political progress. Whether through phrenology or political science, these Jacksonians justified the political order according to universal laws and innate characteristics, rather than environmental explanations. Indeed, John Van Evrie made the case for the 'natural' inferiority of non-white races and the democratic nature of white communities in the same text. In an 1853 pamphlet called the *Negroes and Negro 'Slavery,'* Van Evrie argued that the presence of blacks in America had made the first settlers to the United States conscious of their own 'natural equality,' thereby helping to discredit the artificial distinctions of the Old World.<sup>208</sup> He wrote 'the presence of the negro was and always must be a test that shows the insignificance and indeed nothingness of those artificial distinctions which elsewhere govern the world and constitute the basis of the social as well as the political order.'<sup>209</sup> Van Evrie tried to make racial exclusion compatible with the universal nature

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<sup>207</sup> 'Notices of New Books: The Unity of the Human Races,' 570.

<sup>208</sup> J.H. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro 'Slavery,'* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton and Co, 1861), 289.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 289.

of American democracy, by arguing that the social hierarchy in America was based on ‘natural’ divisions, rather than the artificial distinctions of Europe.

As well as ‘science,’ the *Democratic Review* used literature to construct an idea of humanity so as to exclude non-whites from the benefits of universal democracy. Just as the *Review* argued that ‘democratic’ writers and historians proved that democracy was a universal human trait, it erased non-white peoples from the ‘humanity’ which these literary figures were thought to represent. For example, in an 1846 issue, the *Review* declared that African nations have ‘never possessed any literature, even an alphabet, however rude,’ and that this will ‘always be the case in Africa.’<sup>210</sup> Just as Bancroft and Hawthorne celebrated ‘man’s’ innate capacity for democracy, the *Democratic Review* portrayed Native Americans as an inferior species, bereft of this essential trait. In an 1846 poem entitled ‘The Indian Love,’ the *Review* presented Native Americans as bloodthirsty and savage: ‘I am a wild Lennape chief, / And love the game of life;/ See yonder sumach's crimson leaf!/ 'Tis paler than my scalping knife.’<sup>211</sup> Similarly, in 1838, the periodical complained about the ‘sickly sentimentality’ of most writing on Indians.<sup>212</sup> It is evident that the *Review* excluded blacks and native people from even the most basic civil or political rights on the same grounds that they asserted the white man’s right to democracy: through the universal and inalienable ‘laws of nature.’ Even in making these divisions, then, ‘Young Americans’ maintained that democracy was an essential human trait, rooted in the universal authority of scientific and literary culture, rather than social or moral development.

In contrast to its Jacksonian counterpart, the *Whig Review* attacked both political and natural ‘scientists,’ as well as the Democrats’ view of the relationship between literature and race. Colton’s publication took aim both at theories of racial hierarchy and the idea of democracy as a natural right; a sign that it recognized the relationship between these two political beliefs. The publication singled out Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of a Natural History of Creation* for criticism, not only for its scientific racism, but for its larger thesis that political progress could be reduced to innate, or ‘natural laws.’<sup>213</sup> In 1845, the *Review* attacked Chambers for basing a theory of social development on the secular

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<sup>210</sup> ‘Slaves and Slavery,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 19, (October 1846), 247.

<sup>211</sup> ‘The Indian Lover,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 19, (October 1846), 272.

<sup>212</sup> ‘Thayendanega,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 3, (October 1838), 115.

<sup>213</sup> R. Chambers, ‘Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,’ (London: John Churchill, 1844).

authority of nature rather than religious scripture. The writer bemoaned the ‘supereminent (sic) degree,’ to which works of its kind peddled ‘trains of impudence, arrogance and profound ignorance of Revelation.’<sup>214</sup> The publication criticized Chambers’ assertion that the ‘natural’ quality of race had driven both the political advancement of whites and the degradation of non-white peoples. The periodical complained that every social development was reduced to the operation of general laws, rooted in the secular authority of nature, rather than Protestant faith: ‘individual men and individual nations and even races have suffered and perished in those backward cycles which the scheme admits to be necessary to the general progress.’<sup>215</sup> As we will explore later in this chapter, it was common for other Whig thinkers to complain that Roberts Chambers over-emphasized the innate characteristics of man, rather than the moral development of the individual.

In line with its broader theory of democracy as a contingent, rather ‘natural’ political system, the *Whig Review* stressed the capacity for social improvement among non-white peoples; thereby avoiding the dichotomy common to Jacksonian thought between degraded and superior races, and non-democratic and democratic peoples. In 1845, for example, the *Review* published an article entitled ‘The Past and Present of the Indian Tribes,’ which took an optimistic view of the prospects of the Cherokees within the United States.<sup>216</sup> The article stressed environmental explanations for the differences between white and non-white populations, sometimes contrasting the behavior of ‘civilized’ Indians with the behavior of crude and uneducated white Americans. The writer, for example, wrote that he had heard of a ‘young daughter of a Cherokee chief’ who ‘laugh(ed) at a visit she had received from a storekeeper of some wealth, who lived near the line of the United States, because the vulgar man did not know how to use a silver fork.’<sup>217</sup>

For the *Whig Review*, the responsibility for the Indians’ tragic fate lay at the hands of those Jacksonian heroes on the frontier, as well as their flagship policy of Texas annexation. These attacks are significant because they reveal the Whigs’ ideological assumption that the destruction of Indian communities was more a product of circumstance than inherent defects. Moreover, at the same time,

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<sup>214</sup> ‘Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,’ *Whig Review* Vol. 1, (May 1845), 525.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 539.

<sup>216</sup> ‘The Past and Present of the Indian Tribes’ *Whig Review* Vol. 1, (May 1845).

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 509.

this perspective suggests that Whigs rejected the Democrats' idealization of the frontier, as well as the inherent morality of self-governing white communities. The *Review* took aim at 'the villainy of the frontier desperado' and the 'unprincipled men whom the rumor of gold mines, in all ages, has sufficed to entice from their settled homes.'<sup>218</sup> If Texas were annexed to the Union, the *Review* complained that it would become even more difficult for native people to preserve their sovereignty, as they would be squeezed onto increasingly smaller patches of territory. For this landgrab, the Whig writer blamed the 'idlers who infest every frontier city of our land as the Eldorado, the possession of which is to realize the dreams of their vagabond cupidity.'<sup>219</sup> The different portrayal of race in the *Whig* and *Democratic Reviews* suggests that racism can be conceived in partisan, as well as sectional, terms. Although slavery divided 'Northern' and 'Southern' states, white supremacy certainly did not. In fact, the parties' respective 'natural' and environmental explanations for democracy partly account for different attitudes to race. The *Democratic Review* should therefore be considered neither a 'Northern' nor 'Southern' periodical but a Jacksonian one. Ultimately, the racial ideology it advocated can be characterized as a combination of white supremacy, free labor and popular sovereignty which was popular across the nation

Indeed, despite its faith in inherent racial characteristics, the *Democratic Review* did not make the case that slavery was a positive good. The magazine, as well as many of its contributors and readers, came from the Northern states, and abided by 'free labor' ideology. As I will explore in Chapter Four, even during the height of the sectional crisis, editor John O'Sullivan maintained that slavery degraded both white masters and workers. Although the periodical entertained the idea that slavery could be perpetuated in the tropics, it did not see a future for slavery on the American continent. Instead, the publication advocated a kind of free labor ideology based on the principles of white supremacy, frequently advocating a process of extermination as the path to a free society. One article asserted that 'the very decided superiority of an entire free population over a mixed population of freemen and slaves' was 'shown too clearly in the progress of the United States to be in any way

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 508; 507.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 507.

questionable.’<sup>220</sup> The article predicted that the essential superiority of free labor would mean free states would gradually replace slave states within the Union. However, this would not be achieved through the enfranchisement of the black population but their extermination: ‘in an operation as unerring though somewhat slower than that which substitutes the white population in place of the Indian.’<sup>221</sup> Another article published in 1846, supposedly ‘Young America’s’ ‘liberal phase,’ looked forward to the eventual extinction of the black race: ‘when the blacks shall have been thrown upon their own resources, the increase in their numbers will stop, and ultimately they must become extinct as a race on this continent.’<sup>222</sup>

### **‘Young America’ in Congress: Edmund Burke’s Report on the Dorr Rebellion**

The *Democratic Review* was not the only outlet for the politics of ‘Young America.’ Connected to the *Review* were a class of politicians in Congress who subscribed to the same broadly Jacksonian agenda. As I have discussed in the introduction, the writers at the *Democratic Review* and the politicians who supported ‘Young America’ did not self-consciously define as a political group. The relationship between the magazine’s editors and the political wing of ‘Young America’ could be fraught with tension, particularly as the movement came to embody a caricature of radical politics during the increasingly conservative decade of the 1850s; a dynamic which will be discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. However, there was a distinctive network of Jacksonian political figures who revolved around the *Democratic Review*. As we see from the *Review*’s regular column on the lives of eminent statesmen, the publication admired a certain set of Democrats within the national party. Although this group ranged widely, the magazine tended to single out the more ‘progressive’ wing of the Democracy, frequently identifying the politicians by this term.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> ‘European Views of American Democracy,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 2, (July 1838), 352-53.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Slaves and Slavery,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 19, (October 1846), 254.

<sup>223</sup> ‘Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil. Hon. Edmund Burke,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 20, (January 1847), 75.

Like writers at the *Democratic Review*, ‘Young America’ Democrats in Congress drew on intellectual culture, particularly the notion of ‘natural law,’ to argue that popular sovereignty was a universal political principle. In doing so, ‘Young America’ politicians subscribed to a vision of nationalism rooted not in the specific territory or culture of the United States, but the authority of natural law. In the mid-1840s, the catalyst for this discussion about the foundations of the democratic and national order was a report on the Dorr Rebellion of 1841 written by the long-time contributor and friend of the *Democratic Review*: New Hampshire congressman Edmund Burke.

In 1840, Rhode Island was the only remaining state in the Union that had neither created a new constitution after the American Revolution, nor instituted universal white male suffrage. Unlike the rest of the nation, Rhode Island continued to operate under its old colonial charter, passed in 1663 during the reign of King Charles II. Instead of granting unconditional voting rights for white males over the age of twenty-one, the charter, like many of its time, contained a property qualification. Only when he possessed at least \$134 of property could a white man hope to participate formally in the democratic process. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this constitution was considered sufficiently ‘democratic.’ Since Rhode Island had a largely rural population in 1663, most farmers owned enough land to meet the qualification. With rapid industrialization and unprecedented levels of immigration during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, that all changed. By 1840, the majority of the state’s population lived and worked in urban areas, for wages that gave them no hope of attaining the capital required to cast a ballot on election day. Other states had suffered similar changes during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but had altered their constitutions accordingly. In Rhode Island, almost two thirds of the state’s white male population over the age of 21 were disenfranchised. Still laboring under an outdated political settlement, which not only preceded but appeared to contradict the values at the heart of the nation’s founding, the situation in Rhode Island was ripe for revolution.

After every effort to alter the state charter by formal means failed during the 1830s, Thomas W. Dorr held an extra-legal ‘People’s Convention’ in October 1841 to draft a new constitution that granted the vote to all free white men after one month’s residence. Although he had – at first – proposed giving the vote to blacks, Dorr backed down in 1840 under pressure from the state’s immigrant population, who wanted to achieve suffrage first. To quell this groundswell of democratic



agitation, the General Assembly in Rhode Island issued their own ‘Freeman’s Convention,’ which conceded to many of Dorr’s demands. But, when the two constitutions were subjected to a popular vote later on in 1841, the ‘Freeman’s Convention’ was overwhelmingly rejected. The ‘People’s Convention’ was accepted not only by all white males over the age of 21, but – Dorr claimed – also by the residents who could already legally vote in that state.

In early 1842, these rival legislatures elected governors of their own – Dorr for the Suffrage Party, and Samuel Ward King for the so-called Law and Order faction. Presided over by two rival governors, the state was teetering on the brink of a civil conflict. Unwilling to implement either of the two new constitutions, and clinging on to the formal apparatus of power, Samuel King clamped down on the democrats and declared martial law. With President John Tyler refusing to intervene on either side, Dorr was emboldened to attack an arsenal at Providence in attempt to arm his growing band of supporters. When this was crushed by King’s superior numbers, Dorr fled to New York, where he received some support from Tammany Hall Democrats. Eventually, however, he was forced to disband his group of ‘Dorrites.’ Despite his ferocity in dealing with Dorr, King recognized the need to liberalize the constitution, and issued a new convention in September 1842. This extended the vote to any white male who could make the poll tax of \$1 for the upkeep of the state’s schools, but retained the property qualification for new immigrants, to the horror of many Democrats. With a bounty of \$5,000 over his head, Dorr was finally arrested in 1843, and sentenced to life imprisonment by a jury from the conservative town of Newport in Rhode Island.

Despite being an isolated and anomalous event, the Dorr Rebellion sparked a ferocious debate in Congress over values at the heart of America’s founding. Perhaps more than any over incident in this period, it crystallized what historian Adam I.P. Smith has termed the fundamental ‘philosophical and constitutional dispositions’ between the main parties.<sup>224</sup> Or, in the words of historian Erik Chaput:

The Dorr Rebellion is more than a limited, local event, two decades removed from the grand drama of the Civil War; rather events in the Union’s smallest state reverberated throughout the halls and backrooms of Congress as the nation’s politicians tried to sort out the meaning

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<sup>224</sup> A.I.P. Smith in *Reimagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions, America, France Britain, Ireland, 1750-1850*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

of freedom. Like the issue of the status of slavery in the territories it raised profound questions about the location of sovereignty that only war could ultimately solve.<sup>225</sup>

From its inception in 1841, the Dorr Rebellion had not been a subject for wide-ranging debate in Congress. Eager to make it onto the Democratic ticket in the upcoming election of 1844, many of the more radical ‘Locofoco’ Democrats based in New York – Dorr’s natural allies – avoided public support for the ‘People’s Convention’ to avoid alienating the more conservative wing of the party. Ohio’s William Allen and Democratic historian George Bancroft were among the only ones to lend vocal support for Dorr’s actions. This all changed after New Hampshire’s Edmund Burke published his extensive congressional report on the Rebellion in 1844. With some of it ghost-written by Dorr himself, this document threw its unconditional support behind universal white male suffrage.

What is particularly striking about Burke’s report, and the reason it triggered such widespread disagreement in Congress, are the philosophical justifications for Dorr’s conduct. It was precisely these arguments that tapped into deep-seated ideological divisions about how the two major parties conceived of the American nation; the very same reflected in the *Whig* and *Democratic Reviews*. Indeed, the fundamental divisions exposed by this civil conflict in Rhode Island continued to define politics in the antebellum North until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Whilst an analysis of ‘sectional’ divisions has frequently dominated this period, the disagreement over ‘democracy’ at the heart of debates on Burke’s report raged just below the surface of Northern politics.

One of the primary reasons Burke issued his report on the Dorr Rebellion was to justify the revolt in Rhode Island, with the aim of eventually acquitting Thomas W. Dorr of his sentence to lifetime imprisonment. To this end, the report contained a series of excerpts from pamphlets and conventions which had defended the Dorr Rebellion from 1841 onwards, as well as a statement from the congressional committee Burke had assembled to create the document. A variety of different arguments for Dorr’s innocence emerge, but one thread runs throughout: that popular sovereignty was a ‘natural right’ contained within the Declaration of Independence. For Burke and his associates, democracy was not primarily a system of government, still less one of ‘virtual representation,’

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<sup>225</sup> E. Chaput, ‘Proslavery and Antislavery Politics in Rhode Island’s 1842 Dorr Rebellion,’ *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 85, (2012), 693.

whereby intelligent citizens would balance the competing interests of the citizenry. Rather, ultimate authority resided in ‘the people,’ whose voice stood outside and was superior to government itself.

Dorr’s ‘People’s Convention’ therefore:

Proclaimed that the people in their political capacity are above all laws, and all constituted forms of government, which are their own creations, and they can reform and remold at pleasure. Such is the principle that the committee believes was asserted by the Signers of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>226</sup>

Despite their reputation as a backward and ‘folkloric’ party, this group of antebellum Democrats rooted their ideology liberal political philosophy, or – as they often termed it – the ‘science of politics.’<sup>227</sup> In particular, Burke repeatedly turned to the authority of ‘nature’ to justify Dorr’s new constitution. ‘It is not reasonable,’ he argued, ‘to suppose that the majority, by whose consent the compact was originally formed, would yield up the powers to which they were by nature entitled, to the minority.’<sup>228</sup> It was not mob violence, or folkish wisdom, but ‘the voice of nature, of reason, of true philosophy’ which dictated that true sovereignty should lie with ‘the people,’ manifested in the will of the majority.<sup>229</sup>

Defending popular sovereignty as a ‘natural right’ also required an assault on the more conservative form of nationalism advocated by the Whig Party. Burke attacked the Whiggish notion that the nation constituted an ‘organic’ entity that predated the political rights of individual citizens; one that protected past and future generations as much as the present one. Flying directly in the face of his namesake, Burke declared ‘the dead cannot bind the living; and therefore when any compact become burdensome or oppressive to the living, the latter may alter or abolish such compacts or institutions and form others that will secure to them the enjoyment of such rights to which they are, by

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<sup>226</sup> E. Burke and the Select Committee, *Rhode Island – interference of the executive in the affairs of*, Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., Rep. No. 546, (1844) (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1845), 50.

<sup>227</sup> This interpretation of Jacksonian is dominant in the scholarship. The most extreme example of Jacksonian Democracy as ‘folkloric’ is W. R. Mead, ‘The Jacksonian Tradition and Foreign Policy,’ *The National Interest*, winter, 1999. For the Democrats as backward-looking, anti-intellectual and pragmatic See J. Baker, *Affairs of Party*.

<sup>228</sup> E. Burke, *Rhode Island*, 33.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

nature, entitled.<sup>230</sup> The committee believed that ‘the right of suffrage is a natural, nor a conventional right.’<sup>231</sup> Burke’s report also rejected the idea that people were not sufficiently virtuous to uphold Dorr’s brand of direct democracy. Since ‘the people’ were ‘fickle, unstable and fond of change,’ Dorr’s critics argued they would ‘unsettle the foundations of all governments.’<sup>232</sup> As we shall see, such arguments were common in discussions of the Dorr Rebellion, and in later debates over ‘popular sovereignty’ after the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In both cases, more conservative commentators argued that the people were liable to mob rule. Since the days of Socrates, majorities made decisions motivated more by passion, jealousy and rage, rather than calm, or deliberate reason. Lincoln himself charged that slavery should not be left to settlers in the territories since their views were liable to corruption, especially if they shared presses and pulpits with the Slave Power. Moreover, throughout the antebellum period, Whigs warned that majorities were liable to suasion by charismatic dictators: the modern-day Caesar was truly ‘King Andrew’ of the Democratic Party.<sup>233</sup>

Democrat Edmund Burke took a very different view of political majorities, arguing that the voice of the people was tantamount to ‘the voice of God.’<sup>234</sup> There was no conflict between democracy and individual rights, since the former was an inherently virtuous system, uniquely suited to human nature. Free from the forceful restraint of the state, ‘the people’ were perfectly capable of exercising good judgement in a sober and considered way. Anticipating an argument that assumed even greater significance after the failures of 1848, Burke claimed that the people were, in fact, a conservative force. ‘So far from the people desiring change and instability,’ Burke wrote, ‘history proves that they are in favor of stability and permanency; and that they long bear the abuses, oppressions and tyranny of government before they resort to their ultimate right which is revolution by force in despotic governments.’<sup>235</sup> The Revolution in France, which had so terrified his namesake,

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 43

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 41

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>233</sup> For an eloquent example of the Whigs’ critique of majoritarianism see A. Lincoln ‘The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions,’ Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, January 27 1838.

<sup>234</sup> S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>235</sup> E. Burke, *Rhode Island*, 50

was for the New Hampshire Democrat the product of ‘unfeeling, heartless and ruthless oppression.’<sup>236</sup> Whilst conservatives thought the French Revolution exposed the folly of unbridled majoritarian politics, Burke believed blame lay solely with the overbearing power of the state.

In the report, Burke also reprinted several pro-Dorr meetings which took place during the period from 1841 to 1844. These only reinforced Burke’s central argument that popular sovereignty was a natural right. One convention, which assembled at Providence on February 22 1841, turned to the authority of nature to promote a ‘state constitution.’ ‘We contend,’ they declared, ‘that a participation in the choice of those who make and administer the laws is a natural right which cannot be abridged, nor suspended any further than the greatest good of the greatest number imperatively require.’<sup>237</sup> Conservatives who would argue otherwise made the ‘radical error’ of assuming that ‘political rights’ exist by virtue of the ‘political compact.’<sup>238</sup> ‘The reasoners will tell you about rights created by society,’ the convention declared, whilst ‘we wish to ask...what those rights were which existed before political society itself.’<sup>239</sup>

In Congress, many Democrats met Burke’s report with enthusiasm, whilst Whigs furiously disputed the notion that popular sovereignty should constitute a ‘natural right.’ As a co-writer of the report, the prominent Democrat and ally of Stephen Douglas, John A. McClernand, defended it in the House of Representatives. McClernand claimed that he regretted to see the report turned into a point of disagreement in the first place, since it concerned great national principles which should not be up for political debate. ‘It grasps not only the fundamental principles of civil government,’ he argued, ‘but also those great inestimable rights, which constitute the title to man’s divinity - which verify the fact of his creation in the image of God.’<sup>240</sup> For McClernand, the Union embodied universal principles rooted in natural and divine law. However, despite what he may have hoped, these were not beyond the realm of politics during the mid-1840s. In fact, Whigs disagreed violently with radical Democrats

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>240</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 327, (1844).

like McClernand. They thoroughly rejected the Democrats' attempt to root the political relations of the Union in nature itself.

John McClernand contended that President John Tyler should be impeached for allowing Dorr to be sentenced to life imprisonment. Such a punishment amounted to 'treason against the rights and majesty of man.' Apparently, the decision stood 'in defiance of the laws of nature as they regard man.' Furthermore, although the President did not intervene, McClernand condemned President John Tyler's threat to do so. By 'assuming to himself to interfere by force' in the 'internal affairs of the state' Tyler had assumed a principle that would strike 'down the sovereignty of states' and turn him into a dictator.<sup>241</sup> Instead of presenting the rebellion as a contest between different factions, McClernand linked it to a much longer, age-old struggle between different ideological perspectives: one belonging to enlightened reason, the other an age of despotism. The struggle was as much for control of universities and publishing houses as the halls of Congress. McClernand reminded his audience that the day Algernon Sydney was beheaded, the 'learned' scholars of Oxford University declared 'every principle by which a free constitution can be maintained "impious" and "heretical."' <sup>242</sup> Whilst Thomas Dorr sat alone in his jail cell, the 'learned' Federalists denounced him the same way. McClernand urged his fellow representatives to heed Jefferson's words to keep pace with "the progress of knowledge, the light of science and the amelioration of the condition of society."<sup>243</sup> One of the political thinkers McClernand singled out for retarding the progress of political science was the 18<sup>th</sup> century Irish political theorist Edmund Burke, particularly his towering work *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In his attack on the French Revolution, Burke supposedly 'advanced the same doctrine' as the Federalists who criticized Dorr, leading McClernand to wonder if 'the opposition have borrowed the idea of sovereignty and the immutability of government from him.'<sup>244</sup> Indeed, McClernand claimed the anti-Dorrite faction were even more reactionary than Burke. The Irishman had at least admitted that the people should make the 'original compact' which would form their constitution, whilst the 'Federalists' wanted Dorr to submit to a

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 328.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 328

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 330

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 330.

colonial charter which their ancestors had no hand in drafting. In their backwardness the Whigs surpassed even Burke: they had ‘out-Heroded Herod.’<sup>245</sup>

Democrat William A. Kennedy reinforced McClernand’s arguments in the House of Representatives. Another supporter of Stephen Douglas, and self-proclaimed ‘western man,’ Kennedy endorsed the interpretation of the Declaration of the Independence put forward in Edmund Burke’s Report on Rhode Island. Kennedy condemned those congressmen who were not prepared to implement the ‘natural rights’ outlined in that immortal document, and who denied the right of suffrage was contained within it at all. He lamented that the American people ‘had heard it declared on this floor that the right of suffrage was a natural right, and that the right of Thomas Jefferson which was incorporated in the Declaration of Independence, was a “mere abstraction” which might not be put into practice.’<sup>246</sup> Kennedy countered that ‘in the West they were accustomed to believe that their fathers meant what they said when they asserted that the people had the power and ability to govern themselves.’<sup>247</sup>

Like McClernand and Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat Henry Williams agreed that the Dorr Rebellion vindicated popular sovereignty’s status as a natural right. In the House of Representatives, Williams made perhaps the most eloquent statement of ‘Young America’s’ conception of democracy as much more than a mere political system. Williams contended that democracy was not a system of representation but an attribute of humanity, existing prior to the institutions of government. Not only did this perspective justify Dorr’s rebellion, but helps explain why the intellectual disciplines of political economy, literature and law were as important to Democrats’ political outlook as prescriptive policies. As Williams argued, ‘if inherent’ popular sovereignty ‘is not a right derived from an organization of state, but must be before and above human government – a right that belongs to man as a member of the human family’ – ‘if inalienable it cannot be chartered away, relinquished or parted with. It becomes an attribute of humanity, distinct from and superior to government that attaches to the people at all times.’<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 330.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 378.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 378.

<sup>248</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 277 (1845).

Williams singled out George M. Dallas for praise, the Democrat who became vice-president under James K. Polk. Williams approved of Dallas' idea that democracy was a form of peaceful revolution. He quoted Dallas favorably, saying "a convention is the provided machinery of peaceful revolution. It is the civilized substitute for intestine war; the American mode of carrying out the will of the majority; the inalienable and indefeasible right to alter, reform or abolish their government."<sup>249</sup> What is significant here is that Williams was not just expressing his admiration for Dallas' policies, or political outlook. Rather, Dallas had interpreted American nationality in the right way – he understood the universal principles embodied in the nation, which made it a model of international order. The anti-Dorrites, on the other hand, were not just an opposite political faction, but a separate nation within the Union, abiding by fundamentally different political principles. Using language unimaginable in Whig discourse, Williams said 'the principle thus promulgated by the despots of Europe, to uphold the arbitrary governments of the Old World, is the same...now advocated by the opponents of the Rhode Island Suffrage Party.'<sup>250</sup> They subscribed not to 'the American but the European theory of government' – not the 'doctrine of popular liberty but the one concocted by the Holy Alliance.'<sup>251</sup>

Whigs in Congress met the Democrats' justification of the Dorr Rebellion head on. Indiana Whig Caleb Blood Smith was adamant that these radicals had conflated political and natural rights in a way that dramatically misread the Declaration of Independence. He complained that 'in modern times there had been manifested by a large portion of the community a disposition to flatter the people.'<sup>252</sup> Democrats would talk 'at great length' about 'what they were pleased to term the natural rights of the people – the right of suffrage, the right of self-government, and the right of the people to do as they pleased in all circumstances.'<sup>253</sup> Conversely, Smith had 'never subscribed to the doctrine of vox populi, vox dei – that the voice of the people is the voice of God' because it was merely the monarchical doctrine of undivided and absolute sovereignty applied to the masses.<sup>254</sup> He especially

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 279

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>252</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 384-85, (1844).

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 384-85.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 384-85.



chastised those Democrats who argued that ‘the people of Rhode Island had exercised only the right which the God of nature had given them.’<sup>255</sup>

Smith criticized Kennedy for saying ‘he regarded the right of suffrage as a natural right – if the God of nature had conferred the rights of suffrage on whites.’<sup>256</sup> In order to separate ‘political’ rights from those which were ‘natural,’ Smith pointed out that participation in the electoral process was contingent on a number of factors. He reminded the House that large groups of human beings were excluded from political rights – namely African Americans and women. Furthermore, white men also had to wait until the age of 21 before they could exercise their right to vote. Here, Smith was doing more than just pointing out the dangerous implications of Democratic ideology for racial and gender hierarchies. He was demonstrating the fundamental inconsistency in the belief that democracy was a universal good. ‘Man’ – self-evidently – was not born a political being. For Smith, democracy was one political system among many; not a law that was true in all places and at all times. He did believe in ‘natural rights,’ but these were ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’<sup>257</sup> Self-government was designed to safeguard these fundamental liberties, but was not – in itself – part of the natural law tradition.

‘Young America’ Democrats compensated for the logical inconsistency at the heart of their worldview by drawing sharp divides between the white and black races. They argued that blacks were so mentally inferior they would undermine the stability of white communities if they were allowed to integrate. Democrat William A. Kennedy argued that abolitionists tried ‘to keep the free citizens of this country from the exercise of their rights by attempting to drag within the circle of American people a class...that were not a part of parcel of them.’<sup>258</sup> For Kennedy and others like him, black rights were synonymous with the destruction of white communities. Moreover, Kennedy based his racial divisions on innate, or ‘natural’ qualities, so as to reject the idea that democracy depended on the moral development of the individual, or the stability of the community. Kennedy might have been applying ‘universal rights’ in an inconsistent and divisive manner. Nevertheless, he drew these racial

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 384-85.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 384-85.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 384-85.

<sup>258</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 378 (1844).

distinctions on the universal authority of nature, rather than paternalistic rhetoric of ‘civilization’ or moral improvement. Furthermore, Kennedy’s opposition to federal interference, combined with his deep-seated white supremacy, meant he had no conception of individual rights outside democratic communities. Races unsuited to democratic government would require the federal government to enforce their rights since they were permanently incapable of self-rule. In turn, such government interference would undermine white men’s rights to govern themselves free from external coercion. For a Democrat like William Kennedy, popular sovereignty for white men and individual rights for ‘inferior races’ were simply incompatible. Indeed, the very concept of individual rights undermined the idea that libertarian democracy was a universal political order, from which all other rights and social activity stemmed.

Outside the halls of Congress, the debate over the Dorr rebellion raged on. Another supporter of Stephen Douglas, Democrat and historian George Bancroft, stepped in to defend the natural right of political majorities to alter their governments at will. Invited to a convention protesting Thomas Dorr’s imprisonment in September 1844, the historian apologized that he could not attend. Instead, he wrote a letter to the convention explaining his views on the rebellion and the subsequent imprisonment of Thomas W. Dorr. Here, he expressed similar opinions to Democrats in the House like John McClernand, referring to the ‘late efforts of the majority in Rhode Island’ to ‘obtain their inalienable rights’ – a design that ‘commends itself to humanity and justice.’<sup>259</sup> Bancroft was especially incensed at what he saw as Dorr’s fraudulent trial, and the jury’s decision to sentence him to lifetime imprisonment. For Bancroft, the authorities had cynically located the trial not in Providence, where the uprising took place, but in the more conservative district of Newport, which inevitably attracted a more unforgiving jury. During Dorr’s trial, the prosecution tried to portray the ‘inalienable rights’ upheld by the Dorrites as “‘belligerent” rights”; a trial that would ‘give legal perpetuity to despotic authority throughout the world.’<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> G. Bancroft quoted in G.T. Curtis, *The Merits of Thomas W. Dorr and George Bancroft as they are politically connected*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1844), 26.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

More conservative Whig intellectuals were fundamentally opposed to Bancroft's position. Boston Whig George T. Curtis argued that a political 'majority' was not – in itself – a sign of moral virtue. Curtis recognized that an abstract appeal to a 'majority' was to refer to a fictitious body. Without political organization – the implementation of positive law, the drawing of state boundaries – the 'majority' had no character, let alone political power. Furthermore, he rejected Bancroft's appeal to 'natural rights' outright. When the Jacksonian historian cried ““Shall a man in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in an American land...be locked up to labor in absolute solitude?”” Curtis replied that he should as soon as he disobeyed society's positive laws – ‘whenever he commits a crime against society.’<sup>261</sup> Bancroft might have written frequently of a new democratic age in which the federal government would not be required to quell expressions of majority rule. But, Curtis believed the federal government would always have a role in controlling civil society, either to preserve justice or keep order: ‘so says the law of most countries in this century; so it has said in former times, and so it will say to the end of time, unless a better mode of checking crime is discovered.’<sup>262</sup>

The debate over the Dorr Rebellion divided the two major periodicals of the day too: the *Democratic* and *Whig Reviews*. In an article of 1842 the *Democratic Review* towed Bancroft and McClernand's line on the Dorr Rebellion. After Dorr's failed attempt to capture the arsenal in Rhode Island, Samuel W. King's government knew constitutional change was inevitable, and drew up a more liberal constitution that conceded to many of Dorr's demands. Although it fulfilled many of their practical aims, the *Review* considered this response inadequate. The writer declared Rhode Island was ‘about to receive’ an extension of suffrage ‘as a boon from the sovereign grace of her rulers, instead of taking it by her own voluntary action, as her just and natural right.’<sup>263</sup> Elsewhere, the *Review* held fast to the notion that popular sovereignty constituted a ‘natural right.’ The right to local self-government, and the corresponding right to be free from federal interference, lay at the base of the American Union. The nation's success was not driven by positive legislation but by natural law. ‘Let alone,’ ‘untrammelled’ by positive law, the states ‘will grow and expand from causes as powerful and

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>263</sup> ‘Political Portraits: Thomas Wilson Dorr No. XXXII,’ *Democratic Review* Vol. 11, (August 1842), 205.

irresistible as the law of nature.’<sup>264</sup> The writer argued ‘if the free voice of a great people is the voice of god, so is their united energies a type of omnipotence.’<sup>265</sup>

Crucially, the editor of the *North American Review*, Francis Bowen, did not take issue with the practical consequences of the Dorr Rebellion. As he acknowledged, the constitution offered by the Freeman’s Convention was remarkably similar to the ‘Peoples’ Convention’ originally drafted by the Dorrites (except – one might add – that it retained the property qualification for recent immigrants).<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, Bowen was convinced that the colonial charter should have been reformed long ago, as comparable constitutions had been in other states of the Union. In common with a dynamic conservative tradition that begun with Edmund Burke, Bowen recognized that stubbornly maintaining the status quo – for its own sake – was as dangerous as quixotic change. But, although ‘reform had become expedient and it was unwise to withstand it for so long’ Bowen was very clear that ‘we do not say that the assembly should have made this concession as a matter of right.’<sup>267</sup> This was not a mere matter of linguistic pedantry: Dorr’s doctrine that popular sovereignty was a natural right had its ‘a parallel’ ‘only...in the detestable ravings of Danton or Marat.’<sup>268</sup>

The leading Whig intellectual from New York City, Daniel D. Barnard, shared Bowen’s desire to anchor the nation in positive law. As he explained to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Yale College, ‘each man shall’ ‘observe the positive laws of the state religiously’ this is the foundation of ‘national morality’ and ‘national wisdom.’<sup>269</sup> Outside the nation, there was ‘no other natural state...except...a mere animal one.’<sup>270</sup> ‘Those who are looking after the “natural rights” of men if they mean to look after anything higher and better than the mere immunities that belong to an animal and brute nature, must turn their regards to society, or you will find them nowhere.’<sup>271</sup> Taking aim at the kind of ‘science of politics’ popular in the antebellum Democracy, Barnard explained that he refused

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<sup>264</sup> ‘Compromises’ *Democratic Review* Vol. 34, (July 1854), 15.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>266</sup> F. Bowen, ‘The Recent Contest in Rhode Island,’ *North American Review*, (April 1844), 55.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 20

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>269</sup> D. D. Barnard, *Man and the State, Social and Political, Social and Political: An Address Before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Yale College*, August 19 1846, (New Haven: B.L. Hamlin, 1846), 44.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*. 15

to reduce politics to natural laws for the same reason he detested phrenological accounts of the natural history of creation: both recognized science as the true foundation of human knowledge, and not a higher or divine authority separate from mere political, or animal existence. As Stewart Winger explains, the Augustinian distinction between the city of God and the city of man was a common one in Whig political thought.<sup>272</sup> Thus, Daniel Barnard told his Yale audience, ‘just as we would appeal from the conceited and atheistical doctrines of a modern “sciolist” in his “Vestiges of Natural History of Creation” to the better authority of the Bible in regard to the origin and the character of the individual man, so we would also appeal from the shallow doctrines of political materialists.’<sup>273</sup> Here, Barnard took aim at an early work of evolutionary theory by the phrenologist Robert Chambers; a natural history which, as we have seen, the *Whig Review* believed to be intimately connected to a new theory of Democratic politics, driving everything from the Dorr Rebellion to the annexation of Texas.

One thinker – transitioning from radical Democrat to Catholic conservative – managed to smuggle this distinctly Whiggish conception of nationalism into the pages of the *Democratic Review*; a move met with uproar among the Democrats associated with the periodical. In 1843 Orestes Brownson wrote a long essay entitled ‘Origin and Ground of Government,’ where he proved that self-government was the result of positive rather than natural law.<sup>274</sup> ‘The moment he enters into society,’ Brownson taunted his readers, ‘this system of natural rights is abridged while other rights are multiplied.’<sup>275</sup> ‘To live without law’ (by he did not mean the ‘natural’ kind) is ‘rebellion.’ Proving that he shared Bowen’s bleak interpretation of the ‘state of nature,’ Brownson referred to ‘the despotism and wretchedness of a state of nature.’<sup>276</sup> Taking aim at Thomas Dorr and his Rhode Island democrats, the article warned ‘to give “natural rights” as an authority to resist law is...the most dangerous authority that could be adduced.’<sup>277</sup> Religion was the proper sphere for changing hearts and minds – not politics – which would descend into partisan squabbling.

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<sup>272</sup> S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*, 205.

<sup>273</sup> D.D. Barnard, *Man and the State*, 15.

<sup>274</sup> O. Brownson, ‘Origin and Ground of Government,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 13, (October 1843).

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

Such an outlook on democracy incensed readers of the *Democratic Review*. Burke's Report had, after all, described the surrender of rights in civil society as an apology for the worst form of European despotism. As one might expect, the intellectual vanguard of the Whig Party was delighted by Brownson's conversion. Whig Calvin Colton, the writer of the *Junius Tracts*, praised the fact that 'when the Dorr insurrection broke out in Rhode Island, Mr Brownson bravely attacked the principle of that rebellion in the *Democratic Review*, with which he was then connected.'<sup>278</sup> Apparently, this was a 'good service to the country, though (Brownson) had the misfortune to offend his readers, the patrons of that magazine.'<sup>279</sup> The political philosophy Colton admired in Brownson's writing was the idea that 'changes in the fundamental law of the state must be made according to the provisions of that law, else it is a revolution.' This article – so offensive to O'Sullivan's *Review* – was a 'manifest condemnation of the Dorr Party and movement.'<sup>280</sup>

The relationship between democracy and the natural law tradition was a significant point of disagreement in the antebellum United States. As advocates of Dorr's Rebellion in Rhode Island, the 'Young America' Democrats believed that popular sovereignty was a 'natural right.' Conversely, the majority of Whigs argued that it was merely a political right, which existed by virtue of the nation's specific traditions, institutions and cultural practices. This division reveals two competing visions of nationalism, lost in histories of 'sectional' nationalisms in this period, as well as the current literature on America and 1848. Whilst 'Northern' and 'Southern' identities did emerge in a later period, the debate over nationalism from 1844 to 1854 hinged on different theories about the emergence of democracy. On one hand, Whigs put forward a more conservative theory of the nation, arguing that democracy emerged from the Union's unique historical trajectory. On the other, 'Young America' Democrats put forward a universalist theory, arguing that democracy was a natural right contained in the Declaration. Chapters Two, Three and Four will explore how this fundamental distinction shaped 'Young America's' support for the 1848 Revolutions, territorial expansion and popular sovereignty after the Kansas-Nebraska Act respectively.

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<sup>278</sup> C. Colton, *Junius Tracts*, (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1844), 88.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

## Conclusion

By shifting political debate onto the realm of intellectual culture, 'Young America' Democrats, both in Congress and the pages of the *Democratic Review* began a fierce debate over the meaning of the 'nation' itself. The principles contained within the Declaration of Independence, which should have provided shared foundations for national existence, were now up for political discussion. Rather than mere disagreement over policy, O'Sullivan and his allies began a debate over the meaning of the liberal tradition itself. Whilst the Democrats were eager to define nationality in universalist terms, the Whigs had a very different idea of what being 'national,' or 'above party,' meant in practice. They argued that a feeling of disinterested patriotism, based around sharper territorial boundaries could temper fierce partisan debate. Democrats, then, looked to the 'natural laws' of political science to provide solutions for political problems. Whigs accepted the reality of irreconcilable interests, and tried to balance them within a harmonious Union; one that fostered a concern for the common good.

Behind these very different attitudes to nationalism were divergent views of the role of intellectuals in political life. The flagship periodicals of the two parties, the *Democratic* and *Whig Reviews*, had distinct conceptions of three major areas of intellectual culture: political science, literature and phrenology. In antebellum political culture, all three disciplines were means of understanding the 'natural law' tradition, or the universal principles governing human behavior. Political science and phrenology uncovered the innate characteristics of different races, which determined whether they were 'naturally' suited to democratic government. Similarly, in antebellum literary culture, authors were thought to have access to transcendent principles which united humanity across territorial boundaries. In this context, the support eminent writers lent to the Democracy testified to the truth of the party's political program. Furthermore, writers' sympathetic portrayal of the people was evidence of their inherent capacity for self-rule. Thus, these three aspects of intellectual culture provided 'Young America' Democrats with new authorities for national existence. Rather than stressing the social, religious and historical conditions which allowed democracy to thrive

'Young Americans' argued that it was a universal system of government, common to the white race as a whole. Because the Whigs saw democracy was a conditional proposition, they promoted cultural homogeneity, historical learning and evangelical improvement as the path to national stability. Conversely, 'Young Americans' saw democracy as a transcendent principle. As such, they grounded the nation upon very different foundations: 'scientific' laws which revealed the inherent characteristics of the white race.

'Young America's' nationalist vision was not parochial or backward-looking; characteristics which historians tend to ascribe both to Jacksonian politics, and the idea of 'nationalism' itself. These Democrats certainly worked to construct an 'imagined community' in the pages of their periodical. However, this was not one based on images of a fictitious past, as Benedict Anderson has suggested of European nationalism.<sup>281</sup> Rather, 'Young Americans' subscribed to a very different conception of the nation, which should challenge the model still dominant in the academy; a Jacksonian image that looked to an image of the future, connected to the present through the working of 'natural laws.'

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<sup>281</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.



## Chapter Two: 'Young America' nationalism and the European Revolutions of 1848

Perhaps more than anything else, the immediate aftermath of the 1848 Revolutions strengthened the radical cosmopolitanism of 'Young America' Democrats. During a diplomatic mission to Britain, the Democratic historian and diplomat George Bancroft took time out of his schedule to visit France during the spring of 1848. Bancroft was a prodigious scholar, whose magnum opus, the *History of the United States*, was one of the first multi-volume histories of the founding of the American nation.<sup>282</sup> In his scholarship, Bancroft advocated democracy as a 'natural law,' presenting popular sovereignty as a transcendent principle, which shaped the development of human history. It was exactly this ideology which influenced Bancroft's response, and that of the 'Young America' movement more broadly, to the Revolutions of 1848.

In March 1848, when the French revolution had just broken out, Bancroft wrote home to Secretary of State, James Buchanan, 'has the echo of American democracy which you now hear from France no power to stir the hearts of the American people to new achievements?'<sup>283</sup> Faced with social transformation in Europe, Bancroft concluded that the universal 'democratic principle' was exerting its influence on the international order. Far from being at the vanguard of this revolution, the United States would need to study events closely, and learn from their development. Ultimately for Bancroft, the Union constituted an ethical ideal – its very existence would provide inspiration for European democracy. In Bancroft's words, 'I love the Union' because 'the principle of popular power lies at the bottom of our institutions.'<sup>284</sup> The *Democratic Review* responded in similar terms. Despite its reputation of strident American exceptionalism and militant nationalism, the periodical urged the Union to take heed from changes in European society. O'Sullivan's publication declared 'patriotism is a false-bond,' because 'each should feel himself a citizen of the world – a friend of man

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<sup>282</sup> G. Bancroft *History of the United States*.

<sup>283</sup> George Bancroft to James Buchanan, March 24, 1848, in *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1908), 2:33.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

everywhere.’<sup>285</sup> Before the term assumed more negative connotations in Democratic politics during the late 1850s, the *Review* relished the ‘universal recognition of expanded philanthropy.’<sup>286</sup>

‘Young America’s support for 1848 rested on a very distinct vision of the Union rooted in the natural law tradition. Drawing on an ideology nurtured in the *Democratic Review*, ‘Young America’ politicians in Congress, defined American nationality in terms of the universal axioms of political science and economy. By situating the Union within these new intellectual authorities, rather than in geographic or historical terms, ‘Young Americans’ created a new ‘imagined community’ in American political culture: one that rested less on the territorial boundaries of the American nation, but on a Democratic international order. Without this new conception of the Union, the burst of enthusiasm for democracy in Europe is much harder to image. It was the ‘Young Americans’ who first began to think of the Union as what David Hendrickson has termed an ‘international system.’<sup>287</sup>

It is true that many American liberals outside the Democratic Party, including many abolitionists, greeted the revolutions with enthusiasm. Like ‘Young America,’ these groups celebrated the triumph of ‘natural rights’ across the Atlantic, and connected the struggles of European workers to emancipationist efforts in the United States. However, with its place at the heart of the Pierce administration, ‘Young America’ was the first movement to bring natural rights into the political mainstream. When Americans like Edward Everett examined the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism during this period, they used the phrase ‘Young America’ as a touchstone. As the movement reached the peak of its influence in 1852, it practically became a byword for a cosmopolitan identity. Unlike the abolitionists, ‘Young Americans’ were also the first to reject the trade-off between the ‘nation’ and the natural law tradition. Whilst many abolitionists looked forward to the destruction of the Union in the name of universalist values, ‘Young America’ Democrats drew no such distinction. For them, there was no contradiction between natural and political rights: the universalism of the liberal tradition was fully compatible with the political

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<sup>285</sup> ‘The East and West,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 22, (May 1848), 401.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 401.

<sup>287</sup> D. Hendrickson, *Union, Nation or Empire, The American Debate Over International Relations, 1789-1941*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 1.

relations governing the Union. In the words of Dorothy Ross, they ‘blurred the distinction’ ‘between natural and political rights.’<sup>288</sup>

The Whig and Democratic responses to the Revolutions of 1848 reveal two very different conceptions of the Union; ones as important as ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ nationalisms which also emerged at this time. Unlike their Whig counterparts, ‘Young Americans’ were unwavering in their commitment to the Revolutions, assured their success, as long as foreign powers did not intervene. Most ‘Young America’ Democrats regarded the failures of 1848 as only temporary setbacks within a providential transition towards democracy; a movement that was as inevitable as changes in the natural world.<sup>289</sup> Secondly, ‘Young America’ Democrats maintained that America should intervene in the unfinished revolutions of 1848. Many advocated the official recognition of republican governments in the wake of the uprisings, and urged Congress to condemn imperial governments that compromised national sovereignty. In some cases, they even recommended America suspend diplomatic relations with the offending parties. Moreover, ‘Young Americans’ saw cultural pressure and congressional declarations as vital weapons in the fight against European despotism; ones that marked a real step forward in the US’ policy towards Europe.

Behind these two different responses, were distinct theories about the emergence of democracy, and the success of self-governing nations. For ‘Young Americans’, democracy was part of the natural law tradition – a set of universal principles that should govern political communities across the Atlantic world. With power in the hands of the people, and federal interference destroyed, stable social orders would naturally emerge in the form of democratic nation states. Conversely, for Whigs, democracy was contingent upon the virtue of the community – it was not primarily understood as a universal ‘principle’ but a representative system which required the right cultural practices, historical traditions and institutions to survive. Consequently, Whigs were more skeptical about the success of the 1848 Revolutions, and warier about foreign intervention. For them, it was not just

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<sup>288</sup> D. Ross, ‘Lincoln and the Ethic of Emancipation: universalism, nationalism, exceptionalism,’ *Journal of American History*, 96, (September 2009).

<sup>289</sup> In one article, Democratic writer and diplomat, Henry Wikoff wrote that secret societies in France were ‘fermenting like an unseen volcano.’ H. Wikoff, *Prince Napoleon Louis Bonaparte in Prison*, Vol. 23, (December 1848), 501.

despotic or monarchical regimes frustrating the realization of democratic society. Whigs were more likely to blame radicals for the failures of the uprisings, or argue that Europeans had not developed the right religious practices, or institutional frameworks for successful democratic government. ‘Conversely, Young America,’ tended to blame the intervention of despotic powers. For them, democracy was not the contingent proposition advanced by conservatives like John Bell or Francis Bowen. In turn, Whigs also had a fundamentally different view of the Union. Whilst Democrats tended to view it as a model for international order, Whigs thought of it as a distinct nation, whose traditions and institutions played a large role in the success of its representative government.

‘Young America’s’ theory of nationalism was rooted in the political thought of the *Democratic Review*. The congressional Democrats who advocated official recognition for new European regimes, or ‘intervention’ against the Holy Alliance, also drew many of their ideas from its pages. In particular, they used the 18<sup>th</sup> century international lawyer Emer de Vattel, a key figure in O’Sullivan’s political writing, to justify intervention on behalf of European democrats. One of Vattel’s major contributions to the ‘law of nations’ was to argue that rebellious powers should be recognized as ‘separate nations,’ if they chose to break away from their imperial oppressors.<sup>290</sup> This legitimized revolutionary movements, allowing their uprisings to assume the character of ‘civil wars’ rather than mere rebellions. It also permitted the intervention of foreign powers on their behalf, since interference in a war between two rival powers was legal, but meddling in an internal revolt was not.

Furthermore, Democratic politicians advanced O’Sullivan’s idea that popular sovereignty should replace the ‘balance of power’ as the foundation of international order. As a component within the universalist natural law tradition, ‘popular sovereignty’ was capable of propping up a cosmopolitan community. With this principle in place, the checks and balances promoted by the Holy Alliance would be unnecessary. It is important to note that the Unionism of the Whig Party, as well as many Southern Democrats, resembled the doctrine of the balance of power in important respects; a point which was not lost on ‘Young Americans.’ ‘Young America’ Democrats dismissed the Whigs’

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<sup>290</sup> Vattel wrote ‘if it be between part of the citizens on one side and the sovereign with those who continue in obedience to him on the other, - provided the malcontents have any reason for taking up arms, nothing further is required to entitle such disturbance to the name of *civil war*, and not that of *rebellion*.’ Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, (1758), eds. B. Kapossy and R. Whatmore, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc. 2008), 646.

concern to balance competing interests within the Union, rather than expand indefinitely, as a 'European doctrine.' Similarly, they attacked slaveowners eager to preserve the sectional balance in Congress as the ideological heirs of the Holy Alliance.

The existing literature on 1848 does not take 'Young America' nationalism, or Democratic political thought, particularly seriously, as an ideology in its own right. The three US historians who have written most extensively on 1848 both contend that Americans grew disheartened with Europe when the uprisings foundered between 1849 and 1852.<sup>291</sup> These scholars point out that Kossuth attracted meagre military and financial aid for the Hungarian cause during his tour of the United States. Moreover, Kossuth himself was disappointed with Americans' reluctance to back military intervention. Likewise, they contend that 'Young Americans' were highly critical of Franklin Pierce's failure to follow through on the aspects of his Inaugural Address which promised to increase America's role in global affairs.

Nevertheless, what these perspectives miss are the wider disagreements about the theory of nationalism, and the emergence of democracy, which shaped the divergent responses to 1848.<sup>292</sup> These interpretations assume Americans became disgruntled with revolutionary movements because they did not follow through on their threats to intervene; ideologies only assume significance if

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<sup>291</sup> T.M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism*, (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 15. Roberts argues 'Europeans proved unable, or unwilling to understand and establish state republican governments...without resort to violence or collapse into despotism.' 'Many Americans...responded to evidence of Europeans' failures by concluding not only that the American Revolution was exceptional but also that, indeed, so was America at the mid-nineteenth century'. In a roundtable on *Distant Revolutions*, Daniel Kilbride writes 'if Roberts is right, it is difficult to explain why northerners found so stirring Abraham Lincoln's insistence that what was at stake during the Civil War was not merely American democracy but the future of self-government the world over.' 'Roundtable: "Distant Revolutions,"' *H-Diplo*, Vol. X, (2011), (<https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XII-3.pdf>), accessed 18/09/2017, 16; M.A. Morrison, 'American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848-1852: sectionalism, memory and revolutionary heritage,' *Civil War History*, Vol. 49 (2003). Morrison argues 'the political...fragmentation that attended the sectional quarrels over territorial expansion and slavery extension and the disorientating effects of radical, Dorrite politics...eroded the optimism of the 1840s,' 131. Also see M. Honeck, "'Freemen of All Nations, Bestir Yourselves,'" Felice Orsini's Transnational Afterlife and the Radicalization of America,' *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 30 (Winter, 2010). Honeck argues 'to be sure, identification with the revolutions of 1848/49 dwindled significantly among antebellum Americans after they learned that the European freedom struggles were tilting towards disaster.' Similarly, Honeck writes 'exemplarism, the belief that the American republic should serve as a shining model for others to emulate, slowly succumbed to exceptionalism, the belief that America was a unique nation detached from and unburdened by the troubles of the world.' 595. Honeck's analysis is persuasive given his emphasis on Whig subjects. However, I want to complement Honeck's work by drawing attention to 'Young America' Democrats who did not lose faith in America's international mission.

<sup>292</sup> In a roundtable on *Distant Revolutions*, Daniel Kilbride writes 'it would be useful to know which Americans lost faith in the universal meaning of American Revolutionary ideals, and which didn't.' 'Roundtable: "Distant Revolutions,"' *H-Diplo*, Vol. X, (2011), 16.

politicians make good on their promises. However, this misses the significance of ‘Young America’ Democrats’ worldview: they believed that the US’ moral and cultural influence would have a serious impact on the success of democratic movements. In many cases, declarations of support were thought to have real practical impact, and the threat of intervention was believed to be enough to shape the international order. In a larger sense, we also miss the ideological transformation at the heart of ‘Young America’s’ response by focusing exclusively on political action: the significance of ‘Young America’ lies not with policies, but with the new internationalist consciousness they put forward, which included a distinct interpretation of political events, and historical change. By focusing on foreign policy, we miss the debate over political theory which shaped Americans’ responses to 1848. Once we foreground political thought, rather than foreign policy, we find that the 1848 Revolutions were not so distant after all: ‘Young America’s’ vision of Euro-American interdependence was surprisingly popular.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, counter-revolutions were often thought mere temporary setbacks. Political intervention might not have always been justified, but ‘Young Americans’ never doubted the success of the revolutions. The democratic rumblings were the first steps towards a providentially-determined international order, governed by independent nation states.

With this methodological focus on political theory, we can see that responses to the 1848 Revolutions illuminate a new framework for understanding antebellum nationalism. Namely, that negotiating the tension between nationalism and universalism was as important to the construction of ‘national’ loyalty in this period as ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ identities. In turn, ‘Young America’ nationalism speaks to a different but no less important debate in antebellum political culture, identified by Dorothy Ross: the negotiation between ‘two values...the American nation and universal liberty.’<sup>294</sup> By taking ‘Young America’ seriously as an ideology in its own right, we can situate Jacksonians back within Northern society. ‘Young America’s’ conception of democracy as a ‘universal principle’ united Free Soil and Northern Democratic politicians in the period from 1848 to 1854. Despite very real divisions over how to halt the spread of slavery, supporters of both Democrats

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 16. Kilbride writes ‘if Roberts is right, it is difficult to explain why northerners found so stirring Abraham Lincoln’s insistence that what was at stake during the Civil War was not merely American democracy but the future of self-government the world over.’

<sup>294</sup> D. Ross, ‘Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation: Universalism, Nationalism, Exceptionalism.’

and Free Soilers wanted to become more active in shaping a democratic international order – a vision they often acknowledged as a shared Jacksonian project. This helps us understand a side to ‘Young America’ Democrats that is sometimes lost in the historiography. Whilst Democrats often allied with Southerners in Latin America, their Jacksonian perspective on European politics appealed to Free Soilers in the Northern states too. Indeed, this ‘Young America’ nationalism became so appealing that even Whigs like Edward Everett were forced to confront the term explicitly, offering a more moderate version of international politics in its place.

This chapter will explore ‘Young America’ Democrats’ responses to the 1848 revolutions in two sections. The first will outline how ‘Young America’ Democrats viewed the prospects of these nascent social movements, which suffered serious setbacks during the early 1850s. It will also explore the intellectual authorities ‘Young America’ drew on, for example, their attitude towards concepts like ‘international law’ and the ‘balance of power.’ The second section will examine the debate around intervention in Europe. In particular, I will focus on the disagreement which crystallized in 1852 about whether Congress should issue a formal declaration condemning Russia’s role in the suppression of Hungarian independence by the Hapsburg Empire.

### **‘Young America’ and the Revolutions of 1848**

The intellectual and political figurehead of ‘Young America,’ George Bancroft, did not lose the enthusiasm he felt when the French Revolution erupted in 1848. Before the New Jersey Historical Society in 1854, he gave a lecture entitled *The Necessity, the Reality and the Promise of Progress in the Human Race* which exuded confidence about the political trajectory in Europe. He declared ‘the fifty years which we celebrate has taken mighty strides towards the abolition of servitude.’ The historian noted that Prussia had ‘renovated its existence’ ‘partly by the establishment of schools, and partly by changing its serfs into a proprietary peasantry.’ Moreover, ‘in Hungary the attempt towards preserving the nationality of the Magyars may have failed; but the last vestiges of bondage have been

effaced and the holders of the plough have become the owners of themselves and of its soil.<sup>295</sup> This lasting confidence in the 1848 revolutions was emblematic of George Bancroft's wider political ideology. As the historian Stephen Sawyer argues, Bancroft 'exploded the national boundaries of the American, or any democratic project.'<sup>296</sup> Although the 'Young American' believed 'nations developed their own distinctive value or ethos,' Sawyer points out that he thought 'human societies progress through certain common stages because they share the same human nature.'<sup>297</sup>

Other Democrats, who adhered to the ideology of 'Young America,' argued that the 1848 Revolutions were a sign of the Union's growing influence on the international stage. Pennsylvania Democrat, and close ally of Walker, George M. Dallas remained confident about the success of European republicanism throughout the 1850s.<sup>298</sup> Dallas maintained the role which he was appointed at the tail end of the Pierce administration, Minister to Britain, until 1861; a position that alerted him to the transformations taking place in European politics. In 1856, he explained to Secretary of State, William Marcy, that the Americanization of British politics had increased support for the Democratic Party in the upcoming Presidential election. 'The total disappearance of the Whig Party, their old allies,' Dallas claimed, had 'left' the British 'very suspicious of the new factions,' by which he meant the ascendant anti-slavery Republican Party.<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, it was also the dispersion of democratic sentiments, which was bolstering support across the Atlantic. According to Dallas, the British had no sympathy for nativist politics, or the doctrine of "'America for the Americans.'" A full eight years after the outbreak of the European revolutions, he told Marcy that it was 'our steady adherence to republican doctrines, along with the constantly augmenting prosperity and power of the country' which were 'visibly undermining their former prejudices and letting in upon their thoughts, their manners and even their conversation a great deal more democracy than they themselves are conscious

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<sup>295</sup> G. Bancroft, *The Necessity, the Reality and the Promise of the Progress of the Human Race. Oration delivered before the New York Historical Society*, (New York: November 1854), 23-24.

<sup>296</sup> S. W. Sawyer, 'Between Authorship and Agency: George Bancroft's Democracy as History,' *Revue Francaise d'etudes americaines*, Vol. 118, (2008), 53.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>298</sup> Dallas helped to convince President James Polk to appoint Robert Walker Secretary of the Treasury in 1844.

<sup>299</sup> George Dallas to William Marcy, April 20, 1856, in *A Series of Letters from London written during the years 1856, '57, '58, '59, and '60*, ed. J. Dallas, (Philadelphia: L.P. Lippincott, & Co, 1869), 24.



of.<sup>300</sup> In another letter that same year, he singled out the hopeful aspects of European politics underneath the dispiriting spectacle of counter-revolution: ‘although the end is not perceptible at first glance,’ he said, ‘I am much mistaken if the principle of rapid decay be not seated at the very heart of that league’ (of European monarchs). Its ‘rotten fragments’ will be ‘shaken to the earth by popular convulsions at no distant day.’<sup>301</sup>

Philadelphia Democrat Thomas L. Kane, who shared Douglas’ aspirations for Cuban annexation and ‘popular sovereignty’ in the late 1850s, articulated a vision of 1848 typical of ‘Young Americans.’ Highly sensitive to European developments, he subsumed his disappointment with the failure of the uprisings within an expectation that democracy would eventually triumph. Kane claimed that the lull in support for Kossuth at the end of his national tour had, in Philadelphia, given way to a renewed sense of enthusiasm. Kane admitted ‘at one time we were so low that we could count, all told, five men in Philadelphia, faithful to Kossuth.’<sup>302</sup> But ‘now we have secured the five districts of our city and county...from Wayne to Greene and ‘in both houses’ ‘probably have a majority of our Democratic delegation in congress’ who are faithful to Kossuth. According to Kane, these developments ensured the ‘apostle’ would have a ‘welcome when he returns to us that will make his heart choke with satisfaction.’<sup>303</sup> Anticipating its importance for the coming Presidential contest in 1852, Kane said ‘I must see the Kossuth organization perfected before there is holiday for me,’ admitting ‘the campaign of 1852 will be the vilest in our history.’<sup>304</sup>

With prominent ‘Young America’ Democrats maintaining their commitment to Europe, it became a decisive issue in the campaign for the Presidency in 1852. Part of the reason such ‘distant revolutions’ infiltrated American political discourse was that large numbers of European immigrants flocked to the US following the uprisings.<sup>305</sup> In the presidential campaign of 1852, ‘Young Americans’ felt they were perfectly placed to attract these new arrivals. Evidence suggests that Franklin Pierce recognized the importance of European politics at this crucial juncture, and opened his

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<sup>300</sup> George Dallas to William Marcy, April 20, 1856 in *ibid*, 24.

<sup>301</sup> George Dallas to Judge Joel Jones, May 9 1856 in *ibid*, 34.

<sup>302</sup> Thomas L. Kane to William Wood, 10-11 January 1852, Thomas L. Kane Papers, BYU.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>305</sup> T.M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*.

administration to the influence of ‘Young America.’ Democratic Congressman, Edmund Burke, wrote to Franklin Pierce in 1852 ‘the grand ideas which are the most potent in the election are sympathy for the liberals of Europe, the expansion of the American republican westward and the grasping of the magnificent purse of the commerce of the pacific, in short, ideas for which the term Young America is the symbol.’<sup>306</sup> Reflecting on the Democrats’ lull in support in the Northern states before the 1856 election George Dallas asked ‘can anyone tell me what has become of the mighty avalanche of democracy that...tumbled Franklin Pierce into the White House?’<sup>307</sup> The Pierce administration’s internationalist agenda also did not go unnoticed in the Whig press. The *True American* lamented that ‘had Washington been among us in 1851 or 52’ he would have been aghast at the Pierce Democracy promising war with Austria, France and Spain’ to ‘please’ ‘foreign adventures from Cuba, Hungary or Italy.’<sup>308</sup>

The Whigs’ campaign literature also tried to distance themselves from what they saw as the reckless adventurism of the Pierce administration. One election pamphlet asked readers to ‘contrast’ the two-party platforms with respect to foreign policy. It was the Whigs, it claimed, who adhered to the ‘policy and the injunction of Washington not to mix ourselves up with the congress of other nations but to “stand on our own soil.”’<sup>309</sup> To smear the Democrats as reckless interventionists, the pamphlet drew attention to the party’s connections with European revolutionary movements. It laid out a detailed description of a meeting of German Americans endorsing the Party, and a rally held in honor of Kossuth by the Jackson Democratic Association in New York. The former, headed by German émigré Amand Goegg drew the following distinction between the two parties: the Whigs in their platform had ‘declared themselves against participating in the fate of Europe, whilst the Democrats ‘had not done so,’ meaning a policy of intervention might be realistically expected.<sup>310</sup> There was some truth in Goegg’s distinction between the platforms of the two main parties in the 1852 election. The Whig Platform declared that ‘while struggling freedom everywhere’ ‘enlists our

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<sup>306</sup> Congressman Edmund Burke quoted in M. Curti, ‘Young America,’ *American Historical Review*, Vol. 32 (October, 1926), 45.

<sup>307</sup> G.M. Dallas to Francis Markoe, March 15, 1855, Francis Markoe Papers, LOC.

<sup>308</sup> *True American*, August 8 1855.

<sup>309</sup> ‘The Contrast: the Whig and Democratic Candidates for the Presidency’ 1852, William Allen Papers, LOC.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

warmest sympathy,’ ‘we still adhere to the doctrines of the father of this country, as announced in his Farewell Address, of keeping ourselves free from all entangling alliances with foreign countries, and of never quitting our own to stand on foreign ground.’ ‘Our mission,’ the platform declared, ‘is not to propagate our opinions.’<sup>311</sup>

As printed in the Whig pamphlet, Goegg’s meeting of German immigrants also protested against the government’s interpretation of American neutrality. Goegg declared that ‘every citizen not a bond slave to the soil may support the endeavors after freedom of any other people.’<sup>312</sup> A clause in their resolution explicitly cited the important role diplomats played in popularizing American ideology, as it officially called for the US to be ‘represented by an ambassador to a nation which is battling against monarchism.’<sup>313</sup> At the Jackson Democratic Association’s rally for Kossuth, the Whig pamphlet also drew attention to the Democrats’ internationalist fervor. It quoted Lewis Cass saying “‘the Democratic Party have a mission to perform, it is the general mission of progress in the arts and sciences – in the science of politics and government – in the development and advancement of human rights throughout the world.’” At the same event, Douglas was reported saying “‘I think it is time America had a foreign policy – (applause and cries of good, good) – foreign policy predicated on a true interpretation of the law of nations – a foreign policy in accordance with the spirit of the age.’”<sup>314</sup> Even fairly conservative Democrats like Cass wanted the Pierce administration to assume a more active role in European affairs - something this Whig pamphlet did not hesitate to exploit.

Just as ‘Young America’s’ influence within the Democratic Party reached a highpoint, some newspapers anticipated a realignment in party politics. *Cooper’s Clarksberg Register* wrote ‘the only re-modification of parties that we can foresee is that which may possibly grow out of the differences in sentiment between the “Old Fogies” and “Young America.”’<sup>315</sup> A reorganization of the parties around the polarized attitudes to ‘Young America’ nationalism did not seem unlikely in the early 1850s. As the *Clarksberg Register* pointed out, ‘conservatism and progress are again brought into

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<sup>311</sup> The Whig Party Platform, June 17 1852.

<sup>312</sup> ‘The Contrast: the Whig and Democratic Candidates for the Presidency’ 1852, William Allen papers, LOC.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> ‘The Contrast: the Whig and Democratic Candidates for the Presidency’ 1852, William Allen Papers, LOC

<sup>315</sup> *Cooper’s Clarksburg Register* December 7, 1853.

collision and *may* be made the basis of a new party organization but even in this case we will be much surprised if the Democratic party does not maintain its identity as the Progressive or Young America party, shorn perhaps of many of its ultraisms.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, the *Baltimore Sun* proclaimed that there would soon be a new party dedicated to intervention in Europe, free soil and land reform headed by two Douglas-allies, Robert J. Walker and Isaac Walker. Kossuth had, apparently, brought into action elements already existing in this country' which will 'overwhelm and obliterate all that sixty years of prudent statesmanship has established as a barrier against intervention in the wars and quarrels of the Old World.'<sup>317</sup> In 1852, it was the Democratic Party that was seen as the party of radical cosmopolitanism, drawing together a commitment to universalism and social progress.

Just as the Democratic Party became more receptive to the influence of 'Young America,' George Sanders assumed editorial duties at the *Democratic Review*, and shifted the publication in an even more radical direction. The Southern congressman John Breckenridge commented that the *Review* had not 'been hitherto a partisan paper but a periodical that was supposed to represent the whole Democratic Party.' Commenting on its increasingly radical tone, he told the House of Representatives 'recently I have noticed a very great change.'<sup>318</sup> Breckenridge was particularly critical of the relationship between the Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas and Sanders' periodical. Ahead of the 1852 election, the Kentucky politician accused Douglas of encouraging the *Review* to denounce his opponents in the race for the Democratic nomination as too conservative. In the House, Douglas' staunch ally, and fellow Illinois Democrat, William Richardson, denied collaboration. He pointed out that Douglas' support for the *Democratic Review* predated its attacks on the 'Old Fogy' candidates.<sup>319</sup> Although we are accustomed to focusing on the sectional divisions within the Democratic fold, in the early 1850s, the party was also divided between conservative and radical visions of democracy, which did not map neatly onto views of slavery. Breckenridge accused the 'Young America' movement of arrogantly assuming that the principles of the revolutionary

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, December 8 1851.

<sup>318</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 302 (1852).

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 302.

generation were no longer relevant to the Union. Although in favor of social progress, he wanted ‘to progress in line with the principles of our fathers’; not to abide by different values altogether.<sup>320</sup>

Douglas himself recognized that George Sanders’ editorials were harming his prospects of gaining the nomination. After Douglas wrote to the editor asking him to adjust the *Review’s* tone accordingly, Sanders published a response, saying that his publication did not take orders from a mere congressman.<sup>321</sup> Despite these tensions, Sanders and his publication remained influential within the Democratic Party. As Sanders grew increasingly radical, high-ranking politicians like the financier August Belmont continued to praise him in public. In 1854, Sanders came under heavy criticism from the British press for his attacks on Switzerland’s decision to abridge the right of asylum for political refugees. In response, August Belmont declared ‘the virulent manner with which the demolition has been attacked by the whole conservative press of England and the continent is the most evident proof of its importance.’<sup>322</sup> As historians Kirkwood and Patrick point out, ‘Young Americans’ like George Sanders and Pierre Soulé fitted squarely within the political traditions of the antebellum Democracy.<sup>323</sup> The heightened radicalism of the *Democratic Review* was symptomatic of the increasingly progressive tone of the party at large, and its sympathy for the European revolutions. Although Sanders always ensured he was one step ahead of his party, plenty of Democrats within the administration supported his radical political agenda.

Believing that ‘Young America’ had reached a highpoint in its influence, the Democrats Charles Goepp and Samuel Sullivan Cox gleefully expected the Pierce administration to take a more vigorous role in Europe. Goepp dedicated his 1853 work, co-written with fellow German émigré Theodore Porsche, *The New Rome*, to the incoming Democratic administration. He wrote ‘this work is respectfully dedicated to Franklin Pierce’ ‘being a guess at the spirit in which he was elected.’<sup>324</sup> Similarly, Samuel S. Cox served in the Pierce administration as secretary of the legation at Lima in

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<sup>320</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 302 (1852).

<sup>321</sup> For a discussion of this correspondence, see M. Curti, ‘Young America,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, (October 1926), 44

<sup>322</sup> August Belmont to George Sanders, George Sanders MSS, LOC, no date.

<sup>323</sup> J.R. Green & P.M. Kirkwood, ‘Reframing the Antebellum Democratic Mainstream.’

<sup>324</sup> C Goepp & T. Poersche, *The New Rome; or, The United States of the World*, (G.P. Putnam & Co, New York: 1853).

1853; a move into the diplomatic service typical of ‘Young Americans.’ United in their enthusiasm for Pierce in 1852, both men also supported Stephen Douglas throughout the 1850s, even breaking with Buchanan over the Lecompton Constitution in 1857, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Both Goepp and Cox expected the Union to provide a model for the international order. In a pamphlet on the Hungarian Revolutionary Louis Kossuth, written in 1852, Goepp wrote that ‘the mission of the American Union, since its foundation,’ had been the amalgamation of the ‘multiplicity of states’ into one.<sup>325</sup> This was not merely a continental mission. Rather, ‘an ideal state, established by reflection and choice’ must consist in the ‘Union of all men.’<sup>326</sup> Forming ‘e pluribus unum’ must continue as the ‘aim’ of the Union ‘until it is accomplished.’<sup>327</sup> Similarly, in his travelogue of 1852, *A Buckeye Abroad*, Cox noted that the Arabs were ‘a little jealous of the yankees,’ fearing they would annex the Holy Land – ‘they say we send a naval expedition to survey the Dead Sea – that we send congressmen everywhere as if land is already ours.’<sup>328</sup> Cox embraced these accusations, asking ‘who knows what our destiny may be?’ ‘Palestine may in its course have a representative in the US.’ He went on to fantasize about the ‘United States of America and Asia,’ and dreamed of ‘a month’s annexation of Naples to our Union.’<sup>329</sup>

During their trips across the Atlantic during the early 1850s, these two ‘Young Americans’ saw the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a sign that Europeans were beginning to adopt the Union as a model of international order. For both men, the exhibition showed how political progress had drawn the nations of the world together in an ever-greater commercial union. By gathering as a collection of independent states to celebrate the virtues of free trade, the fair showed European powers were starting to follow the American example. In *The New Rome*, Goepp wrote that in 1853 ‘the ocean world...held its first Olympic festival.’ With ‘all mankind assembled in union,’ ‘who shall tell when the wonders of the world’s fair shall have an end?’<sup>330</sup> Similarly, in *A Buckeye Abroad*, Cox wrote that the Great Exhibition had brought mankind together under the banner of political progress: ‘‘How is it

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<sup>325</sup> C. Goepp, *E Pluribus Unum: a political tract on Kossuth and America*, (F.W. Thomas, 1852), 25.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>328</sup> S.S. Cox, *A Buckeye Abroad; or, wanderings in Europe and in the Orient*, (G.P. Putnam, 1852), 181.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>330</sup> C. Goepp, *The New Rome*, 151.

with the Crystal Palace, wherein is really seen, not fantastically imaged, the fruits of human progress, resulting from the common labor of all men, springing from the germs implanted in our common nature by our Creator.’<sup>331</sup>

In his pamphlet on Kossuth, published in 1852, Goepp explained that a new internationalist consciousness had developed since the founding of the United States. Antebellum political conflict was not a mere re-run of the Revolution, but had assumed a fundamentally different character. For Goepp, the War of Independence was a ‘war of nationalities,’ - such as European had seen for generations – that was continued on the American continent.<sup>332</sup> Both sides effectively either fought for France (revolutionaries) or Britain (loyalists), and thereby desired to become ‘an inferior adjunct to a foreign power.’ Thus, ‘the whole country was divided into two great parties.’ But, these were national parties, not – as was true of the 1850s – ‘that of aristocracy and democracy, not of progress and reaction, not of one part of America against another, not of a distinctive American nationality against a union of mankind in vindication of the rights of man.’<sup>333</sup> Goepp lamented that ‘neither party’ in the Revolutionary era ‘declared that America ought not to be secluded...nor that it ought to form a coordinate part of the great whole of humanity.’<sup>334</sup>

Confident that democracy was a universal proposition, many ‘Young Americans’ argued that – in its most developed form – the Union would become a world government. One such Democrat, Robert J. Walker, was instrumental in the ‘Young America’ movement during the two decades before the Civil War. Walker was born in Philadelphia before moving to Mississippi; a state which he represented in the Senate from 1835 to 1845. As well as Bancroft, Walker was a close congressional ally of Pennsylvania Democrat George Dallas and Illinois’ Stephen Douglas – the leading figurehead of the ‘Young America’ movement in the Senate. Despite representing the South, Walker’s loyalty to the principle of ‘popular sovereignty’ predominated over his desire to protect slavery, as Chapter Four will explore in more detail. Furthermore, when Civil War broke out, he chose to support the Union rather than the Confederacy, despite hailing from the Deep South. In terms of his political beliefs,

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<sup>331</sup> S. S. Cox, *A Buckeye Abroad*, 30.

<sup>332</sup> C. Goepp, *E Pluribus Unum*, 11.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid*, 11

Walker was an ardent expansionist and supporter of free trade. Moreover, like Bancroft himself, or New Hampshire's Edmund Burke, Walker combined the qualities of the intellectual and the statesman. He published, for example, several works of political economy, and wrote a 'history of republics' during his spare time.<sup>335</sup> Even before the outbreak of European Revolution, he predicted, on June 27 1847, to Democratic editor John Forney 'North America, much of Europe and large portions of Asia' are 'Progressing with one commerce, language and one government becoming more and more republican every day.' It was, apparently, 'easy and simple' to form a single confederacy with separate state governments' with 'no treaties...or diplomacy because one nation.'<sup>336</sup> Drawing on a typical theme of transatlantic liberal reform, he claimed 'the expense of such a government would be one twentieth of the expenditure of the several governments of the world.'<sup>337</sup> Similarly, George Bancroft saw nations as mere stepping-stones on the way to a great international order. For the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people were beginning to see the potential for a democratic global system, modelled on the United States – 'the divine unity of the nations' had suddenly 'taken hold of the popular affections.'<sup>338</sup> In other works like Vol. 1 of the *History* he wrote 'the United States of America constitute an essential portion of a great political system, embracing all the nations of the earth.'<sup>339</sup>

'Young Americans' were perhaps most optimistic about the growing the growing political and cultural ties between the US and Great Britain, which complicate the historiographical assumption that 'Anglophobia' was the main ideological tenant behind the 'Young America' movement.<sup>340</sup> Many were particularly complementary of British liberal politicians for popularizing American principles. George Dallas wrote in October 1858 that the liberal MP John Bright 'made a

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<sup>335</sup> R.J. Walker to Martin Van Buren, August 4, 1843, Van Buren MSS, LOC.

<sup>336</sup> Robert J. Walker to John Forney, Washington City, June 27 1847, (not sent), R.J. Walker Letter Book (1883-1848), 264

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>340</sup> Historians have too often defined the 'Young America' movement in terms of a general antipathy towards England, or 'Anglophobia.' See E. Widmer, *Young America*. In fact, Democrats much more often distinguished between corrupt British elites and the downtrodden 'people.' As this chapter explores, many Democrats were optimistic about the United States' future relationship with Britain, saving their greatest admiration for liberal reformers like Richard Cobden and John Bright. Furthermore, fixating on Anglophobia means we avoid engaging with the concepts of 'natural law' and 'natural rights' which 'Young Americans' put forward as alternative foundations for the social order.



stirring speech on reform' in front of his Birmingham constituencies that was 'almost sufficiently Democratic for a fourth of July at Tammany Hall.<sup>341</sup> In another letter, just five days later, he asked fellow Philadelphia Democrat Henry Gilpin if Bright did not have a 'claim to rank with these jewels of the Cornelia' – 'the two Gracchi' and 'as a diamond of the first water.'<sup>342</sup> Perhaps reflecting the views of many American Democrats, including his own, Dallas noted 'Mr Bright loves his country warmly but he hates with equal warmth her institutions and policy. He lets the crown alone but openly denounces the Lords and the Bench of Bishops, whilst taking aim at the un-representing and misrepresenting commons.'<sup>343</sup> In December that year, he wrote to Cass again, saying that if he were to 'maintain his attitude in the House of Commons...it will be difficult to assign a limit to (Bright's) progress.'<sup>344</sup>

Fellow Democrats agreed that the success of British liberalism indicated the American Revolution had come full circle, and that British society was now on the way to becoming Americanized. In 1859, Democratic congressman Samuel S. Cox proclaimed 'England shakes with a new reform movement – John Bright trying to Americanize her by popular sovereignty.'<sup>345</sup> Similarly, Robert J. Walker anticipated greater political and cultural ties between the two countries.<sup>346</sup> Writing to a friend from Britain during the 1850s, he even suggested that Britain should annex herself to the American Union, and incorporate her colonies on an equal footing.<sup>347</sup> Like Dallas and Cox, Walker had nothing but admiration for the British liberals for helping to popularize his beloved principles of free trade on the other side of the Atlantic. He wrote to the *London Daily News* in 1851, for example, 'we are united with you, also, in support of those views of political economy, taught by Adam Smith, Ricardo, Peel and Cobden, which are so hostile to agrarian tendencies.'<sup>348</sup> Similarly, Thomas Kane

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<sup>341</sup> G. Dallas to Mr Cass London October 26 1858. *A Series of Letters from London written during the years 1856, '57, '58, '59, and '60*, ed. J. Dallas, (Philadelphia: L.P. Lippincott, & Co, 1869), 58.

<sup>342</sup> G. Dallas to Henry Gilpin, October 31 1858. *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>344</sup> G. Dallas to L. Cass, December 17 1868. *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>345</sup> S.S. Cox, "Territorial Expansion," *Speech Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 18, 1859*, (Washington: L. Towers, 1859), 15.

<sup>346</sup> R. J Walker, *Speech at banquet given by the mayor & municipal authorities of Southampton, to Lewis Kossuth, late governor of Hungary, 1851*, (London: Waterlow and sons, 1851).

<sup>347</sup> Walker's letter proposing union between the United States and Great Britain is quoted in R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 296.

<sup>348</sup> Letter of R.J. Walker to Mr Deacon, the Town Clerk of Southampton, reprinted in the *London Daily News*, October 15 1851.

expressed his admiration for the working people of Britain, despite his contempt for the political ideology of the aristocracy. Kane confessed in a private letter that he was ‘impressed by the many signs appearing of the will of Providence that the two countries shall be drawn together and their ancient ties renewed again.’<sup>349</sup> However, the Pennsylvanian qualified his admiration by admitting frankly that the British were a ‘nation of snobs.’ Kane made clear that he ‘despised the whole system of check and balance doctrines’ and believed that Britain’s ‘social influence upon America must in every respect act prejudicially.’<sup>350</sup> Despite their reputation for rabid Anglophobia, ‘Young Americans’ like Robert Walker and Thomas Kane anticipated political and economic union between the US and Britain before the Civil War. Nevertheless, this would only happen as far as Britain embraced American ideals, particularly popular sovereignty and free trade.

Other ‘Young America’ Democrats advocated political and cultural union with the British people, reserving their ire for the monarchical system that had maintained itself for so long. Charles Goepp was one of a surprising number who looked forward to re-unification between the nations, believing the American Revolution would reverse itself in time. In the *New Rome*, he argued that America had only sought independence in order to ‘realize an idea’ ‘higher than could be developed in the mother island – that of a republican democracy.’ Now, ‘the political and social forces’ in America must ‘take the lead’ – ‘England with her colonies must be annexed to the American Union.’<sup>351</sup> Similar ideas had been circulating in the *Democratic Review* for some time. An article in summer 1846 – supposedly at the highpoint of Anglophobia over the Texas and Oregon disputes – framed a liberal trade policy between the two nations as a political union. Using the language of territorial expansion, the writer called for the ‘practical annexation of the manufacturing interests of England to the agricultural interests of the US.’<sup>352</sup>

Whilst ‘Young Americans’ were confident about a potential political union between the United States and Great Britain, they were anxious about the stability of their own democracy, particularly in the face of what they saw as a likely European invasion. Although this combination of

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<sup>349</sup> Thomas L. Kane to William Wood November 15 1851 TLK Papers, BYU.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> C. Goepp, *The New Rome*, 88.

<sup>352</sup> ‘Practical Annexation of England,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 19, (July 1846).

visionary international ambition and domestic uncertainty seems paradoxical, the two perspectives were surprisingly complementary. Firstly, the political vision of 'Young America' was premised on an internationalist outlook. Just as they believed democracy was a cosmopolitan phenomenon, Democrats thought the antagonists of republican government were operating on a global level too. For 'Young Americans', it was necessary for democratic nations to unite so they could combat the 'Holy Alliance' of monarchical powers. Likewise, anxieties about the stability of American government went hand in hand with the idea that democracy was a universal political principle. If democracy could take shape anywhere - contingent only on the 'natural fitness' of the race - then it was also equally vulnerable everywhere. Whigs might explain both American success (and European failure) with the comforting idea that America's traditions and institutions made her uniquely suited to self-government. But 'Young America' Democrats de-emphasized these environmental factors in their radically cosmopolitan vision. Moreover, given their optimistic view of American influence in Europe, they surely expected monarchies to be wavier of the US' successful example.

Like a remarkable number of politicians at this time, Dallas did seriously entertain the idea of a war between America and the great powers of Europe. In 1856 tensions between the US and Great Britain reached boiling point after a British diplomat, John Crampton, was found breaching neutrality law by attempting to recruit soldiers in the United States to fight against the Russians in the Crimean War. With Secretary of State William Marcy about to dismiss Crampton from his post, Dallas predicted a further rise in hostilities between the two powers. In May 1856, he warned that 'we may look out for a series of retaliatory and recriminating acts between the two countries which may lead at no distant day to the final trial of strength.' He concluded 'when we are driven to that, we must throw the scabbard away and tie the hilt to the hand.'<sup>353</sup> Thus whilst Dallas allied himself with liberal democrats in Britain, he did believe the monarchical element was strong enough for her to start a war with her ideological enemy, the United States.

Dallas saw abolitionist literature as one of the primary tools in Britain's arsenal. Behind so-called 'British' philanthropy was ideological opposition to the democratic ideals of the United States.

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<sup>353</sup> G.M. Dallas to Mr J.P.H. May 16 1856, *A Series of Letters from London*, 40.

Dallas argued that the British displayed a ‘profound incapacity to understand the federative structure of our government.’ Fearful of America’s growing influence, its former colonial master ‘keenly set on their Press, their pulpits, their lecturers, their speakers, their novelists, their poets, their historians, to provide an overpowering chorus for the subversion of our institutions.’<sup>354</sup> In his letters, Dallas echoed the historian Dorothy Ross’ idea that the nation was ‘an ethical factor’ in its own right. The Pennsylvania Democrat proclaimed, ‘our Constitutional democracy,’ ‘if sectionalized...is our only means of baffling them.’<sup>355</sup> For Dallas, anti-abolitionism was a moral duty since it preserved the American nation. Even with slavery intact, the Union proved that white men were naturally suited to self-government. By the late 1850s, Dallas increasingly saw Britain’s imperial designs on the United States through the lens of abolitionist plots.<sup>356</sup> Whilst he had always been suspicious of Britain’s cultural and political power, Dallas now believed European imperialists were working through radical movements in the United States, which desired to consolidate power around a centralized authority.

Another diplomat in the Pierce administration, August Belmont wrote to the editor of the *Democratic Review*, George Sanders, about his fear of a European invasion. He argued ‘the day is not so far distant when self-preservation will dictate to the United States the necessity of throwing her moral and physical force into the scale of European republicanism.’ He proposed that ‘reorganizing’ and augmenting the Navy was one way the US could protect herself against ‘the jealousy of European powers.’<sup>357</sup> But Belmont’s fear of European monarchs was not based on a pessimistic reading of the prospects of republican government. Like Dallas, Belmont remained hopeful that the setbacks after 1848 were temporary. He told Sanders, for example, that the Crimean War might offer the distraction necessary for a renewal of democratic agitation. In another letter, he praised Sanders for writing to the President of the Swiss Confederation, criticizing his decision to abridge the rights of asylum in that

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<sup>354</sup> G.M. Dallas to Mr Miles London November 25 1856, *ibid*, 109.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*. For Ross’ discussion of the nation as an ‘ethical factor’ see D. Ross, Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation: Universalism, Nationalism, Exceptionalism, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, (September 2009), 379.

<sup>356</sup> The turn towards conservatism among ‘Young America’ Democrats will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. After the 1848 Revolutions, these ‘progressive’ Democrats increasingly saw the threat to libertarian democracy emanating from below as well as above. By the mid-nineteenth century, abolitionists and socialists presented a threat to self-government as well as despotic monarchical regimes.

<sup>357</sup> A. Belmont to G. Sanders August 1854 Sanders MSS LOC quoted in M. Curti, ‘Young America,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, (October 1926), 54.

country. Belmont told the Democratic editor ‘the republican spirit in Europe is subdued but not crushed and manifestos like yours cannot fail to exercise the most beneficial influence on its dormant powers.’<sup>358</sup> Like Dallas then, Belmont did not see the US as politically isolated from Europe.

Other ‘Young America’ Democrats looked forward to a conflict between Europe and America. Fellow Democrat Samuel S. Cox predicted a war between the US and Europe, with the American scholars ‘armed only with the teaching of “abstract truth.”’<sup>359</sup> Later serving in Congress in 1859, Cox only reneged on this earlier position because he believed Britain would not risk upsetting the balance of power in her absence. She dared not ‘pursue us to a fatal end’ since – with her back to events in Europe - the ‘balance of power’ might be ‘overwhelmed by a popular breath.’<sup>360</sup> In his speech for Kossuth in Southampton, Robert J. Walker also anticipated a military clash with the monarchical powers of Europe. But, unlike Douglas and Dallas’ fear of British influence, the Democratic politician and economist saw the UK as a potential ally in the fight against European despotism. Walker was unequivocal in telling his British audience that the US would assist them when the final trial of strength occurred: ‘should the frantic despot of Europe bring on such a crisis, the American people, however distant they might be from the scene of the sanguinary conflict, however, guarded apparently by the wide Atlantic, yet well they knew, what if despotism should establish itself, throughout the continent of Europe, and England be involved in the contest, they must fight.’<sup>361</sup> ‘The present alliance of the tyrants of Europe’ is not ‘partial or geographical’ but an affront to the ‘rights of man, and the liberties of the world.’<sup>362</sup> As long as democratic principles gained ground in Britain, she would be a vital ally of the United States.

### **‘Young America’ and the ‘Balance of Power’**

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<sup>358</sup> A. Belmont to G. Sanders, Sanders MSS, LOC, no date, referenced in M. Curti, ‘Young America,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, (October 1926), 44

<sup>359</sup> S. S. Cox, *The Scholar, as the True Progressive and Conservative, illustrated in the life of Hugo Grotius and by the law of nations, an address delivered before the Athenian Literary Society of the Ohio university*, (Columbus: Scott and Bascom, 1852), 25.

<sup>360</sup> S.S. Cox, ‘Territorial Expansion,’ House of Representatives, January 18, 1859, 15.

<sup>361</sup> R. J Walker, *Speech at banquet given by the mayor & municipal authorities of Southampton, to Lewis Kossuth, late governor of Hungary*, 1851, 8

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

Behind ‘Young America’s’ desire to influence the international order was not an ambition to merely increase American power on the world stage, but to fundamentally transform international relations. ‘Young America’ Democrats wanted new sources of political authority and new sites of loyalty to replace a global system governed by force. At the heart of their grievances was the concept of the ‘balance of power’ which had presided over European politics since the aftermath of Napoleon’s revolutionary wars. ‘Young America’ Democrats saw two policies as fundamental in the fight against this outdated doctrine – free trade and foreign intervention. As early as 1846, a *Democratic Review* article praised Europe’s gradual turn towards free trade, evidenced by the German Zollverein and the anti-Corn law League. Such a transition suggested that the balance of power was losing its hold on the continent. The article entitled ‘Reflections on the “Balance of Power”’ noted that ‘of late...Europe has been industrious’ the people ‘have produced something to sell and have, as a consequence, something wherewith to buy.’<sup>363</sup> ‘Now,’ the article proclaimed, ‘nations realize that power doesn’t come from taking citizens from their labors and making them fight for the “balance of power.”’ Instead, power is sought by compelling citizens to work for their ‘best advantage.’<sup>364</sup>

Typical of the liberal utopianism that characterized ‘Young America,’ the *Review* anticipated that the theory of trade would harmonize the different powers of Europe within a system calculated for their mutual advantage. To this end, the ‘German states’ were ‘united into a general bond of material, national and moral interests under the customs union.’<sup>365</sup> Political union would, of course, naturally arise from these commercial ties. As free trade extended over the continent, nations would become politically aligned, with Belgium being ‘annexed’ to France.<sup>366</sup> The same article blamed ‘the balance of power’ for restraining the growth of the American Union: ‘it was precisely this application of the “balance of power” and for reasons expressed in almost the same words that M. Guizot made,’ which prevented the annexation of Texas to the United States.’<sup>367</sup> For the *Review*, the liberal political

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<sup>363</sup> ‘Reflections on the “balance of power,”’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 18, (April 1846), 280.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

philosophy that underscored commercial and political union would gradually bring states together on both sides of the Atlantic. Since such a union would be formed on the universal laws of liberal theory, it would harmonize different interests, and do away with the notion of power altogether. Another diplomat in the Pierce administration, Henry Wickoff, wrote an article in the *Democratic Review* in 1846 arguing that the balance of power was beginning to lose its hold on European politics. He too credited ‘the power of the Zollverein’ and the ‘Free Trade Party springing up in France’ for undermining outdated ideas about international relations.<sup>368</sup> Wickoff argued that Guizot’s desire to restore the ‘balance of power’ on the American continent by checking American ambition in Mexico were ‘silly.’ According to Wickoff, ‘the century had far outstripped him’ – ‘we are not likely to see another “Congress of Vienna.”’<sup>369</sup>

Many ‘Young Americans’ believed an undue concern for the ‘balance of power’ was hindering the expansion of the Union in the western hemisphere. Word reached Congress in 1852 that Kamehameha III, king of Hawaii, had told an American diplomat that he wanted a closer alliance with the United States. Expansionists in the Senate twice demanded information from Millard Fillmore, only to have the President deny the requests. California congressman Joseph McCorckle accused the President of refusing to further American influence because he still abided by the outdated doctrine of the ‘balance of power.’ McCorckle argued that those politicians who rejected closer union with the Sandwich Islands, on the grounds it was an ‘entangling alliance,’ had effectively swallowed the European doctrine of the ‘balance of power.’<sup>370</sup> It was therefore up to ‘enlightened minds’ to resist ‘the hatred and terror of free government on both sides of the Atlantic that had followed ‘the failure of Hungary, the overthrow of the French Republic and the suppression of liberty in Italy and the German states.’<sup>371</sup>

Whilst working for its overthrow in Europe, other ‘Young America’ Democrats cautioned that ‘the balance of power’ was beginning to gain adherents in the United States. Victorious in the

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<sup>368</sup> H. Wickoff, ‘Is it the policy of England to fight or trade with the US?’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 18, (June 1846), 423

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

<sup>370</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1083 (1852).

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, 1083.

Mexican War in 1848, Americans had to decide whether slavery would be allowed to expand into the newly annexed territories: California, New Mexico, Utah and Texas. In Congress, many Northerners, including 'conscience' Whigs and Free Soil Democrats, rallied behind the Wilmot Proviso; a proposal that slavery should be outlawed completely in new western lands. Southerners rejected this demand outright, arguing they had a constitutional right to carry their 'property' into the territories. Kentucky Whig Henry Clay introduced a compromise which made California a free state and Texas a slave one, whilst introducing a strict Fugitive Slave Law to placate the South; a measure widely resented in the North because it required Americans to capture and return runaway slaves. In the end, Clay's compromise bill could not bridge the chasm between North and South, and it was voted down. However, Democrat Stephen Douglas managed to pass the proposals by breaking up the bill, and putting each element before Congress as individual resolutions. Still, Southern concerns persisted, particularly over the admission of California as a free state. With more free states within the Union, there would be fewer slaveowners in Congress, willing to fight for the interests of the South.

'Young America' Democrats were furious at the South for obstructing the Compromise of 1850 for fear of California becoming free. Two congressmen from the western states with close ties to Stephen Douglas, Ohio's James Shields and Illinois' William A. Richardson, argued that the slaveowners' fears about congressional representation mirrored Metternich's calls for a 'balance of power' following the Napoleonic Wars. According to these two Democrats, Southerners were wrong to maintain that free and slave states were entitled to perfectly equal representation in the United States' Congress. They argued that the US was governed by universal principles which should dictate the admission of states (in their case, 'popular sovereignty'), not such 'monarchical,' or 'outdated' policies as the balance of power. Keen to preserve the competing factions within the 'Union,' Whigs might entertain such anxieties. But, the 'Young Americans' argued they had no such worries, since they were dedicated to an ever-expanding union based on universal principles.

Both Shields and Richardson made clear that the balance of power was a European conception of international relations with no place on the American continent. In a debate over the admission of California, James Shields told Congress, 'the idea of equilibrium is the dream of a



visionary’ – ‘you cannot balance political power, you cannot weight it in scales.’<sup>372</sup> ‘After the fall of Napoleon,’ ‘the Holy Alliance’ had apparently ‘tried a similar experiment,’ only to see it fail.<sup>373</sup> Shields argued that the South’s efforts to perpetuate slavery were doomed. He predicted that ‘the free states will outnumber the slave states’ at no distant day: the slave states are losing influence ‘every day’ ‘not by the action of government but by the action of irresistible laws - laws that control the moral, social and political condition of man.’<sup>374</sup> In this ‘advanced age,’ he said, ‘we should not be trying to convert anyone from a freeman to a slave.’<sup>375</sup> Like the Republican Party, then, ‘Young Americans’ were committed to the eventual abolition of slavery through the direct application of liberal principles. The only difference was that, for ‘Young Americans,’ the Jacksonian ideal of popular sovereignty was all it took to clear the path for free labor.

In a speech on the admission of California in 1850, fellow Democrat William A. Richardson condemned the South’s desire to preserve the ‘balance of power between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states.’<sup>376</sup> If Americans adopted the European notion of statecraft, he claimed, the ‘days of our’ government are ‘numbered and its fragments must be mingled with the ruins of other republics on the highway of nations.’<sup>377</sup> Richardson argued that Northerners would be unworthy of name ‘freemen’ if they permitted the far less populous Southern states to demand political equilibrium within the Union. A nation premised on the ‘balance of power’ was also inherently unstable, since this was not a principle suited to human nature. For Richardson, sectional tensions between the North and South were a mere sideshow. Much more important were the inexorable laws affecting a gradual transfer of power from the eastern to the western states. To resist such a shift, however, was merely to try to obstruct the course of history with outdated notions of realpolitik. Richardson asked the House ‘if the slaveholding states are to have a balance of power why should not the Atlantic states demand a balance of power also?’ ‘Why should they not be equal to the states west of the Alleghany

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<sup>372</sup> Cong. Globe, 31<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 649 (1850).

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 649.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 649.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 649.

<sup>376</sup> W. A. Richardson, “*The Admission of California*,” delivered in the House of Representatives, April 3 1850, (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1850), 5.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 5.

mountains?’<sup>378</sup> He maintained that the Atlantic states should not resist this process, since it merely followed the logic of historical development. The East had predominated during the revolutionary period, when these states were the purest expression of Jacksonian principles. During the early republic, ‘the Atlantic states planned and won the revolution,’ ‘erecting’ ‘the whole structure’ of the Union.’ But whilst they once had ‘all the political power,’ ‘empire and political power will soon pass from them to return no more.’<sup>379</sup> Outdated notions of the ‘balance of power’ could not prevent the operation of these natural laws. For ‘Young America,’ the gradual transfer of power from east to west was to be embraced not resisted. As we shall see in Chapter Four, such a shift would naturally lead to the abolition of slavery – an institution swept away in the great tide of Democratic progress.

## **International Law**

‘Young America’ Democrats saw the theory of ‘international law’ as one of the alternative means of structuring the relationship between states. Many also thought the principles outlined in this new discipline anticipated the ideas underpinning the American Union. ‘Young America’ figures wanted to see international law more vigorously applied to European affairs, and for America to have more say in the rules that governed international relations. However, they could also be critical of the law of nations, arguing that the early writers on international law had not anticipated how far politics would progress in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor that the Union would offer a more perfect model for relations between different nationalities.

The *Democratic Review* was an early champion of writers on international law, most notably Henry Wheaton, who it praised all the more because he was an American. One article from 1847, entitled ‘International Law,’ argued that Wheaton had been an early advocate of transforming European statecraft for a new age. The writer claimed that ‘Mr Wheaton set forth, with admirable clearness, the general proposition that the foreign policy of European nations has been guided by their

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 5.

monarchs.<sup>380</sup> The picture of monarchical alliance, which the writer drew, impressed on readers the need for democratic nations to bind together to defend the principles they had in common: ‘it is scarcely necessary to remind our readers that this college of sovereigns is animated by an esprit de corps stronger than that which united any other equally large class in the world. Their constant intermarriages connect them by ties of affinity; which constitute them one family scattered over the thrones of Europe.’<sup>381</sup>

A later article entitled ‘Intervention’ from January 1852 traced the evolution of ‘international law’ from the ancient world to the present day.<sup>382</sup> It argued that man’s knowledge of the laws of nature had become progressively more extensive over time. Like the historian George Bancroft, the writer believed every age was becoming more enlightened. Whilst many assume the Greeks and Romans ‘were guided solely by their power,’ he said, it cannot be doubted that certain ‘abstract obligations’ were necessary for different states to co-exist peacefully.<sup>383</sup> It was only after the Reformation, however, that ‘natural law’ became a factor which shaped the international order. Thus, ‘after the introduction of Protestantism, at the beginning of the late 16th century, we find for the first time that princes subjected themselves to certain notions of public ethics, governed by the laws of nature,’ even though ‘the idea of equality of rights was yet to be established.’<sup>384</sup> Indeed, monarchs still formed themselves into a ‘family of princes,’ where the concerns of one were made the concerns of all.<sup>385</sup> Before the 1848 Revolutions, European governments had no respect for the principle of ‘non-intervention.’ European powers only failed to invade the American continent because of the difficulty and expensiveness of the undertaking, not out of respect for a new principle of ‘public law.’

The article finished with a plea for America to send aid to Kossuth’s revolutionary movement in Hungary. It approvingly quoted the Philadelphia Democrat Thomas L. Kane, who had recently drawn on the Swedish theorist of international law, Emer Vattel to justify intervention. According to the *Review*, Kane quoted the following passage of Vattel a meeting in favor of ‘substantial aid to

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<sup>380</sup> ‘Laws of Nations,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol 21, (July 1847), 27.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>382</sup> ‘Intervention’, *United States Democratic Review*, Vol. 30, (January 1852).

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

Kossuth': "tyranny obliges nations to rise in defense of its fundamental laws...for when people, for good reason, take up arms against an oppressor, justice and generosity require that brave men should be enlisted in the defense of their liberties."<sup>386</sup> Although Americans were not permitted to meddle in another states' internal politics, Kane argued they could intervene to protect the rights of one nation against another, provided they were not bound by treaty obligations. He cited Vattel: "foreign nations having no right to interference with the internal regulations of another," but they had "nonetheless a right to offer their mediation."<sup>387</sup>

Outside the pages of O'Sullivan's publication, 'Young Americans' maintained their commitment to popularizing international law. The diplomat Samuel S. Cox gave a lecture before the Athenian Literary Society of Ohio on international law in 1852 entitled *The Scholar, as the True Progressive and Conservative, illustrated in the Life of Hugo Grotius and the Law of Nations*.<sup>388</sup> Here, Cox praised the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius for laying down the universal principles that should form the basis of a just international order. The fact that Grotius' work had been translated into eight different language was apparently 'evidence of the cosmopolitan nature' of his mind.<sup>389</sup> Echoing Bancroft's liberal universalism, Grotius possessed a 'love of right' which knew 'no physical boundary' nor the difference between 'one people and another.'<sup>390</sup> Elsewhere, Cox wrote 'international law permits us to step beyond the pale of national boundary' and to say 'all hail republican sister - welcome within the great family of nations.'<sup>391</sup> Admittedly, there were some qualifications in Cox arguments. For example, he claimed that 'exact science' cannot be applied to political affairs - that 'only omniscient God can lay down the law for all humanity.'<sup>392</sup> However, very quickly he moved onto outlining a view of political progress heavily indebted to a science of politics. Namely, he said 'what science can do to develop the law of human progress has been done in France

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>388</sup> S.S. Cox, *The Scholar, as the True Progressive and Conservative, illustrated in the Life of Hugo Grotius and the Law of Nations*.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid, 18.

by M. Comte, and in England by J.S. Mill.<sup>393</sup> Furthermore, Cox outlined something close to the liberal theory of natural law: that there were universal principles – rooted in human nature itself – that governed political progress. Apparently, ‘the generalizations from history have been connected with the laws of human nature’; ‘the operation of physical and psychological agents upon collective masses of mankind have been noted and systematized.’<sup>394</sup>

Samuel Cox believed mankind was becoming progressively more knowledgeable about the universal rules governing political activity. He told his Ohio audience that ‘law, like the human body, though a system of beauty and proportion, is flexible, and like the human soul, it is plastic in order to be progressive.’ Like many ‘Young Americans,’ he cautioned against being ‘fixed in the past and deferential to forms.’<sup>395</sup> As we shall explore in the congressional debates about intervention, Democrats associated with ‘Young America,’ saw international law as a barometer of the age’s political progress. In one debate, for example, Lewis Cass said ‘the law of nations is not a rigid, inflexible code, but it accommodates itself to the varying political condition of the world – history is filled with proofs of this adaption.’<sup>396</sup> It was therefore vital that his country ‘advance in all the elements of knowledge and prosperity intellectually and materially.’ Cass quoted approvingly the British Prime Minister Lord Canning when he declared “‘we must keep on the line of political knowledge.’”<sup>397</sup>

Despite their optimism about the development of international law in Europe, some ‘Young America’ Democrats still thought European monarchs were imposing their outdated theories on the United States. George Dallas, for example, believed Britain was using international law to undermine America’s global reach. In 1856, European powers, headed by Britain, participated in an international congress that issued the Paris Declaration, designed to abolish privateering. For Dallas, this meeting marked an attempt on the part of European autocrats to curb the growing power of the United States. The motion to abolish privateering would, in particular, hamper American filibustering in the tropics.

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>396</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 140 (1852).

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 140.

Dallas observed that ‘out of the Conference at Paris and especially out of the alliance between France and England, has emerged a more formidable league of sovereign powers against sovereign peoples than has yet been witnessed in modern times.’<sup>398</sup> Similarly, he wrote to the former editor of the *Democratic Review*, John O’Sullivan, that ‘these combined potentes of Europe’ were trying to ‘force their international code upon us.’<sup>399</sup> With the ‘join condemnatory standard of “abolition of slavery and privateering” they may put us on our mettle.’<sup>400</sup> Although he argued that the militant filibustering efforts were counter-productive, Dallas certainly perceived British opposition to the US’ involvement in the tropics as a plot to undermine American power.

### **Opposition to ‘Young America’**

Despite reaching the height of its influence in 1852, ‘Young America’ did not pass without criticism. Opposition – primarily from the Whig Party – came in two forms. Firstly, more ‘progressive’ Whigs like Edward Everett and George William Curtis supported a limited version of ‘Young America’s’ providential mission, arguing that it should be tempered by ‘conservative’ elements. Secondly, there were more conservative Whigs who directly attacked the notion that ‘democracy’ was a natural right, universally suited for governments around the world.

One of these more conservative Whigs was Tennessee Senator John Bell, whose response to ‘Young America’ and the Revolutions of 1848 is incredibly instructive. Fundamentally, Bell argued that the failures of 1848 undermined the ideas about democracy at the heart of the ‘Young America’ movement. First, Bell described a particular group of radical Democrats, active in both Europe and the United States, who had been the most assured of the revolutions’ success. He told the Senate that there was a party ‘widely diffused over the country,’ which had its origins in quixotic European theorists, that ‘denounces’ our institutions ‘as oppressive and unjust to the natural rights of mankind.’<sup>401</sup> ‘We are told,’ Bell said that ‘reform lags too far behind the spirit of the age’ – ‘that too

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<sup>398</sup> George Dallas to Judge Joel Jones, May 9 1856, *A Series of Letters from London*, 33.

<sup>399</sup> G.M. Dallas to J. O’Sullivan, January 12 1857, *A Series of Letters from London*, 129.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>401</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 442 (1852).

much of the old anti-democratic level still lurks and ferments in our constitutional forms and legislation.<sup>402</sup> For Bell, both the American and European variants of this school of thought ‘proceeded from the same error’ – ‘they all proceed upon abstractions.’<sup>403</sup> Bell’s theory of democracy was such an eloquent refutation of ideology at the heart of the ‘Young America’ movement that it is worth quoting in full:

All their theories of society and government – all their ideas of liberty and equality, and the forms they would institute to secure them, are founded upon some preconceived notion of what they conceive ought to be right and proper, without the slightest reference to any practical test...to construct true and practical systems of government, they must first reconstruction of philosophizing. They must reconstruct their own theories and adapt them to human nature as they have seen it developed in the past.<sup>404</sup>

The political theory that Bell singled out was the same one that the *Democratic Review* had defended since its inception: that democracy was a universal system of government, rooted in natural law. According to Bell, this view had become untenable in the wake of 1848. After the failures of the uprisings, it became clear that there were many possible forms of government suited to human nature. It was far from self-evident that men desired popular sovereignty in all circumstances. ‘From the complexion of recent transactions in Europe,’ Bell said, ‘it would unfortunately seem that...public opinion...has rejected popular intervention as an unsafe basis of government.’<sup>405</sup> After the disappointment following the European revolutions, democrats ‘must come to understand that the competency of man for self-government is not a universal truth – but that it is a complex and conditional proposition.’<sup>406</sup> Only then, will they come to understand a ‘true science of government,’ rather than cling on to delusive theories.

Bell did believe there were certain political rights naturally suited to mankind. He acknowledged that there was ‘an equality which is agreeable to nature – a liberty and equality resting on a basis that will stand.’ However, he maintained that ‘all else’ was ‘spurious, delusive and

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 442. The editor of the *North American Review*, Francis Bowen, also argued against the idea that the 1848 Revolutions proved the universal nature of democratic government. See, F. Bowen, ‘The War of Races in Hungary,’ *North American Review*, Vol. 70, (January 1850).

mischievous,' including the direct that direct democracy was the harbinger of liberal values in each and every case.<sup>407</sup> Bell chastised the 'thousand presses in this country' which insist that 'the spirit of Democracy is necessarily progressive.'<sup>408</sup> Whilst undoubtedly all men had a 'passion for civil liberty,' this was only one among many competing desires, to be balanced against the love of novelty, the influence of fashion, the passion for national glory, and the sentiment of loyalty. And, above all these, there was 'another passion' which 'aside from religion' 'many regard as the strongest in the human heart' – 'the spirit of loyalty to a chief,' or 'the servile worship of eminent men.'<sup>409</sup> Proof that such hero-worship was a dominant human characteristic lay, for Bell, in the fact that so many democracies succumb to dictatorship. By echoing one of the most common critiques of 'King Andrew,' Bell was doing nothing less than charging the Democrats with misunderstanding human nature itself. Blind to the plethora of passions that governed people's behavior, Jacksonians were ignorant of the very characteristics which were liable to turn their democracy into something much more sinister. Lastly, Bell took aim at the idea that new political ideas were necessarily superior to the old: 'what is the progress of the age in the science of government?' he asked. The only sound political ideas, Bell argued, were the same ones as 'our revolutionary fathers.'<sup>410</sup>

The Whiggish intellectual, and later abolitionist, George William Curtis expressed his skepticism towards 'Young America' during a speaking tour of Ohio. At the 'Young Man's Lyceum' in 1853, he gave a lecture entitled 'Young America' which was heavily critical of the movement. Mocking its disregard for tradition, Curtis told his audience that 'Young America' 'is secretly convinced that all these works of antiquity are only partial and incomplete affairs, not to be compared with what can be done in our day.'<sup>411</sup> Curtis also pointed out that this personified 'Young America' was not as new as it liked to think: every age had its radical elements. Whilst 'in individuals, youth passes away...in nations this spirit does not die, it renews itself with every generation. It has its social, its political and its moral aspects, but it is found... in all countries – infinite contempt, sublime hope

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, 442.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, 442

<sup>411</sup> 'Mr Curtis' Lecture before the Young Men's Association, "Young America," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 December 1853.



and restless ambition are its characteristics everywhere.’<sup>412</sup> In ancient Greece, the Athenian statesman Alcibiades, who advocated the invasion of Sicily in the early 410s B.C. embodied the spirit of ‘Young America’ – ‘he was a radical who bolted regular nominations when they did not happen to suit him. He was a filibuster on a large scale. Sicily was his Cuba.’ ‘It seems curious,’ Curtis wryly observed, ‘to read the history of Young America, in this Greek version, two thousand years old.’<sup>413</sup>

Some of the papers in Ohio were heavily critical of Curtis’ lecture, and their comments reveal the tensions between ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ conceptions of American nationalism. Although it admitted there was some truth in Curtis’ interpretation, one local newspaper said ‘Young America is not an unmeaning word. It is a term which is fast assuming a national character.’<sup>414</sup> The paper cautioned its readers against too readily accepting the criticisms of ‘Young America’ made by a Bostonian intellectual like George W. Curtis: ‘be not too easily led by the nose,’ it said, by men with ‘an Eastern reputation for learning.’<sup>415</sup> Rather, ‘think for yourselves, judge for yourselves...bring down their teachings to the test of your own experience – make it practical, and if true, adopt it; and if not, reject it.’<sup>416</sup>

More ‘progressive’ Whigs such as Edward Everett were also critical of ‘Young America,’ but qualified their assertions. Although Everett attacked the movement, he nevertheless credited it with good intentions. At a July 4<sup>th</sup> lecture in Boston, entitled *Stability and Progress*, the Whig statesman argued that both ‘conservative’ and ‘Young America’ politicians had valuable insights into the American republic, but that ‘practical wisdom and plain common sense’ were found ‘half-way between the two extremes.’<sup>417</sup> On the one hand, Everett argued, there were a class of men were apparently dubbed ‘conservatives’ by the English, but had recently acquired the name ‘old fogies’ in the United States. They possessed the appropriate respect for family, national traditions and institutions, seeing in ‘constitutions,’ ‘laws’ and ‘maxims’ ‘great, undoubted principles of rights and

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> ‘Mr Curtis’ Lecture before the Young Men’s Association, “Young America,” *Chicago Tribune*, 14 December 1853

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> E. Everett, *Stability and Progress. Remarks made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1853*, (Boston: Eastburn’s Press, 1853), 5.

wrong.’ ‘Then there is the opposite side,’ Everett told his audience – ‘the “men of progress” or as they sometimes call themselves in imitation of similar designations in most countries of Europe, “Young America.”’<sup>418</sup> Rejecting the concern for stability that came naturally to conservatives, ‘Young America’ ‘gets to think that everything, which has existed for a considerable portion of time is an abuse.’<sup>419</sup> Unlike John Bell, whose opposition to ‘Young America’ lay in a fundamental disagreement with their political philosophy, Everett’s main criticism was one of degree, not of kind. He wrote, for example, that ‘Young America’ is ‘a very honest fellow – he means well, but like other honest folks, is sometimes a little too much in a hurry.’<sup>420</sup> In language that echoed the *Democratic Review*, he even admitted ‘the principle of progress in the human mind...in all political institutions – in art literature and science’ must be ‘the governing principle’ ‘in all countries.’<sup>421</sup> Finally, he praised the ‘spirit of the age’ for almost bringing down the monarchs of Europe. ‘The band,’ Everett said, ‘which holds the great powers of Europe together in one political league is strained to its utmost tension.’ Similarly, ‘the Turkish Empire...and the Chinese monarchy alike are crumbling.’<sup>422</sup> Despite his Whig background, Everett even acknowledged the successful expansion of the American Union, and anticipated more to come.<sup>423</sup> For Everett, it was the speed with which ‘Young Americans’ wanted to reform the international order that was reckless in the extreme. However, ‘Young America’s’ radical cosmopolitanism was evidently highly influential in the early 1850s. In this context, Everett expressed his admiration for the goals of the movement, whilst reminding his audience that a conservative disposition was also a prerequisite for progress.

As outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, historian Timothy M. Roberts argues that American exceptionalism became more pronounced after the dashed expectations of 1848.<sup>424</sup> For Roberts, the failures of the European revolutions made Americans disenchanted with the prospects of democracy across the Atlantic. Retreating from the surge of internationalism that broke out

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>424</sup> T.M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*.

immediately after the uprisings, Americans came to see their own country as an exceptional nation. In contrast to rash and impulsive Europeans, oscillating between radicalism and reaction, Americans deemed their nation uniquely suited to democratic rule. However, I would contend that this was very much a Whig vision. Certainly, many Whigs argued that America's traditions and institutions made her more suited to self-government than her European counterparts. But 'Young Americans' continued to view the Union's fate as inextricably linked to events across the Atlantic. Democracy did not depend so much on moral development or national traditions, but the spread of the 'democratic principle' in a world dominated by monarchical power. To concede that the US' history and institutions provided her with a unique advantage in establishing self-government meant admitting that democracy was not a 'natural right' – one that would emerge spontaneously in the absence of political oppression. For 'Young Americans,' British democracy, in particular, remained an imminent prospect. On both sides of the Atlantic, a strong state was the only barrier to liberal government. Whether in the hands of monarchists, abolitionists or socialists, it was concentrated power, rather than the inherent failings of individuals, which stood in the way of universal democracy.

### **Washington's Farewell Address and the debate over American intervention**

Whilst the 'Young America' movement remained influential in the early 1850s, debate raged in Congress between conservatives and 'Young America' Democrats about the efficacy of American intervention in Europe. In 1852, after Russia assisted Austria in the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, Michigan Democrat Lewis Cass and the modernizing Whig William Seward introduced resolutions that condemned Russia's brazen subversion of the principle of national self-determination.<sup>425</sup> Although neither politician believed America had a right to interfere with another country's domestic institutions, both thought it could condemn the interference of one state with the affairs of another. 'Young America' Democrats like Stephen Douglas and his allies in Congress,

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<sup>425</sup> Daniel Howe also identifies 'deliberate modernizers' within the Whig Party, such as William Seward and Horace Greeley. D.W Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 184.

argued the US should not only condemn but actively intervene to police the relations between different European nations, giving rise to the doctrine of ‘intervention for non-intervention.’

Isaac Walker was one such Democrat, who stood up on the Senate floor in December 1852 to call for the US to abandon her policy of neutrality and assume a more assertive role in politics across the Atlantic. Walker noted that Washington cautioned against ‘entangling alliances’ in his Farewell Address, which most Americans had taken as a warning against involvement in European politics. Rejecting this interpretation, Walker argued that Washington’s words were no longer relevant. The country had grown in prosperity and was ready to assume a new role as a more assertive power on the world stage. Apparently, Washington had never intended his words to ‘become an established principle’ to govern the country in its maturity and power.’<sup>426</sup> Although ‘in its infancy’ it could only look to Poland’s failed uprising of 1830 with ‘manifest commiseration,’ now the US was ready to throw her weight behind the democratic cause. The Wisconsin politician declared he was ‘for the cause of liberty and free government against slavery and despotism throughout the globe and this without disguise.’<sup>427</sup> Certainly, it was wrong to meddle in the ‘internal concerns,’ but the US could police the relations ‘between nations’ since it had a responsibility to help uphold international law.<sup>428</sup> Against ‘such interference’ as Russia practiced in Hungary, Walker would have America ‘interpose both her moral and physical power.’<sup>429</sup>

‘Young America’ Democratic Pierre Soulé agreed, making perhaps the most famous case for American intervention in this period. Like Walker, the Louisiana Senator proposed that Washington’s Farewell Address was not applicable to the new circumstances in which the country now found itself. In short, it had not kept pace with the ‘spirit of the age,’ especially now the US had the resources to assume a more assertive role. When Washington spoke in 1793, ‘we were just emerging from a sea of agitation,’ Soulé declared, the ‘treasury’ was ‘exhausted,’ and the ‘fate of democracy was uncertain.’<sup>430</sup> He went further, declaring that no man, however great, had the authority to bind future

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<sup>426</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 105, (1852).

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>430</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 351, (1852).

ages with worn-out precedents: 'it is not in the power of man,' to impart 'immutability to any of his works.'<sup>431</sup> To deny the authority of precedent, Soulé turned to the standards established by contemporary scholars of international law. He cited the nineteenth century German scholar, Heffter's maxim that "the law of nations has neither law giver nor supreme judge...its organ and regulator is public opinion."<sup>432</sup> Typical of 'Young America,' Soulé denied that it was the precedents of great men which should guide to political behavior. Rather, as Heffter wrote, it was a "moral obligation" to respect international law' – a code that originated not in dusty tomes, but the "moral order of the universe"<sup>433</sup> – those laws that bound mankind in "one harmonious whole."<sup>433</sup> Soulé's speech encapsulated the disregard for tradition which John Bell and George W. Curtis had been so keen to satirize.

Even older and more conservative Democrats like Lewis Cass argued that America should issue a condemnation of Russian foreign policy. The US needed to exert their moral influence on international affairs since even scholars of international law were not sufficiently progressive for the present age. 'Why even Vattel, enlightened as he was,' said Cass, 'tells us that "the law of nations is the law of sovereigns. It is principally for them and their ministers that it should be written."<sup>434</sup> It was only the influence of the United States that could push the world beyond this 'degraded doctrine.' Behind Cass' desire to police international politics was a conviction that the prospects for democratic government would be bright, if only states were left to regulate their own affairs. Just like in the debate over Kansas that would erupt in 1854, Cass displayed an unwavering confidence in the ability of individual states to manage their own affairs, as long as they were free from external coercion. As Cass told Congress, 'we believe in the right and capacity of man for self-government' – 'we believe he is everywhere fitted, even now, for taking part in the administration of political affairs.'<sup>435</sup>

Of course, some progressive Whigs joined the 'Young America' Democrats in taking an unequivocal moral stance on European politics, most notably William Seward. Like Walker and

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 351.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 351.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 351.

<sup>434</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 161, (1852).

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 161.

Soulé, Seward believed there was a common morality that should regulate the international order, rooted in the laws of nature. In search of this universal code, he turned to writers on the law of nations. They ‘teach us that states are free, independent and equal moral persons existing for the objects of happiness and usefulness and possessing rights and subject to duties defined by the law of nature, which is a system of politics and morals founded in right reason.’<sup>436</sup> Seward contended that Washington only intended Americans to use his words as a guide, not as a prescription for all future foreign policy. Indeed, Washington said that his address must be analyzed in the light of Americans “‘own experience.’” He cited Washington’s own view that when the country had had time to “‘settle and mature its yet recent institutions’” and to “‘progress without interruption’”; it may control its own “‘fortune.’”<sup>437</sup> John Wells was another interventionist Whig who disavowed his party’s platform on the floor of Congress. Wells declared that it was only a ‘narrow patriotism’ that could ‘reach no further than the limits of its own territory.’ He declared that he felt ashamed of the 3<sup>rd</sup> platform of the convention that the Whigs had drawn up at Baltimore, which recommitted the party to Washington’s Farewell Address, and declared that the nation should remain aloof from all entangling alliances.<sup>438</sup>

In general though, even ‘progressive’ Whigs believed the transition to democracy would be a slow process. James Cooper argued that top-down reform was necessary to prepare the ground for self-government. The Revolutions would soon ‘compel kings to concede to their subjects’ natural rights’ which ‘belong to all men,’ but the monarchs would need to stay in power to prevent ‘excess in their exercise.’<sup>439</sup> This quote also reveals the distinction in Whig political philosophy between ‘natural rights’ to civil liberty and the political right to self-government – a distinction that was often lost in the Democrats’ universalist vision. Others like Whig J.C. Jones from Tennessee used the ‘non-intervention’ debate to distinguish between different forms of national progress. He complained that ‘when arguments fail to satisfy the minds and consciences of Senators we are told that this is an “age of progress.”’<sup>440</sup> Jones was happy, he said, with the ‘wonderful developments,’ being made in the

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<sup>436</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 243, (1852).

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, 247

<sup>438</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 791, (1852).

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 791.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, 795.

‘arts,’ and the ‘social,’ ‘physical’ and ‘political sciences,’ but he did not want to ‘fall into these new schemes’ of intervention. When accused of defending a “‘stand still” policy,’ Jones declared he was happy to stand where Washington and Jefferson had stood.<sup>441</sup> Fellow Whig P. Ewing from Kentucky agreed: -

I love progress; I love the word; for in my conception of its signification I do not abuse the term, and if I was not a Whig I should say that I was a “young American.” But we do not have that signification on that side of the house and I would like to conform to the party I belong to.

Instead, Ewing advocated ‘progress of the right sort...progress which has been for fifty years an American idea.’ Let us not ‘turn back,’ he said, and ‘regenerate’ the ‘effete, worn out institutions of Europe’ he implored, since this was a ‘hopeless task.’<sup>442</sup> Although supporters of social progress, and committed internationalist, more even ‘progressive’ Whigs like Ewing did not want to see the United States abandon the foreign policy of the founding founders. Instead, these Whigs believed democracy would extend around the world, as long as people prioritized their own moral and intellectual development first.

## **Conclusion**

From examining Europe’s role in the political thought of ‘Young America’ from 1848 to 1854, we can begin to understand Democratic attitudes towards the ‘Union’ during the antebellum period. Far from designating a geographic area, the Union came to represent a new model for international relations before the Civil War. Drawn from early work on international law, the Union was an embodiment of liberal philosophy. Whilst nations and states might have peculiar characteristics, the Union embodied the universal principles common to all mankind. It was a new model for the relations between states that would replace the doctrine of the ‘balance of power,’ harmonizing conflicting interests within a set of ‘natural laws,’ applicable across the global order. As

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid, 797

<sup>442</sup> Cong. Globe, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., (1852).

other chapters have demonstrated, 'Young America' was nothing less than a white supremacist movement.<sup>443</sup> But, it is significant that these Democrats chose to draw stark political divisions based on race, not with the bounds of tradition, geography or institutional affinities. In this way, the divisions they drew were based around the same scientific theories about 'human nature' which they used to justify democratic rule.

Too often, historians of nationalism during the 1850s have turned inward, examining this period in terms of 'Northern' and 'Southern' sectionalism. 'Young America's' obsession with European politics exposes the limitations of this interpretation. In fact, the divisions between Whig and Democratic forms of Unionism persisted long into the 1850s, with fundamentally different political theories informing each one. As the argument over Hungarian intervention in 1852 shows, 'Young America' Democrats disagreed with conservative Whigs over the theory of how democracy emerged. Whilst Isaac Walker and William A. Richardson believed white men were 'naturally' suited to democratic rule, John Bell and others argued that history and moral virtue determined the stability of self-government in specific places. As we see in Chapters One and Four, behind this disagreement was a debate over the Declaration of Independence itself – whether self-government was included in the set of 'natural rights' alongside 'life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.'

Furthermore, this chapter reinforces historians like Amy Greenberg who argue that we should extend our study of northern attitudes to 'Manifest Destiny' after the Mexican War (1846-48).<sup>444</sup> Once we look at 'Young America's' international ambitions after this conflict, we begin to see that the US' global reach extended east as well as west. Furthermore, we come to appreciate the extent of American ambitions. As well looking to more territory on the continent, they foresaw war between the United States and the Holy Alliance, as well as the annexation of Great Britain, and even parts of Italy and the Middle East. Furthermore, we see that the Union was not just a nation but a model for the international order; a vehicle for liberal philosophy that would replace the balance of power with the rule of natural law.

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<sup>443</sup> For a discussion of the role of race in the 'Young America' movement see chapters one and four.

<sup>444</sup> A. Greenberg, "Manifest Destiny's Hangover: Congress Confronts Territorial Expansion and Martial Masculinity in the 1850s," 97.



### Chapter Three: 'Young America' and territorial expansion in the antebellum North

Much of the historiography on territorial expansionism in the antebellum United States has focused on Southern ambitions to build a slaveholding empire in the tropics.<sup>445</sup> Both older scholars like John H. Franklin, and more recent historians like Robert E. May, emphasize the attempts by Southerners to annex Cuba and Central America before the Civil War.<sup>446</sup> By incorporating these territories into the Union as slave states, Southerners could increase their influence in the halls of Congress, and strengthen the power of slavery. Most recently, historian Matthew Karp has argued that Southerners not only used federal power to gain greater influence in the Union, but also to shore up the control of slaveholders in the Western hemisphere as a whole.<sup>447</sup> These studies have expanded our knowledge of the South's international ambitions during the 1850s, and have transformed our understanding of the region, from a provincial backwater, out of step with its time, to a 'progressive' juggernaut, whose international scope, and undaunted ambition, was a significant driver of global capitalism in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, a serious consideration of attitudes to territorial expansionism in the antebellum North is absent from the existing scholarship. Robert E. May argues that expansion became 'sectionalized' by 1854.<sup>448</sup> In this reading, the Northern Democrats who continued to support the annexation of Cuba were in thrall to Southern interests. More generally, the literature presents the

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<sup>445</sup> See R.E. May, *Slavery, Race and Conquest in the Tropics: Lincoln, Douglas and the Future of Latin America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); M. Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of US Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>446</sup> J.H. Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1956), 108. Franklin argues 'the saber-rattling of the Ostend Manifesto was not a Union policy, it was a southern policy.' Similarly, May argues 'Although acquisition of Cuba remained an official goal of the national government, by the mid-1850s, the debate over Cuba had become sectionalized.' R.E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 76.

<sup>447</sup> M Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire*.

<sup>448</sup> R.E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 258. Other scholars push the argument that 'Manifest Destiny' became 'sectionalized' further. M. Morrison argues that, even in the early 1850's, most Northerners were 'uninterested' in acquiring new territory, see M.A. Morrison, 'American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848-1852: sectionalism, memory and revolutionary heritage,' *Civil War History*, Vol. 49, (2003) J.H. Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1956), 108. Franklin argues 108. E. Widmer, *The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Widmer argues that 'Young America' had entered into its second phase by the 1850's – a period characterized by territorial expansion, driven by the pro-slavery wing of the Democratic Party. 2

expansionist ideology of ‘Young America’ as a mere fig-leaf for Southern interests.<sup>449</sup> Even those who recognize the powerful appeal of ‘expansionism’ in Northern politics, such as Jay Sexton, primarily frame it as a distraction from sectional concerns.<sup>450</sup> Taken alongside recent books on Northern ‘Doughfaces,’ we are left with the sense that sectionalism obliterated what was left of Jacksonian political culture after the Mexican War.<sup>451</sup> Whilst histories of the South abound, works on Jacksonian thought rarely continue into the 1850s, including histories of expansionism.<sup>452</sup> Some recent historians have noticed this trend, calling for historians to refocus on expansionism in the antebellum North; a region that looks parochial and inward-looking in the context of recent Southern historiography. Amy Greenberg writes ‘the fact that the territorial growth of the United States was more or less complete in 1848...had led most historians to accept what appears to be obvious’ – that the ideology of Manifest Destiny had died away with Mexican Cession.<sup>453</sup> But ‘this view is incorrect,’ she concludes.<sup>454</sup> I will follow both these historians in tracing the ideology of territorial expansionism after 1848 within the free states.

This chapter will seek to recapture the Northern figures who supported expansion Southward, and will explore their ideological justifications, particularly in relation to the perilous issue of slavery. I will focus on the annexation of Texas in 1845, as well as the attempts to annex Cuba that culminated in the Ostend Manifesto of 1854, and continued in more inchoate forms afterwards. I will largely omit the Oregon crisis of 1844, since its role in Northern politics has already been discussed at length by

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<sup>449</sup> The one historian who has begun to take the issue seriously in the political culture of the antebellum North is Amy Greenberg. A. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the antebellum American Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Greenberg’s study, however, is primarily concerned with cultural sources, particularly gender roles. This chapter, on the other hand, looks at political sources, especially the ‘Young America’ periodical the *Democratic Review* as well as congressional debates.

<sup>450</sup> J. Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation-Building in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York City: Hill and Wang, 2011), 131.

<sup>451</sup> Landis, M.T. *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: the Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015)

<sup>452</sup> This point is explored at more length in the introduction, but for Jacksonian political culture see D. Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise, America 1815-1840* (Charles Village: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and for the ideology of territorial expansion see T.R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). Samuel Haynes’ essay on expansionism in Jacksonian political culture does not cover the 1850s. *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, (Texas: A&M University Press, 2008), eds. S. Haynes and C.M. Morris.

<sup>453</sup> A. Greenberg, ‘Manifest Destiny’s Hangover,’ *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, eds. P. Finkelman and D.R. Kenon, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 97.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, 97. Also see J.R. Green and P.M. Kirkwood, ‘Reframing the Antebellum Democratic Mainstream.’ 212.

historians such as Samuel Haynes.<sup>455</sup> Furthermore, I will not consider expansion into British North America during the 1850s, as Amy Greenberg has persuasively argued that no one seriously proposed territorial acquisitions in this region during this period.<sup>456</sup>

I will make two main contentions about the ideology of territorial expansion from the outbreak of the Mexican War until the Civil War in 1861: firstly, that ‘Young America’ Democrats deemed it a liberal and progressive program, as did many of their opponents. In this sense, my argument reinforces recent scholarship by Yonatan Eyal, Tom Chaffin and Sam Haynes, who argue that expansionism was an emancipatory ideology, closely tied to attitudes towards the 1848 Revolutions.<sup>457</sup> But, this chapter will extend their work still further by exploring how ‘Young America’ Democrats thought about the relationship between territorial growth and intellectual culture. Expansionism was an anti-monarchical ideology, committed to the overthrow of European power on the American continent. By liberating the US from European standards, efforts to increase the scope of American territory reflected ambitions to emancipate the nation’s intellectual culture from an anterior age.

What is more, the very idea of an ever-expanding Union only made sense as part of a larger commitment to intellectual inquiry. As Chapter One has explored, the role of the intellectual in Jacksonian political culture was to interpret the ‘natural laws,’ understood universally through human reason. Although the new ‘science’ of phrenology meant they were sharply demarcated by race, it was these ‘natural laws’ that provided Jacksonian nationalism with what was perceived as its ‘universal’ significance. Specifically, ‘Young America’ politicians used social and natural sciences (such as political economy, international law and even biology) to prove that the political relations of the Union were rooted in nature itself. As such, the Union was not dependent on shared legal traditions or

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<sup>455</sup> S. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010). Haynes examines how Anglophobia in American culture influenced the Oregon crisis in the mid-1840s.

<sup>456</sup> A. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>457</sup> Chaffin, T. *Fatal Glory: Narciso Lopez and the First Clandestine War against Cuba*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement*; S. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution*.

institutions, still less on 'enlightened' statesmen. Rather, the distinctly Jacksonian political relations of the Union were identical to those of humanity itself. The destruction of 'artificial' power, concentrated in imperial (as well as the federal) government, was the only barrier to the people exercising their full sovereignty within independent states attached to the American republic. By promoting a democratic consciousness, the Union could expand to an indefinite extent without threatening its stability.

Secondly, 'Young Americans' believed their push for territorial expansion, like other aspects of the 'Young America' program, was compatible with a commitment to the ultimate extinction of slavery. Too often considered a Southern phenomenon, the annexation of Texas and Cuba was often justified on anti-slavery grounds. A surprising number of Democrats argued that annexation would lead to the dissolution of the 'institution' in the border states and also help to end to transatlantic slave trade. Far from providing a 'smokescreen' for Southern imperialism, 'Young America' Democrats launched attacks in Congress against 'conservative' Southerners like John Breckenridge, who had misgivings about territorial growth. Even after the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the idea that support for Cuban annexation was purely 'sectional' will not do. Lurking beneath tensions over slavery, Jacksonian nationalism persisted within both major parties. Recognizing this fact is essential for understanding the complex set of alliances within the antebellum North. Indeed, for many Northerners, slavery was not the only 'irreconcilable conflict' in that decade. In fact, territorial expansion should be seen alongside popular sovereignty, support for 1848 and free trade as part of a larger program of Jacksonian nationalism; a laissez-faire ideology based on resistance to centralized political power in any form. Furthermore, like the wider ideology to which it belonged, the Jacksonian program of territorial expansion continued to attract support in the Northern states throughout the 1850s, shaping the politics of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

### **Territorial expansion and natural law**

Slavery had always been at the heart of Texas' struggle for independence. After becoming part of Mexico following the War of Independence against Spain, Texas had a small population of

around three thousand residents, which made it vulnerable to raids by neighboring Indian tribes, particularly the powerful Comanche people. In the hope of defending their new territory, Mexico liberalized immigration laws to bolster Texas' population, leading to a huge influx of American settlers, mostly made up of slaveowners from the Southern states. Soon these new arrivals outnumbered the Tejanos (native Mexicans), and began to bristle under a distant and inflexible Mexican government. Predominantly Protestant, they resented, for example, demands to adopt the state religion of Catholicism. But it was only after Mexico abolished slavery in 1829 that the settlers truly stood on the brink of revolt. Bound labor provided the foundation for their economy, and abolition by Mexico further convinced the settlers their future was only secure as an independent nation. After winning independence in 1836, an overwhelming majority desired annexation to the United States, eager for the federal government to protect their 'property' against outside interference by their western neighbor, or an anti-slavery power like Britain.

The problem for Texas, however, was that people in the Northern United States recognized that slaveowners were leading the calls for annexation. Despite being a staunch supporter of the nation's independence from Mexico, President Andrew Jackson delayed US recognition of the new Republic of Texas, fearing that anti-slavery Northerners would punish the Democrats in the 1836 Election. After the Democrats proved victorious, President Martin Van Buren continued to reject calls for Texas on the grounds that it would strengthen the power of slaveowners in the federal government. And when expansionist John Tyler assumed the Presidency, after Whig William H. Harrison passed away just weeks into his premiership, Northerners voted down his proposal for annexation in Congress.

As the election of 1844 neared, then, Democrats desirous of Texas annexation needed to galvanize popular opinion in the Northern states behind their expansionist program. Mississippi Democrat Robert J. Walker made the most important contribution to this agenda with his *Letter Relative to the Annexation of Texas* published in the *Washington Globe* on 3 February 1844.<sup>458</sup> Subsidized by a secret 'Texas' fund established in Washington by wealthy Southerners, particularly

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<sup>458</sup> *Letter of Mr Walker, of Mississippi, relative to the annexation of Texas, in reply to the people of Carroll County, Kentucky, to communicate his views on the subject*, January 8 1844, (Washington: Globe Office, 1844).

speculators in Texas landholdings, it is easy to dismiss the document as a cynical ploy by Northern ‘doughfaces.’ Eager to see the extension of slavery, Southern elites clearly did enlist to Walker to convince a Northern populace to bolster the interests of the plantation elite. However, this is not how the letter was seen in the antebellum North, either by its readers or Walker himself. Widely reprinted in papers like the New York *Herald* and Philadelphia *Pennsylvanian*, and distributed in pamphlet form, it caused nothing less than a media sensation. Moreover, as historian William Freehling points out, no one came forward to refute the letter, suggesting Northerners accepted the legitimacy of Walker’s political vision.<sup>459</sup> Furthermore, Walker was not a straightforward ‘doughface,’ or ‘Northern man with Southern sympathies.’ Originally from Philadelphia, his closest political and personal connections were with Northern Democrats like Stephen Douglas, and George Dallas, whose niece Walker married. Like Douglas, Walker broke with Buchanan over the Lecompton Constitution in 1857, and supported the Union during the Civil War.

Far from being Southern propaganda, the popularity and authority of Robert J. Walker’s letter can be best understood as an expression of the sort of ‘Young America’ nationalism long promoted in the pages of the *Democratic Review*: one that drew on the authority of intellectual culture to ‘naturalize’ a set of ‘democratic’ political relations. In particular, Walker drew on recent discoveries in the natural sciences to make the case that Texas annexation would lead to the disappearance of slavery in the Upper South. Drawing on studies of ‘isothermal’ lines, which showed that climates closer to the equator were more habitable for black populations, Walker argued that both slaves and free blacks would gravitate towards the newly annexed territories, leaving free labor communities behind them. In conjunction with this infamous line of reasoning, Walker put forward a larger case for territorial expansion based on geographical science. He argued that Texas ‘naturally’ belonged to the Union, since it was bound into one entity by the same river valley.

Using recent discoveries from the natural sciences about climate and race, Walker was indeed appealing to ‘universal laws,’ discernible through reason and rooted in the transcendent authority of nature. He argued that ‘if the Creator had separated Texas from the Union by Mountain Barriers, the

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<sup>459</sup> Freehling points out that ‘no one called Walker’s (analysis) “untrue.”’ W. W. Freehling *The Road to Disunion, Volume 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 422.

Alps or the Andes, these might be plausible objections.’ But since Texas was a ‘large and indisputable portion of the Valley of the West,’ joined together by the Mississippi River, nothing could justify their separation.<sup>460</sup> Walker claimed that he was merely advocating the ‘re-annexation’ of Texas, since the two states were naturally entwined, prior to the passage of political legislation. ‘Our boundary and limits will always be *incomplete*,’ Walker insisted, ‘without the possession of Texas; and without it the great valley and its mighty streams will remain dismembered and mutilated.’<sup>461</sup> A western nationalist to the core, he claimed the unity of the Valley had been destroyed by eastern federalists: dismembered at a time when ‘the west’ was ‘wholly unrepresented in the Cabinet at Washington.’<sup>462</sup>

Unsurprisingly, O’Sullivan’s *Democratic Review* was enthusiastic about Walker’s argument. For the *Review*, the Texas issue was merely one of ‘physical geography,’ not politics: all the territory to the north of the Gulf of Mexico would one day ‘come together in one homogenous unity of political system.’<sup>463</sup> To deny this was not just bad politics, but a rejection of enlightened thought. The Union imagined by Walker was a ‘simple geographical fact which can only be questioned as it appears to us by one equally blind in mental and physical vision.’<sup>464</sup> Similarly, forces much ‘deeper’ than political questions would solve the controversy over slavery.<sup>465</sup> Neither South nor North should be concerned with the ‘balance of power’ between the states because this was to prioritize power over principle. In the absence of federal intervention, ‘natural laws’ would prevail: ‘free states will be made faster than slave ones, to say nothing of the probable decay of that institution in some of the more northern of the southern states, in proportion to its southward growth over Texas.’<sup>466</sup>

Other ‘Young America’ Democrats also looked to the natural sciences to justify territorial expansion. When Democratic diplomat George Bancroft wrote to President James K. Polk from his diplomatic post in Britain, he was keen to point out that the eminent natural scientist and liberal political thinker, Alexander Von Humboldt, approved of the US’ policy in Mexico. Bancroft wrote

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<sup>460</sup> *Letter of Mr Walker, of Mississippi, relative to the annexation of Texas*, January 8 1844, 8

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>463</sup> ‘The Texas Question,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 14, (April 1844), 425.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 429

that Humboldt ‘gave me leave to say to you how greatly pleased he was’ with America’s ‘position in Mexico.’<sup>467</sup> ‘The amount of territory you demand,’ he deemed ‘legitimately due to us.’ Apparently, Humboldt praised the ‘moderation’ of Polk’s Presidential message on the subject, which won his ‘cordial, unhesitating adhesion.’<sup>468</sup> Although Humboldt did not explicitly refer to his scientific research during this exchange, it seems significant that Bancroft asked the prominent scientist’s opinion on territorial questions, particularly in light of R.J. Walker’s writing on Texas Affairs. With their expert knowledge of the natural world, public intellectuals were perfectly placed to arbitrate questions of national expansion in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America. Bancroft was especially pleased with Humboldt’s response, since he believed Humboldt’s honorary Mexican citizenship made him an impartial spectator in this particular conflict. A year earlier in 1847, he mentioned Humboldt in a similar way when writing to his wife. He reported the scientist saying it was ‘impossible’ and ‘unwise’ to ‘come down and take all Mexico,’ but that all north of the 35<sup>th</sup> latitude we ‘ought certainly to have.’<sup>469</sup>

Democrat Hershel Johnson also drew on the natural sciences to justify territorial expansion, particularly the extermination of Indians in western territories. Although Johnson was a Southern Democrat from Georgia, he had close ties to ‘Young America’s’ strongholds in the Northern and western states. Indeed, in the election of 1860, Johnson ran as Stephen Douglas’ running mate against the Southern wing of the party led by John C. Breckenridge. In a speech before the Phi Delta and Ciceronian Societies of Mercer University in July 1847, Johnson referenced the work of the prominent phrenologist Orson S. Fowler’s to explain how ‘white civilization’ was replacing Indian ‘barbarism’ through the action of natural laws.<sup>470</sup> Johnson quoted Fowler’s maxim that “‘nature has so ordained it that the Indian shall recede before the march of civilization, unless he incorporates himself within it.’” Because “‘a given amount of territory will probably sustain a thousand Anglo-Americans

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<sup>467</sup> George Bancroft to President Polk, London January 28 1848, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1908), 2:29

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:29.

<sup>469</sup> George Bancroft to his Wife, 31 December 1847, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1908), 2:76.

<sup>470</sup> Hershel Johnson, *The Probable Destiny of Our Country, the Requisites to Fulfil that Destiny; and the duty of Georgia in the premises; an address before the Phi Delta and Ciceronian Societies of Mercer University; delivered on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, AD 1847*, (Penfield: Temperance Banner Office, 1847), 7.



by agriculture, to one Indian by the chase,” the latter had no right to bar the growth of ‘civilized’ communities.<sup>471</sup> This was a ‘regulating principle,’ endowed by the Creator, like the ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ forces that controlled the solar system.<sup>472</sup> Later in the speech, Johnson elaborated at greater length on the role intellectual culture played in national growth, including the extension of new territory. He pointed out that ‘political economy’ has made Americans familiar with the ‘source of national wealth,’ whilst ‘international law’ had ‘unfolded the duties of nations.’ Moreover, Johnson claimed that it was ‘the achievements of scientific discovery’ that had triumphed over the ‘obstacles to the unlimited enlargement of our borders,’ presumably referring the feats of engineering that had enabled the growth of railroads and steamships.<sup>473</sup>

As well as natural science, the *Democratic Review*, and its congressional allies, drew on the discipline of international law to justify the expansion of the Union into Mexico. In particular, ‘Young America’ Democrats were keen to single out the 18<sup>th</sup> century Swiss theorist of international law, Emer de Vattel to justify the Union’s more assertive international role. As historian David Armitage notes, ‘Vattel’s crucial innovation was to argue that rebels against a sovereign or “public power” could legitimately be recognized as belligerents.’<sup>474</sup> Crucially, Vattel argued that a rebellion became a civil war when the ‘insurgent party have justice on their side.’<sup>475</sup> This intellectual transformation had huge ramifications for the international community. During a civil war, Vattel argued, states “stood in precisely the same predicament as two nations.”<sup>476</sup> This opened up space for outside intervention. Nations generally acknowledged that it was wrong to interfere in another’s internal affairs - for example, to come to the aid of an internal rebellion. But by re-classifying just rebellions as civil wars, Vattel turned war within nations to one between nations, meaning that international, rather than domestic, law applied. Under the law of nations, foreign states were permitted to intervene to aid one of the two warring parties, as long as ‘justice’ was on their side.

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>474</sup> D. Armitage, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Civil War,’

([https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/armitage/files/cosmopolitanism\\_and\\_civil\\_war.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/armitage/files/cosmopolitanism_and_civil_war.pdf)), accessed 03/02/18, 19.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, 9.

In 1844, the Boston man of letters Alexander Everett published an article in the *Democratic Review* examining the validity of Texan independence under international law. Previously, the Mexican government claimed that Texas' revolution was an illegitimate rebellion, and that she was still technically under Mexico's jurisdiction. Everett admitted that – if this were true - intervention in the internal affairs of Mexico would be unjustifiable. Just like the 1848 Revolutions, most 'Young Americans' denied they were actively involving themselves in the political affairs of other nation states. However, once Texas' status as an 'independent nation' was 'a fact,' then 'this being assumed, we know that we were authorized by the laws of nations to deal with her, in every respect, by word and by deed, as an independent nation.'<sup>477</sup> Everett thought the Union was policing the relations *between* states – a doctrine of 'intervention for non-intervention' which ensured that states could act independently on the international stage.

Democrat and son of the Welsh Utopian, Robert Owen, agreed that the Union had a duty to protect Texas' independence in order to uphold international law. For Owen, the entire international order would be under threat if powerful monarchies were permitted to undermine the sovereignty of nations. According to Vattel, Owen said, "the laws of natural society are of such importance to the safety of all states" because "if the custom once prevailed of trampling them underfoot, no nation could flatter herself with the hope of preserving her national independence."<sup>478</sup> It was this concern for international stability that which meant "all nations...have the right to resort to forcible means for the purpose of repressing any one particular nation who openly violated the laws of the society which nature has established between them." (Vattel, prelim page ixiv.).<sup>479</sup> Owen was a committed socialist working inside the antebellum Democracy. Far from supporting a war of national aggression, he believed Texas annexation was compatible with the natural law, laid down by writers on the law of nations.

Although he supported the cause of 'justice,' 'Young America' Democrats were adamant that Vattel did not allow intervention to prop up the 'balance of power.' When the French statesmen

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<sup>477</sup> "The Texas Question," A letter from Alexander Everett, *Democratic Review* Vol. 15, (September, 1844), 251.

<sup>478</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 112 (1845).

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 112.

Francois Guizot threatened to bolster Mexican forces in the war against the Union to prevent the Union becoming a dominant power, 'Young Americans' were livid. New York Democrat John A. Dix told the Senate that they 'are doubtless aware,' that the "right of intervention" was asserted by Guizot, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1845 in French Chamber of Deputies, to "protect the independent states and the equilibrium of the great political forces in America." Dix countered with a denial that the 'balance of power' derives 'any authority from international law,' and has no 'applicability to the political condition of this continent.'<sup>480</sup> Under the pretense of creating a system of balances' 'artificial in its structure,' he told the Senate, the monarchs of Europe had kept their own people in subjugation.<sup>481</sup> 'From a mere right to combine for self-preservation,' he said, European powers had suppressed revolutionary movements, making 'it in practice a right to divide, dismember and partition states at their pleasure.'<sup>482</sup> Dix set his sights on destroying a theory of international relations that had dominated European politics 'from the Treaty of Westphalia to the Ottoman dispute of 1840,' and replacing it with one ruled by 'moral, if not physical agencies.'<sup>483</sup>

In an article in O'Sullivan's *Review*, Democratic legal scholar David Dudley Field argued that the Union was gradually developing its own theory of international law, which would soon supersede Europe's outdated doctrine of the balance of power. Field highlighted Britain's erroneous attitudes towards the law of nations in the *Democratic Review*. He fumed at a claim made by the *Edinburgh Review* that 'ignorance of international law' was the 'glaring defect of American statesmen.'<sup>484</sup> The Democrat retaliated, pointing out that America had produced some of the finest legal scholars to date, such as Jefferson, Jay and 'the best living writer on international law' Henry Wheaton, whilst Britain could not claim a single one.<sup>485</sup> This disagreement over international law, Field argued, came down to a fundamental difference in the interpretation of the rules of international conduct. 'There is one subject above all others on which there can never be a difference of opinions among Americans,' and

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<sup>480</sup> Cong. Globe, 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 175 (1848).

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> D. D. Field, 'The *Edinburgh and Foreign Quarterly* on Oregon,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 17, (November 1845), 327.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid, 327.

‘that is the introduction into the new world of the European system of intervention.’ According to Field, the ‘balance of power is an idea purely European’ – ‘it has no place in the relation of other states.’<sup>486</sup> Similarly, an article from 1851 on ‘Lopez and his companions’ complained that Britain exercised too much influence over ‘doughy’ Whig statesmen on the question of Cuban annexation. Regrettably, it explained, all information on both European and Latin American revolutions continued to be gleaned from British periodicals. *The Edinburgh and Quarterly* the *London Times* and the *London Morning News* are our instructors on the law of nations, the principles of liberty and the duties of philanthropy.<sup>487</sup> ‘The truth is’ the article concluded, ‘that there is no nation or government so under foreign influence as the US.’<sup>488</sup>

As well as turning towards the natural sciences and international law, ‘Young America’ Democrats also drew on political philosophy, which they sometimes termed ‘political science,’ to make the case for territorial expansion. As historian Daniel Walker Howe has shown, Whigs valorized the common law.<sup>489</sup> For them, precedents provided vital authorities for the advancement of national goals. Although they praised the Declaration of Independence as a statement of abstract principle, several Whigs were hesitant to carry its principles into practice, for fear of undermining national stability. Furthermore, as we see in debates over the Dorr Rebellion outlined in Chapter One, none of them considered democracy a ‘natural right,’ contained in the Declaration, but a system of government premised on the more fundamental rights of ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’

Robert J. Walker had no such qualms in using the Declaration to justify Texas annexation. In June 1844 Walker felt compelled to reply to Henry Clay’s famous ‘Anti-Texas’ letter, published in the *National Intelligencer*, which condemned annexation on the grounds that it would lead to a conflict with Mexico. ‘I regard all wars as calamities to be avoided,’ Clay argued, ‘and honorable peace as the wisest and truest policy of this country. What the United States most need are Union, peace and patience.’<sup>490</sup> For Walker, this amounted to a disavowal of the ‘great truths’ contained within

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid, 330.

<sup>487</sup> ‘Lopez and his Companions,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 29, (October 1851), 296.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>489</sup> D.W Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>490</sup> *Washington National Intelligencer*, April 17 1844.

the Declaration of Independence. The letter denied the 'sovereignty of Texas' and 'denied her right to incorporate herself into the American Union without the consent of Mexico.'<sup>491</sup> 'If this be so,' Walker pointed out, 'then our Declaration of Independence unfurls, the sovereignty of the people is a fiction and their right to resist tyranny and establish an independent government.' The people of Texas were in 1836 merely following 'the example of their fathers and our fathers...the people are unanimous in supporting their constitution' and 'yet Mr Clay denies they are a government.'<sup>492</sup> For Walker, there were no qualifications about whether communities were suited to self-government. Rather, the popular principle meant that 'whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute new government laying its foundation on such principles.' Walker's letter makes it clear that the natural laws contained in the Declaration of Independence included the right to popular sovereignty, and could justify revolution. Accusing Henry Clay of denying the Declaration represented a new form of nationalism typical of 'Young America.' For these cosmopolitan Democrats, national loyalty involved a particular interpretation of the natural law tradition, not bound to a particular people or place.

Despite its reputation for providing a smokescreen for American expansion, the *Democratic Review* was adamant that Texas annexation was consistent with liberal political philosophy. An article in October 1845 said that 'democracies must make their conquests by moral agencies. If these are not sufficient, the conquest is robbery.'<sup>493</sup> The American people were 'missionaries of our political science to every quarter of the globe.'<sup>494</sup> Democrats in Congress were similarly impatient with the Whigs' conservative position on Mexico, advocating a new form of political thought, suitable to the current age. Robert Dale Owen asked if it will 'be the spirit of "Young America"' to let the Texans perish at the hands of Mexico, whilst we 'turn over here the leaves of musty volumes.' He deemed Mexico's unwillingness to acknowledge Texan independence an 'outrage upon the law of nature and of nations.'<sup>495</sup> At the same time, Owen hinted that new law would need to be written to justify

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<sup>491</sup> Robert J Walker, June 29 1844, R.J. Walker Letter Book 1883-1848, Robert J. Walker Papers, University of Pittsburgh, 47.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>493</sup> 'Territorial Aggrandizement,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 17, (October 1845), 246.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>495</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 112 (1845).

American annexation, since, ‘there never was in the history of the world before, so far as my reading extends, an offer made by one of the independent nations of the earth to merge sovereignty in that of another.’<sup>496</sup>

As well as drawing on liberal thinkers to justify annexation, many ‘Young America’ Democrats made an anti-slavery case for territorial expansion, which does not always receive sufficient attention in the historiography. Keen to project sectional tensions back onto the antebellum period, most historians merely pay lip-service to anti-slavery Northerners who supported the war. They largely subscribe to the Republicans’ retrospective view of the conflict – that it was a Southern plot to extend slavery which ratcheted up sectional tensions. The likes of Robert E. May do nod at Walker’s ‘safety-valve’ theory, but do not explain how it worked in detail, or why it appealed to a Northern audience.<sup>497</sup> Little effort is made to take anti-slavery expansionism seriously, as a coherent element of Jacksonian ideology, lasting into the 1850s.

Typical of Jacksonians in the Northern states, Alexander Everett blamed Britain for introducing slavery to America in the first place. It was, he said, ‘forced’ upon the South’ by ‘New and Old England.’<sup>498</sup> As such, the Bostonian claimed slavery was naturally incompatible with the Democratic culture and institutions of the United States. Emancipation would ultimately succeed by pursuing a Jacksonian program of expansion and state-sovereignty. On the other hand, by embracing federal interference, the abolitionists only replicated the British policies originally at fault, creating consequences more pernicious than the problems they tried to remedy. In his *Democratic Review* article of 1845, Everett made the case that ‘the practical result’ of Texas annexation ‘will be rather adverse than favorable to the extension of slavery’ because slaves cannot be in ‘two places at the same time.’<sup>499</sup> Thus, blacks will not remain ‘on the banks of the Ohio,’ or near the Atlantic coast, but ‘drain’ away into new territories. This mirrored R.J. Walker’s argument that the states of the Upper South would see a decline in their slave populations as blacks ‘naturally’ gravitated towards more hospitable climes, closer to the equator.

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>497</sup> R. E. May, *Slavery, Race and Conquest in the Tropics*.

<sup>498</sup> ‘The Texas Question, A letter from Alexander Everett,’ Vol. 15, (September 1844), *Democratic Review*, 258.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid, 258.

Echoing arguments for Cuban annexation, Everett also wrote that ‘laws against the foreign slavery trade will be more effectively enforced’ with American control over Texas. Indeed, a large factor driving Texan independence was the desire of gringo planters to retain control over their chattel after Mexico effectively abolished slavery in its constitution of 1824. Dominated by a planter class, Everett evidently believed an independent Texas would be free to increase the importation of slaves. Whilst it might sanction slavery, for Everett, the US government would at least control the institution and put a stop to international traffic. He was adamant that slavery in the US was on the path to extinction already, and that the system in America was less widespread and cruel than in other countries, like Russia where ‘out of 60 million inhabitants, 40 to 50 million are enslaved.’<sup>500</sup>

To emphasize the anti-slavery case for expansion, Alexander Everett blamed Southern congressmen for retarding the territorial growth of the United States. He singled out South Carolina Senator Waddy Thompson who opposed annexation precisely because it would weaken slavery in the Southern states. “‘Our slaves will be carried to Texas by a law as great and certain as that by which water finds its level’” Everett reports Thompson as saying. “‘North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and Maryland’” will all apparently see their slaves disappear if the acquisition took place.<sup>501</sup> In Congress, several Northern Democrats agreed with the younger Everett brother. New York’s Chesselden Ellis proclaimed that ‘the rejection of Texas’ will more likely ‘perpetuate slavery’ than annexation. ‘Confine the negro population within the limits of the present slave states,’ he said, ‘and you inevitably fix it upon them forever, or in time convert them into a continental Haiti.’ Ellis appealed to the ‘unobstructed laws of progress’ which made ‘the acquisition of Texas more important and desirable.’<sup>502</sup> Like other ‘Young America’ Democrats, he believed that the destruction of centralized power would naturally bring about social progress, including the end of slavery. It was by this process that ‘Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri will all join’ their ‘sister states in emancipation within a single generation’ whilst ‘Tennessee and North Carolina will soon follow.’ This was merely a ‘change which

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid, 269

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, 269

<sup>502</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 141 (1845).

depends on natural laws, where obstructions to progress are removed.’ Ellis denied that it was ‘visionary’ to claim that ‘as soil becomes impoverished, labor must emigrate.’<sup>503</sup>

No friend of slavery himself, Robert D. Owen agreed that ‘slavery is not the true difficulty’ when it came to Texas annexation. ‘In reply to the arguments of the abolitionists,’ he said, ‘we are not at the bottom of the question.’ Rather, it is ‘any extension,’ not just ‘extension to the south west that our opponents deprecate.’ ‘The institutions’ which ‘recognize the equal rights of (the slave’s) color,’ were to be found in Mexico and further south. ‘Shut (slaves) out,’ Owen argued, and ‘are you not, by that very act, virtually prolonging (their) bondage?’ ‘Slavery, like monarchy, is a temporary evil’ – ‘it will disappear as all temporary evils disappear.’<sup>504</sup> Indeed, Owen’s view echoed President’s James Polk, who said he ‘believed the acquisition of Texas will be the means of limiting, not enlarging, the dominion of slavery.’ It will be a means of ‘gradually drawing the slaves far to the south, to a climate more congenial to their nature.’ In Mexico, the slaves will ‘mingle with a race where no prejudice exists against their color.’<sup>505</sup>

## **Cuban Annexation**

Like Texas annexation, Democrats drew on intellectual culture to justify the acquisition of Cuba. Similarly, some presented an anti-slavery case for expansion that has frequently been overlooked. As such, territorial growth appealed to the Jacksonian wing of the Free Soil movement, in the same way as popular sovereignty, which I discuss in Chapter Four.

California Congressman, Edward C. Marshall was just one ‘Young America’ Democrat to ground the physical extension of the Union into the tropics in its intellectual development. Although he has been omitted from subsequent histories of ‘Young America,’ Marshall was integral to the movement, particularly at its peak as a political organization in the early 1850s. With close ties to George Sanders and the *Democratic Review*, Marshall was entwined in ‘Young America’s’ political

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>504</sup> Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 111 (1845).

<sup>505</sup> President Polk quoted in Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1054 (1858).



network.<sup>506</sup> A close ally of Sanders and the *Review*, Marshall linked ‘Young America’s’ expansionist agenda to its efforts to develop intellectual culture during the early 1850s. The Californian complained that the same people who opposed territorial growth also tried to thwart progress in political theory, literature and science: ‘every reform, every advance the nation has made, has been opposed by the same conservatism, which would now paralyze the national energy.’<sup>507</sup> Conservatives had opposed the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and Texas in 1846, as well as ‘another sort of progress’ to ‘physical advancement’ that has ‘enlarged and liberated the American mind.’<sup>508</sup> Apparently, the abolition of debtor prisons and property qualifications widespread in the early republic were evidence of the ‘progress...of the kind that Young America contends for.’ Like territorial expansion, this intellectual advancement was inevitable since it was rooted in natural laws: ‘you can’t put down what is natural and ought to exist; and whatever abuses ought to be overthrown will be overthrown.’<sup>509</sup> Like territorial expansion, the abolition of property qualifications and debtor prisons were contingent only on intellectual awakening. ‘Once men begin to think upon subjects like this, you might as well attempt to control the human conscience.’<sup>510</sup> By rooting these policies in intellectual culture, Democrats made them more than just partisan considerations. Derived from natural law, they were applicable to humanity itself, and could justify the forceful acquisition of new territory.

In specific pronouncements on Cuban annexation, Marshall also linked the acquisition of the island to the intellectual advancement of the Union. In a speech on the acquisition of Cuba in January 1853, Marshall attacked Abraham Venable from North Carolina for indulging in a ‘general reprobation of the doctrines of progress’ and the ‘assertion of general principles.’<sup>511</sup> Although he criticized Venable for not ‘confining himself’ to ‘the administration’s policy on that specific island,’ Marshall evidently felt the need to address the philosophical differences between the two politicians head on. He told the House that he would explain his position ‘on behalf of young America and the

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<sup>506</sup> For the relationship between Sanders and Marshall see Introduction, 12.

<sup>507</sup> ‘*American Progress, - Judge Douglas – the Presidency,*’ *Speech of Mr Marshall of California in the House of Representatives, March 11, 1852,* (Washington D.C. 1852), 4

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>511</sup> *Speech of Mr E.C. Marshall of California on the conduct of the administration in Cuba delivered in the House of Representatives, January 6 1853,* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1853), 2.

progressives with whose opinions I sympathize.’ Rebutting the idea that the Union ‘could not with safety embrace any additional territory,’ he said that expansion of this kind only strengthened republican governments.<sup>512</sup> If incorporating Cuba did, however, dismember the Union then it would still teach the world a valuable lesson. ‘The experiment is worth trying,’ Marshall argued, ‘and that good would result even from the temporary union.’ Even in failure, ‘we would have introduced new ideas’ – ‘we would have taught lesson of self-government...of the equality of men in the eye of the law, of the dignity of the individual, without which teachings, man had better not be.’<sup>513</sup> According to Marshall, ‘whether we continued to exist as one union or broke into fifty free republics, the world would be improved by the diffusion of knowledge, which alone makes life tolerable.’<sup>514</sup>

Although more confident the Union would endure, ‘Young America’ Democrat Samuel Cox shared Marshall’s conviction that the nation’s growth was rooted in liberal philosophy. For Cox, the expansion of the Union reflected the laws of historical development that were driving democratic revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Far from being rooted in conquest, the Union grew to keep pace with democratic movements in Europe and Latin America. Even at the height of the sectional crisis, Cox was convinced that the Union would continue to gain power and influence. He told Congress in 1859 ‘within two centuries the transatlantic continent has changed its territory and rulers beyond all the caprices of fancy; yet by a law as fixed as that which returns the seasons or rolls the stars.’<sup>515</sup> With an eye on developments in Europe, he said ‘the disquieting aspect of cisatlantic politics signifies the consummation of territorial changes on this continent, long predicted, long delayed, but as certain as the logic of history.’<sup>516</sup> Just as the *Democratic Review* justified the Union according to the ‘natural laws’ of social and biological science, Cox argued ‘the law which commands this is higher than congressional enactment. If we do not work with it will work in spite of us.’<sup>517</sup> Similarly, the *Review* wrote in 1859 ‘the geographical, commercial, moral and political relations formed by nature’ between ‘that island and this country’ were ‘gathering in the progress of time.’ ‘Cuba’ had

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>515</sup> S. S. Cox, *Territorial Expansion*, 3.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>517</sup> Ibid, 2.

formed an ‘unnatural connexion with Spain’ and would ‘gravitate towards the North American Union’ by the ‘law of nature.’<sup>518</sup>

Drawing on the liberal tradition of ‘natural law,’ Cox advocated the annexation of the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua, as well as Cuba. First, he wanted to see the United States change its policy towards Mexico in order to ‘stabilize’ the liberal factions that were struggling for survival against centralizing, conservative forces during the Reform War - a civil conflict that raged from 1857 to 1860. Opening up free trade would improve the Liberals’ chances, by facilitating the *natural laws* of political development.<sup>519</sup> Like in Cuban affairs, there was also a case for direct intervention, given the crimes Mexico had committed against American citizens. Such acts of aggression demonstrated that Catholic monarchists presented an existential threat to the American republic. Among the ‘wrongs’ Mexico had wrought, were the surveillance of the post office, particularly the refusal to deliver consular correspondence unless it was first inspected by government authorities.

A close ally of Stephen Douglas from California, George E. Pugh, also argued that the Union’s expansionist policy was driven by a generation of younger, more liberal Americans. As late as 1859, he declared that those congressmen opposed to the expansion of the Union were ‘in antagonism to the generation which with pulses warmer and quicker inspire us, with genius more exalted than we can boast, with zeal too heroic for our comprehension, now presses forward to the places we fill today and soon must drive us from the scenes of action.’<sup>520</sup> He called for his fellow senators ‘to adapt...our general policy...to the necessities of our children.’ Like George Bancroft before the annexation of Texas, Pugh drew on the works of Alexander Von Humboldt to justify the acquisition of Cuba. Drawing on this ‘most truthful of travelers,’ Pugh argued that the geographical location of the island made its annexation a political necessity - a measure all patriotic Americans should aspire to. Quoting Humboldt, he said “‘where a multitude of highways thronging with the

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<sup>518</sup> ‘Continental policy of the United States - the acquisition of Cuba’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 43 (April 1859), 24.

<sup>519</sup> S. S. Cox, *Territorial Expansion*, 13.

<sup>520</sup> *Speech of Hon. G. E. Pugh of Ohio on the Acquisition of Cuba delivered in the Senate of the United States, February 10 1859*, (Washington: L. Towers, 1859), 1.

commerce of the world cross each other lies the beautiful port of Havana – strongly defended by nature and still more strongly defended by art.”<sup>521</sup> This geographical fact created a political reality: that “fleets sailing from this port may...menace the opposite coasts.”<sup>522</sup> Like other ‘Young Americans,’ Pugh was convinced that the geography of the United States – the nation’s ‘natural relations’ - should determine national policy: a fact he thought was recognized by a younger generation of American statesmen.<sup>523</sup>

As well as drawing on natural science, Pugh’s case for Cuban annexation was steeped in the liberal universalism of the *Democratic Review*. He was particularly critical of the view that Creoles were not yet fit for independence; a theory that not only ignored the history of the country but denied the Spanish ‘all the characteristics of manhood.’<sup>524</sup> Drawing on the innate qualities of ‘man,’ Pugh conflated the notion of political and natural rights. Rather than assessing the Creoles’ political development, or examining their cultural traditions, Pugh deemed them fit for self-government based on their ‘manhood’ alone. With this rhetorical move, the political relations of the Union became ‘natural laws.’ Pugh’s vision totally rejected historical markers of national identity, in favor of gender and race. The nation was no longer a territorially or culturally specific entity, but an embodiment of universalist political theory. ‘Neither in Cuba nor anywhere else on this or the other side of the Atlantic can there be found an individual of the Caucasian race, who does not aspire, in his heart of hearts, to...participation in the government in which he lives.’<sup>525</sup> Indeed, Pugh downplayed innate national characteristics in order to justify the expansion of the Union. Although the Creoles did share Spanish blood, this ‘did not prove sufficient’ to maintain Mexico, Central or South America’s relationship with their former imperial ruler. Hence, it was no argument to prevent Cuba from coming into the Union. ‘There is no more diversity of race,’ he said, ‘between US and Cuba then all the states in Union have with each other.’<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, 15.

As many Democrats had previously said of Texas, Pugh argued that calls to leave the island to its current rulers aped the European doctrine of the balance of power. The internationalist Whig William Seward, for example, argued that America should be wary of interference since “today, England and France are not only allies but they are united in the policy of maintaining Spain in the enjoyment of the island of Cuba and Porto Rico.”<sup>527</sup> Outraged, Pugh stated that the nation was not ‘so corrupted by wealth – so effete’ as to ‘extend to this continent...the European system of the dictation of sovereigns to each other.’ Instead, Pugh warned that both European power, as well as the political theory of the Old World, had been ‘gathering, silently and surely, ever since the flag of our republic was carried in triumph to the capital of Mexico.’<sup>527</sup> Since the US fulfilled a ‘destiny so natural and appropriate’ in California, Britain had been trying to engineer her downfall. Now, in alliance with France in the Crimean War, she wished to carry that ‘Holy Alliance’ into the western hemisphere.<sup>528</sup> Other ‘Young America’ congressmen saw the annexation of Cuba as a means of transforming the international order. Despite his stance against slavery, Democrat Thomas L. Kane echoed Pugh’s gendered language when he imagined expansion into the tropics. During a visit to the West Indies in 1853, Kane said he saw that ‘fair land’ as an ‘American annexationist,’ and gazed upon it ‘as a man looks upon a woman for the first time when he knows he is going to obtain her.’<sup>529</sup> As Kane’s biographer, Matthew Grow points out, ‘the following year, he supported a war to obtain Cuba from Spain, a cause normally associated with southerners looking to expand slavery’s empire.’<sup>530</sup>

Steeped in the liberal theory of ‘natural law,’ many ‘Young Americans’ also saw Cuba’s struggle for independence against Spain in the context of the 1848 Revolutions in Europe. Exiled in the United States, European liberals gravitated towards the ‘Young America’ wing of the Democratic Party. Despite assisting Southern slaveholders, it is important to recover the radicalism of the Democrats’ message, particularly prior to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Douglas and the *Democratic Review*, in particular, attracted many former revolutionaries, confident that the territorial

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>529</sup> Thomas L. Kane referenced in M. Grow, *Liberty to the Downtrodden*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 105.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid, 105.

ambitions of 'Young America' had emancipatory ends. Irishman Thomas D. Reilly, for example, wrote a series of articles in the *Democratic Review* in support of Franklin Pierce's campaign for the presidency, after he settled in the United States, following the failed Irish uprisings at Tipperary.

The *Review* recruited Thomas D. Reilly precisely because he supported its progressive agenda, which championed America's power and intellectual influence whilst blurring the boundary between the two. As his biographer and fellow Irish nationalist Jon Savage wrote, Reilly was one of the 'new generation' of writers, 'not trammled with the ideas of an anterior era – men who would bring not only young blood but young ideas to the councils of the Republic.'<sup>531</sup> Similarly, recommending Reilly for a political appointment in the 1850s, Congressman Stephen Douglas described him to President Pierce as 'one of the ablest political writers of the age' and who had 'devoted his life to the cause of liberal principles and progressive ideas.'<sup>532</sup> Douglas even alluded to Reilly's support for Young America's 'cosmopolitan' outlook, saying 'his appointment would be esteemed a compliment to a large class of our people who sympathize with the efforts of free institutions throughout the world.'<sup>533</sup>

In an article entitled '1852 and the Presidency,' which endorsed Franklin Pierce for President, Reilly advanced a common Northern justification for the annexation of Cuba.<sup>534</sup> Conveniently glossing over slavery, he emphasised the need to vote for a party capable of overthrowing the European powers residing on the American continent. First and foremost, he considered Spanish Cuba a danger to American citizens, both in the Caribbean and in the US itself. Spain's presence on the American continent threatened US citizens just as monarchical powers oppressed the people of Europe. Among many grievances, Reilly listed 'the firing with impunity into our ships of peace by both Spanish and British ships of war, the surrender of Central America to British local authorities, the unpunished slaughter of 50 of our citizens without trial in Cuba' and 'the base subterfuges of our

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<sup>531</sup> J. Savage, *Our Living Representative Men: From Official and Original Sources*, (Philadelphia: Charles and Peterson, 1860), 69.

<sup>532</sup> 'To Franklin Pierce,' March 1853, *The Letters of Stephen Douglas*, ed. R. W. Johannsen, (University of Illinois Press, 1961), 260.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> T.D. Reilly, 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency,' *Democratic Review*, Vol. 30, (January 1852).

administration justifying these Spanish atrocities knowing them to be subterfuges.<sup>535</sup> Within the United States itself, Reilly argued that the Whigs shared an ideological affinity with the Spanish, which shaped their lacklustre foreign policy. With Fillmore's Whig administration in power, the American people were effectively under a foreign yoke. According to Reilly, Fillmore's truckling diplomacy was '*protecting* a despotic queen in Cuba' just as France protected the Pope in Rome' (my italics).<sup>536</sup> Secretary of State Daniel Webster had sided with the Spanish against Narciso Lopez's filibustering expedition of 1851, mischaracterising the creole uprising as a 'rebellion' and its abettors pirates.<sup>537</sup> Just as factionalism in France facilitated Louis Napoleon's coup, Reilly thought the divisions in the Democratic Party in 1848 had 'enabled an imperialist faction to steal the presidency' in the form of the Whig Party.<sup>538</sup>

For Reilly, the Whigs' betrayal of the Jacksonian project amounted to a counter-revolution comparable with the failures of 1848. The setbacks Europe endured between 1848-1852, had their American parallel in the form of four years of Whig rule. The rise to power of Millard Fillmore thus 'united the fate of Europe's conquered nations with that of hitherto triumphant democracies,' like the United States.<sup>539</sup> The United States, like France, had been 'duped by a name merely victorious on the battlefield' – in the case of France, Louis Napoleon and in America the war hero, Zachary Taylor.<sup>540</sup> Consequently, the Americans had 'yielded contemporaneously with the French people the power of American government into a party coloured faction.'<sup>541</sup> Reilly claimed that democratic movements in both countries were similarly divided: if Cass' name was swapped for Cavaignac and Ledru Rollin for Van Buren, the fate of the two countries had, apparently, been practically identical.<sup>542</sup> For Reilly, the Whig Party's acceptance of a European presence in Cuba showed the party's loyalty to despotic powers.

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>539</sup> T.D. Reilly, 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency,' 2.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, 3.

Just as he backed democratic movements in Europe, Reilly supported the creoles in their struggle for independence against Spanish rule.<sup>543</sup> Although belying a paternalistic attitude, Reilly's frequent calls for Cuba to be 'Americanised' suggest he thought the Spanish were capable of living within the Union.<sup>544</sup> He also compared the plight of Cuba to India under British control, bemoaning the fact that India has 'not yet seen the glory of our flag.' Even before the Indian Mutiny of 1857, Reilly cited the American conflicts of '76' and '1812' as the 'legitimate predecessors' to resistance to British imperialism.<sup>545</sup> Keen to replicate the Union in South Asia, he urged 'sympathy with the Indian people for the overthrow of both English monopoly and Russian arms and for the establishment from Cape Corocin to the Himalayas a system of free trade and free government in amity and commerce in natural justice.'<sup>546</sup> Although we shall see that he upheld white supremacy over black slaves, Thomas D. Reilly believed Cuba could be incorporated within the Union, and wanted to see an end to British imperialism in India too. His support for territorial expansion, therefore, was fully compatible with 'Young America's' emancipatory message, and belief that democracy was enshrined in 'natural law.'

The Boston Democrat Maturin M. Ballou, who edited the prominent Jacksonian newspaper, the *Bay State Democrat* during the 1840s, joined Reilly in championing the creoles' cause. Ballou published *A History of Cuba, or Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics*, which the *Star of the North* favourably reviewed in 1856.<sup>547</sup> After a long account detailing the history and climate of the island, Ballou's volume forcefully advocated creole revolution and the annexation of Cuba as a US state. However, he paused for a second to consider whether this would benefit the Cubans themselves. Although the iniquities of colonial rule were 'forced upon the mind of the citizen of the United States in Cuba,' Ballou wondered whether these 'reflections' 'occur in the minds of the creoles?'<sup>548</sup> He noted

We are told they are willing slaves. Spain tells us so and she extols to the world with complacent mendacity the loyalty of her siempre fielissima isla de Cuba. But why does she

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>547</sup> *The Star of the North*, May 28 1856.

<sup>548</sup> M.M. Ballou, *History of Cuba, or Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company), 197.



have a soldier under arms for every four white adults? We were about to say white male citizens but there are no citizens in Cuba.<sup>549</sup>

The racial categorisation of the Creoles was, of course, significant. By stressing their whiteness, Ballou insinuated that Cubans were entitled to self-government. He chose to emphasise both their age and race because these were signs of distinction in Jacksonian culture – qualities which justified inclusion within the political community. The image of these ‘adults’ – naturally suited to democratic government – being shackled under the yoke of military rule was carefully designed to produce outrage. By accidentally calling them ‘white male citizens’ Ballou evoked the Creoles natural political condition, before contrasting it with the sad state of an island, where ‘there are no citizens.’

Although Ballou believed the Union had a providential role to play in the spread of democracy, he also came close to repudiating American exceptionalism in *A History of Cuba*. ‘Who can say,’ he asked, ‘what would have been the result of our own struggle for independence if Great Britain, at the outset, had been as well prepared for resistance as Spain has always been in Cuba?’<sup>550</sup> The message was clear: Cuba could have achieved the same illustrious fate as the United States, had her imperial oppressor been as easy to topple as Great Britain. For Ballou, there was nothing unique about the Union, either as a people or a place, which made her any more suited to democracy than her tropical neighbours. When free from Spanish tyranny, Cuban exiles in New York proved themselves ‘apostles of republicanism,’ and – laudably - ‘propagandists of treason and rebellion to the Spanish.’<sup>551</sup>

Similarly, several Democratic newspapers saw creole resistance as a continuation of the recent European uprisings of 1848. *The Democratic Sentinel and Harrison County Farmer*, based in Ohio, proclaimed ‘Americans will sympathize for the victims of oppression everywhere, whether in Hungary or Cuba, whether at home or abroad, and when we talk of enforcing our neutrality laws, or any other laws to prevent material aid to the oppressed, it would be as well to remember that we are but attempting to prevent action which arises from the noblest sympathies of the human heart.’<sup>552</sup> As

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>552</sup> *The Democratic Sentinel and Harrison County Farmer*, December 1 1852.

late as 1855, the *Indiana State Sentinel* declared that ‘Cuba has long been struggling for freedom but, like Poland and Hungary, she has been unfortunate.’<sup>553</sup> Similarly, the paper declared later that month – ‘English and French vessels insultingly flaunt their colors in sight of the coast of Florida; and they are there as Nicholas was in Hungary, to crush by the strong hand all revolutionary movements.’<sup>554</sup>

For others, the link between Cuba and 1848 was even more explicit. Democrats had long predicted that monarchical intervention in the Western hemisphere would inspire a second wave of democratic revolutions in Europe. Before the Mexican War, Massachusetts’ Caleb Cushing wrote in the *Democratic Review* that British ‘interference’ in the conflict would be the signal of a general war, ‘calamitous to us’ but ‘more so to them’ ‘it would be a ‘war of opinion’ which Canning predicted long ago ‘shaking to their foundations the unseatable thrones of Europe.’<sup>555</sup> Likewise, Philadelphia Democrat John A. Dix said ‘any attempt by a European power to interpose in the affairs of Mexico either to establish a monarchy or to maintain, in the language of Guizot, “the equilibrium of the great political forces of America,” would be the signal for a war far more important in its consequences...than this.’<sup>556</sup> Similar hopes for a co-ordinated uprising against monarchical power persisted through the 1850s, with ‘Young America’ pushing for intervention in Cuba. When Democrat George Law shipped muskets to Europe in 1854, newspapers speculated that he wanted to weaken Spain’s power in the American hemisphere by sowing domestic discord.<sup>557</sup> European revolutionaries did seriously entertain their role in assisting the Union’s Southward expansion. For example, French

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<sup>553</sup> *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, April 19 1855.

<sup>554</sup> *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel*, April 26 1855.

<sup>555</sup> C. Cushing, ‘Mexico,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 18, (June 1846), 440. Although formerly a supporter of the Whig Party Caleb Cushing switched to the Democrats during the 1840s, and became a strong supporter of the ‘Young America’ program. The *New York Herald* said of him ‘with respect to his political proclivities, we apprehend he is identified with the progressive school of “Young America”...he is not afraid of Cuba...the atmosphere of the Democratic Party has expanded his views on the tariff question into the conviction that the policy of Robert J. Walker and the policy of Sir Robert Peel have done more for our commerce and that of the world than all the high protective tariffs of the last quarter of a century.’ *New York Herald*, February 19 1853.

<sup>556</sup> “*The War with Mexico*,” *Speech of Hon. J. A. Dix of New York in the Senate of the United States, January 26 1848*, (Washington: Congressional Globe Office 1848), 7

<sup>557</sup> See *New York Herald* March 31 1854. The *Herald* relayed a report from the Democratic organ based in Washington D.C., the *Union*, which predicted “an alliance more formidable to our enemies than any ever contracted among the crowned heads.” The *Herald* reported that ‘the most important feature in this grand program is not George Law’s muskets but Kossuth’s policy of intervention, which is threatened by our government organ. The interference of France and England in our quarrel with Spain about Cuba will be the signal for armed cooperation. Therefore, the third party in the European war – the revolutionary element – who are yet to rise up and make the contest a grand triangular fight.’

democrat Ledru Rollin wrote to George Sanders in 1854 suggesting the US pledge support to the Spanish Republicans. He argued that the new regime in Spain would give Cuba to the United States as a reward for supporting the revolution at home.<sup>558</sup>

After many Americans lost hope in European politics, 'Young Americans' continued to believe that an uprising in Cuba would be accompanied by upheavals across the Atlantic. In 1857, Ohio Democrat William Corry told the House 'the Cuba rebellion is every day waxing greater and if it...puts down despotism there.' Predicting a speedy annexation to the Union, he said 'the monarchical combination made in 1850 to keep it for Spain will itself face to face with the power of the United States.'<sup>559</sup> If 'England, Spain, Russia and Austria dare to meddle' with this process, 'their own people will rise and rend them.' And if this dramatic mass uprising did not occur, 'we only want the amity of France,' Corry exclaimed, 'to sweep them all out of the ocean and to free Canada as well as Cuba.' 'After that we will advance into the Baltic and the Mediterranean and the era of the people will begin to dawn for all mankind.'<sup>560</sup> Similarly in 1859, Samuel Cox depicted Europe on the brink of revolution, with 'England, trembling at the one hundred thousand soldiers across the channel' begins to 'build coastal defences' whilst 'Mazzini issues his rescript to the secret societies and open republicans of Italy' to be ready. Whilst England 'shakes with a new reform movement,' and John Bright 'striving to Americanise her by popular sovereignty,' he claimed that Britain would not dare intervene in America. If she did, 'the balance of power might be overwhelmed by a popular breath.'<sup>561</sup> For 'Young America,' events in the American hemisphere were intimately connected to Europe, as they fought for a universal principle against the international networks of European monarchy.

### **Cuba and Anti-Slavery Expansionism**

As well as justifying territorial expansion according to the same liberal ideology that inspired the Revolutions of 1848, 'Young America' Democrats argued that it was the surest way to put slavery

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<sup>558</sup> M. Curti, 'Young America,' 49.

<sup>559</sup> Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., Special Sess., (1857).

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> S.S. Cox, 'Territorial Expansion,' 15.

on the path to ultimate extinction. As I explain in the introduction, a tendency to divide Northern politics into sectional camps is pervasive in current historiography. Northern Democrats frequently become ‘doughfaces,’ either knowingly supporting the Slave Power, or acting as a pawn in their grand schemes. Standing firm against slavery, the Republicans wanted the federal government to block its extension – a vision historian James Oakes terms ‘Freedom National.’<sup>562</sup> Within this picture, there is little room for the ‘Young America’ Democrats, who fitted their distinct version of free labor ideology into a larger program of Jacksonian nationalism, which included expansion Southward. Although state-sovereignty, free trade and direct democracy for white men provided the foundation of their political ideology, most Northern Democrats did not think this was incompatible with a commitment to slavery’s eventual demise. Indeed, some Jacksonian figures carried their support for Cuban annexation into the Republican fold. Slavery and territorial expansion were two aspects of a broader ideology of Jacksonian nationalism, which increasingly transcended the partisan affiliations used to understand this period.

Confident that democracy was man’s natural state, ‘Young America’ believed that the expansion of US states would hasten the demise of a slavery, which many considered a relic of British imperialism. Having abolished the slave trade in 1808, Northern Democrats argued that the US would outlaw the importation of black labor when it assumed control of Cuba from Spain. As Maturin Ballou noted in his *History of Cuba*, the Spanish were bound by ‘treaty stipulations’ to ‘make war’ on the slave trade, but ‘she tacitly connives at its continuance’ – ‘everyone knows that slaves are monthly, almost weekly, landed in Cuba.’<sup>563</sup> ‘Large barracoons’ could be found on the island where imported slaves were imprisoned. Ballou made the case that ‘the time has come when the progress of civilization demands that the island shall pass into the hands of some power’ that had the ‘will and ability’ to ‘crush out this remnant of barbarism.’<sup>564</sup> This was a fate, Ballou claimed, ‘designated by providence’ for the United States. At the same time, Ballou subscribed to the popular view that American slavery was more benevolent than its Spanish counterpart. In particular, Spanish authorities

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<sup>562</sup> J. Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-65*, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2014).

<sup>563</sup> M.M. Ballou, *History of Cuba, or Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics*, 189.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

had purposefully ‘weakened the bond of attachment between master and slave,’ so they could stir up a ‘war of the races’ if the Cubans struck a blow of independence.<sup>565</sup> The prospect of Cuba turning into another St Domingo was the final weapon in the imperial arsenal.

Ohio Democrat George E. Pugh presented the abolition of the slave trade in Cuba as a corollary of the Democrats’ policy of territorial expansion and free trade. In 1859, many of Pugh’s fellow senators complained that the Union’s liberal economic policy was rewarding Cuban planters for continuing to trade slaves on the global market.<sup>566</sup> By importing slave labor from abroad, Creoles could produce sugar more cheaply than American planters in Louisiana. Without trade barriers to compensate, the US was allowing the Cubans to undercut American prices on the open market by virtue of their immoral and illegal modes of production. Instead of raising tariffs as a retaliatory measure, Pugh argued that the America should simply take control of the island, suppress the trade in slaves and implement free trade. At the same time, the Union could lower Cuban duties on American products. It was unfair, Pugh claimed, that America paid three fifths of the island’s total trade taxes, despite only supplying one third of their overall imports.

During his consulship in London, George Dallas made the anti-slavery case for Cuban annexation to Lord Henry Brougham, the British campaigner against the international slave trade. Brougham apparently believed the current method of policing the trade – through visitation and search – was ‘utterly inconsistent with fundamental or universal principles of international law.’<sup>567</sup> “‘Why not put an end to the trade by passing Cuba over to the United States?’” Dallas suggested, to which Brougham replied that “‘it might come to that.’” In relation to domestic slavery, Brougham was also approving of the Democrats’ moderate policy of allowing the ‘institution’ to expire in its own time. “‘As to domestic servitude,’” Dallas reported, “‘your lordship is aware that its cessation in the United States must be the slow effect of time’” for America “‘cannot get rid of it without consequences more dreadful than the thing itself.’”<sup>568</sup> In 1857 Dallas reported that the Liberal Party he

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>566</sup> G. E. Pugh, *The Acquisition of Cuba*.

<sup>567</sup> *Diary of George M. Dallas while United States Minister to Russia, 1837 to 1839, and to England, 1856 to 1861*, ed. S. Dallas, (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1892), 292

<sup>568</sup> Ibid, 292.

admired so much in England was ‘reconciling itself’ to an American Cuba. He said there may be an ‘abatement in the crusading spirit’ against Cuban annexation because the Liberals’ ‘despair of stopping the trade from Africa’ and ‘they prefer to see the institution as it exists with us, to the one on the island.’<sup>569</sup> In a letter to Lewis Cass in 1858, Dallas optimistically alluded to ‘an opinion which although adverse to slavery in general deems it to be less reprehensible under the laws and morals of the United States than elsewhere, and would feel rather philanthropically employed than otherwise in being accessory in its transfer from Spain to us.’<sup>570</sup>

When Governor General Pezuela attempted to reform the Cuban slave trade in 1854, the Pennsylvania paper the *Democratic and Sentinel* reiterated the fact that the US was the only power with the power to eradicate the slave trade for good: ‘the US has vigorously arrested and annihilated the African slave trade with her people since 1808, and England who professes to be so anxious to put an end to it between Cuba and Brazil refuses to consent to the acquisition of the former by this country, although fully aware that such an acquisition is the only way effectually and forever to annihilate that traffic.’<sup>571</sup> The paper quoted statistics that apparently showed the Spanish continuing to import slaves during this period, concluding that, since 1841, ‘the negroes clandestinely carried into Cuba from Africa from 1841 to the present day amount to the number of about *15 thousand every year!*’<sup>572</sup> Even under the editorship of Kentucky’s George Sanders, the *Democratic Review* argued that Cuban annexation would hasten the demise of the slave trade. One article in 1858 said ‘so long as Spain suffers Cuba to be used for the furtherance of the African slave trade,’ the United States were ‘desirous to prevent import...into its own territory, and to take away the inducements and temptations which the trade of that island presents to American citizens and others.’<sup>573</sup> In 1859, the *Review* said ‘the inhumanity and cruelty of the system in Cuba is of a character to excite the commiseration of the most thoughtless,’ whilst the American system promoted a mutually beneficial relationship between

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<sup>569</sup> George Dallas to Lewis Cass July 28 1857 *A Series of Letters from London*, 183.

<sup>570</sup> George Dallas to Lewis Cass January 21 1858. *Ibid*, 249.

<sup>571</sup> ‘Cuba,’ *Democratic and Sentinel*, June 2 1854.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>573</sup> ‘Non-intervention of nations’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 42, (August 1858), 100.

the races.<sup>574</sup> Furthermore, the Americans would shut down the coolie trade, a system of bound labor more cruel than slavery since it affected Asian races, who ‘feel slavery more acutely’ than blacks. It was shocking to the periodical that the Republicans, claiming ‘exclusive friendship for the oppressed races,’ can ‘take ground against a measure calculated in greater degree than any other to promote the cause of humanity and the principle of liberty.’<sup>575</sup>

The *Review’s* former editor John O’Sullivan had always promoted the acquisition of Cuba on anti-slavery grounds. He wrote to Buchanan in 1848 that ‘we Barnburners will be as much pleased at (the admission of Cuba) as the Southerners themselves’ on the grounds that it would help Americans police the international slave trade.<sup>576</sup> Although later on, he told Stephen Douglas that Cuba would ‘of course’ be admitted as a slave state, he still maintained that slavery degraded white masters. Moreover, he told Douglas that he wrote a few ‘pro-Cuba articles’ for the anti-slavery *Evening Post*, to ‘prepare Northern opinion’ for ‘acquisition of that island.’ He even tried to include an ‘elaborate appeal to the party in which it was an influential organ’ – the Republicans – although the editor, William C. Bryant, ‘would not insert it.’<sup>577</sup> Other Jacksonian newspapers made a case for acquisition based on the need to reform slavery in Cuba. The *Jeffersonian Republican*, in 1851, chastised the Spanish for their poor practices in keeping slaves. It stated ‘the work on the plantation is done almost altogether by negroes, whose condition is far worse than that of the slaves of our country. The whipping post is constantly in use.’<sup>578</sup> The article ended by arguing that the soil would be better used by American planters, fusing moral and economic justifications. The *Ottawa Free Trader* claimed that ‘the picture of misery described to me by a person in the vicinity of Trinidad and the wretched appearance of the victims of Spanish Christendom would be deemed horrid even among the “squatters” of California.’<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> ‘Continental policy of the United States - the acquisition of Cuba,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 43, (April 1859).

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>576</sup> John O’Sullivan to James Buchanan, March 19 1848, James Buchanan Papers, History Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>577</sup> John O’Sullivan to Stephen A. Douglas, February 10 1854, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

<sup>578</sup> *The Jeffersonian Republican*, May 22 1851.

<sup>579</sup> *The Ottawa Free Trader* October 15 1853.

Whilst promoting the abolition of the slave trade, some Northern Democrats argued that it was Southern slaveholders who were blocking the annexation of Cuba. As late as 1857, the Northern *Democratic and Sentinel* worried ‘the scruples and misgivings of the South’ about maintain a grip on slavery where it already existed, would ‘have to be overcome.’<sup>580</sup> Indeed, the paper recommended the South should not try to fight the dynamics of the ‘safety-valve’ theory, since it was an inevitable process. Slaveholders should be prepared to ‘withdraw their capital and labor from present employments’ and ‘leave these lands worthless’ since it was a ‘natural’ process, already underway.<sup>581</sup> The future was not ‘backing up’ slavery in Texas but taking slaves to Cuba where they could labor more productively, without degrading or undercutting white workers in the border states. By fighting to preserve the ‘balance of power,’ Southerners were clinging to an outdated version of statecraft that had blighted the Europe for years. Instead, ‘Young America’ urged them to reject federal intervention, and embrace the natural laws driving national development.

Similarly, Californian Edward C. Marshall rallied against Abraham Venable for opposing Cuban annexation on the grounds that it would become a free state, complaining that Venable’s opposition was motivated by ‘jealousy of the North.’ In Marshall’s view, Southerners should not concern themselves with using the federal government to maintain the balance of power between the states. In the absence of federal intervention, the institution would stand or fall on its own terms. By withdrawing the support slavery received from the federal government, Marshall believed he was depriving it of life. Nothing as fundamentally unjust, social regressive, or economically efficient as slavery could exist for long in independent, democratic communities. It was this powerful belief that Jacksonian nationalism could address the problem of slavery which made Marshall claim:

It is a conviction, now nearly universal, that the progress of slavery in American territory is arrested. That in all future acquisitions, from the operation of many active causes, the institution of slavery will not exist.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> *Democrat and Sentinel*, June 3 1857.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>582</sup> E.C. Marshall, *Cuba*, 2.



It was the North's 'greater energy and aptitude for emigration,' which meant that any territory 'seeking admission to the Union' under the principle of popular sovereignty established by the Compromise of 1850 would be free. As long as it was protected by the 'Constitution and the laws,' it did not matter that the natural laws of political development would bring slavery to an end. Since the 'conditions of human society and the progress of free states militate against it,' there was no point attempting to prolong slavery's downfall. 'In its own nature' slavery was 'temporary and evanescent, and about to disappear before the democratic energies and the laws of political economy.'<sup>583</sup> In a powerful articulation of 'free labor' ideology, Marshall explained that emigrants settling in Cuba from the Northern and Western states would protect the 'aristocracy of labor' in the absence of federal intervention.

Although we are accustomed to associating 'free labor' with the Republican Party's 'Freedom National' doctrine, 'Young America' Democrats put forward their own vision of 'free labor' too; one where Northern emigrants would outcompete slaves in self-governing, democratic communities.<sup>584</sup> From a Jacksonian perspective, there was no need for the federal government to get involved. Each of the Northern parties had a principle it would not compromise on – the 'sine qua non' of its existence. For Republicans, this was the expansion of slavery, whilst for the Democrats it was the doctrine of popular sovereignty, supposedly established by the Compromise of 1850. That is not to say, however, that Democrats did not fully expect to see slavery eradicated in the fullness of time.

It was not just Democrats who supported the immediate annexation of Cuba with slavery intact. Indeed, some Jacksonians within the Republican Party made an anti-slavery case for expansion in the tropics, such as Gerrit Smith, Parke Godwin, Walt Whitman and Eli Thayer. Furthermore, Republicans like John Bigelow and John P. Hale might have stood against the acquisition of more slave states, but they still supported the further expansion of the Union; a view distinct from many of the former Whigs in their party.<sup>585</sup> Indeed, these former Democrats opposed the growth of slavery

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> J. Oakes, *Freedom National*.

<sup>585</sup> In January 1853, Lewis Cass reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine in Cuba, hinting that European intervention in the Caribbean would be met with a swift rebuttal. In response, Hale issued an amendment that would repeat word for word the section on Cuba, only substituting 'Canada' and 'Great Britain' for 'Cuba' and 'Spain.' See

precisely because they thought it was a barrier to further territorial expansion. Just as some Republicans supported ‘popular sovereignty’ in Kansas after 1854, some pushed for territorial expansion too. During the decade before the Civil War, the program of Jacksonian nationalism became less tethered to the Democratic Party. Instead, former Democrats took elements of the ‘Young American’ program into both the Democratic and Republican folds.

Like their Democratic counterparts, the Republicans who supported the annexation of Cuba saw ‘Young America’s’ nationalist program as fully compatible with free labor ideology. For Gerrit Smith, anti-slavery feeling had already put the institution on the path to extinction, unlike in monarchical Spain, where concentrations of power and wealth facilitated its spread. The American system was also less cruel than the Spanish one. As Smith told abolitionist Wendell Phillips ‘the type of slavery in Cuba is, in some respects, more terrible than in any other part of the world,’ pointing to the absence of the ‘family relation,’ low life expectancy, high rates of breeding and the existence of slavery encounters, and is modified by a higher civilization than that, which pervades the dominions of Spain and rejoices in bull-fights.’<sup>586</sup> Furthermore, Smith argued that only America would abolish the international slave trade. Despite acknowledging rumors that the South planned to re-open international slave traffic, he believed that, in actuality, both the interests of the South and their moral feeling would forbid it: ‘they have outgrown the barbarism of the African slave trade. May they speedily outgrow other barbarisms, which fall little short of it.’<sup>587</sup>

As well as tempering ‘the cruelties of Cuban slavery, and eventually ‘lead(ing) to its abolition,’ Smith also made the case that annexation ‘will contribute, mightily, to the overthrow of the whole system of American slavery.’<sup>588</sup> He desired to contain slavery in America, in order to isolate the ‘institution’ from the rest of the world, turn international opinion against it and hasten its demise. In his final letter to his constituents, he wrote:

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G. Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of US Empire*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 63.

<sup>586</sup> G. Smith, ‘Final Letter to his Constituents,’ *Speeches of Gerrit Smith*, 390.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid*, 391.

<sup>588</sup> G. Smith, ‘Letter to Wendell Phillips,’ 397.

Let all the other nations of the earth shake themselves of slavery – even though it be into the lap of America. Were for the whole of the foul thing gathered there, no sympathy for it could be found elsewhere; and hence, its years would be few.<sup>589</sup>

Despite rejecting the more forceful assertions of American exceptionalism, avowed by Democrats like Stephen Douglas, Smith nevertheless believed ‘bad, as we are now, even in that case, few of our neighbors would become worse, and most of them would become better, by becoming like us.’<sup>590</sup> Specifically in the case of the Caribbean, Smith claimed that, although he would not pay \$250 million for Cuba, nor \$200 or even \$100 million, he would ‘have her come’ when ‘she wishes to come’ and that he ‘would not have her wait, always, for the consent of the Spanish government.’<sup>591</sup> Rejecting the frequent accusations that this put him in league with petulant expansionists, in the grip of the Slave Power, Smith cried, to great laughter in Congress, ‘now if this is *filibusterism* then all I have to say is ‘make the most of it.’<sup>592</sup> Although too much an abolitionist to constitute a supporter of the ‘Young America’ movement, prominent ‘Young America’ Democrats did express their admiration for Gerrit Smith’s Jacksonian principles. New York’s John A. Dix, for example, wrote “‘he makes strong anti-slavery, (and [sic] reform and free trade speeches.’”<sup>593</sup> Although historian Yonatan Eyal attributes this admiration to Dix’s anti-slavery credentials, it could also reflect Dix’s support for Smith’s Jacksonian ideology, which not only included free trade but also territorial expansion. Indeed, like O’Sullivan, Kane and many other ‘Young Americans,’ Dix’s anti-slavery was rooted in scientific racism, and did not prevent him returning to the Democrat fold later in the 1850s.

Similarly, Parke Godwin’s publication *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* disagreed with ‘those who think that the possession of Cuba by the US would strengthen the hands of the supporters of the slave system in America itself.’<sup>594</sup> Instead, one writer stated that it was his ‘conviction’ that ‘it would just leave the slave question where it is while at the same time it would eventually put an end to the

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<sup>589</sup> G. Smith, ‘Final Letter to his Constituents,’ 393.

<sup>590</sup> G. Smith, ‘Speech on the Mexican Treaty and “Monroe Doctrine” June 27 1854,’ *Speeches of Gerrit Smith in Congress*, 299.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>593</sup> Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 187.

<sup>594</sup> ‘Cuba,’ *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 1, (January 1853), 15.

traffic in slaves, at least in as far as Cuba is concerned.<sup>595</sup> Furthermore, although keen to discredit the South's corrupt and outdated foreign policy, Parke Godwin himself was somewhat sympathetic to the spirit that lay behind filibustering expeditions. In an article in *Putnam's Review*, he proclaimed 'we cannot regard the disposition of the people, even the most wild and turbulent spirits, who yield too unreservedly to the intoxication of a pervading influence as a mere marauding and piratical rage.'<sup>596</sup> Apparently, 'beneath the superficial propensity' to exert influence over other countries lay a 'deep feeling of inspiration.'

Publishing many former contributors to the *Democratic Review*, *Putnam's* support for Cuban annexation was part of a larger commitment to liberal internationalism, often justified according to O'Sullivan's 'democratic principle,' outlined in Chapter One. Keen to subvert an international order dominated by Europe, Godwin explained that annexed territories were direct beneficiaries of America's expanding influence. *Putnam's* wrote 'Mexico Cuba, Canada, the Sandwich Islands, under European rule, would remain what they are; under our tutelage they would grow into powerful communities.'<sup>597</sup> The abstract 'democratic principle,' rather than the arbitrary rule of competing superpowers, was the best means of regulating international relations. The principles governing the Union – self-government, free trade and state sovereignty – were natural laws, applicable to mankind in general. Thus, the 'federal relation' was the 'true relation for all people,' whilst the European system, revolving around the checks and balances of competing powers – was mere 'bondage of fear and feebleness.'<sup>598</sup> For Godwin, it was only 'the system of constitutional federal union' that could 'assure to each (state) a complete republican independence.'<sup>599</sup> In this Jacksonian interpretation, the Union was as much an international system as a nation. By making democracy a 'natural right,' *Putnam's* blurred the boundary between natural and political rights. The relations that governed the Union were 'natural' to man, not the product of the traditions, institutions and geography of the United States.

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>596</sup> 'A Letter to John Bull,' *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 1, (February 1853), 229.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>598</sup> P. Godwin, 'Our Foreign Influence and Policy,' *Political Writings*, 120

<sup>599</sup> Ibid, 120.

Like Godwin, Walt Whitman was a former contributor to the *Democratic Review* who carried his support for territorial expansion into the Free Soil movement. During the Presidential contest of 1856, he published a pamphlet entitled ‘The Eighteenth Presidency.’ Although Whitman had turned to the politics of Free Soil by the early 1850s, this source shows the poet had not abandoned the expansionist fervor that made him support the Mexican War a decade earlier. He wrote, for example, that the US had started to ‘colonize’ ‘the shores of the Pacific’ and the ‘Asiatic Indias.’<sup>600</sup> This expansion of American principles would, for the author, usher in a new era in the history of human progress: ‘on all sides’ ‘tyrants tremble, crowns are unstable, the human race restive, on the watch for some better era, some divine war.’<sup>601</sup> Conflating technological and moral progress, he wrote that America’s expanding influence, aided by the telegraph and printing press, would do nothing short of ‘re-making’ the nature of ‘man.’<sup>602</sup> Like Smith and Godwin, Whitman wanted ‘no reforms, no institutions, no parties’ to govern this new age; simply ‘a living principle as nature has, under which nothing can go wrong.’<sup>603</sup> Specially addressing Cuba in 1851, Whitman wrote that ‘it is impossible to say what the future will bring forth, but “Manifest Destiny” certainly points to the speedy annexation of Cuba by the United States.’<sup>604</sup> In *Democratic Vistas*, which was mostly written during the 1850s, he predicted ‘there will be forty to fifty great states, among them Canada and Cuba.’<sup>605</sup> These pronouncements suggest Whitman still adhered to the same expansionist ethos that made him an enthusiastic supporter of the Mexican American War; a time when he wanted Texas ‘to come under the wings of our eagle’ as part of a political system that could ‘extend to any extent.’<sup>606</sup>

Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that, despite his ‘Free Soil’ politics, Whitman remained loyal to the Democratic Party throughout the 1850s. Although his paper, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, backed the Republican candidate John C. Fremont in 1856, Whitman’s editorials argued for a

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<sup>600</sup> W. Whitman, *The Eighteenth Presidency: a critical text edited by Edward F. Grier*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1956), 43.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>603</sup> An extract from one of Walt Whitman’s notebooks found in D.S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography*, (Knopf Publishing Group, 2011), 327.

<sup>604</sup> D.S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography*, (Knopf Publishing Group, 2011), 136.

<sup>605</sup> W. Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 1871, University of Virginia, (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/Whitman/vistas/vistas.html>), accessed 09/08/17.

<sup>606</sup> *The Brooklyn Eagle*, June 6 1846.

Democratic candidate that would represent a middle-way between John C. Fremont's anti-slavery position and Buchanan's tacit support for the Slave Power; possibly someone like Stephen Douglas, whose enthusiasm for territorial expansion seems to have chimed with Whitman's. In 1857, the poet wrote in the *Brooklyn Eagle* that he wanted 'a great middle conservative party, neither proscribing slavery like Seward nor fostering it like Buchanan.'<sup>607</sup> Since he was comfortable with further expansion Southward, and deemed slavery's 'doom' already 'sealed,' it is perhaps fair to class Whitman with Douglasite Democrats, like William Richardson and Edward Marshall, who believed a renewed commitment to Jacksonian nationalism was perfectly compatible with the eventual extinction of slavery.<sup>608</sup> Like many of this group, Whitman imagined that the future for blacks was in the tropics, since 'nature' had set her 'seal' against racial amalgamation.<sup>609</sup>

Just as Edward C. Marshall believed America's intellectual and political influence were intertwined, Whitman's support for territorial growth went hand in hand with his status as a poet. Writing that 'in both *physical* and *political* America there is plenty of room for the whole human race' Whitman implied that the nation's geography was subordinate to her ideals.<sup>610</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Times* argued that Whitman's literary nature made him comprehensible to humanity as a whole. He was an example 'for the present and future of American letters and American young men, for the south the same as the north, and for the Pacific and Mississippi country and Wisconsin and Texas and *Canada and Havana* just as much as New York and Boston.'<sup>611</sup> As the author in Romantic literary culture articulated universal themes, he could also embody a political system rooted in natural law. Whitman's status as a poet legitimized his claim that American expansion was 'in the interest of mankind.'<sup>612</sup>

Moreover, for Jacksonians, 'man's' ultimate interests were derived from the people's will. Whitman was well-placed to interpret this too, since – as a poet – he could articulate what 'can be

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<sup>607</sup> W. Whitman, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, November 5 1858

<sup>608</sup> *I sit and Look Out: Editorials from the 'Brooklyn Daily Times,' by Walt Whitman*, Eds. E. Holloway and V. Schwartz, (New York: AMS Press Inc, 1996), 87-88.

<sup>609</sup> W. Whitman, *I sit and Look Out*, 89-90.

<sup>610</sup> W. Whitman, *The Eighteenth Presidency*.

<sup>611</sup> 'Walt Whitman: A Brooklyn Boy,' *The Brooklyn Times*, September 29 1855.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

neither captured by representation nor finally embodied by political institutions.’<sup>613</sup> Thus, he said that the people’s calls for new territory in Mexico justified her ‘claim to those lands...by a law superior to parchment and dry diplomatic rules.’<sup>614</sup> Similarly, in the Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he wrote that the poet ‘imaginatively’ ‘incarnates’ the nation’s geography, including the ‘Texan and Mexican and Floridian and Cuban seas’ and those ‘off California and Oregon.’<sup>615</sup> The political role of the literary figure in Whitman’s writings is similar to Shelley’s, who deemed the poet ‘the unacknowledged legislator of mankind.’<sup>616</sup> As ‘nature’ became a source of political authority, the Romantic poet was perfectly placed to interpret its laws. Similar ideas about the political purpose of literature had long been found in the pages of the *Democratic Review*. Southerner William Gilmore Simms chose to title a poem on the Oregon crisis, *Progress in America; Or, a Speech in Sonnets, on Great Britain and the United States; not delivered either in Parliament or Congress*.<sup>617</sup> Proudly declaring that this ‘speech’ was ‘not delivered in Congress,’ Simms drew attention to its political status as a ‘speech’ whilst emphasizing that the proper context for such a political document was outside the formal legislature. Reporting on the nation’s ‘progress’ was clearly the preserve of the poet, not the politician. Although anti-partisan rhetoric like this has long been considered a hallmark of Jacksonian nationalism, historians have perhaps been reluctant to ascribe any intellectualism to the ideology.

Some Free Soilers affiliated with the Republican Party also accepted Marshall’s view that free labor would naturally outcompete slave labor in the tropics, even without explicit federal intervention. Eli Thayer, for example, argued that Central America will ‘prove abundantly sufficient to carry emigration southward, even across many parallels of latitude’; a process that would ultimately ‘cut off’ ‘the umbilical cord of an embryo Southern Empire.’ Indeed, he speculated to much laughter that

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<sup>613</sup> J. Frank, ‘Aesthetic Democracy: Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the People,’ *The Review of Politics*, (69), 2007, 404.

<sup>614</sup> Walt Whitman quoted in R. Scholnick, ‘Whigs and Democrats, the Past and Future: The Political Emerson and Whitman’s 1855 Preface,’ *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism*, Vol. 26, (2016), 83.

<sup>615</sup> W. Whitman, *Preface to Leaves of Grass*, 1855, (<http://www.bartleby.com/39/45.html>), accessed 09/08/17, 618.

<sup>616</sup> P.B. Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, 1820, (<http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>), accessed 04/02/17.

<sup>617</sup> W.G. Simms, ‘Progress in America: Or, a Speech in Sonnets, on Great Britain and the United States; not delivered either in Parliament or Congress,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 18, (February 1846).

it was ‘cut off already,’ since ‘everybody knows the psychological consequences’ of this act.<sup>618</sup> Others argued that a true expansionist agenda would come after the government had set itself against the further extension of slavery. These perspectives show that ‘Young America’ nationalism enjoyed support in the free as well as the slave states. Recent historians associate several aspects of Jacksonian ideology with the antebellum South.<sup>619</sup> Doctrines like ‘popular sovereignty,’ as well as territorial expansion, are viewed as Southern enterprises, serving Southern interests. What Republicans like Thayer and Whitman show, is that some Republicans did take ‘Young America’s’ unique vision of a free labor society seriously.

## Conclusion

After the Mexican American War ended in 1848, territorial expansion remained an important aspect of Jacksonian political culture in the antebellum North. Democrats like Edward C. Marshall, Maturin Ballou, George Dallas and Thomas D. Reilly continued to push for further territorial acquisitions in the tropics, particularly the island of Cuba. In doing so, they did not simply provide a ‘fig-leaf’ for land-hungry slaveholders, as historians suggest.<sup>620</sup> Rather, Democrats associated with the ‘Young America’ movement often made an explicitly anti-slavery case for Cuban annexation, based on America’s purported desire to put an end to the international slave-trade. Furthermore, Northern Democrats continued to link the territorial to the intellectual development of the nation, despite Edward Widmer’s division of the ‘Young America’ movement’s cultural and political sections.<sup>621</sup> With this relationship in mind, we should characterize the ‘Young America’ Democrats as liberal nationalists, who made their commitment to state sovereignty and local democracy compatible with slavery’s ultimate extinction.

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<sup>618</sup> “*The Central America Question*” *A Speech of Eli Thayer delivered in the House of Representatives, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1858*, (Buell and Blanchard Printers, 1858), 7.

<sup>619</sup> The historiography on this topic is discussed in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

<sup>620</sup> The historiography on this topic is discussed in more detail in the introduction to this chapter.

<sup>621</sup> E. Widmer, *The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2. Widmer argues that ‘Young America’ had entered into its second phase by the 1850s – a period characterized by territorial expansion, driven by the pro-slavery wing of the Democratic Party.



Furthermore, support for territorial expansion southward was not confined to the Democratic Party. Some Free Soil politicians from a Jacksonian political tradition carried their expansionist ideology into the Republican fold. Walt Whitman, Parke Godwin, Eli Thayer and even abolitionist Gerrit Smith supported the annexation of Cuba, convinced that the extinction of slavery was more assured within America's system of decentralized, democratic government. Furthermore, former Democrats like John P. Hale based his opposition to slavery on the grounds that it retarded America's further territorial growth. Territorial expansion was therefore an important component of Jacksonian political culture that retained its hold over political figures in the antebellum North. Although Jacksonian political culture - and particularly territorial expansion - is most often associated with the antebellum South, we should recognize that it had a powerful influence over the two main Northern parties too.

#### Chapter Four: 'Young America' nationalism during the sectional crisis, 1854-61

Before 1854, Abraham Lincoln did not mention the Declaration of Independence in his political writings or speeches. As he told a friend in 1852, the Whig Henry Clay was his 'beau ideal of a statesman.'<sup>622</sup> Following Clay's conservative course, Lincoln urged fidelity to the constitution, including the protections afforded to slavery where it already existed. He defined patriotism primarily in terms of the nation's 'positive laws.' Before the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, he did not seriously engage with America's 'natural law' tradition. As discussed in Chapter One, this view of the Union was characteristic of the more conservative vision of nationalism found in the pages of periodicals like *The American Whig Review*. That is not to say the Whigs were amoral or lacking a conception of natural or divine justice. Outside the political realm, they channeled these impulses into evangelical reform. If the Union remained secure, moral reformation, along the lines of evangelical Protestantism, would facilitate the extension of natural and divine law. Thus, Lincoln could implement legislation he profoundly disagreed with, such as the return of fugitive slaves, in order to preserve national stability. To keep the nation together, many Whigs argued that observing existing laws was – in itself – a religious duty. At the same time, Lincoln could rest assured that natural law would finally triumph. If the majority of the nation was still committed to God's 'higher law,' progress was possible, and slavery would be eradicated eventually.

After losing the argument over the Mexican War in 1846, however, the Whiggish conception of the Union came under increasing strain. Together with Texan independence in the west, events in Europe only emboldened the 'Young America' movement; far from diminishing, American expansionism remained incredibly popular in the antebellum North around 1852. Similarly, as Chapter Two explored, the 1848 Revolutions popularized ideas about 'natural rights' that the *Democratic Review* had promoted since its inception in 1837. Convinced that democracy was not just a political system but a 'natural' means of ordering society, George Bancroft and Stephen Douglas

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<sup>622</sup> Roy P. Basler et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55), 3:2

saw no bounds to the expansion of the American republic.<sup>623</sup> Before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, ‘Young America’ Democrats had every reason to be confident. Not only did they believe victory for the 1848 Revolutions was in sight, but they were eager to develop the large tracts of ‘virgin land’ the United States had acquired from Mexico. Just as European nations were reordering themselves according to ‘natural laws,’ America too could start again in the west: vast areas of imagined wilderness provided a receptacle for the natural laws of political science and economics that the *Review* had promoted for so long. As Samuel Parker explained in Congress, Americans were now ‘engaged’ in laying the ‘foundations of society’ as if they were still in the ‘state of nature.’<sup>624</sup>

For ‘Young America’ Democrats, particularly supporters of Stephen Douglas, the question of how to bring this new territory into the Union was not a matter of dispute. They had justified Texas annexation according to the ‘democratic principle’ of popular sovereignty – the ‘people’s will’ contained its own morality. They had long held that democracy was the foundational principle tying the different states together – it was both political system and natural law. Dorothy Ross addresses this conflation of natural and political rights at the heart of Jacksonian political culture in her article ‘Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation.’ She writes:

Whilst theorists had long distinguished between natural and political rights, the increasing democracy of the antebellum decades had blurred the distinction. Under the regime of white manhood suffrage, “equal rights” were popularly understood to encompass both the natural rights of the declaration and the political rights by which they were safeguarded.<sup>625</sup>

Confronted with vast western territories that needed to be organized, Northern Whigs could not stay silent on the question of ‘higher law.’ Democrats had long conflated natural and political rights, but now they had the opportunity to bring new states into the Union; to make popular sovereignty the fundamental principle of national cohesion. No longer could Lincoln continue to urge fidelity to the Union as an ‘organic entity,’ when even fellow Northerners wanted to implement

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<sup>623</sup> H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom, Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). In a discussion of the parallels between ancient Rome and the American Union, Jaffa argues that the ‘universalization of Roman citizenship’ meant that Rome ‘was not a political regime because a political regime, properly so called, is always one of many.’ 137.

<sup>624</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 789 (1854).

<sup>625</sup> D. Ross, ‘Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation.’

fundamentally unorthodox interpretations of the nation's founding principles; ones that could subvert God's will on earth. If the Union was not ultimately on a righteous path, allegiance to the nation became pointless, shorn of moral purpose. Thus, Northern Whigs committed to the principle of personal autonomy were forced to speak out for 'higher laws' contained in the Declaration of Independence; an authority that transcended the political relations of the Union.

In response to Douglas, Lincoln argued that the natural law enshrined in the Declaration of Independence guaranteed freedom from slavery, not the right to exercise democratic rights at any cost. He distinguished between the right to the fruits of one's labor - rooted in natural law - and the political privileges that came with membership of the national community. In a speech in 1858, for example, Lincoln claimed that 'necessity' forbade 'political and social equality' between the races.<sup>626</sup> Moreover, in a Springfield speech on June 26th 1857, he told his audience that the black slave woman is 'in some respects...certainly not...my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands, without asking leave of anyone else, she certainly is my equal and the equal of all others.'<sup>627</sup> Dorothy Ross highlights this distinction between the natural right to labor and the political right of suffrage. She argues 'Lincoln and the free soil movement forced a wedge into the right of self-government to avoid equal citizenship for blacks.'<sup>628</sup>

Conversely, many antebellum Democrats continued to conflate the right to the fruit of one's labor and popular sovereignty, arguing that these positions were not contradictory: with direct democracy in the territories, slavery would 'naturally' be outlawed in Kansas and Nebraska. This was the same principle that justified the Dorr Rebellion of 1841 and the incorporation of Texas into the Union in the first place. Lincoln, however, was less confident about the inherent virtues of self-government – the nationalism of 'Young America' was not a self-regulating moral system, a natural social order that would solve political problems in accordance with divine will. Lincoln distinguished between 'membership in humanity' - which entitled people to freedom from slavery - and

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<sup>626</sup> A. Lincoln, 'Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, September 18, 1858, Charleston, Illinois,' *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1989), 636

<sup>627</sup> A. Lincoln, 'Speech at Springfield, June 26 1857,' *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. R. Basler, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1956), 2: 405.

<sup>628</sup> D. Ross, 'Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation.'

‘membership in the nation.’<sup>629</sup> The political rights of American citizens derived from the latter, by virtue of the traditions and institutions that had long defined the ‘organic’ entity that was the American Union. The former, on the other hand, was a universal principle that could not be compromised on. It consisted of ‘natural rights’ applicable not just to the Union but humanity as a whole. Democracy enjoyed an interdependent relationship with these more fundamental rights, safeguarding and being reinforced by them, but it was not an essential principle contained within the Declaration of Independence.

The way Lincoln ‘made the nation into a moral source of universalist liberal principle and a living center of spiritualist force,’ then, certainly echoed the ‘Young America’ historian George Bancroft.<sup>630</sup> But, Lincoln re-defined the universal principles underlying nationality to mean freedom from slavery rather than O’Sullivan’s ‘democratic principle,’ which encompassed much more: popular sovereignty, free trade and territorial expansion, as well as the extinction of slavery in the fullness of time. It is precisely the tension between these two interpretations of ‘natural law’ that my final chapter will explore.

The different relationships Whig and Jacksonian ideologies had with the ‘natural law’ tradition are entirely absent from historiography on the 1850s. In the existing literature, these ideologies die with the ‘Second Party System’ in 1854.<sup>631</sup> After the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it is widely accepted that sectional loyalties came to characterize Northern politics. Constrained by a ‘sectional’ framework, historians of the 1850s tend to slot ‘Young America’ Democrats into either Northern, or Southern camps, depending on whether they were ‘pro’ or ‘anti-slavery.’ Problematically though, historians who see Northern Democrats as ‘doughfaces’ cannot escape some inconvenient facts: their loyalty to the Union when the Civil War started, contempt for the Slave Power, disdain for slavery,

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 146.

<sup>631</sup> The tendency to ‘sectionalize’ politics after 1854 at the expense of studying Jacksonian ideology is discussed at more length in my introduction. For studies of Jacksonian democracy which stop before 1850 see D Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); S. Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006). The books which do focus on Jacksonian nationalism after 1854 emphasize its utility as a smokescreen for the Slave Power. See E.L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

especially for its effects on white masters, and – in several high-profile cases – turn against the Buchanan administration.<sup>632</sup> On the other hand, the few historians who characterize the Northern Democrats as ‘anti-slavery’ cannot account for the persistence of divergent forms of nationalism within Northern politics, particularly the gulf separating supporters of Stephen Douglas and Republicans like Abraham Lincoln.<sup>633</sup> As historian Stewart Winger points out, the existing political history of ‘Young America’ ‘helps us understand how some New Democrats ended up in the Republican fold,’ but ‘one wonders why Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas did not see eye to eye.’<sup>634</sup> Similarly Graham Peck questions why Northern Democrats so ‘bitterly’ hated Republicans, when they ‘lived in northern society, valued social mobility, celebrated progress and participated extensively in market exchange.’<sup>635</sup>

In my view, slavery alone cannot account for the different forms of nationalism that emerged in the antebellum North, nor was it the issue around which everyone in the 1850s made sense of politics. From the vantage point of the 1850s, Stephen Douglas and his political supporters would not have recognized the story of ‘sectionalization’ historians tell about this period. Looking outward at a vast American empire, they had a very different vision of the nation’s future. At the vanguard of social progress, the ‘Young Americans’ saw not a struggle over slavery but an internationalist uprising against concentrated power - be it imperialism in Europe or its legacy of federal overreach on the American continent. For this understudied group, there was a more important ‘intractable conflict’ in this decade that continued to define Northern politics: a struggle for direct, local democracy against the powers of the federal government. It was this older commitment to Jacksonian nationalism, reminiscent of the ‘Second Party System,’ which best explains the divisions within Northern politics

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<sup>632</sup> M. T. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>633</sup> Y. Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The same tendency to ‘sectionalize’ Northern politics defines the existing literature on antebellum nationalism too. Susan Mary Grant and James Oakes have both explored a strand of anti-slavery nationalism in the antebellum North. Neither seriously consider alternative conceptions of the nation popular in the Northern states, the most prominent of which was found in Jacksonian political culture. J. Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-65*, (London: W.W. Norton Company, 2014). S.M. Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

<sup>634</sup> S. Winger, ‘Review: Yonatan Eyal, “Young America and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1825-1861,”’ *American Historical Review*, 113, (2008), 834.

<sup>635</sup> G. A. Peck, ‘Abraham Lincoln and the Triumph of an Anti-Slavery Nationalism,’ 28.

after 1854. Furthermore, it was this Jacksonian ideology, rather than mere fidelity to the Slave Power, which shaped ‘Young America’s’ commitment to white supremacy. In most cases, ‘Young Americans’ argued that slavery degraded white masters, making an impassioned case for free labor for white Americans. To address the problem of slavery, ‘Young Americans’ promoted either colonization or extermination to preserve racial homogeneity, ridding the Union of black slaves and laborers alike.

This commitment to popular sovereignty and non-intervention as a route to free labor and racial homogeneity does not fit neatly with the sectional categories we use to understand the 1850s: either ‘pro-slavery’ ideology, or the politics of the doughfaces on one hand, or James Oakes view of ‘Freedom National’ on the other.<sup>636</sup> It was a Jacksonian vision of the Union based on the notion that ‘natural laws’ would govern the nation in the absence of federal interference; laws that would guarantee democracy for white men and the extinction or migration of blacks and Native Americans. No mere cover for Southern slaveholders, this vision of Jacksonian nationalism found a home in the Republican Party too. When Democrats defected to the new party, they continued to see this larger struggle against centralization as their primary political battleground. Even those who could not bring themselves to desert the Democratic party, saw the Slave Power, as much as abolitionists, as proponents of a quasi-imperial use of federal authority, which was a mere relic of America’s colonial past.

### **‘Popular Sovereignty’: a universal principle rooted in natural law**

Far from promoting harmony between the sections, the introduction of ‘popular sovereignty’ made congressional compromise practically impossible. With the slavery issue partially settled by the Compromise of 1850, the Union was - at least temporarily - at peace. There was nothing inevitable about the failure of this legislation. Instead, a particular style of nationalism - introduced by Douglas’ ‘Young America’ faction - polarized the nation in 1854. At the core of the policy of ‘popular

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<sup>636</sup> J. Oakes, *Freedom National*. These two interpretations are discussed in more detail in the introduction to this thesis.

sovereignty' was a continuation of the progressive, or cosmopolitan, nationalism that the Democrats had promoted in the previous decade. For the likes of Stephen Douglas and John O'Sullivan, American nationality constituted a set of 'natural laws' that would drive moral and political progress, rather than a specific community, bounded by ethnicity or culture.

Surveying the American nation in 1854, especially from the vantage point of western states, several Democrats exuded confidence and optimism about the country's future. Unaware that he would split with the leader of his party over the Lecompton Constitution in 1857, the Indiana Congressman John G. Davis rose in the House of Representatives to praise his country for catching up with the spirit of 'Young America': 'the idea of constructing a railway across this continent was, but a few years since, regarded as a wild visionary and utopian scheme.'<sup>637</sup> Davis chastised the 'class of men who fold their arms and quietly sit down in the belief that human skill, science and improvement have reached the utmost limits of perfection' and who always 'hang as an incubus on the skirts of progress and advancement.'<sup>638</sup> Fortunately, the 'North American mind' had not 'been idle or inactive.' Having 'read, thought and investigated,' the American people had become convinced of the need for technological progress.<sup>639</sup> In Davis' eyes, this railroad would also strengthen the Union itself. Blind to the sectional antagonism that would engulf him just a few years later, he predicted that the project would remove 'deep seated prejudices of a sectional character' that were caused by 'want of correct knowledge of the habits, feelings and institutions of each other.'<sup>640</sup> He based his optimism about the American future on the power of technology to protect and nurture state sovereignty - a stance that was characteristic of 'Young America' Democrats. Moreover, he showed an unbounded confidence in the power of intellectual culture to provide the appropriate foundations for American nationality. By discovering the 'natural laws' that governed not only technological but also political and moral progress, the US could consolidate itself peacefully and expand indefinitely in the absence of centralized power.

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<sup>637</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 296 (1854).

<sup>638</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid, 296.



When he backed the policy in 1854, Illinois' Stephen Douglas justified popular sovereignty as a continuation of the cosmopolitan vision he had promoted in the previous decade. In 1854, Douglas drew on his expansive vision of American nationality to silence those critics who said he should have never reopened the sectional controversy in the first place. Douglas hit back, saying 'you cannot fix the bounds of the onward march of this great and growing country. You cannot fetter the limbs of the young giant.'<sup>641</sup> For Douglas, the Kansas-Nebraska Act continued the work of the Compromise of 1850; legislation he believed had repealed the Missouri Compromise line with the principles of 'popular sovereignty' and Congressional 'non-intervention' in the territories. In this context, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a 'progressive' measure, replacing the last vestiges of Congressional despotism with the 'Democratic principles' O'Sullivan publication had promoted since 1837. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act would not only facilitate the construction of the Pacific railroad, but allow the United States acquire an indefinite amount of new territory, without threatening the peace and stability of the Union.

Democrats viewed 'popular sovereignty' as a means of realizing America's international mission because they believed it was a principle rooted in 'natural law.' As previous chapters have demonstrated, natural law provided foundations for the nation that were rooted in objective fact, tying white men together in a transatlantic political community. In a pamphlet endorsing James Buchanan for President in 1856, the Democratic writer and phrenologist Nahum Capen described the universalism of 'Young America' as such:

Democracy is based on eternal principles and is limited to no season, age or nation. It is the conservator of humanity...a living system, based upon natural laws, responding to, and providing for, the unnumbered and unceasing wants of mankind, in all their multiplied relations.<sup>642</sup>

For Capen, popular sovereignty was not a 'wandering move' of 'expediency,' but constituted 'the great laws of progress.'<sup>643</sup> Rejecting a geographically determined view of the nation, Capen wrote

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<sup>641</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 337 (1854).

<sup>642</sup> N. Capen, *Plain facts and considerations addressed to the people of the United States without distinction of party in favor of James Buchanan for President and John Breckenridge of Kentucky for Vice-President*, (Boston: Brown, Bazin and Co., 1856), 26.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid*, 28

‘the great truths of Democracy are not of a territorial nature, but moral. Territory is an interest, incident to progress, and the boundaries are marked for the conveniences of sovereignty.’<sup>644</sup>

Dismissing territorial boundaries as arbitrary divisions of power, Capen’s worldview totally subsumed the very notion of ‘interest’ within an overarching commitment to democracy. In a world governed by ‘natural laws,’ there would be no need for competing or conflicting factions – the entire notion of the ‘balance of power’ would be a moot point. This lent a strand of deterministic optimism to Capen’s political thought. For him, the world was not governed by competing parties but two great principles – democracy and despotism. Like territorial boundaries, he ‘looks upon slavery as an evil yet to be removed, by an improvement in condition, and not as power.’<sup>645</sup> Both were symptoms of the same phenomenon: government by force. This was not an intrinsic feature of civil society, which required control, but a way of structuring social relations that belonged to a bygone era. Slavery, like other social evils, could only be abolished through the universalist principle of popular sovereignty, not by confronting it with the ‘check’ of federal authority.

As the grounds of a new cosmopolitan order, which tied individual nations to humanity itself, ‘popular sovereignty’ was frequently linked to political struggles around the world. Particularly among representatives of the western states, Democrats stressed the progressive and cosmopolitan character of popular sovereignty, and explicitly situated it in relation to ‘Young America.’ In a debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Cyrus L. Dunham, a Democrat from Indiana, accused opponents of the bill of trying to block American expansion out of a misplaced fear of American progress. Dunham chastised a Whig colleague for ‘taking alarm at the “progressive spirit of Young America.”’<sup>646</sup> Dunham claimed that ‘fear impairs his vision because he sees nothing by ‘gorgons and hydras and chimeras direct.’<sup>647</sup> By contrast, Dunham was adamant that ‘I look sir in the more hopeful spirit which beamed in the eye of our revolutionary sires.’<sup>648</sup> Like territorial expansion, the principle of popular sovereignty was nothing less than the application of natural law. Dunham proclaimed ‘Fears

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>646</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1134 (1854).

<sup>647</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid, 1134.

of the progress of Young America! Sir the horse murmurs of the Pacific unite with the resounding roar of the profound Atlantic to hush them into silence.’<sup>649</sup> Popular sovereignty was nothing less than the ‘principle of democracy,’ - an idea that was an active agent in historical progress, battling the ‘principle of Despotism’ that was ‘alike aggressive.’<sup>650</sup> It was a new law for the territories that would replace ‘the plan of our territorial governments’ ‘copied from the colonial system of Europe.’<sup>651</sup> Like ‘Young Americans’ before him, Dunham believed the Democrats were fighting a much broader struggle to reform the international order in accordance with the ‘law of nations.’ Dunham’s desire was to make ‘Kentucky and Indiana; Ohio and Virginia stand in the same relation in which England stands to France or France to Germany’ - ‘a regulation controlled by international law only.’<sup>652</sup> Although he believed Europe had a lot to learn from America, here Dunham argued that the US should adopt a system of state sovereignty that mirrored the relations between European nations. Since Dunham was a fierce critic of monarchy, his point seems to have been that the Union should resemble an international system, not that America had anything to learn from Europe’s political system per se. Another western Democrat and Douglas-supporter, David T. Disney agreed that ‘popular sovereignty’ argued that ‘non-intervention’ was an affront to ‘all forms of colonial government’ that assume...the people have no natural rights’ - this position was ‘as old as the law of force, and has been applied in every age wherever it has ruled.’<sup>653</sup>

The Democrat Isaac Toucey, who would go on to become Secretary of the Navy for Buchanan in 1857, also understood ‘popular sovereignty’ as an essential component of America’s international mission.<sup>654</sup> In the Senate in 1854, he claimed that the ‘principle of popular sovereignty’ had been at the root of the Revolutions of 1848. It had ‘penetrated far and wide into the Old World’ and ‘has already wrought a mighty change in the condition of oppressed and suffering humanity.’<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

<sup>654</sup> Isaac Toucey was a prominent Douglas supporter, and favorite of the *Democratic Review*. During the 1840s, the periodical reported that Toucey read and admired Nahum Capen’s *History of Democracy*. See Chapter One, 47.

<sup>655</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 319 (1854).

‘Popular sovereignty’ was one component in the ‘Young America’ Democrats’ cosmopolitan vision that was destined to prevail ‘wherever earth has an inhabitant.’<sup>656</sup> Toucey was struck that the principle’s applicability to ‘a hundred thousand Americans’ needed to be ‘gravely debated’ when - in reality - it should form the bedrock of a new international order. He believed that ‘non-intervention’ was as integral to the American territories as it had been to the European continent during the upheavals of 1848. Without ‘popular sovereignty,’ Congress would become ‘the despotism practiced by the worst governments over the most abject and down-trodden people of Europe, Asia and Africa.’<sup>657</sup>

‘Young Americans’ with more prominent positions within the Democratic administration also recognized the international significance of ‘popular sovereignty.’ During his time as governor of the territory of Kansas, for example, Robert J. Walker believed he was upholding ‘Young America’s’ political project from a decade earlier. As we have seen, throughout the 1840s and early 50s, Walker had been instrumental in providing ideological heft for every aspect of ‘Young America’s’ political program. When President James Buchanan appointed him governor of the Kanas Territory in 1857, Walker continued to stress the universalist character of Democratic principles.

Just a year earlier, in 1856, Walker had issued his *Pittsburgh Letter* to galvanize support for popular sovereignty before the Presidential election. This document was a powerful appeal for national unification according to Jacksonian principles that was translated into French, Italian and German to maximize its circulation among European immigrants. Reaching out to new voters constituted an important strategy for the Democratic Party of the 1850s. As the *National Era* noted in 1852, ‘active missionaries on behalf of the Democratic Party’ address ‘naturalized citizens in their own language, appealing especially to their revolutionary sympathies.’<sup>658</sup> The paper claimed that ‘the Democratic Party had always sympathized more cordially with revolution abroad while the Whigs were high toned conservatives, particularly hostile to the doctrines promulgated by Kossuth.’<sup>659</sup> But, by the mid-1850s, there was a growing threat from the Free Soil movement. It pointed out that

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid, 319.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid, 319.

<sup>658</sup> ‘Naturalized Citizens and Slavery,’ *National Era*, December 2 1852.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

immigrants were not ‘wedded to the triumphant party,’ and were particularly wary of the pro-slavery ‘Hunkers’ within the Democratic Party.<sup>660</sup> Free Soilers, appealing to the ‘universal principles’ associated with the 1848 Revolutions, could draw voters away from the Democratic fold.

In his letter, Walker described a nation still haunted by its colonial past, beset by monarchical forces from across the Atlantic. Rather than exclusively rally against pro or anti-slavery factions, Walker identified threats to decentralized government from both sides of that political divide. By sowing discord in the United States, he pictured the crowned heads reveling in their ‘exulted shouts.’ ‘Upon their gloomy banners’ they would inscribe ‘as they believe never to be effaced, their motto, “man is incapable of self-government.”’<sup>661</sup> Likewise, in his Inaugural Address as governor of Kansas, he tied the political struggles in Kansas to events in Europe. Walker told his audience that ‘our country and the world are regarding with profound interest the struggle now impending in Kansas: whether we are competent for self-government: whether we can decide this controversy peacefully....upon the plains of Kansas may now be fought the last great and decisive battle involving...the liberties of the world.’<sup>662</sup> Ultimately, Walker saw the conflict in Kansas as one part of a broader struggle against centralized power, whether against the federal government on the American continent or the monarchical powers of Europe, banding together in the ‘Holy Alliance.’ The *Pittsburgh Letter* was popular among ‘Young America’ Democrats for unifying the nation around the transcendent principle of popular sovereignty. The Philadelphia editor John Forney wrote to editor of the *Democratic Review* George Sanders in 1856 saying ‘I have Mr Walker’s great letter in hand and, at Mr Buchanan’s advice, have deferred its publication until after our October election, when it shall be spread at length before the public and approved in the strongest manner.’ Forney said it was ‘worthy of (Walker’s) vigorous and original intellect and will produce a capital effect.’<sup>663</sup>

Democratic newspapers also understood ‘popular sovereignty’ as a universal principle rooted in natural law, which transcended the divisions between individual nations. The Democratic organ in

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> *An Appeal for the Union, Letter from the Hon. Robert J. Walker*, September 30 1856, (n.p. 1856), 11.

<sup>662</sup> *Inaugural Address of R.J. Walker, Governor of Kansas Territory, delivered in Lecompton K.T., May 27 1857*, (Lecompton: ‘Union’ Office, 1857).

<sup>663</sup> John Forney to George Sanders, October 13 1856, George Sanders Papers, LOC.

Washington D.C., the *Daily Union* stated that under the Kansas-Nebraska Act the North and South had agreed that ‘the natural law of peaceful and spontaneous immigration’ should decide whether slavery would expand.’<sup>664</sup> It made the case that the Democrats were battling for the application of the same natural law in Kansas as the advocates of self-government in Europe: ‘the advocates of the “divine right of kings” resorted to every shift, whether by argument or by force, to crush out the idea of popular self-government - just as the Republicans are now laboring to defeat the application of the same idea in Kansas.’<sup>665</sup> A strident advocate of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the *Democratic Review* also spoke of popular sovereignty as a ‘natural right,’ which both native born Americans and immigrants were entitled to by virtue of being white men. In 1856, one writer explained ‘those whose natural right it is to share the patrimony of freedom are not like plants, which neither think nor act, the product of a particular soil, but men manumitted and enfranchised from the slavery of despotic principles, by the force of intellect and virtue.’<sup>666</sup>

Some Democratic newspapers also argued that slavery was a distraction from more important natural rights, such as the right to free trade. In 1852, the *Grand River Times* from Michigan admitted that the ‘two principal curses of our country are negro slavery and protectionism’ - relics of the ‘old political philosophy’ that Washington had not managed to banish when he expelled the English from American shores.<sup>667</sup> The paper emphasized Whig hypocrisy on the issue, arguing they only took action on the divisive issue of slavery, ignoring the importance of trade. The writer said ‘to governor Seward and all Whig abolitionists we would suggest that, before making another commonplace exposition in favor of the natural rights of man...they should examine their own tariff doctrine by the same light.’<sup>668</sup> In the state of nature, ‘the lonely barbarian has the right of procuring his provisions where they can be most easily obtained and bartering them where they can be most profitably sold.’<sup>669</sup> Society had no right to infringe upon this natural right in the form of protectionism if it was not strictly necessary for national security. The paper implied that the policy of ‘non-intervention’

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<sup>664</sup> ‘The Struggle Between Truth and Falsehood,’ *The Daily Union*, August 19 1856.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> ‘Know-Nothingism,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 37, (June 1856), 390.

<sup>667</sup> ‘Protection and Natural Rights,’ *Grand River Times*, June 30 1852.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

ensured that slavery was already on the road to extinction. By contrast, politicians should take action against the government's unwarranted intrusion in economic life.

### **Popular sovereignty and the conservative turn**

Despite 'Young America's' commitment to cosmopolitanism and natural law, the movement did take a conservative turn after the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. During 1850s, 'Young Americans' increasingly framed their principles in conservative language. Furthermore, whilst drawing on the abstract foundations of the nation, they now stressed the fragility of the Union too. A spirit of moderation became more appealing during the political tumult of the sectional crisis. As the 1850s wore on, there were cracks appearing in the global order, and the Democratic view of international politics was becoming harder to sustain. France had succumbed to a dictatorship, more violent than the old monarchical regime, the Crimean War plunged Eastern Europe into a conflict over the balance of power, and the British tightened their hold on India and Ireland after failed nationalist uprisings. In such a chaotic and disordered political climate, it was becoming more difficult to detect the fruits of social progress. By 1855, a cosmopolitan community did not seem to be emerging from the shadows of national self-determination. With democracy in retreat in Europe, Latin America and India, Democrats like Stephen Douglas became more defensive of American institutions. Sectionalists who sought to use the federal government to promote their own political and economic interests presented a profound threat to the rights of the states to govern themselves. The usurpation of centralized authority, from both abolitionists and pro-slavery Southerners, challenged many Democrats' notion of American exceptionalism. Now, American states faced the same danger of tyranny as European nations: the right of Kansas to govern itself was as contested as Hungary or France. In such unstable times, the 'Young Americans' began to draw more on the language of moderation and conciliation.

Whilst 'Young Americans' had always rallied against concentrations of federal power, the threats to state sovereignty had fundamentally changed in the 1850s, and so too did the adequate response to these dangers. In Europe after 1848, liberal democracy became a more conservative force

in response to the rising tides of socialism, communism and anarchism.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, in the United States, free soil, abolitionist and even socialist politics exploded onto the political mainstream. In the 1830s, direct democracy in the United States was seen as a radical movement, with Whigs warning of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ inherent in Jacksonian politics. Some conservative Whigs still used ‘democracy’ as a term of abuse, arguing that the United States should be called a ‘republic’ instead.<sup>671</sup> By 1848, however, the Democrats could make an increasingly coherent claim to the mantle of American conservatism. By then, the older patrician Whigs such as Rufus Choate, and writers like Sidney George Fischer, were losing their influence to a younger generation of ‘modernizers’ like Horace Greeley and William Seward, who were more internationalist in their outlook, with the former influenced by abolitionist and even socialist ideas.<sup>672</sup>

Like their conservative forbearers, these modernizing Whigs still seemed threatening to Democrats because they sought to use the federal government to affect social change. But whilst Whigs like Choate did so in the name of order and stability, Greeley began to advocate intervention on behalf of slaves and workingmen. He held fast to universal ideas and appropriated much of the ‘Young America’ rhetoric around westward expansion. Significantly, the most famous phrase associated with the American frontier - ‘go west young man!’ - was not popularized by Stephen Douglas or John O’Sullivan but Horace Greeley himself.<sup>673</sup> Whilst Democrats had always rallied against an aristocratic class of ‘federalists,’ after 1848 they also had to contend with a much more radical argument for federal intervention. As sectional animosities became more pronounced, the Democrats were forced to deal with threats from below as well as above - anarchy was now as dangerous as oppression. With Whig-Republicans dividing the nation along class lines against the

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<sup>670</sup> R. Kirke, *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Eliot*, (Channel Islands: Gateway, 2001), 275.

<sup>671</sup> C. Colton, *A Voice from America to England*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1839).

<sup>672</sup> Stewart Winger discusses the rise of the modernizing Whigs at more length in S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*. In addition to an older generation who cherished the principles of classical republicanism, Winger identifies ‘younger Whigs,’ ‘whose thinking was later taken up into Lincoln’s Republican Party.’ According to Winger, ‘reformed Protestant thought accompanied by Scottish moral philosophy or Romantic thought predominated while classical republican themes faded,’ 82. Daniel Howe also identifies ‘deliberate modernizers’ within the Whig Party, such as William Seward and Horace Greeley. D.W Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 184.

<sup>673</sup> C. Cross, *Go West Young Man! Horace Greeley’s Vision for America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).



Slave Power, and indulging in conspiratorial rhetoric, the Democrats had a new claim to be the party of national cohesion and compromise.

By the mid-1850s, Democrats noted that their party was becoming more conservative. Although the Democracy still stood for natural law, its members shied away from advocating the forceful expansion of American institutions as they had done at the beginning of the decade. At the Pennsylvania Democratic State Convention held in Harrisburg in 1856, William Montgomery of Washington County told the delegates ‘we are emphatically a “fast people”’ but we ‘begin to feel that we have been progressing too rapidly, and the masses with one accord demand of “Young America” to halt in her headlong career.’<sup>674</sup> Whilst in 1852, Pierre Soulé pushed for a departure from Washington’s Farewell Address on the question of foreign intervention, Montgomery argued that ‘we must go back to the true and tried statesmen of the past.’ Similarly, James Porter of Northampton said that ‘all we can ask of’ “Young America” is to ‘take a little advice...from the experience of age.’<sup>675</sup> Montgomery and Porter were typical of their party in supporting James Buchanan because of his conservative qualities. Despite his role in writing the Ostend Manifesto, Buchanan retained a reputation for conservative statesmanship at a time when the Democratic Party were moving away from the reckless adventurism of ‘Young America.’

More progressive Democrats like Stephen Douglas and Robert Walker also began to couch their ideas in the language of conservatism. Confronted with what they saw as unconstitutional federal intervention in the territories on the part of the Republican Party, these ‘Young Americans’ increasingly appealed to the authority of the Constitution and the Supreme Court. When Republicans expressed outrage at the Dred Scott decision, Robert Walker defended the Supreme Court as the ‘great conservative feature of our institutions.’<sup>676</sup> Walker spent the 1840s arguing that majority rule trumped the positive law of state constitutions, for instance in the case of the Dorr Rebellion. But,

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<sup>674</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Democratic State Convention held at Harrisburg, March 4th 1856*, (Philadelphia: W.M. Rice, Pennsylvanian Office Printer, 1856), 50.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>676</sup> *Inaugural Address of R.J. Walker, Governor of Kansas Territory, delivered in Lecompton K.T., May 27 1857*, (Lecompton: ‘Union’ Office, 1857).

after 1856, he found himself increasingly defending the Union with recourse to the Constitution, and using the term ‘conservative’ to defend his politics.

Politicians like Walker and Douglas also called for unity between the Democratic and former Whig parties. To be sure, Democrats continued to view the federal ideology of the Whig Party as dangerous, as it was manifested in the Republican Party. But they also appealed to decent-minded Whigs to join with Democrats in defense of the Constitution and property rights. Walker thus reached out to all Americans, saying ‘come Democrats, come Whigs, come friends of the Union of every party, come to the rescue of the Union.’<sup>677</sup> Whilst Democrats had previously divided the Union into two classes - the ‘aristocracy’ and ‘the people’ - they now rallied in defense of the Union against sectionalists and radicals. Although they still stood by the abstract ideas that the nation represented, the Democrats became increasingly anxious to preserve the physical entity of the Union too; a political unit that was beginning to look more and more precarious as the 1850s drew on.

Michigan Democrat Lewis Cass encapsulated the combination of conservative and progressive ethos at the heart of the policy of ‘popular sovereignty.’ For him, it was a universal principle encoded in the laws of nature. But it was also one that was tested by experience, rather than the theorizing common to abolitionism and socialism. Although Cass was relatively old and associated with a more conservative generation of Northern Democrats, sometimes dismissed by the likes of Douglas and O’Sullivan as ‘Old Fogies,’ he was nonetheless rooted in the same networks as the two Young Americans. In a speech in 1854, Cass drew on the language of ‘Young America,’ as he justified popular sovereignty according to those rights ‘written in the great volume of nature.’<sup>678</sup> He claimed that there were ‘certain inalienable rights which the bountiful creator has given to man as it emphatically announced in our Declaration of Independence.’<sup>679</sup> The Senator said that ‘among these is the rights to institute governments’ and that ‘there the principle stops.’<sup>680</sup> Here, Cass displayed more radical sentiments than an older generation of Whig statesmen who did not believe that popular sovereignty constituted a ‘natural right.’ As he pointed out, even Daniel Webster with ‘his powerful

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<sup>677</sup> *An Appeal for the Union, Letter from the Hon. Robert J. Walker*, September 30 1856, (n.p. 1856), 11

<sup>678</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 277 (1854).

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid, 277.

intellect' 'could not reconcile himself to this claim of self-government' – that the territories, as well as the states, could choose to regulate slavery as they pleased.<sup>681</sup>

Nevertheless, Cass also defined his nationalist vision in contrast to a set of more radical politicians, emerging from the Whig Party in the wake of the 1848 Revolutions. He took aim at figures like Horace Greeley with their distorted notions of political science which sought natural law in socialism, free love and the abolition of slavery. Whilst drawing on what he saw as a time-honored principle of 'popular sovereignty,' Cass denounced those who sought to reorganize the American nation according to their political theories. The 'questions of human rights' could not be 'solved with the precision of a mathematical problem, substituting Euclid for Jefferson. Applying 'the square and compass to human rights' was a 'subject beyond our reach.'<sup>682</sup> Only by trusting in the intellectual culture of the common people, and their power to institute their own governments did Cass believe the natural law could be established. To imagine 'angels in the shape of Congressmen' governing the territories was to 'make slaves of white communities.' If Congressmen were to attempt to impose their own political ideas on the settlers, 'political metaphysics' in America would play the same role 'the sword' played in Europe.<sup>683</sup> Despite his misgivings about political theories, it is important to note that Cass did continue to rely on the universal concepts of natural law and human rights, and advocated their immediate political implementation. He trusted Bright, Dickinson and Dodge to be 'on the side of human rights,' owing to their patriotism and intellectual power, whilst, at the same time, he warned against the 'philanthropists' who used 'political metaphysics' to undermine the established principles underlying national existence.<sup>684</sup>

The newfound conservatism of the 'Young Americans' did, at times, translate into anti-intellectualism but only towards political and theological elites. Although he drew on the language of 'divine law,' Stephen Douglas argued that this was properly expressed in the will of the majority, not by an elite class of philosophers or clergymen. In response to the Republicans' assertion of God's 'higher law,' the Little Giant exclaimed 'if we recognize three thousand clergymen as having a higher

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<sup>681</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid, 279.

right to interpret the will of God than we have, then we destroy the right of self-action, or self-government, or self-thought.’<sup>685</sup> True democracy would be undermined as Americans would simply ‘refer’ political questions ‘to this body of clergymen’ to inquire into whether they are ‘in conformity to the law of God...or not.’<sup>686</sup> For Douglas, the only moral response was to refer political questions to the people. He pointed out that ‘when God created man, he placed before him Good and Evil and endowed him with the capacity to decide for himself and held him responsible for the consequences of the choices he might make.’<sup>687</sup> As we shall see, Whig-Republicans, like Lincoln and Seward, believed that philosophers and clergymen were guardians of a ‘divine law,’ protecting individual rights - often against the tyranny of the mob.

Other Democrats shared Douglas’ skepticism towards intellectual elites, preferring to trust the conservative instincts of the common people. The ‘Young America’ Democrat from Philadelphia, Thomas L. Kane explained that he left the free soil movement because it could not win widespread support among the American people. Kane argued that it was useless to have the support of philosophers and writers and texts like ‘Emerson, the Tribune and Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ when anti-slavery failed to win over ‘the champions of...fair play’ who ‘profess the Gospel of the Declaration of Independence.’ ‘The true philosophy of our country,’ according to Kane, teaches to accept public opinion ‘with a view of understanding it. A law of our own social conditions to be deduced from it.’ Mirroring the language of Stephen Douglas, he argued that the ‘voice of the people’ amounted to ‘divine common sense’ and was ‘to the world’ ‘the voice of God.’<sup>688</sup> In another lecture, entitled ‘Old England or New England - who will govern the United States?’ Kane rallied against the idea that philosophers and theologians, rather than democratic majorities, were the rightful guardians of the natural law.<sup>689</sup> ‘As a Democrat and non-interventionist,’ he explained that he ‘detested’ ‘a priori reasoning.’ Citing the empiricist philosopher Aristotle as the ‘greatest thinker the earth’ has ever ‘produced,’ Kane complained that too many New Englanders tried to make the nation conform to

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<sup>685</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 621 (1854).

<sup>686</sup> Ibid, 621.

<sup>687</sup> *Speech of Senator Douglas at the Democratic Celebration of the Anniversary of American Freedom, in Independence Square Philadelphia, July 4 1854*, (n.p.) 5.

<sup>688</sup> ‘The English System, III.’ TLK Papers, BYU.

<sup>689</sup> ‘Old England or New England - will either govern the United States?’ TLK Papers, BYU.

their own ideals and prejudices. Having established ‘principles’ with ‘rules of conducts based thereupon’ they exerted power to ‘exact a complete conformity with them.’<sup>690</sup> They would establish a ‘theocratic dictatorship,’ disrespecting the ‘laws’ of ‘elected men’ by interrogating them ‘in terms of right or wrong.’<sup>691</sup> For Kane, the laws of nature and of nature’s God, safeguarded in the Declaration of Independence, were to be found in the will of the people themselves. Although Young America Democrats had long been champions of a democratized intellectual culture, they remained resolutely suspicious of theorizing by philanthropists and theologians, who argued that divine law and moral right constituted a higher authority than popular sovereignty. Turning his ire on the disrespect for majority rule among North Eastern abolitionists, Kane recalled in horror how ‘a single line of father, son and grandfather in Massachusetts, can boast of having concocted and coddled the alien and sedition and Main Liquor laws, the anti-Masonry and anti-Texas movements around one and the same old family mahogany?’<sup>692</sup> In New England, Kane saw nothing less than ‘champions of Old England’s imperial system.’ He hoped that one day Americans would discuss ‘Kansas’ ‘right to enter the Union’ and not ‘our privilege of compelling her to come in.’<sup>693</sup>

Democratic intellectuals like historian George Bancroft also believed that the voice of the people was an expression of God’s will. For Bancroft, the people should not defer their judgement to a superior class of thinkers. In an 1854 lecture before the New York Historical Society, he declared ‘the many are wiser than the few; the multitude than the philosopher; the race than the individual and each successive generation than its predecessor.’<sup>694</sup> For Bancroft, ‘common sense’ took priority over the wisdom of the philosopher, teaching that ‘each individual is to contribute some share toward the general intelligence.’<sup>695</sup> Similarly, he argued ‘the husbandman or mechanic of a Christian congregation solves questions regarding God and man’s destiny, which perplexed the philosophers of

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid. It is important to note that although Kane rallied against authors and philosophers from New England, as well as abstract ‘a priori’ reasoning, he presented himself as more intellectually advanced than these thinkers. Inspired by August Comte’s general law of ‘three stages,’ Kane evidently considered himself an ‘empirical’ thinker, more attuned to social progress than the metaphysical and theological reasoning of anti-slavery zealots. Indeed, Comte maintained an active correspondence with Comte.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> G. Bancroft *The Necessity, the Reality and the Promise of Progress of the Human Race, oration delivered before the New York Historical Society November 20 1854*, (New York: Printed for the Society, 1854), 10.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid, 10.

ancient Greece.<sup>696</sup> As we shall go on to explore, many Whig-Republican politicians had profound reservations about making majority rule the bedrock of the American Union in this way. For them, the indisputable, or ‘natural’ authority, upon which all other rights and institutions were based, was the right to the fruit of one’s labor - a right enlightened minds knew to be more important than majority rule.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of this shift in the rhetoric of the ‘Young America’ movement was the extent to which Democrats justified their support for Stephen Douglas in the 1860 election on the grounds that he was the ‘conservative’ candidate. In the 1840s and the early 50s, the ‘Little Giant’ and his followers were almost synonymous with reckless adventurism, and the desertion of the Declaration of Independence in favor of new, untried principles. As this chapter will go on to explore, some conservative Whigs did continue to make this case against ‘Young Americans’ throughout the 1850s. However, ‘Young Americans’ now claimed to be a force for moderation and conciliation. None other than Pierre Soulé, the author of the Ostend Manifesto, who was exiled from France for revolutionary activities, now declared that the ‘conservatism of the north’ will ‘group around Stephen Douglas.’<sup>697</sup> It is important to note, however, that neither Douglas, Soulé, nor any of the ‘Young Americans’ had changed their commitment to the essential components of Jacksonian nationalism, nor the idea of universal principles or natural laws, which would have been so repugnant to an older generation of conservatives.<sup>698</sup> Rather, the world had changed around them. The advent of

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<sup>696</sup> G. Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies*, 512-13. Cited in S. Winger, *Romantic Cultural Politics*, 132.

<sup>697</sup> Speech of Pierre Soulé quoted in *New York Times*, July 28 1860. For another Douglas supporter couching their politics in conservative terms, see *Speech of Hon. W.A. Richardson, of Illinois, delivered in Burlington, New Jersey, Tuesday evening, July 17, 1860*, (<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/abj4952.0001.001/2?page=root;size=100;view=image>), accessed 23/02/18, 4. He declared ‘between the position of Mr Breckenridge and Mr Lincoln, the great body of conservative men in this country can have no choice...It is their right, it ought to be their privilege.’ However, Richardson continued to see politics in millenarian terms, as an eternal battle between opposing principles, of which he had always been on the right side – ‘the difference between the Republican Party and the party to which Breckenridge belongs is this: they are both in favor of intervention’ whilst Douglas and Richardson favored popular sovereignty and non-intervention.’

<sup>698</sup> It is also important to note that both Soulé and George Sanders chose to support Stephen Douglas in 1860, rather than the Southern candidate John Breckenridge. This suggests that ‘Young Americans’ cannot purely be understood in terms of sectional ideologies, even by the end of the decade, but continued to rally around Jacksonian nationalism.

socialism, abolitionism and more interventionist forms of liberalism, together with the death of patrician conservatism, had made libertarian democracy a more conservative force.

### **Anti-slavery and popular sovereignty**

Convinced that majority rule constituted the natural law, 'Young America' Democrats were adamant that the people would vote to exclude slavery from the territories because it violated the order of nature. From studying congressional speeches, newspaper articles and private letters, it becomes clear that the majority of 'Young Americans' were committed to putting slavery on the path to extinction. Predominantly from the free states, the majority of the movement did believe their policies of territorial expansion and popular sovereignty would result in the triumph of free labor. Unlike Lincoln's Republican Party, however, they (misguidedly) believed slavery would be extinguished in the absence of federal intervention - a condition conducive to the operation of natural law. Furthermore, Democrats despised the presence of free blacks within white communities as much as they did slaves. This white supremacy meant that racial exclusion, through colonization and even extermination, were the only alternatives they envisioned to the continuation of slavery within the United States.

Although deeply racist, Democrat Cyrus Dunham was adamant that slavery was contrary to the laws of nature. Drawing on a fictitious state of nature, he argued 'if a black man and a white man should rise up out of the ocean upon some naked island, over which human legislation had never extended, it would be very hard to decide by any show of natural law, which should be the slave.'<sup>699</sup> Dunham then proceeded to argue that the laissez-faire policy of non-intervention and popular sovereignty would enable this natural law to thrive. He claimed that the Governor of Kansas could only block 'positive laws,' not the law of nature itself. Since 'positive legislation will be necessary to the introduction of slavery,' the Governor's veto would only be used to outlaw slavery in the territories.<sup>700</sup> By contrast, 'at the outset,' the territories will be without law' and 'without law as I have

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<sup>699</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1134 (1854).

<sup>700</sup> Ibid, 1134.

shown there can be no slavery.<sup>701</sup> The Governor could not therefore use his veto to prevent the extinction of slavery, since this was ordained by nature, not by legislation. Those who ‘fear “Young America,”’ he argued, should take comfort from the fact that nature was on their side.

In September 1854, a newspaper from Lewis Cass’ home state, *The Grand River Times*, reinforced the Michigan Senator’s belief that slavery contravened the laws of nature. The paper declared that ““General Cass in his elaborate speech on the Nebraska Bill, demonstrated the utter absurdity of the claim that slavery could be carried into the territories by any power conferred by the Constitution.””<sup>702</sup> Apparently, he had shown that slavery could only exist by ““positive enactment”” and was therefore not liable to protection from the constitution in an area untouched by human legislation.<sup>703</sup> The *Times* also claimed that the Democrat Robert Walker believed natural law to be inherently anti-slavery. The paper quoted from Walker’s ‘Mississippi Report’ that said ““the right of the master exists, not by force of the law of nature or of nations, but by virtue only of the positive law.””<sup>704</sup> Since slavery was condemned by ““reason and the law of nature,”” he wrote that it would be struck down by a majority vote, unprotected - as it was - by the same constitutional protections as other forms of ‘property.’ Similarly, the article quoted Wiley Harris from Mississippi who compared Nebraska to ““an island, fresh risen from the sea,”” where the Constitution could not tell wherever ““black or a white person”” should be enslaved.<sup>705</sup> In a territory governed by natural law, where slavery did not already exist, Wiley argued that the natural law of ‘popular sovereignty’ would preserve freedom. The newspaper put together these quotations from Democratic politicians to suggest that a laissez-faire government policy would preserve the natural state of liberty in the territories.

In November 1854, the *Weekly National Intelligencer* championed Charles E. Stuart’s Congressional speech that drew on natural law to argue that ‘the Nebraska Bill does not open the territory to slavery, that slavery cannot exist without positive law, and that slavery has never advanced

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<sup>701</sup> Ibid, 1134.

<sup>702</sup> ‘Slavery: a creature of municipal law,’ *Grand River Times*, September 13 1854.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.



a step into free territory.<sup>706</sup> The paper relayed Stuart's claim that the Nebraska Bill "makes a tabula rasa"; that "slavery cannot go" into the territory "without positive law."<sup>707</sup> Slavery was not a relation entrenched in the Constitution, but a relic of British imperialism propped up by *lex loci*, or local law. Since new territories were governed by the universally applicable 'natural law,' however, they did not sanction slavery. Moreover, in the absence of federal intervention, the majority of settlers would have no reason to introduce it. For 'Young Americans' like Stuart, the decisions of democratic majorities were inherently just, especially when made up of the more enterprising settlers from the free states. The Democrats' insistence that slavery required 'positive law' to survive later provided the foundation for Stephen Douglas' Freeport Doctrine. In his renowned debates with Douglas in 1858, Lincoln argued that 'popular sovereignty' was incompatible with the Dred Scott decision, which deemed the explicit exclusion of slavery in the western territories unconstitutional. Douglas replied that settlers could still practically exclude slavery because it required positive law to survive, particularly local police powers. By simply refusing to pass this legislation, the natural law would prevail, allowing the territory to become a free state. Legislation to exclude slavery was unnecessary, because free labor would 'naturally' prevail, unless positive legislation explicitly sanctioned the South's 'peculiar institution.'

Other Democrats believed the Kansas-Nebraska Act would bring about a 'natural order' without slavery. In 1856, Martin Van Buren was in no doubt that popular sovereignty – properly enforced - would prevent the expansion of slavery. He told Samuel Tilden's brother, Moses, 'if Mr Pierce had from the beginning...interfered efficiently against foreign interference, as soon as he 'notices the movements' of the Missourians, 'Kansas would have been a territory so decisively free as to put an end to attempts to make it a slave state.'<sup>708</sup> Just like national independence movements in Europe, all Pierce had to do to ensure the success of 'popular sovereignty' was to prevent the

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<sup>706</sup> 'The Canvas in Michigan,' *Weekly National Intelligencer*, November 18 1854. Together with David C. Broderick of California and George E. Pugh of Ohio, Charles E. Stuart made up a triumvirate of western Democrats who joined Stephen Douglas' attack on the Leecompton Constitution in the Senate. Earlier in the decade, they had been outspoken critics of the Republican Party, whilst they now turned their ire on the centralizing tendencies of the Buchanan administration.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Letter from Martin Van Buren to Moses Tilden, September 1 1856, 119.

intervention of 'foreign' powers - be it the federal government, or the border Ruffians of Missouri. Only then, would the principle of 'non- intervention' be vindicated in the 'estimation of the world.'<sup>709</sup> Successful in its attempts to solve any problem - including slavery - democratic principles would finally assume their just influence on the international stage.

As well as taking the law of nature to mean universal political principles, the Democrats also drew on the physical geography of the United States to reinforce their argument that slavery was contrary to the natural order. In the Senate in 1854, Douglas maintained that the 'law of physical geography' trumped the authority of the Missouri Compromise, and undermined its status as a 'solemn compact.'<sup>710</sup> Whilst the Compromise of 1820 was based on 'Congressional interference,' the Kansas-Nebraska Act, like the Compromise of 1850, rested on 'natural law.' Douglas made the case that Whig statesmen such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster would have agreed with him. He admitted Webster believed 'every foot of territory in the United States was fixed to as to its character for freedom or slavery by an irrevocable law.' Nevertheless, according to Douglas, Webster believed this 'irrevocable law' was the law of nature itself, not Congressional compromise.<sup>711</sup> The Democrat drew on Webster's speech from March 7th 1850 that said "'as to California and New Mexico, I hold slavery to be excluded from those territories, by a law even superior to that which admits and sanctions it in Texas - I mean the law of nature - of physical geography - the law of the formation of the earth.'"<sup>712</sup> Similarly, he claimed that Webster believed the prohibition of slavery in Oregon, according to the Wilmot Proviso, was 'entirely useless and senseless.'<sup>713</sup> Thus, Douglas argued that Congressional legislation was futile in the face of 'the laws of God,' manifested in the 'physical geography' of the United States.

The governor of Kansas, Robert J. Walker was equally keen to root popular sovereignty in the authority of natural science - one more weighty than mere positive law, or Congressional Compromise. In his Inaugural Address as Governor of the Kansas Territory, he told his audience

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>710</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 333 (1854).

<sup>711</sup> Ibid, 333.

<sup>712</sup> S. Douglas, 'The Nebraska and Kansas Bill - Debate,' 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Senate, 333.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid, 3330.

‘there is a law more powerful than the legislation of man, more potent than passion or prejudice, that must ultimately determine the location of slavery in this country; it is the isothermal line, it is the law of the thermometer, of latitude, of altitude, regulating climate, labor and productions and profit and loss.’<sup>714</sup> These environmental laws worked in tandem with God’s will on earth. Walker declared that the ‘isothermal line’ ‘can no more be controlled by the legislation of man than any other moral or physical law of the almighty.’<sup>715</sup>

Convinced that slavery was best extinguished by withdrawing federal intervention from the territories, Northern Democrats were also anxious that the Republican Party was using slavery as a covert means to enlarge the federal government. In September 1856, Martin Van Buren talked to Moses Tilden about his fear of the new anti-slavery party. Writing privately, Van Buren confessed that he had not relinquished his firm stance against the perpetuation of slavery in the United States. He confessed that it was a ‘wonder’ that the Union had persisted for so long, given the ‘element of discord of such magnitude and of so disturbing a nature as that of slavery.’<sup>716</sup> Nevertheless, he was emphatic that the Republican policy of using the federal government to ban slavery in the territories would only threaten the independence of the states. He told the older Tilden ‘I think there is the greater reason to fear that to commit the power of the government into such hands, at a moment so critical as the present would be but the “beginning of the end” in regard to the confederacy.’<sup>717</sup> Imploring anti-slavery Democrats to return to their former party, he claimed ‘there are I trust few Democrats who would like to subject their control and to the plundering propensities of their followers the treasury, much less the government itself.’<sup>718</sup> His dalliance with the Free Soil Party firmly behind him, Van Buren warned ‘our friends who think they can go with the so-called Republicans and then return make a dangerous experiment. The party has always been a home from whence very few Democratic travelers have ever returned.’<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> *Inaugural Address of R.J. Walker*, May 27 1857.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> Letter from Martin Van Buren to Moses Tilden, September 1 1856, 119.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Martin Van Buren worried that too many would-be Democrats were drifting into the Republican fold. To Moses Tilden, he singled out John C. Fremont, the Republican Presidential nominee in the election of 1856. As an explorer and scientist famous for intrepid investigations into the western territories, Fremont appeared to embody the western-centric ideology of Jacksonian nationalism. Van Buren, for example wrote that he had a ‘very favorable opinion of Col. Fremont personally.’<sup>720</sup> Even the *Democratic Review*, and its Kentucky editor George Sanders, looked upon him as a national hero.<sup>721</sup> But, Van Buren was worried that ‘Seward, Greeley and Reed’ were manipulating Fremont into representing a federalist party like the Republicans.<sup>722</sup> Rather than ‘flying to unknown evils,’ Van Buren told Tilden that men like Fremont were best suited to the ‘conservative character of the Democratic Party,’ which would ‘preserve the sovereignty of states.’<sup>723</sup> Under the cover of Fremont, on the other hand, the Republicans would preside over the ‘long lost ascendancy’ of ‘ancient federalism.’<sup>724</sup> The Democrats’ attempts to reach out to anti-slavery Jacksonians, who were gravitating towards the Republican Party, would become more desperate as the decade wore on, and the Buchanan administration sacrificed states’ rights to the Slave Power at Lecompton.

Moses’ better-known brother, Samuel, agreed with Martin Van Buren that the Republicans advocated a dangerous infringement on state sovereignty, akin to European imperial power. Samuel Tilden argued that the founding fathers formed the Union when the states ‘existed as independent sovereignties.’<sup>725</sup> Apparently, they ‘might have constructed a system...imperial in character’ that subjected ‘all the internal affairs of the states to the dominion of a centralized government.’<sup>726</sup> Instead, they chose to grant independence to individual states - a principle ‘binding’ not only ‘by compact’ but ‘by its intrinsic wisdom and righteousness.’<sup>727</sup> So great was this principle of ‘non-intervention’ that

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>721</sup> The *Democratic Review* had long been publishing complementary articles on John Fremont, even referencing his geographical surveys in articles promoting Texas annexation. As both scientist and western pioneer, Fremont was perhaps the *Review*’s archetypal Romantic hero. ‘Fremont’s Expeditions,’ *United States Democratic Review*, 17, (July-August, 1845), and ‘The Texas Question,’ *United States Democratic Review*, 14, (April 1844).

<sup>722</sup> Letter from Martin Van Buren to Moses Tilden, September 1 1856, 120.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid, 120

<sup>724</sup> Ibid, 120

<sup>725</sup> S. Tilden, *The Union! Its Dangers!!! And how they can be averted – letter from Samuel Tilden to Honorable William Kent, October 26 1860*, (New York: n.p.), 7.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid, 7

Tilden could not imagine slavery coming to an end any other way. ‘So wonderful are the laws of mutual action,’ resulting from state sovereignty, that it could ‘work for the welfare of all better than foreign government, and better than the propagandism of any system by foreign force,’ such as the federal government.<sup>728</sup>

Other Northern Democrats concurred. Cyrus Dunham specified that slavery was contrary to ‘natural right,’ but argued that settlers would only obey laws they had made themselves. ‘In a country like ours where the people have been accustomed to yield obedience only to laws self-imposed,’ he said, ‘they will but little respect those which may be imposed upon them, against their wish, by a legislature they have not selected.’<sup>729</sup> Given the ‘natural’ superiority of free labor, Dunham argued that Northerners ‘have nothing to fear from free and fair competition with the people of the south.’<sup>730</sup> Mirroring an argument that several Northern Democrats applied to Cuba, he said ‘scores of her hardy laborers’ will ‘press forward into the western wilds with greater facility than a single slaveholder with his negroes and the paraphernalia of his plantation.’<sup>731</sup> For the ‘Young America’ Democrats, slavery itself was a result of federal overreach. *Democratic Review* editor, George Sanders and historian George Bancroft both argued that the British had established it in the American colonies in the first place – a legacy propped up by the federal government even since. Sanders implored the ‘republican statesmen of Europe’ to believe that ‘the existence of slavery in the United States is an inheritance from the British government.’<sup>732</sup>

In 1858, California Democrat and close ally of Stephen Douglas, David Broderick made a forceful case that popular sovereignty was the ultimate fulfilment of the ideology of ‘free labor.’ In the Senate, he argued that, if he were a true friend of free labor, William Seward would not lament the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Rather, the Republican Party should rejoice that the territories were a ‘common battle-field in which the conflicting rights of free and slave labor might struggle for

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<sup>728</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>729</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1133 (1854).

<sup>730</sup> Ibid, 1133

<sup>731</sup> Ibid, 1133.

<sup>732</sup> ‘Kossuth Against the Slavery Agitation - Mazzini’s Letter Explained, in a correspondence between consul Sanders and M. Kossuth,’ *New York Times* 24 June 1854. For Bancroft’s view on slavery as an inheritance from the British, see Introduction.

supremacy.<sup>733</sup> Committed to free western territories, Broderick argued that Stephen Douglas had only repealed the Missouri Compromise as a route to free labor. ‘Representing a free state,’ Douglas ‘saw the beneficial results that were to flow from it to the people of the North.’ Eager to ‘devote the whole territories of the Union to the control of free labor,’ ‘it was not for him to object when he found almost a united south endorsing the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.’<sup>734</sup> Although the ‘north felt that a great wrong had been committed against their rights,’ this was not the case. Rather, ‘the South should have mourned the removal of that barrier, the removal of which will let upon her feeble and decaying institutions millions of free laborers.’<sup>735</sup> Echoing the free labor argument Eli Thayer and Edward C. Marshall made for the annexation of Cuba, Broderick said it were ‘Northern opinions, Northern ideas, Northern institutions’ which would monopolize the new territories.<sup>736</sup> Even a ‘dissolution of the Union’ would not prevent the flow of free labor southward, according to Broderick: it could not ‘lessen the amount of immigration or the number of free white men seeking for homes or a market for their labor.’<sup>737</sup> It was simply inevitable that the ‘compulsory labor for slaves’ will give way before the ‘intelligent labor of free men.’<sup>738</sup>

Overall, we can see that the Democrats relentlessly stressed the international significance of ‘popular sovereignty’ and ‘non-intervention’ because it was rooted in ‘natural law’ - a set of universal principles that were applicable in all times and places. Rather than appealing to the distinct needs of individual nations, Democrats drew on the principles common to all humanity that bound the nations together. To lift themselves above the grounds of party, ‘Young America’ Democrats referred to the ‘natural laws’ governing an imagined cosmopolitan community.<sup>739</sup> However, by 1854, the ‘Young Americans’ also couched their political discourse in the language of conservatism. In the latter half of the decade, they emphasized the historical pedigree of the Democratic principle and the importance of

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<sup>733</sup> D. C. Broderick, *Against the Admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution delivered in the Senate of the United States, March 22 1858*, (Washington: Lamuel Towers, 1858).

<sup>734</sup> Ibid, 9

<sup>735</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>737</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>739</sup> This radical cosmopolitanism was distinct from the Whigs’ view of nationalism. Whigs made a claim to non-partisanship by arguing that enlightened statesmen would balance competing interests within the national polity. Although, as this chapter will explore, ‘modernizing’ Whigs like Lincoln began to root the Union in the natural law of the Declaration of Independence after 1854 – defined as freedom from slavery, rather than democracy.

a conciliatory spirit for keeping the Union together. Set on the universal foundations of state sovereignty and majoritarian rule, the Democrats believed they could perpetuate and perfect the Union, with slavery receding under the steady influence of democratic ideals. Indeed, as the Buchanan administration fell under the influence of the Slave Power, the Young Americans' vision of Democratic Unionism looked more and more appealing to anti-slavery Jacksonians within the Republican Party.

### **Jacksonian nationalism and anti-slavery after the Lecompton Constitution**

Conflict had been a constant feature of life on the frontier since the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed in 1854, particularly in the new territory of Kansas, where the climate was conducive to establishing slavery. 'Border Ruffians,' sympathetic to slavery, streamed in from Missouri whilst Eli Thayer's Emigrant Aid Company struck back by organizing the emigration of free laborers. Fighting for its foundational principles, Kansas fell victim to the same violence and instability that characterized Europe and Latin America during the mid-century 'Age of Revolutions.'<sup>740</sup> From the outset, anti-slavery forces were losing the battle to establish a free state. In 1855, they made a doomed lunge for freedom by passing the anti-slavery Topeka Constitution in December. When the constitution was put to the settlers for approval in January the following year, most pro-slavery men boycotted the vote. Lacking approval of the entire territory, President Franklin Pierce condemned the Constitution. Although passed by the House of Representatives, it was ultimately held in committee by the Senate.

The pro-slavery settlers answered the Topeka Constitution with one of their own, drawn up at Lecompton in September 1857. Free soil settlers did not participate in the election for its approval – a process that was marred by corruption, with 6,000 fraudulent votes cast in favor of the constitution.

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<sup>740</sup> Historians characterize the period from 1850-1870 as one of extraordinary violence driven by the ideology of liberal nationalism. As Patrick Kelley explains, the "period between 1840-1880" was one of "extraordinary violence," driven by "economic development, national unification and democratic government, a nineteenth century ideology Enrique Dal Lago has termed 'progressive nationalism;'" one that connected "concurrent rebellions occurring in China, Europe and South America." P. Kelley, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and the Transnational Turn in Civil War History,' *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 4, (September, 2014), 432.

Nevertheless, Lecompton fared better in Washington D.C. Sympathetic to slavery, and eager to preserve political order, President James Buchanan endorsed the document. With the official backing of the Democratic administration, it looked like slavery would prevail. Dissent, however, came from an unlikely source: ‘Young America’ Democrats within Buchanan’s Party turned on their own leader. Having supported Buchanan in the election of 1856, Congressman Stephen Douglas did everything in his power to prevent the decisions made at Lecompton from becoming a reality. Aided by the work of Free Soil lawyer Thomas Ewing Jr., who directed an investigation into the fraudulent ballots, Douglas claimed that the document debased the true principle of ‘popular sovereignty’ and argued vehemently against its passage in Congress. Three senators from the western states, David Broderick, Charles Stuart and George Pugh, joined Douglas’ attacks in the Senate. Outside Washington D.C., other allies rallied to Douglas’ cause. The Democratic historian, and advocate for free labor, George Bancroft, provided him with the colonial precedents against Lecompton. Appointed by Buchanan just a year earlier, Robert Walker also refused to sanction the constitution, and resigned from his position as Governor of Kansas rather than oversee its implementation. Similarly, Philadelphia Democrat and former editor of the administration’s flagship newspaper, John Forney attacked Buchanan for crumbling before the will of Southern slaveowners. Old Buck’s solution to the civil war waging in the territories was being consumed by the progressive ‘Young America’ faction within the Democratic fold. In the words of Stephen Douglas, ‘by God, sir, I made James Buchanan, and by God sir, I can unmake him.’<sup>741</sup>

The behavior of Douglas supporters at this moment is at odds with the dominant interpretation of Northern Democrats before the Civil War. If Douglas, Walker, Bancroft and Forney were mere pawns of the Slave Power, why did they take a principled stand against the South? Why did they turn against their own party because of an abstract political ideal? If free labor and fear of the Slave Power distinguished Republicans from Northern Democrats, why were the latter consumed by these two preoccupations too? If ‘Young America’ was a force for compromise – both within the Democratic Party and the nation at large – why did Douglas divide his own party, and prevent quick

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<sup>741</sup> Stephen Douglas quoted in K. Walters, *Lincoln, the Rise of the Republicans and the Coming of the Civil War: A Reference Guide*, (ABC, 2013), 117.



admission of Kansas as a free state (an action that would have enabled the construction of Douglas' beloved Pacific railroad)? By exploring 'Young America's' response to the Lecompton Constitution, we can see that the group were driven by a deep commitment to rolling back the power of the federal government, not keeping the Democratic Party together, or protecting and extending the influence of slaveholders. Furthermore, we can see that Democratic Unionism – based on popular sovereignty and non-intervention – had considerable appeal to anti-slavery Northerners in the run up to Civil War, including from within the Republican Party.<sup>742</sup>

Disgusted at Buchanan's betrayal of popular sovereignty, the Democrat from New York, John B. Haskin, ran for re-election to the 36th Congress on an Anti-Lecompton ticket. A meeting was organized at Tarrytown to rally support for Haskin that was designed to appeal to anti-slavery Jacksonians in the Republican as well as Democratic parties. It was advertised, for example, 'without regard to party,' implying the political principles involved should transcend partisan differences. At stake was the foundation of 'natural law' itself - the right of majorities to form their own governments, free of federal interference. The prominent Philadelphia Democrat, and supporter of Stephen Douglas, John Forney spoke at the meeting. Ever optimistic, he cried that the people were 'coming to popular sovereignty,' imploring Republicans 'let us take that as a single principle. Everything else that is right will follow.' Fellow Democrat Charles Goepp, who had written the homage to 'Young America' *The United States of the World* in 1853, also predicted 'a great coming together' of the two northern parties. For these Democrats, the establishment of 'popular sovereignty' remained an obtainable goal during the late 1850s. Indeed, it was the only hope for settling the fate over slavery in a just and enduring manner, compatible with the principles of American nationality.

In his speech at the rally, Forney framed his opposition to the Buchanan administration in terms of 'Young America's' older commitment to an international order free from centralized power. He claimed that in Haskin's election 'the principle which has made every liberal government in the world is at stake.'<sup>743</sup> Forney compared the current struggle with the enthusiasm for Kossuth and the

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<sup>742</sup> In his masterful study of popular sovereignty, historian Christopher Childers ends his study around the time of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He therefore misses an opportunity to examine the appeal of popular sovereignty within the Republican fold. See C. Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*.

<sup>743</sup> 'The Anti-Lecompton Meeting at Tarrytown,' *New York Tribune*, September 3 1858.

Hungarian Revolution that had swept the nation earlier in the decade, and had, indeed, provoked the Pennsylvanian to go on a speaking tour in favor of the European revolutions in 1851. Apparently, ‘Kossuth came to this country and by the power of his eloquence, extracted from a money loving...people hundreds of thousands of dollars...because the people of Hungary had been denied the privileges of self-government by Austria.’<sup>744</sup> Forney recalled how his ‘blood had been made to boil by the butcheries of Haynou in Hungary’ just as ‘my blood has been made to boil by the butcheries of Buchanan in Illinois.’ Accordingly, ‘every American who has not come up to the test of Lecompton has been beheaded.’<sup>745</sup> The same ‘democratic principles’ that Forney and Goepp hoped to see flourish in Europe and Latin America during the 1840s, would - they thought - provide the only satisfactory solution to the crisis over slavery.

Once he was successfully elected to Congress, John Haskin defied Buchanan and tried to rally Democrats *and* Republicans around Douglas’ commitment to popular sovereignty. On the floor of Congress, he attacked Buchanan for being beholden to Southern interests, saying ‘the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty which underlies...our national government is sought to be overthrown and destroyed by the south.’<sup>746</sup> Carving out a political niche above partisan squabbling, he glorified the anti-Lecompton Democrats for prioritizing principle over party. Placing himself in a tradition of great philosophers and statesmen, Haskin singled out the ‘Necker of the administration of James Polk - Governor Walker’ and ‘the Gibbon of American history - George Bancroft.’ A western nationalist to the core, he also praised the ‘father of the new states of the West, the heroic, the honest, the able, the fearless, the determined Douglas.’<sup>747</sup> This combination of western nationalism, radical cosmopolitanism and concern for intellectual culture revealed Haskin’s continued debt to ‘Young America.’ Even as the crisis over slavery became interminable, Democrats advanced a Jacksonian solution to the sectional crisis, which had changed little from the previous decade.

Accused of being an ‘agitator,’ Haskin boasted of his pride at routing the political establishment. Whilst Buchanan’s supporters blindly followed party, he stood up for the natural law -

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1052 (1858).

<sup>747</sup> Ibid, 1052.

the ‘democratic principle’ found in enlightened political science. He told Congress ‘popular sovereignty....is the child of light...it is the spirit which lived where a Tell dwelt...it wrested the Magna Carta from King John,’ gave Habeas Corpus to Britain and ‘the Declaration of Independence to us.’<sup>748</sup> By contrast, ‘opposition to agitation is the child of darkness...fostered by kings and emperors....it has in France established the censorship of the press, and is used to keep light from the oppressed people and keep them in ignorance.’<sup>749</sup> In other words, it defied the principles of the ‘progressive democracy’ of which he had once been part. To push ‘popular sovereignty’ further beyond the whims of party politics, Haskin referenced Tocqueville’s maxim that “‘from their origin the sovereignty of the people was the fundamental principle of the greater number of the British colonies in America.’”<sup>750</sup> He also quoted Montesquieu on the role of virtue in maintaining order in the republic since ‘what he so ably wrote in the last century is applicable to the present state of affairs in our republic.’<sup>751</sup> For Democrats like Haskin, political science illuminated the eternal truth of popular sovereignty in the face of a corrupt and partisan Democratic establishment.

Outside Congress, editor John Forney continued his assault on the Buchanan administration for pandering to despotic Southerners. In the face of widespread criticism from the pro-Buchanan press, the newspaperman parodied the administration’s position. In his own paper aimed at Independent Democrats, the *Philadelphia Press*, Forney made fun of the idea of Buchanan asking “‘Walker and Douglas’” to “‘unite in support of my Kansas policy’” and support the territorial election of September 21st, even though it was ‘held under circumstances of fraud and infamy.’<sup>752</sup> Buchanan was portrayed begging Douglas and Walker, “‘I know you have the strong side of the question. I know that you can carry off the people but I appeal to you to stand with me otherwise Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama will secede from the Union.’”<sup>753</sup> For John W. Forney, James Buchanan had certainly turned into a ‘Northern Democrat with southern principles.’ But, Douglas,

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<sup>748</sup> Ibid, 1053.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid, 1053.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid, 1055

<sup>751</sup> Ibid, 1055

<sup>752</sup> ‘Forney and Popular Sovereignty, including a reprint of Forney’s justification of popular sovereignty in the “Philadelphia Press,”’ *New York Tribune*, October 1 1858.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

Haskin and Walker, holding fast to Young America's cosmopolitan vision, were fighting for the universal principles of popular sovereignty and non-intervention: ones they believed had as much traction among Republicans as they did Southerners.

Stephen Douglas made similar comparisons in a speech on the Lecompton Constitution on March 22 1857, likening Buchanan's use of executive power to 'continental despots.'<sup>754</sup> Whilst in the heyday of 'Young America,' Douglas rallied against 'British-backed' abolitionists, he now attacked the Democratic administration for being beholden to the Slave Power. In his comparisons with Europe, Douglas suggested that the current crisis presented a profound challenge to America's exceptionalist mission. Without the cornerstone of 'popular sovereignty,' Douglas implied that American democracy would fade and die. The Illinois Senator pointed out that at least 'in Old England, whose oppressions we thought intolerable, an administration is hurled from power in an hour when voted down by the representatives of the people upon a Government measure.'<sup>755</sup> Although he conceded that Louis Napoleon's France was the greatest despotism of them all, the famously 'Anglophobic' Stephen Douglas admitted that Buchanan's Presidential veto over the popular vote in Kansas constituted a usurpation of executive power, unknown in Britain. He said:

In that monarchical country where they have a queen by divine right...and where Republicanism is said to have but a slight foothold, the representatives of the people can check the throne, restrain the government, check the ministry and give a new direction of the policy of the government, without being accountable to the King or Queen.<sup>756</sup>

Other Democrats noted Douglas' role as a martyr for 'popular sovereignty' within the Buchanan administration. One pamphlet claimed 'Tories prated about the Divine right of kings...and talked about "rebel Americans" just as King James I (Buchanan) and his tools now talk about "rebel Douglas" and his "popular sovereignty."<sup>757</sup>

Rallying against the Buchanan administration, 'Young Americans' drew on the intellectual and political networks they had created during the previous decade. Stephen Douglas maintained an

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<sup>754</sup> S. Douglas, 'Speech in the Senate on the Lecompton Constitution, Delivered March 22, 1857,' *Stephen Douglas: His Life, Public Services, Patriotism and Speeches*, (Cambridge, Mass: Clarke E Car 1909), 234.

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>757</sup> *Campaign Plain Dealer and Popular Sovereignty Advocate* October 13 1860, 27.

active correspondence with historian George Bancroft as the sectional crisis worsened. Not content with mere partisan maneuvering, both men drew on intellectual culture to argue that their principles for national unification were rooted in the universal authority of political science. For example, in 1857, Douglas asked Bancroft to furnish him with precedents for the policy of popular sovereignty rooted from the colonial era. Bancroft responded that ‘the principle of democracy requires popular sovereignty’ and that ‘all precedents are that way.’<sup>758</sup> Bancroft cited Congress’ willingness to let the original thirteen colonies decide on the status of slavery and how that led to a policy of emancipation in the Northern states. According to the historian, ‘the principle and prevailing practice in Virginia’ during the 18th century ‘utterly repudiate the proceedings of the Lecompton Constitution.’<sup>759</sup> These historical precedents amounted to a larger philosophical truth: that the case for popular sovereignty should be self-evident among ‘anyone who studies the history of human nature.’<sup>760</sup>

As well as supplying Douglas with colonial precedents, George Bancroft actively campaigned for Douglas’ version of popular sovereignty against the Lecompton Constitution. After returning from a diplomatic post in London in 1849, the historian retired from the frontline of political life. In the 1850s, he focused instead on writing his magnum opus – the ten volume *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the American Continent*.<sup>761</sup> Apart from an oration before the New York Historical Society in 1854, Bancroft was largely absent from politics, and, in particular, abstained from providing his services to the Democratic Party.<sup>762</sup> But in 1858, he burst back onto the scene, chairing an anti-Lecompton meeting in New York City, with a host of ‘Young Americans.’ These Jacksonians were outraged at Buchanan’s usurpation of popular sovereignty. Bancroft told the meeting that the Constitution amounted to a ‘concentration of power’ in the hands of a convention, which was not an ‘American idea.’<sup>763</sup> As ever, Bancroft linked the struggle for popular sovereignty

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<sup>758</sup> G. Bancroft to S. A. Douglas, December 2 1857, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1908), 2: 130.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid, 131

<sup>760</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>761</sup> G. Bancroft, *History of the United States of America from the discovering of the continent*, 10 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888).

<sup>762</sup> G. Bancroft *The Necessity, the Reality and the Promise of Progress of the Human Race, oration delivered before the New York Historical Society November 20 1854*, (New York: Printed for the Society, 1854).

<sup>763</sup> *Democratic Anti-Lecompton Meeting, held Wednesday 17 1858*, (New York: John T. Trow, 1858), 9.

against federal encroachment to the fate of nationalist movements in Europe; connected, as they were, by the universal principle of non-intervention and democracy for white men. Thus, Buchanan's usurpation of the peoples' rights was 'borrowed from those republics of Europe' – those that were 'not capable of existing for the very reason that power was so concentrated.'<sup>764</sup>

Although Bancroft acknowledged that the conflict in Kansas related to slavery, he primarily perceived it through the Jacksonian lens of resistance to the consolidation of centralized power. If the federal government had the power to legislate for slavery, it would create dangerous precedents for intervention in other areas of social life. Emboldened by the growth in federal power, the administration would soon enough 'limit the right of suffrage' 'by force.' Bancroft reached out to European immigrants, particularly the Irish, since they were aware of the 'bitter fruits' that resulted from 'complicity between a shameless minority and central power.'<sup>765</sup> Far from a mere compromise measure, this was an attempt on Bancroft's behalf to protect a universal principle, or natural law, in the form of resistance to federal power. Like his friend and ally Stephen Douglas, Bancroft attacked the Buchanan administration for its 'neglect of principle for terrorizing expediency.'<sup>766</sup>

Within this broader commitment to Democratic universalism, Bancroft was a staunch critic of slavery, and believed that popular sovereignty would lead to the triumph of free labor. The historian told Stephen Douglas that he approved of the anti-slavery Topeka Constitution in Kansas, saying that 'it is probably the voice of the people,' despite lacking 'form.'<sup>767</sup> In another letter, Bancroft denounced the Dred Scott decision, saying blacks should have the right to testify in court, and pointing out that they had political rights in some colonial legislatures.<sup>768</sup> Turning against the fire-eaters within his own party, Bancroft began to oppose the Slave Power in a manner reminiscent of leading Republicans. But what set him apart from several of the Republicans, and made him

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<sup>764</sup> Ibid, 6. In another speech, Bancroft connected the struggle for popular sovereignty in Kansas to 'our fellow citizens of foreign birth to whom we hold out the hand of brotherhood, remember that liberty in Europe has been trodden underfoot by a complicity between the Central government and a miserable minority in the several states,' *ibid*, 7.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid, 6. Also see S. Douglas to W. A. Richardson, June 3 1856, *The Letters of Stephen Douglas*, 361. Douglas told Richardson that he would withdraw his name from the nomination for the presidency at the Democratic Convention in 1856 if it meant the principle of popular sovereignty was accepted. He wrote 'I have a thousand fold more anxiety for the triumph of our principles than for my own personal elevation.'

<sup>767</sup> George Bancroft to Stephen Douglas, December 2 1857, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2:152.

<sup>768</sup> George Bancroft to James Mason, July 24 1857, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2: 126-128.

suspicious of their motives, was a continued commitment to the Jacksonian vision of state sovereignty. Although he opposed slavery and hailed from the free states, it was Bancroft who declared he was ‘of the old states’ rights school.<sup>769</sup> After the Civil War, George Bancroft reminded fellow ‘Young American’ Samuel Cox that they ‘stood together’ with Stephen Douglas to prevent the ‘outrageous attempt to force slavery upon Texas.’<sup>770</sup> Bancroft evidently saw the ‘Young America’ Democrats as proposing a Jacksonian solution to the problem of slavery by making decentralized, local democracy the route to a free labor society. Advancing a Jacksonian vision of free labor ideology, the historian told Cox that without slavery free labor would ‘rush towards the south with surprising swiftness.’<sup>771</sup> Without the blight of chattel slavery, ‘Texas will be our Italy.’<sup>772</sup>

Despite this emancipatory rhetoric, steeped in Jacksonian and free labor ideology, Bancroft did show a new concern for conservatism, which was characteristic of Democrats in this period. The historian said, for example, that although he wished to ‘keep bright’ the eternal principles of justice, he did not want to do so by ‘warring against all existing institutions.’<sup>773</sup> With the emergence of socialism, abolitionism, and more interventionist forms of liberalism after the Revolutions of 1848, threats to the libertarian order now came from below as well as above. Thus, Bancroft might have compared the Buchanan administration to a despotic tyranny, but he also believed it was emblematic of the ‘worst periods of revolutionary France,’ which ‘usurped power over a nation by terror and reckless daring.’<sup>774</sup> This suspicion of the French Revolution was a far cry from the Democrat Edmund Burke, who defended the Jacobins against monarchical France a decade earlier.<sup>775</sup> Unlike true conservatives like Rufus Choate, Bancroft did not abandon universalist principles. However, in common with many ‘Young America’ Democrats, he increasingly defended them in the language of conservatism.

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<sup>769</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>770</sup> G. Bancroft to S.S. Cox, January 28 1865, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2:156.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>773</sup> George Bancroft to Reverdy Johnson, January 2 1868, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2: 185.

<sup>774</sup> *Democratic Anti-Lecompton Meeting, held Wednesday 17 1858*, 6.

<sup>775</sup> For the Democrats’ favorable interpretation of the French Revolution see E. Burke, *Rhode Island – interference of the executive in the affairs of*, Cong. Globe, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., Rep. No. 546, (1844) (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1845), 50.

Like George Bancroft, the expansionist ‘Young Americans’ Charles Goepp and Samuel Cox both pushed for popular sovereignty as a principled route to free labor from within the Democratic Party. But like the great American historian, who eventually defected to the Republicans, Goepp saw popular sovereignty as a Jacksonian principle which transcended party affiliation. In a letter to Stephen Douglas, Goepp expressed his belief that the Republican Party should adopt the Democrats’ principle of ‘non-intervention’ in the territories as their own. For Goepp, popular sovereignty was not a mere compromise measure but a principle of ‘self evident justice.’<sup>776</sup> Far from being a boon to the Slave Power, it was also ‘not in any manner antagonistic to the position of the Republican Party heretofore.’<sup>777</sup> Goepp held out for a unification of the two Northern parties on the basis of Jacksonian principles. Once the Republican platform embraced ‘non-intervention’ and popular sovereignty, the position of the Republicans and anti-Lecompton Democrats would be ‘identical.’ Finally, the great obstacle to the ‘formation of a unitary opposition party’ would be removed.<sup>778</sup> Fellow ‘Young American’ Samuel S. Cox agreed that popular sovereignty was a principled route to a free labor society. Far from a pragmatic solution to the sectional crisis, Cox believed popular sovereignty was a transcendent principle across time and space. Echoing his efforts to reform the economic and political order of Europe, Cox told Congress ‘that principle has a history...at least since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, or the French Revolution of 1848.’<sup>779</sup> Inherently just, Cox believed popular sovereignty would bring peace and stability to the territory of Kansas. But, ultimately, he was at pains to emphasize that he ‘would not sacrifice the principle involved’ ‘whether there be peace or not.’<sup>780</sup> For this ‘Young American,’ ‘expediency’ was a dangerous doctrine ‘when in collision with principles.’<sup>781</sup> Like the eminent historian George Bancroft, Goepp and Cox both saw popular sovereignty as a universal axiom. Their political aims in Kansas were just one part of ‘Young America’s’ larger project of transforming the international order, which they had begun a decade earlier.

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<sup>776</sup> Charles Goepp to Stephen Douglas June 3 1858, SAD Papers, University of Chicago.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> *Speech of Samuel S. Cox of Ohio On the President’s Message, December 16 1857*, (Washington D.C.: Lemuel Towers, 1857), 2-3.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid.



Other close allies of Stephen Douglas saw the struggle against the Lecompton Constitution as a continuation of ‘Young America’s’ principled attack on centralized power, whether imperial or federal. Douglas’ spokesperson in the House, John McClernand, who had helped instigate California’s admission to the Union in 1850, wrote a public letter denouncing Lecompton, which the Little Giant ‘read with pleasure and admiration.’<sup>782</sup> In turn, McClernand implored his mentor to ‘agitate! Rouse the people!’<sup>783</sup> Douglas himself was adamant that popular sovereignty was a principle for which they would sacrifice both party unity and the support of Southern slaveowners. He told McClernand ‘we must stand on this principle and go wherever its logical consequences may carry us.’<sup>784</sup>

Southern Democrats watched the likes of Douglas, Forney and Haskin making inroads in the Northern states with alarm. The official organ of the Buchanan administration, the *Washington Union* stressed that there were now ‘three factions’ working in opposition to the Democratic Party’ - Douglas’, led by Messers Harris of Illinois; Winter Davis of the Dark Order and Horace Greeley of the Black Republicans.’<sup>785</sup> The sole purpose of this coalition was to bring down Buchanan by ‘the election of Haskin.’ Indeed, the organs of the Buchanan administration heavily criticized Forney and Douglas, undermining interpretations that they were ‘doughfaces,’ or primarily interested in sectional or party compromise. In January 1859, the *Democrat and Sentinel* wrote that Forney ‘does not utter one broad national sentiment.’<sup>786</sup> Apparently, his ‘appeal for sympathy and support for Senator Douglas is made exclusively to the North.’ Before his opposition to Lecompton, ‘the warm hearted, impulsive southerner, the cool calculating northern man and the progressive pioneer of the west’ all extended their support to Douglas.<sup>787</sup> Now, the Senator from Illinois was supposedly in league with Northern sectionalists, waging an assault on Southern society.

Other Democrats joined Douglas in denouncing Buchanan as a traitor to Jeffersonian Democracy. In the House of Representatives, Democrat William Montgomery ‘rose to defend the

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<sup>782</sup> Stephen Douglas to John McClernand, February 21 1858, *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas*, 417.

<sup>783</sup> John McClernand to Stephen Douglas, February 17 1858, SAD Papers, University of Chicago.

<sup>784</sup> Stephen Douglas to John McClernand, November 23 1857, *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas*, 403.

<sup>785</sup> *Washington Union*, September 9 1858.

<sup>786</sup> ‘Does Senator Douglas endorse John W. Forney?’ *Democrat and Sentinel*, January 12 1859.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*

right of the white man to govern himself.’<sup>788</sup> For Montgomery, as for Douglas, Buchanan’s support for the Lecompton Constitution challenged what made America exceptional. He proclaimed ‘the history of the Old World furnishes instances where oaths of allegiance have been required from a conquered people but never before in our free land has an American citizen been insulted when he approached the polls to deposit his ballot.’<sup>789</sup> Montgomery applauded Governor Walker for ‘adhering to this doctrine’ when he ‘resigned from his office rather than desert his principles.’<sup>790</sup> Similarly, he lamented that ‘Governor Wise, Governor Packer and the great Historian George Bancroft refuse to strike the flag of popular sovereignty and are denounced as renegades.’<sup>791</sup>

Tensions between the Northern and Southern wing of the Democracy were further inflamed by Douglas’ allies in the Senate, George E. Pugh and Charles Broderick. After Lecompton, Pugh accused pro-slavery congressmen Alfred Iverson and William Gwin of perverting the principles of self-government. These two Southerners had previously attacked Douglas’ version of popular sovereignty for being as dangerous to slavery as the Wilmot Proviso. The Southerners contended that it should be illegal for settlers to reject slavery prior to the formation of a state constitution to prevent the establishment of free labor communities. Despairing of the Southerner’s complaints, Pugh lamented that the Northern Democracy had always stood up for their Southern brethren, to the detriment of their own support in the free states. The Democracy was a ‘vast mountain of democratic strength’ in March 1854 – before the Kansas-Nebraska Act - when it held every single north-western state.<sup>792</sup> Although he would stand by the national principle of ‘popular sovereignty,’ Pugh refused to bend to Southern demands, incensed at their inability to recognize the North’s truly national stance. Fighting the demands of the Slave Power, Pugh called for popular sovereignty to be established on its original basis. Pugh argued that popular sovereignty was designed to repudiate ‘the ancient idea of an equal partition of territories, as between the north and south,’ not to prop up slavery, as many

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<sup>788</sup> Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1197 (1858).

<sup>789</sup> Ibid, 1197.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid, 1197.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid, 1197

<sup>792</sup> G.E. Pugh, “*Vindication of the Northern Democracy*,” *Speech of Hon. George E. Pugh of Ohio delivered in the Senate of the United States December 19 1859*, (Washington: L. Towers, 1859), 4.

Southerners desired.<sup>793</sup> Indeed, the state of California was an example of popular sovereignty at its best, with the principle working its way to the triumph of free labor. This western state should be ‘the example in future cases; declaring that what her people had done, even without the assent of Congress, should be ratified and forever established.’<sup>794</sup>

Meanwhile in California itself, George E. Pugh’s ally in the Senate, California’s David Broderick, was engaged in another rivalry with pro-slavery politicians, which would culminate in Broderick’s death. In 1859, the pro-slavery Democrat David Terry blamed Broderick, and his free soil supporters, for his failure to win re-election as Chief Justice to the California State Supreme Court. Outraged at Broderick’s anti-slavery politics, Terry compared the Northern Democrats to supporters of the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass. He is reported to have said of the ‘Young Americans,’ “‘perhaps they do sail under the flag of Douglas, but it is the banner of the black Douglass, whose name is Frederick, not Stephen.’”<sup>795</sup> Broderick denounced Terry as corrupt, grouping him with President Buchanan and the pro-slavery Californian, William Gwin. Furious, Terry challenged Broderick to a duel, which ended in disaster for the latter. After Broderick’s pistol discharged before the final count, Terry was left with a free shot, which he fired straight into the senator’s chest. The caning of the anti-slavery Charles Sumner might be the most famous example of violence at the hands of the Slave Power. But, at the time, Broderick was honored as an anti-slavery hero, who was martyred for the cause of popular sovereignty and free labor in the west. On his death bed, the Californian was even reported to have said “‘I die because I was opposed to a corrupt administration and the extension of slavery.’”<sup>796</sup> The principle of popular sovereignty advocated by ‘Young Americans’ like Douglas, Broderick and Pugh was considered, at the time, a Jacksonian route to a free labor society.

In Congress, ex-Democrats who defected to the Republican Party also rallied against Buchanan, accusing him of betraying the true principles of Jeffersonian Democracy. Indeed, many

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>795</sup> J. O’Meara, *A Brief History of Early Politics in California*, (San Francisco: Bacon and Company Printers, 1861), 266.

<sup>796</sup> These final words became something of a rallying cry in the western states for Jacksonian supporters of free labor. Ibid, 256.

Jacksonians who joined the Republican Party in 1854 still considered themselves the true guardians of popular sovereignty. With many Republicans speaking the language of 'Young America,' Jacksonian nationalism transcended party affiliation in the Northern states. 'Young Americans' argued for popular sovereignty and non-intervention against both the abolitionists and the Slave Power; a third conception of American nationalism which conforms neither to sectional divisions of 'North' v 'South,' (nor with the Democratic and Republican parties). Benjamin F. Leiter from Ohio, for example, chastised the Democratic administration in the House of Representatives for declaring 'popular sovereignty an 'abominable heresy,' even though - when properly carried out - it would 'please people all over the country, North and South.'<sup>797</sup> According to Leiter, the administration had displayed 'unparalleled audacity' by setting themselves up as 'rulers and lawgivers of the Democratic Party' with 'power to read Jeffersonian Democrats out of the...Party for refusing to force upon that unwilling and greatly injured people a repudiated constitution.'<sup>798</sup> Leiter argued that the Republican Party were the true party of Jefferson, since they were the first to realize that the doctrine of popular sovereignty as it was contained in the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a sham. In Ohio it was the Republican Party that had 'sounded the tocsin of alarm, that treason again had entered the camp, and that the enemy were about to usurp the rights of the people of Kansas.'<sup>799</sup>

Stephen C. Foster from Maine had been 'read out' of the Democratic Party even earlier in 1848.<sup>800</sup> Opposed to 'the author of the famous Nicholson letter,' in which Lewis Cass first proposed the doctrine of 'popular sovereignty,' Foster defected to the Free Soil Party during the Presidential election of that year, and later represented the Republican Party in Congress. Foster's speeches attacked the centralizing forces of the South whilst remaining wary of ex-Whigs in his own party. He lambasted Buchanan for making support for slavery the test of Democratic loyalty and accused him of being an 'old federalist,' since true Democracy was incompatible with slavery.<sup>801</sup> The fact that Buchanan had voted for the tariff of 1842 showed that he did not care about Jacksonian economic

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<sup>797</sup> Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 485 (1858).

<sup>798</sup> Ibid, 485.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid 485.

<sup>800</sup> Cong. Globe, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1043 (1858).

<sup>801</sup> Ibid, 1043.

orthodoxy and was perverting the Democratic name to strengthen the interests of slave-owners.

Drawing on the Democrats' tradition of political cosmopolitanism, he accused Buchanan of attracting Southern Know-Nothings to the party, thereby sullyng the Democratic Party's vision of a transatlantic community.

Other Republicans who had joined the Free Soil movement in 1848 and had never supported Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act, still defined themselves as the true guardians of 'popular sovereignty' and 'non-intervention.' Salmon P. Chase, for example, told A.P. Edgerton in a widely republished letter of January 1854 that slavery extension was essentially incompatible with a genuine Democratic government.<sup>802</sup> He claimed to have no objection to the clause in the Democratic Party's Baltimore convention of 1852 that condemned 'all interference by Congress with the question of slavery.'<sup>803</sup> In theory, Chase agreed with Douglas' stance on 'non-intervention,' saying 'every intelligent man knows that slavery, outside of state limits, could not exist under our Constitution and system of government without the interference of Congress.'<sup>804</sup> He wrote that this 'fundamental proposition...as an original one was sound.' For Chase though, the federal government had so ingrained slavery into American society through years of Congressional legislation, that Congress itself would have to 'repeal acts, herefore passed without constitutional authority on the subject.'<sup>805</sup> By maintaining 'neutrality' on the question of slavery, Democrats like Douglas were facilitating previous Congressional injustices - the existence of slavery in the District of Columbia, 'the sale of men, women and children under federal process' and the Fugitive Slave Act.<sup>806</sup> By contrast, Chase wanted to see the federal government actively uncouple itself from slavery: 'the Independent Democracy demand the divorce of the national government from slavery as sternly and uncompromisingly as Jackson demanded it from the banks.'<sup>807</sup>

Although he disagreed with Douglas about the best means of applying popular sovereignty and non-intervention in the territories, Chase argued that these principles were universal in their

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<sup>802</sup> *Politics in Ohio: Senator Chase's Letter to Hon. A.P. Edgerton*, January 1 1854, William Allen Papers, LOC.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

applicability. Thus, Chase's policy in Kansas was as much to do with ending slavery as it was creating a Democratic international order. Just as much as opposition to slavery, decentralized government and states' rights were doctrines written in the 'laws of nature,' applicable to the white race across the globe. Chase made explicit comparisons between the struggle for state sovereignty in the territories and self-determination in Europe. For instance, he asked to Edgerton to imagine that there had been a Congress composed of representatives from Austria and Hungary, which attempted to settle the differences between the two countries, but that Hungary's liberties had been 'compromised away.'<sup>808</sup> He further asked Edgerton to imagine that the party which agreed to mediate the agreement, out of desperation to appease the Austrians, called themselves Democratic.<sup>809</sup> Like other 'Young Americans,' Chase wrote that he was not loyal to the party but the ideology of the Democrats. He said that it was 'the Democracy which attracts my devotion' - one that constitutes 'the law of Nature pervading the law of the land.'<sup>810</sup> Compromise with slaveholders was impossible because - by their very nature - they used the federal government to achieve their ends. Chase's letter to Edgerton was influential among Jacksonians in the Democratic as well as Republican parties, and can be found in the papers of Ohio Democrat William Allen.

Other anti-slavery Democrats, who became prominent members of the Republican Party, reached out to Buchanan supporters, arguing that they were the true guardians of popular sovereignty and decentralized government. On September 3 1855, editor of the *Evening Post*, and former contributor to the *Democratic Review*, William C. Bryant wrote to Samuel Tilden interrogating the Democratic resolutions passed at a meeting in Syracuse where Tilden was nominated for Attorney General.<sup>811</sup> Tilden was the most attractive candidate to anti-slavery Democrats like Bryant, since he represented the 'soft' faction of the party, who favored compromise with so-called 'barnburners,' who were opposed to the extension of slavery.

Acknowledging the similarities in their political outlooks, Bryant and his fellow editors said that they were 'anxious to satisfy ourselves, of the propriety of giving ourselves to the ticket with

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<sup>808</sup> Ibid.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> William C. Bryant to Samuel Tilden, September 3, 1855 Samuel Tilden Papers NYPL.

which your name is associated a cardinal support.<sup>812</sup> Nevertheless, the writers saw a contradiction in a resolution that Tilden had endorsed, supporting the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 whilst declaring a ‘fixed hostility to the extension of slavery in territories now free’ and a desire to see settlers ‘free to organize their own government under the laws of Congress.’<sup>813</sup> Tilden declared that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was immaterial given that settlers in Kansas would vote to outlaw slavery when they had the chance. Conversely, although Bryant supported the principle of popular sovereignty, he doubted that its enforcement in the territories was practical.<sup>814</sup> Bryant did not oppose ‘popular sovereignty’ on the same grounds as ex-Whigs in the Republican Party, like Abraham Lincoln. As we will explore, Lincoln showed more anxiety about majoritarian rule when he declared that the question of slavery was too important to be left to whims of the settlers themselves. For the old Whig and admirer of Henry Clay ‘popular sovereignty’ was not a sound foundation for national existence, since majorities might support the extension of slavery. By contrast, Bryant favored the principle of ‘popular sovereignty’ but rejected its perversion in Douglas’ Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Like Chase, he argued that pro-slavery settlers would inevitably subvert the process of local self-government in Kansas, since slavery relied on the federal government to survive. However, Bryant held fast to the same principles of decentralization and states’ rights as Samuel Tilden, only adapting them to the prism of the Republican’s policy of opposition to the extension of slavery.

Indeed, the *Evening Post* maintained an admiration for Tilden’s Jacksonian nationalism throughout the 1850s, despite his association with the pro-slavery Democratic Party. For example, the paper asked Tilden for a copy of a speech he had given at the Cooper Union Institute in 1860, so they could republish it in the paper. According to Tilden, the editors told him that his ‘friends among their readers “would be glad to know how” I “have reasoned” myself into the associations in which I stand on the Presidential question.’<sup>815</sup> This correspondence suggests that the anti-slavery Jacksonians who read the *Evening Post* still took a keen interest in the political stance of their former ally. Tilden

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<sup>812</sup> Ibid.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid.

<sup>815</sup> Samuel J. Tilden to the Editors of the *Evening Post*, October 3, 1860, *Letters and Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. J. Bigelow, 2 vols., (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1908), 1:132.

responded warmly to the *Post's* request, eager for the opportunity to enlighten the 'mass' of *Post* readers, 'among which are many cultivated intellects and some friends of my earlier years' who 'are widely and dangerously wrong in their present political action.'<sup>816</sup> In the coming days, Tilden promised to send his former allies an explanation of his political loyalties, acknowledging 'the sacred duty of showing' *Post* readers 'a decent way out' of the "'political heresies'" that Bryant had accused him of spreading among them.<sup>817</sup>

Commenting on this letter in his memoir of Tilden, *Evening Post* editor and former contributor to the *Democratic Review*, John Bigelow, even claimed that he understood Tilden's position better than the audience who gathered to hear him speak. Apparently, the audience at the Cooper Union were 'unaccounted for debris of the old Whig Party' who 'did not care to listen long to so prominent a political partisan of Jackson and Van Buren' - indeed the 'most formidable critic of all Whig measures during all their successive administrations.'<sup>818</sup> The *Post* observed that they were 'conspicuously impatient of anything savoring of old-fashioned Democracy.'<sup>819</sup> Suggesting that Tilden would receive a fairer hearing in the pages of the *Post*, it offered to 'publish' his speech 'cheerfully.' That way, it would 'reach a great many more of Tilden's friends...and they will be glad to know by what process so clever a man has reasoned himself into such bad company.'<sup>820</sup> Elsewhere, the *Evening Post* maintained its scorn for Samuel Tilden's fellow travelers. It attacked his pamphlet *The Union: its Dangers*, written on the eve of the 1860 election, on the grounds that it was addressed to William Kent, an old Whig. The *Post* argued:

An uninterrupted political antagonism...existed since the days when their fathers were active opponents but who now, like Pilot and Herod, are brought together and united by the bond of a common outrage upon what we regard as the cause of truth and justice.<sup>821</sup>

Addressing Tilden's pamphlet, writers at the *Post* also claimed the mantle of Jacksonian nationalism for themselves. Tilden had argued that the election of Lincoln placed the federal

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<sup>816</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid. 135.

<sup>821</sup> *The Life of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. John Bigelow, 2 vols., (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1895), 1:155.



government in the same relation to the South as a foreign government. For him, it was an unrepresentative administration eager to use the powers of central government in dangerous ways. The *Post* shot back that ‘the character and objects’ of the Republican Party had never been fairly discussed in the southern states,’ meaning that ‘the policy and purposes of the Republican Party are not much better understood in the south today...as they are in Mongolia.’<sup>822</sup> Nor, would they be, argued the free soil paper, until the federal government was free from the grip of ‘oligarchy.’ Here, the *Post* reversed Tilden’s powerful image of Lincoln’s federal government tyrannizing over the South, by depicting Southern elites using the central government to subdue the North, and to keep their people in subjugation. In both images, the struggle was depicted as one for state sovereignty in the face of a federal power that was un-American in its power and influence.

### **Race and slavery in ‘Young America’ nationalism**

Having established that ‘popular sovereignty’ constituted a ‘natural law’ for white men, and that the absence of federal authority would lead to the triumph of free labor, ‘Young America’ Democrats had to explain what would happen to the four million slaves living within the Southern United States. It was all very well claiming they supported the extinction of slavery within a decentralized Union, but the Democrats were still confronted with the question of what to do with America’s existing slave population. This section will ask how ‘Young Americans’ envisioned the future for African Americans and how they thought about the relationship between different races. Essentially, they addressed the problem of slavery not by confining it to the Southern states, but through schemes for territorial expansion and colonization, and even – at times – ‘extermination.’

On balance, the Northern Democrats emphasized racial distinctions more than their Republican counterparts, and certainly more than the former Whigs who joined the anti-slavery cause. However, as we will see, this stance did not necessarily lead to a tacit acceptance of pro-slavery politics. In fact, private correspondence suggests that Northern Democrats earnestly wanted and

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid, 155.

expected the western territories to remain free. Instead, they proposed that territorial expansion and colonization would naturally draw slaves and free blacks away from the mainland US and towards tropical regions. Furthermore, the Democrats' racism, and their solution to the problem of slavery, was not incompatible with their internationalist, progressive outlook, nor the universalist political principles on which it was based.

In his pamphlet of 1860, *The Union and its Dangers*, Samuel Tilden dedicated an entire section entitled 'Natural and Material Laws' to explaining how he viewed the future of slavery in the United States. He argued that slavery was being slowly eradicated from the mainland as it moved towards warmer climates nearer the equator - 'it is withdrawing and moving towards the tropics.'<sup>823</sup> Tilden made the case that slave-owners were selling their property Southward, as it became increasingly difficult to compete with free labor. The tide of immigration into the Northern states kept wages down, ensuring that it was always cheaper to hire diligent and industrious free laborers to do jobs instead of slaves. Thus, 'a man who employ slaves in the raising of wheat or corn on the southern bank of the Ohio uses labor at least twice as costly as it was ten years ago.'<sup>824</sup> At present, Tilden claimed, the chivalry of the South prevented masters from selling their slaves southward at the rate that nature demanded - 'family and social habits, an honorable sentiment against selling dependents...resists.'<sup>825</sup> However, eventually, 'the social laws at last prevail as the unceasing current of a stream outlasts the strokes of the swimmer.'<sup>826</sup> Tilden thus saw slavery as a barrier to fulfilling blacks 'natural' destiny in the tropics.

The fact that the tropics were such an attractive destination for slave labor made the proposition to annex Cuba more appealing to Northerners, eager to keep slavery out of western territories like Kansas and Nebraska. As Chapter Three has discussed, there was a coherent anti-slavery case for Cuban annexation, which was closely entwined with the case for popular sovereignty. Even some abolitionist newspapers recognized the beneficial effect of Cuban annexation for draining blacks away from the mainland United States. Once Cuba had come into the Union, the Liberty Party

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<sup>823</sup> S. Tilden, *The Union - its dangers!* 9.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

paper the *National Era* wrote that ‘the domestic trade will either drain off the domestic population of the more northern slave states, or convert them into merely slave-breeding establishments for their southern customers.’ For this reason, the paper said it would ‘give up much of our hostility towards the acquisition of Cuba,’ if there was a guarantee that families would not be disrupted. Although the *National Era* said, ‘we shall always oppose the extension of the area of slavery,’ it also claimed, ‘we should not regret the concentration of the Slave population in the extreme south.’<sup>827</sup>

The editor of the *Democratic Review* George Sanders was another enthusiastic proponent of colonizing former slaves in tropical regions. In an ‘Address to the People of France’ in 1854, he set his sights on the vast coast of Africa as a viable destination, claiming that the ‘beginning of a great republican empire’ would emerge from the ‘modest American settlement’ in Liberia.<sup>828</sup> He predicted that this would ‘extend the germ of American civilization’ into the ‘bosom of Ethiopia.’<sup>829</sup> Sanders took pride in the American system of colonization and compared it favorably with monarchical empires. He implored ‘Frenchmen of all parties, in justice to republican principles, to compare the action of American colonization in Liberia with monarchies anywhere else the world over.’<sup>830</sup> The genius of American colonization, according to Sanders, was that blacks would carry with them America’s enterprising spirit and knowledge of democratic institutions. In Sanders’ hands, colonization formed a kind of black Manifest Destiny, whereby the U.S. would ‘redeem’ Africa just as it had done to Europe. Whilst Sanders watched the exodus of Frenchmen coming to America with ‘exultation,’ he ‘turns with no less pride to a thriving colony on the western coast of Africa’ which exhibited a ‘new species of immigration.’<sup>831</sup> Having laid out his vision for the region, he chastised the French for using Africa merely as a site to exile ‘Republican authors and men of science,’ struggling for democracy in Europe.

Like Sanders, the Philadelphia Democrat Thomas L. Kane advocated territorial expansion as a means of bringing about the extinction of slavery within the mainland United States. In a lecture

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<sup>827</sup> *National Era*, September 7 1854

<sup>828</sup> ‘Address to the People of France,’ *New York Times*, October 27 1854.

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*

from 1856, he explained his decision to support the Buchanan administration, despite his enthusiasm for the Free Soil movement in 1848. Part of the reason was bound up in Kane's changing attitudes towards race. Although he professed pride in having supported the Free Soil Party in 1848, he explained that his abolitionism waned as he realized that the American people were not receptive to the anti-slavery message. Only after accepting the wisdom of the common people did he begin to declare - in the mid-1850s - that 'all men are created free and equal but not niggers.'<sup>832</sup> Like his former compatriot David Wilmot, Kane retained his belief that blacks should not take up space in the western territories, whether as free laborers or slaves. Although he was not in danger of 'entangling alliances' with 'social inferiors,' Kane argued that the 'poor man was,' seeing blacks 'at his side every day, in the field, factory or workshop.' He may even have to 'live every day in the same confined room with him.'<sup>833</sup>

Unlike Wilmot though, Kane decided that confining slavery to the Southern states was not the best way to prevent its spread to Kansas. Such a policy of 'shutting all the doors and windows on (slavery) as we do a fire' would only unduly punish the South. In a neat summary of what has become known as the 'Freedom National' argument against slavery, Kane remembered how in 1848 he proposed that 'all the avenues for emigration' for the black population should be 'fixed' whilst the whites moved west and settled.<sup>834</sup> As demand for cotton grew, Southern planters would breed more slaves until eventually the soil would become 'exhausted' and the economy unprofitable. As a result, the 'relation' between 'employer' and 'employee' would adjust itself 'naturally.'<sup>835</sup> By 1856, Kane was disenchanted with a solution that would 'starve the master into emancipation.' Professing sympathy for the Southern slave, he painted a horrific picture of a 'starved' slave 'dragging' himself to work with 'skin as fleshless as his hoe hands.'<sup>836</sup> According to Kane, it was this picture of the individual slave that abolitionists neglected in their grand theories of human amelioration. Taking

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<sup>832</sup> *The English System III*, TLK Papers, BYU.

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>834</sup> *What a fine thing is a theorist? XII*, TLK Papers, BYU; J. Oakes, *Freedom National*.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*

their cue from ‘a priori’ ideas, Kane contended that anti-slavery Republicans forgot the wellbeing of the individual in their plan to make freedom national.

Thus, Thomas Kane saw no future for slavery within the mainland United States. He was both unwilling to shut slavery up in the Southern states, and adamant that ‘popular sovereignty’ would keep it out of new territories like Kansas. The only future he imagined for blacks would come via the deportation of free blacks to their ‘natural’ home in the tropics. In a lecture entitled *Transportation, Extermination, Fusion*, he dwelt on what would become of America’s black population.<sup>837</sup> Rejecting a program of total extermination, and dismissing fusion with the white race as ultimately undesirable, Kane proposed a program of colonization. He claimed that ‘on the banks of the river Niger...or the Amazon,’ blacks ‘compete with the descendants of Celts and Saxons with excessive odds in their favor.’<sup>838</sup> Although not long ago the West Indies was a ‘fortress of slavery,’ and all America ‘south of the Gulf of Mexico’ was a ‘sealed book’ for colonization, Kane argued that the islands of free blacks were now compelling destinations for ex-slaves.<sup>839</sup> Technological innovation in the form of railways and steamships also facilitated the transportation of human beings to warmer climes: ‘we are now days from St. Domingo, from Guama, and the mouth of the Amazon and from...Trinidad,’ Kane claimed.<sup>840</sup>

The editor of the *Democratic Review*, John O’Sullivan, also viewed the expansion of slavery into the tropics as a means of drawing blacks out of the United States. Like Thomas Kane, Samuel Tilden and Martin Van Buren, O’Sullivan supported the Free Soil ticket in 1848 before returning to the Democratic fold in 1852, and going on to support the Buchanan administration. And, like Kane, O’Sullivan’s decision to abandon anti-slavery politics was partly due to his changing attitude towards race. In the 1840s, he believed ‘without question’ in the ‘old doctrine of the unity of the Human Race.’<sup>841</sup> O’Sullivan explained that this carried with it ‘the consequence that the negro was merely a Black White man degraded by a long course of external influences to a present merely temporary and

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<sup>837</sup> *Transportation, Extermination, Fusion XI*, TLK Papers, BYU.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>841</sup> J. O’Sullivan to S.A. Douglas, February 10 1854, SAD Papers, University of Chicago.

accidental inferiority.’<sup>842</sup> Thus, ‘slavery involved an idea, to me, of wrongful oppression’ in conflict with the essential American idea.’<sup>843</sup> The former editor of the *Democratic Review* explained that he changed his view in 1852, after reading the work of Harvard zoologist Louis Agassiz, who pioneered the theory of ‘polygenesis,’ or separate creation myths for the black and white race. From that day forward, O’Sullivan deemed ‘slavery to the inferior race...a better as well as a more natural relation than freedom side by side, especially in a democratic country.’<sup>844</sup>

Kane and O’Sullivan’s view of the beneficial effects of slavery for African Americans seems to have mirrored a larger transition in the Northern Democratic Party. The *Democratic Review*, for example, was sympathetic to the idea of the unity of the races during the mid-1840s. By the early 1850s, however, articles about racial science were more complimentary, and accepted the underlying thesis that different races did not share the same origins.<sup>845</sup> John Campbell, the British ex-chartist, who eventually became a follower of Stephen Douglas after emigrating to the United States, also tried to promote polygenesis in the North prior to the Civil War. Like Kane and O’Sullivan, Campbell initially joined the Free Soil Party in 1848. But, by the 1850s, he chastised ‘negro philanthropy’ for distracting from the uplift of the white race.<sup>846</sup> For Campbell, concerns over black rights should not interfere with the natural right of white men to rule by ‘popular sovereignty.’<sup>847</sup>

That is not to say, however, that Democrats wanted to see slavery expanded into territories that would otherwise be reserved for free whites, and, as such, they still maintained an allegiance to the ideology of free labor. Like Kane, O’Sullivan made clear - in a private letter - that ‘there is no chance of either Kansas or Nebraska becoming a slave state.’<sup>848</sup> Furthermore, he maintained that the presence of slavery there would degrade free white labor, and therefore remained morally opposed to the extension of slavery into the western territories. Despite coming to believe it benefited African

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<sup>842</sup> Ibid.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid.

<sup>845</sup> For an exploration of the attitudes to race in the *Democratic Review* see Chapter One.

<sup>846</sup> For John Campbell’s view of race see J. Campbell, *Negro-Mania, Being an Examination of the Falsely Assumed Authority of the Various Races of Men*, (New York: Campbell and Power, 1851), 4.

<sup>847</sup> For an account of Campbell’s political positions during the 1840s and 50s see E. Heath, “‘The Producers on the one side and the capitalists on the other’”: Labor Reform, Slavery, and the Career of a Transatlantic Radical,’ *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 13, (August 2012).

<sup>848</sup> J. O’Sullivan to S.A. Douglas, February 10 1854, SAD Papers, University of Chicago.

Americans, he continued to oppose slavery in the abstract due to what he saw as its degrading effect on white masters.<sup>849</sup> Accustomed to total control over another human being, the planter elite would fail to comprehend the ‘democratic principle,’ behaving with arrogance in Congress and taking a dim view of labor itself. Similarly, John Campbell’s racial science never led him to unequivocally endorse slavery in the American mainland. He always maintained Douglas’ position that the western territories would be filled with free labor and that slavery’s future - if it had one - was south of the Gulf of Mexico.

Rather than evidence of their desire to satisfy the whims of the Slave Power, the ‘Young Americans’ virulent racism was entirely compatible with their former vision of Jacksonian nationalism and tepidly anti-slavery politics. Sanders, Kane, Dallas, Walker and Tilden all advocated territorial expansion and colonization as solutions to the crisis over slavery. Certainly, not all ‘Young Americans’ wanted to deport free people, with many seeking to promote slave labor in these equatorial regions.<sup>850</sup> However, many Democrats did want to see the extinction of slavery on the American mainland and an end to black labor - both bound and free - in the western territories. They should therefore be considered strident advocates of free labor ideology, who addressed slavery through their wider program of territorial growth.

Furthermore, promoting black labor in the tropics fitted into ‘Young America’s’ larger, progressive vision. Undoubtedly, their increasing racism undoubtedly stripped democracy of its more dangerous connotations, which appealed to both Northerners and Southerners fearful of the political participation of non-whites. However, Sanders and Kane spoke the language of Manifest Destiny, endorsing the ‘Americanization’ of regions in the Caribbean, Central America and West Africa. They talked confidently of the effects of technological progress making inroads in previously inhospitable lands. These two figures even considered the possibility that blacks would bring democratic government to these regions, compatible with ‘Young America’s’ larger vision of cosmopolitan democracy. Blacks might never be sufficiently advanced to live alongside whites. But some

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<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> Stephen Douglas asserted that black slavery was the only labor suited to tropical regions. See R.E. May, *Race, Slavery and Conquest in the Tropics*, 197.

Democrats believed they still possessed the natural right to political participation among their own kin - something that would be worked out in the fullness of time.

Lastly, the virulent racism that dominated the 'Young America' movement was - by the standards of the mid-19th century - just another aspect of the Democrats' 'progressive' agenda. O'Sullivan and Campbell's fondness for Louis Agassiz, for example, suggests that the Young America were at the very cutting edge of racial science, as they were in everything else. Walker, moreover, drew on the latest theories of climate science and biology to justify his confidence in popular sovereignty securing the territories for free labor. Just as Democrats presented 'popular sovereignty' as a scientific axiom - a right, rooted in nature that was applicable to all places - so too they drew on racial science to justify their racism. Mostly importantly, the Democrats' racial science was rooted in a universalist conception of 'natural law.' It did not create an exclusionary political discourse policed by the physical boundaries of the Union. Indeed, blacks' existence within borders of the nation gave them no claim to the rights of citizenship - Young Americans could not even conceive of their future within the Union.

Instead, a theory of racial science, which tried to account for universal laws, taught that blacks did not possess the same rights as whites due to their inherent - natural - defects. Thus, Democrats relied on the authority of the universal law of science. They did not credit blacks' physical position within the Union with any political significance. Once again, Democrats drew the bounds of the political community not around national borders but a universalist/scientific notion of racial inequality. Like their commitment to 'natural rights,' the Young Americans justified political exclusion not by tradition or custom but by the starker divisions of nature. Furthermore, the Democrats had decided that the right to political participation was rooted in 'natural law' - a fundamental feature of a white man's natural existence. Those who had no place in the political arena - African Americans - were deemed, at best, inherently inferior and, at worst, essentially inhuman. Lastly, Democrats like Kane also drew on the authority of popular animosity towards blacks to reinforce their claims to have discovered the 'true' racial hierarchy. Such deference to the will of the majority was characteristic of the larger 'Young America' project.



## The Whig vision of Union: organic community and positive law

When exploring the conception of Unionism advanced by ‘Young America’ Democrats, it would be useful to consider critics of the movement. Was there a coherent alternative to the form of Jacksonian nationalism we see rich evidence of in the Democratic and Republican parties? I will argue that there were two. Firstly, conservatives from the Whig Party who looked upon the Union as an ‘organic community’ and rejected the idea of natural law outright. Secondly, ex-Whigs in the Republican fold, who combined this view with a commitment to freedom from slavery, as enshrined in natural law. What these groups both opposed was the idea that popular sovereignty – and democracy more generally - constituted a ‘natural right.’ For Whigs, only the right to the fruit of one’s labor was rooted in nature, and included within the Declaration of Independence. Democracy was a political right, not necessarily applicable to mankind as a whole.

On August 6 1858, the ex-Whig Abraham Lincoln gave his first lecture on *Discoveries and Inventions* before the Young Men’s Association of Bloomington Illinois.<sup>851</sup> In it, Lincoln offered up a powerful critique of the ‘Young America’ movement and its figurehead, Stephen Douglas. The soon-to-be 16th President of the United States declared ‘we have all heard of Young America. He is the most current youth of the age.... he has a great passion - a perfect rage - for the “new.”’<sup>852</sup> Addressing the political program of Douglas, Bancroft and Forney directly, he joked ‘his desire for land is not selfish, but merely an impulse to extend the area of freedom.’<sup>853</sup> But in the speech, Lincoln also chastised the arrogant worldview he identified with the likes of Stephen Douglas and George Bancroft. These Jacksonians condemned the past as a relic of barbarism and looked to the future with all the confidence of supposedly independent and intellectually emancipated Americans. By contrast, Lincoln sought to remind ‘Young America’ that cooperation and collaboration, in the form of discussion and writing, were indispensable drivers of technological progress. Lincoln’s speech was a

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<sup>851</sup> A. Lincoln, ‘Second Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions,’ February 11 1859, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 3 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 3:356.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid*, 356.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid*, 357.

homage to inherited wisdom and the accumulation of knowledge - qualities he did not think were sufficiently credited in 'Young America's future-orientated view of the Union. It was only by combining 'powers of observation and reflection' that people could create useful 'discoveries and inventions.'<sup>854</sup> From exchanging ideas with one another, a 'result is...reached' between two collaborators 'which neither alone would have arrived.'<sup>855</sup> Adam and Eve were the first to exploit this dynamic, when Eve sewed Adam a fig leaf to preserve his modesty in the Garden of Eden - the 'first and most perfect "world's fair."<sup>856</sup> This gentle mocking of international exhibitions calls to mind two of 'Young America's most ardent enthusiasts, Charles Goepp and Samuel Cox. As we saw in Chapter Two, both became besotted with the Great Exhibition when they travelled Europe in the early 1850s.

By using the Genesis story as its basis, Lincoln's lecture took as a touchstone a pre-Enlightenment fable that warned of the dangers of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Of course, Lincoln humorously inverted the original meaning of the Genesis myth by turning Adam into the first 'inventor' - a man who had to 'invent the art of invention.' Despite this, the original meaning of the story was not lost. Just as Genesis teaches us that we cannot truly overcome original sin, Lincoln criticized 'Young America's' unqualified faith in moral progress. He told his audience that the human character had not changed since Adam's day - the first man and father of humankind was 'quite as much of a man as his very self-complacent descendent' (the Young American).<sup>857</sup> Indeed, Adam had an advantage over 'Young America' in that he 'had dominion over all the earth,' whilst 'Young America' seeks only to 're-annex it.'<sup>858</sup> By championing the past in this way, Lincoln was abiding by a long tradition of Whig thinkers who valued the intellectual and political ancestry of the American Union, particularly its Puritan heritage. Furthermore, he articulated a skepticism about the inevitability of moral progress that was a characteristic of many Whiggish criticisms of 'Young America.' In this conservative political tradition, cooperation and accumulated wisdom were highly valued, at the expense of Douglas' blind fixation on decentralization and intellectual emancipation.

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<sup>854</sup> Ibid, 358.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid, 358.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid, 358.

Like Lincoln, the Protestant Episcopal Clergyman, Caleb S. Henry wrote extensive critiques of the progressive doctrines of ‘Young America’ during the 1850s. By the time he joined the Republican Party, Henry offered an alternative vision of Unionism that bore a strong resemblance to Lincoln’s. As a Professor of History and Philosophy at New York University, Henry was in a unique position to do this, addressing Democratic intellectuals like George Bancroft head-on. In 1854, for example, he wrote the lecture *Young America - the true idea of progress* to undermine the Democrats’ beliefs about the universal laws underlying national existence. Like Lincoln, he noted that ‘the phrase “Young America” has become one of frequent utterance among us.’<sup>859</sup> He implored his audience to take the label seriously, writing ‘the wise will not regard it merely as a phrase - merely as designating a certain number of ardent young men.’<sup>860</sup> Rather, ‘it involves ideas, thoughts, sentiments, instincts and practical tendencies of the gravest significance in the political and social sphere.’<sup>861</sup>

Like earlier Whig critics of ‘Young America,’ such as Edward Everett, Henry did not dismiss the movement in its entirety. If it was not taken too its extremes, the historian believed that ‘Young America’s’ vision of the Union could stimulate the imagination, and inspire Americans to strive patiently for national greatness: ‘so far as Young America the feeling of this idea, the stirring of this impulse, it is a noble and sacred thing.’<sup>862</sup> Nevertheless, Henry warned of the dangers surrounding a belief in the spirit of ‘Young America’ that mirrored Lincoln’s critique: it could cause Americans to disavow and disrespect the past, to push abstract ideas too far into practice and also to ignore the indispensable role of religion in bringing about social progress and political cohesion. Whilst ‘Young America’ Democrats were turning towards more conservative language in 1854, Henry nonetheless chastised them for pushing ‘an abstract idea out with reckless absoluteness.’<sup>863</sup> Apparently, they forgot that politics was a ‘practical science,’ and were therefore too keen to ‘uproot what works well merely to replace it with something more theoretically perfect.’<sup>864</sup> Added to this dangerous tendency,

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<sup>859</sup> C. Henry, ‘Young America - the true idea of progress,’ 1854, *Considerations on some of the elements and conditions of social welfare and human progress*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1860), 198.

<sup>860</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid, 204

<sup>864</sup> Ibid, 205.

‘Young America’ applied principles to areas of political life that were best governed by practical considerations. To be sure, Henry recognized that ‘eternal principles of justice’ governed human behavior, such as the right to the fruit of one’s own labor.<sup>865</sup> Nevertheless, ‘questions of economical policy are not questions of political principle.’<sup>866</sup> Confronted with George Bancroft and Robert Walker’s faith in the democratizing power of free trade, Henry wrote ‘it has no more to do with the question of political freedom than the question of gas or oil in street lighting; and to argue it (because of the word “free”) as if it had it absurd and mischievous.’<sup>867</sup> Henry made clear that he did not think free trade was necessarily wrong or inefficient, but that it was profoundly misguided to think of it as a natural right, synonymous with enlightened thought and political liberation.

In another lecture aimed at ‘Young America,’ entitled *Remarks on George Bancroft’s Oration on Human Progress*, Henry attacked the ‘chief intellectual spokesperson’ of the Democratic Party - the historian George Bancroft – for paying insufficient attention to religion in his view of national progress. He criticized Bancroft for arguing that democratic government - rather than religious salvation - should provide the foundations for social advancement. Furthermore, he took aim at the two elements that resulted from Bancroft’s view of historical development: popular sovereignty and territorial expansion. Firstly, Henry described Bancroft’s assertion that the ‘last political state of the world...is ever more exulted than the old’ as ‘pernicious rigmarole.’<sup>868</sup> It was ‘untrue to tell mankind at this age that they are going gloriously onward in a perpetual movement towards something better.’<sup>869</sup> The problem, for Henry, lay in the fact that Bancroft saw the twin forces of technological development and democratic government driving human advancement, leaving no room for religious salvation. The theologian wrote that ‘even if all the nations of the earth had free governments,’ they would not ‘contain the guarantees of national progress.’<sup>870</sup> Similarly, technological and cultural

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<sup>865</sup> C. Henry, ‘California: the historical significance of its acquisition,’ *Considerations on some of the elements and conditions of social welfare and human progress*, 175.

<sup>866</sup> C. Henry, ‘Young America - the true idea of progress,’ *Considerations on some of the elements and conditions of social welfare and human progress*, 205.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>868</sup> C. Henry, ‘Remarks on Mr G Bancroft’s Oration on Human Progress,’ *Considerations on some of the elements and conditions of social welfare and human progress*, 289.

<sup>869</sup> *Ibid*, 289.

<sup>870</sup> *Ibid*, 270.

sophistication could not do the work of religious faith: ‘progress in civilization, in science and knowledge, in the subjugation of the tremendous forces of nature to man’s earthly uses, has not been a proportional progress of humanity in true rational, moral or spiritual development.’<sup>871</sup> This critique of the natural and political sciences as the true drivers of social progress resulted in Henry’s opposition to Bancroft’s internationalist political outlook. Without Protestant piety, the enlightened society Bancroft hoped to create through technological progress, free trade and territorial expansion, was only ‘the increase and expansion of what we are now.’<sup>872</sup> Social progress without the directing forces of Protestantism was aimless and destructive.

Equally, Caleb Henry rejected the idea that the will of the majority - as given expression in American democracy - would always be just and righteous. He devoted a lengthy passage to undermining Bancroft’s claim that “‘the multitude is wiser than the philosopher.’”<sup>873</sup> For Henry, this phrase was as absurd as arguing that “‘the voice of the people is the voice of God.’”<sup>874</sup> This was not, as Bancroft would make out, a ‘universal truth,’ but was true only when ‘the voice of the people is the echo of God’s voice in man.’<sup>875</sup> Just as he dismissed the inherent value of territorial growth, Henry condemned majority rule, if it was not tempered by the wisdom of divine judgment. To think otherwise, it may ‘be rightfully pleased as a divine sanction for all the crimes that have ever been committed under the impulse of popular frenzy.’<sup>876</sup> In fact, for Henry, it was God who had ‘appointed the few to be the guides of the many.’<sup>877</sup> Without their beneficial influence, ‘individuals, the nation, the race can go the road downward, as well as the road upward.’<sup>878</sup> Although he did not mention slavery in this reply to Bancroft’s oration, this statement had undeniable implications for Henry’s attitude towards ‘popular sovereignty.’ Unlike Douglas or Bancroft, Henry knew that the public mind was liable to corruption and that the majority might well vote for slavery in the territories and declare

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>874</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid, 281.

<sup>878</sup> Ibid, 284.

it just. Instead, Henry preached that the right to the fruit of one's own labor, rooted in God's transcendent laws, trumped the fickle demands of American democracy.

Ultimately, the two historians disagreed on the final authority in national life: Bancroft deferred to the will of the people, which was tantamount to the voice of God. By contrast, Caleb Henry thought that Protestant ethics were the ultimate arbiter in human affairs, assuming an importance above even majoritarian rule. Placing the United States at the heart of historical development, Bancroft taught that humankind could flourish only through the influence of American democracy. By contrast, Henry recognized that religious salvation had been achieved in other eras and under different political systems. For him, it was the crucial ingredient of Protestant faith that brought about true progress, rather than Bancroft's eulogy to technological advance and democratic government. Whilst Bancroft believed that America's political system would transform humanity, Henry recognized 'every age has had its side of true and right - just like the present one.'<sup>879</sup> 'Young America must not be ignorant of the past, nor despise it, much less hate it,' or it risked abandoning God's time-honored laws in favor of a novel but misguided form of democratic morality.<sup>880</sup>

Lincoln and Henry's assault on what they saw as 'Young America's' radical conception of Unionism found their echoes in the halls of Congress. Former Whig and Opposition Party Congressman, Oscar F. Moore blamed the 'Young America'-influenced administration of Franklin Pierce for causing the 'sectional bickering and strife' that dominated US politics in 1856.<sup>881</sup> Before the Democrats took over from Millard Fillmore's administration, 'the country was peaceful quiet, happy, prosperous, almost without a parallel.'<sup>882</sup> Moore argued that Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act had acted as a 'tornado' causing 'devastation' in the 'political condition of the country.'<sup>883</sup> He blamed 'the Little Giant, once the pride of 'Young America,' with the talent worthy of a better cause' for wreaking havoc in an otherwise peaceful and prosperous Union. Similarly, Ohio Whig John P. Cook wrote that Congress had 'exclusive jurisdiction' over the territories and that 'no "Young America"

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<sup>879</sup> C.S. Henry, 'Young America - The True Idea of Progress,' 203.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid, 203

<sup>881</sup> Cong. Globe, 34<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1257 (1856).

<sup>882</sup> Ibid, 1257.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid, 1257.

progress can frame an excuse that...warrants direct intervention.’<sup>884</sup> And Samuel W. Parker of Indiana ironically proclaimed, ‘the world is unquestionably making “prodigious advances” and there is absolutely no telling to what empyrean heights Young America will not carry us! We are entirely too wise for those Old Fogies from whom we sprung.’<sup>885</sup>

More conservative members of the Democratic party also mocked Douglas and ‘Young America’ for believing that they possessed superior political wisdom to the Founding Fathers. John S. Millson of Virginia criticized fellow Democrats who supported Douglas for thinking ‘we must plant a government in the wilderness, and then drive a people to take possession of it. This is the spirit of the times...Young America cannot wait. It is perpetually screaming progress! Progress!’<sup>886</sup> Similarly George Morrison, a New Hampshire Democrat, ironically sneered that the ‘fathers of this Republic...died without a correct idea of their work’ because they did not understand ‘the giant intellect of Young America.’<sup>887</sup> However, it was more common for ex-Whigs to attack ‘Young America’s’ vision of the Union for leading the country astray with dangerous and untried political ideas.

It is true that Douglasites would have rejected these accusations during the late 1850s. Keen to prove their newfound conservative credentials, Walker and Douglas distanced themselves from the label ‘Young America’ in the period after 1854. In a decade of profound political upheaval, Douglas was aware there was less appetite for the kind of unqualified progressivism that had animated O’Sullivan’s *Review*. Even though he still adhered to territorial expansion and majoritarian rule, these were couched in the language of moderation, and contrasted with the irresponsible theorizing of abolitionists and socialists. That said, ‘Young America’ retained its power as a signifier of the kind of ultra-progressivism that had caused political upheaval in the first place. The term became shorthand for the distance separating the Civil War generation from the foundations of the Union laid out by the Founding Fathers. In the search for secure political footing during this tumultuous period from 1854-

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<sup>884</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 669 (1854).

<sup>885</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 789 (1854).

<sup>886</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 426 (1854).

<sup>887</sup> Cong. Globe, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 852 (1854).

61, it was common to claim the mantle of conservatism by attacking the irresponsible doctrines of ‘Young America.’

### **The conservative case against democracy as a natural right**

Just as Jacksonian nationalism lived on after the collapse of the so-called ‘Second Party System,’ so too did its Whig counterpart. Like Jacksonians, former Whigs found new homes in a number of different parties after defeat in the 1852 election – the Constitutional Unionists, the Know-Nothing movement, the Republican Party and even Buchanan’s Democratic administration. But what united these former Whigs was a disdain for the idea that ‘popular sovereignty’ constituted a ‘natural right.’ As Chapter One explored, Whigs went to great length to counter the idea that self-government was a ‘natural right’ during congressional debates on the Dorr Rebellion in 1844. Amid the political furor which followed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, former Whigs were equally clear on this issue. For Whigs in the Republican Party, there were rights more fundamental than direct democracy, which must not be left to the judgement of the people; liable – as it was – to corruption and change in the absence of universal moral standards. As such, the reasons Whig-Republicans like Caleb Henry or even Abraham Lincoln had for rejecting the Kansas-Nebraska Act must be carefully distinguished from former Democrats like Salmon P. Chase, or John Bigelow, despite the fact that both groups found themselves in the same party. Within the Republican fold, there were those who believed popular sovereignty and slavery to be incompatible, if only slavery had not become so entangled with the federal government. And there were those who rejected the very idea ‘popular sovereignty’ contained its own moral authority, and that the voice of people constituted ‘the voice of God.’

From his political writings in the early antebellum period through the Civil War, arch conservative and man of letters, Sidney George Fischer, was in the latter camp. In a political tract on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, he wrote ‘the principle announced by the government is precisely that on which Dorr of Rhode Island, assisted by a rabble rout of followers undertook to’ overthrow the



constitution of a 'prosperous state.'<sup>888</sup> The Lecompton Constitution was the work of a 'Jacobin Club' that had gained power on the back of an 'alleged majority.' He criticized the metaphysical pretensions of Democratic Unionism, claiming 'ideas, principle are sharp tools to play with and he who uses them has need of a mind that can see far into the future and calculate remote consequences.'<sup>889</sup> Fischer recognized the idealism at the center of the debate over nationalism in the 1850s, arguing that ultra-Democrats had replaced the true foundations of the Union with misguided, progressive ideas. Ultimately, this arch conservative sided with the Constitutional Union Party. Nevertheless, he found something to admire in Lincoln's political outlook, applauding him for sharing the same attitude towards the Union as Henry Clay. Undoubtedly, Fischer admired Republicans for their hostility to Douglas' newfound doctrine of 'popular sovereignty,' and their fidelity to older ideas.

The conservative periodical the *American Review* shared Fischer's abhorrence of Douglas' supporters within the Democratic Party. One article in 1855 warned that the question of slavery was too sacred to be left to the whims of majority rule.<sup>890</sup> Echoing Caleb S. Henry's warnings about the crimes committed by unruly mobs, the *Review* argued that 'wise and considerate counsels do not prevail among mankind' who would recognize the injustices of slavery.'<sup>891</sup> Accordingly, 'neither communities nor individuals can be relied on to choose what is more profitable to themselves.'<sup>892</sup> The *Review* referenced the situation in Georgia after the Revolution, arguing that 'wise and good men' struggled to consecrate the state for free labor, only to have their voices drowned out by popular rule.<sup>893</sup> The article made a powerful case for safeguarding certain universal principles from the views of the majority. In contrast to the mob, it declared that 'enlightened, patriotic and humane people are shocked by the monstrous dogmatism that denies to them the power to forbid forever the establishment of slavery, or polygamy, or castes or sutterism or cannibalism or any other wrong...within the limits of their common territories.'<sup>894</sup> Unlike Douglas and Bancroft, the article

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<sup>888</sup> S.G. Fischer, *The Law of the Territories*, (Philadelphia: Sherman & Son, 1859), 106.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>890</sup> 'Kansas and Nebraska' (sic), *North American Review*, Vol. 80, (January 1855).

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

implied that a proper conception of ‘human rights’ - including the right to one’s labor - should form the basis of national existence.<sup>895</sup> By contrast, it suggested that ‘popular sovereignty’ was a political right based on membership of the national community, rather than the human race.

After the Civil War, the *American Review* continued to draw this distinction between natural and political rights in regard to the Democrats’ view of ‘popular sovereignty.’ An 1865 article entitled ‘The Democratic View of Democracy’ reflected on the Democrats’ misguided ideas about the meaning of ‘popular sovereignty’ before the Civil War.<sup>896</sup> The writer stated that the ‘natural and inalienable rights of man’ - ‘inevitable deductions from the mere fact of his creation’ - were contained within the Declaration of Independence, and entitled people to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”<sup>897</sup> However, the writer dismissed the idea that casting a vote constituted a natural right. Apparently, ‘no man ever casts a vote on a question...without neutralizing the opinion of someone else.’<sup>898</sup> Whilst the will of the majority was sacrosanct for Democrats, the Whigs recognized that it did not do away with the problem of absolute sovereignty. Democracy still contained the seeds of oppression. When the voice of a neighbor is deprived of all its ‘weight,’ he might just as well have been ‘dragged away from the polls before depositing his ballot.’<sup>899</sup> Accordingly, democracies could slide into despotism as easily as any other form of government. Since ‘popular sovereignty’ did not do away with the problem of power, ‘there is no argument in support of the natural right of individuals to a power of this sort, the exercise of which may so seriously influence the welfare of other human beings, which might not be urged with almost equal force in favor of the divine right of kings or of the divine mission of Caesars.’<sup>900</sup> Thus, it was ‘repugnant’ to ideas about ‘true democracy’ to claim power over others as a ‘personal prerogative’ - ‘something which...is claimed by modern Democrats for each inhabitant of a free state in virtue simply of his age and sex.’<sup>901</sup> Democrats were misguided to talk about ‘popular sovereignty’ in terms of “‘eternal justice” or “eternal truth”” without acknowledging

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<sup>895</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>896</sup> ‘The Democratic View of Democracy,’ *The North American Review*, 101.

<sup>897</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>899</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid, 110.

that there are limits to its operation, 'or that it is open to any more question....than a man's right to his life or to the fruits of his industry.'<sup>902</sup> The *Review* argued that presenting popular sovereignty as a natural right weakened the sense of duty and obligation that was essential to national harmony. The pulpit and press might teach these conservative sentiments, but they could never be applied successfully if 'the bulk of the population are taught from their childhood that every man, upon arriving at the age of twenty-one, has the same right to vote that he has to air or light or the wages of his labor.'<sup>903</sup> The notion that 'majorities are infallible' asks people to believe that 'God...has left the solution of the greatest problems of political science...to the passions or selfish instincts of the least cultivated or gifted members of the community.'<sup>904</sup> It was dangerous for 'every ignorant peasant' to hear that voting is a 'right...not simply by the laws of the land but by the laws of nature.'<sup>905</sup> Like Caleb S. Henry, the *Review* was adamant that the wisest members of society should seek to mold public opinion and enlighten the masses. It deemed the tendency of Young Americans to denounce this influence as 'aristocratic' or 'monarchical' particularly pernicious. This writer complained that Democrats 'generally manage to cover everybody who directly assails them...with odium...and drive them into private life as an... "old fogey."<sup>906</sup>

Caleb S. Henry also distinguished between the natural right to personal autonomy and the political right to popular sovereignty. He admitted that 'logical deductions from metaphysical principles of absolute right, when carried recklessly out in practical application to great social questions are often very absurd and mischievous.'<sup>907</sup> He said, therefore, that it was unnecessary to oppose the extension of slavery out of 'moral repugnance' for the institution. Instead, it was 'quite enough' to fall back on the ancient principles of personal autonomy laid down in the Declaration of Independence: to argue that 'it is an institution not grounded in natural justice, in any general theory of human rights.'<sup>908</sup> For Henry, the fallacy of Douglas' conception of the Union was that it abandoned

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<sup>902</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>907</sup> C.S. Henry, *The Great Republican Movement: what we want, why we want it, and what will come if we fail; remarks made at a public meeting in Geneva, NY July 19 1856*, (New York: Dix, Edwards & Co, 1856), 14.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid, 14.

this theory of human rights for false doctrine of ‘popular sovereignty.’ In fact, the Declaration of Independence did not refer to ‘political rights for these are *not natural but prescriptive rights*,’ entrusted by virtue of belonging to the nation and not common to all humanity.<sup>909</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of the ‘Young America’ movement in antebellum politics as a way of exploring Jacksonian nationalism during the sectional crisis. It has asked a crucial question which has yet to be properly addressed in the antebellum era: what happened to the ideology of Jacksonian nationalism following the collapse of the so-called ‘Second Party System’ in 1854, and the ensuing ‘sectional crisis’? The tentative answers historians have provided so far are, in my view, incomplete. Most follow Michael Holt in declaring ‘the Jacksonian Democratic party that had helped constitute the Second American Party System died just as the Whig party did.’<sup>910</sup> In its place, sectional ideologies predominate, with the Democracy becoming a pawn of the Slave Power, and the Republicans a committed anti-slavery force.<sup>911</sup>

In fact, the ideology of Jacksonian nationalism - associated with the older ‘Second Party System’ - continued to shape responses to the sectional crisis from 1854 to 1861. After the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), a significant number of ‘Young Americans’, with links to the periodical the *Democratic Review*, tried to preserve a Jacksonian conception of the Union. These political figures found a home within both the Democratic and Republican parties, and frequently flitted between the two. But within both these organizations, they argued that the principles of popular sovereignty and non-interference by the federal government should provide the foundations of national existence. They drew on political science to argue that freedom from federal coercion would allow ‘natural laws’ to thrive. In the absence of external authorities, white men would spontaneously form democratic communities, conducive to stability and social progress. As slavery became a truly intractable

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<sup>909</sup> C.S. Henry, *Patriotism and the Slaveowners Rebellion - an oration*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1861), 20

<sup>910</sup> M. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 104.

<sup>911</sup> M. Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties*; J. Oakes, *Freedom National*.

problem in the 1850s, 'Young Americans' like George Bancroft, Stephen Douglas and R.J. Walker resisted calls from both North and South for the federal government to legislate on the issue. As they had in the previous decade, 'Young Americans' saw the sectional crisis as a wider struggle against federal encroachment, incorporating issues such as freedom for European immigrants and the long-term success of the 1848 Revolutions

Overwhelmingly, 'Young Americans' were committed to white supremacy. They believed the 'natural laws,' which formed the bedrock of a democratic society, applied very differently to the white and black races. Whilst freedom from federal intervention allowed white men to gather in democratic communities, it tended towards the extermination and degradation of the black race. However, they were also in favor of free labor in the western territories, and sometimes in tropical regions like Cuba. Based mostly in the Northern states, 'Young Americans' struggled against the political and economic influence of the Slave Power, and believed slavery degraded both the white master and worker alike. Forever looking forward, they believed blacks should either be colonized to tropical regions, or face extermination, much like the Indians supposedly receding on the frontier.

Despite their faith in the transcendent power of democracy, 'Young Americans' did increasingly use the language of conservatism after 1854. With the destruction of the Whig Party and the rise of the Republicans in the mid-1850s, the Democrats came to face very different political opponents. The Whigs had been committed to positive law and compromise for the sake of maintaining the Union. The Republicans, on the other hand, advocated the natural rights of the individual to the fruit of their labor. The Whig Party situated the individual within the political community of the Union, whilst the Republicans based their politics on the abstract rights of individuals in all places and all times. In this context, Jacksonian nationalism, which had been such a radical force during the previous decade, came to represent a conservative concern for the collective. In this period, 'Young Americans' still framed democracy as a universal principle. However, it was one which applied to groups rather than individuals. Therefore, unlike the Republicans, Young Americans' believed they still maintained a concern for the common good, as opposed to the philanthropy, abstract rights and 'a priori' ideas which threatened the stability of the Union. This change mirrored a wider transition in transatlantic politics. After the 1848 revolutions, patrician

conservatism, based on social hierarchy and state intervention, became much more difficult to sustain. At the same time, early forms of socialism were beginning to gain popularity. These new radicals wanted to use the power of the state to redistribute wealth and implement positive moral government. In this shifting political climate, classical liberals, who had seemed so radical during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became the guardians of the status quo. Around the same time, democracy not only lost its radical connotations but became an actively conservative force.<sup>912</sup>

Once we look beyond fragile sectional and partisan coalitions that emerged in the 1850s, we begin to see that Jacksonian nationalism continued to shape Northern politics within both the Democratic and Republican folds. As Civil War loomed on the horizon, a great many politicians maintained a paradoxical commitment not to Northern or Southern sections, but a Jacksonian vision of free labor and popular sovereignty for white men within a decentralized republic, propped up by the colonization or extermination of black laborers.

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<sup>912</sup> For democracy as a conservative phenomenon in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century British politics see Russell Kirk's discussion of Benjamin Disraeli and the passage of the Second Great Reform Act (1867). R. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 275. Kirk notes that Disraeli passed the Second Great Reform Act (1867) 'on a confidence that the great body of the English peoples are conservative.'

## Conclusion

For many Americans in the late 1850s, the Union seemed to be breaking apart, with several discrete nationalities jostling for dominance where there should have been one. But these different nationalities did not always divide along sectional lines, based around the geographical entities of North and South. Rather, as one congressman noted in 1857:

Intellectual anarchy reigns throughout the land. There is no social doctrine. No scientific maxim of government assured of general assent or free from incessant discussion. The entire population of the country seems to be slowly dividing into distinct nationalities, as perverse in their prejudices as opposite in their peculiarities of thought and feeling, as if they were severed by the breadth of angry seas, or the height of icy mountains.<sup>913</sup>

This particular American believed that nationality had nothing to do with geographical markers, or even cultural homogeneity. Instead, it was ‘unity in fundamental opinions’ that ‘constitutes the spiritual essence, the very soul of nationality.’<sup>914</sup> Furthermore, in describing the ideas which divided the nation, he did not turn exclusively to ‘Northern,’ or ‘Southern’ sectionalism. Rather, the ‘general antagonism of primary opinions’ included those Northern politicians who ‘proclaim a frightful despotism in Congress to rule the people of the territories as the mere serfs of government.’<sup>915</sup> For many other antebellum Americans, a shared intellectual culture, rather than geographical or cultural homogeneity, provided the foundations of national existence. And the ideas which defined the nation did not just hinge on the question of slavery.

Observing the 1848 Revolutions in Europe, the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville noted that people had not always seen nationality in this way. Before the French Revolution, people defined themselves in terms of a shared history and a common territory. It was only afterwards that the Revolution ‘created, beyond separate nationalities, an intellectual homeland, where men of all nations could become citizens.’<sup>916</sup> Tocqueville argued that this was a new phenomenon political life. ‘No similar feature can be discovered,’ he said, ‘in any other political revolution recorded in history.’

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<sup>913</sup> Cong. Globe, 34<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 229 (1857).

<sup>914</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>916</sup> A. Tocqueville, *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 25.

For Tocqueville, the universalist ideology behind these political upheavals more accurately resembled religious, than political, conflicts. The French aristocrat summarized ‘religions commonly affect mankind in the abstract without allowance for additions or changes effected by laws, customs or national traditions.’<sup>917</sup> They dealt with ‘the reciprocal duties of men, independent of social institutions...based on principles essential to human nature, they are applicable and suited to all races of men.’<sup>918</sup> If religious questions referred to anything involving ‘principle,’ rather than specific theological doctrines, then the religious disposition was equally relevant for a secular age. What Tocqueville was getting at were the religious roots of secular liberalism – how political conflicts during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century began to assume a religious character.

Tocqueville observed that it was precisely this new form of political mobilization which was responsible for the violent revolutions presiding over the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1789, revolutions had addressed themselves to ‘*natural* principles of social order and government,’ and were therefore capable of ‘simultaneous imitation in a hundred different places.’<sup>919</sup> This did not simply increase the scale of the violence over a larger geographical area, but made the upheavals themselves particularly intense. ‘By seeming to tend to the regeneration of the human race than to the form of France alone,’ Tocqueville, wrote, the Revolution ‘roused passions such as the most violent political revolutions had been incapable of awakening.’<sup>920</sup> The French Revolution had transformed a discrete political conflict into a millenarian struggle; an intellectual revolution that refused to die on the guillotine with Robespierre. These doctrines went on ‘uniting or dividing men’; not according to territorial boundaries but in spite of them. They ‘turned fellow citizens into enemies, strangers into brothers,’ ‘despite their laws traditions, personality of language.’<sup>921</sup> In effect, the cosmopolitanism of the French Revolution had created a global civil war. By making universal ideas the basis of political loyalty, people came to see groups divided by mountains and oceans as allies and friends. At the same time, common territory, shared history and tradition lost their role as markers of political belonging.

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<sup>917</sup> A. Tocqueville, *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 25.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>919</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid 25.



Several of the thinkers admired by ‘Young America’ Democrats were less cynical than Tocqueville about the prospects of internationalism. In 1758, the Swiss theorist of international law, Emer de Vattel looked forward to a time when ‘nations would communicate to each other their products and knowledge; a profound peace would prevail all over the earth, and enrich it with its invaluable fruits.’<sup>922</sup> Others however, seemed to tacitly acknowledge the connection between cosmopolitanism and civil conflict. The French author Victor Hugo, who contributed to the *Democratic Review* during the 1850s, dwelt on this relationship in his most famous novel *Les Misérables*. One of his characters Marius Pontmercy heads to the barricades in 1832 to do battle with the Bourbon monarchy. He asks:

Civil war, what does this mean? Is there any foreign war? Is not every war between men, war between brothers? War is modified only by its aim. There is neither foreign war, nor civil war. There is only unjust war, and just war... War becomes shame, the sword becomes a dagger, only when it assassinates right, progress, reason, civilization, truth. Then civil war is a foreign war.<sup>923</sup>

Here, Hugo perfectly describes the same intellectual transformation as Tocqueville. With the rise of cosmopolitanism, territories and borders became increasingly unimportant. As such, war between different countries began to assume the cast of conflicts between brothers. At the same time, new cities of political loyalty – perhaps new ‘nations’ – emerged in place of geographical lines on the map. The question of being ‘foreign’ came to relate to principle – the ‘sword only becomes a dagger’ when set against ‘right, progress, reason’ and ‘truth.’<sup>924</sup> At the same time, neighbors within the same territory were no longer necessarily allies and friends. If set against ‘right’ and ‘progress,’ they became part of a different ‘nation’ altogether. Twenty years before America’s own great civil conflict, John O’Sullivan touched on the same relationship between cosmopolitanism and civil war in the *Democratic Review*. In an 1840 article entitled ‘Democracy,’ O’Sullivan predicted that the different states of the Union would soon go to war. He wrote ‘a long warfare will infringe on the civilities of life’ which would divide families in two.<sup>925</sup> But from the vantage point of 1840, the conflict

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<sup>922</sup> Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, (1758), 268.

<sup>923</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables...A Novel*, trans. Charles Edward Wilbour, 5 vols., (New York, 1862), 4: 164-165.

<sup>924</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

<sup>925</sup> J. O’Sullivan, ‘Democracy,’ *Democratic Review*, Vol. 7, (March, 1840).

O'Sullivan expected to see was not the one that divided the nation in 1861. Rather than a conflict over slavery, he thought the two principles dividing American life were democracy and centralized government, encapsulated by America's proto-Federalists – the Whig Party.

John O'Sullivan's call to arms was a unique product of his universalist view of the American nation. Rejecting the historicist vision of the Whig Party, 'Young America' Democrats situated the Union in a much wider context. Rather than looking to precedent and positive law, writers at O'Sullivan's periodical turned to the intellectual authorities of political science, political economy and international law. They argued these disciplines could interpret nature and uncover the fundamental principles of national existence. Although they rejected the Enlightenment's static view of a 'state of nature,' these 'Young Americans' still believed the nation should conform to the 'natural laws' which emerged in democratic society. Examining O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review*, and its congressional allies, my thesis traces one of the ways in which cosmopolitanism came to shape American political discourse during the antebellum era. To use Benedict Anderson's phrasing, O'Sullivan and his allies created an 'imagined community' at the international level; one that actually made 'national' existence more precarious.<sup>926</sup> Drawing on the 'democratic principle' to define national loyalty, O'Sullivan turned on his fellow Whigs as enemies of the nation. It is much harder to imagine Whigs pushing for this kind of conflict within the Union, at least before the party disbanded in 1852. Their vision of the nation was very different. It might be called historicist, prioritizing the territory of the United States, and the traditions associated with it, over reforming the international order in line with a particular idea of justice.

As historian Daniel Howe has convincingly shown, the Whigs presented a view of the nation at odds with the radical cosmopolitanism of 'Young America.'<sup>927</sup> Rather than the 'natural law' tradition, their conception of the nation was rooted in a divine obligation to respect positive - or local - legislation, as contained in the British tradition of common law, or issued by the legislature. More wedded to their British ancestry, Whigs saw the institutions and traditions they had inherited from

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<sup>926</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso revised edition, 2006).

<sup>927</sup> D.W. Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

their Anglo-American forbearers as bulwarks of national stability. For Whigs, their specific Protestant heritage drawn from colonial New England drove individual and national uplift. This was not defined as liberation from the central government, but individual moral development based on restraint and self-control. These components amount to a view of the nation that Howe – and many of his Whig subjects – called ‘an organic community.’<sup>928</sup> Place, precedent and a specific religious culture mattered much more than universalist values, amounting to a more conservative view of the nation.

Of course, the Declaration of Independence still played a significant role in the Whig political tradition. But, as we have seen, it was defined in a more qualified way, portraying ‘popular sovereignty’ itself not as a ‘natural right’ but a system of government designed to safeguard the more fundamental freedoms of ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’<sup>929</sup> Furthermore, when Whigs did promote ‘natural rights,’ this was done through extra-political evangelical reform, rather than wielding legislative influence. Historian Stewart Winger refers to the Whigs’ ‘Augustinian’ distinction between the ‘higher law’ emanating from God, and the national law which bound political life.<sup>930</sup> Because the Whigs’ vision of the nation was conservative and territorial, they were far less likely to imagine ideological conflict within the Union. For them, the primary markers of national identity were a shared sense of place and cultural tradition. In this context, nations might fight each other, particularly over their spheres of interest, but they would not turn on their fellow citizens. Living under the same set of positive laws engendered loyalty; natural law was less relevant.

Rather than setting different groups against each other, the Whigs saw the nation as a means of harmonizing competing interests. They recognized that citizens might have different ideas about good government, and different priorities and expectations within society. But, people could still be brought together under a shared legal system, and common cultural traditions. With careful statesmanship, political leaders could hold inevitable social conflicts in check. Whigs talked about being ‘national’ or ‘above party’ just as much as Democrats, but they meant a very different thing by it. ‘Young America’ Democrats meant abiding by ‘natural law,’ applicable in all times and places.

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<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> For a discussion of popular sovereignty and natural rights in relation to the Dorr Rebellion see Chapter One; for the sectional crisis see Chapter Four.

<sup>930</sup> S. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion and Romantic Cultural Politics*, 205

Whigs meant weighing up competing interests in a disinterested manner. Both looked to an authority higher than mere ‘politics.’ But where Democrats turned to political science, Whigs looked to a sense of patriotism, or disinterested concern for the common good.

O’Sullivan’s efforts to divide the nation into two ideological factions, and his prediction of a global civil war, are absent in Whig political writing. In this sense, we can see how ‘Young America’s’ tradition of universalist nationalism acted as a catalyst for the Civil War. Almost all scholars view Stephen Douglas and his political allies as pragmatic politicians, committed to keeping the Democratic Party and the Union together at a time of deepening sectional conflict.<sup>931</sup> The recent historian of ‘Young America’ Yonatan Eyal even suggests that Douglas’ movement postponed the Civil War through its successful attempts at compromise.<sup>932</sup> However, ‘Young America’ Democrats came to the language of accommodation late in the game. Faced with a conciliatory Whig opposition, they opened fissures in the Union by rooting nationalism in natural law. Long before Lincoln started using the discourse of ‘natural rights’ in 1854, Douglas, Bancroft and O’Sullivan advanced a universalist conception of the nation to replace the territorially binding vision of the antebellum Whigs.

The ‘imagined’ global community of ‘Young America’ turned all foreign wars into civil wars. As Democratic politicians envisaged their place in an international order, territorial markers lost their significance. They justified intervention in faraway conflicts on the grounds that they were fighting for the same values, within a shared global community. At the same time, since territory was no longer the primary marker of national identity, the bonds between people living in geographic proximity lost their intrinsic strength. If the ‘Young America’ movement had not replaced the Whigs’ vision of nationalism with one rooted in ‘natural law,’ it would be difficult to imagine the Union dividing into separate nations, along ideological lines, in 1861.

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<sup>931</sup> See H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*. Jaffa contrast Douglas’ pragmatism and material self-interest against Lincoln’s use of the natural law tradition. He writes ‘neither Thrasymachus or Machiavelli espoused more completely than Douglas the doctrine that “justice is in the interest of the stronger,”’ 311.

<sup>932</sup> Y. Eyal, *Young America*, 223.

The ‘Young America’ movement, therefore, illuminates the relationship between cosmopolitanism and conflict which historian David Armitage has recently highlighted.<sup>933</sup> Drawing on European examples at the turn of the 18th century, he reminds ‘contemporary political theorists’ that cosmopolitanism is not necessarily ‘a philosophy of peace.’<sup>934</sup> The prevailing wisdom assumes that ‘cosmopolitanism’s imagined community would be tolerant, egalitarian and universalist.’<sup>935</sup> ‘Only recently,’ Armitage points out, ‘have scholars acknowledged that cosmopolitanism might have something to say about war or that war might shed light on the limits and possibilities of cosmopolitanism.’<sup>936</sup> ‘Just as the Enlightenment itself had its shadows, so there is a dark side to enlightened cosmopolitanism.’<sup>937</sup> My thesis reinforces Armitage’s central argument that these ‘least likely of all conceptual companions’ – cosmopolitanism and civil war – are in fact mutually reinforcing.<sup>938</sup>

Although a civil war did break out in 1861, it was not, as O’Sullivan predicted, a conflict between different visions of democracy. However, this dissertation has demonstrated that the ‘Young America’ movement played a role in shifting the debate over nationalism onto the grounds of ‘natural law’ in the first place. Ascendant in the years between 1848-1854, ‘Young America’ became a touchstone for a broad range of politicians and writers in and outside Congress. Edward Everett, John Bell, George W. Curtis and Abraham Lincoln all defined new visions of nationalism with reference to Douglas and Bancroft’s ‘Young America.’ Although these ex-Whigs rejected the equation of political and natural rights, they nevertheless drew on the natural law tradition, and framed their political position in terms of the international – as well as the national – order. The Whig-Republicans who formed the backbone of the fight against slavery came to champion a form of nationalism very different from their old party. Rejecting the classical republicanism that dominated Colton’s *Whig*

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<sup>933</sup> D. Armitage, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Civil War,’

([https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/armitage/files/cosmopolitanism\\_and\\_civil\\_war.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/armitage/files/cosmopolitanism_and_civil_war.pdf)), accessed 14/09/2017.

<sup>934</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>935</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>936</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>937</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>938</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

*Review*, the Republicans advanced a conception of positive moral government, rooted in the natural law tradition; one that owed much to the millenarianism of O'Sullivan, Bancroft and Douglas.

Furthermore, during the sectional crisis, 'Young Americans' believed they were primarily fighting against the encroachments of the federal government. Stephen Douglas and his allies, George Bancroft, John McClernand and Samuel Cox resisted calls by both the North and South for federal legislation on the subject of slavery in the territories. These Jacksonian nationalists believed that both abolitionists and the Slave Power threatened the Democratic principles of popular sovereignty and non-intervention. Once implemented, it was these universal laws which would bring stability and social progress in equal measure. In this sense, then, Democratic Unionists *were* fighting O'Sullivan's conflict, even if Whig-Republicans like Lincoln were not. If the Slave Power had not assumed the power of the federal government, and rejected the result of a democratic election, these politicians would have been perfectly happy to protect what they saw as slaveholders' constitutional rights within the Union. When viewed in this context, O'Sullivan's prediction is eerily prescient.

The relationship between the cosmopolitanism of 'Young America' and the Civil War reveals some of the unanticipated, destructive results which can flow from 'progressive' movements. In addition, I think the study of 'Young America' challenges some of our assumptions about the meaning of 'progress' in the antebellum US. In doing so, it can help us reevaluate our own accounts of social progress in this era, and how the Civil War fits into our larger histories of the American nation. Whilst historians of the South have long recognized that the slaveowners' hierarchical and racist worldview was also outward-looking and 'progressive,' historians of the antebellum north have been slower to catch up. As historians Edward Ayers and Dorothy Ross have observed, we still see the coming of the Civil War as a melioristic narrative. The major works view abolitionists forcing the universalist values of 'human rights' onto the political agenda. The emancipation of the slaves becomes the culmination of a half-century long struggle on behalf of the values of liberal individualism. As Dorothy Ross describes:

Since the 1960s emancipation has been influentially portrayed as the result of the gradual, halting, but growing triumph of universalist liberal and Christian principles, a key moment in a progressive narrative of growing freedom.<sup>939</sup>

Or, as Edward Ayers suggests, we ‘reassure Americans by reconciling the great anomaly of slavery within an overarching story of a people devoted to liberty.’<sup>940</sup> Recent histories like Manisha’s Sinha’s *Slave’s Cause* and James Oakes’ *Freedom National* only reinforce this narrative.<sup>941</sup> By drawing our attention to the radical origins of the Republican Party, these works suggest antebellum Northerners were more eager to see the abolition of slavery than they were. Ignoring the salience of Jacksonian nationalism, they assume that the natural rights Americans campaigned for related to the autonomy of the individual, and applied across racial divides.

In fact, many Americans did not look at the future in this way. ‘Young America’ was the group perhaps most closely associated with the notion of ‘progress’ during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the future they envisioned was not primarily defined in terms of opposition to slavery. Rather, it constituted the roll back of the federal government, free trade and popular sovereignty. The natural laws they championed worked on behalf of majorities not individuals. At worst, this tradition led to a profound attachment to racial pseudo-science and – at best – to instrumentally assisting Southern slaveowners with their naïve expectations that ‘free labor’ would eventually triumph within the Union.

By rejecting ‘Young America’s’ arguments for territorial expansion and popular sovereignty, Republican opposition to slavery involved as much a conservative as a progressive impulse. They had to do battle with the idea that unbridled democracy brought about an inherently just social order. Likewise, within the Republican Party, a sizeable group of former Democrats remained wedded to ‘Young America’s’ worldview. Far from being a product of half a century of liberal campaigning, the abolition of slavery was in the periphery of their political visions. The ‘natural rights’ they most concerned themselves with were popular sovereignty and free trade for white men.

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<sup>939</sup> D. Ross, ‘Lincoln and the Ethics of Emancipation,’ 1.

<sup>940</sup> E. L. Ayers, “Worrying about the Civil War,” in *Moral Problems in American Life*, ed. Karen Halttunen and Lewis Perry (Ithaca, 1998), 156

<sup>941</sup> M. Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*; J. Oakes, *Freedom National*.

Challenging the narratives that Ayers and Ross cite, involves appreciating the importance of the ‘nation’ in antebellum political thought, but it also means recognizing those ‘progressive’ visions which never came to pass. In order to challenge our teleological assumptions about the Civil War, we must understand how the categories of ‘progressive’ and ‘conservative’ were defined in their own times. Otherwise, we are merely mining the past for the seeds of our own values, telling a story of linear development in a world that was chaotic and unpredictable; perhaps a fine task for George Bancroft, but not for historians today. In their own time, the progressives who congregated around the *Democratic Review* did not look forward to the abolition of slavery through federal intervention: they concerned themselves more with west than north or east; and worried more about popular sovereignty, territorial expansion and trade more than the question of slavery.

Furthermore, we should not shy away from ascribing the white supremacist rhetoric of ‘Young America’ to their progressive worldview. The effort to root politics in natural – not positive - law led many Democrats towards the racial pseudo-science of phrenology. Very few people in the antebellum United States believed in the equality of the races, or even the idea that blacks should gain political rights. However, different groups drew these political divides in very different ways. In keeping with their tradition of historicist nationalism, the Whigs foregrounded cultural explanations, relating to differences in education and circumstance. For many Boston elites, the idea that blacks could be initiated into political society was not an uncommon one. Democrats, on the other hand, subscribed to a sharper form of political exclusion based on ‘natural’ attributes. For them, African American inferiority was inherent in their psychological make-up. The possibility that slaves could thrive outside their climate or integrate into American society was anathema: ‘extermination’ and colonization were seriously entertained as alternatives. In this way, the arguments which assumed equality for the white race were used to bolster the subordination of blacks.

A number of published and private writings suggest that the racism of ‘Young America’ Democrats was rooted in the most cutting edge scientific works. In some cases, these texts shaped their thinking, and turned them to a stricter vision of white supremacy than they had held before. John O’Sullivan revealed to Stephen Douglas during the 1850s, for example, that he had abandoned the



belief in the unity of the races which had defined his ‘barnburner’ politics a decade earlier.<sup>942</sup>

Similarly, Thomas L. Kane criticized the abolitionists for their conservatism – for being stuck in August Comte’s metaphysical stage of ‘a priori’ reasoning.<sup>943</sup> He boasted that he had abandoned such notions about the ‘equality of the races’ on the grounds that he was an empiricist in the tradition of Aristotle. Lincoln was all too aware of these changes in public opinion. He noted that ‘a priori’ ideas about fundamental equality were necessary to guard against the direction which social views might be tending. More unsure of social progress than George Bancroft, he knew the nation was as likely to degenerate as improve, if democracy was the highest standard of morality. Theological certainties were necessary for just and enduring government, together with a healthy skepticism about new scientific developments. The capacity for ‘negative capability’ so many historians have attributed to Lincoln, meant making peace with the things he could not know.<sup>944</sup>

The Democrats’ use of the ‘natural law’ tradition, then, did not lead them to the egalitarianism of the Declaration of Independence; in fact, quite the opposite. Defining themselves against the ‘a priori’ reasoning of the Enlightenment, the Democrats’ ‘empirical’ tradition scorned the fixed ideas about equality as belonging to an anterior age. Instead, ‘Young Americans’ wanted to investigate society as it was, which meant drawing distinctions rather than metaphysical abstractions. Texts such as Elisha Hurlbut’s book on ‘natural rights’ made the case that the white race’s ‘instincts’ made them uniquely suited to democratic society.<sup>945</sup> Similarly, the races which did not emanate from Europe’s intellectual traditions, or seem ‘advanced’ enough for democratic participation, were deemed inherently inferior. Furthermore, ‘Young America’ displayed a reverence for public opinion which made them assume the prejudices of white society revealed general laws.<sup>946</sup>

For ‘Young America,’ natural law did not mean positive moral government: abstract, theological standards implemented by the federal government. Rather, the ‘laws of nature’ emerged in

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<sup>942</sup> For John O’Sullivan’s attitude towards race see Chapter Four.

<sup>943</sup> For a Thomas L. Kane’s attitude towards race see Chapter Four.

<sup>944</sup> J. Burt, *Lincoln’s Tragic Pragmatism: Lincoln, Douglas and Moral Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>945</sup> For a discussion of Elisha P. Hurlbut’s book on ‘natural rights,’ see Chapter One.

<sup>946</sup> For ‘Young America’s’ privileging of popular attitudes to race see the discussion of Thomas L. Kane in Chapter Four.

the absence of an overbearing central government. However, that did not mean, as several Douglas scholars assume, that ‘Young Americans’ were immoral, or saw the question of slavery merely in terms of ‘dollars and cents,’ in contrast to Lincoln’s moral robustness.<sup>947</sup> In fact, Douglas and many of his supporters believed that self-government, free trade and state sovereignty created its own spontaneous moral order, directed by the voice of the masses; an inherently just force that corrected itself in the back and forth of political discussion. Where they departed from the Republicans was assuming there was any theological authority ‘above’ this natural order, or prior to the existence of American democracy.

My thesis has argued that ‘Young America’ were not consciously aiding the Slave Power – both their interests and their ideology were distinct. But, their political vision and their actions did – instrumentally, if not intentionally – further the interests of Southern slaveholders. By selling the Jacksonian agenda to a Northern audience, they comforted voters with the notion that positive government action was unnecessary to halt the expansion of slavery. It was their very confidence in American values that blinded them to the dominance of the Slave Power for so long.

As historians, though, we should be careful not to call ‘Young America’ Democrats ‘doughfaces.’ This characterization was popularized by 19<sup>th</sup> century Republicans to frame Northern Democrats as Southern accomplices, scheming on behalf of the Slave Power. Since many did materially aid the interests of slaveowners, it is tempting to take this view as historical truth. But to do so imposes too much order on the past. It assumes that antebellum Democrats knew what we know now. It assumes that the trends we recognize in American society were intelligible to antebellum Americans. That people were conscious actors, willing events into being with exact precision. The failed progressive venture that was ‘Young America’ nationalism, and the unintended consequences it created, are swept away.

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<sup>947</sup> The view that Stephen Douglas was a moral relativist is closely related to the idea that he was a ‘pragmatic’ politician interested in compromise that I outlined earlier. For a discussion of Douglas’ unprincipled political reasoning see Harry Jaffa. H. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000). Jaffa’s analysis of the ‘natural law’ tradition in Lincoln’s political thought is extensively researched and very convincing. However, like Herman Belz, and other scholars of the ‘natural law’ in the antebellum period, he underappreciates the Democrats’ own universalist view of the nation, preferring the view that they were unprincipled, or wholly interested in commerce and compromise.

The progressive nationalism of the 'Young America' movement, then, challenges the melioristic view of the Civil War, identified by Edward Ayers, in two ways. Firstly, it illuminates the relationship between cosmopolitanism and civil conflict. Secondly, despite what we assume, it shows that federal intervention against slavery was not the only – or even the primary - way antebellum Americans understood 'progress' in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, scientific 'white supremacy,' a political economy of free trade, territorial expansion, and the natural right to popular sovereignty for white men was a particularly strong strand of liberal nationalism. If we consider how many Republicans would have supported a just execution of 'popular sovereignty,' perhaps it was even a dominant one.

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