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Changing Concepts of Party in the United States: New York, 1815–1828

MICHAEL WALLACE

DURING the first thirty years of its existence the United States developed, quite unintentionally, a party system. Organized popular parties regularly contested for power; Federalists and Republicans fought passionately and acrimoniously in Congress and cabinet, in town squares and county courthouses throughout the nation. The evidences of party spirit alarmed many Americans, for the existence of parties and their constant contention violated powerful and ancient traditions of proper political behavior. According to canons inherited from British and colonial thought and practice, parties were evil: they were associations of factious men bent on self-aggrandizement. Political competition was evil: the ideal society was one where unity and consensus prevailed, where the national interest was peacefully determined by national leaders. Because partisan behavior violated normal ethical standards, many men, politicians among them, saw in the rise of parties a sign of moral decline. Not until a new generation of politicians emerged—men who had been raised in parties and had grown to maturity in a world that included party competition as a fixture of political life—were Americans able to re-evaluate the ancient traditions and establish new ones that justified their political activities.

Much of this re-evaluation and development of new ideals took place in New York State in the 1820's.[1] There a group of professional politicians, leaders of the Republican party known as the Albany Regency, developed the modern concept of a political party and declared party associations to be eminently desirable. They adhered to a set of values that insisted on preserving, not destroying, political parties. They denounced and derided the consensus ideal and praised permanent political competition as being beneficial to society.

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[1] I do not claim that only New Yorkers advanced the ideas I am about to discuss, but only that they present us with certain archetypal positions. Investigations of the reflections of politicians in other states during this period, particularly Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and North Carolina, might uncover similar configurations of ideas. For some New Jersey attitudes, primarily concerning the caucus, see Carl Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: The Genesis of a Party Machine, 1789–1817* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1967).

This essay will examine the ideas of these politicians. It will begin with their new definition of a political party, move to the new code of political morality that declared loyalty to party to be of the highest value, and conclude with their gradual rejection of the consensus tradition.

The regency politicians justified their political party by distinguishing it from the parties characteristic of English and colonial American politics. They asserted that while the old type of party had been a personal clique satisfying nothing but the greed and whims of its aristocratic leaders—thus meriting the odium it had received—the new type of party was a popular, democratically run organization that enabled the people to participate in government; it was, therefore, praiseworthy. By distinguishing between old and new parties, and by applying the epithets of the antiparty tradition only to the former, they freed their own association from condemnation. They were able to make this distinction because in fact the parties they were familiar with were quite different from their eighteenth-century forebears the regency ratified a change that had already occurred.

In eighteenth-century England, "parties," "factions," or "connections" were cliques of parliamentary notables, organized about one or more prominent leaders. They were held together primarily by hopes of obtaining office. As Sir Lewis Namier tells us, "whoever in the eighteenth century had the 'attractive power' of office, received an accession of followers, and whoever retained it for some time was able to form a party." In addition to patronage, kinship and friendship were the basic ligaments of these primary political units. Lacking an organizational basis, however, these connections were quite unstable: "Such parties . . . were bound to melt, . . . fo the basis of the various groups was eminently personal."[2] Several suc groups would merge to form the coalitions that made up ministries, bu these coalitions were themselves highly unstable and in a crisis tended t dissolve into their constituent elements. Denominations such as Whig an Tory were often meaningful designations, but they denoted broad stylist and ideological characteristics, not cohesive structures. "There were n proper party organizations . . . though party names and cant were current."[3]

[2] Lewis B. Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1930 242–43.

[3] *Id., The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (New York, 1961), x. (the personal, nonorganizational quality of politics in this period, see also Richard Pares, *Ki George III and the Politicians* (Oxford, Eng., 1953), 74–82; Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, *Growth the British Party System* (2 vols., London, 1967), I, 8; Archibald S. Foord, *His Majesty's O position, 1714–1830* (Oxford, Eng., 1964), 23. For the earlier part of the eighteenth centu see Robert Walcott, Jr., *English Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Ma 1956); and J. H. Plumb, *The Origins of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (Bostc 1967).

Colonial politics in New York adhered to the English pattern: an intricate interplay of family cliques that occurred largely within the confines of the Assembly. This is not to say that contests were simply affairs of personal pique; significant economic and social interests were often at stake. Yet the processes of adjustment and reconciliation of interests were not carried on through the medium of such stable groupings as political parties. The units of political organization were shifting alliances of patrician families or elite individuals: New York's political history was a dense tangle of Livingstonians and DeLanceyites, of Lewisites, Burrites, and Clintonians.[4]

From the Revolution to the 1820's, the English model of party was altered, and a distinctively American form emerged. The Revolution forced the elite factions, whose power had been rooted in connections with England, social prestige, or economic power, to turn to the public, to attempt to bolster their positions by soliciting mass support; this increased dependency on the legitimizing power of numbers produced what one historian has called a shift from a politics of status to a politics of opinion. The mobilization of popular support behind specific political positions or leaders became increasingly crucial in American politics, and the political party emerged as the mechanism for organizing that support. In the 1780's and 1790's, debate over such national issues as the adoption of the Constitution, the Hamiltonian program, the Jay Treaty, and the Genêt mission drew great numbers of previously uninvolved people into the expanding political parties. The parties changed from cliques in Congress to popular associations, as men sought to influence the composition and character of political leadership by concerted action at the polls.[5]

Parties began to develop identities, personas, that were separable from the personalities and positions of their leaders; structures, too, were becom-

[4] See Stanley Katz, *Newcastle's New York: Anglo-American Politics, 1732–1753* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York* (Torchbook ed., New York, 1965); Jabez D. Hammond, *The History of Political Parties in the State of New York* (2 vols., New York, 1846), I; Alfred Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1967).

[5] The literature on the development of parties is extensive; see, e.g., Carl Becker, *History of Political Parties in the Province of New York* (Madison, Wis., 1909); Lloyd Irving Rudolph, "The Meaning of Party: From the Politics of Status to the Politics of Opinion in Eighteenth-Century England and America," doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1956; Harry Ammon, "The Genêt Mission and the Development of American Political Parties," *Journal of American History,* LII (Mar. 1966), 725–41; Joseph Charles, *The Origins of the American Party System* (New York, 1961); William Nisbet Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776–1809* (New York, 1963); Roy Nichols, *The Invention of the American Political Parties* (New York, 1967); Paul Goodman, "The First American Party System," in *The American Party Systems,* ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York, 1967); Noble Cunningham, *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization, 1789–1801* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1957), and *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Operations, 1801–1809* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1963); William Nisbet Chambers, "Parties and Nation-Building in America," in *Political Parties and Political Development,* ed. Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (Princeton, N. J., 1966).

ing less communal, more impersonal, as parties stretched to absorb ever-larger numbers of adherents. Changing terminology marked the process: in New York, where DeLanceyites had fought Livingstonians, Federalists now fought Republicans. Yet by the War of 1812 the process was far from complete; the New York Republican party, for instance, remained primarily a coalition of family factions, which tended to fracture repeatedly along the lines of its component parts. The first generation of party members, generally unaware of the larger processes at work, maintained a greater allegiance to their personal factions than to the larger entity, the party. The structure, function, size, and scope of the party had changed, but not men's attitudes toward it. Because the transformation was unplanned, a series of *ad hoc* reactions to events, the conception of party remained unchanged. What looked like a modern party had evolved, but because change had preceded intellectual awareness, old attitudes toward parties prevailed.

In New York, after the War of 1812, a new conception of party emerged, modeled more closely on reality; in turn, the new definition of what a party ought to be legitimated existing structures. This re-evaluation developed out of what at first seemed just one more intraparty feud among New York Republicans, but that rapidly took a new and significant turn. The focus of the struggle was De Witt Clinton, in 1817 the leader of the party. Clinton held to the old view of party: he was a patrician politician who considered the party his personal property. This attitude is not surprising, given the nature of his career. Clinton assumed his position of leadership effortlessly, inheriting control of the faction that had been led by his uncle, George Clinton, New York's Revolutionary War governor. Despite the fact that the organization he headed in 1817 was quite different from what it had been when he entered politics in the 1790's, his style of leadership remained characteristic of the earlier period. Snobbish, spiteful and supercilious, he was forbiddingly aristocratic. He craved flattery, he rejected advice from subordinates that conflicted with his own political judgments, and he directed the party largely as he saw fit. Above all, he dispensed the rewards of the party—political patronage and party nominations—as he pleased, often to personal friends, often to Federalists at the expense of deserving Republicans.[6]

This type of leadership became increasingly unacceptable to a group c

[6] For Clinton's approach to parties, see John Bigelow, "De Witt Clinton as a Politician *Harper's*, L (Dec. 1874), 409–17, 563–71; Hammond, *History of Political Parties*, I, 360, 461 62, 489–90; II, 269–74; Michael P. Lagana, "De Witt Clinton and Martin Van Buren: Politic Managers in New York State, 1812–1822," master's thesis, Columbia University, 1963, 92–10 103–105, Chap. VI; Samuel P. Orth, *Five American Politicians* (Cleveland, 1906), 90–91, 9 107; Fox, *Decline of Aristocracy*, 194–228; Alvin Kass, *Politics in New York State, 1800–18* (Syracuse, N. Y., 1965), 17.

younger politicians in the party. As the party had become richer, more powerful, more obviously a vital route to a successful career in public life, many men whose allegiance lay not to any person or family but to the party itself had joined the organization. Inevitably such men would resent the idiosyncratic and unpredictable quality of party life, particularly the capricious dispensation of party rewards. Beginning about 1817, a group of these younger politicians known as the Bucktails began a quiet campaign to oust Clinton from the leadership. They were not interested merely in substituting one set of leaders for another. Rather their position may be likened to that of a group of young executives in a family firm who think that the business is being misrun because familial, not managerial, standards govern its operation.

By 1819 the Bucktails, who included such able men as Martin Van Buren, Benjamin Franklin Butler, Silas Wright, William Learned Marcy, and Azariah Cutting Flagg, felt ready to challenge Clinton openly. At first they attacked him personally, charging that he put his own interests above those of the organization. "De Witt Clinton, has acted incompatibly with his situation as the head of the republican party of this state, and in direct hostility to its best interest and prosperity. . . ."[7] "Personal aggrandizement," they declared, "has been his personal maxim, even at the sacrifice of the republican party."[8] As one Bucktail wrote in the Albany *Argus,* the organ of the insurgents, "notwithstanding his capacity, his manners are too repulsive, his temper too capricious and imperious, his deportment too dictatorial and tyrannical to acquire the affections or retain the confidence of any party."[9]

The Bucktails wanted to go beyond indicting Clinton's personal style and to get at the anachronistic system of personal politics that he represented. Yet it was difficult to criticize Clinton's kind of leadership within the traditional framework of ideas about parties, for he was acting in accord with centuries-old standards of behavior. They were thus forced to proclaim a new definition of party and new standards of proper behavior for party politicians that would discredit both Clinton and his style of politics. They accomplished this task by adopting the rhetoric of democracy and egalitarianism and applying it to intraparty organization. Parties, they declared, should be democratic associations, run by the majority of the membership. It was a simple assertion, but it immediately put them in a position of strength. The ideal was virtually unassailable; to undermine the Bucktail position, critics would have to denounce republicanism itself—in

[7] Republican meeting of the city of Hudson, in New York *National Advocate,* Feb. 10, 1820.
[8] Republican meeting of Redhook, in Albany *Argus,* Jan. 21, 1820.
[9] *Ibid.,* Oct. 22, 1824.

the 1820's a political impossibility. Republican ideals became the Bucktails' weapons, and they were weapons that Clinton could not counter.

The Bucktails asserted that a party organized about an individual or patrician family was unacceptable as it was not republican. Personal parties were not parties at all, but factions, aristocratic remnants from the deferential days of colonial politics. Clinton was denounced as "raising up not only an aristocracy, but what has more hideous features, a species of monarchy."[10] He was "the chieftain and head of an aristocracy"; his followers, "governed by no principle or party discipline," were "servile dependents . . . solely devoted to his views"; they were a "dangerous faction, bearing the badge of his family name," and solely concerned with "ministering to personal ambition."[11] His patronage policy was denounced, not simply as unfair, but as producing undemocratic concentrations of power: "Devotion to the person of a chief becomes a passport to public distinction, and servility to men in power is rewarded . . . by honors and emoluments." In sum, Clinton's whole vision of politics, "characterized by personal attachments on the one hand and by personal antipathies on the other," was "highly prejudicial to the interests of the people, and if successful [would] have a tendency to subvert our republican form of government."[12]

The proper form of political organization in a democratic state, the Bucktails argued, was not a personal faction but a political party. A true party was not the property of a man or a family, but transcended any of its members. Like a corporation it outlived its officers and did not, as had been the rule, expire when its leaders died or were removed from office. The proper party was "bound to the fortunes of no aspiring chief."[13] A political party, moreover, was responsible to the mass of its members: it was a democratic organization. The "cardinal maxim with the great republican party [should be] . . . always to seek for, and when ascertained, always to follow the will of the majority."[14] Politicians like Clinton, who felt themselves to be above the majority, could no longer be tolerated. "Those who refuse to 'abide by the fairly expressed will of the majority' . . . forfeit all claims to the

[10] Broadside, Oct. 15, 1824, in Broadside Collection [hereafer cited as BC], New York Public Library.

[11] *National Advocate*, Feb. 25, 1820; Albany *Argus*, Oct. 22, 1824; Dec. 10, 1819.

[12] *Ibid.*, Feb. 11, 1820. Another writer insisted that "the fatal rock upon which the democracy of this state has heretofore run their bark, is an undue attachment to individuals." (*Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1826.) As early as 1817 Marcy declared that "if republicans are to be put down because they have more devotion to the cause than to an Individual I shall consider it a duty and an honor to be arrayed in opposition to such an administration." (Marcy to John Bailey, Aug. 30, 1817, quoted in Robert Remini, "The Early Political Career of Martin Van Buren," doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1951, 203.)

[13] Albany *Argus*, Jan. 21, 1820.

[14] *Journal of the Senate of the State of New-York; at Their Forty-seventh Session, Begun and Held at the Capitol in the City of Albany, the Fourth of January 1824* [hereafter cited as New York Senate *Journal*, 1824] (Albany, 1824), 18.

character of republicans, and become recreant to the principles of that party."[15] This did not mean an end to leadership: "Republicans know full well that ... some must bear the brunt of the battle, and that to some hands must be consigned the interest and honor of the party; the system, the management, the labor and the anxiety." But leaders were expected to consider themselves the instruments or agents of an organization, not its owners. He "whose talents and zeal have benefitted the republican party will be supported as long as he consults the interests and ascendancy of that party, and no longer."[16] The proper criteria for advancement were faithful dedication to the party and long service in its support, not pedigree or property.

By these standards, Van Buren was a model party leader. He proclaimed his obligation to the organization: "There are few men in the state," he told a gathering of the faithful, "more indebted to the favor of the Republican Party than myself and none more willing to acknowledge it."[17] He rose to power in the prescribed fashion: "We speak of him with pride," declared a mass meeting of Albany Republicans in 1820, "because without the influence of fortune, or the factitious aid of a family name, he has, by his entire devotion to the republican cause, raised himself to the first grade as a statesman and a patriot."[18]

By 1820 the Bucktail revolt had succeeded. Largely because they were able to convince many of the party that they were more faithful to the organization and the will of its majority than was Clinton, they managed to oust Clinton and his adherents; they then appropriated the apparatus and symbols of the Republican party entirely for themselves. Despite vigorous protests at being read out of the party because they failed to measure up to the new criteria, the Clintonians were relegated to the status of a distinct personal party.[19] Van Buren and his fellow Republicans entrenched them-

[15] Albany *Argus,* Jan. 19, 1824.

[16] *National Advocate,* Nov. 17, 1821.

[17] Draft of speech to be read at Herkimer Convention, Oct. 3, 1826, Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

[18] Albany *Argus,* Feb. 29, 1820.

[19] The Clintonians were outraged at being displaced by younger men for not adhering to the new party discipline. Their complaints are evident in a revealing pamphlet, *The Martling Man,* written either by Clinton himself or by his lieutenant, Pierre C. Van Wyck. The narrator remarks that "times appear to be much changed since the days of George Clinton. Here I am, just as good a man as ever, just as true a Republican, . . . [and all my] part and lot in the election is, to be appointed on a ward committee, and to do a duty at the polls and to scour round through the cellars and groceries to buy up votes, and for what? to elect a set of young men, of whom I know but little and care less." After many reflections on the old, independent days, the hero decides to reject the new-style politics: "hereafter I will have none of your committees, or caucuses, or tricks; . . . as to your regular modes, and all that make us drill soldiers, . . . if I can find the old Republicans again, I'll join them; if I cannot, why I'll be independent and vote as I please." (*The Martling Man, or Says I to Myself, How is This?* [New York, 1819], 5–6, 8.) Another disaffected member was James Tallmadge, who declared that "these old men who are now marked as irregulars, understand and observe the principle

selves in the legislature and all of the executive branch but the governorship and came to be characterized, by Clintonian and Federalist opponents, as the Albany Regency.[20]

The Bucktails thus succeeded in distinguishing between party and faction in both the theory and actuality of New York politics. A party (such as their own) was a democratically structured, permanent organization; a faction (such as the Clintonians) was a transient, aristocratic, personal clique. "On one side is arrayed the old republican party, and on the other the followers of a man."[21] Personal factions were bad: they were aristocratic and concerned only with enriching their leader. But parties were good: they allowed all members an equal voice; gave all members an equal chance to rise to positions of leadership and to receive party nominations for important elective positions; and provided all members an equal chance at receiving patronage, now no longer dispensed at the whim of an arbitrary leader. The degree to which the newer politicians rejected the antiparty tradition and the personal basis of politics can be seen in their extraordinary degree of attachment to their organization. They went far beyond merely justifying the existence of their party in ideological and practical terms and developed a system of political discipline that enjoined every politician, at whatever cost to himself, to preserve and perpetuate the party. It is to the development of their doctrines of party loyalty and party discipline that we now turn.

The new politicians adopted a code of political ethics, governing the behavior of politicians, that was a startling departure from old traditions. Edmund Burke, the greatest defender of party associations in the eighteenth century, had always considered political connections purely voluntary, based on similarity of ideas; he never assumed that there would be any control of members by the group. To "blindly follow the opinions of your party, when in direct opposition to your own clear ideas," he considered "a degree of servitude that no worthy man could bear the thought of submitting to."[22] It was precisely such servitude that the new party morality demanded:

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of the republican party; while these new converts who have thrust themselves into places and set up as leaders of party discipline, know nothing. . . . To approve of caucus nominations, and obey their leader, is the extent of their education and of their political principles." (*Speech of James Tallmadge, Esq. on the subject of Caucus to Nominate a President given in the House of Assembly, 26th January, 1824* [Albany, 1824], 11.)

[20] For a short account of the Albany Regency, see Robert V. Remini, "The Albany Regency," *New York History*, XXXIX (Oct. 1958), 341–55. Also useful are *id.*, "Early Political Career of Martin Van Buren"; Ivor D. Spencer, "William L. Marcy and the Albany Regency," doctoral dissertation, Brown University, 1940; John Garraty, *Silas Wright* (New York, 1949); Kass, *Politics in New York State.*

[21] Albany *Argus*, Oct. 22, 1824.

[22] Edmund Burke, "Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents," in *Works of the*

all politicians were required to subordinate themselves to the party and not to let either convictions or careers block obedience to the will of the majority. This injunction was not simply tactical but ethical. As one party paper put it, "we hold it a principle, that every man should sacrifice his own private opinions and feelings to the good of his party—and the man who will not do it is unworthy to be supported by a party, for any post of honor or profit."[23] As it was cogently expressed by another paper, "individual partialities and local attachments are secondary and quite unimportant compared . . . with the INTERESTS AND PERMANENCY OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY."[24] The proper politician ignored restraining scruples when they conflicted with those of the greater number. As a group of Bucktail senators declared, "we did not think it *right* to adhere to our individual opinions, in opposition to the will of the majority [italics mine]."[25]

The earliest formulation of this doctrine of subordination was the caucus doctrine. This political code of honor evolved from the need to eliminate the splintering that had characterized the party's years of growth. In its mature form, the caucus doctrine required minority factions in party conclaves to submit to the will of the greater number: party discussion in private was to be followed by party unity in public. As the *Argus* phrased it, "brethren of the same principle [meet] together—the minority yield to the majority—and the result is announced as the will of the whole."[26] This, too, was not just a tactic, but a moral injunction. Republicans were agreed that "violating the pledge of a caucus" was a "black and dishonorable course."[27]

Right Honourable Edmund Burke (7 vols., Boston, 1826), I, 428. Burke assumed that the problem of differences between party and member was a negligible one: "as the greater part of the measures which arise in the course of publick business are related to, or dependent on, some great leading *general principles on government,* a man must be peculiarly unfortunate in the choice of his political company if he does not agree with them at least nine times in ten." (*Ibid.,* 428.) If a party man was so unfortunate as to differ with his party Burke remarks that "he ought from the beginning to have chosen some other, more conformable to his opinions." This of course begs the question, but in a revealing fashion. For Burke, with all his praise for party, was not at ease with organizations; his sort of party was voluntaristic and thus lacked the stability the regency men desired to achieve. The same insistence on the right of individuals to disagree with organization policy (so morally refreshing if so subversive of bureaucratic continuity) can be found decades later in Lord Grey. In 1820 Grey defined party as a "connexion of honorable and independent men" who agree on leading issues. And "the moment there arises a disagreement on these the party is dissolved on the same honorable ground on which it was first united." (Cited in Austin Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815–1830* [London, 1967], 7.)

[23] Black Rock *Beacon,* quoted in Albany *Argus,* Feb. 17, 1824.

[24] *Ibid.,* Aug. 26, 1823.

[25] "Circular of the Republican Members of the Senate," *ibid.,* Dec. 10, 1819.

[26] *Ibid.,* Feb. 27, 1824.

[27] M. M. Noah to Van Buren, Dec. 29, 1820, in Albert Friedenberg, "The Correspondence of Jews with President Martin Van Buren," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society,* XXII (1914), 75.

Jabez D. Hammond, a contemporary historian-politician, put the matter concisely:

When political friends consent to go into caucus for the nomination of officers, every member of such caucus is bound in honor to support and carry into effect its determination. . . . To try your chance in a caucus, and then because your wishes are not gratified to attempt to defeat the result . . . strikes me as a palpable violation of honor and good faith.[28]

The Bucktails did not invent the caucus doctrine; as an organizational device it is obvious, probably ancient. Certainly it had been advanced in New York politics in the early days of the Republican party and had been used nationally even before. Yet in New York, it had never really been accepted. The doctrine was advanced usually only by those whose needs it served: the majority faction of the moment.[29] What the regency men did to strengthen it was to adhere to it when in the minority.

In 1817 Clinton received the Republican nomination for governor. Many Bucktails advocated ignoring the caucus decision and bolting; their New York City allies, the Tammanyites, did just that. But Van Buren firmly believed in the caucus doctrine; for the first time, therefore, a strong body of dissenters was led by a man who felt that his responsibility to the institution transcended his differences with the dominant faction. Under his leadership, the Bucktails supported the caucus decision. As Van Buren explained,

If we could be found capable of opposing [the caucus'] decision for no other reason than because we found ourselves in a minority, our bad faith would reduce us from out present elevated position as the main body . . . of the Republican party of the State, to that of a faction, like the Burrites and Lewisites, which struggles for short seasons & then disappears from the State.[30]

Support of the caucus was a matter of tactics. Van Buren knew the power of the party label. He saw that the party would be most effective as a vote-gathering machine only if it were united in support of a single candidate. Were he to discredit the caucus, the party label would be reduced in value, the mechanism for uniting the party would be crippled, and the victory of future Bucktail candidates might be endangered. Willing submis-

[28] Hammond, *History of Political Parties,* I, 193.

[29] In 1804, for example, the caucus nominated Morgan Lewis for the governorship, but the outvoted faction of Aaron Burr countered with a nomination by "a respectable meeting" in New York City. The Lewisite majority attacked the legitimacy of such proceedings: "Morgan Lewis, Esq., is certainly the republican candidate. Has he not been nominated by the almost unanimous voice of the members of the legislature? Can any better method be devised to collect the expression of the general will? Is it not our duty as good and faithful men to be governed by the voice of the majority fairly expressed?" The Burrites thought not. Similarly, in 1808, Daniel D. Tompkins obtained the caucus nomination, and immediately his backers pleaded with the minority to "acquiesce in the determination of a fair majority of our republican fellow citizens throughout the state." But the minority bolted. (See Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power,* 148–53.)

[30] Van Buren to Gorham Worth, Mar. 19, 1817, Van Buren Papers.

sion to the Clintonian majority of the moment was, therefore, the price to be paid for future victories.

Support of the caucus was also a matter of principle. Van Buren tied the basic republican ethos of majoritarianism securely to the caucus system: minority status was not a legitimate basis for fleeing the party standard; bolting was to be stigmatized as "bad faith." Were the Bucktails to violate their own conception of the behavior proper to members of a true party, they would destroy their credentials as politicians of a new breed and relegate themselves to the status of a faction, indistinguishable from their Clintonian opponents. By their dramatic sacrifice on behalf of the party,[31] the Bucktails gained an impregnable moral position. When, in 1819, the Clintonian faction ignored the decision of a caucus dominated by the Bucktails, they virtually excommunicated themselves; their "bad faith" allowed the Bucktails to claim that only they were true Republicans. Hammond, a Clintonian, later declared: "I aver it as my deliberate opinion that [the 1819 violation of the caucus] was the cause of the [Clintonians'] prostration and ruin."[32]

By the 1820's, then, the caucus doctrine was granted acceptance of a sort it had not achieved previously in New York. Its popularity was traceable to the same reasons as the party's: it was both useful and an operational fulfillment of the majoritarian ethic.

The ethos of subordination dictated further demands for the party activist aside from behaving properly in caucus. If he wished to advance in the party, for instance, there were prescribed patterns of behavior. The perfect party man did not aggressively pursue advancement; his success, at least ideally, depended on service to the institution and a ritual denial of higher aspirations. Nothing irritated these men more than self-seeking politicians. As Van Buren noted, "rival aspirants for the superiority of position in their own ranks have always and everywhere been the bane of political organizations, disturbing their peace and impairing their efficiency." He suggested that humility was the best policy: "it has been those who . . . refrained the most from suffering their personal behavior from being inflamed by their political rivalries and were most willing to leave the question of their individual

[31] The Bucktail acquiescence bewildered many. A nonplused New York *Evening Post* declared that "we are at a loss to account, upon any principle of honor or fair play how [Van Buren], after representing Mr. Clinton in one speech made at 8 o'clock in the evening, as the most unworthy and dangerous man in the state, could afterwards, in another, at 12, the same night, represent him as the great republican citizen who ought to unite all hearts in his elevation." (Quoted in Remini, "Early Political Career of Martin Van Buren," 201.)

[32] Hammond, *History of Political Parties,* I, 479–80. Van Buren concurred. When the Clintonians ignored the caucus, "the effect was electrical and from one end of the state to the other there was a revulsion of feeling in the minds of Republicans." (Martin Van Buren, "The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren," ed. by John C. Fitzpatrick, in *Annual Report, American Historical Association, 1918* (2 vols. plus suppl., Washington, D.C., 1920), II, 90.

advancement to the quiet and friendly arbitrament of their political associates [who] have in the end been the most successful."[33] The regency leader Silas Wright knew the formula. As he wrote to Van Buren, "I have entered upon a political life and while I remain in it I intend to live up to what I understand to be the course of a political party man." Wright abstemiously affirmed that he wanted nothing "by way of office or patronage which [the party leaders] shall not think well sustained to subserve the best interests of the great republican party of our state." He was not averse to advancement, but he insisted that his friends, in considering rewards of office for him, should always "first consult the interests of the Republican party in their doings."[34] Even the meanest party functionaries repeated this litany.[35]

Editors of party papers were particularly subject to party discipline. Isaac Leake, on taking control of the Albany *Argus* in 1820, was aware that he was "a child of the Republican Party" and that in all matters he must seek "the concurrence of the party."[36] Mordecai M. Noah, editor of the New York *National Advocate,* resigned in 1824 over what he felt to be undue interference with the business aspects of his work. While the Republican General Committee remonstrated with him privately, a party-appointed caretaker expounded on the duties of party editors:

> The proprietor of a party journal is entitled to all the profits and emoluments arising out of his establishment; and so far as pecuniary matters extend, none ought to control him. But he should never possess, or ought he to assume the right of governing, instead of being governed. To the political opinions and views of his party, he should ever be subservient. It is upon this principle that a party newspaper is commenced, and, ultimately, by the exertions of active and ardent partisans, placed upon a permanent foundation.
>
> Will any reflecting man pretend that the editor of a democratic newspaper has the right to, on his own responsibility, recommend or assail men or measures in opposition to the will of that party, who are the patrons and supporters of his paper? We think not, because this would be acting on a principle that is untenable. It is assuming the ground that an editor because he controls a press, may, of right propagate his own view, regardless of the dissensions and divisions which he may thus produce in his own political family. If the editor possesses this right, so ought every other individual of his party. The effect of such a system would be perpetual discord and confusion.[37]

In a short time, Noah, bowing to party pressure, returned to his post, ex-

[33] Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 519. See also Albany *Argus,* June 4, 1824: "differences merely personal . . . may be entertained to a reasonable extent . . . yet [must] by no means interrupt the harmony which ought always to prevail among those who feel and act from higher than personal considerations and attachments, for the common cause of the republican party."

[34] Wright to Van Buren, Dec. 17, 1828, Van Buren Papers.

[35] See, e.g., Job Clark to Flagg, Dec. 13, 1826, John Morgan to Flagg, Dec. 4, 1827, Azariah Cutting Flagg Papers, New York Public Library.

[36] Jesse Buel to Van Buren, May 28, 1820, Van Buren Papers.

[37] *National Advocate,* Sept. 6, 1824.

plaining that "it was doubtless my interest to establish a new paper . . . but a new paper might possibly embarrass the republican party, and I yield, as I have ever done, with deference to the wishes of the party, when expressed through its accredited organs."[38]

Loyalty was also expected of Republican legislators, albeit in a sporadic fashion. The party virtually never took positions on public issues, but it did exact, and get, discipline on issues that in some fashion affected the fortune of the organization itself. At such times it was expected that "the great majority of the legislature . . . would in conformity to the principles of their party, sacrifice their personal predilections on the altar of the general good."[39] The length to which legislators would occasionally go in subordinating their interests to those of the organization is illustrated by the political suicide committed by seventeen state senators in 1824. Party strategy required the defeat of the extremely popular electoral bill (which would have given the choice of presidential electors to the people and blocked the regency's delivering the state's united electoral vote to William Crawford, the caucus choice that year). Van Buren urged "the Republican members of both houses [to] act in concert and magnanimously sacrifice individual preferences for the general good."[40] With perfect foreknowledge of the consequences, these seventeen voted, as the party required, to defeat the democratic measure. As Senator John Suydam phrased it, "I have discharged my duty fearlessly but conscientiously."[41] Most of these political Spartans ended their legislative careers with that vote; the hatred generated among the people was extraordinarily intense. Their only recompense, aside from those few who were rewarded substantially with executive appointments, judgeships, and the like, was the overwhelming gratitude of their party brethren. As regency leader Marcy told another party leader, Flagg, a banquet was held for the martyrs where "something approaching to divine honors were lavished on the Seventeen. We did not leave our good friends, while turtle soup or good madera [*sic*] could be seen, tasted or heard of."[42]

[38] *Ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1824. Another battle over finances ended in Noah's permanent departure. (See *ibid.*, Dec. 16, 17, 27, 1824.) The concept of a party press was particularly exasperating to regency opponents. As a "friend to an independent press" angrily wrote the Clintonian Albany *Daily Advertiser* (Sept. 19, 1823), "what avails it whether we have legal censors of the press, or assumed dictators, where will is received both as law and gospel in all political matters? It is a fact . . . that hitherto 'discipline of party,' as the *Argus* and its patron cantingly call it, has kept the press completely under the control of a few, very few, men, who care not a rush for the rights of the people. . . ." The Clintonian *Statesman* (May 30, 1823) insisted that "We are *not* party men, and do *not* print a party paper. . . ."

[39] "Epaminondas" in Albany *Argus*, Mar. 5, 1824.

[40] Van Buren to Daniel Evans, June 9, 1924, Van Buren Papers.

[41] William MacKenzie, *The Life and Times of Martin Van Buren* (Boston, 1846), 199.

[42] Marcy to Flagg, July 19, 1825, Flagg Papers. Party also affected the organization of the legislature. Republican Erastus Root candidly remarked after his election as Speaker that "I was elected to the legislature by a political party, and it would appear that I am honored with

The loyal party adherent, then, could usually count on some reward, tangible or intangible, for his continued support.[43] But even the most faithful of its members could be sacrificed, as is shown by the fate of Joseph C. Yates. Yates, governor of New York in 1824 and a loyal Republican, cooperated, despite his personal reservations, with the party policy of defeating the electoral bill. His consequent unpopularity with the electorate led to a caucus movement to replace him with a more promising candidate in the next election. This greatly upset party stalwarts like Wright and Flagg. As Hammond tells us, "they insisted that if [Yates] had erred, in the course he had taken in relation to the electoral law, it was an error committed in accordance with the policy of the party to which he belonged and in pursuance of their advice and request. If he was to be sacrificed for that, Mr. Flagg declared his readiness to suffer with him."[44] Butler, another important Republican, agreed. He felt that abandoning Yates might be "thought of as a breach of good faith and a violation of political morality and honor." The interests of the party and one of its faithful members clashed; party men faced an agonizing dilemma of conscience. Yet there could only be one solution. The conflict was resolved, to Yates's misfortune, when his opponents appealed to the first law: the preservation of the institution. As Butler noted, the decisive argument had been that "to secure the ultimate safety of the party, some other person must be nominated."[45]

Finally there were requirements for those who merely voted for the party. Their duty was simple: to vote for the nominee chosen by the party caucus. This meant ignoring or repressing reservations about the nominee; it was called being "regular." Republicans were reminded repeatedly that

> it is necessary to preserve the unity and harmony of the party. . . . If opposition to the regularly nominated candidates is countenanced, if a few persons are permitted to distract & divide us it will lay the foundation for new parties & factions which may acquire a fatal strength. . . . Let us not allow personal animosi-

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this chair, by the same party. When a committee is to be appointed on a question which may involve party considerations, it may be expected that I shall appoint a majority of that committee from the party to which I belong." (Hammond, *History of Political Parties,* II, 242–43.) The impact of party loyalty in the legislature burgeoned in the next two decades. For the influence of the ethos of subordination on national legislation in the 1840's, see Joel H. Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841–52* (Pittsburgh, 1967).

[43] There were, of course, negative as well as positive sanctions; they are emphasized in Remini's "Albany Regency." It is true, as Remini says, that "the awful arm of the appointing power" was used freely. But it is interesting to note that even dismissal was made a principled affair. Butler, for example, wrote Flagg about an officeholder who "had fattened on the bounty of the party for years . . . by hollow and hypocritical professions . . . all the while condemning its usages . . . . He was not deserving of reappointment having forfeited all claims by a total dereliction of principle, both moral and political." (Butler to Flagg, Dec. 15, 1827, Flagg Papers.)

[44] Hammond, *History of Political Parties,* II, 156.

[45] Butler to Van Buren, Mar. 27, 1824, Van Buren Papers.

ties to mingle with great considerations of duty we owe to principle and to party.[46]

Many declared their acceptance of regularity, as did Flagg: "I am not partial either to Mr. Crawford or Adams, but am disposed to do that which is for the best good of the Republican party in the state. I am decidedly in favor of supporting the regular nomination . . . fall on whom it may. . . . and the republican who runs counter to this is a schismatic."[47] The essence of regularity was the abdication of dissent. When, appalled by the character of the nominee, Flagg once objected to a caucus choice, Marcy reproved him:

An opposition to a candidate which is abstractly right may be politically wrong. . . . The example of opposing a candidate nominated by political friends is bad not only as to its effects on the pending election but as to others that are to succeed it. An opposition upon the ground of principle will be used to authorize an opposition on the ground of caprice.[48]

When some Republicans voted for a Federalist candidate "just because they [had] some personal dislike to the regular candidate," Noah was outraged: "Had there been political or moral honesty in men from whom the country had a right to expect better things . . . the regular nomination like the laws of the Medes and Persians would have been held sacred."[49]

This injunction was accepted by the party rank and file. In 1824, when the party's procedures were severely attacked, local Republican groups in New York responded with hundreds of testimonials demonstrating adherence to their party's principle of regularity.

[From Columbia County:] That we have the highest confidence in the utility of regular nominations as heretofore made by the usage of the republicans. And that we will faithfully abide such nominations, as the strongest bond of party union.
[From Dutchess County:] That we approve of all regular caucus nominations fairly and equitably made, and that we consider such nominations the only legitimate method by which the will of the majority can be expressed and that we as republicans consider them highly recommendatory and binding on us.
[From Cayuga County:] That we will adhere to, and support those voluntary associations for . . . the nomination of officers founded on the representative principle, which during the revolution and the subsequent political contests and

[46] *National Advocate*, Apr. 27, 1822.
[47] Flagg to Van Buren, Nov. 12, 1823, Van Buren Papers.
[48] Marcy to Flagg, Oct. 20, 1825, Flagg Papers. Wright needed no instruction: "It is part of my political creed always to act with my honest friends and to let the majority dictate that course of action." (Wright to Flagg, Dec. 20, 1827, *ibid.*) See also Peter B. Porter's avowal to Van Buren of his "determination to go with you and the great body of Republicans in this State (whatever candidate they may eventually light upon). . . ." (Porter to Van Buren, Oct. 31, 1822, Van Buren Papers.)
[49] *National Advocate*, Apr. 7, 1824.

during the last war with Great Britain . . . have enabled republicans, the friends of liberty, to harmonize in their views and give efficacy to their exertions.[50]

Such were the tenets of the new party morality. The unity and thus the continuity of the party were to be achieved by party discipline, the willingness of members to set aside personal considerations for the greater good. But there is a final point to be made about this code of political ethics, one that takes us to the core of the regency mind. As we have noted, the Bucktails distinguished a true party as one responsive to the majority of its members. Party discipline and such practices as the caucus were the devices that enabled the majority to rule; they ensured, moreover, that it would rule. They were thus the guarantees of intraparty democracy. They were also believed to be bulwarks of democracy in a larger arena. Party unity allowed the common people (most of whom, of course, were assumed to be Republicans) to deal as equals with aristocratic opponents like the Federalists; the power and influence of family and fortune could be offset by banding together and presenting a united front at the polls. Again, party discipline was an agent of democracy.[51]

[50] Albany *Argus,* Sept. 5, 1823; Feb. 27, Sept. 17, 1824. The reasons for this mass acceptance of party loyalty were many and complex. One point is that the caucus system, to regency followers, did not connote a locked room full of political bosses hacking out nominations. Rather it betokened an elaborate network of ward, city, village, county, and district conventions (a term virtually synonymous with caucus on levels below the legislature) that laced the state into a pyramidal party structure open to the public through most of its tiers. At the top, the caucus of the state legislature was free from direct public influence, though after 1817 it was broadened to include some elected party delegates. Local nominations, however, were the prerogative of the local caucuses, composed of all local Republicans (and often opponents as well, for there were no clear criteria of party membership). While these bodies were often manipulated by local leaders, and while the party as a whole was, like most other mass organizations, subject to Michels' "iron law of oligarchy," the caucus system (broadly conceived) did allow for much participation by the party rank and file. (See James S. Chase, "Jacksonian Democracy and the Rise of the Nominating Convention," *Mid-America,* XLV [Oct. 1963], 23.) Another reason for mass support of the doctrine of regularity involves the psychological function of party loyalty and the role that inherited affiliation to an organization plays in allowing individuals to cope with a complex political world. For a brief discussion, see Michael Wallace, "Politicians and Statesmen: Conflicting Views on Party Loyalty and Party Legitimacy in the United States, 1815–1828," master's thesis, Columbia University, 1966, 121–27; see also Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (New York, 1921), 103–104; Herbert H. Hyman, *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), 46, 51–67, 90; Angus Campbell *et al., The American Voter* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960), 120–68.

[51] Thus, "the caucus . . . was highly instrumental in enabling [the party] to wrest the power of this state . . . from the hands of its aristocratic opponents." (Meeting of Albany Republicans, Albany *Argus,* Apr. 23, 1824.) Only the caucus doctrine, by clearly affixing a well-known party label to a man, could coalesce the needed support behind candidates otherwise unknown (members of the middle or lower classes) and thus neutralize the aristocracy's greatest asset, the familiarity of their family names. When William Rochester was nominated by the party in 1826, the Albany *Argus* (Oct. 14, 1826) reacted sharply to the opposition's jeers: "The aristocratic spirit of the Opposition is . . . strikingly displayed [in their reaction to] the nomination of Mr. Rochester. . . . Who is he? Where is he from? are questions tauntingly asked. . . . We will tell the *gentry* who he is as well as who he is not. He is neither a Clinton, a Livingston or a Van Renssalaer, nor is he connected with any other powerful family in the state. If it indeed be true . . . that none are fit for the office of governor except men of extensive family connections, . . . then Mr. R. has no pretensions." Van Buren remarked in later years that it was a "striking fact" that "the sagacious leaders of the Federal party [had]

In the 1820's a subtle but important shift occurred: party discipline, from being essential to democracy, became the essence of democracy. What had been the practices became the principles of the party. Noah put the matter precisely.

Regular nominations . . . are not so much the engines as they are the principles of a party, because any system which tends to unite the people, to give them their rights, to promote harmony and unanimity, to effect reconciliation and a submission to the will of the majority, and a relinquishment of private attachments, such a system we call a cardinal principle in the administration of a representative government [italics mine].[52]

The practices that tended to preserve the party became the real "principles" of the party, for the ultimate "principle" was self-preservation. The fact that republicans "were cordially disposed to respect and sustain the regular nominations of the party" was deemed "a principle of essential importance," indeed "a criterion of political orthodoxy." The system of discipline "which enjoins upon its members, the obligation of submitting to nominations fairly and regularly made" was declared to be "a great master PRINCIPLE," and "adherence to regular nominations" was pronounced "a sacred and inviolable principle."[53]

Republicans came, in fact, to be defined as those who adhered to "the established usages of the party." They were men "whose steadfast support of the principles of their party [is] manifested through adherence to its practices."[54] Men who ignored or denounced party discipline were, conversely, to be ostracized, no matter how pure their republican ideology. "Let us consider that man no longer a republican, or belonging to our party, who . . . urges us to relinquish those safeguards [party discipline and caucus nominations] which hitherto have offered so much protection to the party."[55]

The Republican party itself came to be defined as the organization that utilized party discipline. The method of holding the political unit together as an entity itself became the symbol of the unit. It was thus logical for Goshen (Orange County) Republicans to suggest that "at all meetings hereafter called by republicans . . . the republicans should be exclusively invited under the appellation of 'Friends of Regular Nominations.' "[56] The

always been desirous to bring every usage or plan designed to secure party unity into disrepute with the people, and in proportion to their success in that has been their success in the elections." Van Buren said that, conversely, whenever the Republican party was "wise enough to employ the caucus or convention system, and to use in good faith the influence it is capable of imparting to the popular cause," it was successful. (Martin Van Buren, *An Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States* [New York, 1867], 5.)

52 New York *Statesman,* Nov. 18, 1823.

53 *National Advocate,* Oct. 28, 1823.

54 Albany *Argus,* Mar. 30, 1824.

55 *National Advocate,* May 31, 1822.

56 *Ibid.,* July 9, 1824.

image of the party was clear: it was "the REPUBLICAN PARTY against the OPPOSITION—the friends of regular nominations against those who strive to destroy them"[57]

Because their goal was the preservation of the party, the politicians lost interest in other, more ideological objectives. This is evident from their election appeals and campaign rhetoric. There were virtually no substantive planks in regency platforms—no programs of internal improvements, no plans for expanded education or agricultural improvements, no demands for expansion of the franchise, virtually no demands at all. There were many declarations that Republicans were the party of democracy, and their opponents the standard-bearers of aristocracy, but these were either vague statements asserting differences in temperament and style or, when made specific, differences in the structure of their organizations. Their basic campaign appeal was aimed at those who already identified with them, and it was simple enough: now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party. Most of their political advertisements were in fact apolitical; they were calls to the colors, exhortations to keep the organizational faith. Classic in its simplicity was this broadside: "Republicans, will you abandon that party which has done so much for your country? Remember the dying words of the brave Lawrence and 'DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!!' "[58] Republicans were reminded of their party's glorious history. "Let scenes gone by, and blessings enjoyed, arouse every republican to a sense of his duty. Remember that republicans saved the nation from anarchy; that republicans stood firm in the 'trying times' of '98; . . . O Ye patriots of '76! Ye preservers of Democracy in '98; ye defenders of our rights in '12, '13, '14; come forth. . . ."[59] The most popular issues in regency campaigns

[57] The Clintonian opposition was remarkably sensitive to the darker side of the new party ethos; in a sense they were the first reform movement. They had, of course, objected to the new criteria for party membership from the beginning; it had been the cause of their ejection, and they protested vigorously: "We are accused of hostility to the 'unity of the Republican Party, and the integrity of its discipline and systems.' Not a word is said of the principles that bind us together but our disaffection is laid to the mode in which the party had thought fit to act when necessary to its purposes." They denounced the nexus of practice and principle that the regency had effected: "The genuine republican rules . . . on the principles of democracy, instead of any machinery of political leaders—on which the caucus men impudently say the existence of republicanism depends." Blind organizational loyalty was declared to be "at war with all the rights and doctrines of democracy." It tended to "degrade the people into mere countersigners of their masters' mandates and cheapen their free and intelligent suffrages into objects of barter and sordid calculation." With remarkable prescience, they asserted that the ultimate effect of party loyalty would be "to drive the great body of the people into submission to a few." It is interesting to note that the literary device critics often employed to describe the new political organization was the metaphor of a machine; regency leaders, for example, were "the master spirits, who have moved the wheels of this complicated and corrupt machinery." (New York *American,* Mar. 31, 1823; New York *Patriot,* Jan. 24, 1824; "State Convention," 1824 Broadside, BC; Clintonian Broadside, Oct. 20, 1824, *ibid.*)

[58] Broadside, Oct. 15, 1824, *ibid.*

[59] Courtland *Courier,* quoted in Albany *Argus,* Oct. 15, 1824.

were those that had been safely dead for twenty years. Republicans were enjoined to ignore objections to particular regency policies, as they were simply threats to the safety of the organization; complaints about the defeat of the electoral bill, while seemingly legitimate, masked an insidious design. "It is not a question about the electoral law . . . that is now pending. It is whether the republican party shall stand or fall."[60]

Such ideological urges as Republicans had were satisfied by their association in a democratic political party. Unlike the party's founders, they felt no need to use the party to achieve certain goals, for the perpetuation of a democratic organization was goal enough. The second-generation politicians were operational democrats.[61]

The "defense" of party association outlined in the preceding pages was relatively simple. Except for harnessing the legitimizing force of majoritarianism, the Republicans had merely recognized and ratified actual changes in the structure and function of parties. The more serious traditional rejection of party had always been closely associated with the rejection of political competition; to justify party fully, it was necessary to justify competition.

In eighteenth-century England parties had been frowned upon less because of their form than because their very existence was believed to be the sign of a flawed society. The ideal state was thought to be one without parties, without political competition—a society of consensus, unity, and harmony. The model for the state was the family. The familial metaphor was persistent in British political philosophy, finding its most extensive elaboration in Robert Filmer, and it remained powerful in the eighteenth century. In 1738, for example, Lord Bolingbroke wrote that "the true image of a free people . . . is that of a patriarchal family, where the head and all the members are united by one common interest, and animated by one common spirit: and where, if any are perverse enough to have another, they will be soon borne down by the superiority of those who have the same." For Bolingbroke, parties, almost by definition, were collections of perverse souls, for they perpetuated contention and division. He called for their elimination,

[60] *Ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1824.

[61] Not only were what were called "abstract" principles increasingly ignored because of the overriding concern with organizational support, but, in the rush of politics, they were increasingly betrayed. Edwin Croswell, editor of the Albany *Argus*, reflected on the problems the incontrovertibly democratic electoral bill raised for the party: "Admit the general correctness of it & yet is this the proper time for its introduction? Ought the question of expediency to be entirely disregarded; or ought it with Republicans, to be one of the first consideration?" (Croswell to Flagg, Dec. 9, 1823, Flagg Papers.) Expediency triumphed increasingly. The notion that legislators should vote as their constituents wished also became a hindrance to men like Marcy, who wanted legislators to vote as their party directed. "Some timid men who wish well to the democratic party are apprehensive that the current of public opinion runs so strong that it cannot be resisted. Too many are . . . popularity hunters." (Marcy to Van Buren, Dec. 14, 1823, Van Buren Papers.)

a principal task for his "patriot king." "Instead of abetting the divisions of his people, he will endeavor to unite them, and to be himself the centre of their union: instead of putting himself at the head of one party in order to govern his people, he will put himself at the head of his people in order to govern, or more properly to subdue, all parties."[62] This dream of a unified state, beyond and above political competition, was the theoretical ideal of most men in eighteenth-century England, and there were many who went beyond mere dreaming: a large part of the lives of men like the Earl of Chatham and George III was spent in trying to reshape the stubborn, factious reality of British political life to conform to the ideal of a unified, broad-bottomed state.[63]

The strength of the tradition, despite constant rebuffs in practice, lay in the continuing centrality of the monarchy. It was difficult to praise competition between the several political units of the state as invigorating and beneficial when one of those units was the king, the repository of much of the legitimacy of the state. Competition with the monarch was not competition, but opposition, and in the eighteenth century opposition still inferred disloyalty.[64] Still, opposition persisted, and it was justified increasingly by appeals to another powerful ideal: freedom. One could not limit the power of the king or his ministers if one adopted the attitude that uniformity and tranquillity transcended all other virtues: freedom and conformity, it was perceived, were often mutually exclusive. By the 1820's, Archibald Foord finds, the legitimacy of opposition to the government was widely granted; the permanent existence of His Majesty's Opposition, as it was called in 1826, was accepted as part of the constitution. Yet although the necessity for opposition was, with varying degrees of reluctance, accepted, the ideal of consensus remained powerful, certainly throughout the eighteenth century, and even in the nineteenth it echoed in the conception of the Ministry of All the Talents of 1806–1807. While occasional appreciations of political competition for its own sake can be found sprinkled throughout the century preceding the Reform Bill of 1832, they were, as Caroline Robbins notes, exceptions to the rule. "It should be emphasized that [those who accepted party] were many fewer than those who condemned party and faction, advocated uniformity of opinion, and praised nonpartisan public service."[65]

[62] "The Idea of a Patriot King," in *Works of Lord Bolingbroke* (4 vols., Philadelphia, 1841), II, 402.

[63] See Bulmer-Thomas, *Growth of the British Party System,* I, 30; Pares, *King George III and the Politicians,* 116–17.

[64] See Lewis B. Namier, "Monarchy and the Party System," in *Personalities and Powers* (Torchbook ed., New York, 1965).

[65] Caroline Robbins, " 'Discordant Parties': A Study of the Acceptance of Party by English-

In England's former colonies, the consensus ideal was also dominant, and parties were also denounced. This might at first appear surprising, for the inhibiting factor of the monarchy had been removed. Legitimacy was no longer immutably fixed, but resided in whoever captured the apparatus of government. Yet despite changed conditions, Americans adhered to English attitudes. They had of course been educated in the antiparty tradition, which they had received from all points of the political spectrum; it was the view of men like John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, as well as Bolingbroke.[66] But there were other, peculiarly American factors, that perpetuated hostility to organized competition. For one thing, the major opponents of the Revolution, those who might have formed the nucleus of a determined opposition, had left the country in great numbers; this relieved much of the pressure for re-evaluating the tradition. Secondly, the new government was an experiment in republicanism, isolated in a world of hostile monarchies. The leaders of the new nation were convinced that republics were delicate and fragile constructions, peculiarly susceptible to destruction by party virulence. To borrow Bernard Bailyn's phrase, the surface of public life was brittle, and Americans feared party contention might shatter it.[67] Finally, the desire to ensure freedom by limiting power, which had been a major force behind the growth of the English countertradition, was thought sufficiently assured here by the constitutional mechanisms of checks and balances within the government itself: by incorporating opposition into the system, the need for parties in the United States had been eliminated.

For all these reasons there were few indeed who disagreed with Washington's classic restatement of the consensus ideal in his Farewell Address. Warning his countrymen against "the baneful effects of the spirit of party," he insisted that partisan conflict "serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration"; that it "agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms"; that it "kindles the animosity of one part against another"; and that it was therefore definitely "a spirit not to be encouraged."[68] Despite Washington's words, reality remained refractory. At bottom the consensus ideal rested on the view that a "national

men," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXIII (Dec. 1958), 505. The re-evaluations of a man like Burke were not accepted in his own day. "Only the consecration of party by the success of the two-party system in Victoria's day has deceived posterity into thinking that Burke had the better of the argument in his own generation." (Pares, *King George III and the Politicians*, 117; see also Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition*, 1, 470.)

[66] See *The English Libertarian Heritage: From the Writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon in the Independent Whig and Cato's Letters*, ed. David L. Jacobson (New York, 1965), xliii–xliv, 45–50, 53–54.

[67] See the excellent essay by John R. Howe, Jr., "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790's," *American Quarterly*, XIX (Summer 1967), esp. 154–60.

[68] "Farewell Address," in *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1897*, ed. James D. Richardson (10 vols., Washington, D. C., 1896), I, 231 ff.

interest" existed, a common good that rational men could agree upon. But in the young republic men agreed upon very little. To Washington's dismay, parties formed, advancing conceptions of the proper organization of society and the structure of government, representing conflicting economic and social interests, pressing differing views on foreign policy, contesting particular actions of the administration. And these parties were even more obnoxious to upholders of the old tradition than were English parties, to their detractors, for they represented not merely parliamentary cliques but popular movements, reaching deep down into society. Unheralded, unplanned for, and, for most Americans, unwanted, the first party system had come into being.[69]

The growth of political competition had little impact on the consensus ideal. Departure from ideals seldom changes them, for the deviations are attributed rather to a lack of virtue in the transgressors than to lack of validity in the ideals themselves. Usually denunciations of violators grow shriller, and the virtue of the tradition is insisted on the more ferociously. That is what happened in the United States in the early nineteenth century. Although there were glimmerings of a re-evaluation of the consensus mentality during the Federalist and Jeffersonian eras—stray remarks about the value of party competition in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Robert Goodloe Harper, Fisher Ames, and John Adams coexist with more conventional denunciations of party, and James Madison achieved a major break-through on the subject of interest groups, though not political parties—the voices seem lost and isolated, exceptions that prove the rule.[70] The intellectual lag behind institutional practice increased.

[69] See note 5, above.

[70] The idea of the beneficence of political conflict had a life of its own, which, of course, antedated the regency years. Yet, although much research is required before anything approaching a fair assessment of the strength of proparty ideas in eighteenth-century America may be made, I feel tentatively justified in my assertion that the tradition had neither deep nor sturdy roots. Milton Klein asserts, however, that party competition flourished in New York in the eighteenth century and that the endless deprecations of party politics were simply rhetorical flourishes. "The political temper of the colony of New York can better be judged by the way men *acted* rather than by the way they *spoke* of parties and factions. . . . The newspaper references to the desirability of political peace and harmony are no more than pious bows to a theoretical ideal." (Milton Klein, "Politics and Personalities in Colonial New York," *New York History,* XLVII [Jan. 1966], 5.) But it is precisely my point that there was a tension between practice and preachment, that everyday behavior was felt to violate accepted standards of political propriety. Paul Goodman has noted that this tension existed as late as the 1790's and 1800's. And it had marked consequences for the way men thought about the legitimacy of political opposition. Goodman notes that slowly "political parties came to be recognized as institutions essential to the survival of free government, providing an orderly means of articulating the majority's wishes and settling differences among contending groups." (Goodman, "First American Party System," 57.) I suggest that the beginnings of this change are to be found in the 1810's and 1820's. On the background of thought on parties, see esp. Richard Hofstadter's forthcoming study, tentatively entitled "Jeffersonian Democracy and Political Parties" (Berkeley, Calif., [1969]); see also Bernard Bailyn's superlative work *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968), esp. 124–31; Nichols, *Invention of the Ameri-*

After 1815 an attempt was made to align theory and practice, but in a reactionary fashion: men tried to reshape reality to conform to the older ideals. The bitter animosities of the War of 1812 had convinced many that parties had to be eliminated. The most popular political book of the day was Mathew Carey's *The Olive Branch: or Faults on Both Sides, Federal and Democratic—A Serious Appeal on the Necessity of Mutual Forgiveness and Harmony, Dedicated to a Beloved but Bleeding Country, Torn in Pieces by Factious and Ruinous Contests for Power.*[71] Peace in 1815, marking the passing of older issues, oriented to foreign policy, seemed a perfect opportunity to eliminate conflict. The nation's political leaders, noting the decline of the Federalist party, declared that political divisions were a thing of the past, that a time of harmony, unity, and consensus had arrived. It was to be an Era of Good Feelings in which the remnants of parties would come together in a celebration of national unity.

The idea of Good Feelings was professed nationally by men of the stature of James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson. In his inaugural address, Monroe declared that parties were not needed. Echoing Bolingbroke, he announced that "the American people constitute one great family with a common interest." The national interest was so obvious that there could be no deviation from it. "Discord," he declared, "does not belong to our system."[72] Privately Monroe noted that a "great undertaking" would be to "exterminate all party divisions in our country."[73] Adams declared too that he would "break up the remnant of old party distinctions, and bring the whole people together in sentiment as much as possible."[74] In his inaugural address, he asserted that party competition had ended; "the baneful weed of party strife" had been uprooted. It remained for those who had "heretofore followed the standards of political party" to make "one effort of magnanimity, one sacrifice of prejudice and passion," that

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can Political Parties, 231–32, 257; *The Making of the American Party System,* ed. Noble Cunningham (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), 17–20, 23–25; *id., Jeffersonian Republicans in Power,* 303.

[71] Edward C. Carter II, "Mathew Carey and 'The Olive Branch,' 1814–1818," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* LXXIX (Oct. 1965), 399, 409.

[72] *Messages and Papers,* ed. Richardson, III, 10.

[73] Monroe to Jackson, Dec. 14, 1816, in *Writings of James Monroe,* ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (7 vols., New York, 1901), V, 346. "Many men," continued Monroe, "very distinguished for their talents are of the opinion that . . . free government cannot exist without parties. This is not my opinion. . . . That the ancient republics were always divided into parties; that the English government is maintained by an opposition . . . I well know. But I think that the cause of these divisions is to be found in certain defects of those governments, rather than in human nature; and that we have happily avoided those defects in our system." (*Ibid.*) To Madison he wrote: "surely our government may get on and prosper without the existence of parties. I have always considered their existence as the curse of the country. . . ." (Monroe to Madison, May 10, 1822, *ibid.,* VI, 151, 289–91.)

[74] John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams,* ed. Charles Francis Adams (12 vols., Philadelphia, 1874–77), VI, 474.

of "discarding every remnant of rancor against each other" and "embracing as countrymen and friends."[75] And in 1817 Jackson wrote President Monroe that "party and party feelings ought to be laid out of view." "Now," he argued, "is the time to exterminate that monster called party spirit."[76]

This was the standard approach to parties and political competition in the 1820's. Against this background, the innovations of the regency politicians in New York once again take on special interest. The attitudes they had evolved toward their opponents in the normal course of political life determined to a large extent how they would react when the Good Feelings persuasion was advanced and used against them on their home grounds in 1824.

The primary goal of regency politicians was to preserve their party. This is of utmost importance for understanding their attitudes toward their opponents in New York politics. Their goal was not to destroy, overwhelm, or eliminate their opponents; they were not ideologues bent on the destruction of evildoers. They were able, therefore, to realize that the continued existence of an opposition was necessary, from the perspective of perpetuating their own party; opposition was highly useful, a constant spur to their own party's discipline. While the party might, it was argued, "suffer temporary defeats" in the interparty struggle, "it is certain to acquire additional strength . . . by the attacks of adverse parties." Indeed, the party was "most in jeopardy when an opposition is not sufficiently defined."[77] As another writer noted, "there is such a thing as a party being too strong; a small and firm majority is more to be relied upon than an overwhelming and loose one."[78] The politicians were aware that during "the contest between the great rival parties . . . each found in the strength of the other a powerful motive of union and vigor."[79]

This need for opposition led to a fertile paradox. The Federalists and their latter-day avatars, the Clintonians, were, of course, guilty of heinous political sins: they were aristocrats, personalists, factionalists, no-party heretics. Yet they were also the opposition. As a consequence, the Federalist party (a label Republicans attached to their major opponents of the moment), while condemned, was simultaneously praised; it was the strong, flourishing, and virtuous organization to which Republicans would accede should it obtain the support of the state's majority. From the need for a sustained opposition came verbal bouquets like the following:

[75] *Messages and Papers*, ed. Richardson, III, 294.

[76] Printed in Albany *Argus*, May 18, 1824.

[77] *Ibid.*, Apr. 9, 1824.

[78] *National Advocate*, Nov. 14, 1821.

[79] Albany *Argus*, Mar. 5, 1824; see also Van Buren's remark: "In the Senate we will stand as strong as we could possibly wish, more might endanger our harmony." (Van Buren to Daniel Evans, May 10, 1819, Van Buren Papers.)

From the first organization of the government . . . this country has been divided into two great parties. . . . Neither party has yielded to the other in the zeal with which it has sought to procure concert among its members, or to give ascendancy to its principles, and although we may lament the occasional inconsistencies and the dangerous excesses into which both have unavoidably been betrayed, . . . we cannot for a minute admit that the majority of either have been actuated by any other than the purest, the most patriotic, and the most disinterested motives.[80]

The *Argus* declared that "we wish not to be understood as having the slightest objection to the maintenance of the old federal party, broadly and with the spirit of other times." The two competing parties, the paper observed, "have existed among us almost from the formation of our constitution, and we are content with their present organization."[81]

The regency, then, had no desire to eliminate its opponents. Rather it hoped for a "tranquil though determined opposition."[82] It is significant that during the 1820's the word "opposition" itself gained popularity in Republican circles. They noted things in "the conduct of the Opposition which afford both amusement and instruction"; rejoiced in frustrating "the hopes and expectations of the Opposition"; and discussed in their papers "the views and opinions of what may now be termed the Opposition to the Democratic Party."[83]

This acceptance of the continued existence of their opponents engendered a sportsmanlike attitude toward the competition. The Oneida *Observer* asserted that Republicans should "exercise a liberal and tolerant spirit toward political opponents, and . . . treat them with a moderation and courtesy which shall leave them no reason for complaint. . . . We feel disposed to allow purity of motives in general to political opponents and as individuals to reciprocate sentiments of good will and esteem."[84] The Albany *Argus* also stressed a spirit of moderation: "It is right that the Clintonians should have their meetings; we care not how they organize . . . [and] we shall avoid disturbing their conventions. . . . To interfere with the meetings of the opposing party, is blackguardism; it betrays a little, mean spirit, that an intelligent, high minded man would disown."[85] Governor Enos Throop, a regency man, observed that "political parties, at the present day, sobered by past experience, leave scope for the exercise of all the charities and courtesies of life, between opposing members. Their spirit does not enter into families to engender hate, nor into social and religious societies to

[80] Albany *Argus*, Apr. 4, 1824.
[81] *Ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1824.
[82] Cooperstown *Watch Tower*, quoted *ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1824.
[83] *Ibid.*, Sept. 17, Apr. 20, 9, 1824.
[84] Quoted *ibid.*, Apr. 27, 1824.
[85] *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1824.

create dissensions, and to produce bitter and destructive enmities."[86] To be sure, to outsiders it appeared that New York politicians lived in a state of perpetual civil war, but, the natives argued, this impression resulted from misunderstanding. One paper attempted to reassure a visitor who had protested against the bitterness of a local election that Republicans got on splendidly with their opponents:

At the late election in the first ward, when the federalists in that ward mustered powerful, beat us by two or three hundred, did not we democrats visit their committee room, and most pacifically eat their crackers, drink their beer, and smoke their segars? To be sure we did; and if Mr. Gales had favored us with a month's residence, he would have discovered that this bitter feeling was all smoke, only visible on days of election.[87]

Republican politicians even envisioned occasionally ceding power to their enemies. They had, after all, done it often enough. Alternating in power with political opponents was a recurring experience. Yet they had a theoretical justification for this alternation that allowed them to deal with ejection from power quite calmly: they applied the doctrine of majoritarianism to interparty relations, a process less elegantly known as the spoils system. Just as they thought that the minority of the party must submit to the greater number, so they thought that the party that obtained a majority of the votes of the state should rule completely, until such time as the minority party managed to convert itself into the majority party. As the *National Advocate* put it, "when a great political change takes place—when one party completely triumphs over another, it is then to be expected that a change is also to take place in the offices. The very circumstance of victory supposes a reformation or alteration in the order of things."[88] Regency men insisted that the victorious party had the right to all the offices. This was not vindictive but democratic. As Van Buren noted, this had been Jefferson's policy:

True to his trust, he not only administered the government upon the principles for which a majority of the People had shown their preference, but he carried the spirit of that preference into his appointments to office to an extent sufficient to establish the predominance of those principles in every branch of the public service. This he did, not by way of punishing obnoxious opinions, or to gratify personal antipathies, but to give full effect to the will of the majority.[89]

But while the spoils system enshrined Marcy's dictum, "to the victors belong the spoils," it also carried with it the vitally important idea that when

[86] *Messages from the Governors*, ed. Charles Z. Lincoln (11 vols., Albany, N. Y., 1909), III, 276.

[87] *National Advocate*, Nov. 15, 1821.

[88] *Ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1818.

[89] Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 123.

the party found itself outvoted, it would submit gracefully to blanket proscription. As Van Buren informed the 1821 constitutional convention, "that the majority should govern was a fundamental maxim in all free governments; and when his political opponents acquired the ascendancy, he was content that they should have it in their power to bestow the offices of the government."[90] As the *National Advocate* put it, "we will surrender nothing voluntarily to our opponents; let them fight and conquer, as the democratic party has done, and we will submit quietly. . . ."[91]

These were the attitudes regency politicians developed toward their opponents amid daily political struggles. Their lack of ideological fervor and their emphasis on preserving their institution contributed to a lowering of the political temperature. In the cooler atmosphere of the 1820's the politicians perceived that an opposition was necessary, and they came to think in terms of the continued existence of two parties, each sincere, legitimate, and capable of administering the government. Within this framework of attitudes a re-evaluation of the consensus ideal could easily emerge. But ideas seldom spring forth without some encouragement, no matter how conducive the times. A stimulus was needed, some reason to force the regency men to think about their political universe and to make them articulate their attitudes toward political parties. The stimulus came in the mid-twenties with a barrage of antiparty criticism from their New York opponents. Only when confronted with a severe challenge to their habits and practices would they formulate a rebuttal. A brief look at the position of the New York antiparty spokesmen may help us understand what provoked the regency response.

The New York opponents of the Albany Regency, drawing on the antiparty spirit of the national leaders, reasserted the old consensus ideal. Clinton, for example, declared that the clash of parties has "rent us asunder, degraded our character, and impared our ability for doing good."[92] He too felt there was no need for division:

I hardly understand the nomenclature of parties. They are all republicans, and yet a portion of the people assume the title of republican, as an exclusive right.

[90] *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821*, ed. Nathaniel Carter and William L. Stone (Albany, N. Y., 1821), 354.

[91] *National Advocate*, May 31, 1822. They often did submit quietly; Van Buren in particular set an example in 1819 when he was removed as attorney general by Clinton. He informed the governor through intermediaries that "he might rest assured that he would hear of no personal complaints from me or my friends on account of my removal," cheerily admitting that he would have done the same were he Clinton. (Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 93.) On the other hand, they often violated their own precepts and resorted to various evasions to retain office after losing an election.

[92] *Messages from the Governors*, ed. Lincoln, II, 54–55.

. . . It is easy to see that the difference is nominal—that the whole controversy is about office, and that the country is constantly assailed by ambitious demagogues for the purpose of gratifying their cupidity.[93]

Many New Yorkers shared Clinton's attitude. They correctly observed that no deep differences of principle divided the parties: "We ask [the regency] to lay down what it considers to be the republican creed, and then to designate any considerable body of men in this country whom it would not embrace."[94] But they went on to conclude that no matters of controversy remained that required opposing political organizations. "What does the great mass of the people . . . care for party? Why should the people be divided into a thousand different interests without knowing for what, and made hostile to each other, when their true and only interest is to be united?"[95] Many assumed that the politicians, with their vested interest in discord, were perpetuating artificial divisions among a happy and passive people. Regency leaders like Erastus Root were charged with engaging in a "mean and contemptible effort to revive party names, and to excite prejudices by cant phrases."[96]

The solution was obvious: eliminate parties. If one could "knock aside all artificial arrangements and the whole machinery of party," it would prevent the "citizens of the state having their sentiments perverted by intrigue and corruption."[97] If parties could not be exorcised, they could at least be merged and amalgamated, particularly as there existed no difference between them. The critics proclaimed an end of parties. The Federalists, "having no longer any ground of principle to stand on, [have] necessarily ceased to exist as a party."[98] Again "[both parties] have manifested a willingness to drop old animosities and obsolete names, and to unite with their former political opponents."[99] And again, "the barriers of party are completely broken down and the lines of political demarcation cannot be again drawn."[100]

When it became apparent that the Republicans had no intention of merging with their opponents, much less of dissolving, the antiparty men moved beyond rhetoric. They organized. They formed, of all things, a party, an antiparty party, a party to end parties. The People's party, formed in 1823 by Clintonians, Federalists, and dissident Republicans, appealed

[93] Cited in Denis Tilden Lynch, *An Epoch and a Man: Martin Van Buren and His Times* (New York, 1929), 240.
[94] Albany *Argus*, Sept. 12, 1823.
[95] New York *Statesman*, June 17, 1823.
[96] *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1824.
[97] *Ibid.*, June 27, 1823.
[98] Albany *Argus*, Sept. 12, 1823.
[99] Albany *Register*, Jan. 11, 1820.
[100] New York *Statesman*, Sept. 20, 1824.

to the electorate "not in the spirit of *party* warfare, for this is emphatically the cause of the People."[101] "We contend," the People's men declared, "not for the aggrandizement of a party of men, leagued together for selfish purposes, but for a great COMMON CAUSE, interesting to the people of this state."[102] Their candidates were picked "without reference to PARTY POLITICS," as it had been deemed "best to sacrifice party considerations on the altar of public good."[103] They offered their party as a means whereby members of all groups could unite, but it was highly unlikely that many regency Republicans would be lured into support of the fledgling party in light of the candidate it chose to support in 1824—De Witt Clinton. Yet here a theoretical assault on party was linked to a potentially powerful organization and a popular candidate. If the antiparty message appealed to many in the electorate, the regency was in trouble. The emergence of the People's party threatened regency hegemony and forced its members to defend the party system that had evolved in New York. This they consciously set about to do. As the Albany *Argus* stated, "the doctrines of dissolution and amalgamation . . . must be met and resisted."[104]

The regency defense against the amalgamation attack took five forms. Their first, most parochial, and probably most effective position was that the philosophy of amalgamation, for all its seeming disinterestedness, was actually an opposition trick, the purpose of which was not to unite the country but to destroy the Republican party. Secondly, on a more theoretical level, regency Republicans denied that parties had dissolved, but rather that they continued in undiminished strength, a result traceable to powerful ideological and historical forces perpetuating them, which the Good Feelings men had ignored. Thirdly, they rejected the entire vision of a society based on consensus; the proper political universe was characterized by constant contention; the truly moral man was not one who put himself above party, but was a committed partisan. Fourthly, echoing the English justification of opposition, they declared that parties had to exist in a free state, that the elimination of parties occurred only under despotism. Fifthly, and most

[101] *Address of the Democratic Republicans of the City of Albany to the Electors of the State of New York* (Albany, N. Y., 1824), 3.

[102] New York *Statesman*, Sept. 20, 1824.

[103] Rochester *Telegraph*, Nov. 5, 1823.

[104] Albany *Argus*, May 14, 1824. There was another, equally conscious conflict on the national level, waged primarily against Monroe. Van Buren reminisced about the "degree of odium" brought upon him by his staunch resistance to amalgamation doctrines "within the precincts of the White House and in most of the circles, political and social, of Washington." "The noisy revels," he recalled, "of bacchanalians in the Inner Sanctuary could not be more unwelcome sounds to devout worshippers than was this peal of the party tocsin in the ears of those who glorified the 'Era of Good Feeling.' " (Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 126.)

broadly, they declared that, for several reasons, competition between parties benefited the state. We must examine each of these arguments in detail.

Republicans declared that advocacy of Good Feelings was a Federalist plot. By persuading Republicans that parties no longer existed, or by convincing them that they no longer should exist, the Federalists would loosen the bands of party discipline so vital to the party, and it would dissolve; then the Federalists would step in and recapture the government. "The great design and hope now is to abolish the old political distinctions," warned the Albany *Argus,* "and as a revolutionary consequence TO DESTROY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY."[105] The glorification of unity was a ruse: "the affections of union, and of the dissolution of all parties, is [*sic*] only a snare for [Republican] feet."[106] That the doctrine was being promulgated was simply a sign of Federalist weakness:

> We have indeed heard of the "era of good feelings"—We have been told also, that the federal party was dissolved; and that time and circumstances had destroyed all the old political distinctions. But when have these declarations been obtruded upon the public? Always at the close of a losing election under the influence of renewed convictions of the energies of the Democratic party.[107]

In 1812, for instance, the Federalists had also "cried aloud unto all the Gods of amalgamation and 'good feeling' and they proclaimed everywhere the passing away of party distinctions."[108] Then the party had stood firm; it should do so again:

> Suffer yourselves not to be deceived, we entreat you, fellow citizens, by the insidious suggestions of those who may inculcate the alarming and dangerous heresy, that the necessity of adhering to regular nominations no longer exists, because your ancient opponents are not openly marshalled in hostile array against you. It surely requires but little sagacity to discover, that the true course on the part of your adversaries is to promote confusion and discord in your ranks, and then to stand ready to profit by your dissensions. Adherence to regular nominations . . . [is] as necessary to be practised at the present as at any former period.[109]

At the heart of the appeal of Good Feelings was the assertion that no differences in principle divided the country; therefore, no legitimate basis for party competition existed. This proved a difficult argument to answer, for it contained much truth, but regency men responded in two ways. One was an exercise in exaggeration, the other an observation of great shrewdness. Their first answer was to assert that a great division did exist in the country, based upon differing constructions of the Constitution and disagreements

105 Albany *Argus,* Apr. 9, 1824.
106 *Ibid.,* Mar. 9, 1824.
107 *Ibid.,* Oct. 8, 1824.
108 *Ibid.,* May 14, 1824.
109 *National Advocate,* Oct. 28, 1823.

over the value of republicanism. Van Buren's formulation of this Republican equivalent of a Whig history is among the more concise:

> The origin of the two great political parties which have divided the country, from the adoption of the Constitution to the present day . . . has . . . been attributed to causes which had either become obsolete, or been compromised by mutual concession. . . . [In reality] they arose from other and very different causes. They are, in truth . . . mainly to be ascribed to the struggle between the two opposing principles that have been in active operation in this country from the closing scenes of the revolutionary war to the present day—the one seeking to absorb, as far as practicable, all power from its legitimate sources, and to condense it in a single head. The other, an antagonist principle, laboring as assiduously to resist the encroachments and limit the extent of executive authority. . . . The former is essentially the monarchical, the latter the democratical spirit, of society.[110]

There was, of course, some truth at the core of the argument: there had been important distinctions in ideology and style between the two parties in the past generation. But this portrait of politics had much less relevance to the state of parties in New York in the 1820's; the attribution of a monarchical spirit to the Federalists was clearly overdrawn. David Fischer has shown how remarkably the second generation of Federalists had changed their rhetoric; in New York they were self-proclaimed supporters of the rights of the people.[111] But regency men simply pointed to past party performance and declared that no real change had occurred. "The whole Federal party cannot so suddenly have altered their opinions nor abandoned their distinctive principles. As well might the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots."[112] And they insisted that differences in principle remained so striking that it was impossible "to destroy the old landmarks of party," impossible to "draw men into a political union who were never united before, and who, from the utter dissimilarity of their views and notions, never could act cordially together."[113]

The regency's second, more muted response to the amalgamationists was also more radical. Parties, they declared, were not simply ideologically coherent organizations, at odds over fundamental issues. They were social institutions in their own right, largely independent of their earlier ideological stances. The men who advocated Good Feelings had confused competition between parties with the bickering of factions:

> [Their error] arises from a comparison of the two great parties in this country with those ephemeral party divisions which occasionally separate the community,

[110] *Substance of Mr. Van Buren's Observations in the Senate of the United States, on Mr. Foote's Amendment* (pamphlet, dated Feb. 12, 1828), in Van Buren Papers.

[111] David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965).

[112] Albany *Argus*, Mar. 5, 1824.

[113] *Ibid.*, May 14, 1824.

which arise from local or individual causes, and which cease to exist when circumstances render those immediate causes inoperative. It is not so with the parties of which we speak. These, although they may originate in single points of difference TAKE DEEPER ROOT: they outlive the causes of their commencement and those who constitute them are led to opposite sides upon all public questions which may arise in the progress of public transactions.

New issues did not require new parties; rather the two traditional organizations remained to act as vehicles for opposing positions. The parties maintained themselves not so much by love of "principle" as by the attachment of the members to the organization itself. The men composing parties "are bound together by a thousand affinities and alliances; the alliance is cemented by time and strengthened by the strongest affections and antipathies; real or fancied persecutions rivet the bonds of union." These loyalties were then transmitted to the next generation. "The succession of generations renders them the more enduring, and the transmission of the sentiments and feelings of the father to the son is generally regular and unbroken. . . . The parties remain unaltered; they are embodied in the constitutions and inherent in the minds of men."[114]

Association with a political party, therefore, was not simply the result of a conscious decision; parties were not to be dissolved after certain issues were resolved. Rather, party affiliation and thus party divisions were handed down, like heirlooms, from generation to generation. Once again, amalgamation was precluded.

The Republicans' third rejection of amalgamation was perhaps their most radical, for it condemned the consensus ideal itself, declaring that it led to politically immoral behavior. The regency conception of what comprised political honesty and morality was not an avoidance of party, but a consistent adherence to party. Amalgamationists insisted that party men of opposite faiths should come together; with Republicans it was an article of political morality for them to remain apart. The Republicans did not respect the man who, following the consensus tradition, put himself above party. They were partisans and respected only other partisans. "Those who continue neuter in any civil dissensions under the denomination of moderate men,

[114] *Ibid.*, Sept. 12, 1823. The assertion that party affiliation was a matter of inheritance was a remarkable insight. Van Buren later wrote that "sons have generally followed in the footsteps of their fathers, and families originally differing have in regular succession received, maintained, and transmitted this opposition. Neither the influences of marriage connections, nor of sectarian prejudices . . . have, with limited exceptions, been sufficient to override the bias of party organization and sympathy. . . ." (Van Buren, *Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties*, 7.) Marvin Meyers has discounted this passage, noting that "there would seem to be something accidental in this hereditary transmission of loyalties." (Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* [Vintage Books ed., New York, 1960], 280.) But modern scholarship in the social sciences has borne out the validity of Van Buren's analysis; see, e.g., Hyman, *Political Socialization*, 46, 51–67, 90.

who keep aloof . . . are generally stigmatized . . . and are neither esteemed nor trusted by either party." Their mentor was not Bolingbroke but Solon, who, they noted, "declared any man infamous who in any civil dissension in the state should continue neuter and refuse to side with any party."[115] A man who disengaged from politics and affected aloofness from parties was not praiseworthy. He might be a trimmer: "in all times, men of incorruptible integrity and virtue have been found in the ranks of parties; and the affected denial of their existence, or an assumed independence of them springs rather from a propensity to trim, and a hankering after official rewards, than from any elevated and patriotic feeling." Or he might be a despot: "it is easy for those whose ambition is as insatiable as the sea, and who to gratify their inordinate lust for power, would overleap all bounds, to affect to be independent of all things, except for the good of the whole, to act for the nation and not for a party, to be patriots and not politicians."[116]

Men who abandoned one party for another were thoroughly denounced. They were condemned, with almost ecclesiastical fervor, as "apostates."[117] But even worse than apostasy was vacillation. The politician who drifted from party to party was condemned as "inconsistent"; Butler lucidly outlined the immorality of this attitude. Writing to Van Buren, Butler declared that "*political consistency* [is] as indispensable as any other *moral qualification*. For say what you will it is a *moral* qualification." This was so because the "man who is dishonest and unstable in his politics" is "equally dishonest and unstable in the relations of his private life."[118] The *National Advocate* advanced a similar argument: "the fixed character of men in public life can only be judged by consistent doctrines"; "the man who joins with any party or every party" is morally suspect.[119] Here again Clinton was denounced as a miscreant; he was "notorious as an ever-inconsistent changeling —notorious for his political inconsistency."[120] But lesser politicians who flaunted regency standards of sectarianism in the political world were also chastised, as in the lashing by the Albany *Argus* of Benjamin Riggs, who floated from Clintonians to Bucktails and back again:

[115] Albany *Argus*, Feb. 13, 1824.

[116] *Ibid.*, May 14, 1824.

[117] It must be admitted that the regency could more readily stomach apostates if they were arriving rather than departing. In 1820, for example, a portion of the old Federalist party known as "the high-minded" moved into the Republican ranks. Butler even had to send a "suggestion for Mr. Noah" to moderate his attacks on Federalists: "It is not very serviceable to talk much of Burrites, Lewisites, or the Highminded. Several of [them] are here among our best friends." (Butler to Jesse Hoyt, Jan. 29, 1824, in William MacKenzie, *The Lives and Opinions of Benjamin Franklin Butler and Jesse Hoyt* [Boston, 1845], 38.)

[118] Butler to Van Buren, May 6, 1829, Benjamin F. Butler Papers, New York State Library, Albany.

[119] *National Advocate*, July 11, 1817.

[120] Albany *Argus*, Oct. 15, 1824.

It was always hard to say which party he belonged to. . . . He is *consistent* only in being *inconsistent*. . . . We could not imagine it possible for [anyone] to be guilty of such barefaced inconsistency. If the people of this county will countenance such vacillating politicians, if they will sanction acts so outrageous to decency—so injurious to the character of their citizens, . . . they are possessed of less *regard for good order* and decorum, than any of their past conduct prove. . . . We call upon all honest politicians to look well to such conduct before they approve it.[121]

This partisan spirit proved the deadliest foe of the consensus mentality. It governed relations between party organizations, not just party members, and thus barred amalgamation. Partisans did not switch, and parties did not mix: organizations as well as individuals were consistent.

The terminology of morality, not tactics, was used when discussing interparty relations. Alliances, temporary joining of party forces, were frowned upon. The *National Advocate* observed that "it is by avoiding and discountenancing these alliances with old and steady opponents that the republican party may confidently calculate on success. It is more honorable to be in a virtuous minority than to succeed by such connections."[122] And if alliances were suspect, amalgamation was anathema. Michael Hoffman, a member of the regency, declared: "I advise against amalgamation. . . . I cannot support a federal, all-party administration. . . . Let us be Republicans, go for the whole, gain what we desire, or fail."[123] Like Hoffman, Butler hoped for a "manly and independent course," one that rigidly adhered to the "old lines," for he felt a "relaxation" would "sap the very integrity and permanency of the party."[124] Politicians knew that "these opinions . . . [were] scorned and ridiculed by the disappointed and discontented, by those who are prepared to break down all party distinctions, and to obliterate our ancient landmarks." "But," they declared, "they ought to be cherished and sustained by all who are opposed to a ridiculous amalgamation of parties."[125] In the rightly ordered political universe, then, there were two or more political parties, they and their members kept separate by the principle of consistency.

The fourth argument advanced by the Republicans concerned the inevitability of parties in a free state; their absence or amalgamation was evidence of repression. Republicans assumed that in any society there would be more than one conception of the national interest. In order to express these differences, men form parties: those whose "general interests are the same"

[121] *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1824.

[122] *National Advocate*, Apr. 15, 1818.

[123] George W. Smith, "The Career of Michael Hoffman," *Papers of the Herkimer County Historical Society, 1896* (Herkimer, N. Y., 1896), 7.

[124] Butler to Flagg, Dec. 15, 1827, Flagg Papers.

[125] *National Advocate*, Sept. 6, 1824.

will always combine to promulgate their ideas, for "all experience has shown, that efforts to be powerful, must be concentrated."[126] It followed that society normally contained parties contending with one another. "Diversity of opinion results from the infirmity of human judgment; and party spirit is but the passion with which opposing opinions are urged in the strife for the possession of power."[127] The development of parties was considered to be a natural and irresistible phenomenon: "It is the vainest thing in the world to deny the existence of parties. They will exist."[128]

Yet they might not exist, if repressed: parties developed only in societies that tolerated organized dissent. The very existence of parties was, therefore, an indication that freedom of expression existed. Parties "will prevail where there is the least degree of liberty of action on the part of the public agents, or their constituents; . . . they are . . . inseparable from a free government."[129] The association of parties and freedom was a basic theme of the regency defense. "Parties," they declared, "will ever exist, in a free state."[130] The maintenance of parties, they asserted, was "necessary to the just exercise of the powers of free governments."[131] Because this was such an obvious equation, they hinted darkly that their Good Feelings opponents, in calling for an end to parties, were contemplating an end of freedom. It was much commented on that military men like Jackson were fervent advocates of eliminating parties, and they contrasted such behavior with their own: "Fortunately for our country, and its institutions, there is another class of politicians, whom we delight to honor, who believe, that when party distinctions are no longer known and recognized, our freedom will be in jeopardy, as the 'calm of despotism' will then be visible."[132] Party competition was the hallmark of a free society.

The fifth ground for rejecting the consensus ideal derived from the belief that permanent competition between political parties was a positive benefit to the state. This was their broadest argument, most likely to appeal to nonpoliticians. "We are party men, attached to party systems," they declared, but added, "we think them necessary to the general safety. . . ."[133]

[126] New York Senate *Journal*, 1824, 18.
[127] *Messages from the Governors*, ed. Lincoln, III, 274–75.
[128] Albany *Argus*, May 14, 1824.
[129] *Messages from the Governors*, ed. Lincoln, III, 274.
[130] New York Senate *Journal*, 1824, 18.
[131] Albany *Argus*, May 14, 1824.
[132] *National Advocate*, Sept. 6, 1824. When Van Buren decided to support Jackson for the presidency in 1828, he had a difficult time convincing his party to do the same. Most regency politicians considered Jackson a no-party heretic. Even someone as high in party circles as Marcy proved recalcitrant: "I am somewhat thick skulled about making distinctions," he wrote Van Buren acidly. "I do not very clearly see how I can prefer with a strong preference an anti-caucus—amalgamation—no party candidate to another who has held the same heretical doctrines." (Marcy to Van Buren, Dec. 10, 1826, Van Buren Papers.)
[133] *National Advocate*, May 31, 1822.

And again, "for the safety of the republic & the good of the people" it was imperative to "keep up and adhere to old party distinctions."[134] How did they justify this position? For one thing, party competition provided a check upon the government; it was an extraconstitutional aid to the people. "The spirit of party," they declared, was "the vigilant watchman over the conduct of those in power."[135] The parties were "among the firmest bulwarks of civil liberty,"[136] and politicians insisted that they were "necessary to keep alive the vigilance of the people, and to compel their servants to act up to principle."[137] But exactly how did they do this? One of their major functions was to inform the people.

> [Parties] on either side of the question, become the counsel who argue the cause before the people. . . . The solicitude and interest of political rivalship, will sufficiently expose the crimes, and even the failings, of competitors for the people's confidence. Competitors of this description *force* into notice facts, . . . which the people at large could never have derived from the ordinary commerce of thought.

The people are thus presented with expert watchdogs: "leading men, on both sides of the question check one another," and the people, presented with informed alternatives, "know when to support and when to oppose."[138] Governor Enos Throop asserted that the party system allowed the people to participate intelligently in government.

> Those party divisions which are based upon conflicting opinions in regard to the constitution of the government, or the measures of the administration of it, interest every citizen, and tend, inevitably, in the spirit of emulation and proselytism, to reduce the many shades of opinion into two opposing parties. . . . [The] organized parties watch and scan each other's doings, the public mind is instructed by ample discussions of public measures, and acts of violence are restrained by the convictions of the people, that the prevailing measures are the results of enlightened reason.[139]

Party competition had another value: it agitated the public and kept the mass of people interested in the operation of the government. It produced discord, and discord, despite the attitudes of the men who advocated Good Feelings, was of utmost value to republics. For, in the eyes of the Bucktails, the real danger to republics was not division, as in consensus cosmology, but apathy. And the surest cure for apathy was party competition. This idea

[134] Butler to Van Buren, May 6, 1829, Butler Papers.
[135] *Messages from the Governors,* ed. Lincoln, III, 275.
[136] New York Senate *Journal,* 1824, 18.
[137] Albany *Argus,* May 28, 1824.
[138] *National Advocate,* Nov. 17, 1821.
[139] *Messages from the Governors,* ed. Lincoln, III, 274.

is most closely associated with Van Buren. From the beginning of his political life he had appreciated the value of conflict. In 1814, for example, amidst the bitter animosities of the war, he said that

> on the various operations of government with which the public welfare are connected, and honest difference of opinion may exist—[and] when those differences are discussed and the principles of contending parties are supported with candor, fairness, and moderation, the very discord which is thus produced, may in a government like ours, be conducive to the public good.[140]

There were others who adopted their leader's message. In 1821, for instance, Erastus Root praised party spirit at the constitutional convention: it was "necessary," for "it keeps the political blood in a genial circulation, and prevents it from running cold and the heart from ceasing to palpitate."[141] But Van Buren worked hardest at convincing others. In 1827 he lectured his colleagues in the United States Senate:

> In a Government like ours founded upon freedom in thought and action, imposing no unnecessary restraints, and calling into action the highest energies of the mind, occasional differences are not only to be expected, but to be desired. They rouse the sluggish to exertion, give increased energy to the most active intellect, excite a salutary vigilance over our public functionaries, and prevent that apathy which has proved the ruin of Republics.

Apathy, not division, endangered republics, and party competition provided the remedy. "Like the electric spark," the contests dispelled "from the political atmosphere the latent causes of disease and death."[142]

Then, paradoxically, party competition bound the country together. Here was one of the shrewdest observations that the politicians made. While only in its formative stages in the 1820's, this idea would quickly enter the main current of ante bellum thought. Van Buren and his colleagues realized that contrary to antiparty mythology, the really divisive threat to the nation

140 Cited in Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 50.

141 *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821*, ed. Carter and Stone, 388.

142 Van Buren, "Autobiography," ed. Fitzpatrick, 512. This redefinition of the real danger to popular government was a consequence of the fact that thirty years had elapsed between the beginning of party conflict and the era of the Albany Regency. The second generation did not inherit the fears of the first concerning the fragility of republics, and for the best of reasons: after three decades of experience, they knew that the system worked. Parties had alternated in power throughout their lifetimes, and the competition had not damaged the republic in the slightest. Throop realized this clearly: "In times past . . . party spirit . . . [alarmed] the fears of patriotic men for the integrity of the Union: but at those periods, the compactness and harmony of our admirable system of government were not thoroughly understood, nor had the attachment of the people to it been fairly tested. Experience has proved that its foundations are laid so deep . . . and its complicated machinery is so nicely adjusted . . . that it has an energy sufficient for its own preservation." Throop spoke for an entire generation when he observed that "our invaluable institutions have suffered but little, if anything, from the spirit of party, fiery and excited as at times it has been." (*Messages from the Governors*, ed. Lincoln, III, 276.)

was not party, but section. Party associations that cut across sectional lines were, in fact, an antidote to interregional stress. The Good Feelings men, by calling for the elimination of parties, were exacerbating sectionalism. Republicans accused them of wanting "to ABROGATE THE OLD PARTY DISTINCTIONS" in order to "organize new ones founded in the territorial prejudices of the people."[143] The consequence of abolishing the old political distinctions would be "to array republicans against each other under such new and artificial distinctions . . . as geographical locations, such as North and South, East and West."[144] Van Buren rested much of his case for the maintenance of the old parties on this ground: "We must always have party distinctions, and the old ones are the best. . . . If the old ones are suppressed, geographical differences founded on local instincts or what is worse, prejudices between free & slave holding states will inevitably take their place."[145]

Finally, contests between political parties benefited society by eliminating the fierce contentions of personal parties. Decrying the "cant and self-interests" that "utter lamentations over the prevalence of party division and the exhibition of party feelings," Butler wrote that

> we are not of that fastidious sect which can desire the extinction of the old parties—which would sweep away the associations . . . and give us in their stead the bitter contentions of personal feuds, and the degrading personalities of an individual vassalage. . . . The old divisions are virtues which we . . . cherish. The contests which grow out of them are salutary and needful efforts for the preservation of the community.[146]

It was now obvious, as Throop noted, that it was "one of the peculiar benefits of a well-regulated party spirit in a commonwealth, that it employs the passions actively in a milder mood, and thus shuts the door against faction. . . ."[147]

By the end of the 1820's, the amalgamation attack had been met, the consensus tradition rejected. "Let us be greeted no more," demanded the Albany *Argus,* "by the cant and whining about the extinction of party feel-

143 Albany *Argus,* Aug. 1, 1823.

144 *Ibid.,* Apr. 9, 1824.

145 Van Buren to Thomas Ritchie, Jan. 13, 1827, Van Buren Papers. See also Albany *Argus* (Jan. 13, 1824): "When men are governed by a common principle, which is fully indulged and equally operative in all parts of the country, the agency of party conduces to the public good. But the political opinions of the same men, when actuated by feelings of a sectional character are directly the reverse. What is *party* in the one case, is *faction* in the other."

146 *Ibid.,* Oct. 22, 1824.

147 *Messages from the Governors,* ed. Lincoln, III, 276. See also Albany *Argus* (Oct. 8, 1824): "[Parties] are in themselves checks upon the passions, the ambition, and the usurpations of individuals. . . . In their absence, personal factions, private feuds, and all the acrimonious feelings of local contentions would not fail to spring up."

ings and the impropriety of endeavoring to keep them alive."[148] "Parties of some sort must exist. 'Tis in the nature and genius of our government."[149]

148 *Ibid.*

149 *Ibid.*, Nov. 26, 1824. Even in the quiet aftermath of the election of 1824, with Clinton triumphantly installed in the statehouse proclaiming an end of parties, the Albany *Argus* insisted that the calm would soon pass. "The present calm is delusive and unnatural. Political divisions are inseparable from our habits and our institutions. . . ." (*Ibid.*, Apr. 1, 1825.) The ideas of the regency men were still in the minority, in state and nation, in the 1820's, but they would spread until, by the end of the century, they had become axioms of American political thought, clichés of the popular mind. (See David Rothman, *Politics and Power* [New York, 1966], Chap. VIII.) For some of Van Buren's later formulations of his party philosophy, see Max M. Mintz, "The Political Ideas of Martin Van Buren," *New York History*, XXX (Oct. 1949), 422–48. I deal with the development of the ideas set forth in this essay in my dissertation in progress, "Changing Concepts of Party in the United States, 1815–1865."