To be 'Read by the Whole People': Press, Party, and Public Sphere in the United States, 1789–1840

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A POWERFUL argument can be made for the proposition that the American Civil War flowed almost inevitably from the Congressional Gag Rule, which from 1836 to 1844 tabled abolitionist petitions against slavery and attempted to silence their discussion.[1] For John Quincy Adams, former president and now a member of the House of Representatives, this legislative ruling posed a fundamental threat to the American body politic. Standing on the floor of Congress in February 1837, under threat of censure for his challenge to the recently enacted Gag Rule, Adams articulated the basic connection between politics and print communications. 'The right by which the national representative holds his seat here, is of vital importance,' he declared, 'and that it may be understood, I hope that this debate will go forth and be

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1. William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume 1: Secessionists at Bay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 287–352.

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read by the whole people.'[2] Adams's appeal to the power of political reading came at a critical juncture in the history of the antebellum republic, when abolitionist initiatives began to challenge the status quo of party and slavery in and beyond the halls of Congress. Though Adams would never be fully comfortable with the abolitionist imperative, he knew that it had 'taken deep root in the soil of civil society,' and stood ready to oppose any proslavery 'attempt to abridge the right of petition.'[3] Weary after a lifetime's experience in American political life, Adams hoped that at this moment of crisis the nation's press would carry the Gag Rule debate out from the capital city to a reading and reasoning American public, informing them of the growing entanglement of the politics of slavery with questions of procedure, deliberation, and constitutional right.

Adams's assumptions about politics and the press suggest a series of questions for the historian. Was the press in both the early and antebellum republic adequate to the task of imparting sufficient political information to the American people? Did all Americans have equivalent access to newspapers in quality and variety sufficient to the deliberative requirements for effective democratic participation and thus legitimate lawmaking? What were the legacies and tendencies that made the press open and accessible, or closed and inaccessible, to the American public? How important, indeed, were the newspapers for the American political system? Quite simply, how was the press embedded in the sociology of the American political process? These were also questions with which John Quincy Adams and his father, John Adams, had long experience. These are the fundamental questions that this essay seeks to address in a review of the dynamics of party and press from the 1780s to the 1840s, with glances back to the Revolution and forward to the Civil War.

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2. *Congressional Globe, Containing Sketches of the Debates and Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Congress*, 2nd Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1837), 4:264; cited in Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 254; see also, 225–73.

3. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 12 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 9:251, 374.

John Quincy Adams had reason to be both optimistic and fearful about the reach of political communications in the late 1830s. His own positions on the press had long been marked by ambivalence. Defending the people's right to petition Congress from the strictures of the Gag Rule, he saw dark shadows looming over unhindered political communication between the people and their government. And scarred by decades of partisan strife, he was worried that 'both the ruling political parties' were waiting to pounce on him for his challenges on the House floor. He had often suffered at the hands of partisan editorial agents on both sides, and he fully expected that 'some overt act' would 'set the whole pack of their hireling presses upon me.'[4] Adams hoped that the Gag Rule debate 'would be read by the whole people,' but the subject of that debate itself—the silencing of those people's petitions—and the very structure of the press itself, threatened to undermine the political communication to which he appealed.

Political communications are an increasingly important topic among historians of the early and antebellum American republic. Until recently, political historians have treated such communication as an unproblematic given. But the attention that cultural historians have brought to language, discourse, and persuasive symbol-making has begun to reopen the question of communication for political historians, just as new understandings of the public sphere and of civil society suggest the wider dimensions of matters political in their widest sense.[5] A rapidly growing theo-

4. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 9:349.

5. Among many others, I would point to the following studies that have contributed to a renewed understanding of political communications: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991); Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Jeffrey L. Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers': Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); Andrew Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790–1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

retical approach to deliberative democracy, most recently expressed by Jürgen Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*, has developed a powerful argument about the fundamental role of communication in linking people and governance. In this synthesis, legitimate lawmaking is grounded in both a constitutionally structured governmental procedure and an open and rational discourse in the wider public sphere. Legitimacy itself thus flows from the practices of participatory deliberation linking governmental action to informed opinion, opinion shaped by the conditions of political knowledge among a broad and inclusive public. But these linkages and conditions are notoriously problematic. Paradoxically, the press itself, in its accomplishments and its failures, stands at the center of such problems. As the critical vehicle of any public communication in modern society, the press is, in Habermas's words, 'vulnerable to the repressive and exclusionary effects of unequally distributed social power, structural violence, and systematically distorted communication.'[6] An ideal of rationality and accessibility is more often than not compromised by the realities of political interest.

As his political stature was rising in the 1820s, Adams expressed

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1997); Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

6. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans., William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1996), quote from pp. 307–8; Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 345–420; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996); James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); James S. Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991); John S. Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Ingram, 'The Limits and Possibilities of Communicative Ethics for Democratic Theory,' *Political Theory* 21 (1993): 294–321; Joshua Cohen, 'Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,' in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 17–34; Bernard Malin, 'On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation,' *Political Theory* 15 (1987): 338–68.

his frustration in journal entries, writing of his enemies' use of newspapers to fill 'column upon column with everything that truth, misrepresentation, or falsehood can supply to defame and disgrace me . . . work[ing] by slander to vitiate the public opinion.' In a darker moment in the spring of 1828 he ventured the opinion that the Sedition Act of 1798 was constitutional.[7] Hints of this pessimism underlay a conversation with Lord Melville, a British minister, in London in 1817 about 'the immense, the overbearing force of public opinion' recently interposed between state and society, shaped by the press: in Melville's view, 'within the last forty years public opinion had risen up and become queen of the world; it was the dominion of the newspapers.'[8] But by 1837 Adams was more than comfortable with the idea of a deliberative public, as his father had been long ago, at the time of the Stamp Act. In his 1765 'Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,' John Adams had urged 'that the art of printing should be encouraged, and that it be cheap and easy for any person to communicate his thoughts to the public.'[9] The Adamses spoke of public opinion and the press in terms that anticipated Habermas's definition of the public sphere, one that had been coined by their contemporary, Immanuel Kant. Habermas's concept of a public sphere is derived directly from Kant's, who first conceived of a domain of the 'public use of reason' in print, deployed before a 'reading public' and mediating between the absolutist state and an emerging civil society.[10]

By the 1790s the Adamses had a passing familiarity with Kant. Fascinated with German texts after serving as secretary to his father in Europe during the Revolution, John Quincy Adams purchased a copy of the 1787 edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

7. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 6:412, 7:262, 398.
8. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 3:479–80.
9. Robert J. Taylor, Mary-Jo Kline, and Gregg L. Lint, eds., *The Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1977–), 1:121.
10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 102–17.

while ambassador to Berlin.[11] Adams may not have read Kant's classic essay on publicity, 'What is Enlightenment?,' in which Kant defined 'the public use of one's own reason' (as against a private use) as restricted to the purpose of 'addressing the entire reading public.'[12] But in January 1798 Adams reported to his father his thoughts on Kant's essay on 'Perpetual Peace,' which defined 'the formal attribute of publicness' as 'the transcendent concept of public right.'[13] In the same letter, written six months before the Sedition Act was drafted in Philadelphia, John Quincy Adams complained from Berlin that Kant's philosophy amounted to 'atheism and revolution,' and in subsequent decades, he would come to feel abused by the political press.[14]

Nevertheless, in 1837 he expressed Kantian principles of publicity on the floor of Congress in the Gag-Rule debate. He hoped that a wide and careful reading of the printed Gag Rule debates would educate the public about the threat to their reciprocal relations with their federal representatives. Print ought to allow a direct exposure to the stuff of government and governing, he believed. Accessible and diverse print allowed the individual voter to sift and interpret the information necessary for autonomous and rational political decisions. Such was the stuff of public opinion. But experience also taught Adams that editorial intervention might well 'vitiate' that public opinion; editors were the key mediators between politics and people. Indeed, Adams seems to have been concerned that the party papers might conspire in the proslavery Gag by not printing the Congressional debates. Print was thus mediated by editorial choice, but once available it was

11. Walter J. Morris, 'John Quincy Adams's German Library, with a Catalog of his German Books,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (1974): 323, 326, 328, citing JQA to John Adams, January 3, 1798, and JQA to Abigail Adams, June 11, 1798 (Adams Papers microfilm, reel 130, p. 309, and reel 133, p. 73).

12. Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Political Writings*, ed., Hans Reiss, trans., H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 55 [emphasis in original].

13. JQA to John Adams, January 3, 1798; *Kant's Political Writings*, 125.

14. JQA to John Adams, January 3, 1798; see also JQA to Abigail Adams, June 11, 1798. Walt Brown, argues in *John Adams and the American Press: Politics and Journalism at the Birth of the American Republic* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1995), 101–6, that John Adams was extremely ambivalent about the passage of the Sedition Act.

free of further mediation by local power brokers, a mediation that was the necessary consequence of the spoken word.

And what of this spoken word? If both Adamses, like Immanuel Kant, privileged print, this was still an age of oratory.[15] A sociology of political communication requires recognition that many derived their political understandings from oral encounters, rather than directly from print. The outlines of this sociology or the social geography of political communication, written and spoken, is the central concern of this essay. This is, I should stress, an exploration. By reviewing the historiography of the period's general public history against a series of quantitative overviews, I propose to test our assumptions about the availability of the press across a series of regional, partisan, and socio-economic issues. Our assumptions about the accessibility of the press vary considerably across schools of historical thought, to which I turn first, in a review of the place of communications in political history and of politics in press history. The second section of the essay explores the shape of the political press in the early republic, and the third the role of the press in the transition to the era of enduring nineteenth-century party competition that some call 'the party period.' In this part of the essay, I argue that the 1830s marked a fundamental 'general crisis' in political communications and were a critical juncture in the transition from classical public sphere to a plural marketplace of opinion and information. For much of this period measures of press and politics are perhaps impressionistic, but from 1840 forward the federal census and presidential voting

15. While Warner in *Letters of the Republic* and David Waldstreicher in *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* argue for the primacy of print in the public sphere, scholars arguing for the continuing role of speech include Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratical Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Jay Fleigelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Michael Schudson, 'Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case,' in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 143–63.

data allow a detailed, county-level analysis.[16] In the final section, a detailed examination of data from 1840 and 1844 supports the argument that this transition was fundamentally more sectional than national, and that well into the 1840s two forms of political communication transformed into two political systems were operating across the country. Voter turnout, one of the central markers of the vigor of the American party system, varied inversely with the availability of print. Voters in Northern constituencies well-supplied with print, especially in New England, did not necessarily flock to the polls, while the opposite was the case in the south. This suggests that there was still an important place for the spoken word in antebellum American political communications, given the wide regional variations in literacy and print production. Print and politics failed to function analogously from region to region, to such an extent that it seems difficult to write about a national political system. Was the press adequate to the political purposes of the American people? Was the press even necessarily an integral part of electoral politics throughout the nation? The answer to these framing questions will be ambiguous and modulated, suggesting that a more careful examination of regional patterns of print, speech, and social formation must be made to assess the shape of popular politics in the early and antebellum republic.

HISTORIOGRAPHY: SYSTEM, PERIOD, DISSENT, DISENGAGEMENT, PRESS

Just as Adams expressed his own ambivalence about the press throughout his career, one can detect similar countervailing threads of optimism and pessimism in modern historians' assessments of political communication in the early decades of the American republic. While some see a broad accessibility of print, others are more impressed by the elements of closure. Such a sim-

16. The data for 1840 and 1844 was made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, to which I am greatly obliged. For details, see below, notes 97–98.

ple dichotomy, however, is complicated by the shifting ground of historical interpretation of American politics in the decades between the era of ratification and that of the Log Cabin campaign. Once interpreted as a succession of party systems, antebellum politics has been redivided into pre-party and party periods and 'decentered' by approaches that emphasize dissent, disengagement, and the operation of a wider public sphere. Historians of politics and of the press examine the same ground without always consulting each other. A quick review of these historiographical shifts suggests that political communication should not be taken as an unproblematical given in the wider antebellum political domain.

For decades historians have been moving from more optimistic toward more pessimistic assessments of political forms in the early American republic. In the 1950s and 1960s a relatively optimistic vision prevailed. The 'realignment' synthesis posited a succession of five distinct but essentially equivalent American party systems, each opening in a period of realignment. In this view the politics—and by implication the political communications—of the First Party System, 1789–1820, was analogous to that of the Second Party System, running from roughly 1828 to 1852.[17] Modern American politics in all its forms can thus be said to have begun with the establishment of the republic. But in the 1970s scholars challenged this party system/realignment synthesis with arguments for a new chronology, that of a 'pre-party period' running into the 1830s, followed by a party period extending from the late 1830s to the 1890s. The politics of the era of the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans began to be seen as outside of an established 'two-party system,' and not meeting the basic criteria of modern politics. Richard Hofstadter argued that hostility to faction and party undermined the very 'idea of a party sys-

17. Some of the formative works in this 'realignment' school include V. O. Key, 'A Theory of Critical Elections,' *Journal of Politics* 17 (1955): 3–18; Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 125–31; Charles Sellers, 'The Equilibrium Cycle in Two-Party Politics,' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29 (1965): 16–38; and Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970).

tem,' while Ronald Formisano saw both 'anti-partyism' and deference as shaping politics well into the 1830s.[18] The emerging 'party period thesis,' developed by Richard L. McCormick, Joel Silbey, Formisano, and others, described a grand epoch of American party politics, beginning in the late 1830s and continuing to the 1890s, when the Progressive Era marked a collapse of both participation and partisanship. This long party period encompassed, in this analysis, a full integration of party, electorate, and the press. Party newspapers mobilized the faithful, who turned out in droves for torch-lit parades and elections, in a grand epoch of partisan participation.[19]

Within the consensus for a unique party period beginning in the 1830s, the question of the communicative integration of politics has produced both optimistic and pessimistic camps. Were voters truly engaged with the public issues of the day and taking part in a true deliberative process, or were they simply responding to the symbolic and persuasive rhetoric of party bosses? On the optimistic side, Richard L. McCormick, John Ashcroft, Harry

18. Richard Hofstadter, *The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Ronald P. Formisano, 'Political Character, Antipartyism, and the Second Party System,' *American Quarterly* 21 (1969): 683–709; Formisano, 'Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789–1840,' *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 473–87; Formisano, 'Federalists and Republicans: Parties, Yes—System, No,' in Paul Kleppner, et al., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 33–76; see also Lynn L. Marshall, 'The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party,' *American Historical Review* 72 (1967): 445–68.

19. Richard L. McCormick, 'The Realignment Synthesis in American History [1982],' in his *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 64–88; Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888–1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1828–1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Walter Dean Burnham's figures for high electoral turnout during this fifty-year period comprise the critical foundation of the party period thesis: Burnham, *Presidential Ballots, 1836–1896* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955). William G. Shade, 'Political Pluralism and Party Development: The Creation of a Modern Party System, 1815–1852,' in Kleppner et al., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems*, 77–112; and William N. Chambers and Philip C. Davis, 'Party, Competition, and Mass Participation: The Case of the Democratizing Party System, 1824–1852,' in Joel H. Silbey et al., eds., *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 174–97, can be seen as transitional between the 'system' and 'period' literatures.

Watson, and Michael Holt argue that the central questions of party-period legislatures were indeed salient for the electorate and shaped their affiliations.[20] On the other hand, the so-called 'ethnocultural' interpretation argued by Lee Benson, Ronald Formisano, and Robert Wiebe posits a great 'chasm' dividing electoral and legislative politics, as electorates responded to symbolic cues rather than substantive policy questions in their voting.[21] Richard D. Brown, in a book that ranges far beyond politics, notes that such a disjunction between voting and policy-making was integral to an elite republican vision, in which the people were to choose the law-makers, who in turn were trusted with policy.[22]

None of these historians, however, has ventured the sustained analysis of the newspaper press in relation to party and electorate that might provide a more definitive picture of the structure of political communications. Joel Silbey, Michael McGerr, and William Gienapp discuss the relationship between party and press in their formative studies of the party period. But because they see party and press advancing in tandem, their discussions are illustrative rather than analytical.[23] Leaving the domain of political communication relatively unexamined has had its price, however,

20. McCormick, 'The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis,' in *The Party Period and Public Policy*, 197–227; John Ashworth, *'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837–1846* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Noonday, 1990); Michael F. Holt, 'The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jackson Voting Behavior,' in his *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 151–91.

21. Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*; Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971); Formisano, 'The New Political History and the Election of 1840,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993): 661–62; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 349–52.

22. Brown, *The Strength of a People*, 204–6.

23. Silbey, *The American Political Nation*, 40, 54–62, McGerr, *The Decline of Politics*, 14–22; William Gienapp, ' "Politics Seem to Enter into Everything": Political Culture in the North, 1840–1860,' in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840–1860* (Arlington: Texas A.&M. University Press, 1982), 41–42, 61–62.

for the door has been left open to skeptical interlopers, who are even more pessimistic about the legitimacy of the political process in antebellum America.

Social historians Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, looking carefully at the newspapers of the early party period between 1840 and 1860, have recently launched an assault on the party period thesis. They argue that—contrary to the prevailing model—a large body of Americans was detached and disengaged from party politics at exactly the moment that party period historians have argued that they were locked into partisan identities that would dominate their lives for a half-century. Voters, according to Altshuler and Blumin, were bored with party struggles and distrustful of politicians; editors amplified their accounts of party fervor before elections and apologized for their partisan excesses aftewards. Highly organized parties in the North were desperate for voters, while a more inclusive southern politics functioned almost without the need for party.[24]

The emergence of this 'disengagement thesis' parallels the 'public sphere approach,' which was given focus in Jürgen Habermas's formative study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Here, historians working both with and against the terms of Habermas's analysis, have sought to explore the ways in which the wider domain of experience in the 'public sphere of civil society' provides a means of widening an understanding of the arena for politics beyond the confines of organized parties. While some work has focused on the utility of the public sphere approach to

24. Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and the Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and 'Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy,' *Journal of American History* 84 (1997): 855–85, with responses following by Harry L. Watson, Jean Harvey Baker, and Norma Basch [886–903], and a rebuttal by the authors: 'Politics, Society, and the Narrative of American Democracy' [904–9]; and Altshuler and Blumin, ' "Where is the Real America?": Politics and Popular Consciousness in the Antebellum Era,' *American Quarterly* 49 (1997): 225–67. The disengagement thesis shares some of the themes of an older critique of the Burnham turnout thesis, developed in Philip E. Converse, 'Change in the American Electorate,' in Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse, eds., *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972), 263–338.

the transitional, pre-party dimensions of political contest from the 1780s to the 1820s,[25] a larger body of literature, grafted onto well-established studies of gender, reform, and third-party politics in antebellum America, has applied the public sphere concept to the associations and discourses that expressed dissenting views and drew many of the disenfranchised into a wider antebellum politics.[26]

As both Paula Baker and Richard D. Brown have noted, this wider politics was grounded not in the imperatives of party organizations but in the salience of specific issues, which were driven by a circulation of information in the public sphere impelling Americans to demand a role in policy formation.[27] Recently, Formisano has written appreciatively of both the 'disengagement thesis' and the 'public sphere approach,' whose critiques of the limited content of partisan politics echo his long-term commitment to both the antiparty thesis and the ethnocultural argument. These interpretations, converging upon the position that parties were not meeting the wider civil needs of the public,[28] are congruent with the new approach to the public sphere ventured by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*. If the parties of the early republic expected the electorate simply to choose policymakers and then withdraw, this relationship clearly shifted in the 1830s, when informed constituencies outside the party arena demanded

25. John L. Brooke, 'Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Freemasonry and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic,' in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *The Beginnings of the 'Extended Republic': The Federalist Era* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 273–377; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 279–485.

26. This literature is discussed in Formisano, 'Party Period Revisited,' and Mark Voss-Hubbard, 'The "Third-Party Tradition" Reconsidered: Third Parties and American Public Life,' *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 93–150, with comments by Michael F. Holt and Paula Baker [151–66]. Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920,' *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 620–47; and Daniel W. Howe, 'The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System,' *Journal of American History* 77 (1991): 1216–39, are critical early statements of this approach.

27. Paula Baker, 'The Midlife Crisis of the New Political History,' *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 164; Brown, *The Strength of a People*, 206.

28. Formisano, 'The Party Period Revisited,' 112–20.

a role in policy formation and lawmaking. In this more extensive definition of a 'public sphere approach,' the topic widens from the dissenting insurgency of disenfranchised groups to the widest assessment of the configuration of the entire political process: parties, movements, and the communicative media, where public opinion coalesced and shaped both elective and legislative politics.

These competing interpretive approaches to antebellum political history—party system, party period, disengagement, dissent in public sphere—have had only a sporadic and tangential relationship with the interpretations of the communications historians who have studied the American press. But the press historians have been engaged directly with the stuff of political communication, thinking carefully about the questions of the public sphere. Their work is essential for a wider synthesis.

The history of the American press before the Civil War has been shaped more fundamentally by chronology than by interpretive school, except for the recent emergence of the problem of the public sphere. Press historians divide their topic into three broad epochs: the colonial/republican, the partisan, and the plural, each shaped by a formative crisis.[29] First, they posit a common press culture of the 'public print' running from metropolis to colonies. Rhetorically formal and even belles-lettristic, the eighteenth-century press was shaped by classical and republican assumptions about a common, virtuous attention to the polity

29. Recent studies working within this three-stage paradigm include Thomas C. Leonard, *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); John Nerone, *The Culture of the Press in the Early Republic: Cincinnati, 1793–1848* (New York: Garland, 1989); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978). Most recently, see Carole Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783–1833* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 41–68, 113–29, 141–42. For the original statements of this paradigm, see Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873); James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1923); Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York: Macmillan, 1937); and Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, A History, 1690–1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

among a class of literate male freeholders—assumptions that were confirmed and amplified during the revolutionary crisis, when the 'colonial press' was translated quite smoothly into the 'republican press' of the pre-party republic.

Second, the traditional press history proposes the emergence of the 'partisan press' in the 1790s, as the contest of Federalists and Jeffersonians within the new republic established a paradigm for dyadic print debate, crystallized in the crisis of 1798–1800, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and Jefferson's first election. From the 1790s to the 1830s the partisan press proliferated, moved beyond the consensual assumptions of the republican press to oppositional opinion structures, and appealed to wider audiences by an increasingly popular, vernacular style. If these qualities in the press suggest accessibility and openness, the gatekeeping networks of partisan editors provided powerful forces for closure, limiting both the range of information published and its deliberative quality.

Finally, the third stage in the press-history model, beginning in the 1830s but not coming to full form until the 1840s and 1850s, brought an increasingly plural press. Various elements within the expanding printing industry broke the hegemony of the party gatekeepers and experimented with a range of print offerings that supported a host of reform movements, covered police courts, and reported with increasing autonomy and detail the content of American national politics. As the volume of print grew, the diversity of available opinions and information expanded as well, presented in an increasingly stable and popular vernacular style. This pluralizing of the press required an increasingly sophisticated analysis by an ever-growing American reading public, expanded far beyond the limits of the eighteenth-century freeholders and their classical public sphere. Although the American press would never be completely 'open' in its structure and rhetoric, the basic outlines of the modern press had begun to take shape by 1860, and elements of these outlines were emerging by 1840. This plural press had its crisis in the mid-1830s, with an explosion

of efforts that would forcibly restrain the flow of new channels of information, including riots against abolitionists and their presses, mail restrictions allowed by the Jackson administration, and the Gag Rule against which John Quincy Adams struggled so mightily during his years in the House.

The three-stage model of the history of the press provides us with a point of departure, a foil for elaboration and revision in relation to the evolving paradigms in political historiography. An opening critique may be suggested at once. A model of stages and the crisis points of transition imply sweeping and comprehensive shifts in the relationship between politics and the press. Quite the opposite was the case; in fact, established practices and assumptions lingered for decades, and may still be operative today.[30] These three stages of republican, partisan, and plural presses and their intervening transitions are problems to be assessed, rather than givens to be assumed.

More importantly, an odd but interesting mismatch between the historiographies of the press and of politics may be observed, notably at each of the two transitions, a slippage shaped by their intellectual chronologies. The transition to a partisan press identified by press historians over a century ago may well have contributed to the party-system thesis among political historians. The press historians' continuing insistence on a 'partisan era' from the 1790s through the late 1830s should be particularly puzzling to party period historians; their understanding is of a sputtering, incomplete structure of partisanship followed by the emergence of a true, national, two-party system just as this partisan press gave way to a plural press.[31]

Two solutions to this conundrum have emerged in recent interpretation. On the one hand, party may indeed have been important in the early republic, growing in symbiosis with an explosion of print communication. Such is the argument of a group of

30. John Nerone, 'Newspapers and the Public Sphere,' paper presented at the Clark University–American Antiquarian Society Seminar in American History, Spring 1997.

31. Michael Schudson has wrestled with this ambiguity in *The Good Citizen*, 90–132.

young historians publishing over the past decade, in self-conscious critique of the party period thesis. Richard John laid the groundwork in *Spreading the News*, describing how the federally sponsored postal system gave preference to newspapers, encouraging their nationwide circulation and thus the emergence of a national public sphere in the 1790s. Andrew Robertson has proposed that by 1810 there were fundamental shifts in editors' rhetorical strategies as they began to engage wider audiences. David Waldstreicher has argued, in his *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, that paradoxically newspapers both shaped an Andersonian 'imagined community' in the new nation, and in their partisanship from the 1790s shaped widely diffused competing definitions of national communities. Most recently, Jeffrey Pasley's *'The Tyranny of Printers'* carefully examines the political editors whose labor shaped this fusion of politics and print, especially the generation of young men radicalized by the Sedition Act of 1798.[32]

These historians, the first to take political communications seriously, seek to restore partisanship to the first party era, moving the origins of popular American politics back from the age of Jackson to the early republic. A second solution, offered by historians of communications, continues to propose a pivotal transition in the 1830s. Here the press history again seems to anticipate political history. The explosive modernization of press technology and the consequent proliferation of an increasing variety of magazines and newspapers attracted considerable attention among communications historians in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably Thomas Leonard, Michael Schudson, and Dan Shiller, and their work on this pluralized press provides a ground for the emerging understanding of 'disengagement' and 'public sphere dissent' in antebellum political history. The emergence of a diverse market

32. John, *Spreading the News*; Robertson, *The Language of Democracy*; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers'*. See also Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Streets: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy*, 386-485; David Waldstreicher and Stephen R. Grossbart, 'Abraham Bishop's Vocation: or, The Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (1998): 617–57.

in print might have allowed Americans to imagine new and different visions of their world, visions that could not be contained within a framework of party. However, the press was not a zero-sum game, but additive. As John Nerone has argued, the partisan affiliations of much of the press across the country did not disappear, but followed both older and newer channels. Nonetheless, party politics now shared the public stage with a host of new priorities newly given voice.[33]

This essay, then, is offered both as an exploratory sketch of the changing shape of political communications from the 1780s to the 1840s and an assessment of historians' competing interpretations of this epoch. I limit myself here to a search for broad patterns, sketching an overview of the changing relationship between political action and the world of print. I propose a 'general crisis' in political communications in the 1830s, but I leave room for manifestations of 'party period,' 'disengagement,' 'dissent,' early partisanship, and even 'pre-party politics.' This balancing act is achieved by a close attention to chronology, but an even closer attention to region and section. The configuration of party, press, public sphere, and popular audience changed in very different ways and at very different rates in the various regions making up the antebellum United States, so much so that one has to ask whether the nation was comprised of fundamentally different political systems.

PARTY AND PRINT IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

The newspapers of 1787, in the era of the ratification of the federal constitution, were a compound of the frameworks and departures of the eighteenth-century press. Two of these require our particular attention. Eighteenth-century colonial newspapers

33. Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming-of-Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1–31, 65–79; Leonard, *The Power of the Press*, 54–96; Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 12–75; Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 12–60; John Nerone, 'The Mythology of the Penny Press,' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (1987): 377–404.

stood on a continuum between what might be called the 'court paper' and the 'country paper,' a continuum that shaped the emergence of the partisan press in the 1790s. The 'court paper' was the newspaper functioning as a source of sanctioned information, with its content approved and printed 'by authority.' John Campbell's *Boston Newsletter* was the exemplar of the court paper, in which the printer saw himself supplying a service to the mercantile community as an extension to his provincially sanctioned role as printer—and often postmaster—and deferred to the interest of the colonial governor whose printing contracts provided the key to the profits of the press office.[34] At the opposite extreme stood the 'country paper,' playing a central part in the Whig ideal of a vigilant, jealous people monitoring and limiting the reach of the state. The printer in the country-Whig ideal bore a public responsibility to provide a forum for civil debate, rather than simply reprinting commercial news and imperial edicts, and self-consciously advanced the ideal of the liberty of the press. Here lay complications: was the press free to publish what the printer wanted, or was the printer obliged to print freely whatever he was offered? What if the press printed something that those in government found libelous, even if true? From these questions rolled the issue of seditious libel, the charges that shut down Benjamin Harris's *Publick Occurrences* in 1690 and from which James Peter Zenger was successfully defended in 1735.[35] By the 1760s, after

34. Charles E. Clark, 'Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press,' in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, Vol. 1, Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 347–65; *The Public Prints: The Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665–1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 77–102, 120–21; William David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Early American Press, 1690–1783* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 17–22.

35. Clark, *The Public Prints*, 71–73; Sloan and Williams, *The Early American Press*, 1–10; 81–90; Jeffrey A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 17–73; Richard Buel, Jr., 'Freedom of the Press in Revolutionary America: The Evolution of Libertarianism, 1760–1820,' in Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1980), 59–98; Leonard W. Levy, *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

forty years of debate over war, religion, and money in the Boston newspapers, John Adams saw the free press as a 'sacred' conduit of political information, vital to the wellbeing of a people threatened with tyranny. This oppositional model of the press was crucial in mobilizing the newspapers of colonial seaport to resist the Stamp Act, the Townshend Act, and eventually the Coercive Acts.[36]

The Revolution brought important changes to the shape of the American press. First, the need to reach the people meant that the press had to expand its range; by the end of the Revolution and more obviously by the ratification years, newspapers had spread beyond the confines of the old seaport towns into interior locations. In this decade and a half the American press more than doubled its circulation per free population. (See Tables 1–3.) Reach and range involved style as much as volume; modes of deliberative debate were amplified, if not set aside, by the need to advance the national cause through pronouncement and serial narrative, building an imagined community of Americans through a political reading that was, as Waldstreicher has put it, a 'ritual of assent.'[37]

However, if the press was more accessible, it also had numerous dimensions of closure. The special conditions of revolutionary crisis and nation-building required the suppression of alternative voices; the idealized open press that advanced resistance to British policy was closed to Loyalist argument.[38] As sovereignty shifted in 1776 from empire to states in continental confederation, there was a subtle reversal, as a 'country-Whig' press standing in opposition to tyrants assumed, without much difficulty, the role of the 'court press,' supporting and supported by the constituted authorities. In the eighteenth-century classical model, the

36. Stephen Botein, 'Printers and the American Revolution,' in Bailyn and Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, 11–58; Sloan and Williams, *The Early American Press*, 123–70; Adams cited in Buel, 'Freedom of the Press,' 59.

37. Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 17–52. See also Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 1–35; and Richard L. Merritt, *Symbols of American Community, 1735–1775* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966).

38. Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 18–52; Buel, 'Freedom of the Press,' 76–82; Botein, 'Printers and the American Revolution,' 23–40.

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED INCREASE IN NEWSPAPERS, 1760–1860

	Total Newspapers	*Total Increase*	*Annual Increase*
1760	18		
1775	37	19 = 105%	1.26/yr = 7.0%/yr
1790	96	59 = 159%	3.93/yr = 10.6%/yr
1800	234	138 = 143%	13.80/yr = 14.4%/yr
1810	366	132 = 56%	13.20/yr = 5.6%/yr
1828	861	495 = 135%	27.50/yr = 7.5%/yr
1840	1404	543 = 63%	45.25/yr = 5.2%/yr
1850	2302	901 = 64%	90.1/yr = 6.4%/yr
1860	3343	1041 = 45%	104.1/yr = 4.5%/yr

TABLE 2

ESTIMATED DECREASE IN RATIO OF FREE POPULATION PER NEWSPAPER, 1760–1860

	*Free Population**	*Free Population/ Newspaper*	*Total Decrease %*	*Annual Decrease %*
1760	1270	70555		
1775	2100	56756	-13799 = -19%	-920/yr = -1.3%/yr
1790	3232	33667	-23089 = -41%	-1539/yr = -2.7%/yr
1800	4403	18816	-14851 = -44%	-1485/yr = -4.4%/yr
1810	6048	16524	-2292 = -12%	-229/yr = -1.2%/yr
1828	10845	12596	-3928 = -23%	-210/yr = -1.3%/yr
1840	14575	10381	-2115 = -18%	-175/yr = -1.4%/yr
1850	19988	8683	-1698 = -16%	-170/yr = -1.6%/yr
1860	27489	8223	-460 = -5%	-46/yr = -.5%/yr

**expressed in 1000s* SOURCES: See Table 3.

TABLE 3

ESTIMATED INCREASE IN CIRCULATION, 1760–1860

	Total Papers	*Total Circ.*#*	*Free Pop.**	*Circulation /Free Pop.*	*Total Increase*	*Annual Increase*
1760	18	468	1270	.4		
1775	37	962	2100	.5	.1 25%	.007 1.7%
1790	96	3975	3232	1.2	.7 140%	.046 9.2%
1800	234	12500	4403	2.8	1.6 133%	.10 13.3%
1810	366	24577	6048	4.1	1.3 46%	.13 4.6%
1828	861	68118	10845	6.3	2.2 54%	.12 2.9%
1840	1404	147500	14575	10.1	3.8 60%	.32 5.1%
1850	2302	388596	19988	19.4	9.3 92%	.93 9.2%
1860	3343	765771	27489	27.8	8.4 43%	.83 42%

**expressed in 1000s   # Circulation = estimated copies per year*

SOURCES AND ASSUMPTIONS FOR CIRCULATION ESTIMATES:
1760, 1775: calculated at 500 copies per issue
1790–1840: from Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information*, 21
1850, 1860: calculated from circulation figures in Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 772

SOURCES FOR NEWSPAPERS TOTALS, TABLES 1–3:
1760: Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 711 [n=18]
1775: Lester J. Cappon, *Atlas of Early American History: The Revolutionary Era, 1760–1790* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 34 [n=37]
1790: North, *Century of Population Growth*, 32–36 [n=96]
1800: Lee, *The Daily Newspaper*, 711 [n=234]
1810, 1828, 1840: S.N.D. North, *History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States . . .* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 47
1850, 1860: Hudson, *Journalism in America*, 771

printers in the resulting 'republican press' would seek a harmony and consensus of which their 'country' antecedents could only dream as they battled imperial tyrants.

It was in this spirit that the American press entered the era of the new republic. It played a vital role in constitutional debate beginning in September 1787, as the printers in their much noted zeal for the federal Constitution were as subversive of the states as they had been of the empire. If they fulfilled their obligations to open debate by printing Anti-Federalist opinion, the overwhelming preponderance of sentiment among the printers was in

favor of the commercial protections of the new Constitution, and they gave precedence at every turn to the Federalist vision. They were supported in this, during the week after the Federalist celebrations of the new national Constitution, by a New York crowd that smashed the office of the *New York Journal*, after its editor, Thomas Greenleaf, persisted in his Anti-Federalism.[39]

The model of the eighteenth-century court paper, with its implications for closure in the press, would powerfully shape the press politics of the 1790s and would echo down into the nineteenth century. But its clash with fundamental new departures in the 1790s led directly to a pivotal crisis, the first of two confrontations between opposing trajectories toward closure and accessibility. The Sedition Act of 1798, followed by the Jeffersonian victory of 1800, marked the emergence of the partisan press, just as riots and edicts in the 1830s would confront the emergence of the plural press. The latter transition may well have been more decisive than the former.

The first partisan papers of the 1790s are best seen as an evolving blend of court and factional press, supported by and speaking for great men in government as they moved from ostensible unity to outright contest. John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, a court paper, was established in New York in 1789. Its intent was 'To hold up the people's own government, in a favorable point of light.' As the sanctioned administration paper, Fenno hoped to gain subscriptions throughout the country; his paper would be considered the source of 'correct thinking' among pro-administration editors everywhere. Though he never received the government salary that he hoped for, Fenno was supported in the form of governmental printing orders from both Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. In the summer of 1790 he went

39. William H. Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 26–28; Nerone, *Violence Against the Press*, 60–63. Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), discusses Anti-Federalist conceptions of the public sphere and their efforts to challenge Federalist preeminence in the press: 19–50, 104–6, 111–20, 122–24.

so far as to announce that he printed laws and proclamations 'By Authority,' ironically by virtue of Jefferson's contract.[40] But by the time the government moved to Philadelphia, Fenno's Federalist orientation led Jefferson to cast about for another organ and to establish his clerk Philip Freneau as the editor of the oppositional *National Gazette*. From 1791 to 1793, then, political opinion was dyadically represented in the battle of the two *Gazettes*, both aimed at a sophisticated national audience.[41] After the collapse of Freneau's *Gazette*, Benjamin Franklin Bache took up the emerging Jeffersonian cause in the Philadelphia *Aurora*, battling Fenno and the Federalists in print and in the streets until both editors were dead of yellow fever by 1798.

With the debate over Jay's treaty and the 1796 election, oppositional papers began to emerge in other seaports. These included Thomas Adams's Boston *Independent Chronicle* and Thomas Greenleaf's New York *Argus*, augmented by a few scattered papers in smaller places, such as, Bennington, Vermont, New London, Connecticut, and Sunbury, Pennsylvania.[42] But these were papers in the country mode, standing in opposition to an administration. These were not party papers. There was no party as such, with an organization, a platform, and recognized candidates to support, unless one were to count the Democratic Societies that sprang up briefly in 1793, in which roughly thirty Republican editors were members.[43] It was these editors whom the Federalists attempted to silence by popular violence and then of the Sedition Act of 1798, in an effort to restore the closure of the court press, i.e., printing in support of government.[44]

40. Pasley, '*The Tyranny of Printers*,' 57, 61; *Gazette of the United States* (New York), April 7–Sept. 15, 1790 [various issues]; see also Mar. 3, 1790.

41. Pasley, '*The Tyranny of Printers*,' 48–78, provides the most detailed account. See also the older accounts in Culver H. Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage: The American Government's Uses of Newspapers, 1789–1875* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 12–23; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1969), 6–11.

42. Mott, *American Journalism*, 127–34.

43. Stewart, *The Opposition Press*, 648–49.

44. James M. Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Acts and American Civil*

The opposition press that the Federalists assaulted with the Sedition Act was only a scattered, emergent forum, an eighteenth-century 'country' press that was a vehicle of annoying opinion and possible libel but was not immediately the agent of organized party. Thus, on election day in Philadelphia in 1796, Benjamin Bache published slates suggested by various ward and county meetings, but did not make an editorial appeal to the voters; it was only with the fall 1797 returns that he identified elected representatives as 'Democratic-Republicans' in the *Aurora*.[45] Ironically, it was the Alien and Sedition Acts, by energizing Republican electoral organization, that began to achieve what the Federalists had feared: an accelerating linkage of the press with party, driven—as Pasley has demonstrated—by the ambitions and idealism of a rising generation of political editors.[46] The transformation can be followed in the pages of the *Aurora*. Bache was imprisoned under the Sedition Act and then died in the fall of 1798; October 1799 was the first time that the editors of his *Aurora* printed comprehensive lists of opposing candidates. Earlier, the paper simply had printed slates recommended by committees, but in 1799 this cover was dispensed with in calling upon the voters to 'Take your Choice! . . . Take Notice! . . . Take Care! . . . [and] Take Advice'; 'look well to your tickets,' 'boxes,' 'tallies,' and 'returns.' It was 'Now or Never.'[47] These exhortations marked the first stage of the transformation of an eigh-

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Liberties (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956); Stewart, *The Opposition Press*, 466–72; Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, 102–21; Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom*, critiques Leonard Levy's analysis originally presented in *Legacy of Suppression*. John Nerone sets the Sedition Act in the wider context of political violence in the 1790s in *Violence Against the Press*, 63–71. For the most recent and authoritative accounts of the press in the era of the Sedition Act, see Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 105–95, and Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997).

45. *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), October 11, 13, 1796; October 12, 1797; Harry M. Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790–1801* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1950), 176–80. For a similar assessment of the pre-1798 Republican press, see Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 106–18.

46. Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 124–228.

47. *Aurora and General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), October 8, 1799.

ELECTION.

TO THE ELECTORS OF PENNSYLVANIA,

Beware.—The partisans of ross have secretly projected a plan, on which their last hopes are fixed:—a short space of time before the election, they intend circulating a report in the counties more remote to the city, that Mr. M'Kean is dead of the yellow fever; and prompt the republicans to take up Gen. Muhlenburg, who by such a division secure the election of Ross—It is hoped the republicans will be aware of this deception. Our pretended Feds often hang themselves with their own-tether.

Take Your Choice.

Thomas M'Kean,

1. A devout Christian
2. A steady Patriot of 1776
3. A true American
4. A Republican
5. A lover of Peace
6. An experienced Magistrate
7. An afferter of the Laws
8. An admirer of the militia
9. An enemy to oppreffive taxation
10. A fupporter of the trial by Jury and the freedom of the Prefs
11. An honest man
12. A friend to the poor.

Or, James Rofs.

1. An avowed Deist
2. A trimming Politician of 1794.
3. A British Partizan
4. A Monarchist
5. An advocate for War.
6. A litigious Attorney
7. A fomenter of the Western Insurrection
8. A friend to standing armies
9. A promoter of the Stamp act, Excife laws, and Land Tax
10. A patron of the Alien and Sedition Bills
11. A Land Jobber
12. An Ufurer

Take Notice!

Who are the Friends of Thomas M'Kean,

1. Old Whigs
2. Staunch Republicans
3. Independent Americans.

and who are the Friends of James Ross.

1. Old Tories
2. Inveterate aristocrats
3. Office-holders or Office-hunters

Take Care!

Thomas M'Kean's election is sure, and

1. If all true Republicans turn out and vote
2. If the Republicans are firm on the ground of election
3. If there is no foul play in the Election

James Ross's election will be sure.

1. If the Republicans keep at home
2. If the Republicans are negligent or timid on the ground of Election
3. If Election frauds are not detected and prevented.

Take Advice!

1. *LOOK WELL TO YOUR TICKETS:*
2. *LOOK WELL TO YOUR BOXES:*
3. *LOOK WELL TO YOUR TALLIES:*
4. *LOOK WELL TO YOUR RETURNS.*

Now or Never.

Fig. 1. The Philadelphia *Aurora*, the country's banner paper for the emerging Democratic-Republican Party, published its first direct partisan exhortation to the party electorate on the eve of the state election, October 8, 1799. American Antiquarian Society.

teenth-century opposition country press into a nineteenth-century party press, a beginning that advanced with the Republican mobilization for the presidential election of 1800 (fig. 1).

The emergence of press partisanship was one fundamental step toward press accessibility. So too were changes in its very scale and distribution. An aggregate view of the press across the coun-

try, looking at the number of newspapers as sites of editorial activity, rough circulation estimates, and the relationship of these numbers to a rapidly growing population, suggests the extent and the limits of the growth in accessibility in political communications in the 1790s.

Protected by the First Amendment, as ratified by 1791, and its distribution facilitated by the Post Office Act of 1792, which gave newspapers preferential rates in the mails, the press expanded mightily in the 1790s.[48] Measured in terms of the number of newspapers (which expanded in a decade from roughly 96 to at least 234), the ratio of free population per newspaper, and the ratio of copies printed per free population, the 1790s were marked by the *greatest rate of growth* in the volume of an American press during the entire century in any decade before the Civil War.[49] (See Tables 1–3.) The majority of these new papers appeared in the last two or three years of the decade, as political conflict intensified, both by the rising opposition and by papers supported by an expanded Federalist patronage legislated in 1799.[50] Jeffrey Pasley has determined that the number of papers founded per year rose from about twenty per year between 1783 and 1791 to about fifty a year between 1796 and 1800, spiking to seventy new newspapers in 1801 alone. This surge in new papers was a response to the Sedition Act, Pasley finds, as forty-four of the eighty-one Republicans papers published in 1800 had been founded since June 1798.[51] The result of this press mobilization was that on the eve of the 1800 election there were roughly six Republican papers for every ten Federalist papers. (See Table 5.) The newer Republican papers were more likely to be very strongly committed to

48. John, *Spreading the News*, 30–63; Kielbowitz, *News in the Mail*, 31–56.

49. This finding is at variance with earlier analyses but agrees with the recent analysis by Pasley. The issue here is not the scale of print volume, but the rate of change. Compare Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 38; Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information*, 58–59; and Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 33, 405.

50. Smith, *Press, Politics and Patronage*, 42.

51. Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 126–75, 404, 407–9; see also Smith, *Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 41–42; Stewart, *Opposition Press*, 867–93; Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 24–38.

their views, while the majority of the Federalist papers were more moderate and centrist in tone, an expression of the Federalist assumption that they represented the people at large, rather than a factional or ideological interest.[52]

The impressive overall growth in the scale of print volume was matched by a formative decentralization of the press. The colonial press had been confined to the seaport towns and during the Revolution its dispersion was a result of British occupation of those cities; in wartime it was even more closely tied to the fortunes of embattled revolutionary state governments. In 1790, still reflecting colonial patterns, 49 percent of American newspapers were produced in leading towns, usually coastal capitals; by 1800 this figure was down to 29 percent, where it would remain until a re-urbanizing of the press began in the 1830s. (See Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, 9a.) This decentralization of the press in the 1790s was of real importance. Newspapers became more accessible to a county-centered rural audience, bringing state and national information to them, and providing a minimal forum for local debate and electioneering.

The explosive expansion of press volume and distribution in the 1790s thus formatively reshaped public communications in the new republic. But was this a national deliberative public sphere? Were voters throughout the nation offered equivalent diversity of opinion? Obviously not. Indeed, rather than a pervasive partisanship, it is regionalism that stands out. These changes unfolded within a broader regional pattern dividing northern from southern states, and Mid-Atlantic from all other regions. As during the Revolution, the New England and the Mid-Atlantic states were increasingly well-supplied with newspapers relative to free population in 1790 and 1800, while the South lagged behind. In the northern states in 1800 there was typically one newspaper per fifteen to eighteen thousand free population; in the South there

52. David H. Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 131; Pasley, *'The Tyranny of Printers,'* 105–75, 229–57.

TABLE 4

PRESS VOLUME AND CENTRALIZATION BY STATE AND REGION, 1790

	Total News-papers	*Free Population /Paper*	*Papers in leading town*	
Maine	2	48,000	2	100%
Vermont	2	42,000	1	50%
New Hampshire	6	**24,000**	2	**33%**
Massachusetts	12	**32,000**	5	**42%**
Connecticut	9	**26,000**	2	**22%**
Rhode Island	4	**17,000**	2	50%
NEW ENGLAND	35	**29,000**	14	**40%**
New York	13	**25,000**	7	54%
Pennsylvania	20	**21,000**	12	60%
New Jersey	2	86,000	1	50%
MID-ATLANTIC	35	**26,000**	20	57%
Maryland	9	**24,000**	2	**22%**
Delaware	2	**25,000**	2	100%
Virginia	9	51,000	3	**33%**
No. Carolina	1	293,000	1	100%
So. Carolina	2	71,000	2	100%
Georgia	2	**27,000**	1	50%
Kentucky	1	62,000	1	100%
Tennessee	0	—		—
SOUTH	26	50,000	12	46%
United States	96	**34,000**	46	**48%**

Bold = *State or region at or better than national average*

"Papers in leading town": a measure of press centralization

SOURCES: North, *A Century of Population Growth*, 32–36; 1790 Federal Census

might be one paper for every twenty-seven thousand, and this limited southern press was often located (in the colonial pattern) in a capital town. The spread of newspapers into the interior towns was especially notable in the Mid-Atlantic: New York, and Pennsylvania stand out as making sharp breaks with the colonial pattern. While in the ensuing decades the southern press would become more decentralized, its relative lower volume per free population would be a fixture for the next forty years, with powerful implications for the relationship of the press to southern politics.

Local partisan competition did not necessarily follow expansion. By 1800 American newspapers had grown in numbers and were being published outside the seaport towns, but they were not yet facing local competition. Only four states had equal numbers of newspapers affiliated with Federalists and the Republicans. (See Table 5.) This political segmentation reached into the towns, as well, for very few localities had competitive presses in 1800. For example, in Massachusetts in 1800 only Boston, Salem, and Worcester had competing papers, while ten other towns had a single local paper. In New York, only New York City and Albany had competing papers, with twenty other towns having only a single paper, only one of which was Republican. In these circumstances, competing political views had to be imported from other places, a luxury only accessible to the relatively prosperous gentry. Only Pennsylvania—the hinge of the 1800 election—stands out as having a balanced state-wide press, with competing papers in eight out of seventeen towns with newspapers.[53] And only Pennsylvania—so often correctly noted as the exemplar of American partisanship—had both an above average volume of newspapers per population *and* a statewide balance between Federalist and Republican papers.

This regional picture shifted slightly and perhaps intensified by 1810, after a decade of ebb and flow of partisanship, as Jefferson and James Madison basked in their successes, especially the

53. Data from Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*, 413–23.

TABLE 5

PRESS VOLUME, CENTRALIZATION, AND PARTISANSHIP BY STATE AND REGION IN 1800

	Total News-papers (Lee)	*Free Pop. / Paper*	*Total News-papers (Fischer)*	*Papers in leading town #*		*Party-identified newspapers*	
						Fed:	*Rep:*
Maine	5	30,000	4	3	75%	4	0
Vermont	7	22,000	5	1	**20%**	3	1
New Hampshire	12	**15,000**	11	3	**27%**	9	1
Massachusetts	21	20,000	19	5	**26%**	13	5
Connecticut	18	**14,000**	16	3	**19%**	13	3
Rhode Island	7	**10,000**	7	4	75%	5	2
NEW ENGLAND	70	**18,000**	62	19	31%	47	12
New York	37	**15,000**	30	7	**23%**	16	5
Pennsylvania	44	**14,000**	34	7	**20%**	**13**	**13**
New Jersey	7	28,000	6	2	33%	**3**	**3**
MID-ATLANTIC	88	**15,000**	70	16	**23%**	32	21
Dist. of Columbia	7	**1,000**					
Ohio	4	**13,000**	2	1	50%	1	0
Maryland	10	23,000	14	4	**28%**	**5**	**7**
Delaware	2	29,000	4	2	50%	1	2
Virginia	26	21,000	21	4	**19%**	6	11
No. Carolina	8	43,000	10	3	30%	5	1
So. Carolina	7	29,000	6	4	66%	**3**	**3**
Georgia	5	21,000	5	2	40%	**2**	**2**
Kentucky	4	45,000	4	2	50%	0	4
Tennessee	2	46,000	2	1	50%	0	1
Mississippi	1	**6,000**	1	1	100%	1	0
CORE SOUTH	65	27,000	67	23	34%	23	31
United States	234	**19,000**	201	59	**29%**	103	64

Bold = *State or region at or better than national average*
 # For 1800 the column of "Papers in leading town" is calculated from Fischer's list, which includes a total of 201 rather than 234 papers

SOURCES: Total newspapers by state: Lee, *Daily Newspaper*, 711
Party identification and location: David H. Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 131 (Note: Jeffrey Pasley has identified 81 Republican papers in publication in 1800; without a comparable state-by-state re-analysis of the Federalist papers, I have decided to use Fisher's data here. See *'The Tyranny of Printers': Newspaper Politics in the Early Republic* [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001], 407–9.)
Population: 1800 Federal Census

Louisiana Purchase, and then faced an explosion of Federalist opposition throughout the North after the Embargo of 1807. The general level of press volume grew at this time, but at a slower pace than during the formative 1790s. (See Tables 1–3.) Developments reflected the reversal of political fortunes from the 1790s, as Jefferson used the powers of patronage voted by the Federalists in 1799 to support Republican papers, and Federalists in turn sponsored stridently partisan papers to challenge the Republicans.[54] The result was a narrowing, but not a reversing of the gap in the number of papers identified with Federalists and Republicans. (See Table 6.) The most dramatic changes came in New York, followed by Vermont, Maryland, and Rhode Island, where the growth of Federalist or Republican papers brought these four states into roughly the same profile of press volume and partisan competition as Pennsylvania. The example of New York was particularly striking; in 1800 only two New York counties had had competing presses, compared to nineteen counties in 1810.

But if by 1810 the greater part of the mid-Atlantic region had developed a dynamic and competitive partisan press, other regions had not. With the exceptions of Vermont and Rhode Island, New England remained dominated by a Federalist press, and the failure of Republican papers to develop brought a temporary regional decline in the ratio of newspapers to population. Except for Maryland, on the edge of the mid-Atlantic, and Georgia, the southern states continued to have relatively few papers per free population. As New England was dominated by a Federalist press, the south was dominated by a Republican press. But in three states, Delaware, Virginia, and South Carolina, even the number of Republican papers fell relative to free population. In Virginia a striking number of Jeffersonian papers founded in the late 1790s—the Fredericksburg *Genius of Liberty*, the Winchester *Triumph of Liberty*, and the Staunton *Scourge of Aristocracy*—had

54. Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*, 129–49; Smith, *Press, Patronage, and Party*, 39–48.

TABLE 6

PRESS VOLUME, CENTRALIZATION, AND PARTISAN COMPETITION BY STATE AND REGION, 1810

	Total News-papers	*Free Pop. / Paper*	*Papers in leading town #*		*Party-identified newspapers Fed:*	*Rep:*
Maine	8	28,000	3	37%	5	3
Vermont	15	**14,000**	3	**20%**	**9**	**6**
New Hampshire	12	18,000	3	**25%**	8	2
Massachusetts	24	19,000	7	**29%**	15	8
Connecticut	12	22,000	3	**25%**	10	1
Rhode Island	7	**11,000**	3	42%	**4**	**3**
NEW ENGLAND	78	19,000	22	**28%**	51	23
New York	67	**14,000**	14	**20%**	**29**	**27**
Pennsylvania	73	**11,000**	20	**27%**	**33**	**28**
New Jersey	8	29,000	2	**25%**	3	5
MID-ATLANTIC	148	**13,000**	36	**24%**	**65**	**60**
Dist. of Col.	6	**3,000**	6	100%	2	3
Ohio	14	**16,000**	4	**28%**	3	8
Indiana	1	**12,000**	1	100%		
Michigan	1	**5,000**	1	100%		
MID-WEST	16	**15,000**	6	37%	3	8
Maryland	21	**13,000**	11	52%	**9**	**11**
Delaware	3	23,000	3	100%	3	0
Virginia	23	25,000	3	**13%**	7	15
No. Carolina	10	39,000	3	**30%**	5	3
So. Carolina	10	22,000	5	50%	**4**	**4**
Georgia	13	**11,000**	4	**30%**	3	7
Kentucky	17	19,000	4	**23%**	2	14
Tennessee	6	36,000	2	33%	1	5
Mississippi	4	**6,000**	4	100%	1	1
CORE-SOUTH	107	21,000	39	36%	35	60
Louisiana	10	**4,000**	10	100%	5	1
Missouri	1	17,000	1	100%		
LOUISIANA PUR.	11	53,000	11	100%		
United States	366	**16,000**	117	**31%**	**161**	**155**

Bold = *State or region at or better than national average*

SOURCES: North, *History and Present Condition*, 38–44
1810 Federal Census

disappeared by 1803. An energetic partisan press had only limited purposes here: with Federalist aristocracy successfully 'scourged' and Jeffersonian liberty triumphant, that press faded away.[55]

These variations in the quantity and distribution of the press overlapped with important qualitative distinctions in political communication. Recently, historians have suggested that shifts in language and rhetorical form marked the transition of the press from republican consensus to partisan contest during the early republic. Andrew Robertson has argued that the 1800 election saw the emergence of a 'hortatory style of political rhetoric' in the press, in which appeals to the people to act in the political arena were couched in an increasingly informal, popular style, drawing its forms from the emerging commercial advertising printed on the outer sheets of the newspapers. Looking at speech, rather than newsprint, Kenneth Cmiel finds a similar transition but places it later. Both Robertson and Waldstreicher emphasize the emergence of new forms of political expression in print at 1800, but Cmiel's argument is more consonant with a longer party period approach. Cmiel describes a transition from a classical mode of rational discourse and debate, closed to non-elite audiences, to a boisterous, popular style, sacrificing deliberative depth for populist impact that he sees entering all domains of language by the 1830s.[56]

Here there may have been significant regional variations. Robertson suggests that the southern press maintained a laudatory rhetoric, focusing on the virtues of candidates, officeholders, and electorate at large, down to the Civil War, and never made the transition to the populist, hortatory style of partisan rhetoric

55. Clarence S. Brigham, *The History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690–1820* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1947), 2:1114, 1156–57, 1165.

56. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy*, 36ff; Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 23–93; and Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*, 129–48. See also Thomas Gustafson, *Representative Words: Politics, Literature, and the American Language, 1776–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 301–99; and Michael Schudson, 'Toward a Comparative History of Political Communication,' *Comparative Social Research* 11 (1989): 151–63.

that dominated northern papers of all persuasions after 1800.[57] The agents behind these rhetorical strategies were the editors, and Pasley has demonstrated conclusively that two different styles of editorship prevailed North and South. In the northern states, newspapers increasingly were in the hands of young men of humble origins, with common school education but not classical training, men who saw political publication as a livelihood and an avenue to respectability. Southern editors were far more likely to be gentlemen of classical education, who were far less likely to inject a populist style into the public prints.[58] Such a sectional difference in editorial style was an essential corollary for the sectional differences in press volume. A large amount of print reached a large potential audience, an audience potentially separated from the traditional channels of local politics, the traditional dialogue between elites and electorates that Alan Tully has discussed in terms of an 'accessible oligarchy.'[59] Such audiences, increasingly detached by mobility, were targeted by—and would respond to—a hortatory, populist rhetorical style. Such seems to have been increasingly the case in the northern states, led by Pennsylvania and New York, after the crisis of 1798–1800. Lesser

57. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy*, xiv. See also Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 145–62, and throughout for the distinctions among Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Waldstreicher has relatively little to say about southern political culture, but see *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 263–69.

58. Pasley, '*The Tyranny of Printers*,' 19, 158–59, 259–64.

59. Alan Tully, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 365–81. See also Richard R. Beeman, 'Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d. ser. 49 (1992): 401–30, William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Afred A. Knopf, 1983), 43–46, 114–19; J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 142–62. The distinct differences in regional press production have deep colonial roots, which are surveyed in the graphs in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 507–8, 510–11. Striking as they are, these estimates of total print production show a far weaker presence in the press in the early South if they are controlled for the total free population. Recalculated relative to free population, the presses in New England and the Mid-Atlantic produced seven to eight times more imprints than those in the South. Southern readers seem to have made up for some of the deficit by importing books from Great Britain at a little less than half the rate for the northern colonies, again controlling for free population. For data, see *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 514.

amounts of print, couched in relatively conservative, classical, laudatory rhetoric, particularly in regions of lower literacy, meant that newspapers would be vehicles not of popular but of elite mobilization, read by gentry leaders who would then communicate selectively with their neighborhood electorates. Such seems to have been the case in much of the North before the end of the 1790s and in much of the South well into the next century.

Thus the emergence of press partisanship during the First Party era took the form of a mosaic rather than a wave. The degree to which a transition to partisanship occurred was shaped by the configurations of state and national politics in the three great regions and the ways in which these configurations shaped the struggle for the patronage of government printing contracts and postmasterships.[60]

New England's Federalist-dominated press was critically shaped by its relationship to stable Federalist state governments and political cultures struggling with the Republican national administration. The role of the Federalist press was to rally the people in a cultural revival against the Jeffersonians, and in this regard it was quite successful.[61]

The political press in the greater mid-Atlantic, in both its urban and small-town manifestations, was shaped by a far more complex configuration in which urban commerce and contests between Republican factions allowed the Federalists and their press to survive and grow on the political margins, occasionally forging strategic statewide alliances, and sniping at the national administration.[62] These circumstances, and a tradition of political contest and pluralism running deep into the colonial past, fu-

60. Smith, *The Press, Patronage, and Politics*; John, *Spreading the News*, 25–168.

61. James M. Banner, *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789–1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 191–99; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 251–67.

62. Formisano, 'Parties Yes, System, No,' in Kleppner et al., *The Evolution of American Political Systems*, 51–55; Lee Benson, Joel H. Silbey, and Phyllis F. Field, 'Toward a Theory of Stability and Change in American Voting Patterns: New York State, 1792–1970,' in Silbey et al., eds., *The History of American Political Behavior* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 83–91.

eled the largest and most diverse political press in the early republic. It is in Pennsylvania and New York that popular partisanship had its earliest manifestations.

Circumstances were quite different from those prevailing across most of the South and the West, where one result of broadly shared agrarian interests and a relative consonance between Republican state and national governments was that the press did not emerge as a primary means by which parties could mobilize the population. John Nerone has been particularly insistent that the transition to a partisan press was far more limited than the traditional accounts would suggest. Certainly this persistence of a consensual republican form of press seems to have been the case for Ohio, which he has studied carefully, and for much of the south and southwest into the 1820s.[63] In effect, if the various competitive configurations of politics in the northern states established the beginnings of a partisan press, such was not the case with the one-party dominance by the Jeffersonians. The occasional factional feuds that broke the harmony of southern politics before 1815 were never enough to encourage the growth of a partisan press. In short, a partisan press developed in much of the North, as party and faction competed for the public's attention, but the press in early national southern politics retained something of the character of the classical eighteenth-century public sphere, a traditional and closed vehicle of communication and debate among the literate gentry.

Clearly, then, there were important preconditions for closure rather than accessibility in political print in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The lack of real partisan print competition in most states was accompanied by ongoing official efforts to sup-

63. John Nerone, *The Culture of the Press in the Early Republic*, 99–178. See also Emil Pocock, '"A Candidate I'll Surely Be": Election Practices in Early Ohio, 1798–1825,' in Jeffrey P. Brown and Andrew R. L. Cayton, eds., *The Pursuit of Power: Political Culture in Ohio, 1787–1861* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), 56–67; for a southern example, see Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 60–81.

press it. In spite of their challenge to the Sedition Act, the Jeffersonians showed signs of continuing the eighteenth-century legal interpretation of seditious libel, as attested by Jefferson's acquiescence to 'a few wholesome prosecutions' of Federalist printers. In the end, these cases did mark the end of government efforts to punish the opposition press, but they also underlined the limits on political communication that could be tolerated in the early republic.[64]

But if Jefferson and Madison eventually came to ignore the Federalist press that harassed them across much of the North, they could do so from a strong position in print. Their powers of patronage, handed down to them by the Federalists, allowed the Republicans to nurture a new generation of court papers, in particular the *National Intelligencer*. Founded by Samuel Harrison Smith in 1801 and published from 1807 by Joseph Gales, Jr., and William W. Seaton, the *Intelligencer* became a permanent fixture on the American political scene, serving as the official administration organ through 1824 and surviving until the Civil War. Starting with contracts from Jefferson, this paper 'operated nearly at the will of the executive officers' under Madison; during the 1820s the editors then lost their executive patronage by supporting first William Crawford in 1824 and John Quincy Adams in 1828. One of the critical services the *Intelligencer* supplied was in recording the affairs of Congress and then allowing Congressmen to edit their notes before publication. This 'Buncombe' system, giving editor and politician joint roles as gatekeepers over the nation's affairs, perpetuated the tradition of the printed 'circular letter,' in which Congressmen presented themselves to their constituents in the best possible light.[65] In both its reputation for

64. Levy, *Legacy of Suppression*, 296–307, and *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (New York: Quadrangle, 1963), 57–69; Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 69–77. Most recently, Pasley, in '*The Tyranny of Printers*,' esp. 274–84, argues convincingly that the Republicans were half-hearted in their prosecutions for libels, compared with Federalist efforts.

65. Leonard, *Power of the Press*, 63–80; the Buncombe system was named when a representative told Congress to ignore his comments on the Missouri Compromise, as he merely speaking 'for Buncombe,' his constituents in his home county. The 1840 census

authoritative information and its symbiotic relationship with both executive and legislative branches, the *National Intelligencer* was a powerful model for the political press in the early republic. It was a model that defined by its very authority the boundaries of the political terrain[66] and it would serve both to be emulated and to be overcome.

POLITICS AND THE PRESS TO THE LOG CABIN: A 'GENERAL CRISIS'?

The dominant position of the *National Intelligencer* from 1801 epitomized the subtle closure of the politics of the early republic: while real party competition emerged in a few northern states, the general rule was single-party dominance. But the period from the mid-1820s through 1840 brought the accelerating emergence of competitive party politics, and both party period and press historians have stressed the formative role of the antebellum party press in organizing and linking state parties and in building turnout.[67]

The primacy of the *Intelligencer* and the hegemony of the Jeffersonian Republicans provided an essential point of departure for the antebellum configuration of political communications. In great measure, the Jeffersonian press, nurtured over a quarter-century of Republican dominance, would provide the essential background for political print in the coming decades. Men experienced in the Federalist press, defeated, disillusioned, and starved for support, would move into other arenas, and in so doing would contribute formatively to the pluralizing of print and the public sphere.

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suggests that one paper in Buncombe County served a section of almost ten mountain counties on North Carolina-Tennessee border, an indication that constituents might not be likely to receive different versions of a speech in Congress.

66. William E. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 151; Culver Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 24–55; Leonard, *Power of the Press*, 70–75; John, *Spreading the News*, 57–59.

67. See above, notes 19 and 29; and Baldasty, *The Commercialization of the Press*, 11–35; Humphrey, *The Press in the Young Republic*, 118–29; Kielbowitz, *News in the Mail*, 65–66; William G. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824–1861* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 99–100.

Strikingly, Jeffersonian backgrounds provided the key experience for the leading political editors of all persuasions during the 1820s. Thus, if John Quincy Adams had support from a few former Federalists, he also had the support of a number of former Jeffersonian editors, including John Binns, Joseph Gales, Sr., Hezekiah Niles, and John H. Pleasants. At the other extreme, although Andrew Jackson's editors were often younger men and he also received the support of the Federalist New York *Evening Post*, most of his leading editors—united in the 1828 election through the efforts of Martin Van Buren—had been Jeffersonian stalwarts or had begun their careers with Republican papers. They were Edwin Croswell, Isaac Hill, Thomas Ritchie, Amos Kendall, William J. Duane, John Norvell.[68] Even among the Whigs, Federalist experience may have been a liability.[69] The key figure in the emergence of a popular Whig press in the 1830s, Thurlow Weed, had his beginnings among New York Republicans of the Clintonian persuasion. With Horace Greeley, whose beginnings had been in New England Federalism, Weed paid tribute to tradition by naming a key early Whig paper *The Jeffersonian*.[70]

In effect, Republican hegemony after 1800 shaped the ground for the political press after 1824, and in this context the tradition of the court paper lived on, supported by the aspirations of editors to rise to the national preeminence of the *Intelligencer* and of presidents to have a dependable vehicle for their administrations' views. Thus Adams made the *National Journal* his official paper in

68. Papers discussed in Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 56–69; politics checked against S. N. D. North, *History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States . . .* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884) 38–44, compared with Brigham, *History and Bibliography*, and various sources. See Shaw Livermore, *The Twilight of Federalism: The Disintegration of the Federalist Party, 1815–1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 253; Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 130–33, and *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Lippincott, 1963), 76–80.

69. Livermore, *The Twilight of Federalism*, 260–61; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 90, 198.

70. Lee, *American Journalism*, 207; Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1947), 11–21, and *Horace Greeley: Nineteenth-Century Crusader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 13–14, 38–39.

1825, and from this model Jackson patronized Duff Green's *United States Telegraph*, until Green's support for John C. Calhoun as Jackson's successor impelled him to set up Frank Blair as the editor of the Washington *Globe*. From 1831 to 1841 Blair's *Globe* would be the official voice of the Democratic administration, as well as the de facto recorder of Congress.[71] With the *Globe*, a system of press politics building since Jefferson's election came to perfection. Newspapers throughout the country were linked to the party line in a hierarchy of contract and patronage emanating from the center, as the administration newspaper dictated the themes to be conveyed to the readership. Such a system drew upon the informal pattern of borrowing news items and information from other papers in the exchange system that had been a fixture since the beginning of the colonial press. In 1829 Jackson's administration worked to strengthen this system, not only with printing patronage and postmasterships, but with a host of other patronage posts: naval agents, land office managers, and customs collectors among them.[72] The result was to eliminate the boundary between press and government, perhaps more effectively than the Federalists had dreamed possible. Jacksonian impulses both contrasted with and echoed Federalist impulses: the underlying psychology was of individual reward, but the result was intended to be a harmonious commonality. In effect, Jackson, as a classical republican, was attempting to reassert the monolithic, eighteenth-century public sphere, stilling or marginalizing contrary voices.

While lacking access to national patronage, the National Republicans and Whigs used the same means of establishing a uniform national party line as the Democratic press machine: clipping and pasting articles and editorials from leading papers via the complex system of newspaper exchanges. The effect on both sides was—in Thomas Leonard's assessment—one of 'numbing uniformity.'[73] The content of the partisan press in the age of

71. Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 73–81, 114–49.
72. Smith, *The Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 82–99; Leonard, *The Power of the Press*, 167.
73. Leonard, *Power of the Press*, 167.

Jefferson, but more particularly Jackson, was extremely limited and controlled. In great measure the parties sought to contain the reach of American political contests, and the press was a vehicle for that containment. The partisan editors worked to open the doors of political party, but only to white men, and only on terms that the gatekeepers themselves had set.

Challenges to the hegemony of the Jacksonian-era party press came from a variety of sources, and many of these ran back to Federalist antecedents in the public sphere. Displaced and excluded from formal politics, and given to a sense of broader moral authority, many editors in the Federalist orbit gravitated into arenas of public life conceded by the party press. The result was that Federalist culture and experience provided a background to important departures in public life in the 1820s that played a key role in the increasing complexity of the American public sphere. Here a diversion out of politics into new civil arenas would have critical implications for the definitions of 'political.'[74]

In the briefest of summaries, these arenas can be described as commercial, benevolent, cultural, and reformist. Commercial news was indeed one of the oldest forms of print, but after the War of 1812 it took on a political implication by exclusion; in the face of rancorous Republican politics, the commercial press of the larger cities set the stage for a broader withdrawal of northern urban elites from politics by minimizing party news.[75] While Federalist commerce attempted to ignore national politics, so too an explosive growth of a benevolent press aimed at reforming American life and reviving Protestant religion was built on Federalist money and driven by the energies of Federalist clergy. The various bible and tract societies founded in and after 1809 produced

74. Though these books do not make exactly this argument, I have profited from reading Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital* in this context. In the largest framework, see Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920,' *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 620–47.

75. Of course, the Federalists had politicized commerce from the beginning, with the Jay Treaty, the Embargo, and the war itself.

millions of pages of printed material and in the 1830s were among the earliest to adopt the new, steam, mass-printing technology.[76] One departure from the domain of this benevolent empire was cultural, as epitomized by Ralph Waldo Emerson and the lyceum movement and anticipated by journals of Federalist belles lettres, most notably Joseph Dennie's *Port-Folio*.[77] Other newspapers and their editors were radically reformist, most importantly William Lloyd Garrison whose abolitionism as expressed in *The Liberator* was firmly grounded in Federalist roots, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions initiative to the Cherokee, which led to the establishment of the *Cherokee Phoenix*.[78] Middle-class moral reformers, with a growing allied body of dis-

76. For an early description, see Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960, 26–34, 44–50, 65–68; otherwise see the vast corpus of work by David P. Nord, including: 'The Evangelical Origins of the Mass Media in America, 1815–1835,' *Journalism Monographs* 88 (1984): 1–31; 'Systematic Benevolence, Religious Benevolence: Religious Publishing and the Marketplace in Early Nineteenth-Century America,' in Leonard L. Sweet, ed., *Communication and Change in American Religious History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 239–69; 'Religious Reading and Readers in Antebellum America,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995), 241–73; 'Free Grace, Free Books, and Free Riders: The Economics of Religious Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 106 (1996): 241–72. Most recently, see Mark S. Schantz, 'Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market Revolution in Antebellum America, *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 425–66. The religious and reform periodicals published through 1830 have been described in detail in Gaylord P. Albaugh, *History and Annotated Bibliography of American Religious Periodicals and Newspapers Established from 1730 through 1830* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1994). The summary chronological and geographical listings (pp. 1130–224) indicate that more than 80 percent of these periodicals were published in the North and that more than half of the imprints in this century-long list began publication in the 1820s.

77. Mary K. Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800–1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 3–39; Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24–41, 86–102, 377–92; Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic*, 146–47; Zboray, 'Technology and the Character of Community Life in Antebellum America: The Role of Story Papers,' in Sweet, ed., *Communication and Change*, 185–215; R. Laurence Moore, 'Religion, Secularization, and the Shaping of the Culture Industry in Antebellum America,' *American Quarterly* 41 (1989): 216–42. On Dennie and the world of Federalist belles-lettres, see most recently and authoritatively William C. Dowling, *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and the Port-Folio* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

78. John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison, A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1963), 27–53; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 23–66; William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 248–51, 253–55, 403–4.

enfranchised voices, formed a great part of the pluralist explosion battling to shape content in the public sphere by the 1830s.

Two other avenues toward a more plural press were grounded in third-party politics. The vigorous, if short-lived, Workingmen's Party in New York City contributed to the emergence of the popular penny press. Openly hostile to both the party press and the commercial press, the new penny press was aimed at selling news to a popular audience, and it competed to introduce innovations to fuel sales, including local crime reporting, as in its coverage of the Helen Jewett murder case of 1835.[79] Despite, or perhaps because of, their declared contempt for parties, the New York penny-press editors were the first to support reporters in Washington, who were independent of the patronage/contract nexus. By the late 1830s, the gate-keeping role of the party editors was being undermined; politicians could no longer be sure that they would control what the people in 'Buncombe County' would hear. From these beginnings of comprehensive and competitive reporting, the American public began to get increasingly detailed and timely information on public affairs. From the mid-1830s, then, Americans began to find in their newspapers an accessible style, plurality of opinion, and quality of deliberative content that they had never seen before.[80]

Antimasonry comprised a second avenue toward the restructuring of the press, in this case leading back toward partisanship. Here editors seeking an audience in the indeterminate factionalism of the late 1820s found a cultural movement upon which to

79. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 12–60; Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 12–75; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990), 77–108; Andie Tucher, *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); and Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

80. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 23–26; Leonard, *Power of the Press*, 78–96; Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 68–95; Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 218–44; David J. Russo, 'The Origins of Local News in the U. S. Country Press, 1840s–1870s,' *Journalism Monographs* 65 (1980): 1–43.

build a party.[81] The result was a flurry of party papers which—in many regions—broke the residual hegemony of Federalist or Republican tradition. In New York State, Antimasonry as a party was grounded in the political-print aspirations of Thurlow Weed, who used local fears of Masonic conspiracy as a vehicle for editorial advancement against the rigid structure of Martin Van Buren's Regency. Van Buren's patronage would turn the press, which 'ought to be free as air and fearless as virtue,' Weed wrote in one of the first issues his Rochester *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, into 'the muzzled organ of faction and the tamed beast of burden of demagogues.'[82] Weed's *Enquirer* was one of the first of more than one hundred newspapers that were founded upon or moved over to Antimasonic principles, each serving briefly as a public voice, indeed the material manifestation, of an aspiring third party.[83] By 1830 Weed had moved to Albany to establish the *Evening Journal*, and in 1834 he used this vehicle to draw together the various anti-Jacksonian movements in New York State into the Whig Party. Late in 1837 Weed recruited Horace Greeley, who was struggling to put out a small literary magazine in New York City, to edit the *Jeffersonian*. Greeley developed a blend of the popular penny-press with the Whig's party press in his 1840 campaign paper, *The Log Cabin*, and then in the New York *Tribune*, which was established early in 1841; these would be critical vehicles of a mature party in opposition to the Democrats.[84]

Before the Whig triumph in the Log Cabin campaign, the country endured a second drama over political communications. Echoing the crisis of the late 1790s over the emergence of a par-

81. William P. Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826–43* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790–1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826–1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

82. Quoted in Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer: New York State, 1785–1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 130.

83. Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826–43*, 35–36, 41–42, 46–48, 177, 182, 189.

84. Van Deusen, *Weed*, 55, 64–69; Van Deusen, *Greeley*, 21–23, 37–45, 50–57.

tisan opposition press, the mid-1830s saw a massive reaction to the pluralizing of the press and of the public sphere. The focal point of this crisis was the abolitionists' printed challenge to slavery. In the South, papers that hinted at emancipation were forced to close, suspected abolitionist agents were lynched, and abolitionist pamphlets were burned with the approval of Amos Kendall, Jackson's postmaster general. John Nerone has documented over 140 cases of anti-abolitionist violence, mostly in the North in the 1830s; among these were riots in Boston, Utica, New York, and Cincinnati targeting abolitionist lecturers, editors, and presses. The most notorious was the 1837 murder of Elijah Lovejoy, killed in Alton, Illinois, defending his antislavery *Observer*. This was the context in which John Quincy Adams made his stand against the Gag Rule, which involved the right of northerners to submit petitions to Congress—petitions that were printed up in vast numbers. Abolitionist opinion was not the only target in this explosive era: the Bank of the United States, African-Americans, Mormons, and Catholics were all targets of a wave of rioting from the 1820s until well into the 1840s. Attempts to suppress the abolitionist message thus were grounded in a broader sense of unease with the way in which the shape of the public arena was changing in the 1830s. With the simultaneous explosion of steam-driven printing and of new voices for immediate social and cultural reform, traditional assumptions about the access to and content of the public sphere were suddenly undermined. The world of print had been dominated by white men talking about politics as defined by partisan editorial gatekeepers; now this stable, closed world suddenly changed with the appearance of previously excluded people and voices. After 1827, beginning with John Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal*, David Walker's *Appeal*, and contributions to Garrison's *The Liberator*, these had included the voices of free blacks. As Leonard Richards has demonstrated, opposition to abolitionists, in particular, was led by the established gatekeepers: local party leaders, lawyers, and merchants, who were threatened by challenges to their preeminence in both

civil and economic life.[85] Ironically, one can see similar motives at work in the 1840 'Moral War,' in which conservative urban dailies attempted to stigmatize and destroy James Gordon Bennett, the popular penny-press editor, who himself had given voice to anti-abolitionist sentiment in his New York *Herald*.[86]

The expansion and reconfiguration of print communication in the 1830s—and the violent and political attacks against these developments—must be seen as a 'general crisis' in American public life.[87] The traditional model of journalism history, framing this period as a transition from a partisan to a plural press, fails to capture the extent of this crisis. Certainly a partisan mode of press had emerged in the 1790s, but it did not sweep the country immediately, nor did it fade into insignificance in the 1830s.[88] Equally importantly, it was in the mid-to-late 1830s, exactly as the country was exploding with violence against new voices in public life, that a fully structured and competitive, national, two-party system took shape, functioning for the first time in the 1840 election. And the onset of this party period came in the context of an increasingly complex, plural print culture, one that for the first time gave equal public voice to partisans, dissidents, and the disengaged.

This perspective, with the party period approach, sees the entire era from the 1790s into the 1830s as a complex intermingling of incomplete forms, with eighteenth-century classical assumptions, institutions, and behavior competing in an awkward tension with those of a nineteenth-century liberal democracy. Any system of labels risks a teleological oversimplification, but we might think of the entire period from the 1780s to the early 1830s as one of republican nation building, closing a long, early-modern pe-

85. Nerone, *Violence against the Press*, 84–110, 221–25; Leonard L. Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing': Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 71–73; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19–21, 85–178; John, *Spreading the News*, 257–80; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*.

86. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 54–57; Saxton, *The Rise and Fall*, 103–4.

87. My thinking here is shaped by Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 11–143; Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 143–67, 234–52; Robertson, *The Language of Democracy*, 69–83; Formisano, 'Deferential-Participant Politics'; and Brown, *Knowledge is Power*, 218–44.

88. Nerone, 'Mythology of the Penny Press.'

riod dating back at least to the seventeenth century. But the themes of the party period interpretation fail to capture the complexities of the configuration of public, print, and politics emerging in the late 1830s. I would suggest that a 'general crisis' of the 1830s marked the *beginning* of a modern era shaped by democratic pluralism, defined not simply by the rise of enduring party competition but by the wider and more fundamental 'transformation of the public sphere.' This transformation was from classical forum to liberal marketplace, from the freeholders' commonwealth toward universal participation. The motor of this transition was the commercializing of the public sphere, to which Jürgen Habermas objected so influentially in *The Structural Transformation*.[89] But commercialization had its virtues. In effect, the reading public became a free market in which editors—still gate keeping, but with lots of competition—had to sell their wares. The entire reading public became drawn into the process of assessing public affairs, though the discrepancies between these post-republican reading and voting publics was not to be settled for at least eighty years.[90] Certainly the Jeffersonian, Federalist, and Jacksonian presses had been appealing to the voting public for decades, but it was the innovations of the penny papers, transmuted into a new kind of popular political press by the likes of Horace Greeley, and the accelerating diversity of the print offering in general, that effected a qualitative change in tone and approach.[91] The press was available and accessible, and it was be-

89. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 175–81.

90. Ronald J. Zboray and Mary S. Zboray, 'Political News and Female Readership in Antebellum Boston and Its Region,' *Journalism History* 22 (1996): 2–14; and 'Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997): 277–315; Baker, 'The Domestication of American Politics.'

91. The massive numbers of temporary campaign papers published for the Log Cabin campaign tell part of the story:

	Democratic	*National/Whig*
1828	11	10
1832	2	5
1836	10	14
1840	58	101

ginning to treat the voter as an active participant in the process. The 1840 presidential campaign marked the beginning of a national experience with a mass press and mass politics, in which —for better or worse—voters were treated as interested, individual consumers in a marketplace of political readership—a fundamental reconfiguration of the classical public sphere of virtuous freeholders.[92] But if many of those political readers became convicted partisans, others—with many of the female disenfranchised—were disengaged or even dissident. Modes of 'the political' were multiplying in this epoch of transformation.

POLITICS AND PRESS IN THE ERA OF THE LOG CABIN: THE PERSISTENCE OF REGION

Perhaps this is the whole story. But how national was this reshaping of the classical public sphere into a plural marketplace of opinion? My summary so far leaves no room for regional difference, and neither does the party period model, envisioning a general modernization of politics and communications that moved the country in a series of steps into a national system. Building on the McCormick synthesis of the opening of the Second Party System, the party period understanding has been that the sequential organization of nationally integrated state parties drove up voter participation and identification and that editors and their newspapers were the critical vehicles linking electorate with party. Political participation required access to print, according to the party period interpretation, and this symbiosis was well established by 1840. It may not, however, have been that simple.

These papers are listed in William Miles, comp., *The People's Voice: An Annotated Bibliography of American Presidential Campaign Newspapers, 1828–1984* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1–53.

92. In thinking about a general crisis in the 1830s and the transition from a politics of republican nation-building to one of a democratic pluralist market place, we may want to keep in mind the periodicity suggested by Jonathan C. D. Clark in *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and the controversial perspective of a 'market revolution,' conceptualized as a reshaping of the public sphere. See Charles Seller, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

From the 1824 election forward, national voting data and reasonably comprehensive statistics on the press allow a test of a press-mobilization/party period model. Measures of voter turnout and party competition for key elections can be compared with aggregate measures of engagement with print: the number and location of newspapers and printing offices, literacy rates and numbers of children in school. These comparisons suggest that we need to reconsider our assumption of a direct linkage between antebellum political participation and the expanding realm of print. Indeed, this evidence suggests that rather than moving together in a single, integrated system, political communications and political partisanship varied significantly by region, and more importantly, by section. As Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats have put it, 'if not separate worlds, the North and the South were different polities.'[93]

The 1824 election, the first for which comparable national turnout figures are available, provides a baseline for a regional comparison. Estimated at roughly 27 percent of the national electorate, turnout varied from a low of 21 percent in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states to 30 percent and 34 percent in the cis-Mississippi South and the Midwest. But these figures are the inverse of the estimates of press volume, which has to be measured in terms of free population per newspaper. In 1828, these respectively were roughly 9,600 in the Northeast, and 15–20,000 in the Midwest and South. Turnout varied widely from state to state, depending on the regional appeal of Adams, Jackson, Clay, and Crawford. The availability of a political press apparently bore no relationship to the grander patterns of the 1824 election. (See Tables 7a, 7b.)

The two subsequent pivotal elections of the era, 1828 and 1840, provide a detailed picture of the transition to structured, two-party politics. But they also suggest that there were two quite different systems of political communication—Bourke and DeBats's

93. Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 12.

'different polities'—at work in northern and southern states as the party period emerged.

The essential themes of the 1828 election have long been seen as mobilization of the press and a surging voter turnout. Strong cadres of editors supported both Adams and Jackson. Jackson's helped him obscure his position on tariffs and internal improvements, and he won with a strong southern base and key support in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. In areas where the existing newspapers were insufficient, supporters of both Jackson and Adams established temporary campaign papers, typically commencing publication in the spring or summer months and closing their doors as soon as the election had passed. Focusing their efforts, the Jackson forces established six of their eleven new campaign newspapers in these three pivotal northern states, while none was set up in the South, which they took for granted.[94]

The geographical distribution of the press must have had some affect on turnout and competition when the voters went to the polls in 1828, but this proposition is hard to demonstrate in aggregate. The 1828 election brought a surge of estimated turnout, up to 56 percent, from roughly 25 percent in 1824. But of the eight states in which turnout doubled between 1824 and 1828, only Pennsylvania had relatively high print volume, while five of the ten states in which participation *did not* double also had high levels of print availability. (See Table 7a.) The aggregate regional picture shifted significantly between 1824 and 1828, as turnout in the high-press Mid-Atlantic region jumped from about 22 percent in 1824 to almost 70 percent in 1828, the Midwest from 34 percent to almost 72 percent. But even if turnout in the low-press South was only 50 percent, it was still far higher than the 39 percent in the relatively high-press New England states. (See Table 7b.) The states that fit the mobilization/modernization model of high press volume, high turnout, and tight competition in the 1828 election were New York and Maryland, followed by Penn-

94. Miles, *The People's Voice*, 1–6; Aldrich, *Why Parties*, 106–19.

Table 7a

press volume, centralization, and the 1824 and 1828 elections, by state and region

	1828 total news-papers (Hewitt)	*Free pop. /paper 1828–30*	*1828 papers in leading town*		*Estimated voter turnout in 1824*	*in 1828*	*1828 party compt. index#*	*1828 campaign papers: Adams (Miles)*	*Jackson*
Maine	29	**14,000**	4	**14%**	19.1%	42.7%	80.3	0	1
Vermont	21	**13,000**	3	**14%**	L	**54.5%**	51.2	0	0
New Hampshire	17	16,000	4	**23%**	18.0%	**74.3%**	**92.9**	0	0
Massachusetts	78	**8,000**	39	50%	**29.0%**	25.7%	33.6	0	1
Connecticut	33	**9,000**	9	32%	14.9%	27.2%	48.6	0	0
Rhode Island	24	**4,000**	8	40%	12.0%	17.1%	45.9	0	0
NEW ENGLAND	202	**10,000**	67	33%	21.7%	39.0%	64.5	0	2
New York	160	**12,000**	36	**22%**	L	**80.2%**	**98.1**	2	2
Pennsylvania	184	**7,000**	52	28%	18.8%	**56.5%**	66.7	0	2
New Jersey	22	14,000	4	**18%**	**35.6%**	**71.0%**	**96.0**	1	1
MID-ATLANTIC	366	**10,000**	92	**25%**	21.8%	**69.8%**	**88.0**	3	5
Dist. of Col.	9	**4,000**	9	100%		—		1	1
Ohio	66	14,000	6	**9%**	**34.8%**	**75.9%**	**96.8**	1	2
Indiana	17	20,000	1	**6%**	**37.1%**	**68.7%**	86.8	0	1
Illinois	4	39,000	1	**25%**	24.3%	**52.4%**	65.6	0	0
Michigan	2	16,000	1	50%	NA	NA	NA	0	0
MID-WEST	87	17,000	9	**10%**	**34.3%**	**71.8%**	**92.3**	1	3
Maryland	37	**9,000**	14	38%	**53.7%**	**70.3%**	**98.0**	3	0
Delaware	4	18,000	4	100%	L	L	L	1	0
Virginia	34	22,000	6	**18%**	11.6%	27.7%	62.3	0	0
No. Carolina	20	25,000	4	**20%**	**41.8%**	**56.9%**	53.8	0	0
So. Carolina	16	17,000	7	44%	L	L	L	0	0
Georgia	18	17,000	5	28%	L	31.8%	6.4	0	0
Kentucky	23	23,000	2	**9%**	25.4%	**70.7%**	**88.8**	1	0
Tennessee	8	68,000	1	**12%**	**28.3%**	**55.0%**	9.6	0	0
Alabama	10	19,000	2	**20%**	**49.1%**	**54.6%**	20.3	0	0
Mississippi	7	**12,000**	3	43%	**41.3%**	**56.6%**	37.9	0	0
CORE-SOUTH	177	20,000	48	**27%**	**30.3%**	**50.7%**	57.8	5	0
Louisiana	10	**11,000**	5	50%	L	36.2%	**94.2**	0	0
Missouri	5	23,000	2	40%	19.8%	**54.0%**	58.2	0	0
Arkansas	1	25,000	1	100%	NA	NA	NA	0	0
LOUISIANA T.	16	16,000	8	50%	19.8%	44.6%	73.8	0	0
Florida T.	2	**10,000**	1	50%		—			
United States	859	**13,000**		**27%**	**26.9%**	**57.6%**	**88.0**	10	11

Bold = *at or better than national average; 1828 turnout: used 50.0% cutoff*

* *Free population in 1830 per newspaper in 1828, expressed in thousands*

"L": *Legislature voted for presidential electors*

\# *Index of party competition (index of 100.0 would mean equal votes for each party; see note 97).*

TABLE 7B

1824 AND 1828: PRESS VOLUME AND ELECTORAL TURNOUT BY REGION

	*Free pop. in 1830**	*News papers in 1828 (Hewitt)*	*Free pop./ paper 1828–30*	*Estimated voter turnout in 1824*	*Estimated voter turnout in 1828*	*1828 party comp. index*	*1828 Adams vote %*	*1828 Jacks. vote %*	*Campaign papers, 1828 A (Miles)*	*Campaign papers, 1828 J (Miles)*	*Combined lists of papers 1828 (Hewett and Miles)*	*Free pop. /combined list 1828 (Hewett and Miles)*
New England	1953	202	**9668**	21.7	39.0%	64.5	**66.4**	30.9	0	2	204	**9573**
Midatlantic	3577	366	**9773**	21.8	**69.8%**	**88.0**	44.0	56.0	3	5	374	**9564**
Midwest	1438	87	16528	**34.3**	**71.8%**	**92.3**	**46.1**	53.8	1	3	91	15802
Core South	3542	177	20125	**30.3**	50.7%	57.8	28.9	**71.1**	5	0	182	19461
Louisiana T.	220	16	13750	19.8	44.6%	73.8	36.9	**63.1**	0	0	16	13750
UNITED STATES	10845	859	**12525**	**26.9**	**57.6%**	**87.6**	**43.6**	**56.0**	10	11	880	**12323**

Given the legislative votes for president in 1824 and 1828 in several states, the figures for regional population and newspapers are for all states, excluding only the District of Columbia and the territories. Tables 8, 10, and 11 exclude South Carolina, D.C., and the territories.

** Free population in 1830, expressed in thousands.*

 # Index of Party Competition: see note 97.

TABLE 7C

1828 ELECTION: TURNOUT, COMPETITION, AND PRINT VOLUME

	*Free pop. 1830**	*1828 total news-papers (Hewett list)*	*Free pop./paper (Hewett list)*	*Campaign papers 1828 A (Miles)*	*Campaign papers 1828 J (Miles)*	*Combined lists of papers 1828 (Hewitt and Miles)*	*Free pop. /combined list 1828 (Hewitt and Miles)*	*Total votes. 1828*	*Jackson votes 1828*	*%*
Six states with high turnout (> 70%) and high party competition (Index > 88)	4305	324	13287	8	5	337	12774	608201	311119	51.2%
Nine states with moderate turnout (52–69%) and low party competition (Index < 88)	3536	276	12811	0	3	279	12674	375381	255406	68.0%
Six states with low turnout (< 43%) and low party competition (Index < 88)	2444	216	11315	0	2	218	11211	155749	71423	45.9%

** Free population in 1830, expressed in thousands.*

Not including Louisiana: 8,687 total votes

SOURCES FOR TABLES 7A–C:

'Daniel Hewett's List of Newspapers and Periodicals in the United States in 1828,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 44 (1934): 365–96.

William N. Chambers and Philip C. Davis, 'Party, Competition, and Mass Participation: The Case of the Democratizing Party System, 1824–1852,' in Joel H. Silbey et al., eds., *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 176–77.

William Miles, comp., *The People's Voice: An Annotated Bibliography of American Presidential Campaign Newspapers, 1828–1984* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1–6.

sylvania and Mississippi, with Maine, Virginia, and Georgia fitting the model in the negative with low print volume and low turnout. But most of the country lay somewhere in between, with the three southern New England states having low turnout as well as high press access, five states (four in the North) having the reverse; and six others (four in the South) having a moderate turnout of roughly 50 percent despite low press access.

The competing camps in 1828 certainly saw print as crucial to their efforts. In combination, of twenty-one temporary campaign newspapers that the Adams and the Jackson camps launched in 1828, thirteen were in the six states that would have the highest turnouts and tightest electoral margins. (See Table 7c.) If there is a correlation, then they were filling a gap. As measured by Daniel Hewett's 1828 list of newspapers, these intensely politicized, high-turnout, high-competition states actually had *fewer* established newspapers per free persons as of 1828 than did the majority of states with *lower* turnout and competition.[95] Adding the campaign papers to Hewett's list brings the six most intensely politicized states up to the volume of print in the nine states with a moderate turnout, but not to that of the six least politicized states. These thirteen campaign papers may have heated the political climate in these closely contested states, but the eight devoted to Adams could not prevent a close aggregate victory for Jackson. In sum, it is difficult to see in the 1828 election an obvious and direct relationship between the volume of the press on the one hand and popular political participation on the other.

While the 1828 election brought national voter turnout to roughly 50 percent, state contests between 1837 and 1839 and the Log Cabin campaign of 1840 brought a second surge to roughly 78 percent and, with the 1844 election, represent the brief moment before the Civil War in which a national two-party compe-

95. Measured as free population in 1830 per newspaper listed in 'Daniel Hewett's List of Newspapers and Periodicals in the United States in 1828,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 44 (1934): 36–96.

tition clearly dominated the American political process.[96] But even in these classic national elections the mobilization/modernization model presents difficulties at the national level.

Specifically, turnout and competition—conditioned by region—were associated with proxy measures of press access in different ways. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Reform (ICPSR) electoral and census data are first available for 1840, and they allow an analysis of political behavior by county rather than by state-level aggregates.[97] Consistently, the ICPSR data for the 1840 and 1844 elections demonstrates that across the country's more than 1,100 counties, local print availability was associated with party competition, but not with voter turnout. (See Tables 8a and 8b.) In both years, low-turnout counties had *more* newspapers than high-turnout counties; conversely, counties with tight party competition had more newspapers than counties where the parties were less competitive. Consistently, counties with low turnout and high indexes of party competition had the most newspapers, relative to free population, while counties with high turnout and low party competition had relatively few newspapers. Thus these data suggest that the press mobilization thesis

96. Michael Holt demonstrates in *The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60–88, that the expansion of electoral turnout usually attributed to the 1840 election actually developed in the states between 1837 and 1839, in struggles over economic policy and temperance.

97. The county-level data analyzed in Tables 8, 10, and 11 is from data sets provided by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The county voting data the ICPSR electoral data set, and the data on economy, print, schools, and literacy are from the ICPSR data sets for the 1840 and 1850 censuses. I am grateful to ICPSR for supplying this data, and to Durwood Marshall of Tufts Academic Computing for assisting me in getting it into shape.

I have used two measures of the intensity of party competition in the 1840 and 1844 elections for each state (Table 9b) and various regional and economic breakdowns of the national data (Tables 11a and b). A general index of party competition is given for each unit, an index figure in which the higher score means closer competition between two competing parties. This figure is calculated as 100.0 minus the difference between each of the two parties' percentage of the two-party vote total. For the method, see Chambers and Davis, 'Party, Competition, and Mass Participation,' 179. I have also provided a second measure of party competition in a percentage of counties in a given category that had higher party competition indexes than the national figure for that year. Turnout was calculated using an estimate of all white men over the age of twenty-one as a denominator. Here see Walter Dean Burnham, 'Those High Nineteenth Century American Turnouts: Fact or Fiction,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 16 (1986): 613–44. Since there was no popular vote for president in South Carolina, I have had to exclude South Carolina from the results listed on Tables 8, 10, and 11. See discussion below, note 99.

Table 8a

1840 turnout, party competition, free population per newspaper and county: United States

	Free pop. in 1840	*Papers in 1840*	*Counties in 1840*	*Free pop./ newspaper*	*Newspapers/ county*
Total	14,190,223	1354	1191	**10480**	**1.14**
High Turnout	8,897,030	754	737	11800	1.02
Low Turnout	5,293,193	600	454	**8822**	**1.32**
High Party Compt.	5,952,741	600	368	**9921**	**1.63**
Low Party Compt.	8,237,482	754	823	10925	.92
High TO High PC	3,700,191	308	253	12014	**1.22**
High TO Low PC	5,196,839	446	484	11652	.92
Low TO High PC	2,252,550	292	115	**7714**	**2.54**
Low TO Low PC	3,040,643	308	339	**9872**	.91

TO = *Turnout*
PC = *Party competition index*
High turnout = greater than 77.5%
High party competition index = greater than 90.0
Bold denotes a figure at a better than national average.

Table 8b

1844 turnout and competition, 1840 free population per newspaper and county: United States

	Free pop. in 1840	*Papers in 1840*	*Counties in 1844*	*Free pop./ newspaper*	*Newspapers/ county*
Total	14,125,475	1348	1244	**10479**	**1.08**
High Turnout	8,027,046	666	758	12053	.88
Low Turnout	6,098,429	682	486	**8942**	**1.40**
High Party Compt.	6,350,810	647	434	**9816**	**1.49**
Low Party Compt.	7,774,665	701	810	11091	.86
High TO High PC	3,747,272	325	288	11530	**1.13**
High TO Low PC	4,279,774	341	470	12551	.72
Low TO High PC	2,603,538	322	146	**8085**	**2.20**
Low TO Low PC	3,494,891	360	340	**9708**	1.06

TO = *Turnout*
PC = *Party competition index*
High turnout = greater than 74.7%
High party competition index = greater than 90.0

SOURCE: ICPSR data sets

that underlies the party period model *cannot explain antebellum voter turnout*, but *may explain party competition*. They also strongly suggest that two very different styles of political communication colored the antebellum electoral process; again, these are Bourke and DeBats's 'different polities.'

The 1840 federal census provides the first data for an analytical snapshot of print, literacy, and education across the entire United States, and the patterns are quite sharp. (See Tables 9a, 9b, 10a, and 10b.) Indices of newspapers, printing presses, literacy, and children in school were typically stronger in urban and manufacturing counties[98] than in agricultural counties, in Whig counties than in Democratic counties, in northern counties than in southern counties, in New England and the Mid-Atlantic than in the Midwest. The South in general had seen a very significant increase in the number of newspapers since 1828, moving from about one paper per 20,000 free population to one per 12,000 free population. Most of this increase must have occurred in counties with some local manufacturing and in the agricultural counties with relatively more slaves[99]—essentially the wealthier plantation

98. Using the 1840 and 1850 United States census data supplied by the ICPSR, I divided counties into broad economic classifications acording the the following formulae:

1840 urban counties ('Cities') (11): 1840 employment in manufacturing, commerce, etc. greater than two times employment in agriculture, and population greater 30,000.
1840 manufacturing counties (176):
1: 1840 employment in manufacturing, commerce, etc. greater than one-third of agricultural employment and population between 5000 and 30000;
or 2: 1840 employment in manufacturing, commerce, etc. greater than one-third of but less than twice than agricultural employment and population greater than 30000;
1840 agricultural counties (999): all others.
Counties formed after 1840 and voting in the 1844 election were assigned to manufacturing status based on data from the 1850 census (none of them fit the 'city' classification):
1: 1850 manufacturing capital greater than 13% of 1850 farm value and 1850 population between 5,000 and 30,000;
or 2: 1850 manufacturing capital greater than 13% but less than 90% of 1850 farm value and 1850 population greater than 30,000.

99. In making the calculation of relative proportions of slaves in southern rural counties, I have used an internal rather than a national comparison. Thus rural counties are assigned to high or low slave categories based on the average ratio of slave to free population within a given state, rather than within the South as a whole. The working assumption here is that economic divisions internal to the various states were the functional points of reference for these national elections.

Table 9A

PRESS VOLUME AND CENTRALIZATION, LITERACY, AND URBANIZATION, BY STATE, 1840

	1840 Total news-papers	*Free pop./paper*	*Free pop./print office*	*Edtns.* in leading county*	*% urban in 1840*	*Studts/children age 5–15 in 1840*	*Adult white illiteracy 1840*
Maine	36	13938	14759	50.0%	7.8%	**131.2%**	**1.1%**
Vermont	30	**9731**	10067	44.4%	–	**120.4%**	**1.3%**
New Hampshire	27	10540	**7905**	**22.2%**	10.0%	**134.2%**	**.5%**
Massachusetts	91	**8106**	**7093**	45.3%	**37.9%**	**114.0%**	**.9%**
Connecticut	33	**9393**	**8610**	49.0%	**12.6%**	**104.5%**	**.3%**
Rhode Island	16	**6801**	**6802**	85.3%	**43.8%**	**89.7%**	**2.3%**
New York	245	**9914**	**7567**	**37.8%**	**19.4%**	**91.4%**	**3.1%**
Pennsylvania	187	**9219**	**7696**	**32.8%**	**17.9%**	45.3%	**3.6%**
New Jersey	36	**10351**	**9316**	**18.0%**	10.6%	**62.2%**	**3.1%**
Dist. of Col.	14	**2714**	**3167**	–	**90.0%**		
Ohio	123	12353	9556	**38.5%**	5.5%	53.7%	**4.4%**
Indiana	73	**9395**	9940	**7.6%**	1.6%	25.5%	11.1%
Illinois	43	11066	10574	**6.2%**	2.0%	27.9%	11.1%
Michigan	32	**6633**	**7581**	**36.8%**	4.3%	54.1%	**1.8%**
Wisc. Terr.	6	**5000**	**5000**	**33.3%**	0.0%		
Iowa Terr.	4	10750	10750	50.0%	0.0%		
Maryland	42	**9041**	**7911**	64.9%	**24.2%**	27.6%	**6.1%**
Delaware	6	12580	12580	80%	10.7%	51.9%	14.2%
Virginia	51	15504	15814	**26.9%**	5.5%	23.7%	14.3%
No. Carolina	27	18800	19523	**25.0%**	1.8%	14.5%	21.6%
So. Carolina	17	15727	16710	76.3%	5.7%	19.6%	14.7%
Georgia	34	12072	17102	45.1%	3.6%	19.7%	15.0%
Kentucky	38	15725	17575	64.1%	4.0%	17.7%	12.9%
Tennessee	46	14047	15760	**29.8%**	0.8%	16.0%	18.3%
Alabama	28	12044	15328	57.4%	2.1%	21.3%	13.7%
Mississippi	31	**5820**	**6444**	**38.6%**	1.0%	21.6%	9.1%
Louisiana	34	**5410**	**5256**	71.8%	**29.9%**	15.1%	**5.1%**
Missouri	35	**9299**	**8136**	78.2%	4.3%	20.5%	11.7%
Arkansas	9	**8626**	**8626**	61.5%	0.0%	13.2%	17.1%
Florida Terr.	10	**2800**	**2800**	**20.0%**	0.0%		
United States	1370	10480	9435	42.9%	10.8%	54.7%	6.7%

** Editions calculated as follows: Daily = 6 editions/week, semiweekly and triweekly = 2.5 editions/week; weekly = one edition/week. Bold denotes a figure at or better than national average.*

SOURCES: 1840 Federal Census; ICPSR data.

Table 9B

VOTER TURNOUT AND PARTY COMPETITION, 1840–1844, AND 1840 CAMPAIGN NEWSPAPERS, BY STATE

	1840 state Pres. elect. turnout	*1840 state party comp. index*	*1840 % of counties w/ high p. comp.*	*1840 election campaign papers; Whig*	*Dem.*	*1844 state Pres. elect. turnout*	*1844 state party comp. index*	*1844 % of counties w/ high p. comp.*
Maine	**82.0%**	**99.6**	**61.5%**	0	1	67.3%	85.8	30.8%
Vermont	73.8%	71.4	21.4%	3	0	65.6%	80.5	28.6%
New Hampshire	**86.2%**	87.8	20.0%	2	1	62.3%	79.4	20.0%
Massachusetts	66.6%	83.6	**35.7%**	12	3	59.6%	88.4	**50.0%**
Connecticut	75.5%	88.0	**37.5%**	1	2	**76.1%**	**95.2**	**100.0%**
Rhode Island	33.5%	77.0	20.0%	1	1	39.7%	80.0	20.0%
New York	**77.6%**	**96.8**	**69.0%**	11	12	73.1%	**99.1**	**65.5%**
Pennsylvania	76.9%	**99.8**	**36.4%**	9	3	**75.8%**	**98.2**	27.6%
New Jersey	**80.4%**	**96.4**	22.2%	2	0	**80.2%**	**98.9**	**42.1%**
Dist. of Col.				0	1			
Ohio	**84.4%**	**91.2**	**39.7%**	22	11	**85.8%**	**98.0**	**43.0%**
Indiana	**86.1%**	88.4	29.9%	9	8	**83.8%**	**98.3**	**60.0%**
Illinois	**85.6%**	**98.0**	**33.3%**	4	2	74.3%	87.6	**36.4%**
Michigan	**84.6%**	**95.8**	**66.7%**	1	2	**80.2%**	93.2	**67.7%**
Wisconsin T.				1				
Iowa T.								
Maryland	**84.4%**	**92.4**	**50.0%**	6	3	**80.3%**	**95.2**	**50.0%**
Delaware	**82.7%**	89.8	**33.3%**	0	0	**84.5%**	**97.6**	**100.0%**
Virginia	54.8%	**98.8**	29.4%	3	2	54.7%	93.9	32.3%
No. Carolina	**83.5%**	84.6	13.4%	2	0	**80.9%**	**95.2**	16.9%
So. Carolina	Legislature voted			0	0	for pres. electors		
Georgia	**87.6%**	87.9	**33.7%**	1	1	**95.5%**	**98.2**	28.3%
Kentucky	73.9%	71.6	15.5%	2	0	**78.9%**	91.8	28.6%
Tennessee	**89.4%**	88.6	16.7%	2	2	**90.9%**	**99.8**	16.2%
Alabama	**87.0%**	**92.2**	22.9%	1	2	**81.3%**	83.2	32.6%
Mississippi	**87.6%**	**92.8**	30.4%	5	0	**86.9%**	85.2	24.1%
Louisiana	39.1%	80.2	**35.3%**	0	0	44.1%	**97.4**	25.0%
Missouri	71.9%	87.0	30.0%	1	1	74.7%	86.2	23.7%
Arkansas	66.7%	87.2	16.2%	0	0	67.3%	74.0	23.7%
Florida T.								
United States	**77.6%**	93.8*	**31.4%**	101	58	**74.8%**	98.6#	**34.9%**

used **90.0 as high/low cutoff. #used **94.0** as high/low cutoff.*

SOURCES: Turnout and party competition: calculated from ICPSR data
1840 Campaign papers: Miles, *The Peoples' Voice*, 14–53.

TABLE 10A

MEASURES OF PRINT AND PUBLIC SPHERE, 1840 CENSUS

	Counties in 1840	*Free Population in 1840*	*Free Population per Newspaper in 1840:*		*Free Population per Printing Office in 1840:*		*Percent of White Adults Illiterate in 1840*	*Students per White children aged 5–15, 1840*
			Papers	*Fpop./Pap*	*Prnt Off*	*Fpop./PO*		
UNITED STATES:	1186	14190223	1354	**10480**	1504	**9435**	**6.7%**	**54.7%**
Cities	11	1191777	223	**5344**	289	**4124**	**2.5%**	**58.9%**
Manuf. counties	176	4774299	573	**8332**	605	**7891**	**3.1%**	**73.8%**
Agric. counties	999	8224147	558	14739	610	13482	9.8%	44.6%
Whig majority cos.	466	8627460	870	**9917**	929	**9287**	**6.1%**	**58.2%**
Democratic maj. cos.	693	5318858	470	11317	558	9552	9.2%	49.1%
North TOTAL	477	9653764	972	**9931**	1141	**8461**	**3.7%**	**71.9%**
South TOTAL	709	4536459	382	11875	363	12497	14.2%	19.8%
North Cities	8	966409	178	**5429**	244	**3961**	**2.4%**	**66.2%**
North Manuf. cos.	137	4307967	453	**9510**	505	**8531**	**2.7%**	**78.1%**
North Agric. cos.	332	4379388	341	12843	392	11172	**5.0%**	**67.4%**
South Cities	3	225368	45	**5008**	45	**5008**	**2.8%**	22.7%
South Manuf. cos.	39	466332	120	**3886**	100	**4663**	**6.6%**	29.4%
South Ag.: Hi Slave	292	1709587	144	11872	140	12211	12.6%	24.6%
South Ag.: Lo Slave	375	2135172	73	29249	78	27374	18.7%	14.5%
New England TOTAL	62	2234800	233	**9591**	255	**8764**	**.9%**	**119.6%**
Mid-Atlantic TOTAL	130	4525518	468	**9669**	585	**7736**	**3.3%**	**71.1%**
Midwest TOTAL	285	2893446	271	10676	301	9613	3.8%	42.5%
Core-South TOTAL	570	3949399	304	12991	279	14155	14.8%	20.1%
Louisiana Trr. TOTAL	139	587060	78	**7526**	84	**6989**	10.7%	18.1%

Bold denotes a figure at or better than national average.

SOURCE: ICPSR data; does not include South Carolina.
For categories, see notes 97 and 98.

Table 10B

MEASURES OF PRINT AND PUBLIC SPHERE, 1840 CENSUS

	Counties in 1840	Free Population in 1840	Free Population per Newspaper in 1840: Papers	Fpop./Pap	Free Population per Printing Office in 1840: Prnt Off	Fpop./PO	Percent of White Adults Illiterate in 1840	Students per White children aged 5–15, 1840
UNITED STATES:	1186	14190223	1354	**10480**	1504	**9435**	**6.7%**	**54.7%**
NEW ENGLAND STATES								
Cities	3	223308	43	**5193**	40	**5583**	**1.0%**	**111.0%**
Manuf. cos.	32	1355517	133	**10191**	152	**8918**	**.8%**	**115.7%**
Agric. cos.	27	655975	57	11508	63	10412	**1.1%**	**129.0%**
MIDATLANTIC STATES								
Cities	4	662956	111	**5972**	172	**3854**	**3.1%**	53.5%
Manuf. cos.	75	2367412	247	**9584**	274	**8640**	**3.6%**	**66.5%**
Agric. cos.	51	1495150	110	13592	139	10756	**6.4%**	**83.4%**
MIDWEST STATES								
Cities	1	80145	24	**3339**	32	**2504**	**.6%**	42.0%
Manuf. cos.	30	585038	73	**8014**	79	**7405**	**4.3%**	48.1%
Agric. cos.	254	2228263	174	12806	190	11728	7.8%	41.1%
CORE-SOUTH STATES								
Cities	2	146623	28	**5236**	27	**5430**	**4.1%**	27.0%
Manuf. cos.	34	416615	95	**4385**	72	**5786**	6.9%	29.9%
Ag.: Hi Slave	235	1508855	119	12679	113	13353	13.1%	24.6%
Ag.: Lo Slave	299	1877306	62	30279	67	28019	19.0%	14.7%
LOUISIANA TERRITORY								
Cities	1	78745	17	**4632**	18	**4375**	**.4%**	12.0%
Manuf. cos.	5	49717	25	**1988**	28	**1776**	**4.5%**	25.2%
Ag.: Hi Slave	57	200732	25	**8029**	27	**7434**	8.3%	25.1%
Ag.: Lo Slave	76	257866	11	23442	11	23442	16.6%	12.9%

SOURCE: ICPSR data; does not include South Carolina.

For categories, see notes 97 and 98.

counties, where the frequency of newspapers and printing presses was comparable to that in the northern agricultural counties. Most dramatically, the rural southern counties with fewer slaves were the weakest by far in all of these measures of print access and literacy. These southern low-slave counties had more than twice the free population per newspaper or printing press, four times more adult white illiteracy, and only a quarter of the children in school compared to their counterparts in the agricultural North.[100] The rural South, in general, in agricultural counties with both fewer and more slaves, was dramatically weaker than northern counties in measures of literacy and schooling.

Measuring competition among local newspapers is more problematic, since counties in the North, particularly the Northeast, were far larger than their southern counterparts, undermining the significance of any national comparison. But isolating the Midwest and the cis-Mississippi South is at least suggestive.[101] Rural southern counties were significantly less likely to have competing papers that presented competing opinions to the elec-

100. Clement Eaton, *The Freedom of Thought Struggle in the Old South* (Rev. ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 64–88, suggests that the 1840 data significantly underrepresented southern illiteracy. For a more recent discussion of the 1840 literacy data, see Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 159–76. On southern illiteracy and gentry education in academies, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethic and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 192–95, and Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 128–53.

101. Press Competition in 1840: Midwest and Core South

	Counties in 1840	*Free Popul. in 1840*	*Counties with two or more Newspapers in 1840*
MIDWEST STATES			
Cities	1	80,145	100.0%
Manuf. cos.	30	585,038	73.3%
Agric. cos.	254	2,228,263	21.6%
CORE-SOUTH STATES			
Cities	2	146,623	100.0%
Manuf. cos.	34	416,615	50.0%
Ag.:Hi Slave	235	1,508,855	12.8%
Ag.:Lo Slave	299	1,877,306	3.7%

torate.[102] Clearly, the southern manufacturing counties, well endowed with newspapers, took up some of the slack. Papers from these counties must have circulated across neighboring counties, shaping a regional political opinion. But we have to assume that these papers would have had a more restricted distribution outside of their county of origin, and it is certainly likely that they had smaller print runs than many northern papers. Michael Schudson has argued that, given the weakness of the press, southern congressmen were more likely to send circular letters to constituents; these would have been part of a wider pattern of circulation of political print in the mail. Printed political information did get to southern voters, but it came from beyond the locality, was less accessible than a local paper, and was inaccessible to the larger numbers of illiterate adults.[103]

The results of the 1840 and 1844 elections suggest that these patterns of print accessibility had only a limited relationship with voter behavior. On a grand aggregate in 1840 the northern states had more print and higher turnout and party competition than the South. But a more detailed look at the regions suggests a different story: In the North, the Mid-Atlantic was fundamentally more partisan than New England, while the cis-Mississippi Core-South maintained striking levels of turnout without as strong a press; and the Midwest and new southern states of the Louisiana Purchase both showed frontier-like qualities.

102. In one of the most useful recent studies of a southern county, Daniel S. Dupre's *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800–1840* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), Dupre bases much of his interpretation in the competing opinion in the Huntsville *Democrat* and the *Southern Advocate*. It should be noted, however, that Madison County was one of only five out of forty-nine Alabama counties to have two newspapers in 1840.

103. Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 117–18, discusses circular letters in the South and West. In *Liberty and Slavery*, 116–17, Cooper notes that of 269 circular letters before 1830, 227 were from southern congressmen. The objection might be made that I am not paying enough attention to 'news in the mail,' and that the number of local newspapers was not significant. However, the studies that have stressed the volume of periodicals in the mail have also found few subscribers relative to local populations and that long-range subscriptions North and South were oriented toward religion, reform, and other special interests that would not have competed with the local political editor. My assumption here is that local editors were important, mediating between the nation and party at large and the particularities of their locality. See John, *Spreading the News*, 154; and Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail*, 109–14.

	Free population per newspaper	*Turnout in 1840*	*Party Competition in 1840*
U.S. total	**10,480**	**77.6%**	**93.8**
North	**9,931**	**78.5%**	**94.6**
South	11,875	75.4%	91.8
New England	**9,591**	72.9%	90.6
Mid-Atlantic	**9,669**	**77.6%**	**97.8**
Midwest	10,676	**85.0%**	92.8
Core South	12,991	**78.2%**	90.0
La. Purchase	**7,526**	59.7%	**94.4**

See Tables 10a and 11a.
Bold denotes figure at or better than national average.

As in 1828, New York, and now Michigan, stood out as exemplars of the mobilization model, with high levels of press, literacy, voter turnout and party competition. In the South only the relatively urbanized states of Maryland and Louisiana look even vaguely similar. Elsewhere, as we scan across the national regions, the picture varies considerably (Tables 9, 10, and 11). New England was characterized by strong literacy and press, but weak turnout and party competition. Manufacturing counties in the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest led the country in virtually all of these print and political measures, while the agricultural counties in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest were strong in both turnout and competition, but weaker in print. Across the south, the new states formed from the Louisiana Purchase were strong in press but weak in literacy and party, while the core southern states, especially Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, were characterized by low levels of literacy and print, moderate party competition, and high levels of voter turnout. Rural counties in the core South region had consistently lower party competition.[104] If we

104. Weak party competition in the South is discussed in Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 47–51. The results of Greenberg's analysis of congressional districts is strikingly similar to mine, which compares counties. These, unlike congressional districts, typically had much larger populations in the North. As Greenberg notes, excluding South Carolina from this analysis certainly results in a higher 'competition index' for the core South than would be the case if it were included. Similarly, including Maryland and Delaware in the core South rather than in the Mid-Atlantic raises the 'competition index' for the core South.

TABLE 11A

1840 AND 1844 ELECTIONS: TURNOUT AND COMPETITION

	1840 Counties	*1840 total presid. vote*	*1840 Pres. elect. turnout*	*1840 party comp. index*	*1840 % cos. w/ hi p. cmp.*	*1844 total presid. vote*	*1844 Pres. elect. turnout*	*1844 party comp. index*	*1844 % cos. w/ hi p. cmp.*
UNITED STATES:	1186	2402550	**77.6%**	**93.8**	**31.5%**	2688790	**74.7%**	**98.6**	**35.0%**
Cities	11	162950	56.8%	**94.2**	**45.4%**	197320	52.8%	94.6	**36.4%**
Manuf. counties	176	841110	76.3%	**93.8**	**46.0%**	915800	72.4%	**98.6**	**50.0%**
Agric. counties	999	1396760	**81.8%**	**93.8**	28.7%	1575670	**80.5%**	96.2	32.4%
Whig majority cos.	466	1472780	**77.7%**	80.2	28.1%	1310590	73.3%	85.0	**40.5%**
Democratic maj. cos.	693	896880	**78.3%**	84.2	**35.5%**	1374360	**76.1%**	83.2	30.3%
North TOTAL	477	1712190	**78.5%**	**94.6**	**40.6%**	1895300	74.3%	**99.2**	**46.8%**
South TOTAL	709	688630	75.4%	91.8	25.2%	793490	**75.9%**	97.4	27.1%
North Cities	8	137760	58.6%	93.6	**50.0%**	167290	54.4%	93.8	25.0%
North Manuf. cos.	137	771530	**77.7%**	**94.2**	**46.7%**	833630	73.5%	**99.0**	**50.7%**
North Agric. cos.	332	802900	**84.2%**	**95.2**	**37.8%**	894380	**80.6%**	96.0	**45.7%**
South Cities	3	25190	49.0%	**97.6**	**33.3%**	30030	45.5%	**99.0**	**66.6%**
South Manuf. cos.	39	69580	63.7%	89.0	**43.6%**	82170	62.8%	95.2	**47.5%**
South Ag.:Hi Slave	292	284550	**81.7%**	87.4	25.8%	313800	**83.1%**	96.8	31.3%
South Ag.:Lo Slave	375	309310	76.3%	**96.1**	22.8%	367490	**78.2%**	90.4	21.7%
New England TOTAL	62	394720	72.9%	90.6	**35.5%**	391480	63.5%	98.0	**40.6%**
Mid-Atlantic TOTAL	130	791130	**77.6%**	**97.8**	**49.2%**	888480	74.6%	**98.8**	**45.5%**
Midwest TOTAL	285	526340	**85.0%**	92.8	**37.7%**	615340	**82.5%**	97.8	**48.7%**
Core South TOTAL	570	606860	**78.2%**	90.0	24.7%	681090	**78.6%**	**99.0**	27.9%
Louisiana Trr.TOTAL	139	81770	59.7%	**94.4**	27.5%	112400	63.1%	87.6	24.4%

Bold denotes a figure at or better than national average.

SOURCE: ICPSR data; does not include South Carolina.
For categories, see notes 97 and 98.

TABLE 11B

1840 AND 1844 ELECTIONS: TURNOUT AND COMPETITION

	1840 Counties	*1840 total presid. vote*	*1840 Pres. elect. turnout*	*1840 party comp. index*	*1840 % cos. w/ hi p. cmp.*	*1844 total presid. vote*	*1844 Pres. elect. turnout*	*1844 party comp. index*	*1844 % cos. w/ hi p. cmp.*
UNITED STATES	1186	2402550	**77.6%**	**93.8**	**31.5%**	2688790	**74.7%**	**98.6**	**35.0%**
NEW ENGLAND STATES									
Cities	3	33090	54.2%	75.9	0	34910	49.8%	78.2	0
Manuf. cos.	32	239970	73.3%	92.8	**46.9%**	240150	64.5%	**99.0**	**59.4%**
Agric. cos.	27	121660	**79.4%**	90.0	25.9%	116420	67.1%	98.0	24.1%
MID-ATLANTIC STATES									
Cities	4	92920	61.0%	**99.2**	**75.0%**	115900	56.0%	95.6	**50.0%**
Manuf. cos.	75	422790	**78.7%**	**96.6**	**48.0%**	471640	**76.8%**	**99.8**	**48.7%**
Agric. cos.	51	275420	**83.4%**	**99.4**	**49.0%**	300940	**81.4%**	94.4	**40.4%**
MIDWEST STATES									
Cities	1	11750	54.0%	**99.7**	**100.0%**	16480	54.2%	89.0	0
Manuf. cos.	30	108770	**85.1%**	88.0	**43.3%**	121840	**82.0%**	95.2	**46.7%**
Agric. cos.	254	405820	**86.4%**	**94.0**	**36.8%**	477020	**84.2%**	96.4	**49.1%**
CORE-SOUTH STATES									
Cities	2	20770	71.8%	**98.4**	**50.0%**	24400	63.9%	**99.4**	**50.0%**
Manuf. cos.	34	62680	66.9%	89.8	**47.1%**	71680	68.9%	95.4	**48.6%**
Ag.:Hi Slave	235	249790	**82.6%**	86.6	23.5%	269950	**84.2%**	96.4	30.0%
Ag.:Lo Slave	299	273620	**77.8%**	92.4	22.9%	315060	**78.0%**	93.6	23.9%
LOUISIANA TERRITORY STATES									
Cities	1	4420	19.7%	79.0	0	5630	20.2%	92.6	**100.0%**
Manuf. cos.	5	6900	44.3%	81.6	20.0%	10490	39.3%	94.6	**40.0%**
Ag.:Hi Slave	57	34760	75.9%	93.3	**35.1%**	43850	**76.6%**	**99.2**	**35.9%**
Ag.:Lo Slave	76	35690	67.1%	74.6	22.1%	52430	**79.0%**	70.8	13.9%

SOURCE: ICPSR data; does not include South Carolina.

isolate the six sets of counties that each had more than one million people—and collectively more than three-quarters of the country's total free population—manufacturing counties in New England and the Mid-Atlantic, and agricultural counties in the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and core South, the regional distinctions stand out all the more sharply:

	Free pop. 1840	*Free pop /paper*	*1840 turnout*	*1840 party competition*
United States total	14,190,223	10,480	77.6%	93.8
N.Eng. manuf. cos.	1,355,517	10,191	73.3%	92.8
Mid-Atl. manuf. cos.	2,367,412	9,584	78.7%	96.6
Mid-Atl. agric. cos.	1,495,150	13,592	83.4%	99.4
Midwest. agric cos.	2,228,263	12,806	86.4%	94.0
Core South ag: Hi slave	1,508,855	12,679	82.7%	86.6
Core South ag: Lo slave	1,877,306	30,279	77.8%	92.4

See Tables 10b and 11b.

Only in the Mid-Atlantic manufacturing counties was there a clear and straightforward relationship between press and partisanship; elsewhere it is difficult or impossible to see any such relationship. The low-slave agricultural counties of the core South stand out as particularly anomalous for the mobilization model. If turnout in these counties was not quite as high as that in the rural Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, it was higher than in manufacturing New England, although the southern counties' indices of print and literacy were far lower.[105] Thus, for example, we have the Democratic voters who turned out in Tennessee to elect James K. Polk governor in 1839; as described in the Whig Memphis *Enquirer*, they were 'the men from the deep gorges of the hills and mountains, and by the sides of the creeks, in the far-off corners of the counties—who take no newspapers and come not into the towns.'[106]

105. The generally very high turnout in southern elections is discussed in Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 184–87.

106. *Enquirer* (Memphis), August 23, 1839, cited in Charles G. Sellers, *James K. Polk: Jacksonian, 1795–1843* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), 374, and in Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party:* 84.

These figures suggest that two distinct systems of political communication operated across the country at the height of the Second Party System, each with different effect. Clearly, the transformation of the press into a plural marketplace was far more advanced in the northern states, and had been under way since the turn of the century. The political press was widely available, and indeed well balanced, with competing forms. Most importantly, the political editors in the North spoke directly to the electorate; their pages were often the only point of mediation between voter and party in many places where there was an accelerating mobility, urbanization, and a collapse of local deference patterns. However, these editors were not entirely successful. Their efforts may have contributed to the relative balance of parties, suggesting parallel levels of organization, but they did not necessarily produce overwhelming turnouts in the presidential elections. Indeed, the very plurality of political, reform, and cultural content and opinion in the explosively expanding, northern print culture may well have diluted the impact of the party press. As Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin have argued, the furious efforts of northern political editors, especially in New England, were already being met with a level of disengagement in 1840 and 1844.[107] And, as the advocates of the 'public sphere' approach to the antebellum political universe would argue, many people across the North were engaged in dissenting, non-electoral politics grounded in associations rather than parties. Parties and their print organs did not necessarily define the domain of 'the political' in much of the North by the early 1840s.

The evidence for the South, especially the core plantation states south and west of the Chesapeake and the Carolinas, indi-

107. Here it should be noted that the constitutional crisis and civil war in Rhode Island (the Dorr War) underlay that state's particularly low voter turnout in these elections. However even if we exclude Rhode Island, New England's turnout was low relative to most of the other regions:

	1840 Turnout	*1844 Turnout*
New England with Rhode Island	72.9%	63.5%
New England without Rh. Island	74.8%	64.8%

Compare with Table 10.

cates quite clearly that Second Party politics, if not always a 'system,' could function at measurably high levels in places where the revolution in communications and the press were distinctly limited. If newspapers had grown in number in the South by 1840, they typically stood at levels that had characterized the North around 1800. Clearly southern newspapers could not have reached as far into the social structure as did those in the contemporary North, and indeed the white population was far less ready to receive them, given the considerably higher levels of southern illiteracy.[108] Certainly the southern press was partisan in its content, and it was part of the wider, national system of newspaper exchange and party patronage.[109] This centralization of the southern press continued to play a fundamental role in the shape of southern partisanship: in 1857 an Alabama Democrat could complain of the 'mandatory authority' of his party's 'central organ at Montgomery' over local papers.[110] But this rigidly controlled partisan content did not reach ordinary rural voters unmediated by the interpretation of leading men. Couched in a discourse that retained something of the classical style of the late eighteenth century, the southern press was aimed at the village and city mercantile classes and the plantation region gentry, who in turn mediated between party and electorate in the traditional settings of southern politics: barbecues, rallies, court days, and speeches. 'The men from the deep gorges . . . who take no newspapers,' in the view of the Whig Memphis *Enquirer* in 1839, were 'uninformed on the political affairs of the country, and easily led astray by the artful demagogues.'[111] Conversely, southerners found

108. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 63–64, reaches similar conclusions to mine about the role of illiteracy in southern political culture. Gienapp, in ' "Politics Seem to Enter into Everything"', 61–63, briefly touches on the discrepancy between education and turnout in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, but he does not explore the national dimensions of the pattern.

109. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*, 61–81, 150–97, 261–75; Smith, *Press, Politics, and Patronage*, 100–14.

110. Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, 128–29, 146–47. Thornton cites J. D. Williams to Clement Claiborne Clay, June 11, 1857, in Clay Papers, Duke University Library, at 128.

111. *Enquirer* (Memphis), August 23, 1839, cited in Sellers, *Polk: Jacksonian*, 375.

elections in New York City to be swamped with 'little bits of paper' and missing the trappings of the traditional southern election: 'New Yorkers never have what we call "stump speeches,"' a southern novelist wrote in 1834, 'and never personally know or even see their representatives.'[112] Oral, not print, communication was critical for the southern voter.

The limits of the popular political press in the South is measurable in 1840, when both parties, but particularly the Whigs, flooded much of the country with campaign papers. (See Table 12.) In the North, these papers were targeted at the states with more poorly developed presses; Ohio and Indiana stand out, with thirty-three and seventeen temporary campaign papers respectively. But this effort failed to materialize in the South, as Democrats took the region for granted and the Whigs put their limited efforts into states already relatively well supplied with newspapers: Maryland and Mississippi stand out. The southern Whigs knew their political system, and they did not have to squander resources on the press: William Henry Harrison swept five of the seven southern, low-press-volume states. The essential forms of mediation in southern politics, as we have seen, were oral and took place in face-to-face settings rather than on the printed page. And—strikingly—the face-to-face politics of this 'herrenvolk' democracy seems to have been at least as—and often *more*—effective than the northern popular politics of print in moving the electorate to the polls, as measured by the extremely high levels of voter turnout recorded in many southern states. If, across the South, 'everybody talked politics everywhere,' the 'illiterate and shoeless' and many of their more fortunate peers learned the 'lore of politics' secondhand.[113] Without the benefit or even the necessity of a fully developed press, southern voters responded to a communal, face-to-face politics of speech and barbecue; living in

112. William Alexander Caruthers, *Kentuckian in New York*, 162–63, cited in David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 19.

113. For quotes, see William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 36–37.

TABLE 12

LOG CABIN CAMPAIGN NEWSPAPERS, BY SECTION, PARTY, AND PREVAILING PRESS VOLUME, 1840

	States with high press volume			*States with low press volume*		
	Total Campaign papers in 1840	*Total free pop. 1840**	*Free pop./ campaign paper*	*Total Campaign papers in 1840*	*Total free pop. 1840**	*Free pop./ campaign paper*
United States:	96	8,012	83.4	61	6,134	100.5
Whig papers	61		131.2	39		157.3
Dem. papers	35		228.9	22		278.8
North:	80	6,867	85.8	43	2,780	**64.6**
Whig papers	49		140.1	28		**99.3**
Dem. papers	31		221.5	15		**185.3**
South:	16	1,145	**71.6**	18	3,354	186.3
Whig papers	12		**95.4**	11		304.9
Dem. papers	4		286.2	7		479.1

**expressed in 1000s*

Bold denotes figure at or better than national average.

High press volume:
Free pop. per paper listed in the 1840 census = 5,000–10,361

Low press volume:
Free pop. per paper listed in the 1840 census = 10,500–18,900

Campaign papers: newspapers established for the 1840 campaign only.

SOURCES:
Miles, *The People's Voice*, 14–53.

a booming marketplace of print, many northerners met the political editors' best efforts with more independence of mind and withwith both dissent and disengagement.[114]

114. Bourke and DeBats, 'Identifiable Voting,' 275–86. See the useful discussion of electioneering and the contest between print culture and barbecue culture in Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*, 172–203, and in 'Barbecues and Pledges: Electioneering and the Rise of Democratic Politics in Antebellum Alabama,' *Journal of Southern History* 60 (1994): 479–512, also the wider literature on the southern face-to-face politics of neighborhood and kinship that includes: Eugene Genovese, 'Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy,' in Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 249–64; Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 11, 114–57; J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 94–108, 117–22; Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 60–61, 182–84; Thomas A. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815–1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989),

These were configurations of the 'different polities' that Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats have sketched in their social analyses of voice voting in antebellum Virginia and Oregon.[115] On the one hand, a mobilization model of the antebellum electoral process centers on the dialogue between the individual voter and printed information in the privacy of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community.' Here the voter's opinion, shaped by a flood of 'little bits of paper,' led to a 'totally private act,' as Bourke and DeBats summarize the thrust of Amasa Walker's 1850 Report proposing the secret ballot in Massachusetts.[116] The polar opposite was a model of 'communal partisanship,' in which politics was embedded in neighborhood solidarity, in the fabric of local pyramids of kinship, work, worship, and recreation that defined the warp and woof of American rural life. Where Bourke and DeBats see this as particularly a southern form, their own work, and the evidence here on the rural Midwest, makes it obvious that aspects of 'communal partisanship' could be found throughout the nation.[117] But

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120–21, 146–47, 314–15; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98, 105–12, 239–46, 265–71, 275–76; Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: the Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (New York: Oxford Univrsity Press, 1995), 84–102, 132–55. Revealingly, while Morris used the Vicksburg newspapers as sources, he did not find it necessary to examine them as agents of political communication. Equally revealingly, neither Waldstreicher nor Pasley devote much space to the forms of southern politics in their studies of politics and print. Most of Waldstreicher's treatment of the South comes in an illuminating, but short, section of regionalism (*In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 251–71); Pasley recognized the distinctiveness of an educated gentleman editorship in the South ('*The Tyranny of Printers*,' 19, 158–59, 259–64), but does not explore in detail its implications, preferring to focus on the experience of a rising class of Republican political editors in the North.

115. Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*; and 'Identifiable Voting in Nineteenth-Century America: Toward a Comparison of Britain and the United States before the Secret Ballot,' *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977–78): 259–88.

116. Bourke and DeBats, 'Identifiable Voting,' 287.

117. Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*, does describe communal voting in Oregon, but the thrust of their analysis is that its primary affinity was among a group of southern emigrants, who were being marginalized by northerners. On the role of a 'core community' in the Midwest, see Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 109–31; Don Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 92–118; and Richard S. Alcorn, 'Leadership and Stability in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: A Case Study of an Illinois Town,' *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 685–702.

it is equally obvious that throughout the north the hold of 'communal partisanship' was rapidly being loosened by the rising tide of 'little bits of paper.' And conversely, it as been argued that the distinctiveness of southern elections runs deep into the colonial past. Edmund Morgan has proposed that the southern tradition of political recreation, of the gentry swilling the voters, and indeed all comers, with alcohol, barbecue, and stump speeches, was a form of carnival, of riotous topsy-turvy that assisted in masking gentry rule behind a 'fiction' of popular sovereignty. Morgan even notes the disparity in voter participation: 'The turnout in egalitarian New England's sober elections was smaller than in the aristocratic South's drunken ones. . . . It is tempting to say that there was less need for a carnival-type election in societies where the fiction of popular sovereignty was closer to reality, where representative assemblies were filled with ordinary men who had not campaigned for the position and sat there, often reluctantly, as a civic duty.'[118] The qualities of sectional politics—Bourke and DeBats's 'different polities'—thus had ancient roots.

THE CLASSICAL PUBLIC SPHERE AND THE MARKETPLACE OF PRINT

We are left with something of an interpretive paradox. Two of the key qualities of the Second Party System (or the opening of the party period)—a popular press and voter turnout—were not systematically related, and sometimes even mutually exclusive. Our understanding of this paradox has been obscured by scholarly tradition: historians of press and print routinely ignore the South and Midwest, and base their modernizing generalizations on the urban Northeast, while historians of party, giving only fleeting attention to the press, ground much of their argument for a stable two-party system on high rates of voter turnout, fueled in some measure by data from voters across much of the South.[119] Only in

118. Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 206–8; see also 183–90, 197, 200.

119. The most significant exception to this statement is Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, passim. See p. 64 on the symbiotic weakness of party and press in the south.

the Mid-Atlantic, dominated by New York and Pennsylvania, can we see the unambiguous markers of 'mobilization' and the onset of the party period: direct relationships between print, turnout, and competition. Elsewhere political communications and process took on different configurations. In New England proper, a diverse press allowed interpretive choices that led an increasing number to join either a growing 'disengagement' from party or an emerging, 'organized dissent.' Conversely, the Midwest exhibited a developmental, frontier trajectory toward the 'party period,' with print catching up with party over time. And across the South high turnouts were routinely achieved by local notables without the mediation of a popular press, in a communal partisanship perpetuating important features of the 'pre-party era.'

Politics and communications were becoming increasingly complicated in the antebellum North, as the 'general crisis' of the 1830s spawned a proliferation of print and organizational forms, exploding the classical public sphere into a plural marketplace.[120] This 'general crisis' was having an opposite effect in the South, as traditional forms of politics and communications remained in place, and indeed were intensified in the reaction to threats of fundamental change. Paradoxically, the traditional forms operating in most of the South were more successful in mobilizing the electorate than were the storied efforts of northern Whigs. Equally importantly, despite the transition in political communications in the wider North that I have described here in terms of a 'general crisis,' a good case can be made for significant continuities. The regional differences evident in the 1840s have clear antecedents in the regional patterning that had been apparent in 1800 and 1810. The limited reach of the press in southern politics in 1840 also had an obvious antecedent in the early republic. Conversely, the Mid-Atlantic states always led the nation toward a competitive,

120. See the arguments on northern exceptionalism developed in James M. McPherson, 'Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question,' *Civil War History* 29 (1983): 230–44. For the South in particular, see Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, esp. 51–84.

high-volume press and competitive party politics. And New England's withdrawal from party, matched by a high-volume press, bears a relationship to an earlier Federalist preeminence. Oddly, but importantly, the truncation of a political future for Federalism, combined with the imperatives of diversification in the marketplace of print, fundamentally shaped the proliferation of print genres that contributed so much to the transformation unfolding in the 1830s, providing discursive avenues for disengagement, dissent, and even for party.

This view of politics and press has implications for the debate over the liberal or pre-modern nature of southern society,[121] and it speaks directly to the problems of access and closure that have framed this review. If there was a 'general crisis' in the 1830s, it involved a transition toward a liberal, market-defined social order, profoundly antithetical to the existence of slavery.[122] In this new world, the essential decisions would be made by autonomous, rational individuals, uncoerced by others and informed by print-assimilated knowledge and understandings. The explosion of new voices and opinions in print in the 1830s marked the opening of this new world and a fundamental threat to a traditional republican order. It can be argued that the parties of the Second Party system were designed to set limits on political discourse, to confine it to safe channels of debate. In an important sense, the parties, and the gate-keeping political editors, carried many of the exclusionary qualities of the classical public sphere into the nineteenth century.

How important, then, were newspapers to the American political system? How should we read John Quincy Adams in 1837?

121. James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpreation of the Old South* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1990), 40–79.

122. My thinking here is informed by the Haskell/Davis debate in John Ashworth, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Grimsted, *American Mobbing*; and Robert W. Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 281–387.

Certainly the parties required print communications for their national articulation. But the parties did not necessarily need great amounts of print, if we may judge by the case of the South. A form of national politics might well have emerged without a truly popular press; such a system would have allowed for limited circulation of a restrained discourse among a leadership class, who would have mobilized the electorate in face-to-face relationships. But mass popular literacy, a rapidly evolving economy, urbanization, and the explosive effects of religious revival in the antebellum North precluded that conservative path. Across most of the North a classical public sphere had segmented into dyadic partisanship and was then transformed into a protean plural marketplace. In this competitive environment political editors worked hard to usher in the 'Second Party System,' or the 'party period,' and their efforts have been recognized by a large school of historians. But they worked increasingly with diminished results, as the very definition of politics began to slip out of their hands, and as parts of an apparently monolithic public moved toward disengagement and dissent—i.e., toward an independence of mind. Conversely, many of the features of the classical public sphere endured across the plantation South, as the imperatives of honor, principle, and slavery trumped partisan organization.[123]

Between these diverging paths, parties and political editors could only attempt to steer the process into acceptable directions, hoping that dissenting voices such as that of John Quincy Adams would not be 'read by the whole people.' But an alternative, dissenting definition of politics had, in Adams's words, 'taken deep root in the soil of civil society.' The next two decades would see an explosion of voices such as Adams's in print across the North, exploring social and political possibilities unmediated by party. This sectional transformation of the public sphere from a classical forum to a liberal marketplace powerfully shaped the redefini-

123. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen.*

tion of 'the political' in antebellum America. Its increasing plurality and volume ultimately contributed to—and perhaps drove—the collapse of the contest between Whigs and Democrats and the coming of the Civil War.[124]

124. Here I adopt the argument offered by Thomas Leonard in *The Power of the Press*, 92–96, that the unmediated proliferation of print information in the 1850s undermined the Second Party System. 'It was reporting that achieved national circulation outside the control of canny party operatives that made the political system unstable. . . . What antebellum politics could not long endure was a reporting out of the control of these gatekeepers. . . .' Richard John, in *Spreading the News*, reaches similar conclusions; see 257–80.

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