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"Preserve Us From Such Democracy": Politics, Slavery, and Political Culture in Antebellum Northwest Virginia, 1850–1861

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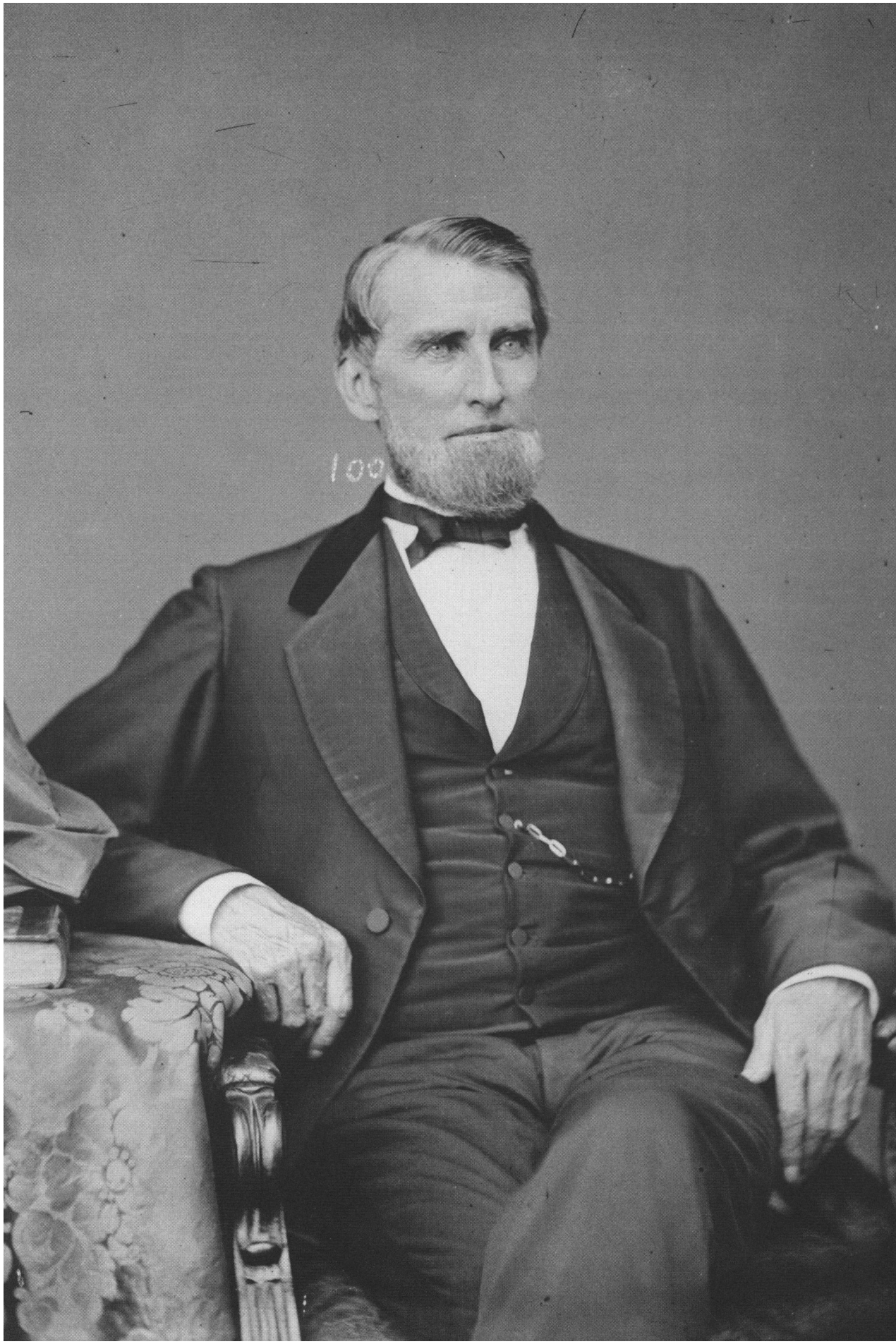

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In March 1861, approximately one month after delegates had assembled in Richmond to debate Virginia's future in the Union, Monongalia resident and local merchant Henry S. Dering wrote to his representative at the convention, Waitman T. Willey. Dering, frustrated by the incessant editorials from the pro-secession *Richmond Enquirer* that attacked Unionist western delegates, unleashed vitriol toward what he considered Virginia's slaveocracy. "The truth is," he declared, "the slavery oligarchy are impudent[,] boastfull[,] and tyrannical. It is the nature of the institution to make men so." Although numerous slaveholders claimed that Abraham Lincoln's election threatened their conception of self-government, Dering blasted these hypocritical accusations because they conveniently overlooked the antidemocratic government that plagued western Virginia. "Talk about lost rights," he fumed. "[B]etter look at poor Western Va. and her lost rights. Has taxation and representation gone hand in hand[?]" he asked Willey rhetorically. Although Dering declared abolitionism anathema, he asserted that should these slaveholders "persist in their course," residents of northwestern Virginia were prepared to "rise up . . . and throw off the shackles . . . [of] this very *Divine Institution* . . . [that] has been pressing us down."[1]

Dering's warning exemplified the mounting frustration expressed by residents living in northwestern Virginia. Northwesterners, having experienced eastern slaveholders' control of the electoral process since the state's inception, believed that electoral politics were antidemocratic and anti-

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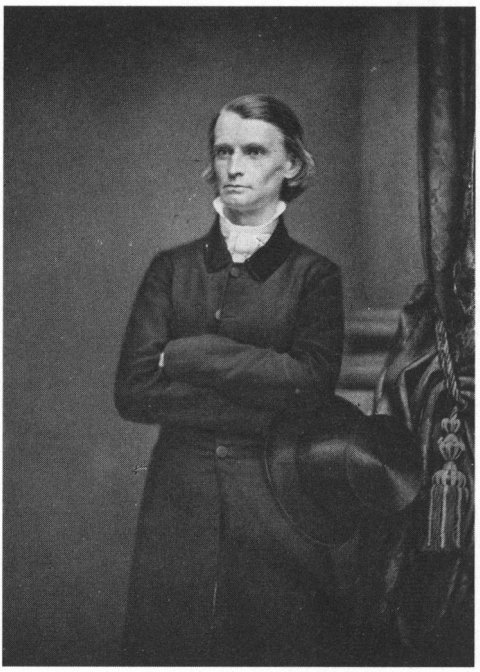
republican.[2] Rather than based on majority will, equal representation, and universal white male suffrage—the cornerstones of democracy, as many nineteenth-century citizens professed—Virginia's constitution favored those who owned landed and human property. Strict suffrage requirements, in place until 1851, disenfranchised many nonslaveholders. Virginians' laggard pace democratizing the state government crystallized internal and external perceptions of the Old Dominion as an anomaly among slaveholding states that had adopted a broader definition of a political actor. Northwesterners grew alienated toward this electoral system because of slavery's influence in politics and soon "embraced a particular political identity" marked by, among other indices, a visceral resentment of "special rights for slaveholders."[3] This political disenchantment, when filtered through a growing white and multiethnic population, an expanding market economy increasingly tied to northern and western marketplaces, and a cultural emphasis on free white labor, resulted in a manifestation of an ethos that William Link calls "Northwestern exceptionalism."[4]

This ethos, present before 1850, became fully manifest following the 1850–51 Constitutional Convention.[5] Northwestern delegates, encouraged by favorable census returns and an increasingly assertive constituency demanding their political and constitutional rights, seized the opportunity to reform the state constitution and inaugurate a new political era. The convention passed such democratic measures as universal white manhood suffrage, a more equitable allocation of seats in the state legislature, and the popular election of political officials such as governor and lieutenant governor. These changes to Virginia's political framework signaled in many ways a fundamental break from the state's aristocratic past and a move toward a more democratic future.

But the changes wrought by the new constitution failed to signal a clean separation between electoral politics and slavery. As historian Manisha Sinha argues, slaveholding elites in antebellum South Carolina instigated an antidemocratic and antirepublican "counterrevolution of slavery" to solidify slaveholder hegemony and remove the Palmetto State from the Union in 1860.[6] Elements of this conservative revolution were present earlier, albeit to a much lesser extent, in Virginia. Accomac County delegate Henry A. Wise pleaded with his eastern brethren during the 1850–51 Constitutional



Henry Alexander Wise (1806–1876) of Accomac County represented a growing number of Virginia slaveholders who, by the 1850s, welcomed universal male suffrage and other democratic reforms. He recognized that slavery and a democratized state government could exist symbiotically, as white men's political representation would depend upon chattel slavery's existence. Wise espoused such views as a delegate to the 1851 Constitutional Convention and during his gubernatorial campaign in 1855. (*Library of Congress*)

Convention to expand the electorate and provide equal representation to citizens in the mountainous portions of the state. Ignoring these demands, Wise feared, would turn those residents toward antislaveryism.[7] And though Wise succeeded, the new constitution failed to satisfy all northwesterners. Years spent as "vassals . . . [of] Eastern Virginia" provoked sharp political backlash among northwestern Virginians who grew more apoplectic about eastern slaveholders' political hegemony.[8] Northwestern Virginians continued to articulate a democracy composed of white men that promoted majority rule by the principle of one white man, one vote. Elite slaveholding Virginians, predominantly found east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, rejected this vision. They maintained that politics and government worked best when political participation remained moored to property ownership, thus elevating the needs of the few above those of the masses. What resulted was a vibrant political debate about the compatibility of democracy in a slave society that questioned the cultural and political authority of slaveholding elites and, in doing so, revealed sharp ideological cleavages in the state.

This essay argues that there was an active political sphere in late antebellum northwestern Virginia, in which white citizens recognized the inordinate political influences that slaveholding elites wielded. Their responses to that influence, whether in the form of Free Soil and Republican mass meetings, flag or pole raisings, newspaper editorials, open acceptance of the Republican Party, or letters written to representatives, demonstrate that a rich dialogue over slavery's role in democracy occurred in a region that was largely bereft of slavery but not untouched by its influence.[9] This focus on residents' actions shifts the analysis away from the structured framework of the political arena, where parties and machinery dominate, to the broader political arena that contained contested and potent rhetoric, actions, and symbols. Ordinary citizens, once excluded from the electoral process, joined the argument over the compatibility of these two forces between themselves and their representatives in a reflexive discourse that historian Mary Ryan has called "civic wars."[10] Slavery, rather than stifling popular movements in Virginia, provided the tinder needed to ignite grassroots democracy.

Exploring the dynamic between slavery and democracy in northwestern Virginia provides a new angle to analyze how residents understood the relationship between these two institutions. Earlier studies have affirmed the close, if not symbiotic, relationship between slavery and the democratic structures of southern governments.[11] More recently, though, historians have challenged this dominant framework. Slaveholders' manipulation of popular politics and trampling of majoritarian rule signaled their distrust of democracy, adversely straining the relationship between slaveholders and nonslaveholders. Even during the Civil War, some Confederate leaders and intellectuals attempted to reverse recent democratic gains and shape the Confederacy into a patrician republic.[12] This essay joins this historiographical field by positioning democracy as a process filled with institutions and laws but also shaped by cultural debate. Democracy did not occur solely during elections or in legislative halls; it was manifest in newspapers, was on full display during meetings and flag and pole raisings, and was openly debated by residents of all classes. By shifting the focus in this debate onto the public sphere, this essay elucidates how residents thought a democracy should function, who and/or what should be represented, and the deep and contested nature of democracy's vocabulary.

IN THE SPRING OF 1850, the Old Dominion appeared on the verge of a constitutional revolution. The current constitution, ratified in 1830, appeared in the eyes of many northwestern Virginians as an affront to republican and democratic sentiments. Primarily based off the Constitution of 1776, the Constitution of 1830 contained strict suffrage requirements that limited enfranchisement to wealthy citizens who owned landed or human property, allocated representation in the state legislature to protect the propertied interests of Tidewater and Piedmont residents, and rejected the direct election of government officials. Eastern Virginians used their legislative power to support projects, including internal improvements, that benefited their constituents while allocating few funds for the rest of the state, including the northwest.[13]

Northwestern nonslaveholders, largely excluded from the electoral process, possessed few formal conduits to express their political interests. A western county courthouse clique, who identified their interests with those of eastern Virginians, often dismissed their neighbors' grievances.[14] The lack of voting rights embittered some nonslaveholders who felt marginalized by a state government designed to protect slavery. "Who can doubt that the foolish and anti-republican restriction upon the right of suffrage . . . make every citizen conscious of their unjust and injurious bearing[?]" a Parkersburg newspaper questioned. Lacking an equal voice in the electoral process, many nonslaveholding northwesterners felt disenchanted about slavery's political influence. And like their revolutionary forefathers, northwesterners who lacked voting rights condemned their political "enslavement" to tyrannical rulers.[15]

Legislative representation, much like suffrage qualifications, reflected eastern slaveholders' affluence and power and resulted in a state legislature staffed primarily by delegates from the Tidewater and Piedmont.[16] This malapportionment frustrated the nonslaveholding mechanics, artisans, and laborers of the northwest. "Is this fair, is this republican? Is this democratic?" the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* asked rhetorically. If so, "[p]reserve us from such democracy."[17] By 1850, however, Virginia's changing demography, a burgeoning free-market economy, and rumors of disunion placed acute pressures on eastern political elites to support the call for a constitutional convention.

Alongside these social, political, and economic changes, fears that external antislavery influences, such as the Free Soil Party, would find support in the politically alienated northwest likely convinced many slaveholding elites of the immediacy of constitutional reform. For example, in early March 1850, a Free Soil Convention convened in Shepherdstown. According to the *Shepherdstown Register*, the convention "attracted considerable attention." One citizen "declared his determination to give fugitive slaves shelter and protection, and was opposed to any new law being passed to render them up. He did not like the idea of being jackalls for Southern slaveholders." In Moundsville in 1848, Anson Berkshire started a newspaper called *The Crisis*. Berkshire supported emancipation because he believed it would remove the "contaminating influence upon free labor" and remove the institution that "disenfranchize[s] thousands of Virginia's noblest sons."[18] The combination of such internal events and national political developments concerning slavery impressed upon easterners the need to resolve internal political conflicts. Reforming the constitution could achieve that end.

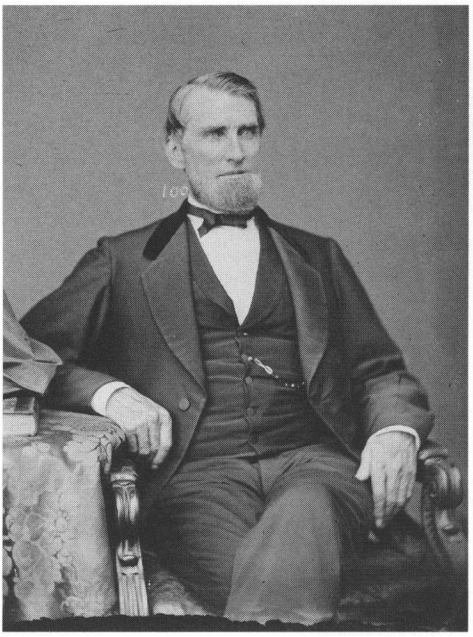
Delegates assembled in Richmond in October 1850 to amend the state constitution, but they agreed to adjourn until the following January when new census data would become available. The census confirmed western claims about the antidemocratic structure of Virginia's government. Though the majority of whites resided west of the Blue Ridge, many lacked political representation while the numerical minority in the east controlled the machinery of the state government.[19] This demographic reality added a measure of urgency to debates over representation, voting rights, and the popular election of government officials. Eastern delegates worried that a new, democratic constitution would lay property (slaves) open to the masses, including nonslaveholders, who could use their recently acquired power to create a political climate hostile, if not inhospitable, to slavery. To prevent such pernicious circumstances from unfolding, eastern slaveholding delegates defended the current political system and attacked those ideas and men who supported a democratic electoral system. A reformed government, Fauquier County delegate and slaveholding judge Robert E. Scott warned, would not provide "protection to property" but would instead "lay it open to be plundered at the discretion of the majority."[20] Scott's argument rested upon the belief that once nonslaveholders possessed political power, they

would use this newfound power to impose draconian taxes on slaveholders and use that revenue to pay for internal improvements.

Culpeper delegate James Barbour echoed similar sentiments. "I tremble when I anticipate the day," he declared, "when the unrestricted control over the powers of this government shall pass into hands not interested in the preservation of that property." Barbour also addressed claims that slave labor degraded free labor. "It is this very argument," he warned the convention, "upon which the free soil party of the north bases itself."[21] Barbour, Scott, and other prominent eastern slaveholders stressed that if nonslaveholders gained access to the electoral process, the evils would be alarming. The Free Soil Party would acquire a foothold in the Old Dominion, fiscal restraint would be lost as internal improvements would be effortlessly approved, and increased taxes on slaves (needed to pay for those internal improvements) would threaten the stability and longevity of the institution. The last prophecy appeared to be the direst. To prevent this apocalypse, eastern slaveholding delegates pleaded with fellow members to keep political participation moored to property ownership.

Northwestern politicians attempted to allay fears that a democratic government would inevitably threaten slavery. Such assurances, though, came with an important caveat: failure to redress their residents' grievances could endanger the peculiar institution. Monongalia delegate Waitman T. Willey clearly articulated this position. He assured fellow delegates that opening the electoral process to nonslaveholders would not endanger their peculiar property. "I take it upon myself to say," he reassured fellow delegates, "that there is no ground for any alarm that any western majority would or could oppress the eastern slave holder by exorbitant taxation, or by any enactment affecting slave property." The danger, Willey warned, was if delegates failed to reform the constitution and, in doing so, continue "regarding . . . goods and chattels with higher distinction . . . [than] the western citizen." Such a development would persuade nonslaveholding citizens to increasingly scrutinize slavery's role in state politics.

> [T]he question *will* arise, when you make your slaves . . . the instrumentality of political and personal inequality in the government, can it be expected that men will ardently and cordially support negro slavery, when by doing so they are virtually cherishing the property which is making slaves of themselves?



Waitman Thomas Willey (1811–1900) of Monongalia County was an outspoken opponent of Virginia's constitutional system before 1851. He argued that democratizing the state constitution and incorporating western nonslaveholders into the body politic would protect, not threaten, slaveholders' property. This stance proved popular in the northwest, as residents elected Willey to the 1851 Constitutional Convention and the 1861 Secession Convention and later supported his efforts in founding West Virginia during the Civil War. (*Library of Congress*)

Willey, by deploying the rhetorical threat of whites' political slavery, effectively articulated the resentment toward Virginia's slave power that most northwesterners felt. Should delegates permit slavery to retain its inordinate influence in electoral politics, Willey emphasized that it would generate "a species of political abolition" against the institution that would threaten its longevity in Virginia.[22]

While delegates in Richmond debated reform, northwesterners joined in this debate over slavery's role in electoral politics. George Ray corresponded with Willey to convey residents' sentiments about the convention's proceedings. Ray feared that delegates from the Shenandoah Valley, aware of slavery's increasing importance to their region, would "play false in the hour of need" and align their interests with eastern slaveholders. This coalition would inevitably foil any attempts at reform. If this occurred, "our people will be dissatisfied," he lamented. Residents "will naturally begin to enquire into the subject . . . and begin to *feel* and know that it is the slave power that is ruling over them." The "mere prejudice" concerning slavery among residents would quickly fade, "and in its stead will arise a hostility to the *peculiar insti-*

tution, which will in the end make Virginia a free state."[23] Ray believed that if the convention failed to properly situate slavery within the state's electoral system, northwesterners would continue to "feel" that the slave power manipulated politics and that enslaved property represented the source of political inequality. This feeling among residents would manifest into an antagonistic spirit toward slavery that could threaten the institution.

Other residents joined in this vibrant debate over slavery's role in the state government. Writing in April 1851 when the convention remained deadlocked and rumors of adjournment surfaced, Fairmont resident Alpheus F. Haymond felt his neighbors becoming jaded at the intransigence displayed by eastern slaveholding elites. "The people of the West," he asserted, "will no longer submit to the present odious constitution and neither will they submit to the mixed basis proper." W. W. Arnett, identifying the middle ground most northwestern residents occupied, demanded the restriction of slavery's geographic and political expansion while professing the "heartless wickedness" of abolitionism. To achieve such ends, Arnett wanted northwestern representatives to "be true to the interest of W.Va." John Burdette, writing from near Grafton, commented that "a respectable group of citizens are . . . discussing the pros. and cons. of the recent developments in your body." The "feeling of our people," he concluded, "are against compromis[ing] what is humbly conceived to be our rights." Seceding from eastern Virginia remained on the table for some residents who demanded political equality with their slaveholding neighbors. "I should dislike for Va. to be divided as long as it can honorably be avoided," Haymond stated, "but if nothing else will do but the degradation on the part of the Western people, or the severance of the state, let the wire be drawn."[24]

These letters demonstrated important northwestern ideologies. Residents who wrote to their representative demonstrated a level of awareness and understanding of larger political issues. They understood the ramifications of the present constitution and the implications of its perpetuation. Their words concerning slavery and slaveholders reveal an equally important development. Although abolition remained anathema, antislave power sentiment burned brightly. Northwesterners supported slaveholders' property rights and defended paternalism's benefits for white and black. What aggrieved residents, though, was the elevation of this form of property above all

others. Privileging slave property over white equality made the supposed benefits of living in a slave society an unfulfilled promise.

The constitutional convention remained in a stalemate throughout the first half of 1851, with rumors of adjournment, disunion, and war swirling around the convention. Fearing what disunion could portend for slavery's future, Accomac County delegate Henry A. Wise joined the chorus of northwestern delegates attacking the antidemocratic state government. "It is the fresh, pure and unadulterated democratic principle," Wise proclaimed, "at war with a democracy, mixed with aristocracy and monarchy."[25] He pinned northwesterners' frustration on the "fundamentally aristocratic and antirepublican" electoral system. Without adequate representation, he warned, northwesterners perceived themselves as equivalent to chattel. When asked why the current electoral process and constitution proved so dangerous, Wise emphatically declared, "because black slaves make white slaves!"[26]

Wise's motives should not be misunderstood for benevolence; rather, political pragmatism dictated his movements. He believed that a democratic constitution would protect, not threaten, slavery. Once northwesterners gained political equality, he reasoned, residents would drop their grievances against slavery. Wise inferred that mountain residents would then realize the benefits of slavery, become slaveholders, and thus tie their interests to those of the slaveholding regime. With slavery spread throughout a state that was home to more slaveholders, the institution would be secured.[27]

Wise's political maneuvering contributed to the ratification of a new, more democratic constitution that still retained important elements for slaveholders. Although he secured a more equitable form of representation, he joined eastern elites in defeating an ad valorem taxation policy that would have increased assessments on slaves.[28] Instead, the new constitution exempted slaves below twelve years of age from being taxed and capped assessments of older slaves at $300.[29] Delegates also inserted the words "slave" and "slavery" in the new constitution, the first time they appeared in the state constitution. Thus, while the new constitution extended significant democratic rights to northwesterners—universal white manhood suffrage, popular election of some government officials, and use of the white basis for House of Delegates apportionment—the rejection of a uniform *ad valorem* tax and the continuation of *viva voce* voting illustrated that a complete trans-

formation of the electoral process remained out of reach.[30] The *viva voce* system provided opportunities for intimidation and ostracism during elections, while an inequitable tax structure elevated slaveholders' property over that of nonslaveholders.[31] Nevertheless, the new constitution represented a significant departure from the previous one, broadening political representation and inaugurating a new and important era of politics.

The direct election of the governor represented one of the important benefits provided by the new constitution. Before, the eastern-controlled state legislature appointed the governor and could choose proslavery or, at the very least, sympathetic governors. Now, with universal manhood suffrage and popular election of the office, the politics of slavery took on greater importance as an electoral force.[32] Kanawha County resident and slaveholder George W. Summers accepted the Whig nomination, while Joseph Johnson of Harrison County, a slaveholder, received the Democratic nomination. Summers initially stressed traditional Whig economic programs, specifically internal improvements and protective tariffs, during his campaign. Slavery, though, quickly trumped economic issues.[33] Following Nat Turner's Rebellion, Summers had supported some form of gradual emancipation. Eastern slaveholding elites pounced on his previous sin against slavery. "They are trying to injure him there [eastern Virginia] by republishing his speech in 1832," a Summers' supporter in the northwest observed.[34] Although Summers had recanted his previous stance and become one of western Virginia's most prominent slaveholders, his supposed unreliability on slavery undermined his electability.

Eastern slaveholders, who had already witnessed the erosion of constitutional roadblocks designed to limit nonslaveholders' political influence, branded Summers an abolitionist. They and the Democratic press promulgated these attacks "to prove that Western men were not then, are not *now*, and ought not *hereafter* to be trusted on the subject of slavery." Though Summers believed that he would "get the Whig vote of Eastern Va. in spite of the mad-dog cry of abolition," Democrats successfully turned slavery into the primary issue of Virginia's first popularly elected gubernatorial race. Although both candidates hailed from the northwest, Johnson appeared the safer choice for many slaveholders because of Summers' supposed flirtation with abolitionism. The election revealed a critical development in Virginia:

the complete fusion of slavery and politics on the popular level. Slaveholders, accustomed to the electoral process shielding their property from internal threats, now became increasingly paranoid about any perceived threats to slavery. The new democratic initiatives introduced by the new constitution swung open the doors of politics to all men, including those in the northwest who had long felt aggrieved by the power wielded by eastern slaveholders.[35]

The new political power extended to northwestern voters encouraged open discussion of previously taboo subjects, including slavery. In late November 1855, citizens of Virginia petitioned the state legislature to modify regulations concerning slavery. Such new rules would have forbidden the separation of parents and young children, recognized slaves' marital relationships, and permitted slaveholders to teach their slaves how to read and write. Many northwesterners professed that these laws were "eminently humane and conducive to morality." But because of the sparse slave population in the northwest, some residents questioned their involvement in this issue. The editor of the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, John G. Jacob, forcefully responded to these claims. "As citizens of Virginia," he affirmed, "we are perfectly competent to ask the Legislature to take any action we choose on the subject of slavery, even to its abolition." And because the new constitution extended to them political power, the legislature could not simply ignore northwestern demands. "[I]f they refuse from fear or other cause to advocate our views," the *Herald* continued, "all we have to do is to indicate our sovereignty by our votes."[36] Jacob encouraged newly enfranchised northwestern citizens to wield their political power as voters and assert their case as members of Virginia's electorate. Before 1851 such sentiments would have been hollow, but Virginia's new constitution sanctioned such political rhetoric and actions.

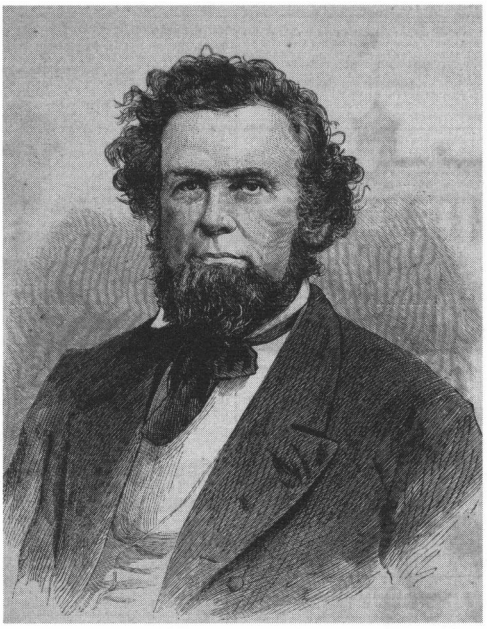
For many slaveholders, this frightening development stemmed from the new democratic constitution. Even before its ratification, Richmond attorney and future secessionist James Lyons feared what democracy could portend. "[A]ll dignity of sentiment, all purity of principle, all the delicacy of honor, must perish in the coarse and savage conflicts of the new democracy," he asserted.[37] One commentator, writing to the *Southern Quarterly Review*, lamented that "King Numbers" now governed the Old Dominion,

giving this despotic majority "power over the property of the East." This new political dynamic, though, represented the beginning stage of a far larger transformation in Virginia. Indeed, this new constitution, the author warned, "has changed, and will change still more deeply, the ancient social system of Virginia."[38] The changes wrought by the new constitution were indeed deep and broad, enlarging the body politic to incorporate those men once excluded.

The political rhetoric concerning slavery emanating from the northwest continued to demonstrate a new era of politics in Virginia. Residents voiced their opinions on slavery, charging that the "'negroocracy' of Virginia" manipulated politics in an effort to protect its peculiar property.[39] One newspaper rhetorically asked why residents should be "mealy mouthed" about slavery's continued nefarious influence in politics. "We assert," its editor aggressively stated, "that the entire legislation of the State is moulded, cramped and controlled by slave influences. We defy any one to point to a single measure wherein the trail of the same black serpent cannot be recognized." The paper, seizing on the "slave power" thesis, caustically mocked the nebulous "grievances" of slaveholders and demanded an "equitable system of gradual emancipation" aimed at returning whites to their rightful place in the electoral process.[40]

Other residents singled out the "operation of the new-tax law" passed during the previous constitutional convention that lowered assessments on slaves as a point of conflict.[41] Many argued that their property was "much entitled to exemption from taxation as that of Eastern Virginia, and it is as right that our cattle should be subject to a '*separate protection*' as their slaves."[42] Ultimately, for many residents, the battle was between democracy and slavery, two incompatible structures and ideals. "Freedom and slavery are essentially antagonistic," the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* asserted, "and it is about as reasonable to expect oil and water to mingle."[43] The rhetoric concerning slaveholders' power and privileges revealed the new contours of political debate in Virginia, further illuminating how the politics of slavery came to the forefront after the ratification of the new constitution.

By 1856, residents in the region continued to make manifest their awareness of the political issues affecting the state. During that summer, two citizens under the pseudonyms "Hancock" and "Publicola" waged an edito-



Francis Harrison Pierpont (1814–1899) of Marion County emerged as a prominent opponent of what he considered eastern slaveholders' blatant disregard for lingering constitutional inequalities that affected western nonslaveholders. Foremost among those inequalities was taxation. The 1851 Constitution limited the amount slaves could be taxed while other personal property was assessed at full value. Pierpont, incensed by this perceived injustice, campaigned for the Republican Party in 1860, brandishing slaveholders' tax receipts to emphasize the privileges they enjoyed over nonslaveholders. (*Harper's Weekly Magazine*)

rial battle, the former attacking slavery's influence in the politics and the latter defending it. Hancock attacked Publicola for his support of Virginia's gag law, which "protects the Slaveholder in his ungodly traffic, from the freedom of speech and of the press." The fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the state and national constitutions, Hancock asserted, apparently did not apply to nonslaveholding Virginians. Instead, the "slave power" curtailed freedoms akin to how they silenced their slaves. "No whisper of discontent must escape your lips," he stated, "lest in doing so, you render slave property some measure more precarious." Hancock underscored slaveholders' fears that democracy inherently proved dangerous for slavery's stability, a not-so-subtle jab about slaveholders' increased paranoia.[44]

Hancock also attacked slaveholders' suppression of constitutional and political freedoms. To strengthen his point, he turned his attention to the recent acts of violence directed toward John C. Underwood and George Rye, two Virginians who attended a Republican convention in Philadelphia.[45]

> Mr. Underwood and Mr. Rye, who had the temerity to attend a convention of freemen in a neighboring State, must not return to their family and their homes, on

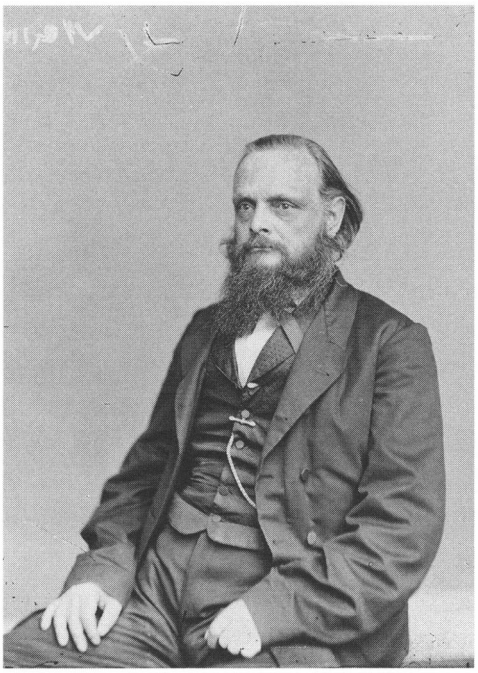
> peril of their lives; for the same reason the citizens of Wheeling peaceably assembled in a republican meeting, must be mobbed and their lives endangered. Take warning ye citizens of Hancock, ye talk of forming a Fremont club, beware! Chief Justice Lecompte will be upon you for treason![46]

Hancock's rhetoric portrayed slaveholders as oligarchs who wielded power in an aggressive regime that purposefully undermined constitutional rights—including freedom of speech, assembly, and petition—to protect their chattel. Such sentiments underscored the reality that northwesterners remained actively engaged in this political discourse over slavery and attempted to mobilize their forces to combat a perceived slaveocracy.

Three weeks later, the editor of the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* continued the political assault on Virginia's slaveholding regime. Demonstrating the ubiquity of antislave power sentiment in the region, the paper published four letters from residents. One resident, who claimed unequivocally that he was "not an abolitionist," still applauded that "philanthropy which dares against popular prejudice, to plead for reform." The resident also supported northwesterners for "*attacking an evil where it is.*" Another letter voiced its support for the *Herald* because it "advocates the rights and interest of the intelligent free white laborer," a pervasive sentiment among white laborers who feared that slave labor would undermine their economic standing. The ideals and issues expressed in these letters yet again revealed an active dialogue concerning the politics of slavery among residents, as well as their ability to possess a "free expression of opinion" and "freedom of speech."[47]

As residents expressed their opinions on the debate over slavery's role in the electoral system, party affiliation represented an important means of displaying their political creed. The collapse of the national Whig Party and the defeat of the Know Nothing Party in the Virginia gubernatorial election in 1855 left Whig-leaning northwesterners searching for a new home. Many gravitated toward the Opposition Party, a mixture of former Whigs, Americans, and disaffected Democrats. A small minority, though, demanded a party that opposed the "slave power" and protected the rights of white laborers.[48] The nascent Republican Party appeared to be that vehicle but acquiring a foothold in the region proved difficult and dangerous.

John C. Underwood understood those dangers. His attempt to facilitate the introduction and expansion of the Republican Party in Virginia generat-



John Curtiss Underwood (1809–1873), lived, among other places, in Clarke County. His antislavery proclivities and his support for Republican John C. Frémont in 1856, however, enraged his Virginia neighbors, forcing him and his family to flee to New York. Underwood became a cause célèbre among northwest Republicans, who applauded his free labor and free soil convictions and used his experience as evidence of Virginia slaveholders' antipathy for freedom of expression. (*Library of Congress*)

ed hostility between him and his slaveholding neighbors in Clarke County. Residents burned him in effigy and threatened him if he returned home.[49] In the northwest, Republicans faced similar obstacles. Editorials in the *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* attacked Republican attempts to form a broad constituency in the northwest. The editor expressed his "sorrow that this little band should attempt in Virginia an organization whose aims are at war with the institutions of Virginia." A planned meeting of Republicans in the city garnered further censure from the newspaper. The editor advised "members of that party to change both *time and place*" as "Wheeling has no sympathy with this party and she does not desire her name to be a second Hartford in political iniquity." A few weeks later in Wheeling, a group of residents established a Republican Association of Ohio County and moved to organize a Frémont electoral ticket. A mob broke into the meeting and dispersed the approximately five hundred citizens gathered. The violence, though, failed to deter the formation of other Republican clubs. Residents in Hancock County and Brooke County formed Republican associations

that condemned the violence at Wheeling and appointed delegates to attend the Republican state convention in Wheeling.[50]

The violence and stigma associated with the Republican Party hampered turnout for the 1856 presidential election. Frémont collected only 291 votes statewide, including 21 from Ohio County and 40 from Brooke County. The continued practice of the *viva voce* method of voting opened Republican voters to physical violence and intimidation, although partisan attacks also likely weakened Republican turnout. "The Union is now complete between the most odious wing of the Black Republicans and the Know-Nothings," the Democratic *Cooper's Clarksburg Register* pronounced. "Proscribing white men . . . and elevating the negro above the foreigner," the paper concluded, "seems now to be main plank in their political platform." In Morgantown, the *American Union* warned residents that "Black Republicanism cannot be trusted" and cautioned voters of the party's "corrupt and wicked" stance on slavery. Despite their marginal success, many Republicans remained cautiously optimistic about the future success of the party and the continued open discussion of slavery. As the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* avowed, "there is nothing lost by the discussion of questions connected with Slavery in Virginia."[51]

By 1860, the discussion over the politics of slavery in northwestern Virginia became increasingly manifest in the public sphere. For those Virginians who less than a decade earlier found themselves on the outside of politics, editorials, flag and pole raisings, and meetings helped connect these new voters to the political sphere. Many of these Virginians attended public meetings, including those affiliated with the Republican Party. In February 1860, "a large crowed of citizens" attended a Republican meeting in Wheeling, the first of many for the northwest's most important industrial city. More intriguing, the descriptions and calls for meetings emphasized not only the size of the gathering but the centrality of individual citizens to these gatherings. "Let the call be read and fairly considered and all the citizens approving or disproving, act accordingly, freely, and as is their indubitable right," an advertisement for an Opposition Party mass meeting in Wheeling stated. The meeting invited all residents who "opposed . . . the extension of slavery into all the territories . . . [and] to any inequality of rights among citizens."[52] By emphasizing the correlation between slavery and equal rights

among white citizens, these meetings reflected arguably the most salient issue among residents.

By the spring of 1860, Republican meetings appeared across the region. "Republican meetings are being constantly held in different Northwestern counties," the *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* observed, including Marshall, Wood, and Taylor counties. These gatherings passed resolutions that endorsed calling for a Virginia Republican convention and attacked the "benighted democracy" of eastern Virginia. Though these meetings articulated resonant themes—including opposing the expansion of slavery into federal territories, supporting an equal tax structure, and antislave power sentiment—these gatherings engaged citizens once excluded from the electoral process.

> We are well aware that the bulk of those professing Republican sentiments, in this State, as well as County, are not of the class of men habitually disposed to dabble in politics; but it is necessary, if their principles are to be developed into practical utility, that they should use the means to render them practically available. Without organization and concert, they are practically disenfranchised.

Unlike the "lawyers, judges, politicians, and leading talking men" who had always enjoyed access to politics, "modest people" only recently gained access to the political system. For new voters, the Republican Party appeared to be the vehicle that could mobilize them against those elite men who hesitated to make politics more inclusive. Other meetings highlighted this same phenomenon. The "intelligent yeomanry" of Hancock County "turned out in force" for a Republican meeting at the local court house and "listened with decorous attention thro'-out the speeches." The *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* made sure to note that this democratic meeting was "both large and respectable."[53] The Republican Party, therefore, supplied the appropriate means for ordinary northwesterners to join the political discourse and engage in the arena of politics.

Other mass meetings and rallies in the northwest represented similar manifestations of political grassroots movements. In October 1860, Republicans organized a local club in Brooke County "numbering some seventy members and meeting regularly . . . to discuss the affairs of the nation like any other first class political club." At a Republican rally in Wheeling in September 1860, residents came out in full force in support of Abraham Lincoln and dwarfed those who came out in support of John Bell.

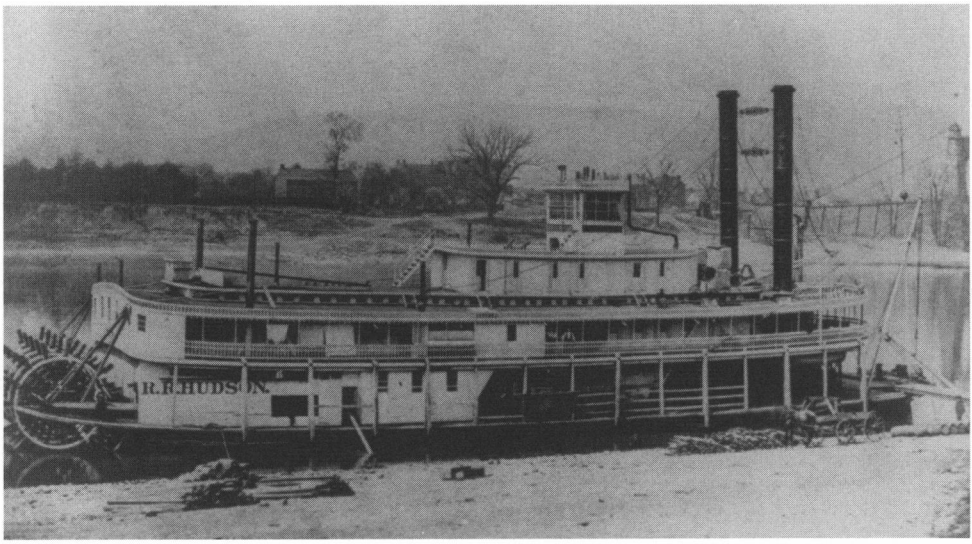
Furthermore, "some 250 uniformed *Wide Awakes*" were present, along with at least an equal number of non-uniformed members. In a separate meeting in Wheeling, a glee club and local military companies gathered with residents in support of the Republican Party.[54] These public gatherings illustrated the unique dynamics present in the northwest's political culture. It demonstrated a burgeoning political sphere filled with residents anxious to engage in politics, hear the issues debated, listen to candidates, and actively debate the direction of their region, state, and country.

The ability of residents to coalesce around a set of ideals became increasingly visible during pole raisings. Much like political meetings, pole raisings often mobilized entire communities to an area, and men and women—regardless of rank or distinction—joined together to debate politics and express their support for a candidate. In the northwest, Republicans used these events as a way to marshal support for their candidate, Abraham Lincoln. In August 1860, "between three and four hundred people" assembled near an iron works plant in Wheeling to raise a Lincoln and Hamlin pole. Neophytes to the Republican Party were among those in attendance, a signal of the supposed weakened nature of the Democratic Party and the attractiveness and ascendancy of the Republican Party in the region. The pole "was hoisted with a rapidity and enthusiasm that never was distanced in these parts," signaling residents' approbation for the Republican Party. One resident wrote a letter to the editor of the *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* asking him to advertise a flag raising in Marshall County and invited "any of the friends of Lincoln" to join.[55] With numerous pole raisings and public meetings throughout the region, citizens could express themselves politically, attempt to persuade hesitant neighbors to a specific cause or candidate, and ultimately demonstrate the very definition of being democratic.

The culture of democracy exemplified in meetings and pole raisings certainly mobilized residents and encouraged them to learn about the issues. The final—and arguably paramount expression of being democratic for white citizens—was to cast a ballot. For those who wanted to vote for Lincoln, an extra aura (and danger) surrounded this decision. One resident published an article entitled, "Reasons for Voting for Lincoln in Virginia," and in the article the author discussed the respective platforms of the four candidates, including each candidates' stance on slavery. On each

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) was the first Republican to hold the office of president of the United States. Though he failed to carry a single county in Virginia, Lincoln enjoyed some popularity in the northwest, a reflection of residents' acceptance of Republicans' message of free labor and free soil. Northwest Republicans competed with other partisans through various political and social activities, including meetings, flag and pole raisings, and political paraphernalia. (*Library of Congress*)

aspect, the author countered with evidence that displayed Lincoln's moral and political uprightness. Yet a more compelling issue loomed. Northwesterners, the author stated, "should vote for Lincoln . . . if for no other reason, because they have been told in some quarters that they would not be allowed to vote for that ticket." Indeed, Republican ballots were difficult, if not impossible, to find in Virginia except in pockets in the northwest and around the Potomac River. For those who attempted to vote for Lincoln, they often encountered violence and intimidation. But such obstacles should embolden, not frighten voters, the author concluded, because voting for one's preferred candidate exemplified the culture of democracy. "*The right to vote as a man pleases*," he emphatically argued, "*is the very corner stone of free institutions.*" In areas across Virginia "it has been publicly proclaimed that *no man shall vote for Lincoln*," thus mandating that northwesterners answer this proclamation "at the polls, at any cost." Voting for Lincoln would "demonstrate their independence" in politics and "demonstrate their abhorrence of the treasonable sentiments of the secession Democracy . . . [and] counteract the slaveholding oligarchy."[56]



Wheeling, located in Ohio County, was northwest Virginia's most important industrial city before the Civil War. Its location along the Ohio River and the growth of glass works, nail manufacturers, and iron foundries there provided fertile soil for the Republican Party in the 1850s, as Wheeling's laborers found common ground with northern industrial workers who feared the "Slave Power" and slavery's expansion. The city's political importance increased during the Civil War, when West Virginia's founding fathers convened in the city to discuss statehood and form a new constitution. (*Library of Congress*)

The author of this article touched on important development since the ratification of the new constitution in 1851. Many northwesterners, now enfranchised, possessed substantial political power that could fundamentally alter the political landscape, much to the chagrin of some eastern elites like Edmund Ruffin and John C. Rutherfoord. Ruffin lamented that Virginia's "miserable constitution" extended the "right of suffrage" to the "lower & meaner class," ultimately debasing his conception of self-government. Rutherfoord caustically remarked that "[i]n the nineteenth century, it is public opinion that is king, making and unmaking the laws . . . sweeping away whatever it opposes, whether it be the compromises of politicians or the compacts of a constitution."[57] Ruffin and Rutherfoord, reacting to the new democratic ethos in Virginia, assailed the inclusion of nonslaveholders into the electoral process. Northwesterners, however, relished their opportu-

nity to flex their political muscle, challenge eastern slaveholder hegemony, and enjoy broad democratic participation among all men.

The active democratic sphere in the northwest took on an added sense of importance during the secession winter. Although residents convened numerous meetings throughout the region, two in the town of Kingwood in Preston County may best exemplify the new democratic ethos in the state. In January 1861, residents gathered around the courthouse and "erected a beautiful pole" that featured a "streamer at the top of the pole" emblazoned with the word "UNION." The reporter at this meeting made sure to note the diversity of those in attendance. "Men of all classes, and ages" came out to support the Union, including the "gray-haired sire, and the flaxend-headed boy—the mechanic and the day-laborer—the most influential citizen, and the most obscure." A few months later, after learning that representatives in Richmond adopted the Ordinance of Secession, approximately one thousand residents gathered around the Kingwood courthouse to express their continued fealty to the Union. They denounced the "mobocracy and Disunion rabble" in Richmond for threatening northwestern delegates and Governor Letcher for putting the machinery in motion to sever ties between Virginia and the union. Residents argued that "until the people of Virginia shall, by their votes, and through the ballot-box . . . decide otherwise," Virginia would remain in the Union.[58]

These two meetings in Preston County illustrated the new political culture that had developed since the passage of the 1851 Constitution. Residents, regardless of class, wealth, and property ownership, gathered together to debate politics, participate in such democratic actions as flag and pole raisings, and display their political power by their vote. Before 1850, such actions had seemed hollow and futile. Though all classes of men could gather together and perform the same functions, their ability to exert power on the political sphere remained limited. Representatives remained beholden to the interest of the voters, not necessarily the disenfranchised. Indeed, the 1830 Constitution accomplished more than limiting suffrage or preventing the popular election of government officials. The previous constitution created a sentiment among the excluded that the benefit of living in a slave society was a canard. Although the color line supposedly cleanly demarcated freedom for whites and slavery for blacks, the inability to exert political

Edmund Ruffin (1794–1865) expressed the sentiments of numerous Virginia slaveholders and elites who feared what they interpreted as democracy's deleterious effects on a slaveholding society. These men worried that democratizing the state's constitution would inaugurate anarchy and mob rule in the Old Dominion, ultimately leaving private property vulnerable to the masses. Waitman Willey and Henry Wise dismissed such apocalyptic visions, but Ruffin's views remained widespread, with many Virginians hopeful that democratic reforms could be rolled back and nonslaveholders disenfranchised. (*Virginia Historical Society, 2007.5.48*)

power by numerous white men blurred that vital distinction. Such a sentiment solidified in the minds of northwestern residents that a "slave power" controlled all aspects of Virginia and that this cabal would protect its chattel at all costs. This "slave power" thesis became one of the rallying cries for residents in the northwest who rejected the Confederacy and supported separate statehood.

For those eastern slaveholders and elites who had enjoyed unchallenged access to the political system, the dramatic changes wrought by the new constitution appeared unsettling. Men like Edmund Ruffin and John Rutherfoord feared that the inclusion of nonslaveholders would invariably threaten the stability and longevity of slavery. But as Henry Wise professed, a democratic government would protect the institution. Residents could fully realize the benefits of living in a slave society, ensuring that men from all classes and all sections of Virginia would protect the institution that guaranteed their freedom. Wise's estimation proved right and wrong. Despite all

the hand-wringing by slaveholders like Ruffin and his ilk, the inclusion of nonslaveholders from the northwest did not fundamentally disrupt the ideological or political currents of the state. The political system proved durable and dynamic, as a large majority of new voters from the region supported established political parties throughout the 1850s and in 1860.[59] The decision to vote for a respective candidate from the two parties often hinged on community pressure, traditional allegiances, patronage, partisanship, treating, or some other compelling variable. Attacking slavery did not appear on that list.

But for those residents frustrated with the "slave power" of Virginia, the new democratic constitution provided an opening to change the electoral system and possibly challenge the perpetuity of slavery. One outside commentator believed that Virginia Republicans could "secure a free soil balance of power" that could "be wielded on the politics" of the state. Indeed, Republican electoral success nationally would "give the cause of Free Soil a powerful propulsion" in Virginia and along the rest of the Border States. Within a few years, the "incubus" of slavery would be removed from Missouri, Delaware, and possibly Maryland and Virginia.[60]

Before 1851, such thoughts would have been inconceivable. But the new constitution and the democratic ethos within the state welcomed the voices of all men, including those who held opposing interests to the majority of Virginians. Often, Republicans believed that by encouraging attendance at meetings and flag and pole raisings, formerly disenfranchised men could be mobilized in support of the party of Lincoln. Republicans further hoped that, by emphasizing the "slave power" and free soil theses, they could turn men long disaffected with Virginia's political culture into a powerful electorate. The initial stages of this voter realignment were visible before the Civil War, providing historians a close look at political party formation.

The active political sphere in northwestern Virginia demonstrates the rich dialogue about the compatibility of democracy and slavery in antebellum America. This dialogue also reveals competing visions about how a democracy should function and what a democratic society needs to function. While slaveholders could argue that a democratic government should protect vested interests, those without such influence railed against what they believed to be corruption and manipulation. The rhetoric employed by

residents—such as "mobocracy" and "rabble"—further reveal the potency of democratic ideals and the contested nature of democracy. What some perceived to be an unruly mob may have appeared to others as an organic, democratic gathering of the people. This disagreement elucidates the difficulty in determining who "the people" are in a democratic society, a fundamental debate that Virginians engaged in during the decade after they ratified a new constitution. Indeed, this debate—emblematic of the growing pains of a democratic society—tested the bonds of whiteness, citizenship, partisanship, and fealty to Virginia's dominant slaveholding culture.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Brian Luskey, Jason Phillips, the staff at the West Virginia and Regional History Center, and the three anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions and comments.

1. H[enry S.] Dering to W[aitman] T. Willey, 19 Mar. 1861, Charles H. Ambler Papers, West Virginia and Regional History Center, Morgantown (cited hereafter as WVRHC).

2. Two prominent Virginians expressed such beliefs. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson, using the counties of Warwick and Loudon as his examples, calculated that one man in the former county possessed as much political power as seventeen from the latter. Northwestern residents often pointed to Jefferson's calculations to support their demands for political equality (Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. Frank Shuffelton [1784; repr., New York, 1999], 124–26). James Madison argued that because of slavery, Virginia's state government "however democratic in name, must be aristocratic in fact" (William T. Hutchinson, William M. E. Rachal, and Robert Allen Rutland, eds., *The Papers of James Madison* [17 vols.; Chicago and Charlottesville, 1962–91], 14:163–64).

3. William Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 253–54. Still, as Richard O. Curry and Ken Fones-Wolf have illustrated, it is imperative not to see

the Northwest as a monolith. Cultural and economic ties to eastern Virginia, most importantly to Richmond, produced strong support among the western landed elite for the state's ruling elites (see Richard O. Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* [Pittsburgh, 1964] and Ken Fones-Wolf, "'Traitors in Wheeling': Secessionism in an Appalachian Unionist City," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 13 [2007]: 75–95).

4. Link, *Roots of Secession*. Although beneficial for continued analysis of the differences arising between eastern and western Virginia, "northwestern exceptionalism" overlooks the diversity of public opinion on the issue of slavery in the Northwest and does not provide a close analysis of popular political manifestations.

5. In *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824–1861* (Charlottesville, 1996),William G. Shade argues that a dynamic two-party system effectively subsumed potentially divisive political issues, including slavery. By the mid to late 1840s, however, the two parties proved unable to control the clamor arising from many nonslaveholders in the Northwest and Southwest who demanded political equality.

6. Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

7. Craig Simpson, "Political Compromise and the Protection of Slavery: Henry A. Wise and the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850–51," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (cited hereafter as *VMHB*) 83 (1975): 387–405.

8. *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 25 Dec. 1860.

9. Other areas across the slaveholding South faced similar experiences, where the politics of slavery emerged as an important electoral force in the 1850s. Historian Adam Arenson details the grassroots efforts in St. Louis of the Republican Party, including the influence of German immigrants on the party, and how the party attempted to challenge the dominant slaveholding culture. Much like northwest Virginia, St. Louis and much of Missouri remained in the dominant political currents of the state and the nation (Adam Arenson, *Great Heart of the Republic: St. Louis and the Cultural Civil War* [Cambridge, Mass., 2010], 109–13). Other areas witnessed similar political and electoral arguments, including Maryland and Kentucky (see Barbara Jeane Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* [New Haven, 1985]). What separated northwestern Virginia from these other regions was a unique alchemy of variables, including immigration, industrialization, and a political history fraught with conflict between landed, slaveholding elite and a nonslaveholding, nonfreeholder populace. All of these changing dynamics occurred within the largest slaveholding state, too, adding a sense of urgency and importance to debates about slavery and democracy.

10. Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1997).

11. Fletcher Melvin Green, "Democracy in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 12 (1946): 3–23; William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (Baton Rouge, 1978); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978). These historians reinforce a conclusion reached long ago by contemporary southerners, including Thomas R. Dew, who argued that slavery created a sense of equality among all white men (Thomas R. Dew, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832* [Richmond, 1832]).

12. William W. Freehling, *Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990); William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York, 2001); William A. Link, "'This Bastard New Virginia': Slavery, West Virginia Exceptionalism, and the Secession Crisis," *West Virginia History* 3 (2009): 37–56; Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); Michael T. Bernath, "The Confederacy as a Moment of Possibility," *Journal of Southern History* 79 (2013): 299–338.

13. For an excellent analysis of the 1776 and 1830 constitutions, see Brent Tarter, *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia* (Charlottesville, 2013), 92–108, 165–87.

14. John Alexander Williams, "The New Dominion and the Old: Ante-Bellum and Statehood Politics as the Background of West Virginia's 'Bourbon Democracy,'" *West Virginia History* 33 (1972): 337–40.

15. *Parkersburg Gazette and Western Virginia Courier*, 15 Dec. 1849 (first quotation); *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 15 Mar. 1850. Reacting to apportionment to the 1850–51 Constitutional Convention, the *Herald* exclaimed, "What do the free citizens of Virginia say to having a price fixed upon them, to being yoked with slaves, and brought to the shambles . . . [F]ive negro chattels valued at $2,000 dollars are balanced by three lusty western white men; making the market price of a poor man in Virginia just 666 dollars."

16. For further analysis of the 1829–30 Constitutional Convention, see Dickson Bruce, Jr., *The Rhetoric of Conservatism: The Virginia Convention of 1829–30 and the Conservative Tradition in the South* (San Marino, Calif., 1982) and Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, esp. chap. 5. Both authors argue that the convention represented the apogee of conservatism in Virginia, with Shade placing more emphasis on the impact of party development on the constitutional proceedings.

17. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 15 Mar. 1850.

18. *Shepherdstown Register*, 5 Mar. 1850; *The Crisis*, 29 Apr. 1848. It seems that this issue was the only one printed by Berkshire; efforts to determine why he ceased publishing have not turned up any evidence. Berkshire, though, attempted to cultivate a wider audience, as he contracted agents in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh to increase his readership. His newspaper also likely reflected an effort to challenge the dominant mores concerning slavery.

19. By 1850, the white population in western Virginia was 494,763 compared to 401,104 in the eastern counties. The slave population in the eastern Virginia was 411,379 and 63,234 in the western counties (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *Historical Census Browser*, http://mapserver.lib.Virginia.edu/php/newlong2.php [accessed 12 Jan. 2011 to 14 Jan. 2011]). The growth of slavery in the counties of the Shenandoah Valley further complicated the political and sectional dynamics during the convention, as their interests became increasingly tethered to those of the Piedmont and Tidewater and away from the northwest.

20. *Register of the Debates and Proceedings of the Virginia Reform Convention* (Richmond, 1851), 284.

21. James Barbour, *Speech of James Barbour, Esq., of Culpeper, in the Committee of the Whole, on the Basis Question, Delivered in the Virginia Reform Convention, on Thursday, February 27, 1851* (Richmond, 1851), 12.

22. Waitman T. Willey, *Speeches of Waitman T. Willey of Monongalia County, before the State Convention of Virginia, on the Basis of Representation; on County Courts and County Organization, and on the Election of Judges by the People* (Richmond, n.d.), 14 (first quotation), 15 (second quotation), 19, 24 (third and fourth quotation).

23. George Ray to Waitman T. Willey, 22 Jan. 1851, Waitman T. Willey Papers, WVRHC.

24. A. F. Haymond to Waitman T. Willey, 28 Apr. 1851, Charles H. Ambler Papers, WVRHC; W. W. Arnett to Waitman T. Willey, 29 Aug. 1851, ibid.; W. W. Arnett to Waitman T. Willey, 2 Dec. 1850, ibid.; John Burdett to Waitman T. Willey, 28 Apr. 1851, ibid.; A. F. Haymond to Waitman T. Willey, 28 Apr. 1851, ibid. Arnett, an Episcopal priest who eventually settled in Philadelphia during the 1850s, was a native-born Virginian and strongly desired to settle in western Virginia.

25. *Register of the Debates*, 208.

26. Henry A. Wise quoted in Barton H. Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806–1876* (New York, 1899), 145 (first quotation), 150 (last quotation).

27. Tarter, *Grandees of Government*, 191. Wise pointed to the proliferation of slaves and slaveholders in southwest Virginia and noted how close its cultural, economic, and political ties were to the Tidewater and Piedmont. Historian Kenneth Noe details how the completion of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad in 1856 in the southwest helped overcome sectional allegiances by creating new markets for growers goods in Richmond (Kenneth W. Noe, *Southwestern Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* [Urbana, 1994]).

28. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 22–23. On 16 May 1851, Del. Samuel Chilton of Fauquier County finally broke the political siege when he proposed amending a previous bill offered by a committee. In the House of Delegates, the western counties would get eighty-two of the 150 seats, while the eastern counties would fill thirty of the fifty positions in the Senate. The legislature would then be in charge of revisiting apportionment in 1865. If it still could not decide, the public would vote on four available options. After some minor changes, delegates ratified the bill on 21 May by a vote of 51 to 44. An *ad valorem* tax would have equalized assessments on all forms of property. Non-slaveholders claimed that slaveholders did not pay their fair share, and this issue remained divisive up to and through Virginia's secession in April 1861. Historian Robin Einhorn explores unequal tax structures in Virginia in greater depth in *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago, 2006).

29. Simpson, "Political Compromise and the Protection of Slavery," 394–405. Even though Wise helped defeat an important issue advocated by the northwestern counties, many citizens still applauded the Accomac delegate for his work in achieving a more equitable form of representation. "[T]he name of Mr. Wise is a cherished word in every cabin in W. Virginia," resident John Burdett stated. "I am myself a *convert,* whereas I used to hate him (or rather his political tenets), I *now love* the man and hope that the time may offer when I may have the opty. tosignalise my gratitude in some more tangible form" (John Burdett to Waitman T. Willey, 28 Apr. 1851, Charles H. Ambler Papers, WVRHC).

30. The final bill allowed all white males to vote if they were above the age of twenty-one and had lived in the state for two years and their district for twelve months preceding an election. Restrictions were placed on paupers, the mentally handicapped, and noncommissioned military personnel. For a synopsis of the 1850–51 Constitutional Convention, see David L. Pulliam, *The Constitutional Conventions of Virginia from the Foundation of the Commonwealth to the Present Time*

(Richmond, 1901), and for a traditional sectionalist approach to the convention, see Francis Pendleton Gaines, Jr., "The Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850–51: A Study in Sectionalism," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1950).

31. Northwesterners agitated for reform on voting procedures because many argued that "many evils arise from it [*viva voce*] in a close contest. It gives wealth an undue preponderance—gives power to active partisans by operating upon the sensitive who are unused to the crowded arena of the polls, and tightens the chains of party." With so many new voters possibly entering the political sphere, many worried that these novices would be overwhelmed by oral voting and thus would not vote or vote for a candidate not of their choosing (*Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 16 Aug. 1850).

32. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery.* Cooper argues that the politics of slavery helped subsume class differences between slaveholders and nonslaveholders, thus preventing any political conflict between the two groups. Although this interpretation applied to most of Virginia after 1851, including the northwest, the politics of slavery also increased antagonism between supporters of the state's slaveholding culture and those who argued that a "slave power" stalled economic and social progress and corrupted politics.

33. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 77.

34. N. Fitzhugh to Waitman T. Willey, 30 Oct. 1851, Charles H. Ambler Papers, WVRHC.

35. Hugh W. Sheffey to Waitman T. Willey, 11 Nov. 1851, ibid.; Link, *Roots of Secession*, 77–80.

36. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 30 Nov. 1855.

37. James Lyons, quoted in Shearer Davis Bowman, "Conditional Unionism and Slavery in Virginia, 1860–1861: The Case of Dr. Richard Eppes," *VMHB* 96 (1988), 38n20.

38. "The Constitution of Virginia, 1851," *Southern Quarterly Review* 12 (1855): 372 (first and second quotations), 382 (third quotation).

39. Francis H. Pierpont to Waitman T. Willey, 16 Mar. 1859, Charles H. Ambler Papers, WVRHC.

40. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 11 Apr. 1856.

41. Ibid.

42. *Cooper's Clarksburg Register*, 5 Nov. 1858.

43. *Wellsburg Herald*, 27 June 1856.

44. Unfortunately, missing newspapers in the microfilm reel prevent a full analysis of their arguments. One of the surviving editorials from "Hancock" contains rebuttals to "Publicola's" arguments, and thus provides an opportunity to gauge their interpretations. The pseudonyms used by these two citizens convey their position on the argument. Publicola likely refers to Publius Valerisu Publicola, a Roman aristocrat who helped establish the Roman Republic and claimed to be close to the people. Hancock likely refers to John Hancock, a Patriot and defender of colonists' liberties during the American Revolution (*Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 5 Sept. 1856).

45. Richard G. Lowe, "The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia, 1856–1860," *VMHB* 81 (1973): 263.

46. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 5 Sept. 1856.

47. Ibid., 26 Sept. 1856.

48. Lowe, "The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia," 259–60. Though Lowe mentions numerous meetings in his study, he overlooks the rhetoric used by gatherers and reporters to describe how these new citizens thought about the relationship between democracy and slavery.

49. Ibid., 261–64.

50. *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 18 Aug. 1856; Lowe, "The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia," 264–65.

51. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 7 Nov. 1856 (vote totals); *Cooper's Clarksburg Register*, 23 July 1856; *American Union*, 25 Oct. 1856; *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 9 July 1858; Link, *Roots of Secession*, 205.

52. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 17 Feb. 1860 (first quotation) and 2 March 1860 (second and third quotations).

53. Ibid., 20 Apr. 1860, 17 Aug. 1860 (last quotation).

54. Ibid., 12 Oct. 1860 (first quotation) and 14 Sept. 1860 (second quotation); *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 14 Sept. 1860.

55. Pole raisings proved dangerous in areas with little Republican support. For example, in Prince William County, local residents cut down a pole with an American flag and a streamer bearing the names of Lincoln and Hamlin. The *Wellsburg Weekly Herald* condemned it as an act of "tyranny, of illiberality" that reflected the antidemocratic "spirit of slavery" (see *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 3 Aug. 1860; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 6 Aug. 1860 and 24 July 1860.

56. *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 2 Nov. 1860. Lincoln received a small number of votes in Virginia, 1,929, with the majority of those coming from Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Preston, Wood, and Fairfax counties. In Brooke County, Lincoln received 178 votes, second to Breckinridge's 451; Ohio County provided 771; Hancock County gave Lincoln 254 votes; and Marshall County delivered 195 votes. Only in Hancock County, the northernmost tip of Virginia, did Lincoln almost win a county; he received eight fewer votes than Breckinridge (Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 82; Link, *Roots of Secession*, 210; Tarter, *Grandees of Government*, 199, 213; *Wellsburg Weekly Herald*, 16 Nov. 1860.

57. Edmund Ruffin, *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. William Scarborough (3 vols.; Baton Rouge, 1972–89), 1:453; John C. Rutherfoord, *Speech of John C. Rutherfoord of Goochland, in the House of Delegates of Virginia, 21 February, 1860, in Favor of the Proposed Conference of Southern States* (Richmond, 1860), 11. Wallace Hettle argues that Rutherfoord was the embodiment of Democratic principles, who, paradoxically, became more conservative during the late 1850s and rejected the idea that all white men were created equal. Rutherfoord increasingly lost faith in democracy because of the political unreliability of nonslaveholders in protecting slavery (see Wallace Hettle, *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* [Athens, Ga., 2001], 57–83).

58. *Kingwood Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1861 and 27 Apr. 1861.

59. Tarter, *Grandees of Government*, 202.

60. J. Medill to Archibald Campbell, 30 Oct. 1859, Archibald W. Campbell Papers, WVRHC.