

“NO BOURGEOIS MASS PARTY, NO DEMOCRACY”: THE MISSING LINK IN BARRINGTON MOORE’S AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT

Moore (1966) once argued that the American Civil War was a fundamentally “bourgeois” revolution. As such, Moore’s account falls in line with much of the larger literature on democratization, which emphasizes the class dimensions of democratic expansions and transitions, but is largely silent on how party politics are implicated in those processes. Such approaches miss a great deal of the party, inter-elite and discursive dynamics that are crucial to understanding the origins and consequences of democratic change. This chapter seeks to discern the impact of mass party formation and political discourse on modern routes to democracy through an examination of mid-19th-century Chicago politics. It holds to Moore’s conclusion that the American Civil War was indeed a bourgeois revolution, while demonstrating that the trajectory of party politics before, during and after the war challenges Moore’s interpretation of how class forces were mobilized in the American case. Partisan shifts, for example, worked at turns to weaken and strengthen the rhetorical and organizational basis of working-class mobilization, suggesting that

democratization and the class coalitions that give rise to it are shaped and re-shaped by the context of partisan struggle.

In his foundational *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Moore (1966) argued famously that the driving revolutionary force behind democratization was a strong bourgeoisie. Using the American Civil War as his case, he claimed that the most formidable obstacle to the democratic project was a landed aristocracy, since its wealth invariably depended on labor-repressive systems of agriculture. Democracy could only be achieved, therefore, when a substantial degree of antagonism existed between industrial and landed elites and when such antagonism culminated in the violent overthrow of the latter as an important political and economic force. Thus, in the American Civil War the industrial elite of the northeast and the independent farmers of the Midwest joined forces to eliminate the southern planter aristocracy.

A central feature of Moore's narrative is that the northern alliance was possible only once northeastern industrialists had shattered a pre-existing alliance between Midwestern farmers and southern planters. This crucial connection, Moore argued, "helped to make unnecessary for a time the characteristic reactionary coalition between urban and landed elites" (Moore, 1966, p. 141). There are, however, at least two empirical problems with this line of argument. First, antebellum farmers and planters tended to vote for different parties even in the South and disagreed bitterly over almost every question of economic policy. Nationally, Midwestern farmers were allied with the yeomanry and artisans of other regions in the Democratic Party. Second, the "characteristic reactionary coalition" of urban and landed elites had already existed. The planters of the Old South comprised the rank-and-file of the Whig Party, the Democrats' main challenger, and were allied nationally with northeastern big business interests. As Wilentz writes, "The largest planters, ranging from the sugar growers in Louisiana to state-rights men in the eastern states, gravitated to the Whigs, taking with them districts where slaveholding was most thickly concentrated ... the Democrats came to depend largely on yeoman farmers in the less developed areas ... who were distrustful of the planters' power, fearful of commercial banks and other monied institutions" (Wilentz, 2005, p. 431).¹

These oversights point out at least four gaps in the wider literature on democratization. First, with few exceptions the principal agents of democratization are seen as class actors, not party actors or a combination

thereof.² Where parties are mentioned at all, a one-to-one correspondence between class and party is typically assumed in spite of political systems like that of the 19th-century United States which, though not “competitive capitalist democracies” in Moore’s sense, nevertheless saw parties aggregate and disaggregate voting blocs from differing class positions to win mandates. Second, few accounts take political discourse seriously as a factor in democratic revolution, yet in the American, European and Latin American cases cited in the literature, elites and non-elites alike have tended to employ populist claims to power in order to mobilize peasants and workers against the landed aristocracy. Third, whereas the establishment of bourgeois democracy in America requires an analysis of Republican Party hegemony and therefore of elites and their rank-and-file constituents, very little work has been done to synthesize the elite- and working-class-driven approaches that have split the democratization literature in two. Finally, much of the research on democratization has focused primarily on the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes, yet the mid-19th-century United States was decidedly not authoritarian.

Jacksonian America was instead a primordial soup of Moorean possibilities. On the one hand, the antebellum period was dominated by the Democrats and their farmer–artisan base, whose coalition in the Jacksonian era (1828–1852) was built upon a populist critique of “dependency” under monopoly capitalism. Known collectively as the “money power,” incipient finance and industrial capitalists were said to undermine the ability of white men to become, and then remain, independent farmers and artisans. For Moore, [Luebbert \(1991\)](#) and others, a dominant peasant–worker coalition such as this is predictive of a communist route to modernity. On the other hand as we have seen, the Whig Party, which was chronically in the opposition, united the urban and landed upper-class fractions of Moore’s classic authoritarian coalition.

Given the cleavages of antebellum politics, Moorean class analysis places us in a double bind, for we are left with not one, but two, possible routes to American modernity, the communist and the fascist. Indeed, the balance of class power in the 19th-century United States resembles that of [Paige’s \(1997\)](#) Central American cases if only in the sense that the rise of American capitalist democracy required the dissolution, not of a farmer–planter coalition as Moore famously framed it, but instead of an urban and landed elite coalition, which Moore assumed had not existed in America to that point. Additionally, because the Whigs were already embattled in this period especially in the all-important Midwest where they had little to no hope of electing a governor or Congressman let alone a president, urban elites

required the support of the historically hostile Democratic base in states like Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin (Holt, 1999). Since the northeast's partnership with the Midwest was so critical to Moore's argument, the puzzle that animates this chapter is why these entrenched Midwestern class coalitions reorganized in support of a liberal capitalist democracy.

As Moore rightly noted, the long discredited argument that southern slavery by its mere existence set in motion an "irrepressible conflict" of civilizations will not do as an explanation (Cole, 1934, p. 242; Moore, 1966, p. 114). Urban and landed elites were warm business associates and the peculiar institution had existed at that point for more than a century without a civil war. Put another way, the notion that "it simply could not have been otherwise" cannot explain why the Civil War began in 1861, instead of say, 1789, 1820 or 1850 when other fierce disputes over slavery took place (Holt, 1978).

My abridged answer to the aforementioned puzzle is that Midwestern class coalitions were reorganized by intraparty factionalism in the early 1850s and the subsequent rise of the Republican Party, the combined force of which shifted the terms of political discourse away from the formerly dominant Jacksonian critique of dependency under monopoly capitalism towards a critique of dependency under slavery, thereby uniting northern elites, farmers and workers against their southern counterparts despite having been united nationally along class lines just a decade earlier.

Though the end of slavery was one consequence of the war, another was the political tactic of "waving the bloody shirt," the branding of anti-monopolist Jacksonian dissent as an unpatriotic apologia for the treasonous pro-slavery South. Thus, the American Civil War was revolutionary to the extent that it ended the institution of slavery, but fundamentally bourgeois to the extent that it both undermined the rhetorical and organizational basis of working-class mobilization and vastly expanded the coercive prerogatives of the state to protect industrial capital.³ Posing and addressing the problem of American democratization in this way foregrounds the role of mass party formation and political discourse in shaping democratic expansion and transition, suggesting that Moore's founding statement, "no bourgeoisie, no democracy," may be revised thus: no bourgeois mass party, no democracy.

MOORE'S CIVIL WAR

By 1976, a decade after the publication of *Social Origins*, no other case had received more critical attention than the American (Wiener, 1976). As liberal democracy spread in a post-1989 world, even non-Americanists joined in

their dissatisfaction with “no bourgeoisie, no democracy,” a theoretical dictum derived largely from Moore’s most famous positive instance thereof, the American Civil War. This seemingly endless scrutiny suffers from a two-fold problem, the resolution of which will require a fresh intervention that is at the same time anchored in the fundamentals of Moore’s project. First, some of Moore’s critics, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the book’s debut, appear to have misunderstood the character of Moore’s class analysis in general and the basic objective of his account of the American Civil War in particular. This applies mainly to those who charged Moore with economic determinism and with sidestepping the radicalism of the American Revolution. Second, while many have grappled with *Social Origins* on its own terms, few scholars have bothered to return to Moore’s Civil War and attempt a synthesis of the state-of-the-art in the social sciences and historiography. This is especially true of studies which suggest that Moore slighted the importance of urban classes, state repression, institutionalized electoral practices and supranational factors.

Among the first charges leveled at Moore was that *Social Origins* was a paean to economic determinism (Almond, 1967; Lowenthal, 1968; Rothman, 1970; Benson, 1972; Zagorin, 1973). One weakness of this charge is that Moore explicitly rejected purely economic explanations of the Civil War, since nothing in the antebellum economic order precluded the alignment of urban and landed elite interests. As Wiener (1976) (himself a student of Moore), Stone (1967) and others have noted, the assumptions of economic determinism are not the same as those that proceed from class analysis: the former insists that all non-economic forms are epiphenomenal to material conditions, whereas the latter advances a more delimited claim that classes are the key actors in initiating routes to modernity. This chapter accepts the view that classes are important units of analysis, but adds that mass party formation and political discourse may work to aggregate and disaggregate class groupings. To wit, the politics of the American Civil War divided farmers, workers and elites by region and form of labor control.

Some like Bendix (1967) and Lowenthal (1968) wondered why Moore had not focused on the American Revolution. The implication of this critique is that by 1860 the United States had long been both democratic and capitalist. But if 19th-century America was not fascist or communist, then neither was it a bourgeois capitalist democracy. As Laurie (1989) points out, to talk of factory production prior to 1860 would be to apply Gilded Age concepts to antebellum realities. A majority of Americans still lived on the land in 1860, and artisans, though increasingly sweated, were not the industrial proletariat that had only begun to emerge in the 1850s. Furthermore, while

it is true that universal white manhood suffrage increasingly became the rule in the antebellum period, the party of America's incipient bourgeoisie was almost always in the opposition, clamoring for, but largely not getting, what an urban elite would need to truly flourish: a banking system, a protective tariff and even a national currency. In sum, the economy was not bourgeois and the party of the bourgeoisie was not in power. It is probably for this reason that Moore called Jacksonian America an "agrarian democracy" in contradistinction to a liberal bourgeois democracy (Moore, 1966, p. 116).⁴

The esoteric debate surrounding the non-economic causes of the Civil War and the precise turning point of U.S. capitalist development serves to underline yet another misinterpretation of *Social Origins*. Moore was not so much concerned with the causes of the war as he was with the antebellum conditions that led to the *consequences* of the war. This paper aims to hold to Moore's project by examining the antebellum *political* conditions that gave rise to a new configuration of class power in the post-bellum era.

There is nevertheless a great deal of research that accepts the utility of class analysis on its own terms, but criticizes Moore for slighting factors that tend to interact with class in forging paths to modernity. Downing (1992), for instance, has argued that state coercion may tip the balance of power against an emerging class coalition. Jones (1972), Skocpol (1973), Paige (1975, 1997) and Ross (1998) suggest that supranational forces may be equally determinative of paths to modernity as those operating at the national level. Others contend that institutionalized electoral practices (e.g., patronage systems) may affect the choice of liberalism over competing alternatives (Luebbert, 1991; Skocpol, 1992, 1998). And still others insist on a place for ideas, intellectuals, ideology and culture (Black, 1967; Stone, 1967; Lowenthal, 1968; Rothman, 1970; Peel, 1973; Walzer, 1998).

Though each of these approaches enhances our knowledge of Moore's problem, the sum total of gaps enumerated in the literature amounts to what Moore once criticized as "intellectual chaos," and few social scientists have attempted a synthesis, least of all of their favorite straw man, the American Civil War (Moore, 1966, p. 135). Furthermore, few if any have envisioned party formation or political discourse as the focal point for such a synthesis. I will argue that this results from the assumption, also apparently held by Moore, that political parties are especially animated by underlying institutional or class bases and therefore have no significant autonomy of their own, for instance to reorganize class coalitions, wield state power or take political advantage of international contingencies. Neither a synthesis nor its potential basis in a more agentic conception of political elites, however, is possible without a synthesis of the central divide in the democratization literature.

ELITES OR NON-ELITES?

As scholars gradually moved beyond Moore's *Social Origins*, a new controversy emerged within the democratization literature: Were elites or non-elites the prime movers of democratic change? The centrality of this question in the field works to obscure four facets of the American bourgeois revolution, which correspond in turn to the aforementioned gaps in Moore's work. The first is that elites and non-elites together gave rise to bourgeois democracy in the United States. The second is that this revolutionary coalition was bound together by two concurrent discourses: a "free labor" ideology from above and a producerist discourse of dependency from below. The third is that the formation of the Republican Party and the subsequent defeat of the Democrats set the stage for both the violent overthrow of slavery and the reconstruction state's repression of non-elites. The fourth is that Republicans capitalized on international contingencies for political advantage, especially the rise of anti-slavery Irish nationalism, the immigration of German workers fleeing the counterattack on the Revolutions of 1848 and the end of the Crimean War, which helped to precipitate the Panic of 1857. In sum, a fuller accounting of Moore's American Civil War requires a synthesis of elite/non-elite relations, political discourse, party formation, state repression and supranational forces.

The elite/non-elite divide, however, has rendered the literature somewhat ill-equipped for a broader synthesis.⁵ The elite-driven "transitions" literature, for instance, inaugurated by the work of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), argues that the shift from authoritarianism to democracy is mainly the result of bargaining between elite incumbents and moderate elites of the opposition, in which popular movements and other collective actors are secondary at best and mere tools of the contending elites at worst (see also DiPalma, 1990; Burton, Gunther, & Higley, 1992). The exact opposite is true for Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) who argue that bourgeois elites have tended to seek limited rights for property and exchange, and are therefore just as likely as not to support the enfranchisement of lower classes. The working-class, by contrast, who embody the central contradiction of the capitalist system, are the more consistent exponents of democratization, since their struggle for the franchise is necessarily a call for broader societal inclusion (see also Therborn, 1979).

Paige's (1997) analysis of democratization in Central America offers a way to bridge the elite/non-elite divide, while also foregrounding the role of political discourse. Although Costa Rica, Nicaragua and El Salvador had become neo-liberal democracies by the end of the 20th century, they had

neither the divided elite nor the full-blown working-class that Moore, the transitions literature and Rueschemeyer et al. had argued were the key conditions for democratization. The landed and agro-industrial elites in those countries were bound too closely by blood for one to destroy the other, while the workers in question were all but forbidden to self-organize. Without the weapon of the strike and with the bonds between upper-class fractions weaved so tightly, Paige argued that the only available route to democracy in Central America was armed revolution from below.

Revolutionary socialism, in turn, forced urban elite factions in all three countries to retrieve the discourses of liberty (Nicaragua), progress (El Salvador) and democracy (Costa Rica) from bygone anti-colonial struggles and wield them to justify both a break with their landed kin and a coalition with popular movements. Thus, it was not a strong bourgeoisie as such that gave rise to the neo-liberal coalitions of that region, but rather the convergence of armed socialist revolutionaries and an *embattled* liberal elite who were compelled to express offense at the status quo. As one Nicaraguan grower hollowly insisted, “The cotton growers opposed Somoza as citizens, not as cotton growers” (Paige, 1997, p. 356).

Paige’s analysis is a critical intervention for at least four reasons. First, it is a rare synthesis of the extant literature, in that neither the elite nor the non-elite were given exclusive credit for democratization.⁶ Second, Paige offers a testable sequence of events that might plausibly describe how elites and non-elites reorganize to forge liberal revolutionary coalitions. Non-elites set themselves adrift of old allegiances (in this case engaging in open revolt), while elites split into factions, of which one is able to join with non-elites on the road to democracy. Next, political actors exploit international relations, in Paige’s case the Cold War and American imperialism. Lastly, the mechanism that binds these inimical class fractions is not economic interest as such, but the convergence of two discourses – revolutionary socialism from below and classical liberalism from above.

Though party elites are still absent in Paige’s case, his formulation compliments the implications of the party formation literature. Like the democratization literature, students of party formation have their own elite/non-elite divide. “Electorate-driven” approaches in sociology argue that parties are generated by, and therefore may be read directly off, the principal cleavages in a given society. Its touchstone is Weber’s foundational essay, “Class, Status, Party,” in which parties are said to “vary according to the structure of domination within a community” (Weber, 1946, p. 195). Likewise, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) hold that parties “have an expressive function” and “develop a rhetoric for the translation of contrasts in the

social and cultural structure into demands for action” (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 5). These “contrasts” or cleavages are “inherited” from “critical junctures” in a nation’s distant past such as the Industrial Revolution, which split European politics along class lines and eventually gave rise to parties representing those interests (Rokkan, 1999, pp. 302, 304, 305).⁷

The electorate-driven approach is useful to the analysis of democratization insofar as it identifies a cause for the emergence and transformation of oppositional identities, namely, the critical juncture. Furthermore, it defines workers not as a unitary actor (i.e., “the electorate” or “the working-class”), but as a series of organized voting blocs that emerge and reorganize in response to transformative historical events.

Much of the “party-driven” literature shares the emphasis on historical turning points, but rejects Lipset and Rokkan’s depiction of party actors as merely “expressive” of pre-existing social cleavages. As leaders of factions within established parties, party elites can create and reshape cleavages as they struggle for hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Przeworski, 1977; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986; Desai, 2002). For example, Aminzade (1993) contends that the decision of Parisian artisans to go to the ballot box or take to the barricades during the municipal revolutions of 1871 depended on whether a liberal, radical or socialist faction controlled local Republican parties. Ansell (2001) likewise employs religious analogies to suggest that when the French Left has split into different factions or “sects” as they did in 1882 and 1922, the labor movement has divided neatly along party lines.

Taking these cues from Paige, Lipset and Rokkan, and the party-driven literature, this chapter sees the relationship between mass party formation and class forces as fundamentally dialogical. That is, the relationship is forged mutually through political dialog and contestation. While there are people who undoubtedly farm, plant, invest and make manufactures for a living, none of these is a priori a basis for political conflict or mass mobilization. It is the political party (which above all seeks power) that articulates a society’s principle cleavages, usually in a way that aligns the party with a discursively constructed “majority” or hegemonic bloc. These cleavages need not be class-based: the great mass of the people may be said to be a regional, national, religious or ethnic majority, for example. As Przeworski (1977) once put it, there can be no struggle *between* classes unless there is a discursive struggle *about* class.⁸

At the same time, actors on the ground are not passive. For example, in their struggle for power a given party may attempt to mobilize voters along class, as opposed to religious or ethnic, lines. In that case, the politicization of class inequality or conflict must resonate with the lived experience of voters;

merely shouting class slogans is not enough. Furthermore, once coalitions between party elites and the governed take hold, the latter come to develop expectations of their respective political patrons even in authoritarian regimes (see, e.g., [Scott, 1985](#)). When expectations are met or exceeded, party elites retain hegemony; when they are not met (e.g., in an international economic crisis), unfulfilled expectations may destabilize the existing regime and even the regime type itself. Formerly hegemonic coalitions divide into factions and in so doing open the door to the reorganization of existing cleavages (e.g., elites versus non-elites) along new discursive lines (e.g., northerners versus southerners), inaugurating what Lipset and Rokkan call a critical juncture.⁹

If a new mass party emerges to unite urban elites and segments of the non-elite (e.g., German workers and commercial farmers) against the remaining class fractions, a liberal capitalist democracy becomes possible. Often this involves the convergence of two ideologies: classical liberalism from above and some form of producerism from below. When the same party then uses its popular appeal to justify and carry out a successful offensive using the state's means of coercion on the opposition, a liberal capitalist democracy is achieved. The new mass party may then choose to secure the liberal regime by employing the state machinery to repress non-elite dissent within its own ranks in the name of the now sovereign people.

CHICAGO AT THE CROSSROADS: CASE SELECTION AND DATA

To illustrate the importance of these interlocking elements in modern routes to democracy, this chapter employs the case of 19th-century Chicago from 1833, the year of the town's incorporation, to 1877, the end of post-Civil War Reconstruction. Chicago was a crossroads in ways that are indispensable to testing the empirical and theoretical claims of the democratization literature. First, if the alliance of elite northeastern and Midwestern economic interests is the *sine qua non* of Moore's analysis, then one could do no better than 19th-century Chicago, which served as the primary commercial link between the growing outposts of the Midwest on the one hand and New York by way of the Erie Canal in the East on the other. Second, Chicago was home to growing numbers of industrial workers, allowing us to observe the behavior of the democratic agents privileged by Therborn and Rueschemeyer and the Stephensens. Third, Civil War era Chicago was highly significant politically. After two and a half decades of almost uninterrupted Democratic Party rule, Chicago became a battleground city in the home state of Abraham Lincoln and

Stephen A. Douglas (Lincoln's main Democratic adversary in the North), and as such was a key theatre in the transformation of 19th-century party politics and discourse. The city was therefore something of a bell-weather for the entire nation, for if staunchly Democratic Chicago could defect to the Republicans, then surely the rest of the North could do so as well – as it ultimately did.

The study draws on ward-by-ward electoral returns by class and party and is therefore novel in that available Civil War era electoral statistics (e.g., ICPSR Study 1) seldom disaggregate county-level returns.¹⁰ The study then integrates qualitative evidence from Chicago newspapers to recover how voters and party elites thought about the political allegiances revealed in the voting data. Newspapers were the official organs of parties and party factions in the 19th-century United States and frequently published the minutes of local non-elite organizations like trade unions (Nord, 1985; Jentz, 1991).

In total, the entire runs of seven newspapers available on microfilm for the years 1833–1877 were reviewed. The *Chicago Democrat* was the organ of the “locofocos,” the dominant faction of the Democratic Party led by presidents Jackson and Van Buren, for most of the Jacksonian Era, and of the “free soil” Democrats in the late 1840s; it then became a Republican organ in 1857 when its editor, John Wentworth, was elected the first Republican mayor of Chicago. The *Chicago Times* was the organ of Stephen A. Douglas's “Young America” Democrats, who purged the free soil faction from the city's Democratic establishment in 1856. The *American* and *Chicago Express* were the successive organs of the Whig Party, while the *Daily Journal* and the *Chicago Tribune* were competing Whig sheets, representing the Whig establishment and renegade Republican faction, respectively. For the perspective of Chicago's workers, the minutes of trade union meetings published in the above party papers were collected and analyzed along with articles from the *Workingman's Advocate*, the city's English language trade union paper.

The Chicago data, in turn, were compared with county-level electoral returns from the rest of Illinois to assess whether the claims of Moore and the democratization literature stand up to the observable voting behavior of independent Midwestern farmers. As with Chicago workers, letters from farmers to the aforementioned newspaper editors were used to make sense of any patterns that emerged from the returns.

In the following empirical analysis, then, I will attempt to show that mass party formation and political discourse played a critical role in bringing formerly antagonistic class fractions into the Republican Party, thereby setting the stage for Moore's last capitalist revolution. I begin by describing the anti-monopolist implications of Democratic Party hegemony in the smallholder republic of the Jacksonian era. Next, I describe the critical

juncture of the 1850s. Here I examine the political, economic and international context for the decline of the Whig and Democratic parties as well as the concomitant rise of the Republican Party and then lay out the consequences of free labor ideology for the old Democratic critique of dependency. Lastly, I outline in brief the limited character of post-war bourgeois democracy by detailing the Republican Party's use of state coercion and the memory of the war to undermine trade unions during Reconstruction.

HIRELING AND SLAVE: THE CHICAGO PARTY SYSTEM, 1833–1852

With the dredging of a town harbor in 1835 that made the Chicago River accessible from Lake Michigan, Chicago became an important link between the western frontier and the northeastern ports of the Great Lakes waterway (Cronon, 1991, pp. 55–60; Einhorn, 1991, pp. 29–31). At the root of this transformation was the rise of commercial middlemen known as merchant capitalists, whose aim was to drive down the cost of commodities by marketing them in unprecedented quantities (Pessen, 1967, pp. 4–5). Meanwhile revolutionary improvements in transportation made it possible for these large orders to move about the country at substantially reduced costs. Together, the advent of merchant capitalism and transcontinental transportation inaugurated an era of frenetic competition that led to the decline of household production in the city and the countryside (Pessen, 1967; Laurie, 1989; Sellers, 1991).

The Democratic Party's aim, in the face of these developments, was to restore the nation to what Welter has called an "economy of nature," the pure and simple design of an earlier America dominated by independent farmers and artisans (Welter, 1975, p. 85). Though Chicago Democrats were by no means opposed to the economic growth of their city,¹¹ they saw any interference with the role of local small-scale agriculture and manufacture in that project as a presumptuous attempt on the part of the "aristocrats" to deprive freemen of their birthright. Accordingly, the point of electoral politics was to discipline the "uneven development" of the incipient market economy by mobilizing the might of the common man against a new aristocracy of bankers and speculators, whom the Democrats referred to ominously as the "money power" (Wilentz, 2005).

What was at play in these politics was a deep distrust for any form of government that would nurture dependency as the natural condition of men. It is anchored in what Fraser and Gordon (1994) have referred to in another

context as the “discourse of dependency.” Dependency, in Jacksonian parlance, was a state of non-citizenship reserved for sweated wage laborers, slaves and women, whose current or potential deprivation was said to make them incapable of reflecting upon the broad interests of the republic as a whole. Conversely, white male subsistence farmers and artisans were the icons of independence, for it was imagined that they lived comfortably enough off their own labor that they could steer the course of the republic without prejudice to their own enrichment.

The implications of the discourse were threefold. First, as we shall see below, it served as the ideological justification for a farmer–worker Democratic coalition. Second, incipient captains of American industry and finance, though economically independent, were not to be counted in the same number as farmers and workers, since they were deemed incapable of seeing beyond the horizon of their next speculative scheme. The result is that the fledgling American bourgeoisie joined southern planters in the Whig Party who were similarly excluded from the farmer–worker coalition (Thornton, 1978; Watson, 1981; Ford, 1988; Wilentz, 2005). Third, citizenship in its Jacksonian form was confined to self-employed white men, and as such was deeply inflected by ethnoracial, gender and class distinctions (Boydston, 1991; Roediger, 1991; Fraser & Gordon, 1994). The racial and gender implications of the discourse of dependency would eventually allow the Republican Party to unite northern white men across class lines against the threat of southern enslavement, and thereby undermine the class basis of the Jacksonian party system.

For the meantime, however, this broad construal of dependency to include and therefore to stigmatize not only women and blacks, but also sweated white men as unfree, exemplified the dominant locofoco brand of Democratic politics. It rendered incipient capitalist institutions such as the wage system, large banks, tariffs and a national paper currency the main targets of political attacks, and set the terms of political debate through the 1830s and 1840s (Blau, 1954; Wilson, 1974; Thornton, 1978; Ashworth, 1983; Watson, 1990; Sellers, 1991; Wilentz, 2005). Owing to a peculiar “intimacy between federal, state, [and] local politics,” Chicago Democrats freely insisted that the city and the republic were likewise divided by questions of economic interest: farmers, artisans and the Democratic Party were opposed to the tyrannical exactions of the money power, and all others were the hirelings of capital, known only by their advocacy of big business measures and their allegiance to the Whig Party (Pierce, 1937, p. 364).

In this, there was perhaps no other issue more divisive or more illustrative of the Democratic preoccupation with dependency than that of banking.

The *Chicago Democrat* routinely linked the party's opposition to banks with the plight of embattled journeymen. In the following passage, the paper's editor, John Wentworth, writes in support of striking iron workers in Pittsburgh who wish to start their own mill. He notes that in ruining the latter's credit, the employers have "fixed matters in such a way as will compel their workmen to continue in the position of dependents," adding,

The honest hard-working man cannot get bank facilities to the amount of a dollar, while the nonproducer, who speculates upon the laborer's toil, can have accommodation to the amount of tens of thousands. There is not an iron mill about Pittsburgh that has not one or more representatives in all the Banks of that city. The voice of one of them can destroy the credit of an honest man at their board; and we have no doubt but they are ready and willing to use the advantages that circumstances have given them. This is conclusive evidence that the present system of banking will never permit the laborer to come into the enjoyment of his rights; that it altogether favors the capitalist at the expense of the laborer; that it is unequal in its working, giving the speculator the lion's share; that it must be so reformed as not to be obnoxious to those objections, or it will end in the degradation of one class and the demoralization of another of the people of any country. If it cannot be reformed it must be entirely abolished. (*Chicago Democrat*, Feb. 12, 1850, p. 2)

These are the terms of Jacksonian Democratic politics par excellence. Wentworth articulates the party's preference for independent manufacture and decries the employers' conspiracy against the worker-owned mill as an unnatural preference for dependency. This fact leads him not only to call for the abolition of banks, but also to situate Democrats and workmen in diametric opposition to both industrial and financial elites.

But if the Democratic Party's commitment to personal independence resonated among white workers, then it was due at least in part to the fact that early 19th-century workers had "elaborated their own variant of American republican ideology, bound to their expectations about workshop production" (Wilentz, 1984, p. 15).

The depression of wages due to greater competition in the Jacksonian era made it increasingly difficult for journeymen to become independent artisans (Laurie, 1989, p. 36). Moreover, since the capital requirements to do business in this period grew daily, banks flourished due to their lending power. The result was that aspiring master mechanics began to acquire permanent debt (Hugins, 1960; Pessen, 1967).

Meanwhile a fluctuating paper currency made consumer prices increase to almost unlivable levels on a regular basis. During the Panic of 1837 alone, the Federal Reserve's cost-of living index rose a full 41.2 percent. In the Midwest, this resulted in an increase in the wholesale prices for all commodities of as much as 56 percent. Wages, however, had been cut by as

much as 50 percent, and as many as one-third of the nation's workers were unemployed (Pessen, 1967, pp. 36, 37, 44, 49; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1961, pp. 121, 124, 127).

Democratic and working-class interpretations of these new arrangements reinforced each other, generating a hegemonic critique of monopoly capitalism that cast the Democrats as the party of the common man. Because the price of staples rose and fell erratically in response to a fluctuating paper currency, Jacksonian era workers opposed the use of paper money, referring to it routinely by the name fastened upon it by the Democratic Party: "rag money." Additionally, since more and more mechanics were being saddled with debt, workers also opposed the banking system in general, reserving special venom for the Second Bank of the United States, which they called the "Monster Bank" and the "mammoth monopoly" very much as the Democrats did, and against which they incited their members to engage in a "war of extermination" (Hugins, 1960, pp. 24, 28, 33–34). Ultimately, because Democrats and workers shared so much in common politically, journeymen from New York to Louisville rallied against the Whig Party, then the leading exponent of big business measures (Hugins, 1960; Pessen, 1967; Wilentz, 1984).

As the social betters of farmers and workers, the Whigs recoiled from the subversive implications of Democratic politics, which they referred to as "the agrarian, radical and revolutionary doctrines of the locofoco party" (*Chicago American*, May 4, 1842, p. 2). But with the albatross of elite collusion hung firmly around their necks, the Whigs could not help but maneuver within the terms of debate set by the Democrats, and so did their best to tilt the focus of the discourse of dependency away from economic power and inequality towards the virulent partisanship of Democratic Party politics. If there were any scheme to undermine the personal independence of the common man, they argued, it consisted in the Democrats' rearguard attempts to stall economic progress for the sole benefit of party leaders. For that reason, the Whigs portrayed Democratic administrations as hives of dependency:

The General and State Governments together control 87,000 [public positions]. This is exclusive of army, navy, and the troop of persons employed by the executive officers of the national and State governments. The dependents upon all these swell the number to half a million, and makes what may well be regarded as a frightful picture of power upon one hand and dependence upon the other. (*Chicago Daily Journal*, Oct. 8, 1845, p. 2)

In contrast to the Democratic appeal to a timeless producers' republic, the Whigs therefore preached that American liberty was a state-sponsored

process that was “cumulative and ongoing” (Wilson, 1974, pp. 4–5). Through an activist national government the Whigs hoped to fulfill a corporatist vision of progress known as “the American System” which, though reliant on state-driven commercial measures such as the Second Bank of the United States and a protective tariff, was intended to enrich the collective life of the nation over time (Howe, 1979; Holt, 1999).

This statist approach to economic policy became attractive to Americans during the Panic of 1837, which helped to deliver a Whig to the White House in 1840, but the Whigs’ support of banks and a national paper currency more often than not lent credence to the Democratic Party’s exhortations against them. The second and third columns of Table 1 report Chicago’s presidential and gubernatorial returns for the 1852 election. Since the proportion of skilled workers throughout the city remained stable at about 25 percent in the 1850s, working-class wards (signified in bold) are those in which unskilled workers comprised at least an additional one-third of the male labor force, giving skilled and unskilled workers together a comfortable voting majority. The resulting ward designations reflect the natural break between Chicago’s affluent lakeshore communities represented by wards 1 and 2 where unskilled workers comprised less than one-quarter of the labor force and the interior of the city where the proportion of unskilled workers ranged from more than

Table 1. Percentage Share of Chicago’s Popular Vote for Democratic Candidates in 1852, 1856, 1858 and 1860 by Ward and Class (Working-Class Wards Bolded).

Ward	1852 Pres	1852 Gov	1856 Pres	1858 Tre	1860 Pres	1860 Gov
1	48.7	49.8	28.3	41.7	36.5	34.3
2	In Ward 1 Count	In Ward 1 Count	37.0	48.8	42.1	41.8
3	65.1	65.3	39.1	51.1	46.3	45.1
4	74.9	75.2	48.2	55.4	50.05	47.7
5	56.1	56.3	38.7	36.6	731 short of majority	Unavailable
6	73.2	72.8	40.6	41.3		
7	86.8	95.7	55.2	48.1		
8	63.5	62.8	51.1	47.6	44.2	44.0
9	In Ward 8 Count	In Ward 8 Count ^a	51.4	49.2	49.1	48.8
10	n/a	n/a	n/a	55.9	57.8	57.8

Sources: For socioeconomic statistics, Einhorn 1991: 261, 263; for electoral returns, the *Chicago Democrat*, Nov. 9, 1852: 2; *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1860: 1.

^aVoters in wards 1 and 2 shared the same polling station, as did voters in wards 8 and 9.

one-third (wards 5, 6, 8 and 9) to as high as one-half in the most “proletarianized” ward (7) (Einhorn, 1991, pp. 249, 261).

The Democratic Party carried all five of the city’s working-class wards as well as the two least-prosperous non-working-class wards (3 and 4), with majorities ranging from 56 to 95 percent. The Whigs carried the remaining two wards (1 and 2) on the “Miracle Mile” corridor. The latter’s relatively strong showing in wards 5 and 8 was due to the substantial presence of native-born skilled working- and middle-class voters in ward 5’s northern neighborhoods and the Yankee elite minority of ward 9’s lakeside neighborhood, whose votes were cast at the same polling station as those of ward 8. In contrast, the city’s Democratic base consisted mainly of immigrant workers: (a) the North side’s 7th through 9th wards which were dominated by German workers; (b) the mixed German and Irish working-class West side 6th ward and (c) the lower portion of the South side’s 5th ward and increasingly the 4th ward, which were mainly Irish working-class neighborhoods.

These patterns were not specific to urban Chicago, however. There was a similar pattern statewide, with poorer to middling farmers voting with urban workers for the Democrats. The second column of Table 2 lists the number of Illinois counties voting Democratic in the 1852 presidential election by quartile of capital investment in manufacturing. Capital investment, which I use as an inverse index for the centrality of independent farming in county economies, is categorized by quartile, where quartile 1 consists of counties that had consistently posted the highest level of investment in manufacturing both in absolute dollars and dollars per capita from 1840 to 1860.¹² It bears noting that there is a high degree of convergence between capital investment and large-scale commercial farming: all but one of the largest cash crop counties in Illinois were in the top two quartiles of capital investment in manufacturing (U.S. Census Office, 1840, 1860; ICPSR, 1999).

Table 2. Number of Counties Voting Democratic by Quartile of Capital Investment in Manufacturing.

Capital Quartile	1852	1856	1860
1 (<i>N</i> = 8)	5	3	3
2 (<i>N</i> = 12)	7	5	5
3 (<i>N</i> = 9)	7	7	6
4 (<i>N</i> = 10)	9	9	9
Total (<i>N</i> = 39)	28	24	23

Sources: For capital investment in manufacturing, U. S. Census Office (1840; 1860); for electoral returns, ICPSR (1999).

The 1852 electoral returns reveal a discernible political rift between middling to poor farming counties on the one hand and counties with large commercial farming and manufacturing on the other. A total of 84 percent of small farming communities (the third and fourth quartiles) voted Democratic, compared to 60 percent of their larger and more industrial counterparts. Moreover, the Democrats carried 62 percent of the popular vote in rural counties and only 47 percent in urban counties.

Farmer support for the Democratic Party was rooted, as it was for workers, in a mistrust of banks. In a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, one farmer announced that he was not bothered by the tendency of “federalists ... to denounce all objections raised to banks, as being dangerously ultra and radical,” for he himself was “one of those unfortunate democrats who doubts the utility of banks.” Seemingly to make public the rationale for his own position, he then quoted an article from an agricultural journal, introducing it this way: “I am, Mr. Editor, a practical farmer, and as such take the *Cultivator*, an agricultural paper, edited by Judge Buel, a thorough going federalist, but one who is honest enough to speak his real sentiments respecting the mischievous tendencies of banks.” The article reads,

The creation of immense amounts of purely artificial and fictitious capital produces a dangerous delusion with individuals on the public mind This money is loaned to what are called men of business – a class of men who as far as they are money brokers, are the mere exchangers of commercial products, without any increase of their value, or speculators in lands, who add little or nothing to the wealth of the community But on the other hand, the obtaining of land for agricultural purposes, for production, and the actual creation of wealth is by this enhanced price rendered the more difficult to the man whose labor is his only capital. (*Chicago Democrat*, September 25, 1839, p. 2)

Thus, for this rank-and-file Democrat, and for many like him if the rural returns are any indication, the “federalist” or Whig Party had reversed the natural order of things as delineated by the discourse of dependency. Like Wentworth’s Pittsburgh industrialists, Judge Buel’s “men of business” were “a class” of non-producers trafficking in “fictitious capital” who nevertheless prospered, while those who worked to increase the value of land by dint of old-fashioned hard work were made to suffer. As late as 1852, then, less than a decade out from Moore’s last capitalist revolution, poorer Illinois farmers joined Chicago’s immigrant workers in supporting the Democratic Party, whose anti-bank policies and critique of dependency in the new market economy resonated powerfully with their experience of a changing world.

FREE LABOR OR SLAVE POWER: THE CHICAGO PARTY SYSTEM TRANSFORMED, 1853–1860

The windy city, like the rest of the North, was therefore not the limited bourgeois democracy that Moore rightly described as the outcome of the American Civil War, but rather a commercial crossroads in a smallholders' republic. The dominant political order was a patchwork of Jeffersonian ideals, anti-statism and producerism, all of which militated against a national currency, a national bank and protective tariffs – in short, everything that an incipient big business bourgeoisie would need to flourish in what was then still a largely agrarian and artisanal society. Politically, the place of Whiggism was tenuous especially in Midwestern states like Illinois, and indeed, that party would cease to exist within the next two years. But for the present, the representatives of the urban and landed elite merely stared across the aisle at the self-styled representatives of the common man, whose majorities were a never-ending source of frustration for the former. Moore's coalition of the northeast and Midwest seemed a distant if not inconceivable future, but a critical juncture from 1853 to 1857, punctuated by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, the subsequent Kansas crisis and the Panic of 1857, would give urban elites in the Whig Party the chance to craft the liberal free market democracy they had always wanted but could never achieve with their landed associates.

Chicago continued to experience rapid economic growth throughout the 1850s, due principally to the construction of railroads and the city's canal, which connected the northeast and Midwest to the Mississippi River by way of Lake Michigan for the first time. The city's workers, however, were doing worse in 1860 than they had been doing in 1850. In the ensuing decade, a day's wages in Illinois for unskilled and skilled workers increased by about 20 percent, but the price of room and board had increased by almost 50 percent ([U.S. Census Office, 1850, Vol. 4, p. 164, 1860, Vol. 1, p. 512](#)). In an editorial about the disjuncture between workers' wages and the cost of living in 1850s Chicago, the *Times* lamented,

Rents are beyond precedent in any city on the globe The mechanic who here earns two dollars per day pays one dollar for house-rent If he have a wife and two children, the most rigid economy will hardly enable him to supply the wants of his table with the other dollar. (*Chicago Times*, May 3, 1855, p. 1)

But whereas workers and Democratic leaders had once advanced mutually reinforcing interpretations of the new economy, the Democrats, having lost their bearings after the death of their charismatic leader, Andrew

Jackson, turned inward to focus on the emerging contest over leadership succession facing the party. A new generation of politicians calling themselves “Young America” espoused a platform of westward expansion and economic growth to distinguish itself from, and supplant, the older but still narrowly dominant faction led by former president Martin Van Buren. Van Buren, who foresaw that politicizing westward expansion would divide the country over slavery, staked out an anti-expansionist position (Klunder, 1996).

The power struggle initially split the Democratic Party into two factions: the Young America (sometimes known as “hunker”) faction of Lewis Cass and Chicago’s own Stephen A. Douglas on the one hand, and the old locofoco (or “barnburner”) faction of Van Buren, a large portion of which eventually opposed the expansion of slavery to the western territories and therefore became known as the “free soil” faction (Spencer, 1977; Klunder, 1996; Widmer, 1999; Wilentz, 2005). The emergence of the latter, in turn, gave rise to the southern rights wing of the party, leaving the Democrats divided into no fewer than three factions, two of which resumed competing operations in Chicago when Douglas purged locofoco free soiler and *Chicago Democrat* editor, John Wentworth, from the city’s Democratic establishment (Nichols, 1948; Fehrenbacher, 1957; Einhorn, 1991, p. 164).

The unraveling of the Democrats presented an opening for the Whigs, but even they self-destructed as one after another Whig faction broke off to challenge the political establishment as a third party. The Liberty Party, for instance, was organized exclusively around the abolition of slavery. The Temperance or “Maine Law” Party sought to prohibit the sale and consumption of wine and spirits. The nativist Know-Nothing Party, which was also a Whig spin-off in the main, mobilized voters against immigration and the Roman Catholic Church. But as we shall see, it was the emergence of the “fusion” or “Republican” faction that would most weaken the Whig organization in Chicago, a process that culminated in the disastrous mid-term elections of 1854.

With the major parties in disarray, and with the Democrats in particular unable to secure the common man’s economic independence as they had promised, workers in Chicago and elsewhere organized extra-political movements in an effort to meet their immediate economic needs (Holt, 1978). Though there are no direct quotations prior to 1854 from self-identified workers stating that their actions were a response to the vacuum in political leadership, there are data that speak indirectly of the relationship between party practice and autonomous worker activism. First, Democratic voter turnout was unusually depressed in 1852. Workers delivered Chicago’s

Cook County to the Democratic Party that year to be sure, but the votes cast for Democrats numbered only 4456 compared to 5680 just four years later, an increase of almost 30 percent. If we take into account the additional fact that two out of the five working-class wards in Chicago voted Republican in 1856 (see [Table 1](#), column 4), then a substantial number of the Republicans' 9020 votes are likely to have been Democratic working-class voters who sat out the election of 1852 ([ICPSR, 1999](#)).

Second, letters to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* point to growing disenchantment between 1852 and 1854 with the inability of the Illinois Democratic establishment to deliver their promises to working people. One letter writer argued that the Democratic-controlled State Assembly had been putting special interests ahead of the "mass of people":

Few are met with in this 'lower house' who have not some selfish scheme to be forwarded, some object of private interest to be obtained at the sacrifice of public interests. The mass of people, for whom general laws should be enacted commensurate with their wants, have no delegates here. True, they have their representatives in the General Assembly, but unluckily for the uninformed masses they have not been sagacious enough to send outside members; members to set the ball of legislation [rolling] and to direct its course. (*Chicago Tribune*, January 26, 1853, p. 2)

It is notable that the author does not offer the Whig Party as an alternative here, nor does s/he think that the Democrats will serve working people of their own accord. Instead, the author advises the "uninformed masses" to send "outside members" to lobby on their behalf. Another letter in the same issue likewise opined that business moguls in Alton and nearby St. Louis "have alternately controlled legislation, right in the face of the interests and rights of the masses of the people" (*ibid.*). The very next day, still another letter to the editor joked that instead of either the State House or the Senate, "The lobby is decidedly the most active branch of the General Assembly" (*Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1853, p. 2).

At almost exactly the same time, there was an unusual proliferation of Luddite mob violence. The winter of 1853 saw a series of riots directed at important segments of railroad and canal routes into Chicago. A railroad rioter is reported to have "indulged in the most savage threats of vengeance, and made appeals to the mob to resist the grinding oppression of railroad companies." Another rioter is quoted as saying, using the imagery of slavery, "We will whip them – will whip them – will bury them so deep that electricity can't reach them – we will whip them – we'll whip the guts out of them" (*Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1854, p. 2). Riots were becoming so frequent in this period that the editors of the *Tribune* wrote, "unless immediate steps are taken by the general government for the protection of

the public ... a movement among the people of this part ... will entail disaster for the whole country" (*Chicago Tribune*, December 29, 1853, p. 2).

Moreover, whereas worker activism in Chicago took the form of Democratic Party clubs and benevolent and mechanical societies in the early years of the Jacksonian period, Chicago's first full-fledged trade unions emerged in the early 1850s. In that time, shipwrights, caulkers, iron and brass molders, cabinet makers, masons, bricklayers, painters, railroad workers, typesetters, shoemakers, and tailors organized and struck (*Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 4, 1851, p. 2; April 23, 1853, p. 2; May 4, 1853, p. 2; Nov. 16, 1853, p. 3; [Pierce, 1940, p. 160, 165, 166](#); [Schneirov, 1991, p. 385](#)).

The emergence of labor consciousness in Chicago seemed to be tied to a feeling expressed by some workers that they had scarcely any free time to themselves. The city's first union, the Chicago Typographical Union, appeared in printing, one of the most badly sweated industries of the day ([Laurie, 1989, p. 38](#)). Because their pay was worth less in 1860 than in 1850, workers worked longer hours to make ends meet. A clerk who titles his letter, "A time for labour and a time for rest," writes,

How many is there that live up to this rule? ... look at the clerks of this city that are obliged to work from six in the morning to nign, or ten, at night. what time have them to improve the mind, or for enjoyment. None ... I propose that the clerks get up a society and regulate this matter. if they could all joyn in the project there could be something accomplished" [sic]. (*Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1854, p. 2)

What seems to underlie these glimpses into worker subjectivity is what Daniel T. Rodgers has called "the first American Dream," an expectation of personal independence that placed a premium not only on hard work, but also on leisure. Workers in Chicago – like others across the country – formed trade unions in this period, in part because they felt their independence slipping from their grasp ([Rodgers, 1978](#)), and accordingly likened their state uncomfortably to that of black bonded slaves. Indeed, it was not uncommon for mid-19th-century white workers to riot and protest in blackface (*Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1855; [Roediger, 1991](#)).

Thus, a dual process unfolded in the years immediately following the 1852 election. On the one hand, the dissolution of the Democratic Party alienated working class voters, but this process worked the other way too, for the disaffection of the base dissolved the party further still. While these developments did not send workers into the waiting arms of the Whigs or any other party but rather into their own organizations, they nevertheless comprised the first tentative steps toward an unprecedented coalition,

repeated across the North, between the working-class voters of Chicago's North and West sides and the elites of the lakeshore.

It is with the Democrats' sponsorship of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 that we find the first explicit working-class denunciations of that party and thus an underlying rationale for why workers eventually defected into the Republican camp. The act, authored by Chicago's Stephen A. Douglas in 1854, nullified the Compromise of 1820, which prohibited slavery above the Mason-Dixon Line, by allowing settlers to decide whether their territories would be admitted into the Union as free or as slave states. Since such referenda or "popular sovereignty" raised the specter of enslaving white workers in the North, passage of the Act heightened existing anxieties about the expansion of slavery as part of the emerging industrial order. The result was the immediate founding of the Republican Party later that same year (Gienapp, 1987; Richardson, 1997).

At a mass meeting of Chicago's German workers, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was roundly condemned for "reducing the free foreigner to the position now occupied by the slave, who is politically without any rights, depriving him of all influence against the phalanx of slaveholders," adding that "we have lost our confidence in, and must look with distrust upon, the leaders of the Democratic party, to whom, hitherto, we had confidence enough to think that they paid some regard to our interests" (*Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1854, p. 4).

In September that year, Senator Douglas would come under fire at home for his role in the Kansas controversy. Hoping to defend his actions at a rally in the German working-class North side, Douglas was greeted by the sight of American flags flying at half mast in anticipation of his arrival and, more ominously, an angry crowd of 8,000, whose "popular indignation was so great and so loud, that after waiting to be heard until after 10 o'clock, he was at last obliged to leave the stand" (*Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 6, 1854, p. 1; Lewis & Smith, 1929). A reporter noted the abrupt shift in public opinion, observing, "This man, who eight months ago, could have called to his support nearly the entire state, now finds himself hooted and hissed" (*Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 6, 1854, p. 1).

The passage of the act also gave rise to a Paigean rift among Chicago's better-off citizens. The Whig Party and its native-born middle-class to elite base in wards 1, 2, 5 and 9, split in two with the "Silver Gray" Whig establishment urging compromise with the landed southern wing of their party and the "Woollie" or Republican faction calling for "fusion" with the free soil Democrats and their working-class base in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The feud culminated in the Congressional elections of 1854 when the

Republican faction nominated a free soil Democratic candidate, Chicago Mayor James Woodworth, while the Silver Grays, who found the nomination of their sworn enemy intolerable, nominated the more conservative Whig stalwart Robert S. Blackwell. Woodworth's Republican coalition won a clear majority, but Blackwell, who mustered only one-fifth of the popular vote, took 40 percent of the Whig base with him. As Holt (1999) notes, with the Republican faction in the ascendant, "the Chicago Whig organization had not been completely supplanted, but it had been ripped apart" (*ibid.*, p. 870).¹³

The Kansas question soon deepened into a crisis, for while Congress had allowed Kansas residents to decide for themselves whether their new state would become free or slave, the exact outcome of that decision took years to ascertain. Popular sovereignty was derailed when so-called "border ruffians" from Missouri had crossed into Kansas to "vote early and often" for slavery, causing both the free and slave factions to claim victory and establish alternate territorial governments (Reynolds, 2005). The indecision of successive Democratic administrations in the face of such outright fraud served to confirm the perception propagated by Chicago Republicans that the Democratic Party was acting at the behest of southern interests. This sentiment was registered at the polls in 1856, when the Democratic presidential candidate, James Buchanan, drew a smaller share of votes in every ward, but especially so in Chicago's strongest working-class neighborhood.

Recall that in 1852, just two years prior to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Democrats had carried Chicago overwhelmingly, capturing all five of the city's working-class wards (5 through 9) and the two least-prosperous non-working-class wards (3 and 4). The fourth column of Table 1 shows that the Democrats retained only three of these in the 1856 presidential election, and witnessed a steep erosion of their base even in the wards they still controlled. The Democratic Party's share of the popular vote dropped by double-digits throughout Chicago, but the decline was most precipitous in the solidly working-class German 7th ward. Still, the rout was incomplete: a thin majority of German working-class North side voters, including those in the dramatically precarious 7th ward, remained loyal to Douglas.¹⁴

Newspaper reports confirm that the working-class defection came principally from free labor sentiments in the German wards of the city. In the lead-up to the 1856 election, the latter filled Chicago's imposing German Theatre and then marched in a torchlight procession in support of the Republican presidential ticket of Fremont and Dayton. The theme throughout the night's speeches was said to be a "determination to battle zealously and untiringly for free labor." Significantly, the Turner Association,

one of Chicago's earliest and most radical German-American labor organizations, was a prominent guest and presence at the event (*Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1856, p. 2). Commenting on the German Democratic exodus with approbation, the editors of the *Tribune* wrote in terms reminiscent of Barrington Moore: "We are glad to notice this movement, as it betokens the final separation of the liberal German element from the intolerant Pro-Slavery Democracy" (*Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 1856, p. 2).¹⁵

A similar shift took place in the less rural counties of Illinois where the Democrats were more deeply divided over slavery extension and where former Whigs were more eager to unite with the free soil element of the opposition (Holt, 1999). The third column of Table 2 reports that the Democrats lost a third of their strength among commercial farming and manufacturing counties. Of the most rural counties, by contrast, the Democrats lost two and gained two, a zero net loss, suggesting that small farmers had once again voted with a shrinking but still extant majority of Chicago workers. This result is corroborated by the average decline in the Democratic share of the popular vote, which was most precipitous in counties with the highest rate of investment in manufacturing. In the top quartile, the Democratic share dropped by 10.5 percent, double the state average loss of 5.27 percent and altogether divergent from the numbers in the lowest quartile where the Democrats actually gained in strength by 2.1 percent of the popular vote. Still, as in Chicago, the Democrats were able to secure a slim statewide majority of just under 10,000 votes.

But if the partisan controversy over Kansas had done the crucial work of splitting working-class voters off from the Democrats and dividing the Whigs' middle-class to elite base, then the subsequent politicization of the Panic of 1857 constituted the last straw in that process, since it helped to move the North side into the Republican column and thereby unite renegade elite and non-elite factions. Railroad failures and rising inventories along with British divestment and Russian re-entry into global markets after the Crimean War burst a bubble economy that had been inflated by widespread speculation. The panic, which was eventually touched off by the failure of New York's Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company in late August, sent shock waves through Chicago. In a city whose total population numbered a mere 93,000, the panic left 20,000 workers unemployed (Pierce, 1940, p. 156; Skogan, 1976; Huston, 1987).

In response to the ensuing deprivation, Chicago's working-class voters continued to organize their own autonomous movements, which, fueled by the economic collapse, spread for the first time beyond the point of production to include living conditions in the North side working-class

wards that had delivered majorities to the Democrats just one year earlier. In the first week of November, with the local economy bottoming out, the North side's tenants banded together to demand, and ultimately win, a reduction in rent (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 5–7, 1857). A few days later, working-class residents of the North side and the West side's 6th ward began holding mass meetings to assist the ranks of the unemployed, inspired in part by similar mobilization efforts in New York where workers were starting to riot for "bread or work" (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 17, 1857, p. 1).

In contrast to the syndicalist and riotous movements of the early 1850s, these community mobilizations fed more directly back onto party politics as Republican elites insinuated that the Democratic Party had been compelled by their southern masters to adopt a low-tariff trade policy to the economic ruin of workers and farmers in the West. At the same time, however, workers did not then abandon their organizations simply because a party of some discernible stature had finally emerged to replace the Democrats. Unions and other working-class organizations had produced real results, including, it seemed, a shake-up of the party elite. Thus, in that same bleak November, while workers were in the streets winning reduced rents and demanding relief for the unemployed, North-side German voters also went to the polls in mid-term national and municipal elections and delivered their neighborhoods to the Republicans. Once the results were announced, jubilant voters "drove all through the North side, congratulating their friends on the glorious victory over ruffianism and slaveocracy" (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 5, 1857). This was not an isolated outcome. The Panic of 1857 triggered a similarly small but decisive shift to the Republicans among working-class voters throughout the northern United States (Huston, 1987; Wilentz, 2005).

Electoral returns from 1856 to 1858 reveal that the economic crisis had a dual significance. On the one hand, a North-side majority had eluded the Republicans as late as March 1857 when former Democrat John Wentworth became the first Republican mayor of Chicago, just five months before the downturn (*Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1857, p. 1). The results of the 1858 mid-term election for state treasurer figured in the fifth column of [Table 1](#) show that after the panic, the Republicans had at last begun posting majorities in the 7th through 9th wards (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 5, 1858, p. 1). On the other hand, the shift in the popular vote was relatively minor compared to that of 1856. Thus, while the salience of economic interests issued the final blow to Democratic hegemony, it was primarily the *political* realignment of 1853–1856 that emptied the ranks of the Democratic bloc – especially in the German working-class North side – in effect setting the panic up to seal the revolutionary cross-class coalition one year later.

That the Kansas crisis in particular inflamed such vast numbers so quickly was due in part to the grand old party's (GOP's) deployment of a discourse that had once been discredited by its earlier association with the radical abolitionists of the Liberty Party. The Republicans warned that upon settling the western territories, southern planters would tip the balance of power in Congress toward the slave states, legalize slavery nationally and of necessity come to enslave every free white man in the North (Davis, 1969; Foner, 1970; Wilson, 1974; Holt, 1978; Gienapp, 1987; Wilentz, 2005). In 1854, for example, the *Tribune* ridiculed the national Democratic administration, charging that they "cry 'the people, the people'" for election purposes, but "degrade every poor white man below even the slave himself." The "grand aim" of the South and its northern collaborators, the *Tribune* continued, was "centered in the accomplishment of one object – the degradation of all free labor, and as an inevitable necessity, the mental and physical enslavement of the great mass of the people" (*Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1854, p. 2). Accordingly, a territory's refusal to become a slave state was described as "a preference for white men and white labor" (*Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1858, p. 2), while embracing slave state status was derided as a preference for "intense 'niggerism'" (*Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1857, p. 1).

Such claims, however fantastic, appeared real enough to northern workers, whose racial and masculine anxieties over the security of their independence had been elevated by the politicization of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Kansas crisis and the panic. It did not take long for the leadership of the city's white workers to see that they had been taken in by Republican race-baiting, but even the leadership admitted to its initial effects. Commenting on the Republicans' inability to reconcile their glorification of white workingmen in the antebellum period with the harsh reality of their growing impoverishment in 1864 (Richardson, 1997), the editors of the *Workingman's Advocate*, a Chicago trade unionist paper wrote,

When it can do nothing else it can bleat about 'slave-drivers.' Alas! gentlemen (?) of the Tribune, your old demagoguecial [*sic*] cry is worn out. We are no longer going to permit you to make dupes of us by your false statements and past hypocritical catch-words, nor mislead us from protecting our own interests and rights. You have already made yourselves rich by bleating about the Negro, for whom you cared not a fig ... This is a white man's question. Our brave soldiers in the field are taking good care of the 'slave owners and slave drivers.' To them we leave them ... That game is up ... We are determined to prevent a wholly unscrupulous set of scoundrelly and hypocritical politicians and purse-proud, moneyed aristocrats from bringing want and slavery to the doors of the FREE LABORING MEN OF THE NORTH" [their capitals, emphasis, and parentheses]. (*Workingman's Advocate*, September 17, 1864, p. 2)

Alongside their new-found animosity toward the Republican Party, the city's workers had come to see the "white man's question" as intricately bound up with their class and gender status as "FREE LABORING MEN OF THE NORTH." While they would "no longer" permit Republican elites to "make dupes" of them by invoking "past hypocritical catch-words" ("that game was up"), it was clear that what Chicago's white working-class came to fear more on the eve of the Civil War was not their figurative enslavement as dependent wage earners under capitalism, but rather their literal enslavement at the hands of southern planters.

The Republican Party therefore exploited the racial and gender underpinnings of the Jacksonian discourse of dependency to reorganize the now badly compromised class basis of the old party system, and in doing so set the stage for Moore's bourgeois revolution. Where the preoccupation with dependency had served previously to undermine the legitimacy of sweated wage labor and thus of incipient industrial capitalism, the Republicans, in the context of an increasingly harsh economic order, crafted an even broader coalition of disaffected elites and non-elites by shifting the focus from economic issues to the singular question of slavery's extension to the West. This reframing all but erased the once potent class distinctions that placed industrialists, financiers and their sweated hirelings at odds with farmers and independent artisans – a powerful discursive move that redefined deskilled capitalist wage labor as "free" simply because it was neither formally feminized nor black.

As the last two columns of [Table 1](#) demonstrate, the continuing political conflict over slavery seems to have merely consolidated this cross-class coalition. By 1860 the Republicans had captured all but two wards in the entire city much as the Democrats had done in 1852, but with an alliance of the lakeshore and the North and upper West sides. Of the two Democratic wards, ward 4 was essentially a tie, with the Democrats winning the presidency by a single vote and losing the gubernatorial race by a much larger margin. That left only the Irish working-class 10th ward, a new ward that had been gerrymandered by the Republicans out of the poorer southern half of the old 5th ward in 1857 (see [Fig. 1](#)), as the sole stronghold of the Democrats who mustered 58 percent of the vote.¹⁶ In sum, Republicans carried four of the city's now six working-class wards, the middle-class 5th and 8th, and the Yankee elite of the perennially affluent 1st and 2nd wards.

The fact that workers came to identify themselves as ambassadors of free white labor rather than as objects of industrial servitude was evident

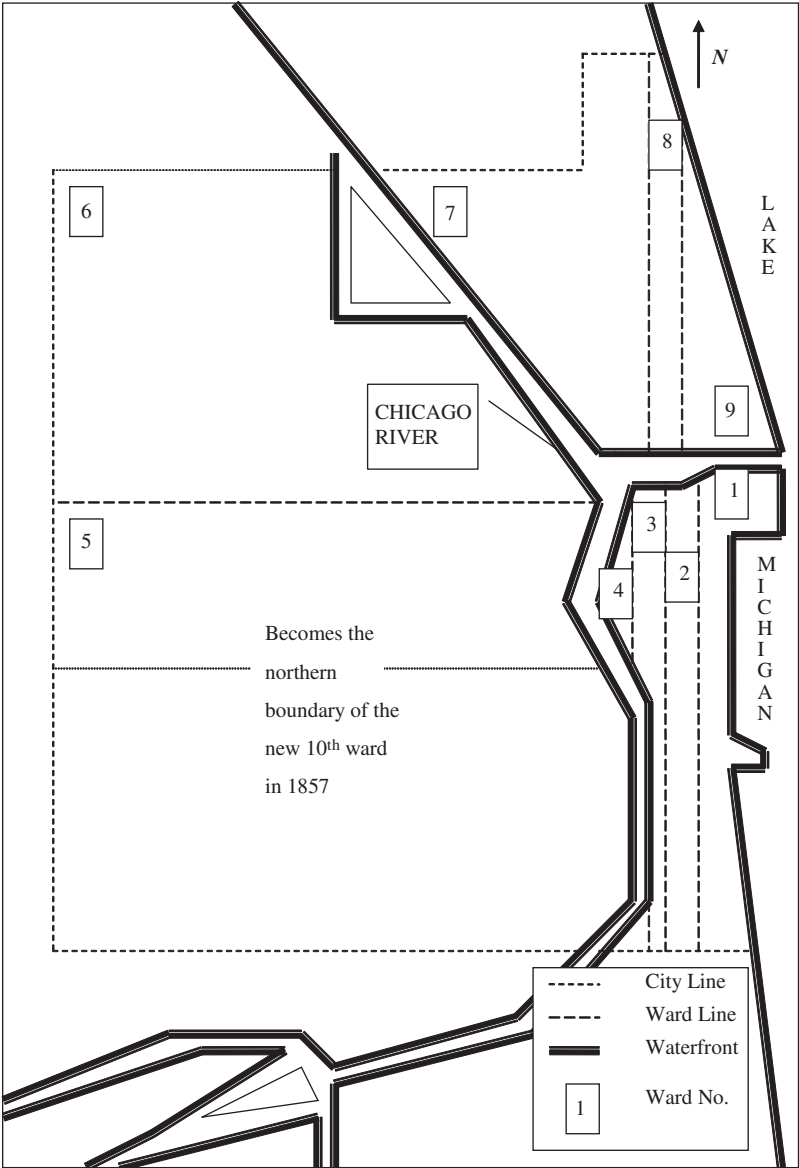


Fig. 1. Chicago Ward Map, 1847-1863.

throughout the course of the 1860 presidential campaign. Witness the various floats and banners on display at this parade for Abraham Lincoln:

There was a huge frame on wheels ... filled, below and on top, with machines ... On this ... was a four-horse-power portable engine, driving turning lathes, and furnishing power for various machinists. There were blacksmithing, planing, sawing, boring and hammering, and fifty other things a doing ... 49 men from the corn planter factory for Lincoln! ... On wheels was a blacksmith shop and forge; five grim smiths sledge-hammered a bar of iron, striking in time Other wagons bore along loads of cabinetmakers, house builders, carpenters, brick layers, stone cutters, tinners, shoe-makers, dusty millers, harness-makers ... A platform on wheels had a farm in miniature on it. There was a small log cabin, worm fence, corn field, wheat, oats, meadow, all kinds of fruits in the orchard, a grape vine climbing the side of the house loaded with luscious grapes. (*Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 23, 1860, p. 1)

This scene is an admixture of occupational categories that would have been unimaginable in the Jacksonian era when farmers and journeymen clamored against their descent into the ranks of sweatshop and manufactory operatives. The parade juxtaposed the floats of wage hands from “a corn planter factory” and a model factory, “filled, below and on top, with machines” alongside the quintessential Jacksonian images of the small-holder republic, that of a “blacksmith shop and forge” and an opulent “farm in miniature.”

This unprecedented coalition gave the Republicans an 11,753 vote (or 3.5 percent) statewide majority out of a total 333,427 votes cast. As the last column of [Table 2](#) suggests, very few counties actually changed hands between 1856 and 1860, further evidence that the political realignment of 1853–1856 was more instrumental in delivering the Republicans to power than the economic panic of 1857. Four-fifths of the Republican advantage came mainly from counties where the Democrats continued to lose ground in their share of the popular vote, of which roughly 60 percent came from the most capitalized counties. The remainder of Republican support came from a scatter of more rural counties, which continued to post Democratic majorities.

A letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* provides us with a window into the dynamic between some Illinois farmers and the Republican Party. During the depths of the panic, one farmer calling himself “Shem,” wrote,

There seems to be a league of the whole commercial community, to make out of farmers the entire losses of the recent revulsion. So it has always been, and so it will be until farmers become aware of the power in the State, and use it. By unequal laws, by indirect taxation, by paper money, and other commercial conspiracies, and by a thousand unfair

means, the agriculturalists of this country have been compelled to bear the larger share of taxation, and to suffer in times of panic like these, for the extravagance, folly, and dishonesty of the commercial world. (*Chicago Tribune*, November 14, 1857, p. 2)

Here Shem recuperates the old terms of Jacksonian Democratic dissent with its characteristic charge of a money power, as opposed to a slave power, conspiracy. Rather than give credence to the charge or appear willing to logroll a protective tariff for homesteads as Barrington Moore suggests the GOP did, the Republican *Tribune* scolded the farmer: “If he has wheat to sell, and will not accept the market price therefore, his are the chances of loss not ours. When, however, he charges that there is a conspiracy between the railroads, editors, merchants and bankers, to make up their losses out of the farming community, he certainly states that which he cannot know and which is as certainly untrue” (*ibid.*). Unlike Chicago workers, then, for whom the Panic of 1857 was merely a further proof of the shadowy influence of the South, some Illinois farmers seemed to be unwilling to divest themselves of Jacksonian rhetoric, and the Republican Party, which had forged a comfortable majority in more prosperous commercial farming counties in any case, seemed unwilling to abase itself before the entire altar of the agricultural interest.

It bears noting that the Democratic defeat in Chicago was facilitated partly by certain demographic shifts. Middle-class proprietors moved into the once working-class 8th ward, further securing it for the Republicans. Other shifts infused the working-class population with values that were at least sufficiently consistent with Republican liberalism. The newest wave of German immigrant workers, for instance, consisted of veterans of the Revolutions of 1848 who had fled the rapidly ascendant counter-revolution. For the so-called “48ers” who were more liberal in their politics than the socialists who would immigrate to Chicago a decade later, a flight from the Metternichs of Europe to the waiting arms of southern slave-drivers was unacceptable, and they quickly delivered the North side as ward captains of the Republican Party. In the meantime, Fenian Irish nationalists had begun to infiltrate their countrymen in the West and South sides of the city, turning a sizeable minority away from the pro-compromise politics of the Catholic Church and Democratic Party (Pierce, 1937, pp. 49, 174, 419; U.S. Census Office, 1860, p. 613; Einhorn, 1991, pp. 261, 263; Jentz, 1991, p. 229; Schneirov, 1991, p. 383).

But demography notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that the rise of the Republican Party and its relentless deployment of the slave power conspiracy were critical to reshaping the terms of electoral competition in Chicago. By 1860 the issue of slavery extension had crowded out all other potential issues for organizing party competition in Chicago. Table 3 shows

Table 3. Chicago Mayoral Tickets by Party, 1842–1860.

	Whig	Liberty	Indept Dem (Free Soil)	Dem w/o Formal Nomination	Temperance	Know- Nothing	“Pro- Nebraska” Dem (Douglas)	“Anti- Nebraska” Dem (Free Soil)	Dem (Douglas)	Rep
No. of tickets	4	6	3	8	2	1	1	1	14	4
First Ticket	1842	1842	1844	1849	1852	1855	1856	1856	1842	1857
Last Ticket	1846	1847	1849	1853	1854	1855	1856	1856	n/a	n/a

Source: Chicago Public Library Digital Archives (2002).

not only the proliferation of internal and third-party factions in this period, but also the gradual extinction of non-slavery extension issues, from the old questions of economic inequality debated by the Whigs (whose last mayoral ticket was launched in 1846) to the causes of temperance and nativism (whose last tickets were launched in 1854 and 1855, respectively).

In time, the Republican *Tribune* would enforce a blackout on Jacksonian rhetoric by discrediting critics of big business as apologists for slavery. When, for instance, the aforementioned unemployed workers were hatching plans to demand “bread or work,” the Republicans drew the improbable relationship between European socialism and the slave power, writing,

When the Slave Power is dominant, then will be the time in which the claims of the poor and unfortunate upon the authorities, for what they eat, drink and wear can be maintained ... Let us have no European socialism here. (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 16, 1857, pp. 1)

Taking advantage of the stigma of dependency, the Republican Party succeeded for a time in branding socialism as the political program of slaves who were incapable of taking care of themselves, and indeed Chicago did not see a march of the unemployed that month or any month until some years later. Defeating the slave power, on the Republicans’ account, was one and the same with precluding the conditions under which workers could legitimately organize against the state.

After the war, elites from both parties used the slave power conspiracy as a rhetorical tool to undermine trade unionism and secure the emerging industrial order. For example, to justify the state’s repression of Chicago’s first general strike for an eight-hour day, the *Tribune* denounced the job action as

an effort to prevent men from selling their own property (their labor) on such terms as were agreeable to both seller and purchaser. It was the voice of the slave power crying out – You shall work only when, where and on such terms as we dictate. (*Chicago Tribune*, May 3, 1867, p. 2)

This same logic animated their rationale for subsequent battles with labor, including the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, in which local police, state and private militia, and the U.S. Ninth Infantry unleashed 20,000 armed personnel to crush labor’s uprising in the infamous Battle of Chicago (Foner, 1977, pp. 151–156).

Eventually the state’s rationale for such acts would be shorn of its Civil War rhetoric until all that remained was the politics of free market liberalism itself. In 1888, Chief Justice Mellville W. Fuller, one of the leaders of the Chicago Democratic Party and a loyal Douglassite, led the U.S. Supreme Court to write the doctrine of freedom of contract into constitutional law, to

gut the Sherman Antitrust Act and to declare labor unions conspiracies in restraint of trade. By the turn of the century, a man's capacity to sell himself to the highest bidder, though once an act as vile as slavery itself, had at last become a metaphor for freedom (Stanley, 1998).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that while class analysis is crucial to understanding the onset and implications of the American Civil War, the reorganization of the decisive class coalitions in that conflict cannot be accounted for without also appreciating the trajectory of 19th-century mass party formation and political discourse. Moore's exclusively class-centered account is limited in at least three ways. First, Chicago's road to war was shaped not by concerted bourgeois class action per se, but by party politics. In a time of rampant factionalism, the leadership of the Republicans was critical to reorganizing the class basis of the party system and focusing the resulting regional cross-class partnership on the problem of the slave power. Furthermore, the Democratic critique of early monopoly capitalism, which had been so fundamental to Jacksonian politics, and the advocacy of compromise by the Whig and Democratic establishment in the years leading up to the Civil War, were among the most formidable obstacles to liberal bourgeois democracy and revolution. The division and defeat of the Democratic Party along with the supplanting of the conservative wing of the Whig Party by its emergent Republican counterpart eliminated these obstacles.

Second, the emergence and consolidation of Republican hegemony depended upon the transformation of political discourse, which also was not exclusively bourgeois in its origins. Free labor ideology, which combined strains of Jacksonian and abolitionist politics with the anxiety over, and producerist rhetoric surrounding, economic dependency among working people on the ground served to unify party factions and formerly hostile voting blocs against the South. That said the liberal free market agenda of the Reconstruction era would eventually be driven by the bourgeois implications of free labor ideology, which recast all subjects of the new economic system as free, in spite of the pre-existing critique of wage dependency. Since this placed the capacity to buy and sell labor at the core of one's liberty, working-class Civil War veterans could neither strike their employers nor organize their fellows without the threat of state repression.

Third, because Moore's units of analysis are classes, there is insufficient room to differentiate among sub-groups within a given class or to conceive

of party politics as the cause of such differentiation. Thus, it is difficult within a Moorean framework to speak of pro- and anti-southern urban elite Whigs, but as we have seen, the defeat of the former and the emergence of the latter were critical to the ascendancy of the Republican Party in Chicago. Likewise, German and native-born, but less so Irish, workers comprised the working-class base of the Republican Party. Finally, as Hobsbawm (1967) once noted of Moore, *Social Origins* misses the subtle differences in rural society, so that while there is mention of a “dominant upper stratum of Western farmers,” more often than not Moore referred to a unitary group that consisted of “the family farm” itself, which, in contrast to the non-slaveholding family farm in the South was “a successful commercial venture” (Moore, 1966, pp. 128–129). Broad categories such as these, along with “yeomanry” and “peasantry” which Moore also used interchangeably to describe Western farmers, do not capture the divergent political allegiances of largely Democratic small farmers on the one hand, and of mainly Republican cash crop farmers on the other, all of whom were technically “commercial farmers” to the extent that by 1860 most farmers took their surplus crops to market.

Though the claim that party dynamics correspond closely with dominant class interests also limits the work of Rueschemeyer et al., the presence of an emergent working-class just prior to the Civil War is perhaps a more interesting departure point for evaluating their work. The account advanced here squares with the general terms of the latter’s argument. Reconstruction-era Chicago reveals the limits of bourgeois democracy for the working-class, and workers, while notable in Moore’s account only by their absence, do in fact set the stage for America’s revolution against the southern landed elite. In the particulars, however, the case of Chicago diverges in ways that suggest revisions to the statement, “no working-class, no democracy.” Workers do not actually strike for the franchise in this case. Universal white manhood suffrage had been in place in Chicago as early as 1841 (Sparling, 1898, p. 29). Workers’ disavowal of the Democratic Party – a “desertion from below” if you will – did nevertheless destabilize the party system and open party politics to an alternative organizing principle. Thus, working-class political unrest, even when not in the form of a strike or for the purposes of achieving the franchise, may have democratizing effects.

That said, working-class mobilization, both by parties and workers, was deeply inflected by race and gender in the American context and was therefore not a linear and heroic struggle for freedom. The “radical” faction of the Republican Party was a vocal proponent of black suffrage among other civil rights to be sure, and indeed the radical Republicans provided

much of the elite impetus behind the passage of the 13th through 15th amendments (DuBois, 1935; Montgomery, 1967; Foner, 1988). However, the politics of free labor on the ground in the years leading up to the Civil War was built not upon the cry for black suffrage, but on the desire of white male workers to distance themselves from, and thereby further degrade, black slaves at precisely the moment of their formal emancipation. Later, in the Compromise of 1877, the Republican Party would sell out the project of black Civil Rights to retain control of the White House in a tight race with Democrat Samuel Tilden (Woodward, 1951). Moreover, as Montgomery (1967) has noted, even the radical Republicans ultimately foundered on the shoals of the labor question. After showing initial support for the eight-hour day immediately after the war, many fell in with the more conservative elements of their party to put down the movement.

Finally for Paige, the critical question of democratization in Central America lay in the process by which industrial elites came to disavow their landed kin. The analysis here holds to Paige's class and cultural analyses. Unlike Moore who believed that a formal urban-landed elite coalition had not taken hold in the United States, this chapter has argued that the coalition had already become institutionalized in the Whig Party. But because the Whigs were politically unsuccessful relative to their Democratic counterparts, any realignment along bourgeois democratic lines would require a mass party coalition with farmers and workers and a radical split with their landed elite compatriots to the South. In Chicago, the elite split occurred in the mid-term Congressional elections of 1854, while the mass party was formed between 1854 and 1857, not in a revolution, but in an exodus out of the Democratic Party, from below. Furthermore, like the tropes of "liberty" and "progress" in Central America, free labor served to justify the urban elite's break with their landed counterparts, despite having been politically aligned throughout the Jacksonian era.

However, this chapter also suggests that some part of the variance must be reserved for party formation. For it was the breakdown of the Jacksonian two-party system and the subsequent ascendancy of the Republican Party that shifted the terms of political debate from an economic divide that united voting blocs nationally to a sectional divide that recast America's landed and urban elites as mortal antagonists.

In sum, this chapter has attempted a synthesis of Jeffery Paige's work in *Coffee and Power* and two strands of the party formation literature, Lipset and Rokkan's emphasis on social cleavages at critical junctures and the more party-driven approach of Przeworski, Aminzade, Ansell, Desai and others. It has done so first by underlining the role of both elites and

non-elites in shaping the American path to liberal capitalist democracy, and second, by employing a more agentic conception of party formation, in which political elites at opportune moments are able not only to reorganize class coalitions, but also to wield state power, advance resonant mass ideologies, transform the terms of electoral competition and seize openings presented by international contingencies.

In Chicago and in Illinois more generally, the possibility of a liberal capitalist democracy emerged at the critical juncture of the 1850s when Whig, but especially ruling Democratic, elites failed to meet taken-for-granted expectations that the state safeguard the independence of free white men. The factious obsession with leadership succession squandered any pre-existing popular consent from the masses to be governed. Consequently, segments of the Democratic non-elite base, particularly larger commercial farmers and German workers, abandoned and thereby further destabilized their old party, while the elite Whig base split into pro- and anti-southern factions with the latter joining the aforementioned non-elites in 1854 in a mass coalition led by the insurgent Republican Party. The mechanism that bound these formerly inimical class fractions into a revolutionary force was not the mere convergence of class interest per se, but the convergence of two mutually reinforcing discourses – a producerist discourse of dependency from below and a Republican free labor ideology from above. Additionally, the Republican Party was able to exploit international contingencies such as the migration of German 48ers and the Panic of 1857, to make inroads into previously hostile class-based voting blocs. The resulting popular basis of the Republican Party, realized most famously in Abraham Lincoln's elevation to the presidency in 1861, then became the justification for a revolutionary offensive using the state's means of coercion against the formerly class-based, but now secessionist, voting blocs of the South. Once victorious, the Republicans used the state machinery again, this time to repress non-elite dissent within their own ranks in the name of the now redeemed and reunited sovereign people, inaugurating Moore's liberal capitalist democracy.

NOTES

1. The Democratic critique was not an indictment of capital or the bourgeoisie *in toto*, but rather of what Marx calls uneven development, the concentration of capital in an ever-shrinking number of financial-industrial elites.

2. Unlike much of the literature, [Bendix \(1964\)](#), [Rueschemeyer et al. \(1992\)](#), and [Collier \(1999\)](#) acknowledge that party politics may help or hinder democratic change.

3. One notable exception is Republican support of railroad regulation during Reconstruction. It was a Republican Supreme Court, for instance, that declared such regulation constitutional in the Granger Cases. Still, it bears noting that, as [Summers \(1984\)](#) suggests, Republicans were also outspoken proponents of government aid to railroads in the same period.

4. That said Moore underestimated the extent to which a market-mentality had already taken hold in the Jacksonian era. There is evidence to suggest that early 19th-century farmers, for example, sold their surplus crops for specie currency, which they assiduously conserved to pay taxes and purchase land for themselves and their children (see, for instance, [Laurie, 1989](#)).

5. It is also ill-equipped because the American case is not a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Still, the analytical categories in the “authoritarianism to democracy” literature are instructive here of the impasse that must be traversed for the sake of synthesis.

6. [Collier’s \(1999\)](#) is another.

7. In political science, the canonical electorate-driven approaches are [Downs’s \(1957\)](#) spatial or economic theory of voting behavior and the critical realignment school of [Key \(1955\)](#) and [Burnham \(1970\)](#).

8. In political science, the principal exponents of this approach are [Rabinowitz and MacDonald \(1987\)](#), [Carmines and Stimson \(1989\)](#) and [Aldrich \(1995\)](#). This perspective also dovetails with the “political constructionist” literature, which has focused largely on the ways in which racialization takes place in the political arena. See, for example, [Marx \(1998\)](#), [Gerteis \(2003\)](#), [Redding \(2003\)](#) and [Valelly \(2004\)](#).

9. Some might prefer to interpret durable shifts in political power as changes in the appeal of platforms as issue bundles, rather than as a shift in discourse. My position is that the two are not mutually exclusive. Discourse is causally prior to, and organizing of, issue bundles. As we shall see, both the Jacksonian economic issues and the question of slavery’s extension to the western territories were framed in terms of the independence of free white men. The shift I focus on is not that of the issues per se though they are certainly part of the narrative, but the transformation of the discourse of dependency that happened in conjunction with the change in issue bundles, namely from connoting dependency under monopoly capitalism to connoting dependency under slavery. It was that shift – not that of the issues per se – that I argue shaped the elite/non-elite coalition, which eventually prosecuted the American bourgeois revolution.

10. Historians seem more willing to reconstruct precinct- or ward-level dynamics from manuscript census data. See, for example, [Watson \(1981\)](#), [Ford \(1988\)](#) and [Einhorn \(1991\)](#).

11. Indeed, Midwestern Democrats were at variance with their party in favoring state aid to “internal improvements” for surface roads, canals and railroads.

12. Counties that were not present in 1840, that reorganized under different names in the lead-up to the Civil War, or that did not stay in the same quartile between 1840 and 1860 are not included in this table.

13. This reconfiguration of bourgeois class fractions in response to the onset of the Civil War was widespread, but was not true of New York City where the war occasioned the unification of mercantile, financial, and industrial elites ([Beckert, 2001](#)).

Both configurations, however, set the conditions for a capitalist revolution against the South.

14. This lends credence to Formisano's (1971) thesis that the realignment of the 1850s involved ethnocultural factors.

15. The Tribune overstates the uniformity of the Democratic Party here. As we have seen the latter was divided into at least three factions, only one of which was explicitly "pro-slavery," and the Republicans were not "anti-slavery" as such, but opposed to the *extension* of slavery to the West. Nevertheless, this statement is significant in that by 1856 the planter-heavy Whig Party was no longer a national contender, leaving large southern slaveholders in 1860 to forge political alliances either with wings of the Democratic Party or with the anti-secessionist (and largely Whig) Constitutional Union Party.

16. The tenth was the only new ward created between 1847 (when the preceding ward map was established) and 1857. The other nine wards preceded the political crisis of the 1850s.

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