

The Character of Party Dialogue:
Democrats and Whigs in New York State, 1844-1852

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In the last chapter of his influential intellectual study, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief*, Marvin Meyers reflects upon the "close" of the Jacksonian age.¹ Looking specifically at the New York constitutional convention of 1846, Meyers finds many of the fiercely contested issues that had divided Whig and Democrat for years had either been resolved or (with the new state constitution) were being removed from the political arena. "Here toward the end of an era," writes Meyers,

the antagonists found themselves slipping into concord on most of the incendiary issues of two decades — banking and corporations, public debt and public works — and uniting with no perceptible friction on long-settled principles of majority rule.²

The debates of the convention are a transitional record for Meyers; while often cast in Jacksonian rhetoric, they indicate that a consensus had been reached in several policy areas. The moral (and, some intellectual historians would add today, classical republican) ambivalence toward modernization that Meyers believes distinguished the Jacksonians may not have vanished abruptly in 1846, but one supposedly hears only "the falling echo of Jacksonian party quarrels" in the political discourse of the following decade.³ Accordingly, Meyers (and a good number of other historians of the Middle Period) view the second party system breaking under the weight of destructive new sectional

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1. Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 235.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

questions, without the key support once provided by economic issues.⁴ Throughout the Jacksonian era, in the words of Michael Holt, the major parties "defined alternative ways to secure republican ideals" and in doing so they gave voters a tangible, if not always significant, choice.⁵ The economic policies of Presidents Jackson and Van Buren helped spawn and sustain a vigorous two party system of Democrats and Whigs on both the national and state levels. New York state had long been renowned for its spirited and faction-ridden politics. Differences stemming from banking and related economic issues of the 1830s had fueled political conflict between the Whig and Democratic parties and had divided the Democrats themselves into hard money and egalitarian Loco-Focos (often called Radicals) and more conservative, pro-bank elements. Members of the latter faction became known as Hunkers by the late 1840s and the Radicals, with their championing of the free soil cause after 1847, were titled Barn-burners. New York Whigs too suffered from internal divisions but, as indicated below, these would not split the party formally until 1850. All of which suggests that New York, in the years following its 1846 constitutional convention, could serve as an appropriate test case with which to evaluate this aspect of the 'Meyers thesis' and, by extension, a prevalent interpretation of the decline of the Jacksonian party system.

Meyers is careful not to demarcate too neatly the end of the Jacksonian political era with the 1846 convention. "Felt differences," he contends, "no matter how vestigial, count for more than a new, reluctant, uneasy consensus."⁶ The following discussion proposes, however, that partisan differences in New York were not yet 'vestigial' in 1846. Jacksonians may, in some sense, have "been trapped by history," but their traditional partisan perspectives also allowed them to both postpone serious interparty consensus and deal with new sectional issues for longer than Meyers and others have suggested.⁷

One way to garner an understanding of partisan dialogue is to explore the

4. Meyers's thesis is, in key respects, consistent with a large body of historical literature that sees the age of Jackson winding to a close with consensus having been reached on certain basic economic questions and upon the entrance of new (mostly slavery-related) issues into the realm of political debate. For example, Glyndon Van Deusen's survey, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), portrays the end of the period in this light with a final chapter entitled "The Deterioration of Parties." More recently, William R. Brock in *Parties and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840-1850* (Millwood: KTO Press, 1979), has laid new emphasis upon slavery as the wrecker of the second party system which, he contends, had reached a grave point of no return as early as 1846 (p. 151). To illustrate his point, Brock also refers to New York and, in particular, to the crippling divisions within the Democracy of that state after 1847 (see chap. 7).

5. Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1978), p. 12.

6. Meyers, *Jacksonian Persuasion*, p. 267.

7. *Ibid.*

terms or 'language' in which the parties confronted one another, rallied their members and addressed the electorate at large.⁸ This paper will focus primarily on two common vehicles of mediation between party and voter: state party convention addresses and resolutions and the editorials of partisan newspapers. Some rudimentary use of content analysis has been made in addition to a careful reading of the sources under consideration.⁹ Content analysis is simply a systematic way of analyzing the contents of a given text by counting the words or measuring the space devoted to a specific topic within the text and then expressing that as a fraction of the whole. Inferences are then drawn regarding the relative importance of topics that take up certain portions of the text. Such a method is not without certain fundamental limitations but it is used here merely as a 'shorthand' to help summarize findings in concise and reasonably objective terms.

I

Lee Benson contends that "by 1844 the similarities and differences between the major New York parties had not only crystalized but were reflected in the platforms and addresses adopted at national and state conventions."¹⁰ Moreover, Benson finds the state and national platforms of 1844 revealed some substantial philosophical and pragmatic differences between Whigs and Democrats.¹¹ That being the case, the election of 1844 in New York may provide for our purposes a useful example of the Jacksonian party debate prior to the 1846 constitutional convention. Seen in the light of this earlier, exemplary contest of issues and underlying political 'persuasions', subsequent political dialogue in the state is clarified.

Certainly one of the most striking general characteristics of the Democratic state address of 1844 (like its national equivalent) was its limited or negative conception of the proper role of government.¹² The address declared:

8. See J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays in Political Thought and History* (London: Methuen, 1972), chap. 1, for an insightful discussion of the nature of political 'languages'.

9. See Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), for an accessible introduction to content analysis. Thomas F. Carney, *Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1972), provides a more detailed look at various methods. Because party addresses do not always breakdown neatly into quantifiable sections, impressionistic judgments are often necessary (along with fairly flexible categories). Which is to say that even the most systematic content analysis is not methodologically 'air tight'.

10. Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York As a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 219.

11. *Ibid.*, chap. 11.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

we are in favor of a simple and economical administration. We are in favor of a strict construction of the constitution. And we are in favor of confining the general government, in all its branches and departments, to the exercise of such powers as are clearly and beyond all question delegated to it.

Content analysis of the address reveals that state issues (in particular a detailed overview of the canal debt question) took up the lion's share of the Democratic platform (see Table 1). Democrats apparently thought it politically advantageous to provide the public with a historical portrait of their involvement in the state's hard-fought canal financing debate. Such an account allowed the Democracy to present the Whig "schemes of improvement" as reckless and costly.

In the election of 1844, New York Democrats believed, "the prominent questions, on which the country has been divided from the foundation of the government, are brought distinctly into controversy."¹³ A whole range of national issues and Whig responses to them were dealt with in succession. The basis of the Democratic critique was the "corrupting tendencies" inherent in all the Whig proposals.¹⁴ A national bank was opposed because it dangerously threatened "the purity of the government," a high protective tariff because it served only vested, "partial" interests and the distribution of public land sale revenues because it was a "corrupt scheme."¹⁵ The "ideal of a chaste republican order, resisting the seductions of risk and novelty, greed and extravagance, rapid motion and complex dealings" that Meyers and others have found to have pervaded Jacksonian thought was plainly evident in the Democratic address.¹⁶ A vigilant citizenry must perform its duty, declared the platform, so that the polity "can be handed down, untarnished and unimpaired, to our descendants."¹⁷

The 1844 convention address and resolutions of the New York Whigs revealed some fairly significant differences with their Democratic opponents, as well as some underlying similarities. Perhaps the most striking finding of my content analysis was the complete dominance of national as opposed to state issues and the disproportionate share of space devoted to the tariff and Texas annexation questions (see Table 2). Though it was obviously not above negative assaults upon the Democrats, the Whig address was (as Benson discovered¹⁸) decidedly more positive in tone, presenting a number of chiefly economic proposals that involved government intervention. A high protective tariff and the distribution of public land sale proceeds to the states were advocated in turn,

13. *Daily Albany Argus*, 9 September 1844, p. 1. The two preceding quotations are also from this source.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

16. Meyers, *Jacksonian Persuasion*, p. 12; Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 105-106.

17. *Albany Argus*, 9 September 1844, p. 2.

18. Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 242-253.

with references to the negative or inadequate Democratic alternatives in these fields. Notably, however, the Whigs argued such policies on the basis both of constitutional right and economic expediency, presumably, so as not to violate the same kind of popular constitutional scruples to which the Democrats appealed.

Issue Mix of State Party Platforms
(counting newspaper column lines—raw numbers in brackets)

Table 1

1844 – Democratic Address (1351 lines)

General introductory or closing remarks	5% (74)
National Issues	
Banking	5% (75)
Tariff	8% (107)
Public land sale revenue distribution	8% (114)
Party response to above issues	2% (33)
Presidential candidates	7% (93)
TOTAL	31% (422)
State Issues	
Public debt and canal policy	49% (660)
Constitutional amendments	6% (85)
State candidates	8% (110)
TOTAL	63% (855)
Resolutions (8)	
National issues	2 (one very lengthy)
State issues	1
Candidates	5

Table 2

1844 – Whig Address (931 lines)

National Issues	
Tariff	42% (396)
Public land sale revenue distribution	15% (136)
Executive power	5% (52)
Texas annexation	26% (246)

Table 2 — continued

Candidates	3% (28)
Miscellaneous	8% (73)
Resolutions (15)	
National issues	5
State issues	1
Candidates	8
Miscellaneous	1

As we have seen, the Whigs' positive vision of the state's proper role allowed them to differ with their Democratic opponents on several substantial national issues. But, as their careful constitutional arguments suggest, the Whigs often did not escape the classical republican heritage they shared with the Democrats.¹⁹ Thus the Whig denunciation of executive abuse of power in the 1844 address employed 'country party' rhetoric: "All such [abused] power is a usurpation upon each one of the people. It is so much taken from your sovereign power, your share of Government, which is your liberty."²⁰ The Texas annexation question was addressed in like terms, though the "perpetuation of Slavery" was also included as an important consideration.²¹ A threatening 'Slave Power' composed of southern slaveholders was referred to only obliquely. Subsequent development of that evocative image would serve to arouse the republican values of many northern voters.²²

Taken together, the Democratic and Whig state platforms of 1844 show two parties addressing New York's electorate in a common political language that called upon the voter to participate in the defense of traditional republican values and institutions which were being threatened. Yet, though their appeals were often cast in similar terms, the platforms did present a meaningful range of specific policies over which the parties differed profoundly. Subsequent election battles in New York reveal how certain of these basic concerns remained important while specific issues became more or less prominent in partisan discourse.

It may be useful at this point to digress briefly and review the specific accomplishments of New York's 1846 constitutional convention. Meeting

19. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), introduction.

20. *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 September 1844, p. 2.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

22. See Rush Welter, *The Mind of America, 1820-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 344-371 for an analysis of how the notion of a 'Slave Power' spoke to the republican fears of antebellum northerners.

between June 1 and October 9, 1846, the convention made changes in several key areas of the state's fundamental law. A number of alterations were made to democratize the political structure. All state officers were now elective, constitutional amendments could be submitted to the electorate and the governor's veto could be overridden both by a simple legislative majority, and state senate terms were shortened from four to two years. Elsewhere, New York's dated land laws were modernized and the question of continued high property qualifications for black voters was submitted to the public in a separate referendum. Among the more major reforms was the establishment of an elective, decentralized judiciary (demands for the expansion and liberalization of the state's judicial system had been prominent in the calls for a constitutional convention).²³

Perhaps the most important changes secured in the new constitution (and those with the most immediately noticeable political impact) had to do with the public debt and what amounted to the intrenchment of the Democratic restrictive 'stop and tax' policy of 1842. Prominent Radical Democrat, Michael Hoffman, headed the convention's Committee No. 3 on canals, public revenue and the public debt — a position that enabled Hoffman to influence deliberations on this subject greatly. In its final form, the law stipulated that of the canal system's revenues \$1.5 million was to go each year to help retire the state debt (which Hoffman fixed at \$38 million), \$.5 million to be set aside for state use and the remainder to go for improvement or possible extension of the Erie and two other canal systems. Though they were forced to make some concessions, the fiscally conservative Radicals emerged largely victorious on this particular question.²⁴ On another pet Radical issue, banking and incorporations, the convention's actions were mixed. A general incorporation law for banks was established, but according to one historian, "the door was left open for a continuation of special incorporation" in other fields.²⁵

23. Jabez D. Hammond, *Political History of the State of New York*, vol. 3 (Syracuse: L.W. Hall 1852), pp. 605-641, 656-670; DeAlva S. Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York*, vol. 2 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1906), pp. 103-113. For the full text of the amended constitution see *Albany Argus*, 12 October 1846, p. 2. It is difficult to assess the impact of the significant increase in the number of elected (as opposed to appointed) state offices. State party machines were thereby denied a large number of patronage positions to fill; but what changes, if any, this stimulated in the party dialogue is unclear on the basis of my research. It may have made factional disputes for control within the parties fiercer, but this is only conjecture.

24. Hammond, *Political History*, pp. 641-656; Alexander, *Political History*, pp. 107-109.

25. Lloyd Ray Gunn, "Political Implications of General Incorporation Laws in New York to 1860," *Mid-America: An Historical Review*, vol. 59 (1977), p. 179. For a broader view that conflicts somewhat with Gunn's conclusions see John R. Norton, "New York State Government and the Economy, 1819-1846," *New York History* 34 (1953), 298-314. Norton appears to overstate his case when he asserts that the constitution of 1846 marked "an end of legislative power over economic affairs" (p. 298).

The New York state election of 1846 came in the immediate wake of the constitutional convention. Again, the major parties were given an opportunity to present their respective political visions reflected in contemporary issues. Content analysis of the Democratic address shows that significantly greater space was devoted to state as opposed to national questions (by almost the same ratio as in 1844, a presidential election year – see Table 3). Though discussion of the recent constitutional convention itself was fairly brief, the remaining state issues (under headings such as ‘Executive Department’, ‘Judicial Department’, etc.) were all presented in the light of the convention’s reforms.²⁶ Perhaps here was the most striking, issue-based inter-party consensus of the 1846 campaign, for the Whigs also supported popular approval of the amended constitution. But, whereas the Democrats chose to devote considerable space to the accomplishments of the convention, the Whigs (as we shall see) decided to run on other issues. Undaunted by the bipartisan support given the new constitution, the Democrats did their best to turn it into a party issue. Resolution No. 4 placed the constitution in this light:

Resolved, That we are highly gratified to find so large a number of our political opponents voting in favor of engraving on the Constitution the financial policy of 1842: A measure which the representatives of that party in the Legislature have resisted, almost to a man, from 1842 to 1845.²⁷

Other articles of the amended constitution were likewise portrayed as vindications of historic Democratic positions.

Apart from the proportion of space devoted to state and national issues, there were other notable similarities between the Democratic state platforms of 1844 and 1846. Less time was spent attacking Whig proposals (for, after all, there was now a Democratic president), but many of the same, traditional economic issues were tackled. For example, the persistent bank question was addressed through reference to Polk’s Independent Treasury, the tariff through a lengthy treatment of the Democratic Walker tariff, and trade and currency issues with a brief presentation of the Warehouse System. While Democratic control of the executive may have forced the party to be less negative than it had been in 1844, their limited conception of governmental power was still clearly in evidence. The Independent Treasury was, for example, praised because, as Democrats knew: “the fiscal transactions of the government should be disconnected with all banking institutions.”²⁸ Or, as the address’s conclusion put it simply: “The principles and measures it [the address] represents, appeal and confirm the true independence of the people by giving full and free effect in the government to the simple, and self-denying articles of the democratic faith.”

26. *Albany Argus*, 27 October 1846, p. 2.

27. *Ibid.*, 6 October 1846, p. 2.

28. *Ibid.*, 27 October 1846, p. 1.

New national issues did, however, intrude at several points in the 1846 address. These new issues included Oregon and the Mexican War. The Oregon question was disposed of quickly at the beginning of the address with praise for the peaceful and honorable settlement achieved by the Polk administration. Meanwhile, the War with Mexico was portrayed as "just and inevitable" and thereby required "the support of all classes of citizens." "The history of the war of 1812 has taught a lesson of inestimable value," the platform remarks cryptically, "in respect to this high political duty."²⁹ This passage foreshadows how the Democrats (and especially the 'Hunker' wing of the party) would use the Mexican issue to attack Whig opposition to the war as disloyal, reinforced by the traitorous image of their Federalist 'predecessors' of the Hartford Convention.

A comparison between the Whig and Democratic state platforms of 1846 is, in some respects, a study in contrasts. To begin with, the Whig address was considerably shorter with an almost literary quality that made it read less like the product of a committee than did its Democratic counterpart. Content analysis again reveals the almost exclusive attention given to national issues (see Table 4). Perennial economic questions such as banking, currency and the protective tariff were given a fairly traditional Whig treatment. Democratic hard money policies were portrayed as aristocratic: "The Bank note that will buy bread, has not dignity of look enough to pay the salary of a minion of the Executive." With the Walker tariff they contended: "our own Labor [is] given up, our own Mechanics surrendered — to foreign competition, and foreign wages of labor with no adequate remuneration."³⁰ The traditional platform of the Whig party was put in a simple historical context in the state convention's first resolution:

Resolved, That we are now, as in 1840 and 1844, Whigs, enlisted under the same banner under which we triumphed with the lamented Harrison, and advocates and supporters of the same principles which we endeavored, unsuccessfully but honorably, to maintain under our faithful leader, HENRY CLAY.³¹

The new sectional issue that had entered the political debate in 1844, Texas annexation, had now become a question of war with Mexico, but it was handled in the same vein (though, notably, with fewer sectional overtones). Whigs viewed the war as yet another example of executive usurpation, for it was "started by the Executive Power alone, without consulting Congress, nay, in spite of Congress, and in spite of the sacred Constitution itself." And, like the earlier annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico would be "enormously

29. *Ibid.*, p. 2. The preceding two quotations are also from this source.

30. *New York Tribune*, 8 October 1846, p. 2. The preceding quotation is also from this source.

31. *Ibid.*, 26 September 1846, p. 2.

expensive." The static agrarian republic was depicted as being disturbed by "an ambitious and aggrandizing war." "Thus we are a changed People!" it lamented, "once happy and content in the peaceful cultivation of our fields, now gathering arms and men far beyond our borders, and rolling up the bloody tide of war on the rocky steeps of the unknown, uneasily-spoken, sad far foreign Sierre Madre!"³² Whig opposition to the Mexican War was thus neatly set in the classical republican mold of a debt-ridden, tyrannical executive power recklessly disturbing an idyllic pastoral order.³³

Table 3

1846 – Democratic Address (1028 lines)

General introductory or closing remarks	2% (25)
National Issues	
Oregon	3% (30)
Independent Treasury	5% (56)
Tariff	17% (176)
Warehouse system	4% (38)
Mexican War	8% (84)
TOTAL	37% (384)
State Issues (constitutional changes)	
Convention	16% (167)
Executive	2% (25)
Legislative	12% (120)
Administrative	6% (63)
Judicial	10% (107)
Finance	.3% (3)
Incorporations	3% (36)
Candidates	9% (98)
TOTAL	60% (619)

32. *Ibid.*, 8 October 1846, p. 2. The preceding three quotations are also from this source.

33. For the best analysis of the historical roots of these themes see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), chaps. 11 and 12. The implications of some of these themes for American Whig thought are brought out in: Major Wilson, *Space, Time and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974); Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., *Daniel Webster and the Trial of American Nationalism, 1843-1852* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973). Dalzell shows more concretely how Whig political strategy helped determine their position on the Mexican War (see p. 124, for instance).

Table 3 — continued

Resolutions (7)	
National issues	2
State issues	3
Candidates	2

Table 4

1846 — Whig Address (83 lines)

General introductory or closing remarks	17%	(16)
National Issues		
Mexican War and executive power	29%	(27)
Banking and currency	21%	(20)
Tariff and credit	21%	(20)
TOTAL	72%	(67)
Resolutions (3)		
National issues		
(and traditional party principles)	1	
Candidates	2	

As in 1844, both Whig and Democratic platforms shared a common political language even if they offered important policy alternatives on old and new issues. At the beginning and end of the Whig address, voter vigilance was called for to “put out this FIRE that is consuming our Republic!” In this extended metaphor, the party became a “good watchman” who must ring “the alarm bell of our country” when the republic is threatened.³⁴ Similarly, the Democratic address spoke of a national “crisis” that deserved “diligent attention” because “the foes of popular liberty are ever wakeful, and its friends can never safely slumber.”³⁵ Such calls for vigilant voter participation in the election process would remain potent in New York as long as the major parties continued to offer distinctive political visions based, at least in part, upon meaningful policy alternatives.³⁶ But, as the Democrats in particular discovered to their dismay in 1846, political parties are not always able to impose their definition of the issues on the voting public.

34. *New York Tribune*, 8 October 1846, p. 2. The preceding quotation is also from this source.

35. *Albany Argus*, 27 October 1846, p. 2.

36. Holt, *Political Crisis*, chap. 2.

A thorough examination of several of New York's leading party newspapers serves to complicate somewhat the above portrait of party dialogue during the 1846 election³⁷ (see Table 5). A conservative Democratic journal such as the *Albany Argus*, for instance, spent slightly over half of its lead editorials discussing internal party dissension and attacking its Radical competitor, the *Albany Atlas*. No single issue dominated the columns of the Radical *New York Evening Post*; but attacks upon the Whig candidate for governor, John Young, and impassioned defenses of the Walker tariff appeared with some frequency. Characteristically, what especially enraged the Democratic *Post* was Young's relative silence on the issues, coupled with his past affiliation with the state's turbulent Anti-Rent movement (a frequently violent alliance of tenant farmers who objected to an archaic and often oppressive lease system in the state that favored large land owners).³⁸ Meanwhile, Whig newspapers contented themselves mainly with lauding Young's character and answering the more extreme accusations regarding his sympathy for Anti-Renters. This glance at Whig newspapers suggests that some editors were more concerned with Young's popularity than with issues.

Table 5

1846 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

(Figures indicate number of times topic appeared in 27 issues, one full month, prior to state election. Topics that appeared fewer than three times have been omitted.)

Albany Argus – 14: Democratic factionalism
New York Evening Post – 7: Young candidacy, 5: Walker tariff
Albany Evening Journal – 3: Young candidacy
New York Tribune – 6: Young candidacy, 3: Nativism

In the end, the Whig strategy of emphasizing national concerns and selecting an attractive gubernatorial candidate who was 'soft' on state issues, was vindicated. The Whigs elected Young and posted significant gains in legislative and congressional seats. Though the Democratic platform took credit for the state's new constitution (overwhelmingly adopted in the election) and hardly

37. Due to the sheer volume of editorial material (coupled with limitations of time), I have not really employed content analysis in my survey of party newspapers. Rather, the main topics of lead editorials were classified and totaled for the month preceding the state election. This means that pieces of differing lengths are sometimes given equal status – a definite methodological weakness – but where especially lengthy editorials are included in the tally these are noted.

38. *New York Evening Post*, 16, 28 October 1846; Hammond, *Political History*, pp. 480-481.

mentioned the canal question, voters apparently had not forgotten Governor Wright's initial opposition to the constitutional convention nor his veto of an important canal appropriation bill.³⁹ Democratic attempts to ride the crest of popular approval for the new constitution failed because Wright's reelection itself became the primary issue. As such, the Whigs with their engaging but relatively unknown alternative drew broad support. After all, the Democrats' silence on Wright and the canals hid deepening divisions within the party that Whigs capitalized on aided by the support of anti-Wright Anti-Renters. As the wealth of factional editorials in the *Argus* suggests, debate within the Democracy could crowd out issue-oriented debate between the major parties. Unfortunately for the Democrats, their loss in 1846 only exacerbated their internal divisions as the Radicals and their opponents searched for scapegoats.⁴⁰

II

In discussing the state's fierce political battles of 1847 and 1848, it is important to keep several points in mind. To begin with, though the relatively new slavery extension question was perhaps these years' primary political issue (and as such it widened the split in the New York Democracy), it was invariably addressed in the familiar terms of a Jacksonian past. Secondly, other issues, not directly related to the slavery question, played a role in these elections and continued to distinguish Whig from Democrat (be he Hunker or Barnburner).⁴¹ Slavery would do much to disrupt a stable two-party system in New York but, as our close reading of state party platforms confirms, other factors contributed to the chaotic 1847-1848 period.

Analysis of the Democratic addresses of 1847 predictably shows a much greater emphasis upon the slavery extension issue in the Barnburner than in the Hunker platform (see Tables 6 and 7). Yet the Barnburners went to some length to demonstrate that the principle of free soil had been "frequently and un-animously asserted by the democracy of New York and of the north, and so intimately interwoven with its history and usages" as to be fundamental to its political creed.⁴² The other grounds for Barnburner opposition to slavery extension are also revealing. The "conquest of Free territory, and the establishment of Slavery thereon" were referred to as "a usurpation of powers" on the behalf of the slaveholding states. "We protest," declared the address (defending the traditional Jacksonian ideal of a static republican polity) "against the ex-

39. Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792-1854* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), pp. 358-359.

40. Herbert D.A. Donovan, *The Barnburners* (New York: New York University Press, 1925), pp. 74-83.

41. Welter, *Mind of America*, p. 332f; Holt, *Political Crisis*, pp. 58-66.

42. *New York Evening Post*, 28 October 1847, p. 1; Donovan, *Barnburners*, p. 89.

tension of an institution which is a source of insecurity and poverty in peace, and of embarrassment and danger in war." Barnburners were, however, not opposed to the Mexican War. Like their fellow Hunker Democrats, they believed "that our glorious federal institutions are capable of indefinite expansion."⁴³

Table 6

1847 – Democratic (Hunker) Address (611 lines)

General introductory remarks	14%	(85)
National Issues		
Mexican War	10%	(59)
Immigrants	3%	(16)
Banking and tariff	35%	(212)
TOTAL	47%	(287)
State Issues		
Public debt and canal policy	29%	(179)
Candidates	10%	(60)
TOTAL	39%	(239)
Resolutions (8)		
National issues		
(Mexican War)		3
State issues		5

Table 7

1847 – Democratic (Barnburner) Address (540 lines)

National Issues		
Slavery extension	51%	(275)
State Issues		
Constitution and public debt	14%	(78)

43. *Ibid.* The preceding two quotations are also from this source. Though the Barnburner stance on expansion may, at first glance, appear contradictory, Welter has shown how many Americans were able to preserve a fixed republican ideal alongside of territorial expansion (see especially pp. 7-13, 23-24). For a more complex understanding of this dilemma see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 533-537.

Internal Party Dispute
(procedural, etc.)

35% (187)

Resolutions (18)

National and state economic	5
Mexico	1
Slavery extension	6
Internal party dispute	4
Miscellaneous	2

In the aftermath of the 1846 disaster, leading Hunkers were calling for the nomination of 'new men' who were above the party's old factional disputes. These Democrats reasoned that the state's new political environment (ushered in by the new constitution) required new faces untainted by past associations. Barnburners, however, rejected this move as a transparent effort to unseat prominent Radicals such as State Comptroller Azariah Flagg (which, indeed, it was).⁴⁴ The aforementioned tables point to the significant amount of space the Barnburners devoted to these organizational and procedural disputes in their address. Nor were older economic questions neglected. Though little space was allocated to them in the address, five of the eighteen resolutions dealt with familiar economic issues such as free trade, corporate liability, internal improvements and public debt.⁴⁵ The Hunker wing of the Democracy gave even greater space to these more traditional economic questions. After a fairly conventional Democratic discussion of the banking, tariff and internal improvement issues, their address noted that, though the Polk administration had pushed through legislation in these key areas, "we must not flatter ourselves that political divisions are ended, or that the line which separates the two great political parties of our country is obliterated." Of course, it was to the Hunkers' advantage to emphasize the persistence of this "difference in principle."⁴⁶ The question was would New York's Whigs fight the divided Democracy on new sectional issues or on more familiar grounds?

Consistent with New York Whig practice, their address of 1846 stressed national issues almost exclusively (see Table 8). Treatment of slavery extension shared roughly comparable space with that ancient Whig hobbyhorse, 'executive usurpation'. Referring to Polk's war policy, the address declared that "Freemen

44. Walter L. Ferree, "The New York Democracy: Division and Reunion, 1847-1852" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1953), chaps. 2 and 3; Donovan, *Barnburners*, pp. 90-94.

45. *New York Evening Post*, 28 October 1847, p. 2; Donovan, *Barnburners*, p. 96.

46. *Albany Argus*, 7 October 1847, p. 2. The preceding quotation is also from this source.

everywhere in their struggles for Constitutional Liberty” will admonish “this alarming One-Man Power of our republic.” Moreover, the Mexican War was opposed not only for its role in slavery extension but because it would “run up an untold National Debt, and saddle our posterity with Fund Mongers, Tax-brokers, Tax gatherers, laying an excise or an impost on every thing they taste, touch or live by.” The recurrent theme of the vigilant republican voter surfaced again at the close of the address where New York was called upon to make “the One-Man Power tremble in Washington” through the ballot box.⁴⁷

Table 8

1847 – Whig Address (136 lines)

National Issues	
Mexico	20% (28)
Slavery extension	40% (55)
Executive power	39% (53)
Resolutions (4)	
National economic	1
Slavery extension	1
Candidates	2

New York Whigs were also eager to turn the slavery extension issue on the Democrats. To do so, they had to direct most of their attacks against conservative Hunkers, while convincing free soil Democrats that they were the only viable free soil alternative. Accordingly, the 1847 convention’s first resolution pronounced the Whigs’ “uncompromising hostility to the Extension of Slavery into any territory now Free.” Beneath this resolution, published in the *New York Tribune*, appeared the note that this same resolution “was submitted to the Loco-Foco [i.e., Democratic] State Convention and there shuffled upon the table by the Hunkers, who did not dare to permit a direct vote upon it.” In keeping with their balanced approach, though, the next resolution affirmed traditional economic measures as “the cardinal principles of Whig faith and action throughout the Union.”⁴⁸ Thus the Whig appeal of 1847 was based upon familiar economic issues and new sectional questions portrayed in a familiar idiom.

Consistent with their desire to punish the Hunkers both for 1846 and their tactics at the recent state party convention, the Barnburners (having not named

47. *New York Tribune*, 9 October 1847, p. 1. The preceding two quotations are also from this source.

48. *Ibid.*, The preceding two quotations are also from this source.

an alternative ticket) directed their campaign rhetoric chiefly against their fellow Democrats.⁴⁹ The overwhelming majority of lead editorials, for example, in the free soil *Evening Post* dealt with factional issues within the party⁵⁰ (see Table 9). A Hunker newspaper like the *Argus*, meanwhile, was busy (in between attacking Democratic 'bolters') developing an old anti-Whig theme. Under titles such as "The True Issue," editor Edwin Crosswell characterized Whig opposition to the Mexican War as treasonous.⁵¹ "The federalism of the Hartford convention," declared the *Argus*, "still continues to mildew and corrode" the Whig party.⁵² The Hunkers were the Whig presses' prime targets and free soil was their major weapon. While opposition to the Mexican War itself remained, the Wilmot Proviso was the main rallying cry. Wrote the *Albany Evening Journal*: "This [the Proviso] is common ground upon which Democrats and Whigs can stand shoulder to shoulder."⁵³ Such Whig appeals, or Barnburner sabotage (or both), proved to be effective; the Whigs posted a substantial statewide victory in 1847.⁵⁴

Table 9

1847 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

Albany Argus – 10: Democratic factionalism, 10: Mexican War
New York Evening Post – 21: Democratic factionalism
Albany Evening Journal – 14: Mexico and Slavery extension
New York Tribune – 8: Mexican War

The campaign of 1848 in New York was remarkably similar to that of 1847 in terms of party appeals to various issues, but the addition of a presidential race did interject a few new factors. Content analysis shows that the Democrats were increasingly consumed by intra-party factional conflict, with the Hunkers now addressing the problem openly and at some length.

49. Donovan, *Barnburners*, p. 97.

50. The *Post* seemed particularly enraged by the fact that the *Argus* had referred to the Proviso as the "Wilmot vomito" (14 October 1848, p. 2).

51. *Albany Argus*, 20 October 1847, p. 2.

52. *Ibid.*, 1 October 1847, p. 2.

53. *Albany Evening Journal*, 29 October 1847, p. 2.

54. Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), p. 152.

Table 10

1848 – Democratic (Hunker) Address (753 lines)

National Issues		
Slavery extension		23% (173)
Mexican War		23% (172)
TOTAL		46% (345)
State Issues		
Constitution		18% (135)
Internal Party Dispute		34% (259)
General Party Principles		18% (14)
Resolutions (10)		
National economic	1	
Slavery and Mexican War (and National administration)	5	
State issues	1	
Internal party disputes	3	

Table 11

1848 – Democratic (Barnburner) Address (1017 lines)

National Issues		
Slavery extension and Mexican War		46% (464)
State Issues		
Public debt		20% (201)
Internal Party Dispute		35% (352)
Resolutions (18)		
National economic	3	
Slavery extension	3	
Internal party dispute	4	
Personalities	5	
Miscellaneous	3	

New York Whigs, however, found a new national 'issue' in the career and character of their presidential candidate Zachary Taylor. In the Whig state address old economic issues were de-emphasized and the slavery extension question was pursued almost exclusively, with attempts to impugn Martin Van Buren's free soil credentials and attacks upon Lewis Cass's southern sympathies. Again, executive usurpation emerged as a major concern, but it was discussed primarily as a way to praise the limited executive function envisaged by Taylor. Leading New York Whigs (such as Thurlow Weed) hoped that the General's private opposition to slavery extension could be played up in New York, while Taylor's rather ill-defined economic views might allow him to draw wide bipartisan support.⁵⁵ Newspapers echoed this concern with personalities coupled with emphasis given to the hot Proviso issue. Free soilers were not to despair, declared Weed's *Albany Evening Journal*, "Old Zack is coming."⁵⁶

Table 12

1848 – Whig Address (296 lines)

National Issues		
M. Van Buren (past pro-slavery stance)		9% (27)
L. Cass (on Mexico, internal improvements and currency)		19% (57)
Executive power		51% (152)
Z. Taylor (character and career)		20% (60)
Resolutions (4)		
National economic (tariff and currency)	1	
Slavery extension	1	
Candidates	1	
State Candidates	1	

55. Aida D. Donald, "Prelude to Civil War: The Decline of the Whig Party in New York, 1848-1852" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1961), pp. 12-21. Horace Greely still believed that the champion of the American System, Henry Clay, would be the party's best choice.

56. *Albany Evening Journal*, 31 October 1848, p. 2.

Table 13

1848 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

Albany Argus – 10: L. Cass and Z. Taylor candidacies

New York Evening Post – 15: Free Soil

Albany Evening Journal – 8: Z. Taylor and Free Soil

New York Tribune – 5: L. Cass candidacy, 4: Free Soil

III

1849 appears to mark an important turning point in the decline of the second party system in New York or at least in the degeneration of an issue-oriented party dialogue. Engaged in sensitive negotiations to field a common ticket, both Democratic factions published only resolutions at their state conventions; detailed addresses were a thing of the past. These resolutions were mere shadows of the lengthy, thorough and polemical party addresses adopted in 1844 and 1846 (see Tables 14, 15). The Hunker resolutions, for example, waxed nostalgic in “the recollection of its [the Democracy’s] conflicts and triumphs . . . the contest with Monopoly and its audacious and corrupting auxiliary the Moneyed Power.”⁵⁷ But the party seemed to have been unable to locate worthy successors to those old struggles in the issues of the day. Here, indeed, was a party trapped in the past (to borrow Meyers’s image), denying itself any exploitation of the emotional slavery issue and incapable of fitting contemporary questions into a traditional conceptual structure.⁵⁸ Granted, one resolution lashed out against the national administration but it referred only to “The whole system of Whig measures” without specifics.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Whig state administration was attacked more for plain mismanagement than for a ‘corrupt’ political philosophy based upon ‘aristocratic’ privilege.

The Whigs did print a party address in 1849 (their last for several years to come) and, like its predecessors, it focused most of its attention upon national issues (see Table 16). On the then familiar slavery extension question, though, the Whigs directed their ire against the compromise of principles implied in the state Democracy’s reunification. Having been in control of New York for three years, the Whigs now also included an overview of the canal issue. The address admitted that under the 1846 constitution “the legislative power in regard to internal improvements is greatly restricted” but contended that “there is [still]

57. *Albany Argus*, 13 September 1849, p. 2.

58. Welter, *Mind of America*, pp. 339-340, 371-372.

59. *Albany Argus*, 13 September 1849, p. 2.

room upon this subject for the exercise of both legislative and administrative power upon a policy either liberal or narrow."⁶⁰ What was missing from the address, advocacy of traditional Whig economic measures, was relegated to the resolutions (four of which deal with the tariff question).⁶¹

Table 14

1849 – Democratic (Hunker) Resolutions (14)

National Issues	
(other state elections and past national platforms)	5
State Issues	2
Internal party dispute	
(organizational questions too)	6
Miscellaneous	1

Table 15

1849 – Democratic (Barnburner) Resolutions (13)

National Issues	
(mostly slavery extension)	7
State Issues	1
Internal Party Dispute	
(mostly organizational questions)	5

Table 16

1849 – Whig Address (315 lines)

General introductory remarks	6% (18)
National Issues	
Slavery extension and Democratic coalition	70% (222)

60. *Albany Evening Journal*, 29 September 1849, p. 2.

61. Whigs may have had difficulty finding a broad audience for their economic proposals because of the relative prosperity of the national economy at this time. Though the Northeast suffered a slight financial recession in 1847-48, generally the economic picture was bright. See Douglas C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961), pp. 208-212.

Table 16 – continued

State Issues		
Public debt and canal policy		24% (75)
Resolutions (9)		
National economic	6	
Slavery extension	2	
Miscellaneous	1	

A brief glimpse at leading state newspapers serves to underline what was suggested above, viz., the gradual reëmergence of the canal issue (at least in Whig journals) coupled with a decided lack of other issues, apart from Democratic factional reconciliation.

Table 17

1849 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

<i>Albany Argus</i> – 7: Democratic unity
<i>New York Evening Post</i> – 4: Taylor administration
<i>Albany Evening Journal</i> – 11: Democrats and canals
4: Democratic unity
<i>New York Tribune</i> – 4: Free Soil (plus 1 lengthy piece on canals)

The basic trends outlined above continued in 1850 and were advanced by serious divisions among the Whigs that finally came to a head at the party's annual state convention in Syracuse. There, the long dissatisfied conservative or 'national' element finally bolted over the tough free soil stance consistently advocated by the progressive Seward wing of the party.⁶² Conservatives felt that President Fillmore's advocacy of the Compromise measures should be solidly supported by his homestate organization, but progressives were unwilling to abandon their traditional free soil stance. Though the 'Silver Grey' (as the conservative pro-Compromise element was called) bolters did not name an alternative ticket, the division did hurt the party at the polls. Hoping to gain by the Whigs' internal problems, the reunited Democrats largely supported the Compromise. With the Whigs hamstrung over the slavery issue and the gubernatorial candidates of both parties equally supportive (at least verbally) of canal

62. Donald, "Prelude to Civil War," pp. 243-270; Robert J. Rayback, "The Silver Grey Revolt," *New York History*, 30 (1949), pp. 151-164.

expansion, the election of 1850 became a fairly tepid affair.⁶³

The state party resolutions and newspaper editorials of 1850 confirm this uninspiring picture of party conflict. New York's Democrats printed only six convention resolutions, none of which displayed the kind of issue-oriented, combative tone that had distinguished earlier party platforms (see Tables 18,19). Included was a rather unenthusiastic endorsement of the Compromise and another general condemnation of the national administration. One resolution did point to the resurfacing of an old issue in a new guise by assaulting the state Whig administration's canal policy as "unsound and lavish" and, more seriously, in "violation of the Constitution." Nonetheless, Democrats were not anti-improvement; they simply advocated (in contrast to the Whigs) "a safe and approved policy."⁶⁴ The groundwork was thus laid for the major Democratic attack upon new Whig expansion proposals in 1851.

Table 18
1850 – Democratic Resolutions (6)

National Issues	4
State Issues	1
Internal Party Unity	1

Table 19
1850 – Whig Resolutions (12)

National Issues (and traditional party principles)	8
State Issues	4

Meanwhile, the Whigs attempted to dredge up some dated economic issues (see Table 20). The party's third resolution, for instance, declared that "the interests of the whole Union demand such a revision of the Tariff of 1846 as shall afford more equal and effective Protection to American Industry."⁶⁵ Perhaps Whig leadership hoped that a return to traditional economic proposals would quell growing dissent in the party. But party newspapers like the *Evening Journal* and *Tribune* failed to follow this course and directed their attention

63. Shaw, *Erie Water West*, p. 364.

64. *New York Evening Post*, 14 September 1850, p. 2. The preceding quotation is also from this source.

65. *New York Tribune*, 30 September 1850, p. 4.

upon party factionalism and, that most controversial part of the congressional Compromise legislation, the Fugitive Slave Act. The two Democratic papers examined were similarly concerned with this feature of a compromise that their party declared had 'settled' the divisive slavery question.

Table 20

1850 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

Albany Argus – 6: Fugitive Slave law

5: Democratic unity

New York Evening Post – 9: Fugitive Slave law and Union Safety Committee

Albany Evening Journal – 16: Fugitive Slave law and Whig unity

New York Tribune – 13: Whig unity and Union Safety Committee

By 1851 in New York, leaders of both major parties were grasping desperately for state issues with which to unite their followers, in light of the apparent irrelevance of older economic questions and growing divisive agitation over the Compromise (and the Fugitive Slave Act in particular).⁶⁶ The new centrist Whig governor, Washington Hunt, latched on to the venerable canal question in an effort to unify his fragmented party and meet a growing Democratic threat.⁶⁷ Other prominent Whigs, such as Weed and James Watson Webb, backed Hunt's nine million dollar canal appropriation bill as a way to rekindle Whig fortunes.⁶⁸ A parallel search was afoot among the Democrats. John Van Buren, leader of the old Barnburner faction, arrived at a conclusion similar to Hunt's. It was vital for New York Democrats, Van Buren surmised, to abandon controversial national questions and concentrate now on state issues.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, therefore, Governor Hunt's bold 'Nine Million Bill' elicited an extremely partisan response when it was introduced into the legislature; the election of 1851 was fought primarily on this question.⁷⁰

State party resolutions reflected a resurgent interest in the canal question, but they (and newspaper editorials on the subject) also reveal how the nature of the issue had changed since the early 1840s (see Tables 21, 22). In the eyes of the Democrats, the Whigs were now simply bad managers. Through their ballots,

66. Democratic and especially Whig leaderships were concerned about the conservative 'Union Safety Committee' that had formed in New York City in reply to agitation over the Fugitive Slave Act. As a bipartisan coalition of conservatives such an organization clearly threatened the existing two-party system. See Donald, "Prelude to Civil War," pp. 272, 276-277; and Ferree, "New York Democracy," p. 350f.

67. Shaw, *Erie Water West*, pp. 364-369.

68. Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed*, p. 184; Shaw, *Erie Water West*, p. 372.

69. Ferree, "New York Democracy," p. 384.

70. Shaw, *Erie Water West*, p. 366.

voters could "rescue the public funds from their wasteful hands and thereby ensure the speedy completion of that glorious work [the Erie Canal]."71 Both Democratic and Whig newspaper editorials also played up the canal issue in its latest form with columns entitled "True Friends of the Canals — Who Are They?"72 and "The Canals and their Friends."73 Otherwise, the party resolutions and the newspapers simply restated outdated positions in empty phrases. As one student of New York politics during this period concludes tersely: "the resolutions of the conventions meant nothing."74

Table 21

1851 — Democratic Resolutions (4)

National Issues	2
State Issues (canals and finance)	1
Adopt Last Year's Resolutions	1

Table 22

1851 — Whig Resolutions (4)

State Issues (canal improvement)	2
Internal Party Unity	2

Table 23

1851 — Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

Albany Argus — 9: Canal bill

**New York Evening Post* — 6: Canal bill

Albany Evening Journal — 12: Canal bill

5: Union Safety Committee

New York Tribune — 7: Canal bill (several editorials quite lengthy)

* Indicates only 26 extant issues

71. *New York Evening Post*, 15 September 1851, p. 2. This is not to suggest, however, that the Democrats were completely united on this whole question (Shaw, p. 370).

72. *Albany Argus*, 4 October 1851, p. 2.

73. *New York Tribune*, 13 October 1851, p. 2.

74. Ferree, "New York Democracy," p. 402.

Ironically, the canal issue (or at least the Whig enlargement proposal) was snatched away from the political parties when, in the spring of 1852, the state appeals court ruled Governor Hunt's ambitious plan unconstitutional. Democrats and Whigs still both hoped to get some political mileage out of the storm that surrounded the question but, 1852 being a presidential election year, they could find refuge in other issue areas.⁷⁵

As the state party resolutions indicate and newspaper editorials especially suggest, the parties fell back on the personalities of their presidential nominees (see Tables 24-26). Only the stubborn *Albany Evening Journal* continued to see canal enlargement as "the true issue."⁷⁶ "Protection and Improvements", affirmed the *Journal*, were the real questions at stake, and the latter issue boiled down to whether the state's laborers would have public works projects to keep them employed.⁷⁷ The three other leading party papers (including even the Radical *New York Evening Post*) focused their editorial attention upon topics such as Winfield Scott's alleged nativism or Franklin Pierce's religious affiliations.⁷⁸ New York Whigs reduced their convention's positions on the tariff, public lands and internal improvements to five tiny sub-sections of a single resolution. The five resolutions adopted at the Democratic state convention were similarly unobtrusive in character; completion of the Erie Canal received only conditional support.⁷⁹ It is surely not without significance that the state platform of the Democratic party which in 1846 filled nearly one and a half eight-column pages (resplendent with lengthy historical asides, statistical tables and charts) had by 1852 been reduced to five vague resolutions that took up scarcely a quarter of a single newspaper column.

Table 24

1852 – Democratic Resolutions (5)

National Issues (and presidential ticket)	3
State Issues (and candidates)	2

75. Shaw, *Erie Water West*, pp. 376-378.

76. *Albany Evening Journal*, 12 October 1852, p. 2.

77. *Ibid.*, 29 October 1852, p. 2.

78. *Albany Argus*, 30 October, 1852, p. 2; *New York Tribune*, 12 October 1852, p.

4.

79. *New York Evening Post*, 4 September 1852, p. 2.

Table 25

1852 – Whig Resolutions (3)

National Issues
(economic, 7 sub-sections)

State Issues
(candidates only)

Table 26

1852 – Most Popular Lead Editorial Topics

Albany Argus – 10: Pierce and Scott candidacies
**New York Evening Post* – 7: Pierce and Scott candidacies
Albany Evening Journal – 8: Canal issue
New York Tribune – 10: Pierce and Scott candidacies

* Indicates only 26 extant issues

If, as Rush Welter has argued, the Civil War “was the preëminent consequence of the ideas” Americans had developed during the Middle Period, then the intellectual bankruptcy of the two-party dialogue in New York by the beginning of the 1850s clearly has a broader significance.⁸⁰ Though issue-based partisan disagreement is not the sole requisite for a healthy two-party system, its absence by the early 1850s surely contributed to the decline of that system in New York.⁸¹ The preceding overview suggests, however, that Meyers and others may have fixed somewhat prematurely the advent of a pervasive partisan consensus in New York. As we have seen, the state elections of 1846, 1847 and even 1848 (with a completely divided Democratic party) showed the major parties opposing each other on a broad spectrum of old and new issues ranging from economic policy to slavery extension.⁸² Moreover, the ways in which both new and old political questions were dealt with suggests that the Jacksonian world view still colored, indeed defined, America’s political discourse. The new state constitution may have narrowed debate on canals and the public debt but, at

80. Welter, *Mind of America*, p. 332.

81. Holt, *Political Crisis*, pp. 134-138.

82. See Joel H. Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967). Silbey shows that by 1846 party was still more important in determining congressional voting than “sectional influences” (pp. 81-82).

least up until 1849, the state parties could point to other important programmatic differences to arouse voters. Ironically, it was the constitutionally limited canal issue that was latched onto by both parties in 1851 but its revival proved to be short-lived. It was left to new or minor parties (Republican and Native American) to transform New York's party system in the wake of the sectional and cultural crises of the 1850s.⁸³

83. For a discussion of these themes see Judah B. Ginsberg, "Barnburners, Free Soilers, and the New York Republican Party," *New York History*, 57 (1976), pp. 475-500; and Donald, "Prelude to Civil War," pp. 412-416.