'Diffusion against Centralization': Centralization and Its Discontents in America, 1848-1860

By:

Charles Alastair James Thompson

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Department of History

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Summary of Thesis

This thesis explores how American conservatives in the 1850s used centralization as a term and process to understand social change, sectional conflict, and political economy, but paradoxically used opposition to centralization tactically to expand economic networks, extend state capacity, and rein in the effects of Jacksonian democracy.

Opposition to centralization might seem an inherently democratic language. But a diverse group of northerners sought to reclaim this language for their own purposes. Drawing from revolutionary warnings against democratic excess and contemporary fears of popular violence, they tried to redefine the people as the greatest centralizing threat. The transformation of France from democratic republic to authoritarian empire gave conservatives an opportunity to show that democracies inevitably allowed power to centralize. But centralization also had a geographic dimension, and conservatives in eastern metropolises often used the term to warn against the growing power of rival empire cities and long-distance trade. Anxieties about consolidating divided municipal governments and concentrating voting power in a majority northern electorate also found expression in critiques of centralization.

Yet historians have also identified processes of centralization underway in the period, and conservatives engaged with these too. Reformers embraced stronger municipal governments, city boosters pushed to entrench their economic dominance over expanding hinterlands, and pro-compromise unionists urged the federal government to intervene in the sectional crisis. Conservatives often supported these changes, arguing centralization without further democratisation was a necessary step. When confronted with disunion, urban disorder, and economic growth, they often backed centring power both institutionally and geographically in response. Denouncing democracy and rival cities as centralizers only helped conservatives legitimise their own centralizing agenda.

Exploring how conservatives used centralization therefore highlights a sometimes neglected conservative modernising agenda in the 1850s, one that used an Early Republican political language but anticipated postbellum administrative rationalisation and democratic retreat.

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This research would not be possible without academic, financial, and emotional support from a huge number of people over four years, and before expressing particular gratitude to many individuals, I would first like to thank the many other people who have in innumerable smaller ways touched my life and work.

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In addition to work at the Library of Congress, I undertook substantial research at Georgetown University Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the New-York Historical Society, the American Antiquarian Society, the Widener Library at Harvard University, the British Library, and the unfortunately now closed British Library newspaper archive. I would like to thank all the staff at these institutions who did the actual work of ferrying and carrying books, boxes, and volumes that I either didn't read or probably didn't fully understand.

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Introduction

On January 6 1852, members of the Rochester Athenæum and Mechanics' Association gathered to hear Lewis Henry Morgan – a prominent anthropologist, railroad lawyer, and Republican legislator in upstate New York – lecture on 'Diffusion against Centralization.'[1] Opening his lecture, he argued that a supposed centralization of knowledge, trade, and property reinforced the power of European monarchies, aristocracies, and imperial capitals.[2] But in addition to discussing politics, he also used centralization to describe global trade and domestic political economy. According to Morgan, universities 'centralized' knowledge in the hands of an 'aristocracy', where common schools, public lectures, and a free press diffused it among the masses.[3] The 'centralization' of property in the hands of the few, meanwhile, left the labourer in a state of bondage; by 'diffusion,' though, all could rise to propertied independence, and conflict between capital and labour would be avoided.[4] Showing the ambiguity in a term often used pejoratively, he boasted that New York would 'centralize the trade of the world' at the expense of London.[5] Centralization allowed Morgan to link together ideas and phenomena that historians usually treat separately. In a nation familiar with republican warnings about agglomerations of power, it allowed Americans to understand power relationships in ways that cut across historians' subfields. A study of how conservatives engaged with debates over centralization – both as a term in political and economic debate and as a process in which power consolidated in institutions, individuals, and places – shows that they did more than just reproduce an American 'republican' tradition rooted in Renaissance Europe and the English commonwealth tradition. They also provide an insight into how conservatives approached modern nation- and state-building and grappled with democratic transformation.

Centralization as an idea allowed Morgan to convey seemingly contradictory ideas about changing power relationships in the midcentury republic. Despite his criticism of the centralization of trade in London, Paris, St. Petersburg, and Vienna – the 'great cities are the foci into which every thing tends and the centres from which all things irradiate', he argued – Morgan enthusiastically embraced the 'law of commerce' that meant America 'must centralize the trade and finance of the world.'[6] Within the United States, canals, railroads, and waterways, would also bind the Union together and make secession impossible.[7] But

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[1] Lewis H. Morgan, *Diffusion against Centralization. A lecture Delivered before the Rochester Athenæum and Mechanics' Association, on its Third Anniversary, January 6, 1852* (Rochester, 1852).
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-22.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 22-37.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-46.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, 46.

Morgan's claim that only decentralised federal government could make the New World safe for imperial trading cities – building, as he put it, an 'empire without a magistrate' – suggests he also saw a potential threat in allowing New York to become the commercial city of an expanding continental empire.[8] Despite extolling the virtues of diffuse property ownership, his opposition to 'agrarian' redistributions of wealth, also hints about his doubts over how state power should respond to industrialisation concentrating wealth in the hands of new corporations, an emergent urban bourgeoisie, and southern planters.[9] The temporality of centralization – which Morgan saw as an ongoing process rather than a fixed fact – therefore helped him think critically about change over time as the United States underwent political, economic, and social upheaval. Moving across different uses of the term 'centralization' between 1848 and 1860, this thesis will show how the idea helped to structure a conservative response to events at home and abroad, and suggest ways to link our understanding of debates over sectionalism, state power, democratic rights, and economic growth in that period.

Centralization from Revolution to Midcentury

Morgan was not the only American who used centralization – and its close cousin, 'consolidation' – to think about power around midcentury. As Chart 1 and Chart 2 below show, in the 1850s these terms became widely used in American print culture. Americans often used the term as a political weapon against their partisan or sectional rivals. In this context, they defined centralization against the power relationships of Jacksonian democracy and states' rights. However, the term had a long history in American political discourse. In the early republic and the Jacksonian era many Americans used centralization in a similar way. Others, though, used centralization to warn against perceived democratic excess as well as tyrannical government. These Americans instead used centralization to convey how both corrupt individuals or the democratic masses could overturn the intricate balances of republican government. Opposition to centralization, despite sounding democratic, was therefore an extremely malleable term that could be used to support or challenge the idea of majority rule.

At midcentury Americans often used the term as a rhetorical weapon against their political opponents, whom, they suggested, wanted to create a large and undemocratic federal government that would dominate people and states. In such party battles, Whigs and Democrats used 'centralization' as a populist term to illustrate an inversion of the ideal power relationships of American democracy.[10] The term was also useful for pro-slavery southerners who warned against the authority of the federal government.[11] Here centralization and its antonym of states' rights conveyed southern warnings against the power of the federal government to intervene against slavery in the South and the West. The term centralization could therefore convey the concept of a powerful institution like a party or the federal government, making it a powerful rhetorical tool.

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[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 53.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[10] For example, see 'A Last Word to our Weekly Readers', *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 1, 1848; 'Principles not Men', *USDR* 23 (1848), p. 4.
[11] 'The Progress of Consolidation', *Semiweekly Camden Journal* (June 17, 1851); 'The Consolidation Candidate for Governor', *Semiweekly Camden Journal* (June 17, 1851).

Chart 1: *Frequency of Keywords Appearing in Google Books, 1845-1865*
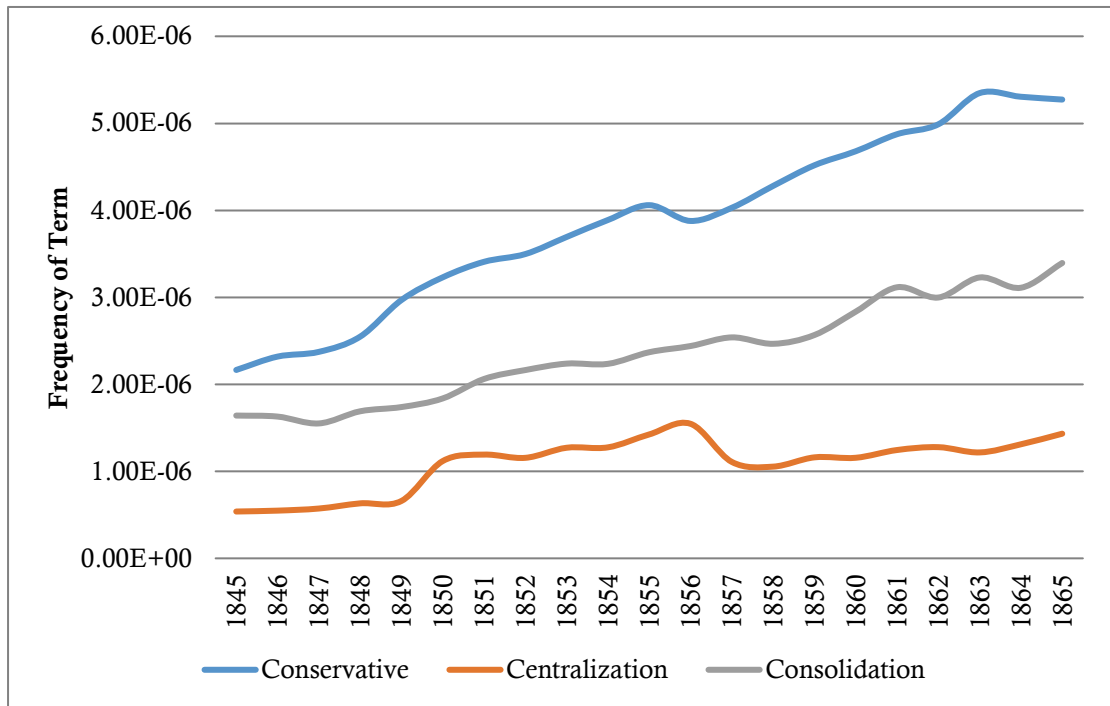
Source: 'Google Ngram Viewer', Google Books Search, http://books.google.com/ngrams [Accessed November 23, 2014]

Chart 2: *'Centralization' in the Chronicling America Newspaper Archive, 1845-1865*
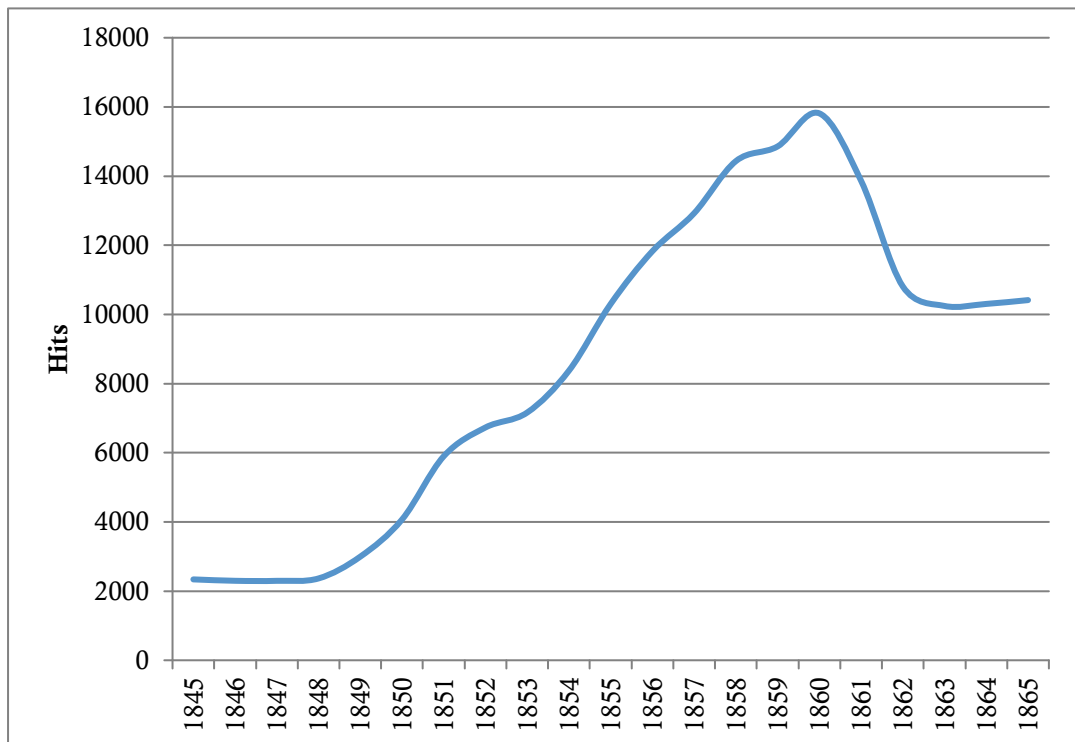
Source: 'Chronicling America', The Library of Congress, http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov [Accessed February 21, 2016]

Others, like Morgan, also used centralization to describe power relationships over space, rather than power within institutions like parties, offices, and corporations. As railroads and telegraph lines remade economic geography, bringing remote parts of the Union into closer contact with financial and industrial centres, centralization became a useful tool to describe how one place could influence and control another. These geographic connotations of the term also fitted easily into the debates over slavery. Southern supporters of slavery cast social and economic challenges to planter power as consequences of centralization in remote cities, sections, or states.[12] Centralization could therefore also refer to power relationships and dependency between places as well as the authority of powerful institutions.

Opposition to centralization had a long career in American political discourse, having formed part of the political vocabulary of the revolutionary generation, and shaping their approach to constitution-making. During the revolution, many Americans also used centralization to warn against the power of an institution. In this case they defined centralization against the republican division of power among the multiple branches of a federal polity. Historians have rooted later fears of despotism in the 'traditional American opposition to centralized power' from the revolutionary era.[13] James Madison himself in the *Federalist Papers* warned against the 'accumulation of all powers' in one man or set of men, and against 'tyrannical concentration' of government authority. [14] Anti-federalists like Jefferson, too, warned of power that 'concentrating' in 'the same hands, is precisely the definition of despotic government'. [15] Centralization – and related keywords such as consolidation – helped justify the republican principle of divided power as a check on despotic government. [16]

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[12] For example, see 'The Union and the South', *Nashville Union and American* (November 21, 1860); 'Governor's message', *Cooper's Clarksburg Register* (December 25, 1857).

[13] Thomas Brown and Richard Curry, 'Introduction', in Richard Curry and Thomas Brown (eds), *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History* (London, 1972), pp. x-xi.

[14] James Madison, 'The Particular Structure of the New Government and the Distribution of Power Among Its Different Parts' in J. Miller (ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (Mineola, 2014), pp. 235-241; James Madison, 'These Departments Should Not be So Far Separated as to have No Constitutional Control Over Each Other' in J. Miller (ed.), *The Federalist papers* (Mineola, 2014), pp. 241-245.

[15] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Boston, 1832), p. 123.

[16] The origins, definition, and the existence of republican ideology have generated an extensive body of historical scholarship. See: Joyce Appleby, 'Republicanism and Ideology', *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1985), pp. 461-473; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967); Stanley Elkins and Robert McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788 - 1800* (Oxford, 1993); François Furstenberg, 'Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse', *Journal of American History* 89 (20riot03), pp. 1295-1330; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975); Daniel Rodgers, 'Republicanism: The Career of a Concept', *The Journal of American History* 79 (1992), pp. 11-38; Robert Shallope, 'Towards a Republican Synthesis', *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (1972), pp. 49-80; Robert Shallope 'Republicanism and Early American Historiography', *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982), pp. 334-356; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln* (London, 2005), pp. xvii-xviii; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (London, 1993), pp. 3-45, 127-161; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992). For specific work on the Madisonian System of divided government, see: Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (Oxford, 2003); Christian Fritz, *American Sovereigns: The People and America's Constitutional Tradition Before the Civil War* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 119-152; Jack Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York, 1997); James Read, Power *Versus Liberty: Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, and Jefferson* (London, 2000). For references to the threat of cities in a republican polity see Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (London, 2013), pp. 3-5; Wood, *Empire*, pp. 42-43, 45-46, 357; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'The City in American History', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27

Revolutionary era opposition to centralization might seem like a democratic language. However, during this period, many sought to prevent the people from dominating republican government, just as they had used centralization to warn against a single officeholder from doing the same thing. The Founders' generation warned against majority tyranny, where majorities disregarded minority rights, and a 'pure' or 'unmixed' democracy where the people themselves assumed violent power that rightfully belonged to the state. Events like Shays' Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the French Revolution proved to some that an overbearing democracy eventually turned into mob rule. The delegates who drafted the United States Constitution were aware of this democratic threat, and divided power to prevent it concentrating in the hands of the people as well as in the executive. They were therefore keen to ensure that the state, not an assemblage of the people themselves, held power and maintained a monopoly on legitimate force. And, moreover, they sought, to varying degrees, restrictions on the power of elected assemblies over the remainder of the state apparatus, often turning to bicameral legislatures of propertied elites, property qualifications for suffrage, indirect elections, and judicial review to limit majority rule.[17] The keyword centralization did not necessarily convey support for mass suffrage, elective officeholders, and popular protest. Rather, it could potentially convey republican concerns that the people too were a danger to their ideal balanced government of learned elites.

An antidemocratic rationale for opposition to centralization endured into the antebellum period. This reflects the changes in the Jacksonian era between 1828-1846, when the centralizing tendencies of majority rule seemed more apparent than ever. In the antebellum period, many American elites lost their grip on power, as professional politicians and mass-based party politics replaced deference to propertied leadership.[18] Many propertied citizens regretted the decline in deference and disliked having to cater to, mix with, and solicit the votes of the lower classes.[19] Contemporaries, including Alexis de Tocqueville, described the Jacksonian era as a contest for power between a small number of propertied elites and the democratic masses.[20] Events like the Dorr War, where small-d democrats tried to overthrow Rhode Island's deeply undemocratic state government, proved to some elites that the people still threatened to concentrate sovereignty that belonged in the balanced

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(1940), pp. 44-45; Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 7-8.

[17] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 20-57; Fritz, *American Sovereigns*; Sandra Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy in the Early American Republic* (London, 2011), pp. 1-7; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York, 2000), pp. 3-26; Pauline Maier, 'Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America', *William and Mary Quarterly* 27 (1970), pp. 3-35; Kimberly Smith, The *Dominion of Voice: Riot Reason, & Romance in Antebellum Politics* (Lawrence, 1999), pp. 45-49; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 3-10, 13-39; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 18-28, 206, 197-256, 393-429; Wood, *Liberty*, pp. 110-111, 133-138, 147-148. James Madison also warned against a similar phenomenon when defending the United States Constitution. See also James Madison, 'The Same Subject Continued' in J. Miller (ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (Mineola, 2014), pp. 41-47; Rakove, *Meanings*, pp. 161-202.

[18] Elizabeth Geffen, 'Industrial Development and Social Crisis: 1814-1854' in R. Weigley (ed.) *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (London, 1982), pp. 348-349.

Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (Cambridge, 2008).

[19] Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (London, 1980), pp. 210-237; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford, 2007), p. 238; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 39-40; Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), pp. 50-51; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945), pp. 13-17, 267-268

[20] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, trans. Henry Reeve (New York, 1899), pp. 174-179.

institutions of government.[21] Whig criticism of Jacksonian Democracy also implied a subtle critique of overly democratic government. When Andrew Jackson claimed a popular mandate to veto legislation, overrule the supreme court, and make fiscal policy over and above the wishes of the other institutions of balanced government, opponents charged Jackson with 'executive tyranny' and having 'converted the Government into an *Elective Despotism*'.[22] Democracy, too, could centralize power.

Centralization remained a keyword to convey these republican fears about the overbearing influence of the people in government. Alexis de Tocqueville in particular had used centralization to describe the transformation of an aristocratic republic to a mass democracy. In *Democracy in America,* he cautioned against weakening checks on popular power and creating an egalitarian 'simple government, as satisfying democratic impulses could allow a potentially tyrannical majority to wield state power against a minority.[23] 'All democratic nations are instinctively led to the centralization of government', he wrote, using the term to describe the accretion of state power in the hands of the electorate that once rested in aristocratic senates, life tenured courts, and unelected officeholders. [24] 'Centralization' allowed de Tocqueville to make sense of Jacksonian Democracy as a process, turning a single moment – such as the adoption of more democratic state constitution – into one episode in a narrative with a past, present, and future. It allowed him to describe the relationship between democracy and power as something progressed over time rather than remaining static between institutions.

De Tocqueville's conflation of centralization with democracy was nonetheless increasingly anachronistic in a period that seemed to accept the right of white men to rule. More radical democrats argued that the masses themselves were sovereign and held ultimate authority over the state.[25] From the 1820s to the 1840s, most states abolished property and taxpaying requirements for voting and claimed, at least, that they had given power to the 'common man'. Jacksonian Democrats claimed that they were guaranteeing America's democratic promise – to white men at least – against a small group of propertied 'aristocrats'. [26] The Whigs, heirs to a conservative political tradition more sceptical of

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[21] Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, pp. 246-276; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 209-217; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 539-546.

[22] Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 1-88; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 328-445; Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 69-95; Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 203; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 426-455. Also see Henry Carey, *Letters to the President, on the Foreign and Domestic Policy of the Union, and its Effects, as Exhibited in the Condition of the People and the State* (Philadelphia, 1858), pp. 13-25, 47-49, 71-73, 102-112, 157-188.

[23] De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, pp. 301-348, 379.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

[25] Stanley Elkins and Robert McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788 - 1800* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 451-488; Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (Oxford, 1971); Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 51-86.

[26] Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983), p. 121; Holt, *American Whig Party*, p. 16; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 231, 328-410, 489-491; Keyssar, *Right to Vote,* pp. 22-60; Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 205-206; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson;* Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 73-95, 132-171; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 181-520. Edward Pessen argues that politicians claimed universal white male suffrage handed power to the 'common man', but in practice kept power in the hands of a small number of elites. See Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America*; Edward Pessen, 'Who Governed the Nation's Cities in the "Era of the Common Man"?' *Political Science Quarterly* 87 (1982), pp. 591-614. For similar arguments for the antebellum period and Gilded Age, see Mark Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000); Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, 'Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America', *Journal of American History* 84 (1997), pp. 855-885.

democracy, themselves embraced mass democracy when it became apparent they needed to do so to win office.[27] Their candidates, like William Henry Harrison, instead argued that the threat of 'consolidation' lay not in the power of the federal government but the undivided executive power of the Oval Office.[28] In an era of mass white male voting, many supporters of popular democracy defined centralization as the threat that an elitist government posed to the authority of a sovereign people. They might have agreed with de Tocqueville that centralization was a bad thing, but used it differently to warn against curbing the growing power of the people in government.

Centralization also helped Jacksonians understand economic concepts, and again they posed centralization against democratic government. In the years after the American Revolution and the adoption of the constitution, the federal government adopted an interventionist economic policy, chartering turnpikes, canals, and banks, but this raised the prospect for anti-Federalists and later Jacksonians of a dangerous 'consolidation' of power.[29] When opposing internal improvements and central banking, Jackson himself warned against 'consolidating into one the General and State Governments, which were intended to be kept for ever distinct', and he urged voters to reject 'a practical consolidation, cemented by wide-spread corruption'.[30] Jackson and his followers turned to anti-statist rhetoric because they felt big government could only concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few.[31] Centralization here helped illustrate the concept of economic ties between corporations, government, people, and places, and allowed Jacksonian democrats to warn against these supposed new economic threats to the people's liberties.

By 1848, the keyword centralization already had a long history in American public discourse, and helped to frame talk of political rights and economic power. The term fitted into the language of revolutionary republicanism and Jacksonian democracy just as easily as it fitted into the language of party conflict and the sectional crisis. As part of the vernacular of Jacksonian democracy and antebellum party conflict, it could be used to paint partisan or sectional opponents as potential tyrants and to laud the role of the people in checking a reversion to aristocratic rule. But its meanings were far from stable. Small-r republicans continued to use centralization to advance their ideal government of balanced institutions

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[27] Schlesinger, *Jackson*, pp. 267-305; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 210-224; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 482-520

[28] Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 69-95; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 570-612; Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, pp. 267-305; Quentin Taylor, '"The true principles of government": William Henry Harrison and the Whig Counter-Revolution', *American Nineteenth Century History* 16 (2015), pp. 129-157. See also William Henry Harrison, 'William H. Harrison Inaugural', in P. Morledge (ed.), *"I Do Solemnly Swear" - Presidential Inaugurations from George Washington to George W. Bush* (Sheffield, 2008), pp. 57-71.

[29] Robin Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 24-25John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (London, 2001); Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 137-148; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, pp. 115-209; 334-349; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 132-171; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 359-425.

[30] Andrew Jackson, '"Second Annual Message," December 6, 1830', *The American Presidency Project,* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29472 [Accessed July 13, 2016]; Andrew Jackson, '"Sixth Annual Message," December 1, 1834', *The American Presidency Project,* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29476 [Accessed July 13, 2016]; Andrew Jackson, '"Seventh Annual Message," December 7, 1835', *The American Presidency Project,* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29477 [Accessed July 13, 2016]; Andrew Jackson, '"Veto Message [Of The Re-authorization of Bank of the United States]," July 10, 1832', *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=67043. [Accessed August 10, 2015].

[31] Larson, *Internal Improvement*, pp. 109-194; Marbin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, 1957), pp. 10-14, 24-28, 101-108; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 3-41, 132-171; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 281-455. See also *Congressional Globe* 30th Congress, 2nd Sess., December 5, 1848, p. 6.

and divided power. To do so, they employed the term in opposition to both authoritarian government and democratic rule.

Americans, this thesis argues, may have agreed that centralization was a pejorative term, as it conjured images of power and dependency. However, they had very different concepts of what constituted a centralized polity. To some, it was the power that government could hold over the people, but to others, it was the power that officeholders or voters could hold over republican government.

Centralization, 1848-1860

This thesis focuses on the role of centralization in American public discourse in the dozen years that preceded the Civil War. These years were dominated by growing divisions over slavery, but an emphasis on centralization can reveal how Americans often understood isolated phenomena – namely the sectional question, democratisation, and disorder at home and abroad – through reference to the same term.

In 1848, crises in Europe and America forced Americans to think again about centralization. That year, French, Italian, German, and Hungarian revolutionaries attempted to either remove or reform the monarchical regimes that distinguished centralized states from more democratic republics. Their attempts were ultimately unsuccessful: Russia and Austria crushed a newly-independent Hungary; Louis-Napoleon overthrew the Second French Republic and restored the Pope in Italy; and Wilhelm IV of Prussia foiled attempts to build a constitutional monarchy in Germany.[32] Despite this failure, the Revolutions of 1848 thrust 'centralization' to the forefront of midcentury political dialogue on both sides of the Atlantic. Louis Kossuth, the exiled leader of the Hungarian revolution, gave speeches in the United States defending attempts to establish democratic republics in Europe and routinely cited the United States' freedom from 'centralization' as the example Europeans should follow.[33] Americans often defended the struggle against 'centralization of power in the Crown' in Europe, and saw the likes of Kossuth taking New World republicanism back to the Old.[34] By supporting opposition to centralized regimes, these Americans thought they were defending the principle that power rested with the people in a true republican government both at home and abroad.

National expansion also led citizens to rethink the distribution of power. The conclusion of the war with Mexico in 1848 allowed President James Polk to acquire 525,000

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[32] For details on the Revolutions of 1848 and establishment of the Second French Empire, see Peter Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club of 1848* (Princeton, 1975), p. 313; Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London, 1997), pp. 804-812; Dieter Dowe et al., *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, ed. Dieter Dowe and trans. David Higgins (Oxford, 2001); R.J.W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann et al., *The Revolutions in Europe, 1848-1849: from Reform to Reaction*, ed. R.J.W. Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford, 2000); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London, 1975), pp. 21-42; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel de Leon (Chicago, 1907); John Roberts, 'Revolution from Above and Below: European Politics from the French Revolution to the First World War' in T.C.W. Blanning (ed.), *The Oxford History of Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 15-45; Timothy Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville, 2009); Johnathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (Cambridge, 1994); Peter Stearns, *The Revolutions of 1848* (London, 1974); Charlotte Tacke et al., *1848: Memory and Oblivion*, ed. Charlotte Tacke (Oxford, 2000).

[33] 'Foreign News', *Sunbury American* (November 15, 1851); 'President Fillmore and Governor Kossuth', *Glasgow Weekly Times* (January 22, 1852); 'Mobile (Ala.) April 4 1852', *New York Daily Tribune* (April 13, 1852); Speech of M. Kossuth at the Washington City Banquet', *The Primitive Republican* (February 19, 1852); 'Kossuth's New Orleans Speech', *Wilmington Journal* (April 16, 1852).

[34] For example, see *Congressional Globe*, 30th Cong. 1st Sess, p. 558; 'XXXIId Congress', *NYT* (January 2, 1852).

square miles of territory in the southwestern United States, but this further thrust the already tense issue of whether new territory should be free or slave into public debate.[35] Many were confident that annexation did not require stronger government power. Polk's Whig successor Zachary Taylor described an enlarged America as an 'empire of freedmen' while one Democratic paper called the annexation of Cuba part of an 'Empire of Liberty'.[36] They seemed confident that the USA could expand without creating consolidated centres of political authority. But when Americans discussed extending slavery to these territories, the contestants often used the vernacular of centralization to either warn of – or bring on – stronger federal intervention.[37] Debates over slavery extension – and the place of the federal government in regulating the 'peculiar institution' were frequently interwoven with the question of centralized power.

Both sides of the slavery debate, rather than just using centralization to describe the growing power of the national government, also used it to describe power concentrating in particular places and people. The *Courier* warned that 'the most terrible of all tyranny is the tyranny of majorities separated and rendered unmistakeably distinct from the minority by sectional feelings and geographic lines'.[38] Claims of a slave power conspiracy –a cabal of southern slaveholders seeking to use the federal government to spread slavery even to the North – spoke to similar concerns about a centralization of power instigated by leading planters.[39] Contesting the definition of centralization helped Americans consider the growth of the people as a force in American politics, but it also helped them to think through where power centred in the free labour North and slaveholding South too.

Contemporaries, too, could not help but ground the sectional crisis in wider questions of power and democracy. As immigration, industrialisation, and urban disorder made American cities seem increasingly European[40] and the slavery divide grew ever bitterer, it is perhaps unsurprising that some northerners – the subjects of the following chapters – returned to older concerns that democracy threatened good republican government. Michael Conlin has shown how northern conservatives attacked increasingly radical opposition to slavery as one of many 'isms' of northern social and political reform –

[35] James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 6-77; Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, vol. 1: *Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847-1852* (New York, 1992); David Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), pp. 1-89.

[36] 'President's Message', *Keowee Courier* (January 5, 1850); 'Acquisition of Cuba', *Preble County Democrat* (December 23, 1858)

[37] 'South Carolina, the Constitution, and the Union', *Keowee Courier* (September 20, 1850); 'The Government and Slavery', *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (December 11, 1858)

[38] 'South Carolina, the Constitution, and the Union', *Keowee Courier* (September 20, 1850).

[39] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 9, 73-102, 119-120; Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (London, 1978), pp. 50-52, 89, 151-154; Russel Nye, 'The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860' in Richard Curry and Thomas Brown (eds), *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History* (London, 1972), pp.78-87; Russel Nye, 'The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860', *Science & Society* 10 (1946), p. 264; Potter, *Impeding Crisis*, pp. 286-296.

[40] Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York, 1999), p. 635; Michael Conlin, 'The Dangerous "Isms" and the Fanatical "Ists": Antebellum Conservatives in the South and the North Confront the Modernity Conspiracy', *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (2014), pp. 214-216; Andrew Heath, 'Paris, Philadelphia, and the Question of the Nineteenth-Century City' in A. Heath and D. Scroop (eds) *Transatlantic Social Politics: 1800-Present* (New York, 2014), pp. 43-74; David Johnson, *Policing the Urban Underworld: The Impact of Crime on the Development of the American Police, 1800-1887* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 15-38; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 61-66; Adam Smith, 'Conservatism, Transformation, and War for Union', in P. Davis and I. Morgan (eds) *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations* (New York, 2013), pp. 41-58.

abolitionism, socialism, and free love, to name but a few – that amounted to an overarching conspiracy against the pillars of the American capitalist, Protestant, and constitutional social order. Indeed, they defined themselves as conservatives by their opposition to these allegedly foreign, ideologically-driven projects to perfect and liberate humanity over time. [41] Antebellum nativists shared some of these fears, blaming Catholic immigration for bringing not just crime and poverty, but also ideological challenges to the existing social order like 'red republicanism', monarchism, feminism, and, of course, abolitionism.[42] The growth of the slave controversy following 1848 only seemed to highlight, to some Americans in the North and South, that the growing legions of lower-class 'agitators' and political 'demagogues' presented a wider challenge to the future of their republic. Rather than simply using centralization as just a cipher for proslavery or as a radical democratic critique of undemocratic government or remote institutions, some Americans used it to think through the political and economic power relationships that growing cities and their enfranchised populace brought to bear on the American republic. Together, the European Revolutions of 1848, the sectional crisis at home, and perceived political radicalism demonstrated the fragility of their republic and its supposedly decentralized political settlement in the face of long-term processes of change underway in the nineteenth-century transatlantic world.

Despite these connections, historians of the 1850s often explore the decade through slavery, sectionalism, and the emerging American Civil War.[43] 'Fundamentalist' historians see the territorial conflict between free soilers and expansionist slaveholders as the driving force behind sectionalism. They take the acquisition of northern Mexico in 1848 as an important waymark in the chain of events that led to secession and a near inevitable battle between fundamentally antagonistic societies.[44] Conversely, even revisionists who question the inevitability of the Civil War and emphasise how a 'blundering generation' of politicians turned slavery in western land into the defining issue in party competition, see conflict over slavery defining the years 1848-1860. [45] While these historians might disagree on the origins

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[41] Conlin, '"Isms" and "Ists"', pp. 205-233; Douglas Fermer, *James Gordon Bennett and the New York Herald: A Study of Editorial Opinion in the Civil War Era, 1854-1867* (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 66-70; Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 238-243, 299-300.

[42] Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 103-126; Conlin '"Isis" and "Isms", pp. 205-233; Bruce Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery: Thomas R. Whitney and the Origins of the Know-Nothing Party', *The Journal of American History* 88 (2001), pp. 455-488. See also Timothy Roberts, 'Margaret Fuller's Rome and the Problem of Provincial American Democracy, *Patterns of Prejudice* 40 (2006), pp. 45-60.

[43] For general guides to the historiography of the origins of the American Civil War, which has often dominated the historical writing into the 1850s, see Edward Ayres, *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York, 2005), pp. 103-144; John Brooke, 'Party, Nation and Cultural Rapture: The Crisis of the American Civil War' in Adam I. P. Smith and Daniel Peart (eds), *Practicing Democracy: Popular Politics in the United States from The Constitution to the Civil War* (Charlottesville, 2014), pp. 72-98; Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1980); Eric Foner, 'The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions', *Civil War History* 20 (1974), pp. 197-214; Gary Kornblith, 'Rethinking the coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Approach', *The Journal of American History* 90 (2003), pp. 76-105; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 23-43; Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill, 2008), pp. 2-4.

[44] For fundamentalist interpretations that conclude on the inevitability of sectional conflict, see John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. 1: *Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (Cambridge, 1992); Charles Beard and Mary Beard, *History of the United States* (New York, 1921), pp. 295-398; Marc Egnal, *Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the American Civil War* (New York, 2010); Foner, *Free Soil*; Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War* (New York, 1992); James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, 1998).

[45] For revisionist interpretations, which emphasise the political choices that raised sectionalism, see William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (Oxford, 1986); Holt, *The 1850s*; Michael Holt, *The Fate of*

of sectional realignment, they all agree that slavery defined the 1850s, and the decade set the stage for Civil War in 1861.

But slavery and sectionalism raised questions that went beyond whether slavery should expand to western territories. The debate touched a wide variety of political, economic, and cultural issues, and catalysed regional differences on policy into a larger sectional conflict.[46] This linked the sectional crisis to the kinds of debates that Americans often used slavery to contest. Scholars have shown how the unique commercial imperatives behind cash-crop slavery led southerners to embrace economic imperialism in Texas and Central America and 'direct trade' with European markets as an alternative to the supposed centralization of the cotton trade in New York.[47] Concerns about the viability and stability of slavery may too have influenced how northern capitalists chose to invest in free state Chicago over slave state St. Louis.[48] Slavery therefore also raised questions over the centralization of wealth into northern cities.

The growing crisis over slavery was interwoven with other political transformations in the 1850s too. Following 1848, southerners and northerners appealed to European political thought and national state building. In doing so, some northerners envisaged the whole nation-state coming together under a European-style central government. Conversely, the Revolutions of 1848 confirmed many southerners' prejudice that only slave society and states' rights protected propertyowners from radicalism.[49] Given slaveholders' need for absolute personal authority in individual plantations,[50] it is perhaps unsurprising that Northerners and Southerners often had very different ideas about where political and economic power ought to lie.

Decentralization was far from the only possible response to crisis. Some southern planters saw proslavery imperialism under the aegis of a powerful southern-dominated federal government as the only route for prosperity, while plenty of northerners, like the antislavery editor Horace Greeley embraced communitarian socialist experiments or state-sanctioned distribution of western land.[51] Ever more divisive debates over slavery may not

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Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War (New York, 2005); J. G. Randall, 'The Blundering Generation', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (1940), pp. 3-28; Joel Silbey, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (Cambridge, 2005); Joel Silbey, *The Transformation of American Politics, 1840-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967).

[46] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 40-44.

[47] Philip Foner, *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp. 1-14; Johnson, *River*.

[48] Jeffrey Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge, 2002).

[49] Henry W. Casper, *American Attitudes Towards the Rise of Napoleon III: A Cross Section of Public Opinion* (Washington, 1947), pp. 38-44; Andre Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill, 2012); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 54-68, 707-709; Michael O'Brien, *Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860: An Abridged Edition of Conjectures of Order* (Chapel Hill, 2010), p. 34; Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South*, 1848-1865 (Oxford, 2012); Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, pp. 127-133; Miles Smith, 'From Savannah to Vienna: William Henry Stiles, the Revolutions of 1848, and Southern Conceptions of Order', *American Nineteenth Century History* 14 (2013), pp. 27-51.

[50] Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 219-220; Andrew Heath, 'Small Men, Best Men, and the Big City: Reconstructing Political Culture in Antebellum Philadelphia', in Adam I. P. Smith and Daniel Peart (eds), *Practicing Democracy: Popular Politics in the United States from The Constitution to the Civil War* (Charlottesville, 2014), pp. 222-243.

[51] For details of slaveholders' desoigns for a proslavery political economy, see Matthew Karp, 'Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South', *The Journal of Southern History* 77 (2011),

have crowded out the kinds of issues that Americans had previously used centralization to contest, but became entwined with long running debates over democracy, state-building, and political economy.

Affairs in Europe continued to raise the issue of how democracy might centralize power. For some Americans, the French Revolution in 1848 showed the dangers of a democratic radicalism that stood at odds with – rather than a European adaptation of – the rule of law that supposedly characterised the political architecture of 1776-87.[52] The sense that the Paris crowd had consolidated power in 1848 animated American critics of the uprisings.[53] 'Leisler' a nativist letter-writer writing in opposition to British royal authority[54] warned that the Revolution of 1848 and the new French republic had created an 'empire' in France out of once supposedly sovereign royal provinces.[55] Napoleon III's seizure of power proved to some that France had always been 'a centralizing country', even under the Second Republic – an assumption many Americans shared with de Tocqueville.[56]

Such concerns about democratic consolidation – the concentration of power in the people – reverberated in the United States. Indeed, in 1852, the *Camden Journal* charged American opponents of European 'centralization' with neglecting the same threat at home, as no government, it argued, 'is becoming central and consolidated faster than ours'. [57] As the following chapters show, conservative Americans here used centralization not to batter down entrenched interests but rather to question the legitimacy of majority rule.

Americans in the 1850s continued to use centralization as a weapon to challenge economic power relationships between places too. The massive expansion of railroads before the Civil War cut local ties, connected distant communities, and laid bare the dependence of hitherto seemingly autonomous cities and regions on remote centres. [58] Philadelphian political economist Henry Carey and southern proslavery advocate George

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pp. 283-324; Matthew Karp, 'The World the Slaveholders Craved: Prosavery Internationalism in the 1850s', in A. Shankman (ed.) *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic: Land Labor and the Conflict for a Continent* (London, 2014), pp. 414-432; Johnson, *River*, pp. 280-302; Andrew Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill, 2015). For references to Horace Greeley's reform advocy, see William Hale, *Horace Greeley: Voice of the People* (New York, 1950); Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 181-209; Adam-Max Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley's New York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor* (Ithaca, 2009).

[52] Cleves, *Terror in America*, Richard Rohrs, 'American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848', *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (1994), pp. 359-377; Rodgers, *Revolutions*, pp. 14-15; Timothy Roberts, 'Revolutions have Become the Bloody Toy of the Multitude: European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850', *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (2005), pp. 266-270. See also, Furstenberg, 'Freedom and Slavery', pp. 1295-1330.

[53] For details of the American conservative turn against the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe following the emergence of socialism in particular, see Casper, *Napoleon III*; Conlin, '"Ists" and "Isms"', pp. 215-216; Merle Curti, 'The Impact of the Revolutions of 1848 on American Thought', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 93 (1949), pp. 209-215; Fleche, *1861*, pp. 11-37; Genovese and Genovese, *Master Class,* pp. 54-68, 707-709; John Higham, *From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860* (Ann Arbor, 1969), pp. 15-20; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 793-794; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', p. 469; Morrison, M., 'American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848–1852: Sectionalism, Memory, and the Revolutionary Heritage', *Civil War History* 49 (2003), pp. 111-133; Roberts, *Revolutions*; Roberts, 'Bloody Toy of the Multitude', pp. 259-283; Rohrs, 'American Critics'; Smith, 'Savannah to Vienna', pp. 27-51.

[54] Jacob Leisler led a rebellion in 1689 against James II's absolutist administration of British American colonies. See Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* pp. 90-105.

[55] Quoted in Rodgers, *Revolutions,* pp. 78-79.

[56] 'Cavaignac and Louis Bonaparte', *The Camden Journal* (January 31, 1849); 'The New French Constitution', *Semi-Weekly North-Carolina Standard* (February 18, 1852).

[57] 'The Kossuth Mania', *Semiweekly Camden Journal* (January 16, 1852).

[58] Albert Churella, *The Pennsylvania Railroad*, vol. 1, *Building an Empire*, 1841-1917 (Philadelphia, 2013), p. 7.

Fitzhugh, despite disagreeing on the morality of slavery, both wove midcentury debates over free trade and classical liberal economics into a global metanarrative in which cosmopolitan cities attempted to 'centralize' wealth at the expense of their surrounding areas. But despite cautioning against such urban centralization, Fitzhugh and Carey warned that 'the world is too *little* governed', and constructed an alternative vision of a stronger protectionist government growing or 'concentrating' American 'centres of trade, thought, and fashion' over time. [59] Both therefore idealised very different concentrations of power to the centralization supposedly produced by free trade and imperial expansion. Far from harking back to an agrarian economy or blithely accepting the transition to Gilded Age industrialism, conservative Americans across the political spectrum thought about power relationships between places and institutions when speculating about the open-ended modernisation of the midcentury United States.

Midcentury Conservatism and Opposition to Centralization

America's conservatives – the principal subjects of this thesis – were one of the groups contesting the right to control these ongoing processes of centralization. However, what made a midcentury conservative is unclear in scholarship on the 1850s. In Stephen Spielberg's *Lincoln*, Francis Blair, Sr. directs the official 'conservative faction of Republicans' with a gesture of his hand when watching the House of Representatives vote.[60] However, the 1850s lacked a single conservative party, organisation, or institution. Indeed, 'conservatives of all parties' attending a midcentury New York union meeting recognised that they had to put aside many partisan issues that divided them.[61] This thesis will use a keyword analysis to suggest what fears, ideas, and vision drew such a diverse group of Americans together.

Historians have often used defined conservatives in the 1850s by reference to the ongoing slavery crisis. White southern support for slavery has led scholars to describe the region as 'conservative', as the need to protect property in man led them to interpret any form of radical change North, South, or European, as a threat. Historians like Eugene Genovese, Michael O'Brien, and William Freehling have described either individual proslavery planters or the region as a whole as conservative because of the South's ongoing

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[59] For more on Henry Carey, see Paul Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity: America's First Political Economists* (Bloomington, 1980), pp. 261-306; Andrew Dawson, 'Reassessing Henry Carey (1793–1879): The Problems of Writing Political Economy in Nineteenth-Century America', *Journal of American Studies* 34 (2000), pp. 465-485; Egnal, *Clash*, pp. 239-241; Arnold Green, *Henry Charles Carey, Nineteenth-Century Sociologist* (Philadelphia 1951); A. D. H Kaplan, *Henry Charles Carey, a Study in American Economic Thought* (New York, 1982); Stephen Meardon, 'Reciprocity and Henry C. Carey's Traverses on "The Road to Perfect Freedom of Trade"', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 33 (2011), pp. 307-33; Rodney Morrison, *Henry C. Carey and American Economic Development* (Philadelphia, 1986); Michael Perelman, *Marx's Crises Theory: Scarcity, Labor, and Finance* (London, 1987), pp. 10-27; George Smith, *Henry C. Carey and American Sectional Conflict* (Albuquerque, 1951); Ernest Teilhac, *Pioneers of American Economic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1967).
For examples of George Fitzhugh, see George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!: Or, Slaves Without Masters* (Richmond, 1857), pp. 86-96; George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, 1854), pp. 1-33; George Fitzhugh, 'Centralization and Socialism', *Debow's Review* 20 (1856), pp. 692-694; George Fitzhugh, 'Uniform Postage, Railroads, Telegraphs, Fashions, etc', *DeBow's Review* 26 (1859), pp. 657-664.
[60] *Lincoln* [film], directed by Stephen Spielberg (Amblin Entertainment, DreamWorks SKG (presents), Dune Entertainment (in association with), The Kennedy/Marshall Company, Participant Media (in association with), Reliance Entertainment (presents), Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation (presents), Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2012).
[61] For example, see Union Safety Committee, *The Proceedings of the Union Meeting, Held at Castle Garden, October 30, 1850* (New York, 1850), pp. 6, 14, 17, 22, 31.

interest in slavery. Recognising the consequences that slavery had for society and politics in the region, scholars have often noted that southern 'conservatives' often insisted that protecting slavery meant suppressing democracy in order to preserve the 'peculiar institution'.[62]

Historians studying northern antebellum politics have also used the term as a catch-all to define northerners who opposed more radical antislavery politics: the 'Fillmore men', 'Silver Grays', 'Hunkers', Union movements, 'moderates', and 'doughfaces'. For example, Michael Holt uses the term to define New York Whigs who supported the Compromise of 1850 and opposed Senator William Seward's antislavery activism within the party, and Eric Foner defies conservative Republicans as those who wanted to emphasise economic issues rather than antislavery in order to appeal to the lower North and border state unionists in the South.[63] Others describe the forerunners of the 'copperhead' or 'peace' antiwar wing of the Democratic Party and proslavery northern Democrats as 'conservative' too.[64] In such work, support for the Compromise of 1850, opposition to abolitionism, and unconditional support for the Union are markers of conservative alignment. However, there is evidence to suggest that defining conservatives simply as anti-abolitionists may oversimplify their core beliefs and values. Scholarship on American attitudes to revolution abroad can help identify Americans who held a conservative outlook. Looking at the politics of the Early National era, both Rachel Cleves and Daniel Walker Howe use the term to define Americans who were sceptical, and even afraid, of the violence that accompanied the French Revolution and used the terror that followed the revolution as a political weapon to attack their supposed 'radical' Democratic-Republican opponents.[65] Instead of looking to revolutionary France as a guide for democratic zeal, conservatives turned to Edmund Burke's faith in hierarchy, tradition, and law.[66] It was therefore not proslavery or anti-abolitionism that motivated these (often Federalist) voices, but fear of popular violence, scepticism of democratic excess, and preservation of social hierarchies and orders.

Studies of the American response to 1848 have also defined those who turned away from revolutionary republicanism and tried to redefine democracy towards British-style representative government as 'conservative'. Timothy Roberts, for example, argues that southern 'conservatives' were the first to turn against the Revolutions of 1848 once the French began to call for redistribution of property, democratic expansion, and, of course, the abolition of slavery in the French West Indies. However, Americans in the north also stridently opposed those who argued that a true democracy embraced French-style social

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[62] For example, see Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Master Class*; William Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol. 1, *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (Oxford, 1990); William Freehling *Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, *Secessionists Triumphant* (Oxford, 2007); Karp, 'World the Slaveholders Craved', pp. 414-432; Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2000). Michael O'Brien notes that these conservatives did not have a monopoly on intellectual life even in the South, however, even if they remained dominant in many Southern states. See Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South,* vol. 1 (Chapel Hill, 2004); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South,* vol, 2 (Chapel Hill, 2004).

[63] Foner, *Business*, pp. 38-39, 47, 107, 109, 110-111; Foner, *Free Soil*, pp. 136-137, 139, 144-145, 186-225; Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 430-439, 550, 590-591, 909-985; Howe, *God Wrought*, p. 769; Varon, *Disunion*, pp. 5, 109, 174, 298, 330, 340-341; Wilentz, American *Democracy*, pp. 608-610, 614-619, 658, 681-682, 700-701, 759.

[64] Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (Oxford, 2006).
Michael Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (London, 2014).

[65] Rachel Cleves, *Terror in America*, p. 33; David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (London, 1990); Wood, *Empire*, pp. 174-208.

[66] Cleves, *Terror in America*, p. 33; Howe *American Whigs*, pp. 210-237.

reform, and argued that democracy meant elections and the rule of law rather than the power of the people to act directly.[67] As with their predecessors in the Early Republic, historians have argued that opposition to much more than just antislavery motivated midcentury conservatives. Rather, conservatives used European upheaval to warn against democracy and highlight concerns that America would see similar violence unless the enfranchised masses deferred to the law, the established social order, and orthodox economics.

Historians writing surveys of nineteenth-century American politics also use the term conservative to describe Americans interested in similar issues to those concerned with democracy and revolution in France. Scholars of the Whigs in particular use the term to describe those in the party who opposed the influence of those like William Seward and Horace Greeley who championed immigrants' rights, black suffrage, and social reform, and much as they opposed slavery. Daniel Walker Howe, in his biography of the antebellum Whigs, identified an anglophile Burkean trend best seen in the likes of Daniel Webster and Rufus Choate, who venerated Edmund Burke, the rule of law, and hierarchical authority over individualism. To reconcile white male suffrage with republican government, these Americans turned to proscription through oratory and the law to keep the masses in check.[68] Conversely, Michael Holt argues that Whig conservatives championed the unity of the Whig Party in both the North and the South; opposed abolitionism, black suffrage, and social reform; and supported Millard Fillmore's presidency and failed candidacy in 1856 on a procompromise platform. These Whigs had no intention of allowing their party to become one of feminism, antislavery, and black suffrage over internal improvements, banking, and compromise.[69]

Battles between reformist and conservative wings, however, were not unique to the mid-century Whigs. Historians have also described Democrats who held similar concerns as conservative too. For example, Sean Wilentz recognises that not all northern Democrats supported the Jacksonian revolution within the party. [70] Often, these Democrats opposed the partial democratisation of American politics under Jackson as much as they opposed radical reformers, and some, like their conservative Whig counterparts, even turned to the doctrines of Burke.[71] This too strongly suggests that conservatism in midcentury America extended beyond concern for the Union and opposition to antislavery. These historians too used the term conservative to describe Americans opposed to democratic expansion, social reform, and excessive individualism.

More recent scholarship has specifically focused on conservative political thought, and has sought to uncover a conservative ideology outside of the second party system. Again, these historians emphasise that conservatives were interested in more than just the

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[67] Curti, 'Revolutions of 1848', pp. 209-215; Fleche, *1861*, pp. 1-37; Morrison, 'American Reaction to European Revolutions', pp. 111-133; Roberts, 'Bloody Toy of the Multitude', pp. 259-283; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, pp. 10, 18, 29, 47, 77; Rohrs, 'American Critics', pp. 359-377; Adam Smith, 'The Fortunate Banner: Languages of Democracy in the United States, *c.*1848' in J. Innes and P. Phillip (eds) *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain Ireland, 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 28-39, pp. 28-39.

[68] Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 210-237.

[69] Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 227, 239-241, 432, 491.

[70] Alexander, *Political History*, vol 2, p. 54; Holt, *Whig Party*, p. 87; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, p. 506; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 443-445, 530-533.

[71] Baker, *Affairs of Party*, pp. 181-183; Jean Friedman and William Shade, 'James M. Porter: A Conservative Democrat in the Jacksonian Era' *Pennsylvania History* 42 (1975), pp. 188-204; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 399-344, 458-459.

preservation of the Union and compromise with the South. In a study of the nativist movement in New York City, Bruce Levine argues that the members of these organisations wanted to build a new conservative alternative to the Whig and Democratic parties that would both support the Compromise of 1850 and curb democratic participation. Rather than believing a fundamental conflict between freedom and slavery led to sectionalism, they argued that the exigencies of democracy incentivised 'agitation' of the slavery issue. Saving the Union was therefore an opportunity to return to a government by propertied white Protestant men.[72]

Michael Conlin has also argued that a conservative ideology rooted in opposition to so-called 'ists' and 'isms' which they believed were a coordinated threat to the status of propertied white men. Again, these conservatives believed that democracy incentivised professional agitators to import supposedly radical doctrines like feminism, abolitionism, and Mormonism from Europe. These Americans may have supported economic transformation, but opposed any new political movements arising from ongoing social change.[73] The connections that these historians have noticed between democracy and sectionalism in conservative thought strongly implies that there was a conservative political tradition in America that saw slavery and Union as only one part of a wider problem of democracy and power in the American republic.

The conservatives and conservatism explored in this scholarship challenge the assumption that the North had embraced democracy by the 1850s. The emergence of universal white male suffrage in most states, the Jacksonian revolution in the Democratic Party, the collapse of the aristocratic Federalist Party, and the Whigs' embrace of populism in the 1840 presidential election all suggest that Americans accepted popular government. Having accepted that the people should, it only required the ongoing expansion of the suffrage to all the people. This thesis will argue, however, that democracy was far from universally accepted even in the northern states, and that antidemocratic thought had an influential audience in the period. These antidemocratic ideas helped unite a conservative movement that nonetheless divided on other political issues of the day like free trade, internal improvements, and even the morality of slavery. Moreover, their antidemocratic reading of political events strongly informed how they would come to conceptualise and respond to the sectional crisis during the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and as America edged closer to civil war in 1860.

Americans who identified as conservative often recognised their shared values despite never working within a single national organisation.[74] However, in places, they could unite through local and state networks. This included organisation within the Whig and Democratic parties.[75] In New York City, lawyers Charles O'Conor, a Democrat, and William Evarts, a Whig, began a career in conservative politics in the 1850s that spanned from the antebellum era to the Gilded Age. Both shared platforms at Union Meetings in the 1850s, attacking abolitionism and supposed northern sectionalism.[76] After the Civil War,

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[72] Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 606, 768-769, 856, 865; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488.
[73] Adam Smith, 'Conservatism, Transformation, and War for Union', in P. Davis and I. Morgan (eds) *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations* (New York, 2013), pp. 43-44; Conlin, '"Isms" and "Ists"', pp. 205-233.
[74] Conlin, '"Ists" and "Isms"', pp. 207-208.
[75] Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 349-350.
[76] For their involvement in the Union movement, see Union Safety Committee, *Proceedings*.

they again shared a platform at public meetings; this time they both defended the elitist anti-Tweed movement, advocated lower taxes, and pushed for a government of the 'best men'. Their antidemocratic agitation culminated in the Tilden Commission – which Evarts sat on – recommending in 1877 that the state silence the voice of the unpropertied in city government. Despite their conservative backgrounds and their cooperation in lobbying for a taxpayers-only democracy, they never shared a party; Evarts and O'Conor represented Republican Rutherford Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden respectively before the commission to resolve the disputed 1876 Presidential Election.[77]

The single issue movements of the midcentury United States also speak to the existence of a conservative impulse that existed beyond the second party system. Instead of organising as a political party, conservatives mobilised politically around matters that allowed them to promote aims like unionism, law and order, and improvements to their property. In 1850, conservatives in northern cities, and New York City in particular, formed bipartisan Union committees and parties to defend the Compromise of 1850, and then turned to similar tactics a decade later.[78] Locally, conservatives had more success at organising into movements that crossed party lines. The 'Silver Gray' faction of New York Whigs split from the main party after years of opposition to Whig-backed reforms, including black suffrage, Catholic schooling, and the reform of quasi-feudal land tenures in upstate New York.[79] In Massachusetts, Boston's 'conservative Federalist-Whigs' defeated the constitution of 1853, which proposed similar changes to the measures Silver Grays had opposed in the Empire State.[80] Foreshadowing the bourgeois movements of the 1870s, conservatives in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities in the 1850s organised into reform leagues and metropolitan consolidation movements.[81] Yet they were not an exception: James Gerard, a minor Democratic activist, moved among New York's Union Party and

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[77] For their involvement in the Gilded Age reform movement, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 182, 219-222; John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, *American National Biography*, vol 7, *Dubuque-Fishbein* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 626-628; *Ibid.*, vol. 16, *Mosler to Parish*, pp. 610-611. See also Committee of Seventy, *Appeal to the People of the State of New York: Adopted by the Executive Committee of Citizens and Taxpayers for the Financial Reform of the City and County of New York* (New York, 1871); 'Reform', *NYH*, November 3, 1871; 'Tremblings of Tammany', *NYH*, September 19, 1871; William Evarts et al., *Report of the Commission to Devise a Plan for the Government of Cities in the State of New York* (Albany, 1877). O'Conor also regularly appeared in public meetings to uphold the Union in the 1850s against abolitionists and in 1860 against secessionists. See Foner, *Business,* pp. 163, 234. For the antidemocratic and antipartisan aspirations of the anti-Tweed movements, see Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 268-286. Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 172-195.
[78] De Alva Stanwood Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York*, vol 2 (New York, 1906), pp. 156-157; Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (London, 2009), pp. 48-55; Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 86-87; Foner, *Business*, pp. 34-87; Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 591-593; Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 210-237; Thomas Woods, 'Introduction', in T. Woods, Jr. (ed.) *The Political Writings of Rufus Choate* (Washington, 2002), pp. 1-12.
[79] Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 227, 229, 239-243, 299; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488.
[80] John Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1990), pp. 3-59; Samuel Shapiro, 'The Conservative Dilemma: The Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1853', *The New England Quarterly* 33 (1960), p. 224.
[81] For further details on the consolidation of Philadelphia as a conservative reaction against urban disorder, see Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362; Russell Weigley, 'The Border City in the Civil War' in R. Weigley (ed.), *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (London, 1982), pp. 363-416; Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 125-157. For an alternative view, see Michael McCarthy, 'The Philadelphia Consolidation of 1854: A Reappraisal', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 110 (1986), pp. 531-548. For further details on charter reform in New York, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* pp. 822-921; Seymour Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (New York, 1965), pp. 11, 105-113; Spann, *The New Metropolis*, pp. 313-340

police reform circles in the early 1850s, before turning against the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.[82] Despite the absence of a national organisation, there was a coherence to conservatives' participation in antebellum civic life, and they were able to claim some considerable successes from some of their lobbying efforts. Conservatives found a way to participate politically without having to organise as a single political party on the national stage.

More informally still, urban upper class print, social, and associational networks helped shape a conservative perspective. In Philadelphia, for example, the *North American* catered to the upper-class conservative elite, with editor Morton McMichael a stalwart of bourgeois associations.[83] Indeed conservatives often united through upper class institutions like clubs, trade associations, and social groups. McMichael and his Burkean friend Sidney George Fisher both belonged to the Philadelphia Farmer's Club, an upper class gentleman's club.[84] During the Civil War, bipartisan (but pro-war) Union League Clubs in New York and Philadelphia – with the likes of Evart and McMichael in prominent roles[85] – combined upper-class socialisation with political advocacy. Members of these self-proclaimed 'respectable' organisations were able to mobilise on the home front from opulent clubhouses in prime downtown locations.[86] After the war, both the Philadelphia and New York leagues involved themselves in curbing the supposed democratic excesses of the Gilded Age party system, particularly at the local level. Morton McMichael would himself come to campaign for a new constitutional convention, in his words, 'under the leadership of the propertied and conservative class'.[87] Conservative members of the northern elite had independent institutions within which they could organise and engage politically without necessarily having to play party politics.

Two Philadelphians who appear over the following chapters – the aristocratic diarist Sidney George Fisher and the political economist Henry Carey – show how conservatives networked through the urban upper class. Fisher despised democracy and its symbol Andrew Jackson – the 'chieftain of the lower orders' – while seeing mob violence in

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[82] *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. VII (New York, 1931), pp. 217-218.

[83] Robert Bloom, 'Morton McMichael's North American', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 77 (1953), pp. 156-163. For more on upper class urban sociability, see Beckert, *Metropolis*; David Scobey, 'Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-Century New York', *Social History* 17 (1992), pp. 203-227.

[84] Andrew Dawson, *Lives of the Philadelphia Engineers: Capital, Class, and Revolution, 1830-1890* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 98.

[85] Dawson, *Engineers*, p. 145; Union Club of the City of New York, *Officers, Members Constitution and Rules of the Union Club of the City of New York* (New York, 1880), pp. 3, 50; Union League of Philadelphia, *Charter and By-laws of the Union League of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1865), p. 16.

[86] Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 130-132; Burrows, Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 887; Dawson, *Engineers*, p. 145; Frederickson, *Inner Civil War*, pp. 131-134; Gallman, *Mastering Wartime*, pp. 95-96, 112; Frank Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 1984), pp. 34-63; Melinda Lawson, '"A Profound National Devotion": The Civil War Union Leagues and the Construction of a New National Patriotism', *Civil War History* 48 (2002), pp. 338-362; Thomas O'Conor, Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield (Boston, 1997), pp. 141-142, 190-198; Edward Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865* (Wilmington, 2002), pp. 91-92; Weigley, 'Border City', p. 407; Maxwell Whiteman, *Gentlemen in Crisis: The First Century of the Union League of Philadelphia, 1862-1962* (Philadelphia, 1972). For contemporary accounts of the Union Leagues, see Henry Bellows, *Historical Sketch of the Union League Club of New York: Its Origin, Organization, and Work, 1863-1879* (New York, 1879); George Lathrop, *History of the Union League of Philadelphia, from Its Origin and Foundation to the Year 1882* (Philadelphia, 1884).

[87] Beckert, *Metropolis,* pp. 210-224; Dawson, *Engineers*, pp. 177-178; Whiteman, *Gentlemen*, 108-116. See also Union League of Philadelphia, *Essays on Political Organization Selected from Among Those Submitted in Competition for the Prizes Offered by the Union League of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1868).

Philadelphia as the natural product of a riotous democracy and the progeny of anarchy and despotism.[88] He left a record of these observations in his diary, published pamphlets in his own name, and wrote for McMichael's paper.[89] Carey, who intellectually validated protective tariffs, also moved in these circles. He joined the Philadelphia Union League, penned articles for his friend McMichael, and published books, pamphlets, and articles on protectionism. He followed Philadelphia Whigs into the Republican Party, but associated himself with a conservative faction of ex-Whigs, who supported pro-compromise 'moderates' in 1856. Carey's support for the same Union Party projects that O'Conor and Evarts backed, and his association with compromise over antislavery, suggests a conservative outlook.[90] McMichael, Fisher, and Carey formed a coterie of upper-class conservatives in antebellum Philadelphia interested in economic modernisation, maintaining law and order, and policing the boundaries of political participation.

Conservatism, though, could be national as well as local in reach. Conservative unionist organisations like the Georgia Union Party, the Union Committee of Safety in New York, and Union movement in Massachusetts offered fraternal support, even if they were never able to form a single national party.[91] Northerners also read and used South Carolina-based political scientist Francis Lieber's research on republican government and used it to further their own understanding of the trajectory of democracy and republics; some published for southern journals.[92] Fisher, despite claiming to dislike slavery, defended the southern landowning planter class as a necessary aristocratic counterbalance to the universal white male suffrage he blamed for just about every problem in United States politics – including making his servants unruly.[93] He too had family and friendship ties to slaveholders.[94] Newspapers in the North also reprinted articles from the southern press

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[88] Conlin, '"Ists" and "Isms"', pp. 208-209; Sidney George Fisher, *A Philadelphia Perspective*, ed. Nicholas Wainwright (New York, 2007), pp. 1-13; Nicholas Wainwright, 'Sidney George Fisher: Personality of a Diarist', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 72 (1962), pp. 15-30.

[89] Fisher published on a wide range of topics in the 1850s and 1860s. *Kanzas and the Constitution* and *The Law of the Territories* defended Congressional authority to exclude slavery and maintain law and order in territories threatened by Missourian 'border ruffians.' *A National Currency* and *The Trial of the Constitution* defended Congressional authority during Reconstruction and the Civil War. See 'Cecil', *Kanzas and the Constitution* (Boston, 1856); Sidney George Fisher, *The Law of the Territories* (Philadelphia, 1856); Sidney George Fisher, *A National Currency* (Philadelphia, 1864); Sidney George Fisher, *The Trial of the Constitution* (Philadelphia, 1862). See also Riker, 'Fisher', pp. 397-412.

[90] Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 108-122; Elwyn Robinson, 'The North American: Advocate of Protection', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 64 (1940), pp. 345-355; Smith, *Carey*, pp. 36-37, 41-88, 74-82;

[91] Foner, *Business*, pp. 55-87; Smith, *Carey*, pp. 99-117.

[92] Francis Lieber fled Germany in 1835 after being accused of sedition and settled at the South Carolina College. Despite owning slaves and being in correspondence with northern Abolitionists, he came to consider himself a moderate in opposition to both Boston and Columbia. See O'Brien, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 26-30. O'Brien, *Conjectures*, vol. 1, p. 448. See also Franklin Giddings, 'The Nature and Conduct of Political Majorities', *Political Science Quarterly* 7 (1892), p. 121; John Jameson, 'National Sovereignty', *Political Science Quarterly* 5 (1883), p. 197; Maurice Richter, *The Municipalist*, (New York, 1858), p.191; William Russell, 'The Proper Province and Office of Constitutional Law', *The American Law Register and Review* 42 (1894), p. 503; Joseph E. Thompson, *The Test-Hour of Popular Liberty and Republican Government* (New Haven, 1862), p. 9; 'De Tocqueville and Lieber, as Writers on Political Science', *The Princeton Review* 30 (1858), pp. 621-645; 'American Literature: Lieber's Civil Liberty', *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* 2 (1853), p. 566.

[93] Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 18-24, March 4, 1850; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1857, pp. 42-43, March 9, 1857; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1860, pp. 82-86, May 19, 1860.

[94] Sidney George Fisher debated the secession crisis with Harry Middleton, a distant relative by marriage, on at least one occasion, and Morton McMichael also took an interest in the Middletons' affairs. The collapse of the slave economy and system of social control on the Middleton plantation gave Fisher grave concern during the American Civil War. See Sidney George Fisher Diary, 1860 volume, Dec 4 1860, pp. 273-274; Sidney George

which gave airing to antidemocratic views. [95] Such northerners did not exclude the South from a prospective national conservative coalition, despite their substantial differences on slavery. Northern conservatives, rightly or wrongly, identified with many elite southerners as people like themselves, forming an important political tie between North and South.

Questions about the nature of midcentury conservatism therefore remain unanswered. It is clear that conservatives wanted to preserve the Union, it is less certain what kind of Union they wanted to preserve. Existing scholarship documents what liberal and democratic movements conservatives opposed, but with the exception of material prosperity, is less clear about what conservatives supported and what policy objectives they wished to achieve. Given that these men were all interested in questions of power and power relationships, it is instead worth considering what power relationships between government, people, and places they wanted to build. This can help broaden our understanding of conservatives and conservative political thought in the period. Moreover, by situating conservative responses to the sectional crisis and support for the Compromise of 1850 in their responses to the political problems of the 1850s, we can perhaps also obtain an understanding of how and why they responded to sectionalism in the way that they did.

Conservative Print Culture and Keyword Analysis

A study of how conservatives and the conservative press used the term centralization can help answer questions about the kind of republic midcentury conservatives wanted to build and defend in the 1850s, and the extent to which their ideas penetrated the northern public sphere and defined the political climate of the 1850s.

Keyword analysis borrows from an earlier body of intellectual history focused on the history of concepts. Intellectual historians have long used the history of words, ideas, and concepts as tools to help reconstruct political thought in the European and American past, even if there are sharp methodological differences between (often) Anglo-American and European historians. Historians following the *begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history model associated with Reinhart Koselleck emphasise the need to study how key concepts are constructed and how the components of these concepts change over time. Koselleck's *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, an encyclopedia of some of the important concepts he identified, defines how the meaning of words and associated concepts and how these changed over time.[96] Conversely, historians following the Cambridge school model developed by Quentin

Fisher, 'The Diaries of Sidney George Fisher, 1849-1852', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 86 (1962), pp. 183-185; Sidney George Fisher, 'The Diaries of Sidney George Fisher, 1844-1849', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 86 (1962), pp. 62-63; Sidney George Fisher, 'The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1859-1860', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 87 (1963), p. 205; Sidney George Fisher, 'The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1860' *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 87 (1963), pp. 330, 443; The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1861', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 88 (1964), pp. 71, 206, 221; Sidney George Fisher, 'The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1864', *The Pennsylvania magazine of History and Biography* 89 (1965), p. 98; 'The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1865', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (1965), pp. 208-209, 216-219. For more on the Fishers' and the Middletons' relationships, see Eliza Cope Harrison, *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846* (Columbia, 2001); Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia* (Columbia, 2006), pp. 30-53.
[95] [Untitled], *Boston Post*, July 22, 1853; 'Vagaries of Ultraism', *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 26, 1851.
[96] Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela Richter, 'Introduction and Prefaces to the "Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe"', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011), pp. 1-37; Reinhart Koselleck, '*Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Cambridge, 2002); Rudolf Valkhoff, 'Some Similarities Between Begriffsgeschichte and the History of

Skinner emphasise studying the context of a word, concept, or idea in a particular moment in time. Rather than defining how a single term or concept changes over time, these historians argue that studies of how thinkers and writers use or contextualise a term or idea give a greater insight into political thought.[97] Despite their methodological differences, these schools for studying the history of ideas and concepts show the possibility of uncovering political thought in written primary texts.

Historians, particularly Daniel Rodgers and more recently Elizabeth Varon have used keyword studies as a tool to uncover political thought in the American past.[98] Their approaches recognise that words do not have fixed ideological meanings. John Adams's observation that 'There is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism' attests to just how malleable the meaning of words in a common political lexicon could seem.[99] Rather than looking at keywords themselves, historians have therefore studied how these words were used and why rather than focusing the words themselves. Picking up on such insights, they have studied how Americans used keywords tactically to advance their own agendas and beliefs. Daniel Rodgers, for example, has suggested how antebellum conservatives began to talk about 'government' and 'the state' rather than 'natural rights' as safeguards of republican liberty, a subtle linguistic shift that allowed them to articulate an elite-led republic rather than a more expansive popular democracy.[100] More recent research has suggested that supporters of democratic reform and opponents of popular government contested the definition of democracy to legitimise and delegitimise different visions of government based on either civic engagement or deference to elites.[101] Studies of how Americans used keywords and the context within they used them can therefore help uncover political thought in the period and the political agendas that they used keywords tactically to advance.

Elizabeth Varon's *Disunion* is one of the most recent and accomplished keyword studies, in which she uses the term to consider how midcentury Americans understood national unity and the strength or fragility of the Union, and how this changed over time and made southern withdrawal seem more possible over time. The multiple meanings of the term, she argues, can help clarify questions of the causes of the American Civil War.[102] In her introduction, she argues that Americans used the keyword 'disunion' both as a political weapon against their opponents and as a description of a process. As a political weapon,

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Discourse', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 2 (2006), pp. 83-98; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976).

[97] J. G. A. Pocock, Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History (London, 1972); Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969), pp. 3-53; James Tully (ed.) *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, 1988); Valkhoff, 'Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Discourse', pp. 83-98.

[98] See Daniel Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (London, 1987); Varon, *Disunion*; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976).

[99] Cited in Rodgers, 'Republicanism: The Career of a Concept', pp. 37-38. The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 embraced near-universal male suffrage, a strong unicameral legislature, and a divided weak executive. See Wood, *Creation*, pp. 222-226, Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 292-294.

[100] Rodgers, *Contested Truths*. Unless context implies otherwise, by 'the state' I mean the institution with a monopoly on use of legitimate force within its area of jurisdiction rather than the primary political subdivision of the United States. This encompassed the federal, state, and local governments. See Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation' in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 77-128.

[101] Smith, 'Fortunate Banner', pp. 28-39.

[102] Varon, *Disunion*.

they used it as a prophecy of what might happen in the future should America fail to heal its sectional divide, as a southern threat against northern abolitionists, and an accusation to delegitimise southern states' rights activists. But as a process, they also used it to conceptualise how southern states would secede and to describe the political programme or set of policies that secessionists advocated.[103] In other words, the keyword disunion could be a political weapon one could use to delegitimise one's political opponents or their agendas, both proslavery and antislavery, by tarnishing them with a pejorative term. However, it could also help conceptualise an ongoing process or political agenda unfolding over time. This thesis will consider centralization in a similar fashion, looking at what political agendas conservatives tried to advance when using it as a political weapon and what processes they used centralization to describe.

As well as being first a pejorative political weapon and second a term to conceptualise change over time, centralization has also been a category with which historians can understand the American past. For these historians, centralization was not just a keyword but a process pre-empted by the Civil War as the pressures of combat forced the federal government to consolidate power over states and citizens. The federal government emerged from the Civil War and Reconstruction with a far larger administrative scope and capacity.[104] Political scientist Stephen Skowronek, for instance, described the Gilded Age United States as a 'state of courts and parties', which slowly gave way to a strong central government Gary Gerstle, Brian Balogh and William Novak have shown how late nineteenth-century government grew in strength, even if state builders often turned to private organisations, local administration, or divided power to do so.[105] Scholars influenced by modernization theory, meanwhile, have conceptualised the Gilded Age as a period in which professional middle-class elites integrated a so-called 'distended society' via new corporate, bureaucratic, and administrative means.[106] The simultaneous emergence of large corporations, with power to dictate prices and wages from remote offices, employ mass wage labour, and exist seemingly independent of any one individual, speaks to a similar idea of

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[103] Varon, *Disunion*, pp. 1-16.

[104] Richard Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* (New York, 2000); Richard Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1877* (Cambridge, 1990); Laura Edwards, 'Reconstruction and the History of Governance' in G. Downs and K. Masur (eds), *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill, 2015), pp. 22-45; George Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965); William Hoffer, *To Enlarge the Machinery of Government: Congressional Debates and the Growth of the American State, 1858-1891* (Baltimore, 2007); Mark Neely, *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2011); William Riker, 'Sidney George Fisher and the Separation of Powers During the Civil War', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954), pp. 397-412.
For an alternative view emphasising the endurance of states' right and private authority, see Michael Les Benedict, 'Contagion and the Constitution: Quarantine Agitation from 1859 to 1866', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 2 (1970), pp. 177-193; Michael Les Benedict, 'Preserving the Constitution', *The Journal of American History* 61 (1974), pp. 65-90; J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990).

[105] Brian Balogh, *A Government out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, 2009); Gary Gerstle, 'A State Both Strong and Weak', *American Historical Review* 115 (2010), pp. 779-785; Gary Gerstle, 'The Resilient Power of the States Across the Long Nineteenth Century: An Inquiry into a Pattern of American Governance' in D. King and L. Jacobs (eds), *The Unsustainable American State* (Oxford, 2009), 61-87; Larson, *Internal Improvement*; William Novak, 'The Myth of the "Weak" American State', *American Historical Review* 113 (2008), pp. 752-772; William Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (London, 1996).

[106] Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955); Samuel Hays, *Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago, 1957).

individuals coming together under the aegis of new centres of power.[107] Like their counterparts in Europe, Americans often defined their era as one of a balance between competing forces of integration and differentiation, believing that social disorder appeared when the forces of differentiation overtook the necessary drive to integration.[108] These historians therefore use centralization to conceptualise the process of strengthening government during and after the American Civil War.

Historians have also used centralization to conceptualise the politics of democratic retrenchment around midcentury too. The Civil War is often seen today as a pivotal moment in this turn to centralization. Studies of northern conservatives have suggested that many saw the conflict as an opportunity to build 'a commitment to national or centralized authority'.[109] They believed that the egalitarian and individualistic politics and culture of the antebellum period, characterized by movements like transcendentalism, challenged their vision of social order. Only state and institutional authority would establish control and safeguard patriotism; democracy and individualism were the casualties.[110] This thesis, however, dates backing for centralizing projects earlier. Americans in the 1850s rarely spoke of centralization in positive terms but conservatives often supported an ongoing process of creating and strengthening sources of political and economic authority over time. In an essay published in the 1960s, historian John Higham charts the Civil War turn away from antebellum individualism, democracy, and egalitarianism back into the 1850s. A generation of administrative rationalisers – men like Henry Carey in Philadelphia and Frederick Law Olmsted in New York – looked to new forms of social control in the period. Reforms like city planning, uniformed policing, and the professionalization of institutions could seem like tools to impose social order on American individualism. Even antislavery took a more conservative turn as the reform movements of the 1840s gave way to the process of conservative 'consolidation' via well-drilled parties and movements.[111] Other historians have described midcentury efforts to reform growing cities as an example of 'centralization' too.[112] These historians too use centralization to describe the process of creating and strengthening governments as well as concentrating political authority in fewer hands at the expense of the enfranchised masses.

Historians have also used centralization as a tool to analyse changing economic power relationships over geography. Many historians have suggested how America might have undergone a 'market revolution' in the antebellum period, as subsistence farmers and independent artisans came to produce for consumers or work for wages under the direction of a growing middle and upper class, and on terms mediated through the impersonal laws

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[107] Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (London, 2008); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982).
[108] Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).
[109] Frederickson, *Inner Civil War* (1993 edition), p. ix.
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] Higham, *Boundlessness to Consolidation*, pp. 15-28.
[112] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 832; Leonard Curry, *The Corporate City: The American City as a Political Entity, 1800-1850* (London, 1997), pp. 1-32, 86-138; Einhorn, *Property*, pp. 148-149, 170; Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 3-11, 12-15; 38-40; 90-121; David Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 43-52, 199-204, 204-209; James Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (London, 1998), pp. 9-180; Edward Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (Guildford, 1981), pp. 364-400.

of the free market.[113] Major cities benefited from this growing mercantile and financial sector built around shipping and the transportation of agricultural merchandise from the West and South. Thanks to federal support for steamship lines to Europe, close connections to the West, and longstanding links to southern cotton planters, New York City cemented its position as America's commercial capital. Projects like Robert Fulton's steamship monopoly, the Erie Railroad, and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad received support from urban mercantile elites as they expected they would benefit from this reordering of economic space. In New York and elsewhere, though, this led to a geographic division of labour between a metropolis that increasingly accumulated capital in the hands of its growing upper class and a hinterland dependant on the city as a source of credit, market, and transportation of staple crops. Historians observing this growing geographic division of labour have described it as an ongoing process of centralization as capital concentrated in the core rather than the surrounding hinterland. [114] Southerners recognised this phemonemon: recent scholarship has shown a southern 'shift in the focus of a pro-slavery critique from imports and merchants *as such* to imports and merchants *from the North* – from the terms of commerce and chicanery to those of geography and politics.'[115] Just as centralization could describe a process of strengthening government power in institutions, it could also be used to indicate the process of building new power relationships between places too.

This thesis will draw from these three meanings of centralization – as a political weapon, as a process, and as a category of historical analysis – to help further understand conservative political thought at midcentury. Considering what causes, agendas, and groups conservatives chose to warn against by delegitimising them using the pejorative term centralization can show what policies, movements, and issues particularly motivated conservative thinkers and writers. Moreover, comparing how conservatives used this rhetorical weapon in a number of areas like international politics, political economy, and city reform will give a broader understanding of conservatives areas of concern than just focusing on opposition to abolitionism and support for the Compromise of 1850. Conservatives may have shared a common language of opposition to centralization with other Americans, but this by no means implies a political consensus on what the greatest supposedly centralizing threat might be. It was how, why, and to what ends that conservatives used the term that illustrates some of their political agenda and distinguishes it from the agendas of other Americans who used the same term.

Second, this thesis will also consider what processes conservatives themselves conceptualised as a centralization. As well as being a pejorative political weapon, the idea of centralization without its negative connotations could help understand changing power relationships over time. Conservatives used the term to describe the process of creating or

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[113] The historiography on the 'market revolution', includes a substantial debate over its usefulness as a tool to periodise the antebellum era and even its existence. See Melvyn Stokes, 'Introduction', in Stephen Conway and Melvyn Stokes (eds) *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill, 1996), pp. 1-20.

[114] Sven Beckert, *Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 20-29; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 450-451, 563-586, 649-673; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (London, 1991); Jo N. Hays, 'Overlapping Hinterlands: York, Philadelphia, And Baltimore, 1800-1850', *Philadelphia Magazine of History and Biography* 116 (1992), pp. 295-321; Johnson, *River*, pp. 244-279; Diane Lindstrom, *Economic Development in the Philadelphia Region, 1810-1850* (New York, 1978), pp. 1-21; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 43-52; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 40-44; Foner, *Business*, pp. 1-14.

[115] Johnson, *River*, p. 288-289.

strengthening sources of political authority and economic wealth. Here it helped them conceptualise expanding or strengthening power relationships between one person, city, or political institution, and wider people or territory. Moreover, in addition to using the term to describe processes of centralization, conservatives also often visually described these changing bonds of dependency using graphic or emotive language. Considering how conservatives used the language and imagery of centralization to understand processes can therefore help historians understand both who held power in midcentury America and how they believed power changing over time. In other words, it can answer how conservatives interpreted the power relationships of the world around them and uncover some of their assumptions about how politics and economics were structured.

Finally, this thesis will consider conservative support for processes that historians and contemporaries conceptualised as centralization. As well as considering what conservatives chose to delegitimise using the rhetoric of centralization, looking at the processes that historians and contemporaries recognised as centralizations but conservatives chose not to label as dangerous centralizations can give further insight into their political thought. Where delegitimising a person, policy, or place as centralization could delegitimise it, not labelling an alternative centralizing process the same way could implicitly legitimise it. They could instead choose to label such processes using less preoperative language – city consolidation, enforcement of the laws, or creating a tributary hinterland – that did not imply the same dangerous power relationship that centralization did. Considering how conservatives used and refrained from using the language of centralization tactically can therefore show the kinds of power relationships conservatives wanted to create in midcentury politics and economics. This can, in turn, illustrate where conservatives believed power should lie, in contrast to those who they used centralization as a rhetorical tactic to warn against, and demonstrate how conservatives used this common language to promote their own agenda.

The published and unpublished works of individuals are one of the places where conservatives used centralization to contest who and where power should hold power in the United States. Sidney George Fisher, for example, recorded his critical observations of domestic and international political developments in his diary, giving particular attention to the French Second Republic and the politics of sectionalism and compromise. Both handwritten and transcribed versions of his diaries are available at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.[116] References to the keyword and processes of centralization in Fisher's private diaries can therefore give an insight into how men like him conceptualised the power relationships of the midcentury United States.

However, most discussions of centralization took place in the world of print culture, and this thesis will use conservatives' articles, pamphlets, and books as primary sources. Conservatives had a history of printing publicly. However, as part of the movement to consolidate government authority as part of the Civil War mobilisation effort, conservative organisations like the Loyal Publication Society, a body associated with the Philadelphia Union League, organised to propagandise on the home front. Their propaganda urged northerners to curb political enthusiasm and perceived radicalism in favour of deference to

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[116] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS.

the limits of legitimate political behaviour set by the political establishment.[117] Henry Carey was one of the most prolific publicists, and beginning with the publication of his book *The Past, the Present, and the Future* in 1848 he began to frequently employ the term centralization in his work. Indeed, he even titled one of his chapters 'Concentration and Centralization'.[118] Records of Carey's work have been digitised and made available online – which radically simplifies keyword analysis – and undigitised work is also freely available at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

Conservatives were out of office most of the time and so usually did not have the benefit of formal state authority to propagate their views or write their projects into law, but they were still able to participate in and engage with formal political institutions, especially at the state and local level. When New York State placed a call for a constitution convention on the ballot in 1848, Maurice Richter, a conservative Democrat from Brooklyn, published a 300-page tract demanding reform of 'legislative encroachments upon the simplest, clearest, and most sacred municipal rights of towns', 'public debt, taxes, crime and mobism', and, above all else, the 'elective judiciary'.[119] When Massachusetts did the same thing in 1853, records of opposition to the radical document that the convention drafted are found in the official journal of its proceedings.[120] Organisations like the Union Committee of Safety in New York and opponents of the radical 1853 Massachusetts Constitutional Convention also published pamphlets of their debates and proceedings to mould public opinion.[121] Many of these documents are also available on digital archives like Archive.org and search engines like Hathitrust, making them easily accessible for research. The figures who wrote these documents may not have always been in positions of power or necessarily even saw themselves as accountable to a capricious electorate, but they organised privately as people interested in politics who made their views public.

Tracking the use of centralization in these primary sources can help give an insight into what a number of conservative private individuals and public officeholders thought about political and economic power in mid-century America. Most of these men might have been out of national political office, and so they are much less visible in the political history of the second party system. However, their position in local and single issue political movements meant that this small number of people could influence policy in a number of areas, making their political thought nonetheless worthy of scholarly attention. A study of centralization will help show which people and places they believed had benefited from industrialisation and the emergence of Jacksonian democracy and how they thought that this small network of elites should respond. This will deepen our understanding of midcentury conservatism, giving a particular insight into the power strictures that they

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[117] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 887; Frederickson, *Inner Civil War*, pp. 131-150.

[118] Henry Carey, *The Past, the Present, and the Future* (Philadelphia, 1848).

[119] Maurice Richter, *Internal Relations of the Cities, Towns, Villages, Counties, and States of the Union, or, The Municipalist: A Highly Useful Book for Voters, Tax-Payers, Statesmen, Politicians and Families* (New York, 1858). See also Maurice Richter, *On Self-Government: Together with General Plans of a State Constitution and a Constitution for a Confederation of States Founded on the Principle of Self-Government* (Boston, 1847); 'New publications Received', *The North American Review* 88 (1859), p. 285; Maurice Richter, *Addenda to the Municipalist* (New York, 1862); 'List of Books', *The Atlantic Monthly* 3 (1859), p. 780.

[120] *Official Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the State Convention, Assembled May 4th, 1853, To Revise and Amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, vol. 3.

[121] Union Safety Committee, *Proceedings*; Rufus Choate et al., *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854).

wanted to build rather as well as the changes that they opposed. Moreover, understanding how they thought about power in midcentury America can in turn help historians better understand how they responded to the sectional crisis itself and the extent that they saw rebuilding the Union as an opportunity to rebuild power relations within the North itself.

However, these conservatives' efforts were limited in comparison to the wider conservative press. In Philadelphia, McMichael's *North American and United States Gazette* had established itself as the voice of Philadelphia's conservatives. McMichael's passionate pursuit of consolidation in 1854, opposition to abolitionism, and defence of the city's business interests led one contemporary to describe it as 'antediluvian', though McMichael himself embraced what he saw as modernizing forces like government and industry.[122] Similarly, in New York, James Watson Webb's mercantile *Courier and Enquirer* accused the rival Whig *New York Times* and the *Tribune* with dangerous radicalism.[123] However, Whig newspapers did not have a monopoly on conservatism: James Gordon Bennett published the Democratic – but populist – *New York Herald*, and claimed to speak for the 'conservative masses'. By this, he meant opposition to any 'ism' he deemed a threat to existing social relations and hierarchies, and the Union. Like many other conservatives, Bennett wove everything from abolitionism and feminism to free love and socialism into a single threat to the Union, a single subversive mindset from which radical would establish anarchy and a 'reign of terror'.[124] Editorials of the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Brooklyn Eagle*, like the *Herald*, took direct issue with northern social reform as well as southern secession, as the sectional crisis placed slavery higher on the political agenda.[125] In their pages, they suggested how American conservatives also tried to appropriate the language of opposition to centralization to challenge the evolving power relationships of the midcentury United States.

Where the publications of a small number individuals can help demonstrate conservative thought among a small number of properted elites, these newspapers can help show how these ideas circulated in the public sphere and had mass appeal. Thanks in part to a generally literate enfranchised citizenry, the American newspaper industry had proliferated since the 1820s. And this industry was more than happy to cater to its readers' appetite for political discussion, and so debates in Congress, the Supreme Court, and general elections extended well into the editorial rivalries between major American newspapers. Newspapers' growing financial independence from party patronage in the Jacksonian era gave their editors substantial editorial freedom, even if they generally aligned with one of the two parties of the second party system. Moreover, both contemporaries and historians recognise the importance of the press to the antebellum urban public sphere. In their pages and columns, newspapers carried, contested, and settled the political debates that animated the American electorate.[126] A study of how these conservative newspapers and journals used

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[122] Bloom, 'North American', pp. 156-163. See also Phillip S. Paludan, 'The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis in Law and Order', *The American Historical Review* 77 (1972), pp. 1017-1018.

[123] James Crouthamel, *James Watson Webb: A Biography* (Middletown, 1969); James Coruthamel 'James Watson Webb: Mercantile Editor', *New York History* 41 (1960), pp. 400-422; Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 227, 239.

[124] James Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracause, 1989); Fermer, *Gordon Bennett*, pp. 66-70.

[125] Raymond Schroth, *The Eagle and Brooklyn: A Community Newspaper, 1841-1955* (Westport, 1974), pp. 59-69; Harold Williams, *The Baltimore Sun, 1837-1897* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 40-64.

[126] James Crouthamel, 'The Newspaper Revolution in New York, 1830-1860', *New York History* 45 (1964), pp. 91-113; Philip Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (London, 2001), pp. 19-25; Fermer, *Gordon Bennett*, pp. 90-99; William Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (London, 1999), pp. 1-40; Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History Of American Newspapers* (New York, 1978).

centralization to delegitimise their opposition and rationalise the processes unfolding around them can therefore   reflect wider concerns over power and economics among northern voters. In other words, it can help show how the ideas of a small number of conservative elites were also shared among the northern population and helped shape the political culture of the period.

Within these diaries, newspapers, and publications, conservatives challenged new institutional and geographic sources of authority as centralizations of power and described their political opponents as dangerous centralizers. Conservatives did not have a monopoly on claiming opposition to centralization; almost all Americans found it a useful language to legitimise their political agenda. A keyword search through digital archives will show how and where conservatives chose to use this term to conceptualise the changes taking place around them. However, as other keyword studies suggest, Americans often used words tactically to advance a particular agenda. This thesis will therefore identify who and what conservatives chose to delegitimise in the public sphere by labelling them as dangerous centralizers. Rather than focusing on the definition of the term, it will therefore explore how conservatives contested this term, tried to redefine what constituted centralization, and who exactly provided the greatest centralizing threat. Unlike many other Americans, who used it to attack corporate monopoly and undemocratic regimes, this diverse group of people from wide variety of partisan, regional and religious backgrounds used a similar language of opposition to centralization for very different purposes. This study of how conservatives deployed the term centralization will therefore help highlight a hitherto hidden political divide within the second party system and in the years of realignment that followed its collapse. Focusing on how conservatives used a political language (rather than looking at the term centralization itself) can therefore help reveal some of their political thought and agenda.

As well as being a useful political weapon for contemporaries, historians studying the social and political changes of the mid-nineteenth century and studies of keyword analyses have also identified and described the transformations of midcentury America as centralizations too. This thesis will therefore consider how conservatives advanced their particular political agenda by labelling one process of centralization as a dangerous centralization of power in order to distract from or legitimise other changes that they hoped to benefit from. These processes included the creation of stronger governments with greater interventionist potential, handing decision-making authority into a smaller group of people, as well as the emergence of cities with infrastructure to dominate surrounding areas' economies. By choosing not to label these processes pejoratively as a centralization, conservatives implicitly legitimised their own centralizing processes. As well as looking at the processes conservatives chose to delegitimise as dangerous centralizations of power, this thesis will also consider the processes they left unchallenged – and even embraced – that historians and contemporaries have described as centralization. Studying which processes conservatives chose to support – or at least leave unchallenged – can therefore help deepen our understanding of a conservative political agenda by looking not just at political rhetoric but how they believed power should be exercised, where its sources should lie, and how to build a more modern government and economy.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it will build on recent historiography to show that conservatism in the 1850s was more nuanced and expansive than simply support for compromise with the South and opposition to abolition. A study of how

conservatives defined centralization and used it as a political weapon against their opponents can highlight how they believed that the greatest political divide in America was not between proslavery and antislavery, Whigs and Democrats, or bankers and the people, but between supposed radical centralizers and conservatives. Second, it will highlight a conservative programme of modernisation. Despite using a language of opposition to change, this thesis will seek to show how conservatives also embraced various processes that historians and contemporaries have described as centralization. It will suggest that conservatives may often have been divided on many issues like free trade, the morality of slavery, and immigration, but they often came together in support of state-strengthening, democratic retrenchment, and special protection and privileges for private property. Finally, it will seek to contextualise the conservative response to the sectional crisis within their reading of American politics as a divide between democratic centralization and conservative state-building. Conservative opponents of disunion and abolition often conceptualised revolution abroad, urban and economic growth, and riot and popular disorder in American cities in similar terms to the slavery crisis. In doing so, it argues that historians studying usually discrete phenomena in the antebellum era can use centralization to understand connections between political and economic thought and practice, and the wider sectional crisis.

Thesis Outline

Between 1848 and 1852, American conservatives observed the transformation of France's July Monarchy to the Second Republic and Louis-Napoleon's Second Empire, and like almost Americans, they criticised his *coup d'état* as a dangerous centralization of state power in a single individual. The first chapter explores how conservatives, especially Sidney George Fisher and conservative journals in New York and Philadelphia, used France as a laboratory to explore the trajectory of republican government under democratic rule. Despite using the same language of centralization to describe France's fate as American small-d democrats, conservatives distinguished themselves by describing democratisation as the 'centralization' of political authority responsible for Louis-Napoleon's authoritarian regime. These Americans therefore redefined centralization as a concentration of power in the people, which in turn allowed them to present undemocratic government as sharing power between balanced institutions and propertied officeholders. France enabled them to speculate about their own possible futures of a (desirable) republican polity with power centred in the state and a (dangerous) democratic anarchy with power centred directly in the hands of the Paris mob. Their comparisons between the French and American electorate allowed American conservatives to define legitimate republican citizenship at home. Othering France and the French as a nation that supposedly centralized all power in the state, then, provided conservatives with an argument for their own model for centralization, which involved strengthening the bonds of dependency between the people and a state over which they had only limited control. In other words, Louis-Napoleon's France and centralization helped conservatives address nation-building at home.

The Americans who criticised French democracy as a process of centralization in the Paris mob also tried to understand the geographic aspect of centralization. As well as describing power relationships between a small institution and the masses, it could also describe power relationships over space, such as the ties between French provinces and the

national capital.[127] The second chapter therefore explores how centralization could describe changing power between a city and a surrounding hinterland as much as the ties between the people and an institution. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the competition between conservatives themselves for control over the transformation of the antebellum American economy. Henry Carey and his supporters in some of the conservative protectionist press used the idea of geographic centralization in an empire city to warn against the consequences of free trade. At a local level, citizens of Northeastern cities, including conservatives at Massachusetts's constitutional convention and McMichael's *North American* too warned against New York's triumphant commercial expansion as a dangerous process of centralization over space. Yet these urban elites expected the ongoing processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and capitalism to continue to give them prosperity far into the future. Defining centralization as a process which led to geographic dependency on a remote city allowed conservatives to legitimise their own smaller-scale centralizations of power over their own cities and hinterlands. Centralization therefore gave conservatives the opportunity– and political weapon – to explore how state building and economic development could help them secure political power and economic prosperity in their own metropolitan locales.

Cities, then, featured heavily in the processes that conservatives used centralization to describe over time. After all, urban centres contained most of 'the people' who threatened to centralize state authority in themselves – Paris proved an alarming example – and were 'naturally' centralizers of economic wealth too. [128] The third chapter therefore explores how the problems of democratic and economic centralization existed within cities as well as around them. Looking to Paris as a warning, conservatives in New York, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia, among others, warned that collective violence threatened 'centralization' in their own cities. Drawing in part from a belief that too much democracy meant mob rule, reformers sought to reassert the power of the local government over the people. Again, defining the people as the greatest centralizing threat allowed them to present state-building at a local level as sharing power. Consolidation, police reform, and charter reform offered, at a local level, the opportunity to experiment with ways to strengthen city government, both remapping it across space away from disorderly suburban neighbourhoods and centring power in city government and institutions over a more deferent populace. Designs for local centralization of power allowed conservatives to develop alternative models of state building to the democratic teleologies of perceived radicals and the stagnant despotisms of the Old World, and posited the 1850s city as a microcosm for the nation as a whole.

Municipal politics, though, did not exist in a vacuum. Many conservatives saw the parallels between the processes of municipal consolidation and their long-term project to uphold the Union against the growing threat of northern abolition and southern disunion.[129] The fourth chapter explores how conservatives applied similar solutions they had pursued within cities on a national scale, defining illegitimate centralizations in order to legitimise their own concentrations of power. In the face of national disunion, local state building

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[127] Ironically, Louis Napoleon's government in practice drew support from country France and found resistance in Paris, but this did not prevent most conservatives from assuming *a priori* that the Second Empire was a metropolitan imposition.

[128] For example, see David Schley, 'Tracks in the Streets', *The Journal of Urban History* 39 (2003), pp. 1062-1084.

[129] City-dwellers in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York drew parallels between political economy, order, and culture within their city and refashioning the nation as a whole at a larger scale in their own image. See Einhorn, *Property Rules*, pp. 20-26, 70-74; Heath, 'In Union There is Strength', pp. 101-124; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 15-54.

could also create a precedent for a national basis for strong government. Conservatives unsurprisingly rallied to the cause of the Union when slavery threatened to pull it apart following the conclusion of the Mexican American War in 1848 and the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Northeastern conservatives' ties to the South, though, went well beyond cotton, credit, and steamships. Just as Northeastern conservatives identified themselves as the victims of a centralizing democracy in their own cities, they identified with southern slaveholders as 'victims' of the logic of majority rule, seeing in the concentration of state power in the hands of northern urban voters as a challenge to a bisectional federal government. In this context, building support for compromise can be read as part of a process of national consolidation, one that stood as an alternative to the anarchy of disunion. Conservatives who took part in bisectional Union Parties, the Constitutional Union Party, and even some conservative Whigs and Republicans took the opportunity to chart a new trajectory for the United States: one that avoided the centralizing teleology of democracy that led to French-style urban disorder and national revolution. Northern conservatives, then, used 'centralization' in Europe, political economy, and cities to think about the future of their own republic in an era where the triumph of liberal republican democracy seemed neither inevitable – nor desirable.

Chapter 1: Centralization Abroad: Conservatives Confront the Second Republic and the Second Empire in France

Introduction

Dramatic political upheavals in Paris in 1848 and 1851-52 gave Americans the opportunity to explore the definition and responsibility for the 'centralization' of political authority in France and the United States. Conservatives used the term like many other Americans did: to describe how Louis-Napoleon had monopolised political decision making in France and could wield violent authority over the entire country. But unlike other Americans, they warned that the French people had started this process themselves in 1848. Conservatives therefore used France to define the pejorative term 'centralization' as the threat they believed the people posed to government. This made France a useful political weapon with which they could cast domestic radicals, subversives, and democrats as dangerous French-style centralizers. But having defined centralization as a perceived radical democracy, conservatives used France as an opportunity to put forth their own ideal government, one that centred power in propertied elites with a clear monopoly on legitimate force. France therefore shows how conservatives redefined and used centralization tactically to legitimise monopolising power in their own hands, using a seemingly radical and democratic language to far more proscriptive ends.

Once the February 1848 French general election campaign descended into violence on the streets of Paris, King Louis Philippe fled the capital and republicans proclaimed the Second French Republic under a democratic constitution. However, by June, confrontations between socialists who supported national labour reform and conservative and liberal supporters of 'order' led to a second violent uprising. The government brutally broke workers' barricades, killing 5,000 workers in the process.[1] In this political tumult, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of the first French Emperor, named himself a candidate for the elections scheduled for December 1848, and won by a landslide. Not content with being a mere president of a democratic republic, Louis-Napoleon organised a coup d'état in 1851 and established a dictatorship. One year later, he swept away the Second Republic and, in a rigged referendum, inaugurated the Second French Empire. Despite blatant fraud, the transformation from republic to empire had substantial support from the French countryside.[2] This left Louis-Napoleon's empire as an authoritarian state that relied on both demagogy and political repression to rule – even if it was forced to concede democratic rights by the time it fell in 1870.[3]

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[1] Peter Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, 1975), p. 313.
[2] For observations of the Revolutions of 1848 and establishment of the Second French Empire, see Victor Hugo, *Napoleon the Little* (Boston, 1900); Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel de Leon (Chicago, 1907). For details of the establishment and political life of the Second Empire, see John Bury, *Napoléon III and the Second Empire* (London, 1964); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, 1998); Sudhir Hazareesingh *The Saint-Napoleon: Celebrations of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2004); Hobsbawm, *Age of Capital*; Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 7-38; Roger Price, *Napoleon III and the Second Empire* (London 1997); Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848-1870* (Cambridge, 2004).
[3] See Price, *Second Empire: An Anatomy*.

Louis-Napoleon's power-grab gave Americans a window on to the transformation of a democratic republic into an authoritarian monarchy. American newspapers and journals eagerly reported developments in Paris, ambassadors Richard Rush and William Rives documented the revolutions while fulfilling their ministerial duties, and diarists like Sidney George Fisher and George Templeton Strong recorded their views on the upheavals. Unsurprisingly, most American observers welcomed the overthrow of Louis Philippe 1848. As king, he had promised to follow a middle-class course between extremes of democracy and absolutism, and his administration used tax and property qualifications to limit suffrage to one voter for every 170 citizens.[4] This contrasted sharply with most American state governments, which by the mid-1830s had enfranchised almost all white men. Scholarship on the American reaction to Revolutions of 1848 often suggests that most U.S. observers supported replacing an undemocratic monarchy with a democratic republic, which resembled the one they had established in 1776, and dismissed the small minority who questioned the French capacity for republican citizenship as unpatriotic. This historiography suggests that most Americans supported French democracy, believing that the French were establishing a similar republic to their own. Only when the red flag of socialism appeared in Paris in June 1848 did many Americans bitterly turn against French republicanism.[5]

But when looking to explain the origins of Louis-Napoleon's Empire, some Americans turned to criticisms of the Revolutions of 1848 themselves. Rather than seeing 1848 as a re-enactment of 1776, they argued that the violence of 1848 and descent into Empire gave them a glimpse into their own possible future under industrialisation, immigration, and urbanisation. By mid-century, rioting and violence – much of it with political aims – had become a pressing issue in most major American cities.[6] Collusion

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[4] King Louis Philippe coming to power in 1830 following a revolution that deposed the conservative Bourbon monarch Charles X. This new government claimed to follow a moderate policy, rejecting the conservatism of traditional Bourbon governments, the violence of republicanism, and the upheavals associated with the Bonapartes. It also claimed to enshrine the values of the middle class and the growing urban bourgeoisie, pursuing a policy of 'moderate liberalism', emphasising a capitalist economy and constitutional government. But in practice, this meant excluding from public political debate those who the Orleanists believed were unreasonable and threatened the newly established order with mass passions and disorder. For a brief background on the July Monarchy, see Hugh Collingham, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France, 1830-1848* (London, 1988), pp. 70-83; Davies, *Europe*, p. 803; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789-1848* (London, 1962), pp. 146-147; Roger Magraw, *France 1815-1914: The Bourgeois Century* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 51-88.

[5] An emerging literature is considering how Americans understood major events in nineteenth-century European social and political history, such as the Revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune. See Beckert, *Metropolis*, p. 63; Casper, *American Attitudes*; Cleves, *Terror in America*; Curti, 'Impact of the Revolutions'; Enrico Del Lago, '"We Cherished the Same Hostility to Every Form of Tyranny": Transatlantic Parallels and Contacts between William Lloyd Garrison and Guiseppe Mazzini, 1846-1872', *American Nineteenth-Century History* 13 (2012), pp. 293-320; Fleche, *1861*; Paola Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles* (Athens, Ga., 2005); Katz, *Appomattox to Montmartre*; Morrison, 'American Reaction'; Frank Prochaska, *The Eagle and the Crown: Americans and the British Monarchy* (London, 2008); Philip Roberts, '"All Americans are hero-worshippers": American Observations on the First U.S. Visit by a Reigning Monarch, 1876', *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* 7 (2008), pp. 453-477; Roberts, 'Bloody Toy of the Multitude'; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*; Timothy Roberts, 'The European Revolutions of 1848 and Antebellum Violence in Kansas', *Journal of the West* 44 (2006), pp. 58-68; Smith, 'Savannah to Vienna', pp. 27-51; Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (London, 2007). The exception was the more radical *New York Tribune*, which supported the Revolutions throughout. Tuchinsky, *Greeley's*, pp. 84-88.

[6] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham,* pp. 135-841; Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (London, 1975); Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot & Disorder in Jacksonian America* (Oxford, 1980); Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362; Paul Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (London, 1987); David Grimstead, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861* (Oxford, 1998); Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 432-434; Lisa Keller, *The Triumph of Order: Democracy & Public Space in New York and London* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 149-214; Carl Prince, 'The Great "Riot Year": Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of

between local politicians and gangs led to the manipulation of the electoral process, and the immigrant proletarian electorate looked very different to the 'Anglo-Saxon' artisans and farmers enfranchised in the 1820s and 1830s. Urban disorder and demographic change gave city-dwellers in the United States a sense of profound political upheaval, which anti-immigrant nativist politicians harnessed in the mid-1850s to seize power in several major metropolitan centres.[7] The failure of city governments to restrain urban violence pushed urban elites to rethink power relationships in a republic, and they used a language of opposition to centralization to do so. Citizens in the antebellum metropolis experimented with some less then democratic alternatives to restore law and order, including police and charter reform, takeovers by so-called 'vigilance committees,' and occasionally disenfranchisement.[8] Research on the extent of government authority too suggests that many Americans were comfortable with extensive law-enforcing authority and a powerful state, even if their methods of doing so – ranging from private authority, strong local government, and strong political parties – did not always resemble a modern European nation-state.[9] Rather than seeing the 1848 Revolutions as the Old World catching up with the New and Louis-Napoleon's 1851-52 power grab as a regressive reaction against this democratic promise, conservatives sometimes saw France as rehearsing the kind of fate that America might experience if they failed to prevent government weakness against popular violence.

The parallels between the democratic Second Republic and the partial democratisation of the United States in the Age of Jackson therefore gave some conservatives the opportunity to reflect on the limits of American democracy. The historiography of American republicanism shows how conservatives in the Revolutionary and Early National eras feared a democracy where the people as a mob, assembly, or crowd directly wielded violent authority as much as they opposed the concentration of power in an absolute monarch or despot. They used tools like mixing appointive and elective positions,

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Violence in 1834', *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985), pp. 1-19; Richards, *Property and Standing*; Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 135-182; Smith, *The Dominion of Voice* (Lawrence, 1999), pp. 51-83; Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War* (London, 2004); Frank Towers, 'Mobtown's Impact on the Study of Urban Politics in the Early Republic', *Maryland Historical Magazine* 107 (2012), pp. 469-475; Warner, *Private* City, pp. 125-157; Weigley, 'The Border City', pp. 363-416.

[7] For the conservative aspects of the Nativist movement in New York City, see Conlin, '"Isms" and "Ists"', pp. 205-233; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488; Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 910-917. For general reading on Nativism, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*; Mark Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War* (London, 1992); Dale Knobel, *America for the Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States* (London, 1996); Jean Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (London, 1977); John Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston, 1990); Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 241-247.

[8] Beckert, *Metropolis*, p. 83; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 635-638, 735-773; Curry, *Corporate City*, pp. 1-32; Ethington, *Public City*, pp. 86-169; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 138-156; Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 3-122, Keller, *Triumph*, pp. 151-169; Keyssar, *Right to* Vote, pp. 65-69; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 153-160; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 134-216; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 45-66, 313-340, 364-400; Willbur Miller, *Cops and Bobbies: Police Authority in New York and London, 1830-1870* (Columbus, 1999), pp. 2-24; Leonard Stevenson, *Policing in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, 2008), pp. 10-19; Jon Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (London, 1979), pp. 5-31; Jon Teaford, *The Municipal Revolution in America : Origins of Modern Urban Government, 1650-1825* (London, 1975); Weigley, 'Border City', pp. 363-416. For more extensive references, see Chapter 3.

[9] Balogh, *Government Out of Sight*; Gerstle, 'Strong and Weak', pp. 779-785; Gerstle, 'Resilient Power of the States', pp. 61–87; Novak, 'Myth of the "Weak" American State, pp. 752-772; Skowronek, *New American State* (Cambridge, 1982).

limiting the size of the electorate, and placing restrictions on who could hold office to prevent the people assuming control over the country.[10] A conservative reading of events like the Whiskey Rebellion and Shays' Rebellion – where impoverished westerners violently challenged the right of state governments to tax them – suggested that the people, not the state, could still threaten liberty.[11] In the Jacksonian period, states opened more offices opened to popular vote and repealed most property qualifications for voting and holding office. The Democratic Party in particular had claimed the mantle of popular sovereignty, struggling against aristocratic and monarchical influence in government; their success forced their reluctant Whig opponents to follow them.[12] Against this backdrop of partial democratisation, however, fears of popular authority still endured in responses to the Dorr War in Rhode Island against an undemocratic state government, urban rioting, and Whig critiques of Andrew Jackson's claim of a popular mandate to overrule Congress and the Supreme Court.[13] Louis-Napoleon's accession therefore came just as Americans themselves felt a profound change in their own republic as it had emerged as a white male democracy. Americans opposed to universal white male suffrage used the riotous democracy of France and Louis-Napoleon's transformation from President to Emperor to help consider the limits of democracy at home. These contests over democratic radicalism and law and order appeared in how conservatives used centralization.

Writers, politicians, and intellectuals across the political spectrum often used 'centralization' repeatedly to describe France between 1848 and 1852, as Louis-Napoleon assumed control of all the national and local institutions of the French government, and, from Paris, used the force of the state to impose his will over the whole country. But despite using the term to describe a similar process of power concentrating in the hands of a single officeholder, they used this term as a political weapon to suit very different agendas. For example, the *Democratic Review* – the voice of the 1848-inspired Young America wing of the Democratic Party 1848 – wove together European revolutionary republicanism, opposition to Louis-Napoleon's coup, and the ongoing struggle for 'free trade and free government' in America. The need to 'get rid of centralization' on both sides of the Atlantic implied an ongoing process of devolving power to the masses that had begun, but had not been completed, in 1776.[14] The *American Whig Review*, the official journal of New York City's conservative Whigs, retorted that France had 'centralized herself', blaming the French people for a coup that 'taught the world that suffrage is not liberty'. Here, the people too posed a centralizing threat as much as any tyrannical emperor, as power centred in the hands of the mob.[15] Despite common agreement on the definition of centralization as a process,

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[10] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 3-21, 33; Rakove, *Original Meanings*, pp. 35-56; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 49-50; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 430-468.

[11] Cleves, *Terror in America*, pp. 20-57; Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, pp. 80-116, 153-189, 246-276; Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 11-50; Wilentz, A*merican Democracy*, pp. 13-50

[12] Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party*, p. 121; Holt, *American Whig Party*, p. 16; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 231, 328-410; Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 205-206; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 49-51; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 181-520.

[13] Conlin, '"Isms" and "Ists"', pp. 205-233; Grimsted, *Mobbing*, pp. 209-217; Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 69-95; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 367-445, 581-603; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488; Keyssar, *Right to* Vote, pp. 56-60; Schlesinger, *Jackson*, pp. 322-323, 485-487; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 51-83; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 17, 425-455, 539-545.

[14] 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency', *USDR* 30 (1852), pp. 1-13. For more on the *Democratic Review*, see Holt, *Whig Party*, p. 67; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 241; Edward Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (Oxford, 1999) pp. 12-16.

[15] 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 164-176. For more on the *Whig Review*, see Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 68-70, 212-213.

conservatives could use this seemingly democratic language to caution against democratic expansion.

France offered conservatives confirmation of a prejudice that a democracy unrestrained by institutions was as much a danger as centralization of power in one man. Their use of centralization to define both a democratic republic and an authoritarian empire belied the appearance of consensus that the French left in June 1848 and the French right in December 1851 had betrayed the principles of 1776. They argued that the same 'centralization' that distinguished the Second Empire existed under the Second Republic and had doomed the project from the very beginning, and explained Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état as an inevitable end point to a process that led from an overbearing democracy to an authoritarian tyranny. Contesting the responsibility for centralization in France helped conservatives warn against democratic expansion. Moreover, the context of urban disorder, further calls for democratic rights in the United States, and their own comparisons between France and America suggest that these criticisms of French voters and democracy were made with American popular government in mind. And while they seemed more comfortable with white male majority rule at home, they compared unfit voters in France to perceived radicals at home to set limits on acceptable political debate. This conservative redefinition of centralization as a popular threat to republican institutions allowed them to legitimise a process of centralization on their own terms, one that prioritised the growth of state power and propertied rule to cope with an increasingly urban, disorderly, and industrial society.

Rather than seeking to return to an imagined Early National idyll of small government, rural society, and deferential patrician rule, conservatives were already aware they were looking for a government suitable for the world of 1848, and sought a conservative alternative to the democratic Revolutions of 1848. The observations and assumptions they made about France suggest that they welcomed the opportunity to overturn the principle that the people, however narrowly or widely defined, should naturally claim more and more control over the government of the republic over time.

Centralization and Louis-Napoleon's Coup d'état, 1851-1852

When Louis-Napoleon laid the foundations of the Second Empire between 1851 and 1852, many American found centralization a useful way to understand the changing government of France. As Alexis de Tocqueville put it when writing about Jacksonian America, 'The government centralizes its agency whilst it increases its prerogative — hence a twofold increase of strength'.[16] Similarly, liberals and conservatives both used 'centralization' to describe two processes: first the process of concentrating political decision-making power inwards into the hands of fewer institutions, officeholders, or people, and second the process of strengthening government power to enforce its will efficiently outwards over the French people and provinces from the imperial office in Paris. Centralization therefore helped Americans understand changing political power relationships between Emperor, state, and people. However, using Louis-Napoleon's centralization as a political weapon against domestic political opponents and contesting the responsibility for this centralization revealed a deep divide behind this seeming consensus on the dangers of centralization. Conservative comparisons of French centralizers to abolitionists and warnings that Louis-Napoleon had

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[16] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, p. 84; de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, p. 321

usurped powers that belonged to republican government rather than the people suggests that these Americans used French centralization to warn against democratic radicalism.

Louis-Napoleon's personal authority concerned Americans from many political backgrounds. Between the coup d'état in late 1851 and the proclamation of the Second Empire a year later, France remained a titular republic, albeit with a constitution that sanctioned a legal dictatorship. [17] A whole host of liberal, conservative, Whig, and Democratic newspapers joined political scientist Francis Lieber in labelling Louis-Napoleon's authoritarian republic as a 'mockery of' or a 'libel on the name of' a republic. Instead, they argued, it resembled an elective despotism', a 'burlesque of representative government'. [18] The extent of the President's executive authority particularly concerned these observers. They compared Louis-Napoleon to the monarchs who had rejected democratisation in 1848 and had no popular or legal restrains on their executive authority. Indeed, writers across the political spectrum in America's major metropolises described the French President after his 1851 coup as a 'prince', a 'king' or even a 'demigod' similar to the Russian Czar, a Habsburg monarch, or the Pope. [19] The idea of a monarchy within a republican constitution allowed American observers to conceptualise how Louis-Napoleon had control over the law-making and law-enforcing purposes of government. Despite both America and France being republics between 1851 and 1852, they recognised that France's strong executive made France a very different republic to the USA.

Republican anxieties over concentrations of power made monarchy a useful political weapon for partisans who used it as a political weapon to attack their opponents. Many Americans assumed that republics were fragile and that without careful vigilance individuals could usurp power that belonged to the people and the institutions of government. These fears often manifested in depictions of republican presidents as European-style monarchs, suggesting that political opponents were a part of this tendency of power to concentrate over time. [20] Whig depictions of Andrew Jackson as a king after he unilaterally vetoed the charter of America's central bank (see Illustration 1 below) and Democratic portrayals of William Seward offering Whig candidate Zachary Taylor the imperial crown (see Illustration 2 below) illustrate how propagandists already used a polemical tradition of presenting overly-active Presidents as monarchical. Even if it is unlikely that anyone genuinely expected

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[17] Sophie Boyron, *The Constitution of France: A Contextual Analysis* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 13-14; Price, *Second Empire: An Anatomy*; Arthur Tilley, *Modern France: A Companion to French Studies* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 161-163.

[18] Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*. vol. 1, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), pp. 42-43; 'Louis Napoleon', *Gallipolis Journal*, March 25, 1852; 'The Explosion in France', *BDE*, December 22, 1851; 'The Revolution in France-its Consequences', *NYH*, December 25, 1851; 'Louis Napoleon's Constitution', *PL*, February 9, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon's Constitution', *The Mountain Sentinel*, March 04, 1852; 'The New French Constitution', *The Boston Daily Atlas*, February 13, 1852. '[Untitled]', *The Natchez Courier*, February 24, 1852.

[19] 'Louis Napoleon's Constitution', *PL*, February 9, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon's Constitution'; *The Mountain Sentinel*, March 04, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon Bonaparte', *DSG*, January 05, 1852; 'The Election in France', *The Boston Courier*, January 1, 1852; 'France', *NYT*, December 24, 1851; 'The Revolution in France-its Consequences', *NYH*, December 25, 1851; 'The New Constitution of France', *NYH*, February 8, 1852; 'Order' in France and Europe', *NYT*, January 6, 1852.

[20] For more on scepticism of monarchy in the antebellum and early republic eras, see Bernard Bailyn, 'The Logic of Rebellion: Conspiracy Fears and the American Revolution' in Richard Curry and Thomas Brown (eds), *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History* (London, 1972), pp. 21-42; Bailyn, *Origins*, p. 70; Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, pp. 12–13; Andrew Heath, '"Let the Empire Come": Imperialism and Its Critics in the Reconstruction South', *Civil War History* 60 (2014), pp. 152-189; Holt, *American Whig Party*, pp. 30, 110; Rodgers, *Distant Revolutions*, p. 61; Watson, *Liberty*, pp. 42-72; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 56-57, 289, 563; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 28-36, 107-114; Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 263, 271, 278.

Taylor or Jackson to proclaim a monarchy, propagandists played on perceptions that their political opponents would claim further power if the people did not check it. Depictions of Louis-Napoleon as a monarch, like cartoons of Andrew Jackson, spoke to similar fears that republics were vulnerable, and could easily fall victim to corrupt individuals. These fears were still relevant in 1850s America. The idea that power relationships in a republic could change not just as a revolutionary moment but as part of a long-term process, like a President's term of office, gave the charge that policies and politicians posed a centralizing threat to the republic its potency.

Conservative writers in particular backed up this assertion by describing constitutional changes in France as a process of centralizing control over the state apparatus into Louis-Napoleon's own hands. The small legislature, appointed officeholders, and long terms of office – common in America before the Jacksonian era – made institutions the mere 'instruments of the will of M. Bonaparte' and reduced the legislature to the role of 'mutes' stripped of all independent control over state power.[21] Moreover, according to both Whig and Democratic conservatives, his control of the law enforcing apparatus of the state, like the Army, legislature, and bureaucracy, proved the Louis-Napoleon had 'an uncontrolled and apparently irresistible power over all the interests and institutions of the country'.[22] Rather than functioning independently as part of a system of divided power, it seemed that Louis-Napoleon had turned the French state into a rubber-stamp for his own political decision-making. Centralization had a place in American political science to describe how the French leader built ties of dependency from his office in Paris over the institutions and offices that exercised power on the streets, towns, and cities of France. Far from being just journalistic hyperbole or a partisan insult, the term reflected how even minor constitutional changes could create or strengthen power relationships between one man or institution and the entire machinery of the state. Conservatives would themselves come to use many of these techniques themselves when looking to build more centralised regimes at home.

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[21] 'Additional Foreign News', *NA&USG*, January 19, 1852; 'Historical Review of the Month, *International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 5 (1852), pp. 422-423.
[22] 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15, no. 86 (1852), pp. 183-188; 'Kossuth and the Recent Revolution in France', *NYH*, December 29, 1851; 'Our General Review', *The American Whig Review* 15, no. 88 (1852), pp. 368-375; 'Louis Napoleon and Gen. Cavaignac', *NI*, January 1, 1852; Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 1, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), pp. 166-174; 'The New Constitution of France', *NYH*, February 8, 1852.

Illustration 1: *King Andrew the First.*

Caricature of Democratic president Andrew Jackson as a monarch published in 1833, one year after Jackson was re-elected after vetoing the charter of the Second Bank of the United States. This image speaks to republican assumptions that monarchs were able to exercise substantial amounts of discretionary power in contrast to a restrained constitutional American president.

Source: 'King Andrew the First', Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, *The Library of Congress*, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661753/ [Accessed January 21, 2013].

Illustration 2: *A Magnificent Offer to a Magnificent Officer*.
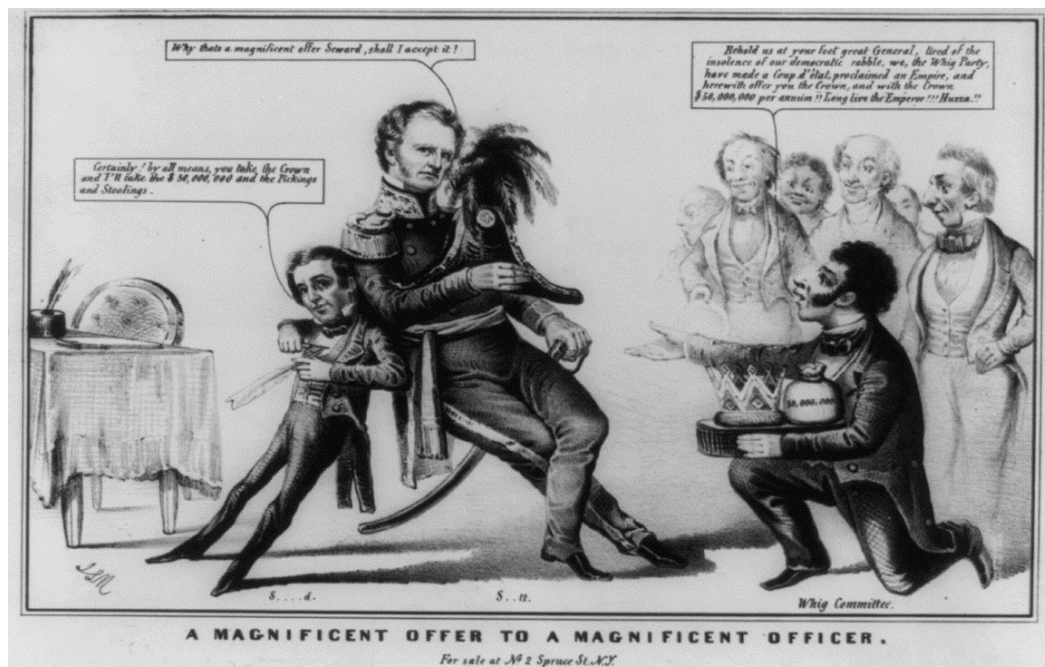
This democratic cartoon shows abolitionist Whig politicians offering presidential candidate Winfield Scott an Imperial crown in 1852, while the Second Republic was being remodelled as the Second Empire. This cartoon too draws from an assumption that ambitious monarchs held substantial discretionary power, as it tried to link the power to enforce abolition to the kind of power that European monarchs held over their own nations.

Source: 'A Magnificent Offer to a Magnificent Officer', Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, *The Library of Congress*, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661557/ [Accessed September 06, 2013].

Centralizing inwards all the branches, institutions, and offices of government into the hands of one man seemed to create another centralization, strengthening the government and its ability to enforce its will over the entire nation. When explaining how Louis-Napoleon could create a police state in France, the Washington *National Intelligencer* referred to his domination of the French National Assembly.[23] In other words, the centralization of political decision-making inwards from the institutions if the French government to Louis-Napoleon's office seemed to increase or intensify the extent that the French state could exercise power outwards over its subjects. American observers criticised the methods of law enforcement that the dictator used to keep citizens in line. Newspapers and writers noted his large standing army, described his government as a 'military despotism' or 'military absolutism' supported by a 'centralized civil force of office-holders', and warned about his readiness to use railways as agents of 'centralization' over the rest of the country.[24] These tools showed how Louis-Napoleon could from the capital use the coercive power of the state upon entire nation. The *Boston Courier* counselled that as a result 'There is no government at France but the bayonets of Louis-Napoleon'.[25] These descriptions of state violence speak to fear that streamlining and simplifying the decision-making apparatus of the state allowed officeholders to use the ability of government to wield executive power over the people. Midcentury conservatives used centralization in this regard to understand not just the process of concentrating decision-making authority inwards from one institution from many but also the process of strengthening the state and its ability to enforce the law. This assumption – that centralizing decision-making power of multiple institutions into a single officeholder led to a stronger government – would become a vital party of state-building measures in the 1850s as conservatives dealt with the threat of urban rioting and the dissolution of the union.

The association of Louis-Napoleon with centralization meant that many Americans used him to attack their partisan political opponents. For example, the premier journals of the Whig and Democratic parties in New York City used Louis-Napoleon to delegitimize their opponents. The *Democratic Review* suggested that the 1848 and 1852 Whig presidential candidates Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor both plotted to bring chaos to the republic by provoking civil war or building a militaristic popular following in order to emerge as a Louis-Napoleon-style strongman.[26] The *Whig Review* claimed in response that unfit French voters had established centralization – a common conservative response to the crisis – and that strong leaders were therefore not the greatest centralizing threat to the republic.[27] Similar comparisons appeared elsewhere as the campaign for 1852 heated up.[28] The *Whig Review* and the *Democratic Review*'s comparisons indicated a veiled contest over whether

[23] 'From Our Paris Correspondent', *NI*, July 13, 1852.

[24] W., 'Styles, American and Foreign', *AWR* 15, no. 88 (1852), pp. 349-56; 'The French People', *The Sun*, January 29, 1852;
'Saturday Morning, February 14, 1852', *SWC&NYE*, February 18, 1852; 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 554-61; 'The Revolution in France-its Consequences', *NYH*, December 25, 1851; Lieber, F., *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 1, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), p. 292; 'Napoleon and his Designs', *The Cleveland Herald*, January 10, 1853; 'Louis Napoleon', *NYH*, September 25, 1852; 'From Our Paris Correspondent', *NI*, January 30, 1852; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 53, December 31, 1851; 'Kossuth and the Recent Revolution in France', *NYH*, December 29, 1851; [Untitled], *Gallipolis Journal*, February 26, 1852; 'Impeachment of Louis Napoleon', *NA&USG*, December 31, 1851; Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 156, 197; 'The French Usurpation', *NYT*, December 22, 1851, pp. 4; 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 174-175.

[25] 'Another French Revolution', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851.

[26] 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency', *USDR* 30 (1852), pp. 1-13.

[27] 'The Crisis of the Century', *The American Whig Review* 15 (1852), pp. 164-76.

[28] 'Gen. Scott', *The Mountain Sentinel*, August 05, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon', *DSG*, June 26, 1851.

officeholders or the people posed the greater danger of precipitating a slide towards centralization. While Americans might seem to have agreed that this process of centralization posed a threat to liberty and republican government, the *Whig Review* dissented from the democratic narrative that popular government best prevented the creation of dangerous centres of government authority. Despite agreeing on the dangers of centralization and exploiting this in their party propaganda, not all Americans agreed on how this fitted into processes of political and social change, like industrialisation, urbanisation, and democratisation.

Many observers, like the *Democratic Review*, agreed that popular vigilance prevented the process of centralization of power in a single officeholder. The march of democracy seemed like progress to a republican future. Small-d democrats fitted Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état into a wider narrative of counter-revolutionary reversals that temporarily arrested moves towards a democratic millennium. Newspapers like William Cullen Bryant's *New York Evening Post* Louis-Napoleon had 'subverted' their progressive vision for a 'grand republic' and instead returned France to 'ancient absolutism'.[29] By sweeping away democracy, the Emperor had acted against the progressive ideal that power should diffuse among the people over time. Instead, champions of democracy saw Louis-Napoleon as putting power back in the hands of the small cabal of European autocrats that had ruled Europe for generations. Indeed, they assumed that Louis-Napoleon had acted in concert with 'the allied despots of Europe' in Austria, Russia and Prussia – countries that had rejected democratisation in 1848 – as part of a 'European army for subjugating liberty'.[30] Recollections of Louis-Napoleon's backing for the Pope against the insurgent Roman Republic in 1849 appeared to sustain the assertion that leaders sought to reverse democratic gains.[31] To these small-d democrats, Louis-Napoleon's abandonment of the democratic Second Republic seemed like a betrayal of America's democratic promise.[32]

Conservatives, in contrast, did not always dismiss Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état as a challenge to democratic progress. When news of Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état reached Washington, the Whig *National Intelligencer* and the *Courier and Enquirer* recognised that not all Americans would dismiss the abolition of the Second French Republic as a setback.[33] Until news of the bloodshed that accompanied the coup reached New York, even the Democratic *New York Herald* defended the early stages of Louis-Napoleon's dictatorship as

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[29] 'The Rebellion of the President of France', *The Evening Post*, December 22, 1851; 'France and the United States', *The Evening Post*, January 3, 1852; 'A Week Later from Europe', *BDE*, February 7, 1862; 'Kossuth's Republicanism', *The Evening Post*, November 12, 1851.

[30] On Robert J. Walker, see 'Alliance between England and America', *Gallipolis Journal*, January 22, 1852. 'A Change of Front', *BDE*, December 30, 1851; 'Napoleon the Little', *BDE*, December 30, 1851; 'France', *Jeffersonian Republican*, January 08, 1852; 'Projects of Napoleon', *Jeffersonian Republican*, January 22, 1852; 'The Struggle at Hand', *Gallipolis Journal*, March 25, 1852; 'France', *The Mountain Sentinel*, January 01, 1852; Monthly Record of Current Events', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 4 (1852), p. 556.

[31] 'Meanness', *Public Ledger*, December 19, 1851; 'Louis Napoleon', *Gallipolis Journal*, March 25, 1852.

[32] These newspapers denounced him as a 'traitor' or an 'oath-breaker' to the Second French Republic and the French people. See 'European Affairs', *Fayetteville Observer*, December 09, 1852; 'The French Usurpation', *NYT*, December 22, 1851, pp. 4; 'France and Empire.--Napoleon III', *The Daily Ohio Statesman*, November 30, 1852; 'France', *The Mountain Sentinel*, January 01, 1852; 'Mr. Rives', *BDE*, January 03, 1852; 'The Rebellion of the President of France', *The Evening Post*, December 22, 1851; 'France and the United States', *The Evening Post*, January 3, 1852.

[33] 'Another Revolution in France', *NI*, December 22, 1851; '[Untitled]', *SWC&NYE*, December 24, 1851; 'Kossuth and the Recent Revolution in France', *NYH*, December 29, 1851; 'France', *SWC&NYE*, January 10, 1852.

a suitable government for France.[34] Conservatives often abandoned Louis-Napoleon once they saw his programme of 'centralization', but even these criticisms were focused more on the accumulation of power in the executive at the expense of balanced government rather than accumulation of power in the imperial regime at the expense of the masses. Some criticised Louis-Napoleon's 1852 constitution for making the independent institutions of republican government an extension of his 'will' and officials 'auxiliaries to his thought'. '[T]he whole and sole government is concentrated in his person' or 'will', they argued, when it ought to reside in legal institutions.[35] These conservatives implied that Louis-Napoleon had subordinated the entire state to private desires and emotions – a critique conservative newspapers could easily apply to the French people too. Conservative newspapers cast the coup d'état as a battle between the French legislative and executive branches of government suggested that it was a struggle between the institutions of government rather than a struggle between the French people and an authoritarian regime.[36] They might have agreed that Louis-Napoleon demonstrated the dangers of allowing power to accumulate in a single figure, but did not quite define centralization in opposition to a master narrative of the rise of democratic republics. So while Americans might have agreed that Louis-Napoleon's empire was centralized, different groups could deploy this example of centralization potentially to advance very different agendas.

Describing Louis-Napoleon as a monarch allowed Americans to plot the changing power relationships as France moved from republic to empire. The idea of a process of centralization allowed Americans to conceptualise how Louis-Napoleon had reconstructed the relationship between the institutions of the state and the relationship between the state and the people. They vividly described control over state power moving from the people and multiple state institutions inwards into the hands of the President turned Emperor, allowing him to wield power from the centre over the enite nation. This idea of a process of political centralization therefore helped citizens to understand how one institution or officeholder could control the whole machinery of the state and how much executive authority the government could impose on the country. However, while Americans seemed to agree that the coup was a centralizing moment, agreement on opposition to the centralized power structure of absolute monarchy neither resolved the question of how to decentralize power nor assigned responsibility for the centralization of power over time. Despite seeming like a fixed and precise term to describe simple constitutional changes abroad, the ambiguities of the term in fact made it a potent political weapon. American conservatives found a way to use this seemingly liberal language of opposition to an authoritarian government to consider the limits of democracy and alternatives to popular government.

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[34] For example see: 'The Recent Explosion in France by Louis Napoleon', *NYH*, December 22, 1851; 'The Two Napoleons-A Historical Parallel', *NYH* (January 20, 1852).

[35] 'Another French Revoluton', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851; 'Historical Review of the Month', *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 5 (1852), pp. 421-24.
'From Our Paris Correspondent', *NI*, January 30, 1852.

[36] 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 183-185; 'Historical Review of the Month', *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 5, no. 2 (1852), pp. 277-80; 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 81; 'Progress of the Usurption in France', *NI*, January 1, 1852; 'From Our Paris Correspondent', *NI*, July 13, 1852; 'The New Constitution of France', *NYH*, February 8, 1852; 'Napoleon and his Designs', *The Cleveland Herald*, January 10, 1853; 'Important Events in France-The Crisis Arrived', *PL*, December 22, 1851.

Centralization and the Paris Mob, 1848-1852

Conservatives might have agreed with other Americans that supposedly centralized government posed a danger to people's liberties. But when looking to explain the origins of the Second Empire, conservatives often turned to criticism of the democratic Second Republic and its supposed democratic excesses.. Champions of the Second Republic like Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* and the Young America-inspired *Democratic Review* saw the coup as a reactionary betrayal of American-style democratic progress. Conservatives dailies like the *New York Herald*, *National Intelligencer*, and *Philadelphia North American* instead emphasised that the centralization already existed when Louis-Napoleon became president in 1848 and proclaimed the Second Empire in 1852. They used centralization to describe how the French people in the guise of the Paris mob had seemingly monopolised violent power, just as Louis-Napoleon appeared to have done, and too exercised violent tyranny over the entire country. Rather than using the threat of political centralization to warn against the power of despots and dictators, that Americans seemed predisposed to use it to warn that the people could usurp power and assume for themselves the violent power that belonged to the government. American conservatives in a country beset by social and political change therefore seemed predisposed to perceive the excesses of a democracy that allowed the people to assume too much power without the watchful power of the state.

In America in 1848 many read the European revolutions against these kinds of monarchical governments as evidence that the Old World was catching up with the spirit of the New.[37] Horace Greeley saw his paper and European democratic republics as part of a common movement, and the *Tribune* even carried the correspondence of Karl Marx on events in Germany.[38] Transatlantic republicanism also fitted into Democratic political culture. The Young America faction of the Democratic Party argued that aggressive expansion of the American republic and the defence of republicanism in Europe were both part of America's 'manifest destiny'.[39] The editor of the main Young America journal, the *United States Democratic Review*, gave Irish immigrant and republican firebrand Thomas Francis Meagher the first thirty-three pages of the July 1852 issue, where he condemned both British and American bankers as part of a 'moneyed power' and 'moneyed interest' conspiring to undermine democracy.[40] However, these were by no means the only journals to argue that true Americans would support liberty at home as much as abroad.[41] For American supporters of transatlantic democracy, support for the Second French Republic symbolised commitment to domestic democratisation. Failure to challenge the centralisation of power abroad would set a dangerous precedent for banks, slavery, or anti-suffragists to do the same in the United States.

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[37] See Casper, *American Attitudes*; Curti, 'Impact of the Revolutions'; Del Lago, 'Transatlantic Parallels', pp. 293-320; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 792-386; Morrison, 'American Reaction', pp. 117-118; Roberts, 'Bloody Toy of the Multitude', pp. 262-263; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*; Rohrs, 'American Reaction', pp. 359-360; Widmer, *Young America*, pp. 15-17, 78, 151-152; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 622, 661.

[38] Hale, *Greeley*, pp. 154-155; Tuchinsky, *Greeley's*, pp. 104-107; For example, see 'Germany', *NYT*, November 7, 1851; 'Germany', *NYT*, November 12, 1851; 'Germany', *NYT*, November 28, 1851; 'France', *NYT*, February 3, 1852.

[39] For an overview of Young America and its involvement with the Democratic Review, see Widmer, *Young America*, Norman Graebner, *Manifest Destiny* (Indianapolis, 1868), pp. 15-29.

[40] Meagher, T. F., 'Ireland and the Holy Alliance', *USDR* 31 (1852), pp. 1-33.

[41] 'France and the United States', *The Evening Post*, January 3, 1852; 'Mr. Rives', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 03, 1852; 'The French Usurpation', *NYT*, December 22, 1851.

Others, though, used Louis-Napoleon' coup to distinguish French democracy from American republicanism. New York's wealthy diarist George Templeton Strong claimed the violent success of Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état proved France incapable of self-government and the fragility of the Second Republic demonstrated there was no likeness between violent French democracy and American 'constitutional republicanism'.[42] The *Boston Courier* too feared that the coup d'état showed that there was no hope for 'real republicanism' in France.[43] These Americans took Louis-Napoleon's coup as an opportunity to distinguish their vision of government from the republics of 1848 and redefine centralization to embrace a democracy where the people appeared to have claimed too much authority over the their government – and the elites who were best placed to fill government offices.

When trying to explain the coup, conservatives often assumed that centralization existed under the Second Republic, albeit under different hands, concurring with Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that France had always experienced centralization regardless of its professed form of government.[44] For example, they described the supposed violence of 1848 and the instability of the Second Republic in terms similar to the coup itself. Both the conservative Democratic-leaning *New York Herald* and Washington Irving described Louis-Napoleon's takeover as one of many 'spasms' and 'convulsions' that had engulfed France since 1848 – similar to the pathological terms of emotions and wills that others had used to describe France under Louis-Napoleon. These constant violent episodes seemed to show that Louis-Napoleon's violence only continued a pattern that existed under democratic government.[45] Moreover, the French people were themselves responsible for these violent episodes as much as the French emperor. Philadelphia diarist Sidney George Fisher agreed with the *Herald* and the *Courier and Enquirer* in New York that the French people were 'incapable of voluntary submission to the law' and needed restraining to prevent violence throughout all of France.[46] The self-styled 'Berkeley Men', in their favourable biography of Louis-Napoleon published following the coup d'état, also described the political history of France following the 1789 revolution in lurid terms of 'anarchy' and 'blood' at the hands of the Paris mob.[47] Even under democracy, France had always experienced the violence that distinguished centralized regimes. Conservatives therefore argued that the symptoms of centralization proceeded alongside French democratisation before 1852. This reasoning – that rule by the people caused rather than checked centralization – provided an underpinning for antidemocratic politics in the midcentury United States.

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[42] George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins, vol. II: The Turbulent Fifties 1850-1859 (New York, 1952), p. 78.

[43] Another French Revolution', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851.

[44] de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, pp. 84-85; de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime*. This was a common assumption. See Bernard Roleker, *The Constitutions of France: Monarchical and Republican; Together with Brief Historical Remarks Relating to Their Origin, and the Late Orleans Dynasty* (Boston, 1848), pp. 55-56; Frederica Rowan, *History of the French Revolution: It's Causes and Consequences*, vol. 1 (New York, 1854), pp. 14, 63; 'Our General Review', *The American Whig Review* 15 (1952), pp. 183-185, 'The New Constitution of France', *NYH*, February 8 1852.

[45] 'France-Louis Napoleon and the Universal Suffrage Question', *NYH*, October 31, 1851; Washington Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving,* ed. Pierre Irving, vol. IV (New York, 1864), pp. 99-102.

[46] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 53, December 31, 1851; 'France', *SWC&NYE*, January 7, 1852; 'Affairs in France', *SWC&NYE*, February 4, 1852.

[47] The Berkeley Men, *The Napoleon Dynasty: Or, The History of the Bonaparte Family. An Entirely New Work* (New York, NY, 1852), p. 603.

The uprisings of 1848 and Louis-Napoleon's subsequent ascent came just as many urban conservatives felt a perception of loss of political authority in public space. Urban violence had become common in most northeastern cities, as fire companies, local gangs, and striking workers often fought on the streets among themselves and against what passed for municipal policing. Riots against abolitionists in 1842 and Catholics in 1844 in Philadelphia were some of the largest insurrections in the United States until the Civil War.[48] However, such violence was a common part of the urban experience throughout the United States between the 1830s and 1850s, and the fact that such a state of affairs had occurred almost simultaneously with the triumph of popular sovereignty left some citizens wondering whether democracy meant discord. Sidney George Fisher, for example, struggled to distinguish between riots and elections, seeing universal suffrage as a prelude to universal disorder.[49] Many American conservatives felt that mob violence demonstrated the dangers of democracy, as it weakened government and handed the state monopoly on violence to the hands of the people directly, rather than simply open offices to popular input.[50] This assumption that the mob had centralized coercive power that rightfully belonged to the state itself would strongly influence how conservatives approached the likes of municipal reform and enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act.

The assumption that the crowd directly held state power appears in conservatives' depictions of the Second Republic as an institutional veneer for a violent anarchy. The strength of popular protest and power in France seemed to suggest to conservatives that the Paris mob controlled violent power in place of government itself. As such, according to the *Courier and Enquirer* and the pro-Bonapartist Berkeley Men, the Second Republic was a façade, behind which 'a deadly mass black with ignorance, sweltering with fanaticism and festering with vice' threatened to overturn all order and government.[51] French politics, conservatives claimed, was not an orderly expression of the people's will, but damning evidence that the French were 'a turbulent, unsettled and self-despising population,' who were 'transient', 'fickle', and possessing 'no stability'. Such a population, lacking 'self-restraint, and 'subject to impulse', preferred rule by revolt rather than law.[52] Like Louis-Napoleon, the French people had made the public functions of government subject to the private will of their own emotions. This inverted the ideal top down relationship between the government and the people. As the *Philadelphia North American* put it 'Sovereigns are made and unmade there [in France] with equal facility'.[53] Francis Lieber codified these fears that the people seemed to have already centralized legislative authority in their own hands when he insisted that 'what the French republicans demand in the name of democracy, kings insist upon in the name of divine right' – and explicitly stated that democracy did not preclude centralization.[54] These conservatives' depictions of France as a dictatorship of the

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[48] For more on disorder in Philadelphia, see Feldberg, *Riots of 1844*; Feldberg, *Turbulent Era*, pp. 9-32; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 346-359, Warner, *Private City*, pp. 125-157; Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (Oxford, 1971). For more on disorder generally, see chapter 3.

[49] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 58, December 31, 1851.

[50] Keller, *Triumph of Order*, pp. 151-167; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 94-131; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 51-83.

[51] 'Wednesday Morning, Dec 31, 1851', *SWC&NYE*, January 3, 1852; Berkeley Men, *Napoleon Dynasty*, pp. 599-602.

[52] 'Another French Revolution', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851; 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), p. 171.

[53] 'French Republicanism', *NA&USG* (August 13, 1850).

[54] Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 1, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), pp. 55, 168.

mob spoke to an assumption that often appeared in their depictions of democracy both at home and abroad: that within the people lay the potential for violence and political extremism. France, it seemed, demonstrated the dangers of allowing the people to seize all government authority.

Just as political decision-making centralized in the hands of the Emperor led to oppressively strong government on the streets of France, the French people's monopolisation of legislative authority explained mob violence and democratic tyranny. In conservative descriptions of France, the Paris mob – not the French state – subjected the rest of the country to brutal executive power. Sidney George Fisher graphically described how the 'blasts of the first revolution' had easily overpowered the *ancien régime* to highlight how the weak Second Republic had fallen to the violence of the Paris mob.[55] The people, not the state, held the state monopoly on violence in France. Conservatives did not see public violence as a rightful expression of the people's democratic will; instead, it demonstrated the excesses of powerful government. Both Fisher and Washington Irving argued that French political 'factions' were 'eager to make a revolution to attain' their 'ends' and that 'every political change is a military convulsion'.[56] Their stress on military violence demonstrates how they cast the people as users and abusers of the state monopoly on legitimate violence. After all, the military was one of the law enforcing agents of the state. Just as Louis-Napoleon's concentration of decision-making power allowed him to wield despotic state power over France, conservatives were predisposed to see the people as just as dangerous if given too much authority over the institutions of the republic.

Especially after it fell to Louis-Napoleon, the Second Republic seemed to conservatives less like a reproduction of the American government in Europe and more a violent episode akin to the Dorr War or Shays' Rebellion. Their criticisms of the Second French Republic echoed concerns from the Early Republic that giving the people too much authority over the government would fundamentally weaken its ability to maintain law and order, leading to anarchy and disorder. After all, followers of Daniel Shays, Thomas Dorr, and participants in the Whiskey Rebellion had all claimed a popular mandate to overturn the decisions of legal government using violent means.[57] Conservatives' view that the people were often responsible for centralization rather than a vigilant check upon it may not have been predominant in the midcentury United States, but it would come to inform a wide variety of proposals to reform government and strengthen the state in response to perceived domestic harbingers of democratic centralization. The Second Republic here provided as much of a warning as the Second Empire.

For American conservatives, the true meaning of Louis-Napoleon's empire lay back in the Revolutions of 1848 themselves. Both republican political science and conservatives' own experience of urban rioting and disorder – which would spark local state-building movements – confirmed long-standing conservative fears that the people as a single entity could establish the same processes of centralization they had described under Louis Napoleon. The Paris mob, they argued, had assumed control over political decision-making,

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[55] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 55, December 31, 1851.
[56] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 53, December 31, 1851; Irving, *Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. IV, p. 100.
[57] Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, pp. 80-116, 185-189, 246-276; Grimsted, Mobbing, pp. 209-217; Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy*, pp. 1-7; Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Rakove, *Meanings*, pp. 161-202; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 45-49; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 3-10, 13-39, 359-456; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 306-390; Wood, *Liberty*, pp. 110-111, 133-138, 147-148.

leading to the people usurping the state's monopoly on legitimate use of force to compel citizens to its will. In doing so, they drew on Jacksonian-era fears that the people tended to participate in politics not through peaceful elections, deliberative assemblies, and the rule of law but through mob violence and urban rioting. The agency and authority that public violence gave the mob, they argued, made them a state within a state, a dangerous source of power that in practice ruled the streets of large cities and even laid siege to the national political institutions that made big cities their home. These conservatives therefore tried to reclaim and appropriate the idea of centralization to apply to mass democracy as well as imperial tyranny. This allowed them to contest the desirability of mass political participation, contextualising the power relationships of centralization as a problem of the rise of a democratic challenge to state authority, rather than as a reversal of a natural trend towards liberal democratic republics.

Centralization and the Second Empire, 1851-1852

Having defined the French people as the progenitors of centralization in France, conservatives made clear that the French were unfit voters incapable of maintaining a republic themselves. For conservatives, the transformation from Second Republic to Second Empire did not mark as radical a change as it might appear. Indeed, they did not even describe it as an ambitious individual betraying and usurping a democracy, albeit a flawed one given French instability. Instead, conservatives retold Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état as a continuation of the same kind of democratic centralization in action. They assumed first that the French people had democratically elected Louis-Napoleon, giving him unrestricted control over the institutions of the government. Second, the French supposedly submitted to his authoritarian rule, continually allowing him to use government authority to compel France to his will. Conservatives therefore extrapolated their assumption that the people bore responsibility for centralization in France to make critical value judgements about French voters. France therefore helped conservatives discuss whether all men were fit voters and suitable for suffrage in an era when most had seemingly accepted popular government by white men.

Conservatives typically assumed that the French people were responsible for the Emperor's centralized command over the institutions and offices of the French state. They did so by emphasising that Louis-Napoleon's coronation reflected the will of the French electorate. The Second Republic's American supporters had been quick to denounce Louis-Napoleon's elections and plebiscites as a 'sham', unwilling to suggest that the French people had chosen despotism, and predicted that the French would soon overthrow the usurper.[58] Indeed, William Cullen Bryant's *Evening Post* was so enamoured with the idea of an imminent revolution in France that that it dismissed their own Paris correspondent's reports of Louis-Napoleon's popularity and assumed France would soon revolt in defence of the republic.[59] The *Boston Courier*, though, was by no means the only conservative paper to

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[58] 'The French Empire', *BDE*, December 14, 1852; 'The Counterfeit Napoleon', *New Hampshire Statesman*, February 14, 1852; 'The Counterfeit Napoleon', *NYT*, February 9, 1852; 'France', *NYT*, February 3, 1852; 'Prospects in Europe', *NYT*, January 30, 1852; 'Education for Free Government', *PL*, January 6, 1852; 'The French Revolution', *PL*, December 24, 1851; 'What Are We Next to Look For in France', *The Evening Post*, December 24, 1851; 'Mr. Rives', *BDE*, January 03, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon's Appeal to the People', *The Evening Post*, February 9, 1852; 'France', *NYT*, January 19, 1852; 'Napoleon's Election Farce', *The Evening Post*, January 19, 1852; 'Suffrage - France and America', *USDR* 29 (1851), pp. 97-105.
[59] 'France and its Prospects', *The Evening Post*, December 31, 1851.

presume that Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état, elections, and plebiscites fairly reflected French public opinion, even when they suspected substantial vote-rigging.[60] Instead of seeing an example of how ambitious individuals could monopolise state power, they took Louis-Napoleon's election as an example of how easily a demagogue could persuade the people to surrender their own monopoly on sovereignty. Francis Lieber compared Louis-Napoleon to Julius Caesar as examples of 'imperatorial sovereignty' because both had made themselves 'the sole ruler by the popular element, against the institutions of the country'. The French Emperor's apparent eagerness to satisfy his people's desire for military glory in return for absolute power made his dictatorship an informal democracy dependant on the Paris mob.[61] Lieber, though, was by no means the only American observer to conclude that France proved how overzealous democracies, where power concentrated in the people, created despotic dictators, with power centralized in one officeholder.[62] In conservative circles there remained a fear that a demagogue could harness the power centralized in the crowd to establish despotism with popular support. Their understanding of the emergence of Second Empire France fitted into this prejudice that the people were a threat to – rather than a part of – their ideal model of republican government as they supposedly gravitated towards concentrations of political authority.

French voters seemed poorly placed to check the tendency of power to concentrate if given the opportunity. Accusations that the Louis-Napoleon could easily 'dazzle' the French people with parades and public works, as Francis Lieber and Washington Irving claimed, implied that the French had little agency.[63] The *New York Herald* too felt that Louis-Napoleon had 'sway' over the 'minds' of the French people as well as undisputed mastery over the country.[64] This strongly contrasted with the republican ideal of a people vigilantly defending their liberty that champions of democracy had expected to pan out in France. The centralization of decision-making power there confirmed conservatives' predisposition to see the masses as unable to prevent dangerous concentrations of authority.

As a result, some conservatives made deeply critical value judgements about French voters and their fitness for the elective franchise. In conservatives' imagination, the French allowed Louis-Napoleon to wield centralized executive power just as they had allowed it under the democratic government of 1848. For example, the *North American* saw the success of Louis-Napoleon as a test of European fitness for liberty, which the Old World had unreservedly failed.[65] Describing the French people as submissive made them seem responsible for the violence that they believed had come out of Paris in 1848 and 1852. The *Courier and Enquirer* and a correspondent for the *National Intelligencer* both described the

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[60] 'Intervention and Non-Intervention', *The Sun*, January 26, 1852; 'The Election in France', *Boston Courier* (January 20, 1851); 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15, no. 90 (1852), p. 556; 'The French People', *The Sun*, January 29, 1852; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 52, December 31, 1851; 'The Two Napoleons-A Historical Parallel', *NYH*, January 20, 1852; Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, vol. II, p. 79; 'Intervention and Non-Intervention', *The Sun*, January 26, 1852; 'France', *SWC&NYE*, January 10, 1852; 'The Late Revolution in France', *NI*, December 25, 1851; 'Our General Review', *AWR* 15, no. 90 (1852), p. 556
[61] Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 2, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), pp. 78-97.
[62] Quoted in 'English Identity', *The Mountain Sentinel*, March 11, 1852; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, pp. 42-80; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 87-117; 'Another French Revolution', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851.
[63] Lieber, F., *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 2, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853); Irving, *Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. IV, pp. 99-100.
[64] 'This Morning's Summary', *NYH*, January 17, 1852.
[65] 'The Times and the Men', *NA&USG* (December 23, 1851).

French people's election of Louis-Napoleon as a 'submission'.[66] Conservatives also sometimes compared French dictatorship to American slavery to illustrate French responsibility for their experience of centralized state power. In the antebellum period, some Americans defended slavery on the basis that whites had proven themselves capable of resisting tyranny, while African-American slaves had not. Blacks own continued enslavement therefore 'proved' – in a tautological sense – their unfitness for freedom and citizenship.[67] Conservatives used similar reasoning to argue that only the French people were responsible for their subjugation at the hands of a centralized government. The *American Whig Review* argued that the apparent willingness of the French to consent to Louis-Napoleon, despite his violent exercise of state power, made them 'slaves', while other writers frequently referred to Louis-Napoleon as being a 'master' that the French people had expressly desired.[68] The *New York Herald* too claimed that 'the slave makes the tyrant', shifting responsibility for the ongoing centralization in France to a degraded electorate.[69] These observers were keen to point out that not all people could resist such power and preventing a republic from degenerating into a centralized monarchy. Comparing French centralization to slavery therefore helped conservatives link it to a wider debate about who should participate in government – a connection that would help them use France to challenge democracy in the United States.

Louis-Napoleon's successful coup therefore offered American conservatives the opportunity to critique not just overbearing mobs and violent democracies but also the people, voters, and universal white male suffrage itself. To these Americans, the Second Empire was a continuation of the centralization of the Second Republic rather than a radical break with an emerging republic. They assumed that his accession reflected the will of the French people, often refused to disregard his elections and plebiscites as rigged and unrepresentative, and presumed that Louis-Napoleon would have won any free election in France. The very success of the coup proved that the French were not fit to maintain a republic in the first place. As well as blaming the Paris mob for centralizing power as Louis-Napoleon had done, conservatives extended their negative value judgements to the entire body of French voters and people. Their interpretation of events in France therefore suggests a conservative desire to reinterpret world events to fit a critique of voters and to confirm a wider critique of voters who supported democratic radicalism.

Centralization and American Democracy

Conservatives did not limit these criticisms just to the French. They also used the French people's supposed centralization of power in France as a political weapon against their domestic political opponents, particularly abolitionists but sometimes the entire American voting population. Some, like Sidney George Fisher, were happy to compare American to French voters as equal threats who might centralize government power, unleash 1848-style violence, and create an American Napoleon III. Few conservatives, though, were as overtly contemptuous of democracy as Fisher. More commonly, conservatives simply contrasted fit

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[66] 'Louis Napoleon and Gen. Cavaignac', *NI*, January 1, 1852; 'Saturday Morning, February 14, 1852', *SWC&NYE*, February 18, 1852.

[67] Francois Furstenberg, 'Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse', *Journal of American History* 89 (2003), pp. 1295-1330.

[68] 'Our General Review', *AWR* 14, no. 84 (1851), p. 536; 'From Our Paris Correspondent', *NI*, January 24, 1852; 'Affairs in France', *SWC&NYE*, January 10, 1852.

[69] 'The Two Napoleons-A Historical Parallel', *NYH*, January 20, 1852.

American citizens to unfit French voters and American abolitionists, radicals, and reformers. But far from accepting American popular rule, proclaiming American exceptionalism in this way helped caution voters to defer to conservative elites and lead them away from claiming more democratic authority than conservatives were prepared to concede. In other words, fitness to vote was conditional on avoiding what conservatives had defined as a dangerous process of popular centralization. As industrialisation and immigration combined with democratisation to make America seem more like revolutionary Europe, 1848 gave conservatives the opportunity to think about the prospects of American democracy too. In the context of urban disorder, mass voting, and support for radical social and economic reform, distinguishing French from American citizenship in this way helped conservatives define a 'true' American political culture based on deference and restraint in contrast to revolutionary movements at home and abroad.

American supporters of European democracy used France to demonstrate the danger that despotic aristocrats posed to the people's liberties, seeing European and American republicanism as a single movement towards freedom. They blamed a lineup of historical French despots for enforcing centralization on the French people, but argued that any people could face despotism if the people did not remain vigilant. [70] These small-d democrats used France in this way to warn that the American democratic project was also under pressure. The *Democratic Review* compared the democratic aspirations of European republicans to Jacksonian universal white male suffrage and even women's suffrage in the American west, while warning that any attempt to restrict universal suffrage in the United States would lead to American despotism too.[71] In several articles repeating their assertions that the French were resisting Louis-Napoleon's agglomeration of power, the Whig *Tribune* and others argued that this was only the beginning of a pan-European revolt in favour of republics and against centralized monarchical regimes.[72] Liberals suggested that the coup d'état was only a temporary reversal of a global trend towards democracy in both the Old World and the New, and tried to defend mass political participation at home. Notably, one of the letters defending European fitness for citizenship came from an author writing under an Irish pseudonym, possibly in defiance of nativist opposition to immigrant suffrage.[73] In New York, there were renewed calls for extending African American suffrage, something that Greeley's *Tribune* supported with the same vigour that it opposed Louis-Napoleon.[74] Predicting the imminent overthrow of European centralized monarchy allowed these Americans to defend mass political participation not just in Europe, but also the United States. American small-d democrats therefore used the centralization of 1852 to defend embracing popular government and warn against retreating from democratisation.

Conservatives were also aware that Europe could illustrate the future of the United States.[75] After all, the population of major American seaboard cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston mushroomed in the antebellum period, fuelled by increasing

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[70] 'France and Republican Liberty', *NYT*, December 2, 1852; 'France', *NYT*, January 10, 1852; 'France', *NYT*, December 27, 1851; 'The Empire in France', *NYT*, December 11, 1852.
[71] 'Napoleon's Election Farce', *The Evening Post*, January 19, 1852; 'Suffrage - France and America', *USDR* 29 (1851), pp. 97-105.
[72] 'The French Usurpation', *NYT*, December 22, 1851; 'Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency', *USDR* 30 (1852), pp. 1-13; 'Prospects in Europe', *NYT*, January 30, 1852.
[73] Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 64-69; 'Napoleon the Little', *BDE*, December 30, 1851.
[74] Tuchinsky, *Greeley's*, pp. 42, 182-186.
[75] Fleche, *1861*; Katz, *Appomattox to Montmartre*; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, pp. 25-26.

immigration from the Old World, even if they had yet to reach the size of London and Paris.[76] (See also Chart 3 and Chart 4 below) Rather than believing Europe would come to resemble America, it seemed to some conservatives that social changes might make the USA look more European. In the 1870s, upper and middle class Americans would often come to use the Paris Commune as an example of what America might expect if strikes and labour unrest were allowed to spiral out of control. These Americans seemed far less comfortable about the future of American exceptionalism, and used this to warn against indulging labour reform and redistribution of property.[77] Conservatives therefore used comparisons between America and Europe and warnings that the people could centralize power not to highlight Americans' exceptional fitness for democratic rule but as a political weapon to undermine the principle of democratisation in the United States as well.

A small number of conservatives more sceptical of popular rule described the centralizing tendencies of democracy in universal terms could apply to America as much as they applied to France and Rome. The transformation of Rome from Republic to Empire fascinated writers and artists in the antebellum era; it proved to these conservatives that the centralized power relationships of democratic rule always became the centralized power relationships of despotism. Francis Lieber compared Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état to Rome's descent into empire, arguing each served as examples of a 'wide-spread centralization of power'.[78] Fisher too described the coup d'état as 'the old story', a repetition of the law that universal suffrage created a president for life and a dependant legislature.[79] As a universal law that applied to the modern and ancient world, the descent of democracies into dictatorships seemed applicable to the New Would as well as the Old. Indeed, Fisher would later claim that 'democracy has ever had and must ever have from its nature but one course and termination – popular violence – anarchy and military despotism' and 'wherever it has been tried it has wholly and signally failed', including the United States.[80] Both Lieber and Fisher seemed open to the possibility that the American people could too become a centralizing threat if they seemed to emulate the challenges that the French people posed to the supremacy of national government.

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[76] Schlesinger, 'The City in American History', p. 51.
[77] Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 180-181; Katz, *Appomattox to Montmartre*.
[78] Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), pp. 78-97.
[79] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 52-57, December 31, 1851.
[80] *Ibid.*.

Chart 3: *Population Growth of Major American Cites, 1830-1860*
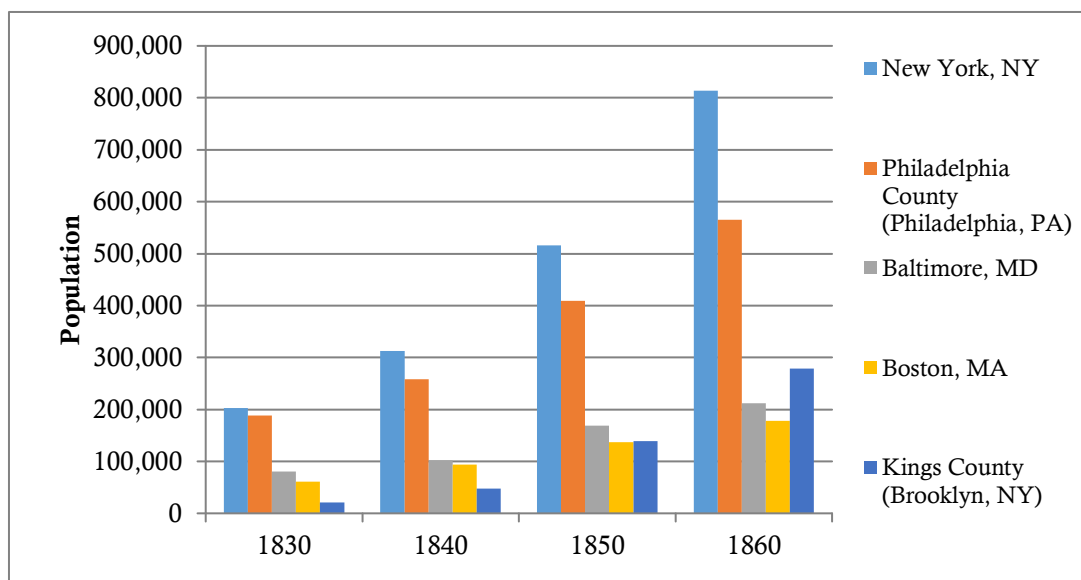
In this period, America experienced rapid population growth, which fuelled the anxieties many American had about the growth of the American electorate.

Source: 'Population of The 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990', United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html [Accessed June 18, 2016]; 'New York County-Level Results', University of Virginia Library Historical Census Browser, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html [Accessed June 18, 2016].

Chart 4: *Immigration at Major Northeastern Ports, 1830-1850*
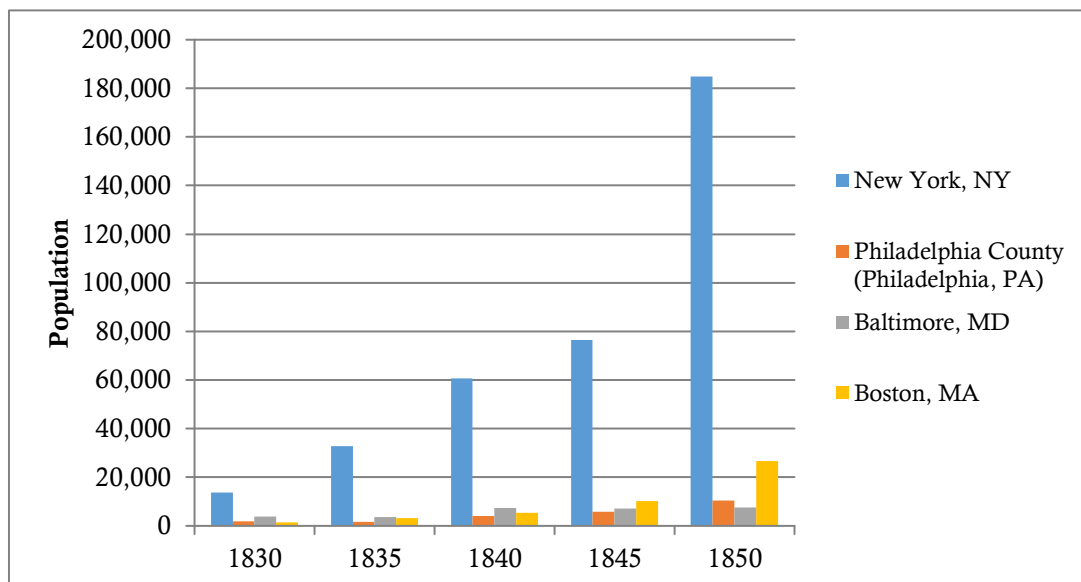
In this period the number of immigrants also fulled concerns about the enfranchised population and challenged American exceptionalist assumptions that the United States would not follow the same historial path outlined by European states like France.

Source: William Jeremy Bromwell, *History of Immigration to the United States, Exhibiting the Number, Sex, Age, Occupation, and Country of Birth, of Passengers Arriving ... By Sea from Foreign Countries*, from September 30, 1819 To December 31, 1855 (New York, 1856).

Most conservatives were less overtly antidemocratic. Conservative Whigs like Fisher tended to put more emphasis on law and order than Democrats, who sometimes defended popular agitation in defiance of law, as shown by their support of the popular Dorr revolution in Rhode Island or their appearance at the head of crowds in cities. [81] It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that Fisher and the *Whig Review* tended to fear more than most that popular government threatened a process of centralization of legislative authority in city mobs or authoritarian dictators. Many conservatives, often of a more Democratic heritage, used American exceptionalism to claim that American voters were worthier than the French for citizenship. Contemporaries often divided Protestant English Anglo-Saxon whites from Catholic European 'Celts' and claimed that the Irish were racially predisposed to violence, crime, and disorder.[82] These conservatives drew from this assumption to explain Americans' relative resistance to centralizing power. Writers across the partisan described the French (another 'Celtic' people in mid-century racial science) as a 'volatile race' with 'unreflecting', 'erratic' and 'ignorant' traits, which left them 'in sum possessing a 'temperament, altogether too changeable and fervid for dwelling in peace and harmony under a republican government'.[83] Even Francis Lieber, despite his German background, agreed with the *Herald* that a history of 'centralization' had degraded the French, leaving them dependant, irrational and incapable of submitting to the rule of law and the power of republican institutions. [84] Outwardly, conservatives who used nineteenth-century racial science to differentiate American from French voters seemed happy to accept that Americans were worthy voters – even if it left the fitness of immigrant voters unresolved.

Turning to American exceptionalism, though, warned American voters themselves that they had to avoid the perception of a French-style democracy in order to remain legitimate American voters. Criticising the Revolutions of 1848, one correspondent to the *National Intelligencer* claimed 'no assassinations, no house-burnings, no gratuitous destruction of their adversaries' property disgraced their [Americans'] struggle for liberty'. [85] In other words, American exceptionalism was conditional upon American voters deferring to the law and legal institution and avoiding a conservative perception of centralizing power into their own hands, as the French seemed to have done in 1848. This made American exceptionalism a useful political weapon to caution American voters from embracing radical reform at home. In America, as in France, it seemed that the people needed to be prevented from the kind of democracy conservatives had used centralization to warn against.

Conservatives were therefore not complacent about the potential for American voters to stray beyond the legitimate boundaries of political behaviour as the French had done in 1848. Just as a lack of French restraint led to the centralization of power in the Paris mob, a national debate over slavery threatened explicitly 'centralized' rule at the hands of a

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[81] Grimsted, *Mobbing*, 209-217; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 599-603; Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 85-86, 128.
[82] Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (London, 1998); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (London, 1981).
[83] Irving, *Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. IV, pp. 99-100; 'Louis Napoleon', *DSG*, June 26, 1851; 'Another Revolution in France', *NI*, December 22, 1851; 'Napoleon III, Emperor of France', *The Hinds County Gazette*, December 9, 1852; 'Louis Napoleon', *DSG*, June 26, 1851.
[84] Irving, *Letters of Washington Irving*, vol. IV, pp. 97-106; 'Another Revolution in France', *NI*, December 22, 1851.
[85] 'American Republican Sympathy in Action', *NI*, October 3, 1851.

northern democracy. The amount of state power needed to abolish slavery in the South, Richter and others argued, meant that an unchecked northern electorate would need their own Louis-Napoleon to bring about emancipation.[86] This reasoning – that political abolition would come through a democratically anointed dictator – informed conservative union movements' attempts to wrest lawmaking authority over slavery away from the democratic sphere and its northern antislavery majority. Such conservatives may not have believed in disenfranchisement, but they were happy to define a portion of the American electorate as the centralizing threat to the American republic, akin to the Paris mob and French voters. Moreover, defining their political opponents as French-style centralizers implicitly defined legitimate American citizenship in opposition to conservatives' understanding of unrestrained democracy. Defining abolition as a similar democratic centralization of power to the Second Republic allowed conservatives to imply that abolitionists, too, were unworthy citizens. They might have disagreed with Fisher on the proportion of voters that, in their opinion, threatened centralization. But these conservatives all agreed that a popular threat to conservative rule existed and used the threat of centralization as a political weapon to caution the people to warn the people from overstepping the political boundaries conservatives had set for them. Universal white male suffrage did not mean the people should stop deferring to propertied elites and political institutions. Warning against concentration of power might seem like a democratic language, but based on the assumption that the people posed the greatest centralizing threat, conservatives could use it to proscribe their political opponents and set boundaries on political debate.

Conservative fears of an out of control democracy in France therefore spoke to fears of urban disorder and disunion in the mid-century United States. Sidney George Fisher and Francis Lieber identified 'the question of order in large cities' and 'popular tyranny' as a challenge to republican government in America, suggesting that they saw in America's own popular disorder the potential for a democracy to centralize power in the mob rather than the state. Both Fisher and Lieber to different degrees read this as evidence of unfitness for republican citizenship. [87] Other conservatives in both parties compared Garrisonian abolitionists, corrupt politicians and radical young America Democrats to French democrats, claiming they threatened to reduce republican 'liberty' to violent democracy.[88] Compared to disenfranchisement, strengthening the independence of state institutions offered a subtler form of democratic proscription, but these conservatives still sought to limit the independent decision-making power of the American people. They encouraged Americans to see popular political mobilisation – whether in abolitionist meetings or urban riots – as threats to the republic. Issues like the nullification of the Fugitive Slave Act, secessionism, and maintenance of the compromise of 1850 loomed in the background of conservative desires to maintain public institutions' authority over the people. Conservatives believed America too needed to find forms of government that prevented the centralization of power in voters unable to resist the temptations of centralized power. Encouraging the people to blacklist those who appeared to challenge the authority of America's public institutions was another way to ensure democratic outsiders could not take power from the

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[86] 'Letter from Hon. James Buchanan', *Semi-Weekly North Carolina Standard*, January 28 1852; Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 117-118, 121-122.

[87] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 57-58, December 31, 1851; Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* Vol. 2, (Philadelphia, PA, 1853), p. 99.

[88] 'Speech of John Bell', *NI*, April 23, 1852; 'The Emperor of France', *NYH*, November 26, 1852; '"Young America and its Allies"' *NI*, September 10, 1853

American state. In America, just as in France, conservatives saw the need for a state-building programme that protected the state – and conservative hegemony with it – from an encroaching people.

Conservative comparisons between French centralizers and American voters resemble how nativists used nationality and xenophobia to delegitimise domestic political opponents, albeit using a more obviously proscriptive language. The nativist movement that rose to prominence in the antebellum era may also have helped some conservatives rein in popular threats to the what they believed was a genuine republican government. Investigations of the nativist movement in New York City and the South suggests that nativism may have offered conservatives a way to discuss disenfranchisement in a polity that already allowed almost all white men to vote and appeared to have accepted mass suffrage. Northern and southern conservatives dismissed socialism, democracy, and abolitionism as a single foreign influence that threatened self-government in the United States, and used this to challenge the legitimacy of reformers at home. Some even suggested that allowing impoverished immigrants to vote was responsible for threats of an 1848-style uprising in the United States.[89] Warning that these radical reform movements were a foreign threat to the republic resembles how other conservatives used the possibility of democratic centralization as a political weapon to challenge these movements too. Even a conservative Democratic-leaning paper like the *New York Herald* compared Irish American voters to the French to emphasise they were potentially unfit voters who strayed beyond the boundaries of acceptable American political behaviour thanks to violent street politics.[90] Nativism also helped highlight the possibility that subversives threatened on American soil the same centralization they saw in the second Republic and Second Empire – and use it as a political weapon set the boundaries of legitimate political debate and limit the role of the people in the political decision-making process.

Having defined centralization as a popular threat to government, conservatives could now use this term against their domestic political opponents who challenged the political and social order. Defenders of democracy like the *Tribune* and the *Democratic Review* – not to mention abolitionists, labour reformers, and feminists – hardly conceived of popular rule as mob law. But to some citizens it seemed like America placed too much faith in the popular will – even if they divided on just how well the people were fulfilling their political role. Conservatives more supportive of a broad American suffrage like the *Herald* may have disagreed with the likes of Fisher, who was less optimistic about American voters. But they nonetheless agreed a portion of the United States electorate threatened the kind of democratic activism they had conceptualised in France as a popular centralization of power. Some, like Fisher, might have seen France as evidence of the need for disenfranchisement. Others, though, used American exceptionalism to narrow the boundaries of legitimate political debate by associating with French centralization groups that might centre more political and economic authority in the hands of workers, African-Americans, and women. Opposition to centralization and affirming the differences between unfit French and worthy American citizens were therefore democratic-sounding languages – at least as far as American voters might be concerned. In practice, though, conservatives used opposition to

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[89] Conlin, '"Ists" and "Isms"', pp. 213-216; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488.
[90] 'The Two Napoleons-A Historical Parallel', *NYH*, January 20, 1852.

centralization to warn that the greatest threat to the republic came not from the banks, officeholders, or corporations, but from the people themselves.

State-Building and Conservative Centralization

Given these conservative critiques of popular government both at home and abroad, it is unsurprising that they looked for alternative forms of government to European republicanism and American democracy. Defining French (and American) democracy as a centralizing threat allowed conservatives to explore alternatives to popular government and present them as an alternative to democratic despotism. For the *Herald*, the *North American*, and many other conservative writers, the July Monarchy, the Madisonian system of divided government, and sometimes even the Second Empire itself served as examples of governments that could restore to government the powers that the Paris mob had allegedly usurped. And as keen observers of the democracy, urban violence, and conflict at home, they were keen to apply these lessons to American government too. Ironically, defining the people as a centralizing threat allowed them to deflect from their own programme of centralization both abroad and at home. Despite not using this pejorative term, they proposed to redistribute power from the people and keep it in the hands of the best men. France therefore gave conservatives the chance to think about governance –how they could strengthen government and insulate power at home – and use warnings against centralization to promote a centralization of their own.

Instead of seeing the French Second Republic from the outset as a partner in the pursuit of universal liberty, some conservatives turned instead to European constitutional monarchy. A few even upheld Louis Philippe – the monarch France deposed in the 1848 Revolution – as an example of how less democratic forms of government were a legitimate weapon in the conservative arsenal against the centralizing tendencies of majority rule. Louis Philippe's embrace of constitutional government but a limited electorate seemed to many conservatives an attractive option for a people too predisposed to centralizing power. The San Francisco *Alta California*, which came to regret the downfall of the July monarchy, claimed that American supporters of the Second Republic 'admit of no middle ground – no medium between the absolute and unmitigated sway of tyrants and the universal, instantaneous prevalence of perfectly matured republicanism'. [91] As French democracy descended into dictatorship, conservative politicians and newspapers revised their estimation of the late constitutional monarchy, seeing it as a judicious enforcer of law and order. [92] Fisher, for example, supported 'an hereditary monarchy with constitutional limitations and a representation of the better classes', as did McMichael's *North American*.[93] Democracy and republicanism therefore here did not necessarily seem more progressive than hereditary states built on narrow voting rights. Constitutional monarchy and even

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[91] '[Untitled]', *The Alta California*, December 16, 1852.
[92] For example, see 'Political Aspects of France and Italy', *NI*, November 10, 1851; 'Speech of Mr. Cooper', *NI*, June 25, 1852; 'The News from France-The Progress of Louis Napoleon and Despotism in Europe', NYH, January 22, 1852; 'Extracts from a Speech by Hon. John Bell in the United States Senate', *SWC&NYE*, May 19, 1852, 'Our French Correspondence', *NYH*, February 21, 1852; 'The News from France - Progress of Louis Napoleon and Despotism in Europe', *NYH*, January 22, 1952; 'Speech of Mr. Cooper', *NI*, June 25, 1852; 'Political Aspects of France and Italy', *NI*, November 10, 1851; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 89-102, July 22, 1848.
[93] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, p. 97, July 22, 1848; 'Amicus', *NA&USG*, December 16, 1851.

limited suffrage, as a middle ground between the extremes of democracy and dictatorship, appeared a better foundation for a republic free of the radicalism that they used centralization to undermine.

Louis-Napoleon's American apologists also presented the Second Empire as a necessary balance between direct democracy and strong government in place of the radical centralization of anarchic republicanism. The authors of *The Napoleon Dynasty* noted Louis-Napoleon's interest in electromagnetism on a previous visit to the United States and his decision to create prizes for discoveries in this field upon becoming Emperor, presenting him as a modernising and progressive leader.[94] They, too, were keen to see Louis-Napoleon as a man in keeping with the spirit of the times, but one resistant to democratic centralization and popular disorder. Labelling him as the 'Emperor of the French Republic', they claimed that 'The Napoleon Dynasty was, and will be for some time to come, an inevitable government in France-it is the only possible compromise between Bourbonism, or the past, and Republicanism, or the future'.[95] Louis-Napoleon, in the eyes of his American admirers, showed how successful governments avoided the dangerous excesses of centralization of power in both mobs and monarchs. Like more mainstream conservatives who turned to Louis Philippe as an example of a modernizing government, they believed progress and modernisation were possible under a less democratic form of government.

A surprising number of conservatives, despite often criticising Louis-Napoleon, defended the Second Empire as a government that maintained authority against the centralizing tendencies of the masses. When forced to choose between the centralization of law-enforcing authority in the Paris mob or the French emperor, they were often happy to choose Louis-Napoleon as, at the very least, the lesser of two evils. Two Ohio Whig papers, for instance, accepted that France had a choice only between democracy and barricades or the Empire and peace, and wisely opted for the latter.[96] But other conservative voices, including the *New York Herald*, contrasted the French people's assumed predisposition towards violence with Louis-Napoleon's supposed statesmanship, and argued that the latter could hold together a frail government in a turbulent society.[97] Given the people's demonstrable unfitness to rule, the imperial regime's ability to enforce its will over France from the capital seemed like its greatest asset. In this light, the Emperor's military rule was merely a 'vindication of the authority' of the state; the restoration of, a 'firm government' prevented 'chaos', 'anarchy' and 'an explosion' of violence.[98] He would lead a 'triumphant vindication of the authority of the government' and a 'vigorous execution of law', and demonstrate that the French people were 'safe and tranquil only under the reign of strong government'.[99] Conservatives' fear of centralizing power in the people led them to look sympathetically on strong government shielded from direct democratic control. The power relationships that they pejoratively described as a centralization of state power in one man could, when necessary conditions dictated, seem like a necessary concentration of law-enforcing power in the state. As much as they decried Louis-Napoleon's centralization of

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[94] Berkeley Men, *Napoleon Dynasty*, pp. 557-558.

[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 533, 603.

[96] 'Napoleon and the Crown', *Cleveland Herald*, December 18, 1852.
'Napoleon and the Crown', *Gallipolis Journal*, December 18 1852.

[97] 'The Emperor of France', *NYH*, November 26, 1852; Berkeley Men, *Napoleon Dynasty*, pp. 599-602.

[98] Berkeley Men, *Napoleon Dynasty*, pp. 599-60; 'Editor's Correspondence', *NI*, January 6, 1852; 'Thursday Morning, Dec. 02, 1852', *SWC&NYE*, December 4, 1852.

[99] 'Louis Napoleon', *DSG*, June 26, 1851; 'Another Revolution in France', *NI*, December 22, 1851; Berkeley Men, *Napoleon Dynasty*, pp. 599-603.

control over the apparatus of the government, these criticisms sometimes melted away when the alternative seemed like a centralization of power in the hands of a violent overbearing democracy that they associated with threats to conservative rule at home.

These conservatives therefore supported a process of centralization, albeit a different one to that which they claimed to oppose in Paris. For all their talk of decentralization, many in practice seemed comfortable with concentrating authority in the hands of propertied elites. Despite editor James Gordon Bennett's rabid Anglophobia, the *Herald*, like other conservative voices, used the British government and the July Monarchy as examples of how dividing control over state power could allow a strong government to avoid a dangerous centralization of power. Favourable comparisons to British 'parliamentary constitutional liberty' and the idea of a 'legitimate monarchy with liberal institutions' suggested that, in contrast to the Second Empire and Second Republic, the July Monarchy institutionalised control over state power into independent constitutional monarchs, heredity legislatures, and limited electorates.[100] Even politicians who faulted Louis Philippe for not extending the right to vote defended his regime as 'a triumph of republican principles' because he had granted a constitution that restricted monarchical power and created a deliberative legislature.[101] Instead of having control over state power vested in one man or the unchecked will of the people, conservatives supported institutionalising power in a system of supposedly balanced institutions that might ensure that a newly centralized state would not use centralized power to despotic ends. Constitutional monarchy and property qualifications for suffrage showed to conservatives that it was possible to have a strong central government capable of enforcing its will on wayward states, cities, and citizens. Where most Americans had celebrated the overthrow of the monarchy as a triumph of republicanism, these conservatives argued that Louis Philippe was the true republican, defending the French state against the centralizing tendencies of unrestrained democracy.

Monarchy appealed to these Americans because they hoped to centralize power in legal institutions. The Philadelphia *North American*, which only supported French republicanism when it looked like the republic they wanted to build in America, rejected popular violence even as a counterrevolution against Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état, and instead praised judges who symbolically impeached Louis-Napoleon – even though their actions had no writ on the streets that the dictator's soldiers patrolled.[102] The similarly conservative *Courier and Enquirer* in New York urged the French to reject Louis-Napoleon's dictatorship not at the barricades but instead through abstaining from the referenda and elections that he used to legitimise his rule.[103] Even in opposition to Louis-Napoleon's centralization of control over the French government, conservatives expected the people to avoid direct action themselves to defend the republic, and to allow political elites to symbolically resist centralization in the legal institutions of government. In their search for order they questioned the Lockean right to revolt against tyranny to prevent centralizations of power. Even to defend their own liberties, conservatives believed that the people had no legitimate power independent of their government.

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[100] 'The News from France - Progress of Louis Napoleon and Despotism in Europe', *NYH*, January 22, 1852.
[101] 'Speech of Mr. Cooper', *NI*, June 25, 1852.
[102] 'Impeachment of Louis Napoleon', *NA&USG*, December 31, 1851.
[103] 'France', *SWC&NYE*, January 10, 1852.

Conservatives instead defined decentralization as sharing power in institutions rather than her people. The *New York Herald*'s criticism of the local officeholders who personally swore allegiance to Louis-Napoleon reflects this conservative understanding that republican institutions rather than the people were the rightful guardians against centralization.[104] Local government was, after all, very important to Americans, who saw it as a foundation of freedom.[105] An enduring assumption that propertied great men in legal institutions were the best trustees of government authority perhaps explains why conservatives defended and obsessed over the actions of elite statesmen in France. Many writers defended republicans like Louis Cavaignac, the dictator who suppressed the socialist uprising in June 1848 and then relinquished his power.[106] Supporters argued that there was a 'moderate republicanism' in France represented by 'leading men' and 'influential men' of his following. This 'conservatism' would 'save that interesting country, from the encroaches of despotism, or the deluge of Anarchy.'[107] Describing Louis Philippe as a 'man of peace' too gave the King of the French the appearance of a legitimate leader who had resisted using centralized violent power.[108] Building a genuine republic meant embracing the guiding vision of elites who were eager to restrain centralizing tendencies. Conversely, the officials and bureaucrats of the Second Empire had 'little weight of personal character', as they had failed to check the power of the French Emperor.[109] Contrasting republican statesmen to apologists for 'despotism' and 'anarchy' endowed them with legitimacy. American commentators created an image of reasonable, rational elite men who exercised state power without allowing the people or one man from becoming a single centralized source of state power over the entire republic. Unsurprisingly conservative elites believed that only they were fit to hold power in a republic and prevent democracy and dictatorship – and this assumption would come to influence state building within a United States that had its own problems with order.

Closely linked to reasserting the leading role of political institutions over the will of the people was restoring government by the best men. Criticism of Louis-Napoleon's supposed attacks on French elites speaks to this conservative assumption that elites, rather than the people, were bet placed to hold power without centralization. As the *Whig Review* put it, 'the seizure and imprisonment of the statesmen and great lawyers of France', and not the suppression of the popular voice, allowed Louis-Napoleon to monopolise power, as they were 'the sole obstacles in the way of despotism, the only voices and arms able to disturb and disconcert it'.[110] However, they were by no means the only newspaper to believe that the arrest of France's 'gentlemen', 'public men', and 'most respectable citizens' of Paris and the rest of France allowed Louis-Napoleon to maintain power.[111] Belief that a smaller number of propertied, educated, and officeholding citizens also appeared in the *Philadelphia*

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[104] 'The State of Europe', *NYH*, November 3, 1852.
[105] Paludan, 'Crisis in Law and Order', pp. 1013-1034.
[106] G. P. Gooch, *The Second French Empire* (Westport, CT, 1960), pp. 14, 155, 214.
[107] 'Our General Review', *AWR* 14 (1851), pp. 536; 'Louis Napoleon', *DSG*, June 26, 1851.
[108] 'The News from France - Progress of Louis Napoleon and Despotism in Europe', *NYH*, January 22, 1852. '[Untitled]', *The Alta California*, December 16, 1852.
[109] 'Historical Review of the Month', *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 4 (1851), p. 704; 'The Condition of France', *The Sun*, December 31, 1851.
[110] W., 'Styles, American and Foreign', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 353.
[111] 'French Liberty', *NA&USG* (March 8, 1852); 'Harper's New Monthly Magazine', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 6 (1853), pp. 697-698; 'Historical Review of the Month', *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* 5 (1852), p. 423.

North American, when it pointed to the censorship of French academics as an important part of Louis-Napoleon's dictatorship.[112] It seemed far more important to American conservative journals that French elites had been deprived of power than that the people no longer had a leading role in the in the government of the republic and empire. Paradoxically, they could use the same reasoning to defend the Second Empire too. According to the *New York Herald*, 'the men of commerce and trade, who care nothing for political theories and religious opinions' would 'unite, and support the military government' in place of the 'violent' French republicans. [113] Ultimately, such conservatives suggested that limits on the political autonomy of the people were less troubling than the limited power of institutions and elites.

The fact that conservatives had redefined unfit voters as the progenitors of centralization allowed them to present their own process of centralization as sharing power. For example, the *American Whig Review* and Sidney George Fisher both extolled the value of dividing power among France's nobility as a way to avoid the supposed centralization of power in the people at Paris. As the *Whig Review* put it, 'If France were divided into many sovereignties, as in feudal times, and these sovereignties represented as peers in a house of assembly, authority might remain in the people of the provinces'.[114] Such a proposal, which resembled the design for an upper class, indirectly elected Senate, might have guaranteed that no individual had access to the entire state apparatus and that the propertyless urban electorate did not have a monopoly on power. However, despite clothing this proposal in the language of sharing power by suggesting that they were avoiding a geographic concentration of power in Paris, they nonetheless centralized power as they hoped to hand control over the state to a small number of landed elites – the same people who stood to lose the most should the people gained control of powerful government conservatives desired to keep order on the streets of large cities. Conservatives, then, were more than capable of using a seemingly democratic language of modernisation, strong government, and opposition to centralization for rather more proscriptive ends.

Louis-Napoleon's few American apologists used this contest between popular and elite centralization of control over state power to suggest that the Second Empire could too serve as an example of republican government in comparison to the centralization of government in one man or one mob. Where the Second French Republic relied on 'the prop of one hundred thousand bayonets' to maintain support, an enthusiastic correspondent to the *National Intelligencer* claimed, Louis-Napoleon governed through normal republican statesmanship and a restraining system of public institutions. [115] Similarly, in contrast to absolute monarchs who 'blotted out' and 'crushed' popular rights, defenders gave the impression that Louis-Napoleon, by comparison, looked like a legitimate constitutional monarch. By reading his rule as a mere 'execution of law' designed to suppress public violence, conservatives sometimes implied that Louis-Napoleon supported, rather than subverted, legal institutions.[116]

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[112] 'French Despotism', *NA&USG*, August 25, 1852.
[113] 'Kossuth and the Recent Revolution in France', *NYH*, December 29, 1851.
[114] 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), p. 171; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 54, December 31, 1851.
[115] 'Editor's Correspondence', *NI*, January 6, 1852.
[116] The Berkeley Men, *The Napoleon Dynasty* (New York, NY, 1856), pp. 599-601.

Debating centralizing political power in a smaller number of political institutions and propertied elites in France also left conservatives considering the need for such a centralization at home. When arguing against American support for European republicanism, some conservatives recognised that supporting what appeared to them as dangerous radical democracies abroad could set a dangerous precedent for a centralization of power in the people at home. In cautioning against embracing the cause of the Second Republic or Kossuth in Hungary, Francis Lieber, John Bell[117] and the *National Intelligencer* claimed a responsible course of action at home would be for the Union to remain an example of a polity that divided sovereignty among legal institutions and avoided the concentration of political authority in the masses.[118] Using the same language they would later use to argue that abolitionists threatened the integrity of government the *Boston Courier* warned that the 'agitator' Kossuth would bring the same chaos to the United States as Louis-Napoleon and the Paris Mob had brought to France.[119] The threats that conservatives used centralization to delegitimise existed on both sides of the Atlantic, and that the USA too needed a conservative programme of centralization too. Lieber himself quoted heavily from Daniel Webster on the importance of separation of powers among state institutions, warning that a 'wide-based' democracy could lead to a despotic 'unity of power' in the United States.[120] Both John Bell and *The National Intelligencer* argued that the French did not subscribe to genuine American republicanism based on 'the schools of antiquity', and followed instead this dangerous path of an 'overzealous democracy'.[121] The Union should not be diverted from the course conservatives had defined for it.

Louis-Napoleon's supposed ability to ensure that political authority rested in public institutions and great statesmen rather than city mobs and demagogues who courted them offered conservatives timely lessons for the United States. Even passing sympathy for Louis-Napoleon suggested the antidemocratic tendencies of some conservatives. The *Herald*, for example, regretted that the Union had no Louis-Napoleon to abolish the 'agitating' proslavery Senators who were already threatening the truce established by the Compromise of 1850.[122] Its wish for imperial intervention was almost certainly a rhetorical exaggeration, but it indicated conservative fears that political debate challenged the power of America's public institution to hold the Union together. In opposing northern abolitionists and southern disunionists in 1850 and 1860, supporters of Union and Constitutional Union parties would draw on these ideas to justify strengthening the power of the federal government and shielding its independence from popular politics. Other commentators that worried about the debilitating impact of democracy on federal power, like conservative Whig journals the *North American* and the *Courier and Enquirer*, suggested that America could learn from Louis-Napoleon's 'firm' style of 'strong government' as it showed how a government unburdened with electoral concerns was free to invest in infrastructure and commercial growth. This seemed a stark contrast to Jacksonian Democracy, which to them had stalled internal improvements and debased public life.[123] It is improbable that such voices wanted a real Emperor for the United States. However, Louis-Napoleon's

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[117] Whig Senator from Tennessee and Constitutional Union Party nominee in 1860.
[118] '"Young America and its Allies"', *NI*, September 10, 1853; 'Speech of John Bell', *NI*, April 23, 1852.
[119] 'Another revolution in France', *Boston Courier*, December 22, 1851.
[120] Lieber, *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. 2, p. 24.
[121] 'Speech of John Bell', *NI*, April 23, 1852; '"Young America and its Allies"', *NI*, September 10, 1853.
[122] 'The Compromise Declamation in the Senate', *NYH*, December 18, 1852.
[123] 'Thursday Morning, Dec. 02, 1852', *SWC&NYE*, December 4, 1852; 'Railways in France', *NA&USG*, March 12, 1853; 'France', *SWC&NYE*, January 10, 1852

government did give conservatives the opportunity to think through their own desire for stronger government at home – and they saw a real opportunity to reorient power away from the people and back towards a government less concerned with popular opinion.

Claiming that the people were unfit to hold power without centralization also allowed them to argue instead that propertied citizens were better placed to hold power. By no means all Americans accepted the quasi-democratic polity they had inherited from Jackson, let alone the expectation that the American government should naturally democratise over time to prevent the country from falling into the hands of despotism. Both the *Whig Review* and Sidney George Fisher openly admitted that they believed that propertied citizens – the sort who would be most likely and able to participate in the institutions and offices they believed should hold sovereignty in a republic – were best placed to resist the centralization of political authority into dictators and demagogues. Propertied elites were the only 'individuals capable of understanding and foreseeing danger and of using proper means to meet it' as land gave 'valor' and 'influence'.[124] In other words, rather than seeing the capacity to participate as citizens as something inherent to white men – let alone African-Americans and women – these conservatives believed property gave the individual agency to participate in political life. Fisher in particular yearned for an aristocracy in the United States, proudly boasting the Philadelphia had what he thought of as a true aristocracy that gave the city far more prestige and influence than the democracy of New York City.[125] He placed the availability of land and property in the West and South alongside the 'traditions' of England as 'defences as yet to retard the course of democracy,' but worried that before long, the U.S. too would succumb to the fate of prior republics and descend into the tyranny of either the mob and an American Bonaparte.[126] The aim of mixed government was to keep power in the hands of those with the supposed power to resist democratic and authoritarian centralization – an American aristocracy of propertied elites and establishment political insiders. Alongside their plan to build a stronger, more centralised state capable of maintaining law and order, they imagined a process of centralization of political authority in fewer and fewer hands.

Many conservatives still believed that property ownership was the best benchmark to prove voters' fitness to hold power in their republic. Assumptions that men had to hold property to be good citizens had a long pedigree in the United States. The eighteenth-century political thinkers from whom many Americans claimed to draw inspiration had often claimed that only property gave individuals the necessary independence to vote freely. This was, after all, an era without a secret ballot. From the Revolution onwards, fears persisted that enfranchising unpropertied citizens would lead to their votes becoming under the control of devious employers, artful demagogues, or militaristic officeholders.[127] In the age of the second party system, some conservative Whigs still believed that unelected and undemocratic political bodies gave landed property the opportunity to steer the polity between anarchy and despotism – and veto any burgeoning democratic radicalism and

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[124] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, p. 54-55, December 31, 1851; 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), p. 171.
[125] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, p. 112, October 1, 1848.
[126] *Ibid.*, vol. 1850-1856, p. 58, December 31, 1851.
[127] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Cleves, *Terror in America*, pp. 20-57; Elkins and McKitrick, *Federalism*, pp. 9, 15; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 121, 401, 489-191, 599-601; Keyssar, *Vote*, pp. 3-21; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 11-86; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 13-180; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 162-196, 214-221.

attacks on property. [128] However, even Jacksonian Democrats had claimed that Whig support for banks and paper money undermined a working-class ownership society necessary to maintain a broad-based republican government. They, too, believed the political power would follow the distribution of property among white male citizens. [129] Conservative support for government by the propertied fitted into this assumption that landed wealth, ranging from large estates to smaller independent farms, enabled citizenship in a republican polity.

For all their warnings against centralization, conservatives were in practice avid centralizers. France gave them the opportunity to think about the tools they could use to reinforce the power of government over the people and put government back into fewer hands. In the context of their own experiences of urban disorder and challenges to the integrity of the union, conservatives lauded those – including Louis-Napoleon – who they believed could reassert the power of the government over the multitude. In addition to centralizing violent authority in the state at the expense of the people, they often supported centralizing control over state institutions from the people to a smaller group of propertied elites. Comparisons between France and the United States further suggested that when conservatives discussed France, they were thinking of state-building in the United States too. In America as much as France, conservatives seemed happy to embrace less democratic models of government to centre power in their own hands. Conservatives therefore warned against allowing the people to centralize power not because they opposed strong, decisive, or powerful government, but simply because they opposed giving the people too much control over government power. Rather than looking back to an imagined stateless agrarian past, conservatives seemed to believe that progress meant developing a stronger government to combat the threat of disorder that grew as their economy industrialised and urbanised. 1848 might have proven to conservatives the dangers of continually allowing the people in a democracy to claim more power over government, but, in the context of class conflict, sectional divides, and urban violence, it also gave timely lessons in how they could meet this growing popular challenge.

Conclusion

The transformation from the Second Republic to the Second Empire gave Whig and Democratic conservatives the opportunity to think about the long-term evolution of government in the New World as well as in Europe. Almost all Americans saw Louis-Napoleon's regime as an example of a dangerous centralization of power, for they assumed he had absolute control over all the institutions of government and, could apply authority from his office in Paris over the entire empire. A number of observers, though, ranging from the *New York Herald* and Maurice Richter in the Democratic Party to the Whig *Philadelphia North American*, *National Intelligencer*, and diarist Sidney George Fisher, used France to warn that the people at the barricades and at the ballot box could be the progenitors of dangerous centralization. They employed Louis-Napoleon's accession to show how democratisation and the growth of an unfit, unpropertied, and often immigrant electorate threatened to weaken republican government and challenge elites' hold on political authority. Defining the people as the greatest centralizing threat in Europe and even America allowed them to justify a centralizing programme of their own, intended in part to prevent the consequences

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[128] Howe, *American Whigs*, pp. 76-77.
[129] Watson, *Liberty and* Power, pp. 46-47; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 507-518.

of the democratisation they opposed. France gave them an experiment from abroad of how a republican polity could enforce order. These conservatives, although they were sometimes influenced by the likes of Edmund Burke, had no intention of returning to an imagined eighteenth-century agrarian republic, and instead sought their own modernisation suitable for the challenges of the nineteenth century. The 1848 Revolutions and the reaction that followed therefore happened at a pivotal moment, as American conservatives weighed up warnings from the revolutionary past against the need for state strengthening to meet the challenges posed by social and sectional conflict. Napoleon III presented a conflicting figure as someone who could be condemned for destroying a republic, assailed as the head of a mob, yet sometimes admired by conservatives for his apparent improvements to an unstable French state.

Like most Americans, conservatives tended to see Louis-Napoleon's authoritarian republic between 1851 and 1852 as the antithesis of republican government. While centralization was a useful piece of political propaganda to tarnish opponents with, American citizens also used it to describe changing power relationships, with a particular emphasis on the decline and fall of republics. This idea of a process of political centralization over time – of power's tendency to consolidate without checks – was an important part of American political science in the period. They described two aspects of his government as 'centralized' to justify describing him as a monarch, usurper, or traitor to the Second French Republic. First, they argued that he had monopolised control over state authority, as he appeared to have unlimited and unchecked control over the state apparatus. He had 'centralized' decision-making power inwards from the people and institutions of the French government to his own office. Second, the French government in Paris, which Louis-Napoleon had complete control over, could wield vast and violent power from Paris over the rest of the country. France was also 'centralized' in the sense that a single source could compel the republic to obey its decrees. These two forms of centralization – the first institutional, the second, geographic – appeared regularly in conservative thought in the 1850s, where they informed responses to economic development, urban government, and the sectional crisis.

Louis-Napoleon's demonstration of the dangers of centralized government was important to conservatives, but it was far less important to them than the circumstances in which he was able to assume centralized power. Conservatives situated Louis-Napoleon's centralization in France within a wider problem of democratisation. When doing so, they borrowed from an older republican fear that mob violence better defined democracy than free elections held in a society that respected human rights. And just as a dictator like the French emperor could control the political institutions of the republic and enforce his will upon all of France, the Paris Mob too could become a democratic source of centralized power in a republic. The Second Republic, conservatives argued, had failed because the French people had embraced the same centralization as their imperial successor. In comparison to an idealised American tradition of respect for the rule of law and protection from majority tyranny, the Parisian crowd had supposedly usurped power that rightfully belonged to the French state and made themselves a centralized source of power within the republic. These conservatives therefore used the descent from republic to empire to define the process of power concentrating in the people as a grave centralizing threat. This redefinition of a pejorative term was vital to how conservatives sought to restore deference at home and legitimise a centralization of their own. Defining centralized forms of government in France allowed conservatives to experiment with new – and older – ways to

limit democracy and build a strong government capable of withstanding the pressures of the mid-nineteenth century.

French centralization concerned these American conservatives because they tied it to urban disorder and political radicalism at home. The Second Republic and Second Empire came at a point when conservatives themselves felt an acute loss of political authority. Urban rioting, challenges from northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders to the integrity of the Union, and the influence of Jacksonian democracy, suggested to conservatives that America also faced the threat of a centralization of power in the people. Rather than seeing these issues as isolated phenomena, conservatives related them back to the underlying issue of the power relationships between the people and the state. The claims of these seemingly unrelated movements that challenged existing legal authority suggested to these conservatives that democracy, such as it existed in midcentury America, might allow the people to claim far more control than conservatives were prepared to allocate to them. After all, some of these movements themselves openly claimed inspiration from the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe.[130] Contrasting French democratic centralization to federated American republicanism allowed conservative sceptics of democracy to promote a different political culture at home. American citizens, they argued, ought to defer to the decision-making power of legitimate institutions and refrain from asserting authority in public space.

To avoid the threat of democratic centralization, conservatives planned a centralization of their own, as they sought to keep political decision-making in the hands of fewer institutions and men of property independent of the popular will. Far from believing that they needed to look backwards to the agrarian early republic, conservatives often argued that their government needed to consolidate powers over time to maintain its authority over a growing empire. France allowed them to think about tools that they might use to concentrate the power in an elite-directed state rather than the people themselves. Rather than seeing monarchy, hereditary aristocracy, and restricted suffrage as relics of the past, some conservatives found these useful ways to consider what a centralization of power might look like on conservative terms. Rejecting the idea that progress meant democratisation, conservatives did not always see these forms of government as inherently regressive, but rather argued they offered a closer model for a republic to follow than direct popular control. While the ideal of a separation of powers, a staple of republican theory, might seem like a democratic language of power-sharing, in the hands of conservatives it often meant dividing power among elites, officeholders, and institutions. It is improbable that many of these figures wanted a European-style aristocracy in America or a constitutional monarchy – the few who did, like the Philadelphian Sidney George Fisher, were an exception – but their critiques of American voters suggested that they were far more comfortable with the idea of limiting government to men of property. Where democracy weakened government, invited mob violence, and ultimately led to the rise of demagogic leaders like Louis-Napoleon, a more insulated government would have the necessary strength and legitimacy to command respect for the law.

Conservatives were therefore not just anachronistically opposing the social and political changes of the nineteenth century in nostalgic terms. Like their liberal opponents, they believed that government needed to change over time, only they did not believe that

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[130] Del Lago, 'Hostility to Every Form of Tyranny', pp. 293-320; Fleche, 1861; W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge, 2013); Tuchinsky, *Greeley's*, pp. 82-107; Widmer, *Young America*.

this required democratisation. It was not opposition to growing concentrations of state power over time or a desire to return to the agrarian polity of the eighteenth century that made many conservatives wary of the Second Republic and Jacksonian democracy; instead it was a belief that centralization should take place on their terms. Conservatives, then, used France to think about a conservative path to modernity.

The conservative reaction to Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état shows how Americans used events in Europe to contest the nature of the post-Jackson polity. The midcentury United States, as historians writing in the transnational tradition have shown, was not simply an inward-looking nation comfortable that republicanism had set it apart from reactionary Europe, and more interested in its own domestic conflicts than foreign affairs. Despite their domestic problems, Americans still found time to think about government and politics in Europe. Situating themselves in a transatlantic context alongside European revolutionary republicans, constitutional monarchs, and absolutist empires helped conservatives find new ways to think about domestic politics. That would have implications for their approach to economic transformation, urban disorder, and sectional politics.

Chapter 2: Centralization and Geography: Railroads, Tariffs, and Cities

Introduction

Conservatives who used 'centralization' to understand power relationships between the people and institutions also used the term to describe power relationships between places. Conservative critiques of the Second Republic and Second Empire often hinted at opposition to the concentration of economic and political authority inwards from the nation to the capital, and of Paris's ability to project power outwards over France. As the *New York Herald* put it,

> In France, the learning, the genius, the intellect, and the power, if not the wealth, are concentrated in Paris; and hence, whatever may be the change or modification of government, it originated, carried out, and centralized in the capital. In other words, Paris rules France, and France yields willing obedience.[1]

Such centralization had mixed results. On one hand, the *Herald* noted, railroads, improvements, and capital allowed New York to rival the great imperial cities of the Old World. But it also issued a sobering warning: that this centralization could lead to 'insanity', 'disgust', and 'gambling'.[2]

As well as referring to power relationships between the people and institutions, centralization had a geographic meaning, and could refer to power relationships between places too. Conservatives, like many other Americans, believed that industrialisation, commercial growth, and transportation created and altered power relationships between cities and surrounding country. Centralization as a process helped them conceptualise these changing power relationships as the American economy grew. Using centralization as a political weapon helped conservatives in different cities delegitimise these changes when they benefited their commercial rivals. But the same conservatives who warned against centralization in New York or London were no less keen to embrace this process for themselves. They shared an assumption that centralization brought prosperity, but rather than referring to their ambitions using this preoperative term, they tried to justify it as a defensive response to their neighbours' hostile intentions. Moreover, centralized economic geography had political consequences, and conservatives engaged in a variety of state-building responses to give themselves the authority to ensure that economic geography served their own interests. Responding to hostile centralizations therefore served as a pretext to strengthen government, assert the political preeminence of their own city, and, drawing on similar arguments to those used against France, set limits to popular government.

The geographic connotations of centralization – of one nation, region, or city concentrating power at the expense of an increasingly dependent periphery – were particularly useful for conservatives when describing the changing shape of a U.S. economy

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[1] 'Is Europe to be Cossack or Republican', *NYH*, May 13, 1852.
[2] 'Centralization', *The Sun*, August 11, 1858.

in the process of being remoulded by railroads and steamships. Conservatives employed centralization to resist the consolidating tendencies of the era. Philadelphians, for example, warned against 'centralization' in New York yet desired it for themselves.[3] Baltimoreans talked about a 'Trade League of the Chesapeake' to combat the centralizing tendencies of New York, the 'monopolist of all commerce'.[4] Conservative Bostonians hoped that railroads would redirect trade tor Boston that the Erie Canal had made 'tributary' to Manhattan.[5] Political economist Henry Carey – a key figure in this chapter – constantly warned against 'centralization' in his battles against railroad monopolies and international free trade, which he called a 'commercial centralization' that amounted to 'the worst of all the forms of tyranny that the ingenuity of man has ever yet devised'.[6] Just as they did in France, these conservatives also used an anti-monopoly language to defend their own interest in centralization.

These examples also suggest that conservatives warned against rival centralizations to legitimise their own alternative programme of modernisation and state-building against those of mercantile rivals in other cities and workers and artisans in their own cities. In response to the supposed threat of centralization in imperial cities, they pushed to centralize power in their own locales, albeit on a smaller scale they could package as sharing power. To realise these ambitions, conservatives needed the likes of charters, regulations, and subsidies, which in turn required political sanction. Centralization was therefore an important tool for conservatives who believed that their own prosperity required redistributing political and economic power away from popular control or remote metropolises. Centralization was therefore useful to conservatives because it allowed them to legitimise their own attempts to establish economic power over hinterland trade and urban workers. Warning against the supposedly centralizing tendencies of other cities allowed them to justify strengthening their control over their city's surrounding territory as a defensive move. Criticising centralization at the hands of another city therefore had much to do with building power relationships outwards over their own surrounding suburbs, counties, and states.

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[3] For example, see 'The Mint and the Empire City', *PNA&USG*, February 8, 1851; 'The Erie Troubles', *PNA&USG*, January 10, 1854; 'The Epicurism of Politics', *PNA&USG*, June 12, 1851; 'The "Centralization of Commerce"', *PNA&USG*, October 26, 1859; 'Centralization of Commerce', *PI*, October 25, 1859; 'The Erie Troubles - Public Meeting', *PNA&USG*, January 30, 1854; 'The Erie Troubles', *PNA&USG*, January 07, 1854.

[4] For example, see 'Patabsco River and Chesapeake Bay', *BA*, March 21, 1854; 'Trade League of the Chesapeake', *BA*, February 15, 1854.

[5] *Official Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the State Convention, Assembled May 4th, 1853, To Revise and Amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, vol. 3 (Boston, 1854) p. 16; 'The City and the Country', *Boston Herald*, October 20, 1853; 'Speech of Wm. Schouler', *The Boston Daily Atlas*, July 21, 1853; Quoted in 'Disfranchisement of Boston', *Boston Daily Atlas*, July 13, 1853. For more on Boston's conservative elite and their activities at the constitutional convention, see Dale Baum, 'Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850s', *The Journal of American History* 64 (1978), p. 962; Baum, D., *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill, 1984), pp. 24-54; John Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston, 1990), pp. 7-27; Samuel Shapiro, 'The Conservative Dilemma: The Massachusetts Constitutional Convention of 1853', *The New England Quarterly* 33 (1960), pp. 207-224.

[6] For example, see Henry Carey, *The Harmony of Interests: Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Commercial* (Philadelphia, 1851), pp. iii-iv, 203-204, 208; Henry Carey, *Principles of Social Science*, vol. II (Philadelphia, 1858), pp. 177-181, 434-440; Henry Carey, *Principles of Social Science*, vol. III (Philadelphia, 1858), pp. 209-232; Henry Carey, *Beauties of the Monopoly System of New Jersey. By a Citizen of Burlington* (Philadelphia, 1848), pp. 2-8. Quote from Henry Carey, 'Centralization', *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil* 4 (1852), pp. 387-388.

Industrialisation and new corporate forms of business organisation also served conservatives who wanted to shield property and power from democratic control.[7] As well as helping build power relationships outwards, warning against centralization similarly helped conservatives impose power within their own metropolises too. American cities experienced internal conflicts between artisans, workers, employers, and propertyowners.[8] Conservatives used centralization to define these conflicts in geographic terms, claiming that the most dangerous centralizing threat came not from corporations, interests, and institutions within their own city, but from centralizing imperial metropolises. In addition to allowing them to impose power over surrounding territory, warning against remote centralizations helped conservatives legitimise property relationships and wage labour within their own cities. Criticising centralization elsewhere therefore gave these conservatives the opportunity to preserve property and impose power closer to home.

Conservatives' use of centralization in this way reflected attempts to deflect social conflict in their own cities to avoid the kind of battles that became common in the Gilded Age.[9] Pennsylvanians' criticism of the supposedly centralizing tendencies of free trade, for example, well suited Pennsylvania iron and coal industries vulnerable to international competition and Manhattan's growing mercantile supremacy. Claims that protection harmonised tensions between classes could be read as a carefully-constructed marketing tool to make industrialisation palatable.[10] Conservatives' arguments that a horizontal process of geographic centralization could explain rising inequality helped them deflect attention from the vertical redistribution of power taking place in their factories and workshops. Concerns about centralization of power in remote cities thus had much to do with managing political and economic challenges in their own urban centres, by showing, in their opinion, that real threats to prosperity lay far away, rather than close at hand.

Although this chapter emphasises the modernising vision of conservatives, they did not necessarily want to create the national market, hierarchical class structure, and corporate capitalism we associate with the Gilded Age. The antebellum era was one of experimentation in political economy and forms of state authority. Horace Greeley, editor of the *Tribune* in New York, flirted with socialism.[11] Some urban workers challenged the slow substitution of wage labour – and the dependence it engendered – for artisanal autonomy or craft unionism.[12] Slaveholders and abolitionists clashed on the merits of free

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[7] Andrew Shocket, *Founding Corporate Power in Early National Philadelphia* (Dekalb, 2007).

[8] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 265-863; Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 57-76; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 335-339; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 525-569; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the Working Class 1788-1850* (Oxford, 1984), Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 181-519.

[9] In the years after the Civil War, and particularly after Reconstruction, the Panic of 1874, and the Great Strike of 1877, many propertied elites open called for restraints on universal male suffrage in the South and North. See Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 172-236; Sven Beckert, 'Democracy in the Age of Capital', in M. Jacobs, W. Novak and J. E. Zeizler (eds) *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 146-174; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 1032-1033; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 460-601; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 106-107; Donald Kent, 'The Erie War of the Gauges', *Pennsylvania History* 25 (1948), p. 257.

[10] Conkin, *Carey*, p. 280; Dawson, 'Carey', p. 469.; Egnal, *Extremes*, pp. 240-242.

[11] Hale, *Greeley*, pp. 91-107; Perelman, *Marx*, pp. 10-27; Tuchinsky, *Greeley's*, pp. 20-51, 104-105, 126-164.

[12] Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 17-43; Celia Eckhardt, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (London, 1984); Foner, *Free Soil*, pp. 11-39, 149-185; Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, 1991); Carl Guarneri, 'The Americanization of Utopia: Fourierism and the Dilemma of Utopian Dissent in the United States', *Utopian Studies* 5 (1994), pp. 72-88; Andrew Heath, '"Every Man His Own Landlord": Working-

labor and slavery as economic systems and their ability to satisfy commercial growth.[13] Conservatives were also experimenting in political economy. They used a language of opposition to centralization – and their own local centralizing schemes – to promote their own vision of modernisation, one that accepted industrialisation, urbanisation, and new technology, but also reflected their concerns about the division of property, the impact of democratisation over time, and the consolidation of a national market. Seeing centralization as a geographic process that created core and dependent regions allowed conservatives to articulate a modernising vision and advocate their own economic interests within a republican political economy seemingly hostile to concentrations of economic power.

The Process of Economic Centralization in Midcentury America

Conservatives, like many other Americans, used centralization to describe economic changes underway in midcentury United States. The period saw substantial technological and economic expansion in terms of infrastructure, trade, and capital. This meant that more people over wider territory came under the influence of institutions like markets, railroads, and banks that made cities their seat. Both contemporaries and historians described and understood these changes as a centralization as ties of economic dependency between cities and surrounding territory both strengthened and traversed greater distances. And for many Americans, this could pose a threat just as much as it could offer prosperity. These changing economic power relationships formed a part of conservatives' agenda as much as political authority, and centralization also helped them vie for control over them.

In the 1850s, the ties of capital and infrastructure between cities and their surrounding territories grew substantially. As Chart 5 below shows, the railroad mileage in eastern states grew substantially during this period, with New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia developing in particular as major railroad hubs. New York's access to the west through the Hudson and Mohawk river valleys gave it a particular advantage over other seaboard cities in accessing western trade.[14] Citizens in all these cities, though, hoped that their railroads would monopolise trade, carry raw materials from western farms, mines, and lumber yards inwards to their eastern city, and create wealth. They envisaged new infrastructure carving out a division of labour between a mercantile or manufacturing city and a dependant producer hinterland: railroads encouraged the inward concentration (or centralization) of labour and capital in growing cities.[15]

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class Suburban Speculation and the Antebellum Republican City', *Journal of Urban History* 38 (November 2012), 1003-1020; Andrew Heath, '"The Producers on the One Side, and the Capitalists on the Other": Labor Reform, Slavery, and the Career of a Transatlantic Radical, 1838-1873', *American Nineteenth-Century History* 13 (2012), 1-29; Margaret Lane, *Frances Wright and the 'Great Experiment'* (Manchester, 1972); Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia: 1800-1850* (Philadelphia, 1980); Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 46-47; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*.

[13] Wilfred Carsel, 'The Slaveholders' Indictment of Northern Wage Slavery', *Journal of Southern History* 6 (1940), pp. 504-520; Foner, *Free Soil*; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol. 2, pp. 35-39, 55-57, 99; Genovese and Genovese, *Master Class*, pp. 39, 52, 63, 143, 305-318; James Huston, 'The Panic of 1857, Southern Economic Thought, and the Patriarchal Defense of Slavery', *The Historian* 46 (1984), pp. 163-186; Johnson, *River*, pp. 280-302; Matthew Karp, 'American Sea Power', pp. 283-324; Karp, 'The World Slaveholders Craved', pp. 414-432; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*.

[14] François Furstenberg, 'The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History', *The American Historical Review* 2008 (113), pp. 659-665; Hartz, *Economic Policy*, pp. 42-51; Larson, *Improvement*, pp. 71-80; Almon Parkins, 'A Comparison of the Trans-Appalachian Railroads', *The Journal of Geography* 9 (1911), pp. 113-118; Sellers, *Market*, pp. 40-41.

[15] According to William Cronon, the 'logic of capital' dictated that New York City would market goods from the American west, which itself became dependant on Chicago as a hub for marketing and monetising these

On an international scale, British free trade policy in the period helped London become the centre of a global trade network.[16] New York became a major part of this system, as Congress in 1849 subsidised a Liverpool-Manhattan steamship mail route that, in practice, strengthened its merchants' advantage over rivals in other eastern cities.[17] New York became increasingly important as a centre of trade and banking, with only Boston coming close in terms of invested capital and foreign commerce.[18] (see also Chart 6 and Chart 7 below). This process too came to be called a 'centralization', not just by rural agrarians, but also by conservatives in other Northeastern cities who saw in this transformation a direct challenge to their own prosperity rather than the emergence of a modern integrated economy.

Historians have long conceptualised this period of economic expansion as a centralization. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. observed how eastern cities used turnpikes, canals, and railroads, to subordinate surrounding territory as far as the South and the West. Economic life in far flung corners of the Union came to hinge on remote stock exchanges, commodity markets, and private corporations. Capitalists and politicians in different cities therefore employed new infrastructure to monopolise the material wealth of surrounding territory, expanding their spheres of influence outwards and centralizing inwards the material wealth of their surrounding hinterlands.[19] More recent scholarship has suggested how antebellum corporations, cities, and states competed to expand their colonial spheres of influence. Such competition meant that the commercial growth of major cities did not necessarily result in the creation of an integrated national market. On a local and international level, internal improvements and trade policy had a protectionist or mercantilist element, as local elites attempted to prevent other cities from accessing their own claimed geographic markets.[20] Centralization has therefore helped historians describe how midcentury cities came to dominate American economic geography both on a local and a national scale, as trade and railroad networks fanning out from growing metropolitan cores divided the eastern United States into (sometimes overlapping) economic empires, each characterised by a major city and a tributary hinterland.

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goods so railroads could export them to New York. Jeffrey Adler argues instead that Chicago overtook St. Louis because its physical distance from slavery (both as a source of violent conflict and a declining economic system) made it a safer investment for New York capital. Other historians link New York City's growth as an international port to the exigencies of packet trade, which made it cheaper for lines to sail there, and British trade policy. See Cronon, *Metropolis*, pp. xv-95; Adler*, Yankee Merchants*; Johnson, *River*, pp. 257-258; Sellers, *Revolution*, p. 41. For more details on how this process occurred in practice, see Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 20-24; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (London, 1991), pp. 55-259; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), p. 43.

[16] Hobsbawm, *Empire*, pp. 39-40; Hobsbawm, *Revolution*, pp. 49-53, 196-203.

[17] Frequent, scheduled sailings to London gave New Yorkers the most up-to-date European market data ahead of other eastern cities and reduced the cost of shipping via Manhattan. See Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 20-24; Johnson, *River*, pp. 287-292; Sellers, *Market*, p. 41; Stover, *Baltimore and Ohio Railroad*, pp. 4-5.

[18] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 435, 441, 446, 654-655; Churella, *Pennsylvania Railroad*, pp. 9-10; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 216-217, 393-394; Scobey, *Empire City*, pp. 24-25; Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 40-43; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 1-22; John Stover, *History of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad* (West Lafayette, 1987), pp. 1-14.

[19] Schlesinger, 'The City', pp. 43-66.

[20] Churella, *Pennsylvania Railroad*, pp. 76-77; Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania 1776-1860* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 42-21; Hays, 'Overlapping Hinterlands', pp. 295-321; Douglas Puffert, *Tracks Across Continents, Paths through History: The Economic Dynamics of Standardization in Railway Gauge* (London, 2009), pp. 96-97; Douglas Puffert, 'The Standardization of Track Gauge on North American Railways, 1830-1890, *The Journal of Economic History* 60 (2000), pp. 933-934; Douglas Puffert, 'Path Dependence in Spatial Networks: The Standardization of Railway Track Gauge', *Explorations in Economic History* 60 (2000), pp. 282-314.

Chart 5: *Growth of Railroad Networks in Selected Northeastern States, 1845-1859.*
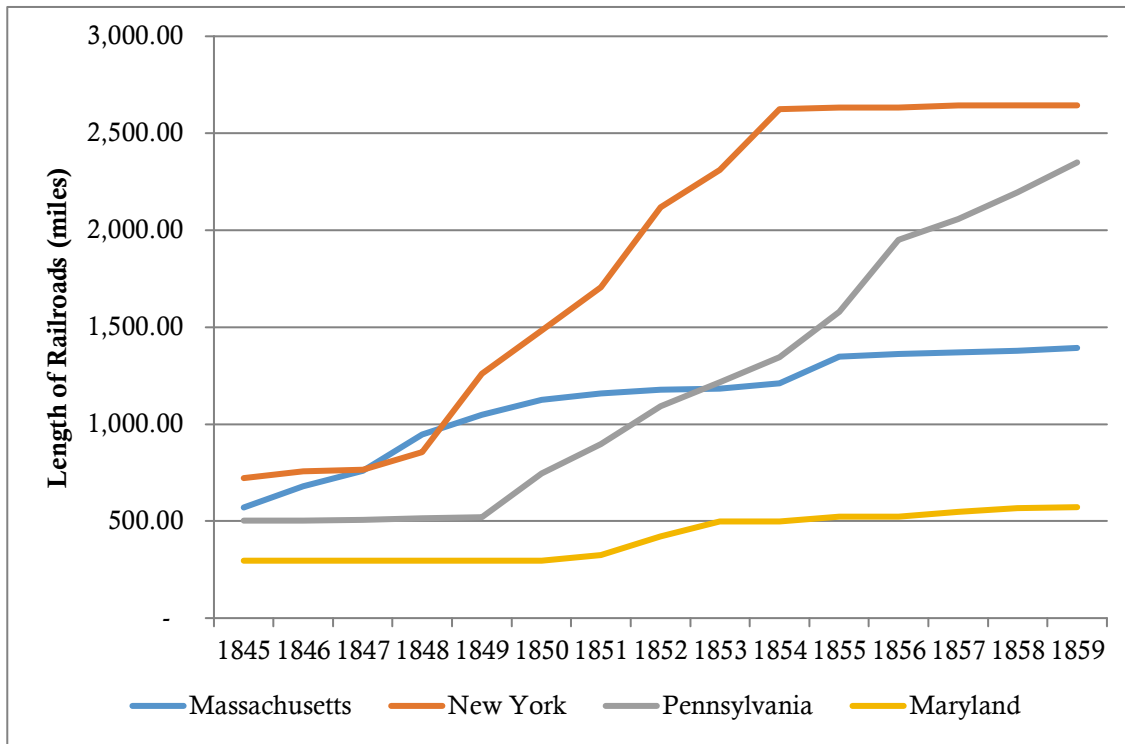
Source: Henry V. Poor, History of the Railroads and Canals of the United States, vol. 1 (New York, 1860).

Chart 6: *Total Tonnage of Vessels Calling at Major Eastern Ports, 1856.*

Chart 7: *Proportion of Banking Capital Invested by State, 1848-1849*
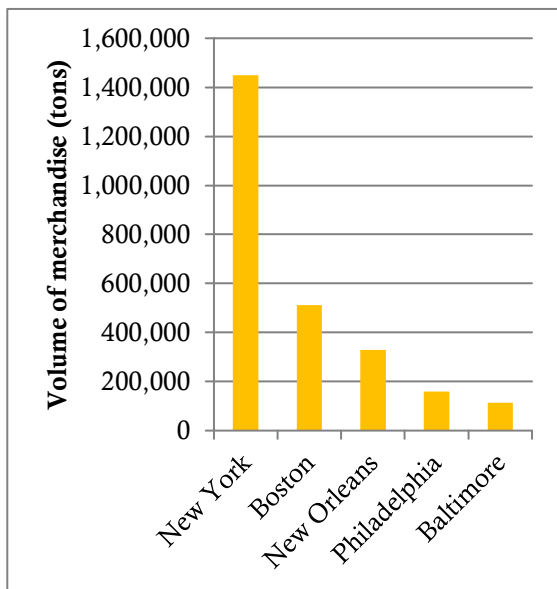
New York in particular dominated international trade. Source: *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting a Report from the Register of the Treasury of the Commerce and Navigation of the United States*, vol. 2 (Washington, 1856), pp. 628-629.
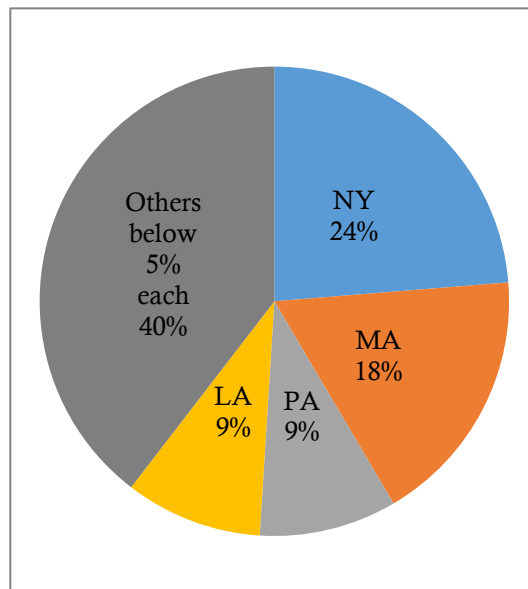
New York leading Northeastern cities. Source: Condition of the Banks of the United States: Condition of the Banks in the United States: Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, May 16, 1850 (Washington, 1850), p. 321

Because urban imperialism required government intervention, the process of economic centralization raised similar questions to the political centralization of Louis-Napoleon in France. Federally supported internal improvements had been dealt a blow by Andrew Jackson and James Polk, who vetoed projects they saw as a 'concentration of power' and 'consolidation of power' in 1832 and 1846 respectively.[21] But within states, historians have shown, both Whigs and Democrats backed government support for infrastructure, and although the Federal government could no longer run banks or improve harbours, it retained (as the New York mail monopoly showed) an ability to shape the nation's economic geography. Where power belonged across space as well as between institutions came into question. Despite the common claim that geography picked out future centres of trade, citizens understood that growth was politically contingent. Whoever controlled the levers of state power – the capacity to grant railroad charters, fund internal improvements, offer steamship subsidies, and revise tariff schedules – could help determine where trade would centralize.[22] City boosters demanded state action to realise nature's promise.[23] The question of distributing economic power between cities, counties, and states therefore raised concurrent questions about the legitimate extent of government authority and who should control it: questions that bore a striking similarity to those asked about Louis-Napoleon's France.

Contemporaries were fully aware of this economic and political centralization unfolding around them, even if they did not always believe its benefits and costs were shared equitably. As Illustration 3 below shows, cartographers imagined multiple city-centred railroad networks spreading outwards over vast metropolitan hinterlands rather than portraying a single national network. Since the Early Republic, many Americans had feared the prospect of urban interests dominating their surroundings in such a way.[24] Some of these sceptics turned to the idea of an agrarian 'empire of liberty' as a counterbalance to the corrupting power of large cities.[25] Surprisingly, though, midcentury Americans in major eastern metropolises also drew on republican fears of empire cities in competing with one another for economic growth. For example, conservative papers in New York and Philadelphia publicly accused each other's cities of using railroads, government spending, and even slanderous whispering campaigns to create a dangerous 'centralization of

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[21] Andrew Jackson, '"Veto Message [Of The Re-authorization of Bank of the United States]," July 10, 1832', *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=67043. [Accessed August 10, 2015]; James Polk, '"Veto Message", August 3, 1846', *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=67936. [Accessed July 8, 2016].

[22] Cronon, *Nature's,* pp. 63-74; Glaab, *Kansas City*, pp. 1-60; Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 58-65; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 24-25; Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 43-44.

[23] For example, see Joseph S. Clark Jr. and Michael Schlatter, 'The Railroad struggle for Pittsburgh: Forty-Three Years of Philadelphia-Baltimore Rivalry, 1838-1871', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 48 (1924), pp. 1-38; Curry, *Corporate City*, pp. 223-240; Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought*, pp. 42-51; Hays, 'Overlapping Hinterlands', pp. 259-321; Larson, *Improvement*, pp. 71-107; James Watson Livingood, *The Philadelphia-Baltimore Trade Rivalry, 1780-1860* (Harrisburg, 1947), pp. 116-165; Irene Neu and George Taylor, *The American Railroad Network, 1861-1890* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 29-35; Schlesinger, 'The City', pp. 50-51; Schley, 'Tracks', pp. 1063-1064.

[24] Schlesinger, 'The City', pp. 44-45; Towers, 'The Urban South', pp. 5-9.

[25] Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 45-58; Reginald Horsman, 'The Dimensions of an "Empire for Liberty": Expansion and Republicanism, 1775-1825', *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 (1989), pp. 1-20; John Murrin, 'The Jeffersonian Triumph and American Exceptionalism', *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (2000), pp. 1-25; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 47; Wilentz, American Democracy, pp. 15-20; Wood, *Empire*, pp. 357-399.

commerce' and make their city an American Paris.[26] When Congress proposed moving the United States Mint from Philadelphia to Manhattan, the *Boston Evening Transcript* satirised Philadelphian concerns that 'the country is centralized, to be devoured as all centralized countries must be' as hyperbole, but the fears were real.[27] Southerners like George Fitzhugh too claimed New York used the telegraph, steamship, and postal service as agents of economic 'centralization'.[28] These Americans saw the processes underway in midcentury American cities, but rather than believing that they would lead to an integrated economy that would work to their benefit, they believed an economy centralizing around their more rivals signalled a potential threat. The negative connotations of the term centralization therefore made it a useful political weapon with which they could try to delegitimise – and even reverse – changes in economic geography.

But where many Americans saw economic centralization as a threat, others saw it as an opportunity. In growing western cities, so-called boosters described the centralizing tendencies of rivers and railroads as a source of metropolitan prosperity. They claimed to have found the spot on which climate and geography would naturally centralise the trade of an entire continent, and urged eastern capitalists to fund the improvements needed to its potential. William Gilpin, for example, enthusiastically promoted the tellingly named 'Centropolis' in Independence, Missouri as the destined geographic centre of the American economy.[29] To facilitate this materialistic vision of wealth creation, boosters proposed turnpike, canal, and railroad connections from such cities outwards, to ensure a growing, dependent and monopolised hinterland could 'pay tribute' – as they often called it – to their metropolises.[30] These Americans did not always use the term centralization to describe their ideas about urban growth, but they embraced the same process of economic consolidation that other Americans condemned. Boosters, then, could embrace centralization when it was in their own economic interest to do so.

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[26] 'The "Centralization of Commerce"', *NA&USG*, October 26, 1859; 'Centralization of Commerce', *NYH*, October 24, 1859. Opponents of internal improvements had since the adoption of the constitution warned that spending on internal improvements risked 'corruption' in the hands of closely-connected politicians and investors and 'consolidation' in place of states' rights. See Larson, *Internal Improvement*.

[27] 'Centralization in the United States', *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 2, 1851.

[28] Fitzhugh, 'Uniform Postage', pp. 657-664; Johnson, *River*, pp. 287-292.

[29] For discussions of William Gilpin and city booster ideology, see Adler, *Merchants*, p. 5; Cronon, *Nature's*, pp. 46-31; Charles Nelson Glaab, 'Visions of Metropolis: William Gilpin and Theories of City Growth in the American West', *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 45 (1961), pp. 21-31; Glaab, *Kansas City*, pp. 1-60; Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 58-65; Scobey, *Empire City*, pp. 43-52.

[30] For discussions of wider applications of city booster ideology and how it related to a process of centralization in the West and East, see Adler, *Merchants*, pp. 4-8; Cronon, *Nature's*, pp. 23-54; Glaab, *Kansas City*, pp. 36-60; Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 23-29; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 43-52.

Illustration 3: *Principal Cities of the United States*

Map showing how many Americans observed growing railways as a set of discrete networks each spreading outwards from an individual major metropolitan centre. Source: *Principal Cities of the United States* (Washington, 1850), The New York Public Library, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-f4e4-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99 [Accessed May 21, 2016].

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, these supporters of economic centralization also embraced stronger government as a way to build the infrastructure required to expand their hinterlands.[31] This marked one part of a wider project of state-building around midcentury. In the antebellum period, Americans often strengthened city and state governments, seeing such action at the local level as a palatable alternative to European-style centralized regimes. [32] City consolidations and police reform movements remade municipal governments.[33] Vigilance Committees provided extra-legal authority in San Francisco and New Orleans.[34] The question of slavery also involved the organisation and powers of new states and territories in the west. [35] The same conservatives who warned against agglomerations of economic power also hinted that they wanted to experiment with now forms of government capable of intervening in the national or local economy. These often involved preventing political power draining away into remote capitals. Philadelphian political economist Henry Carey, for example, cautioned against treaties and unions with the UK that he claimed pooled national sovereignty and allowed the domination of London as a global centralized city.[36] But his proposals for tariffs, conversely, showed his support for a powerful national government. On a local level, the *Baltimore American* in 1854 proposed that cities in Maryland and Virginia establish their own publicly owned and subsidised steamship line to rival those in Manhattan, an extension of government's role in economic life designed to ward off a larger centralization of power.[37] This came in addition to the city's own investment in the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. [38] Philadelphians who supported strengthening the city government argued that this too would give them the political authority to promote their city as the preeminent metropolis of the United States.[39] These examples suggest how Americans in major cities linked the question of changing economic geography to the issue of who controlled government power and how strong it needed to be.

The mid-century American economy therefore developed in a way that both historians and contemporaries perceived as centralized. Railroads and other improvements in transportation spreading outwards from American cities allowed cities to grow rapidly in population, dictate the terms of trade with surrounding regions, and become the seats of ever more powerful corporations. And to achieve this, politicians, investors, and propertyowners relied on government power, which despite the supposed dominance of Jacksonian *laissez faire*, allowed the state to intervene in the economy at the local level in particular.

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[31] Sellers, *Market Revolution*, pp. 43-44.

[32] For example, see Balogh, *Government Out of Sight;* Gerstle, 'A State Both Strong and Weak', pp. 779-785; Gerstle, 'The Resilient Power of the States,' pp. 61–87; Paludan, Crisis in Law and Order', pp. 1013-1034; Skowronek, *Building a New American State*; Novak, 'Myth of the "Weak" American State, 752-772; Novak, *People's Welfare.*

[33] See chapter 3.

[34] Philip Ethington, *The Public City* (London, 2001), 86-169; Dennis Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805-1889* (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 66-67; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 135-180.

[35] For further details on the territorial question, see Nevins, *Ordeal*, vol 1, pp. 3-33, 219-252; McPherson, *Battle Cry*, pp. 70-77, 121-123, 164-169; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 51-120, 145-176, 297-327. For a discussion of some of the complex legal links between the slavery issue and forming territorial governments, see Robert Russell, 'What Was the Compromise of 1850', *The Journal of Southern History* 22 (1956), pp. 292-309.

[36] Henry Carey, *Letters on International Copyright* (Philadelphia, 1853).

[37] 'The Chesapeake Cities-Their True Policy', *BA*, January 28, 1854; 'Trade League of the Chesapeake', *BA*, February 15, 1854.

[38] Schley, 'Tracks in the Street', pp. 1062-1084; Stover, *Baltimore Railroad*, pp. 15-28.

[39] Andrew Heath, 'The Public Interest of the Private City: The Pennsylvania Railroad, Urban Space, and Philadelphia's Economic Elite, 1846–1877', *Pennsylvania History* 79 (2012), pp. 177-208; 'The Erie Matter, *NA&USG*, January 23, 1854; 'Philadelphia Consolidation Celebration', *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 20, 1854.

Importantly, though, they framed this competition not as one between classes, interests, or groups within cities but as a competition between places, each of which had a unitary interest in benefiting from the centralization of the American economy and avoiding becoming subservient to a more dominant neighbour. Centralization could therefore easily help American conservatives understand the geographic power relationships of capital, trade, and an expanding economy, as well as those of states, governments, and democracy.

Conservative Perceptions of Centralization in American Cities

American conservatives also perceived this centralized economic geography, but this was particularly acute in the cities that appeared to lose out to the New York and London for transatlantic mercantile trade. In their writing, conservatives routinely warned that other cities – and other nations – were dangerous centralizers, impoverishing their annexed hinterlands to satisfy their own greed. Two examples from Philadelphia show how conservatives used the term to describe and delegitimise these economic processes. Political economist Henry Carey warned against the supposed centralization of trade in London, while other Philadelphians argued that New York's westward railroad and commercial ambitions amounted to a centralization too. Trade networks tended to centralize because they spread out from cities and subordinated remote environs to metropolitan cores. In turn, these networks seemed to divert trade, capital, and population inwards, accentuating the geographic division of wealth between a colonised hinterland and a wealthy city. Like many other Americans, conservatives also described – and feared – not just the centralization of power in a small number of corporations, interests, or institutions, but a geographic centralization of power in one place.

The language of centralization occurs frequently in economic debates of the 1850s, but two examples in particular indicate how some conservatives sought to shape the direction of the process at the national and international level. Both are drawn from Philadelphia: a city whose industrial base and declining position relative to New York made centralization a particularly potent language. Firstly, in his criticisms of free trade, the eminent Philadelphian political economist Henry Carey[40] used centralization to understand the global economy. Carey moved in conservative circles, being friends with the Whig editor Morton McMichael, flirting with third party 'union' movements that form the basis of the final chapter, and considering himself more of a supporter of compromise with slaveholders than a radical reformer.[41] However, his relentless pursuit of the protective tariff made his economic policy seem far more radical, as he pushed a course that he insisted would create a healthy, decentralized economy free of colonial ties. International free trade, he warned, pried producers and consumers of goods apart, when he believed they should be as close together as possible. Where a protected economy would build up local strength through exchanges between neighbouring farmers, artisans, and factory owners, free trade tended towards the opposite, creating colonial dependency between remote buyers and sellers. Long distance ties of trade between the metropole and a colonial unprotected economy, he argued, allowed merchants in London to control wealth and labour in the likes of Ireland, India, and increasingly the United States. With the metropole centralizing trade and manufacturing,

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[40] Karl Marx referred to Carey as 'the only American economist of importance. See Seymour Harris, *American Economic History* (Washington, 1961), p. 12.

[41] Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 48-55; Bloom, 'McMichael's "North American"', pp. 173-174; Joseph Parks, *John Bell of Tennessee* (Baton Rouge, 1950), pp. 329-360; Smith, *Carey*, pp. 7-37.

Britain's economic empire became a mere producer of raw materials, and a dumping ground for goods produced in the core. Incapable of building up a diverse, decentralized economy of its own, the dependent periphery sank further into poverty, and without the material prosperity for republicanism to prosper, would soon descend into despotism. [42] Though Carey is usually read as a theorist of national protection, he sometimes scaled down his critique of economic centralization to a local level. Thus he had the same concerns about the distribution of wealth, capital, and trade within (and across) individual states. Like southerners and the residents of American cities who charged New York with centralizing designs, Carey presented other cities' interest in gathering the trade of a local, national, or international hinterland as a geographic centralization of power. [43]

Secondly, conservatives in Philadelphia also observed the 1853-54 Erie Gauge War, which took place as New York and Philadelphia competed to build railroads to the Midwest. This struggle centred on the lakeside city of Erie, which lay on a small strip of Pennsylvanian territory between the states of Ohio and New York. It also stood along railroad routes (whether built or projected) between the West and the two great metropolises of the East Coast. [44] Until 1853, the Pennsylvania legislature ensured that Erie divided incompatible eastern and western railroad networks. [45] This state-mandated incompatibility forced goods crossing Erie along the railroad to change cars, bringing prosperity to Erieians who benefited from the transfer, and giving hope to Philadelphian merchants who wanted to tap the flow of goods with a railroad of their own. [46] (See Illustration 4 below.) But in 1853, the Pennsylvania legislature allowed the railroads to convert the whole line to Ohio's standard, which enabled trains from the West to run to New York State without having to stop in Erie. The move – which probably came about through legislative bribery on the part of Manhattan-based interests – denied Erie its income from transhipment and deprived Philadelphian railroad builders equal access to western material wealth. [47] (See Illustration 5 below.) The neglected dispute that followed provides an insight into how concerns over economic centralization in a city like New York animated late antebellum economic conflict.

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[42] For more on Henry Carey, see Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity*, pp. 261-306; Dawson, 'Reassessing Henry Carey', pp. 465-485; Egnal, *Clash*, pp. 439-421; Green, *Carey*; Kaplan, *Carey*; Meardon, 'Reciprocity', pp. 307-33; Morrison, *Carey*; Perelman, *Marx's Crises Theory*, pp. 10-27; Smith, *Carey*; Teilhac, *Pioneers of American Economic Thought*.

[43] Green, *Carey*, pp. 29-30.

[44] Sellers, *Market*, pp. 42-43.

[45] As they had different gauges, or distance between the two rails of each track.

[46] Until 1853, the Pennsylvania legislature regulated the use of railroad gauges through Erie, requiring 4′ 8½″ Standard and 6′ Broad gauges East to New York City and a 4′ 10″ gauge westward to Cleveland. A change in the law in 1853 – supposedly at the behest of New York railroad interests – had allowed the New York Central and Erie railroads to try and build a single Ohio gauge link through from Cleveland to Buffalo via Erie.

[47] The state legislature chartered the Sunbury and Erie Railroad to connect Philadelphia to Erie in 1837 with support from Philadelphia, which owned large portions of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Sunbury and Erie Railroad stock. However, they were not able to complete the line until 1864, at which point, the Sunbury and Erie had come under the control of the larger Pennsylvania Railroad. See Albert Churella, *The Pennsylvania Railroad* (Philadelphia, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 99, 226-240, 305-309.

Illustration 4: *Western Railroads as Planned by Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Erie*
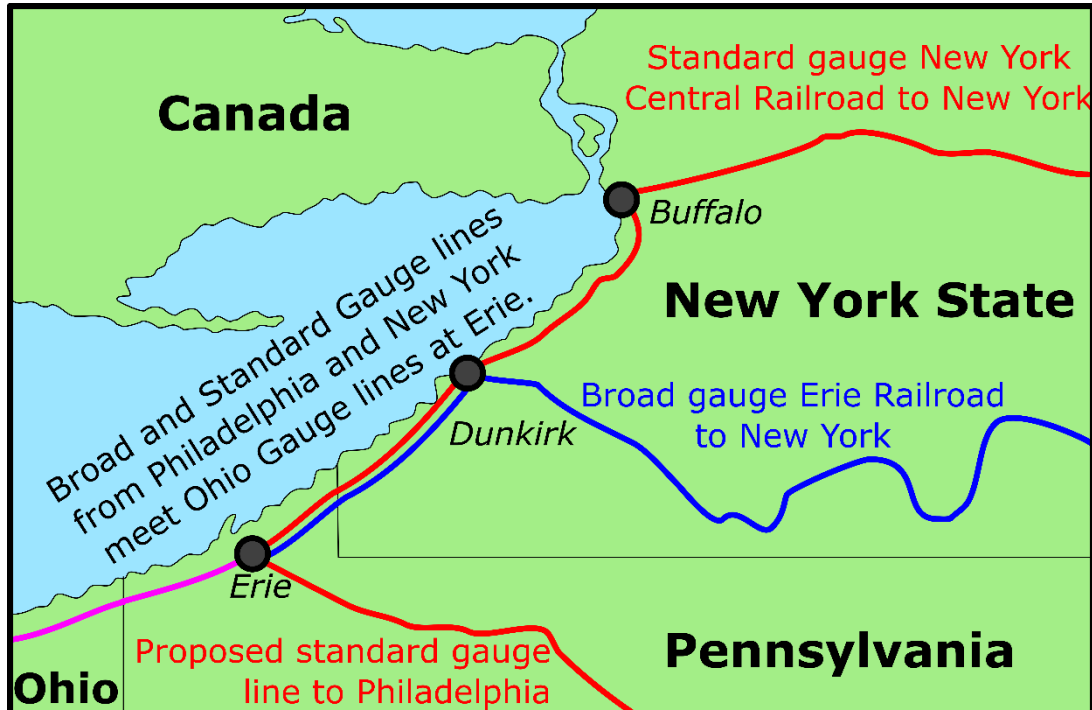
Illustration 5: *Western Railroads as Built, 1854*
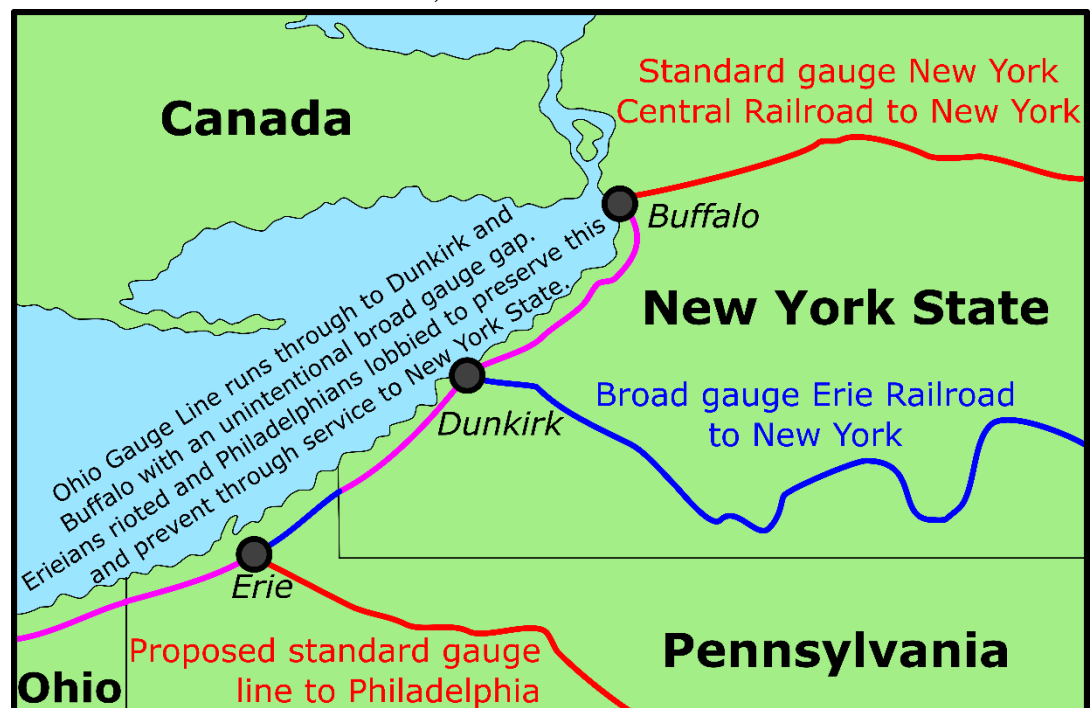
These maps show the railroad network around Erie, PA just before the Erie Gauge War. The railroads and the Pennsylvania legislature proposed that the eastern and western railroad networks would meet at Erie. This would allow Erie residents to profit from transferring goods betwween these networks' termini, and Philadelphian merchants would have access this merchandise through their own railroad. But to reduce costs the railroads decided to build a single Ohio gauge line terminating in Buffalo. This would allow trains from the West to run through Erie to Dunkirk and Buffalo, leaving merchandise out of reach for Philadelphian merchants reliant on the enforced stop at Erie. Erieians responded to this threat by rioting, preventing the conversion of a small portion of the line between Erie and the New York state line, preserving an enforced stop there. These violent riots and their battles with railroad officials gave the Erie Gauge War its name.

Erieians tore up the Lake Shore railroad, preventing the conversion of the through route to New York. Only when the federal government intervened and gave the line its protection did New York's railroad companies build the line.[48] Notably, Philadelphia's conservative press supported Erie's right to fight 'centralization', rather than backing the rights of private property or the efficiency savings that would have come through compatible railroad standards throughout the Northeast. Here they were happy to accept rioting if it helped them to establish their own power relationships over western soil. They turned to using state power to regulate the use of private property and bolster their defences against centralization, not through tariffs, but through public regulation, gauge laws, and state aid to railroads, even expropriating and running for themselves parts of the railroad in order to prevent New York extending its sphere of interest.[49] Conservative Philadelphians and their allies described the struggle not as a product of corporate profiteering, regulatory failure, or national integration, but as a consequence of Manhattan's supposed desire for 'centralization': an economic empire that threatened to subsume both Philadelphia and the West.

In such battles, conservatives refashioned common critiques of the economic power of corporations, turning them into attacks on nations and cities extending power over territory. The Democratic *Erie Observer* drew on Jacksonian hostility to corporate power in comparing the railroad's colonial ambitions to the Second Bank.[50] But Morton McMichael's conservative *North American* described gauge conflict as an urban dispute between Philadelphia and its geographic 'rivals': one that Philadelphians of all classes had a common interest in fighting.[51] The issue here was less corporate power in itself, and more where corporate power would tend to centralize. Philadelphians argued that New Yorkers sought an 'unscrupulous monopoly' over western trade.[52] In turn, New Yorkers described Erie and its Philadelphian supporters as selfish provincials.[53]

Where power lay between cities and nations to conservatives seemed just as important as its distribution between institutions. Indeed, addressing one with considering the other was futile, Carey implied, for economic dependence on a remote power could doom projects for political decentralization. Louis Kossuth, the popular Hungarian revolutionary, found substantial support among Americans for his belief in national self-

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[48] For details of the whole Erie Gauge War, see Churella, *Pennsylvania* 186-189; Kent, 'Erie War', pp. 253-275; Carl B. Lechner, 'The Erie Triangle: The Final Link between Philadelphia and the Great Lakes', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116 (1992), 59-85; Puffert, *Tracks*, pp. 118-119; Neu and Taylor, *American Railroads*, pp. 30-32; James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the McKinley-Bryan campaign of 1896* (London, 1920), vol. 2, pp. 177-481. Nor was this the only example of these kind of fears, as Pittsburgh fought to prevent a through route through their city in 1857. See Neu and Taylor, *American Railroads*, pp. 30-32.

[49] In 1854, the Pennsylvania legislature – seemingly in violation of the Dartmouth College case, which gave constitutional protection to private corporations – repealed the charter of the Franklin Canal Company, which owned the railroad from Erie west to the state boundary with Ohio. See 'Repealing Railroad Charters', *American Railroad Journal* 27 (1854), pp. 59-60; 'Franklin Canal Company's Railroad', *American Railroad Journal* 27 (1854), pp. 218-219; 'Governor Bigler's Doings at Erie, and his Report to the Legislature', *American Railroad Journal* 27 (1854), pp. 113-116.

[50] 'Railroad Insolence', *Erie Observer*, August 27, 1853; 'The Disturbances at Erie', *Erie Observer*, February 4, 1854; 'The Erie War', *Erie Observer*, January 14, 1854.

[51] 'The Railroads and the West', *NA&USG* (January 4, 1853).

[52] 'The Erie Troubles - Public Meeting', *NA&USG*, January 30, 1854; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 2, 1854; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 10, 1854.

[53] 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 14, 1854; 'The Erie Matter', *NA&USG*, January 23, 1854.

determination and opposition to despotic government. [54] Carey, though, cautioned Americans against supporting his movement, claiming that Kossuth's free trade politics – whether wittingly or not – supported British centralization.[55] London, he argued, would soon usurp Hungarian independence, just as New York threatened to monopolise the wealth of Erie and Pennsylvania. Like Philadelphian observers of the gauge war, he redefined dangerous centralization not just as the vertical power relationship between a centralized state and the people but as the horizontal geographic relationship between metropoles and their surrounding – in this case global – territory.

Conservatives recognised that the railroad network developing in the 1850s often focused on major cities. They visualised the layout of their railroads as geographically centralized, describing them as spreading outwards from big cities rather than forming a national polycentric network. (See Illustration 3 above) After all, transport networks had only just begun to connect disparate regions into a single national market. [56] When the *Baltimore American* described their hoped-for railroad network fanning from their 'common centre' across the South, its writers built on a common assumption. [57] Newspapers in Philadelphia, Boston, and Newark visualised their own railroads in similar terms.[58] This was more than local boosterism. The *American* also described Cincinnati as a 'centre of a great system' with 'railroads-moving as *radii*' outwards, forming the centre where 'the trade of a vast region is to concentrate itself'.[59] Even the *American Railroad Journal* described the 'centralization of railroads' as of the expansion of monocentric networks, each spreading outwards from a single Atlantic city.[60]

And far from being a cluster of private corporations acting in a politically neutral marketplace, urban-centred railroad networks, conservatives assumed, carried power outwards, as New Yorkers' capacity to influence Pennsylvania legislators evidently showed. They often described these railroads as agents of a rival city rather than businesses or representatives of an emerging national bourgeoisie. Urban historians suggest that nineteenth-century American cities had a singular identity, as people often discussed 'Philadelphia' or 'Baltimore' interests, as though each had a single common interest rather than amounting to a collection of independent interests, identities, and individuals. [61] Conservatives often described railroads and steamship lines as public goods that satisfied their city's collective public interest rather than as private investments on behalf of capitalists.[62] Moreover, when describing railroads, they used the name of the company and the name of the city interchangeably, and situated competition between lines and companies

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[54] Genovese, *Master Class*, pp. 43-68; Michael Morrison, 'American Reaction', pp. 111-133; Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, pp. 146-167; Smith, 'Savannah to Vienna', pp. 27-51.

[55] Carey, 'Centralization', pp. 385-387; 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *New York Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1851; Henry Carey, *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign: Why it Exists, and How it may be Extinguished* (London, 1853), p. 379.

[56] Puffert, *Tracks*, pp. 96-97; Puffert, 'The Standardization of Track Gauge', pp. 393-394; Sellers, *Market* p. 43.

[57] 'Southern Railroads', *BA*, May 29, 1854.

[58] For example, see 'The Hossac [*sic*] Tunnel', *Boston Herald*, May 11, 1853; 'The Westward Movement', *The Boston Traveller*, February 12, 1857; 'Thirty Miles Around New York', *Newark Daily Advertiser*, November 21, 1853.

[59] 'Baltimore and the West', *BA*, January 18, 1851.

[60] 'Centralization of Railroads', *American Railroad Journal* 8 (1852), pp. 725-726.

[61] Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 36-42; Schley, 'Tracks', pp. 1063-1064.

[62] 'Ocean Line of Steamers', *BA*, February 23, 1854; 'The Spring Trade, *NA&USG*, January 4, 1850; 'The Secret of New York Progress', *NA&USG*, May 21, 1853.

for trade in terms of a competition between cities for control over a hinterland. Conservatives in Philadelphia and Massachusetts[63] recognised that the railroads and canals through Erie were 'a New York road, was built by New York money, and is controlled to suit New York interests'. Conservatives therefore described railroads not as private corporations acting in a national market but as agents of the cities that they served.[64] The logic could be extended abroad. Carey linked the construction of internal improvements to the furthering of the interests of the metropolitan centre, arguing that Paris controlled public works and licences to ensure that provincial towns and cities did not build lines that challenged the capital's supremacy.[65] Such reasoning, then, conceptualised private profit making in public terms of a mercantilist city exercising power over a hinterland. Railroad corporations seemed less like private businesses and more like tools for the city that controlled them to exercise colonial control over territories they penetrated.

Carey applied the same principle that infrastructure carried a power relationship on an international scale. While the construction of a Pacific Railroad – agitated from the 1840s onwards – would have obvious benefits for Pennsylvania's iron and locomotive industries, and therefore drew considerable booster support in the city, he opposed what he saw as a tool to give London 'commercial power' over the American west. The supposedly 'centrifugal' nature of trunk lines would only lead to the export of raw materials to the United Kingdom, which would profit from draining the wealth of the American hinterland. [66] He blamed New York's mercantile firms for allowing London to control the cash crops of the South and West and discourage decentralized diversification.[67] Carey may have been unusual in opposing long distance railroad building, but he shared with many conservatives the conviction that Even landownership in Ireland, Turkey, and India, could give London power over territory, as 'the monopoly of land is the centralization of power'.[68] The power

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[63] In 1853 Massachusetts held a constitutional convention, as archaic constitutional provisions gave a small coterie of conservative Boston Whigs a monopoly on power, which they used to the benefit of Boston-based corporations. Western opponents of this economic polity saw this 'centralization' of power in 'conservative Boston' in geographic terms. Division between city and country, then, turned questions of economic policy and democratisation into one of concentration or diffusion of control over state authority between Boston and Western Massachusetts. Western Democratic and Free Soil ('coalition') opponents tried to rewrite the state constitution in 1853-54, embracing Jacksonian Democracy. Making the judiciary and officeholders elective, making social reforms, and abolishing property qualifications therefore went hand in hand with all but disenfranchising Boston in the state legislature. Boston-area Whig conservatives, particularly delegates Rufus Choate, William Schouler, George Hilliard, Ebenezer Bradbury, and George Upton, sought to maintain their position as a leading commercial and political interest in the state, and too drew from the links between centralizing political economy over state topography and state authority in the capital city. See Baum, 'Know-Nothingism', p. 962; Baum, *Civil War Party System*, pp. 24-54; Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party*, pp. 7-27; Shapiro, 'Conservative Dilemma', pp. 207-224.
[64] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 45; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 16; 'A Liberal View of the Matter', *NA&USG*, January 24, 1854; 'The Erie Question, In Congress', *Lewisburg Chronicle*, February 3, 1854; 'The Railroad War in Erie', *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, July 25, 1853; 'Railroad Insolence', *Erie Observer*, August 27, 1853; 'The Erie Troubles - Public Meeting', *NA&USG*, January 30, 1854; 'The Erie Railroad Troubles', *PL*, December 20, 1853; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 25, 1854; 'The Erie Railroad Troubles', *PL*, December 20, 1853; 'Competition for the Trade and Travel of the West', *BA*, January 6, 1853.
[65] Henry Carey, *The Past, the Present, and the Future* (Philadelphia, 1848), pp. 291-294.
[66] Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, p. 134; Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 298-302; Henry Carey, 'To the Hon. R.M.T. Hunter, Chairman of the Committee on Finance, of the Senate (Letter Third)', *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil* 5 (1853), p. 134.
[67] Carey, *Letters to the President,* pp 35-44; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 95-117; Carey, 'To R.M.T. Hunter (third)', pp. 131-144.
[68] 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; 'The Macsycophant Family in Europe', *NYT*, November 18, 1851; Carey, *PP&F,* pp. 378-391; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 117-130, 308-826.

relationships in international trade therefore did not lie between institutions and people but instead lay between places. Commercial interests were not independent of place. Instead, they furthered the influence of the metropole over a surrounding colonial hinterland.

These power relationships over railroad tracks seemingly reduced regions to subservience to the city that they served. On an international scale, Henry Carey and the *Baltimore American* criticised London's 'centralization' and 'monopoly' of merchant shipping, arguing it extended over an economic empire that could subsume the United States. [69] Preoccupations with geographic economic power relationships had national as well as international implications. Carey described the Camden and Amboy railroad's termini in New Jersey as having a 'monopoly' on surrounding land due to the line's influence. [70] Other conservatives also applied Carey's theory to make sense of regional inequality at home and abroad. The *American Whig Review*, for instance, warned that Louis-Napoleon was creating a network of railroads centred on Paris to keep the nation dependant on the capital. [71] In Boston, the conservatives warned that Massachusetts was in danger of becoming 'provincial' to a centralizing Manhattan. [72] In the minds of these urban conservatives, cities and mercantile infrastructure carried power outwards and created a region dependant on the central city. Rather than uniting the entire country into a single national market, new trade routes seemed to divide the Union into rival spheres of interest, within which the economy became more integrated and 'centralized'.

Conservatives who saw their cities losing out economically to their larger and more successful rivals thus claimed that they were victims of geographic centralization. Conservative Philadelphian papers, for example, warned that the extension of New York's railroads into Pennsylvania threatened to drain wealth and power from their city. The *North American* and the *Public Ledger* situated the Gauge War within this wider fear of urban failure, seeing it as an attempt on the part of New York to make Pennsylvanian material wealth 'wholly tributary to her own advantage'. [73] 'The first revolution of the engine on the Lake Shore places the traveller within the magnetism of Broadway', the *North American* warned, illustrating its fear of a city pulling wealth inwards through the power of its railroads. [74]

Moreover, as centralization happened, the rival city consumed the wealth of the periphery. Both the conservative Philadelphia diarist Sidney George Fisher and his acquaintance Carey warned that Paris showed the dangers of 'centralization' in a commercial capital that 'swallowed up' wealth and population of a surrounding nation. [75] Carey too argued that the British metropole prevented dependent regions from developing their own manufacturing and commerce. [76] Locally, at the scale of the city and its immediate surroundings, and internationally, at the scale of a colonial metropole and empire, these

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[69] 'Lake and Chesapeake Line - Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad', *BA*, February 20, 1854; Carey, *Letters to the President*, p. 102.
[70] Carey, *Beauties*, p. 2; Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 291-294.
[71] 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 15 (1852), pp. 174-175.
[72] 'The Hossac [*sic*] Tunnel', *Boston Herald*, May 11, 1853; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 320.
[73] 'The Railroad Troubles at Erie', *NA&USG*, December 16, 1853; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 10, 1854; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 14, 1854.
[74] 'The Northwestern Railroad', *NA&USG*, August 9, 1853; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 14, 1854.
[75] Carey, 'Centralization', pp. 388, 393-394; Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, p. 203; 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, p. 89-102, July 22, 1848
[76] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 394; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 62-74, 174-209; [Untitled], *BA*, May 8, 1852; 'Protection to the Farmers of Germany and its Results', *NYT*, March 11, 1852.m

conservative city residents interpreted economic change in terms of geographic dependency. They saw the trade routes spreading outwards from New York and London outwards into Pennsylvania and the British Empire and assumed that they were part of a deliberate effort to subordinate an economic empire to the interests of colonial metropole. This formed the centralization that many Americans, including some conservatives, wanted to avoid.

Conservatives in cities losing out to New York and London's growing commercial role perceived their economic decline as a dangerous process of economic centralization. They vividly described how rival cities extended railroads, steamships, and trade outwards over their immediate surroundings and informal empires. Ties of private trade, capital, and corporations, rather than just carrying lumber, grain, or passengers, seemed to carry material wealth, power and dependency on their central city. These cities, infrastructure, and economic development seemed to create spheres of influence distinct from the political creations of states, nation, or municipalities, within which these conservatives believed larger cities were centralizing wealth. This process could exist locally , as New York extended its geographic market south and west, or internationally, as London grew as the major mercantile centre of the Atlantic economy under a free trade policy. These perceptions of centralization would come to inform how conservatives competed for what they believed was the material wealth of western territories, as they used the language and imagery of centralization to challenge these developments when larger rivals – notably London and Manhattan – appeared to threaten their own prosperity. However, it would also help inform how conservatives sought to build their own political institutions and economic power relationships within their own cities, regions, and states.

Economic Development and Political Centralization

This centralized economic geography, where territory became dependant on the infrastructure, markets, and capital of a single city, also seemed to have profound consequences on the geographic distribution of formal political power. The infrastructure that tended towards centralization required government authority to build. For conservatives, economic centralization was therefore seen as both an effect as well as a cause of its political counterpart, and tied the question of economic centralization to prevailing concerns about state-building, democracy, and strong government.

Midcentury Americans used 'empire' to describe extending political boundaries outwards as well as strengthening the ties of political dependence within the polity.[77] Conservatives drew from this definition of imperialism to understand how cities secured the public investment that they needed to expand their hinterland and to caution against a single city securing political dominance within the republic.[78] They warned in geographic terms of political authority concentrating inwards towards big cities like New York and London, as imperial metropolises forced their surrounding regions to surrender control and weakened their colonised citizens' fitness for self-rule.

The links between a centralized economic geography and state power were obvious to conservatives. Heirs of the antifederalist tradition cited opposition to 'consolidation' to warn against national infrastructure programmes that might set a precedent for stronger

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[77] Cronon, *Metropolis*, pp. 41-46; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 43-52.
[78] Including Henry Carey, who specifically defined centralization in these terms. See Henry Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 289-290.

federal government.[79] But while Washington's role in building internal improvements was curtailed in the Jacksonian era, cities continued to turn to government – often on a local level – to realise their ambitions.[80] The same was true of these conservatives: The *Baltimore American*, for example, demanded the federal government spend money on Baltimore's harbours as it had done for New York and Philadelphia.[81] In the 1830s and 1840s, wealthy Philadelphians convinced the state government to stop Baltimore railroads penetrating their hinterland.[82] New York boosters also persuaded Albany lawmakers to prevent the Erie Railroad from sending trade to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Ohio cities, in a move that prefigured the Erie War of 1853-4.[83] As well as looking to the state to effectively restraining interstate commerce to protect urban markets, conservatives often backed direct funding of internal improvements through stock purchases and bonds, which left corporations in private hands but financed by public money. Advocates of such projects fully understood that programmes to reorganise economic geography relied on state power. In the eyes of many city conservatives, then, economic imperialism and big government went hand in hand.

Political and economic centralization seemingly drove each other forward. City builders threatened by New York's expanding hinterland argued that their Manhattan rivals had extended corrupt influence over distant areas. Morton McMichael's Careyite *North American* even argued that New York had corrupted the federal government to get its 'virtual monopoly' of steamship trade with Europe, threatened the 'individuality of the states', and conspired to move the national seat to Manhattan, so the whole government could be 'tributary to her aggrandizement'.[84] However, they were by no means the only Americans to attack their rivals as centralizers. Further south, for instance, the *Baltimore American* reported that New York City and Philadelphia were using the federal government to further their centralizing designs.[85] From the viewpoint of residents of the periphery, big city control of state and national governments explained the rise of monocentric railroad and trade networks that brought them into the sway of centralized power, and made them subject to remote executive authority. The *Eagle* felt aware of New Yorkers' ability to outvote Brooklyn in any election,[86] and blamed this supposed monopolisation of representation in the state legislature for its lack of supposed respect for the rights of residents of Brooklyn and Long Island.[87] Conservatives in such places used centralization to imply that their opponents translated economic influence into political power. Centralizing control over governments

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[79] Larson, *Internal Improvement*, pp. 71-107, 109-111.
[80] For discussions of William Gilpin and city booster ideology, see Adler, *Merchants*, p. 5; Cronon, *Nature's*, pp. 46-31; Glaab, 'Visions', pp. 21-31; Glaab, *Kansas City*, pp. 1-60; Glaab, *Urban America*, pp. 58-65; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 43-52.
[81] 'Patapsco River and Chesapeake Bay', *BA*, March 21, 1854.
[82] Hartz, *Policy*,
Clark and Schlatter, 'Struggle for Pittsburgh', pp. 1-38; Hartz, *Economic Policy*, pp. 9-17, 42-51; Hays, 'Overlapping Hinterlands', pp. 295-321; Larson, *Internal Improvement*, pp. 23-25; Livingood, *Trade Rivalry*; Neu and Taylor, *American Railroads*, pp. 29-30.
[83] Churella, *Pennsylvania Railroad*, pp. 76-77; Puffert, *Tracks*, pp. 96-97, 113-114; Puffert, 'Standardization of Track Gauge', pp. 945-946.
[84] 'New York Branch Mint', *NA&USG*, February 6, 1851; 'The Mint', *NA&USG*, December 20, 1850; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 7, 1854.
[85] 'Patabsco River and Chesapeake Bay', *BA*, March 21, 1854; Alleghany, 'The Canal and the Constitution', *NI*, May 29, 1851.
[86] 'More Consolidation', *BDE*, February 28, 1857.
[87] 'More Consolidation', *BDE*, November 12, 1853.

inwards into big cities allowed them to project state power outwards over its surrounding hinterland.

This conceptualisation of how political power could concentrate in major cities resembled criticism of Paris, with urban centralization here becoming a way to explain republican failure. Conservatives used political centralization to understand how Paris had come to dominate all of France. According to Sidney George Fisher, 'all power is centralized in Paris'.[88] His acquaintance Henry Carey too argued that Paris showed the dangers of giving a single city too much control over state authority, as it had used that authority to build the infrastructure that safeguarded its own dominance.[89] Conservatives too often feared that France lacked robust local sources of state authority that checked the centralizing tendencies of big cities and seats of government. Both Francis Lieber and the *Brooklyn Eagle* warned that French and American constitution-makers needed to divide their cities among 'many sovereignties', as 'centralization is by its nature corrupting'.[90] In place of that commitment to a broad geographic distribution of power, French 'centralism' meant that Paris telegraphed political decision-making outwards from the capital, with little room for input from the rest of the nation.[91] Seeing centralization as a process tied to outward expansion rather than one characterised by the intensification of power within a given space might seem paradoxical. Yet this made sense to many conservatives, who believed that cities expanded their political reach outwards over geography in order centralize wealth and power inwards. Here, indeed, they could apply classical republican lessons to modern economic growth, as those reared on this and the course of French republics after 1793 and 1848 knew that large republics easily fell to a centralized tyranny.

Such power centralized in one city clashed with the American idea of government divided among national, state, and municipal authorities, and led conservatives in New York's periphery to laud local government as a check on consolidationist projects. After all, most nineteenth-century Americans interacted with government principally through local rather than national administrations, and so threats to the former raised questions about dangerous concentrations of power.[92] Accusing rival cities of endangering that balance became a useful tactic. Philadelphian conservatives thus warned that Manhattan's political influence threatened the federal system, arguing that New York's tendency to drain wealth from its expanding hinterland would allow it to supplant all the state, county, and city governments within its domain.[93] Conservative fears about New York therefore married concerns about geographic as well as institutional centralized power. Carey, for example, turned to British as well as French history, in warning that the abolition of Scottish and Irish local governments under the Acts of Union turned independent nations into mere 'provinces' of England, unable to resist the transfer of wealth to London.[94] In France, too, he insisted, the destruction of local governments led by provincial aristocrats allowed Paris to control public works and consolidate its control over the national market.[95] Carey then

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[88] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 47-64, December 31, 1851.

[89] Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 291-294.

[90] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853; 'The Crisis of the Century', *AWR* 86 (1852), pp. 171-173.

[91] Lieber, *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. II, pp. 100-102, 105

[92] Paludan, 'Crisis in Law and Order', pp. 1019-2027.

[93] Carey, *Slave Trade*, p. 74; 'The Northwestern Railroad', *NA&USG*, August 9, 1853.

[94] Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; 'The Macsycophant Family in Europe', *NYT*, November 18, 1851; Carey, 'Centralization', p. 387; Carey, *Copyright*, pp. 25-33; Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 291-294, 294-296, 378-391.

[95] Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 291-294.

argued that the weakening of local governments transferred power inwards over national geography from the hinterland to the metropole. By tying the fate of institutional autonomy to changing economic geography, conservatives in cities like Philadelphia could present their economic rivals as a centralizing threat to the republic.

Without political authority distributed geographically between multiple local seats of government, big mercantile cities could become states within a state, wielding executive authority outwards over the hinterland. Conservatives described cities' authority over surrounding land as a form of governance that transcended state and national government. Carey, for example, criticised the New Jersey railroad monopoly both in institutional terms as a monopoly that that selects our governors, appoints our judges, dictates our legislation, elects our senators in congress, and taxes us'[96] and in geographic terms as 'the sources of taxation, Camden and Amboy'[97] This language moved between criticising both corporations and places as the *de facto* government of the surrounding market. Philadelphians described the cities at the centre of a railroad network as having a 'monopoly' on surrounding land and territory and talked about 'foreign' and 'rival' corporations jostling for empire.[98][99] New Yorkers too expected that the Pacific railroad would make the West 'ours' to the exclusion of all other cities.[100] In their writings, such figures saw cities as rivals seeking influence beyond their borders, using railroads rather than rifles and cannon. Imperialism, it seemed, operated at both an international and at a smaller scale as residents of the hinterland perceived a small geographic centre seizing control over state authority for itself and projecting power outwards over wider surrounding territory.

This process of economic centralization did not exist in isolation from wider concerns about governance. Conservatives – both Whigs and Democrats – commonly believed that government institutions could promote economic growth by issuing charters, granting subsidies, and creating regulations. Figures like Carey therefore used geography to link centralized economic and political power by showing how each shaped the other. To reshape economic geography to their own advantage, imperial cities needed control over formal political authority. As well as altering the distribution of wealth between cities, states, and regions, conservatives therefore referred to a geographic centralization of political authority too. Again, conservatives who perceived themselves to be losing out in this process used this term pejoratively to delegitimise rival mercantile cities. Opponents upheld the virtues of an American federalist tradition that cautioned against consolidating power in a single state, city, or body, which also made the threat of power centralized in a single city a powerful political weapon Americans could use to warn against the ambitions of their competitors. However, this connection many American conservatives made between centralizing economic dependency and political authority over space into a single city strongly informed their responses to both their economic competitors and wider political concerns.

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[96] Henry Carey, *To the People of New Jersey* (1853), p. 1.
[97] Carey, *To the People of New Jersey*, p. 2.
[98] Carey, *Beauties*, p. 2; Carey, *To the People of New Jersey*, pp. 1-2.
[99] *Speech of Mr. J. R. Flanigen, of Philadelphia City, Delivered on the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania March 31, 1853, On the Bill Providing for a Repeal of the Gauge Laws of the Commonwealth* (1853), p. 1; 'The Erie Troubles - Public Meeting', *NA&USG*, January 30, 1854; 'The Railroad Troubles at Erie', *NA&USG*, December 16, 1853.
[100] Carey, *Beauties*, p. 2; Scobey, *Empire,* p. 35.

Local Centralization as a Defensive Response

Conservatives on the periphery to New York and London conceptualised centralization as a process of wealth and political authority concentrating in a remote city, and used this pejorative term as a political weapon to attack their competitors' mercantile ambitions. However, believing that monopolising the material wealth of a wider territory was a path to prosperity, albeit at the expense of surrounding settlements, these conservatives were themselves centralizers. These conservatives supported a centralization of power on their own terms, arguing that local state building – like Carey's protectionist national government – amounted to a relative decentralization of power. They often claimed that a smaller scale centralization than their rivals – one at the scale of the township, region, or state as opposed to the nation or Atlantic world – would share wealth between multiple cities. Claiming that this local response to a larger, dangerous centralization therefore helped these conservatives legitimise a different centralization closer to home. In the hands of some conservatives, then, opposition to centralization in the 1850s offered a means to extend power over their own city, subjects, and hinterland.

Conservatives often enthusiastically embraced the language of centralization, which had seemed such a threat when trained against their opponents. Urban opponents of the supposedly centralizing ambitions of remote cities sought economic centralization on their own terms. Cities on the Atlantic seaboard had all seen the West as a colonial resource to develop the eastern urban economy.[101] Merchants in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston each invested in railroads to compete with New York's Erie Canal and Erie Railroad in gathering the wealth of the West.[102] Conservatives here saw centralized economic geography as an opportunity, even a necessity, for their own city, where a network that carried wealth over long distances to New York City appeared threatening. When western Massachusetts delegates to a state constitutional convention claimed that Boston threatened to concentrate wealth and power in the state, George Upton responded that 'I know, Sir, of no evil which has resulted from centralization.'[103] Others hoped railroads would gather trade for Boston that the Erie Canal made 'tributary' to Manhattan.[104] The *Baltimore American* predicted that their city would become the 'common centre' of a railroad empire running out of Baltimore carrying inward the resources of the South from as far as the Pacific.[105] McMichael's *North American* strongly supported the construction of railroads to Pittsburgh and Erie so that 'our commercial metropolis, Philadelphia' would command a 'the entire trade (or nearly so) of the country, from West to East and East to West, to pay tribute to her.'[106] When it came to their own cities, then, conservatives embraced this ideal of centralization for themselves, believing it would bring them wealth, even as they condemned their opponents' centralizing schemes as a drain of capital. Just as Henry Carey only opposed economic centralization when it benefited Philadelphia's larger mercantile rival cities, these conservatives made it clear that they opposed centralization only when it hurt their own cities.

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[101] Andrew Heath, 'The Public Interest of the Private City', *Pennsylvania History* 79 (2012), pp. 180-199.

[102] N. H. Egleston, 'The Story of the Hoosac Tunnel', *The Atlantic Monthly* 49 (1882), pp. 289-304; Schley, 'Tracks', pp. 1063-1064; 'Sunbury and Erie Railroad Subscription', *Sunbury American*, January 14, 1854.

[103] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 320.

[104] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 3, p. 16; 'The City and the Country', *Boston Herald*, October 20, 1853; Quoted in 'Disfranchisement Of Boston', *Boston Daily Atlas*, July 13, 1853; 'Speech of Wm. Schouler', *The Boston Daily Atlas*, July 21, 1853.

[105] 'Southern Railroads', *BA*, May 29, 1854; 'A New State in New York', *BA*, March 22, 1851.

[106] *Speech of Mr. Flanigen*, pp. 5-9; 'The City of Erie', *NA&USG*, December 13, 1853; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 2, 1854; 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 7, 1854.

Conservatives used the vision of many railroad systems building up different centres to give the impression that their designs would spread power across a series of powerful cities, but they remained convinced that economic development required centralization in some form. Even Carey acknowledged as much. When writing in opposition to the Camden and Amboy's railroad monopoly in New Jersey, Carey had warned that western expansion facilitated 'centralization', as long distance relationships encouraged dependency on a single city. Rejecting this model, Carey proposed that tariffs would create a dense web of self-sufficient towns, each with their own agricultural hinterland and only minimal contact with far flung markets. [107] At a local level, then, Carey therefore sought to replicate the political economy of protectionism, erecting geographic (rather than political) barriers to long distance trade, within which a town would have power over its surrounding territory to direct economic development. Despite claiming to oppose centralization, Carey still believed that progress required an economic centralization in which a city extended authority over its surrounding market, even if he limited the workings of the process to an imagined patchwork of towns, counties, and townships

Other conservatives tried to legitimise their local centralizing ambitions by suggesting that theirs would act as a stimulant – rather than a drain – on an enlarged hinterland. City boosters often claimed that their plans for centralization would bring prosperity to satellites. [108] Bostonians and Philadelphians argued that building railroad networks outward from their cities would prevent larger metropolises – Usually New York City – from carving up Massachusetts and Pennsylvania between them. Instead, prosperous small towns would grow 'all over the surface of the state' and become 'the great central point', the 'depot of commerce' for western counties.[109] Conservatives who articulated such ideas argued their designs for centralization in the form of railroad building would spread wealth and power. Carey, too, distinguished between long-distance railroads that concentrated power at the termini and local railroads that encouraged exchange between towns across the route.[110] Such a polycentric system of railroads and canals, in contrast to lines radiating from a trading centre to the hinterland, would allow multiple towns to benefit from trade and exchange.[111] Rather than imagining a network radiating out from a major city, they visualised a decentralized economic geography where multiple towns and cities each had their own trade networks carrying wealth to and from a hinterland. Rather than opposing centralized economic geography, these conservatives hoped to appropriate a smaller portion of it for themselves.

Conservatives therefore used the threat of centralization to delegitimise long-distance economic power relationships while legitimising those same power relationships on a scale that benefited them. Comparing their own supposedly local centralization to the

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[107] Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 284-288; Conkin, *Prophets*, pp. 284-285; Green, *Carey*, p. 151; Morrison, *Carey*, pp. 32-42; Smith, *Carey*, pp. 14-24.

[108] Cronon, *Nature's*, pp. 43-46.

[109] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 1, pp. 861, 866; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, pp. 45, 51, 172, 182; 'The Erie Matter, *NA&USG*, January 23, 1854; 'Speech of Wm. Schouler, *The Boston Daily Atlas*', July 21, 1853; 'Erie and her Neighbors', *NA&USG*, May 19, 1854.

[110] Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, pp. 89-91.

[111] Henry Carey, *A Review of an Address of the Joint Board of Directors of the Delaware and Raritan Canal and Camden and Amboy Railroad Companies to the People of New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1848), p. 7; Henry Carey, *Letters to the People of New Jersey, on the Frauds, Extortions, and Oppressions of the Railroad Monopoly* (Philadelphia, 1848), p. 4; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 350-362; Carey, *To the People*, p. 2; Carey, 'Wages', p. 262.

supposedly larger imperial ambitions of their larger rivals allowed conservatives to package their railroad and transportation programmes as a defensive, decentralizing measure. To avoid becoming 'provincial' to New York City, the *Boston Herald*, advised, Boston should 'finish at once the iron arms which diverge from our metropolis' and command the trade of Vermont and upstate New York.[112] In other words, to prevent Manhattan realizing its centralizing ambitions over the entire nation, the *Herald* urged its own city to dominate New England. Carey used the same technique, contrasting the dangerous international centralization of trade in London to internal trade within Germany and the United States under protective tariffs. He defended both the German *Zollverein*[113] and his proposed tariff for America on the basis that encouraging national-state oriented economic centralization provided 'efficient protection against the British monopoly.'[114] Free trade within tariff boundaries – and the resultant centralization – seemed legitimate on a local scale if it could help prevent power concentrating in London. Conservatives therefore tried to define legitimate local from illegitimate large-scale centralization and marketed their own plans for centralization in the democratic language of decentralization.

The danger of large-scale centralizations in imperial cities or nations here could be used to harmonise competing interests closer to home. Urban historians have shown that cities on a national or regional scale might have perceived a united interest in gathering the trade of its surrounding hinterland. But on a local or neighbourhood scale this perceived unitary interest broke down between neighbourhoods and streets that also competed for western trade.[115] Conservatives in Baltimore did the same, looking out at a larger national scale to harmonise conflicts within their own smaller claimed hinterland. In 1854, the conservative *Baltimore American* outlined what it called a 'Trade League of the Chesapeake', in which Virginia, Washington, and Maryland cities would invest in a steamship line from Baltimore to Europe to compete with New York's monopoly. It pre-empted criticism that 'jealousy amongst the cities' would doom the enterprise by arguing that they all had a common interest in competing with New York City, the 'common monopolist of all commerce'.[116] In pushing Baltimore's business interests, the *American* used the relative closeness between Baltimore and the Chesapeake region to argue that for a common interest. This, in turn, allowed them to give the impression that the smaller scale of centralization in the Chesapeake region would lead to widely shared benefits. Baltimoreans therefore tactically used the threat of centralization at the hands of a more distant rival to justify building the infrastructure of centralization in its hinterland. Opposition to centralization was, to these conservatives, a tool to legitimise their own power over the citizens and territory and surrounding their own cities.

Conservatives in Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia were therefore themselves avid centralizers. They too wanted to define their own hinterland and within it enforce political and economic authority over surrounding territory. They did this on a variety of scales, ranging from Carey's polycentric network of small railroad towns, to northeastern conservatives' demands for economic hegemony over their surrounding state, and even

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[112] 'The Hossac [*sic*] Tunnel', *Boston Herald* (May 11, 1853).
[113] A Prussian-led customs union that imposed tariffs on goods entering the German states from outside the union.
[114] 'Protection to the Farmers of Germany and its Results', *NYT*, March 11, 1852; Carey, *PP&F*, p. 302.
[115] Heath, 'Interest', pp. 184-199; Schley, 'Tracks,' pp. 1064-1068.
[116] 'The Chesapeake Cities-Their True Policy', *BA*, January 28, 1854; 'Trade League of the Chesapeake', *BA*, February 15, 1854.

protectionist proposals for tariffs to create a sheltered national market safe from the imperial pull of free trade. To help legitimise their own attempts at centralization, they claimed their own centralization was a smaller defensive response to their competitors' supposedly larger imperial-scale ambitions. This helped legitimise their own ambitions in contrast to those of larger cities. So rather than opposing centralization outright, then, they used it as a political weapon against their larger competitors so that they could extend power over their own cities and hinterland. In other words, it was not economic dependency, mercantile power, and corporate infrastructure that they opposed. Where in the hands of Jacksonian radicals, centralization could seem like a weapon to restore a flagging agrarian republic, in the hands of modernizing midcentury conservatives it could sustain an aggressive programme of economic development and state building.

State-Building in Response to Economic Centralization

Conservatives feeling marginalised by New York and London recognised the link between economic and political centralization and accepted that economic centralization could bring their city prosperity as much as it could threaten ruin in the wrong hands. It therefore made sense for them to seek a political centralization of their own capable of serving their own interests rather than those of their commercial rivals, both in terms of creating stronger political institutions and ensuring that control over it lay firmly within their own city. Proposals for city reform, private corporations, and even protective tariffs all gave conservatives the means to shape economic geography to their own advantage. To legitimise their claims, they insisted that their cities should share political influence, precluding a Parisian-style centralization of political authority. However, in practice, this professed opposition to centralization became a path for conservative state-building in the mid-1850s.

Conservatives often endorsed political centralization as a necessary accompaniment to this centralizing economy. When western Massachusetts delegates to a constitutional convention warned that fast-growing Boston threatened to overwhelm the state, metropolitan conservatives demanded that the state government give the city in the power it needed in the state legislature. Responding to western warnings against centralization in Boston, George Upham was not the only Bostonian to propose that Massachusetts' 'network of railroads all over its surface' demanded 'a government adapted to the present state of things'.[117] In other words, as the economy centralized in Boston, conservatives claimed that politics should too. In Brooklyn and Philadelphia, wealthy reformers also described consolidating multiple municipalities into larger and more powerful city governments as 'progress', despite facing accusations of centralizing tendencies.[118] Regardless of whether it was a centralization of control over state authority in their own hands or the hands of their urban rivals, these conservatives assumed that the times required a centralization of political authority in American cities.

Conservative designs for local political centralization linked their economic designs to their desire to combat popular disorder. Failure to consolidate government power over cities and hinterlands, they warned, would lead to the kind of tumult that threatened France

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[117] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 158, 179, 429; George Hilliard, 'The Letters of Silas Standfast', *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854), pp. 165-166; '"Boston Influence"', *Boston Courier*, July 4, 1853.
[118] 'Progress of Brooklyn - The Water Project and Consolidation', *BDE*, April 12, 1853; 'The Election-Seward Elected-Our Local Ticket', *BDE*, November 9, 1853; Progress, 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853.

under the second Republic. Unless Boston retained its authority in the state government and Brooklyn's municipalities consolidated, the lack of 'centralization' at a local scale would lead to popular anarchy and disorder. [119] Delegate Hillard warned the Massachusetts constitutional convention that 'the moment the government ceases to be central, it ceases to be government' and 'if the tendency to centralization be an evil, the opposite tendency is also an evil' that destroyed the cities of Greece and Rome.[120] Thus despite claiming to oppose centralized regimes, conservatives were keenly aware that they needed to grow state authority over time rather than reduce it.

And conservatives were clear that efficient rule from the centre would protect the interests of property. Many feared that popular violence threatened to upend the state itself. The *Baltimore American*, for example, describing attacks on railroad property, compared the Erie War and the 'military power of a single village' to Shay's Rebellion and demanded that Pennsylvania 'execute the laws'.[121] Where Philadelphia conservatives saw violence as a legitimate tool to defend access to their own western hinterland, Baltimorean conservatives with their own long standing rivalry with their Pennsylvania neighbour fell on a discourse of opposition to popular disorder. Others tied the extension of state power to other examples of progress. A correspondent to the *Evening Telegraph* therefore linked strong government that could develop suburban property and build western railroads to police power that promised to bring 'order and quiet' to the city's main thoroughfares.[122] Stronger government, then, far from seeming like a tool to attack property, seemed here an important weapon in the arsenal of conservatives threatened by rival cities and popular violence. Conservatives therefore may have seen in economic changes the possibility for popular challenges to the state and authority, and embraced state authority as part of their own programme for modernisation.

To realise these ambitions for strong government, conservatives often turned to the city reform movements of the period. Propertied citizens often believed that stronger local government would allow their cities to build an infrastructure capable of extending their commercial power outwards. At Philadelphia's bipartisan consolidation celebrations – which marked the extension of municipal power over three dozen different jurisdictions and 127 square miles – speakers defended enthusiastically both Erie's involvement in the Gauge War and Philadelphian attempts to build their own railroad to Erie; each were read as part of a strategy to capture western trade and prevent it going to New York.[123] State-building in the urban centre and extending Philadelphia's imagined economic hinterland here went hand in hand. Indeed, in New Orleans and Philadelphia, conservative newspapers argued that merging municipalities under a central local state would create governments capable of building in the internal improvements required to turn their cities' commercial influence outward over the 'surrounding states'. Philadelphia's Consolidation Act, indeed, spurred a wave of city investment in railroad building. 'Divided people' and 'an inefficient and districted government' explained their inability to resist New York's centralizing pull. [124]

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[119] Progress, 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853.
[120] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 132.
[121] 'Nullification at Erie', *BA*, January 5, 1854.
[122] 'Correspondence of the Transcript', *Boston Evening Transcript*, January 3, 1854.
[123] 'Philadelphia Consolidation Celebration', *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 20, 1854.
[124] 'Brooklyn in Favor of Progress', *BDE*, May 31, 1854; 'Business', *The Daily Picayune*, February 8, 1852; 'Consolidation', *PL*, October 25, 1853; 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, July 23, 1853; Many Whigs, 'Consolidation',

Despite accusing their rivals of imperialism and tyranny, conservatives sought to use stronger state authority to extend their own economic reach. Where the post-Civil War bourgeoisie turned to classical liberalism – free trade, supply and demand, and the gold standard – to advance their interests,[125] their antebellum predecessors turned to building stronger governments, even if this often meant stronger city governments rather than an interventionist national or federal government. Notably, even though they did not, and under the constitution could not, embrace tariffs to shape interstate economic geography to their own advantage, they, like Carey, looked for strong government that could police the boundaries of their sphere of interest. At a local level, then, they embraced a similar state-building scheme to Carey's national vision, looking to give their governments the necessary resources to intervene in the economy and frustrate economic development when it appeared to threaten them.

Concerns about the skewed distribution of economic power therefore became a pretext for centralizing political authority in enlarged city governments. Like many Americans, conservatives often assumed that cities ought to have a leading role on account of their size and wealth. Even those who continued to hold a classical republican reverence for the virtues of rural life, like Sidney George Fisher, recognised that towns were necessary engines of culture, money, and power. Newspapers, ranging from the liberal New York *Tribune* to the conservative Philadelphia *North American* ranked their cities alongside the likes of London, Paris, and Vienna, often disregarding in their comparisons the undemocratic means they used to centralize legislative authority.[126] The size and scale of consolidated cities fascinated writers, who celebrated the physical area of enlarged municipalities and even claimed they were more important than many states of the federal republic.[127] In Brooklyn, for example, a conservative Democratic paper claimed the enlarged city would rightly have more political 'weight' within their own state and nation.[128] Consolidating local power here could once more rebalance the equilibrium empire cities threatened.

These conservatives therefore hoped to ensure that their city, and their city alone, governed its hinterland. In their writing, they suggested that cities had a rightful claim to control state governments that served exclusively their mercantile interests. The *Brooklyn Eagle* and *The New York Herald* both predicted that the consolidation of the 'village' of Brooklyn into a 'grand city' would lead to it becoming the capital of an independent Long Island State, which it would use railroads to develop and control.[129] In 1853, the *Boston Herald* also defended state aid to railroad construction, claiming that the state government existed to protect Boston's 'right' to the trade of western Massachusetts that 'New York is so fast absorbing'.[130] Just as important as having a government with the authority to build

NA&USG, August 29, 1853; 'Consolidation. Lafayette—Railroads', *The Daily Picayune*, November 14, 1851; 'The Election. Its Promises And Its Fruits', *The Daily Picayune*, November 9, 1851); 'Our Railroads', *The Daily Picayune*, March 08, 1854; *An Address to the Citizens of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1850);

[125] Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 172-236; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 460-601.

[126] 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG*, July 30, 1853; Quoted in 'The Consolidation of the Great Metropolis', *BDE*, October 5, 1850; Sentinel, 'The State Legislature', *SWC&NYE*, April 4, 1855; 'Union of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh with New-York', *NYT*, November 06, 1850.

[127] [Untitled], *Lancaster Intelligencer*, April 13, 1852; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, December 29, 1854; Quoted in 'Philadelphia', *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, February 15, 1854; 'The Press', *NA&USG*, February 21, 1854.

[128] 'The Consolidation Bill', *BDE*, June 6, 1853.

[129] 'Railroads in Brooklyn', *The Weekly Herald*, June 3, 1854; 'More Consolidation', *BDE*, November 12, 1853.

[130] 'The Defeat of the Hoosac Tunnel Loan', *Boston Herald,* June 2, 1853.

railroads, levy taxes for their construction, and stimulate trade, was having a government in which cities had a leading role in the political decision-making progress. Appeals to the tradition of American federalism might have suggested that these conservatives were interested in power-sharing, but in practice, they tried to ensure their cities could control surrounding territory without interference.

The control cities exerted over private corporations also helped conservatives exert power closer to home. The American state had a long history in using private means for attaining public ends.[131] Improvements like early turnpikes and the Erie Canal had been funded by federal and state governments. After the Panic of 1837, promoters often asked for municipal support to fund transport connections, and vast corporations like the Pennsylvania Railroad (chartered in 1846) were backed by city debt. Soliciting support for public investment in a line from Philadelphia to Erie, the *North American* described railroad corporations in New York and Baltimore not as profit-seeking private entities, but as pursuers of these cities' collective good.[132] As well as lobbying for federal investment, the *Baltimore American* urged Chesapeake city governments to subscribe to the stock of a private steamship line to Europe to give Baltimore control over European and Chesapeake trade.[133] What mattered was not whether the state or private corporations built such investments or contributed the capital for their construction, but whether the mercantile interests of a particular city had control over where infrastructure would centralize trade. Where propertied interests were able to solicit enough private subscriptions to railroad and steamship corporations, local capitalists' private ownership of railroads and corporations formed a part of their wider state building programme to concentrate control of political power in the metropolis. Corporations under the control of urban investors and mercantile interests served as the infrastructure of a political centralization much as railroads and steamship lines were the infrastructure of economic centralization.

A similar logic – that government should serve the mercantile ambitions of cities – appeared in Carey's justification for the protective tariff. He often framed support for tariffs as an issue of state strength and sovereignty. Repealing tariffs and entering into copyright treaties with Britain, Carey warned, weakened the American national government and its ability to enforce law over its own territory. In effect it amounted to a pooling of sovereignty with another country.[134] Free trade also made the Turkish government 'as weak as the people… entirely dependent on the bankers, that they may be regarded as the real owners of the land and the people, taxing them at discretion'.[135] His argument therefore went beyond economics and instead raised the issue of whether government was capable of intervening in economic geography, something the weak American and Turkish governments could not do. Conversely, Carey praised Spain for establishing tariffs, lauding an example of how strong interventionist government helped establish strong law enforcement at home and avoided the colonial weakness that came at the hands of free trade.[136] Tariffs took on a wider significance as evidence of national state-strengthening. Like the conservatives who turned

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[131] Novack, 'The "Myth" of the Weak American State, pp. 769-771.
[132] 'The Secret of New York Progress', *NA&USG*, May 21, 1853; 'The Spring Trade, *NA&USG*, January 4, 1850; 'The Railroads and the West', *NA&USG*, January 4, 1853.
[133] 'The Chesapeake Cities-Their True Policy', *BA*, January 28, 1854; 'Trade League of the Chesapeake', *BA*, February 15, 1854; 'Patabsco River and Chesapeake Bay', *BA*, March 21, 1854.
[134] Carey, *Copyright*; Carey, 'To R.M.T. Hunter (third), p. 134.
[135] Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 117-130.
[136] *Ibid.*, pp. 339-350, 350-362

to city reform, Carey saw a problem in weak government that seemed vulnerable to the ambitions of distant cities and unable to build the infrastructure that would allow a process of economic centralization closer to home.

His support for stronger national government through the protective tariff therefore resembled demands for stronger city government capable of making these economic interventions. On a national level, Carey defended self-government for India, not to bring democracy to the Indian people, but because a protectionist state could build the railroads that would keep Indian trade within an independent nation's borders.[137] Carey's advice centred on ensuring that state power served the economic interests of Indian cities, as those cities, in turn, would benefit their hinterlands too; a not dissimilar argument northeastern newspapers' belief that government should support urban imperialism. Indeed, when talking about the importance of city government, Carey sounded like a city reformer. In his critiques of the British Empire and European monarchies, claimed that powerful local village, town, and city governments had the 'strength' to 'resist' imperial seats of government.[138] Within the USA, Carey also defended his supposedly decentred patchwork of strong township, town, and city governments, as tools to centre political authority in urban areas and institutions and allow them to build the infrastructure of economic centralization on a local level. Centralization into multiple local cities allowed the construction of local roads, colleges, and schools that made the town 'a common centre of attraction to the whole people', he argued.[139] The conservative Brooklynite Maurice Richter, too, told his readers that strong local government could make 'every town a Paris'.[140] When he discussed both the need for strong national government and the need for strong local government, Carey's proposals also resembled plans to ensure that strong government served the interests of large cities and establish the centralized economic geography that many Americans believed could, properly harnessed, bring prosperity.

The political supremacy of smaller eastern cities over their surrounding towns, counties, and states, though, raised the same fears of political centralization that the supremacy of New York and London raised on a larger scale. When Williamsburgh Village residents opposed annexation to Brooklyn, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* replied that consolidation would allow both Long Island municipalities to 'stand against the oppressive measures of the big city over the river' and avoid the 'centralizing influence of New York'.[141] Resisting the 'absorbing and centralizing influence of New York' went hand in hand with building a stronger government at home.[142] Philadelphians too answered critics of their own consolidation in 1854 by insisting a much bigger city government would save the metropolis from becoming a satellite of New York. Conservatives often tried to suppress such contests over power within and around their own cities. Defining New York as the ultimate centralizing threat therefore allowed them to deflect fears about their own designs for

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[137] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 393.
[138] 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; Carey, 'Centralization', pp. 394-395; Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 294-296; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 363-396.
[139] Carey, *Copyright*, pp. 45-55; Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, p. 228; Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 287-288. Carey, 'Virginia', p. 66.
[140] Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 270.
[141] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, August 1, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 29, 1853; 'The Consolidation Bill', *BDE*, June 6, 1853.
[142] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, August 1, 1853); 'More Consolidation', *BDE*, November 12, 1853; 'A Brooklyn university', *BDE*, January 23, 1854; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 29, 1853.

political centralization. Conservatives in Boston and Philadelphia also claimed that strengthening their own cities and giving them extensive political influence in their state government could prevent their cities from becoming 'New Yorkized' and indistinguishable from the Empire City. [143] These conservatives used the apparent smaller size of their centralization to give the impression that they were sharing power between multiple cities instead of creating a national or international empire and becoming the next Paris. Indeed, they also suggested that city building protected the American system of federal government. Boston and Philadelphia, they claimed, were only consolidating political authority within individual states, within which a single city could legitimately assume authority without dominating a nation in the manner of a Paris, as New York supposedly intended. [144] Contrasting their designs to the remote centralization at the hands of New York allowed them to try and redefine dangerous centralization so that it only applied to the supposedly larger centralizations of New York and London. This, in turn, helped them try to overcome the perception that they, too, were centralizers, and legitimise their own plans to consolidate political power in their own cities.

To offset charges that they were also centralizers, conservatives often tried to mask the political basis of their designs, even as they pursued new charters, subsidies, and protectionist measures. The imperial language of city boosterism allowed them to give the impression that geography, not government authority, would send goods from a tributary hinterland to their cities. One railroad promoter wrote to the *North American*, claiming that the topography of the Appalachians predestined Ohio Valley trade to concentrate at Philadelphia, if only Philadelphians would build a railway to the region. [145] Such overtures transformed the basis of urban power from the kind of imperial state authority Americans associated with central cities like Paris into the natural contours of a topographic survey. A 'central' location, a shorter route, or easier grades would centre trade on their city through 'natural advantage'. [146] Where the likes of New York, Paris, and London supposedly needed a politically protected monopoly, their cities did not. Their opponents relied on dangerous government authority while they themselves would rely only on the natural laws of trade and geography.

In addition to claiming not to need big government to help them build their centralized trade networks, the same conservatives also gave the impression that they would share control over political authority with the hinterland. Benjamin Hallett – a Boston lawyer who opposed the radical 1854 Massachusetts constitution and enforced the Fugitive Slave Act in Boston[147] – and Boston newspapers argued that their city had the right to a 'just

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[143] *Mr. Flanigen*, p. 8; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 320; Price, *History of Consolidation*, pp. 79-80.
[144] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, pp. 131-132, 234-235, 624-625; Speech of Wm. Schouler, *The Boston Daily Atlas*, July 21, 1853; 'The Convention and Representation', *Boston Post*, June 28, 1853.
[145] 'Philadelphia and the West—No. 1, *NA&USG*, January 3, 1853; 'Philadelphia and the West—No. 2', *NA&USG*, January 4, 1853; 'Philadelphia and the West—No. 3', *NA&USG*, January 7, 1853; 'Philadelphia and the West—No. IV', *NA&USG*, January 10, 1853.
[146] *Mr. Flanigen*, pp. 5-9. 'The Northwestern Railroad', *NA&USG*, August 9, 1853; 'The Railroads and the West', *NA&USG*, January 4, 1853; 'A Liberal View of the Matter', *NA&USG*, January 24, 1854; 'The Erie Railroad Troubles', *PL*, December 20, 1853; 'Patabsco River and Chesapeake Bay', *BL*, March 21, 1854; 'The Movement for Trade with the South and West in Baltimore', *BL*, December 25, 1852.
[147] President Franklin pierce appointed Hallett United States Attorney with jurisdiction for Boston, and he defended the Fugitive Slave Act in court. See Stanley Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860.* (Chapel Hill, 1970), pp. 110-147.

influence' over the state, but would not create a 'Babylon' or a 'Rome'.[148] The *Baltimore American* also compared its plan for Chesapeake trade with Europe to the Hanseatic League, which 'gave law to kings', emphasising local cities would retain political authority under Baltimore's commercial leadership.[149] Indeed, critics in Philadelphia claimed that they would claim their 'rightful share' of 'metropolitan influence and prosperity' only through 'honourable means'. They would not, they suggested, assume control of local government in the hinterland, while in their own cities the defensive measures they had taken against centralizing New York and London would safeguard republican self-government.[150]

Conservatives in major cities therefore recognised that economic required a measure of political centralization. Rather than turning to the classical liberalism that marked the politics of retrenchment after the Panic of 1873, they assumed that the growth of an urban economy required a substantial amount of state activity. This included strengthening state and corporate authority to reorganise the hinterland economy through railroad construction, tariff enforcement, and government regulation. But for conservatives who believed they were peripheral to New York and London's commercial empires, it also meant ensuring that control over this newfound state power remained in the hands of their own city and interests rather than that of rural agrarians or their mercantile competitors. In other words, they wanted to ensure that their city could govern, if often indirectly, its surrounding territory, and turned to government reform to realise these ambitions. Stronger city government, private corporations, and national tariffs enforced by a strong national government could all be justified based on their ability to ensure economic centralization served the right people and cities. Claims that they would share power suggested that they were aware of, and wanted to defuse, contests for power within their own cities, between the neighbourhoods, towns, and municipalities over which they wanted to extend control. However, these claims of support for power sharing, like claims of opposition to centralization at the hands of empire cities, only helped conservatives legitimise new forms of government that concentrated power in practice.

Henry Carey, Centralization, and Citizenship

As well as being a pretext for centralizing political authority over surrounding towns, cities, and states, the need to control changing economic geography also justified centralizing power within cities too. Carey, in particular, discussed the problem of popular sovereignty in areas that had been come under the influence of larger cities. He blamed New York and London's growing geographic influence for the emergence of this unpropertied wage-earning class in Philadelphia, a class that could not resist political dependency on propertied Manhattanites. He therefore refashioned in geographic terms warnings that dependant voters could not maintain self-government. Moreover, Carey talked about the industrialising economy not in terms of a vertical power relationship between a propertied upper class and unpropertied artisans and workers but as a horizontal power relationship between cities. The centralizing threat came not from local capitalists, as radical workingmen claimed, but from British and Manhattan-based traders, allowing him to justify a state building programme at home that centred on strengthening power in less democratic regimes. Despite the egalitarian appearance of Carey's programme, it came with a far less democratic set of

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[148] 'Mr. Benjamin F. Hallett Upon Boston Politics', *Boston Courier*, July 15, 1853; 'The City, the Country, and the Constitution', *Boston Courier*, November 10, 1853.
[149] 'The Chesapeake Cities-Their True Policy', *BA*, January 28, 1854.
[150] 'The Erie Troubles', *NA&USG*, January 14, 1854.

assumptions about the role of unpropertied citizens in government. Opposition to long-distance centralizations might have sounded like a democratic language, but as with France, conservatives found ways to use this language to advance a conservative agenda over property, democracy, and power much closer to home.

Carey's warnings against dependency on great commercial cities included scepticism of dependency and unpropertied citizens in the American republic. Southern slaveholders claimed that northern wage earners were in no different a position to their own slaves as they too lacked property and independent control over their own labour.[151] Carey agreed, but saw this power relationship spatially, warning that free trade turned the natural harmony between local capital and labour into an exploitative power relationship between London-based capital and dependant wage labourers on a colonial periphery.[152] He viewed agriculture in a similar fashion too: throughout the British Empire, he accused Britain of using free trade to reduce independent farmers to tenants dependant on landlords and London capital.[153] His arguments therefore drew from an older suspicion that tenancy and wages turned independency citizens into dependant subjects. These rural and urban wage labourers appeared as 'slaves' because workers in the hinterland were economically dependent on the central marketplace that controlled the value of their labour and produce.[154] Like the bonds of railroads and steamships spreading outwards from major cities, the ties that linked London capital and provincial labour formed a geographic power relationship. Indeed, in his critique of the Act of Union, he identified the poor law in Ireland as a tool that allowed British capitalists to control Irish labour from their seat in London.[155] Carey therefore warned against mass wage labour in his lobbying for a protective tariff. But his analysis of wage labour as the consequence of geographic inequality helped reframe fears of dependency and unpropertied voters in less proscriptive terms of dependency on remote cities and towns.

Carey's opposition to geographic centralization therefore might sound radical, insofar as it seemed opposed to of the inequality that came with wage labour. But in fact it had a far less democratic and far more antiradical agenda. It implied Carey shared assumptions about unpropertied voters with conservative critics of the French in 1848 and 1852: both believed that unfit citizens could not prevent dangerous concentrations of power. His protectionism here spoke to deep unease about the effect economic change had on farmers, workers, and the electorate. As he put it, as the British became less and less propertied, they were 'declining in self-government' as 'low-priced labourers' could not govern themselves.[156] And as the expansion of trade and railroads westward encouraged dependent cash crop agriculture in the West, he argued, Americans were reduced to 'barbarianism' as homesteaders allegedly fell into crime and poverty, and inhibited law and order and self-government.[157] Unpropertied wage workers dependant on London were

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[151] Foner, *Free Soil*, pp. 66-67.
[152] Carey, *Slave Trade*, p. 62-74.
[153] 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; Carey, 'Centralization', p. 393-395.
[154] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 388; Henry Carey, *Ireland's Miseries: Their Cause* (New York, 1852), p. 2; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 21-35, 174-209.
[155] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 393-394; Carey, *Miseries*, pp. 8-9; Henry Carey, 'How to Increase Competition for the Purchase of Labour, and How to Increase the Wages of the Labourer', *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil* 5 (1852), p. 262.
[156] Carey, 'Centralization', pp. 33-44; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 174-209.
[157] Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, p. 208.

therefore the source as well as the victims of centralization. London might have usurped workers' economic authority in the global free trade system, but Carey also warned that these impoverished citizens themselves allowed political centralization into despotic government.

An assumption that unpropertied citizens could not prevent – and might even further – the centralization of political authority in remote metropoles pervaded his appeals against free trade. In addressing the South, he even blamed the training of dependency on London and New York for the creation of a despotic slave society.[158] He could argue that free trade would lead Americans to become like the 'bayonet-governed, priest-ridden, pauperized millions of Europe' because he believed centralizing wealth created a population unable to resist the centralization of power in the hands of reactionary regimes.[159] From Virginia to Scotland to Hungary, Carey predicted that breaking bonds of dependency that spread outwards from London in particular would allow unpropertied citizens to acquire property and become full citizens in a free society.[160] Implicit in Carey's thought, then, was the assumption that property created citizens capable of freely participating in a republican polity. Claims that free trade limited growth and led to tyranny might seem unsurprising from a protectionist. Yet Carey's argument that the centralized geography of free trade would undermine republican liberty had implications for an emerging urban wage-earning class and impoverished western farmers in the United States. His home city of Philadelphia, like New York, Boston, and Baltimore, had seen growing industrial unrest in the first half of the nineteenth century. Journeymen, mechanics, and artisans stridently opposed the increasing use of wages as a tool to organise labour.[161] It was in this context that Carey warned that unpropertied voters, under the sway of centralized economic power, were not fit voters in the American republic.

Carey's pro-tariff advocacy therefore drew from the idea that ownership of property gave citizens the ability to participate in political life. Defining the ideal citizen in terms of the bourgeois urban values that protectionism purportedly fostered, he argued tariffs would create citizens who would preserve local centres of economic and political authority. In place of the exploitative wage labour and chattel slavery that a system centred on New York and London, tariffs – by offering peripheries protection from metropolitan dominance – would promote the 'association' of independent propertyowning farmers and manufacturers, a decentred economic geography where individual workers and farmers kept control over their own labour, capital and agency.[162] 'Freedom of trade, or of man' were mutually exclusive in his view because economic exchange between independent producers formed the basis of a free society, not wage labourers voting for – and dependent on – the representatives of distant, powerful cities.[163] Carey, then, saw citizenship in material terms. The 'barbarism' of western poverty and supposed misgovernment contrasted to the growing towns, local

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[158] Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 95-117.
[159] 'Why Change the Tariffs?', *NYT*, April 24, 1852.
[160] 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; 'The Macsycophant Family in Europe', *NYT*, November 18, 1851; Carey, 'Centralization', pp. 388, 394; Carey, 'Letter to R.M.T. Hunter (third)', p. 137; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 139-173; Carey, 'How Virginia Sells in the Cheapest Market and Buys in the Dearest One', *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil* 5 (1852), pp. 66-67; Conkin, *Prophets*, pp. 289-290.
[161] Dawson, *Engineers*, pp. 51-78; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana-Champaign, 1997); Laurie, *Working People*; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362.
[162] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 395; Conkin, *Prophets*, p. 289.
[163] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 395.

railroads and banks that were the hallmarks of civilization and progress under decentralized republican government.[164] Rather than defining citizenship through a universal right to participate in elections, Carey defined citizenship through participation in middle-class economic institutions like banks, owning property, and engaging in the local commercial life of the town and city. A stake in local property was vital to Carey's understanding of citizenship, despite the seemingly egalitarian language of his protectionist campaign.

As well as subtly cautioning against democracy under free trade and unpropertied voters, Carey also looked to less democratic forms of state building in response. Redefining dependency on another city as the most dangerous centralization of power allowed him to justify centralizing power in relatively authoritarian governments. Like conservatives responding to 1848, he looked to European monarchy to find examples of good government. He was certainty happy to use Alexander II's autocratic government in Russia as an example of good protectionist government.[165] Given Carey's prioritisation of property over popular sovereignty in his writing, it is unsurprising that he defined free governments based on their power to prevent supposedly centralized political power relationships, rather than their commitment to universal suffrage. He advised Kossuth, for instance, that France and Scotland showed how 'commercial centralization' under free trade was far more dangerous to Hungarians' liberties than the 'political centralization' of the Hapsburg monarchy.[166] His definition of liberty, then, seemed more based on the state power to impose protective tariffs, regardless of whether it embraced democratic authority, rather than the ability of the masses or minorities to influence their government. Based on this assumption, Carey distinguished between English 'consolidation' of land and the 'centralization of exchange' that went hand in hand with the destruction of 'local self-government'[167] and German 'decentralization, local activity and freedom' when Prussian tariffs promoted the division of land from large to small landholders.[168] In Carey's reasoning, Britain could never be a free as Germany because only a decentralized economic geography created citizens that could resist political centralization too. Comparing the United States to France under Louis-Napoleon, he argued that America was following a path to 'centralization, barbarism, and slavery' while the protected Second Empire was on the road to freedom. Warning against centralized economic power relationships allowed Carey to argue firstly that government power was a far better protector of the people's liberties than the democratic will of the people themselves. In other words, defining centralizing power in cities as the dangerous threat to the people's liberties allowed him to legitimise centralizing authority in strong institutions and governments. Opposition to economic centralization here justified, in Carey's opinion, centralizing power in authoritarian governments.

As London and New York emerged as global trade hubs, Carey sought to redefine the centralizations of wealth and power taking place within cities as a geographic centralization of power that reduced American workers to dependency on remote metropoles. His hostility to centralization might suggest he favoured popular government and a more equitable division of property. After all, opposition to the centralizing ambitions

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[164] Carey, *Harmony of Interests*, pp. 86-88; Carey, *Letters to the President*, p. 47, 155.
[165] Howe, *American Whigs*, p. 109.
[166] Carey, 'Centralization', p. 137.
[167] 'Real Free Trade versus Centralization', *NYT*, December 18, 1851; Carey, 'Centralization', p. 394; Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 209-293.
[168] Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 308-826.

of major cities and their supposed aristocratic interests easily was common among Jacksonian Democrats.[169]

Carey's argument that high tariffs would redistribute property to all American workers was clearly well suited to his political agenda, and many Americans at all ranges of the political spectrum took issue with his economic policy. However, Carey's warnings that free trade economies could not sustain republican government refashioned in geographic terms an argument that unpropertied and dependant voters could not maintain self-government. In the context of a city rife with industrial unrest, he made it clear to his readers that the growing number of unpropertied wage workers in the unprotected American economy posed a challenge to republican government. Stressing that republican government could not rely on the votes of the unpropertied was an assumption that Carey shared with other midcentury conservatives. Suggesting that tariffs could build propertied citizens capable of maintaining a republican government therefore allowed Carey to talk about the problems of mass suffrage without having to talk directly about disenfranchisement, as fellow Philadelphian Sidney George Fisher did in private. And like other conservatives, he used opposition to centralization as a platform he could use to justify a state building programme of his own, one that did not necessarily rely on a particularly democratic foundation. Carey's opposition to long-distance economic centralization over geography therefore spoke to deeper conservative concerns about democracy, property, and citizenship within their own cities, and a desire to centre political authority back into the hands of men of property and privilege.

Geographic Centralization, State-Building and Popular Government

Carey's obsession with tariffs by no means applied to all conservatives, but they all used the threat of remote centralization to embark on a state building programme that centralized power in an elite-controlled government. The struggle between conservatives in different cities for control over political and economic power had consequences for democracy within their cities too. Reactions to 1848 suggest that they did not want to concentrate power in their own city only to share it with the masses that lived there. Given Carey's warning that long distance economic 'centralization' threatened to bring about a Parisian-style concentration of unpropertied voters in dependent regions, and the readiness of conservatives to seek state power to prevent this eventuality, it is unsurprising that many conservatives did not want government to fall into the hands of those they wanted to reform. Therefore, when conservatives attempted to centralize political power inwards through state strengthening and the extension of metropolitan power over a hinterland, they also sought to transfer control over policymaking from people to the state. In practice, this meant putting power back in the hands of a conservative elite. The process of extending geographic power from the city outwards therefore sometimes involved a parallel concentration of sovereignty in elites, institutions, and the state itself, at the expense of the people, just as many conservatives supported a similar process of centralization to bring order to Paris and France.

When defending the leading economic and political role of cities within their states and nations, conservatives often pointed to the large number of urban citizens to give their political aspirations democratic legitimacy. And since country delegates wanted to distribute

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[169] Glaab, *America*, pp. 45-58; Sellers, *Revolution*, p. 170; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 46-47; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 15-20

power away from the towns and cities where most voters lived, it is unsurprising that Boston's representatives used a language of majority rule to stake their claim for political leadership of the Commonwealth. They often claimed there was no reason that political power should not be concentrated in cities if that is where voters lived,[170] and described the overrepresentation of rural towns as 'anti-republican', a 'partizan madness', or an 'Anti-democratic assumption of power.'[171] Carey's critique of political authority beyond any kind of democratic control – such as Great Britain's dominion over Ireland and the Camden and Amboy's rule over New Jersey – implied support for a kind of popular sovereignty. After all, he suggested that these entities held power that ought to lie with the people in a much wider diffusion of political authority. Concentrating political power geographically in the city gave conservatives rhetorical ammunition to claim they were sharing political and economic power with the people.

Despite using this democratic language, these conservatives often implied that the people were more of a threat to the government than a natural part of it. When describing their state-building programmes, conservatives again turned to the image of Paris to caution against the risks of creating an overbearing democratic capital. When New York aldermen suggested annexing Brooklyn to Manhattan, the Brooklyn *Eagle* and its correspondents raised the image of 1848-style Parisian violence to demonstrate the supposed dangers of this consolidation, warning all power would lie in the 'central legislature' of a dominant, violent city.[172] Respectable Brooklynites, like the inhabitants of French provinces, would become victims to mob rule if they centred political power in a city full of those unfit for citizenship. Bostonians had to respond to western accusations that they were creating a Paris. Rather than arguing that urban citizens proved the greatest centralizing threat, they argued that Bostonians' 'moral character' and 'stability and integrity' contrasted to French 'mobs' and 'Jacobins'.[173] Only Bostonians deference to the city's social and political elite, these conservatives claimed, made Boston a suitable custodian of state power. These Brooklyn and Boston conservatives might have disagreed over whether rural agrarians or urban rioters posed the greatest democratic threat, but seemed to agree that Paris showed the dangers of allowing the people – however defined – to seize power. The Brooklynite Richter, too, claimed that Paris proved the danger of allowing larger cities to accumulate too much political authority at the expense of towns, wards, and townships, as urban residents could easily overthrow any government based there.[174] These conservatives may well have wanted to centralize power in cities in spite of, rather than because of, their large voting populations. In the minds of conservatives, reorganising the economic and political power relationships outside the metropolis and its hinterland was linked to questions over the distribution of power between people and elites too.

The question of whether power lay in the right hands therefore had a social as well as geographic dimension. Conservatives in Massachusetts tried to redefine curbs on the

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[170] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 836; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, pp. 407-409.
[171] 'Popular Representation', *Daily Evening Transcript*, November 12, 1853; Quoted in 'A Pertinent Question', *Daily Evening Transcript*, July 15, 1853; Quoted in 'The Apportionment of Representatives', *Daily Evening Transcript*, July 29, 1853; Quoted in 'Injustice to the Cities of Massachusetts', *Daily Evening Telegraph*, July 18, 1853.
[172] Progress, 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853.
[173] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 1, pp. 888-890; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, p. 47.
[174] Lieber, *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol II, p. 100; Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 70, 121.

political authority of Boston as a democratic centralization of power in a dangerous (western) agrarian democracy. Advocates of a strong Boston cautioned against allowing voters to send 'instructions' to legislators at state elections, making judges and officeholders elective, and removing vestigial tax qualifications for voting. Adopting these reforms, they warned, would replace a 'learned, impartial, and trusted magistracy' with a 'pure and direct democracy' with 'no law of any kind, save the expressed will of the majority of the day', akin to the Second French Republic.[175] As well as being an opportunity to protect their control over state power, the constitutional convention allowed Boston conservatives to protect constitutional tools that concentrated political decision-making in the hands of a small number of well-connected elites. Philadelphians, too, seemed to recognise the risks of centralizing power close to unfit voters and looked for constitutional tools to make state power safe in growing cities. Explicitly denying that the United States was a democracy, the *North American* cited the threat of Parisian-style mob violence as a risk of majority rule, lamented that city gentleman had to vote alongside lower-class rowdies, and even suggested disenfranchising Philadelphia's unpropertied could help ensure clean elections and public order.[176] Despite leaving universal white male suffrage untouched, conservatives who looked to consolidate government authority in their metropolis were also looking for ways to concentrate power in the state and elites, rather than the enfranchised masses. Promoting economic centralization and the political leadership of their own city went hand in hand with reminding Americans that they faced a potential centralizing threat at the hands of Paris-style urban mobs and western radicals.

The willingness of conservatives like Carey to laud authoritarian regimes also suggests an ambivalent relationship at best to democratic rights. When Carey defended protectionist countries like Prussia and Russia, he neglected to mention that these states did not share political authority with their citizens.[177] He suggested that strong government with power to enforce its will over its national borders better protected people from his centralization than democratic rule. Indeed, he claimed that the *Zollverein* gave Germany freedom, even though governments had quashed the democratic aspirations of the German people in 1849.[178] Rather than seeing democracy as the basis for republican government, he suggested to his readers that freedom meant liberty for governments to act without the restraints of centralized economic power rather than in accordance with the desires of voters.

His support for strong local government as a tool to resist larger national and international centralization could also hide an antidemocratic agenda. Dividing the economy into self-sufficient townships, towns, and cities with only minimal long distance trade rejected ambitions for a national market place based around individual workers and

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[175] *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 2, pp. 471-473, 524-525, 529-531, 707, 799-811; *Report of the Debates and Proceedings*, vol. 3, pp. 212-214, 226-228, 441-444; George Ticknor Curtis, 'Letters to Phoicon' in *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854), p. 77; Samuel Hoar, 'The Address of Samuel Hoar, at Fitchburg' in *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854), pp. 182-183; Marcus Morton, 'The Address of Marcus Morton, at Taunton' in *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854), p. 211; John Palfrey, 'The "Remarks" of J.G. Palfrey', in *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853* (Boston, 1854), pp. 259-306; 'Districts for Election of Representatives', *Boston Herald*, June 9, 1853;
[176] 'Republicanism and Democracy', *NA&USG*, August 28, 1858; 'Vagrancy', *NA&USG*, June 14, 1856; 'Wrong Upon the Ballot Box', *NA&USG*, August 28, 1856.
[177] Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 117-362, 308-326, 326-339.
[178] 'Protection to the Farmers of Germany and its Results', *NYT*, March 11, 1852.

capitalists. Instead, he saw the corporate town, internally harmonious and without class competition, as the basic building block of an economy that would not leave individuals labouring under the direction of remote cities like London and New York.[179] Harmony under the aegis of strong local government, he implied, could help dampen political radicalism closer to home.

Within the United States too, Carey therefore emphasised state strengthening over popular government as the best way to prevent dangerous centralizations of power. He described Jackson's claim of a popular mandate[180] that overrode the power of unelected institutions as a 'centralization'.[181] What Jacksonian Democrats saw as the tenets of democracy – that government should be accountable to a white male electorate – he warned amounted to a dangerous consolidation of power.[182] Instead, he emphasised the role of town, city, and county governments in preventing geographic centralized power relationships. In America, just as in Germany, freedom meant the capacity for governments to act independently, and did not mean popular control.[183] To prevent centralization, Carey's proposals resembled the compact theory of John C. Calhoun. Control over state power, including the power that a central bank could hold over the economy, had to be divided among a network of state institutions, rather than united in the undivided electorate. Conservatives seemed reluctant to discuss repealing universal white male suffrage. Carey's definition of centralization as a geographic phenomenon and insistence that strong government was not the sole centralizing threat nonetheless allowed him to undermine the principles of majority rule too.

When looking to build governments that could help them build up their own regional economies and resist the centralizing pull of empire cities, conservatives drew from some of the lessons that Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état seemed to confirm: that consolidations of political authority in the hands of the people could lead to disaster. Giving cities the power to govern their immediate hinterlands therefore came with significant dangers if this gave too much power to the masses of unpropertied voters that lived there. Centralizing political authority in cities therefore also required consolidating power in the hands of elite-led government institutions. Conservatives in the 1850s may not have been able to challenge universal white male suffrage. But when designing their governments, they emphasised that independent government institutions, rather than popular action, best protected the republic from dangerous concentrations of power. Therefore, as well as seeking to centralize political authority over their surrounding spheres of interest, conservatives in smaller cities sought to centralize power within their own cities too. These conservatives' support for a process of centralization therefore combined centralization of power into institutions and over geography so that they could maintain control over a powerful government that catered to their needs, and shows how their desire for building new centres of power reflected anxieties closer to home.

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[179] Carey, *Slave Trade*, pp. 52-61.
[180] Carey, *Letters to the President*, p. 26.
[181] *Ibid.*, p. 13, 26, 23, 71.
[182] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[183] Carey, *PP&F*, pp. 284-288, 296-297.

Conclusion

Conservatives, like a large number of Americans observing the economic changes around railroads, steamships, and industry around the 1850s, used centralization to understand how political and economic power relationships could operate across space. They considered how a single city could extend control outwards over surrounding territory as well as theorising how power could centre in institutions or the people. Yet centralization in its geographic and political aspects were related. Henry Carey in particular showed how the threat posed by remote centralizing cities could be used to restructure political relations within the likes of Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Carey's obsession with the protective tariff might have been exceptional, but conservatives frequently used the negative connotation of centralization to challenge the emergence of large commercial cities, principally London and New York. These cities acquired through their economic might the same imperial power that Paris enjoyed through its privileged political position. Both protectionists, like Carey, and other conservatives with more liberal views on trade saw these centres as colonial cities that threatened to dominate their surrounding state, national, or even international hinterlands. Economic and political power overlapped, with one reinforcing the other.

Yet they knowingly embraced the same process of expanding economic power when it gave them the opportunity to extend their own geographic markets. And just as they often associated their opponents' economic centralization with a dangerous monopolisation of state authority, the conservatives in this chapter often looked to centralizing state authority themselves to pursue their regional ambitions through trade policy, railroad funding, and local state building. Projects to centre trade in their own metropolises here were justified as local defensive manoeuvres, necessary responses to the national and international scale aggressive posturing of imperialistic rivals. Conservatives in different cities therefore drew on their understanding of economic centralization as a process to compete between themselves for the imperial riches of a vast hinterland.

The 1850s marked a moment of intense local state-building efforts, whether it was in the form of vigilance committees in San Francisco and New Orleans, city consolidation movements, and territorial organization in Congress. Understandings of geographic centralization of political and economic power linked how conservatives engaged with these processes at an international, national, and local level. Carey's opposition to the trade routes spreading out from major American and especially British cities and his desire for forms of local and national centralization in response bears similarity to how other American conservatives responded to the threat of New York's dominance. Local and national ideas about how to use the state to intervene in the economy were therefore closely linked. Midcentury America may have often rejected the idea of a powerful federal government in Washington with the necessary authority to intervene in the national economy. The veto of the Second Bank of the United States and Marysville Road charters, the failure of the Rivers and Harbours Convention of 1846, and the adoption of squatter sovereignty in the territories in 1850 and 1854 suggest a very limited role for the federal government in constructing the political and economic infrastructure that could bind America together, even if calls for stronger tariffs and a Pacific Railroad indicate that not everyone accepted that settlement. Urban imperialism, though, may have at helped conservatives engage in state building, albeit in different forms to contemporary European regimes.

As supporters, rather than opponents, of a developmental state that used public authority to promote the interests of wealthy property developers, merchants, and nascent corporations, it is also unsurprising that the people explored in this chapter were rarely enthusiastic about majority rule and often saw strong government instead as the best custodian of liberty. Conservatives used centralization to help modernise the American economy and government on their own terms. But if centralization was not a means to turn back to the pastoral ideal of Jeffersonian republicanism, nor did they necessarily imagine a centralized economy in the sense historians of the Gilded Age might understand the term. Indeed, forestalling the centring of the American economy in Manhattan, avoiding social conflict between capital and labour, and limiting the capacity of free markets to redistribute economic power were all aims of midcentury conservatives whose distinctive vision stood between the yeoman republic and corporate capitalism. Their methods often reveal their mistrust of centring power in the people.

Debates over the geographic centralization of economic might in the 1850s were therefore closely connected to discussion of political power. Conservatives who believed that sovereignty needed transferring from unpropertied voters to state institutions found in the idea of centralization over space a powerful weapon. Just as they often insisted they were decentralizing economic power from places like New York to legitimise their own programme of centralization, they also claimed the mantle of majority rule while in practice curbing it at its margins. Centralizing control over state authority by strengthening local government gave them opportunities to rebalance power between the people and the state, and when designing governments, they sometimes took steps to impose order on disorderly populace at home. Indeed, defining centralization in London and New York as the most dangerous threat to liberty and prosperity only made it easier for them to distract attention from their attempts to centralize power in stronger institutions often shielded from direct popular control. Unlike radical supporters of democratic republics, conservatives believed that that state – and not the people – was the best custodian of power in a republic. Conservative state-building in the 1850s, then, may have looked to modernise regional economies, but it often rested on the same fears about centring power in the people that had animated debate over the 1848 Revolution in Paris. Conservatives could employ a seemingly democratic language of decentralization here to pursue far more conservative ends.

Regional elites' fears of becoming part of a colonial hinterland exporting goods to New York or London can be read as geographic expressions on social anxieties. Conservatives' professed desire to maintain a polity of propertied citizens rather than dependant farmers and labourers might have seemed egalitarian, especially when they prescribed decentralization of economic power away from large cities and corporations as the remedy for rising inequality. But what sounded democratic in theory was not necessarily in practice. Their critique implied the unfitness of propertyless urban voters for the franchise, and their program often called for local centralizations of power under their own authority to combat empire cities. Moreover, by seeing geographic rather than social relations as the source of urban malaise, they could deflect attention away from the 'labor question': the centralization of power in owners of industry that working people were attacking through the likes of craft unions and radical societies. then, they anticipated upper class scepticism about the role of unpropertied urban voters that led to hysteria over the Paris Commune in 1871, the Tilden Commission in 1877, and a retreat from Reconstruction's commitment to

expanding democratic rights.[184] But instead of arguing for restricting voting rights to the propertied, as would happen under the Tilden Commission, they tried to restructure the geography of power so that the state served the interests of capital at the centre, and gave an urban bourgeoisie a privileged position. This, they hoped, would allow them to reconcile class tensions within their own city by presenting the metropolis as united in fighting the centralizing threat posed by rivals. The likes of the Erie Gauge War, or Baltimore's design for a Chesapeake successor to the Hanseatic League, illustrate how conservatives tried to unite cities and regions around their leadership.

Two decades later, with economic growth, industrialisation, and proletarianisation continuing apace, postbellum conservatives often understood questions of urban political economy more in terms of class formation rather than as a matter of competition between cities over where economic power would centre. By then a national bourgeoisie – shaped by the Civil War, class conflict and strikes on a national scale, and the integration of hitherto city-dominated railroads into a nationwide system – were less inclined to think in regional terms about power, and were more inclined to see the 'labor question' as fundamental. Conservatives in the 1850s, though, tended to conceptualise the problems of industrialisation, class conflict, and urbanisation differently to their postbellum successors. They may even have laid some of the intellectual groundwork for the retreat from democratic reform that followed the Civil War as they kept alive in their discussions of centralization scepticism about the wisdom of universal white male suffrage. Their belief that economic and political modernisation at a local scale could rebuild, rather than threaten, their authority, then, is one marker of a conservative rationale for modernisation. Despite claiming to oppose centralization, conservatives more often tried to redefine the pejorative term to make it apply in economic terms only to the supposedly imperial designs of their larger rivals, and in doing so used the term to claim power over their own citizens and expanding hinterlands. These conservatives therefore accepted a process of political and economic 'centralization' on their own terms, but did not see themselves as a national upper class, lauded the benefits of a national market only when it came to opposing international rivals, and remained suspicious of democratic rights. Centralization here became a language conservatives could draw on to contest which propertied elites in different cities would benefit from long term processes of economic change and to impose their will on their own city and economic empire.

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[184] Beckert, 'Democracy', pp. 146-174; Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 172-236; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 1032-1033; Evarts et al., *Report of the Commission*; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 460-601; Katz, *Appomattox to Montmartre*; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 106-107.

Chapter 3: The Centralization of American Cities

Introduction

The lessons from France and political economy helped inform conservative attempts to build local governments in the mid-1850s. In these years, cities like New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn supported what was often called 'consolidation': merging cities and suburbs into larger big city governments. Others, like Boston and New York, sought to reform their charters, police, and institutions as an alternative route to strong government. Conservatives in these cities drew on similar processes of centralization they had described in Paris and from criticisms of urban imperialism. They described a process of centralization of power into the hands of rioters and urban voters, a state within a state that exercised power over the entire city. However, again, conservatives used this threat of centralization to justify a centralization of their own. They often hoped to centralize power geographically in larger city governments and claimed that economic ties over suburbs and neighbourhoods could tie disorderly cities together. Politically they hoped to remove barriers to state institutions and, concentrate political decision-making in the hands of institutions and propertied elites. Conservatives may not have had the chance to reform politics on a national level, but looking at how conservatives used centralization as a process and political weapon in local government can highlight conservative state-building and attempts to restructure political power in midcentury America.

American cities in the 1850s had a long history of urban violence, which drove movements for consolidation. Echoing their censure of the Paris crowd in the Second Republic, conservatives warned that American mobs and voters had become a single source of violent power with potential to subject the city to its rule. Urban disorder confirmed to conservatives the danger of allowing the people to usurp government control over public space, just as the events in France between 1848 and 1852 had done. Moreover, conservatives, drew from a radical tradition that saw rioting as a part of American democracy, a way for the people to assert their authority over public space and officeholders who defied the will of the people. Conservatives, though, looked upon this with horror. To these Americans, consolidation took a wider significance than just bringing law and order to seemingly disorderly cities. Consolidation therefore showed how conservatives believed they could reassert the authority of government in public space over the people and their democratic capacity in a republic that supposedly embraced universal white male suffrage.

Having warned that the people were centralizing power in American cities, conservatives were able at reject republican warnings that consolidating government authority a local level to led to tyranny. Movements supporting police reform and enlarging the boundaries of city governments in particular gave conservatives opportunities to strengthen local governments and bring order to the American metropolis. Suggesting that balanced government and local decentralization were less important in city government, conservatives hoped that they could remove institutional and geographic checks on power, and enable the law-enforcing power of the centre. These reformers often embraced the assumption that removing outdated institutional and geographic checks on power through creating police forces and annexing independent districts could impose order on growing cities. Such measures helped conservatives strengthen government in response to urban

disorder, and ensure that centralization as a process benefited a conservative-directed state rather than a violent democratic rabble.

When confronted with stronger city government in the hands of their partisan opponents or democratic control, however, the strongest conservative reformers could become avid decentralizers. Conservatives used decentralization of authority in the spheres of property and finance, especially as a tool to prevent urban majorities from usurping power too. This, perhaps, helps to explain why research on municipal government in the 1850s can seem so contradictory. While some see the antebellum years as moments of aggressive state-building, others, notably Robin Einhorn, argue that decentralization allowed propertyowners to insulate property from majority rule.[1] However, both centralization and decentralization of government authority here allowed conservatives to ensure control over state power remained in the right hands. Local centralization – coupled to occasional decentralizing measures – therefore helped conservatives pursue their own programme of state strengthening without embracing the kind of European-style national centralization they had critiqued in France.

The percent power relationships between people and government consolidation could set locally was also of national importance. Despite the distinctions historians have drawn between federal and local power, however, city reformers – conservatives prominent among them – moved back and forth between local and national centralization in making their case, sometimes treating cities as microcosms of the Union as a whole.[2] One reformer in Philadelphia, for instance, proposed to consolidate the city into not one but two municipalities, a South Philadelphia and a North Philadelphia, just after Congress adopted popular sovereignty in the territories as a solution to the sectional crisis.[3] As well as providing a window onto seeing how national federalism shaped local politics, though, the local experience of reform also came to inform how conservatives responded to the national sectional crisis too. Municipal reform therefore formed part of a much wider conservative response to midcentury challenges posed by turbulent democracy, economic transformation, and divisions over slavery, and provided one arena for conservatives to pursue an agenda that predated the turn to retrenchment in the 1870s.

Conservative supporters of municipal reform in the 1850s used ideas about centralization to fight over democracy, power, and union in their cities and the country as a whole. Their battles offer insights into how they expected the state to modernise in the face of industrialisation, urbanisation, and sectional conflict on both a local and national scale. At a local level, it allowed them to argue that the people were responsible for a process of centralization, just as they were in Paris, but their responses had national implications. The conservatives studied here recognised their governments needed to evolve over time, rather than remain static, if they were to maintain the proper distribution of power between the state and the people. The debates surrounding consolidations and policing helped them explore what that evolution might look like: 1848-style republic or British-style propertied rule; a patchwork of local governments or a centralized unitary state; a powerful government shielded from democratic sway or one directly amenable to the people. Midcentury

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[1] See Einhorn, *Property*.

[2] For more on how Americans applied lessons over national political economy at a local level, see Einhorn, *Property*, pp. 68-86; Heath, 'In Union There is Strength', pp. 101-24; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 15-54.

[3] Thomas Fernon, *Minority Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Consolidation of the City of Philadelphia, With Enlarged Boundaries* (Harrisburg, 1851).

municipal reform, in addressing some of these questions, allows us to see how conservatives hoped to build their own path to modernity.

Examples of municipal centralization – often called consolidations – in the 1850s, suggest that centralization was more than just a political weapon to describe phenomena on an international, national, or regional scale. Urban conservatives also used the concept to contest the legitimate institutional and geographic centres of authority within cities. In so doing, they helped define a conservative approach to building a government quite different to that of their republican eighteenth-century forbearers, and the ostensibly egalitarian vision of Jacksonian democrats. And when applied on a national scale, their approach can help us understand their response to the slavery crisis.

Riot and Reform in Midcentury America

Questions about the where power belonged in the metropolis arose while American cities confronted a problem of urban disorder. Like in Paris, it seemed that the people had the potential to monopolise violence in public space outside of the control of the institutions of republican government. [4] For conservatives, these questions about disorder were closely related to concerns about democratic overreach. In response, they looked to the many city reform movements of the era. In this period, smaller cities like Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and New Orleans merged with surrounding townships, counties, and municipalities to form larger city governments, often citing the need for strong policing as a reason. Others, including New York and Boston, engaged in institutional reform, merging separate police forces, strengthening city executives, and reforming city charters. To opponents, these reforms seemed like a dangerous curb on American democracy, and they drew from ideas like states' rights to demonstrate their opposition. But for proponents, this process of geographic centralization in more expansive municipalities and centralization in formed an important part of how they hoped to build stronger conservative government fit for the pressures of the nineteenth-century.

Historians have described the 1840s and 1850s as particularly violent decades, as ethnic, class, and political tensions often led to outbreaks of unrest. Just one riot in Philadelphia in 1844 between Irish Catholics and nativist Protestants led to over twenty deaths and over fifty wounded, and while the death toll was unusually high, the street fighting was not. The Philadelphia nativist riots followed riots against abolitionists and African-Americans in particular in 1842, and resulted in the burning and looting of many black churches and property. New York experienced major riots through the 1830s and 1840s, culminating in 1849, when class and ethnic tensions exploded at a performance of Macbeth, leading to the death of 25 people and over one hundred injuries. In the 1850s, the city's two rival police forces fought each other and, in this power vacuum, the city's gangs started a year-long violent gang war. In this decade armed uprisings also successfully ruled

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[4] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Cleves, *Terror in America*, pp. 20-57; Fritz, *Sovereigns*; Grimsted, 'Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting', pp. 361-397; Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy*, pp. 1-7.; Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Richards, *Property and Standing*, pp. 85-111; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 94-131; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 11-86; Towers, *The Urban South*; Towers, 'Mobtown's Impact', pp. 469-475; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 15-31. James Madison also warned against a similar phenomenon when defending the United States Constitution. See also James Madison, 'The Same Subject Continued' in J. Miller (ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (Mineola, 2014), pp. 41-47.

New Orleans and San Francisco in the period, and Baltimore too experienced violence at the hands of nativists and firemen.[5]

Moreover, much of this rioting was inherently political. Not only did rioters often have political aims, such as protesting abolitionism, brawling gangs were often politically connected to volunteer fire companies, ward bosses, and police forces. Urban Americans also had a long tradition of using rioting as a legitimate way for the citizens themselves to settle disputes between the governed and the governors. Even eminent citizens often accepted that rioting was a form of democratic expression, even if by the 1840s most had come to oppose it. From the revolutionary era onwards, many Americans had seen in popular violence – ranging from violent urban protest to the Shays and Dorr rebellions – the potential for the people themselves to claim sovereignty outside the formal channels of elections. Some, drawing on earlier traditions of legitimate revolt and community justice, saw this as legitimate. Even wealthy citizens sometimes headed the crowd in the Jacksonian era.[6]

But to conservatives, this right to rebel increasingly looked more like a licence for insurrection, anarchy, and mob rule.[7] If crowd violence could be read as democratic excess, elite control over public space could also become a tool to curb a wider definition of popular sovereignty.[8] Defenders of white male democracy suspected as much. Their concerns often stymied plans for a stronger police force in many cities.[9] Conservatives might not have openly discussed disenfranchisement as a tool to curb the democratic rights of the masses and create a British-style government in the hands of a smaller number of propertied citizens, though such proposals did occasionally surface in the Nativist movement.[10] However, this thinking – that democracy and mob violence were intrinsically linked – was central to how conservatives in the 1850s understood urban disorder as a centralization of power in the assemblage of the people themselves, and in their response, they looked to both restore law and order and curb urban democracy.

Looking at midcentury in this way can help bridge understand the links in antidemocratic politics between the Jacksonian era and the late nineteenth century.

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[5] For work on rioting generally, see Feldberg, *Turbulent Era*; Gilje, *Mobocracy*; Grimstead, *Mobbing*; Howe, *Hath God Wrought*, pp. 432-434; Prince, 'Great Riot Year', pp. 1-19; Richards, *Property and Standing*; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 51-86. For the Philadelphia Nativist Riots, see Feldberg, *Riots of 1844*; pp. Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362; Warner, *Private City*, pp. 143-151; Weigley, 'Border City', p. 368. For rioting in New York City, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, p. 49-50; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 135-841; Keller, *Triumph*, pp. 158-168; Wilbur Miller, *Cops and Bobbies* (Chicago, 1977); James Richardson, 'Mayor Fernando Wood and the New York Police Force, 1855-57', *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 50 (1966), pp. 5-30; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 151-157. For vigilance committees in New Orleans and San Francisco, see Ethington, *Public City*, 86-169; Rousey, *Policing*, pp. 66-67; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 135-180. Baltimore, see Amy Greenberg, 'Mayhem in Mobtown: Firefighting in Antebellum Baltimore', *Maryland Historical Magazine* 90 (1995), pp. 164-179; Towers, 'Mobtown's Impact, pp. 469-475.

[6] Richards, *Property and Standing*.

[7] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Cleves, *Terror in America*, pp. 20-57; Fritz, *Sovereigns*; Grimsted, 'Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting', pp. 361-397; Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Richards, *Property and Standing*, pp. 92-111; Ryan, *Civic Wars*, pp. 94-131; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 11-86; Towers, *The Urban South*; Towers, 'Mobtown's Impact, pp. 469-475; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 15-31, 62-65.

[8] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, pp. 9-190.

[9] Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 15-38, 90-122; Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, pp. 25-73; Rousey, *Policing*, pp. 2-6; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 313-340; Stevenson, *Policing*, pp. 14-19.

[10] For disenfranchisement in the Know-Nothing movement, see Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 49-53; Bruce Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', pp. 455-488. For disenfranchisement campaigns after the Civil War, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 207-236; Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 117-171; Foner, *Reconstruction*, pp. 488-499.

Historians often take the Gilded Age as the beginning of a major conservative turn in approaches to American city government. The most spectacular example of this lies in New York. In 1871, wealthy taxpayers revolted against the high-spending regime of city boss William Tweed, who had used patronage and corruption to reconcile the city's fractured class and ethnic groups. These taxpayers demanded lower taxes, smaller government, and democratic retrenchment; the official inquiry into preventing another Tweed Ring in New York recommended all cities in New York State effectively disenfranchise non-propertyowners in most municipal decision-making.[11] However, conservatives in the 1850s – who were hardly enthusiastic converts to the creed of Jacksonian democracy – used American cities as an opportunity to redefine centralization in the people as a threat to republican government. Like their attempts to combat economic centralization in empire cities, they used urban disorder here to legitimise their own state-building programme, and linked strengthening government to forms of democratic retrenchment.

The riotous antebellum era saw substantial experimentation in local government too. Unlike the 1870s, though, municipal reform tended to mean creating stronger governments rather than just opposition to property taxation and perceived government corruption. Conservatives at midcentury inhabited fragmented cities in which state power – though often considerable in theory – was widely dispersed in practice. Big cities like Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and New Orleans were often divided among multiple municipalities and townships that provided their own police, services, and regulations. Others, including Boston and New York, devolved power among multiple wards and institutions. Police forces, for instance, were sometimes split between different officeholders, and ward aldermen often had substantial authority over criminal justice and improvements within their district. In this regard, American cities resembled the American government, with power divided among many smaller municipalities and states. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that the response to both national and local disorder came to involve a similar programme of centralization.

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[11] For details on the Tweed regime as a tool to maintain order in New York, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 141, 173-175; Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, pp. 195-209; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 1008. For details on the turn against democratic politics in response after 1871, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 172-204, 207-236; Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, pp. 228-236; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 1008-1035; Scobey, *Empire City*, pp. 258-261. See also Evarts et al., *Report of the Commission*.

Illustration 6: *Map of the Circuit Ten Miles Around the City of Philadelphia*
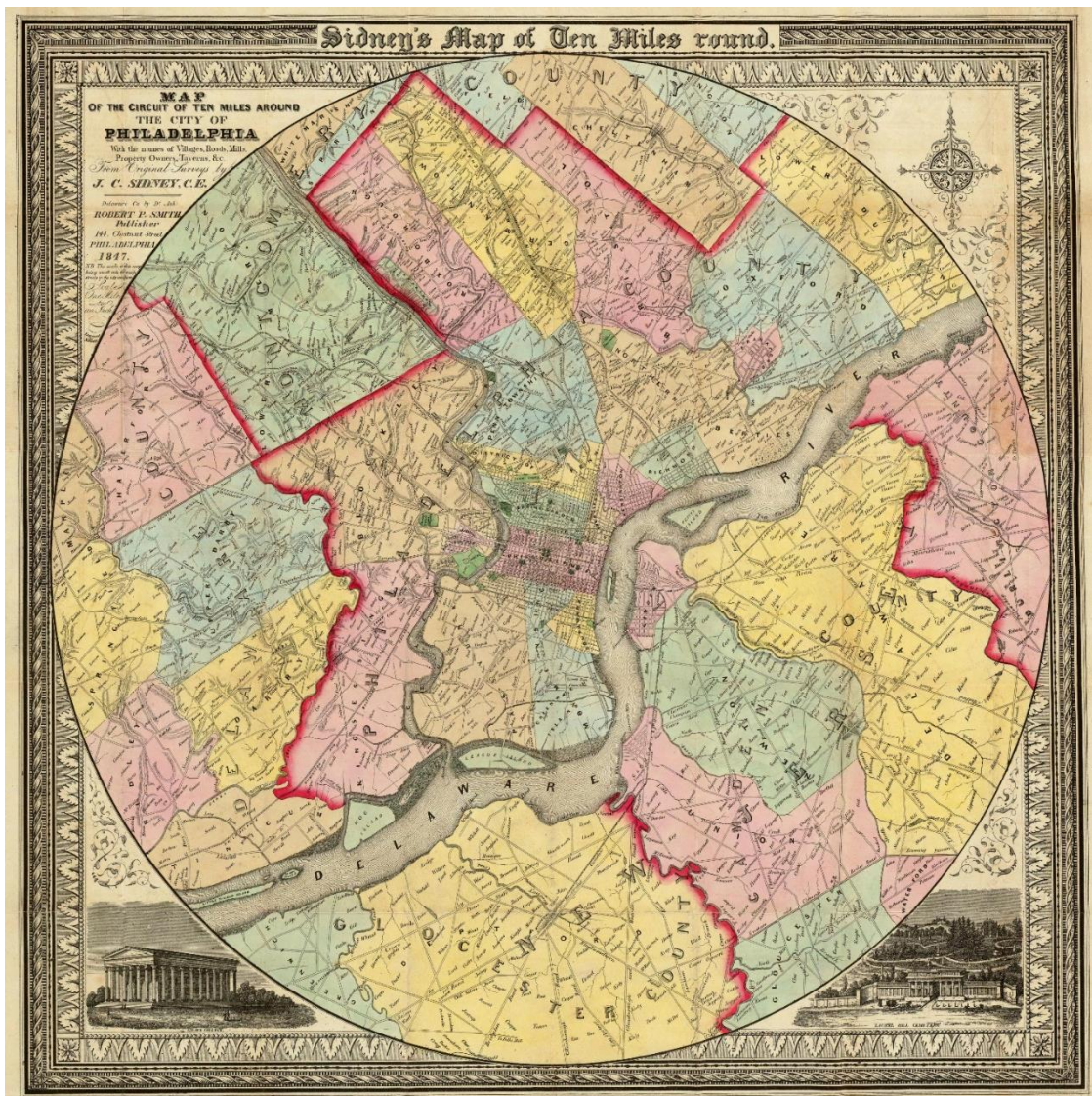
Source: 'Map of the Circuit Ten Miles Around the City of Philadelphia' David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, http://www.davidrumsey.com [Accessed August 19, 2016]. Image copyright © 2000 by Cartography Associates. Image may be reproduced or transmitted, but not for commercial use.

This map shows the area that would become the City of Philadelphia as it existed in 1847, divided among many municipalities each with their own government, debts, and police. The Act of Consolidation, 1854 amalgamated the highlighted area north of the Delaware River into a single city after many years of intense lobbying by municipal reformers.

To many city-dwellers, this decentralized system represented an American tradition of self-government, yet it was one that could seem increasingly outmoded. In the 1850s, many cities turned away from divided municipal authority in favour of what they often called 'consolidation'. Charter reforms in 1853 saw New Orleans and New York restructure their divided city governments. One year later, Brooklyn and Philadelphia annexed their surrounding municipalities and formed big city governments. [12] (For example, see Illustration 6 above.) Reformers saw their projects in centralizing terms. Philadelphian reformer Eli Kirk Price, for example, cited conflict between the intricate networks of elected and appointed boards, commissions, and offices as a reason for consolidation, claiming instead that these needed to be placed under the aegis of a single city government.[13] While these movements took place in individual cities, and were different in each metropolis, Americans saw the consolidation of cities across the nation as part of a national trend towards centralized municipal government.[14]

Other cities removed institutional, rather than geographic, boundaries to government power. Police reform also gave reformers an opportunity to respond to the changes taking place within American cities. Until the 1840s and 1850s, city policing – like municipal government more widely – remained decentralized in the hands of a variety of institutions, notably separate day marshals and night watches, but also ward constables, marshals, and lamp lighters. These often had little overall control and direction. Beginning with New York in 1845, cities therefore began merging these inefficient law-enforcing systems into modern police departments, often accountable directly to the city mayor, and considered tools like uniforms, telegraphs, and firearms to give them more authority over city streets.[15] These were not simple modernizations, even if they were sometimes seen as such, and they often involved fierce political conflict. When the Republican New York State Legislature created a metropolitan wide force in 1857, for example, the existing Municipal Police rejected the authority of the new force, and, instead of disbanding, fought with its

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[12] For a general overview of the movement towards consolidation, see Curry, *Corporate*, pp. 1-32; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Teaford, *City and Suburb*, pp. 5-31; Teaford, *Municipal Revolution*. For coverage of the Boston consolidation and annexation, see Lawrence Kennedy, *The City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst, 1992), pp. 43-108; Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (London, 2010); Allen Wakstein, 'Boston's Search for a Metropolitan Solution', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 38 (1972), pp. 285-296. For coverage of the Brooklyn consolidation, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 719;
Henry Reed Stiles, *A History of the City of Brooklyn*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, 1867) pp. 418-420; E. A. Livingston, *Brooklyn and the Civil War* (Charleston, 2012), pp. 11-13; Stephen Ostrander, *A History of the City of Brooklyn and Kings* County, Vol. II (Brooklyn, 1894), pp. 80-116; Daniel Van Pelt, *Leslie's History of the Greater New York*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1898), pp. 197-198. For coverage of the Philadelphia consolidation, see Geffen, 'Industrial Development, pp. 307-362; McCarthy, 'Philadelphia Consolidation; Warner, *Private City*, pp. 49-157; Weigley, 'Border City, pp. 363-416; Eli Kirk Price, *The History of the Consolidation of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 57. For coverage of charter reform in New York, see Beckert, *Metropolis*, pp. 78-108; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 635-638; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 189-216; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 313-340; James Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (Oxford, 1970); Christopher Thale, 'Assigned to Patrol: Neighborhoods, Police, and Changing Deployment Practices in New York City Before 1930', *Journal of Social History* 37 (2004), p. 1039. For coverage of the consolidation of New Orleans, see Robert Reinders, *End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850-1860* (Gretna, 1964), pp. 63-64; Dennis Rousey, *Policing the Southern City* (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 40-101.
[13] Price, *Consolidation*, pp. 53-55.
[14] 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG*, July 30, 1853.
[15] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 829-831; Curry, *Corporate*, pp. 1-32; Feldberg, *Turbulent Era*, 208-119; De Francias Folsom, *Our Police: A History of the Baltimore Force From the First Watchman to the Latest Appointee* (Baltimore, 1888), pp. 24-44; Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 12-40; Roger Lane, *Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 95-105; Miller, *Cops and Bobbies* pp. 2-24; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 313-340; Stevenson, *Policing*, pp. 14-19, 90-122; Joel Tarr, 'The City and the Telegraph. Urban Communications in a Pre-Telephone Era', *The Journal of Urban History* 14 (1987), pp. 51-68; Weigley, 'Border City', pp. 368-372.

rival in the   streets.[16] Others denounces measures like police uniforms, meanwhile, as militaristic and authoritarian.[17] Where consolidation helped remove geographic boundaries to government power, cities also looked to removing institutional barriers that restricted the government when it sought to impose order on citizens, but neither project was uncontested.

American conservatives engaged with – and sometimes led – these municipal reform movements. The leader of the consolidation movement in Philadelphia, Eli Kirk Price, for example, took part in union meetings[18] that denounced abolitionists for threatening the Union, affirmed the harmony between the free and slave states, and suggested that Pennsylvania counties should be liable for compensating slaveholders for fugitive slaves.[19] He also supported Buchanan as a union candidate against John C. Frémont in 1856 and John Bell over Abraham Lincoln in 1860.[20] Additionally, conservative leaning newspapers often provided the strongest support for city reform movements. The New York *Herald* was one of the foremost proponents of centralizing New York City's myriad elected and appointed officeholders, boards, and departments into a single city government in the 1850s.[21] Price's good friend, the newspaper editor and conservative Whig-Republican Morton McMichael, presided at a public meeting in support of consolidation and wrote about the movement extensively in his *North American*; he chaired the committee that drew up a new charter in 1853-4, which included wealthy Democrats, Whigs, and Nativists.[22] Conservative papers with partisan inclinations here saw themselves working towards similar ends too. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* argued consolidation was an electoral opportunity for Whig conservatives, and the Democratic Brooklyn *Eagle*, which positioned itself as a bipartisan 'conservative' alternative to radical Whiggery, which it associated with 'fanaticism', also supported Brooklyn's union.[23] Consolidations typically drew support of economic elites regardless of party affiliations.

Historians of these movements have often seen them part of a city booster impulse that led many citizens to embrace the internal improvements and railroad construction outlined in the previous chapter. Believing that 'bigger is better' – as Kenneth Jackson put it – boosters boasted about the size of their consolidated cities' and believed that their rank in the census and their territorial dimensions reflected their modern, prosperous, and metropolitan condition.[24] Other have seen consolidations like Philadelphia's in 1854 as backward-looking measures – lackadaisical responses to disorder that failed to confront entrenched interests - rather than attempts to create modern city governments.[25] But these scholars have been exceptions. Writing about the consolidation of Philadelphia, one

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[16] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 835-841, 927-928.

[17] Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 90-122; Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, pp. 25-73; Rousey, *Policing*, pp. 2-6; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 313-340; Stevenson, *Policing*, pp. 14-19. See also James Gerard, *London and New York: Their Crime and Police* (New York, 1853), pp. 17-18; 'Police Badge of Uniform', *NA&USG*, August 11, 1854; 'Common Council', *BDE*, January 3, 1854; New York Police Uniform, *The Sun* (January 10, 1854); 'Police Uniform', *Baltimore Sun*, December 29, 1853.

[18] For more on Philadelphia's conservative union movements, see chapter 4.

[19] 'Union Rally', *PI*, December 14, 1860.

[20] [Untitled], *Republican Compiler*, September 18, 1856; 'Meeting of the Bell-Everett Executve Committee', *Altoona Tribune*, October 04, 1860; 'The Electoral Tickets', *Weekly Mariettian*, November 03, 1860.

[21] Fermer, *Gordon Bennett*, pp. 72-78.

[22] 'Consolidation', *PI* (March 11, 1854).

[23] 'The Coming Election And The Prospect The Consolidated City', PI, May 31, 1854; 'The State Ticket-The Horizon Clearing Up', *BDE*, September 30, 1854; 'The Party of Principle', *BDE*, October 10, 1854.

[24] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 144-145.

[25] Warner, *Private City*, pp. 49-157.

historian, more typically, sees the 1854 charter as part of a programme of modernisation that created a more democratic, efficient, and nationally prestigious metropolis.[26] Many others argue that urban elites turned to city consolidation as a tool of social control, as they looked to extend police powers over riotous citizens, at the cost of the civic engagement and democratic culture that marked the decentralised eighteenth-century system of city government. In this respect, police reform, school reform, and crackdowns on prostitution, gambling, and, alcohol all proceeded together.[27]

For conservatives, though, modernisation and social control – curbing the violent democratic excess – went hand in hand. As much as many other reformers, conservatives were dissatisfied with an outdated system of government and wanted municipalities capable of promoting their city and intervening in the wider economy. This fitted within their own conservative vision of modernisation. They sought to build a stronger government, restrain the influence of propertyless voters, and ensure urban development over time took place under what David Scobey calls elite 'stewardship' – government by a supposedly high-minded propertied elite.[28] City reform movements offered conservatives the opportunity to pursue this much wider reform of politics and society that went well beyond their own municipal boundaries. The fact that cities or towns were the layer of government Americans interacted with on a regular basis meant that local reform, especially when it came to enforcing law and order, gave conservatives the opportunity to radically change the relationship between the state and the people, while seemingly leaving the federal structure of the American government relatively untouched.[29] As William Novak and others have pointed out, states often outsourced the police power reserved to them by the 10th Amendment – the power to regulate for the common good – to municipalities, which, in contrast to the carefully circumscribed Federal government, therefore wielded considerable capacity to intervene in everyday life.[30] Historians haver therefore used the distinction between a relatively weak federal government and relatively vigorous local government to understand how the American state remained both decentralised but relatively powerful.

American cities in the 1850s were violent places. Many cities responded to the problem of disorder with a programme of centralization. Some sought to enlarge city governments by merging multiple local governments into larger consolidated cities. Others sought to amend or replace their city charters and strengthen city government with streamlined law enforcement powers. Conservatives often engaged with these movements, lending support to reforms that sought to bring stronger government to city streets. However, the conservative assumption that public violence was a symptom of democratic excess suggests that their motives for doing so may have extended beyond simply curbing crime. As when observing Paris and when looking to build governments capable of reforming economic geography, conservatives may have seen embracing the cause of centralization at a local level as part of a wider reform to reassert the role of property and elites in governing the American people.

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[26] McCarthy, 'Reappraisal', pp. 531-548.

[27] Feldberg, *Turbulent* Era, pp. 104-119; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 335-362; Johnson, *Policing*; Warner, *Private City*, pp. 152-157.

[28] Scobey, *Empire City*, pp. 210-213.

[29] Gerstle, 'Resilient Power of the States', pp. 61-87.

[30] Curry, *Corporate City*; Gerstle, 'A State Both Strong and Weak', pp. 779-785; Gerstle, 'Resilient Power of the States', 61-87; Novack, 'Myth of the "Weak" American State', pp. 752-772; Novack, *People's Welfare*.

Conservative City Reform as a Centralization of Power

Conservatives applied similar ideas about centralization of power in institutions and over geography that they had used to understand France and urban imperialism to understand the politics of reform in American cities. Like critics of the Second Republic and empire cities, opponents of city reform and consolidation movements often used centralization pejoratively as a political weapon to delegitimise plans to create larger governments, and warned of dependence on remote sources of power. Rather than denying that they were centralizing power, consolidationists and city reformers accepted the charge, and argued that centralizations of power were necessary in a modern metropolis. They, too, accepted that reforms like police telegraphs and enlarged municipal boundaries helped the city extend power outwards, and that establishing impersonal bureaucracies could strengthen government institutions and their ability to compel citizens to the will of government. Conceptualising these changes to city government as a process of centralization therefore helped conservatives understand how city reform might remove institutional and geographic barriers to executive power and create new centres of political authority.

To more than a few Americans, mid-century city governments seemed increasingly dysfunctional, but whether centralization was the right response was open to debate. In New York, for example, commercial growth in the 1840s had not solved the problem of rising property taxes, while city services, such as wharves and docks, the paving and clearing of streets, and the provision of effective policing, remained conspicuously poor. Mayors had advocated a radical restructuring of government in response to these issues. Mayor Robert Morris had in the 1840s proposed to make all city offices elective and to devolve huge amounts of power to individual wards to give the people power to directly control their government. One of his successors, William Hevemeyer, who would serve a second term as a municipal reformer in the 1870s, conversely, proposed creating a far stronger municipal civil service and streamlining the divided executive branch to improve city efficiency. However, none of these programmes came into effect. New Yorkers could never agree whether an efficient city government required strengthening the executive or dividing its power among elective officeholders to prevent executive tyranny.[31] While there seemed agreement on the need for government reform, there seemed less agreement on how to do this in practice.

Such contrasting views on the wisdom of remaking municipal government appeared in other cities too. When reformers proposed merging municipalities into larger consolidated cities, opponents invoked 'centralization' again, casting tyrannical local government as a threat in a similar manner to the way Carey and others had warned of distant imperial cities and colonial metropoles. For example, in Southwark district – an independent municipality just south of Philadelphia proper – commissioners claimed that annexation to their larger neighbour would lead to a 'centralization of power in the hands of the few'.[32] Maurice Richter, a Brooklyn-based physician and publicist[33] warned that 'Encroachments' and 'Consolidations' into larger cities caused 'Centralization' and 'Despotism'.[34]

Critics imagined that, as well as concentrating power in a small number of people, institutions, and officeholders, consolidation would concentrate political authority inwards

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[31] Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 45-66.
[32] 'Local Affairs', *PL*, January 17, 1851.
[33] W.H. Smith, *Smith's Brooklyn Directory*, *1856* (Brooklyn, 1856), p. 267.
[34] Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 183.

at the expense of the urban periphery. Echoing on a local scale the kinds of concerns that Henry Carey and other city boosters had seen in New York and London's growing geographic dominion, some warned that more remote seats of government posed a threat. A correspondent to the *Cleveland Herald* feared that 'the balance of power would be in the lands of the West side of the Cuyahoga' if the city consolidated with its western suburbs, while Williamsburgh papers claimed consolidation with Brooklyn would displace the city from its present 'central' position.[35][36] Brooklynites, too, warned that consolidation with Manhattan would 'remove the seat of government' across the East River.[37] Opponents of consolidation used centralization to counsel that territorially larger governments would create bonds of dependency between city centres and citizens of surrounding suburbs, neighbourhoods, and towns. Such ties, they suggested, were too high a price to pay for bringing order.

As with the spreading ties of urban infrastructure, conservatives also saw the extension of a municipality's territorial reach as a tool to extend power relationships over greater territory. What it did not resolve was whether it would centralize power in the right people and places. Richter, for example, elaborated on how big cities created ties of dependency between people and government, contrasting London, Dresden, and Paris's town, ward, and borough authorities under weak central city government to the 'pyramid of official bureaus' of bureaucratic, consolidated city government. [38] Smaller municipal governments, relying on more personal relationships, would allow the people and the government to exercise 'mutual control' over one other, without needing long-distance ties of bureaucratic dependency.[39] The danger of an enlarged city government lay not so much in its vast patronage – the bugbear of many reformers – but rather because it established impersonal bureaucratic ties between citizen and state that enabled the government to exercise power without restraint. Others though could see this impersonality as an advantage in overcoming local sources of power. The conservative Whig *Philadelphia Inquirer*, for example, agreed with Richter that consolidation bound people to the state through the institutions and workings of government, but saw this as a virtue rather than a flaw. [40]

The forces driving these changes were not just a matter of re-drawing borders. Just as railroads redrew national power relationships around mid-century, technological advancements did the same in cities. By the mid-1850s several municipalities had adopted police telegraphs, which allowed the circulation of information across rapidly extending metropolitan areas, and helped direct state power quickly to where it was needed. Police reformers understood this too. In similar language to Francis Lieber, who had claimed that Paris had 'telegraphed to the departments' the Revolution of 1848,[41] the *Baltimore Sun*, as part of their campaign for the consolidation of a new police department, cited evidence from Philadelphia of how a police telegraph office allowed police officers to relay orders, the Mayor to direct subordinates, and officials to transmit dispatches to city government. [42]

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[35] 'The Consolidation Scheme', *BDE*, June 7, 1853.
[36] Forest City, 'Cleveland and Ohio City Annexation', *The Cleveland Herald*, September 5, 1851.
[37] 'More Consolidation', *BDE* February 28, 1857.
[38] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 149-150.
[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 120, 149-150.
[40] 'The Consolidation of the Police', *PL*, January 04, 1850; 'The Consolidated City--The Duties of the Mayor', *PL*, September 7, 1854.
[41] Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. II (Philadelphia, 1853), pp. 100-101.
[42] 'The Fire and Police Telegraph', *The Sun*, December 9, 1856.

Conservatives, indeed, tended looked on approvingly at the technological advancements that brought state power into suburbs. The Philadelphia paper owned by Morton Michael – who had fought suburban rioters as county sheriff in the 1840s – noted soon before the Civil War how horse-drawn trams, an innovation of the late 1850s, had resulted 'in the carrying of law and order among the rude urchins of the outlying streets and districts.'[43] To reformers, increasing government's geographic reach and technological capacity allowed a state to impose its will on citizens. Reforming supposedly dysfunctional city administrations would allow governments to impose their power vertically from officeholders and institutions over the people and horizontally from the centre to the periphery.

This two-fold process of centralization, rather than taking America back to the past, seemed an important part of how the United States would cope with its projected urban future. The New York lawyer and police reformer James Gerard[44] – a leader of the conservative union movement in the 1850s – described London and Paris as 'a century ahead of us' in their ability to maintain order, but he remained concerned that despotic governments used these police forces as tools of coercion.[45] While Gerard understood republican warnings against strong states and centralized government, he saw that New York needed a government capable of dealing with a modern city.[46] Indeed, conservative reformers like Eli Kirk Price, the *North American*, and the *Baltimore American* also indicated that urban areas divided among petty municipalities belonged to an outmoded agrarian age. Cities, they believed, needed stronger government to impose order on a society growing more disorderly over time. They expected 'centralization' and the strong power relationships it brought would help them keep up with a changing society around them.[47] To these Americans, the process of centralization meant modernization and progress, as it gave government the tools to impose order on cities that grew more diverse, disorderly, and larger over time.

Others, though, felt that the power of large cities posed a threat rather than the opportunity, and Europe again served as a warning rather than an example to follow. Richter, in writing about consolidation, policing, and municipal government, felt that large cities 'monarchized' republics, as larger polities required European-style state intervention.[48] Progress, he argued, meant large states and cities should divide as their population grew, lest the polity fall victim to the 'monarchy' and 'centralization' of powerful government.[49] But both supporters and opponents of municipal reform expected government power to grow with cities themselves, although they seemed unable to agree on whether this was always a good thing in practice.

American supporters and opponents of these city reform movements understood city reform as a process of centralization of political authority. Indeed, opponents often accused reformers of being centralizers as a political weapon to undermine these changes, just as

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[43] *North American and United States Gazette*, June 16, 1859.

[44] In 1850 James Gerard, a lawyer and minor Democratic politician in New York City, supported the Union Party movement in opposition to abolitionism (see chapter four) but opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act following 1854. He is also described as being a leading campaigner for police and school reform in antebellum New York City. *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. VII (New York, 1931), pp. 217-218.

[45] Gerard, *Police*, pp. 6-7.

[46] Price, *History of Consolidation*, pp. 50-57.

[47] 'The Mayor's Communication', *BA*, January 21, 1851; J. S. P. 'Consolidation is a Fixed Fact', *NA&USG*, November 26, 1853.

[48] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 5-10, 294-300.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 140-158, 270-271, 287, 294-300.

opponents of New York or London's commercial growth had done. Conservatives also conceptualised these changes as processes of centralization, just they had done so to understand the changing power relationships of Second Empire France and internal improvements. Both supporters and opponents recognised that these seemingly small changers to city government could remove some of the barriers to state authority and allowed city government to exercise stronger power over a larger area. Given the importance of their local governments to the American constitution, it is perhaps unsurprising that seemingly trivial changes to municipal authorities could seem like a more fundamental reorganisation of the state, in which republicanism might give way to something approaching monarchy, or order could come out of anarchy. Thinking about the process of centralization at a local level could therefore help conservatives think about the relationship between the people and government more widely.

Consolidation and Urban Disorder

Conservatives who supported consolidation movements conceptualised the urban disorder that they supposed plagued their cities in a way that mirrored their reading of the Second French Republic. Like the Paris mob, they suggested that urban rioters had monopolised violence and power in public space and become a state within a state, like the French republican counterparts. The American people, too, could drive a dangerous process of centralization straight into the wrong hands. Conservatives therefore conceptualised riot and reform as an issue of government strength against government weakness. Conservatives therefore turned to the city reform movements of mid-century America as a tool to bring about law and order, centralizing power on their own terms. Rather than seeing geographic and institutional barriers on government power as necessary guarantors against tyrannical government – as federalism and checks and balances did nationally – urban conservatives sought to remove them. They did so by consolidating executive authority, creating police forces, and abolishing the political boundaries between municipalities. Conservative critics of consolidation may have opposed creating larger municipalities, but far from rejecting centralization in principle, they demanded centralizations more amenable to control by their own party. Conservatives therefore used geographic and institutional centralizations of power as tools to strengthen city governments in response to a violent threat from below, as well as compete among themselves for power to direct this new stronger government.

City reformers focused on combating urban violence in midcentury American cities. Philadelphia's consolidated city charter reformed the police department, and followed years of lobbying to reform the police system, which had already resulted in the creation of a metropolitan wide force in 1850 – a compromise between conservatives and politicians who disagreed over whether a full consolidation was necessary. The city government also established a police telegraph system to ensure the new department could efficiently patrol the entire city from its central headquarters.[50] The consolidation of Brooklyn also coincided with the foundation of a stronger police department for the entire city, and the first mayor of the consolidated city had a record of lobbying for police reform.[51] Historians of

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[50] Weigley, 'Border City', pp. 368-372.
[51] Jacob Judd, 'Policing the City of Brooklyn in the 1840s and 1850s', *Journal of Long Island History* 6 (1966), pp. 13-22; Stiles, *History of the City of Brooklyn*, vol. 2, p. 273.

consolidation, indeed, have often seen social control as the main motive for extending the territorial and administrative powers of municipal governments.[52]

Cities that did not annex smaller neighbours also looked to strengthen law enforcement. In mid-century New York City, wealthy citizens had been demanding a 'civic army' since the 1840s, and charter reforms of 1845 and 1852 did not satisfy their desire for change. James Gerard, for instance, vividly compared disorderly New York at midcentury to the supposedly peaceful streets of London under the watch of the Metropolitan Police.[53] Fernando Wood, Mayor of New York from 1855-1858 and a prosperous merchant, won election as a Louis-Napoleon-esque figure who could bring order out of New York's chaos, although most turned against him once he endorsed workingmen's calls for public aid after the Panic of 1857.[54]

Elsewhere concerns over disorder led to real and imagined seizures of state power on the part of 'best men'. The San Francisco Vigilance Committee – largely made up of the mercantile community – overthrew the city's elected government and executed and exiled enemies in 1856 partially because elite citizens believed the city government had grown too corrupt to maintain local law and order.[55] Sidney George Fisher, one of the leading conservative diarists of the age, predicted that rioting and crime would make the same kind of coup necessary in New York and Philadelphia.[56] Indeed conservatives in eastern cities often approved the actions of San Francisco's genteel vigilantes, who carefully staged rituals of government to ensure that their reign over the city looked more legitimate to elites than mob law.[57] Across the United States, conservatives in major cities sought various changes to city government in response to the threat of popular disorder. In doing so they created the physical, legal, and extra-legal infrastructure – uniformed police, telegraph lines, and institutions like consolidated municipal governments and vigilance committees – that gave the centre power over a wide area.

To justify such changes, conservatives described their cities as under mob rule, arguing a violent people seemed to hold complete authority over public space. Conservatives described rioters, gangs, and criminals as a source of power able to control the whole city, similar in composition and character to the Paris mob in the Second Republic. The lurid descriptions of urban violence in editorials proposing reform emphasised the violent control that the people could exercise over the city.[58] The fact that rioters, gangs, and mobs had access to guns, while policemen patrolled unarmed, seemed particular evidence that a state

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[52] Feldberg, *Riots of 1844*; Feldberg, *Turbulent Era*, pp. 9-32; Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 15-38; Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 346-359; Warner, *Private City*, pp. 125-157.

[53] Gerard, *Police*, pp. 3, 6-11.

[54] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 826-835; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 313-340, 364-400; Thale, 'Assigned to Patrol', p. 1039.

[55] Philip Ethington, *The Public City* (London, 1994), pp. 86-169. For examples of Eastern support for the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance, see 'The California Vigilance Committee', *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 1, 1856; [Untitled], *SWC&NYE*, June 16, 1856; 'A Few Facts in Defence of the Vigilance Committee of San Francisco', *NYH*, August 3, 1856; 'The Revolution in California', *NYH*, June 29, 1856; 'The Emeute in San Francisco-Committees of Safety', *NYH*, July 6, 1856; [Untitled], *SWC&NYE*, August 2, 1856.

[56] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1858, pp. 137-138, June 4, 1858; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1857, p. 141, October 2, 1857.

[57] Ethington, *Public City*, pp. 97-105, 143-145, 145-149.

[58] C., 'The Riots—No. 1', *NA&USG*, October 23, 1849; 'The Robbery and murder of Burd', *The Sun*, August 21, 1850.

monopoly on legitimate force was a fiction in American cities.[59] Conservative commentators in Philadelphia and Baltimore both described gangs – dozens of which flourished in midcentury metropolises – as literally ruling the streets in place of civil authority.[60] The *Baltimore Sun* could warn that rioting – in which gangs often participated – would create an anarchic city divided into 'feudal' and 'warlike factions'. It marked a 'total perversion of the republican theory' to the paper because popular violence challenged the principle that government, not the people, should wield power in public.[61] Private groups, distributed across the city, and ready to use violence therefore seemed to hold ultimate sovereignty because of a weak state unable to wield power from the central seats of city institutions.[62]

Urban disorder therefore illustrated, to conservatives, a problem of state weakness, as the people formed dangerous states within states that were simultaneously geographically decentralized among gangs and rioters across the city, but institutionally centralized in the democratic principle and urban violence. The reforms they demanded in response would tie individual citizens all over the city to the municipal government and ensure that the state held a monopoly on violence with no rival sovereignties to challenge its authority.

To combat these states within a state, then, conservatives looked to centralize power in governments capable of maintaining state control over the city. Where Richter saw the power centralization brought as dangerous, reformers tended to see necessary government authority over the people as a tool to maintain law and order. Conservatives described their projects in hegemonic terms of state power and supremacy, emphasising that the state should direct violence against rival sovereignties in their cities. Baltimore papers pressed for the 'supremacy of the law', an 'energetic interposition of the law', and 'quietness and order' on city streets.[63] And in New York, even though the Democratic *Herald* and Republican-leaning *Courier and Enquirer* opposed the partisan Metropolitan Police, both demanded after riots in 1857 a 'thorough' force to maintain order, the vigorous use of the 'strong arm of the law', and the strengthening of the 'powers of their chief magistrate' on the London and Paris model.[64] In Philadelphia and New Orleans, too, conservatives warned that the American people as much as the French needed 'military resistance to popular insurrection' and 'power' to keep them in line.[65] This language of 'power', 'forcible resistance' to 'insurrection', and 'order' all suggested that conservatives intended to ensure that the people were subject to the power of the state. Conservative consolidationists therefore saw their

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[59] 'Law and Order', *BA*, November 22, 1850; C., 'The Riots—No. 1', *NA&USG*, October 23, 1849; [Unreadable], *The Sun*, November 18, 1850; 'Outlawry of the City', *The Sun*, November 12, 1850.
[60] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1857, p. 161, November 1, 1857, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 89-192, July 22, 1848.
[Untitled], *The Daily Exchange*, June 24, 1858; 'The Mayor's Communication', *BA*, January 21, 1851; 'The Youth of the City', *The Sun*, November 14, 1850; 'Outlawry of the City', *The Sun*, November 12, 1850.
[61] 'Riot', *The Sun*, October 6, 1856.
[62] Many Americans had thought about the possibility of private groups holding a monopoly on violence over a small territory within the larger polity. Stephanie McCury, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 219-220; Heath, 'Small Men', pp. 222-243.
[63] 'Law and Order', *BA*, November 22, 1850; 'Our Municipal Election', *The Sun*, October 8, 1856; [Illegible], *The Sun*, November 18, 1850; 'The Peace of the City', *BA*, October 14, 1856; 'The Peace of the City', *BA*, October 8, 1852; 'Law and Order', *BA*, November 22, 1850; 'The Mayor's Communication', *BA*, January 21, 1851; [Untitled], *The Daily Exchange*, March 26, 1858; 'Lawlessness', *The Sun*, October 15, 1850.
[64] 'The Late Riots – Prompt Judicial Action Required', *NYH*, July 10, 1857; 'Important Political Movement', *NYH*, July 26, 1857; 'The Police Commissioners', *New York Evening Express*, January 29, 1858.
[65] C., 'The Riots—No. 1', *NA&USG*, October 23, 1849; 'Charter Amendments', *DP*, January 21, 1855; 'City Charter', *DP*, February 7, 1854.

reforms as tools to increase the authority of the state over the people. They wanted to create a simpler, more visible state government that would allow the institutions and individuals at the centre to extend their authority over the people of the hinterland. They clearly visualised government agents imposing order and ensuring that the government ruled city streets. In place of a 'spirit of lawless insubordination', the press imagined a polity where the people owed the government obedience and respect. [66] The consolidated and policed city, conservatives hoped, would have a single sovereign, capable of governing a midcentury metropolis, in place of the centralization of power in the mob.

Streamlining government institutions so that they could more easily exercise state power allowed conservatives to strengthen the power relationships that bound the people to the government. Newspapers in Baltimore, for example, argued that merging the city's day police and night watch as part of their reform programme would encourage the 'efficiency' of the police department and guarantee an active corps of beat policemen in place of the supposedly passive watch.[67] The *Sun* insisted an 'energetic Mayor of Baltimore' would ensure 'an active, zealous exercise of that [municipal] authority'.[68] The division of the police, such voices suggested, inhibited an active city government that could govern the streets. When the Louisiana state legislature placed New Orleans's police under the control of a multi-member board, city critics argued too that where having a single Mayoral executive gave law enforcement 'promptness' and 'efficiency', the new organisation would always be 'weak and 'feeble'. [69] Such a board could never maintain order as well as a single officeholder. [70] Again, reformers hoped that consolidating control over local law enforcement in a smaller number of officeholders with fewer checks on their power would lead to a more active government capable of limiting popular violence and disorder. Simplifying government institutions could make it easier for a small number of men to make policy decisions and have them enforced over the entire territory of the metropolis. Consolidators therefore recognised that seemingly trivial bureaucratic reforms could enable stronger government from the centre.

Indeed, when it was their man in charge, conservative consolidators cheered 'one man' government as bringing order to city and government. The *Herald* opposed weak government, at least, so long as its favourite Democrat Wood held the Mayor's office, fearing the 'paralysis', 'municipal decay', and 'anarchy' that would set in without someone of his ilk. [71] But in 1857, Republicans increased the number of independently elected city officers in New York to curb Wood's authority. In response, the *Herald* suggested that this blatantly partisan reform 'aggravates the present scheme of decentralization' and counselled that 'such a contrived government could never exercise power as efficiently as one

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[66] 'Outlawry of the City', *The Sun* (November 12, 1850).

[67] [Illegible], *The Sun*, November 21, 1850; [Illegible], *The Sun*, November 20, 1850; [Illegible], *The Sun*, November 18, 1850.

[68] 'Our Municipal Election', *The Sun*, October 8, 1856.

[69] 'Legislation for the City', *DP*, January 21, 1856; 'Police Board', *DP*, March 10, 1855.

[70] 'The Police Board, *DP*, August 28, 1854; 'Police Board', *DP*, March 10, 1855; 'City Charter', *DP*, February 7, 1854.

[71] 'Important Political Movement', *NYH*, July 26, 1857; 'The Prospects of a New City Charter', *NYH*, November 28, 1856, 'The Court of Appeals on Municipal Liberty', *NYH*, June 13, 1857; 'The Mayor's Message—The New City Charter', *NYH*, January 6, 1857.

officeholder.[72] And it reminded the New York *Tribune* that it too had once believed adding to 'the complication which renders our municipal administration unwieldly to a proverb' would lead to riot and disorder.[73] Only a 'centralization of authority' and 'concentration of responsibility' in the Mayor, giving Wood complete control of the police, city departments, and offices, could bring order to city government.[74] The *Herald* saw the plethora of elected officeholders as a check on state power, but rather than seeing this as a necessary guarantor of republican liberty, it appeared to the paper as the symptom of a dysfunction that led to disorder.

Such views extended beyond a paper with Democratic sympathies, and even those with little time for figures like Wood often supported centralization of executive power in a single office. New York's conservative *Courier and Enquirer*, for example, shared the *Herald*'s scepticism at the decentralizing thrust of Jacksonian democracy, describing the number of elected officials as a 'monster' and demanding that the executive be 'strengthened', even if it meant handing power to a Democratic mayor.[75] Eli Kirk Price, retrospectively defending consolidation, boasted that 'a single Executive' could use Philadelphia's new police telegraph to 'meet riotous proceedings'.[76] Within their municipalities, these conservatives embraced centralization, arguing that consolidating power in one man could bring order to a turbulent democracy where the checks and balances of Madisonian government and Jacksonian government could not.

Removing institutional barriers to state power was only one weapon in conservatives' arsenal. They also saw urban disorder as a problem of power over space. To bring peace to the riotous streets of suburban Philadelphia, consolidators in the city argued that 'the extension of a strong government to weak and neglected suburban districts carries with it the blessings of order'.[77] The New Orleans *Picayune* too claimed that a police under 'one central and experienced authority' would bring order over the city's municipalities.[78] Such perspectives on consolidation implicitly involved extending the supposed order, harmony, and government of the centre over conflict-ridden, weak, and disorderly suburbia. Consolidation would carry order out from the centre to the hinterland, but even reformers who did not envision expanding municipal boundaries supported this geographic extension of power. In New York, police reformer and union Party activist James Gerard praised London's police for their 'constant communication by telegraph from the great station at Whitehall to all parts of' the city, with information 'radiating and communicating like a spider's web from the chief office as the common centre, to all the ramifications of the great metropolis.'[79] Gerard joined other conservative admirers of England's capital in boasting

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[72] 'The Municipal Case in the Court of Appeals', *NYH*, July 11, 1857; 'Debut of the Metropolitan Police – Their Baptism in Blood', *NYH*, July 7, 1857; 'Municipal Affairs', *NYH*, May 5, 1857; 'The City Charter', *NYH*, February 06, 1857.

[73] 'The Tribune on the New Police Law', *NYH* (July 8, 1857).

[74] 'The Mayor's Message—The New City Charter', *NYH*, January 6, 1857; 'Prospect of a City Government at last', *NYH*, March 2, 1860; 'Municipal Affairs', *NYH*, May 5, 1857; 'The prospects of a New City Charter', *NYH*, November 28, 1856.

[75] [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, December 27, 1856; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, December 13, 1856; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, December 6, 1856.

[76] Price, *History of Consolidation*, p. 135.

[77] Frank, 'Philadelphia Correspondence', *Charleston Courier*, July 24, 1854; 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG*, July 30, 1853; 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG*, July 30, 1853; 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, August 13, 1855.

[78] 'The New Police', *DP*, April 22, 1852.

[79] Gerard, *Police*, pp. 11-12.

that 'the eye of the Policeman, in his steady, ceaseless round' put the entire city under the supervision of the government'.[80] Conservatives who shared such views sought to subject suburbs to a new geography of power in which the city projected authority over its suburban hinterland, a local equivalent of their designs for urban imperialism.

Sharing power among multiple municipalities across the city only encouraged disorder where a central government could act in what conservatives believed was the interest of the whole metropolis.[81] Both the Brooklyn *Eagle* and Eli Kirk Price blamed the 'mutual contest' and 'conflicting interests' between adjoining and overlapping municipal governments for disorder, and prescribed amalgamation as a remedy.[82] The *Eagle*, indeed, saw in Philadelphia's riotous fire companies – often closely tied to street gangs and aligned with suburban politicians – as an example of what Brooklyn could expect if it failed to consolidate its city, village, and township governments.[83] Instead of containing corrupt power, such voices insisted, small municipalities inhibited the pursuit of the common good. Cleveland's *Herald* thus argued that the 'union' of Cleveland and Ohio City would end disputes over bridges, dredging, and navigation of the Cuyahoga River, as well as strengthen law enforcement.[84] To city reformers, rather than checking the power of a corruptible government, the boundaries separating local centres of political authority actually led to disorder within the metropolitan region, and inhibited the kind of policies required for development.

When looking for stronger local government, these conservatives looked for analogies at national and international levels. Conservatives who saw divided government as an impediment to development sometimes praised Napoleon III's centralized government for its ability to develop the French economy by building railroads and canals. Both the *Cleveland Herald* and Morton McMichael's Philadelphia *North American* praised Napoleon III's strong, imperial state for delivering the commercial prosperity that the Second Republic had been unable to create.[85] The logic of state centralization could be scaled up or down, with debates about political economy – as Robin Einhorn has argued in the case of Chicago – having ramifications at municipal, state, and federal levels.[86] Similar ideas about the boundaries between different municipal governments, would also come to influence conservatives when they looked to stronger government to prevent the disorder of national disunion.

Conservatives indeed believed that the invisible boundaries between municipalities weakened the executive power of central governments. This could be useful or dangerous, as many challenged Napoleonic centralization, threats to the federal system, and even metropolitan consolidations when they threatened to centralize power beyond conservative control. Francis Lieber, for example, warned that Paris had deliberately redrawn French

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[80] 'City Police Arrangement', *The Sun*, November 19, 1850; Gerard, *Police*, p. 6.

[81] For more on this thesis, see Heath, 'Small Men', pp. 222-243.

[82] Price, *History of Consolidation*, pp. 51-57; 'Consolidation Town meeting', *PI*, August 11, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 29, 1853.

[83] 'Consolidation', *BDE* (August 1, 1853).

[84] 'Harbor Obstructions', *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, May 6, 1854; 'Union of Cleveland and Ohio Cities', *The Cleveland Herald* March 4, 1851; Quoted in 'Union of Cleveland and Ohio City, *Plain Dealer*, November 23, 1853; 'Union of the Cities', *The Cleveland Herald*, October 13, 1851.

[85] 'Designs of Napoleon', *The Cleveland Herald*, December 29, 1852; 'Municipal Improvements – Paris', *NA&USG*, November 8, 1853; 'Great Cities', *NA&USG*, July 27, 1860.

[86] Einhorn, *Property*, pp. 68-86; Heath, 'In Union', pp. 101-24; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 15-54.

municipal boundaries to wield power over the rest of the nation.[87] City reformers agreed, but wanted to use this newfound source of political power. Having rival police forces had prevented New Orleans and Philadelphia from maintaining order. [88] Commentators recognised that the division of Philadelphia and Brooklyn into 'little local governments' had 'paralyzed' state power, as the polities limited policemen to working within their invisible municipal boundaries, while fugitives crossed borders and evaded justice.[89] Brooklyn and Philadelphia's consolidationists shared Lieber's assumption that dividing law enforcement power within strictly defined boundaries weakened government's ability to suppress popular violence – and turned to a 'powerful central government' or a 'centralized' administration to strengthen police power.[90] They agreed with Lieber that ancient municipal boundaries prevented political power spreading out from city centres – but saw the process on a municipal scale as a way to impose order. Indeed, the *Picayune* claimed that ending the division of the New Orleans police into multiple municipalities would give government 'energy and efficiency' in place of weakness.[91] Price meanwhile compared the process of consolidation in Philadelphia to that of the replacement of the Articles of Confederation, drawing from a conservative reading of the Constitution as a document designed to replace ineffective state governments with a powerful central government in Washington that could suppress disorderly states and people.[92] Adopting the mantra of states' rights within the city, he warned, invited Shays-like uprisings on the streets of Philadelphia. Embracing the process of opening up power relationships and removing boundaries to the power of the state might seem dangerous nationally, but at the local level, they supported centralization so that the centre could rule the masses.

Not all conservatives were happy to support consolidation, and pressed their claims in the language of opposition to geographic centralization. To avoid the risk of handing power to their political opponents these Democrats instead turned to centralizing power in institutions. Centralizing power in state institutions could instead diffuse the threat a violent people posed to state integrity. Thomas Fernon, the ranking Democrat on the Pennsylvania Senate committee on consolidation and an ardent railroad promoter, repeatedly denounced the consolidation of the city as a precedent for a 'doctrine of centralization that would spread the power and the laws of one city corporation over its whole surface'.[93] Yet he and other opponents of consolidation also demanded a 'powerful' and 'efficient' Marshal's Police to deal with violence on the streets of the city. [94] They supported giving the 'powerless' government the authority to impose 'obedience to the laws' over the 'spirit of riot and ruffianism', and believed having the police under 'one head' accountable to 'one body' was

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[87] Lieber, *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. II, p. 101.

[88] Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 152-157; Rousey, *Policing*, pp. 42-57; Weigley, *Private City*, pp. 152-157.

[89] 'The Coming Election And The Prospect The Consolidated City', *PI*, May 31, 1854; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, August 1, 1853; Price, History of Consolidation, pp. 51-57, 73-76.

[90] 'Consolidation of Philadelphia Important Public Demonstration', *NA&USG*, September 17, 1850; [Untitled], *BDE*, January 5, 1857; 'Consolidation - Its Policy and Advantages', *PI*, January 19, 1854; 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG*, July 30, 1853; Progress, 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853.

[91] 'The Police Board', *DP*, August 28, 1854; *An Address to the Citizens of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1850).

[92] Price, *History of Consolidation*, pp. 61-64.

[93] Thomas Fernon, *Minority Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Consolidation of the City of Philadelphia, With Enlarged Boundaries* (Harrisburg, 1851), pp. 3-4.

[94] 'A Union of the Police', *PI*, October 16, 1849; M., 'Police—No. 1', *NA&USG*, October 19, 1849; W., 'Police Consolidation', *NA&USG*, November 24, 1849.

the best means to do this. [95] Despite this opposition to geographic centralization over territory, they nonetheless supported strengthening the state's law-enforcing power by removing institutional and geographic barriers to the exercise of police power. Only on a more local scale than the whole city would Fernon accept geographic centralization. He supported the separate mergers of the municipalities North and South of Philadelphia, which would give them the ability to 'build up' their own territories, just as an independent West Philadelphia had already been created in the 1840s. [96] Fernon's Democratic politics may have influenced his desire to avoid a consolidation as large as that undertaken in 1854, as many suburban Democrats feared a Whig inner city outvoting them, and he readily invoked a Jacksonian idiom of local self-government to resist the amalgamation of the entire metropolis. [97] But he nonetheless remained convinced that centralization in the sphere of law enforcement was necessary to suppress disorder. Like consolidationists, he hoped reform would streamline government and remove the obstacles to giving officeholders and state institutions the power to impose order upon the territories they governed.

Conservative opponents of geographic centralization could therefore also be supporters of stronger government and centralizing power in institutions, even if they wanted to keep it at a more local level to keep power out of the hands of rival cities or the people themselves. Richter, for example, warned against the possibility of 'mobs' and 'vigilance committees' wielding power in towns and cities. [98] He warned that consolidating towns and counties into Philadelphia-style big governments would weaken and make 'unwieldly' American cities. [99] While he claimed to reject geographic centralization, he did so on the understanding that consolidation would weaken city government. To strengthen the power of the government over the people, he urged instead concentrating government authority in fewer municipal officeholders and removing barriers to their political authority. Like many other conservatives, he demanded that local government adopt a single executive head to wield power over independently elected officeholders, and bring order to his patchwork of town governments. [100] Town, county, and ward police forces under this direction, he proposed, would guarantee 'laws are well executed' and that 'society will be in order'. [101] He even proposed that town governments charge residents for damages incurred in riots as a way to protect property – a measure already on the statute books in Pennsylvania, and one bearing a similarity to Eli Kirk Price's suggestion at a Philadelphia Union Meeting in 1860 that local communities compensate slaveholders if they fail to respect the Fugitive Slave Act. [102] Richter therefore applied to metropolitan areas the ideal that opponents of urban imperialism had described on a regional scale: local centralizations of power as a defensive measure to prevent more remote central places emerging. Under Richter's reforms, then, municipal statelets would be given the power to impose order. Power would be centred in strengthened institutions rather than consolidated over space, but the end – the supremacy of the state over the people – remained the same.

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[95] Fernon, *Minority Report*, pp. 24-25; M., 'Police—No. 1', *NA&USG*, October 19, 1849; 'The Consolidation of the Police, *PI*, January 04, 1850; C., 'The Riots—No. 1', *NA&USG*, (October 23, 1849; 'A Union of the Police', *PI*, October 16, 1849.
[96] Fernon, *Minority Report*, pp. 13-13, 20-22.
[97] McCarthy, 'Reappraisal', pp. 541-542; Warner, *Private City*, p. 153.
[98] Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 148.
[99] *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 170-171, 226.
[100] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 147, 238-243.
[101] *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 151-152, 239.
[102] *Ibid.*, *Municipalist*, pp. 217-218; 'Union Meeting', *PI* (December 14, 1860).

Conservatives might have supported a centralization of power in response to disorder, even if they did not always agree in whose hands they ought to centralize power. To conservatives, it seemed that the people – or at least a portion of them – held ultimate authority over life, death, and property in public space in American cities, as they had in Paris in the 1848 Revolution. They demanded that government restore its legitimate monopoly on the use of force. To do so, consolidationists and police reformers imagined a new political geography. What once may have appeared necessary checks on government authority now appeared as outmoded responses to riot and disorder. To conservative consolidators, increasing the intensity and territorial reach of state power, required simplifying structural boundaries to government authority. Consolidation and police reform, conservative supporters of law and order hoped, would remove these geographic and institutional barriers and allow state institutions – if necessary under the authority of one man – to wield law-enforcing power from the city centre outwards. Police and metropolitan consolidations provided the means to the same ends as telegraphs, uniforms, and armed policemen did: ensuring the centre ruled a governable city. Even conservatives who rejected the expansion of urban territory accepted the need to centralize power in city institutions. Removing institutional boundaries to power within individual municipalities, they hoped, would create multiple centralizations, in place of a larger – and perhaps more dangerous – metropolis. These conservatives, far from adhering to warnings about concentrated state power, also embraced the idea of centralizing geographic and institutional authority over the city.

City Decentralization, Property, and Partisanship

Disputes over whether large geographic centralizations as opposed to smaller institutional centralizations in response to disorder would concentrate power in the right people or party spoke to wider concerns among conservatives. Partisanship and disagreement between conservatives on national issues often divided conservatives and complicated plans to centralize power in city governments. Conservative reformers and opponents therefore agreed on the need for some form of centralized power to enforce the law, but rarely had any intention of centralizing or decentralizing power over property, improvements, and assessments, if doing so handed further power to their partisan opponents or democratic majorities. When reform seemed to place such powers out of their control, conservatives often denounced reforms as a dangerous centralization – with all the negative value judgements the term imparted. But as in the case of urban rivalries over trade, they opposed the people who benefited from centralization more than the principle of centralization itself. Moreover, conservative consolidationist movements often structured their programmes carefully to ensure that political authority did not fall into the hands of anyone who might stake a claim to their property either, as they feared the consequences of allowing new state power to fall into the hands of the people themselves, as it had done in Paris in 1848. Consolidationists and opponents of consolidation therefore balanced the need for centralization to maintain law and order with the need to prevent centralizing power in a whole range of other affairs that divided Americans, including conservatives, by class, party, and region. When building these new power relationships between governments and people, they were all careful to ensure that they centralized power in the correct people, parties, and places.

Both supporters and opponents of reform envisaged centralization in the sphere of law and order while retaining unwieldy government in other areas of municipal government. In Chicago, property-owners embraced a 'segmented' political economy that devolved most decision-making over improvements, assessments, and finance to individual wards as a tool to ensure that taxpayers in one neighbourhood did not have to pay for services elsewhere.[103] When Philadelphia consolidated in 1854, a united police force under an elected marshal already patrolled the city and its immediate suburbs, while the city's many municipalities retained control over all other areas of municipal life.[104] Many Philadelphians, like Fernon, were happy with this system of consolidated police and decentralized general city government. Consolidated city governments, Fernon warned, would simply concentrate power in the hands of the downtown Whig establishment.[105] Fernon may have lost in 1854, but consolidators sometimes envisioned a similar distribution of power within the boundaries of enlarged cities. Consolidated New Orleans in 1854 retained vestigial districts with some autonomy from city government.[106] (See Illustration 7 and Illustration 8 below.) The *Eagle* in Brooklyn proposed that ward aldermen should be responsible for improvements like lighting, paving, and water within the new metropolis.[107] (See Illustration 9 and Illustration 10 below.) Historians have seen such measures as concessions to local interests as part of a liberal modernising agenda, but conservatives had their own reasons to support keeping some local authority.[108] Such reformers happily removed geographic boundaries to state executive power, so that city government could impose order from the centre at the expense of the people. But in all other spheres they accepted a much more complicated government to prevent centralization and strong government that might damage them.

Even avid supporters of centralization worried about who might benefit from their state-building. Wide partisan divides made it difficult for many to consider removing barriers to state power lest the new machinery came under the control of the wrong people. They even used centralization as a political weapon when they sensed that their partisan opponents might benefit from it and wanted to delegitimise state strengthening that would not advance their interests. The first attempt to merge Philadelphia's city and districts in 1844-45 had failed after strong opposition from Whig conservatives, including Sidney George Fisher and Federalist nostalgic Horace Binney. They believed suburban Democrats wanted to use the prosperous city centre's property taxes to subsidise suburban improvements. 'It is not democracy; it is not federalism', one protestor – probably Binney – argued. '[I]t is centralization, in its worst application.'[109] Decentralization was still useful when it protected private property from assessment and taxation under metropolitan majority rule.

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[103] Einhorn, *Property*, pp. 61-187.
[104] Geffen, 'Industrial Development', pp. 307-362; Johnson, *Policing*, pp. 15-38; McCarthy, 'Consolidation', pp. 534-535; Warner, *Private City*, pp. 125-157.
[105] Warner, *Private*, p. 153; Fernon, *Minority Report*, pp. 20-22.
[106] Rousey, *Policing*, pp. 64-65.
[107] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853; 'Consolidation-The Plan of the Commissioners', *BDE*, October 6, 1853; 'The Offices under the New Charter - The Candidates', *BDE*, September 2, 1853; 'The Offices under the New Charter - The Candidates', *BDE*, September 2, 1853.
[108] McCarthy, 'Consolidation', pp.
[109] 'Citizen', *Philadelphia Pennsylvanian*, 30 December, 1844; Heath, 'In Union', pp. 111-116. By 1854 Binney had become a convert to consolidation. See Price, *History of the Consolidation*, pp. 17, 18-21, 29, 32, 42, 46; Heath, 'In Union', pp. 113-114.

Illustration 7: *Norman's Plan of New Orleans & Environs, 1845*

Map shows New Orleans prior to consolidation, divided among three independent municipalities and the City of Lafayette in place of a single city government.

Source: 'Norman's Plan of New Orleans & Environs, 1845', Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, *The Library of* Congress, http://www.loc.gov/item/98687133/ [Accessed December 12, 2015]

Illustration 8: *Norman's Plan of New Orleans & Environs, 1854.*
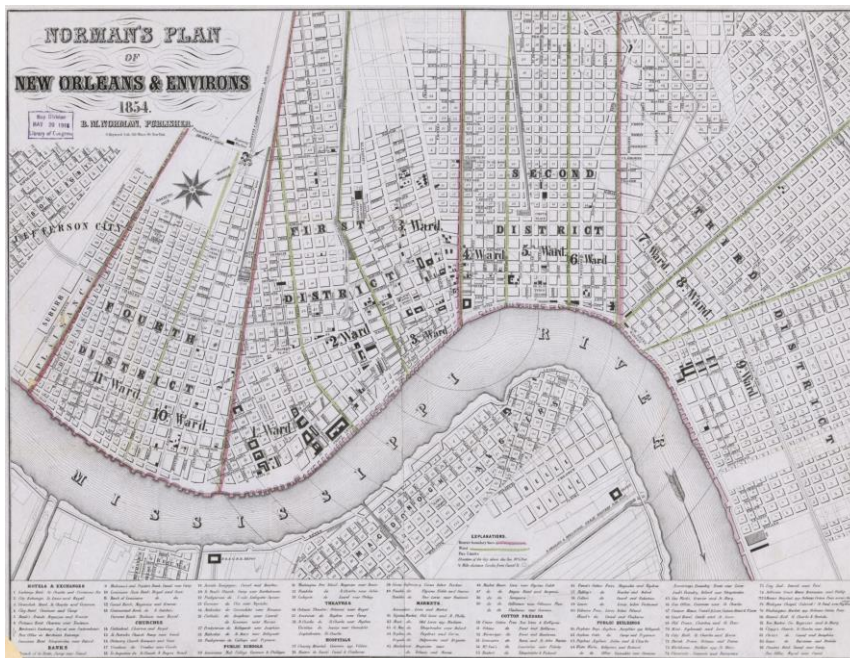
Map showing New Orleans following consolidation, with the retention of the former municipalities and Lafayette as the as districts with residual powers over city debt and finances.

Source: 'Norman's Plan of New Orleans & Environs, 1854', Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, *The Library of* Congress, *Source*: http://www.loc.gov/resource/g4014n.fi000029/ [Accessed December 12, 2015]

Illustration 9: *Map of the City of Brooklyn, and Village of Williamsburgh*

This map shows the City of Brooklyn divided into wards and the neighbouring independent Village of Williamsburgh. These indeopendent municpalities independently exercised powers of local government.

Source: 'Map of the City of Brooklyn, and Village of Williamsburg' Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, *New York Public Library*, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-f01b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99 [Accessed December 12, 2015]

Illustration 10: *Map of the Consolidated City of Brooklyn, for Bishop's Manual of the Corporation*
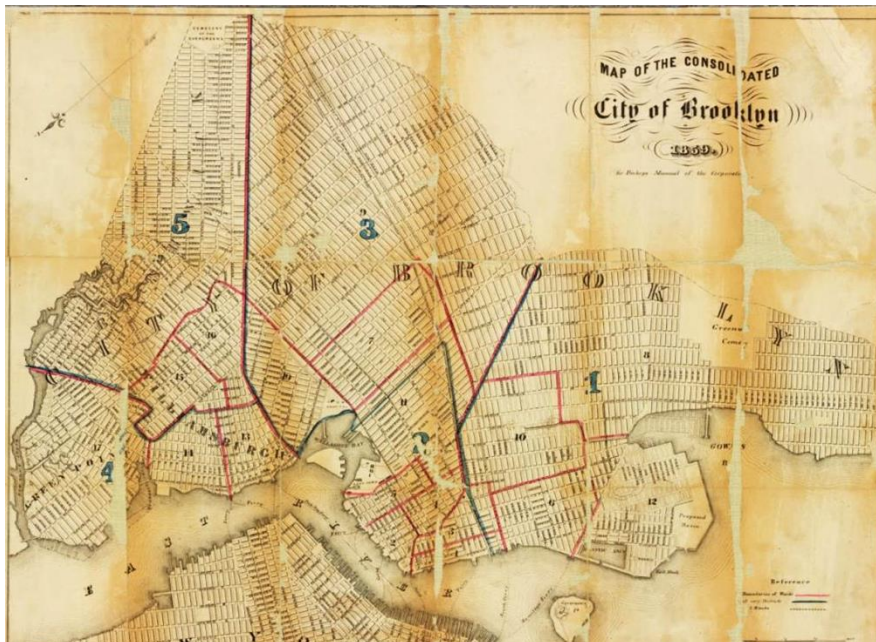
This map of Brooklyn after conslidation shows the enlarged city but emphasises the continued division of the city into wards and districts, each with substantial devolved powers over city finances and improvements.

Source: 'Map of the Consolidated City of Brooklyn, for Bishop's Manual of the Corporation', Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, *New York Public Library*, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c4a48df1-917c-6ecc-e040-e00a18064536 [Accessed December 12, 2015]

Similar fears persisted into the 1850s. The Louisiana legislature in 1854 transferred municipal control of the consolidated New Orleans police from the mayor to a board of city officers who could appoint officers in their wards without the city council's advice and consent. The *Picayune* condemned this reform as a dangerous centralization of political authority.[110] Similarly, many New York Democrats and conservative Republicans opposed to the ruling antislavery faction of the party challenged the merger of Manhattan and Brooklyn's police forces in 1857 as another dangerous 'centralization'.[111] They invoked fears of geographic centralization in a remote capital to help illustrate the dangers of dependency on Republican Albany. France, the *Herald* warned, showed the dangers of 'centralization' where all power was 'in the possession of a single city' with control over the police in far-flung provinces.[112] And New York City, it repeatedly opined, was 'as dependant on the central power at Albany as the people of a department or prefecture or municipality in France are on the central power at Paris'.[113] As well as implying that the people had become a power over and above the institutions of government, consolidators also used centralization against their partisan opponents when they proposed to create stronger government too. Party conflict on national issues related to the sectional crisis therefore made the imagery of national centralization a powerful political weapon to contest who would control these powers to reorder the metropolis.

But despite warning against centralization, these figures nonetheless supported centralization when it did not conflict with their party or political interests. The *Picayune*, for example, had warned against centralizing power in an 'irresponsible' police board.[114] Consequently, when the Louisiana legislature returned control of the police to the mayor – this time without any council oversight – the *Picayune* raised no objection to this new form of centralization.[115] Others opposed centralization in one institution or city only to support it when it benefited their objectives or party. The *Herald*, defending municipal policing, upheld strong local government in the hands of the states and municipal governments in England and America as the only alternative to the centralization of power in Paris and Albany. This came despite editor James Gordon Bennett's traditional Anglophobia.[116] Even when criticising the 1857 police merger, the *Herald* pointed out that a powerful city government would protect life and property and prevent 'State centralization' in a contest for power between cities and state governments.[117] Such comparisons contrasted Republican-driven national and state power grabs with a smaller, defensively-driven Democrat-led local centralization of authority. Richter, too, argued that 'centralized

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[110] 'The Police Board, *DP*, August 28, 1854; 'Police Board', *DP*, March 10, 1855; 'City Charter', *DP*, February 7, 1854.

[111] 'Defending One's Own Home', *New York Evening Express*, May 4, 1857; 'The Press without the State on Centralization', *NYH*, May 13, 1857; 'The Municipal Conflict—Hereditary Treason', *NYH*, May 22, 1857.

[112] 'The Municipal Conflict—Hereditary Treason', *NYH*, May 22, 1857.

[113] 'Important Political Movement', *NYH*, July 26, 1857; 'Beginning of a Judicial Revolution the Decision of the Court of Appeals', *NYH*, July 7, 1857; 'The Court of Appeals on Municipal Liberty', *NYH*, June 13, 1857.

[114] 'City Charter', *DP* (February 7, 1854).

[115] 'The Police', *DP* (March 8, 1856).

[116] 'The Municipal Contest—Its Pretexts, Realities and Dangers', *NYH*, June 5, 1857; 'The Conflict with the Legislature—Importance of the Issues Involved', *NYH*, May 15, 1857; 'The Logical Consequence of the Albany usurpation', *NYH*, June 27, 1857; 'The Conflict with the Legislature—A Lesson Borrowed from History', *NYH*, May 20, 1857; 'The Municipal Contest—Its Pretexts, Realities and Dangers', *NYH*, June 5, 1857; 'The Pending Struggle for Municipal Liberty', *NYH*, May 2, 1857.

[117] 'The Municipal Case in the Court of Appeals', *NYH*, July 11, 1857; 'The Mayor's Message—The New City Charter', *NYH*, January 6, 1857; 'The Municipal Contest', *NYH*, June 8, 1857.

governments' made cities harder to govern and less able to maintain order, which expanded the opportunity for national and state government to intervene.[118] Rather than opposing centralization per se, the *Herald* and Richter supported centralization on their own terms to assert state supremacy they could control. Their position as Democratic outsiders to Republican Albany led them to perceive that new centres of political authority could fall under the influence of partisan rivals. The difference in scale between their party's own local centralization and Albany's more remote state building plan therefore allowed the *Herald* to legitimise a more centralized government where their party would benefit from it. It was therefore not the principle of centralization that concerned these conservatives, but the possibility that it could fall into the hands of their partisan opponents.

In addition to using centralization as a political weapon to prevent strong government falling into the hands of partisan opponents, conservatives also used it to prevent government exercising too much control over property. Conservatives may not have had the example of the 1871 Paris Commune to illustrate the threat of the masses seizing control of the city government, but they were nonetheless aware of the challenge that Workingmen's Parties, the unemployed (especially following the Panic of 1857), and Anti-Renters posed to property. They also used the June Days in France as evidence of the dangers of 'red republicanism' and its socialistic doctrines.[119] They therefore understood the risks of allowing a powerful government to acquire jurisdiction over private property as well as public space.

Property and finances frequently appeared in discussions over consolidation movements. In Boston, questions over municipal annexation and division centred on paying for poor relief and keeping revenues from property development.[120] In Philadelphia, early opponents of consolidation had worried that poor, indebted suburbs would use annexation to tap the propertied wealth of the city centre.[121] A few years later, Thomas Fernon predicted that Philadelphia's union would increase taxes, depress property values, and distribute responsibility for paying the excessive debts of profligate municipalities among the city's taxpayers.[122] This insight proved insightful, as many municipalities issued debts and spent money on the basis that the consolidated city would have to pay once governor Bigler – who at the time in Erie supporting the Gauge War – had given his assent.[123] These questions, which transcended partisan divisions, featured in questions over who would control power in consolidated government.

Opponents of consolidation therefore drew on wider fears of how strong centralized government could exercise power over property. Given the context of sectional debates over slavery, tariffs, and internal improvements, Fernon's midcentury proposal to incorporate separate North and South Philadelphias – with their own power over property taxes –

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[118] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 170-171, 271, 297

[119] Anti-Rent see Charles McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era in New York Law and Politics* (Chapel Hill, 2001); Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom* (Oxford, 2000); Reeve Huston, 'Popular Movements and Party Rule' in J. Pasley, A. Robertson and D Waldstreicher (Eds.), *Beyond the Founders* (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 355-386.
For workingmen's and anti-unemployment movements, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, pp. 846-850; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 363-389; James Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (London, 1987), pp. 25-28; Spann, *Metropolis*, pp. 401-427

[120] Rawson, *Eden*, pp. 145-149.

[121] Heath, 'Small Men', pp. 222-243.

[122] Fernon, *Minority Report*, pp. 4-11.

[123] Geffen, 'Industrial Development', p. 360; 'Passage of the Consolidation Bill', *Public Ledger*, February 1, 1854.

implied his conviction that geographically centralized governments would give majority parties and sections dangerous powers over the property of a minority.[124]

Concern for property also appeared in Richter's defence of decentralised city government. He took the Jacksonian laissez-faire approach to the economy to its near extreme, arguing that state and federal governments should not own public works or interfere with private businesses, as such measures led to 'debts and high taxes' on private property. Napoleon III's rehabilitation of the Landes Forest, the Erie Canal, and the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works – two of which, at least, were often lauded by conservative boosters – served as examples for Richter of how centralized polities attacked private property.[125] Similarly, on a local level, he warned how removing geographic barriers to government allowed the centre to establish economic power over the people. Richter argued that attempts to create gas, railroad, and public works monopolies, and subject the people to excessive taxes and assessments to pay for them, lay behind city consolidation movements.[126] He even described government charity for the poor as a 'bad centralization' and a 'monarchical' policy as it led to 'high taxes, standing armies, frequent laws,' and 'interference with industry by laws'.[127] Richter may sound like the archetypal individualist, but like Fernon – and some conservative consolidationists – he intended to keep power over property contained within smaller municipal boundaries, rather than rejecting the principle of government entirely. Patchworks of municipal governments, with strict geographic limits to their power, would serve as local 'communes' with the capacity to organise the likes of schools without 'unjust' taxes on property, would allow people to assess their own tax burden without any need for state intervention, and would levy taxes to penalize rioters and protect property-owners.[128] Richter's link between small polities and the libertarian tenets of Jacksonian political economy suggests that he too saw the geographic boundaries that inhibited state power as vital guarantors of property rights as much as city consolidators did. Both supporters and opponents shared a common interest in maintaining geographic and institutional barriers to government authority over property, even if they did not agree whether removing geographic barriers to police power brought order or tyranny.

Like these opponents of consolidation, though, consolidationists themselves embraced devolution when it prevented a majority section in the city from claiming power over property. Brooklyn, for example, rebuffed consolidation with New York; citizens feared the measure would expose Brooklyn to the corruption and caprice of Manhattan's politics.[129] Within their own city, too, the *Eagle* suggested that devolving power to ward, districts, and neighbourhood governments would prevent New York-style 'centralization.'[130] While they wanted to remove boundaries to police authority, they had no intention of letting that turn into unrestricted majority rule across the city. Dividing power and re-establishing checks and balances prevented control over state power falling into the hands of the majority and

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[124] Fernon, *Report*, pp. 20-22. For more on how Americans applied lessons over national political economy at a local level, see Heath, 'In Union There is Strength', pp. 101-24; Robin Einhorn, *Property Rules*, pp. 68-86.
[125] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 144-147, 256-262.
[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.
[127] *Ibid.*, pp. 206-212, 218-219.
[128] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63, 148-149, 217-218, 272-275.
[129] 'More Consolidation', *BDE*, February 28, 1857.
[130] 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853; 'Consolidation-The Plan of the Commissioners', *BDE*, October 6, 1853; 'The Offices under the New Charter - The Candidates', *BDE*, September 2, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853.

establishing a Parisian-style centralized democracy. Philadelphians therefore defended electing council members by ward rather than at large in their consolidated city because it would allow a 'balance of local power' between the parties and 'sectional interests', where a citywide ballot would hand power to a 'single section of the city'.[131] They, too, intended to distribute power geographically across the city rather and ensure the representation of minority interests. Conservatives therefore made it clear that clearing away barriers to city government did not mean that they intended to hand power to outright majority rule.

When designing governments and justifying dividing power within the city, reformers either retained or created institutional and geographic barriers to power over private property. Centralization and state power could legitimately create order only where city consolidators felt it necessary to suppress what they saw as violent threats to conservative control of city government. Consolidators in Brooklyn and New Orleans argued that city-builders needed to avoid 'centralization' when it came to dealing with city finance, property, and improvements. In Brooklyn, for example, the *Eagle* hoped that having elected aldermen responsible for assessments and infrastructure in their own wards would prevent the city taxing propertyowners to pay for improvements in annexed territories.[132] The *Daily Picayune* too used similar logic to oppose an earlier New Orleans consolidation project; such an unwarranted 'centralization', it argued, would lead to citywide control of control over taxes, development, and public services.[133] When they changed their editorial stance 1851, they nonetheless the supported 'uniform port and police regulations' of a consolidated government, but approved devolving assessments, schools, and debts to the city's former municipalities.[134]

State authority over private property therefore followed a very different geography to that set by the consolidated police forces. In the sphere of city improvements, assessments, and debts, conservative reformers happily kept the kind of cumbersome geographic boundaries to central government that they had lambasted when they had inhibited the state from intervening effectively in the sphere of law and order. In these areas, conservatives seemed happy to embrace the kind of 'segmented' model that kept government weak, taxes low, and government in the hands of the propertied. But this did not necessarily prevent them from embracing a strong consolidated government that could maintain order over disorderly citizens, street, and suburbs.

Only when they could use state power to improve property values did conservatives envisage removing institutional and geographic barriers to government's taxing power. To answer conservative critiques of aspects urban centralization, then, supporters of measures like consolidation tried to show how it would benefit property. Reformers and consolidators in Brooklyn, Cleveland, and Philadelphia urged voters to support reform to strengthen the provision of water, gas and street railroads, and the establishment of universities and public

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[131] 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, November 28, 1853; Price, *History of Consolidation*, p. 77.
[132] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853; 'Consolidation-The Plan of the Commissioners', *BDE*, October 6, 1853; 'The Offices under the New Charter - The Candidates', *BDE*, September 2, 1853; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 10, 1853.
[133] 'The Consolidation Question', *DP*, April 7, 1850, 'Consolidation of the City', *DP*, February 11, 1850; 'The Consolidation Scheme', *DP*, February 5, 1850
[134] 'The Annexation of Layfayette', *DP*, February 10, 1852; 'Police Board', *DP*, March 10, 1855; 'The Election. Its Promises And Its Fruits', *DP*, November 9, 1851; 'Consolidation Again', *DP*, November 9, 1851.

services.[135] Price too justified consolidation on the grounds that 'simple government' would raise land values, presumably outweighing for property owners any increase in taxation.[136] Bigger government without restrictions on its power to build infrastructure could look legitimate when it had the capacity develop private property. Indeed, imposing order and private profit often went hand in hand. In Philadelphia, the *Inquirer* argued after consolidation that establishing a new inspector of buildings to regulate safety and creating a professional fire brigade naturally followed the creation of a larger city.[137] In other words, removing geographic boundaries to central power from the centre allowed government to bring order to the city's property market and legislate in the interest of property owners. The *North American* even saw the fire department as an 'auxiliary' to the police under the 'central command' of the Mayor, such was their association of concentrated executive authority with preservation of property.[138] Gerard similarly claimed a reformed police would secure commercial property in city ports.[139] State involvement in property therefore became a justifiable part of a broader crusade to protect law and order when it protected the wealth of city elites.

Consolidators also saw in government power to develop and protect property an economic centralization in which the city centre exerted control over its suburban hinterland. Annexing municipalities allowed them to extend ties of capital, ownership, and communications that mirrored on a smaller scale the internal improvements advocated by urban imperialists. Years after the city's enlargement, the Brooklyn *Eagle* argued that further property development in annexed areas and ferry connections to downtown would 'make consolidation more complete' and 'practically consummate consolidation'.[140] This linked political consolidation of the city and municipalities to an economic geography where the city centre was the hub of an expanding transport network and property market, but one safe behind barriers that protected it from an overbearing New York City. Similarly, consolidators in Philadelphia, who extended the old city's street grid and numbering system outward over its former suburbs, also saw their program as radiating power outwards from the city centre, making land and property more valuable. Price himself saw this as a virtue of the reform while McMichael frequently talked of 'practical consolidation' holding the metropolis together.[141] Others argued in this vein that consolidated government could extend street railroads and public thoroughfares to encourage suburban development.[142] Within the city itself, consolidators imagined creating the kind of metropole-hinterland ties that Henry Carey and city boosters portrayed on a national and international scale. New centres of political authority might be dangerous in the hands of the propertyless masses. But removing geographic boundaries that carried outwards bonds of economic dependency, giving central

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[135] 'A Brooklyn University', *BDE*, January 23, 1853; 'Union of Cleveland and Ohio City', *Plain Dealer*, November 23, 1853.

[136] 'Consolidation', *PL*, January 11, 1854.

[137] 'Important Reforms In Philadelphia. What We Need', *PI*, December 21, 1854.

[138] 'The Fire Department', *NA&USG*, February 6, 1854.

[139] Gerard, *London and New York*, pp. 18-23.

[140] 'The New Ferry to Williamsburgh', *BDE*, June 18, 1857; 'Important Sale of Brooklyn Property', *BDE*, June 6, 1857.

[141] 'Philadelphia in the Future', *NA&USG*, November 12, 1862; 'Practical Consolidation', *NA&USG*, March 14, 1855; 'The West End: Practical Consolidation', *NA&USG*, November 7, 1862; 'Practical Consolidation', *NA&USG*, March 30, 1866; Weigley, 'Border City', p. 375; Price, *Consolidation*, pp, 73-76; Heath, 'Every Man His Own Landlord', 1003-1020. A similar phenomenon occurred in New York. See Scobey, *Empire City*, pp. 89-133.

[142] 'Correspondence of the Transcript', *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 3, 1854; 'Consolidation', *PL*, October 25, 1853.

institutions and city elites the power to reshape the city economy to their benefit, was a desirable benefit that consolidators here sought.

As big cities grew, conservatives situated their projects in time, arguing that centralization of power was an inevitable process, of which changes in metropolitan government were just one part. The *Eagle*'s observation three years after consolidation that their project remained incomplete suggests how even those who advocated limited reforms nonetheless wove their designs into a narrative of centralization. Some consolidators who were sceptical of an overly centralised city government expressed support for further consolidation in the future, perhaps because the power they believed rationalised metropolitan government created tended to offer them more of what they wanted than feared. Following the consolidation of New Orleans, the *Picayune* criticised the 'cumbrous machinery' of bicameral city government, asked for 'consolidation' of the four school boards, and the merger of the city recorders. Referring to the escalating sectional conflict following the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it argued that the vestigial districts that had once served to protect property owners from taxes to pay the debts of the old municipalities only served to 'inflict us with sectional feelings and sectional legislation'.[143] To these New Orleans consolidators, it seemed that consolidation, even if caveated with limits to protect private property, naturally prompted the further removal of geographic and institutional limits on the power of city government. In Brooklyn too the *Eagle* supported the abolition of neighbourhood judicial offices despite having once opposed the 'corruption' of 'centralization' in local government.[144] And two years after Philadelphia's consolidation, the *Public Ledger* defended a further transfer of police powers to the Mayor and further centralization in institutions,[145] while the *North American* saw the reform as part of a national trend.[146] Even Richter argued that cities need to further centralize power in city institutions over time, though he believed that continual geographic decentralization best achieved this.[147] So long as state powers did not come under the control of those who might use them to attack property, it seemed to conservatives that progress required some form of ongoing removal of the boundaries to government authority in response to popular violence – even barriers they had insisted upon them in the first place.

Despite agreeing on the need for centralization in the sphere of law and order, questions on the ground over property and development and party loyalties meant that at first glance conservative city reformers were often more divided than united on the issue of how to govern a metropolis, and were happy to raise the threat of centralization to further their own financial or partisan interests. These opponents of consolidation often accused their partisan opponents of plotting a dangerous centralization of power, claiming that they wanted to centralize power in the wrong institution or a remote city centre. However, rather than opposing consolidation on principle, many opponents seemed more concerned with where and who would control a centralized municipal apparatus, especially when an enlarged government had power over property, patronage, or taxation rather than just law and order. Even hardline consolidationists sought to avoid such dangerous consolidations

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[143] 'Charter Amendments', *DP*, January 21, 1855; 'Police Board', *DP*, March 10, 1855; 'Amendments to the City Charter', *DP*, November 25, 1855; 'Legislation for the City', *DP*, January 21, 1856.
[144] 'The Mayor Vetoes the Paid Fire Department Project', *BDE*, May 11, 1858; [Untitled], *BDE*, January 5, 1857.
[145] 'The Suppliment to Consolidation', *Public Ledger*, May 17, 1856; 'Important Reforms In Philadelphia. What We Need', *PI*, December 21, 1854.
[146] 'Consolidation of Cities', *NA&USG* (July 30, 1853).
[147] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 120-121, 149-150, 270-271.

of power when they could be used against their property or party. Supporters and opponents of consolidation thus had a very similar definition of where power belonged in the metropolis, even if they disagreed sharply on who would wield it and how. In the spheres of property finance, and taxation, both conservative consolidators and opponents supported retaining the kind of complicated governments that characterized 'segmented' and district systems, and did not see these kinds of divided authorities as inconsistent with the creation of centralized control over law and order. Urban centralization and decentralization were therefore frequently complementary, rather than contradictory, approaches to building a conservative city in the 1850s.

Centralized Urban Democracy

Conservative city reformers were therefore sure to ask who would control centralized city governments while considering how to reassert the power of government over a seemingly disorderly popular multitude. Urban disorder took on a wider significance to conservatives who saw it as a democratic challenge to state authority. As a result, they assumed that they could not successfully build new institutional and geographic centres of power within cities and maintain the rule of law without curbing what passed for democracy in mid-century American cities. Conservatives often used antiparty rhetoric to challenge weak governments that lacked the authority to prevent the people from monopolising state authority as they had done in Paris in 1848. But they often extended this critique of party competition to elections and voters themselves, claiming that officeholders' dependence on disorderly voters allowed the people to centralize power that belonged to government institutions. Democracy explained to these conservatives both the problem of weak government and the existence of urban violence. As well as removing geographic and institutional barriers to centralized local government, conservatives used city reform as an opportunity to rein in urban democracy. Even if they did not often turn their back on universal white male suffrage, conservatives found other ways to avoid democratic excess in reformed city administrations. Conservatives often expressed hope that these new powerful political offices could attract men of property to stand instead of politicians dependant on the votes of a criminal population. Moving institutions of government further from violent suburbs and residential neighbourhoods, too, could be a tool to limit the informal authority of the people on government. In local government, as in other areas, conservatives linked reform and state-building to curbing democracy and limiting popular government.

Antebellum Americans often claimed political parties inhibited democracy, and reformers often blamed parties and politicians for urban violence on city streets. [148] Consolidationists in Philadelphia, for example, expressed deep hostility to the Philadelphia party system they intended to 'sweep by', and after years of finding their reform blocked by Whigs and Democrats in Harrisburg, eventually secured success by aligning conservative

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[148] For more on antebellum antipartyism, see Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, 'Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America', *The Journal of American History* 84 (1997), pp. 855-885; Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000); Adam Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (Oxford, 2006); Mark Voss-Hubbard, *Beyond Party: Cultures of Antipartisanship in Northern Politics before the Civil War* (London, 2002); Mark Voss-Hubbard, 'The 'Third Party Tradition' Reconsidered: Third Parties and American Public Life, 1830-1900', *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999), pp. 121-150.

voters and Nativists behind an municipal reform ticket composed of 'best men'.[149] Reformers in San Francisco had done the same after usurping the official city government in 1856.[150] The *Public Ledger* explained the success of Philadelphia's pro-consolidation third party ticket as an expression of the electorate's dissatisfaction with the 'profitless combat', 'obsolete doctrines', and 'clap trap of hackneyed politicians'.[151] The *North American*, meanwhile, argued that only 'party discipline' sustained Philadelphia's complex and dysfunctional pre-1854 government.[152] But the Baltimore *Sun* warned that parties threatened to corrupt strong government too. A partisan, city-wide police force, it argued, could concentrate too much patronage power in the Mayor, while weakening the force's authority, as officers appointed on the grounds of party loyalty every four years would be 'demoralized', inefficient, and lacking popular respect. Ensuring that no party, ethnic group, or neighbourhood had a monopoly on the force, it hoped, would prevent partisanship undermining a state-strengthening measure.[153] While they arrived at very different solutions to the problem of partisanship, both the *Sun* and Philadelphian consolidationists shared concerns that party conflict created obstacles to the authority of city government. Picking up on strands of scepticism about the role of political parties in Antebellum American public life allowed conservatives to give their proposals greater legitimacy.

Behind these criticisms of the second party system, though, lay a critique of popular elections as a way of choosing officeholders, not the parties themselves as inhibitors of democracy. Politicians who wanted to limit majority rule claimed political decision-making needed to be taken out of the realm of corrupt 'politics' and into the hands of competent 'administration', which, in practice, used seemingly trivial administrative reforms to limit popular rule over city property.[154] Handing control over state power to the people, conservatives also implied, weakened government power over law and order as much as decentralizing power among municipalities and institutions did. Price himself rejected having a police Marshal 'elected by the people, and subject to no direct control by any other body', suggesting his conservative scepticism at popular government unrestrained by elite institutions.[155]

Often, such figures assumed that opening offices to democratic elections in large cities only opened state power to marauding mobs and gangs. Richter, for instance, thought universal white male suffrage and party politics gave politicians an incentive to allow urban mobs and abolitionists to disobey the law.[156] Consolidationists and police reformers meanwhile claimed that 'political' appointments of officers and the involvement of elected aldermen in police departments explained poor policing and public violence.[157] According to the Baltimore *Sun*, the city laboured under a 'spirit of lawless insubordination' because

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[149] 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, November 12, 1853; 'Consolidation', *Public Ledger*, October 25, 1853; 'Local Items', *PL*, September 18, 1851; 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, July 23, 1853; N., 'The Consolidation of the Police', *PL*, March 8, 1850. See also Heath, 'Small Men', pp. 222-243.
[150] Ethington, *Public City*, pp. 161-170.
[151] 'Consolidation', *Public Ledger*, October 25, 1853.
[152] 'Municipal Reform', *NA&USG*, October 7, 1853.
[153] 'An Alternating Police For Efficiency-Officers Elective, &c.', *The Sun*, November 26, 1850; 'City Police Arrangement', *The Sun*, November 19, 1850; 'The Police Bill', *The Sun*, September 17, 1856.
[154] See Einhorn, *Property*, pp. 7-8.
[155] Price, *History of Consolidation*, p. 54.
[156] Maurice Richter, *The Municipalist*, pp. 48-49, 123-127, 227, 236.
[157] Gerard, *Police*, pp. 15-16; 'Common Council', *BDE*, January 3, 1854.

politicians allowed gangs to rule the streets in return for votes.[158] The fact that so many of gangs were political, sought patronage from politicians, and looked to control the polls on election day only lent weight to the idea that gangs had usurped civil government.[159] The electoral process of democracy in large cities, it seemed, incentivised the very reverse of what reformers expected city government to do: use state authority to protect property and person.

This logic had a wider basis in conservative circles where De Tocqueville's warnings about majority tyranny were carefully heeded. Sidney George Fisher had long blamed democracy for Philadelphia's disorderly state, arguing that politicians beholden to the votes of criminals and gangsters packed juries and prevented a thorough administration of the law.[160] Francis Lieber, too, claimed that urban mobs challenged the independence of republican government.[161] Democracy only seemed to accelerate the centralization of power in the hands of the crowd. The question of preventing centralization in a turbulent people was therefore inseparable from policing the legitimate limits to democracy.

In addition to considering removing geographic and institutional barriers to government power in response to disorder, reformers also looked at who would control this state power. In the antebellum period, supporters of a wide suffrage managed to make local and state judicial offices elective, and this included Pennsylvania in 1850. [162] Consolidationists by midcentury strongly rejected this opportunity to extend more control over government power to the average voter. Conservative city reformers seemed horrified with the idea that judges could become dependent on the 'exaggerations' and 'excitement' of partisan elections[163] and the 'ebullitions of feeling which characterize the will of the populace'[164]. The 'rights and property and lives' of the people, they argued, should not be subject to 'the passions, the prejudices' of 'political factions, always liable to excitement and to excess'.[165] Opposition to an elective judiciary included the New Orleans *Picayune*[166] and the Brooklyn *Eagle*, which linked the elective judiciary to 'Fourierism' and the socialist, feminist, and abolitionist writings of Robert Owen and Frances Wright.[167] And despite often appearing to support local democracy, even Maurice Richter took the time to denounce the elective judiciary as 'a political monstrosity'.[168] Reformers may not have openly shared Sidney George Fisher's[169] and Francis Lieber's[170] enthusiasm for property qualifications, but they showed little interest in extending the boundaries of democracy when given the opportunity.

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[158] 'Outlawry of the City', *The Sun*, November 12, 1850; 'The Riots', *The Sun*, September 16, 1856.
[159] The Peace of the City, *BA*, October 14, 1856; 'Outlawry of the City', *The Sun*, November 12, 1850; 'The Peace of the City', *BA*, October 8, 1852; 'The Riots', *The Sun*, September 16, 1856.
[160] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, p. 89-102, July 22, 1848, 200-203, May 14, 1849, vol. 1858, pp. 67-71, April 4, 1858.
[161] Lieber, *Civil liberty and Self-Government*, vol. II, pp. 97-120
[162] Matthew Streb, *Running for Judge: The Rising Political, Financial, and Legal Stakes of Judicial Elections* (London 2007), pp. 8-11.
[163] Cited in 'An Elective Judiciary', *NI* (September 23, 1859).
[164] 'Elective Judiciary', *MC&NYE* (September 28, 1960)
[165] 'The Judiciary', *BA* (November 7, 1850).
[166] Quoted in 'An Elective Judiciary', *MC&NYE*, October 22, 1858.
[167] 'Crudites in High Places', *BDE*, December 15, 1858.
[168] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 96-97, 244-246.
[169] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1858, pp. 1857-1858, June 4, 1858, vol. 1860, pp. 72-73, April 2, 1860.
[170] Lieber, *Civil liberty and Self-Government*, vol. I, pp. 188-191.

In trying to shield institutions from centralized control in the people, critics argued that the role of judges in enforcing the law and keeping order in large cities made them particularly unsuitable offices to make dependent on the will of rioters and gangs that sought to centralize the power of the balanced institutions of city government. In 1850, the New York *Courier* opined that

> Owing his election to a rabble, which, under the workings of universal suffrage is sure, in all cities, to control the ballot-box, he [the judge] will, unless constituted differently from a majority of those holding office in this country, seek, by bending to the will of his constituents, the renewal of their suffrages. And when the office, thus thrown open to all, is filled by bad and unprincipled men, nothing can save the community from the worst of all evils that can happen to it.[171]

Drawing from the same fear that elections required officeholders to trade law and order for support and votes, conservative newspapermen accepted that alleged gang control of judicial elections in New Orleans, Brooklyn and New York proved the system unsuitable for supporters of law and order: the connection between gangs and politicians allowed the disorderly to appoint pliant judges and go unpunished.[172] 'In crowded cities', the *Eagle* repeatedly argued, the courts should protect the 'respectable' from the violent 'loathsome and unmentionable abominations of the city' who also controlled primary elections. Democratic rights allowed criminals and rioters to violate the law with impunity, and elective judiciaries therefore proved cities were unsafe for democracy.[173] Within the judicial branch, it seemed clear that distributing control to the people left government institutions with little authority to impose law and order. Even incidents like corruption in judicial nominating conventions, violence in the courtroom, and partisanship in deciding a court case seemed to prove the conservative prejudice that democracy led to disorder.[174] Conservative city reformers therefore saw the need for centralization in city government on terms that would shield the state from direct control by the people. Order required more than just imposing power on city streets; it meant reducing the power of the streets on city government.

This was particularly true of Paris, which proved a useful lesson in demonstrating the close links between, democracy and violence. Some conservatives did not distinguish between democracy and violence at all, recognising that riots often had a political role and that the crowd could claim to speak for the people.[175] They used Paris to illustrate this link

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[171] 'An Elective Judiciary', *NC&NYE*, September 26, 1850.

[172] 'An Elective Judiciary', *BDE*, July 12, 1858; 'An Elective Judiciary', *MC&NYE*, September 26, 1860; [Untitled], *MC&NYE,* May 24, 1860; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, January 18, 1858; 'Judicial Election in New Orleans', *NI*, May 25, 1853; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, November 4, 1853; Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 96-97; 'New York Judges', *NI*, June 30, 1853; 'An Elective Judiciary', *NI*, November 9, 1854; 'From the City of New York', *NI*, August 31, 1858; 'The Elective Judiciary', *NI*, November 11, 1858.

[173] 'An Elective Judiciary', *BDE*, July 3, 1858; 'An Elective Judiciary', *BDE*, September 26, 1860; 'The State of Society', *BDE*, November 9, 1857.

[174] 'The Police Law-"Constitutional"', *New York Evening Express*, May 25, 1857; 'Crudites in High Places', *BDE*, December 15, 1858; 'The Bar of New York', *BDE*, August 10, 1858; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, September 12, 1859; 'Independence of the Judiciary', *NI*, September 21, 1857.

[175] Fritz, *American Sovereigns*, Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*.

between democracy and public violence. Both Fisher and Lieber described Louis-Napoleon's government as an informal democracy, where Louis-Napoleon indulged the whims of the 'huzzaing crowds' of the Paris mob to stay in power. Rather than exercising power as a traditional European monarch, he allowed the people to capture the institutions of the French government, and simply stood at their head. [176] Other city reformers agreed that the people could easily overthrow a French government in the capital and impose a new one, demonstrating the 'centralization of all authority in Paris.'[177] Especially after 1848, the setting of crowd violence in politically important cities gave it a wider significance to many conservatives, who saw in the so-called 'mob' an overbearing informal democracy that threatened to redistribute control over government power from the state institutions of a federal polity to urban people.

In American cities too, conservative reformers warned that locating centres of government power too close to the people might allow them to violently usurp control over government power. These northerners shared fears common in the South that large cities threatened republican government.[178] Conservative editorials warned that voters in 'large cities with mixed populations' were unfit to distinguish between the sheer number of offices, candidates, and parties when voting. [179] Maurice Richter similarly counselled that 'the masses' were too impulsive, violent, and unrestrained to participate in the political life of the republic.[180] 'Centralization' in large cities, Richter argued, led to a dangerous rule by urban rioters, as 'the crown' became 'the plaything of the mobs', much as the overbearing Parisian people had violently overthrown successive governments. [181] When challenging bigger governments, Richter and the *Eagle* – horrified that the New York state capitol could move to Manhattan – warned that relocated state governments would need violent authoritarian power simply to protect itself from the caprice of the people, just like the French state. [182] Despite supporting a consolidation in their own city, the *Eagle* contrasted Parisian and Manhattan-centric centralization to the decentralised town governments of Vermont and Connecticut that checked the power of corrupt officeholders and prevented an American Paris.[183] The *Eagle* had no intention of allowing a city on the scale of New York to reign unchecked over the state. Since the physical setting of government helped to determine who would control it, such voices wanted to distribute power outwards away from the urban voters who threatened sound government. Just as in Paris, the absence of institutional and geographic checks on power had the potential to allow unfit citizens to seize control of the state.

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[176] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1859, pp. 182-184, July 9, 1959, pp. 195-196, July 21, 1859, p. 202, July 27, 1859, p. 206, July 30, 1859.
Lieber, *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, vol. 2, pp. 101-106.
[177] 'Friday Morning, April 28, 1848', *MC&NYE*, April 28, 1848; 'The Constitution of France, Monarchical and Republican', *The Southern Quarterly Review* 16 (1850), pp. 504-505; 'The Crisis of the Century, *The American Whig Review* 15 (1852), p. 171; 'The Municipal Contest—Its Pretexts, Realities and Dangers', *NYH*, June 5, 1857.
[178] John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. 2 *The Coming of the Civil War, 1850-1861* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 107-108; Genovese and Genovese, *Master Class*, pp. 2, 174; O'Brien, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 79, 149, 223-225; Towers, *The Urban South*, pp. 15-36.
[179] Cited in 'Confusion of a New York Election', *NI*, November 24, 1853; Cited in 'The Elective Judiciary', *NI*, June 12, 1855.
[180] Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 158
[181] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[182] Richter, *Municipalist*, p. 70; 'Centralization', *BDE*, Jun 28, 1854; 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853.
[183] 'Consolidation', *BDE*, October 20, 1853.

Conservatives opposed to consolidation, like Richter, saw avoiding centring state power in populous cities as a solution to the problem of power centralizing in street gangs and mobs. Consolidationists, though, often interpreted disorder itself as an expression of democracy, and linked curbing the authority of the multitude in public space to limiting their authority in democratic elections within consolidated cities. When designing charters for consolidated cities, consolidationist newspapers called for a small number of 'experienced and capable citizens', the 'best citizens', and 'competent citizens' to draft charters, explicitly selected candidates from third party tickets or genteel partisans, and deliberately looked outside the second party system for solace.[184] Eli Kirk Price saw Philadelphia's enlargement – including larger wards and at-large elections – as a way for 'quiet and unobtrusive citizens', 'men of large experience and stake in the community' and the 'best men' to take back control from corrupt politicians, gangs, and firemen who controlled partisan nominating conventions.[185] Such manifestoes for nonpartisan consolidated government therefore gave the impression of sharing power in a polity purged of party corruption, but they also hoped that suppressing party conflict would serve to make consolidated government less responsive to popular control. A consolidated government, figures like Price hoped, would allow propertied men to rise to office.

Some conservatives went even further. Where partisan government weakened government ability to impose order on the people, a government free of democratic competition would enable the efficient exercise of state power outwards. The conservative New York *Express* warned that cities teeming with European immigrant voters needed European-style standing armies and police to maintain order, and consolidationists also emphasised that their new centres of political authority could wield power outwards over people in need of firm government but often all too dependent on inept party leaders. To such consolidators, a 're-organization of parties', the removal of 'corrupt partizan dictators', and a government of the 'right minded and independent citizen' would allow for an 'orderly' fire department, a 'uniform and rigorous' police system, and better city railroads.[186] To the *Picayune*, the 'quiet and order' of elections without the Whigs and Democrats would lead to 'vigorous enforcement' and 'good order' within the city. [187] Thus conservatives suggested creating new centralized institutions isolated from party control would rein in the power of a Paris-style crowd. Rather than replacing the second party system in their consolidated cities with a more expansive urban democracy, they hoped that a strong government and an orderly society would help make people more deferential both on the street and at the ballot box.

For consolidations, the remoteness of enlarged city government could offer an alternative to more proscriptive democratic curbs. In New Orleans, the *Picayune* argued for city officers to be elected citywide rather than by district on the basis that localism encouraged them to cater to 'cliques' and 'factions' above the common good. [188] Philadelphian consolidators too argued that an enlarged city would create 'good order' as it

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[184] 'Municipal Affairs', *DP*, March 5, 1854; 'Consolidation Again', *DP*, November 9, 1851; 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, November 12, 1853; 'Consolidation', *DP*, December 7, 1851.
[185] Price, *History of Consolidation*, pp. 23-24, 78
[186] 'Municipal Reform', *NA&USG*, October 7, 1853; 'Consolidation', *PL*, October 25, 1853; 'The Election and What it Settles', *NA&USG*, October 15, 1853.
[187] 'The New Council', *DP* (March 30, 1855).
[188] 'Charter Amendments', *DP* (January 21, 1855)

suppressed 'petty local strifes' and 'ward politicians'.[189] Replacing politicians close to the people with a more remote government would help insulate the state from popular control while also, supposedly, allowing the 'best men' to rise to the top. Instead of disenfranchising voters, they simply hoped to move power to where they believed the people could not access it. Moreover, they applied the same logic to the police, hoping that a more distant impersonal force would better impose order on the people, replacing the personal authority of neighbourhood control in which local alderman and ward constables often relied on the votes of wrongdoers. Reformers in Philadelphia and Brooklyn both defended the 'remedy' of 'consolidation' and 'centralization' on the basis that it allowed them to separate police officers from the 'local sympathies, local politics, or local fears' of the neighbourhoods the city policed. [190] When consolidationists called for putting power to direct the new consolidated city government in people and not parties, they were not calling for a decentralisation of sovereignty from the centre outwards to residents of the wards or from elites to the people through competitive elections. Rather, consolidators in Philadelphia and other cities emphasised that centralising power by expanding the borders of the polity would in practice safeguard control over state authority.

Even conservative critics of 'centralization' in its consolidationist guise, however, shared some of the scepticism about democracy as their counterparts. In Brooklyn, Richter, despite opposing the sort of large consolidated governments consolidationists envisioned, did so in a manner that indicated his lack of comfort with Jacksonian democracy. While had claimed he opposed bureaucracy and professional government, he also lambasted rotation in office, stating that a more 'steady form of government' was required. [191] He, too, demanded that states and municipalities replace multiple local officeholders and frequent elections with single executives invested with broad authority to enforce the law. Anticipating the cry of Gilded Age 'mugwump' reformers, who insisted that so-called 'administrative' offices should not be appointed through majority rule or party patronage, Richter argued that 'clerical' executive offices should not be elected. [192] Thus both the democratic aspects of the second party system and the size of consolidated governments tended to undermine Richter's ideal patchwork of town and ward governments, but he, like other conservatives, saw the necessity to place state authority in the proper hands. As much as Richter decried consolidated government and 'monarchical' centralization, indeed, he shared the belief that municipal governments needed to centralize power in independent officeholders, even if he wanted to contain their power within individual districts, wards, and townships in a federated system of local government. Despite opposing the geographic centralization of power inwards from the periphery to the centre and upwards from towns and counties to states and the nation, Richter followed, at a local level, the conservative instinct for centralization of control over municipal government in institutions and propertied citizens as an alternative to a riotous partisan democracy.

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[189] Many Whigs, 'Consolidation', *NA&USG*, August 29, 1853; 'Passage of the Consolidation Bill', *PL*, February 1, 1854.
[190] 'Local Affairs', *PL*, September 17, 1850; M., 'Police—No. 7', *NA&USG*, November 01, 1849; 'The Report of the Committee on Police of the Consolidation Commissioners', *BDE*, January 10, 1854. One speaker at a meeting, Judge Anson V. Parsons, also spoke at conventions in support of Philadelphian railroad expansion to Erie to compete with New York. See 'Sunbury and Erie Railroad Convention', *The Star of the North*, October 02, 1851.
[191] Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 222-223.
[192] *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 238-243, 277.

Such ideas moved between municipal and national politics in the 1850s. Some conservatives also used a similar logic to explain the sectional crisis, seeing the disorder as a consequence of democratic excess and a problem of government weakness, something that would to come to inform many conservatives' attitudes to sectional tension. Just as conservative city reformers used partisanship to explain urban chaos, some also blamed partisanship in both Kansas Territory and Congress for the crisis in 'Bleeding Kansas'.[193] The *Public Ledger*, in response, enthusiastically supported the use of the army to impose law and order on the contending parties much as it had supported militia intervention to rein in Philadelphia's 'savages'. Yet it also proposed the abolition of the free territorial press and democratic elections, and argued settlers should spend their time farming rather than idly engaging in politics and violence.[194] The *Ledger*'s response to sectional conflict then followed a similar path to their response to urban disorder. They presented it not as an issue driven by structural tensions over (say) slavery or class but as a problem of a weak state allowing the popular usurpation of power, and one that only concentrating that power in a government remote from the people could prevent. Antislavery conservatives could also use the same reasoning. The *Courier and Enquirer* in New York, despite opposing the Fugitive Slave Act, stridently opposed abolitionists who ousted a Massachusetts judge from office for enslaving Anthony Burns, and described it as an example of a 'mass-worshipping' democracy overturning the independence of the judiciary, the rule of law, and 'public order'.[195] Such Americans explained sectional tension, like social conflict in big cities, as a problem rooted in the weakness of democratically-elected governments and the dangers of centralizing power in the people. This was a problem that only creating new centres of government authority either independent of the people – or at least less dependent on their whims – could solve.

Conservative supporters and opponents of centralization might have disagreed stridently over in whom and what party they ought to centralize power. Yet they all linked creating geographic and institutional centres of authority capable of enforcing order over the city to curbing the perceived excesses of democratic government. Implicit in conservatives' critique of the party system, politicians, and party conflict was a criticism of the universal the white male electorate. By voting for politicians who indulged their violent tendencies and undermining the rule of law on the streets, voters in large cities reminded critical onlookers of the Paris crowd, and with it, the roots of a dangerous centralization either in mob rule or authoritarian dictatorship. The growing ranks of unpropertied, immigrant, and Catholic voters in America's expanding cities seemed, some conservatives suggested, unable to resist the temptation to become a rival source of sovereignty to the republic. Conservatives responded with their own programmes for modernisation, which tried to resist the democratic tendencies of the era. Measures to preserve law and order and roll back some of the gains of Jacksonian democracy served to concentrate power in the hands of conservative elites. Even the most ardent centralizers hoped to retain barriers to state power when it might threaten their property. The conservatives examined here therefore did not intend to create powerful governments that radicals might use to redistribute property or interfere with the enforcement of the laws, which, in the 1850s, included the re-enslavement of fugitives from the South. Their reform programs instead stood as counters to a narrative of progress and

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[193] 'Governor Reeder on Kansas Affairs', *The Sun*, July 28, 1856.
[194] 'Law Beginning to Reign in Kansas', *PL*, June 25, 1856); 'Food for Kansas', *PL*, June 17, 1856.
[195] [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, March 24, 1855; Problem democracy age slavery.

democratisation. Law and order did not just give conservatives the opportunity to scale back democracy at its margins. Conservatives instead hinted that limiting the authority of the enfranchised masses and encouraging law and order were one and the same.

Conclusion

When writing his history of the Philadelphia consolidation movement, Eli Kirk Price concluded that conflicting laws, governments, and police in the region's municipalities drove the movement to merge the metropolis into one government with a strong executive and all the constituent parts 'bound to the common center'. The absence of 'division', he argued, gave the consolidated government its strength.[196] Price's analysis captured much of the conservative rationale for consolidation. Municipal boundaries limited state authority, so consolidated government had a law-enforcing power greater than the sum of its parts, as it removed barriers to the central institutions of city government from exercising power over the entire city. These questions about geographic barriers to more centralized state authority were especially portentous when attention turned from local rioting to national sectional conflict, and the conservative justification for consolidation showed how they believed they could build strong government, but insulated from democratic control and often in practice free from control of party opponents.

When engaging with movements for municipal reform, conservatives used centralization as a political weapon to challenge gangs, rioters, and mobs as a rival state within a state. Like conservative critics of Louis-Napoleon and the French Second Republic, they used centralization to help understand how the people had assumed a monopoly on political authority, though this time the American city rather than Paris provided the example. They interpreted violence on the streets of their metropolises as a challenge to the rule of the law, rejecting older ideas that riot was a legitimate form of politics, yet accepting that violence and democracy seemed to go hand in hand. Consolidating authority in the institutions of an expanded municipal government offered an alternative to the centralized power of the people.

But conservatives in different political parties could also use centralization to delegitimise rival city strengthening movements. Democratic critics described the Republican imposition of the Metropolitan Police on New York City in terms similar to how Carey's warnings about the consequences of international free trade: of dependence on remote and centralized sources of power. While conservatives might have agreed on the need for law and order, they also diverged on wider issues of political economy, the sectional crisis, and ethnic tensions. State strengthening could give them genuine cause for concern when it did not put themselves and their political allies in power. Claiming that their political rivals were creating a much more dangerous state, regional, or national centralization that threatened American traditions of self-government allowed them to work towards their own ends, with the term functioning once more here as a political weapon to delegitimise opposition.

Despite claiming to oppose centralization when it threatened to give the people or rival parties control over stronger government, conservative consolidators looked for ways to create centralized power relationships between places and institutions. Just as they often turned to geographic and institutional centralizations nationally and regionally, they applied

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[196] Price, *History the Consolidation*, pp. 80-81.

the same imagined power relationships within cities to bring about law and order. To combat the perceived popular threat to state supremacy, reformers looked to removing institutional and geographic barriers that inhibited city government authority. Both police reform and consolidation allowed conservatives to open up and strengthen power relationships of city government outward over deviant people and neighbourhoods. Americans might have often claimed that dividing power was necessary to avoid dangerous excesses of government power when applied to nations and states. But in practice, while they did take seriously republican warnings against concentrations of power, they used these warnings to build governments as well as restrict them.

Even conservative opponents of consolidation, while opposing the consolidation on a wide metropolitan scale that supporters enthusiastically embraced, nonetheless supported and imagined centralization at a smaller scale, even at the level of the township, ward, or municipality. They opposed consolidation not on the grounds of opposition to state power itself, but on terms of who would control that state power and to what ends. When defending their programme, they emphasised that decentralizing power among a patchwork of municipalities would strengthen local government, where consolidation would weaken it in comparison to remote state and national governments. Like consolidationists, they supported a consolidation of institutions, offices, and officeholders, albeit within strict municipal boundaries, and expected these consolidated institutions to wield substantial state power over disorderly citizens. Rather than removing geographic boundaries to state authority, they instead sought to remove institutional boundaries to government power. However, they strongly supported keeping control over this aggregate of state authority (or authorities) local, strongly fearing the consequences of this power falling in the hands of their economic or political rivals, or, even worse, the assemblage of the people or a single demagogic officeholder.

Given the common conservative assumption that mob violence allowed the people to seize the state monopoly on legitimate force and establish a majority tyranny, it is unsurprising that many of the figures considered here conceived of their project to establish law and order as a form of democratic retrenchment. Informally, they sought to rebalance the distribution of power between the people and the government in public space firmly towards the state. This meant that conservatives also looked for ways to ensure that control over this new stronger government did not fall into the wrong hands. In addition to consolidating governments, they proposed another centralization: one of decision-making power from the people to a small group of propertied urban residents. While they did not necessarily turn away from universal white male suffrage, as would sometimes happen in the 1870s, their designs for new city charters indicate that they were relocating centres of power away from local control, reducing the number of elective officeholders, and enforcing deference through powerful police forces. Making these changes, they implied, would draw control of politics away from the masses and the corrupt politicians who managed them, and put power back in the hands of propertied elites, now free of the supposed incentives to permit disorder in return for votes. Conservatives might have been reluctant to endorse European-style authoritarian regimes, despite their occasional praise for Napoleon III, but their belief that public order required the rule of the 'best men' perhaps made them more similar to European state builders than they cared to admit.

Conservative supporters of 'consolidation' may not have described their own projects pejoratively as a centralization, but they nonetheless embraced this process. Despite

invoking a republican vernacular of opposition to centralization, were by no means backward looking, uninventive, or overly enamoured with the state structures of the eighteenth century. The growth of large cities, fuelled by economic growth and immigration, may have offered conservative elites prosperity. However, the growing numbers of immigrant and unpropertied citizens also seemed to pose a challenge. When conservatives suggested that Paris showed the future, it was in reference to this ongoing transformation. Rather than seeing the extension of democratic rights such as universal white male suffrage and the opening of offices like the judiciary to popular ballot as progress, they argued that real advancement required greater centralization of power over time in order to preserve republican order from this growing democratic disorder. They might have often disagreed among themselves over where and whom to centralize power into, but all agreed that they needed to remove barriers to city governments downtown. Consolidation allowed them to build new power relationship outward from seats of city government over people, neighbourhoods, and property. City reform therefore helped conservatives of different stripes think about how to build a modern conservative government and contain what they perceived as the growing trend towards democracy and disorder.

Chapter 4: Conservative Opponents of 'Centralization' Confront the Slavery Crisis

Introduction

While the conservatives from previous chapters confronted the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848, the growth of imperial cities, and social disorder in burgeoning metropolises, they also observed and responded to the widening sectional dispute. Despite often having strong opinions on the morality, immorality, and economic consequences of slavery, many conservatives in the early 1850s believed that sectionalism was a problem of democracy and power relationships rather than slavery. They warned that, through democratic elections that gave northeastern voters a sectional majority in Congress and resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act in northern cities, the people were again responsible for centralizing power. They therefore conceptualised the slavery crisis as a similar problem of democracy and disorder, a process of centralization geographically inwards into the northeast and institutionally into the hands of northern antislavery voters and rioters. However, as the sectional crisis grew over the course of the decade, some conservatives began to use centralization differently. Those who moved into the new Republican Party in the late 1850s sometimes described slaveholders removing geographic boundaries to power, only this time the power of the South, as a political weapon against slavery, the South, and Democrats. Centralization, while not determining their stance on slavery extension, helped conservatives conceptualise the fraught politics of the period.

In the first half of the 1850s, conservatives argued again that the people were centralizing power. First, direct antislavery action against the Fugitive Slave Act allowed them to define northern opposition to the law as a Parisian-style centralization of government power in the people, in short mob rule. Second, a northern sectional majority in terms of voters, coupled with growing mistrust in the adequacy of the checks and balances of a federal system, allowed them to recast democracy as a geographic centralization of power inwards from the nation to a single section. Conservatives, then, once again defined democracy as centralization in order to delegitimise it. This allowed them to justify a different distribution of power and redefine it as power sharing. They hoped to stabilise by concentrating political decision making in a small elite inoculated from majority rule. That is not to imply a consensus among conservatives: many split on sectional questions towards the late 1850s and by the end of the decade old allies argued over whether the greater centralizing threat lay in the northern voters rallying to the Republican banner or southern slaveholders. Yet in the crisis of the Union lay an opportunity to put forward proposals for centralization of their own, which would come to the fore in wartime blueprints and postwar Reconstruction.

Following two years of unrest over the status of slavery in the newly-acquired southwest and northern reluctance to enforce the weak Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, Congress passed the Compromise of 1850. This included a much stronger Fugitive Slave Act, a fudge on the status of slavery in the southwest, and the admission of California as a free state. Its supporters hoped that a political consensus on the settlement would end all discussion on slavery in the North and South. However, events did not turn out as the compromisers had intended. Northern abolitionists continued to protect fugitive slaves, antislavery Whigs blocked president Millard Fillmore from the 1852 Whig nomination because of his vocal

support for the compromise, and in 1854 Congress reopened the slavery debate in Kansas and Nebraska Territory, shifting the focus of agitation from the Mexican cession to the remnants of the Louisiana Purchase. This culminated in northern former Whigs, Anti-Nebraska Democrats, and Freesoilers coming together to form the antislavery Republican Party in 1854 as a purely sectional movement. In the second half of the 1850s, tensions rose as guerrilla fighting between proslavery and antislavery settlers ravaged Kansas, South Carolinian congressman Preston Brooks attacked Charles Sumner in the Senate after a fiery abolitionist speech, the Supreme Court sustained the introduction of slavery into free territory in the Dred Scott decision, and the militant John Brown brought the violence of Kansas to northern Virginia by attempting to start a slave revolt. As old party lines dissolved, the Republicans swept several northern states in the 1856 presidential contest, became the largest party in the House of Representatives in 1858, and claimed the House of Representatives and Presidency outright in 1860. Although a grouping of unionists and Know-Nothings prevented an absolute Republican majority in the House in 1858 and Democrats retained control of the Senate right up to the point of secession, critical observers in the North as well as the South sensed the federal government had fallen into sectional hands. Power, they suggested, had been centralized in the northern electorate.

A number of northern conservatives foresaw this possibility and sought to forestall it. Both antislavery and secessionist agitation for them could appear as a problem of lawlessness. Southerners routinely criticised northern urban violence as evidence that democracy was degenerating into mob rule and, used this to defend their vision of a slaveholders' republic in the South.[1] Northern conservatives shared some of these fears. Secessionists who upheld doctrines like nullification and disunion posed an obvious threat to law and order.[2] Abolitionists of the Garrisonian variety also refused to admit the legitimacy of the federal compact, calling it a 'covenant with death'. Their politics of conscience – which turned into a politics of collective resistance in response to the Fugitive Slave Act – also threatened to fragment government power.[3] Responding to such dangers led to some unlikely alliances. The Burkean Sidney George Fisher shared this conservative outlook with a number of northern ex-Whig papers but also the Democratic leaning *New York Herald* of James Gordon Bennett. Notables like Rufus Choate and George Ticknor Curtis in Boston, Charles O'Conor in New York, and George Mifflin Dallas in Philadelphia crossed the old party divides to lend their backing to reorganising the second party system to protect the Union.

Although these movements only achieved minor electoral success late in the decade, its origins stretched back further. In 1850 and 1851, a 'Union Party' movement hosted public meetings in northern cities. With the blessing of senior politicians like James Buchanan, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster, as well as many conservative dailies, they argued that the United States should defer to the Compromise of 1850 as a final settlement to the slavery question and put abolitionism and southern rights finally to rest. To do so, they suggested that the Whig and Democratic parties should officially refrain from nominating candidates whose statements on slavery were anything other than glowing endorsement of the 'peace

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[1] Genovese and Genovese, *Master Class*, pp. 2, 119, 174-175, 315-316; O'Brien, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 79, 91-92, 149, 225; Towers, *The Urban South*, pp. 15-36.
[2] Paludan, 'Crisis in Law and Order', pp. 1013-1034.
[3] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 47-48.

measures' of 1850 and ensure that they retained support from both the north and the south. But if they failed to do so, they demanded that a bisectional 'Union Party' in favour of the Compromise of 1850 replace the discredited second party system entirely. Union Party supporters therefore threatened to abolish party competition completely. [4] Yet while northern conservatives urged northerners to respect the rights of the South and respect their demanded states' rights under the Constitution and Compromise of 1850, they also supported the use of force to defend the Union to prevent secession in 1850 and 1860. [5] For conservatives, ongoing adherence to the Compromise of 1850 took great importance as a plan to prevent power consolidating in an unthinking northern electorate or southern slaveholders accustomed to brinkmanship.

For these conservatives, the Compromise of 1850 was less a convenient agreement on the status of slavery in Utah and New Mexico and more a tool to curb the democratic debate that allowed this geographic centralization of power into Northern cities. Historians have discussed the relative success or failure of the Compromise, and whether its terms were pro-northern, pro-southern, or the beginning of a political realignment. [6] Indeed, conservative supporters of the Compromise of 1850 included men on both sides of the slavery divide, and moderates who would not come to oppose slavery until 1856 and 1860. I argue that conservatives did not see the Compromise of 1850 as a proslavery or antislavery bargain. They rejected such terms because they believed that the process of politicians coming to an agreement and forming a political consensus would solve the sectional divide. The terms mattered less than keeping slavery out of democratic debate where the northern majority could settle it on their own terms, leaving the south out of the decision-making process. Democratic debate on slavery seemed anything but part of a plural open-ended debate between two opposed but legitimate viewpoints. They assumed that the practice of democracy – election campaigns, public debate, and popular mandates – only encouraged the people to become a singular source of violent power. Following the passage of the compromise, they emphasised that both parties needed to agree to stop discussing any of the issues around slavery and assist the federal government in enforcing the law. To them, the Compromise of 1850 was a tool to give the federal government power to enforce the law, rather than a settlement between a proslavery South and an antislavery North.

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[4] Foner, *Business and Slavery*, pp. 55-87; Parks, *John Bell of Tennessee*, pp. 263-282. For records of meetings launching Union movements, see Union Safety Committee, *Proceedings of the Union Meeting*; Union Safety Committee (ed.), *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Prominent Men in the United States* (New York, 1851); Committee of Arrangement, *Proceedings of the Great Union Meeting Held in the Large Saloon of the Chinese Museum, Philadelphia, on the 21st of November 1850* (Philadelphia, 1850); Union Safety Committee, *The Proceedings of the Union Meeting, Held at Brewster's Hall, October 24, 1850* (New Haven, 1851); *The Proceedings of Two Meetings: Held in Boston, on the 7th & 14th July, to Protest Against the Nomination of Gen. Scott, for the Presidency, & to Recommend Hon. Daniel Webster for That Office* (Boston, 1852); *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall, November 26, 1850* (Boston, 1850). For examples of newspaper support, see 'The Great Meeting', *NYH*, October 28, 1850; 'Letters from Washington', *Newark Daily Advertiser*, January 26, 1850; 'The Union and Constitution Movement', *The Weekly Herald*, December 14, 1850; 'Affairs at Washington, *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, March 4, 1850; 'A National Union Convention', *Pensacola Gazette,* December 21, 1850; 'Union and Compromise Triumph - Position of Mr. Benton - Union of the Democracy, &c', *The Sun*, April 18, 1850; 'The Election To-Morrow-The Seward State Ticket and Nullification', *NYH*, November 4, 1850.
[5] 'Resistance to the Law in Boston', *MC&NYE*, February 19, 1851; 'The Union as it Is', *BA*, October 14, 1850; 'The Admission of Nebraska-Not a Question of Southern Faith', *BA*, February 9, 1854; 'Disunionists', *BA*, September 20, 1850.
[6] Ayres, *What Caused the Civil War'*, pp. 103-144; Brooke, 'Party, Nation and Cultural Rapture', pp. 72-98; Foner, *Politics and Ideology*; Foner, 'The Causes of the American Civil War', pp. 197-214; Kornblith, 'Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War', pp. 76-105; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 23-43; Varon, *Disunion*, pp. 2-4.

Raising the threat of centralization at the hands of the northern electorate therefore helped conservatives justify their own programme of centralization. Conservatives' responses to the sectional crisis suggest that they used it as a pretext to build a stronger but less democratic federal government, just as they used urban disorder as a crisis to do so at a local level. Indeed, they cited violent opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act as a justification for giving the federal government power to intervene in northern cities as well as enforce the union over an unwilling south, just as the same spectre had been used to condemn Parisian revolutionaries in 1848 and urban rioters who challenged the rule of law. Their demands for deference to the Compromise of 1850 also helped them concentrate decision-making power in fewer hands. In place of a plural system of competing candidates, supporters of a Union Party sometimes hinted they would curb majority rule by establishing a quasi-one-party state and withdrawing the opportunity for the people to elect opponents of the Compromise of 1850. Suggesting that the federal government and parties would gain legitimacy from their ability to command support from northern and southern elites rather than popular majorities helped give this strong, undemocratic, and centralized regime the impression of power sharing across geography. This distracted from its concentration in the hands of conservative men of property and political institutions. Conservatives therefore saw the slavery crisis as an opportunity to build a new Union, one less beholden to popular majorities.

By the mid-1850s, northern conservatives had already failed in their attempts remove slavery from the realm of legitimate public debate. But some continued to draw on their understanding of sectional politics as a democratic centralization of power when confronting the emergent Republican Party and, to a lesser extent, states' rights Democrats. To put their plan to reconcentrate power back in the hands of the federal government into action, they turned to the candidacies of Millard Fillmore in 1856 and John Bell in 1860. Pledging adherence to the law, finality on the Compromise of 1850, and opposition to disunion and abolitionism, their platforms implicitly encouraged the people to defer to the decisions of their betters rather than use elections to decide whether the western territories would be free or slave.[7] Other northern conservatives, meanwhile, began to define slaveowners and proslavery violence in the North as the more menacing centralizing power, and turned to the Republican Party itself as an agent of strong government capable of imposing order. Unlike their new abolitionist allies, though, they turned to antislavery primarily out of concern for the Union and the integrity of the federal government rather than humanitarian concern for slaves themselves. Fear of another sovereignty beyond their control – this one vested in masters rather than norther voters – created a conservative argument for Republican rule that contrasts recent reevaluations of the party that emphasise its aggressive antislavery position.[8]

These northern conservatives in the 1850s had to weigh up where the greater threat of centralization lay: in northern voters or southern slaveholders. In doing so, though, they could define their own nation-building alternative to both the perceived excesses of northern

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[7]   'Whig   Party   Platform   of   1856',   The   American   Presidency   Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25857 [Accessed October 10, 2015]; 'Constitutional Union Party Platform of 1860', The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29571 [Accessed October 10, 2015].
[8] For example, see Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana, 2005); James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (London, 2007); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (London, 2013); James Oakes, *The Scorpion's Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 2015).

majority rule and southern disunion and states' rights, while marketing it as decentring power broadly across sectional divisions. State-strengthening – often tied to anti-democratic retrenchment – appeared to offer a solid basis for national stability. As much as southern fire-eaters and northern Republicans, then the conservatives studied here actively fought to define the form of the changing American nation-state. Saving the Union was therefore a means to an end as much as an end in itself: allowing conservatives to rebuild elite power.

Antislavery Activism and Centralizing Democracy

In the early years of the 1850s, warnings that the people were about to centralize power, as they had in France and were doing in northern cities, were an important political weapon in their arsenal against abolitionists, freesoilers, and antislavery. Resistance to the controversial and punitive Fugitive Slave Act in northern cities blurred the distinction between antislavery activism and the kinds of urban disorder conservatives had seen and opposed in France and American cities. Conservatives therefore conceptualised opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act as an issue of who held power in American cities rather than a battle over the morality of enslaving free African-Americans. They again described the people as progenitors of this process of centralization, putting government institutions and city streets under their own authority with no institutional or legal limits on their power. Conservatives therefore believed that antislavery activism had important consequences on the ground in their own cities, counties, and states, and well as throughout the Union between the North and South. This allowed them to use the idea of a process of centralization locally as a political weapon with which they could attack their abolitionist and antislavery political opponents nationally.

These warnings against popular centralization rested on popular resistance to the new Fugitive Slave Act, which strengthened federal power to apprehend alleged runaways in northern cities, brought the reality of slavery and the sectional crisis right onto people's doorsteps. Indignant abolitionists, preachers, and mass meetings denounced the law, demanded Americans disobey it, and organised to prevent its enforcement by violence if necessary.[9] However, the Fugitive Slave Act had numerous supporters in the North, including President Millard Fillmore and newspapers, meetings, and political parties. They defended it as a measure to hold the Union together and as such demanded strict adherence to its provisions.[10]

Divisions over race and slavery had long sparked riots on the streets of northern cities, and tied national questions over sectionalism to local ones over law and order. In the 1830s and 1840s mobs had often attacked abolitionists and blacks who met in northern cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, often with 'gentlemen of property and standing' leading and directing violence against antislavery and non-white activists. By midcentury, however, mercantile and professional elites had largely embraced the cause of law and order, and no longer saw collective violence as a legitimate response to urban tensions over race

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[9] Stanley Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860.* (Chapel Hill, 1970), pp. 49-79; Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to slavery* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 231-151; McPherson, *Battle Cry*, pp. 80-86; Nevins, *Ordeal*, vol. 1, pp. 380-401; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 135-130.

[10] Campbell, *Slave Catchers,* pp. 49-79, 96-109; Fehrenbacher, Slaveholding, pp. 231-151; Nevins, *Ordeal*, vol. 1, pp. 401-404

and slavery. [11] Thus when critics of the Fugitive Slave Law turned to some of the extra-legal tactics of the earlier anti-abolitionists they faced censure as much for the methods they used as the ends they pursued. Benjamin Hallett, for example, argued that opponents of the Compromise of 1850 advocated 'rebellion, mobism, and anarchy', and as citizens had during the 1787 Shays Rebellion, they now faced a choice between the 'the supremacy of the law' and 'the despotism of the mob'. To Hallett the divisions were stark: 'law or anarchy, the magistracy or the mobocracy'.[12] Resolutions at a Faneuil Hall pro-compromise meeting attended by several conservatives like Hallett and Rufus Choate described any 'resistance' to the Fugitive Slave Act as 'subversive', threatening 'anarchy and bloodshed'. [13] And drawing from similar arguments used to delegitimise domestic radicals after the Revolutions of 1848, the *Baltimore American* compared what it saw as illegitimate Irish resistance to the British government to abolitionists' inability to 'submit' to the law.[14] As well as provoking the South – another common trope in pro-compromise propaganda – resistance to the Compromise of 1850 therefore threatened urban order and state authority in the North.

Here conservative criticism of resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law was woven into wider suspicions of the threat a violent democracy posed to balanced government. George Ticknor Curtis, a critic of what he saw as the overly democratic 1853 Massachusetts constitution, also raised the spectre of Shay's Rebellion and the French Revolution as examples of the people collectively usurping the authority of the state.[15] In the late 1840s and early 1850s, the Philadelphian Sidney George Fisher routinely defined democracy as a system of mob rule, used a lurid language of violence to describe its character, and frequently compared Jacksonian America to the French Reign of Terror. Fisher also blamed popular disorder for legislative brawls and dysfunction over slavery. [16] When conservatives used graphic depictions of violence and disorder, they challenged what they perceived as usurpations of, the state monopoly on power. Conservatives blurred the boundaries that separated discussions of sectionalism, democracy, and urban order, reading national and municipal affairs as part of a common problem rooted in untrammelled power in the people.

This fitted into a wider elite suspicion that the people were more inclined to participate in government through public rioting and political violence than free elections and the rule of law. To many antebellum Americans, the mob had a place in a democratic polity to the horror of elites who privileged 'reason' over violence.[17] Anxiety about the links between violence and politics shaped the battles of the Early Republic. Federalists saw in their 'Jacobin' Jeffersonian Republican opponents the same democratic violent threat against established hierarchies that the *Sans-Culottes* posed, and their descendants raised the threat of violent anarchy through the civil war era.[18] Local assumption of state power that rightfully belonged in national institutions raised the spectre of what James Madison[19]

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[11] Richards, *Property and Standing*.
[12] *Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, pp. 23-24.
[13] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[14] 'The Higher Law', *BA*, January 24, 1854.
[15] George Ticknor Curtis, *History of the Origin, Formation and Adoption of the Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2 (New York, 1854), pp. 37-43; Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 260-274.
[16] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 281-284, November 16, 1849, p. 165, March 11, 1849, pp. 200-203, 207-208, May 14, 1849, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 47-64, December 31, 1851.
[17] Maier, 'Popular Uprisings', pp. 3-35; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 87-164.
[18] Cleves, *Terror in America*; Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, pp. 303-373; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 41-42, 45.
[19] Madison, 'The Same Subject Continued', pp. 41-47; Rakove, *Meanings*, pp. 161-202.

described as a 'pure democracy', where the people held power directly. And like Madison, who believed that 'such Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention' when extended over wide and diverse countries like the United States, these conservatives feared the consequences of devolving too much authority from governors to the governed. When Jacksonian Democrats rode roughshod over legal and procedural niceties in the name of popular government, National Republicans and Whigs charged Jacksonian Democrats with embracing mob rule through popular government, political machines, and corrupt patronage.[20] The urban setting of this aspect of the growing sectional crisis linked the sectional question to existing concerns about power, democracy, and urban violence.

The dramatic rescue of the alleged fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins in Boson in the spring of 1851 gave northern supporters of the Compromise of 1850 in a number of northern cities the opportunity to demonstrate how concentrating power in the people – not the rights and wrongs of slavery – created sectionalism. In the Spring of 1851, United States marshals arrested Minkins in the Boston restaurant where he worked. When he was brought before the commissioners authorised to decide his fate under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act, a group of abolitionists broke into the courtroom and spirited him to Canada beyond the reach of federal law. President Fillmore ordered civilian and military officials to catch and prosecute all involved as local police and law enforcement seemed unable and unwilling to enforce the law.[21]

Conservative newspapers in Boston – a centre of moral opposition to slavery – saw the failure of enforcement as a problem of state weakness. The sectional crisis came to the streets of northern cities rather than remaining an abstract debate about the morality of slavery in far-flung southern states and western territories. Before the American Civil War, many Americans drew links between strengthening the national government and strengthening city government.[22] Conservatives did the same to bolster the legitimacy of the federal government in fugitive cases. Editorials moved easily between local and national law enforcement, asking rhetorically if the reader would 'feel secure at his own fireside' if important laws went unenforced. This reconfigured the Fugitive Slave Act by seeing it not as part of the sectional question but as a local question of whether the law stood above the crowd. Enforcing the measure, one paper put it, was about the 'power…of the city police' as much as protecting the Union.[23] When describing the Minkins case, other conservatives linked local 'resistance' to the law to 'disunion, anarchy, and ruin' on a national scale.[24] The *Boston Courier* raised the 'spectre of the chaos of the old [pre-1787] confederation' in charting what would happen without 'the laws duly enacted' on the streets of Boston.[25] The sectional

[20] Grimstead, *Mobbing*, pp. 3-7.
[21] Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, pp. 148-151; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic,* pp. 233-235; Stephen Kantrowitz *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York, 2012); McPherson, *Battle Cry*, pp. 80-86; Nevins, *Ordeal*, vol. 1, pp. 388-389; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, pp. 135-130.
[22] Einhorn, *Property Rules*, pp. 20-26, 70-74; Heath, 'In Union There is Strength', pp. 101-124; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 15-54.
[23] 'Measures for the Public Safety', *Boston Courier*, February 19, 1851).
[24] Joseph Wright, 'Extract from the Message of Governor Wright, of Indiana, December 31, 1850', in Union Safety Committee (ed.), *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Prominent Men in the United States* (New York, 1851), pp. 50-53; 'The Appeals to the Constitution', *Boston Courier*, November 1, 1850; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, February 20, 185; 'Affairs in Boston', *NI*, February 24, 1851; 'Mr. Webster's Letter', *BA*, February 3, 1851;
[25] 'The Common Cause', *Boston Courier*, April 9, 1851.

crisis did not just exist in Congress, Kansas, and the offices of the *New York Tribune*: it shaped
– and was shaped by – the towns and cities that were already experimenting with new
geographic and institutional concentrations of power to challenge the threat of urban
disorder to republican government.

Minkins' rescue therefore allowed conservatives to show how, in their opinion, the
mob had usurped legitimate government in Boston. They described the affair as a 'riot' and
its participants as a 'mob', framing this aspect of the sectional crisis as another example of
the urban disorder that appeared on both sides of the Atlantic.[26] Opponents of the Fugitive
Slave Act, conservative papers argued, were 'taking the matter into their own hands' and
ensuring 'MOB LAW take the place of legal authority in Boston'.[27] The fact that these
abolitionists had protected Minkins 'within a stone's throw of City Hall, the Marshal's office,
and the headquarters of the Police' only highlighted that the people – like urban rioters and
the Paris mob – had assumed power that legitimately belonged to the state.[28] Newspapers in
Boston and elsewhere hysterically raised the threat of the city under complete mob rule,
governed by 'that spirit of lawless violence that would have filled our streets with violence
and bloodshed'. Only obedience to the Fugitive Slave Act, they argued, would protect
Boston from these 'ultras' and 'fanatics'.[29] Conservative appeals to the constitution framed
the question of the morality of the Fugitive Slave Act in terms of popular opinion
overturning lawful government – and made it clear this was something they stridently
opposed. Indeed, the fact that Bostonian US Marshals declined to intervene outraged
conservatives precisely because, by failing to enforce the law, they had acquiesced in
inverting the proper power relationship between the people and the state.[30] These
conservatives described resistance to the fugitive law as a process of centralization of power
in the hands of the people and the formation of a state within a state in northern cities.

From cities it was easy to extrapolate to the wider North. Later, one conservative
Whig journal in New York compared the Wisconsin Supreme Court and Ohio Legislature's
nullifications of the Fugitive Slave Act and South Carolina's nullification of the 'tariff of
abominations' to the rebellions of the Early Republic, again showing how the federal
government no longer governed where it was supposed to, and suggesting how lawless
popular sentiment had usurped bulwarks of order like judiciaries and states.[31] In place of the
rule of law, Curtis bemoaned, America had become a 'mere democracy, enacting,
expounding, and executing laws by the direct action of the people.'[32] The idea that a riotous,
violent democracy had laid siege to the institutions of government – capturing some and

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[26] 'Affairs in Boston', *NI*, February 24, 1851; 'The Effect of False Doctrines', *Boston Courier*, February 21, 1851;
'The Late Riot in Boston', *BA*, February 19, 1851; 'The Late Boston Riot', *BA*, February 20, 1851; 'The Police
and Public Order', *Boston Courier*, February 18, 1851; 'The Slave Case', *Boston Courier*, April 12, 1851.
[27] 'The Appeals to the Constitution', *Boston Courier*, November 1, 1850; 'Resistance to the Law in Boston',
MC&NYE, February 19, 1851.
[28] 'Mob Law Triumphant', *Boston Courier*, February 17, 1851; Veritas, 'The Boston Outrage as Regarded in
Washington-The River and Harbor Bill, *MC&NYE*, February 20, 1851; 'The Late Boston Riot', *BA*, February
20, 1851.
[29] 'Mob Law Triumphant', *Boston Courier*, February 17, 1851; Veritas, 'The President's Proclamation-Important
Decision in the Supreme Court-Affairs in Congress', *MC&NYE*, February 21, 1851; 'Law and Liberty', *Boston
Courier*, April 14, 1851.
[30] Veritas, 'The Boston Outrage as Regarded in Washington-The River and Harbor Bill, *MC&NYE*, February 20,
1851; 'The Late Boston Riot', *BA*, February 20, 1851.
[31] 'Nullification Sentiments', *New York Evening Express*, March 4, 1857.
[32] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 468-477.

prostrating others – and could, unchecked, assume the state monopoly on violence for itself, lay implicit in these conservatives' attempts to force northerners to abide by the Compromise of 1850.

To some conservatives, then, the people, rather than the federal government and the Fugitive Slave Act, had become the centralizing threat in national politics, and this could apply when the people acted individually as well as collectively. Conservatives often criticised both southern secessionists and northern abolitionists for relying on a supposed 'higher law' doctrine to justify opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act or the Constitution.[33] To such unionists, the idea that the people could follow a 'higher law' than the Constitution represented more than just a theological dispute. It also involved the creation of multiple competing sources of state authority to rival the federal government. Indeed, the *Baltimore American* used William Seward's famous formulation of 'higher law' doctrine to describe how northern abolitionists and southern 'disorganizers' believed the individual had the right to subvert the government and the law, based on an 'assumption he knows better than the state'.[34] In other words, the consequences of an individualist politics of conscience – like a collective politics of mob law – were strikingly similar, with citizens redistributing legitimate power from state institutions to disorderly people. Individuals like antislavery agitators, institutions (real or imagined) like 'the President and Directors of the Underground Railroad', and 'secret associations' – akin to 'monarchies which rely on physical force' – had effectively become states within a state because of their ability to usurp violent power.[35] The concept of a higher law, more than just representing a process of power centralizing in the hands of the people that belonged to government, helped conservatives to use centralization in a manner that challenged both the individualistic and collective strands of Jacksonian political practice. Many Americans would argue that the federal government and the power it could wield over states and citizens was the most dangerous source of violent authority – this indeed became a major claim of opponents of the Fugitive Slave Law – but these conservatives used the idea of a process of centralization to emphasise that the people claiming a mandate over the institutions of the state was the most dangerous threat to liberty instead.

Resistance, sometimes violent, to the Fugitive Slave Act brought together two issues important to conservatives in the early 1850s: the possibility that citizens in northern cities could assume for themselves violent power that conservatives wanted to reserve for themselves and the issue of preserving the Union between the North and the South. When explaining early resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law, conservatives often defined the people themselves – not slaveholders, corporations, or the federal government – as centralizing power by subjecting cities to the unrestrained rule of mobs, rioters, and protestors. The national sectional crisis therefore also spoke to conservative fears about the potential for a supposed pure, unrestrained, or direct democracy in cities and states, where the assemblage of the people, not the state, held violent power. Dissent from the Fugitive Slave Act did not just threaten the Union in Washington; it also threatened to concentrate power at the expense of the balanced structure of American republican government on their own

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[33] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, p. 21. 'The Country's Cause', *Boston Courier*, April 19, 1851.
[34] 'The Higher Law and the Right of Revolution', *BA*, January 8, 1851.
[35] 'The Higher Law', *BA*, January 24, 1854; 'Panic Among the Abolitionists', *NYH*, October 30, 1850; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, February 20, 1851.

doorsteps. This allowed conservatives to use the threat of centralization they had described in Paris, Philadelphia, and elsewhere as a political weapon against those who they believed put the Union in jeopardy. Moreover, this understanding of northern antislavery as a problem of weak government, democratic activism, and urban disorder, would strongly inform how conservatives would come to try and curb sectionalism by strengthening government.

Centralization, Sovereignty, and Democracy

Many conservatives used this threat of centralization as a pretext to monopolise political decision-masking for themselves, just as they had when confronted with other perceived challenges to elite rule. America had a long history of trying to depoliticise slavery, through mechanisms like the Gag Rule, the judiciary, and third parties. Conservatives, who often blamed democracy for northern sectionalism, hoped to do the same. Many conservative observers of resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act indeed blamed formal democracy the situation they observed on the streets of Boston. Drawing from similar arguments that democracy weakened city governments and their ability to combat violent disorder, they argued that popular elections incentivised officeholders to permit abolitionists and antislavery men to assume violent power and rule northern cities themselves. 'Agitation' in the public sphere, they warned, was thus responsible for sectionalism, not a fundamental conflict between freedom and slavery. In response, conservatives sought to centralize decision-making power over slavery in institutions insulated from popular control. This included the judiciary, political elites, and a less competitive party system. The connection conservatives drew between disobedience to the law, northern sectionalism, and electoral democracy led them to conclude that only centralizing power in their hands could hold the Union together.

When it came to the sectional question conservatives often hoped to depoliticise slavery. This was a tactic that stretched back to the early days of the Republic. The Constitution made slavery a matter for state regulation, and when the issue of territorial expansion brought it into national politics, skilled politicians like Martin Van Buren looked to creating bi-sectional parties to contain antagonism. For a few years in the 1830s and 1840, Congress's gag rule also prevented abolitionists from being heard in Washington. But by the 1840s, slavery had forced its way back into national politics, and issues like enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act made the matter all the more relevant. The years from 1848 onwards were marked by several attempts – many backed by conservative voices – to depoliticise the issue of slavery extension by putting sectional questions beyond the reach of Congress, parties, and voters. This included handing power to territorial legislatures and voters, or leaving the decision to the Federal court system. Both approaches failed, as popular sovereignty led to guerrilla warfare in Kansas, while the Dred Scott decision in 1857 only strengthened northern opposition to a 'slave power'.

Union parties, which sprung up after the crisis of 1850, represented a less explored third option. Conservatives here used antipartisan populism, not just because they were critical of individual political parties but also because they were critical of the principle of popular government that parties encapsulated. These Union Parties and movements appeared at public meetings held in northern and southern cities in 1850 and 1851. Once Congress had passed the Compromise of 1850, supporters of compromise in northern cities held public meetings to publicly display their section's fidelity to compromise and Union – and the Fugitive Slave Act the South had demanded. Delegates and calls for these

conventions emphasised their bipartisan nature but often called for substantial reform of the second party system to deny abolitionist and secessionist sympathisers any place in the public sphere.[36] In the South, particularly Georgia, a number of Whigs and some Democrats opposed to secession formed union parties to contest elections against various southern rights coalitions.[37] Many of the organizers and attendees of northern meetings hoped for something similar, and in New York a union meeting organised a Union Party ticket for elections in 1850 and 1851, and in Massachusetts and Georgia Union Party activists drafted Daniel Webster as their candidate in 1852, who died a week before the election.[38] Meetings in other cities gave support to the idea of forming a single party to surpass the Whigs and Democrats, despite never formally organising as extensively as elsewhere. These movements therefore all hoped – but failed – to supplant the second party system, replacing party competition with consensus on the Compromise of 1850. But a broader number of mainstream conservatives – like Henry Clay, James Buchanan, and Daniel Webster – spoke of an informal Union Party consisting of Whigs and Democrats who opposed keeping abolitionist and proslavery sympathisers within their ranks.[39] These parties might compete on the tariff, immigration, or inflation – but could conspire to deny northern voters the option of voting for antislavery candidates. While Union Party activists hoped to form a formal national political party, the movement also included a larger movement that hoped to substantially reform the second party system and curb democracy to challenge sectionalism.

Those who ventured into the Union Party movement around midcentury drew on old ideas. As far back as Early Republic, Americans had considered the relationship between the people exercising their authority through elections and through mob violence. Constitution-makers in 1776 had distinguished between democracies like Greek city-states and New England towns where the people themselves directly administered state authority and mixed republics where propertied officeholders and the people shared the power of the state.[40] Such models may have worked in classical city states or among Puritan property owners, they reasoned, but would fail in a larger continental republic. In framing what was sometimes referred to as 'representative democracy' instead, they hoped that indirectly elected bodies like the Senate, gubernatorial and presidential vetoes, and the judiciary would help restrain excesses of popular power.[41] It did not seem apparent to such theorists that democratic debate was any more rational or orderly than actual mob violence. In their opinion, both the silver-tongued demagogue and the frenzied mob relied on emotional passion rather than reasoned debate: each fed off the other.[42] This interpretation of a

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[36] For an overview of Northern union meetings, see Foner, *Business and Slavery*, pp. 34-87. Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 591-592, 613-614, 801-803; Smith, *Carey*, pp. 52-64.

[37] Freehiling, *Disunion*, vol. 1, pp. 523-524; Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 608-616; Parks, *Bell*, pp. 263-282.

[38] Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 636-644; 'Union Nominations', *NYH*, November 4, 1851; 'The Election To-Morrow-The Seward State Ticket and Nullification', *NYH*, November 4, 1850.

[39] For example, see *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, pp. 37-38, 40-51; 'Mr. Clay's Speech at Frankfort', *BA*, November 2, 1850.

[40] Wood, *Creation*, pp. 197-225.

[41] Bailyn, *Origins*, pp. 272-301; Cleves, *Terror in America*, pp. 20-57; Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *Federalism*, pp. 351-357, Gustafson, *Imagining Deliberative Democracy*, pp. 1-7; Keyssar, *Vote*, pp. 1-26; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, pp. 15-16; Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 45-49; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 3-10, 13-39; Wood, *Creation*, pp. 393-467.

[42] Smith, *Dominion*, pp. 87-11.7

demagogic democracy strongly influenced how many conservatives understood the origins of antislavery violence.

Conservative unionists blamed democracy and demagoguery – not slavery – for allowing the people to usurp federal authority on the streets of Boston. Conservative supporters of the Fugitive Slave Act like George Ticknor Curtis cited Madison's fear of democratic majorities attacking property to make the case for stronger federal government.[43] Conservative unionists often blamed the public debate on slavery for the supposed violence in Boston. The 'inflammatory language' that marked discussion of the Fugitive Slave Act, warned the *Boston Courier*, created the 'spirit of resistance to law' that led to the rescue of Shadrach Minkins.[44] Indeed, the northern public sphere seemed a particularly unsuitable forum to determine the future of slavery in America. Editorials and speakers told their audiences that venal presses and politicians made 'inflammatory appeals to the base passions and blind prejudices of the multitude' and stirred up mob violence and contempt for law, authority, and Union.[45] Union Party supporters and activists described northern and southern pro and anti-slavery activists as 'nullifiers', 'disloyal', and 'fanatics' for their part in this public debate.[46] Political debate seemed like threat to government rather than a rational forum for the settlement of the sectional crisis. Such concerns about public opinion shaped the sectional politics of other conservatives too. Despite not directly writing about the Compromise, Sidney George Fisher sympathised with the plight of slaves depicted in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Yet the fact American democracy allowed the book to inflame passions, inform party politics, and subject the southern aristocratic minority to the power of the northern democratic majority tempered his support for antislavery.[47] To conservatives inclined to see rioting as an outlet of the popular will, debate, democracy, and disorder all seemed to tend towards the centralization of power in a turbulent – and unrestrained – people.

Political parties and partisanship carried this potentially violent debate from the sphere of democratic discourse into government itself. The *Baltimore American* blamed the 'turmoil' and 'passion' in New York public debate over slavery (led by the *Tribune* and other papers) and the 'squabbles, and the prominence of the sergeant-at-arms' in the House of Representatives.[48] Others warned against allowing opponents of the Fugitive Slave Law to throw 'firebrands' into elections and congressional debates, showing how they conceptualised the slavery debate in civil society as an external threat to an orderly government.[49] And supporting the Union Party movement in Boston, the *Courier* too warned that the 'sport of agitation' on slavery would lead to a 'political convulsion', describing in lured terms the violence that would follow the fall of government at the hands of a violent

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[43] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 260-274; Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 37-43, 51-55.

[44] 'The Appeals to the Constitution', *Boston Courier*, November 1, 1850.

[45] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, p. 31, 33-35; 'Measures for the Public Safety', *Boston Courier*, February 19, 1851.

[46] For example, see Thomas Pratt, James Pearce, and James Clay, *An Appeal for the Union* (Washington, 1856); *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 13-14; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, pp. 11-12; *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, pp. 10, 21, 23; 'The Great Union Meeting-Stampede Among the Nullifiers-Good beginning of a Great Work', *NYH*, November 1, 1850.

[47] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 97-106, December 27, 1852.

[48] 'Agitation Monopolised', *BA*, May 17, 1854.

[49] 'Fraternization of Abolitionism with Secessionism', *NI*, May 16, 1851; [Untitled], *Fitzgerald's City Item*, March 8, 1851; 'Mob Law Triumphant', *Boston Courier*, February 17, 1851.

democracy.[50] Public debate on slavery – not slavery itself – seemed to weaken government and its ability to contain violence. In Europe and America, conservatives had demanded that governments impose order on disorderly subjects, but public debate on slavery seemed to be doing the opposite. And to some Union party activists who wanted to further scale back party competition, it was obvious that the 'old parties', 'demagogues', and 'ale-house politicians' carried this dysfunction from public debate into federal government.[51] Direct democratic government, conservatives sometimes warned, could never maintain order, as it handed power to the very people that conservatives argued needed to be subject to government authority. This allowed conservatives to make the case for reversing the supposedly centralizing tendencies of American democracy.

Believing that democracy created northern sectionalism, conservatives turned to limiting the ability of the people to determine the future of slavery for themselves. Union Party activists' programme was perhaps the most notable, as they argued that only a one-party state could successfully contain popular debate on slavery and hold the Union together. Reforming the party system gave conservatives an opportunity to prevent debate. Unionist speakers and papers called for both political parties to drop references to slavery, predicted a reorganisation of parties along lines that separated legitimate 'conservatives' from the 'agitation' and 'fanaticism' of 'ultras'.[52] These activists therefore hoped to reform the party system so that American voters would no longer have the option of deciding between legitimate pro and anti-slavery candidates at the ballot box as they had under the second party system. Instead, a legitimate conservative party of compromise would enjoy a privileged position in public discussion and political office against its abolitionist opponents. Conservative unionists therefore tried to police political debate to the point of trying to curb party conflict on slavery altogether and leave decision-making in the hands of the federal government. Taking the power to control how the federal government dealt with slavery out of a supposedly dysfunctional democratic arena of competing parties, democratic elections, and platforms, though, curbed the decision-making power of the people and put it in independent legal institutions and offices that conservatives could more easily supervise and control. By curbing party competition, these conservatives hoped to leave legal institutions free to enforce the Compromise of 1850 free of any mandate from voters to decide the future of slavery on either northern or southern terms.

Despite not using the term, these conservatives recognised that they were implicitly centralizing power. It is striking just how hegemonic unionists recognised their vision was. The *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, for instance, confidently predicted that a Union Party would 'swallow up all others'.[53] Rather than giving decision-making power to the people who would enact it through free and fair elections, conservatives turned instead to

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[50] 'The Prospects of the Country', *Boston Courier*, December 2 1850.
[51] Philip Foner, *Business and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp. 79-80 138; *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 13-14; 'The Great Meeting at Castle Garden in favor of the Union and Constitution', *NYH*, October 29, 1850; 'Union for the Sake of Union', *Natchez Courier*, November 29, 1850; 'The Meetings of Saturday', *The Natchez Courier*, November 26, 1850; 'The Union Movement—The Good Work Still Going on', *The Weekly Herald*, December 28, 1850; 'Reception at New York of Messrs. Cass, Dickinson, and Cobb, by the Union Committee of Safety', *NI*, December 2, 1850; 'Washington Correspondence', *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, September 5, 1850. See also, Heath, 'Small Men', pp. 222-243.
[52] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall* (Boston, 1850), pp. 29, 36-38; 'The President's Special Message', *BA*, February 24, 1851.
[53] 'Affairs at Washington', *Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, March 04, 1850.

strengthening the sovereignty of the state. At a Philadelphia Union meeting, the Clay Whig Joseph Ingersoll, engaging with the antiparty movement, reminded his audience that 'the sovereignty of the law' formed 'a still higher authority' over citizens,[54] while the Baltimore *Sun* demanded public 'suppression' of opponents of the Compromise of 1850.[55] While they did not use the pejorative term, conservatives here understood that the consequence of curbing party competition on slavery was to centralize political decision-making power in fewer hands.

Union meetings were another tool conservative elites hoped to use to monopolise the debate over slavery and ensure it remained under the strict supervision of a bisectional coalition of conservative elites. Supporters urged candidates for local, state, and federal offices to abstain from discussing slavery and support the compromise in an attempted to limit the boundaries of public debate. At a meeting held just after the passage of the Compromise of 1850 at Boston's Faneuil Hall, resolutions and speakers argued that the compromise had finally 'adjusted' the territorial question, and that self-proclaimed unionists needed to 'check' those that 'vilify' the compromise measures.[56] Protecting the Union, the *Boston* Courier argued, meant attendees needed to show 'constant vigilance and discreet foresight'.[57] Their desire to eradicate discussion shows how they sought to put boundaries on what the people could debate in public. Rather than using state regulation, they sought to use pressure and influence to control what the people could and could not legitimately discuss in public. Curbing public debate in this way also helped conservatives centralize decision-making power by taking slavery out of the public sphere.

The judiciary also offered conservatives an attractive and relatively nondemocratic institution that could take responsibility for slavery without popular influence. After all, conservatives had historically supported an appointed judiciary as a check on democratic authority, and urban reformers opposed plans to make judges elective around midcentury.[58] Conservative senators had also had precedent for handing slavery to the courts as a solution to the inability of elected government to reach a binding decision. In 1848, the Senate passed the 'Clayton Compromise', which handed authority to determine the legality of slavery in the territories to the Supreme Court, only for the House to reject it, though similar provisions did appear in the Compromise of 1850.[59] Both before and after the Dred Scott decision, where Chief Justice Taney sought to impose a settlement through judicial fiat, conservative unionists demanded that 'local interests have had to submit' to the only 'tribunal whose legal province' included the power 'to decide these points'.[60] When George Ticknor Curtis published his history of the Philadelphia Convention in 1854, he stridently defended the necessity of a supreme national judiciary to enforce the law over disobedient states, no doubt

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[54] *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 21.
[55] 'Union and Compromise Triumph - Position of Mr. Benton - Union of the Democracy, &c', *The Sun*, April 18, 1850.
[56] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, pp. 6, 8-9.
[57] 'The Fanueil Hall Meeting', *Boston Courier*, November 26, 1850.
[58] Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, pp. 15-16.
[59] Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, vol. 1, pp. 492; Holt, *Whig Party*, pp. 335-336; Russel, 'What Was the Compromise of 1850?', pp. 300-301.
[60] 'The Common Cause', *Boston Courier*, April 9, 1851; The Appeals to the Constitution', *Boston Courier*, November 1, 1850; 'The Higher Law Doctrine, *BA*, January 24, 1854; 'Union Meetings at Pittsfield, (Mass.), *NI*, January 2, 1851; *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, p. 3.

with antislavery Massachusetts and disunionist South Carolina in mind. [61] These conservatives imagined removing the power to determine the future of slavery from democratic debates and the electorate to the insulated forum of the courts. Indeed, appointed judges and life tenures made the judiciary particularly suited for sovereignty on the slavery question. Fisher privately and newspapers and speakers publicly argued that the 'independent' judiciary allowed it to adjudicate on slavery where a disorderly Congress and 'demagogues' could not. [62] The judiciary, too, allowed conservatives to build a unionist government that subjected he people to its decision-making authority rather than reflected the will of the majority.

Beneath conservative opposition to partisanship, politicians, and parties lay a critique of voters and their ability to address the slavery question. Allegations that politicians intentionally inflamed sectional divisions implied that the people were unable to rationally evaluate competing positions. [63] Indeed, conservatives sometimes assumed that the people lacked the capacity to participate in a democratic polity without falling under the control of demagogues. One pro-Union Party newspaper did argue that a National Union Party would spring from 'the people'. Yet it revered the statesmen who had authored the Compromise of 1850, comparing men like Lewis Cass, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay to Roman Senators, and excluding 'fanatics' and 'incendiaries' who could mislead the electorate from their proposed movement. [64] Far from unquestioningly embracing popular sovereignty, they defined 'the people' of the union movement by deference to the political elites who they believed were real agents of historical and political change. Even defending popular sovereignty in the territories, as the *Baltimore American* did, seemed less about decentring democratic control, and more about setting a precedent that bisectional statesmen unconnected to the 'abolition' or 'slave interest' in the North and South dealt with the territorial question. Despite giving the impression of devolving power from Washington to territorial voters, what seemed important to the *American* was not that it opened democratic promise to the western territories. The paper defended the measure on the grounds that it would deny the northern people and southern slaveholders power to determine the future of slavery in the territories. [65] Despite using the language of antipartyism, these unionists used it as a form of exclusion defining 'the people' as a crowd susceptible to extremist appeals, when they ought to defer to statesmen.

In place passionate and potentially centralized democracy, conservatives looked to non-partisan deference to elites. Vesting decision-making power in nondemocratic national institutions like the federal judiciary meant giving control to those with the restraint and dispassion conservatives believed were better traits for solving the sectional crisis. Union Party activists defended their designs to replace the bipartisan second party system with a single bisectional party on the grounds that it would return 'harmony, faith, justice and order' to the American government; like Henry Carey, they used the idea of harmony as a

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[61] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 61-67, 372-384.

[62] Rufus Choate, 'The Position and Functions of the American Bar as an Element of Conservatism in the State', in Thomas E. Woods, Jr. (ed.) *The Political Writings of Rufus Choate* (Washington, 2002), p. 202; HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 105-109, July 29, 1848; 'The President's Message', *Natchez Courier*, December 13, 1850; 'Correspondence to the Newark Daily Advertiser, *Newark Daily Advertiser*, May 16, 1850; [Untitled], *Boston Courier*, December 21, 1852.

[63] 'Friends of the Union, to the Rescue!', *NI*, March 2, 1850.

[64] '"Clear the Track"', *Bellows Falls Gazette*, February 14, 1850.

[65] 'Shall New States be "Admitted upon an Equal Footing with the Original States!"', *BA*, February 6, 1854.

tool to encourage deference. Such ideas chimed with the ideal of rule by conservative 'best men' that appeared repeatedly in midcentury discussions of statecraft.[66] Sidney George Fisher, for example, routinely demanded that American 'statesmen' manage the sectional question, not the 'demagogues' who courted the northern electorate, and in doing so, wistfully contrasted democracy to monarchies and aristocracies where independent sovereigns respected the 'common good' rather than popular passion.[67] Fisher's views were unusually forthright but he was no outlier. Criticising the Whig nomination of Winfield Scott over compromise supporter Millard Fillmore in 1852, George Ticknor Curtis won acclaim for arguing that an electoral college of 'moderate and sound judgement' should choose the President without regard to political parties or the popular will.[68] He, like Fisher, linked preserving the union to the restoration of elite authority. To Ticknor and Fisher, centralizing decision-making power in government institutions that were sheltered from the democratic storms that threatened to centralize power in a demagogue fitted with a wider principle that America's political and propertied elite should govern America.

This conservative take on the sectional crisis as a consequence of democratic disorder fits alongside their more direct, and sceptical, responses to democracy in the 1850s. The *New York Herald*, for example, drew an explicit link between centralizing decision-making power over slavery and centralizing decision-making power over municipal law and order. It argued that rowdies and roughs controlled corrupt partisan city and state nominating conventions at the expense of the 'intelligent people of the city'. Instead, it supported giving Union Committees of propertied citizens power to nominate municipal officers to maintain order as well as national candidates to prevent disunion.[69] Sidney George Fisher argued that universal suffrage required parties to court the violent mobs he feared on the streets of Philadelphia and so limited the city's power to keep order and suppress disorder; his support for the 1857 coup by prosperous vigilantes in San Francisco, an act he argued might soon need to be copied by best men in Philadelphia and New York, bore similarities to the case he made for a conservative takeover of national politics. Maurice Richter also called for a concentration of local decision-making in nonpartisan state and local executives.[70]

Some conservatives called for even more dramatic extensions of state power as an antidote to democracy. Stephen Colwell, a close friend of Henry Carey in Philadelphia and man who warned after 1848 of a coming American socialism, led calls for replacing violent volunteer fire companies – which he too described as states within a state – with a professional city run system around the time of Consolidation, and also argued an authoritarian federal government, under a benevolent Protestant elite, needed to intervene far more vigorously in the nation's social life to prevent disorder. Although Colwell would become in time a strong Republican, he was a native of slaveholding Virginia, and prior to the late 1850s believed ardently in bisectional rule under the stewardship of propertied elites. 'Popular elections,' he argued, 'do not ensure a selection of representatives worthy to be

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[66] *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 31; *Union Meeting, held at Brewster's Hal*, pp. 35-36.
[67] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 281-282, November 16, 1849, vol. 1850-1856, p. 22-23, March 4, 1850, pp. 97-106, December 26, 1852.
[68] George Ticknor Curtis, *Speech of George T. Curtis, Esq. on the Presidential Election* (Boston, 1852).
[69] 'The Great Meeting at Castle Garden in Favor of the Union and Constitution', *NYH*, October 29, 1850.
[70] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 13-19, February 27, 1848, pp. 168, March 21, 1849; Richter, *Municipalist*, pp. 233-235, 239-240.

governors or legislators; not only so, they render the choice of such improbable and very rare.'[71] Indeed there was, he claimed. 'no subject on which the friends of democratic institutions choose to remain under greater delusion and mystification than that of popular elections.'[72]

In other words, they applied on a local level the assumption that electoral democracy weakened government, and shaped their approach to local and national problems. When Governor Enoch Lowe proposed repudiating state debts and hosting a constitutional convention in Maryland, indeed, the *Baltimore American* challenged his assumption that 'the arbitrary will of the majority' of the people had 'a sort of superior sovereignty' over the government.[73] To the *American*, some political questions – in this instance, repudiation and constitution-forming – ought to remain vested in the institutions of the state rather than being opened to the people.[74] Such conservative voices feared that, as in Second Republic France, unworthy voters would centralize power in their own hands at the expense of law, order, and government. It was a view they held of abolitionists violating the Fugitive Slave Act as much as urban rioters and mobs. Saving the Union was an opportunity to ensure control over state power nationally and locally remained outside of democratic control rather than fall under the influence of the disorderly electorate.

Conservatives often interpreted sectional conflict as another example of how democracy allowed the people – and the demagogues who exploited their passions – to usurp legal government. Whether looking abroad or at American cities, they showed power concentrating in the hands of the mob or licentiousness individuals, and saw such a process as a warning about the consequences of democratisation. Disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Act, like periodic rioting and disorder, seemed like a problem that party competition, officeholders, and elections allowed in return for votes rather than an example of the divisiveness of the slavery question to northern citizens. Believing that democracy permitted and encouraged sectionalism, they argued that informally limiting popular rule could prevent secession. They particularly hoped that curbing party competition by eliminating the second party system would stop candidates being elected on proslavery or antislavery platforms and leave the political establishment free to settle sectional divides on amicable terms to the south and northern elites. In this regard, they were centralizers who supported putting cities and people under the rule of a small number of propertied men and establishment politicians. But rather than describing it as a dangerous centralization, they claimed that this could help heal the sectional divide. Opposition to the consolidation of strong government may have been a staple of political rhetoric across antebellum America, but in practice conservatives used opposition to the centralization of power in the people and the growth of the sectional crisis to claim greater authority for themselves.

Centralization of Executive Power

In addition to taking political decision-making power out of the hands of the people, conservatives hoped to strengthen the federal government. Just as sectionalism was a pretext for centralization of political decision-making in the hands of elites, it was also a pretext for

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[71] Stephen Colwell, *Politics for American Christians: A Word Upon our Example as a Nation* (Philadelphia, 1852), p. 59.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[73] 'Gov. Lowe's Inaugural', *BA*, January 7, 1851.

[74] *Ibid.*.

centralizing executive power in the hands of the federal government. Drawing parallels with local city-building, to prevent what conservatives described as power centralizing in the hands of the people, northern conservative looked to the federal government in Washington to impose power over the entire Union. Unlike southerners, who frequently claimed the federal government violated the rights of the states, northern unionists often opposed federal retrenchment. Some had also used Old World rioting to justify more centralized governments across the Atlantic, whether in the form of Louis-Philippe, Louis-Eugène Cavaignac, or occasionally even Louis-Napoleon himself. Northern supporters of the Compromise of 1850 similarly used violent opposition to the so-called 'peace measures' as the pretext for a state-building programme of their own. Despite the limits of the Tenth Amendment, they eagerly anticipated the idea that the national government could exercise police power in northern cities, and impose authority over local states too beholden to the popular will. Far from believing in small government, when given a government under the authority of the 'best men', conservatives could enthusiastically embrace state power.

Some southern opponents of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act in northern cities recognised an implicit threat in allowing the federal government to enforce the law over Boston. States' rights activists in the Senate felt that giving the federal government the power to enforce law over disorderly states and cities would set a precedent for 'consolidation'. 'A determined front of Federal power, vindicating its own authority' would give the federal government sovereignty over southern states too. [75] But to northern and Border state supporters of enforcement, this was the point. Thus when opponents of the Fugitive Slave Act accused its supporters of an intolerable federal intervention in municipal government, the Washington *National Intelligencer* suggested the matter was about law enforcement rather than sectional conflict, arguing the federal government should not show 'pitiable weakness' in dealing with southern disunionists either,[76] This was no exception. The *Baltimore American* made explicit its desire for a centralization of power in the federal government. Rioting that opened sectional wounds and challenged the authority of the national government, it argued, justified the President directly intervening in local law enforcement.[77] Describing not the 1787 compact, but, rather, the Constitution and Union as he wanted it to be in the mid-1850s, Curtis routinely cited the requirement to guarantee the states a republican form of government and suppress domestic insurrection as evidence that Washington could intervene. [78] Strengthening the power of the federal government – something many Americans had long derided as a dangerous centralization of power – often paralleled programs of local consolidation.

Northern conservative unionists therefore explicitly demanded a consolidated federal government as a check on local states perhaps more susceptible to direct popular control. As soon as they heard about the rescue of Shadrach Minkins, critics demanded the government at Washington apply power outwards over its territory and fill the vacuum left by Boston's inaction. Conservative unionists enthusiastically used a language of strong governance to justify enforcement, emphasising the 'duties of the Executive', and praising

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[75] 'Vagaries of Ultraism', *NI*, March 26, 1851.
[76] *Ibid.*.
[77] 'The President and his Proclamation', *BA*, March 7, 1851.
[78] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 9-10, 37-43, 80-84.

'compulsion' and 'energetic measures'.[79] They repeatedly demanded that federal authorities bring about 'order', for example, and in meetings and editorials campaigned for the 'preservation of the peace', and 'enforcement of the law'.[80] So enthralled were some conservatives with state power that the *New York Courier and Enquirer* demanded 'that every life in Boston should be sacrificed and the city itself wiped from the face of the land, than that any law of the General Government should be resisted, and proclamation made that it cannot be enforced in Boston!'[81] The *Courier*, like many in the conservative unionist movement and the city reformers they often overlapped with, seemed enthralled at the prospect of state power imposing the law on a disorderly people. These Americans seemed happy with a government capable of intervening on the streets of northern cities and southern states in order to enforce its will. It is hard to imagine that such voices did not have the challenges both the Union and France had faced from 1848-1850 in mind in framing their defence of centralized executive power. New York's *Courier and Enquirer* directly compared the necessity of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act in Boston to the need to 'whip' South Carolina should it attempt disunion: the constitution and federal government was its own 'higher law' with and 'a stronger arm and a more potential authority, than any mob a city or State can organize.'[82] To solve the sectional crisis, northern conservatives looked to expand the physical presence of the national government in northern capitals by ensuring that a government more remote from popular control held sway.

Conservative unionists saw enforcing adherence to the law as a way to centralize power in the hands of the state at the expense of urban mobs and southern secessionists. As far back as 1845, Rufus Choate, who would later become an ardent unionist in Boston, told an audience that the legal system existed to prevent 'the assembly of the people' holding 'every power of the state - executive, legal judicial' and creating the kind of 'unmitigated democracy' that had destroyed Athens. Attacks on the Madisonian system, he argued, threatened to bring this to Massachusetts: lawyers were a conservative restraint on democracy.[83] Later, when discussing the sectional crisis the *Boston Courier* argued that the people had the 'right of private judgement on public affairs' but 'obedience to the law...is the duty of a good citizen'.[84] However, they were by no means the only unionists to urge Americans to 'respect and obey the law of the land'.[85] As William Novack has suggested, the law could be in practice an extensive tool of state power.[86] These conservative unionists seemed to make a similar argument: that 'local interest' violating the 'general law', as they understood it, as determined by elites in legal 'tribunals' allowed the people themselves to become the sole sovereign power. Support for the rule of law could in practice reverse the power relationship.[87]

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[79] Veritas, 'The President's Message-English Views of Our Tariff-Affairs in Congress', *MC&NYE*, February 22, 1851; 'The President's Proclamation', *BA*, February 20, 1851; 'Resistance to the Law in Boston', *MC&NYE*, February 19, 1851.
[80] [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, February 18, 1851; The President and his Measures!', *Boston Courier*, February 25, 1851.
[81] 'Resistance to the Law in Boston', *MC&NYE*, February 19, 1851.
[82] *Ibid.*.
[83] Choate, 'American Bar as an Element of Conservatism in the State', pp. 199-201.
[84] 'President Fillmore's Letter', *Boston Courier*, November 22, 1850.
[85] 'Resistance to the Law in Boston', *MC&NYE*, February 19, 1851; 'Resistance to the Law in Boston', *MC&NYE*, February 19, 1851; 'The Boston Slave Case', *BA*, May 31, 1854; 'The Boston Slave Case', *BA*, June 5, 1854.
[86] Novack, 'Myth of the "Weak" American State', pp. 767-768.
[87] 'The Higher Law Doctrine', *BA*, January 24, 1854.

The link between sectional crisis and local disorder allowed northern conservatives to redefine a strong federal government not as the centralizing threat that many Americans had long seem as, but instead to root the danger in ineffective (or overly democratic) local law enforcement. After Shadrach Minkins's rescue, Kentucky Senator Henry Clay introduced a Senate resolution questioning President Fillmore on measures he intended to take to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act in Boston.[88] Ordinarily, municipal disorder in New England would not require a Kentucky Senator to take such action, but conservatives believed the Fugitive Slave Act linked local lawlessness to the national sectional crisis. Conservative papers therefore publicly supported Fillmore's threat of national force in terms that would be recognisable to any municipal reformer: a need to ensure the prompt 'execution of the law and maintenance of the public peace', to prevent 'riot in Boston', and to defend 'law and order'.[89] The connection between local disorder that conservatives feared on the streets of northern cities and the sectionalism they stridently disliked meant that they could cast strengthening the presence of Washington on northern cities as an act of local law enforcement of a police with municipal consolidations and professional policing, rather than a dangerous centralization of power. Strikingly, indeed, the leader of Philadelphia's Consolidation movement Eli Kirk Price proved one of the most steadfast defenders in the city of the Fugitive Slave Act right up the 1861, despite his Quaker background and personal distaste for slavery.[90] Comparisons between opposition to that Act, Shay's Rebellion and other examples of 'domestic violence' that the federal government could, under the Constitution, suppress, further defined the issue in terms that legitimised national power. Just as South Carolinian nullifiers, Daniel Shays and Whiskey Rebels warranted federal marshals and troops to suppress, so did Boston rioters and the personal liberty laws.[91] Suppressing disorder in Boston would not just preserve the Union by persuading southerners that the North could protect southern slavery. Northern conservatives would also protect the Union by concentrating power in the federal government at the expense of any rival sovereignty: setting the stage, as some planters feared, for the war effort in 1861. They did so in the 1850s by packaging a more centralized government in the honeyed language of constitutionality and local law and order.

Both secession and the nullification of federal law by the mob violated conservatives' sense that a government of propertied elites ought to rule America, and not the people directly. This linked the issues of local disorder to that of national Union, and allowed them to present a national centralization of power in the hands of Congress and the federal government in palatable terms that did not suggest the coming of an American Second Empire. Northern conservative unionists were adamant that they needed to concentrate power in the hands of the federal government to thwart the dangers posed by centralized democracy. Without a central government to suppress disorderly sectionalists, conservatives feared North and South too risked another Daniel Shay's Massachusetts, Louis Blanc's Paris, or Shadrach Minkins's Boston, a democracy centralized insofar as the mob held power rather than the state. They were happy to see the federal government take a more active role

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[88] 'The New York Courier', *Boston Courier*, February 19, 1851.
[89] 'The President's Special Message', *BA*, February 24, 1851; 'The Police and Public Order', *Boston Courier*, February 18, 1851; 'The President of the United States and the Boston Mob', *NI*, March 24, 1851; 'The President and His Measures!', *Boston Courier*, February 25, 1851)
[90] Eli Kirk Price, 'A Plea for the Union of All Union Men', *NA&USG*, October 11, 1860; 'Union Rally', *PI*, December 14, 1860.
[91] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, pp. 24-25; 'Nullification Sentiments, *New York Evening Express*, March 4, 1857; 'Nullification in Vermont and Massachusetts', *Boston Courier*, April 8, 1851.

in policing the North, something normally that lay in the province of state and local government, and argued it must become a visible force in big cities. Northern unionist state-building therefore often amounted to designs for a centralization of power in the federal government, something that opponents of the Fugitive Slave Act and southern opponents of a stronger federal government recognised. Rather than seeing states' rights and a small federal government as the solution to the slavery question, they saw the sectional crisis as an opportunity to enforce deference to federal authority. Conservative state building during the sectional crisis therefore occurred while they attempted to redefine centralization as a democratic problem that only state authority could solve.

Elite Rule and Geographic Decentralization

As well as centralizing executive power in the federal government, conservative unionists hoped to centralize political decision-making back into the hands of bisectional federal authorities, where men like themselves could access it. Warning against centralization as a geographic phenomenon helped them legitimise centralization of political authority into government institutions that they claimed would share power geographically. The northern majority in Congress and the Electoral College meant that they could conceptualise power in geographic terms like those many Americans conceptualised urban imperialism: as power concentrating inwards from the nation to a smaller area. Handing power to northern voters centralized power geographically. Conversely, they argued, centralizing power in institutions would share power geographically between the two sections. Northerners who called for power-sharing between North and South were therefore neither self-abnegating nor supplicant to southerners. Discussing the geographic patterns of democracy allowed them to present government by conservative elites as a geographic decentralization of power, by reinterpreting the northern people rather than a bisectional elite-controlled federal government as the greatest centralizing threat. Again, this helped conservatives legitimise curbing democracy as part of their response to the sectional crisis.

In the 1850s, the northern states outstripped the South in population (see Illustration 11 below) and, consequently, Congress, and it became possible that a solely northern party could control an empowered stronger federal government, much as large propertyless populations had seemingly come to control municipalities. With the free states enjoying a majority in both houses of Congress and the Electoral College following the 1850 United States census, simply dividing government between different institutions no longer seemed like enough to prevent the centralization of power in the northern electorate (See Illustration 12 below).

Illustration 11: *Map Showing the Population Density of the United States in 1850.*
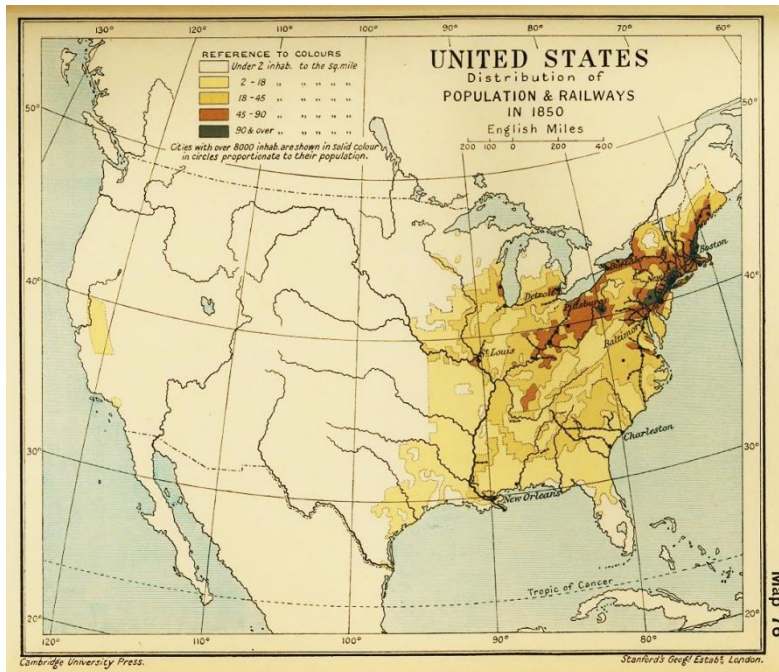
In 1850, a substantial portion of the American people lived on the eastern seaboard in the northeast and mid-Atlantic states. Despite their smaller size, the northeastern states had a far denser population, entitling them to an increased representation in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College.

Source: 'United States: Distribution of Population & Principal Railways in 1850', University of Texas Libraries, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/ward_1912.html [Accessed September 15, 2016].

Illustration 12: *Cartogram of the United States Presidential Election Results by County (1860).*
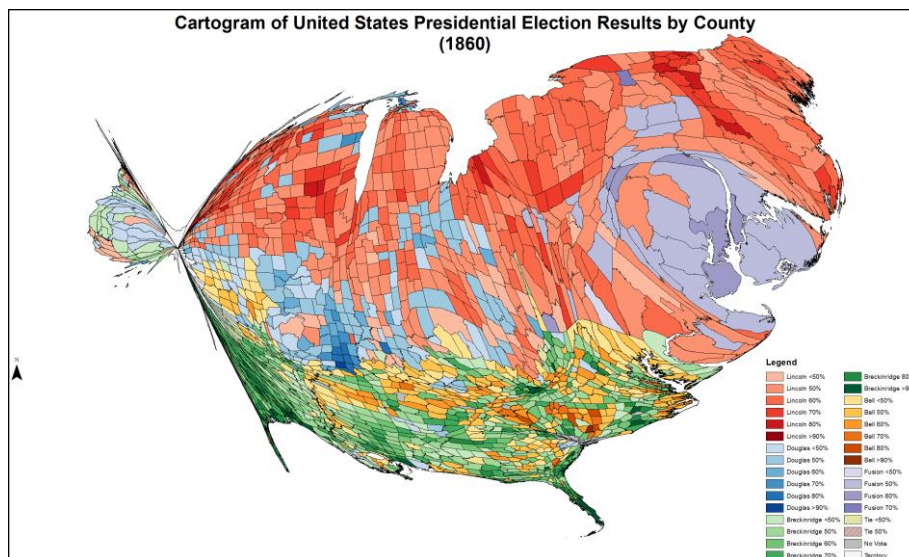
This cartogram illustates how the North's population increased its influence in national elections: the large numbers of voters in northern cities outweighed the South – although the three-fifths clause mitigated this somewhat in practice.

Source: 'Cartogram of presidential election results by county (1860)', Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CartogramPresidentialCounty1860Colorbrewer.gif, [Accessed September 15, 2016]/

When conservatives talked of national consolidation to fight disunion, they couched it in terms that generally avoided inferences of a French-style unitary state. Unionists used a language of empire to link expansion outwards to national unity, describing loyalism and communications consolidating a northern, western, and southern periphery.[92] However, conservative approaches to processes of centralization and decentralization across space could seem contradictory and complicated. Rufus Choate, for example, eagerly supported what he called the 'grand incorporation' of America. But he believed that only 'tolerance' and 'careful withdrawal' would achieve his desired end, with unity coming from decentralization.[93] Choate strongly supported a state-building programme, but rejected the kind of centralized dependence on a single metropolis like New York that he would come to defend on a local scale when opposing the Massachusetts Constitution of 1854.[94] Strengthening the Union under the aegis of a more powerful central government capable of organizing expansion meant avoiding French-style dependency on a single central city. George Ticknor Curtis too wanted the federal government to have the authority to impose order, but also feared the supposed centralization of power in the federal government and the possibility of an explicitly French-style American republic.[95] They spoke enthusiastically of consolidating distant states into a single nation but shied away from outright majority rule when doing so.

As the likes of Carey had done with economic relationships, conservatives warned of power spreading outwards from a metropole to a periphery, though this time the driving force was the weight of votes rather than the pull of railroads and free trade. A Union meeting at New York's Castle Garden cautioned against the North turning its 'wealth and numbers' into 'strength and power' to employ against the states of the South.[96] Indeed, the president of the gathering, George Wood, raised the idea of a threat to 'our institutions which are free and liberal', and the need for a permanent standing army, if the North was able to impose its will over southern states and western territories.[97] Conservative unionists even interpreted the sectional crisis in this regard as the result of a small northern 'clique' – sustained by majority votes – extending power beyond its sectional border.[98] This centralization would only get worse over time, speakers at New York's major Union meeting argued, and would culminate in the North having to use force to compel an unwilling South to remain in the Union.[99] A national government of conservative elites imposing its will over the North might be a legitimate exercise of law enforcement. But in some conservative discussion, the North's capacity to impose its majority will over the South and West became

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[92] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, p. 31; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, pp. 6-7, 41-42

[93] Rufus Choate, 'Speech Delivered at the Constitutional Meeting in Faneuil Hall, November 26, 1850', in T. Woods (ed.), *The Political Writings of Rufus Choate* (Washington, 2002), p. 214; Fellow Unionist Edward Everett opposed the 1854 Massachusetts state constitution as it deprived the 'power of representation' away from the 'commercial, manufacturing, navigating and mechanical industry of the state centres'. Centralization seemed acceptable at the state level, but not necessarily nationally. See 'Mr. Everett and the New Constitution', *Boston Courier* (November 4, 1853).

[94] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, pp. 31-32.

[95] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 328-379; Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 37-43, 372-384.

[96] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 3-4.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[98] 'The Union Movement—The Good Work Still Going on', *The Weekly Herald*, December 28, 1850; 'The Democracy of the Union Must and Will Save the Union' *The Union*, February 28, 1850; 'Friends of the Union, to the Rescue!', *NI*, March 2, 1850.

[99] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, October 30, 1850 (New York, 1850), pp. 18-19, 29-30.

a dangerous centralization of power. Federal expansion to maintain law and order was contingent on making sure that power was not misused by sectional majorities. It marked a national manifestation of the dilemma conservatives had faced when debating the merits of urban consolidations, whether centralized power could fall into the wrong hands.

Unionists who feared that northern majority control of the federal government might lead to disunion presented this as a centralization of decision-making power away from the nation and towards a smaller geographic – but demographically dominant – section. They often claimed to oppose abolitionists who wanted to see the federal government move against slavery by warning against power concentrated inwards from the nation as a whole to the northeastern quadrant. Union Party supporters referred to their designs for restructuring the party system as pitting 'provincials' against 'nationals'[100], talked of the election of 'men of national views'[101], and argued that they were citizens of the Union rather than of their states.[102] Their nationalism turned battles between slavery and freedom into one that pitted local, geographically defined centres of political power against the nation as a whole. Conversely, local decision-making, rather than being the basis of American self-government, seemed to raise the possibility of creating powerful rival sovereignties that, if they became preponderant, could dismantle the Union. The *New York Herald* argued that Union Parties would decentralise power nationally, contrasting the 'national portion of our citizens' to the conspiracies and fanatical 'midnight councils' who sought to usurp power.[103] When the *Baltimore American* – like many conservatives – argued that 'agitators' North and South used 'sectional prejudice' to gain political power at the expense of 'nationality' and 'the constitution', they imagined two contrasting definitions of space where politicians could gain legitimacy to wield state power: either from the nation as a whole or from a smaller section.[104] People like Rufus Choate, Union Party activists, and conservative papers saw 'sectional prejudice' and 'local attachments' as a threat not because they opposed local self-government, but because these localities threatened to become majorities which could dominate the nation.[105] Loyalty to any other territory within the United States, these nationalists warned, could create a powerful state within a state, which in turn could come to dominate the Union that had incubated it.

It is unsurprising that conservatives sometimes stated that the logic of majority rule – not slavery – accounted for the geographic centralization of power in a single section. Antislavery voices might have condemned a 'slave power' conspiracy to centralize authority from the 1840s onwards, but Union Party backers saw a greater danger in the weight of votes. When the Whig Party nominated Winfield Scott over unionist candidates Daniel Webster and Millard Fillmore in 1852, George Ticknor Curtis blamed 'unconstitutional' partisan nominating conventions gathering 'in a central city' for this unsatisfactory outcome. The machinery of democracy, he argued centralized power over space, where the indirectly chosen electoral college of the early republic had intended to distribute it more evenly.[106]

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[100] 'The Compromise and New York Union Safety Committee', *Pensacola Gazette*, October 25, 1851.
[101] 'Union Safety Committee', *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, October 14, 1851.
[102] Rufus Choate, 'Speech on "The political Topics Now Prominent before the Country"' in Thomas E. Woods, Jr. (ed.) *The Political Writings of Rufus Choate* (Washington, 2002), pp. 327-350.
[103] 'Panic Among the Abolitionists', *NYH*, October 30, 1850.
[104] 'The Compromise Settlement', *BA*, January 23, 1851.
[105] 'The President's Message', *Natchez Courier*, December 13, 1850.
[106] Curtis, *George T. Curtis, Esq. on the Presidential Election*, pp. 4-10.

The founders, it seemed, had failed to anticipate the rise of big cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, whose size alone menaced the checks of a federal system. Sidney George Fisher too blamed democratic campaigning for allowing a majority North to become a political force in the Union and allow sectional politicians with a solely northern constituency to obtain power.[107] And like attendees at the Union meetings in New York, he argued that the North had to restrain itself from using its majority status in dealing with the South, lest it force its neighbour into colonial status.[108] Handing too much power to the American electorate, he argued, moved the imagined centre of political power inwards and northwards, and meant only restrained statesmen – which a two party system was unlikely to produce – could act with the restraint to save the Union. This, to many conservatives, was the sectional crisis in a nutshell: democracy had centred power in the North.

States' rights nonetheless seemed an unsuitable response to the sectional question. Rather than strengthening the union, states' rights as they understood them helped create a riotous democracy, through allowing local passions to trump national interests. As much as conservatives appeared to believe in decentralizing power, they were reluctant to support a polycentric polity of multiple sovereignties: diffusing the state monopoly on violence between different territories weakened government's capacity to maintain order. Indeed, some unionists used similar arguments to those that conservatives had employed to warn against divided municipal government. Rufus Choate recalled how disorderly and conflicting Greek and Italian city-states had become harmonious and orderly unions, and the *Baltimore American* warned against unequal weak confederations like the former Netherlands or Switzerland.[109] When describing the consequences of disunion, unionists predicted that the resulting 'separate, weak, discordant communities', and 'rival neighbouring republics' would be in a permanent state of war.[110] George Ticknor Curtis also cited the old Articles of Confederation as evidence of the dangers of decentralizing too much power from the federal government to the states and to the people.[111] Only consolidating the law-enforcing authority of institutions at the centre for such voices seemed to cure the problem of disorder. The supposedly American solution of devolving power locally would not work alone. In its most extreme formulation, like that put forward in the early days of the war in a pamphlet that Henry Carey helped prepare, envisaged abandoning state sovereignty entirely. [112] Few went this far, preferring instead to emphasise the importance of a strong relationship between federal and local governments. Nonetheless, conservative scepticism at the capacity of local governments to diffuse tension distinguishes these northern commentators from their southern counterparts, and may suggest why so many of them rallied to the Union course after the attack on Fort Sumter. The weak government of

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[107] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, Vol. 1848-1849, pp. 281-284, November 16, 1849, vol. 1850-1856, pp. 22-23, 26, March 4, 1850.

[108] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1848-1849, 282-283, November 16, 1849, vol. 1850-1856, 25-26, March 25, 1850.

[109] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, p. 42. 'The Admission of Nebraska-Not a Question of Southern Faith', *BA*, February 9, 1854; 'The Sumner Proviso', *BA*, January 20, 1854; 'Shall New States be "Admitted upon an Equal Footing with the Original States!"', *BA*, February 6, 1854.

[110] *Proceedings of the Constitutional Meeting at Faneuil Hall*, Boston, 1850), p. 6; Curtis, *His Constitution of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 368-369; Union Safety Committee, 'Fellow-Citizens of the State of New York', in Union Safety Committee (ed.), *Selections from the speeches and writings of prominent men in the United States* (New York, 1851), pp. 3-8; 'Consequences of Disunion', *Alexandria Gazette*, November 27, 1850.

[111] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 142-151,172-189.

[112] Charles Godfrey Leland, *Centralization or 'States Rights'* (New York, 1863).

states' rights and the riotous democracy of abolitionism both seemed part of the same problem of allowing power to concentrate in smaller part of the country at the expense of the whole.

Democracy at a local level seemed to encourage sectionalism rather than prevent it. Instead they saw conservativism as a national force rather than a provincial one, much as city reformers argued their views were metropolitan rather than local. Thus when two Maryland Whigs defected to the Democrats in 1856, they claimed that 'national conservative citizens' should follow them, seeing conservatism itself as transcending locality.[113] Handing power to local government, it seemed to some, only abetted the process of centralization in a democratic polity: a reason many remained wary of popular sovereignty as a suitably Jacksonian answer to the slavery question. Union Party movements demanded instead that city and state politicians and voters defer to the decision of national statesmen and state institutions rather than follow local leaders.[114] Attempts to form Union Party tickets for local and state races and exclude abolitionists and proslavery men from such offices reflects their belief that only those with national perspectives should share power across the entire nation. When conservative unionists spoke of the need to decentralize power, then, they did not want to vest sectional questions in the likes of northern majorities. Ideas about the ideal relationship between local and national government were indeed for more complex than simply devolving power to local government, especially when those governments seemed susceptible to demagogic control.

Conservative unionists could therefore sometimes sound like avid centralizers, but they instead hoped to centralize power beyond the reach of either section and into the hands of those best placed to share power between both sections. As so often after 1848, conservatives looked to the kind of state power that monarchical and undemocratic European regimes offered, but shied away from openly advocating similar structures. Centralization of power over national geography could play a role in this process. Conservative newspapers happily imagined 'the government at Washington' exerting itself over disorderly distant northern cities and southern states, while George Ticknor Curtis linked the absence of a national capital to the weakness of the pre-1788 confederation, which 'impaired its dignity and efficiency'. Indeed, in his history of the Constitution, published in 1854, he argued that American liberty *required* a 'central and prepondering power', as 'impending anarchy' seemed more of a threat than federal aggrandizement, an argument conservative commentators sometimes used as an apology for Louis-Napoleon's coup.[115] Despite claiming to oppose dependency on a smaller region, they did not seem to believe this precluded a strong government capable of preventing disorder and preventing disunion. In other words, conservatives redefined geographic dependency as the centralizing threat, which allowed them to suggest that centralizing power in the federal government could distribute power between North and South and ensure sectional peace.

This sense of centralization as a geographic problem that, ironically, centralizing power in national institutions resolved, appeared in unionist appeals to the Constitution of

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[113] Pratt, Pearce, James Clay, *Appeal for the Union*.

[114] 'The Compromise and New York Union Safety Committee', *Pensacola Gazette*, October 25, 1851; 'Union Safety Committee', *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, October 14, 1851; 'Correspondence of the Baltimore Sun', *The Sun*, October 25, 1850; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 32; 'A New Party Test', *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, January 30, 1852.

[115] Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 1, pp. 200-230; Curtis, *Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2, pp. 268-277. Wright, 'Extract from the Message of Governor Wright', pp. 50-53.

1787. Union Party activists and conservative unionists retold the history of the Philadelphia convention by arguing the founders wrote an antidemocratic document designed to concentrate power in a national government at the expense of a disorderly people, yet simultaneously, they tried to argue that the Constitution had been designed to decentralise power geographically. The founding fathers, they claimed, sought to prevent 'possession of the government by a dominant, geographical majority' and set out to encourage officeholders with 'official tenure above the region of party passions and temporary excitements'.[116] George Ticknor Curtis illustrated how conservatives saw the balance of power between the democratic sphere and the state in geographic terms. Writing in 1854, he argued that the three-fifths clause, the electoral college, and the Senate existed as part of a plan to prevent the 'democratic power' of the North from taking 'control as against the Southern states'. Where handing control of the federal government to a majority of voters would permanently concentrate power in highly populated areas north of the Mason-Dixon Line, balanced power in republican institutions would spread it out to the nation as a whole.[117] In other words, these conservatives suggested the centralization of power that the founders had sought to prevent was in the hands of a populous North, and not a strong and undemocratic federal government.

Conflating majority rule with centralized power across geography allowed them to claim that centralizing power back into the hands of independent institutions and political elites could share power. Union Party activists, for example, argued that uniting Whigs and Democrats into a single bisectional party would share power between both north and south. They urged northern voters to defer to their bisectional coalition of conservative elites rather than govern based on majority rule. At a speech to a Philadelphia Union Meeting, the Clay Whig Joseph Ingersoll grappled with the consequences of concentrating decision-making power in the federal government. While Congress – not the people or the states – had the ultimate power to determine the future of slavery, only 'mutual concession and forbearance' between the sections gave it the power to do so.[118] These commentators defended their proposed organisations' fitness for office and participation in political life based on their supposed supposedly bisectional programme of support for the Compromise of 1850. President Fillmore, in a letter supporting the New York Union Committee of Safety, cited the warning in Washington's farewell address against parties concentrating in a single geographic section.[119] Others too supported the idea of a new 'Union party, founded on broad and national principles', giving themselves the geographic inclusivity and legitimacy to exercise government power independent of majority rule.[120] Union Party activists therefore warned against the geographic centralization into the North to delegitimise majority rule and, in practice, legitimise centralizing political decision-making into a smaller minority of conservative unionists rather than northern voters themselves.

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[116] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, p. 12, 21; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 46; W. C. Rives 'The National Crisis', *NYH*, February 8, 1850; 'Another Union Demonstration', *The Weekly Herald*, December 28, 1850; 'Union Safety Committee to the People of the United States', *NI*, February 3, 1851.
[117] George Ticknor Curtis, *History of the Origin, Formation and Adoption of the Constitution of the United States*, vol. 2 (New York, 1854), pp. 150-167, 388-393.
[118] *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 23.
[119] 'The New York Celebration', *NA&USG*, February 25, 1851; 'The Anniversary at New York', *NI*, February 26, 1851.
[120] Cited in 'Correspondence of the Baltimore Sun', *Richmond Whig*, March 19, 1850; 'The Union Movement— The Good Work Still Going on', *The Weekly Herald*, December 28, 1850.

Conservatives loyal to the Whigs and Democrats sometimes drew from a language of monarchy, aristocracy, and strong government to accuse Union Movements of trying to monopolise the power of the federal government for themselves. The charge, though exaggerated, was not necessarily misleading given the Union Party movement so obviously opposed partisan competition.[121] However, many Whig and Democratic unionists also believed that denying the northern majority the right to choose antislavery candidates at the ballot box was a suitable response to the sectional crisis. A bisectional two party system with consensus on the finality of the Compromise of 1850, they argued, could give the government power hold the union together without 'the sword and despotism' of federal authority.[122] Again, conflating northern majority rule with a geographic centralization of political authority helped legitimise curbing democracy. Union Party activists and partisan conservatives disagreed on whether they needed to abolish the second party system entirely, but they agreed that a strong central government, which did not derive legitimacy from sectional majorities, was needed to prevent disunionist agitation. But like the formal Union Party movements, these reformers hoped the threat of geographic centralization in the north could reform the party system so that the sectional question lay in the hands of a bisectional elite rather than the northern majority.

The Compromise of 1850 showed how bisectional strong government could work in practice. Conservatives presented it as a political success rather than a territorial armistice, and argued its legitimacy derived from its dependence on cross-sectional support, despite the individual measures in reality passing on sectional votes. The agonizing process of compromise, they argued, had answered a political question too 'dangerous' for a democratic majority to determine for themselves, and in doing so, they had avoided a sectional 'union by force' in favour of a 'union by compromise'.[123] They described in some detail a process of congressional reconciliation and compromise, somewhat bending the truth to argue that both sections had sanctioned the outcome, passing through Congress, the presidency and the courts to become law.[124] Therefore, rather than seeing the Compromise of 1850, and the Fugitive Slave act in particular, as a centralizing measure that overrode the prerogatives of free state legislatures and voters, conservatives presented the process that made it as productive of legitimacy in itself. Sectional compromise, then, was not a means to an end but a legitimate end in itself: it was how unionists expected the American government to function. It showed how a decentralized basis of support and geographic

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[121] For example, see 'The Words of Justice and Truth', *The Daily Ohio Statesman*, December 20, 1850; '"A Great Union Party, *Columbian Register*, February 9, 1850; 'Strength of the "Union Party."', *MC&NYE*, November 11, 1850; Sensible Remarks from a Southern Paper', *Daily Ohio Statesman*, February 8, 1851; 'Expectations Of General Taylor's Friends', *New York Evening Post*, January 28, 1850; 'The Old Federal, Alias, the New "Union Party"', *Mississippian and State Gazette*, January 3, 1851; 'A "Union Party"', *Greenville Mountaineer*, January 20, 1851; '"A Great Union Party?"', *The Daily Ohio Statesman*, February 5, 1850; 'The Democratic Party will Save the Union, *Missouri Courier*, March 21, 1850; 'The Democracy of the Union Must and Will Save the Union' *The Union*, February 28, 1850; 'The Iniquitous Scheme-Executive Plan for Staving off the Settlement of the Territorial Question', *The Union*, February 12, 1850; 'Sensible Remarks from a Southern Paper', *Daily Ohio Statesman*, February 8, 1851.
[122] 'Old Politicians Defining Their Positions—Speech of Mr. Benton', *Daily Ohio Statesman*, November 22, 1850; [Untitled], *New Hampshire Statesman*, November 22, 1850.
[123] Castle Garden Proceedings, p. 16; 'Union and Compromise Triumph - Position of Mr. Benton - Union of the Democracy, &c', *The Sun*, April 18, 1850; 'The Syracuse Convention—Split among the New York Whigs', *Daily Morning News*, October 4, 1850.
[124] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 9-11; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, p. 12; 'Union Safety Committee to the People of the United States', *NI*, February 3, 1851; 'The President's Message', *Natchez Courier*, December 13, 1850; 'Union Safety Committee to the People of the United States', *NI*, February 3, 1851.

coalition building could legitimise a centralized government with power to intervene on the streets of northern cities.

Altering economic geography could also be a national centralization capable of combating the growing power of the northern majority. Indeed, the *New York Herald* cited Manhattan's near monopoly on European steamship trade as an example of how the South paid tribute to a dominant North. Solving the problem of the centralized geography of capital, then, could help ease the sectional crisis, with an end to New York's 'monopoly' on steamships promising to help tie the South and the West into the Union.[125] The *Herald*, much like Henry Carey and other city promoters, imagined a polycentric polity where economic ties would allow each section to grow without becoming dependent on distant sites. A wide range of American conservatives from both parties claimed that economic development could tie the Union together, replacing apparent northern domination with sectional balance. 'Intercourse' through canals, railroads, and telegraphs could help create horizontal ties and bind the Union together.[126] This thinking, that public works could obliterate local identity in favour of national feeling and incorporation into the body politic, spoke to unionists' desire to create a unitary national political culture. To many Whigs happier with federal sponsorship of internal improvements to bind the nation together, the American System Henry Clay had spent decades proposing was indistinguishable from maintaining the Union.[127] For conservatives sceptical of northern dominance, this was an opportunity to rebalance the seemingly colonial centralization of power in northern cities. Where national elections threatened to vest power in populous regions, decentred economic development could spread control outwards, while bringing together a divided union. Changing economic geography gave these conservatives another way to pursue national consolidation.

Conservative city and state boosterism was therefore sometimes tied to sectional questions, as promoters argued their metropolis or region was best placed to preserve the Union. Few were as willing to sacrifice the likes of steamship monopolies as some New Yorkers. Indeed, many conservative unionists legitimised their own programmes for expanding hinterlands by suggesting that their central place could balance North and South. One correspondent to the New York Union Party meeting explained Indiana's position as a 'central state' for its 'high conservative position' that opposed northern and southern sectionalism.[128] Mid-Atlantic unionists drew from this assumption that border regions avoided sectionalism to argue that their ambitions for economic empire would subordinate northern and southern extremes to a neutral centre. The *Baltimore American*, for example, described a project to bring international steamships to Baltimore as a plan that could unite trade separately destined to New Orleans and New York and, in so doing, prevent a strictly 'Northern centralization' in Manhattan.[129] But New York's unionists also claimed their city's dependence on northern and southern trade tied the city to a bisectional hinterland.[130]

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[125] 'Southern Steam Line for Europe', *BA*, January 22, 1851; Johnson, *River*, pp. 280-302.
[126] Choate, 'Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall'; p. 317; *Chinese Museum Proceedings*, pp. 6-9; Proceedings *of Two Meetings*, pp. 12-13. 'Southern Commercial Conventions', *BA*, April 7, 1854; 'Friends of the Union, to the Rescue!', *NI,* March 2, 1850; 'Commercial Convention', *NI*, December 17, 1852.
[127] 'Speech of Mr. Clay', *Pensacola Gazette*, December 7, 1850; 'Mr. Webster and the Presidency', *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, January 22, 1852.
[128] Wright, 'Extract from the Message of Governor Wright, pp. 50-53.
[129] 'Liverpool and Boston Steamship Lines', *BA*, March 22, 1854.
[130] 'The Great Commercial Metropolis of the American Republic, and its Destiny', *NYH*, October 31, 1850; 'The Position and Prosperity of New York, and Abolitionism', *NYH*, November 2, 1850.

This dependency, they argued, blurred the distinction between the city and the Union at large.[131] They redefined their commercial interest in northern and southern trade as an argument for Manhattan's unionist political leadership, claiming their city's commercial growth would eliminate sectionalism, with support for Union and Compromise following expanding ties of trade.[132] Indeed, Castle Garden speaker James Gerard reminded his audience that New York's unionist message would be 'carried by *steam* and *lightning* to every city, town, and village.'[133] Despite looking to promote different cities, such urban unionists legitimised their own designs to centre economic power by suggesting they could mediate between North and South.

Some conservative reformers argued too that their city-building programs had unionist implications.[134] On the shores of Lake Erie, one paper celebrated the 'the obliteration of all lines of discord or disunion' between consolidated Cleveland and Ohio City with a picture of the flag of the United States and '100 guns for the Union', linking national union to urban consolidation.[135] When describing city consolidation movements, such voices often used the same language they applied to the crisis of the Union. In New Orleans, the *Picayune* spoke of the dangers of 'sectional feelings and sectional legislation' on municipal issues.[136] Their nationalistic discourse implied that the disorderly city was a microcosm of a wider polity at risk of dissolution. Consolidators, moreover, drew linked the principle of centralizing local and national governments. Eli Kirk Price was not the only reformer to have compared the process of city-building to creating the national government in 1787. The Brooklyn *Eagle* argued unifying the city and the nation were symmetrical.[137] Surprisingly, though, even southern papers saw consolidating power in urban seats of government positively. Arguing that the city's decentralised government created local 'sectional feelings and rivalries',[138] the New Orleans *Picayune* argued that the division of the city along Canal Street between two French and Anglo-American municipalities reflected national divisions and prevented the metropolis from competing with its national and international rivals.[139] The kind of amalgamation that cities offered urban conservatives, it seemed to argue, could give them power to impose order on the nation in the same way it allowed them to reorder the urban hinterland. City-building sometimes gave these conservatives the opportunity to think wider programs for stronger government.

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[131] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 13, 18. 'The Great Meeting', *NYH*, October 28, 1850; 'Panic Among the Abolitionists', N*YH*, October 30, 1850; 'The Great Commercial Metropolis of the American Republic, and its Destiny', *The New York Herald*, October 31, 1850; 'The Position and Prosperity of New York, and Abolitionism', *NYH*, November 2, 1850; 'The Great Union Meeting-Stampede Among the Nullifiers-Good beginning of a Great Work', *NYH*, November 1, 1850; 'The Great Union Meeting', *NYH*, November 1, 1850; 'The Election To-Morrow-The Seward State Ticket and Nullification', *NYH*, November 4, 1850; 'The Great Union Meeting', *NYH*, November 1, 1850.

[132] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, pp. 10, 17, 21, 34; 'The Great Meeting at Castle Garden in favor of the Union and Constitution', *NYH*, October 29, 1850; 'The Great Union Meeting To-Night', *NYH*, October 30, 1850; 'The Movement for Trade with the South and West in Baltimore', *BA*, December 25, 1852; 'The Great Meeting', *NYH*, October 28, 1850; 'The Great Union Meeting', *NYH*, October 31, 1850; *Congressional Globe*, 31st Congress, 2nd sess., 1851, pp. 306-307.

[133] *Castle Garden Proceedings*, p. 12.

[134] Einhorn, *Property Rules*, pp. 20-26, 70-74; Heath, 'In Union There is Strength', pp. 101-124; Scobey, *Empire*, pp. 15-54.

[135] 'Cleveland & Ohio City Annexed', *Plain Dealer*, June 6, 1854.

[136] 'Charter Amendments', *The Daily Picayune*, January 21, 1855.

[137] Progress, 'Worthy of Consideration', *BDE*, June 10, 1853.

[138] 'The Consolidation of the Great Metropolis', *BDE,* October 5, 1850; 'Municipal Reform', *The Daily Picayune*, December 17, 1854.

[139] *An Address to the Citizens of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1850).

When conservatives claimed that they needed to avoid centralizing power in northern majorities, they were not, as they seemingly implied, interested in denying themselves power. Their warnings that majority rule centralized power and that power needed to be shared between north and south helped them legitimise government by a coalition of northern and southern conservatives insulated from the pressures of majority rule. If the logic democracy centralized power by excluding the South from Congress and the Electoral College, they argued, then curbing democracy could decentralize power and share it between the two sections. Opposition to centralization could therefore become an argument for concentrating decision-making power in fewer hands. Union Party activists and even city-builders argued that their leadership, as an alternative to the mandates of majority rule, could share power geographically. In practice, this meant disregarding northern majorities if northern votes were all cast to an antislavery candidate. Conservatives therefore used warnings against centralization to think about how to build governments less beholden to the popular will.

Conservatives drew on warnings about majority rule and applied them to what might happen if, as would occur in 1860, the North swung the electoral college in favour of a sectional candidate. [140] But unlike slaveowners themselves, who (with the exception of their support for measures like the Fugitive Slave Act or a slave code in the territories) tended to take refuge in the ideology of states' rights, these conservatives used centralization to defend a powerful, independent federal government rather than to undermine it. Drawing on ideas about the geographic distribution of power between North and South allowed them to defend the ideal of a more powerful federal government with authority over the states and territories, albeit one that neither resembled a European-style state nor the kind of machine that would threaten slave property. Conservative unionists, in emphasising the national authority of their post-Compromise federal order, therefore sought an alternative to the visions of Old World despots, northern antislavery radicals, and southern disunionists, and European despots. They upheld instead an authoritative state relatively shielded from majority control.

1856, 1860, and the Threat of Centralization

In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act showed that the Compromise of 1850 had not succeeded in bringing finality to the sectional question, and over the coming years the question of whether slaveholders had a right to take the peculiar institution into the West gave new life to debates about centralization. When Anti-Nebraska Democrats, abolitionists, and former northern Whigs began to build a strong Republican Party, the possibility of a purely sectional antislavery party winning national political power – the very thing that northern unionists had claimed they wanted to avoid after 1850 – became very real. A number of conservatives formed new movements to encourage northern voters to act with restraint and convince southerners to defer to the authority of pro-compromise politicians. In 1856, this included the rump Whig and Know Nothing presidential ticket of Millard Fillmore, the former President who had himself enacted the Compromise of 1850. Four years later, many turned to the Constitutional Union Party ticket of John Bell and Edward Everett, which drew plenty of old Whigs as well as some Democrats. Both these tickets had some support in the North and Border States, coming second to the Democrats in major Northeastern cities in 1856,

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[140] Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 32-36; O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, vol. 2, pp. 851-852.

and second (occasionally in coalition with Democrats) to the Republicans in 1860.[141] Each movement had reasonable claims to inherit the unionist mantle proponents of a new party had urged on the country around 1850.

Some conservatives, though, embraced the very sectional party that they had once claimed to oppose. A number moved into a conservative wing of the Republican Party itself. Historians like Mark Lause and James Oakes, who have recently pointed to the Republican Party's roots in radicalism and antislavery, have tended to deflect attention from the movement's more conservative wing.[142] The conservatives who came to support this new sectional party claimed that slavery had become a 'despotic interest in the administration of the government'.[143] Lincoln's Attorney-General, Edward Bates, as one example of a conservative who wholeheartedly supported compromise before himself seeking the Republican nomination in 1860.[144] Unlike many of their new abolitionist allies, then, these new conservative Republicans did not embrace radical democratisation of the American government, or even necessarily oppose slavery on the grounds of the moral or economic superiority of 'free labor'. Instead, they often grounded their antislavery in very similar terms they had used to oppose abolitionists after 1850, criticising southern disunionists and their northern allies for succouring a rival sovereignty to challenge the supremacy of the federal government. Unionists who turned to the Republican Party may well have pivoted on the need for a sectional party and the extent that southern, not northern, sectionalism threatened the Union. But they nonetheless remained wedded to their support for strong government, scepticism of democracy, and prioritisation of compromise over conflict.

As they had after 1850, many conservatives saw the possibility of a Republican victory in 1856 or 1860 with only northern votes as akin to a geographic centralization of the federal government in one region. Constitutional Unionists told the northern people that uniting their votes against slavery created a sectional state within a state. Rufus Choate, for example, warned against northern 'combinations of states…possessing the government'.[145] Bell and Everett newspapers (such as the *Boston Courier* and *Baltimore American*), as well as meetings in support of the ticket, warned that the Constitution did not intend for there to be a division between 'governing' and 'governed' states, and a Republican 'government of the whole Union by one geographical section' was no less treasonous than secession. They argued that voters and politicians who embraced the Republican cause through the logic of majority rule, and abandoned bisectional political coalitions, monopolised political authority in one section rather than shared it across the nation at large. And centralising this control over the federal government inwards would lead to the North wielding the executive power of the federal government outward. A sectional government would 'seize the government and make laws for their own purposes', they contended, 'overbearing' the other

[141] However, the Bell-Everett ticket came fourth in Philadelphia in 1860.
[142] For examples of work on the radicalism of the Republican Party, see Lause, *Young America*; Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*; Oakes, *Freedom National*; Oakes, *Scorpion's Sting*. For an example of the conservative pressures within the Republican Party, see Gienapp, *Origins*.
[143] For more on these conservative republicans, see Foner, *Free Soil*, pp. 186-225; Levine, 'Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery', p. 486.
[144] Marvin R. Cain, *Lincoln's Attorney General: Edward Bates of Missouri* (Columbia, 1965), pp. 90-127; Don Fehrenbacher, 'The Republican Decision at Chicago' in Norman Graebner (ed.) *Politics and the Crisis of 1860* (Urbana, 1961), pp. 55-56; McPherson, *Battle Cry*, p. 217; Potter, *Impending* Crisis, pp. 420-422.
[145] Choate, 'Political Topics now Prominent before the Country', pp. 335, 340, 346.

section. [146] These politicians still used the threat of centralizing power in a preponderant section to caution against outright majority rule. And when confronted with the challenge of a majority using the government for its own ends, these Constitutional Unionists and Fillmore supporters urged Americans to see bisectional power sharing among elites as a more legitimate basis for authority than democratic majorities.

As well as sensing a growing centralizing threat in northern voters, these unionists continued to draw upon the same arguments the danger of extra-legal mob rule that supporters of the Fugitive Slave Act had used in 1850-51. Supporters of the Bell and Everett ticket raised the spectre of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, depicted Republican conventions as violent and disorderly, and cited examples of supposedly incendiary abolitionist language to argue that abolitionists eagerly used violence to wield power if given the opportunity.[147] Conservative unionists therefore continued to draw from the idea that disunion, sectionalism, and antislavery violence were examples of an out of control democracy that allowed popular violence to weaken the state and the people to usurp violent power that ought to rest in government institutions. In response, they once more proposed strengthening the independent power of the federal government. New York Governor Washington Hunt, for instance, told the 1856 rump Whig convention that Republicans and southern Democrats were a 'violent and reckless' threat to what speaker George Lunt described as an 'orderly and decent' antebellum republic. These politicians presented their failed attempt to resurrect the Whig Party in 1856 as a tool to give the federal government power over an increasingly disorderly United States.[148] And at a Union meeting in 1860, one Pennsylvania judge told delegates that the sectional crisis showed that the United States had outgrown an overly weak federal government, just as they had outgrown the Articles of Confederation in 1787; the state again needed strengthening to deal with the threat of secessionists and seditious northern writers, editors, and politicians.[149] Rather than being a battle between slavery and freedom, they continued the argument that the elections of 1856 and 1860 were part of a wider choice between state fragility, democracy, and disorder on the one side, and republican government, union, and order on the other.

Conservative unionists often continued to blame democracy – not the existence of southern slavery – for this centralization of power from the nation as a whole inward to a single majority section. Rufus Choate, along with unionist newspapers and meetings, blamed partisan conflict, party platforms, and power-hungry 'demagogues' for bringing about a sectional election that would lead to disunion.[150] The slavery dispute seemed like a problem that politicians, voters, and political parties manufactured for votes rather than an irrepressible conflict rooted in competing moral, economic, or social systems. Conservative unionist antipartyism, moreover, continued to draw from suspicion of electors as much as the elected. George Ticknor Curtis argued that a people too easily manipulated by 'baser

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[146] 'Great Meeting in Roxbury' *Boston Courier*, July 26, 1860; 'Who are the Threateners Now!', *Boston Courier*, August 1, 1860; 'Address to the People of Massachusetts', *Boston Courier*, October 3, 1860.
[147] 'The Conservative Movement in New York', *Boston Courier*, August 25, 1860; 'Order and Disorder', *Boston Courier* (September 7, 1860; 'John Brown Himself is Right', *Boston Courier*, September 9, 1860; 'John Brown is Right', *Boston Courier*, September 13, 1860; 'Republicanism-What Is It', *Boston Courier*, September 10, 1860.
[148] 'Proceedings of the National Whig Convention', *Baltimore American*, September 18, 1856.
[149] 'The Great Meeting', *PI*, December 14, 1860.
[150] Choate, 'Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country', pp. 335; 'Enthusiastic Bell and Everett Meeting in Dorchester', *Boston Courier*, July 21, 1860; 'The "Friends of Freedom"', *New York Evening Express*, March 12, 1856; 'Parties and their Principles', *NI*, July 7, 1860; 'Great Meeting in Roxbury' *Boston Courier*, July 26, 1860.

and lower passions' were vulnerable to 'popular agitation' on slavery and, he argued, would have 'this country turned upside down' rather than defer to the 'decided' Dred Scott decision. Even though Curtis had been one of Scott's lawyers, he linked fitness to participate in the polity to deference to the decision-making power of national institutions unencumbered by majority rule.[151] Similar ideas appear among delegates to the rump Whig convention in 1856, including New York Governor Washington Hunt and Lincoln's future Attorney General Edward Bates, as well as Constitutional Unionist newspapers in 1860. Such commentators blamed a 'bewildered' people and the 'susceptibility of the popular mind' for the growing political divide between North and South.[152] These conservatives defined fitness to participate in the polity based on deference to the independent decision-making authority of state institutions.

The process of Italian unification underway in 1860, much like the French Revolution of 1848, also allowed them to show that sectionalism was a problem of the people monopolising power.[153] Conservative newspapers compared the Republicans to the supposed violent tendencies of Mazzini and Victor Hugo[154] - and argued they would bring the 'Revolutions of France' and the 'broken Confederacies of South America' to the United States.[155] These comparisons to Italy, France, and South America enabled critics to visualise the consequences of allowing party conflict on sectional issues to weaken central government authority. They foresaw permanent instability as violent factions held state power nationally. Comparisons to supposedly failed regimes abroad gave conservatives an opportunity to explore domestic instability during Reconstruction, and these countries filled the same function in the 1850s.[156] The *Boston Courier*, for example, argued that Italian unification taught them that America would inevitably produce a Napoleon, a Cromwell, or another Andrew Jackson if citizens allowed their governments to become as disorderly and 'licentious' as the early modern Italian city states.[157] Not just did the *Courier* again raise the spectre of a distended government without a central authority to suppress corruption and disorder, it looked to a monarchical regime under Victor Emmanuel II and the Count of Cavour as an example of good government, in a similar manner to the way its midcentury counterparts had sometimes praised the supposedly carefully calibrated constitution of King Louis Phillippe to the centralized power of a Second Republic dependent on the Paris crowd. Europe here provided a warning of what would happen if slavery was not taken out of the democratic sphere. Embracing majority rule and disunion, they argued, risked opening a Pandora's Box of popular violence in the cities and states of the North.

After the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Lecompton Constitution, and the Dred Scott decision, though, it was less obvious to conservatives that a northern antislavery majority was the principal centralizing threat. Instead of following the Union Party movement into the Fillmore and Bell-Everett campaigns, many turned to the very sectional party they warned about after 1850. Secessionists in the South often accused Republicans of

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[151] 'Union Ratification Meeting', *Boston Courier* (September 26, 1860).

[152] 'Proceedings of the National Whig Convention', *BA*, September 18, 1856; 'Great Meeting in Roxbury' *Boston Courier*, July 26, 1860.

[153] For more on the American reception of the Italian Revolutions of 1848, see Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles*.

[154] 'Mazzini Abroad and at Home', *Boston Courier*, October 9, 1860.

[155] 'Patriotic Letters', *NI*, November 7, 1860.

[156] Greg Downs, 'The Mexicanization of American Politics', *American Historical Review* 117 (2012), pp. 387-409.

[157] 'Italy and the United States', *Boston Courier* (October 1, 1860)

'consolidationist' or centralizing designs, but for some northern voters it seemed that the South had already monopolised the federal government in the 1850s. In New York, William Evarts and the *Courier and Enquirer* both concluded that southern slaveholders, not the northern people, controlled the once independent and balanced institutions of the federal government. [158] The 'slave power' conspiracy, as it was often known, allowed these conservatives to argue that slaveowners had centralized federal power in their own hands. Ironically, given their scepticism of democratic rule, northern conservatives in the early 1850s had often criticised the 'slave power' [159] for controlling all branches of the federal government and forming an 'aristocracy.' Both too argued that this centralized power would lead to a government like the French *Ancien Régime* or the Reign of Terror: one that wielded power through violence rather than consent. [160] Their conceptualisation of the sectional crisis bears similarity to the way they saw Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état: as an example of how illegitimately acquired concentrations of power – whether they amassed in the South and Paris, or an Emperor and cabal – led to the abuse of state authority against the nation as a whole. It also helped link southern sectionalism to threats against the integrity of the federal government – and by extension to the threat of disorder that conservatives feared on the streets of northern cities.

Turning against slavery, though, did not always mean that these new Republicans rejected the conservative assumption that democracy invited challenges to republican government. Conservatives who had turned against slavery also drew from concerns about popular violence when campaigning in 1856 and 1860. One former compromise Whig blamed the South for threatening 'anarchy', 'disorder' and 'bowie knife' violence: slaveholders seemed to ferment violent subversion to the law from below. [161] Despite his opposition to slavery, Sidney George Fisher still shared the conservative assumption that a violent democracy threatened republican deference to the law. As the slavery dispute paralysed Congress and sparked legislative violence, Fisher blamed 'popular passion' for turning the legislature into a disorderly 'mob'. [162] Conservatives in the early 1850s associated antislavery with popular lawlessness and disorder; by the latter part of the decade, Fisher also associated disregard for the law with the slave power. When southern medical students and local policemen attacked an 1859 abolitionist meeting in Philadelphia, Fisher cited it as evidence that the South had allied with the violent tendencies of northern democracy rather than northern conservatives, and demanded that consolidated Philadelphia use its police to

[158] William Evarts, *The Issues of the Day: Speech of William M. Evarts of New York City at Auburn, Tuesday, Oct. 16, 1860* (Albany, 1860), pp. 7-8, 12; 'Political Items', *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer* (October 31, 1850).

[159] To defend the constitutionality of an antislavery programme, some northerners argued that the Constitution was an antislavery document and a 'slave power' conspiracy of Southern planters and Northern collaborators had usurped the institutions designed to secure freedom.
David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge, 1970); Foner, *Free Soil*, p. 9, 73-102; William Gienapp, 'The Republican party and the Slave Power', in Michael Perman and Amy Taylor (eds), *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 2011), pp. 74-85; McPherson, *Battle Cry*, pp. 51-55, 162, 149-150, 160, 193, 225-226; Russel Nye, 'The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860', *Science & Society* 10 (1946), pp. 262-274; Michael Pfau, *The Political Style of Conspiracy: Chase, Sumner, and Lincoln* (East Lansing, 2005); Potter, *Impending Crisis*, p. 289.

[160] John Palfrey, *Letter to a Whig Neighbor on the Approaching State Election* (Boston, 1855), pp. 3-5, 25-26; 'Political Items', *MC&NYE*, October 31, 1850.

[161] The Joel Parker, *The True Issue, and Duty of the Whigs* (October 1, 1856).

[162] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1859, pp. 274-275, October 21, 1859, vol. 1860, pp. 28-29, February 2, 1850.

maintain law and order on city streets.[163] The New York *Courier and Enquirer*, no ardent ally of the antislavery cause, nevertheless described northerners who threatened William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Henry Ward Beecher as the 'worst of despots' who 'had no right to usurp the power of the laws'.[164] The threat to the rule of law, this Republican paper now argued, came from proslavery public violence, not abolitionists. The fusion of sectional questions with the people on the streets once more presented a problem.

Criticism of the slave power conspiracy also suggested that conservatives did not see sectional questions as a simple choice between southern slavery and a northern-dominated democracy. Some conservatives emphasised that the 'slave power' usurped authority that ought to rest in unelected institutions like the judiciary.[165] Planters had either captured or bypassed what ought to have been independent sources of legitimacy. Attacking southern elites, though, did not mean endorsing democratic rule. Sidney George Fisher still defended southern plantation owners as a necessary aristocratic check on the majority monopolising the power of the state, even though he opposed these slaveowners controlling the three branches of the Madisonian system of government.[166] He, like Republicans who had once supported antiparty union and compromise movements, therefore saw slaveholders in a similar way to northern majorities. In wielding disproportionate power, they constituted an illegitimate, centralized hold over the federal government, and their rule rested on – and threatened to perpetuate – violence and anarchy.

Both conservative Republicans and Fillmore and Constitutional Union supporters seemed attracted to centralizing power on their own terms as a solution to the sectional crisis, even if they rarely risked using the pejorative term. The supposedly natural authority of disinterested best men was an important element of their appeal. Thus opponents of sectional parties continued to defend antipartyism as a tool to concentrate political decision-making over slavery in the state rather than in demagogic or conspiratorial partisans. Constitutional Union Party propaganda emphasised that the movement had nominated candidates based on their character and reputation in a manner based on the virtuous practices of the Early Republic. One address declared its support for tickets that 'fifteen gentlemen' in New York had put together as superior to the kind of men put forward at a nominating convention. It claimed that 'agitation' and 'passions' led to elite withdrawal from politics and prevented Congress from legislating 'calmly, judiciously, dispassionately, for the common good'.[167] Believing that northern democracy still formed the greatest centralizing threat to the Union, these conservatives followed the 1850-51 Union Party plan of concentrating decision-making power in the hands of a smaller number of propertied men, changing the machinery of the party process to secure better nominations. When the elections of 1856 and 1860 had shown that the northern people did not accept deference to conservative opinion, though, constitutional unionist and conservative newspapers sometimes suggested the Supreme Court could again serve as an alternative to the decision-

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[163] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1859, pp 290-291, November 6, 1859, p. 231, December 16, 1859.

[164] 'Mob Law', *MC&NYE*, December 20, 1860.

[165] Evarts, *Issues*, Albany, 1860, pp. 8-11; 'To-Morrow', *MC&NYE,* November 3, 1856.

[166] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1857, pp. 42-43, March 9, 1857.

[167] 'Alex R. Boteler', *Address of the National Executive Committee of the Constitutional Union Party to the People of the United States* (Washington, 1860); 'A Candid Appeal', *NI*, May 12, 1860; 'Immense Union Meeting', *Boston Courier*, September 19, 1860.

making power of the people. This apolitical institution, they argued, could legitimately impose order and sectional unity.[168] Like the Union Party movement in the early 1850s, conservative unionists saw antipartyism as a way to way to prevent disunion and disorder, but they were not necessarily hostile to an active federal government.

Also like the previous Union Party movements, conservative unionists in the late 1850s also supported centralizing decision-making authority because they believed a stronger government could impose order on the nation's disorderly periphery. As municipal reformers had done on a citywide level, they used a discourse of opposition to riot and disorder to justify a state-building programme. For example, the rump Whig Party at the 1856 Baltimore Convention defended Millard Fillmore's record of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act in terms of suppressing 'disturbance' and punishing 'rebellion and mutiny'.[169] Fillmore's Whig supporters in 1856 insisted that their party sought a following either side of the Mason-Dixon line, and emphasised that their candidate would enforce the law across the whole nation, combating southern disunionism and northern resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act.[170] Eli Kirk Price, who had led the municipal Consolidation movement in Philadelphia in 1853-4, became a Bell supporter by 1860, and argued at meetings and in the press for far more vigorous enforcement of the Fugitive law, on the grounds that respect for the legitimate authority granted by the Constitution superseded moral qualms over slavery.[171] When the Republicans insisted that the Dred Scott decision was nonbinding, the unionist *Boston Courier* denounced them as 'radical' and 'Jacobin', a term often reserved for abolitionists and rioters in the 1830s and 1840s.[172] These conservatives clearly hoped that taking slavery out of the public sphere through unionist political parties and unelected supreme courts could allow a strong government to exercise power over these rival sovereignties and in so doing challenge sectionalism. Like their predecessor Union Movements in 1850 and 1851, northern conservative unionists in the later 1850s were also ardent centralizers who believed that the bisectional solution to the sectional crisis was strengthening the federal government rather than retrenchment.

The conservatives who turned to the Republican Party in the late 1850s also seemed attracted to the state-building aspects of the Republican programme, even if they believed the federal government should wield its power against southern slavery rather than northern sectionalism. Fisher criticised southern congressmen for creating 'disorganization' in Congress, proof that American democratic government could never maintain respect for law and order in the long term.[173] The 1860 Republican leadership candidate Edward Bates returned to the same criticism of the 'higher law of the Democracy' that conservatives had used to justify federal enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act in Boston: popular sovereignty over legal institutions, he argued, allowed the people to contemplate sectionalism,

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[168] 'Republican Inconsistency', *Boston Courier*, October 12, 1860; Mr. Seward's Speech at Detroit', *Boston Courier*, September 7, 1860; 'The Personal Liberty Law', *Boston Courier*, August 30, 1860; 'To the People of the United States', *NI*, February 25, 1860.

[169] 'Proceedings of the National Whig Convention', *BA*, September 18, 1856.

[170] *Ibid.*.

[171] Eli Kirk Price, 'A Plea for the Union of All Union Men', *NA&USG*, October 11, 1860; 'Union Rally', *PI*, December 14, 1860.

[172] 'The Republican Party and the Supreme Court', *Boston Courier* (August 29, 1860).

[173] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diaries MSS, vol. 1859, pp. 290-291, November 6, 1859, p. 231, December 16, 1859, vol. 1860, pp. 12-13, January 13, 1860.

radicalism, and disunion.[174] Just like the conservatives who denied the threat posed by a slave power, these individuals feared government's inability to wield executive power to prevent disorder. Opponents of Reconstruction would come to use anxiety about 'Mexicanization' to articulate fears about state weakness, instability, and dissolution unless America abandoned its democratic experiments in the South.[175] William Evarts used a similar idea to argue that, by 1860, slaveholders who constantly threatened secession provided the 'Mexicanization' threat. But he assured his audience that the eventual 'submission' of the South to the national government would only strengthen federal institutions, the law, and the Constitution.[176] To such conservatives, the election of an antislavery government with a mandate to prevent disunion and curb the expansion of slavery in the territories could reassert the power of the Union over rival sources of power. This sharply contrasted to Fillmore and Constitutional Union party supporters who thought northern rule would result in the disunion that would permanently weaken the American government's ability to preserve order, suppress violence, or counteract majority rule. But these Republicans shared with these unionists – and the 1850 and 1851 Union Party movements they had once supported – an interpretation of the sectional crisis as a problem of weak government that their own centralization could solve.

These conservative Republicans strongly supported a powerful federal government in Washington exercising power outwards across the nation. In the same speech in which he warned against Mexicanization, Evarts asked what kind of government could legislate on any issue that effected free men, but not slaveowners. 'If you have got a government', he suggested, 'it can govern'.[177] Slaveowners' challenges to federal authority seemed to set themselves up as a rival to the federal sovereignty that conservatives prized, and asserting the sovereignty of Congress over the territories seemed a legitimate use of this indivisible national government. Amid these fears of state weakness, Fisher too saw Congress's inability to properly govern its own territories as a cause for concern.[178] As the sectional crisis escalated he, as well as the New York *Courier*, spoke positively of the supposedly enlightened, if sometimes despotic, monarchical governments of Cavour and Napoleon III. Directly comparing Europe and America, they positively contrasted the monarchical governments of Europe to the American government that allowed the people to dismember it.[179] The regimes that had concentrated sovereignty in fewer hands seemed to show how America too could concentrate state power in a central government and reassert its authority over a disorderly society – if only it were prepared to scale back the perceived democratic excesses of the Jacksonian period. Evarts and Fisher both suggested that, as the demands of slaveholders on the North grew, antislavery too could fit into the conservative agenda for a less democratic but more active federal government. However, rather than building their case for powerful government in opposition to the northern people, these conservatives began to build it against the disunionist, subversive, and violent tendencies of southern slavery. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Fisher would call during the Civil War for an American Cromwell to wield the latent powers of the Constitution, in a pamphlet that by

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[174] 'Proceedings of the National Whig Convention', *BA*, September 18, 1856.
[175] Downs 'Mexicanization', pp. 837-409.
[176] Evarts, *Issues*, pp. 12-13.
[177] Evarts, *Issues*, pp. 9-10.
[178] HSP: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1859, pp. 159-162, June 18, 1859.
[179] HSP*: Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS*, vol. 1860, pp. 37-38, February 7, 1860, p. 145, July 5, 1860; [Untitled], *MC&NYE*, December 19, 1860.

1867 was being used to justify Military Reconstruction.[180] The logic of antebellum northern conservatism, in war and Reconstruction, could serve as the basis for creating a more centralized American national state.

The events of the later 1850s, such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott decision, and the caning of Charles Sumner might have turned many conservatives away from compromise with the South, and divided the unionists who had come together at midcentury. These events might have helped redefine southern slavery rather than the northern people as a centralizing menace to the Union. Conservative Republicans might have reversed their earlier position on the sectional question, though, but the terms they used to critique slavery and the tools they wanted to prevent southern sectionalism bore many similarities to their counterparts who refused to enlist in an antislavery party. They shared with Constitutional Unionist supporters and former Union Party men a relatively common understanding of the sectional crisis as a problem of where power came from and how it was distributed. Where abolitionists saw the sectional conflict as a problem that only abolishing slavery could solve, these conservatives all saw slavery as a politically-manufactured problem that unfit voters, politicians, and interests used to transfer power from a truly national government to sectional interests. In other words, it seemed like a process of centralization. And rather than seeing democracy or states' rights as the solution to sectionalism, these conservatives still believed on the verge of the American Civil War that they could hold the Union together with a stronger federal government that could respond to violent challenges to its integrity and sovereignty. To do so, they drew on ideas about the geographic and institutional processes of centralization that both small-d democrats and states' rights' advocates had warned against in both Europe and the United States, and that Union Party movements themselves had advocated in the early 1850s. Conservatives who opposed slavery or supported compromise continued to use the idea of democratic centralization to challenge emerging of sources of power to rival an imagined elite-run federal government but continued to challenge this with a centralizing process of their own.

Conclusion

In 1860, vice-presidential candidate Edward Everett spoke in Boston. He argued that opposition to the 'lawlessness, venality, fraud, and violence' that had characterised the 'unbalanced democracy' of ancient Greece, Rome, Revolutionary France, and the English Civil War explained American prosperity. While an unelected judiciary, the division of America into 'local centres of political influence', and the Madisonian system guarded America from such a pure democracy, he warned that a growing threat from 'party' and from 'laws sometimes violated by the mob' – a thinly veiled reference to the Fugitive Slave Act – threatened the American republic. [181] Everett's speech neatly encapsulated how conservative unionists understood the sectional crisis. Where slaveowners and abolitionists saw it as about the morality of slavery, northern conservative unionists situated it within a wider violent and popular challenge to a government that, to avoid the excesses of Paris in 1848, needed to resist partisanship and curb popular influence. The 1860 Constitutional Union 'motto, "*The Union, the Constitution, and the Laws*"…not knowing North, South, East or West' drew from this conservative reading of the sectional crisis. [182] By linking

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[180] Fisher, *Trial of the Constitution*.

[181] 'An Address Delivered Before the Municipal Authorities of the City of Boston on the Fourth of July, 1860, by Edward Everett', *Boston Courier*, July 5, 1860.

[182] *Proceedings of the Bell & Everitt* [sic] *Club*, New York, 1860.

strengthening federal institutions and deference to the Compromise of 1850 to a bisectional government, it implied sectionalism, democracy, and weak government went hand in hand. Centralization of law-enforcing authority in government institutions could lead to the decentralisation of political influence over national geography, in much the same way the Carey's supporters assumed that national tariffs overseen by a strong government would decentre economic power. Just as the threat of the Paris mob represented a geographic as well as an institutional centralization – power would extend over all France as well as all parts of the French state, – unionist movements in 1850-51 and 1860 the threat of a northern sectional victory in 1860 threatened to concentrate all power in a seemingly violent northern democracy. Even supporters who turned against slavery in the latter part of the 1850s reinterpreted the 'peculiar institution' as a similar external threat to government integrity. Northern conservatives therefore did not support the Union just for its own sake. They championed it because they also saw it as the only alternative to a European-style democracy.

In the elections of 1850 and 1860, Conservative Unionists read the sectional crisis as a problem of democracy and government power rather than the result of an irrepressible conflict between freedom and slavery. Firstly, antislavery in the North seemed a product of politicians encouraging the people to subvert the law through a riotous democracy or the politics of individual conscience epitomized in the higher law doctrine and Garrisonian abolitionism. Northern antislavery seemed little different to the southern secessionists or urban rioters who claimed the right to appropriate the authority of government for themselves. Secondly, they warned that the logic of democracy in a country where a majority lived in a single quadrant of the country threatened to concentrate power geographically. Describing the geographic and democratic aspects of the sectional crisis in similar terms to centralization allowed them to describe the growth of new sources of political authority in a negative light, suggesting that a peripheral South was in danger of becoming subject to a majority North. Drawing from a conservative reading of the foundation of the United States Constitution in response to the likes of Shays Rebellion, weak overly democratic state governments, and populist measures against propertyowners, they argued that the national government existed to suppress disorder. Disunion therefore seemed to open in the North as well as the South the possibility of state weakness and permanent disorder. For conservative unionists, the sectional crisis was an opportunity to think about democracy rather than slavery, and they saw in the North the threat of an American Reign of Terror, a kind of Paris writ large, centralizing the power of the state in a violent democracy with absolute power over its own section and the nation at large.

In 1850 and 1860, conservatives confronted the real possibility of the southern states seceding. Their diagnosis of sectionalism as a democratic problem exacerbated by a federal state that lacked independent power to enforce the law helped guide their response. They hoped to prevent what they described as a dangerous centralization of power with a centralization of their own. To combat disunion and suppress disorder – slavery-related or otherwise – conservatives often supported strengthening the executive power of the federal government, though they strongly backed keeping control in the hands of a bisectional conservative elite. These conservatives therefore endorsed centralization insofar as it involved building a federal law-enforcing capacity accountable to the President and capable of intervening in disunionist enclaves, whether that be in the South or northern cities like New York. The conservatives' Union therefore encapsulated a necessary centralization of violent power to suppress disorder at a national and local level. Saving the Union, just like

city reform, economic development, and observations of European revolution, was an opportunity to advance what can be seen as a conservative antidemocratic agenda.

In addition to strengthening the federal government, the conservative unionist programme of centralization also embraced taking the authority to determine the future from voters and keeping it in the hands of Congress and the country's political establishment. As Philadelphia's consolidator Eli Kirk Price put it, a coming antislavery majority in the North meant 'a minority of the whole country will rule' the South 'by reason of their war upon a subject forbidden them by the Constitution.'[183] To avoid the people from acquiring too much authority, conservatives hoped to depoliticise slavery (as Price indicated) or hand power over the subject to non-democratic institutions. Union Party activists sought to abolish party conflict entirely where Whig and Democratic Unionists tried to force both parties to take slavery out of public debate. Arguments for sharing power between North and South might have sounded self-denying among northern conservatives who often stood to benefit from Republican rule. But this chapter has tried to argue that conservatives seemed more interested in centralizing power than sharing it. Their proposals were stridently antimajoritatian and sought to take the people out of the decision-making process. Conservatives instead sought to concentrate decision-making power in a far smaller elite to whom they expected the electorate to defer. Yet redefining centralization as a geographic problem of power in a single section rather than one rooted in a consolidationist federal government allowed them to suggest that building the institutional capacity in Washington D.C. would actually decentralize power over space. Proponents of such measures in 1850-51 and 1860 believed a bisectional coalition of elite leaders, freed from dependence of local passions, would share control of the country's destiny. They proposed to rebalance control over the federal government and slavery policy away from the tumultuous realm of civil society – which they saw as predisposed to violence as a form of dispute resolution – and into the often unelected realm of state institutions.

Events did not transpire as Whig, Democratic, and Union Part supporters of the Compromise of 1850 had intended, as abolitionists still challenged the Fugitive Slave Act and southerners still took opportunities to expand slavery. A number of conservatives who had once supported Union Party proposals turned, ironically, to the Republican Party itself in the later 1850s. This might seem contradictory to their previous beliefs, but in practice did not require them to abandon their conservative interpretation of sectionalism. These new Republicans described southern slaveholders and proslavery activists in similar terms to those they had once used to describe northern opponents of the Compromise of 1850, casting them as a hostile sectional state within a state that threatened to seize power over the federal government. Some even described proslavery rioting and elections as an example of how slavery, not free labour, was the democratic threat. Many of them did dislike slavery itself. But these conservatives downplayed the abolitionist and antislavery positions of the Republican Party and instead were attracted to its programme of strengthening the federal government against what they now saw as a southern, rather than a northern, threat. This shared understanding of the sectional crisis as a problem of sectional centralization rather than an irrepressible conflict, together with the common heritage in Union Party movements, suggests why they both came to rally to the Union flag once South Carolina

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[183] Eli Kirk Price, 'A Plea for the Union of All Union Men', *NA&USG*, October 11, 1860.

fired on Fort Sumter: it showed, once and for all, that southern slavery, not northern democracy, threatened republican government.

In some ways, northern conservative unionists' conceptualization of the sectional question and the constitution seemed more in line with some southern thinkers than those of the North. In the early 1850s, many northerners often derisively referred to northern conservative unionists as 'doughfaces' for accepting a Union built on slavery, not expanding democracy and human rights over time. [184] After all, conservative unionists stridently defended the rights of the South and virulently opposed northern abolitionism. And many mercantile traders in New York had a financial stake in maintaining trade links with the South. Their desire for a powerful government that derived its legitimacy – and extended its authority – across sectional divisions can seem similar to John C. Calhoun's scheme of 'concurrent majorities', whereby both North and South would have a mutual veto on the decision-making power of the federal government. Both too shared an understanding that majority rule led to tyranny over the minority excluded from power, that partisanship exacerbated this process, and that an 'absolute' democracy was a threat to avoid. [185] The Virginian proslavery ideologue George Fitzhugh, for instance, despite supporting the 'federative system' as opposed to a 'centralization of power' in Washington, too, cited London and Parisian rule over Great Britain and France to argue that a 'conservative' DC could have a 'centripetal' influence on the USA. [186] Here it seemed that northern conservatives did surrender to southern visions of a slaveholders' republic.

But northern conservative unionists saw more choices on offer than northern majority rule or southern compact theory when trying to define the future relationship between the people, the states, and the federal government. They were comfortable instead with the idea of an expansive government capable of suppressing opposition to its rule. However, this was often indistinguishable from curbing the supposed excesses of democracy, which they saw as a threat to national integrity. For these northerners, progress meant building a government capable of withstanding the growing challenges to law, order, and property. Preserving the Union gave them the opportunity to check the assumption that the majority of white men should rule, even in the North. It seemed perfectly plausible to conservatives that they could strengthen the institutions of the federal government, while ensuring that control over these institutions remained in the hands a geographically balanced propertied elite rather than falling into the hands of sectional partisans. Their vision for the Union therefore challenged assumptions that equated decentralization with democracy and nation building with centralization.

Northern conservatives often seemed to look like southern aristocrats when they discussed state building, centralization, and the distribution of power in the federal government. Yet they held to fundamental differences that may help explain why they so quickly turned to federal use of force to meet the secession crisis. In 1850 Rufus Choate, along with states' rights democrats, might have warned that democracy threatened the rule

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[184] Conlin, '"Isms" and "Ists"', pp. 205-209.
[185] For more on Calhoun's concurrent majorities, see John C. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on the Government and Constitution of the United States* (Columbia, SC, 1851); Eugene Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of American Conservatism* (London, 1994), pp. 60-64; O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order,* vol. 2, pp. 849-862.
[186] George Fitzhugh, 'Washington City', *De Bow's Review* 24 (1858), p. 507.

of law, but in 1861 northerners of almost all political stripes warned that secession, not democracy, threatened all law and order.[187] And where many southerners held to a belief that the United States was not a single nation, that the Constitutional Convention had rejected the consolidation of the states into a single sovereignty, and that sovereignty remained decentralized among many state governments that had the power to reclaim it, northerners concerned about local disorder and violence had no use for legitimate challenges to the legal establishment. Southern states-rights Democrats and northern conservative unionists therefore both used a language of decentralization to set out their ideal Union, and agreed that the federal government needed something akin to a concurrent majority to operate. However, the fact that centralization had many different meanings meant that they understood the term and the power relations it could describe very differently. Where northern conservatives were often open to a large role for the federal government in suppressing local disorder, their southern brethren claimed to oppose a centralization of power in Washington – unless it returned fugitive slaves – and sought to divide this power among the state capitals of a polycentric union. Where northerners looked to executive power emanating from Washington and reining in disorder, southerners no doubt saw a threat to the authority of slaveholders. Where northerners believed balanced government could reconcile decentralization with a big federal government, southerners, with the exception of the Fugitive Slave Act and a slave code for the territories, believed progress tended to require a smaller federal government, not a larger one.

Given northern conservative divisions over many other issues of political economy, party, and even the morality of slavery itself, it is unsurprising that the growing divisiveness of slavery in the later 1850s divided conservatives who had once agreed that a northern antislavery democracy threatened a Parisian-style centralization of power in the hands of voters in a single section. However, both before and after the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the formation of the Republican Party, many conservatives saw the sectional crisis as part of a wider debate over democracy and the changing power relationships of majority rule. Centralization allowed conservatives to warn against nation building when it appeared to hand power to voters or slaveowners, a process they did not separate from the emergence of sectionalism as much they did not separate it from the problem of urban rioting. The possibility of preserving the Union in 1850 and 1860 represented to conservatives the fulfilment of their own programme that, ironically, embraced all the centralizing process they used centralization to delegitimise when it benefited an empowered electorate. To many Americans, preventing the triumph of sectional majority rule or even proslavery violence in these years was part of their own counterrevolution against the violent Parisian democracy of 1848.

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[187] Philip Paludan, *A People's Contest: The Union and Civil War, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, 1996); Paludan, 'Crisis in Law and Order', pp. 1013-1034.

Conclusion

In January 1848, when Sidney George Fisher first heard news of an attempted revolution in Ireland and reflected upon the Mexican-American War for 'plunder', he remarked that these events showed that the main political divide in America lay not necessarily between Whigs and Democrats, North or South, or pro-bank or anti-bank, but between 'Jacobins' and 'conservatives'. [1] The conservatives considered in this thesis often shared Fisher's conclusion. For these men, 1848 and its aftermath in Europe and the United States marked a critical moment. Rather than seeing the 1850s as a prelude to civil war over slavery or an extension of Jackson-era battles over political economy, they often believed that the decade involved a struggle for power between the people and the state, and framed many of the political disputes of the era in these terms.

It is perhaps surprising that a populist Democratic newspaper like the *Herald* and a Whig-leaning aristocrat like Fisher could share a similar political platform. Yet they reacted similarly, in some ways, to the crises of 1848, using the threat of centralization to warn against revolutionary French republicanism and free state majority rule. Most Americans would probably have agreed that the greatest threat of centralization came from ambitious demagogues, corrupt officeholders, and an overbearing government, one either in danger of falling into the hands of fanatical antislavery agitators (to many white southerners) or a conspiratorial 'slave power' (to plenty of northerners). But some Americans reacted to the transformation of the Second French Republic to the Second Empire as proof that the people of Paris had centralized power inward both from the government to the people and from the country to the city. A number of observers across the partisan divide in the Northeastern United States shared Fisher's and the *Herald*'s views. They did not share a political party and their attempts to build one during the sectional crisis never met with electoral success, but instead, they tended to organise within different movements and parties to meet their objectives. And while conservative leaders often overlapped in the institutions of the urban upper class, conservatism in the penny press too suggested that conservative ideas reached a wider audience. However much they might have disagreed on the likes of free trade, the wisdom of municipal reform, and the morality of slavery, a common set of ideas – linked by concerns over democracy and centralization – make them worth of attention.

Centralization was a useful language for conservatives to use when wading into these debates over political economy and the boundaries of democracy. The negative connotations of the term allowed them to challenge emerging rival sources of political and economic authority. By implying that rivals would pull wealth or democratic capacity inwards and wield government power or mob violence outwards they could delegitimise opponents.

Conservatives, of course, were not the only Americans to warn against centralization, but the evidence submitted here suggests that they employed it in particular ways. If anything, the term was most common in the 1830s and 1840s in the discourse of Jacksonian Democrats, who made hostility to concentrated power in institutions like the Second National Bank a major part of their appeal. But any American could use this term as a political weapon to attack their rivals. Whigs, indeed, employed it against Jackson himself. What appeared as one centralization in the eyes of one person could be perfectly

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[1] Sidney George Fisher Diary MSS, vol. 1848-1849, pp. 2-4, January 21, 1848.

legitimate in the eyes of another. What made the term useful for conservatives in particular, though, was that they could try to redefine the term by using it against many of the democrats who used centralization to warn against autocratic regimes and corporate power. They therefore frequently used the negative connotations of centralization to describe and delegitimise the power of the people in what passed for a democratic polity in nineteenth-century America. More Americans than historians have tended to assume were yet to reconcile themselves to white male democracy and party competition. Describing the formal politics of voting and the informal politics of street rioting as centralization therefore implied that the democratic advances of the Jacksonian years – at least in terms in white male suffrage – might have been a mistake. But it did so in a language seemingly more in step with a republic that had ostensibly embraced white male democracy.

This thesis also sets out how conservatives also found the idea of centralization as a process particularly useful, as well as using it as a term to warn against democracy and rival cities' urban growth. Centralization, shorn of the negative value judgements that contemporaries associated with the term, also referred more broadly to giving institutions and places more authority and/or expanding the territory over which they exercised power. Despite using centralization as a political weapon, conservatives assumed that power could centralize in institutions and places over time. Rather than necessarily presenting a threat, these process were useful for a group of men interested in preserving law and order, preventing disunion, and directing economic growth in their own favour. Conservatives thus often embraced centralization when it suited their goals. Conservatives therefore used centralization as a political weapon selectively to delegitimise and implicitly legitimise different aspects of processes taking place around them – like state-strengthening, industrialisation, and urban reform – and instead design their own model for modernising the United States.

Historians often describe the 1850s as an era where America's popular institutions focused increasingly on the rights and wrongs of slavery, having settled the question over universal white male suffrage in the battles of the Jacksonian era. Having determined that the people should rule, it was now time for the people to end human bondage.[2] Slavery unsurprisingly dominates histories of the period, especially as the conclusion of the Mexican-American War forced the question of its territorial expansion more prominently into public debate and sparked the descent towards the American Civil War. Historians have tended to treat state power and political economy in the period on a more local level.[3] Studies of projects to reform city governments and expand urban economies often seemed disconnected from national debates over sectionalism. But centralization as a political term and a process shaped conservatives' understanding of both local and national affairs, and in keeping with recent research that shows how Americans drew parallels between local and national state-building and political economy, allows us to connect events usually treated discretely. Here the connections between events in Europe, political economy, city building, and nation building become more apparent.

The Revolutions of 1848 in France and their ultimate failure with the accession of the Second Empire in 1852 gave conservatives the opportunity to explore their fears for the

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[2] Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, pp. 22-42; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, pp. 159-209, 267-282, 401-421; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 210-224; Wilentz, *American Democracy*, pp. 181-520.

[3] See in particular Holt, *1850s*.

future of democratisation in America. Most conservatives agreed that the creation of the semi-authoritarian Second Empire was a centralizing moment. Even if they did not always use the term to describe Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état, they, like most Americans, graphically described France as straining under a single source of political authority, one that took form both institutionally in the office of the Emperor and geographically in the city of Paris. However, many conservatives agreed that centralization predated the Second Empire: the outward form of government mattered less than the centralized principle itself. They defined the democracy established in 1848 as an even more dangerous example of centralization, one that occurred not through the bayonets of an emperor, but at the hands of the Paris mob. Both Louis-Napoleon and the Parisian people, conservative observers warned, had usurped power that belonged to the French state, and, by implication, a similar class of French propertied elites that were best placed to fill the offices of government. Moreover, when defining democracy as centralization in this way, these conservatives sometimes referred back to rioting and universal white male suffrage in their own cities, suggesting how their assumptions about France were shaped by fears that unpropertied voters in big American cities could seize power too. In other words, their impulse to define French democracy as a centralizing threat reflected fears of democracy on their side of the Atlantic too.

Democracy was one of many possible centralizations, and defining this as the single centralizing threat in France and the United States implicitly legitimised other consolidations. Consequently, conservatives could define their own programmes of centralization as sharing power. This assumption about the state of French democracy contrasted to the often professed American ideal of power divided vertically among county, state, and federal government and horizontally among legislative, executive, and judicial branches. But this hid conservatives' hopes to centralize power in the hands of the government. Despite at times advocating federalism and the Madisonian system for France, conservatives at times supported General Cavaignac's temporary dictatorship, constitutional monarchy, and even Napoleon III himself as examples of governments suitable for a country unfit for self-government. Delegitimising democratic government as centralization allowed them to suggest that less democratic government could share it. However, rather than sharing power among millions of individual voters, conservatives hoped to share power only among a smaller number of propertied officeholders, aristocrats, and political institutions. Conservatives might have opposed centralization, but in France they clearly had a very different definition of what constituted a decentralised republic.

Changing economic geography also showed the possibility that power could concentrate particular places – a tendency observers had seen in Paris. As well as confronting the possibility of power relationships between institutions, then, conservatives also confronted changing power relationships over space, and for thinkers like Henry Carey at a national level and urban boosters more locally, centralization played a major role in allowing them to frame a critique of long distance dependency. Conservatives, like many Americans, observed railroad, canal, and steamship lines spreading outwards from major cities and assumed they too allowed the centre to exercise power over a surrounding hinterland. Drawing again from the image of France, conservatives in American cities warned that New York's mercantile supremacy threatened to create a Paris in the United States on account of its ability to pull surrounding territory into its commercial orbit. They used centralization to warn against allowing these trading rivals – often New York, London, or nearby railroad hubs – to expand their commercial hinterland outward and threaten propertied and

mercantile interests in their own cities. In place of a territory dependant on the interests of a single city, conservatives described a polycentric economy where cities, towns, and states each cultivated their own hinterland and balanced regional economic power. Warning against centralization therefore allowed conservatives in different cities to compete with each other for material wealth as well as compete for political authority with the people.

Yet conservatives used centralization as a political weapon only to choose which city and city inhabitants would benefit from it, rather than as a democratic language of opposition to monopoly, inequality, and corporate power. They redefined centralization as a remote threat across geography to legitimise imposing power themselves much closer to home. Defining their larger rivals as the sole centralizing threat in the sphere of political economy implicitly justified a smaller-scale centralization of their own. Claiming that infrastructure in Boston, Baltimore, or Philadelphia would share wealth mong multiple cities in place of New York gave the impression of decentralization on a national scale. But on a local scale, conservatives still supported the process of centralization of economic activity in growing mercantile cities. It was not the principle of economic centralization that conservatives warned against, but the scale of it – as they believed a large-scale centralization in New York or London came at the expense of their own cities and property. They therefore embraced, for their own purposes, building the very geographic ties of dependency that they used the language of centralization to caution against. Opposing centralization therefore allowed them to pursue their own economic goals. Moreover, building the infrastructure of economic centralization often relied on government power to issue charters, grant subsidies, and regulate the economy. As well as allowing conservatives to pursue state-building through economic power relationships between places, economic centralization also spurred stronger government and even offered democratic retrenchment by shielding power over property and corporations from democratic control. Conservatives in different cities therefore pursued different forms of political centralization to ensure that they could use government power to shape the economy for their own ends and impose their will on their own cities. The political language of opposition to centralization served, as it did when applied to France, its conservative users by allowing them to choose between multiple possible centralizations, economic as well as political.

The imperative to build institutional and geographic bonds of dependency on conservative terms came together in conservative attempts to reform city governments and even hold the Union together. In response to the French-style democratic threat that they feared on the streets of American cities, conservatives joined movements to consolidate city governments – replacing the patchworks of multiple municipal governments with larger city governments – and substitute outdated watches and sheriffs with modern police forces. In these contexts, conservatives often embraced the language of centralization, calling for 'union' or to rally support for stronger government. They openly argued that they needed to remove geographic and institutional barriers to government authority so that they could impose order on a disorderly city. Within the municipality they therefore embraced the tools and processes of centralization they supported on a national scale in France and in economic development: using street railroads and planning to subdue suburbs to the city centre and strengthen the police and telegraph so government could impose its will over dangerous citizens. As well as allowing government to exercise power outwards over people and places, consolidation also had the advantage of centralizing political decision-making power away from neighbourhoods, where it was more susceptible to democratic control. It therefore helped conservatives curb municipal democracy, centralizing power in a smaller number of

properted officeholders. Centralization gave urban conservatives the opportunity to scale back the formal democracy of elections and voting as well as the informal democracy of violent street politics.

Embracing centralization and strong government did not mean that conservative city reformers supported it when they threatened to give the people power over government and property. Conservatives supporting consolidation still drew from the imagery of a polycentric polity to defend their own centralization. To justify their own city-building programme, they sometimes raised the threat of a larger scale centralization at the hands of another larger city that would have power over them. Again, they used the possibility of a large regional or national centralization to justify a more local one, and packaged their programs to unite cities in federalist language. Conservatives also used centralization as a political weapon to delegitimise creating new sources of political authority over property and democratic authority over city government. Within their cities, they often looked to devolve fiscal powers to wards, districts, and vestigial municipalities, weakening and decentralizing government in the sphere of property taxes, improvements, and assessments. This allowed conservative reformers to clothe their proposals in the language of decentralization while removing barriers to government power to enforce the law and protect property. It also reflected how conservatives continued to use centralization as a political weapon to pick and choose between emerging and potential sources of strong government power and ensure that these powers served their own propertied interests.

Conservatives also warned against centralization during the sectional crisis. Rather than seeing the sectional crisis as a dilemma over the morality of slavery, they assumed that northern antislavery was responsible for supposedly forcing the South to consider disunion – a situation that would negatively affect their business interests. In the early 1850s, conservative unionists used centralization to attack northern antislavery, defining northern urban resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act and the possibility of a northern antislavery voting bloc in Congress as a geographic centralization of power in the North and an institutional centralization of power in the people at the expense of the federal government. By appropriating for themselves the power to govern slavery from the entire Union, they warned, the northern people had become an uncontrolled sovereignty with power to impose their will from the North over the South and West. In other words, they fell back on the assumption that democracy and majority rule – not officeholders and corporations – created dangerous concentrations of power. They described the Union under the northern people in similar terms to the way they described France under Paris because both seemed like examples of a concentrated mass subjecting the surrounding country surrounding to their authority. Some conservatives joined the Republicans, using the slave power conspiracy to argue that slavery had become the policy around which the people rallied to usurp lawful government, but for conservatives, sectionalism was closely tied to geographical imbalances.

Defining centralization as an external threat to constitutional government (whether it was antislavery or proslavery) allowed conservatives to redefine centralizing power in the federal government as power-sharing. Suggesting centralization was a geographic threat allowed them to claim that a strong federal government – one with the ability to enforce its law across the nation – would be far better placed to share power than the people with their northern majority. In other words, conservatives again used use the rhetoric of centralization to legitimise their own nation-building proposals. Despite claiming to share power, conservatives hoped to centralize power in the federal government, both in the sense that

they wanted a strong government in Washington that could enforce the law over disorderly states and cities, and also in the sense that they wanted to ensure that political decision-making authority lay in Congress and the federal institutions rather than people at the ballot box. In the early 1850s, adherence to the Compromise of 1850 took centre stage in conservative efforts to reform the union. As a piece of legislation, it strengthened federal law-enforcing authority. As a rallying point around which they could reform the second party system, it allowed them to try and ensure that all candidates and parties supported 'finality' and did not compete on slavery at the polls. Perhaps unlike the South, conservatives responded to the problem of sectionalism and slavery by sharing power between politicians and propertied citizens in federal institutions, rather than sharing power with states and citizens that might challenge the ultimate sovereignty of the federal government.

Redefining centralization as a popular threat allowed them to give their own attempts to impose power and build a more hierarchical society the illusion of decentralizing measures. Their attempts to reform city governments were perhaps the most obvious way in which conservatives sought a top-down solution to imposing order on society. However, revolutions in France, the growth of mercantile cities, and sectionalism also gave conservatives opportunities to work towards this goal. When observing urban disorder in their own cities and in France, they interpreted the power of mobs, criminals, and rioters, and the potential of the people to overthrow legal government as a sovereign challenge to their own authority. In response, they supported removing geographic and institutional barriers so that the governments at the centre could wield power outwards over disorderly suburbs and citizens. Additionally, they supported concentrating inward control over government authority inwards into the hands of the propertied elites who were closest to these stronger sources of state power. Even redefining class conflict in industrial cities as the consequence of economic dependency on a distant central metropolis helped propertied conservatives argue there was no fundamental conflict between capital and labour. A number of conservatives consistently chose to use such rhetoric to challenge moves towards liberalisation, democratisation, and reform. Instead, they used centralization to pursue what often amounted to an antiradical and antidemocratic form of modern state-building. Despite sounding like a democratic language of opposition to monopolies, state power, and remote government, conservatives were able to appropriate this language and use it to build something very different to what the Jacksonian Democrats envisioned while using it in the 1820s and 1830s.

This also meant that conservatives were, in fact, avid modernisers, in spite of using a language inherited from classical republicanism. Their opposition to centralization usually implied a choice between which sources of political or economic authority should strengthen over time rather than opposition to all change per se. These conservatives did not seek to return to an eighteenth-century ideal of an agrarian republic free of big cities and big government. They in fact embraced many of the social changes of the nineteenth century, including urbanisation, industrialisation and the rise of national states, and believed that this nineteenth-century society had outgrown its eighteenth-century political institutions. Instead of trying to reverse these changes to prevent them from corrupting good republican government, they turned to the kinds of constitutional reforms they had advocated at the national and local level: state strengthening and democratic retrenchment. In other words, they wanted to build a strong government to cope with and encourage the growing economy, cities, and population that they believed would bring them prosperity. For these conservatives, their own programme of centralization allowed them to modernise

government on their own terms rather than on the terms of urban workers, street rioters, or seditious abolitionists.

Nor were conservatives simply proslavery 'doughfaces' who did the bidding of the southern planter class. New York merchants had an obvious pecuniary interest in maintaining trade with the South and it makes sense that other conservatives who owned property would fear the consequences disunion and civil war might have for the value of their own property and investments. However, they also had other reasons to support the continuation of the Union as they suggested that a strong federal government and a southern landed aristocracy were an important counterbalance to the emerging democracy within the North itself. In other words, the federal government could help prevent the northern people from centralizing power that belonged to the government while southern landowners and their participation in Congress prevented the political centre of gravity moving too far North. But their use of centralization also hinted at an important ideological distinction from southern states-rights advocates, despite both using the same language to warn against northern rule. Where southerners often warned against centralization to challenge an overbearing federal government (unless it returned fugitive slaves or suppressed servile insurrection), northern conservatives used it to legitimise a stronger federal government, albeit one with a northern and southern basis of support. It is perhaps possible that using a similar language but with different implications helped convince southerners that they had a northern basis of support for their proslavery agenda and hid northern conservative support for the integrity of the federal government over the North and South.

Also important to conservative state-building movements was the role of place in creating the kinds of power relationships that could tie the United States together and impose order. This was most obviously apparent when conservatives gave their support to city consolidation movements and projects for mercantile growth. As well as helping conservatives improve the value of their property, they were attracted to the idea of a centralized economic geography between cities and their hinterlands, and between downtowns and their immediate suburbs. Indeed, conservatives often linked extending these centralized power relationships with creating new political power relationships too, unsurprising given that these improvements needed political charters, subsidies, and surveys to get off the ground. Extending railroads outwards into the hinterland implicitly went hand in hand with making the hinterland governable by controlling state legislatures, demanding rural deference to urban commercial interests, and keeping state power in institutions geographically remote from dangerous suburbs and western interests. Even when seeking to preserve the Union, conservative unionists drew from the geographic definition of centralization and sought to foster dependency on place to tie the South into the Union and prevent what they claimed was a dangerous geographic concentration of power in the North. This could mean building creating a more polycentric union with a southern counterbalance to the North or fostering dependency on Washington or a self-proclaimed unionist border city that could impose Union on the North and the South. Conservative use of centralization to delegitimise power relationships over space and build alternatives shows the extent that altering perceptions of geography, as much as strengthening institutions, also formed part of how Americans believed their republic should operate.

Conservative organisation for mercantile infrastructure also hinted at how these conservatives tended to organise within other movements and only occasionally formed a united conservative political movement. Rather than forming a united upper class,

conservatives in different east coast cities tended to see themselves as rivals in the contest to profit from economic centralization. Instead of working together to form a single economic programme, they worked within the city booster movements of their individual cities. Other aspects of these conservatives' programmes also allowed them to work within single-issue political movements, such as consolidation movements, police reform, and Union parties. Their divisions on other issues like free trade, the morality of slavery, and the extent to which they were prepared to accept mass democracy may also have made it difficult for them to organise within a single organisation and encouraged them to organise within the two main political parties. The Union Party movements that entered into political competition might have come closest to an independent movement that could embrace a larger number of these self-defining conservatives, as it fully embraced the idea of a strong government and public deference to bisectional government power. But given the success of the Compromise of 1850 in keeping slavery off the table until 1854 while other issues on which conservatives had interests continued, it is perhaps unsurprising that they never coalesced into a single political organisation.

Despite not helping conservatives form a single political party, except when sectional tensions were perhaps at their highest, centralization was an important term in their political lexicon. It was a vital tool in how they contested the direction of changes underway in the United States. What distinguished these conservatives from other Americans was not that they opposed change or even opposed centralization, even if they only occasionally embraced this usually pejorative language to describe their own programmes. This thesis argues that what marked out these northerners from other Americans was what they used centralization to shape: the changes underway in the 1850s in both Europe and the United States, including democratisation, industrialisation, and the growing sectional crisis. But rather than opposing the emergence of new geographic and institutional sources of wealth and political power, conservatives sought to take advantage of them for their own purposes: curbing democracy, protecting property, and preserving the Union. Redefining centralization in order to suit their own purposes, they embraced the idea of imposing political decision-making and executive power from remote seats of government onto the people. They embraced extending bonds of economic dependency from growing cities over their hinterlands. And they embraced extending all forms of power over southern states and northern democracy from the federal government in Washington. Directing the rhetoric of centralization at their opponents allowed them to embrace a more controversial centralization of power of their own. Ironically, as supporters of an indissoluble state, an undemocratic government, and economic modernisation, these northern conservatives might have had more in common with the centralized regime of the Second Empire than they cared to admit.

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