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*The Birth of*  
**MASS  
POLITICAL  
PARTIES**

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**Michigan, 1827-1861**

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# I

## *The Historical Problem of Party Formation*

American society of the first half of the nineteenth century continues to interest historians, political scientists, novelists, poets, and other cultural analysts. Many sense in the period after 1815 the beginning of peculiarly modern experiences and social forms, especially in politics. Modern American political culture took shape in the 1820s and 1830s with the formation of mass party organizations. In most states a mass electorate had internalized party loyalty on so vast and intense a scale by 1840 that a new context for political activity was constituted. Professional politicians had moved in behind Andrew Jackson's 1828 victory to secure substantial power over the processes of government. With their cohorts in the states they worked to create an institutional environment which favored disciplined and cohesive organizations in the competition for majorities in electoral campaigns. Any political majority in a country of so many contrasts would have to be coalitional. Even within regions, states, and localities, the growing heterogeneity of nineteenth century society required that parties would be "coalitional systems" of subcommunities varying by locality. Binding ties of action needed to be developed to rationalize political activity, get political power, maximize the usefulness of power, and provide criteria for the distribution of rewards. By the 1830s, as Richard P. McCormick put it, a "hidden revolution" changed the institutional environment of politics and fostered the growth of pragmatic, electorate-oriented, coalition-building parties, hungry for the spoils of power.<sup>1</sup>

The political chaos of the 1820s is well known. During the disintegration of the Republican establishment of Monroe a bewildering array of

<sup>1</sup> Parties as coalitional systems are discussed in Samuel J. Eldersveld, *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis* (Chicago, 1964), 89; Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, 1966). Also, see the essays by Chambers, Paul Goodman, Frank Sorauf, and McCormick in William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems: Stages of Development* (New York, 1967), 3-116.

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elite personalities, factions, cliques, and juntos dominated national and local election contests. Round-robin factionalism gradually gave way to highly institutionalized and ritualized party politics in the 1830s—at least in most areas of the North. Of the intriguing preparty situation almost nothing is known in social terms. The period is often described as one of “personal” or “factional” politics, but these categories are a variation on the “Presidential Synthesis.” The structure of society has not been convincingly related to political changes, and social and political history have not come together to provide social analysis of the transition to mass politics. Social group cleavages and patterns of ostensibly nonpolitical group relations beyond the formal contests have been ignored.<sup>2</sup> But these were becoming the bases of loyalty or antipathy to the new mass organizations.

A case study of party formation in Michigan, encompassing a social analysis of party character, political subcultures, and changing voter loyalties, can open a window into American political culture during a seminal phase of its development. The molding of parties in Michigan spanned the crucible years of 1828 to 1837, the beginning of the party system in the nation. During this time Michigan passed from territory to state, and the creation of mass parties closely followed the building of society itself. Demographically speaking, Michigan was a colony of New York, New England, and, increasingly during the period from 1835 to 1860, of Europe. This held great significance for the development of party loyalties.

The strategy of this study is to identify the mass constituencies of the Democratic and Whig parties from 1837 to 1852, and the Democratic and Republican parties from 1854 to 1860; to determine vital differences for voters between the parties; and to discover the rapport between party postures and social group attitudes. These basic steps are needed before understanding may be gained of the impact of mass politics on events or political culture.

Significant political changes unfolded in both the 1830s and 1850s. In the thirties voter loyalties crystallized after a period of resistance to organization, and some social group alignments created then have persisted to the present. In the 1850s, when the Republican party gradually replaced the Whigs, a similar process of party formation occurred. In one sense the ongoing system was only modified, but at the same time significant realignment during 1853 to 1856 made the two periods much alike. The Republican movement was a new departure and was hesitant to establish itself as a party. Republicanism grew to a great extent on

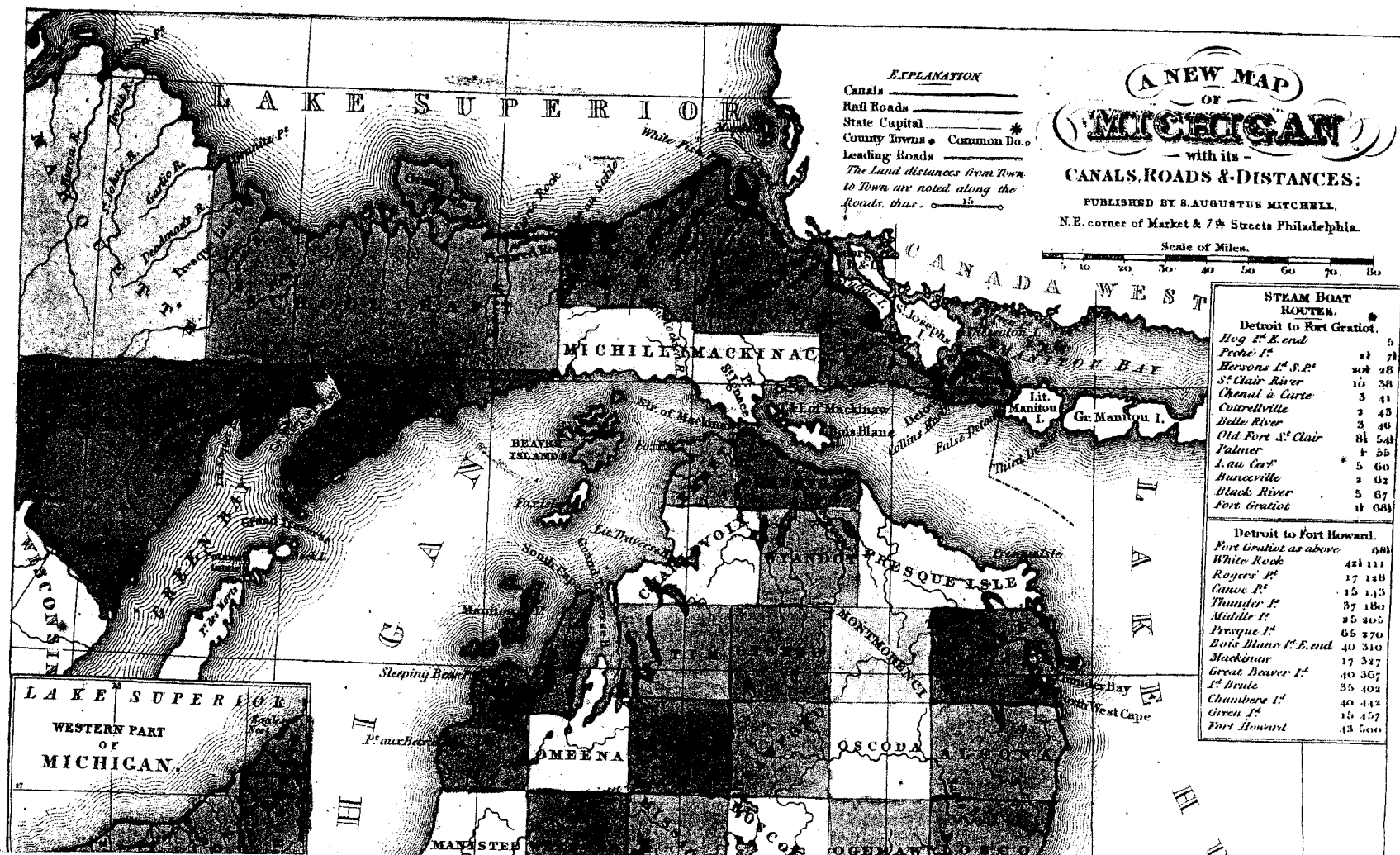
<sup>2</sup> The best attempt to deal with this problem so far has been in Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961), 3-63, 165-207.

preexisting anti-Democratic elements, yet manifested an ethos differing in important ways from its predecessors. Thus the periods 1828 to 1837 and 1853 to 1856 are worthy of intensive study to uncover the original character of the parties and the causes of mass voting patterns.

Shortly after Michigan became a state in 1837 "Democracy" and "Whiggery" took hold as major parties. In 1840 political antislavery intruded as the Liberty party became a third but minor contestant, replaced from 1848 to 1853 by the Free Soil organization. With the exception of 1839 to 1840 the Democrats enjoyed almost continual political hegemony. They succeeded as brokers among a disparate coalition of antievangelical social groups who rejected the moral society which pietist Protestants promoted first through Antimasonry and then Whiggery. Antievangelicalism pervaded the antiaristocratic, laissez faire, and secularist image conveyed by the Democrats. Their coalition also won because of defection from Whiggery of antislavery men. A tendency to schism was one of the symptoms of an antipartyism endemic to the Whig political character.

In the mid-fifties the Whig and Free Soil parties dissolved and recombined in the Fusion, Independent, or, as it came to be called, Republican party. While some voters crossed party lines, much established behavior persisted along Democratic and anti-Democratic lines. The modified system of the 1850s raises complex problems. What changes in voter behavior and what initiatives of party organizers created the new party? Which issues and attitudes now commanded the mass electorate's fealty or hostility? What new relations among social groups, if any, accompanied the political shifts? These questions, in turn, relate to that great historiographical Sargasso Sea of explanations for the Civil War. The triumph of Republicanism in Michigan by 1856 was an early instance of the sectionalization of the North, and therefore led to Lincoln's election in 1860 and to Southern secession. The data presented here, then, should make a small but decisive contribution to the endless combat among historians over the causes of the Civil War. Much scrutiny has been devoted to activities of elite decision-makers who led their sections to war, but analysts have not systematically weighed the conditions in which they acted.

In 1853 cultural and moral issues coming together from different sources caused sharp divisions in the Democracy, and began, at the township, city, and county levels, to transform Whiggery. The most powerful engine of the new movement was anti-Catholicism, as Know Nothingism swept the farms and villages of rural Michigan. In 1854 the anti-Southern outburst occasioned by the Kansas-Nebraska bill joined the already convulsive upheaval that had unhinged traditional loyalties, and the battle for Free (White) Soil gave party leaders the public common





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denominator for a successful anti-Democratic coalition. Under the banner of "Fusion" or "Independency" and sometimes "Republican," the anti-Democrats won the state in 1854 and held a new electoral majority. Religious and ethnocultural cleavages structured the realignment of the 1850s just as they had powerfully shaped the earlier party formations. Michigan Whiggery had been the Christian Party, seeking in many ways to regulate a moral society. Republicanism continued the evangelical quest of Whiggery, and can be considered the Protestant party because of the greater unity it achieved among the several Protestant denominations through anti-Popery. Republicanism's great achievement in building a broader coalition was aided by its blending of moralism with the popular egalitarian compulsion—formerly the property of the Democrats. Popery and the Slaveocracy provided Republicans with foils for a modified antiaristocratic posture and a competitive egalitarian appeal such as the Whigs had never managed to muster against the Democrats.

The Wolverine state has been touted as an example of northwestern Republicanism's intensely antislavery character—"radical Michigan" it has been called in some general studies. But few Michigan Republicans cared about slavery where it did exist. When Democrats stirred Negrophobia against the anti-Southern party, Republicans reassured their constituents that they were the champions of Northern white rights. Among Republican leaders, however, there existed some desire to extend justice to Michigan's own black second-class citizens, by enfranchising them, for example. But most of the party's leadership bowed to white hopes, Democratic and Republican, that caste be maintained in "radical Michigan."

Michigan Republicans stood, nevertheless, in the vanguard nationally of those asserting the prerogatives and political weight of a Northern bloc growing in cohesiveness and backbone. Checking slavery's expansion meant holding firm in the struggle against the South for national power and symbolic representation. Important as anti-Southernism was in Michigan Republicanism, it was just one of several major impulses in a complex movement that lacked social or ideological homogeneity. Its most salient postures and symbols contained overlapping meanings. As a symbol "Slavery" harbored many dragons to be slain by the just.

To avoid or at least lessen misunderstanding about the assumptions of this study,<sup>3</sup> it is necessary to engage now in what Professor Heinz Eulau has aptly called "theorizing activity." The first assumption carries with it the *raison d'être* for this work; namely that a case study can reach beyond description and classification of the unique. Properly designed

<sup>3</sup> David Potter, "Explicit Data and Implicit Assumptions in Historical Study," in Louis Gottschalk, ed., *Generalization in the Writing of History* (Chicago, 1963), 190-91.



it can join with other such studies to provide bases for broader generalizations. Such local studies permit one to perceive communities in depth—organic entities with their myriad human relationships, their individuality, and their universality. Significance and subtlety in human affairs are not functions of size. As David Potter has said, bringing to mind Pascal's famous structure within which an "infinity of universes" existed: "generalization in history is inescapable and . . . the historian cannot avoid it by making limited statements about limited data. For a microcosm is just as cosmic as a macrocosm. Moreover, relationships between the factors in a microcosm are just as subtle and the generalizations involved in stating these relationships are just as broad as the generalizations concerning the relation between factors in a situation of larger scale."<sup>4</sup>

A second assumption is that a number of variables in their social development and immediate experience strongly influence men's voting and their choice of parties. This is not a euphemism for denying that class or "how a man gains his livelihood" has anything to do with voting. Rather, it recognizes the whole man in his total social environment and a multiplicity of potentially relevant variables whose mix can kaleidoscopically shift over time and place.

These assumptions underlie those modern studies of voting patterns in which political scientists observe many variables relating to individuals. Analysts can know how a person voted and can ask him questions about himself. They can measure an individual's class, for example, by means of such "hard" indicators as occupation and income and can also ask what class he thinks he is in. No such luxurious and helpful tools exist for those conducting studies before the Civil War. Rather, the mass of voters must be viewed from outside, as it were, via a relatively limited, although potentially significant, number of variables. Generalizations about antebellum voting must rest primarily on aggregate data collected for counties, townships, and wards, with the smallest minor civil divisions bringing one somewhat closer to the individual. With aggregate data one does not even see individual voters through a glass darkly; rather, to shift the metaphor, one creates a screen of information about aggregates and reaches through to individuals by inference. Fortunately mid-nineteenth-century settlement patterns in Michigan produced many townships of homogeneous populations or homogeneous politics, permitting reasonably strong inferences to be made regarding the voting of their constituent groups. While the available data and methods do permit inferences to be

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 191. For perceptive comments on the utility of case studies, James C. Malin, "Local Historical Studies and Population Problems," in Caroline Ware, ed., *The Cultural Approach to History* (New York, 1940), and Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, 1961), v-vi.

drawn from knowledge of community frames of reference,<sup>5</sup> such inferences do not hold for individual members of social groups who are dispersed throughout the population and are presumably psychically apart from the group, lacking its reinforcement of perception and norms.

Lack of adequate demographic data before 1850 complicates analyzing party formation in the 1830s. Using traditional sources, one must cast a wide net through society, examining many ostensibly nonpolitical activities, to determine which groups transferred their rivalries and antagonisms into party conflicts. The historian must reconstruct the political universe in terms of its political subcultures. The latter might be a group in which class, religion, or ethnicity overlap, but not necessarily. Members generally share primary-group experiences which tend to give them a common view of life and habituated responses to the ever-changing political scene. Examination of the values, attitudes, and opinions of the group permits one to discern its belief-system, that is not so much a reasoned, fairly coherent, and perhaps logical "ideology" but rather a hierarchy of values linked by quasi-logical unstructured beliefs.<sup>6</sup> Political subcultures existed before political parties, and they were of various kinds. Some consisted of elite or narrow pressure groups, others were amorphous, dispersed among broad issue publics. Their interaction ranged from cooperation, to coexistence, to struggles for power, patronage, tangible resources, status, and "recognition" of their values. Antagonistic relations between political subcultures will be of most interest here since it appears that they were carried into formal political conflict. Through this complex process of transference, parties as institutions then became reference groups.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Philip H. Ennis, "The Contextual Dimension in Voting," in William N. McPhee and William A. Glaser, eds., *Public Opinion and Congressional Elections* (Glencoe, 1962), 180-211; Austin Ranney, "The Utility and Limitations of Aggregate Data in the Study of Electoral Behavior," in Austin Ranney, ed., *Essays on the Behavioral Study of Politics* (Urbana, 1962), 91-102.

<sup>6</sup> My scholarly debts in this and following paragraphs overwhelm any attempt to enumerate them here. The most immediate are: Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (Glencoe, 1964), 206-61; Frank J. Sorauf, *Political Parties in the American System* (Boston, 1964); Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York, 1962); Samuel P. Hays, "The Social Analysis of American Political History, 1880-1920," *Political Science Quarterly*, 80 (September 1965), 373-94; Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Two books of influence here were Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1965; originally published 1922), and Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, 1964). The way in which parties function today as reference groups is described by Robert Lane in *Political Life: Why People Get Involved in Politics* (Glencoe, 1959), 299-300. The literature on reference groups is extensive, with the most outstanding work probably being Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. edn. (Glencoe, 1957); for a stock-taking of the subject,

No party ever really conformed to its historical description. The flexibility and pragmatism, the heterogeneous constituencies and lack of ideological rigidity of American parties defies their being captured on paper. In describing the kinds of individuals who are a party's loyal voters and key pressure groups, the historian creates stereotypes, to use the term in its neutral sense. He describes social groups as if they had a common personality or political character. Indeed, a rapport usually exists between a party's character, that is, its image, style, rhetoric, attitudes, and aura, and the political character of its loyalists.<sup>8</sup>

It should be emphasized that elite groups will be neglected here. The pursuit of tangible goals by well-organized minorities or powerful individuals in such controversies as banking, internal improvements, tariffs, land distribution, and territorial expansion will be discussed chiefly in terms of their symbolic meaning for the masses, not in terms of the "allocation of tangible resources" among elites.<sup>9</sup> Historians who believe that the Bank War, states rights, or similar issues gave rise to political parties among the masses are wrongly extending the issue-orientation of limited segments of the electorate to all of it. They assume wide knowledge and intensity on party issues—warranted neither by recent studies of voter issue-awareness nor by what we know about the electorate of 1840.

Many historians admirably immerse themselves in the colorful detail of the politics of the Middle Period only to become victimized by the dramaturgy of Jacksonian politicoes, whose ability to beguile has seduced far more sophisticated analysts of politics than their "common" contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> Our vulnerability lies in the lack of a conceptual

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now ten years old, Herbert H. Hyman, "Reflections on Reference Groups," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24 (Fall 1960), 383-96. Stein Rokkan has written several stimulating works on the historical relationships between social cleavages and party development, e.g., Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments," Lipset and Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York, London, 1967), 1-64.

<sup>8</sup> Three works that develop the concept of political character in different ways have greatly aided my thinking: Robert E. Lane, "Political Character and Political Analysis," in Heinz Eulau, et al., eds. *Political Behavior* (Glencoe, 1956), 115-25; Robert Kelley, "The Thought and Character of Samuel J. Tilden: The Democrat as Inheritor," *Historian*, 26 (1963-64), 176-205, and "Presbyterianism, Jacksonianism and Grover Cleveland," *American Quarterly*, 18 (Winter 1966), 615-36. Of undoubted importance to this line of thought, too, is the seminal work by David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denny, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950).

<sup>9</sup> The phrase comes from Edelman, *Symbolic Uses of Politics*, 1-21.

<sup>10</sup> It is in political situations laden with emotion in which the mass public has little or no understanding of issues that governments take bold tacks, such as announcing regulation of business, or warring against monopolies or banks. Since the public which responds has little information or understanding of what goes on,

approach to how group attitudes form, and too heavy a reliance on a liberal-rational judgment of public opinion. According to V. O. Key, Jr., classical treatments of public opinion were disposed "to regard the political system as an atomized collection of individuals, each more or less informed about public issues and possessing views about them. This preconception produces a picture of social conflict organized along issue alignments of individuals," but Key warns that this is only part of any explanation of political controversy: "in some degree cleavages that involve the mass public are in terms, not of conflicting attachments to issues, but of loyalties to competing groups."<sup>11</sup> If Professor Lee Benson is only half correct in his judgment that "historians have not yet generally even *begun* to develop scientific procedures to study past public opinion,"<sup>12</sup> it should not be surprising that their accounts of party formation contain unconvincing accounts of electoral group responses to party battles.

Researchers in elite sources have overestimated the information and interest possessed by mass publics on issues which generated intense elite engagement. It is time that historians confronted the brute fact that "large portions of the electorate do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis of intense political controversy for substantial periods of time."<sup>13</sup> Recognition of the citizenry's limitations implies a realism which can complement, indeed intensify, commitment to a Jeffersonian belief in the development of an informed citizenry.

How many accepted explanations of American political episodes need to be rewritten once it is recognized that mass political knowledge has been low and that voting has generally lacked issue orientation? Political scientists have also developed the corollary point that "Party loyalty apparently lacks ideological underpinning." A party's beliefs may attract and unite its activists but issues which are the organization's articles of faith at a given moment may not be revered at all by its mass constituency. Republican and Democratic leaders in the 1950s, for example, divided significantly by issues, but deep ideological cleavages did not separate their constituencies.<sup>14</sup>

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its response and its gaining of assurance (or feeling a threat) from the announced policy must be based on sociopsychological factors already there, on group attitudes already in existence, *ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> V. O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, 3rd edn. (New York, 1964), 60.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Benson, "An Approach to the Scientific Study of Past Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 31 (Winter 1967-68), 522-67.

<sup>13</sup> Converse, "Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," 245. See also Daniel Katz and Samuel J. Eldersveld, "The Impact of Local Party Activity Upon the Electorate," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25 (Spring 1961), 21-22 (on the electorate's lack of basic political information).

<sup>14</sup> Herbert McCloskey, Paul J. Hoffman, and Rosemary O'Hara, "Issue Conflict

While it is assumed that political knowledge, issue orientation, and articulate belief-systems do not extend significantly beyond elite groups into the electorate, certain assumptions are made regarding the psychological affinities of leaders and followers in parties and other social groups. To some extent psychological congruity is assumed between elites and constituencies: bridges of rapport exist between spokesmen and supporters along a "latent value continuum" which can be inferred from the expressed attitudes of leaders and, when available, followers.<sup>15</sup> The concept of political character rests on this assumption as does the assertion that there is a rapport between a party's character and its loyal constituent groups. All this implies that analysts of traditional documents should search not only for substantive, overt objects of persuasive rhetoric but also for emotions and values appealed to because the rhetorician knows that his readers or listeners are already imbued with them.<sup>16</sup>

These strategies for analyzing party formation and voting will thus use elite sources, but elites will be relatively neglected. Elites, however, played the most important role in creating parties. Social group conflicts did not mechanically generate party organizations. Rather, patterns of conflict among subcultures pervaded the sociopolitical milieu in which organizers worked to build parties. The professional politicians manipulated the institutional environment with ease, but their relative lack of control over the social arena meant that many consequences of their actions would be unintended.<sup>17</sup> Party builders who set out in the 1820s

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and Consensus Among Party Leaders and Followers," *American Political Science Review*, 54 (June 1960), 426. "However, we cannot presently conclude that ideology exerts no influence over the habits of party support, for the followers do differ significantly and in the predicted directions on some issues." The latter are of a type in which considerations of "position" and "style" are "mixed," 418.

<sup>15</sup> The quoted phrase is from Edelman, *Symbolic Uses of Politics*, 154-55. Among other works of relevance here are: Lane, *Political Ideology*, 10-11; David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, "The Meaning of Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 12 (Winter 1948-49), 633-48, esp. the section "An Approach to Latent Meaning," 644-48; Herbert McCloskey, "Conservatism and Personality," *American Political Science Review*, 52 (1958), 27-45; T. W. Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1964; originally published 1950), i; and M. Brewster Smith, Jerome S. Bruner, and Robert S. White, *Opinions and Personality* (New York, 1956).

<sup>16</sup> The preceding sentence is a paraphrase and slight alteration of an observation from Svend Ranulf, *Moral Indignation and Middle Class Psychology: A Sociological Study* (New York, 1964; originally published in Copenhagen, 1938), 60.

<sup>17</sup> The basic studies of the activities of party organizers are: M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties: The United States*, II (New York, 1922); Robert V. Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963); and Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, Ill. 1969) who discusses the literature and attempts to make a synthesis of works on party organizers, the political system, and the rise of the major parties, 154-247, 374-80. Highly stimulating and important for what it implies

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to make political power more effective, more predictable, and more rewarding could not, for example, have anticipated the intense cultural shocks that took place in the 1830s, both within and without American society. Yet the intensification of cultural conflict in the 1830s perhaps made mass party formation easier. The interaction of many causes, some deliberate, some unintended, brought parties and voter loyalties into being.

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about the motives of party organizers is James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York, 1966).

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## II

### *Michigan and the Party System*

#### SOCIETY, 1830–1860

In 1818 the first wave of the transportation revolution washed the shores of the Great Lakes as the steamboat *Walk-in-the-Water* sailed from Buffalo across Lake Erie. That same year the first government land office opened in Detroit, and more Eastern emigrants made their way to Michigan Territory. Archaic survivals attended a new society's emergence: in 1824 territorial law still punished witchcraft, and on September 23, 1830, one Stephen G. Simmons was hanged for killing his wife. Michigan's first and last public hanging victim departed after delivering an eloquent "repentance" before a crowded grandstand—gallows and stand having been built for the occasion. Reaction against the event caused the abolition of whipping posts in Detroit. In 1830 the last Indian treaty removing any formal aboriginal obstacle to white pioneering was still twelve years away, but the most important cessions had already been cheaply extracted. Ten years of almost uninterrupted growth and development lay ahead.

In the thirty years before the Civil War a society came into being in Michigan, "Out of the Wilderness" as Professor Willis F. Dunbar put it, and hard upon social growth a new political party system emerged in the 1830s. The new politics came early to this frontier state and was part of the first genuine mass party system ever created. Before looking at Michigan's experience in its broad outlines, it will be useful to explore the character of this market society where the intensity that charged men's pursuit of happiness carried over into politics: "Speculation and politics are the reigning spirit of the times," said the 1839 *History of Michigan* by Charles Lanman, "and they pervade all classes of the population."<sup>1</sup>

Like the rest of the nation in these years, Michigan experienced the transportation and communications revolutions. The state grew in socio-

<sup>1</sup> Charles Lanman, *History of Michigan* (New York, 1839), 296-97.

economic complexity, it knew great demographic change with a rapid population increase and an influx of a variety of ethnoreligious groups which produced far-reaching cultural shock. Nevertheless, Michigan society in 1860 resembled that of 1837 in all essentials—the year of its entrance into the Union. This heretical view obviously chooses to stress continuities rather than changes on the social landscape. It also suggests that life goals and styles in 1860 did not differ greatly from those of 1837, that economic and social patterns had more in common than is usually granted when “improvement” or “progress” is emphasized.

Steamboats, canals, cheap Western land, and economic pressures in the East in the 1820s brought settlers to Michigan. Population climbed from 31,640 in 1830 to 212,671 by 1840, an increase of 571 percent, faster than any state or territory in that decade. But the rate of increase fell sharply in the next two decades while population rose to 397,654 in 1850 and 749,113 persons in 1860. This constituted 2.38 percent of the nation's population. Farm land values after 1830 began a steady climb upward, but in 1860 Michigan's still lagged well behind those of New York, Ohio, and even rocky New England.<sup>2</sup>

Although patterns of life were very similar throughout Michigan, yet some socioeconomic developments did depart from prevailing modes. The Upper Peninsula gave the nation its first gold rush, without gold. Copper, and then iron, brought Eastern investors, fortune seekers from all over the Upper Lakes, and miners from Cornwall, Ireland, and the East. In 1860 some 20,000 persons lived on the wild, rich, and beautiful peninsula of tall tales. Perhaps one-half or more of the men worked in mining. The rest were largely employed in lumbering, fishing, or trapping, while a few grew potatoes.<sup>3</sup>

Like mining, lumbering also was essentially peripheral to the mass of society. The Saginaw Valley on the eastern side of the lower peninsula and the Muskegon Valley on the west were well on their way as centers of commercial lumbering by 1860. Their mills, some of them steam powered, employed proportionately large numbers of men in these northern counties. The individual sawmill itself, however, was woven into the fabric of rural agricultural life. It marched across the state with farm settlements, providing lumber for barns, houses, and village homes. Often

<sup>2</sup> *Michigan Statistical Abstract* (Lansing, 1966), 6; George J. Miller, “Some Geographical Influences in the Settlement of Michigan and in the Distribution of Its Population,” *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, 45 (May 1913), 347; J.D.B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States: Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, 1854), 40, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Willis F. Dunbar, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State* (Grand Rapids, 1965), 365, 369, 375. The Upper Peninsula is discussed in more detail in Chapter XIV.



run by the owner and a "hand" or two the sawmill marked the post-frontier stage of pioneering.<sup>4</sup>

In at least one other important respect the Michigan of 1860 differed from that of 1837: the foreign born had arrived in numbers beyond anyone's expectations. In 1850 almost 14 percent and in 1860 nearly 20 percent of the population was foreign born—150,000 persons. This produced (with other causes) a younger and more male society. Of all the immigrants arriving in the United States from 1820 to 1860 males outnumbered females by a ratio of 3 to 2, and almost one-half of the total was between 15 to 30 years of age. Thus, in Michigan among the total white population, males outnumbered females 388,006 to 348,136 in 1860. The discrepancy was widest in the 30 to 40 age group. It and the 20 to 30 age group, largest numerically, together constituted nearly 32 percent of the total white population.<sup>5</sup>

The image of foreigners concentrated in cities is erroneous for Michigan in 1860: they covered the state, from towns, to farms, to lumber and mining camps. True, the foreign born did account for 45 percent of Detroit's population in 1860, but the 21,349 newcomers there were only 14 percent of the entire foreign group. Taking only Detroit's population as urban, the foreign born were more rural in 1860 since Detroit's 9,927 immigrants in 1850 had constituted 18 percent of the total. Counties with high percentages of foreign born in their population spanned the state in 1860, from the northern mining, lumbering, and fishing counties to the densely peopled southern counties such as Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Kent where greater numbers of foreigners could be found. The foreign population spread across the state and was overwhelmingly rural and small town, as was the state itself.

Census numbers of farm and nonfarm occupations are not reliable guides to social structure and fail to indicate that Michigan was largely rural. In 1850 the percentage of strictly agricultural jobs was perhaps 60, while it fell in the next decade to 55 or less. Figures based on the population size of towns describe the state as 92.7 and 86.7 percent rural in 1850 and 1860. This measure, although arbitrary, better indicates the society's ruralness.<sup>6</sup>

The preurban and preindustrial character of socioeconomic life can perhaps be appreciated by considering work patterns in the major urban center. DeBow described Detroit in 1850 as one of the "Leading Cities of the United States." The federal census manuscript of social statistics

<sup>4</sup> Dunbar, *Michigan*, 358-60.

<sup>5</sup> *Eighth Census of the United States, Population, 1860* (Washington, 1864), I, xxi, 230-31.

<sup>6</sup> *Michigan Statistical Abstract*, 6; *Eighth Census of the United States*, 249; *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, 1853), 902-03.

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listed dozens of "manufacturing establishments" throughout the city, but none employed over 100 "hands." Only 3 worked more than 75 men; in 11 plants over 50 "hands" labored, and most typical of the larger Detroit "manufactories," 19 places employed more than 25 and under 50 men (and women). The largest single employer was the railroad; steam sawmills and lumber yards; makers of sashes, blinds and doors; and machine and foundry shops came next. Moreover, most hands were probably skilled or at least semiskilled workers.<sup>7</sup> (Of course, a large pool of unskilled laborers was otherwise present.) The biggest factory in Michigan in 1860 was not in Detroit, ironically, but just south of it in rural Ecorse Township where the Ecorse Iron Works and Wyandotte Rolling Mills had 80 and 300 men on their payrolls.<sup>8</sup> These mills provide the only approximation of an industrial factory system, and they had come into being in the previous five years. Many occupations in Wayne and other counties, nevertheless, should be considered urban or at least nonfarm. But the structure of manufacturing in Detroit, with a population of over 45,000, gives perspective on socioeconomic patterns in the 15 or so large towns in the state—only 4 of which held over 5,000 inhabitants. These places, or rather the men in their workshops were neither strictly rural nor urban. "Mechanics" came to the towns of Michigan in increasing numbers after 1840, perhaps from Eastern or European cities. They could earn more in Michigan where skilled labor was in demand. Highly mobile, many moved on at faster rates than the rest of a footloose small town population.<sup>9</sup> If urban Michigan was not quite urban, rural Michigan was not solely one big farm.

The agricultural society under discussion here was heavily concentrated in the two southern tiers of counties along the old military roads and the East-West rail lines. Fertile land, rivers, and lakes drew relatively dense settlement into some counties in the third and fourth tiers, but barely halfway up the lower peninsula heavy pine growth, sandy soils, and harsher climate discouraged farmers.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The bound manuscript volumes of the 1850 "Social Statistics of Michigan" are located at the Michigan Historical Commission Archives, Lansing. (Hereafter referred to as MHCom) DeBow, *Compendium*, 399. The table of Michigan occupations in the printed United States Census of 1860 erroneously listed only 50 "factory hands" in the entire state.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter XIV.

<sup>9</sup> On the mobility of nonfarm occupations in western townships: Mildred Throne, "A Population Study of an Iowa County in 1850," *Iowa Journal of History*, 57 (October 1959), 309-10; William L. Bowers, "Crawford Township, 1850-1870: A Population Study of a Pioneer Community," *ibid.*, 58 (January 1960), 18-24. On high wages in the West: DeBow, *Compendium*, 164; Edgar W. Martin, *The Standard of Living in 1860: American Consumption Levels on the Eve of the Civil War* (Chicago, 1942), 408, 410, 411, 414.

<sup>10</sup> Dunbar, *Michigan*, 350, 358; Miller, "Geographic Influences in Michigan Settlement," 330.

Everywhere in the state from 1835 to 1860 in each year one could find new farms just planted. Although a cross section of farming regions at any point in time would reveal every stage from frontier to commercial farming, almost all shared a basic orientation. The farmers' great goal was to produce cash crops and get rich. "Wealth and honor," said one observer, "are the grand motives of emigration." The habits of thought connected with the constantly advancing value of real property and "the custom of 'dickering,' makes almost every individual a speculator. . . . Everybody seems to know what everything is worth, and what it will sell for."<sup>11</sup> Federal census categories, too, implied mobility and a market psychology. The monetary value of farms, recorded in agricultural censuses for the first time in 1850, has apparently always been understood to mean "estimated current market value of farm land, fences, permanent improvements, and buildings," and did not include estimated value of crops produced, farming implements, machinery, or livestock.<sup>12</sup> These traveled with the farmer-speculator.

Markets beckoned in Detroit, Chicago, New York, or New Orleans. Goods flowed east and west along the Erie axis or south to the Ohio and Mississippi valley. Increasingly in the two decades before the Civil War, Michigan like the rest of the upper Northwest, sent products disproportionately to the East rather than to the South.<sup>13</sup>

Initially goods had to move inside Michigan. In the 1830s and 1850s "railroad fever" raised ecstatic visions of cheap access to markets, but track construction proceeded slowly. It suffered first from collapse of the grandiose internal improvements plan of 1837 in the depression of the late 1830s. Private companies took over in the 1840s, yet by 1850 Michigan possessed only 342 miles of track. Ten years later the mileage had crawled to 800 while Wisconsin, a younger state, built 902 miles in that decade alone. And the canal-building bonanza that affected some Western states left Michigan almost untouched.<sup>14</sup>

Michigan farmers used roads and rivers. The terrain, although sometimes muddy or dusty, was not terribly difficult. In the 1850s the "plank-

<sup>11</sup> Lanman, *History of Michigan*, 297. From Jackson County a pioneer wrote on January 9, 1837: "Speculation! Speculation! . . . a person that has never been in Michigan knows nothing about it. It almost begins to make my fingers itch. Money laid out here will double in one year." Louisa Fidelea Palmer, ed., *The Palmer Letters* (privately printed, 1963), 35. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library. (Hereafter referred to as BHC)

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Pressly and William H. Scofield, *Farm Real Estate Values in the United States by Counties, 1850-1959* (Seattle, 1965), 4.

<sup>13</sup> A. L. Kohlmeier, *The Old Northwest as the Keystone of the Arch of American Federal Union: A Study in Commerce and Politics* (Bloomington, 1938).

<sup>14</sup> Dunbar, *Michigan*, 333, 379, 384-85; Carter Goodrich, ed., *Canals and American Economic Development* (New York, London, 1961), 1-12, 249-55; *Statistics of the United States, 1860* (Washington, 1866), 330.

## 20 *Michigan & the Party System*

road craze" created a new speculative mania and temporary boon to internal transportation. Meanwhile, throughout the period, rivers and lakes carried most of the freight. This era remained (in spite of the popular emotions aroused by other ways of travel) "the heyday of river transportation in Michigan."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the transportation revolution came to Michigan only piecemeal. Farm products moved within Michigan in 1860 to a great extent as they had in 1837. Operators in Detroit might be in instant telegraphic communication with Chicago or New York, but Dunbar has put the case well for the everyday impact of the various "revolutions": "Although Michigan had come a long way out of the wilderness by 1860, vast areas of the state were still covered by unbroken forests and isolated hamlets, and a large proportion of the farm homes were often out of touch with the outside world for months at a time—especially during the winter. Rail lines, plank roads, and telegraph wire were remote from many Michigan homes."<sup>16</sup>

Poor local transportation, of course, probably would not prevent Michigan farmers from moving further West with the same facility as other Northwestern migrants. The high geographical mobility of the farm electorate requires comment in connection with the method of this study, which relies heavily on data from the censuses of 1850 and 1860. There is a proverb that a man cannot step into the same river twice. The historian of the nineteenth-century Northwest, similarly, cannot look into the same township twice and expect to see the same population. If one is comparing the voting of townships in 1837 and 1850, for example, their electorates may have changed considerably in that time. This agricultural market society, as noted above, induced high lateral if not vertical mobility. When the seeker of "wealth and honor" met failure or a dead end, he moved on. Studies of mid-nineteenth-century Northwestern townships show that population turnover may have been going on at a tremendous rate. Much impressionistic evidence encourages one to assume this for Michigan. Thus, when one compares the party vote of a township or county in 1837 to its vote in 1850 one compares the party preference of a voting unit, not necessarily of voters, not even in the aggregate.<sup>17</sup>

Despite high geographical mobility the available data is still very useful because most townships formed at an early stage a social character which persisted for a decade or two. Hundreds of local histories sug-

<sup>15</sup> Dunbar, *Michigan*, 378-79, 385.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 390-91.

<sup>17</sup> Peter S. Coleman, "Restless Grant County: Americans on the Move," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Autumn 1962), 16-20; Merle Curti, et al., *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier Community* (Stanford, 1959); and the Iowa studies cited in note 9 above.

gest this, as do aggregate data depicting the social composition of Wayne County in 1850 and 1860 assembled from the manuscript population schedules. The turnover among Canton township's native Protestant farmers, for example, may have been high, but between 1850 and 1860 Canton remained a predominantly native Protestant farming community.

Although the myth of the "classless" frontier has died slowly, empirical study has consistently shown that class structures were steadily elaborated after communities passed through a brief communal phase.<sup>18</sup> Postwar county histories provide voluminous testimony to the intensity of the quest for "honor" or distinction. Evidence from Iowa and Michigan counties indicates that most townships began life with a great group of farmers owning farms with a cash value of \$1,000 or less. As townships matured the large middle group flattened out, with some increase in the top economic ranks and larger movement to the lowest (see Appendix B).

With these caveats in mind, aggregate voting data over time for townships can provide a basis for making inferences about the party loyalties of social groups. Aside from state and county returns for major elections, this study makes use of voting profiles for townships and wards. Such a profile shows the number, percent, and total vote for parties in each unit in every election year available, from 1835 to 1860. Profiles of some use for 32 counties were assembled.<sup>19</sup> Fairly complete returns for Detroit's wards existed for the entire period, and for several large towns which incorporated as cities in the 1850s, returns by wards were also available.

#### MASS PARTY LOYALTY, 1835-1852

In the 1830s mass party loyalty on a stable basis came into being for the first time in American history. If a political party is defined as having three major areas of being, namely legislative, organizational, and electoral, then the latter at least had not characterized party structure previously. Studies of the Federalist and Republican parties suggest that they achieved most of their rootedness in the electorate after 1800, and stable, large-scale citizen support proved at best transitory in the individual states. Studies of the "first party system" have not yet provided the data to show the existence of stable voting patterns among freely attached electoral followings.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> An excellent discussion of the subject and the literature may be found in Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage* (New York, 1966), 97-116.

<sup>19</sup> Returns came from several sources including newspapers, the rich but incomplete collection of election returns in the Michigan Historical Commission, and county courthouses.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Goodman, "The First American Party System," in Chambers and Burnham, eds., *American Party Systems*, 86. The last sentence is a paraphrase from

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The second party system—or by this definition the first—created a “party-in-the-electorate,”<sup>21</sup> and thus resembles the political scene today in distribution and intensity of partisanship. Political scientists have shown the great extent to which party loyalty has shaped voting behavior in this century. The “role of basic partisan dispositions” has been called perhaps “the most impressive element” in American political life. While short run influences are not trivial “each election is not a fresh toss of the coin; like all good prejudices, the electorate’s basic dispositions have a tremendous capacity to keep people behaving in accustomed ways.”<sup>22</sup>

Actually, party loyalty is probably less widespread now than during the nineteenth century when, according to Professor Walter Dean Burnham, the “voting universe was marked by a more complete and intensely party oriented voting participation among the American electorate than ever before or since.” Comparing the period from 1854 to 1872 with six subsequent periods between 1878 and 1962 Burnham found stronger party voting by every measure for the earlier years. In Michigan during the Civil War scarcely 15 percent of the potential electorate appeared to have been outside the voting universe. About 7 percent could be classified as “peripheral voters,” who participated during “surge” elections of high excitement, while more than three-quarters of the total appear to have been core voters, or party loyalists.<sup>23</sup>

The conditions of electoral mobilization just described came into being in the 1830s. For most of its Territorial Period, from 1805 to 1837, Michigan did not know party politics. In 1819 territorial elections began

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William Nisbet Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776–1809* (New York, 1963), 45. Recent studies carefully examining the early electorate include David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965), Carl E. Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: The Genesis of an Early Political Machine, 1789–1817* (Chapel Hill, 1967), and Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, 1967). They show that party loyalties were shallow and unstable among a comparatively limited electorate.

<sup>21</sup> The phrase is from Frank Sorauf, “Political Parties and Political Analysis,” in Chambers and Burnham, eds., *American Party Systems*, 37–38.

<sup>22</sup> Donald E. Stokes, “Party Loyalty and the Likelihood of Deviating Elections,” *Journal of Politics*, 24 (November 1962), 689–90; Angus Campbell, Phillip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York, 1960), 121, 121–67 passim; Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago, 1954, 1962), 15–16, 19–22; Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, 1954), 88–111; Angus Campbell and Donald E. Stokes, “Partisan Attitudes and the Presidential Vote,” Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, eds., *American Voting Behavior* (Glencoe, 1959), 355–58, 368.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Dean Burnham, “The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe,” *American Political Science Review*, 59 (March 1965), 12–13, 23. Burnham’s indicators show only net change, and gross changes could be concealed within the data. However, the indicators all point in the same direction.

in which taxpayers chose a Delegate to Congress every two years. In 1823 voters could also elect a nine-man Council to legislate for the territory. These steps toward self-government often resulted in spirited battles for office among competing Republican factions, but did not bring parties into the arena. Political participation was low. In 1829 Antimasons organized the first party, and the rival Republican factions, whose ideological distinctions have thus far escaped detection, quickly emulated the Antimasons. But these organizational trial runs possessed little continuity, let alone measurable support among voters. The fragmentary state of the data, however, makes identification of voting patterns almost impossible. Before 1835 stable alignments cannot be discerned in a confusing thicket of leadership factions, a growing and barely rooted electorate, and shifting civil division boundaries. Demographic and socioeconomic conditions, undeveloped communications, and political practices all suggest that persisting patterns of voter alignment did not divide Michigan's territorial electorate.<sup>24</sup>

In 1835 the first true Whig-Democratic contest mobilized much of the electorate along party lines.<sup>25</sup> Then after a two year hiatus during which party competition vanished, organizational cadres and the voters finally rallied in 1837. For state and presidential elections virtually all adult white males soon participated. And the vast majority divided along lines that would endure. Nevertheless, party loyalty should not be treated as a "given," but rather as a variable with at least two kinds of fluctuation: defections and conversions. Defecting voters temporarily leave their traditional party to vote for another and return when the specific causes of their departure relax. Converting voters switch their vote and their party allegiance.<sup>26</sup>

Evidence for the party attachment of the electorate by 1837 is of three kinds: aggregate returns, studies of elite affiliations, and contemporary testimony. Returns for the presidential elections from 1840 to 1852 show that voters divided fairly evenly between the Democrats and their combined opponents (Table II. 1). The Democratic vote ranged from 47.2 to 51.0 percent. In off-year contests after 1840 the distribution was not so even. However, the Democratic vote displayed relative stability. The one near landslide of the period (1851) occurred not because of an outpouring of Democratic voters but resulted from a depression in turnout

<sup>24</sup> Some returns by counties for territorial elections of delegates to Congress are in the Secretary of State Papers, Great Seal and Archives, MHCom; the county returns for 1823 and 1825 are reprinted in M. Dolorita Mast, *Always the Priest: The Life of Gabriel Richard* (Baltimore, 1965), 207, 259; also useful is the *Detroit Gazette*, BHC.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapters IV and V.

<sup>26</sup> Phillip E. Converse, unpublished lecture given at Inter-University Consortium for Political Research Seminar, Ann Arbor, August 1965.

## 2 4 Michigan & the Party System

affecting largely the anti-Democrats. That party loyalty was weaker among the latter is the subject of a later chapter.

TABLE II.1  
Major State Elections, Party Vote, 1837-1852

Year	Office	Democrat		Whig		Liberty	
		Vote	Percent	Vote	Percent	Vote	Percent
1837	Gov.	15,314	51.0	14,546	49.0		
1838	Cong.	16,255	50.3	16,051	49.7		
1839	Gov.	17,037	48.3	18,195	51.7		
1840	Pres.	21,096	47.6	22,933	51.7		
1841	Gov.	20,993	55.7	15,449	41.0	321	0.7
1843	Gov.	21,392	54.7	14,899	38.1	1,223	3.2
1844	Pres.	27,737	49.7	24,375	43.8	2,776	7.1
1845	Gov.	20,123	50.9	16,316	41.3	3,639	6.5
1847	Gov.	24,639	53.3	18,990	41.1	3,023	7.6
1848	Pres.	30,677	47.2	23,930	36.8	2,585	5.6
1849	Gov.	27,837	54.2	23,540	45.8	10,393	16.0
1850	Cong. <sup>a</sup>	29,259	48.7	30,872	51.3		
1851	Gov.	23,827	58.5	16,901	41.5		
1852	Pres.	41,842	50.5	33,860	40.8	7,237	8.7

<sup>a</sup> Equals total of Congressional districts

If returns for major elections are examined by county it is clear that most of those units established a partisan loyalty by 1840. Similarly, inspection of voting profiles for townships in 32 counties throughout the period suggests that most townships, once population stabilized, took on a fairly predictable pattern of vote distribution. Many townships fluctuated widely in the degree to which they preferred a particular party, but major changes of basic disposition usually could be traced to demographic changes.

Another way of inferring party loyalty consists of statistical correlation of party percentage strength over a series of elections. Returns for 30 counties in 1840, for example, were available. The Democratic percentages in each election could be correlated with the Democratic percentages in all other presidential elections. The Pearson coefficients of correlation (Table II.2) suggest the high stability of the 1840-52 period, at least for every four-year interval.

In Wayne, Livingston, and Calhoun counties, interyear correlations for *townships* produced results of overall similarity. These three counties provided a rough sectional sample and different patterns of voting. Wayne, in the east, maintained a consistent Democratic loyalty until 1860. Livingston, north and west, voted Democratic in the 1840s but went Republican in 1856. Calhoun, further west and south, returned a low Democratic vote throughout. The correlations also suggest that the



TABLE II.2  
Interyear Correlations of Democratic Percentage Strength of Counties,  
1840-1860, Presidential and 1854 Gubernatorial Elections

	1840	1844	1848	1852	1854	1856
1844	.622					
1848	.385	.786				
1852	.345	.810	.858			
1854	.079	.611	.562	.827		
1856	.242	.280	.389	.063	.228	
1860	.106	.603	.551	.589	.066	.482

TABLE II.3  
Interyear Correlations of Democratic Percentage Strength  
in 3 Selected Counties, 1840-1852

WAYNE COUNTY							
	1837	1840	1844	1848	1852	1854	1856
1840	.755						
1844	.642	.672					
1848	.662	.385	.656				
1852	.547	.605	.718	.849			
1854	.364	.227	.546	.801	.837		
1856	.476	.237	.569	.880	.887	.914	
1860	.420	.244	.496	.834	.902	.856	.912

LIVINGSTON COUNTY						
	1844	1848	1850	1852	1854	1856
1848	.556					
1850	.802	.634				
1852	.706	.653	.668			
1854	.519	.662	.588	.471		
1856	.489	.484	.730	.498	.704	
1860	.593	.563	.696	.667	.385	.797

CALHOUN COUNTY						
	1840	1844	1848	1852	1854	1856
1844	.622					
1848	.385	.786				
1852	.345	.810	.858			
1854	.079	.611	.562	.957		
1856	.242	.280	.389	.787	.787	
1860	.106	.603	.551	.786	.870	.708

basic Democratic and anti-Democratic divisions of the electorate in the 1840s probably continued into the 1850s. One result of the turmoil of the 1850s may have been to *increase* the tendency to identify with a major party.

Political researchers using aggregate data often rely on measurement

ity was weaker

Liberty  
Vote Percent

321 0.7  
1,223 3.2  
2,776 7.1  
3,639 6.5  
3,023 7.6  
2,585 5.6  
10,393 16.0

7,237 8.7

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of split ticket voting as an index of party loyalty. Burnham has suggested that the 99 percent levels of straight ticket and complete ballot voting that he found in the nineteenth century "may have been partly an artifact of the party ballots then in use." Michigan law provided that voting "shall be by ballot in writing, or on a paper ticket, containing the names of the persons for whom the elector intends to vote."<sup>27</sup> Newspapers, or their printing presses, were vital to party organization because they usually distributed printed ballots, often of bright colors, to their party's faithful. The convenience of such ballots undoubtedly encouraged straight ticket voting. Ticket splitting did occur, however, and political observers regarded it as a deliberate display of independence of party.<sup>28</sup> However, in township after township, county after county, from the late 1830s on, manuscript and newspaper tallies of votes given for groups of federal, state, or local offices, presented in tabular form, usually looked like an intricate design consisting of vertical columns of numbers. Some idiosyncratic breaks in the symmetry could be observed, but the overwhelming impression was of straight ticket voting, especially in rural townships.<sup>29</sup>

Elite behavior also suggests a high degree of party loyalty. Men mentioned frequently in newspapers as political activists broadly represented party leaderships. From 1848 to 1856 in Wayne County of the 743 men who appeared as active in one or more elections only 174 changed their allegiance and only 11 shifted more than once.<sup>30</sup> When one considers that the Republican party replaced the Whig and Free Soil parties during these years the overall stability is more impressive. Professor Alexandra McCoy's study of Wayne County's economic elite observed the party loyalty of 97 elite members from 1837 to 1854. McCoy found that the elite displayed almost uniform party loyalty up to 1854. Only two of these prominent men switched parties.<sup>31</sup>

No wonder contemporaries described "heredity in politics" as "stronger even than in religion" and that "It was expected as a matter of course that partisan politics would descend from sires to sons with unbroken regularity." One pioneer told of how a strong Jackson man typically had carried his Democratic principles from New York state into the Michigan

<sup>27</sup> Burnham, "American Political Universe," 18; Thomas M. Cooley, ed., *The Compiled Laws of the State of Michigan* (Lansing, 1857), I, 107.

<sup>28</sup> *Kalamazoo Gazette*, Nov. 10, 1838, microfilm, Michigan State Library, Lansing. (Hereafter referred to as MSL) *Detroit Free Press*, Nov. 15, 1847; *Detroit Advertiser*, May 9, 1850.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix A lists newspaper and manuscript sources of election returns for counties by townships and wards.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy Fisher, "Personnel of Political Parties in Wayne County from 1848 to 1878" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1935), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra McCoy, "Political Affiliations of American Economic Elites: Wayne County, Michigan, 1844, 1860, As a Test Case" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1965), 96.

woods where he raised his sons: "It was natural for his young family, to claim to be Democrats in principle, in their isolated home."<sup>32</sup>

Finally, campaign styles prevalent in Michigan by the late 1830s also bolster the proposition that intense partisanship characterized the disposition of the mass of voters. Parades, wagon trains, marches, rallies, singing, floats, transparencies, flags, and a variety of quasi-military activities directed toward mobilizing opposing "armies" implied mass party loyalty.<sup>33</sup> Such practices assume that the hosts to be marshalled for voting were already committed partisans.

#### IMPACT OF THE LIBERTY AND FREE SOIL PARTIES

The Liberty party's entrance into the political lists in 1840 did not disturb the unity of the 1837-52 period because the new party drew its votes overwhelmingly from Whiggery. Thus, Democratic and anti-Democratic divisions remained about the same, much to the advantage of the Democrats. Whigs, naturally did not take a calm, analytical view of this. Astute Whig observers recognized that "political abolitionists" came from both parties but that "the majority in our state, heretofore has been [sic] of the opponents of the Locos."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, one major Libertyite goal was to seize the balance of power between parties. Whigs were thus more vulnerable and Libertyites expected more from Whigs. Many had been Whigs, their old party had pretensions to morality while the Democrats had always been pro-Southern, pro-slavery, and of dubious virtue. Liberty leaders felt justified in punishing the Whigs even if the loss of votes and elections did not push them to antislavery.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Edward W. Barber, "The Vermontville Colony: Its Genesis and History," *Historical Collections, Michigan Pioneer Society*, 28: 236-37. (Hereafter referred to as *MHC*) William Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House: Or Back in the Woods Again* (Detroit, 1876), 121-22; for the author's attitude to his father, 202-04. In Monroe in 1852 the boys of the town had their own rallies, parades, and political meetings "same as the men. . . . Each political party among the boys controlled its company of soldiers." "Auld Lang Syne," *An Incidental History of Monroe* (Merrill), 12. For an example of party loyalty conceived of as being as strong as or stronger than one's "own blood," John Stuart to Kate Stuart Baker, Dec. 12, 1850, in Helen S. M. Marlatt, ed., *Stuart Letters of Robert and Elizabeth Sullivan Stuart, 1819-1864* (New York, 1961), I, 166.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Jensen, "American Election Campaigns: A Theoretical and Historical Typology," paper delivered to the Midwest Political Science Conference, Chicago, 1968, 2, 2-10. Contemporary comments often implied an enduring division of the electorate, e.g., Robert Stuart, Nov. 19, 1841, to William Woodbridge, Woodbridge MSS, BHC.

<sup>34</sup> William Woodbridge, Aug. 25, 1843, to Hon. Willie P. Mangum, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. See also *Detroit Advertiser*, Nov. 6, 1840, Oct. 18, 1841, and Sept. 19, 1842.

<sup>35</sup> Theodore Foster to Birney, Ann Arbor, Dec. 14, 1841, ed. Dwight L. Dumond, *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857* (New York, London, 1938), II, 644; Arthur L. Porter to Birney, Detroit, Oct. 4, 1844, *ibid.*, 846-47; Theodore Foster to Birney, Oct. 16, 1835, *ibid.*, 979-80. Also, Ann Arbor, *Signal of Liberty*, Nov. 17,

The aggregate state vote from 1837 to 1841 suggests that most abolition votes came from the Whigs. In major elections from 1837 to 1840 Whigs kept pace with and surpassed the Democrats, but fell drastically behind in 1841, as the Liberty vote climbed to 1,223. The Whig vote fell from 22,933 to 15,449 (Table II.1). Obviously, in addition to defections and conversions, nonvoting also caused the Whig decline. In the 1840 Congressional voting, 17 counties out of 31 gave one or more votes to the Libertyites. Of these 17, 13 had voted Whig in 1839. By 1841 only two of those 13 remained Whig. In the others the Liberty vote had increased and the Democrats now enjoyed a majority or plurality.

Many causes produced Whig nonvoting in 1841. Before the election one Democrat observed that the Whig party "manifests a most astonishing apathy and I do not believe they can drag their force to the polls." The first Whig President, William Henry Harrison, had taken office only to die soon after in April 1841. His successor, John Tyler, dismayed Whigs everywhere by revealing himself to be more of a States' rights Southern Democrat than a Whig. Michigan Whig leaders reacted to Tyler's "apostasy" with rage, disgust, and frustration.<sup>36</sup>

In Michigan itself political apathy received a boost from hard times, while Whiggery had been racked by internal feuds and had been deprived of its most prominent leader. The party controlled the legislature in 1841 but could not agree on a choice for United States Senator. After an intraparty fight, the Democratic minority joined one Whig faction to elect William Woodbridge, incumbent Whig governor elected in the Whig triumph of 1839. The departure of the popular Woodbridge could not have helped Whig morale. Meanwhile the Bank of Michigan, which the Whigs had made state fiscal agent, failed, and many Whigs privately predicted that the "monster's" mishaps would cost the party votes.<sup>37</sup>

The Liberty party's presence probably increased nonvoting among Whigs. Since they were more vulnerable to political antislavery, it follows that more Whigs than Democrats would be caught undecided between their old party loyalty and the abolition appeal, and might resolve their indecision by not voting.<sup>38</sup> Many of the Whigs who failed to vote

1841, Nov. 7, 1842, May 15, July 17, 1843, June 17, 1844, microfilm, Ann Arbor, Michigan Historical Collections. (Hereafter referred to as MHC<sub>ol</sub>)

<sup>36</sup> Robert M. McClelland, Oct. 7, 1841, to John S. Bagg, letters from the John Sherman Bagg MSS in the Huntington Library. George Goodman, Niles, Sept. 8, 1841, to W. Woodbridge, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. The Woodbridge Papers contain many examples of Whig distress with Tyler. Also, Austin Blair, Jackson, Dec. 15, 1841, to A. T. McCall, Austin Blair MSS, BHC; and *Detroit Advertiser*, Nov. 3, 1841.

<sup>37</sup> Floyd Streeter, *Political Parties in Michigan, 1837-1860* (Lansing, 1918), 39-40; Franklin Sawyer, Ann Arbor, Jan. 16, 1840, to Woodbridge; Richard Butler, Mt. Clemens, Feb. 9, 1841, to Woodbridge; same to same, Dec. 26, 1840, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 4, 1841.

<sup>38</sup> On cross pressure situations and withdrawal see Lane, *Political Life*, 199-201.

in 1841 probably voted Liberty in 1844. In 12 counties in 1844 the Liberty party received more than 6.5 percent of the vote, its statewide percent. In only 3 of the 12 counties did the Democratic percentage strength decline from 1840. In 2 of these, Genesee and Kalamazoo, the Democratic percentage fell slightly while the Whig tumbled much more (Table II.4). In only one, Van Buren, did the Democrats lose more percentage points than the Whigs between 1840 and 1844.

TABLE II.4  
Party Percentages in 1840 and 1844 Presidential Elections in Counties  
Giving the Liberty Party 6.5 Percent or More in 1844

			Dem.	Whig	Liberty
EAST	Oakland	1840	44.9	50.1	
		1844	52.1	40.9	6.9
	Washtenaw	1840	44.9	55.1	
		1844	48.2	44.4	7.3
	Hillsdale	1840	46.1	53.9	
		1844	48.0	42.7	9.3
	Jackson	1840	42.7	57.3	
		1844	43.9	41.1	15.0
	Eaton	1840	40.5	59.5	
		1844	44.4	48.4	7.2
NORTH	Lapeer	1840	45.6	54.4	
		1844	50.8	40.3	8.9
	Genesee	1840	42.6	57.4	
		1844	42.5	46.0	11.5
	Shiawasee	1840	36.0	64.0	
		1844	40.1	45.1	14.4
	Ionia	1840	45.2	54.8	
		1844	45.5	47.8	6.7
WEST	Kalamazoo	1840	43.8	56.2	
		1844	40.7	45.8	13.6
	Van Buren	1840	58.0	42.0	
		1844	52.3	40.8	6.9
	Ottawa	1840	52.1	47.9	
		1844	66.3	24.0	9.7

In most townships Whig and Liberty voters can be regarded as the approximate sum of anti-Democratic strength, particularly in units where, were it not for the abolitionists, Whiggery would have enjoyed a majority. The most common pattern observed was the Liberty party taking votes from Whigs. The social bases of this will be explored later.

In 1848 the Liberty party merged into a broad political antislavery movement which nationally brought together Conscience Whigs, New York's Barnburners, and a variety of supporters from the antislavery-abolition spectrum of politics. In Michigan prominent Democrats for the first time joined political antislavery. The national Free Soil Party nominated Martin Van Buren, former Democratic president, to head the coalition's ticket. It appeared that Michigan Democrats with antislavery tendencies were being given strong incentives to set aside party loyalty. At first Michigan politicians expected that Van Buren's candidacy would help the Whig nominee, General Taylor, and Whig leaders encouraged Free Soilism. However, it became clear that "multitudes of Whigs also were joining" Free Soil,<sup>39</sup> and regular Whigs called for a halt to any efforts to aid the independents. In some areas, however, Whigs and Free Soilers formed coalitions.

More Michigan Democrats do appear to have defected to Free Soil in 1848 than had ever deserted earlier to the Liberty camp. Yet it is surprising how few Democrats did vote Free Soil. Of course, the Democrats were running Michigan's favorite son, Lewis Cass, for President, and this must have offset somewhat the pull of Van Buren. Open Whig-Free Soil fusion in some districts also repelled Democrats from Free Soil.

The Democratic percentage of the state vote fell by 2.5 percentage points between 1844 and 1848, while the Whig fell by 7 points. The number of Democratic votes rose by 3,000 with the Whig falling by 400. In 1852, with Van Buren absent from the ticket and the sectional crisis quiet, the Free Soil vote declined sharply. The Whigs increased their percentage strength between 1848 and 1852 far more than the Democrats: they had far more to regain. County and minor civil division returns show the same patterns, with this difference: slightly increased Democratic defections occurred mostly in units already disposed to cast some antislavery votes. Whig defection or conversion to Free Soil still greatly surpassed that of the Democrats.

Thus, in the period from 1837 to 1852 most of the electorate identified with a party, and most voters obeyed the norm of party loyalty. Antislavery parties upset very little the gross divisions of voting strength because they drew votes largely from the Whigs. In 1844 probably 90 percent of Liberty men were ex-Whigs and in 1848 perhaps 80 percent or more of Free Soilers were ex-Whigs. The general continuity of party loyalty simplifies the task of identifying Whig and Democratic social groups.

<sup>39</sup> William Woodbridge, Oct. 2, 1848, to N. W. Coffin, Boston, Mass., Woodbridge MSS, BHC. Democratic editor Wilbur F. Storey had earlier feared that free soil promoters in Michigan "desire above all to carry the state for General Taylor." Storey, Jackson, July 31, 1848, to John S. Bagg (confidential), Bagg MSS, Huntington Library.



### *Economic Interest, Elites, Classes, and Parties: 1837-1852*

Do not allow yourself to be gulled into bitterness towards what is falsely called "aristocracy"—this is a cant term used by demagogues to effect vile purposes—"monopoly" is another. . . . There is neither "aristocracy" or "monopoly" in this country: the best and firmest friends of popular rights are found among those who have property enough to be independent, and who can never in this land have enough to sever their interest from those of the people—they are more reliable, because they are rarely seekers for office and therefore rarely resort to falsehood. The interests of property are here, the interests of all—for property is so generally diffused that all are interested in its preservation and inviolability.—George F. Porter to Fred B. Porter, September 15, 1851<sup>1</sup>

Through the long ascendancy of Progressive history in the first half of the twentieth century<sup>2</sup> an economic determinism, sometimes unconscious, declared that economic conflicts brought parties into being and caused rival economic groups to align in opposing parties. Leaders and masses were assumed to choose their parties by the lights of a fairly rational perception of their interest as members of a class or economic group. Some historians offering this kind of interpretation emphasized different classes as the most significant, but all tended to present variations on a theme: Democrats came from the poor and Whigs from the rich classes. It then followed that Democratic ideology and party programs challenged the status quo, calling for the radical, democratic, and humanitarian, while Whiggery, opposing change, was conservative, aristocratic, and property minded.

Many features of "Jacksonian Democracy" have undergone substantial shifts in interpretation.<sup>3</sup> But at least since James Schouler, a patrician

<sup>1</sup> George Porter claimed to have been a Federalist but was now a "democrat." The family was Whig and abolitionist in sentiments. John S. Porter MSS, MHC.

<sup>2</sup> John Higham, Leonard Krieger, and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 171-97.

<sup>3</sup> For a review of changing interpretations see Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Andrew Jackson Versus the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 44 (March 1958), 615-34; Higham, *History* 216-18; and Alfred Alexander Cave, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Historians* (Gainesville, 1964).

liberal of the 1880s<sup>4</sup> to the 1950s, most analysts agreed more or less on the class composition of parties. In 1919 Dixon Ryan Fox introduced quantitative data to demonstrate empirically the relationship between class, or at least wealth, and party in the period from 1828 to 1852.<sup>5</sup> The distinguishing feature of what Fox and many later writers called their "statistical" attempts to show "correlations" between class or wealth and party consisted of their observing for a number of political units (usually counties) only two variables: party vote and some aggregate index of wealth. Indeed, such work can be described generally as single-factor analysis, since it operated on the unexpressed assumption that an economic variable was the only one of any relevance to voting. Time and again counties or wards would be shown to have voted according to their relative wealth; at least most units observed would adhere to the pattern asserted. Yet there always seemed to be, in each study, "exceptions" to the general tendency of poor Democrats and rich Whigs. The explanations for these deviant cases were conspicuous for their lack of credibility.<sup>6</sup>

Class conflict between Democrats and Whigs probably reached its apogee not in 1832 or 1840 but in 1945 with the publication of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s, *The Age of Jackson*, which contained one of the most thoroughgoing economic interpretations of politics and parties to be found in any study of the era. Schlesinger presented no quantitative data, relying instead on the work of Fox and others to argue that Frederick Jackson Turner had misled scholars in emphasizing that the wellsprings of Jackson's party could be found on Western farms and frontiers. Rather, rising industrialism in the East caused urban workingmen and their intellectual spokesmen to provide the main drive of the Jacksonian coalition. This thesis, along with the general tide of revisionism, provoked studies of the voting habits of urban workingmen in the 1830s and 1840s. William A. Sullivan contended that Philadelphia workingmen did not support Jackson and the Democrats, Edward Pessen found the same for Boston workingclass wards, while Robert T. Bower disagreed with

<sup>4</sup> James Schouler, *History of the United States of America Under the Constitution*, iv: 1831-1847, *Democrats and Whigs* (New York, 1889). Schouler was one of the first to give such a full description of the class composition of parties. Cf. Horace Greeley, *The American Conflict* (Hartford, Chicago, 1864), i, 168; Henry Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, i (Boston, New York, 1872); and Herman von Holst, *Constitutional History of the United States*, ii: 1828-1846, *Jackson's Administration Annexation of Texas* (Chicago, 1879), 330-405, 696, 697.

<sup>5</sup> Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801-1840* (New York, 1919), 116-17, 420-22, 438-39. Fox had been influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of such monographs see Ronald P. Formisano, "The Social Bases of American Voting Behavior: Wayne County, Michigan, 1837-1852, As a Test Case" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1966), 17-40.



both Pessen's method and conclusions for Boston.<sup>7</sup> These works did service by making "labor's" support for Jackson and the Democrats, which had usually been taken for granted, a moot question. But they still either paid unconscious homage to economic determinism or failed to demonstrate that urban workingmen constituted a self-conscious political subculture during the 1830s. Meanwhile, as many orthodoxies of Progressive history came under attack in the 1950s, critics began to question the allegedly "radical" and humanitarian program of Jackson's party, and to deny the significance of economic conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Much of the revision seemed to be directed at establishing a point made long before by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Anticipating our contemporaries Bray Hammond and Richard Hofstadter, Emerson said, "However men please to style themselves, I see no other than a conservative party. You are not only identical with us in your needs, but also in your method and aims. You quarrel with my conservatism, but it is only to build up one of your own."<sup>9</sup>

The revision of the 1950s seconded Emerson in stressing similarities between the parties. Democrats seemed to be men poorer than Whigs who wished to become rich. As Democrats lost much of their reputation as radicals and humanitarians, historians still tended to place them below the Whigs in socioeconomic status, even as, in some studies, class lines between parties began to blur.<sup>10</sup> About 1960 revision entered a new phase as Richard P. McCormick and Lee Benson explicitly challenged the axioms of economic determinism and class divisions between parties. McCormick showed that broad upper and lower economic groups in New York's electorate in the 1820s and in North Carolina's from 1835 to 1856 behaved very much like one another at the polls.<sup>11</sup> In 1961 Ben-

<sup>7</sup> William A. Sullivan, "Did Labor Support Andrew Jackson?" *Political Science Quarterly*, 62 (December 1947), 569-80; Edward Pessen, "Did Labor Support Jackson?: The Boston Story," *Political Science Quarterly*, 64 (June 1949), 262-74; Robert T. Bower, "Note on 'Did Labor Support Jackson?: The Boston Story,'" *Political Science Quarterly*, 65 (September 1950), 441-44. See Bernard Berelson, H. Gaudet, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *The People's Choice* (New York, 1948). Carl Neumann Degler, "Labor in the Economy and Politics of New York City, 1850-1860: A Study of the Impact of Early Industrialism" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1952), criticized Fox's method of analyzing voting in city wards, 296, 330, 331, 333.

<sup>8</sup> Higham, *History*, 213-14.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Arthur I. Ladu, "Emerson: Whig or Democrat?" *New England Quarterly*, 13 (September 1940), 439. Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957). Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> Higham, *History*, 216-18.

<sup>11</sup> Richard P. McCormick, "Suffrage Classes and Party Alignments: A Study in Voter Behavior," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (December 1959), 397, 398-400, 401, 402; Lee Benson, *Turner and Beard: American Historical Writing Reconsidered* (Glencoe, 1960), 153-59.

son published *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* and sought to reorder the priorities of the debate. His New York parties had drawn their leaders and mass support from roughly the same socioeconomic groups; ethnic and religious cleavages influenced the party loyalties of social groups more than economic differences. In considering six variables, Benson did not ignore economic or sectional differences (intrastate), but assigned them lesser influence; under different conditions they could become relatively more important.<sup>12</sup>

Benson's and McCormick's work, for many scholars, exposed the implicit and often unconscious assumptions of their predecessors and freed students of Jacksonian parties from the economic determinism underpinning almost all previous explanations of mass voting. It is possible of course, that this generation is substituting new implicit assumptions, new determinisms, in place of the old. But detecting voting patterns should be the kind of problem to which methods can be applied which contain built-in checks upon unrecognized assumptions. The systematic observation of social variables of known or suspected relevance to political life offers the best hope of analyzing the mass electorate.

The standard work dealing with Michigan antebellum politics is Floyd B. Streeter's *Political Parties in Michigan, 1837-1860*, published in 1918 and typical of the economic determinism described earlier. Although Streeter paid considerable attention to ethnic and religious elements in political life he tended to reduce these variables to mere dependencies of economic class. For example, Baptists voted Democratic and Episcopalians voted Whig but Streeter related nothing in their religio-cultural background to their politics. Baptists, however, were mostly "rural" and in "moderate financial circumstances" while Episcopalians "represented the wealthy and conservative class." Democratic voters generally were "poor and uneducated people in the cities and rural districts, though a number of well-to-do had also been attracted to it"; the "vast majority" of Whigs rather "were the well-to-do" and conservative men, or those who for some reason upheld the interest of this class. Among them were many bankers, merchants, and financiers in the cities and large landowners in the country."<sup>13</sup> At no point did Streeter confront the problem of explaining the Democratic loyalty of "a number of well-to-do" or why some men of no wealth apparently supported Whiggery against their economic interests. In the 1830s, according to Streeter, poor radicals dominated the Democratic party and enacted "radical" legislation designed to benefit the lower classes.

<sup>12</sup> Benson, *Concept*.

<sup>13</sup> Streeter, *Political Parties*, 4-6. Streeter stressed three "reasons for division of voters into political parties": place of origin, amount of wealth and social position, and sectional interests. The first and third actually dovetailed into the second.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES OF THE 1830s

In 1839 the Democratic editor of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* offered a very different appraisal of his own party's recent legislative achievements. He said that they "ilfully suited" a new state and "much of it has been destructive and ruinous." The legislators since 1835 had failed to consider the interests of the *whole* state and had engaged in "a general scramble for sectional and private benefits. And to effect their purposes, a system of log-rolling, buying and selling, gambling and finessing, huxtering, and compromising, has been resorted to . . . which has been degrading to themselves, mortifying to their constituents and ruinous to the State."<sup>14</sup> Neck-deep in depression, expecting defeat soon at the polls, possibly embittered for personal reasons, the *Gazette's* editor obviously exaggerated. Yet his analysis, the like of which rarely appeared in print, approximated far better than Streeter's what happened when political entrepreneurs found themselves possessed of political power, alluring economic opportunities, and responsible to an electorate possessing little understanding of public matters. What information went out to "the people" was filtered by poor communications and constricted by partisan blinders. In any event, Democratic politicoeconomic legislation cannot be construed to be radical or lower class oriented. The one piece of socially conscious legislation promoted by Democrats during the early period of party development was a debt exemption law which allowed workers, artisans, and others in debt to keep that part of their personal property needed to make their living. The law established criteria of what was "necessary." The Democracy promised such a law in its 1841 state platform, although Democratic legislators subsequently did not support it unanimously.<sup>15</sup> Other than this law, Democrats showed little interest in the poorer classes.

If basic differences between parties had resulted from conflicting economic interests one might expect that such cleavages would have become manifest during the constitutional convention of 1835, as Michigan passed from a territory to a state. In New York, according to Marvin Meyers, the "most incendiary issues" of the two Jacksonian decades (1826-1846) were "banking and corporations, public debt, and public works"; and these issues caused partisan splits in New York's conventions of that era.<sup>16</sup> Yet in Michigan's 1835 convention, economic issues

<sup>14</sup> *Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 27, 1939, microfilm, MSL.

<sup>15</sup> Paul A. Randall, "Gubernatorial Platforms for the Political Parties of Michigan, 1834-1864" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1937), 37. The Whig *Detroit Advertiser* recognized the need for the law but criticized the Democratic version for going "too far," Feb. 15, 1842; *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 21, 1842.

<sup>16</sup> Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford,

barely threw off a spark of conflict. Although the Whig contingent was small (only about 10 percent of the delegates), it protested loudly over other issues. But the record of the debates contains few hints about what Whigs thought about political economy. Whigs and Democrats apparently shared that enthusiasm for public works which a traveler in Michigan had noticed even in 1833, when projects as grandiose as a railroad from Detroit to Chicago were talked about, not to mention a canal from Maumee (Toledo) to Lake Michigan.<sup>17</sup>

The convention decided without disagreement to have the constitution enjoin the legislature to encourage internal improvements. Similarly, it provided that the legislature could pass no act of incorporation unless by a two-thirds majority in each house. No strong sentiment for or against this measure materialized.<sup>18</sup> Nine delegates voted for a sweeping ban on corporations "with special privileges," but 56 voted against it. Nineteen delegates favored authorizing some kind of state bank, including prominent Democrats as well as leading Whigs such as William Woodbridge.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, an attempt to make the private property of corporation stockholders liable for the debts of the corporation, a measure not usually encouraging to business enterprise, failed without a roll call vote.<sup>20</sup>

Michigan's internal improvements plan of 1837 cannot be viewed as a class or interest group issue in relation to parties. Historians have often assumed that in state politics Democrats opposed internal improvements while Whigs promoted them. Carter Goodrich has warned that this idea should be viewed with caution and pointed to Michigan as one case where those positions, as Streeter described them,<sup>21</sup> were reversed. Yet even this needs to be qualified. The Michigan parties never differed significantly on internal improvements and both generally favored them. The Democrats, a majority party responsive to demands from Democrats in all sections, tried to build railroads and canals in the north, south, and center all at once. It may have been the only way to get an improvements program through the legislature. The *Advertiser* and some Democrats eventually argued that transportation facilities should be built

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1957), 236. For a corrective to Meyers' view that the Whig and Democratic parties descended directly from the Federalist and Republican see Shaw Livermore, *The Twilight of Federalism* (Princeton, 1962).

<sup>17</sup> Harold M. Dorr, ed., *The Michigan Constitutional Conventions of 1835-36: Debates and Proceedings* (Ann Arbor, 1940), 55-420, 462, 539. (Hereafter referred to as *Debates*) Charles Fenno Hoffman, *A Winter in the West* (New York, 1835; Ann Arbor, 1966), 137.

<sup>18</sup> *Debates*, 606, and passim.

<sup>19</sup> The vote was 19-57, *Debates*, 391, Appendix A, roll call 87.

<sup>20</sup> *Debates*, 393. A measure requiring payments in specie on notes and bills secured by land failed 27 to 48.

<sup>21</sup> Streeter, *Political Parties*, 9.

where people were, not through empty forests.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the Northwest the "interplay of regional and local rivalries" in improvements, as Harry N. Scheiber has observed, caused partisan politics to disappear. Members of state legislatures would vote "for nothing which does not pass through their own county." So Michigan, like Indiana and Illinois, adopted a program overextending its resources.<sup>23</sup>

Whigs began to criticize the program after the panic of 1837 and complications developed attending the state's notorious Five Million Dollar Loan. Taking power in 1841, Whigs cut back the program.<sup>24</sup> In turn the Democrats continued the limited Whig policy and began negotiations to sell the railroads to private investors. In 1845 both parties promised to sell the roads, and soon Democratic governor Alpheus Felch began selling the roads at bargain prices. Some Democrats raised protests against "monopolies" but sentiment to unload the roads by then pervaded both parties. Opposition came mainly from local interests.<sup>25</sup> Party positions on improvements thus varied little and changed with circumstances. The improvements mania respected no party or class lines. Farmers and merchants in all sections viewed railroads as their stairway to prosperity.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of Canals and Railroads, 1800-1890* (New York, 1960), 266. Streeter, *Political Parties*, 10-13. Harold B. Hoffenbacher, "Michigan Internal Improvements, 1836-1846" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1937), 10-12, 25-26.

<sup>23</sup> Harry N. Scheiber, "Urban Rivalry and Internal Improvements in the Old Northwest," *Ohio History*, 71 (October 1962), 228, 234-35.

<sup>24</sup> One Whig legislator told Woodbridge that the cut back on railroads would have no effect on the election of 1840. Henry B. Lathrop, Jackson, to William Woodbridge, July 2, 1840, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. Lucius Lyon to Gen. John McNeil, Jan. 24, 1840, "Letters of Lucius Lyon," *MHC*, 27: 531.

<sup>25</sup> Goodrich, *Canals and Railroads*, 144-46, 326. William L. Jenks, "Michigan's Five Million Dollar Loan," *Michigan History*, 15 (Autumn 1931), 619, 622-23. Austin Blair to A. T. McCall, Jan. 8, 1846, Austin Blair MSS, BHC. Henry T. Backus, Whig legislator, thought the "wire workers" reluctant to sell the railroads which they deemed "the nursery of their power." Backus to William Woodbridge, Feb. 21, 1846, Woodbridge MSS, BHC.

<sup>26</sup> George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*, IV: *The Economic History of the United States* (New York, 1951), 91, 100, 344-45, 375-77. For an example of an axiomatic belief in transportation improvements, Comfort Tyler, Centreville, to Woodbridge, Feb. 3, 1840, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. It might be instructive to study who was awarded public work contracts and the political activities of this group. See, e.g., the Memorial, Dec. 28, 1839, Woodbridge MSS, BHC, of 15 contractors engaged in building the Clinton-Kalamazoo Canal, asking the Governor-elect not to stop or cut back on that work; and from the contractors on the same project, "Petition, Mt. Clemens, July 28, 1842, to John Barry," the Democratic governor, in "Executive Records, Petitions," *MHCom*. Also fruitful for this line of inquiry would be the tremendous volume of correspondence relating to the appointment of commissioners to the Internal Improvements Board during 1840 in the Woodbridge MSS.

It has frequently been assumed that most entrepreneurs and promoters in the old Northwest were largely Whigs.<sup>27</sup> Yet even a cursory look at enterprise in Michigan during the 1830s reveals the heady involvement of Democrats in growth-related business enterprises. Counting on the wealth promised by a continuing influx of settlers, entrepreneurs established new banks, promoted towns, and turnpike, canal, and railroad companies. Democrats controlled the state government from 1835 to 1839 and most county and town governments as well. Being strategically placed more Democrats than Whigs may have been involved in promotion of internal improvements.<sup>28</sup>

Banking certainly attracted many Democrats, both before and after Michigan's costly "Wild Cat" episode. Legend has it that "radical" Democrats democratized banking. The realities were different. In 1837 the state had 16 chartered banks. The Democratic legislature passed a General Banking Act permitting "freeholders who had a limited amount of capital to start a bank." But this "killer of monopolies" spawned an illegitimate brood of wildcat banks, mainly because of an untimely suspension of specie payments which applied to the new banks as well as the old. Forty-nine new banks existed by April 1838, with a nominal capital of \$3,915,000. "Most of them flooded their communities with worthless notes and then failed."<sup>29</sup>

Several items block interpretation of this episode as an unfortunate result of a Democratic assault on economic privilege. If the 16 chartered banks in 1837 represented "entrenched capital" or monopoly, then these things were nonpartisan. Both Whigs and Democrats owned the "old" banks: in 1836 the Democratic legislature had chartered 9 of them. While Governor Mason simultaneously vetoed applications for charters from steamboat companies and other corporations, arguing against potential monopolies, he had not vetoed any bank charters. Old and new banks had both Whig and Democratic officers, stockholders, and debtors, and out of state Whig and Democratic capitalists had interests in Michigan banks.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Glyndon Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848* (New York 1959), 96.

<sup>28</sup> On Democratic involvement in railroad, turnpike, and canal building: John T. Mason to Stevens T. Mason, Nov. 7, 1836, and stock certificates of S. T. Mason, Nov. 1836 and March 24, 1837, Mason MSS, BHC; *Free Press*, April 18, 21, 1837; record of meeting, May 22, 1837, John R. Williams MSS, BHC; John Sherigian "Lucius Lyon: His Place in Michigan History" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1960), 34-67, for the affairs of a particularly active businessman and Democratic leader in western Michigan; also Edsel K. Rintala, *Douglass Houghton: Michigan's Pioneer Geologist* (Detroit, 1954), 67, 84-85, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Streeter, *Political Parties*, 32-33.

<sup>30</sup> William G. Shade, "The Politics of Free Banking in the Old Northwest, 1837-1863" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1966), 13-14. Professor Shade contributed freely of his expert advice to this section.

The General Banking Act provided that no more than 12 freeholders in any county could organize a bank, with a minimum of \$50,000 capital, 36 percent of which had to be paid in in specie. Persons possessing the capital required for such a venture in Michigan in 1837 were not poor. Most of the new banks' capital was land which would never have the productive capacity claimed for it; some of it was encumbered. The banks misrepresented their capital, overextended themselves, and brazenly defrauded the populace. No one has ever shown that "the masses demanded that banking should be free."<sup>31</sup>

A suggestive fictional portrait of a wildcatter appeared in 1837, created by a social commentator, Mrs. Kirkland, in her *A New Home: Who'll Follow?*—an account of life in Michigan in the 1830s. She satirized the typical wildcat banker in her story of one Harley Rivers, of "Tinkerville." Rivers was poor, but not "of the poor classes." A typical popular villain, he fancied himself a gentleman, had never worked for a living, and had squandered two fortunes. Rivers redeemed himself from poverty by setting up the Bank of Tinkerville, making "money of rags," and moved East to "live like a gentleman on the spoils of the Tinkerville Wild Cat."<sup>32</sup>

A systematic inquiry into the identity of wildcatters would unearth characters like Rivers, no doubt, as well as respectable Whigs and Democrats. The *Kalamazoo Gazette* said that "in the associations" created under the bank law "many members of the legislature and their *particular friends*, figured conspicuously, as Presidents, Directors, Cashiers, stockholders and borrowers." The legendary "Bank of Brest" probably qualifies as the most notorious of the wildcats; located, according to its sponsors, in the "thriving metropolis" of Brest, which was and is a thriving forest. At least one of its stockholders was a Democratic politician. Origen D. Richardson, elected Lieutenant Governor by the Democrats in 1841, promoted the 1837 Bank of Oakland with several other Democrats.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Streeter, *Political Parties*, 33. The claim rests ultimately on the reminiscences of Alpheus Felch, banking commissioner in 1837-38. Professor Shade in his study of free banking has exposed the origins of the myth. See Alpheus Felch, "Early Banks and Banking in Michigan," *MHC*, 2: 114; H. M. Utley, "The Wildcat Banking System in Michigan," *MHC*, 5: 221; and Herbert Randall, "Alpheus Felch: An Appreciation," *Michigan History*, 10 (April 1926), 166.

<sup>32</sup> C.M.S. Kirkland, *A New Home: Who'll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (New York, 1837), 191-200. I have used the 1850 edition, BHC.

<sup>33</sup> *Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 27, 1839, film, MSL. *Advertiser*, Sept. 30, 1841. Democrat Calvin Britain held stock in the Brest bank. Edwin O. Wood, *History of Genesee County, Michigan* (Indianapolis, 1916), 314, 519-21; *Michigan Biographies*, 75, 329, of Democrats launching banks in frontier Genesee County. The names of the men incorporating banks and other corporations, e.g., the "Walled Lake Steam Mill Company," during 1836 can be found in *Michigan House Journal*, 1835-36, 188, 192-93, 196, 206, 216, 226, 236-37, 247, and passim.

The *Monroe Times* (Democratic) congratulated the townspeople of Brest on their new bank and noted that the town has risen "to wealth and importance in a surprisingly short time." One has to choose between awarding the editor a vast gullibility or a ready sense of humor. The *Detroit Free Press* welcomed a flock of wildcats while the *Pontiac Balance* (Democratic) greeted the Bank of Oakland as an "antimonopoly triumph."<sup>34</sup> *Free Press* editor John Bagg implored a friend to loan him money in 1836 for unrivaled investment opportunities. His description of the latter reveals much about the ties between editors, legislators, land speculation, new towns, and new banks. "You must be aware," wrote Bagg:

that from my situation with this press, I am easily enabled to form acquaintances with members of the Legislature. They are men of good judgement and most of them have laid the foundations for fine fortunes in real estate. They are very friendly to me—more perhaps on account of my situation than anything else—and would very willingly do me a favor in affording me facilities for investing money in lands in different parts of the state. Many of them are anxious to have me invest something in their *embryo cities*—so as to get an occasional puff from the state paper, and it provokes me much to see the fine opportunities I enjoy for making money—if I had the capital to avail myself of them.<sup>35</sup>

By the time the wildcats failed and their frauds were exposed the populace had already begun to experience depression. Rich, poor, merchants, farmers, laborers, and artisans, all suffered from the wildcats. Speculators were so despised that "the people would hang them if they could."<sup>36</sup> Yet the public did not seem to associate wildcats with any one party. Both parties accused each other of harboring all bankers. The Whigs published a list of bank officers which said, in effect, that 69 percent of them were Democrats. The Democrats released a list claiming that 55 percent of bank officers were Whigs. These claims, as William G. Shade has observed, tended only to confirm that bankers could not be associated with any one party.<sup>37</sup>

The Whigs originally raised no clamor against the banking law, but as the financial debacle descended Whig legislators introduced a resolution declaring it unconstitutional.<sup>38</sup> This opportunism contrasts with

<sup>34</sup> *Times* quoted in *Free Press*, Aug. 28, 1837; others from *Free Press*, Sept. 13, Sept. 27, 1837, and Aug. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Italics in original, John S. Bagg, Detroit, to I. H. Bronson, Feb. 21, 1836, Bagg MSS, Huntington Library.

<sup>36</sup> Austin Blair to A. T. McCall, July 21, 1841, Blair MSS, BHC. See also Lawton T. Hemans, *Life and Times of Stevens Thomson Mason* (Lansing, 1920), 377-78; the Hemans biography, while flawed, is one of the best books on antebellum Michigan politics available.

<sup>37</sup> Shade, "Free Banking," 33, 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Gantz, "A History of Banking Legislation and Currency in Michigan, 1835-1865" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1936), 18. *Adver-*



Whigs otherwise consorting rather openly with the Bank of Michigan. The party's 1837 gubernatorial candidate, Charles C. Trowbridge, was its cashier, later its president.<sup>39</sup> Governor Woodbridge's administration (1840-41) relied heavily on Bank personnel and facilities. Bank officials and stockholders served as chairmen of the Senate Finance Committee, United States Senator, Auditor General, and State Treasurer. It became the state's fiscal agent and took over management of the Five Million Dollar Loan.<sup>40</sup>

This liaison hurt the Whigs. In 1840 the Bank of Michigan and the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank provided the state with reliable currency, though both had suspended specie payments; in 1841 their notes joined their predecessors in ignominy. From all over the state, even from George Dawson's Whig *Advertiser*, came denunciations of the Bank of Michigan for protecting the investments of absentee controllers at the expense of local interests. The 1841 Whig State Convention, while blaming Democrats for the misdeeds of all other banks, virtually admitted that the party had erred in relying on the Bank.<sup>41</sup> The Bank's failure angered many persons in 1841, poor and "monied." It also benefited rich individuals who had access to political power to protect their interests, but the Bank was not the tool of a cohesive "wealthy and commercial" class in the Whig party. How can such an interpretation cope with Democratic chieftain Lewis Cass being one of the Bank's largest stockholders?<sup>42</sup>

The Democrats also had a "monster," indeed, at least two. A group

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*tiser*, July 14, 1836. Elsa Holderreid, "Public Life of Jacob Merritt Howard" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1950), 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> Democrats reacted mildly to Trowbridge's candidacy. The *Free Press* regarded him as a good banker but unqualified for office. Democrats, it explained, were "not hostile to banks per se" and a "moderate connection" with banks did not disqualify a man. *Free Press*, Sept. 18, 20, 1837. Although Whigs called them "loco-foco" for years, Michigan Democrats did not deserve the label, which connoted total hostility to all paper money facilities. For understanding of real locofocos, see Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, 1967).

<sup>40</sup> *Free Press*, Jan. 24, 1840, Jan. 25; see Woodbridge MSS, BHC, 1840-41, esp. correspondence between Woodbridge and Robert Stuart.

<sup>41</sup> MS of Peter Beckman, St. Louis University, on James F. Joy, Chap. I. Juliana Woodbridge to William Woodbridge, Jan. 26, 27, and Gideon Gates, Romeo, to Woodbridge, June 29, 1841, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. The latter is a good description of the depression. Thomas Rowland, Detroit, to Woodbridge, Jan. 25, 1841, and Robert Stuart to Woodbridge, Jan. 29, 1841, Woodbridge MSS, BHC, discuss Dawson. Stuart said that Dawson was "worse than mad" and feared he would "destroy us root and branch—he is worse than any locofoco, for he is all brimstone." Also Robert Stuart to Thomas Dunlap, President U. S. Bank, Pennsylvania, Feb. 13, 1841, Department of Treasury Papers, Letter copy book, 1840-1848, MHCom. Randall, "Gubernatorial Platforms, Michigan, 1834-1864," 20-37.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Stuart, Detroit, to Woodbridge, July 16, 1841; Henry T. Backus to Woodbridge, July 6, 1841; Richard Butler, Mt. Clemens, to Woodbridge, July 9, 1841, Woodbridge MSS, BHC. Shade, "Free Banking," passim.

of Democrats led by John R. Williams had incorporated the Michigan State Bank in March 1835. The Democratic state administration used it for deposit of state funds; shortly, after the 1837 depression began, the bank failed. The scene enacted between the Whigs and the Bank of Michigan virtually repeated the embarrassment earlier of the Democrats.<sup>43</sup> The Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank was more successful: John R. Williams also had led in founding this bank. Williams was one of Detroit's wealthiest men who enjoyed a long public career in the Democratic party. He had been president of the Bank of Michigan but resigned when control of the Bank shifted eastward to the Dwight family of New York. That transaction touched off a legal battle between the Dwights and Williams, marked by his being jailed three times in 1829.<sup>44</sup>

The Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank eventually became a "pet"—a federal deposit bank of the Jackson administration—after John Norvell, one of its directors, "assured the treasury department of its solvency and of the high percentage of its stockholders (90 percent) who had Democratic views." Not only did Democrats nurse their own monsters but in 1831 Lewis Cass had helped the Bank of Michigan obtain a government deposit and become a "pet bank." Later, in 1837, John Norvell urged Treasury Secretary Levi Woodbury to sue the Bank of Michigan if it could not meet its drafts. George Bancroft, Massachusetts Democrat, joined Cass in intervening on the Bank's behalf. Bancroft was a relative of the Dwights and held stock in several of their enterprises.<sup>45</sup>

#### ELITES

Obviously both parties contained many men of wealth, enterprise, and power. Party loyalty and economic competition sometimes joined together in the motives of these frontier condottiere; they also could disregard party when mutual profit was at stake. But the upper classes did not act as a unit in politics. There was at least widespread tacit acceptance of the economic, social, and political system. Party programs never

<sup>43</sup> Clarence M. Burton, Gordon K. Miller, and William Stocking, eds., *The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922* (Detroit, 1922), I, 640. Kinsley S. Bingham believed the Michigan State Bank failure hurt the Democrats more than the wildcat episode, Bingham to Alpheus Felch, March 30, 1839, Alpheus Felch MSS, BHC. (Parts of the Felch MSS are in the Michigan Historical Collections.) According to Professor Shade the nonlocal stockholders of the State Bank were Albany Regency men. For its incorporation see *Territory of Michigan, Acts Passed at the Extra and Second Session of the Sixth Legislative Council, 1835* (Detroit, 1835), 155.

<sup>44</sup> Burton, et al., eds., *Detroit*, I, 634-35. Silas Farmer, *History of Detroit and Michigan*, I: *General* (Detroit, 1884), 860-61.

<sup>45</sup> Harry N. Scheiber, "George Bancroft and the Bank of Michigan, 1837-1841," *Michigan History*, 44 (March 1960), 83-88, 88-89; 1833 fragment of letter of John Norvell to S. T. Mason, n.d., Mason MSS, BHC.

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threatened the distribution in society of property or power. Political life certainly provided access to both for ambitious or "well situated" men, while political and economic elites appeared to be, and encouraged the belief that they were, relatively open, competitive, and divided in party preferences.

If the Democracy possessed many political entrepreneurs, it also enjoyed status derived from political control of the territorial establishment fashioned with care by Lewis Cass in halcyon Republican days. When Captain Marryat visited Detroit in 1837 he observed that "the society is quite equal to that of the eastern cities"; he met some of the "pleasant people" at the home of Michigan's Democratic governor, Stevens T. Mason. Both Whigs and Democrats often commented in these years on the "respectability, talent, and influence" of many Democratic politicians. On the other hand, Whigs too possessed wealth and status, and seemed more disposed to social snobbery.<sup>46</sup>

Several recent studies of leadership groups in Wayne County permit more systematic assessment of the party preferences of men at the upper levels of economic and political life. These works vary in the rigor of their methods, but all push beyond any impressionistic sample.

An earlier survey of politically active men in the 1840s and 1850s found no significant differences in occupation between Whigs and Democrats. The two groups consisted simply of men listed in newspapers over the years as engaging in party affairs and included both top and secondary leaders. Occupation alone is not a reliable guide to wealth, class, or status, but since Wayne was the most commercially advanced county, obvious divisions among the business class there are significant.<sup>47</sup>

A more recent study of the occupations, wealth, birthplace, religion, age, and length of time in Wayne County of 100 Whig and Democratic leaders in 1844 concluded that leaders could not be distinguished by socioeconomic background. Similar classes provided leaders for both parties. Democratic leaders included some of the wealthiest men in the county, particularly landowners.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Frederick Marryat, *Dairy in America*, ed., Jules Zanger (Bloomington, 1960), 133; Arno L. Bader, ed., "Captain Marryat in Michigan," *Michigan History*, 20 (Spring-Summer 1936), 169; Gen. Jos. W. Brown, Tecumseh, to Lucius Lyon, Feb. 1, 1835, Lyon MSS, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor (Hereafter referred to as Clements); Thomas Rowland to Woodbridge, Jan. 14, 1842, Woodbridge MSS.

<sup>47</sup> Fischer, "Personnel of Political Parties," 10. For systematic consideration of the limits of occupation as an indicator of economic mobility, wealth, and income, see Stuart Mack Blumin, "Mobility in a Nineteenth Century American City, Philadelphia, 1820-1860" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1968), 60-82.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Howard Sabbath, "Analysis of the Political Leadership in Wayne County, Michigan, 1844" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wayne State University, 1965), 75, 128, 135. On the lack of significant class differences between Whig

#### 44 *Economics & Parties: 1837-52*

Alexandra McCoy's 1965 doctoral dissertation on Wayne County's economic elite in 1844 and 1860 is a carefully controlled investigation which used both wealth and economic role as indicators of class and status. The elite group of 97 in 1844 had a Whig majority: 60 Whigs (62 percent), 5 Libertyites (5 percent), 28 Democrats (29 percent), and 4 unknown. Although the elite preferred Whiggery, no simple economic determinism accounted for this, and surely failed to explain the anti-Whig minority among elite members. McCoy tested several variables and sorted out subgroups (e.g., Democratic landowners) for closer examination.<sup>49</sup>

Economic role had some relation to party choice. Merchants and non-specialized entrepreneurs tended to be predominantly Whigs (87 percent) as did manufacturers (68 percent), while landowners (as with farmers among party leaders) showed a Democratic preference (66 percent). Yet rationally calculated economic interest did not seem to have determined men's choice of party. Party programs offered few clues; men with the same interests preferred different parties. The nonspecialized nature of business enterprise, moreover, made the positing of a fixed "interest" unrealistic for most men.<sup>50</sup>

Ethnocultural and religious group correlations with party preference yielded more suggestive relationships than those for economic role. Yankees were the largest single ethnic group among the elite (47 percent), and 84 percent of all elite Yankees were Whigs. But a minority of Yankees, from New England and New York, made up the largest ethnocultural group within the Democracy—32 percent. Religious affiliation, however, decisively separated Yankees. With one exception "Yankees who were not Democrats were not Presbyterians," while 76 percent of elite Presbyterians were Whigs, and 61 percent of all Whigs were Yankee Presbyterians. This finding was particularly impressive, ac-

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and Democratic party leaders in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1850, see Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 53. W. Wayne Smith, "Jacksonian Democracy on the Chesapeake: Class, Kinship, and Politics," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 43 (March 1968), 55-67, also did not find class to be a significant distinction between opposing party elites. For a summary of the literature analyzing party leaderships, Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 251-54; Pessen properly emphasizes the similarities of party leaderships. A preliminary study of Rochester, New York, party leaders under my direction has found a tendency for Whigs to be both lower and higher in class and status than Democrats; the latter were overwhelmingly middle class while the Whigs tended to be upper class or not quite in the establishment at all, Albert C. E. Parker, "Inter-Party Differences in Rochester, New York, 1834-1843: A Preliminary Study of a Political Elite," unpublished paper, 1969.

<sup>49</sup> McCoy, "Economic Elites, Wayne County, 1844, 1860," 97-98. She discusses her method, 51-52, and criteria of selection, 55-67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-20.

cording to McCoy, because "religion presents a much more clear-cut designation than economic role. Many who were merchants or capitalists were also landowners, but no one was a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian simultaneously." In searching for an explanation of the Yankee Presbyterian Whig preference McCoy observed that Presbyterians promoted moral reform to which Whiggery was far more sympathetic than the Democrats. Presbyterians and Whigs alike pursued a kind of "Yankee reformism," but Democrats seemed hostile to such "reformist zeal"—propositions which will be explored in some detail below. McCoy concluded that "opposing party types were characterized by different religious affiliations and economic roles" and that men's political choices depended on complex social conditioning rather than on narrow economic interest; examination of personal and family relationships showed that "class interest among the elite operated in the same way as party loyalties in the community as a whole; class solidarity tended to lessen party cleavage [on elite levels] in the same way that party loyalty among all economic strata blurred class antagonisms."<sup>51</sup>

Whatever small comfort McCoy's data offers to those who would see the Whigs as the party of the rich and special interest groups, it presents further obstacles to the perhaps already impossible view of the Democrats as poor radicals. Yet scholars who developed their economic conflict view of Democrats and Whigs did not create it from nothing. Jacksonian rhetoric, for one thing, provided a powerful stimulus to their model of party conflicts and constituencies. Democrats throughout the country generally trumpeted antiaristocratic and antimonopoly rhetoric to a much greater extent than did the Whigs, using a class conscious vocabulary and terminology borrowed from the true radicals of the day.<sup>52</sup> These rhetorical habits infected Michigan Democrats more so than their Whig opponents. The existence of this verbal militancy, especially in the

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-61, 173-83, 199; also 193-95, 197. Typical of political differences dissolving before the prospect of profit was the launching of the Cass Farm Company in 1835, "one of the largest real estate enterprises" in Detroit's history, formed by Whig and Democratic businessmen. Burton, et al., eds., *Detroit*, I, 341; George E. Catlin, "Oliver Newberry," *Michigan History*, 18 (Winter 1934), 13-14. Charles C. Trowbridge and Lewis Cass enjoyed a close business and personal relationship both before and after Trowbridge ran for governor as a Whig in 1837. Several letters in the Cass MSS, Clements, show this. See, e.g., C. C. Trowbridge to Cass, May 29, 1837, and same to same, Aug. 24, Sept. 6, 1838. Most interesting is the letter in which Trowbridge, formerly a Democratic Republican but not an active politician, first mentioned his candidacy to Cass, who was in Paris. Trowbridge speculated about the coming election, passing it off as if it were a sporting event in which gentlemen and friends happened to find themselves on opposing sides. C. C. Trowbridge to Cass, Aug. 14, 1837, Cass MSS, Clements.

<sup>52</sup> For a sensible assessment of party rhetoric, Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 224-33. Joseph L. Blau, ed., *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy: Representative Writings of the Period, 1825-1850* (New York, 1954), is misleading in conception, but provides examples of the rhetoric from which the Democrats borrowed.

mid-1830s, allowed earlier historians to marshal plausible if superficial evidence for their hypotheses about the class composition of the Democrats and their radicalism.<sup>53</sup> Although the words functioned as a smoke-screen for clever, opportunistic men, one still confronts the problem of why Democrats chose to stage the mock drama of their political warfare so heavily against "monopoly" and "aristocracy" while Whigs tended to deplore such rhetoric as socially divisive, unhealthy, and phoney. Subsequent chapters should shed some light on why Whigs employed a more integrative rhetoric.

Democratic political appeals in Michigan do not seem to have differed as much from those of the Whigs as in other areas of the North. The Antimasons contributed to radicalizing political language in Michigan as they did in New York.<sup>54</sup> The Democratic Republicans acquired antimonopoly and egalitarian verbiage from Eastern workingmen's parties and the Antimasons made it fashionable. This style of political declamation peaked in the mid-thirties and then began to pass into rather empty ritual. In 1837 a new Democratic newspaper demonstrated how tame the anti-aristocratic strain could become. In its maiden issue the *Detroit Morning Post* proclaimed its solidarity with "workingmen," its opposition to monopolies and to a caste system creating "artificial classes of rich and poor." The *Post*, however, was no rabble-rouser, and insisted that the rights of all be protected, including the rights of property and success. "Because an individual is wealthy, or elevated in office, it does not necessarily follow that he is to be denounced or humbled. . . . Some of the most true, self-sacrificing friends of the [Democratic] cause are to be found among them."<sup>55</sup>

Reexamination of the politicoeconomic issues of the 1830s has failed to discover any Democratic "radicalism" and has shown, rather, a lack of vital differences between the two parties. Crucial distinctions in Whig and Democratic attitudes and style on economic matters may have existed, but not the kind previously alleged. Democrats engaged heavily in entrepreneurial pursuits, but that Democrats were newer capitalists "on the make" in Michigan is yet to be demonstrated.<sup>56</sup> The economic elite in Wayne County was predominantly Whig but not because that party simply reflected its economic interest.

Too little is known about political and economic elites and their rela-

<sup>53</sup> For examples see editorials in the *Monroe Times* and *Detroit Free Press*, 1834 to 1836, and Stevens T. Mason's messages, George N. Fuller, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Michigan* (Lansing, 1925), I, 137-38, 140-41, 142.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter V, and Benson, *Concept*, 9-46.

<sup>55</sup> July 3, 1837.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, "The Detroit Markets Controversy," *Detroit Historical Society Bulletin*, 25 (December 1968), 4-8.

tion to parties. More studies of the McCoy type are needed.<sup>57</sup> Skeptics may retort that while everything is not known, enough information exists to describe the distribution of power and resources in American society. But why, for example, were Presbyterians so disproportionately numerous among the elite? Could an examination of the Protestant ethic and its relation to certain occupational groups as well as to the successful, tell us more of the world view of these men, their party choices, and their political behavior generally? There are no easy answers. Invoking the "Protestant ethic," for example, does not explain the disproportionate presence of the nonpuritanical Episcopalians among the elite. More knowledge on such questions will give better insight into the causes of party choice and political behavior generally.

#### MASS VOTING BEHAVIOR

Among the masses significant differences in party preferences for socioeconomic groups are less detectable than among elites. This finding does not seem to have resulted from the state of the available data, but rather from the relative insignificance of class or economic group lines in forming party cleavages. The small Wayne economic elite had a Whig tendency, but the vast middle and lower classes were closely divided in party preference. Given the limited size of the economic elite the Whigs could not have been a major party without the support of thousands of "common men."

In the first party contest in 1835, the Whigs polled from 40 to 49 percent of the vote in several eastern and more populous counties. In 1837, 14,546 men or 49 percent of all Michigan voters chose Whiggery, well before the effects of the depression began to be felt in Michigan. In 1839 and 1840 the Whigs carried the state as more voters turned out (proportionately) than in any other election from 1835 to 1852. In 1840 79 percent of the potential national electorate voted, and 84.9 percent of Michigan's potential electorate swarmed to the polls. Of 44,350 voters in 1840, 51.7 percent went Whig.<sup>58</sup>

The great majority of voters in the 1830s were rural farmers, and many of these were still hacking their way out of the forest. Census data for 1850 taken from several sample counties shows the overwhelming majority of voters to have been middle and lower class, so in 1840 the vast middle range probably stood even lower in the socioeconomic scale.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Sociologists and political scientists have provided provocative historical works on some of these problems, e.g., E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (New York, 1964), and Dahl, *Who Governs?*

<sup>58</sup> McCormick, "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," 292.

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix B and below.

Although farmers generally were poorer in 1840, probably more were self-employed than in 1850. Indirect evidence for this comes from the scarcity of labor then. One prosperous new farmer wrote in 1837: "My greatest difficulty is to find men to work for they are nearly all farmers themselves." In the spring of 1837 Charles Trowbridge observed that "the opening of navigation has brought us immense crowds of *old fashioned* emigrants, with their wives and babies and wagons and spinning wheels and a hundred dollars to buy an eight-acre lot for each of the boys." In 1843 a traveler estimated that with "first quality" land selling at \$1.25 an acre and with timber nearby it would take \$600 "at farthest" to buy the necessities of farming and "independence."<sup>60</sup> Both before and after hard times began to set in, roughly half of this electorate in 1837, 1838, 1839, and 1840 voted Whig.

Urban and rural differences had no apparent effect on party loyalties. Any inquiry into urban-rural voting patterns, however, must begin by questioning whether the classifications are meaningful for antebellum Michigan. Moreover, many workers and employers in the early or mid-nineteenth century may have been first or second generation migrants from farms. Whether they lost their rural perspectives as rapidly as is often assumed is a moot question. Even long time town dwellers may have remained rooted in economic and social patterns which were pre-industrial, prefactory, and preurban.<sup>61</sup>

Detroit's electorate best approximated urban voting in Michigan, but its population was never large during this period: 6,000 in 1835 and 12,000 in 1845. In 1838 the City of the Straits had 4 banks, 4 foundries, 2 breweries, and several small metal and woodworking factories. Detroiters owned 47 lake vessels and commercial interests led the economy. The port functioned as a jobbing center for merchants in the interior and its industry produced for the hinterland. Before the rise of Chicago the town served as a key center for the general eastward flow of grains and wool and the westward flow of manufactured goods. In 1849 William Candler found Detroit to be "a thriving, manufacturing" city with "shipping of all sorts and descriptions—steam tugs, huge schooners, and

<sup>60</sup> Louis Leonard Tucker, ed., "The Correspondence of John Fisher," *Michigan History*, 45 (September 1961), 231. Catherine Stewart, *New Homes in the West* (Nashville, 1843, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1966), 10-11. Hoffman, *Winter in the West*, 112, 128. C. C. Trowbridge to Lewis Cass, May 29, 1837, Cass MSS, Clements.

<sup>61</sup> Recent studies of Philadelphia argue that up to 1860 the pace of the industrial revolution there moved in deliberate stages, with older methods of production persisting as market relationships and the scale of production changed, Blumin, "Mobility in Philadelphia, 1820-1860," 34, 38-39; also Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968).



a few square-rigged ships, with here and there a steamer churning white waves in her wake."<sup>62</sup> The 1840 federal census takers counted 1,009 persons engaged in commerce, manufacturing, and the learned professions, accounting for roughly 11 percent of Detroit's population; this was perhaps 30 percent of the potential electorate.<sup>63</sup>

While all this made for an electorate more urban than elsewhere in Michigan, it did not create political subcultures based on occupational groups related to an urban-industrial structure. Mechanics, the group most often mentioned next to farmers in political discourse, do not seem to have possessed a separate political consciousness. Many were self-employed and this type seems to have predominated among the leadership of Detroit's Mechanics' Society, which included prosperous businessmen and professionals. The Whigs regarded the mechanics as loyal to them and in 1843 conspicuously nominated a prominent member of the Mechanics' Society for state representative.<sup>64</sup>

There is only one example, conspicuous by its rarity, suggesting the kind of artisan self-consciousness and occupational group solidarity more common in the East or Europe. In September 1839 a group of journeymen printers lost faith in the goodwill of their employers, the owners of the *Detroit Morning Post* (mentioned earlier). Accordingly, the printers set up a clandestine sheet called the *Rat Gazette*, whose purpose was to report on the unfairness of employers generally, but especially those of the *Post*. The printers claimed that the *Post's* owners, Democrats all, had not paid them for honest work and habitually made money by cheating honest men.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately this episode was short-lived and it does not seem to have been typical of Detroit.

The city's party vote closely followed the even balance of the state vote, with Whigs winning in 1838, 1839, and 1840, running slightly better there than statewide in the last two years. The Whigs did not carry

<sup>62</sup> Almon E. Parkins, *The Historical Geography of Detroit* (Lansing, 1918), 131-32, 184, 316-17. On emigration in 1826, 1834, 1835, and 1836, see Gordon W. Thayer, ed., "The Great Lakes in Niles' National Register," *Inland Seas*, II (Fall 1955), 208; *ibid.*, 14 (Spring 1958), 56-57; *ibid.*, (Summer 1958), 163-64; *ibid.*, 15 (Winter 1959), 313. Burton, ed., *Detroit*, I, 336, 339. Candler letter of July 20, 1849, quoted in Henry E. Candler, *A Century and One: Life Story of William Robert Candler* (New York, London, 1933), 141, 148.

<sup>63</sup> Detroit occupations for 1840 can not be found in the federal census but were printed in the *Free Press*, Dec. 1, 1840; see also George N. Fuller, *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, 1807-1837* (Lansing, 1916), 182, and *Michigan Manual, 1838* (Lansing, 1838).

<sup>64</sup> Julius P. Bolivar MacCabe, *Directory of the City of Detroit, 1837* (Detroit, 1837); *Detroit Directory, 1845*, 109; *Detroit Advertiser*, Oct. 4, 1843, Nov. 4, 1845.

<sup>65</sup> (Detroit) *Rat Gazette*, Sept. 1839, BHC. This may have been the only issue ever published.

Detroit again in state or federal elections during the next 12 years. Still, Whiggery retained a sizable part of Detroit's vote in Presidential contests.

TABLE III.1  
Party Percentage Strength, Detroit, 1837-1852

Year	Office	Total Vote	Dem.	Whig	Liberty
1837	Gov.	1,645	51.0	48.7	0.3 <sup>a</sup>
1838	Cong.	1,497	49.7	50.2	—
1839	Gov.	1,588	48.7	51.3	—
1840	Pres.	1,484	46.9	52.3	0.8
1841	Gov.	1,169	59.2	37.4	3.4
1842	St. Sen.	1,206	56.1	40.9	3.0
1843	Gov.	1,340	51.4	47.2	1.4
1844	Pres.	1,932	50.3	47.8	1.9
1845	Gov.	1,411	51.2	45.0	3.8
1846	Cong.	1,716	56.7	42.7	0.6
1847	Gov.	1,542	56.6	41.2	2.2
1848	Pres.	2,663	51.5	45.4	3.1
1849	Gov.	1,792	60.2	39.8	—
1850	Cong.	2,614	55.6	44.4	—
1851	Gov.	2,228	68.9	31.1	—
1852	Pres.	4,428	54.8	41.1	4.1

<sup>a</sup> Independent Democrat

There were other large towns in Michigan, such as Pontiac, Jackson, and Grand Rapids, but election returns for them in the 1830s and 1840s are either incomplete or usually available as aggregate returns for the particular village and its surrounding rural township, a condition which theoretically as well as practically argues against attaching too much significance to any discoverable town-country voting differences.

It was possible to grade townships within particular counties according to the relative degree of "urbaness" in 1837-40 by using data in the 1840 United States census, the far more complete data in Blois's *Gazetteer of Michigan, 1837*, and information from county and township histories. This process, crudely though exhaustively pursued, revealed no relationship between level of development and party strength.<sup>66</sup> The 1850 federal census manuscript of population schedules provided a more precise measurement in the descriptions of occupations of individuals. Every potential voter went into two major occupational divisions, "farm" and "urban," and the percentage of each provided a relative measure of rural or urban voters. These data were assembled by township for six counties (Wayne, Eaton, Ingham, Kalamazoo, Barry, St. Joseph), selected because they spanned the settled part of the state

<sup>66</sup> An exhaustive study of Wayne County is reported in Formisano, "Social Bases of Voting: Wayne County, 1837-1852," 126-28, 461.

from east to west in 1850. A seventh group of towns included the "banner" party units (top Democratic and anti-Democratic units) in the counties of Washtenaw, Oakland, and Hillsdale. The great majority of the townships were, of course, overwhelmingly rural; 97 were 60 percent rural or more. There was great variation of party strength among them. In 10 of the entire 107 townships considered, 40 percent or more of the potential voters pursued nonfarm occupations. Four of these units had strong Democratic party percentages, 3 had anti-Democratic means, and 3 did not have strong party characters, as Table III.2 shows. Further, the coefficients of correlation between rural and Democratic Party strength in the townships in every county but one were low and insignificant (Table III.3).

TABLE III.2  
"Urban" Towns and Democratic Mean in 6 Michigan Counties, 1850

Township	County	Percent Urban	Percent Democrat
Lansing	Ingham	79.9	62.0
Springwells	Wayne	68.0	53.0
Hastings	Barry	60.0	65.0
Constantine	St. Joseph	56.0	52.0
Monguagon	Wayne	51.0	60.0
Plymouth	Wayne	49.0	38.0
Hamtramck	Wayne	48.0	70.0
Sturgis	St. Joseph	46.0	38.0
Lockport	St. Joseph	44.0	49.0
Milford	Oakland	43.0	38.0

Within the banner categories of farm and urban were 17 subgroups, (8 farm and 9 urban), used here as an occupational status scale. Potential voters in townships were ranked on the scale according to the description of their occupation and the amount of real estate they owned.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> The farm owner categories are not completely arbitrary, but are not based on statistical procedures. However, they were decided upon after several trial runs of townships were made classifying farm owners by property; e.g., the \$1,000 and \$3,000 figures were common and obviously popular ways of classifying a farm in round figures.

Farm				Urban			
1.	Laborers			1.	Unskilled		
2.	Tenants, renters			2.	Semiskilled		
3.	Farmers with land \$	500 or less		3.	Skilled		
4.	" " "	\$ 501-\$1,000		4.	Service		
5.	" " "	\$ 1,001-\$3,000		5.	Sales		
6.	" " "	\$ 3,001-\$5,000		6.	Clerical		
7.	" " "	\$ 5,001-\$9,999		7.	Managers, officials		
8.	" " "	\$10,000 and up		8.	Professionals		
				9.	Proprietors		

The Rural Lower Classes might have included individuals from several of these groups, but after experimenting with various combinations and taking into account other evidence it was decided that the bottom 3 farm groups (1-3), and the bottom 2 urban (unskilled, semiskilled), best represented the rural lower classes (RLC). When the towns of the 6 counties and the banner units are ranked by their Democratic mean percentages, 1848-52, and rural lower class percentages listed in a parallel column, simple observations suggest no relationship between the two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficients for Democratic means and rural lower class percentages and Democratic means and rural percentages are also, with one exception, all low and insignificant (Table III.3).

TABLE III.3  
Democratic Mean, 1848-1852, in 6 Michigan Counties and  
Banner Units Correlated with Rural Lower Classes and Ruralness, 1850

	Rural Lower Classes	Rural
Wayne	.158	.332
Ingham	.200	.724
Eaton	.316	.261
Barry	.207	.239
Kalamazoo	.165	-.121
St. Joseph	-.210	-.083
Banner units	.212	*(not computed)

One of the ten commandments of American history, pervading even the most divergent schools of interpretation, has been that small, independent farmers constituted the backbone of the Democratic Party, virtually anytime, anywhere. Countless textbooks and secondary works have made such an assertion particularly for the antebellum period. But in Michigan small independent farmers showed no consistent attachment to the Democrats—in many rural areas they voted heavily anti-Democratic.

In southwestern Wayne County where the Huron River, as Charles Hoffman described it in 1833, "waddles onto the lake, as little excited by the flocks of ducks which frolic on its bosom, as an alderman after dinner by the flies that disport upon his jerkin,"<sup>68</sup> lay 3 townships where farm owners with farms worth \$1,000 or less constituted the great majority of potential voters: 76 percent in Sumpter, 71 in Taylor, and 67 in Romulus. The 3 had similar socioeconomic structures; none had many farm laborers or tenants. Since no large farms were present, men who owned farms worth under \$500 were probably not tenants, as was the possibility in other towns with large farms where small property own-

<sup>68</sup> Hoffman, *Winter in the West*, 126.

ers may have worked their land and someone else's as well. No man in the 3 towns owned a farm worth over \$3,000. Sumpter had a Whig-Free Soil mean (1848-52) of 53 percent; Taylor was the strongest Whig township in the county with a 63 percent straight Whig mean; and Romulus had a Democratic mean of 60 percent.

The phenomenon of small farmers dividing between the parties was not confined to southern Wayne County. Searching through the other 6 counties and banner units 27 townships (in Ingham, Barry, and Eaton) could be found in which farmers owning farms worth \$1,000 or less constituted 60 percent or more of the potential voters. Eleven of these units had Democratic means of over 55 percent, 9 of 45 to 55 percent, and 7 less than 45 percent. Thirteen had Democratic mean percentages of 50 or less. Clearly, a great many small farmers throughout Michigan, probably just under half at the least, voted anti-Democratic.

For a long time the frontier has been regarded as the special breeding ground of Jacksonian Democrats, but frontier areas throughout Michigan obviously produced wide variations in party loyalty. Most of the farm communities discussed above were just beginning to move out of the frontier stage and subsistence farming, and were increasingly tied into a market economy. These units were not the raw frontier but were not far removed from it. Even Wayne County in many areas in the late 1830s still received many pioneers.<sup>69</sup> Farmers worth under \$1,000 were not necessarily lazier, or inefficient, or unproductive compared to other farmers, nor did they necessarily occupy poor lands. In 1850 they tended to be men whose farms had been more recently settled. (See Appendix B.)

The data thus far have been marshalled to establish a negative point: disproportionate voting support for the Democrats from the lower classes did not exist. For example, the problem can be seen in microcosm in three Wayne County units: Livonia, Plymouth, and Canton. These townships were the 3 richest in the county, no matter what measure of prosperity was used. They lay side by side where the flat land west of Detroit begins to roll and look greener. All 3 had comparatively large proportions of middle-class farmers, and Plymouth had large groups of skilled workers. Farmers with farms worth over \$3,000, rare elsewhere, constituted 9 percent of Canton's potential voters, 8 percent of Livonia's, and 17 percent of Plymouth's. Except for the skilled workers in Plymouth, the towns bore a striking resemblance to one another in socioeconomic character. According to the traditional model of interpretation all 3 of these towns should have voted anti-Democratic. Plymouth and Livonia obliged, with Democratic means (1848-52) of 39 and 38 percent. Canton, however, was one of the Democracy's strongholds in Wayne with a

<sup>69</sup> Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House*, 29-46.

64 percent party mean. Could it have been possible, although Canton gave a consistent Democratic majority, that most of its prosperous farmers voted anti-Democratic with the Democratic vote consisting of an unbroken array of the lower classes plus a small portion of the upper occupations? Given the data presented so far this was possible though unlikely. It was not the case. Newspapers and county records provided the names of Democratic party leaders and activists and township officers. The schedules of the 1850 census gave their real property ownership. All of those investigated owned farms worth \$1,000 or more, usually more. Archibald Y. Murray, a Democratic county leader and Supervisor of Canton in 1836, 1837, 1841, 1844, and 1852, owned more real estate than any other man there in 1850: \$18,750. More typical was David D. Cady, Supervisor in 1846, 1853, 1854, and 1855, who owned real estate valued at \$4,800. These men were among the original settlers of the town, like the Kinyons, Stevens, and Andrews families, who were also Democrats. They came mostly from New York state in the 1820s and 1830s, prospered quickly, and were staunch Democrats.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the question arises as to why the prosperous farmers of Canton, unlike their neighbors in Livonia and Plymouth, voted Democratic.

To this point only socioeconomic variables have been considered. But what of religious, ethnocultural, or other kinds of variables of potential relevance to party cleavages? Other data are available, though hardly complete. What is quantifiable is limited, but when 2 noneconomic variables are correlated with Democratic percentages in the 6 selected counties and banner units, the results (Table III.4) show an inconsistent relationship between Democratic voting and the foreign born, and quite insistently argue for a negative relationship between Yankee background and Democratic voting.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *United States Census of State of Michigan, 1850, Population Schedule*, microfilm. Party delegates listed in *Free Press*, Nov. 1, 1836, Oct. 14, 1837, June 16, 1840. Town officials in *Farmer, Detroit*, II, 1255-57.

<sup>71</sup> A final test of this data was made using multiple regression analysis, measuring the effect on the Democratic voting percentage of 7 variables in all 95 townships of the 6 sample counties considered together. The 7 variables were the percentages of potential voters who were (1) Yankee or New England born, (2) foreign born, (3) urban, (4) mid-Atlantic states born (not New York), (5) New British, (6) farm laborers and tenants, and (7) rural lower classes. It was possible to determine the relationship of each variable to changes of Democratic percentages; both logarithmic and arithmetic measures were obtained. However, the primary goal was conceived of simply as measuring the relative strength of correlation of each variable with the Democratic percentage within the universe of 95 townships. Partial and simple correlation coefficients show that 2 of the ethnocultural variables, Yankees and foreign born, were correlated significantly with Democratic strength. The only impressive finding again emerged as the negative association between Yankees and Democrats. For providing indispensable help in making this analysis I am indebted to Professors Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, and to the University of Rochester Computer Center.

TABLE III.4  
Democratic Means, 1848-1852, Correlated with Percent of Foreign Born  
and Yankees in 6 Michigan Counties and Banner Units, 1850

	Foreign Born	Yankees
Wayne	.561	-.422
Ingham	.490	-.621
Eaton	-.318	-.318
Barry	-.069	-.349
Kalamazoo	.386	.018
St. Joseph	-.052	-.388
Banner units	.195	-.534

Socioeconomic differences did not significantly affect party divisions in the electorate. Both masses and elites agreed on the basics of political economy. Parties quarreled over how to manage the economy and the role of the state in it, but they were quite opportunist and internally divided on such affairs. The parties' mass supporters tended to follow the positions on economic issues marked out by national and state leaderships. The electorate took its partisan passions seriously, but these did not originate in class antagonism and much less in different views of political economy. As to the latter, Whigs and Democrats did possess diverging ideologies which must be seen in the broader context of their antipathetic world views of man and society.

Ethnocultural and other social cleavages may have had a strong impact on party loyalties, as seems very likely with Yankee ethnicity. The findings for elites and masses at this point encourage exploration of ethno-religious variables. The presence of sharp ethnic and religious conflict, like intense party competition, cut vertically through class groups and inhibited class resentments.<sup>72</sup> Whatever the cohesion of the upper classes beyond party disputes, the lower classes were sharply divided. Mass politics did not raise any threat to the political-economic order, and the kinds of cleavages underlying mass party loyalties probably insulated the social order from any serious challenge, let alone abrupt change.

<sup>72</sup> A recent study of temperance, sabbatarianism, and other moral reformisms in early nineteenth-century England concluded that these movements should be interpreted in terms of "culture-conflict," which blurred class conflict: "England was thus 'sewn together by its inner conflicts.'" Brian Harrison, "Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, 38 (December 1967), 98-125.

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As New York emigrants poured into Michigan in the 1820s, Antimasonry lost little time in spreading there.<sup>18</sup> Antimasons in Michigan as in New York seem to have promoted themselves as well as morality. Antimasonic leaders in Detroit headed benevolent and reform societies and promoted railroads, banks, and land companies. A leading Antimason developed the town of Ann Arbor and other enterprises. New York and Michigan Antimasons shared not only a concern for the mundane, but both also showed themselves capable of political pragmatism. From the beginning of its career in Michigan, Antimasonry was accused of opportunism. Gradually, the charge became true as the crusaders bent their zeal to a desire to win by nominating popular candidates who were not whole-hog Antimasons.<sup>19</sup>

Michigan Antimasonry impresses one most, however, with its evangelical and moralizing style. The Antimasonic *Detroit Courier* and Ann Arbor, *Western Emigrant* were essentially moral reform journals. Many Antimasonic leaders staffed the interlocking directorate of Christian benevolence. Henry R. Schoolcraft, a Democrat, caught the quasi-messianic cast of Antimasonry when he wrote that it was a "kind of 'shibboleth' for those who are to cross the political 'fords' of a new Jordan."<sup>20</sup> At their first territorial convention, at Farmington, January 1, 1829, Antimasons declared that Masonry was a "perpetual conspiracy against morality, Christianity, and republicanism." Their "Address" recited a typical litany of Masonic evil-doing and ended with praise for those recusant Masons who had "come out and washed themselves from the pollution" and who had "confessed their sins and the sins of that society; they have made atonement to the community."<sup>21</sup>

Antimasons hammered away incessantly at themes tied to the anti-Democratic nature of Masonry. But Antimasons also recognized, at least implicitly, that Masonry threatened Protestantism by serving many persons "in place of a church, to the exclusion of Christianity." Thus Antimasons exhorted that "no man can perform the duties of a

<sup>18</sup> Even fugitive Masons joined the trek, Jackson, *American Citizen*, July 11, 1855, film, Jackson Public Library.

<sup>19</sup> Benson, *Concept*, 14-27. *Courier*, Nov. 13, 27, 1833. Russell E. Bidlack, *John Allen and the Founding of Ann Arbor* MHCot, *Bulletin*, 12 (1962). *Michigan Sentinel*, May 23, 1829. Philo C. Fuller to H. Howard, July 3, 1837, Department of Treasury Papers, Letters 1836-1862, MHCom, shows Fuller's interest in the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad Company of 1836.

<sup>20</sup> Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs* (Philadelphia, 1851), 324. The entry quoted was written about 1830. Many Antimasons in Washtenaw County supported temperance, a favorite evangelical cause, *Emigrant*, Jan. 1, 20, 1830, April 27, 1831. I have seen two privately owned copies of what was probably Michigan's first temperance newspaper, the *Michigan Temperance Recorder*, published in the thirties. A descendant of the editor said that his ancestor was a lifelong Antimason.

<sup>21</sup> *Michigan Sentinel*, Jan. 10, 24, and Feb. 21, 1829.



The temperance crusade of course aggravated many nonevangelicals and antievangelicals. A Democratic editor associated the cause with "New England puritans who scoff at 'Western morals,'" and the desire of many to drink and regulate themselves probably created Democratic voters. In 1836 Henry Schoolcraft, a Democrat, described how the "tendency to ultraism" of temperance men alienated moderates like himself. The movement, he wrote, had excited the community of Detroit: "Its importance is undeniable on all hands, but there is always a tendency in new measures of reform to make the method insisted on a sort of moral panacea, capable of doing all things, to the no little danger of setting up a standard higher than the Decalogue itself."<sup>68</sup> In an 1840 election of town officers in Farmington temperance men aroused such furor that a Justice was elected "rather in opposition to temperance principles." The victor proved such an enthusiastic drinker that even his anti-temperance backers joined some Whigs in requesting his removal.<sup>69</sup>

The case of Charles M. Bull, Detroit merchant in the 1830s, shows how resentment of Presbyterian moralists probably influenced politics. Bull, a Democrat, held several opinions more characteristic of Whigs. On such issues as the Bank of the United States, Jackson's removal of deposits, and submission to Congress on the Ohio boundary, Bull sustained potentially anti-Democratic postures. If he disliked "the Irish and French," as his younger brother Hampton did, there was additional reason for expecting him to be a Whig.<sup>70</sup> Yet one incident in 1834 points in an opposite direction. The Territorial Government had just raised the price of retail liquor licenses to \$100—a tentative temperance move. This incensed tavern keepers as well as store keepers like Bull who kept a bar at one end of his counter. Merchants had submitted a petition of protest to the city council which included the names of "30 of the richest and most influential men in the place." Bull thought "we are safe now and have all on our side except the d---d presbyterians and them we do not care anything about we shall get about the best we can until we can get a new board."<sup>71</sup>

The evangelical demand for a quiet Sabbath irritated the unorthodox who wished to keep it as they pleased. The missionary in Macomb wrote of his encounter with "Universalists or Deists who wish to sell and go

<sup>68</sup> *Centreville Western Chronicle*, June 30, 1853. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 550-51.

<sup>69</sup> Seth A. L. Warner and Amos Mead to W. Woodbridge, Dec. 7, 1840, and related petitions in file, 1839-1841, Woodbridge MSS, BHC.

<sup>70</sup> Charles M. Bull to John Bull, Feb. 24, 1834; C. M. Bull to J. Bull, June 4, 1834; Charles wanted to have not "much to do with the Banks," C. M. Bull to J. Bull, Jan. 12, 1834; C. M. Bull to J. Bull, Feb. 13, 1837; C. M. Bull and Hampton Bull to J. Bull, Jan. 12, 1834, Bull MSS, BHC.

<sup>71</sup> C. M. Bull to J. Bull, Aug. 31, 1834, Bull MSS, BHC. Fitzgibbon, "King Alcohol," 2: 740-47.

is the course of the Whig party and it has occasioned them many a disaster. Let us be firm to our principles, but conciliatory in our conduct towards men."<sup>15</sup>

Ethnic politics overlapped to some extent with denominational politics, which here means primarily the politics generated by rivalries between the major native Protestant denominations. A broader religious politics also functioned in the chasm opened by the Catholic-Protestant cleavage. An example of the latter appeared in 1835 as the first party contest gathered headway. John R. Williams, Detroit Democrat and Catholic, wrote to Michigan's Territorial Delegate, Lucius Lyon on the subject of Indian missions—and religious politics. Williams's spiritual father, Bishop Résé, had persuaded him that Catholics were being discriminated against by the federal government. One Protestant mission received \$2,000 in aid while six Catholic missions, serving many more Indians, received a total of \$1,000. This "partiality" rewarded Catholics poorly for their immense service in "civilizing those unfortunate beings." The deserving Bishop enjoyed great popularity for his talent and "liberal principles." In case Lyon had missed the point Williams abruptly switched to discussing the prospects of the Democracy in Michigan: "Our party is thriving fast . . . and the Catholics are generally warm supporters of the democratic cause and principles. The Rev. Bishop is a decided friend of the present administration. The Catholics hold it to be their duty, to support the government under which they live.—hundreds of Germans and Irish emigrants are every day taking incipient measures to become naturalized Citizens—democracy is increasing daily in strength, and Michigan, I trust, will take her stand in the Union, as a decidedly democratic state."<sup>16</sup>

Religious and ethnic politics obviously blended together. As the different "nations" of Catholics grew after 1835, ethnic politics *within* the Catholic group became increasingly important. French, German, Irish, and native Catholic rivalries created problems for church administrators—and Democratic party managers. Denominational rivalries, on the other hand, had their origins in the intense competition among Protestant

<sup>15</sup> Robert McClelland, Sept. 5, 1843, and Robert McClelland, May 30, 1843, Bagg MSS, Huntington Library. Gov. Alpheus Felch admitted to not giving enough care to "sectional considerations" in his appointments. He may also have neglected other considerations such as his unwillingness to attend a St. Patrick's Day celebration indicated. A. Felch to Lucretia Felch, March 18, 1846, Felch MSS, MHC. Also, same to same, Jan. 26, 1846.

<sup>16</sup> John R. Williams to Lyon, Feb. 6, 1835; another Democratic leader also pressured Lyon on this point, John McDonell to Lyon, Feb. 14, 1835, Lyon MSS, Clements. Religious politics and Indian missions constituted a source of trouble between Gabriel Richard and Lewis Cass much earlier, Mast, *Always the Priest*, 282-83, 312-14.