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*Polity*, Vol. 26, No. 4. (Summer, 1994), pp. 729-768.

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# A Chapter in the History of American Party Ideology: The Nineteenth-Century Democratic Party (1828–1892)\*

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*American political parties have been studied primarily as electoral organizations and as aggregations of particular constituencies. The subject of party ideology is commonly ignored or treated as a product of the aggregated views of the party-in-the-electorate. Consequently, we have a conception of American parties as vote-getting machines and an understanding of American political culture as the product of a hegemonic liberal tradition. This article, which focuses on the Democratic Party in the nineteenth century, challenges these views. Using party platforms and presidential election speeches, it reconstructs that party's core ideology from 1828 to 1892 and finds it remarkably consistent in its basic values.*

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What was the ideology of the nineteenth-century Democratic party—the party of Andrew Jackson, Stephen Douglas, and Grover Cleveland? A variety of scholarly work has addressed this question, at least tangentially, and it yields many propositions pertaining to that party over this long and tumultuous period. Three overarching perspectives, however, have dominated contemporary research on the ideology of the Democratic party.<sup>1</sup> To some, the nineteenth-century party is quintessentially *liberal*,

\*The author wishes to thank Taylor Dark, Richard Ellis, Lawrence Gerring, Marissa Golden, James Gregory, Judy Gruber, Cathie Martin, William Muir, Duane Oldfield, Beth Reingold, Michael Rogin, Arun Swamy, Aaron Wildavsky, and the editor of *Polity*, Jerome Mileur, for help in the preparation of this article.

1. Granted, some overlap can be discovered in the ways that the Democratic party is described from within these three perspectives. Yet, each highlights quite different features of the nineteenth-century party.

in the classic nineteenth-century sense, i.e., enamored of free trade, free markets, laissez faire, industrial development, philosophical individualism, and the task of protecting civil liberties and civil rights.<sup>2</sup> To others, the party appears to be the embodiment of the *democratic* ideal, often referred to as populist or egalitarian. This perspective, introduced by the Progressive historians and revised and reformulated in various recent accounts, interprets the party's mission as the defense of the rights of farmers and urban laborers against financial and industrial elites.<sup>3</sup> Finally, recent work in the "ethnocultural" tradition has re-christened the Democratic party as a *coalition of ethnic and religious minorities*. Accordingly, the Democratic party is said to have developed an ideology centered on personal liberty: "a toleration and defense of alternative lifestyles and values, of laissez-faire social ethics, and of a government whose powers were circumscribed so as to preclude positive intervention in the daily lives of its citizens."<sup>4</sup>

All of these major arguments—liberal, populist, and ethnocultural—are similar in that all three tend to highlight *discontinuities* in Democratic dogma through the course of the nineteenth century. Democratic populism is usually discussed in the context of the 1830s and 1840s, and liberalism in the context of the Gilded Age. Ethnocultural accounts, likewise, are keen to emphasize the *shifts* in party ideology from the second party system to the third. Finally, the vast bulk of the work conducted on party ideology takes the form of period-specific studies, which also tend to emphasize the fragmented nature of Democratic party ideology during

2. See Robert Kelley, in *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).

3. Charles Beard, *The American Party Battle* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929); Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1909); Arthur Holcombe, *The Political Parties of To-day* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1924); Edward McChesney Sait, *American Parties and Elections* (New York: Century, 1927); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (New York: Book Find Club, 1945). See also John Ashworth, *'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Thomas A. Bailey, *Democrats vs. Republicans: The Continuing Clash* (New York: Meredith, 1968); Richard Hofstadter, *Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); Everett Carll Ladd, *American Political Parties: Social Change and Political Response* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970).

4. Paul Kleppner, "Coalitional and Party Transformations in the 1890s," in *Party Coalitions in the 1890s*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981), p. 97. See also Lee Bensen, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 332; and Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1991), p. 89.

the nineteenth century, partitioning that history into increments of one or several decades.

I argue, to begin with, that we are better served by focusing on the remarkable *continuities* within this first century of Democratic history.<sup>5</sup> Despite the strains induced by westward expansion, wars foreign and domestic, a continuous inflow of European immigrants, fundamental alterations in the party's supporting constituencies, and seven decades of industrialization and urbanization, the Democratic party in 1892 retained the same essential values and beliefs upon which it had been founded six decades earlier. I argue, more specifically, that this ideology is most accurately and concisely described as the conceptual intersection of two English political perspectives, *civic republicanism* and *antistatism*, and one peculiarly American perspective, *white supremacy*.<sup>6</sup> Following a brief explanation of the evidence and general approach of this study, I will discuss this ideology within four broad issue-categories: Slavery, Government, Marketplace, and Politics.

## I. Approach

Any study of party ideology is subject to the familiar objection that ideology is merely rhetoric. Yet, a large body of fairly recent national and cross-national research supports the general proposition that the ideologies of political parties are critical factors in the policymaking process.<sup>7</sup> Although the question has not been studied systematically, it is

5. The continuities of Democratic history in the nineteenth century have not gone entirely unnoticed (e.g. Silbey, *The American Political Nation*, p. 89), but they have failed to attract sustained scholarly investigation and have not led to a reformulation of established views of the party during this period.

6. Many writers have noted the Democratic party's preference for "limited government," particularly during the Gilded Age. A few writers have recognized the significance of civic republican norms within the Democratic party of the 1830s, but the conclusion of these studies is generally that this impulse expired sometime in the 1840s or 1850s. Jean Baker, on the other hand, suggests that civic republicanism, while a negligible influence on the Jacksonian party, made a brief comeback at mid-century, guiding the party through the perilous years of the Civil War. See *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and "From Belief into Culture: Republicanism in the Antebellum North," *American Quarterly*, 37 (Fall 1985): 549-50. My thesis is evidently a much stronger claim insofar as I shall attempt to demonstrate a republican thread tying together partisan themes from the 1830s through the 1890s.

7. See Ian Budge and Richard I. Hofferbert, "Mandates and Policy Outputs: U.S. Party Platforms and Federal Expenditures," *American Political Science Review*, 84 (March 1990): 111-31; Ian Budge, David Robertson, and Derek Hearl, *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change: Spatial Analyses of Post-War Election Programmes in 19 Democracies*

reasonable to suppose that party ideologies were, if anything, *more* significant during the nineteenth century, when the organization of party elites and the affiliations of party rank-and-file were much stronger than they are today.

The trickier question is how to define and operationalize the ambiguous concept of "party ideology." I argue that the role of party ideology within national politics is best studied by focusing on party *elites*, where ideological modes of thought are most prevalent; on the *presidential* wing of the parties, where national, rather than state or local, values and beliefs are most likely to be represented; on what party leaders *said*, the explicit, and hence most easily verifiable, content of party ideologies; and on *both parties*, back-to-back, so as to identify the distinctive elements of each party's agenda.<sup>8</sup> I argue, also, that we need to examine this evidence over long stretches of historical time, so as to discern accurately which values and beliefs were structural features of a party's ideological makeup and which were merely circumstantial.<sup>9</sup> We will, in short, sepa-

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 3; David Cameron, "Social Democracy, Corporatism, Labour Quiescence, and the Representation of Economic Interest in Advanced Capitalist Society," in *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, ed. John Goldthorpe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Francis G. Castles, ed., *The Impact of Parties* (London: Sage, 1982); Jeff Fishel, *Presidents and Promises: From Campaign Pledge to Presidential Performance* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1985); Benjamin Ginsberg, "Elections and Public Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 70 (March 1976): 41-49; Douglas Hibbs, "Political Parties and Macroeconomic Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 60 (1977): 1467-87; Hans Kerner, "Parties, Politics and Consequences: A Cross-National Analysis," *European Journal of Political Research*, 12 (1984): 147-70; Michael G. Krukones, *Promises and Performance: Presidential Campaigns as Policy Predictors* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984); Gerald Pomper, "'If Elected, I Promise': American Party Platforms," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 11 (August 1967): 318-52; Edward Tufte, *Political Control of the Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

8. Like most classic academic debates, this one has its classic reference: Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964). For a recent review of the literature, see Eric R. A. N. Smith, *The Unchanging American Voter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Without engaging in the endless, and endlessly complex, debate over how to conceptualize and operationalize "ideology," "coherence," "masses," "elites," and other such troublesome concepts, it is possible to conclude that party elites, in most circumstances, are *more* ideological and *more* influential (in the creation and dissemination of that ideology) than are rank-and-file party adherents. It follows that we should be at least as attentive to the ideology of party elites as we have been to the purported ideology of party identifiers.

9. The realignment paradigm has generated countless studies on the ideology of party voters throughout American history. For a recent review of this literature, see Byron

rate those policies and ideals which party leaders *intended*, from those to which they merely assented.

From this perspective, the most useful set of indicators for party ideology are provided by partisan campaign discourse, specifically those platforms, speeches, and “open letters” to the electorate emanating from the major parties (Whigs, Republicans, and Democrats) during presidential races from the onset of party organization in 1828. These texts indicate the views of national party elites and are comparable across time and across parties. Over 1,990 texts—drawn from manuscript collections, newspapers, published speeches, and party publications—were collected and analyzed. A small subset, including party platforms and key speeches, were subjected to extensive content analysis.<sup>10</sup> Although this article draws primarily upon Democratic party texts from the nineteenth century, it is important to stress that conclusions about this party’s ideological moorings were reached within the context of a much larger analysis of Democratic, Whig, and Republican campaign rhetoric over the entire 1828–1992 period.

## II. Slavery

No one doubts the significance of the issue of slavery in the southern wing of the Democratic party, especially during the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction, but it has been difficult to resolve the relationship of this issue both to the national, i.e. presidential, wing of the party and to those decades falling before and after the mid-century crisis. Was slavery—and the broader question of negro civil rights—a passing issue, or of purely sectional importance, or was it a vital part of Democratic party ideology during the nineteenth century? The evidence provided by presidential campaign rhetoric supports the latter view, although in a modified form.

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Shafer, ed., *The End of Realignment?* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). Benjamin Ginsberg conducts a synoptic study of party platforms as a key to changes within party ideology during realignment periods: “Critical Elections and the Substance of Party Conflict: 1844–1968,” *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 16 (November 1972): 603–25. David W. Brady has analyzed ideological changes within congressional parties: *Critical Elections and Congressional Policy Making* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). For a more complete review of the literature, see John Gerring, *The Development of American Party Ideology, 1828–1992*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of California at Berkeley, 1993.

10. For information on the texts, procedures, and coding categories employed in the content analyses, see Gerring, *Development of American Party Ideology*, which also contains a complete list of primary sources consulted.

Neither before, during, nor after the Civil War did the party ever explicitly condone the institution of slavery. Yet, its position was far from ambiguous and was established well before the 1850s. While Whig and early Republican politicians in the north frequently declared their personal abhorrence of slavery, similar sentiments are virtually impossible to discover among Democratic election statements, either in the north or south. Indeed, repeated statements of Democrats to the effect that slavery should be kept off the political agenda constituted a more than implicit defense of the institution. Veiled, and scarcely veiled, references abound in party rhetoric as early as the 1830s.<sup>11</sup> This is hardly surprising, given that in the second year of that decade the first issue of Garrison's *Liberator* appeared and Nat Turner's slave rebellion broke out in Virginia. Two years later, in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded and began pressuring Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Propaganda efforts were taken up by the Democratic party, north and south. The Democratic State Convention *Address to the Republican Electors of the State of New York* supported the recent extension of the franchise in New York, but noted approvingly that it "did not extend to persons of color." "Congress" the *Address* added, "has no right to interfere with the question of slavery in any state of the Union." As for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, it would tend "to produce in the [slaveholding sections of the population] a degree of uneasiness and excitement, which would disturb the feelings of harmony now happily subsisting between the different states of the Union."<sup>12</sup> Stephen Douglas, while not embracing the enslavement of persons of African descent, declared: "in my opinion, this government was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity for ever, and should be administered by white men, and by none other whatsoever."<sup>13</sup>

11. Actions of a more than rhetorical sort were also taken by local party functionaries—as in Charleston when a local postmaster allowed a mob to burn abolitionist literature held within the post office, or in the North, where similar mobs of Democrats were doing their best to forcibly disperse abolitionist meetings. "Almost unanimously, the Jacksonian political coalition sought to defend slavery against abolitionist attack," is the judgment of historian Harry Watson (*Liberty and Power*, p. 203).

12. *Evening Post* [New York] (September 20, 1836).

13. Speech before the Senate, February 29, 1860; rptd. in H. M. Flint, *Life of Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), p. 175. In the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 (for Douglas's Senate seat in Illinois), Douglas remarked: "We here do not believe in the equality of the Negro socially and politically. Our people are white people; our state is a white state, and we mean to preserve the race pure without any mixture with the negro" [qtd. in Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 185].

There was, in short, greater continuity to the national Democratic position on matters of race than historians have generally acknowledged. Douglas's principle slogan during his Illinois Senate contest against Abraham Lincoln (and subsequently during his run for the presidency two years later) was "popular sovereignty," a term that referred to the rights of states to decide political matters, i.e. slavery, by democratic choice rather than by the implicitly undemocratic intervention of the federal government. This same principle, called "local sovereignty" by Lewis Cass, the Democratic standardbearer in 1848, was just another way of expressing the party's traditional stance of "states rights." It had always been critical to select as the party's presidential candidate a northern leader with "safe" views on any matters pertaining to the institution of slavery.<sup>14</sup>

Racial issues, moreover, informed Democratic ideology not only in the Antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction periods, but also throughout the Gilded Age, this time in the form of arguments over "civil rights." The 1892 party platform, for example, focused its ire on the so-called "Force bill," a proposed (but never passed) piece of legislation that provided for the supervision of elections by the federal government in order to ensure the voting rights of African-American voters in the South.<sup>15</sup> Since the issue remained one of how far the federal government would, or could, intervene in southern affairs to protect the rights of Negroes, the terms and tenor of these Gilded Age debates remained remarkably consistent with those of Jacksonian vintage. A comprehensive count of civil rights issues in Democratic platforms, charted in Figure 1, demonstrates the early origins of this theme, its brief upsurge in the 1850s and 1860s, its return to a peripheral position within party rhetoric in the Gilded Age, as well as the stark contrast between the two parties on this congeries of issues.

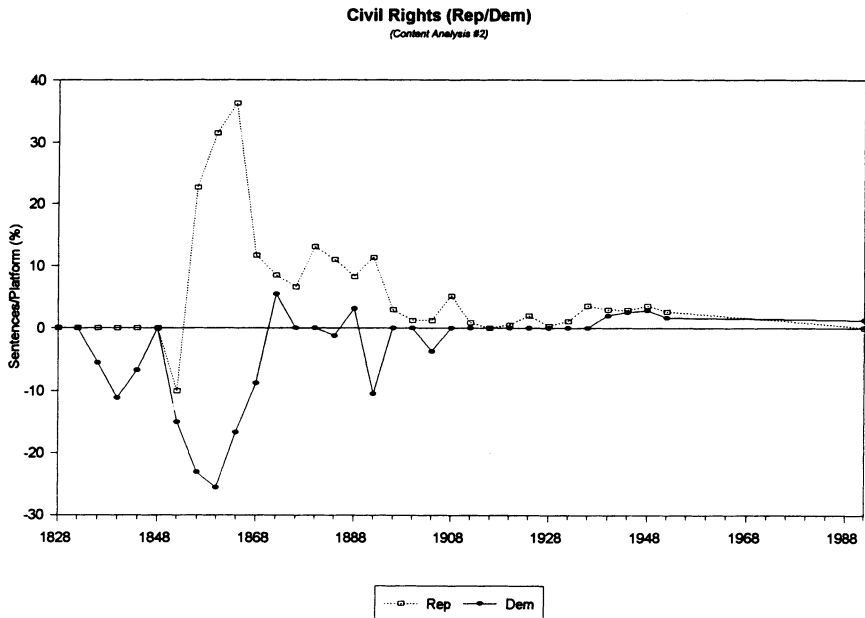
Taking a broader view of the matter, it may be observed that virtually every aspect of the Democratic party's rhetorical and programmatic agenda supported the cause of white supremacy. Its opposition to federal voting rights laws, its all-pervasive antistatism, its constitutional fundamentalism (centered on the Tenth Amendment), its "minoritarian" view of democracy and general distrust of power, its defense of property rights, its praise for the virtues of tolerance and a pluralistic society, its

14. To this end, each non-Southern presidential hopeful was pressured to issue a written statement of his support for states rights. Martin Van Buren, a New Yorker, was the first to undergo this litmus test.

15. 1892 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, pp. 86-87.



Figure 1.



The percentage of sentences within Whig/Republican and Democratic party platforms advocating civil rights or civil liberties for African-Americans *minus* the percentage of sentences opposing same (e.g., “Negro Supremacy,” Abolitionism, and support for states’ rights in such contexts as would obviously impede civil rights). (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

proto-Marxist critique of capitalism, as well as its embrace of the interests of agriculture, all bolstered the legitimacy of the increasingly peculiar institution, and afterwards its replacement by Jim Crow. It is important to note that, even with the bolting of the southern factions during the tumultuous election of 1860 and the subsequent domination of the party by northern Democrats through the Reconstruction era, national party leaders continued to reiterate the themes of a long-established ideological tradition. It is impossible, therefore, to interpret Democratic issue-positions on slavery *simply* as a bow to “sectional” demands. While the issue of slavery rocked the nation for several decades, the party’s position on that question, and on the persisting issue of civil rights for Negroes, hardly varied during the course of the nineteenth century, informing the political perspectives of virtually every Democratic presidential candidate from Jackson to Cleveland.

### III. Government

While one would not want to downplay the norm of white supremacy in Democratic party ideology, it would be equally fallacious to jump to the conclusion that it was the only key to the party's identity during the nineteenth century. Much of the party's programmatic consistency during this period is rightfully attributed to the forceful simplicity of a single perspective: antistatism.

On the famed banking issue that lit up the political sky in the 1830s and 1840s, the party embraced a weak-regulation approach, one that would release industry from the corrupting hand of government. "We trust the day is coming when free trade principles will wholly prevail," wrote one party organ, "when the restraining law will be entirely swept away; and when men will be left to the enjoyment of their natural liberty to follow whatever pursuit their capacity may fit them for, or their inclination select."<sup>16</sup> The bank was denounced throughout the 1830s and 1840s as "unconstitutional, inexpedient, and dangerous to public liberty; and [a] . . . gigantic instrument of corruption."<sup>17</sup> As a substitute to the Federalist/Whig national bank, Democrats proposed something called the Subtreasury, by which banking policy would be put in the hands of a whole series of state banks rather than, as formerly, consolidated in the hands of a single Bank of the United States.

Internal improvements were opposed on the same grounds, from Jackson's famed veto of the Maysville highway construction bill in 1830 to Gilded Age opposition (more muted, to be sure) to Republican schemes to finance railroads, waterways, highways, and harbors. "Every day's experience teaches us . . . that public works of every description can be made at a much smaller cost by private enterprise, or by the local authorities directly interested in the improvement, than when constructed by the Federal Government," said Douglas.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to the preeminent economic issue of the nineteenth century, the tariff, Democrats were ardent opponents of Republican protectionism. "All restraints on the freedom of trade must be swept away," one editorial in the Democratic *Evening Post* read, inferring the natural-

16. Editorial, *Evening Post* [New York] (September 28, 1836).

17. *Address of the National Democratic Party Convention to the People of the United States* (Baltimore, MD: [pamphlet], May 5, 1840), p. 2.

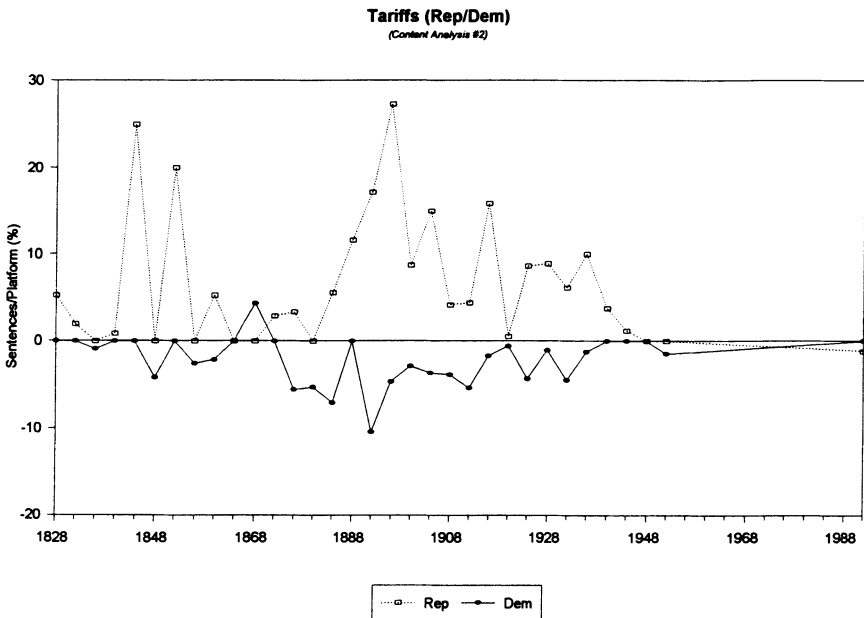
18. *Letter to Governor Matteson*, January 2, 1854, rptd. in Clark E. Carr, *Stephen A. Douglas: His Life, Public Services, Speeches, and Patriotism* (Chicago: A.C. McClure, 1909), p. 241. See also, "Democratick State Convention Address to the Republican Electors of the State of New York," *Evening Post* [New York] (September 20, 1836).

ness of the free trade and the artificiality of tariffs.<sup>19</sup> After the 1830s, when the “free trade” label lost its political shine, the party still doggedly insisted upon tariffs established at minimal levels. The standard Democratic slogan was “tariffs for revenue only,” by which was meant that only that level of surcharges on imported goods should be tolerated which was absolutely necessary to sustain the normal operations of the federal government. Tariffs were rightly viewed as a tax and, as such, to be restricted to the lowest possible levels.<sup>20</sup> A content analysis of party platforms, displayed in Figure 2, reveals that just as Protection, more than any other single issue, defined Republicanism in the late-nineteenth

19. *Evening Post* [New York] (October 28, 1836).

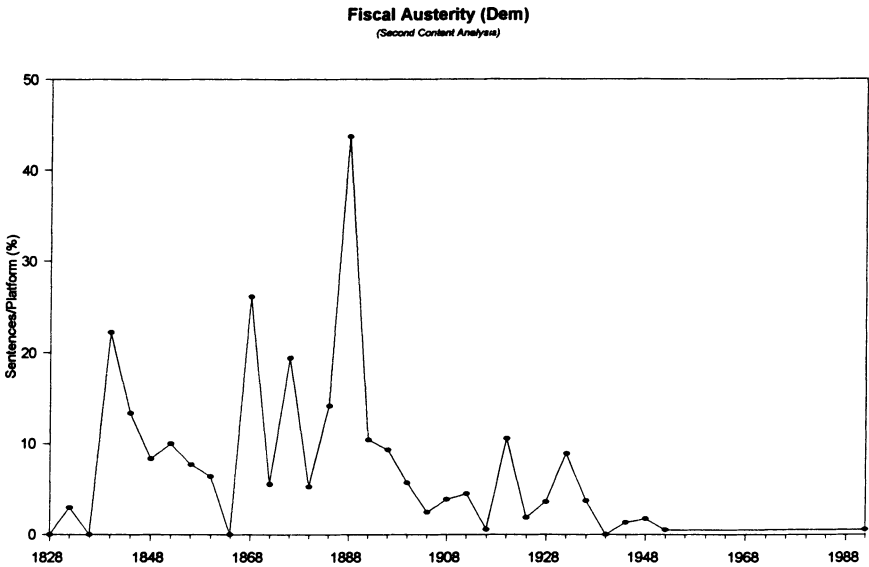
20. Grover Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 8, 1888; rptd. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of American Presidential Elections 1789-1968*, vol. II (New York: Chelsea House, 1971), p. 1685.

Figure 2.



The percentage of sentences within Whig/Republican and Democratic party platforms supporting high Tariffs *minus* the percentage of sentences in opposition to high tariffs. (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

Figure 3.



The percentage of sentences within Democratic party platforms endorsing Fiscal Austerity (e.g. the extinction of the public debt, deficit reduction, lower government spending, or taxing). (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

century, so “tariff reform” defined their opponents. Cleveland attempted to rally the rank-and-file on the eve of the 1892 campaign by referring to the latter as “the shibboleth of true Democracy and the test of loyalty to the people’s cause.”<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy that those Democrats who adopted the cause of a federal income tax in the 1890s did so because they perceived that such an overt tax would be more difficult to collect.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout most of the century, Democratic leaders adopted tight fiscal, currency, and monetary policies: hard currencies (gold and/or silver), balanced budgets, little government borrowing (and quick repayment), low spending, and low tariffs. A comprehensive count of all party

21. Speech given at the Opera House, Providence, RI, April 2, 1892; rptd. in Grover Cleveland, *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland* (New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1909), p. 331.

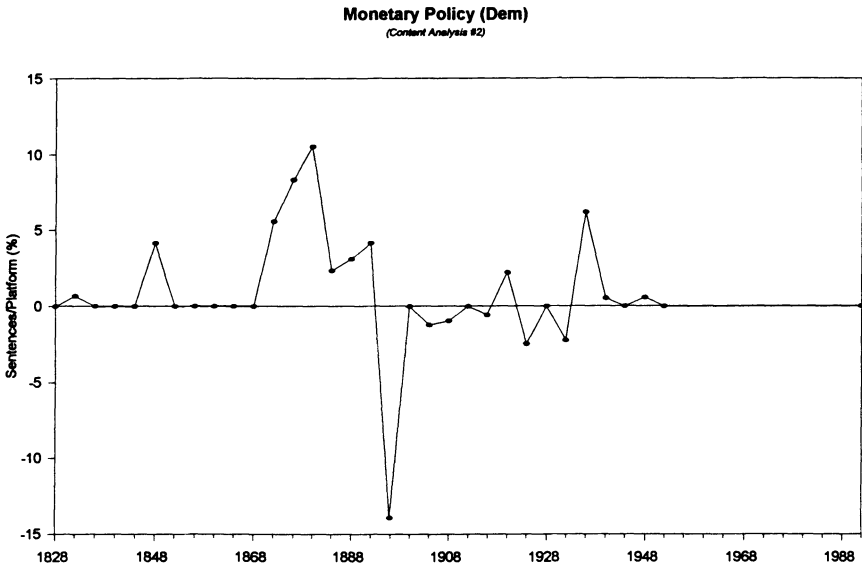
22. Cf. Harold Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

platform statements in support of “fiscal austerity,” displayed in Figure 3, reveals the deep commitment of the nineteenth-century party to this Spartan model of economic management, a commitment that did not loosen perceptibly until the end of the century. Content analysis focused more narrowly on monetary policy confirms this general picture, accentuating the party’s transformation in the 1896 election, as displayed in Figure 4.<sup>23</sup>

Taxes were the subject of a continuous Democratic harangue in the nineteenth century. “When the government, this instrumentality created and maintained by the people to do their bidding,” wrote Cleveland,

23. I should note the fact that monetary policy was not always a partisan issue in the nineteenth century (Whigs and Republicans sometimes echoed the same “tight” policies of Democrats). However, monetary issues separated the nineteenth-century Democrats from their twentieth-century descendants, as the content analysis figures attest, and are, in this sense, an important ingredient of the party’s overall political philosophy.

Figure 4.



The percentage of sentences within Democratic party platforms endorsing a Tight Monetary Policy (e.g. the gold standard, “sound money,” prompt payment of government debts, upholding the public credit), *minus* the percentage of sentences endorsing a loose monetary policy. (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

“turns upon them and, through an utter perversion of its powers, extorts from their labor and capital tribute largely in excess of public necessities, the creature has rebelled against the creator and the masters are robbed by their servants.”<sup>24</sup> In the less restrained prose of a Jacksonian era party press, this sentiment translated into the following soliloquy: “Everything, except the light of heaven and the air we breathe, is burdened with a tax, in some form or other. . . . the vast herd of useless officers to which indirect taxation gives birth, as certainly as carrion breeds maggots in the sun.”<sup>25</sup> The early Democrat anti-tax philosophy went far beyond the pale of Whig and Republican calls for “public economy.” While Republicans also professed an interest in saving money and in keeping “sound” business-like practices, they did not look upon the government as an entity evil by nature. But for the Democrats more than money was at stake. Democrats subscribed to what might be called the original sin theory of government: the state was evil in and of itself, and the most it could do for its citizens was to attempt to restrain its greed. Democratic economic policy consisted of blaming all illnesses on governmental policy. If only tariff schedules could be reduced, and the government ceased its special interest favoritism, the market would be restored to its pristine state of equal competition, and all social classes would thrive once again in a happy state of social harmony. Good actions on the part of government, in the Democratic view of things, occurred only on those occasions when the people rose up and the state was forced to conform to their wishes.

Predictably, Democratic leaders vehemently opposed any enlargement of the federal bureaucracy. Civil service reform, for example, meant not

24. “The continual withdrawal and hoarding by the Government,” Cleveland continued, created a “tendency toward gross and scandalous public extravagance.” A surplus of public moneys had a “demoralizing influence . . . upon the judgments of individuals” (acceptance address, September 8, 1888; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, pp. 1684-86).

25. Editorial, *Evening Post* [New York] (September 21, 1836). The “Address of the Democratic Republican Young Men’s Convention” asserted “The unconstitutionality of any law by which congress shall raise money for distribution” (*Evening Post* [New York], October 5, 1836). Jackson, one year later, wrote: “There is, perhaps, no one of the powers conferred on the Federal government so liable to abuse as the taxing power” (*Farewell Address*; March 4, 1837; rptd. James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* [Washington, DC: Bureau of National Literature, 1897], p. 1518). Cleveland, finally, wrote: “the right of the government to exact tribute from the citizen is limited to its actual necessities, and every cent taken from the people beyond that required for their protection by the government is no better than robbery” (October 26, 1884; rptd. Cleveland, *Letters and Address*, p. 56).

the strengthening of the civil service so much as its streamlining, and its removal from partisan politics. From Jackson to Cleveland, Democrats opposed any scheme of governmental distribution based on the principle of need, and in the latter part of the nineteenth century they spent a good deal of their political capital fighting the expansion of Union Army pensions, which the Republicans were apt to distribute to anyone who could demonstrate sufficient political pull. Cleveland, the only Democrat to inhabit the White House from 1860 to 1912, argued tirelessly against the idea, “largely prevailing among the people that the General Government is the fountain of individual and private aid; that it may be expected to relieve with paternal care the distress of citizens and communities, and that from the fullness of its Treasury it should, upon the slightest possible pretext of promoting the general good, apply public funds to the benefit of localities and individuals.” Cleveland professed outrage at the discovery that “gratuities in the form of pensions are granted upon no other real ground than the needy condition of the applicant.”<sup>26</sup> To be sure, the party opposed any federal interference in the affairs of the several states—whether pertaining to slavery, civil rights, morality, or other legislation—and strenuously upheld rights of individual liberty against the perceived threat of governmental despotism. Even internal improvements (canals, dams, roads, harbors, bridges) were often opposed on the grounds that such matters were best left to the states.

Democratic economic policy in the nineteenth century is impossible to understand without reference to the party’s virulent opposition to the federal government. No other single issue was repeated so adamantly or so persistently as limited government, whether expressed as the opposition of republic and monarchy, states rights, home rule, or popular sovereignty for those *within* single states. These were the party’s mating calls from Jackson to Cleveland.

Much of the argument over the size and shape of government was carried on in the special dialect of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century constitutionalism. Democrats held to the “compact” theory of constitutional origins, i.e. the federal government derived its authority from the constituent states, not the people at-large. As one 1828 manifesto made clear: “The states were left, as distinct sovereignties, not merely for the purpose of securing a better administration of our domestic concerns, but as an additional precaution against the growth of an absolute govern-

26. Fourth Annual Address, December 3, 1888; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, p. 5362.

ment.”<sup>27</sup> Limited government referred not simply to the reserved power of the states, but also to the division of power within the central government. The 1880 party platform reaffirmed the party’s now-traditional opposition to “centralization and to that dangerous spirit of encroachment which tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create whatever be the form of government, a real despotism.”<sup>28</sup>

Nineteenth-century Democrats exhibited a quasi-religious reverence for the words of the Constitution and took a fundamentalist approach to its interpretation. “Upon this country more than any other,” declared Andrew Jackson, in a style that managed to be both plain and regal at once, “has . . . been cast the special guardianship of the great principle of adherence to written constitutions. . . . It is our duty to preserve for it the character intended by its framers.”<sup>29</sup> Constitutionalist themes were prevalent throughout the century, as Figure 5 demonstrates. The eighteenth-century Federalist/Antifederalist debate endlessly repeated itself, with Democrats fulminating against “liberal or latitudinarian construction,” and the “doctrine of expediency and general welfare.”<sup>30</sup>

This raises a central problem in early Democratic party history: namely, how are we to differentiate the party’s stance toward the federal government from its stance toward state and municipal governments, where extensive economic regulation, as well as social policies, were commonly

27. “Address to the Republican Electors of the State of New York from the New York Republican State Convention,” September 29, 1828 (*Evening Post* [New York], September 30, 1828).

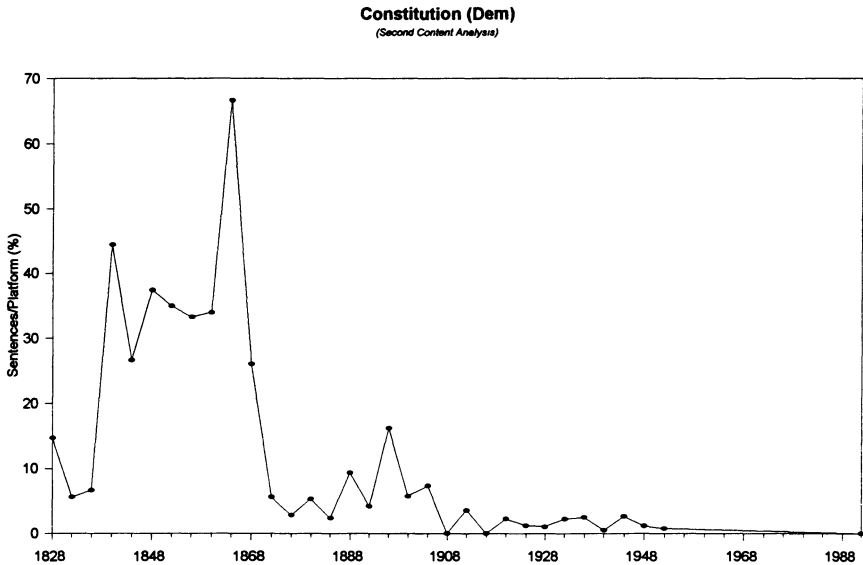
28. Donald Bruce Johnson, ed., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1956* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 56. See also Horatio Seymour, acceptance letter, August 4, 1868; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, pp. 1282-84. The one notable exception to this generalization could be found in the first decade of Whig rhetoric, when the party responded to the threat of “King Andrew” with a spirited defense of the separation of powers as a check on ambition in the executive branch.

29. First Annual Message, December 8, 1829, rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, p. 1015.

30. “Statement by the Democratic Republicans of the United States,” July 31, 1835, rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. I, pp. 624, 629. A host of specific issues were opposed on constitutional grounds. Van Buren’s main objection to the Bank, for example, was limited to the objection that “the Constitution does not give congress the power to erect corporations within the States.” Open letter to John B. Cary and others of Elizabeth City County, VA, July 31, 1840 (New Era Publishers, 1840), p. 3. See also “Address of the National Democratic Party Convention to the People of the United States” (May 5, 1840), p. 5; and Grover Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message, December 3, 1888, rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, p. 5358.



Figure 5.

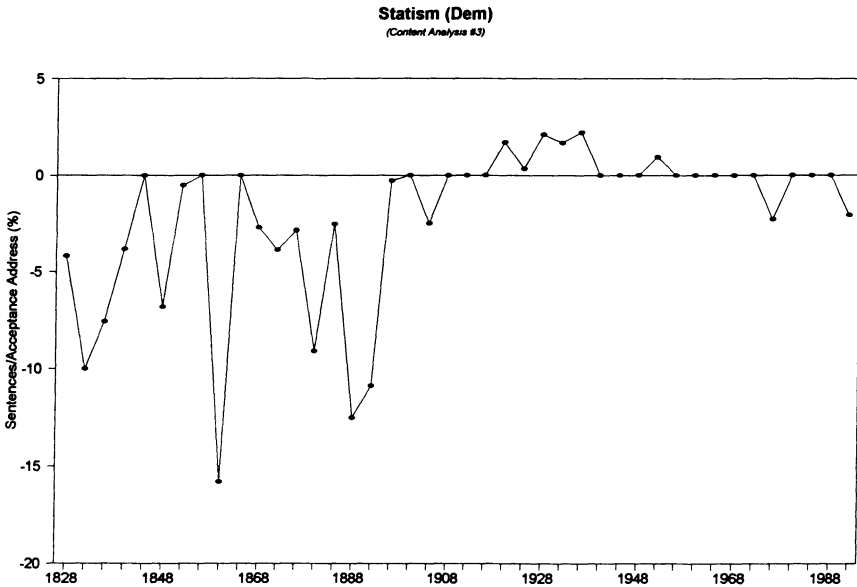


The percentage of sentences within Democratic party platforms endorsing the Constitution. (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

administered by Democratic regimes?<sup>31</sup> First, one must appreciate the profound gulf that nineteenth-century Democrats perceived between the distant federal government and the nearby state and local governments. While the latter lay directly under popular control, the government at Washington was too large, too removed, and too heterogeneous to be trusted with such important tasks. Democrats, secondly, perceived economic and social policies as pertaining to local groups, local businesses, and local problems. No single set of initiatives crafted in Washington could hope to address such a wide range of human needs and cultural demands. Most importantly, by entrusting such *household* matters to a distant federal source, the states would be granting authority beyond

31. See Frank Bourgin, *The Great Challenge: The Myth of Laissez-Faire in the Early Republic* (New York: George Braziller, 1989); Oscar Handlin and Mary Flug Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861* (New York: New York University Press, 1947); Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).

Figure 6.



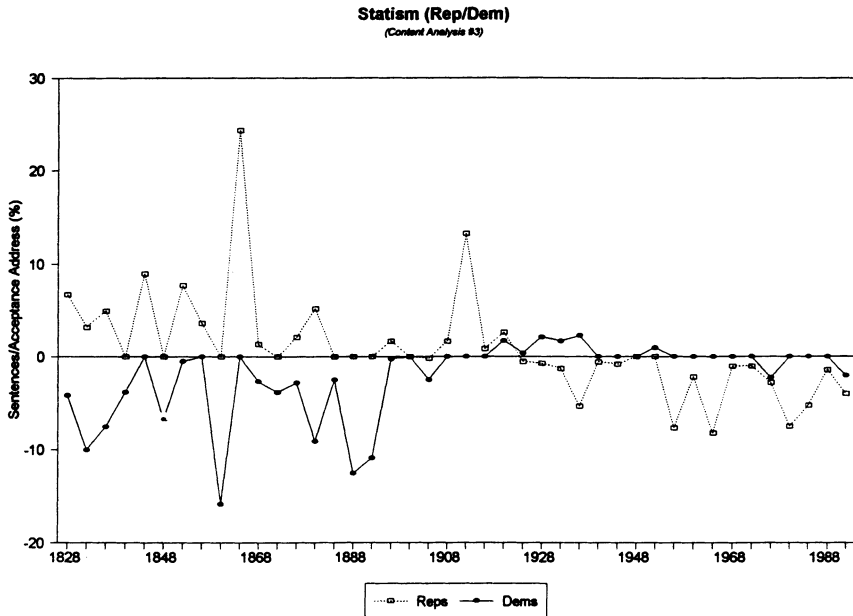
The percentage of sentences within Democratic nomination acceptance addresses expressing Statist tendencies (the supremacy of the law, the virtues of the established authorities as brakes on popular passions, norms of social deference, the duties and responsibilities of the people vis-à-vis the government or society at large, strong and active government, government ownership, loose construction of the Constitution, the supremacy of the Federal Government vis-à-vis the states and localities) *minus* the percentage of sentences in those texts critical of Statism.

their power to control. For all these reasons, many of which echoed the arguments of the original opponents of the U.S. Constitution, one must differentiate Democratic attitudes toward the federal government from the party's attitudes toward state and local government.

In the former case, Democratic attitudes were so austere as to approximate the ideal of a "Nightwatchman State." Party leaders were opposed not only to high taxation, but also to the distribution of federal funds to the states (gained by selling public lands, tariff duties, or direct taxation), since this would put ultimate control in the hands of federal politicians.<sup>32</sup>

32. "Democratick State Convention Address to the Republican Electors of the State of New York," September, 1836 (*Evening Post* [New York] September 20, 1836).

Figure 7.



The percentage of sentences within Whig/Republican and Democratic nomination acceptance addresses expressing Statist tendencies *minus* the percentage of sentences in those texts critical of Statism.

Cleveland envisioned “a wise and frugal government which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.” This, Cleveland insisted, was “the sum of good government.”<sup>33</sup> If only, party leaders complained, the government would uphold virtue in its own sphere, rather than corrupting the populace with its vain and meretricious expenditures. In contrast to the reverence accorded the government in Whig and Republican campaign orations, Democrats insisted that the federal government was an instrumentality, “maintained by the people to do their bidding.”<sup>34</sup> “Though the people support the government,” Cleve-

33. Speech before the Democratic Club, New York, April 27, 1889; rptd. *The Writings and Speeches of Grover Cleveland*, ed. George F. Parker (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1892), p. 247.

34. Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 8, 1888, rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, p. 1684.

land said, “the government should not support the people.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, a comprehensive count of statist and non-statist themes in Democratic acceptance speeches, displayed in Figure 6, reveals the party’s overwhelming opposition to federal activism in all its guises. This was in marked contrast to Whig and Republican rhetoric during the period, which, as Figure 7 shows, was cautiously supportive of the expanding role of government.

It should be stressed that Democratic alarm over federal power was not simply a response to the threat of Whig or Republican party control. Democratic opposition to energetic and consolidated power was principled, extending even to periods when that party exercised hegemony in Washington. Democrats, briefly put, were naysayers on every significant economic and social policy of the day. The proper role of the national government, reiterated generations of Democratic orators, was simply to protect private property. “The protection of the people in the exclusive use and enjoyment of their property and earnings concededly constitutes the special purpose and mission of our free Government.”<sup>36</sup>

#### IV. Marketplace

Not surprisingly, the nineteenth-century Democrats have often been described as a party of *liberalism*. Yet, despite their attachment to an antistatist philosophy of government, to the protection of private property, and to individual liberties, Democratic leaders also gave voice to some remarkably *unliberal* ideas and ideals. One of the many curiosities posed by early Democratic history is that while apparently supporting a *laissez faire* vision of economic policy, the party was on many occasions quite hostile to the signposts of economic progress. Monopoly was a pro forma target of Democratic rhetoric from Jackson to Cleveland. The “despotic sway” of the National Bank, Jackson’s *bete noire*, was described as a “great monopoly,” that concentrated “the whole moneyed power of the Union, with its boundless means of corruption and its numerous dependents, under the direction and command of one acknowledged head.”<sup>37</sup> Contrary to most historical accounts, the anti-

35. Qtd. Charles Henning, *The Wit and Wisdom of Politics* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Press, 1989), p. 91.

36. Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 26, 1892; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, p. 1765.

37. *Farewell Address*, rptd. Blau, *Social Theories*, p. 15.

monopoly theme did not entirely disappear from Democratic party rhetoric after the 1830s. In 1888, with reference to its support of homestead legislation, the party boasted having “reclaimed from corporations and syndicates, alien and domestic, and restored to the people, nearly one hundred millions of acres of valuable land.”<sup>38</sup>

We should also note that although occasional mention of a “let alone” policy could be found in the party’s election rhetoric from the 1830s, Democratic politicians by and large avoided such an explicit avowal of free market faith. Nor, after the 1830s, were they enamored of the free trade level that Whigs and Republicans were fond of pinning on the tail of the donkey.<sup>39</sup> In short, the Democrats’ de facto *laissez faire* policy should not be interpreted as an embrace of free market capitalism or, more generally, of a classic, nineteenth-century liberal faith. The animating ideal of the Jacksonian Democrats was not that the market was so wonderful, but rather that the state was so bad. Democratic economic philosophy, while it followed some of the Manchester or Bentham/Mill liberalism, is more correctly viewed as the product of antistatism and of the older ideology of *civic republicanism*.

Civic republicanism, like its arch-rival *liberalism*, is an abstract and ever-shifting concept.<sup>40</sup> We can best gain a sense of this term, and the mountains of historical work it has generated in the past several decades, by aggregating all those traits and ideals that have been commonly applied to it: virtue, liberty, frugality, fraternity, community, citizenship, active participation in and responsibility for the commonweal (understood as part of the concept of patriotism), popular sovereignty (not to be confused with democracy), balance, order, an agrarian way of life, individual autonomy, the rights of property (on a small scale, and referring to land, rather than capital goods), a millennial vision of a regenerated society, self-sacrifice, a backward-looking view of time (in particular, the jeremiad), a suspicion of power, and a fear of the corrup-

38. 1888 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, p. 77.

39. Cleveland declared: “The question of free trade is absolutely irrelevant, and the persistent claim made in certain quarters that all the efforts to relieve the people from unjust and unnecessary taxation are schemes of so-called free traders is mischievous and far removed from any consideration for the public good” (Third Annual Message, December 6, 1887, rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, vol. XI, p. 5175).

40. In fact, historians have only recently agreed to adopt a common name for the political culture. Virtually synonymous with what I have called *civic republicanism* are the terms *civic virtue*, *civic humanism*, *Country*, *Commonwealth*, *neo-Whig*, and simply, *republicanism*. The latter word now seems to rule the terminological roost. I have used its older version (*civic republicanism*) in order to differentiate this ideology from that of the Republican party.

tion of the republic into some form of tyranny.<sup>41</sup> As we shall observe in the following pages, *all* of these descriptives might be profitably applied to the nineteenth-century Democratic party, though some are more apropos than others.

Indeed, the terms that used to be applied to the Populists and the early twentieth-century Democratic party—that they comprised a backward-looking class of anti-industrial Jeffersonians—could with much greater accuracy be applied to the *nineteenth-century* Democratic party. “What has been the financial history of this country for the last twenty-five years?” James Buchanan asked, in an election sermon notable for its anticapitalist bile:

It has been a history of constant vibration—of extravagant expansions in the business of the country, succeeded by ruinous contractions. At successive intervals many of the best and most enterprising men of the country have been crushed. They have fallen victims at the shrine of the insatiate and insatiable spirit of extravagant banking and speculation. . . . What effect has [a] bloated system of credit produced upon the morals of the country? In the large commercial cities it has converted almost all men of business into gamblers. Where is there now to be found the old-fashioned importing merchant, whose word was as good as his bond, and who was content to grow rich, as our fathers did by the successive and regular profits of many years of patient industry? . . . All now desire to grow rich rapidly. . . . If the speculator should prove successful, and win the golden prize, no matter by what means he may have acquired his wealth, this clothes him with honor and glory. Money, money, money, confers the highest distinction in society. The republican simplicity and virtue of a Macon would be subjects of ridicule in Wall street or Chestnut street. The highest talents,

41. This constellation of traits is drawn from discussions of the subject in Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), and *The Origins of American Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), and “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (Summer 1972): 119-34; Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History*, 79 (June 1992): 11-38; Robert E. Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 29 (January 1972): 49-80.

directed by the purest patriotism, moral worth, literary and professional fame, in short, every quality which ought to confer distinction in society, sink into insignificance when compared with wealth. Money is equivalent to a title of nobility in our larger commercial cities. This is the effect of our credit system. We have widely departed from the economical habits and simple virtues of our forefathers. These are the only sure foundations upon which our republican institutions can rest. The desire to make an ostentatious display of rapidly acquired wealth, has produced a splendor and boundless expense unknown in former times. There is now more extravagance in our large commercial cities, than exists in any portion of the world which I have ever seen except among the wealthy nobility of England. Thank Heaven, this extravagance has but partially reached the mountains and valleys of the interior. . . . Our system of banking is the very worst, and the most irresponsible that has ever existed on the face of the earth. The charters of these banks nowhere impose any efficient restraints upon the first instinct of their nature, which is to make as much money for their stockholders as possible.<sup>42</sup>

Such diatribes against speculation, mammon, gambling, and other figurative allusions to marketplace activity were not at all unusual in Democratic rhetoric—particularly when the economy was performing poorly.<sup>43</sup>

Economic tidings, for good or ill, were interpreted as the product of virtuous or unvirtuous behavior. Any deviation from “sound” economic principles—particularly in the form of stock speculation or economic concentration—was bound to result, sooner or later, in economic collapse. The cycle of sin, suffering, and expiation was endlessly repeated. As a result, when the panic of 1893 set in, Cleveland held firm, refusing to increase the supply of money or to extend government spending.<sup>44</sup>

Although Democratic orators were not so unwise as to deprecate

42. Speech before the Senate, January 22, 1840; rptd. James Buchanan, *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising his Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1908), pp. 5-8.

43. Buchanan spoke in the immediate wake of the first serious nationwide economic downturn in the country's history, the Panic of 1837. See also editorial, *Evening Post* [New York] (September 14, 1836) and “Address of the National Democratic Party Convention to the People of the United States” (Baltimore: May 5, 1840), p. 4.

44. Democratic economic philosophy stuck as close to common wisdom as possible, as revealed by Tilden's declaration: “I would give all the legerdmain of finance and financiering, I would give the whole of it for the old, homely maxim: ‘Live within your income.’ ” Political speech, Chatham, New York, September 24, 1868, rptd. *The Writings and Speeches of Samuel J. Tilden* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1885), p. 437.

industrial enterprises openly, it was clear where their sympathies lay. An editorial in the *Evening Post* expressed fear that Whig-sponsored legislation would confer “vested rights” on manufacturers.<sup>45</sup> The anti-industrial leanings of the party came into the open during the heat of the 1850s, when the party came increasingly under attack from abolitionists. The northern system of free labor, charged Douglas, was nothing more than “white slavery,” since it deprived the workingman of the true value of his labor. This proto-Marxist critique of the northern industrial economy, not uncommon for Democratic orators at mid-century, was drawn directly from Jacksonian rhetoric.<sup>46</sup>

While the Whigs and Republicans were mercilessly portrayed as parties of mammon, the Democratic party was seen as the protector of the common people; while the Republicans cast themselves as harbingers of limitless industrial growth, Democrats were wont to emphasize the difficulties inherent in such a project. In the midst of the 1848 campaign, one of the party’s broadsheets proclaimed, “We must count upon a host of presses . . . upon the streams of money, contributed by the rich merchants and the greedy manufacturing capitalists, being poured out against us.”<sup>47</sup>

As the foregoing quotations indicate, the economic philosophy of the early Democratic party is perhaps more accurately encapsulated in the terms *agrarianism*, *producerism*, or, as I have chosen, *civic republicanism*, than in liberalism. It was not the marketplace that nineteenth-century Democrats sought to protect, since they did not have a well-developed understanding of that mechanism. The despised term, *laissez faire*, as I have indicated, was entirely absent from Democratic discourse, and its correlate, free trade, beat a hasty retreat by the end of the 1830s. The party’s concern was for the protection of civil society, and the individuals therein. Democrats inhabited a moral economic universe in which hard work was, under normal market conditions, assumed to pay off in roughly equal quantities of money. The Marxist overtones of Jacksonian rhetoric flowed in part from the common assumption that money should derive its value more or less directly from labor hours, and that insofar as money became a value in and of itself (separate, that is, from its labor value), it was corrupt speculation. Andrew Jackson’s *Fare-*

45. *Evening Post* [New York] (October 28, 1836).

46. Andrew Johnson, speech before the State Democratic Convention, January 8, 1856; rptd. Johnson, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. II (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), p. 355.

47. *The Campaign* (June 21, 1848), p. 56.



*well Address* formulated the classic statement of what I shall call a civic republican economy:

The planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer all know that their success depends upon their own industry and economy and that they must not expect to become suddenly rich by the fruits of their toil. Yet these classes of society form the great body of the people of the United States; they are the bone and sinew of the country; men who love liberty and desire nothing but equal rights and equal laws and who, moreover, hold the great mass of our national wealth, although it is distributed in moderate amounts among the millions of freemen who possess it.<sup>48</sup>

Labor may be considered one of the touchstones of Jacksonian economic thinking, the connecting thread between the party's yeoman ideal of the independent producer, its family-farm (traditional agrarian) economic model, its distrust of the parasitic state, of paper money, of all speculative schemes, and of large concentrations of capital—all of which were thought to rob the virtuous laborer of his just rewards.

Far from championing the advances of the bourgeoisie, Jacksonian Democrats distrusted currencies, banks, monopolies, tariffs, and virtually all other trappings of capitalist civilization. Within this context, the party's insistent defense of property rights is properly viewed as a defense of the rights of smallholders. Property required labor, since land would otherwise be unproductive, and also ensured individual autonomy. Van Buren, for instance, imagined that Native Americans could be "induced to labor and to acquire property, and [that] its acquisition will inspire them with a feeling of independence."<sup>49</sup>

Following Jefferson and Jackson, the example of the yeoman farmer loomed large in Democratic discourse. Samuel Tilden, in 1868, testified that "it was in the simple habits, moderate tastes, and honest purposes of the rural community that I was accustomed in my youth. . . . It is from [the farmers] that we must largely hope for whatever of future is reserved to our country."<sup>50</sup> Democrats throughout the century stood resolutely

48. From Jackson (*Farewell Address*, rptd. Blau, *Social Theories*, p. 17).

49. First Annual Message, December 5, 1837; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, p. 1609.

50. Speech, September 24, 1868; rptd. *The Writings and Speeches of Samuel J. Tilden*, p. 423. Cass, in 1852, envisioned "the glorious light of a community, stretching along our vast inland frontier, each family keeping its own land, and every one with elements of prosperity within their reach. . . . what is more glorious for us, or more useful to the republican institutions of the world, than such a distribution of the public domain of this country" (speech given at Tammany Hall, September 2, 1852; rptd. *Evening Post Documents—No. 10, Speeches Delivered at Tammany Hall* . . . (New York: *Evening Post*, 1952), p. 3).

for an agrarian set of economic policies: cheap land, low taxes, minimal tariffs, stable and affordable currency, westward expansion on the American continent (but not overseas), noninterference with slave labor (understood as necessary in the growing of tobacco and cotton).<sup>51</sup>

But the civic republican economy was meant to encompass not simply farmers—its original inspiration—but also urban artisans, as represented by the figure of *the mechanic* in Jackson's Farewell Address. Economic and political wellbeing (for the two were inseparable) were the product of "industry, morality, intelligence and republican habits."<sup>52</sup> It was these virtuous habits, and the smallness and independence of their proto-industrial operations, that bestowed virtue upon urban artisans.

## V. Politics

Contrary to those who have interpreted Jacksonian ideology as organized around the central principle of *equality*, this ideal actually had a rather limited range of application within Democratic ideology.<sup>53</sup> Egalitarian themes are virtually absent from party rhetoric before the advent of William Jennings Bryan, as Figure 8 attests. Moreover, when used, equality was applied primarily within a political, rather than social or economic, context. Government, said Jackson, echoing Jefferson, should "measure out equal justice to the high and the low, the rich and the poor."<sup>54</sup> There was no condemnation of riches in this remark, simply an insistence upon the right to procedural justice.

At a more basic level, the concerns of the Jacksonian Democratic party were preeminently *political*, not economic. The occasional panic was duly registered in party rhetoric, but Democrats were simply not as oriented to monetary and financial concerns as their Whig and Republican opponents, hence their rather lackadaisical approach to economic theory. Civic republicanism was an ideology whose primary concern was with the vices and virtues of government, and a substantial proportion of nineteenth-century party rhetoric concerned observations—often of a highly theoretical sort—on the rightful purposes of government, the construction of government, and so forth, as Figure 9 demonstrates.

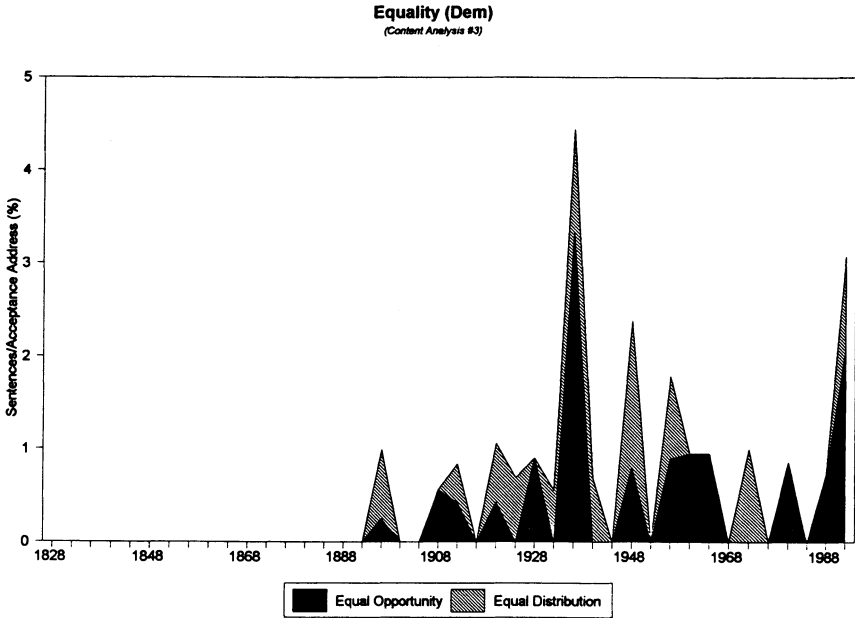
51. See Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), p. 114.

52. Van Buren, open letter to North Carolina constituents, March 6, 1836; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, p. 605.

53. E.g. Ashworth, 'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats,' p. 7.

54. Veto Message, September 10, 1832; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, vol. II, pp. 1142-44. See also, Grover Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 26, 1892; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, p. 1766.

Figure 8.

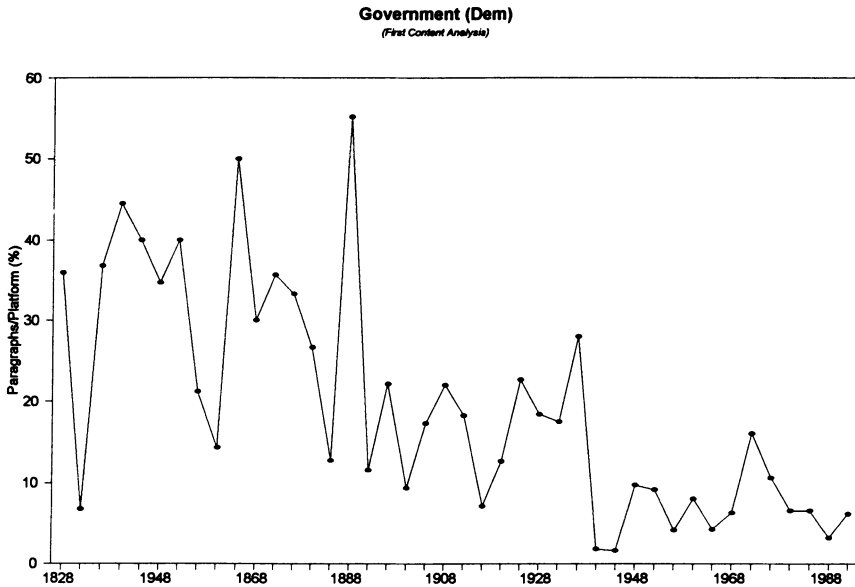


The percentage of sentences within Democratic nomination acceptance addresses devoted to (a) Equal Opportunity (and the general accessibility of material well-being), and (b) Equal Distribution of wealth (e.g., progressive taxation).

Democrats were also much more anxious about the health of the republic than about the health of the economy or the equality of its citizens. They assumed that a basic level of social equality would result if the state were modest in stature and virtuous in performance. But this was not the animating purpose behind the party's national ideology, which was oriented toward the *prevention* of tyranny rather than the *achievement* of anything in particular. Here we arrive at one of the most consistent themes of nineteenth-century Democratic oratory. The National Convention of 1840 worried that "our Republican institutions, though they might preserve their form, would not long retain their purity, their simplicity, or their strength."<sup>55</sup> The "great moneyed institution" was a threat to the survival of republican government, and it was on these

55. Address of the National Democratic Party Convention to the People of the United States," [pamphlet], (May 5, 1840), p. 11.

Figure 9.



The percentage of paragraphs within Democratic party platforms devoted to Government (election laws, constitutional issues, the rights of citizens vis-à-vis the state, civil service, corruption, patronage, gross levels of taxing, spending).

grounds primarily that it was attacked. The danger was spelled out in more explicit form by General Jackson himself. The Bank, he argued, was unjust because of the “great evils to our country and its institutions [that] might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people.”<sup>56</sup> In truth, the party’s attacks against predatory monopolies were motivated more by worries about political corruption than by any concern for the inequality such aggregations of wealth might produce within civil society.

In the storybook view of Jacksonianism, a view which retains support among many historians today, the early Democratic party is defined not only as liberal, but also by the ideal of *democracy*, with Jackson the original fount of a long tradition of *American populism*.<sup>57</sup> While in some

56. Veto Message, July 10, 1832; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, pp. 1142-44.

57. For the democracy/populism view, see Richard Hofstadter, *Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The*

sense true, neither of these latter two labels fits the party very exactly. What party leaders understood by democracy is today—given the changes of usage in the past century and a half—difficult to reproduce with this term.

Party “pols” did speak ecstatically of “the people,” “the republic,” and variously of “popular sovereignty.” The party’s first official national platform made the following declarations:

That the will of the people is the only legitimate source of power. That all power thus derived, is a trust to be exercised only for the public good. That agents so entrusted with its exercise are responsible to the people for the performance of their duties. That this responsibility should be as direct and immediate as possible.<sup>58</sup>

First, we should note the ritual affirmation of popular government. Democratic politicians were exceedingly fond of presenting issues as a contest between the People and some infamous element of tyranny (in the 1830s, it was the Bank). Second, note the direct and immediate relationship that was supposed to characterize the roles of lay citizen and elected citizen. While Whigs and Republicans viewed representatives as *trustees*, Democrats insisted upon an unmediated *delegatory* relationship. Antifederalist principles of frequent rotation in office, of amateur rather than professional representatives, and of direct popular rule found their home in the Democratic party. Even in the Gilded age, when such ideals are commonly assumed to have fallen by the wayside, Democratic orators often bemoaned the distance that separated the people from the office-holders.

The party’s rejection of federal consolidation, I have argued, was not simply a knee-jerk rejection of government and defense of slavery, but also an impassioned defense of an older concept of democracy. More than *popular* rule, Democrats were concerned with *virtuous* rule and with the maintenance of the republic as it stood in 1776 or 1800. While fears for the demise of the republic have been much remarked upon during the 1830s, it is noteworthy that this ancient political rhetoric survived through the late-nineteenth century in Democratic party election pro-

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*Age of Jackson* (New York: Book Find Club, 1945). While democracy and populism are, of course, not synonymous, they both build upon the central principles of popular sovereignty and the assumption of majority rule.

58. “Address of the National Democratic Party Convention to the People of the United States,” [pamphlet], (May 5, 1840), p. 1.

nouncements.<sup>59</sup> In 1880, for example, vice-presidential candidate William H. English warned, “The constant encroachments which have been made by that [Republican] party upon the clearly reserved rights of the people and the states will, if not checked, subvert the liberties of the people and the government of limited powers created by the fathers, and end in a great consolidated central government—strong, indeed, for evil—and the overthrow of republican institutions.”<sup>60</sup>

The danger posed by the military was particularly great, for as Buchanan reminded his audience: “The history of all ruined republics . . . teaches us this great lesson. From Caesar to Cromwell, and from Cromwell to Napoleon, this history presents the same solemn warning,—beware of elevating to the highest civil trust the commander of your victorious armies.”<sup>61</sup> The fragility of the republic, and hence the necessity of continued vigilance on the part of its citizens, was the common assumption. The English Revolution—or, more accurately, the Whig version of the English Revolution—was thus re-lived several centuries later (and an ocean away, with no apparent monarch in sight) in the hands of Democratic speechwriters. Platform resolutions urged, “that the usurpations of Congress and the despotism of the sword may cease,”<sup>62</sup> and warned against, “a self-perpetuating oligarchy of office-hands of Democratic speechwriters. Platform resolutions urged “that the usurpations of Congress and the despotism of the sword may cease,”<sup>62</sup> and warned against “a self-perpetuating oligarchy of office-

It was in the nature of power to insinuate itself into the hearts and minds of those it sought to direct. Thus, despite the apparent disappearance of overt repression, e.g. the Alien and Sedition Acts, Van Buren warned, “the spirit of encroachment has . . . become more wary, but it is not a bit more honest. Heretofore the system was coercion, now it is seduction. Heretofore unconstitutional powers were exercised to force submission, now they are assumed to purchase golden opinions from the

59. See Simeon Hubbard, *An Address to the Citizens of Connecticut* (Norwich, CT: L.H. Young, 1828); Address to the Republican Electors of the State of New York from the New York Republican State Convention (*Evening Post* [New York], September 30, 1828); Van Buren, speech before the Senate, 1827, rptd. *Opinions of Martin Van Buren, vice president of the United States upon the Powers and Duties of Congress* (Washington, DC: Blair and Rives, 1836), p. 21.

60. Letter of acceptance, July 30, 1880; rptd. in National Democratic Committee, *The Campaign Text Book* (New York: National Democratic Committee, 1880), p. 7.

61. James Buchanan, speech in October 7, 1852, at Greensburg, PA; rptd. *Works of James Buchanan*, vol. IV, p. 464.

62. 1868 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, p. 38.

63. 1892 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, p. 86.

people with their own means.”<sup>64</sup> The well-worn opposition of the people and the interests, virtue and corruption, liberty and power, disinterestedness and ambition was replayed in Democratic speeches in the course of virtually every nineteenth-century election.

Use of the term “democracy” also confuses the ideology of that party insofar as it implies a devotion to *majority* rule. How are we to square this with the party’s insistence on a governmental apparatus that was constitutionally handicapped? This has been a difficult feature for contemporary writers to digest, lending the party a conflict-ridden or non-ideological air.

As I have suggested, Democrats were much more comfortable with the principle of democratic responsiveness when this operated at a state or local level. Secondly, Democrats conceived of a zero-sum political universe in which the power of government was achieved at the expense of the rights of the people. The majority rule versus limited government contradiction, which has so exercised the modern era, was simply not understood by nineteenth-century Democrats, who could not foresee any circumstances in which rightminded citizens would wish to grant their own privileges to the keeping of a national government. The Democratic sentiment, according to Van Buren:

has its origin in a jealousy of power, justified by all human experience. It is founded on the assumption that the disposition of man to abuse delegated authority is inherent and incorrigible; it therefore seeks its only security in the limitation and distribution of those trusts which the very existence of government requires to be reposed somewhere. Here the aversion of its supporters to grant more power than is indispensably necessary for the objects of society; and their desire, as an additional safeguard, to place that which is conferred in as many hands as is consistent with efficiency.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the constitutional restrictions that Democrats lauded were intended to hem in the powers of government, not the powers of the people. Elections were viewed as an occasion for the people to rise up to smite the giant, else his rule deprive them of their most sacred liberties. Democracy was to serve as “the sheet anchor of [the people’s] liber-

64. Speech before the Senate, 1827; rptd. Van Buren, *Opinions of Martin Van Buren*, p. 24.

65. Speech before the Senate, 1827; rptd. *Opinions of Martin Van Buren*, p. 19.

ties,”<sup>66</sup> against any “consolidation of unchecked, despotic power, exercised by *majorities* of the legislative branch.”<sup>67</sup>

Left implicit was the notion that a virtuous exercise of the franchise would be moderate and restrained. A sentimentalized version of the drama of self-government was served up by party rhetors, one bound up in the patriotic duty of the citizen and glorious Old Republican tradition. Cleveland’s peroration is typical of Democratic views on this score: “With firm faith in the intelligence and patriotism of our countrymen, and relying upon the conviction that misrepresentation will not influence them, prejudice will not cloud their understanding, and that menace will not intimidate them, let us urge the people’s interest and public duty for the vindication of our attempt to inaugurate a righteous and beneficent reform.”<sup>68</sup> Here it is the “people’s interest and public duty” that is called upon, rather than simply “the people demand”—a trope used with great regularity *after* Bryan’s arrival. Cleveland and other Democratic orators of a time spoke as leaders unto the people, their charges. “We have undertaken,” states Cleveland quite revealingly, “to teach the voters.”<sup>69</sup> Government was a simple matter of following strict republican principle, matters about which there could be little doubt. Politics was seen as a duty—“a patriotic performance of the duties of citizenship”—not a field of creative endeavor.<sup>70</sup>

Although champions of the people, Democratic candidates represented their constituencies in an aloof, Olympian manner. Again, the concept of democracy (or of populism) is misplaced. Political leaders were expected to rise from the common people, but, at the same time, to embody *uncommon* virtue. The curiously distant quality of Democratic leaders was a stance intended to indicate their disinterestedness—and hence, their capacity for independent and virtuous judgment. This Sir Galahad, imbued with self-restraint, modesty, and forbearance, would thus remain one of the people while inhabiting—for a limited time—the most exalted position of the republic. The magic of Democratic candidates like Andrew Jackson and, in a more mundane fashion, Grover Cleveland, was that they managed to capture the simplicity, as well as the

66. Address of the Democratic National Convention (May 5, 1840), p. 9.

67. James K. Polk, Fourth Annual Message, December 5, 1848; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, vol. IV, p. 2519 (emphasis added).

68. Acceptance letter, September, 1888; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, p. 1690.

69. Open letter, September 14, 1888; rptd. Cleveland, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 286.

70. Speech before a banquet of the Young Men’s Democratic Association, January 8, 1891; rptd. Cleveland, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 263.



nobility, of the Washington model. The nobility of the Democratic orator, it might be observed, sprang from his simplicity.

This congeries of eighteenth-century Republicanism and nineteenth-century moralism is captured in particularly resplendent form in a speech by Grover Cleveland:

The intrigues of monarchy which taint the individual character of the subject; the splendor which dazzles the popular eye and distracts the attention from abuses and stifles discontent; the schemes of conquest and selfish aggrandizement which make a selfish people, have no legitimate place in our national life. Here the plain people of the land are the rulers. Here, our patriotism is born and entwines itself with the growth of filial love, and here our children are taught the story of our freedom and independence. But above all, here in the bracing and wholesome atmosphere of uncomplaining frugality and economy, the mental and moral attributes of our people have been firmly knit and invigorated.<sup>71</sup>

In consonance with their general antistatist bent, Democrats assumed the existence of natural rights, that government was instituted to serve basic principles, like private property and liberty, which were therefore *prior* to government. Any infringement of these rights by government constituted an offense against nature. Some form of popular government was necessary in order to preserve these rights, thereby countering the inherent corruption of political power, but the point of popular participation was as a preservative, not as a forum for public policymaking. There were, in point of fact, few decisions open to adjudication, since most matters could be reduced to simple judgments of principle.

Well before the outbreak of the Civil War, Democrats were emphasizing the rights of minorities and the corresponding danger presented by the overweening power of popular majorities.<sup>72</sup> No doubt Democrat suspicion of the majority was strengthened by the humiliating position of the south during Reconstruction. The advocacy of minority rights, however, cannot be chalked up to simple calculations of expediency. After all, this position had been strongly articulated during the 1830s, when the party was dominant, and again during the Gilded Age, when stiff two-party competition prevailed. Throughout the nineteenth century, the

71. Speech before the Thurman Birthday Banquet, November 13, 1890; rptd. Cleveland, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 250.

72. Polk, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1845; rptd. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, p. 2225.

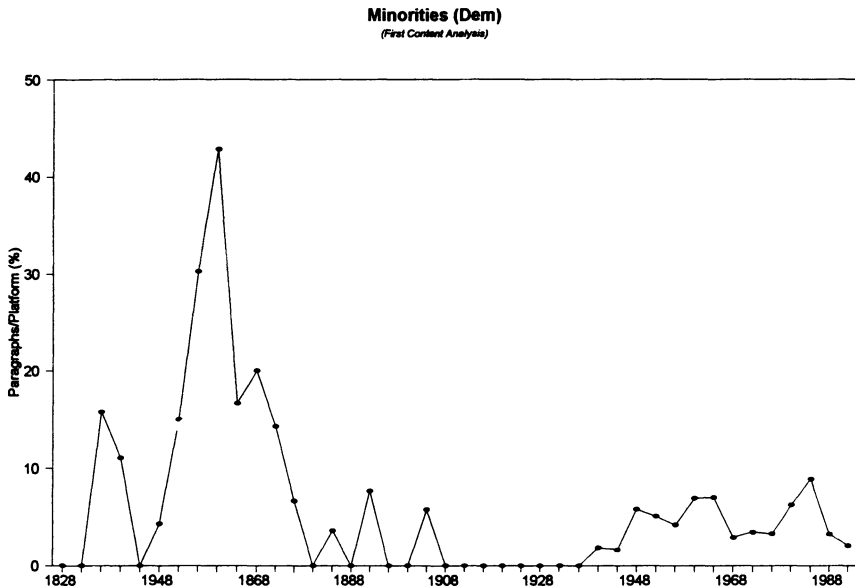
Democratic party was much more likely to emphasize the significance of civil liberties and civil rights (as they pertained to white men) than were the Whig and Republican parties. Freedom of the press and of religion, “personal or home rights,” as well as the abstract praise of liberty and the ritual invocation of the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions and the Bill of Rights were predominantly Democratic themes. This is perplexing, given the role of the Republican party in emancipation, and its at least tentative support for civil rights in the post-Civil War South. Slavery, however, was the only major sin on the moral agendas of the Whig and Republican parties, and it was forced onto that national agenda for only a brief period at midcentury. At all other times and in most other respects, the Whigs and Republicans saw themselves as a party representing majority interests within American society, and hence generally adopted a majoritarian view of the workings of government.

Democrats, on the other hand, as ethnocultural historians have keenly pointed out, saw many disadvantaged groups in their midst—the South of course, but also agriculture (oppressed by industrial and financial interests) and the various religious and ethnic newcomers who were over-represented in the party’s voting base. The reality of this geographic, economic, and/or cultural oppression matters less, for our purposes, than its perception. The Democratic party *portrayed itself* throughout the nineteenth century, well before the advent of the Civil War, as a party of victims, and it is this rhetoric of victimization that gave Democratic ideology much of its minoritarian flavor (which, of course, lay behind its civil liberties harangue). A comprehensive count of statements in support of minority rights, excluding those pertaining to African-Americans, reveals their constant presence throughout the nineteenth century, with a predictably strong upsurge in the 1850s and 1860s as the party defended the rights of citizens in the South, as shown in Figure 10. Democrats, predictably, were much more open to European immigration than were the Republicans, as Figure 11 demonstrates.<sup>73</sup> No statements in opposition to (European) immigration could be found among party platforms.

In matters of religion, Democrats were secular republicans, both in deed and in rhetorical form. Although their campaign oratory did begin to incorporate a Protestant moralism toward the end of the century, references to God and scripture were so rare as to be almost unnoticeable. When they did appear, they were casual, almost pro forma, and harkened more to the civic republican sense of the sublime, than to the religious. Cleveland, for example, ended his acceptance address with the

73. See Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 242.

Figure 10.



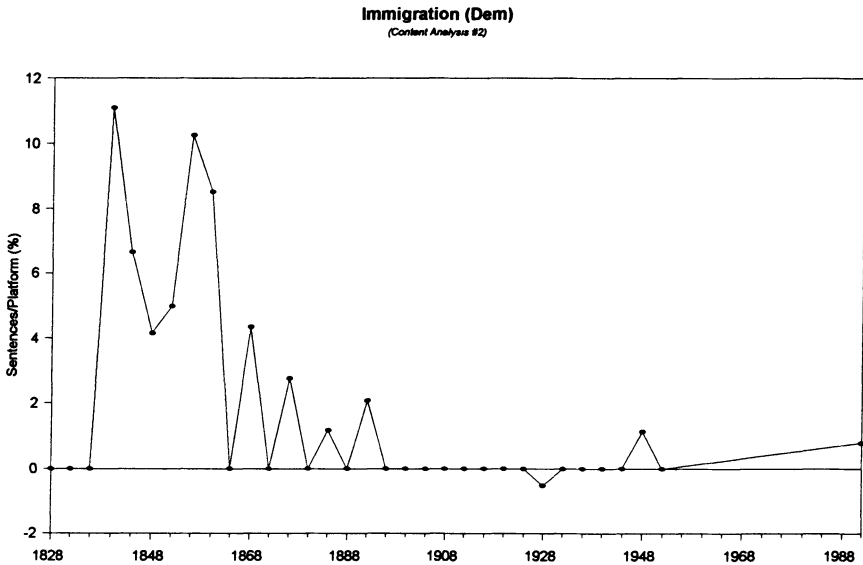
The percentage of paragraphs within Democratic party platforms devoted to the subject of Minorities (references to African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, European-Americans, the 13th, 14th, or 15th Amendments, civil rights, voting rights).

promise of “humble reliance upon the Divine Being, infinite in power to aid, and constant in a watchful care over our favored Nation.”<sup>74</sup> Sometimes Cleveland substituted Supreme Being for Divine Being; in either case, the effect was soporific.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to the evangelical tenor of the Bryan period and to the overwhelmingly Protestant ethos of the Whig and Republican parties, the nineteenth-century Democrats were an island of secularism. The only persistent reference to matters of the cloth was to the party’s Jeffersonian call for the “separation of church,” an abstract doctrine that has long since left the field of mainstream political rhetoric in America but found its most avid defender in the nineteenth-century Democratic party.

74. Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 26, 1892; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, vol. II, p. 1769.

75. Cleveland, acceptance letter, August 18, 1884; rptd. Cleveland, *Letters and Addresses*, p. 55.

Figure 11.



The percentage of sentences within Democratic party platforms that positively portray European Immigration *minus* the percentage of sentences with negative portrayals of the latter. (Platforms from 1956 to 1988 were not included in this content analysis; hence, the line connecting data-points from 1952 and 1992 is hypothetical.)

In the party's perpetual battle against the deprivations of self-interest, Democrats continually called on the populace to enforce rigid republican norms. Greed became the focus of much Democratic opprobrium, particularly with regard to import taxes. "Though the subject of tariff legislation involves a question of markets, it also involves a question of morals. We cannot with impunity permit injustice to taint the spirit of right and equity which is the life of our Republic, and we shall fail to reach our National destiny if greed and selfishness lead the way."<sup>76</sup> Democrats defined themselves as the party of virtuous frugality, and their opponents as the profligate party of mammon. One can see the ease with which the civic republican language shaded into the Protestant-tinged language of the Gilded Age.<sup>77</sup>

76. Grover Cleveland, acceptance letter, September 26, 1892; rptd. Schlesinger, *American Presidential Elections*, p. 1766.

77. See Cleveland, speech at Opera House, Providence, RI, April 2, 1892; rptd. Cleveland, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 324. See also, personal interview given to the New York

The cry of corruption was one of the most consistent elements of Democratic rhetoric in the Gilded Age. It did not, of course, go unnoticed in Republican campaign rhetoric, but its volume and vituperance were stronger on the Democratic side. After all, Republicans had most of the federal patronage; Democrats had little to offer the voter but their virtue. This was in plentiful supply. Every Democratic platform promised, “the expulsion of corrupt men from office,”<sup>78</sup> or “a thorough reform of the Civil Service.”<sup>79</sup> Corruption, however, in the nineteenth-century political vocabulary, implied not simply illicit gain from public office, but also the eventual downfall of the republic. Something of the charged nature of this omnipresent word is brought home by Cleveland’s pledge to “preserve from perversion, distortion, and decay the justice, equality, and moral integrity which are the constituent elements of our scheme of popular government.”<sup>80</sup>

Unsurprisingly, such a restricted view of the purposes of politics gave a distinctly conservative cast to Democratic rhetoric in the nineteenth century. The party was opposed to radicalism in all its guises, as shown in the content analysis expressed in Figure 12. Communism and socialism were equated with free love and the breaking of social taboos. Cass declared himself “opposed to all the isms of the day.”<sup>81</sup> The Address of the New York City and County Nominating Committee enjoined respondents to remember “that we have usages transmitted to us from the pure and simple days of our Republic; we have held fast to those usages in times of trial; we have conformed to them now.”<sup>82</sup> The party which identified itself as the bearer of the revolutionary tradition was the most determined upholder of tradition throughout the nineteenth century.

Democracy and its correlates (equality, populism, popular sovereignty) must therefore be placed within the larger rubric of civic republicanism, for it was the republic and the natural rights of the people, not majority rule, that party officials were concerned to protect. It is an ironic fact that “democracy” (or democrat, or democratic) was rarely used by nineteenth-century party orators.<sup>83</sup> Insofar as the term appeared at all in

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*Commercial Advertiser* under the title “Moral Issues in Politics” (September 19, 1889); rptd. Cleveland, *Writings and Speeches*, p. 343.

78. 1868 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, p. 37.

79. 1872 Democratic party platform; rptd. Johnson, *National Party Platforms*, p. 42.

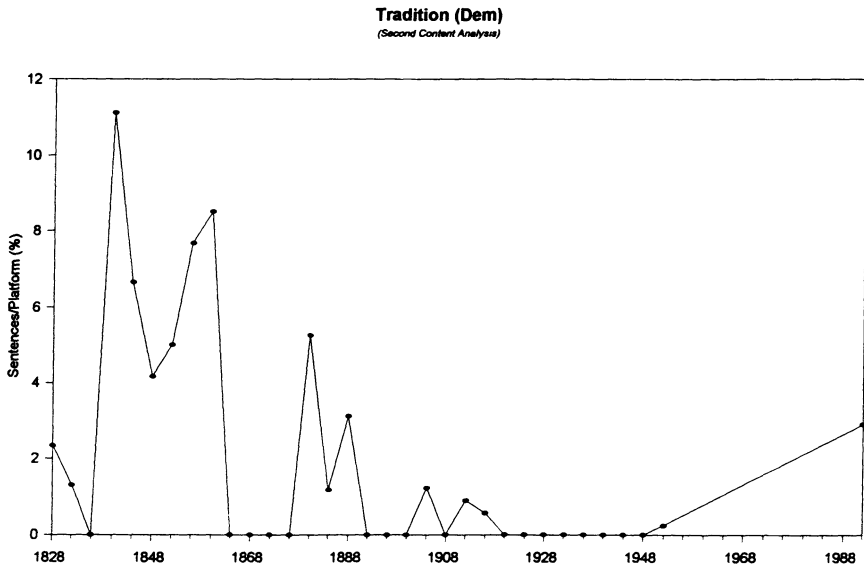
80. Speech at the Opera House, Providence, RI, April 2, 1892; rptd. Cleveland, *Letters and Addresses*, p. 333.

81. Speech at Tammany Hall, September 2, 1852; rptd. *Evening Post Documents—#10*, p. 4.

82. *Evening Post* [New York] (October 30, 1832).

83. “Populism,” of course, was an invention of the late nineteenth century.

Figure 12.



The percentage of sentences within Democratic party platforms that make appeals to Tradition (conservatism, continuity, the American national heritage; warnings against “experimentation,” revolution, radicalism, and uncertain change).

nineteenth-century discourse, it was simply a convenient stick to beat over the head of government. References to self-government—the primary and self-evident principle of republics—were much more common than those to democracy. Preserving the purity—one might almost say, the innocence—of government was clearly an end in and of itself for nineteenth-century Democrats.

## VI. Conclusion

From the founding of the discipline to the present, political parties have occupied a central position in American political science. Yet these parties have been looked upon primarily as electoral organizations and as aggregations of particular constituencies. Scholars have spent little time investigating the ideas that animated those institutions. Not surprisingly, we retain a vision of the American parties as vote-getting machines, and a vision of American political culture as the product of a single, hegemonic liberal tradition. Yet to a degree rarely acknowledged within aca-

demic political science, American political history is correctly portrayed as a battle of party ideals, and American public policy as the product of those ideals that won out. This case study of the national Democratic party between 1828 and 1892 has sought to take that party's public ideology seriously, and, in doing so, develop a new interpretation of this period.

As outlined above, views of the early Democratic party have usually centered on one of three general frameworks: democracy (and the associated concepts of populism and egalitarianism), liberalism, and ethnoculturalism. The *democratic* view, I think, is most apt as a description of the radical elements of the party during the 1830s, particularly in New York City. Mainstream Democrats, on the other hand, were less than enamored of the leveling pretensions of their compatriots in the *loco-foco* movement. Democracy and political equality were goals that had already been achieved; the obsession of the Jacksonians was in the maintenance of existing rights and liberties. Social equality, by contrast, was a goal which the presidential wing of the party had not even begun to contemplate.

As for *liberalism*, this analysis has shown that the impulses of the party were often quite *unliberal*. It explains a lot about American political culture that the impulse toward preserving civic republican traditions would culminate in a set of policies normally associated with the forward-looking, self-interested, pragmatic, economic, and industrially based philosophy of liberalism. Yet, it remains the case that the Democratic party stayed out of marketplace affairs not because of any faith in free enterprise, but because they did not trust the federal government to do anything at all.

Like the democratic and liberal views of the party, *ethnocultural* accounts are not so much incorrect as incomplete. The party's preference for liberty, states rights, and limited government no doubt gained impetus from its coalition of white ethnics, who feared the dominance of an intolerant majority. These policies, however, were not simply the product of constituency pressures, nor do they exhaust the nineteenth-century Democratic belief system.

In contrast to most previous work on the subject, I have argued that Democratic ideology remained remarkably constant over the long and tumultuous course of the nineteenth century, and that this ideology is best described as the confluence of three sub-ideologies—*white supremacy*, *antistatism*, and *civic republicanism*. Although this study has not explicitly addressed the question of causation, suffice to say that the party's national-level ideology was the product of a great diversity of social, economic, political, geographic, and cultural factors. Southern

Democrats, for example, had economic reasons for opposing high tariffs, federally sponsored internal improvements, and the abolition of slavery; but they also had “ideological” reasons for doing so. Urban Democrats had quite different economic needs and objectives, but nonetheless managed to support a single economic and political philosophy. Not only were the interests and cultural composition of Democratic constituencies diverse, they were also continually changing through the course of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the strongest evidence for the proposition that ideology mattered is to be found in the remarkable continuity of Democratic presidential dogma through the electoral realignment of 1860 and the Civil War, with all its political, social, and economic repercussions. No fundamental changes in the party’s national ideology resulted from either of these two events.<sup>84</sup>

Without dismissing questions of causation, it may be noted that amid the radical diversity of possible explanatory arguments, our firmest conclusions about the party rest at a descriptive level. It is, more specifically, the effective *periodization* of American party ideology which offers us the greatest analytic power, i.e., which most concisely and correctly organizes the facts of the case. With an accurate and comprehensive periodization of American party ideology it becomes possible to see how these sets of values, attitudes, and beliefs have served as the primary building blocks of American public policy. We should look at party ideologies, therefore, not simply as residual variables or as the product of particular constituencies, but rather as explanatory devices in their own right.

We can catch a glimpse of the totalistic, dogmatic—in short, “ideological”—character of Democratic politics in the nineteenth century in a letter of acceptance submitted by the party’s vice-presidential nominee to the national convention during the campaign of 1880, a fitting epitaph to this study.

Perpetuating the power of chronic Federal office-holders four years longer will not benefit the millions of men and women who hold no office; but earning their daily bread by honest industry, is what the same discerning public will no doubt fully understand, as they will also that it is because of their own industry and economy and God’s bountiful harvests that the country is comparatively prosperous, and not because of anything done by these Federal office-holders. . . . This contest is in fact between the people en-

84. Nor, for that matter, can we explain the party’s subsequent ideological transformation in 1896 by changes in its demographic composition.



deavoring to regain the political power which rightfully belongs to them, and to restore the pure, simple, economical, constitutional government of our fathers on the one side, and a hundred thousand Federal office-holders and their backers, pampered with place and power, . . . on the other.

—William H. English<sup>85</sup>

85. Letter of acceptance, July 30, 1880; rptd. National Democratic Committee, *The Campaign Text Book* (New York: National Democratic Committee, 1880), p. 7.