

THE WHIG ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT
AND THE MEXICAN WAR

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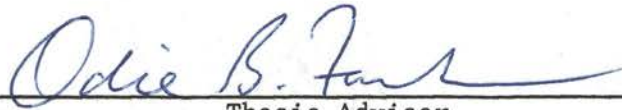
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PREFACE

This thesis is an attempt to examine the various factors which helped stimulate the rise of the Whig abolitionists from 1840 to 1848. Historians have written little on this segment of the Whig party; and they have limited their studies primarily to the Whig abolitionists from Massachusetts. Although many respected leaders of the Whig abolitionists were from Massachusetts, the movement was not isolated to that one state. The Whig abolitionists claimed the basis for their campaign was to prevent slavery in newly acquired territories and eventually, to abolish all slavery in the United States. They used a variety of methods. They had seen the failure of the Liberty party in 1844 when abolitionists outside of the two regular parties, the Whigs and the Democrats, nominated James G. Birney. Thus, the Whig abolitionists tried to work within their own party until they could persuade members of the Democratic party, who were sympathetic to the antislavery cause, to join them in a coalition with other abolitionists.

Meanwhile, abolitionists in Britain and in the United States helped the Whig abolitionists in the United States congress. As interest in annexing Texas to the United States developed, abolitionists held world conventions in which they denounced any such action by the United States. They claimed that southerners were trying to establish slavery in new territories by expansion. After Texas was annexed, the Whig abolitionists assured the nation that a war with Mexico would follow. Their predictions came true and they began to correspond with dissatis-

fied Democrats. The result was the Freesoil party, a coalition of Whig abolitionists, antislavery Democrats, and former members of the Liberty party.

An examination of the rise of the Whig abolitionists will enable the student of the Mexican War to understand the basis for the charge of abolitionists that the Mexican War was caused by a "slaveocracy conspiracy." Furthermore, this thesis will attempt to determine the influence the Whig abolitionists had on political parties from 1846 to 1848.

There are many people who deserve my gratitude for their aid and advise in writing this thesis. Dr. Homer L. Knight, the head of the History Department, has been a source of encouragement from the beginning of my graduate studies. His genuine interest in all students has been an asset to the History Department for many years. Dr. Norbert Mahnken, the director of graduate studies in the History Department, made suggestions as my second reader which were highly beneficial. I also want to thank Dr. Odie B. Faulk, my advisor and mentor, for his advice, inspiration, and gentle prodding for the last few years. Dr. Faulk's endless energy and his good disposition helped me through those frequent days in the life of a graduate student when everything seems to go wrong.

There are people outside of the History Department I want to thank, too. The people who live with a graduate student often are forced by their proximity to share the burdens of that graduate student. Connie Moyers, my friend and roommate, has listened patiently as I planned this thesis and has offered many suggestions to improve it. I owe my family the greatest gratitude. Throughout my life my parents, Mr. and

Mrs. Wayne Conrad Haun in Enid, Oklahoma, have sacrificed in many ways for their children. My father and mother encouraged us to have ambitious dreams and helped us try to fulfill these dreams. My brother, Ronald, and my sister, Judy, have helped me in my studies, also. The love which my family has for each other stimulated me to seek an education.

Despite the aid of all these people, this thesis may have numerous errors. Any mistakes which have been made are mine alone and I accept full responsibility for them.

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CHAPTER I

THE BRITISH ROLE IN THE RISE OF THE WHIG ABOLITIONISTS

While much has been written about British involvement in the Republic of Texas, little has been published concerning British influence on the domestic politics of the United States during that same period. Frederick Merk implies that the American Whigs remained consolidated throughout this period.¹ Another historian, Ephraim Douglas Adams, states that British policy influenced American politics; however, he does not elaborate on that point.² In his classic work, Justin H. Smith suggests that a great number of Whigs were "intensely hostile to the incorporation of Texas."³ Nevertheless, he does not relate the British to that hostility. Yet there was a clear division among the American Whigs after the annexation of Texas, and this split did not erupt suddenly.

Certainly, there was a reason for a split within the Whig party. The Whigs opposed the annexation of Texas; yet Congress, by joint resolution, incorporated that state. The Whigs said, in their campaign against the bill in 1845, that a war with Mexico would result and that,

¹ Frederick Merk, The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

² Ephraim Douglas Adams, British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), p. 13.

³ Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1941), p. 239.

if this should occur, Mexico would be justified in its actions. However, when President James K. Polk, a Democrat, asked Congress to declare war against Mexico, only sixteen Whig congressmen voted against the declaration.⁴ These men were known as Whig abolitionists, and the background to these events clearly shows why they voted as they did. They were not pure American organisms, but hybrids who had been "fertilized" by the British anti-slavery impulse.

The Whig party was never a national party, only a political coalition. The issue of slavery was anathema to the party's leaders for if it was made a national issue, it would divide the party along sectional lines. Not wanting to lose elections, they ignored slavery in their national platforms, and at the same time, allowed each state organization to do as it wished concerning the problem of slavery. Thus the forces of abolition soon infiltrated many state conventions, and Massachusetts became the caldron of Whig abolitionists, who also were known as "Conscience Whigs" or "Young Whigs." These men placed moral politics above party politics. On the other side of the Atlantic, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (B.F.A.S.S.), through its influence on British governmental policy and through its ties with American abolitionists, had a major role in the rise of the Whig abolitionists. The Conscience Whigs opposed the annexation of Texas, for they thought it would extend the hated institution of slavery. Therefore they found themselves in complete agreement with the B.F.A.S.S.

However, the American government questioned British motives con-

⁴United States Congress, House, 29th Cong., 1st sess., 1846, Journal, May 11, 1846, p. 239.

cerning Texas. Were the British pursuing an imperialistic course under the guise of humanitarianism? Apparently the American public thought so, for in the election of 1844 James K. Polk was elected President and annexation shortly was realized. As a result, the Whig abolitionists began a campaign against the extension of slavery.

They had allies in the United States supporting their crusade; yet these allies, known as abolitionists, had divided into two factions. William Lloyd Garrison led those who believed in non-resistance through withdrawal from the government, while Henry B. Stanton and James Gillespie Birney directed those who supported political actions through a third-party movement.⁵ Thus the Liberty party developed. Garrison's followers remained within the American Anti-Slavery Society and crusaded for various other reform movements, such as women's rights, in addition to the abolition of slavery. The men of the Liberty party, who initiated the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, thought Garrison subjugated the cause of anti-slavery to other reforms. Within the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, the New York Committee dominated many decisions.

At the suggestion of this committee, the B.F.A.S.S. called a world anti-slavery convention in 1840. The various British societies against slavery took sides in the quarrels of the American movements. The B.F.A.S.S. society originated in 1839 with its main policy being universal emancipation. Until 1838, the British abolitionists, sup-

⁵ John L. Thomas, The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963), pp. 277-293. See also, Dwight L. Dumund (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (2 vols., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), pp. 481-483. Louis Ruchames, The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), pp. 209-218.

ported by members of all parties, achieved their greatest successes through Parliament. Consequently the British movement gained prestige. In 1840, the "New Administration" (those abolitionists in the metropolitan areas of London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Bristol) supported the American Liberty party delegates. The more rural societies praised Garrison's representatives. Controlled primarily by the London associations, the B.F.A.S.S. opposed Garrison's supporters. However, both American abolitionist groups sent delegates to the convention, and, except for a fraction of the Garrisonian representatives, the delegates of both groups were seated. Despite a warning notice which excluded women from the convention, the American Anti-Slavery Society sent female representatives. At the opening session an American Garrisonian spokesman, Wendell Phillips, moved that all accredited persons be admitted to the convention; but the convention tabled his proposal. After this action, the women accompanied by escorts ascended the stairway to the balcony.

Upon his arrival three days later, Garrison renewed agitation on the subject. Failing in this attempt, he expressed his objection by refusing to sit with the rest of the convention and by joining the women in the balcony. In addition to this rejection, the delegates of the convention did not ask Garrison to speak at the anniversary meeting of the B.F.A.S.S., while they did request speeches from Birney and Stanton. During the dinner parties, Garrison surprised his hosts with his "heresies."⁶ Stanton and Birney delighted at the bad impression Garrison made, while they continued to gain greater influence

⁶Thomas, The Liberator, p. 297.

with the B.F.A.S.S.⁷

Meanwhile, the Texas government asked for British mediation in its war with Mexico. Texans also requested treaties of commerce. But Great Britain found this appeal to be a double-edged sword. If England helped the slave state of Texas sever itself from free Mexico, Englishmen would be shocked, for anti-slavery feelings ran high in Great Britain. Yet, if Great Britain allowed the United States to annex Texas, the British public would also be enraged. If the United States, regarded as the citadel of slave holders, expanded its territory, Great Britain's dependence on American cotton would increase.

Due to this fear of domestic disapproval, the British government postponed the recognition of Texas; however, its officials encouraged Mexico to make peace with Texas. They did this to prevent Texas from seeking annexation to the United States for protection from Mexico. In 1840, Britain offered Texas a treaty of recognition and trade, which included Mexican agreement for an armistice, on condition that the Texans approve a convention for suppression of the maritime slave trade. Consumation of these treaties would be delayed for two years. During the year of 1841, domestic problems within Mexico and Great Britain pushed the question of Texas into the background.

The Congress of the United States also was in turmoil. A few abolitionists, dissatisfied with both Garrison and the Liberty party, decided to lobby for anti-slavery legislation. They found aides for their cause in Congress. When Joshua Leavitt, an abolitionist lobbyist, returned to Washington in the fall of 1841, he discovered some Whigs

⁷Ibid., p. 297.

ready to abandon party policies and to make slavery the leading issue. At this moment the Whig party began its division, with those against slavery becoming more attentive to abolitionists.

These congressmen called themselves "a Select Committee on Slavery," and they planned a program of bills and resolutions which would lead to an open discussion of slavery.⁸ Previously, the Speaker of the House referred petitions and memorials praying for the abolition of slavery to a select committee where Southerners buried the matter. However, the unyielding ex-President, John Quincy Adams, led the fight for repeal of this so-called "gag-rule." In arguing for the right of petition, Adams invariably introduced the subject of slavery. Southern congressmen, disregarding party lines, called Adams a traitor and attempted to censure him. Yet he did not stand alone! Other Whig insurgents Joshua Giddings of Ohio, William Slade of Vermont, Nathaniel Borden of Massachusetts, Seth Gates of New York, and Francis James of Pennsylvania--rallied around him. Leavitt's lobbyists, including Theodore Weld, scurried into the battle.

Two months previously on December 30, 1841, Weld had arrived in Washington at the request of the Whig revolvers. They had provided him money for traveling expenses, access to the Library of Congress, a room, stationery, and other facilities. Weld had realized the immense potential of his new position and resolved to make full use of it despite the financial hardships his family would have to endure because of his absence.⁹ With a major party disclaiming slavery in Congress, the

⁸ Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933), p. 180.

⁹ Benjamin P. Thomas, Theodore Weld: Crusader for Freedom (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1950), p. 196.

abolitionists' cause would gain publicity in national newspapers.

Although Weld did not like the political atmosphere of the city of Washington, he did enjoy the location of the boarding house which the Whigs had found for him. Spriggs' house was located directly in front of the Capitol, and the iron railing around the Capitol Park came within fifty feet of the door. Every morning before breakfast Weld escaped from the political arena in the Spriggs' house to the park where he could find solitude. After the early walk he returned to his boarding house where he ate breakfast and conversed with the other boarders about slavery, abolition, and runaway slaves. Colored servants waited on these men during these discussions, and Weld marveled at this paradoxical situation.

Giddings and Gates also resided at Spriggs' boarding house, which soon became known as "the Abolition House." There they would consult with Leavitt and Weld on strategy against slavery. A few weeks after his arrival, Weld met the Massachusetts representative, John Quincy Adams. Both men admired each other. During the last two weeks of January, Weld watched from the gallery as Adams defended himself against Southern denunciations. Each evening Adams met with the abolitionists, who fired his imagination as well as his speeches with charges about the system of slavery. By February 7, it had become apparent that the censure of Adams would be a political disaster; thus the resolutions of censure ignominiously fell to defeat. Weld regarded this moment as "the first victory over slaveholders in a body" since the foundation of the government.¹⁰

¹⁰Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, p. 187.

Without hesitation Giddings continued the battle in Congress. Joshua Reed Giddings, Adams' closest friend, represented Ohio's Western Reserve and had been brought into the abolition movement by Weld in 1839. Giddings drew himself up to his full six feet two inches, pushed his flowing white locks from his heavily furrowed brow, and presented another petition for the dissolution of the Union. He was not an apprentice in this field, for Southern Congressmen had warned him before that should he dare set foot in the South, he would be hanged. Although they did not reprimand him this time, he would be censured later by his angry Whig colleagues when he attempted to present his resolutions on the case of the Creole.¹¹ As a result, Giddings resigned his seat in the House and went home to stand for re-election in his district. Without the Whig party's support, Giddings was returned to Congress, and the Whigs resolved themselves to his presence.

In a series of published letters, Giddings attempted to define the problem of slavery for both the North and the South. He contended that there was no need for the Liberty party if the Whigs would clearly state their objectives.¹² He said that if the Whig party wanted to win elections, a coalition with the Liberty party was essential.¹³ No one heeded this advice--until the Whigs lost the Presidential election in

¹¹In 1841, an American ship, the Creole, sailed from Virginia to New Orleans with a cargo of one hundred and thirty-five slaves. During the voyage the slaves mutineered, killing one person and wounding several others. They then set sail for the British port of Nassau, where they were given their freedom. The United States protested the illegality of the matter but the British did nothing.

¹²William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease (eds.), The Antislavery Argument (Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), p. 414.

¹³Ibid., p. 417.

1844. When Giddings returned to Congress, he found the issue of slavery no longer disguised under the cloak of the right to petition. With the aid of the abolitionists who would research in the Library of Congress, the Whigs began to question slavery and exposed it in its rawest form to the public.

Meanwhile, Weld continued to lobby for further converts in Congress. During the winter of 1843, the Abolitionists House had many visitors: members of the New York Committee, a British Abolitionist, and Lewis Tappan. At this "headquarters of abolitionism," British abolitionists asked Weld to unite the anti-slavery factions of the North, but he refused to try. Also, the B.F.A.S.S. and the American abolitionists wanted him to attend the second World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, but Weld, clinging to anonymity, rejected the invitation. Despite his indifference to fame, Weld's name meant a great deal in England where he became known as the greatest of all American anti-slavery men.¹⁴ Weld stayed in Washington until April, 1842--long enough to see the peach blossoms and the magnolias and to smell their perfume in the soft spring air.

During this period of consolidation between Whig abolitionists and their abolitionist advisors, rumors ran rampant of a British plot to destroy slavery in Texas and the United States. In the summer of 1843, the Texan agent in Washington notified the American State Department that annexation of Texas was no longer open to discussion. President John Tyler grew fearful. The American Secretary of State, Abel P. Upshur, already had received information from "a private citizen

¹⁴Thomas, Benjamin P., Theodore Weld, p. 172.

from Maryland," Duff Green, about the so-called British scheme.¹⁵ Green, an ardent foe of abolition, was in England in 1841 when Parliament proposed to lower the duty preferences given sugar from British colonies with free labor. The supporters of this measure in Parliament reasoned that the measure would compensate former slaveholders for emancipation of their slaves and help them compete with powerful slave markets in Cuba and Brazil. Led by Sir Robert Peel, the Conservatives induced Parliament to reject the proposal and to give the emancipation experiment a chance to succeed. As a result, Lord Melbourne's ministry fell, and Peel established his own. To Green, this event clearly illustrated the failure of British emancipation of slaves. Indicting British policy, Green said England attempted to maintain its commercial and manufacturing superiority by a war on slavery and slave trade in the United States, Brazil, and Cuba. If England were victorious in these countries, its colonies could sell their raw products cheaply through the leveling of the market.¹⁶

Later, in June, 1843, Green supplied another rumor. The second World Anti-Slavery Convention intrigued him. The American and British abolitionists stated that the annexation of Texas "would be one of the greatest calamities to befall a human race."¹⁷ The British abolitionists knew that Texan and Southern newspapers were reporting "British

¹⁵United States. Senate Documents, 28 Cong. 1st sess. (Serial 435), No. 341, 50-53.

¹⁶Ibid., 50-53.

¹⁷The Times (London), June 21, 1843.

influence paramount in Texas."¹⁸ The key speaker of the convention, Lord Morpeth, spoke hopefully of prospects for the abolition of slavery in Texas.¹⁹ Word of his speech reached the United States before the twenty-fifth of July. Furthermore, the Society adopted resolutions that they trusted the abolition movement in the United States would be "encouraged and strengthened by the due exertion of the influence of the Government and people" of England.²⁰ Another member of the Society announced Lord Aberdeen's statement that Great Britain would spare "no legitimate means to abolish slavery in Texas."²¹ An American delegate at the convention, Lewis Tappan, suggested that the abolition of slavery in Texas would hurt Virginia and the Carolinas' slave trade so much that they would be forced to eliminate slavery.²²

After the convention, a delegation of abolitionists met with Lord Aberdeen, British Foreign Secretary. Although Green was not present at this meeting and the conversation was not recorded, Green wrote Upshur confirming British plans toward Texas. Green, who despised abolitionists, contended that Aberdeen discussed the possibility of his government's underwriting of a loan to Texas to finance the emancipation of Texan slaves. Since London was the banking center of the world at this time, Green suspected these loans would have imperialistic ties

¹⁸ Ibid., June 22, 1843.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., August 11, 1843.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

with them.²³

Perhaps this rumor evolved from the proceedings of the anti-slavery convention rather than from Aberdeen's post-convention conversations with the abolitionists. Ashbell Smith, the Texan minister to Great Britain, was present at the convention, and he reported in a letter to the Texan Secretary of State, Anson Jones, a similar story. According to Smith, various plans were discussed at the convention. He said abolitionists had suggested Aberdeen should guarantee interest on a loan to be applied to the purchase of the slaves and their emancipation, provided that the further introduction of slaves be prohibited. Another plan was to raise money to buy land from the Texan government in large quantities; the money gained would enable Texas to abolish slavery. This in turn would increase European emigration to the Lone Star Republic. He also stated that a strong possibility existed that Britain would soon obtain Mexican recognition of Texas.²⁴

Furthermore, Smith maintained, Englishmen wanted Texas to become a refuge for fugitive slaves from the United States. In fact, abolition in Texas was not as important to England as the results which Texan abolition might have on the United States.²⁵ Texas would become a rival to the United States in the production of cotton and sugar. The Texan minister related that this would harm slavery in the Southern United States and because of the smuggling of manufactured goods from

²³ Abel P. Upshur to W. S. Murphy, Texas, August 8, 1843, in Senate Documents, 28 Cong., 1st sess. (Serial 435), No. 341, pp. 18-22.

²⁴ Ashbell Smith to Anson Jones, Diplomatic Correspondence of Texas, American Historical Association (Report of 1908), part 2, Vol. II, pp. 1099-1103.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 1103.

Texas to the United States, American agriculture, manufactures, and commerce would be harmed.²⁶

Smith's ideas gained support on August 18 when Parliament debated the British government's policy on abolition in the Western hemisphere. Lord Brougham asked Aberdeen to clarify Britain's position. In addition, Brougham speculated that Mexican recognition of Texas could be used to force abolition in that state, and this would promote abolition of slavery in the United States. In glowing terms, he spoke of Texan soil and of Texas' accessibility to the Gulf of Mexico and to the Mississippi River.²⁷ Without disputing Brougham, Aberdeen replied in vague terms about England's recent acknowledgement of Texan independence, about the treaties of commerce, and about abolition of slave trade. Beyond this he was "most anxious for abolition of slavery in Texas" and "throughout the world."²⁸

News of this statement reached the United States and caused a furor. Upshur sent Edward Everett, the American minister in London, to speak with Aberdeen and to determine the truth about the British interests in Texas. Everett reported that Aberdeen denied meeting with Texans over the subject of abolition.²⁹ Later, in a letter to Smith, Aberdeen disclaimed any intentions of interference in Texan affairs;

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 3rd series, Vol. 71 (August 18, 1843), pp. 915-917.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 915-917.

²⁹ United States, Senate Documents, 28 Cong., 1st sess. (Serial 435), No. 341, pp. 38-42.

however, Aberdeen added, Britain did hope for abolition in Texas.³⁰

In the United States the new Secretary of State, (following the death of Upshur), John C. Calhoun, corresponded with Green, and Calhoun maintained that the British were intent on preventing the annexation of Texas to the United States. In his letters to the new British minister to America, Sir Richard Pakenham, Calhoun derided the supposed British plot and spoke very strongly in defense of slavery.³¹ Again, Aberdeen reiterated British policy towards Texas in the same fashion of those statements he had made to Smith and Everett. Calhoun chose to ignore Aberdeen's response--for what he wanted was not a British defense but a suspicious America. This would be good propaganda in Congress as well as in the election campaign which was rapidly approaching. On April 12, 1844, Calhoun signed a treaty for the annexation of Texas, and Tyler submitted it to the Senate along with selected dispatches which would convince the Senate of a British plot. The press foiled Calhoun's attempt to maintain secrecy, however.

Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a Democrat from Missouri, challenged the completeness of the evidence which was used to support annexation through passage of this treaty. He asked why Aberdeen's replies to Smith and to Everett were missing. Meanwhile, the national parties nominated delegates to their conventions for the presidential election of 1844. The Whigs selected Henry Clay, who blurred his position on annexation by two contradictory letters he had written. However, the

³⁰ Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, p. 91.

³¹ John C. Calhoun to Lord Aberdeen, Ireland, Irish University Press Series, Parliamentary Papers (Slave Trade), Vol. 89 (April 27, 1844), pp. 606-607.

Democrats chose James K. Polk, who clearly stood for annexation of Texas. James G. Birney, the nominee of the Liberty party, rejected annexation. After the nominating conventions completed their work, the Senate rejected the annexation treaty by a vote of 16 to 35.³² Thus the treaty became a leading issue in the campaign.

During this election year in the United States, Great Britain intentionally avoided decisions concerning Texas which could be used by Polk's followers to arouse further anti-British feeling among the American people. However, in secret agreements with France, Great Britain suggested a plan to prevent American annexation of Texas.³³ Peace and preliminary recognition of Texas independence would be made by Mexico. Furthermore, negotiations on the Texan-Mexican boundary would be conducted while France and Great Britain guaranteed Texan independence, even to the extent of armed support. But France withdrew from the agreement, leaving Britain with sole responsibility for the guarantee, and Mexico appeared to be planning an invasion into Texas. Therefore, Aberdeen abandoned the plan.

In the United States, Polk won the election in the Electoral College with 170 votes to Clay's 105. Yet the majority of the population voted for Clay and Birney. Had these two parties united and nominated one candidate with a definite anti-slavery policy, they probably would have won the election. Giddings had proposed this two years earlier, but no one listened. Because of Clay's dubious position on annexation, many abolitionists had voted for Birney.

³²Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 698.

³³Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, p. 95.

After the election, a lame-duck Congress introduced and passed a joint resolution for the annexation of Texas. President Tyler, believing Calhoun about the British plot and thinking he should act instantly, sent an American representative to Texas to offer annexation. When Polk assumed office, he countermanded the instruction, then he changed his mind and ordered it confirmed. England, in its last effort, continued to try to gain Mexican recognition of Texas. On March 1, 1845, Tyler signed the joint resolution.

Thus the British involvement with Texas and with slavery had greatly influenced the rise of the Whig abolitionists. With the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society seeking to shape English policy toward Texas, the British and American abolitionists had agreed to oppose the annexation of Texas to the United States. American abolitionists, who were frequent visitors to the World Anti-Slavery Conventions, had lobbied in Congress against slavery and had influenced various Whig congressmen. These Whig congressmen had realized that their party would have to fight against the annexation of Texas to prevent the expansion of slavery. Yet the Whig party had failed to take a firm stand. Fearing British control of Texas, the American public had elected Polk, an expansionist. Uniting with American abolitionists, the Conscience Whigs had split the Whig party. Without British involvement in Texas, its annexation might have been prevented for a while, and the question of slavery might have been postponed by a national political party. However, when the Whig party had divided along sectional lines, the Democratic party also had begun to split. From that time forward, there would be sectional arguments on national issues.

CHAPTER II

THE ELECTION OF 1844 AND THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS

The American people had three choices in the election of 1844: James K. Polk, a Democrat who wanted Texas annexed; James G. Birney, a Liberty party man who opposed the annexation of Texas; and Henry Clay, a Whig, whose position on the annexation of Texas wavered. The three differed on other issues, but the question of Texas remained the most prominent issue of their campaigns. That issue served as the divider between Northwestern Democrats and Southern Democrats, between Whigs and Liberty men, and between Whig Abolitionists and the rest of the Whig party. The election of James K. Polk carried with it not only the annexation of Texas but a war with Mexico--and a nation clearly divided along sectional lines.

In 1844 the Democrats struggled for a semblance of cohesion. A faction existed in the South under the leadership of John C. Calhoun, that wanted Texas annexed, and which upheld slavery. In the Northwest the Democrats, led by Lewis Cass and Stephen A. Douglas, wanted Oregon annexed; although they stood against slavery, they would stoop to anything to gain Oregon. The Northeastern Democrats did not condone slavery, and they did not want Texas annexed; these Democrats supported Martin Van Buren. Therefore, when the party met in Baltimore, Maryland, for its national convention, it had to make some sort of compromise. The Southern delegates threatened to bolt the conven-

tion and form their own party. The Northwesterners spent long hours talking to Calhoun's delegates, trying to make an agreement. The result was the bargain of 1844--the "Oregon and Texas" plank.¹ The Northwestern delegates and the Southern delegates reached a compromise. With an Oregon and Texas plank in the Democratic platform, a balance between the free- and slave-soil partisans existed, and the party's sectional participants found a common meeting ground. Polk, a dark-horse candidate, became the Democratic presidential nominee by a unanimous vote, and George M. Dallas, of Pennsylvania, received the vice-presidential nomination.

Those who supported Van Buren for the nomination would later regret giving their support. Dallas gained his nomination only because Silas Wright of New York, a friend of Van Buren, refused the nomination saying he did "not choose to ride behind the black pony."² Indeed, Polk had not ranked as one of the party's most influential leaders. Presented by his own state of Tennessee as a vice-presidential contender, Polk had only recently tasted political defeat. He had been speaker of the national House of Representatives and then governor of his state. Yet he twice had been defeated since that time while running for the governorship of Tennessee. However, Van Buren promised to support the party's nominees, and he kept his promise. And when election day came, Van Buren's support in New York for Polk helped de-

¹Clark E. Persinger, "The Bargain of 1844 as the Origin of the Wilmot Proviso," Oregon Historical Society, Vol. XV, 1914, as quoted in Charles Buxton Going's David Wilmot: Free-Soiler (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924), pp. 119-20.

²Edward M. Shepard, Martin Van Buren (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), p. 411.

cide the nation for Polk.

Polk won the state of New York not only because Van Buren supported him but also because a third party, the Liberty party, drained many abolitionists' votes from the Whig party. On August 30, 1843, the Liberty party's delegates had gathered in a tent over one-hundred feet in diameter in front of the Buffalo courthouse. With over a thousand delegates and some one thousand to four thousand spectators. The party nominated James G. Birney of Kentucky for the presidency and Thomas Morris of Virginia for the vice-presidency.³ Because the Liberty party and the Whig party appeared opposed to the annexation of Texas and the Democratic party did not, a great rivalry developed between the Liberty men and the Whigs for antislavery votes. Nine-tenths of the abolitionists were drawn from the Whig party.⁴ The Whigs maintained that since their party opposed annexation of Texas, it would be better for Liberty men to support the Whig candidate rather than throw their votes away.

Had the Whigs nominated someone whose position on slavery and annexation was clear, the Liberty men might have listened to this Whig reasoning. However, Henry Clay was a slaveholder who had refused to free his slaves at Birney's request in 1834.⁵ His subsequent actions convinced Birney and the Liberty party that he was definitely not opposed to slavery. Yet they could not be as positive about Clay's

³Betty Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 225.

⁴George Rawlings Poage, Henry Clay and the Whig Party (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 112.

⁵Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney, p. 234.

position on the question of annexing of Texas, for it appeared that Clay was not absolutely in opposition. In April, 1844, Clay wrote his "Raleigh Letter" in which he maintained that annexation at that time was a danger to the national character and would force the nation into a war with Mexico. This would endanger the integrity and financial condition of the Union.⁶ Many Whigs thought Clay abandoned annexation in this letter. To alleviate these fears the Great Compromiser wrote two more letters in which he said he would be glad to see Texas annexed without dishonor or war and with the consent of the states as to fair and reasonable terms.⁷ If elected, he promised to judge annexation on its own merits.

The Liberty party gained many abolitionists' votes from this statement. Clay tried to divorce the issue of slavery from annexation, while Birney said that annexation of a pro-slavery Texas would be unconstitutional. In the summer of 1844 the Whig and Liberty rivalry became even more bitter. Birney attacked Clay by saying he served the slave power, and Clay accused Birney of being secretly Catholic. Clay also stated that Birney had only sold his slaves in Alabama to make money, and that the English supported Birney. Meanwhile, Birney's name was suggested for the state legislature in Michigan. To make matters yet more complicated, a Democratic convention nominated him for this position. The Whig newspapers shouted that a bargain had been made between Birney and Polk to defeat Clay.⁸ Birney did say that

⁶Daily National Intelligencer, April 27, 1844.

⁷Arthur Charles Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington: American Historical Association, 1913), p. 112.

⁸Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney, p. 242.

he was not supporting either Polk or Clay. Birney thought both had repudiated the unity of the nation. He added that as Clay was a leader of his party to a greater extent than Polk, Clay should be feared most.⁹

Later, a letter purportedly written by Birney to Jerome B. Garland of Kentucky supposedly contained proof of these charges. It appeared that Birney was a Democrat! However, this letter proved to be a forgery. Yet the damage to the liberty party's campaign was done. Their press, thoroughly unprepared for this charge, did not have time to prove the letter a forgery, and all they could do was to deny it.¹⁰

As a result, Liberty party members contended they lost the votes of many antislavery men to the Whig party, and Birney maintained that the Whigs forged the letter to attain that end. After the election the Whig-Liberty antagonism continued. The Liberty men would not wholeheartedly join any Whigs until the Whig abolitionists of Massachusetts bolted their party's convention in 1848.

While the nation's anti-slavery voters pondered the merits of the Whig and Liberty candidates, the Whig party struggled to maintain cohesion between its Northern and Southern members. Many prominent Southern Whigs failed to support Clay because of his "Raleigh Letter." For the most part, however, Clay received the endorsement of the Whigs in the South. Many of these Whigs thought that annexation of Texas would cause a migration of slave owners to Texas and thereby render slavery unprofitable in the older slave states.

⁹ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 245-6.

In the election Southern Whigs were the champions of the Union; their slogan, "Union without Texas rather than Texas without Union" rang pleasantly in Northern ears. However, Henry Clay was not elected. The election revealed the Whig's strength in the North. Clay did not receive the electoral votes of any states in the lower South, and it appeared that the Whig party was weak in the entire South.¹¹ This decrease of votes convinced many Southerners to abide by sectional interests, and it would be the votes of Southern Whigs which would make possible the passage of the joint resolution for the annexation of Texas.

Polk won the election and interpreted his victory as a national mandate for the annexation of Texas. However, an analysis of the results proves that Polk's election was not a national referendum to annex Texas. Birney's popular vote was 62,300 to 1,299,062 for Clay, and 1,337,243 for Polk. Had the Liberty party joined the Whig party, Clay might have won. The election returns in New York were the most significant; there Birney received 15,812 to 232,482 for Clay, and 237,588 for Polk.¹² With only one-third of Birney's votes in New York, Clay could have won. Certainly Polk derived his narrow victory in New York from Van Buren's support. This unity did not last long, however, for Polk forgot his debts when he chose his cabinet.

During December and January, Polk put together his cabinet and attempted to maintain cordial relations with the Van Burenites of New York. He offered Silas Wright the Treasury position; but Wright, newly

¹¹ Cole, The Whig Party in the South, p. 115.

¹² Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney, p. 246.

elected governor of New York, declined. Polk then requested the assistance of Wright and Van Buren in selecting the secretaries of state and of treasury. Both men agree that Benjamin F. Butler should be secretary of state and Azariah C. Flagg secretary of the treasury. On January 30, Polk traveled to Nashville convinced that Flagg would be his secretary of the treasury. But western Democrats feared that a Van Burenite in the Treasury Department would fill all the Western land offices with appointees hostile to Cass.¹³ The Calhoun and Cass forces of the Democratic party thus threatened open revolt should Flagg become secretary of the treasury. In the end, Robert J. Walker of Mississippi received the post. After Polk announced his cabinet, he acquired solid opposition from within the Democratic party in New York. These Democrats in New York, led by Van Buren, came to be known as Barnburners, and in 1848 they bolted their national convention.

John Quincy Adams saw the Democratic celebrations in New York when it was learned that Polk had won. Torchlights lined the streets of the city and at midnight Adams awoke to the sound of twenty-six guns. The next day he wrote, "It is the victory of the slavery element in the constitution of the United States."¹⁴ On March 1, 1845, three days before the James K. Polk inauguration, President John Tyler signed the joint resolution for the annexation of the state of Texas. To many Northerners this act seemed to verify Adams' statement--that the slavery element had won.

¹³ Charles Sellers, James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 195.

¹⁴ Charles Francis Adams (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (12 vols., Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), XI, p. 103.

Texans long had been seeking this annexation. In 1837, the President, Sam Houston, tried to solve the various problems of the newly independent Republic of Texas by asking the United States to annex Texas. President Martin Van Buren rejected the proposition, considering it an unconstitutional act. By 1843, however, rumors were circulating through the United States of the second World Anti-Slavery Convention and of its resolutions toward abolishing slavery in Texas and the prevention of the annexation of Texas to the United States. Later, Lord Aberdeen, British Foreign Secretary, stated in Parliament and in a letter to Ashbell Smith, the Texan minister to Great Britain, that Britain did hope for abolition in Texas. In subsequent letters to John C. Calhoun, then Secretary of State of the United States, Aberdeen reiterated this statement and said that Great Britain did not intend to interfere in Texan affairs. Calhoun did not acknowledge Aberdeen's explanation and along with a treaty for the annexation of Texas he sent selected dispatches which would convince the Senate of a British plot to abolish slavery in Texas and to prevent the annexation of Texas to the United States.

While the Senate challenged Calhoun's evidence of British complicity, the House heard speeches by Southern members favoring the treaty. Finally, on May 21, 1844, Joshua Giddings of Ohio obtained the floor late in the day. Gazing directly at his audience, he attacked the idea of annexation of Texas. He sometimes groped for words, for he was not a polished speaker. Despite this deficiency and without notes, Giddings presented five reasons why Texas should not be annexed. He thought it unfair that citizens of the United States would be taxed to pay the debts of Texans. If Texas were annexed, he claimed,

a possibility existed of a war with Mexico, Great Britain, and perhaps France. The United States would then be in a position of providing an army to protect slaveholders. Also, if Texas joined the Union, the North and the West might lose power in Congress and they would have neither protective tariffs nor internal improvements. Furthermore, he asserted the United States Constitution contained no guarantee for the maintenance of slavery.¹⁵ Implicit within Gidding's speech were the two major challenges to the Whig party and their abolitionist allies: a contest between the agrarian West and South and the industrialized East and Great Lakes regions in Congress, and the expansion and strengthening of slavery.¹⁶ However, the Senate rejected the treaty, and the country awaited the results of the election of 1844 to determine a solution for the dilemma of Texas.

Accepting the election of Polk as a mandate from the people for the annexation of Texas, and desiring credit for his administration, Tyler signed the joint resolution of Congress for the annexation of Texas on March 1, 1845, three days before Polk's inauguration. On February 27, the Senate amended a House bill for annexation so that Texas could be invited to join the Union either by joint resolution or by a new treaty. The next day the House approved the amendment. Polk had suggested that the Senate amendment be added to the House resolution to induce the followers of Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri to accept the joint resolution. Benton and his disciples feared that a war with Mexico would result and decided that a new treaty might pro-

¹⁵ Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, pp. 704-705.

¹⁶ Norman A. Graebner (ed.), Manifest Destiny (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), p. xxxiii.

vide the necessary time to secure Mexican approval.¹⁷

Yet Tyler, and not Polk, decided the method of annexation. Calhoun led Tyler to believe that Britain was trying to prevent annexation and to promote the abolition of slavery in Texas. The joint resolution which Tyler signed provided for the annexation of Texas as a state (or states) when the people of Texas had drawn up a constitution providing for a republican form of government suitable to Congress. Texas' boundary problem and its defense would be the responsibility of the United States, while Texas would retain its debt and all its public lands. It also provided that with the consent of Texans, four additional states could be created from the territory of Texas, and that territory north of the Missouri Compromise line would be closed to slavery. Finally the resolution set the deadline for a Texas constitution to be presented to Congress as no later than January 1, 1846.¹⁸

Whigs voted for this joint resolution. The election of 1844 had caused many Southern Whigs to re-evaluate their positions. Comparing the election of 1844 with the election of 1840, the Southern Whigs found that they cut their majority in the black belt and yet had not appealed to the Democratic backcountry either.¹⁹ That convinced these Southern Whigs to vote their sectional interests rather than support the national Whig party position. They knew that the Texas issue had cut their majority. Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia and Milton Brown of

¹⁷ Kinley J. Brauer, Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 105.

¹⁸ Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 2 Sess., pp. 362-63.

¹⁹ Cole, The Whig Party in the South, p. 116.

Tennessee agreed it was necessary for Southern Whigs to support the annexation of Texas. With the assistance of eight other Southern Whigs, the resolution was carried in the House. Simultaneously, in the Senate, Ephraim H. Foster of Tennessee presented the joint resolution for annexation. Later, he refused to support it when the Senate added the amendment to permit the president to secure annexation by treaty if he so desired. Most of the Whigs concurred with Foster's refusal. They thought this amendment failed to recognize the superiority of the legislature's treaty-making power. Nevertheless, three Southern Whigs provided pivotal votes that made possible passage of the resolution on the final ballot.

Whig journals cautiously avoided offending the South on this matter. Meanwhile, the abolitionists' newspaper, The Liberator, soundly denounced the South. Appealing to the pecuniary interests of the North, the organ assailed the "wantonly disrespectful" acts of the South in regard to the rights and feelings of free states.²⁰ By illegal maneuvering it asserted, the South had legislated a burden on the North. Texas was a land with a population equal only to three or four of the largest counties in Massachusetts: yet should Texas become a state it might, through its newly acquired legislative powers, swallow the North. Texas also was the land of little money; money scarcity would not promote importation of Northern products. Texas would grow only because markets shifted from the South to the new state. The North thus could not profit by the annexation of Texas. Texas was the land which could only bring bankruptcy to Northern

²⁰The Liberator, June 27, 1845.

pocketbooks and national morals.²¹

The annexation of Texas alarmed the Whigs, but for different reasons, Charles Sumner, representing the abolitionist Whig sentiment, wrote in his memoir, "...history records no baser transaction than the annexation of Texas."²² Failing to prevent the incorporation of Texas into the Union, a small number of Whig abolitionists began to campaign against admission of a Texas with a pro-slavery constitution. The majority of the Whigs shuddered at this maneuver. In New England the influence of the manufacturers and the capitalists dominated politics, and to them the issue of paramount importance was the maintenance of the protective tariff of 1842--and not Texas. If the Whigs succeeded, party unity with their Southern neighbors needed to be maintained. The slavery issue could only embarrass the Southern Whigs and perhaps prevent a Whig restoration to power in the approaching elections. To these men, material questions controlled national politics.

For the Conscience Whigs, however, the time had arrived for the triumph of moral principle over party politics. Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams and a senator in the Massachusetts legislature, led a group of anti-slavery Whigs who insisted that the resolution of Congress had only allowed Texas to form a government and apply for statehood. Massachusetts was the model state for an experiment of conscience. Within that state's Whig party there existed those who opposed slavery, but only so long as it did not split the party or harm their business to do so. And there were those who opposed slavery

²¹ Ibid., April 18, 1845.

²² Edward L. Pierce (ed.), Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols., Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), III, p. 166.

without hesitations; these were young men--most of them in their thirties.²³ Prior to the passage of the joint resolution, Adams and his fellow Whig abolitionists attended conventions which protested the annexation of Texas. One of these conventions at Faneuil Hall in Boston resulted in a committee of correspondence to communicate in emergencies with the opponents of annexation in all states.

This committee consisted of Stephen C. Phillips, a Salem merchant and shipowner; Charles Allen, a former Whig member of the legislature and Judge of the Court of Common Pleas; and Charles Francis Adams. The committee decided that the emergency had arrived with the joint resolution of Congress. However, little resulted until the fall of 1845. At that time the "Young Whigs" called for a meeting open to all who opposed annexation. Adams greatly influenced the Texas Committee's preparations for another convention at Faneuil Hall. That committee appointed Adams, Samuel E. Sewell, an abolitionist of the Liberty party, and Sumner to draw up the resolutions. Sewell and Sumner prepared separate drafts for these resolutions; however, Adams thought they were too extreme. Adams, assisted by John Gorham Palfrey, who was a former Unitarian minister and a past editor of the North American Review, composed a new set which Adams presented to the Texas Committee the day before the convention. The committee accepted his resolutions.

On the evening of November 4, 1845, two thousand people attended the convention at Faneuil Hall.²⁴ Outside the hall, lightning illuminated the sky; rain and hail pattered and thumped against the building;

²³ Martin B. Duberman, Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 103.

²⁴ Oscar Sherwin, Prophet of Liberty: the Life and Times of Wendell Phillips (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), p. 176.

and the thunder rolled and cracked. The Liberator sympathetically described the meeting and stated that the weather was "emblematic of the present moral and political aspects of the country."²⁵ The Democratic newspapers replied that the weather was an expression against the traitorous undertakings within the Boston hall.²⁶ The assembly made Adams chairman, and he spoke at the opening of the meeting. Adams stressed unity, energy, and moderation as guides in their continuing struggle. Palfrey followed Adams and presented the resolutions which the Texas Committee had approved. The resolutions denounced slavery, slaveholders, and the annexation of Texas. Furthermore, the members of the committee had resolved that Massachusetts would continue to resist the slaveocracy which conspired to annex Texas to extend the bounds of slavery. They knew that Massachusetts' Congressmen would resist that "fatal measure to the utmost at every stage."²⁷

Sumner spoke after Palfrey, and Adams' group feared that Sumner would again denounce annexationists too vehemently. He did not. His address stressed unity and moderation as had Adams'. He did not think the convention radical, for he said it was "to preserve existing supports of Freedom; it is to prevent the violation of free institutions in their vital principles."²⁸ For these reasons he thought the convention was conservative. According to Sumner, they assembled

²⁵The Liberator, November 21, 1845.

²⁶Charles Sumner, The Works of Charles Sumner (11 vols., Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870), I, p. 149. See also pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner, III, p. 103.

²⁷Sumner, The Works of Charles Sumner, III, p. 150

²⁸Ibid., pp. 155-156.

without "distinctions to party;" they did not want to interfere with any institution of Southern states, but they did not want to involve Massachusetts in committing a wrong:²⁹

God forbid that the votes and voices of Northern freemen should help to bind anew the fetters of the slave! God forbid that the lash of the slave-dealer should descend by any sanction from New England! God forbid that the blood which spurts from the lacerated, quivering flesh of the slave should soil the hem of the white garments of Massachusetts!³⁰

After making this speech, Sumner became famous nationally.

Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and the Reverend W. H. Channing frightened the Whigs when they proposed disunion resolutions. Nevertheless, the meeting remained quite moderate in its course. The Liberty party, represented by H. B. Stanton, helped the Whigs to avoid friction and bad publicity. This meeting resulted in the needed stimulus that was to provoke similar gatherings in the Northeast in rapid succession throughout 1845. Speeches were made; pamphlets were written; and editorials were printed on behalf of the antislavery cause. Palfrey and his friends attended many of these meetings. They fidgeted uncomfortably when abolitionists damned the Constitution and countenanced disunion.³¹ Soon the Texas Committee appeared to be dominated by extreme abolitionist ideas.

The regular Whig party leaders in Massachusetts discounted the actions of the abolitionists. They considered the question of annexation

²⁹Ibid., pp. 152, 155.

³⁰Ibid., p. 157.

³¹Frank Otto Gatell, John Gorham Palfrey and the New England Conscience (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 125.

tion settled. Abbott Lawrence and Nathan Appleton represented the Whig regulars and the textile lords. Henry Wilson attempted to push anti-annexation resolutions through the state senate, but the Whig leaders blocked him. E. Rockwood Hoar spiritedly replied, "It is as much the duty of Massachusetts to pass resolutions in favor of the rights of man as in the interests of cotton."³² This led to the application of the name of "Cotton Whigs" to those who opposed adopting a distinctly anti-slavery policy by their party. Later, in early 1846, Hoar would be responsible for the new name for the Whig abolitionists--the "Conscience Whigs."

On December 16, the House in Washington passed a resolution to admit Texas as a state, and on December 22, the Senate approved it. The vote was not along sectional lines of both houses, and Democrats as well as Whigs were in favor of it. Then on December 29, Polk signed the measure. The next day the Texas Committee had its final meeting. Adams denounced Appleton and Lawrence and those congressmen who had supported admission. However, he noted that no Northern Whig had voted for the measure. The abolitionists of the Texas Committee charged that Adams tried to protect the Whigs by that remark. Adams changed the wording, and the committee accepted the report and dissolved itself. The committee's activities had lasting importance. Massachusetts Whiggery split and the Conscience Whigs spread the idea of moral politics over party politics to other states.

The dissolution of the Texas Committee left the Whig activists in a quandry. How could they continue to play a role in the anti-slavery

³²Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner, p. 106.

question? The Abolitionists' factions had many journals to present their views to the public. Yet the Whig Abolitionists had none. Whig journals generally ignored the slavery issue. Early in 1846 Charles Francis Adams negotiated for a daily means of public expression for the newly dubbed "Conscience Whigs." Adams, Palfrey, and Phillips purchased the Boston Whig. Adams' first editorial stated that existing Boston papers were not true to Whig principles, for they dealt too much with property rights rather than the question of what was right.³³ They bought the Whig on May 28, 1846, and by that time the Whig abolitionists had a new issue on which to expound their theories--the Mexican War.

The Democratic plank for the re-annexation of Texas and reoccupation of Oregon resulted in the eventual division within the Democratic party as well as within the Whig party. Thus the election of 1844 and of James K. Polk presented a direct question--should the political parties abide by national interests or sectional ties? The Southern Whigs resolved themselves to represent the South. The election returns proved that the Whig party was strongest in the North; therefore why should they hurt their chances in future elections by upholding Northern principles? While the Whigs concerned themselves with Texas, the Democrats in the Northwest called for completion of the bargain which had been made in 1844--the reoccupation of Oregon.

The day after Polk signed the bill admitting Texas, the clash between Northwesterners and Southerners in the Democratic party erupted. Senator Edward Hannegan of Indiana declared that Texas and

³³ Gatell, John Gorham Palfrey, p. 129.

Oregon were "nursed and cradled in the same cradle--the Baltimore Convention."³⁴ Furthermore, he charged that "There was not a moment's hesitation, until Texas was admitted; but the moment she was admitted, the peculiar friends of Texas turned, and were doing all they could to strangle Oregon!"³⁵ If the United States risked war with Mexico when Texas was annexed, he asked, why did the government not do the same with Oregon? Northwesterners questioned the hesitation of the administration on the Oregon territory, while Calhoun led a faction of Democrats who feared that Great Britain would go to war if a compromise could not be reached on the boundary between Oregon and Canada. Polk agreed with Calhoun and in June, 1846, a war with England was averted by a settlement of the Oregon boundary at the forty-ninth parallel.

The anti-slavery elements of the Democratic party attacked this action by the administration and used it to eliminate the more radical elements from President Polk's party. The Van Burenites who had been anti-Texas denounced Polk for his treachery. They stated that Polk was willing to go to war for a boundary which would extend slavery, but was not willing to go to war for a boundary which would extend freedom. Later, in August of 1846, when Polk needed appropriations for the war with Mexico, he became alarmed and disgruntled by Northern Democrats who voted against the measure in retaliation for the Oregon settlement.

By 1846 truly national political parties did not exist. Due to the duplicity of the leaders in the Democratic and Whig parties,

³⁴Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 110. See also Sellers, Charles. James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 370.

³⁵Ibid.

sectionalism had arisen. Those who thought they had been duped by both parties joined under a common cause--opposition to slavery, and they expressed this opposition in Congress during the war with Mexico.

CHAPTER III

THE MEXICAN WAR

Near the time of his inauguration, president-elect James K. Polk related to George Bancroft, who later would be secretary of navy, that one of the great measures of the Polk administration would be the acquisition of California.¹ After assuming office Polk sent John Slidell to Mexico to arrange for the purchase of California. The president of Mexico, José Joaquín de Herrera, seemed moderate, and it appeared possible that differences with the United States could be settled by diplomacy. Polk thought Mexico, which had not paid its debts to American citizens, might consider trading these claims for California. Upon his arrival in Mexico, however, Slidell found the Mexican government not so eager to settle disputes. In fact, Herrera refused to see him. Despite Herrera's action, a popular uprising threw him out of office late in 1845, whereupon General Mariano Paredes replaced Herrera and took a more aggressive position towards the United States.

The annexation of Texas to the United States in part triggered a war with Mexico. Differences had arisen from a disputed boundary--the United States claimed the Rio Grande as the southern and western boundary of Texas while Mexico demanded that the actual boundary of Texas was the Nueces River. Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and

¹ Charles Sellers, James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 213.

his troops to move to the mouth of the Nueces River when Texas was officially annexed. With the failure of the Slidell mission and the subsequent overthrow of Herrera, Polk foresaw possibilities of a conflict with the Mexican government over the Texan boundary. To protect the boundary claims, Polk instructed Taylor to move to the Rio Grande. Paredes made a similar move and sent Mexican troops northward. On April 23 American dragoons were attacked north of the Rio Grande.

Polk received word of this attack, and with the help of secretary of state James Buchanan and secretary of the navy Bancroft, the President set to work on a war message. On May 11, 1846, Polk requested that Congress recognize a state of war owing to the Mexican invasion of American territory. He did not ask for a declaration of war--merely a recognition that war existed and an appropriation of the means for persecuting it.

In the lower chamber the administration's supporters rallied around the President's message to protect it from detractors. The House dissolved into a Committee of the Whole to discuss the matter. A few Southerners objected to what was termed an administrative usurpation of congressional powers--Congress alone could declare war. Robert Winthrop, a Massachusetts Whig in the House, asked for the official correspondence to be read. The supporters of the administration rejected this proposal. They brushed aside all opposition under the operation of the previous question and amended the bill into an act to prosecute the existing war between the United States and Mexico. Also in defense of Polk, they supported the addition of the preamble in

the President's statement on Mexican invasion.² A motion to strike the preamble fell, despite the support of nearly every Whig member.³ In the flurry which ensued, the bill passed with the controversial preamble. It also contained a provision for raising fifty thousand volunteers and an appropriation for ten million dollars to prosecute and quickly terminate the war.⁴ Only fourteen congressmen opposed the measure; John Quincy Adams headed the list, and thirteen Whig abolitionists followed his lead.⁵

The Senate moved more slowly. They also dispensed with the reading of the documents, but they did order the documents printed for their members' use. Calhoun obtained the floor and stated that no war existed--only hostilities arising from an invasion of American soil. He had heard of the hostilities previous to the President's message and had tried to organize a peace coalition. He reiterated that the President was empowered to repel an invasion but not to make war. The senator from South Carolina further stated that the question was too

²This preamble caused much debate in Congress. It stated that the war was in existence by an "act of the Republic of Mexico." Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 782-795.

³Horace Greeley, The American Conflict (2 vols., Hartford: O. D. Case and Company, 1885), I, p. 187.

⁴Alfred Hoyt Bill, Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico, 1846-1848 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 106.

⁵Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 795. Those who voted against the bill were John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, George Ashmun of Massachusetts, Henry Young Cranston of Rhode Island, Charles Vernon Culver of Pennsylvania, Columbus Delano of Ohio, Joshua Reed Giddings of Ohio, Joseph Grinnell of Massachusetts, Joseph Mosley Root of Ohio, Luther Severance of Maine, John Strohm of Rhode Island, Charles Hudson of Massachusetts, D. P. King of Massachusetts, Daniel Rose Tilden of Ohio, and Joseph Vance of Ohio.

grave not to be considered calmly and deliberately.⁶

Despite attempts to rush the bill through the Senate, the members divided the message between the committees on Foreign Relations and Military Affairs. The following morning the Committee on Military Affairs approved the House bill. Before the Senate met at noon, a Democratic caucus concurred with what the House had done. Immediately, the bill came before the full Senate for a vote. Calhoun would vote for supplies and men to repel invasion, but he would not vote a declaration of war without seeing the documents. The Committee on Foreign Relations agreed with the military committee, and all efforts to proceed more slowly were voted down. In fact, all protests against declaring war without knowledge of facts met with shouts of disapproval. Finally, when a vote was taken, the Senate passed the bill by a majority of 40 to 2.⁷

Those who voted directly against the bill in both houses were Whigs. Except for those sixteen, the mass of Whig members voted for the bill. Although the majority of the Whigs thought the war had begun unjustly and unconstitutionally, they construed their votes to mean only a direct aid to those soldiers who were engaging in battles. And their party did not formally condemn their actions. However, Henry Clay, then in private life, said that "no earthly consideration would have ever tempted or provoked me to vote for a bill with a palpable falsehood stamped on its face."⁸

⁶ Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 783.

⁷ Ibid., p. 804.

⁸ Edward L. Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols., Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), III, p. 109.

The Daily National Intelligencer, a Whig organ of wide circulation, expressed strong disapproval. It foresaw the day when Whigs would regret their actions.⁹ Excuses abounded. Thomas Corwin, Senator from Ohio, voted for the bill to save "our little army from its perilous position."¹⁰ He had no idea that the "little army" would invade Mexico. Later, he regretted his vote. Robert Toombs, a Representative from Georgia, reasoned that if the Whigs did not vote for the bill the President and his party would make political capital of it.¹¹ He did not want to be on the wrong side of what appeared to be a popular war. Although Giddings voted against it, he said that the first vote was given under "peculiar circumstances;" the Whigs had not enough time to compare views or to discuss the propriety of the matter. They were told that American troops were in need so they responded on first reactions.¹² The National Intelligencer stated that "Congress went to war on deficient information."¹³ The paper questioned the details which the Chief Executive had not given Congress or the people. What if the Mexican government had immediately resolved upon war without information or avowal or disapproval from the United States when Commodore ap. Gatesby Jones in 1842 had captured the Mexican part of Monterrey on the Pacific, it asked.¹⁴

⁹ Daily National Intelligencer, May 16, 1846.

¹⁰ Congressional Globe, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 543-44.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 140-41.

¹² Ibid., 29 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 58.

¹³ Daily National Intelligencer, May 16, 1846.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Yet in its early phases, the war seemed extremely popular. Men rushed to volunteer. People reacted out of patriotism for their country and out of a desire for revenge for Mexican outrages and insults to their country. The Democratic party could use the war to gain prestige and unity. They could offer offices and appointments while businessmen would grow rich. News of Taylor's victories aroused further enthusiasm.

Suddenly, that enthusiasm waned. Having acknowledged the war, the Whigs began to question the President and his objectives. The Twenty-Ninth Congress was volatile. Numerous rumors circulated about Polk's true purpose. The National Intelligencer challenged them. If Polk was sincere when he said in his Proclamation to the People of Mexico that the object of the war was to overthrow tyrants, why did he want to negotiate with President Paredes? Polk stated in the same proclamation that the object of the war was to obtain indemnity for claims. The Whig journal derided Polk for spending money to obtain money. In his speech on May 11 to Congress, he had said his object was to repel an invasion and to defend American territory; yet Congressmen from both parties questioned if this were indeed American territory.¹⁵ The Whigs bombasted the President for "starting" the war, yet they continued to vote for appropriations to sustain the war--a very peculiar position indeed!¹⁶ A few Whigs stood with Giddings when he stated that this was a war of conquest. Therefore, if they voted for war appro-

¹⁵ Thomas Hart Benton (Democrat) and Abraham Lincoln (Whig) doubted American territorial claims.

¹⁶ Daily National Intelligencer, May 16, 1846.

priations, he said, they would certainly have a wicked part in it.¹⁷

The split between Whig abolitionists and the Whig party widened. Nowhere was this division clearer than in Massachusetts.

The main body of Massachusetts' delegation voted against the war, while Winthrop and one other colleague voted for it. The Whig abolitionists held Winthrop responsible for breaking the unity of the Massachusetts delegation,¹⁸ while Whig politicians and capitalists apologized for him by saying that peculiar and difficult circumstances justified an honest difference of opinion.¹⁹ They did not shield his vote behind a facade of patriotism and public duty, for this would have reflected upon his Conscience colleagues and would have harmed party harmony.

Reluctantly, Sumner criticized Winthrop's vote. Yet Winthrop belonged to a constituency with which he was eminently in accord; society in Boston was "conservative, delighted in refined manners and liberal culture, shrank from moral reforms and from any agitation which was likely to bring the masses to the front," and it was allied with the manufacturers.²⁰ Winthrop himself never offered any apology for his position. He voted for reasonable supplies so that the war could be quickly ended and settled honorably. Furthermore, he denounced any thought of acquiring territory from Mexico.²¹ Charles Francis Adams

¹⁷ Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 58.

¹⁸ Pierce, Memoir, III, p. 114.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

²¹ Ibid., p. 112.

admonished Winthrop in the Whig for his treachery to the Massachusetts' people. After a few of his friends requested him to take part in the discussion, Sumner began writing articles anonymously.

In these, Sumner admired Winthrop's character and attainment, and he stated that he felt great pain in condemning Winthrop's public action.²² Yet on moral grounds, he challenged the right of a representative to affix his name to a legislative falsehood. The abolitionist Whig implied Winthrop feared "to be found alone in the company of truth."²³ Later, Sumner wrote, "Blood! blood! is on the hands of the representative from Boston."²⁴ Greatly incensed by this attack on his public morality, Winthrop declared Sumner would never have the service of the blood-stained hands. Sumner thereupon became a social outcast in the city of Boston. Aside from the question of slavery, the two elements of the party directly opposed each other on the war. Voting on appropriation bills made this fact apparent. The two factions radically disagreed on questions of morals, politics, and national honor.²⁵

Most Democrats defended the war, although some Northern members of that party thought the President had thwarted or manipulated them on one issue after another. The Northwestern Democrats felt they had been deceived by the Calhounites and Polk on the Oregon question.

²²Ibid., p. 115.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 117.

²⁵Ibid., p. 118.

And in New York, the Van Burenites saw the grip Polk had in undermining their positions by federal patronage.

During the last-minute, hectic business of Congress on August 8, 1846, a special message from the President was delivered. Polk asked for an appropriation of two million dollars to be used to negotiate a treaty with Mexico. He thought the United States should pay a fair equivalent to Mexico for any concessions. The House discussed Polk's message until lunch and then reconvened at five o'clock.

While having lunch, various Northern Democrats concurred on this plan of action. They decided to attach a rider to the appropriations amendment prohibiting slavery or involuntary servitude in any territory acquired from Mexico as a result of the war. Upon returning from dinner, James Thompson of Pennsylvania, Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio, and David Wilmot of Pennsylvania huddled in the rear of the chamber to decide on tactics. They selected Wilmot to introduce the amendment because he was in better standing with the administration and the Southern Democrats.²⁶ The Whigs challenged the Democrats to propose such an amendment before Wilmot attained the floor. Thus it was the Whigs who opened the subject.²⁷ After Wilmot presented the rider, the House debated for two hours and adopted it by a vote of 83 to 64. The amended two-million appropriation bill was passed by a vote of 85 to 79. The parties divided along sectional lines. The free-state Democrats supported the bill 52 to 4 while the slave-state Democrats opposed it by 0 to 50. Two Southern Whigs voted for the

²⁶ Charles Buxton Going, David Wilmot: Free-Soiler (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924), p. 138.

²⁷ Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 1210-1215.

bill, while eight free-state Whigs voted against it.²⁸ The quiet, stout, light-haired David Wilmot awoke the next day a famous man, and the amendment became known as the Wilmot Proviso.²⁹

On August 10 the Senate got the two-million bill only thirty or forty minutes before the mandatory adjournment at noon. A movement to strike the Wilmot Proviso gained momentum, but John Davis of Massachusetts secured the floor and began to discuss the whole matter. Alabama's Senator Dixon Lewis interrupted Davis several times in an attempt to strike the proviso. Davis would not yield the floor but promised to finish in time for Lewis to present his resolution. Lewis protested that the House might adjourn any minute. Still Davis would not yield.

In the House everyone watched the clock. Winthrop rose and stated that the House clock was seven or eight minutes faster than the Senate clock. By which clock would they adjourn? The Speaker replied, by the House clock. Many voices cried, "Twelve o'clock, twelve o'clock." They adjourned and the news sped to the Senate. Lewis stated that it was needless to proceed--the House had adjourned. Thus Polk's two-million bill died.³⁰

Polk, thoroughly disappointed, wrote in his diary, "What connection slavery had with making peace with Mexico it is difficult to conceive."³¹ The Northern Democrats enjoyed Polk's defeat on this

²⁸ Ibid., p. 1217.

²⁹ Oscar Sherwin, Prophet of Liberty: the Life and Times of Wendell Phillips (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), p. 178.

³⁰ Congressional Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 1220-1221, 1223.

³¹ Allan Nevins, (ed.), Polk: The Diary of a President, 1845-1849 (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 138.

matter, but the antislavery Whigs who had voted against the Mexican war bill felt even more gratified.

The Wilmot Proviso became the topic of conversation throughout the country during the summer and fall of 1846. Congress reconvened in December, and Polk sent another message requesting three-million dollars. Again Wilmot's colleagues suggested he introduce the proviso. The time came on February 17, 1847, when the House sat as a Committee of the Whole, but the antislavery Democrats found Wilmot's seat empty. Hannibal Hamlin of Maine replaced Wilmot and presented the amendment. The House adopted the proviso by 115 to 106. Wilmot entered the chambers, red-faced and perspiring, while many anti-slavery Democrats glared at him. Later, in the cloakroom Wilmot explained that he had received a note from the President to come to the White House immediately. Wilmot believed that the President had called him deliberately to detain him--and in so doing, defeat the proviso.³² However, the Wilmot Proviso faced great difficulty in the Senate.

Although the proviso never was passed, it cut across party lines and became a periodic assertion of principle for antislavery factions within both parties. It made differences more noticeable in the Whig and Democratic parties. Southern Whigs united solidly with Southern Democrats to oppose the measure, and with the help of Northern men with Southern principles they succeeded. The Whig party danced awkwardly on its tiptoes to obtain some form of party unity--for the midterm elections were drawing nearer.

To avoid the issue, Southern Whigs declared hostility to the

³²H. Draper Hunt, Hannibal Hamlin of Maine (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 40.

acquisition of any territory as a result of the war. In the House, Alexander Stephens, with Toombs' support, offered a resolution to this effect.³³ The Senate chose the views of John M. Berrien of Georgia, however. He called upon national patriotism to exclude this question. Northern Whigs cooperated to insure order. And prominent Whig Henry Clay stated, at the close of a speech at Lexington, Kentucky, that he disavowed any wish to acquire territory to propagate slavery. Even General Zachary Taylor thought the acquisition of any territory south of 36° 30' would endanger the permanency of the Union.³⁴ South Carolina's Waddy Thompson, the late minister to Mexico, asserted that conditions of soil and climate would make slavery impossible in the coveted regions.³⁵ Still, the Southern Whigs distrusted the Northern Whigs who had supported the Wilmot Proviso. Yet they restrained themselves because the presidential election in 1848 would require a united Whig party.

Meanwhile, in 1846, the Conscience Whigs had fought their battles in Congress and in state conventions. The Conservative (or Cotton) Whigs in Massachusetts had sought to keep the supremacy of the tariff issue, while the Young Whigs had pushed to the front questions on slavery and the Mexican War. A conference was then held before the state convention. The conservatives had decided they needed a platform which was broad enough to offend no one in the national Whig

³³ Congressional Globe, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 61.

³⁴ Arthur Charles Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington: American Historical Association, 1913), p. 121.

³⁵ Daily National Intelligencer, October 21, 1847.

party.³⁶

On September 23, the convention met in Faneuil Hall. The delegates seemed tense. The conservatives controlled the managers of the assembly, who arranged the business so that antislavery sentiments could be excluded. Scattered throughout the hall, the antislavery Whigs called loudly for Sumner, and without formal permission, Sumner marched to the platform. He demanded the Whig party sustain the fundamental principles of human rights and duty by amending the United States Constitution to allow further aggressive action against slavery. Cheers went up as the Young Whigs wildly applauded this idea.³⁷ The Conservative Whigs found Sumner's suggestion repugnant. After Sumner took his seat, Winthrop spoke. He dwelled upon the measures on which the Northern and Southern Whigs agreed. The two speeches vividly showed that sympathetic ties no longer existed between the Cotton and Conscience Whigs.

While the platform was being considered, the antislavery forces proposed it be based on resolutions upholding their position on slavery. The small "island" of Conscience Whigs was further isolated by the request of Stephen C. Phillips. He asked for amendments which would make opposition to slavery the prime political duty of the Whig party. Support would go only to men who promoted that principle and purpose.³⁸ Of course, this would offend the national Whigs, for it reeked of sectionalism. As Phillips spoke, sullen countenances and angry insults

³⁶ Pierce, Memoir, III, p. 122.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 123.

³⁸ Ibid.

were exchanged. No one knew what would happen to Phillips' amendment.

Then the door in the back of the hall flew open. Heads turned. Voices hushed. Everyone rose, with a loud cheer and prolonged applause. Daniel Webster entered Faneuil Hall led by a Conservative Whig, Abbott Lawrence. Slowly, Webster walked the length of the hall, delegates parting as he advanced. Webster's presence decided the fate of the amendment, for it was well known that his escort, Lawrence, was unfriendly to Phillips' motion. After they voted and the amendment failed, Webster spoke briefly to inspire party enthusiasm. When he heard the outcome of the convention, John Quincy Adams concluded, "There are two divisions in the party, one based upon public principle, and the other upon manufacturing and commercial interests."³⁹

Despite Whig differences, the party in the off-year elections of 1846 gained control of the House by 117 to 110. Whig solidarity seemed even more important since the Whigs had a narrow majority. Winthrop arrived in Washington on December 2, 1846, for consultations on nominations for the Speakership. True to his former character, Winthrop said and did nothing to arm his foes with weapons against him. Therefore, the party caucus elected him as their nominee. John Gorham Palfrey, a newly elected representative from Massachusetts and a Conscience Whig, determined to make Winthrop state his position towards the war and slavery.

To do this he sent a note to Winthrop, but received the reply that no pledges would be given. By the day of the election at the capitol, the galleries, which were filled early, contained many people

³⁹ Charles Francis Adams, (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (12 vols., Philadelphia: J. B. Pippincott & Co., 1877), xii p. 274.

who anticipated a conflict over the Speakership. On the first ballot Winthrop lacked three votes of the needed 108. Palfrey, Giddings, and New Hampshire's Amos Tuck gave their votes to others, and they proceeded to vote in this manner throughout the election. On the second ballot Winthrop gained one vote, and one member of the hall left, reducing the required majority to 110. The third ballot resulted in Winthrop's election because of the departure of a South Carolinian. John Quincy Adams administered the oath of office, thereby causing a great embarrassment for his son, Charles Francis Adams. Palfrey's position against a fellow representative from Massachusetts showed the independent course the Conscience Whigs had decided to take.⁴⁰

Although the Whig abolitionists were unsuccessful in Massachusetts in the election of 1846, they did make progress in another state--New Hampshire. Whigs there joined the Independent Democrats and the Liberty men in electing John P. Hale of the state legislature as senator to the national Congress. In return for their support, the Whigs asked that Anthony Colby, a Whig, be selected governor. The newly formed alliance in the state legislature succeeded in fulfilling the bargain, and government of New Hampshire became decidedly anti-war and antislavery. Later, because of his success, Hale would be considered by the Liberty party as a potential candidate for the presidency in 1848, but the Whig abolitionists had other plans for him.

During the next year, 1847, Congress accomplished little--proviso men from both parties upset the plans of party managers. Anti-slavery

⁴⁰ Frank Otto Gatell, "Palfrey's Vote, The Conscience Whigs and the Election of Speaker Winthrop," New England Quarterly Vol. XXXI (September, 1958), p. 231.

speeches abounded, and Conscience Whigs found themselves agreeing more with the Proviso Democrats. Southern Whigs cooperated in restraining their violent utterances. Polk commented on the Thirtieth Congress in his diary when after half a session they had accomplished nothing but arguments "on politics and slavery."⁴¹

By March 10, 1848, Conscience men lost their main subject of debate--the Mexican War. The status of slavery remained undetermined. However, upon the resolution of thanks to the officers, Giddings declined, saying that the war had been unconstitutional and he would not thank murderers.⁴² Most Whigs "trimmed their sails for public sentiment."⁴³ They were thinking of the presidential election that year. The Mexican War had produced for them an excellent candidate, General Zachary Taylor. Conscience Whigs knew they would have to block his nomination; they would give their support to whichever candidate who would agree to the intent of the proviso.

The issue of freedom or slavery in the new territories acquired by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo remained the most important issue in the Thirtieth Congress. Previously, a proposition had been made in the Senate by Berrian that no land be acquired as a result of the war with Mexico. This soothed Northern and Southern Whigs. Winthrop presented this proposal in the House. The vote was by party rather than sectional, and Berrian's request died. Then in July, 1848, a compromise committee, headed by John M. Clayton, a Whig Senator from

⁴¹Nevins, Polk, p. 186.

⁴²The Liberator, March 10, 1848.

⁴³Bill, Rehearsal for Conflict, p. 325.

Delaware, proposed to leave the question of slavery to the Supreme Court and prohibit territorial legislatures from acting on the subject. Most of the Northern Whigs in the Senate rejected the Clayton Compromise; however, Southern Whigs cooperated and it passed.⁴⁴ But in the House the compromise was shelved by Southern Whigs. Stephens, the leader of this movement, thought the court could only recognize the continuity of Mexican laws against slavery. Northern Whigs helped defeat the bill because they believed the Democrats could make political gains thereby in the next election.⁴⁵ And 1848 was above all, an election year.

⁴⁴Cole, The Whig Party, pp. 125-26.

⁴⁵Ibid., 126.

CHAPTER IV

THE FREE-SOIL PARTY

Polk, as previously noted, had commented in his diary that the Thirtieth Congress accomplished nothing but arguments "on politics and slavery."¹ However, Congress accomplished little on politics and slavery when compared to the activity outside their chambers. Throughout the year 1847, the Liberty party, the Democratic party, and the Whig party sought potential candidates for the presidential elections in 1848. The subjects most often discussed were the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, and the Wilmot Proviso. The Whig and Democratic parties tried to maintain cohesion, while the Liberty party found its existence hard to defend. However, the Whig abolitionists looked forward to a more elaborate combination of antislavery factions--one similar to that which had elected John P. Hale to the Senate in 1846. They succeeded in their plans, and the Free-soil party developed. At last the advice of Joshua Giddings, given in 1843, had been heeded--the Whigs and Liberty men worked together in an election.

The Liberty party began inquiring of Hale as early as the fall of 1846 about the possibility of his accepting the Liberty party's nomination for the presidency. Hale grew uneasy and received these overtures coldly. He thought talk of nominations so long before the elec-

¹The Liberator, March 10, 1848.

tion was premature, and he preferred to enter the Senate known as an independent rather than as an adherent of any one party. Yet by the summer of 1847, antislavery journals from Maine to Illinois were openly declaring in favor of a Liberty ticket headed by Hale. Sam Lewis and Salmon P. Chase were most often mentioned for the vice-presidency. Finally the Liberty Party National Committee issued a call for a nominating convention to meet in Buffalo in October, 1847.

Prominent Eastern Liberty men invited the Senator-elect to meet with them in Boston in July. Hale accepted the invitation so that he could make clear his position regarding the nomination. Before this July meeting, Hale sought the counsel of three Conscience Whigs: Charles Sumner, Charles Francis Adams, and John Gorham Palfrey. These men suggested that he decline all offers temporarily because they were thinking of a broader antislavery movement. On July 24, Hale met with the Liberty men and made it clear that he favored postponing the convention until spring. In the conversation, however, Hale indicated that he agreed with the Liberty party in principle, and that he would not refuse a draft nomination.²

Most of Hale's friends urged caution. Amos Tuck hoped for a broadly-based Northern coalition united behind Silas Wright of New York. Charles Sumner tried to dissuade Hale, as did Ohio's Salmon P. Chase. Chase, a liberty man for more than six years, thought the Liberty party was dead and that the only chances for success in the election would be a national antislavery league. Many people steadfastly advised Hale to accept the Liberty nomination, however. John

²Richard H. Sewell, John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 89.

Greenleaf Whittier enthusiastically plugged for Hale's candidacy, while Henry B. Stanton, Joshua Leavitt, and Lewis Tappan decided to nominate the reluctant Hale.

The national Liberty party convention met at Buffalo, on October 20, 1847. One hundred-forty regular delegates represented all Northern states, and some volunteer delegates and Liberty Leaguers attended the meeting.³ All enjoyed equal privileges. They met in private conferences and caucuses at hotels, while the full sessions were held in a large revival tent which had been brought from Ohio. First they decided to write the platform, whereupon a struggle developed. The Liberty Leaguers demanded a declaration that slavery was illegal everywhere--even in the states. The "expedient" faction gasped, for Hale would never consent to run on such an aggressive platform. Instead, these delegates recommended and passed moderate resolutions calling for the exclusion of slavery from the territories, abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.⁴ They then adjourned until the next day.

Upon reconvening, the convention turned to nominations. Chase jumped to his feet and moved that no choice be made until spring. A great deal of discussion followed; but Stanton, Leavitt and Tappan won again. At first many Liberty men suspected Hale to be inadvisable as a nominee; however, Stanton, Leavitt, and Tappan praised him so highly that the delegates nominated him on the first ballot. Before adjourning, they selected Leicester King of Ohio as the vice-presidential

³ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

candidate. Hale waited two months before accepting. By that time, other antislavery movements appeared possible, and Hale added in his acceptance a note that should a broader-based antislavery coalition form, he would gladly step aside and support it.⁵ Not all Liberty men supported Hale, however; the presidential nominee of 1840 and 1844, James G. Birney, became very disgusted with Hale's nomination. "Our old Liberty party," he wrote, "is pretty much shattered to pieces by this ridiculous Hale movement."⁶

By that time the Democratic party likewise appeared to be shattered. During a Democratic convention at Syracuse in September, 1847, the Hunkers⁷ seized control. The Barnburners asked for acceptance of the Wilmot Proviso, and they were defeated. They cried fraud and called for a mass meeting at Herkimer on October 26 to consult as to future action. This meeting marked the beginning of an open revolt in New York against the Polk regime. David Wilmot addressed the meeting, and John Van Buren, son of the former President, presented the resolutions. Basically their platform endorsed the Wilmot Proviso, and asserted that they would not vote for any candidate who supported the extension of slavery.

In February, 1848, the Barnburners met at Utica and again repudiated the Democratic organization. At this meeting they opened the way for a new Free-Soil party by choosing a rival set of delegates to the national convention in Baltimore. Three months later the Democratic

⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

⁶ Dwight L. Dumond, (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney: 1831-1857 (2 vols., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), I, p. 1091.

⁷ The Hunkers had been for Polk in 1844 and continued the support throughout Polk's administration. They rivaled Van Buren's control of New York state politics.

National Convention convened. The rivalry of the two New York delegations became the immediate topic for debate in the Committee on Credentials. By the second day, no decision could be reached by the committee; therefore it stated that those who pledged themselves to support the party nominee would be accepted. The Barnburners refused while the Hunkers accepted, and the committee immediately recommended that the Hunkers be seated. The next day the wrangling resumed, however, lasting until the evening. At that time a resolution to seat both delegations and split the vote passed by a majority of two. The Hunkers protested, and the question was resolved when the Barnburners gathered their forces and departed.⁸

The remaining delegates at the convention selected big, heavy-jowled Lewis Cass of Michigan for the presidential nomination. At an evening session the same day, May 25, they nominated General William O. Butler of Kentucky for Vice-President. On the final day of the convention, they turned their attention to platform making. They reaffirmed the resolutions of 1840 and 1844 and added new ones. The convention pronounced the Mexican War just and necessary; officers and men in the army were praised; and the achievements of Polk's administration were listed with a note of congratulations.⁹ This convention brought no harmony to the party, however, for it had driven the New York radicals completely away. In 1844 Cass had run against Van Buren, and the Michigan Senator had been supported by the Hunkers in New York. With only a portion of the Cass' delegates Van Buren could have won the

⁸ Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Sectionalist, 1840-1850 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1951), p. 362.

⁹ Ibid., p. 363.

Democratic nomination. Instead Polk had been elected with Cass' support.

On returning from the convention the Barnburners paused in the City Hall Park in New York City for a meeting. They decided to act independently and to hold their own convention at Utica in June. At this gathering, they nominated Van Buren for president and Henry Dodge, a Democratic Senator from Wisconsin, for vice-president. However, Dodge politely declined because his state had accepted Cass' nomination. B. F. Butler headed the committee which wrote the platform--a standard Democratic document with the Wilmot Proviso added. The attendance bespoke of careful preparation, for delegates attended from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

The Democrats in Washington received the news of this gathering and reacted to it strongly. Polk called it "a most dangerous attempt to organize geographical parties upon the slave question. It is more threatening to the Union than anything which has occurred since the meeting of the Hartford Convention in 1814."¹⁰ Calhoun did not immediately support either Cass or Van Buren. He waited to see if sectional peace could be maintained by Congress; however, in late July the Clayton Compromise was defeated in the House, whereupon administration leaders in the Senate urged Polk to dismiss all officeholders who yielded allegiance to the Van Buren faction but Polk hesitated.

While the Barnburners were preparing for their convention at Utica, the Whig convention met in Philadelphia on June 7 and their convention proved almost as hectic as the Democratic convention at Balti-

¹⁰Allan Nevins (ed.), Polk: The Diary of a President, 1845-1849 (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 328.

more. Charles Sumner became a middleman between the Massachusetts Conscience Whigs and the national leaders of the political anti-slavery campaign. He confidentially corresponded with Chase and Hale, both of whom wanted to fuse the antislavery elements of all parties into a new national organization. In New York, he frequently met with leaders of the Barnburners and he came to know them well, and Giddings was his source of the latest Washington gossip. Other Whig abolitionists became closely connected with the Barnburners, as did Hale through correspondence; but Sumner did most of the writing.¹¹

At the meeting of the Massachusetts state Whigs in Springfield in 1847, the Massachusetts conservatives and the Conscience Whigs had agreed to support Daniel Webster for the presidency. They had assembled district conventions throughout the state to select delegates to the Whig national convention at Philadelphia. On March 15, 1848, Henry Wilson was named the delegate of the Eighth District and in the Fifth District, Charles Allen was elected. They would not support Zachary Taylor or any slaveholder.¹² After their selection, they met with Charles Francis Adams, Charles Sumner, Stephen C. Phillips, E. Rockwood Hoar, and three other Whig abolitionists in Adam's Whig office. They decided that if the Whigs at Philadelphia nominated Taylor for President, they would not support Taylor. To Phillips, however, they assigned the task of formulating a plan for opposition.

Meanwhile, the Whigs also aligned their possible nominees along

¹¹ David Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 153.

¹² Frank Otto Gatell, "Conscience and Judgment: the Bolt of the Massachusetts Conscience Whigs," The Historian, XXI (November, 1958), p.21.

pro- and anti-slavery lines. Clay seemed a logical candidate for the Whigs. Yet Southern Whigs recalled his "Raleigh letters," while Northern Whigs remembered his subsequent letters. To ruin Clay would ruin the party's success. Taylor's name frequently was mentioned. The Southern Whigs reasoned that not only was Taylor popular with the public, but he was a champion of the Southern cause.

During the campaign of 1848 efforts were made to establish a Taylor bloc in New York City. Earlier attempts had been disrupted by Clay's Whig "roughs." Alexander Stephens arranged for Isiah Rhynders, "captain among toughs and shoulder hitters in New York" and a Taylor man, to insure an uninterrupted speech given by Toombs in a hall in the city. The price for this was two hundred dollars.¹³ At Rhynder's suggestion, Toombs met with some of the Rhynder boys at a favorite saloon to establish comaradarie the night before his speech. The next evening Toomb's speech was interrupted by shouts of "slaveholder" and "a hurray for Clay." Toombs continued speaking. Again the cries erupted in the hall. Toombs began to question his success at establishing friendships in the saloon the night before. Then a great row broke out, and the hall was cleared of forty trouble-makers in two minutes. Toombs later discovered that during the initial heckling Rhynder's men had circulated and chalked the backs of the hecklers. Then on order, they were bodily ejected.¹⁴

Other speeches were made on the behalf of Taylor by Northern as well as Southern Whigs. The Whig abolitionists decided to bolt the

¹³William Y. Thompson, Robert Toombs of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 47.

¹⁴Ibid.

national convention if Taylor was nominated. Actually many Whigs spoke of not holding a convention at all and merely placing Taylor on the Whig ticket. But on June 7 the Whigs held their national convention. They adopted no platform. After balloting three times, Taylor was selected the nominee of the Whig party. When the name of Abbott Lawrence was placed in nomination for vice-president, the Massachusetts delegation became noisy. Charles Allen stated he felt the Whig party was dissolved, and Wilson declared he would return to Massachusetts to help defeat the Whig slate.¹⁵ The rest of the Whigs tried to console the Conscience Whigs by nominating Millard Fillmore for the vice-presidency, but the Whig abolitionists had already made up their minds. Horace Greeley aptly described the Whig convention as "The Slaughterhouse of Whig Principles."¹⁶

On June 10, a call for a convention was issued in Massachusetts for all those opposed to the nomination of Cass and Taylor to meet at Worcester the 28th of June. They selected Worcester as the convention site because of its reputation as a center of antislavery sentiment, and because of its central location and accessibility to Boston by railroad.

Before they left Philadelphia, fifteen antislavery Whigs met to lay the groundwork for a convention of all factions opposed to slavery. They suggested that it be held in Buffalo during the first week of August. Adams and his fellow Whig abolitionists prepared a big welcome

¹⁵ Edward L. Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols., Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), III, p. 162.

¹⁶ Frank Otto Gatell, John Gorham Palfrey and the New England Conscience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 160.

for Wilson and Allen. They had little time to prepare for the convention, so they sent invitations to men in Washington who were friendly to their cause. Conscience meetings occurred throughout the state to remind those interested in Worcester that half-fare rates would be in effect on the railroad.¹⁷

A few days before the Worcester convention, antislavery meetings also gathered in Ohio and New York. Salmon P. Chase led the meeting in Ohio, and the convention passed resolutions condemning any extension of slavery.¹⁸ At Utica, the Barnburners nominated Van Buren, while the Ohio men did not nominate anyone.

The air in the town hall of Worcester was warm on June 28, 1848; the emotional fervor of five-thousand free-soilers made it so. Because of the large crowd, the convention adjourned to the Common where the hot sun blazed down upon the heads of an assemblage of disaffected Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty men. Toward the afternoon they sought protection in a shadier place called the Grove, which adjoined the Worcester Lunatic Asylum (the afternoon location seemed quite appropriate to the Taylor Whig press.)¹⁹ These Whigs who initiated the meeting on that scorching summer day were the protesters of their time. They enthusiastically greeted speakers from remnants of all parties. Although they did not choose a nominee, the Conscience Whigs did question Van Buren's sincerity. However, they soon realized that he was all they had, and thus was sure to be the nominee at Buffalo in

¹⁷ Gatell, "Conscience and Judgment", p. 31.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

August. During July these Whigs tried to find a replacement for Van Buren, but they could not. While organizing antislavery sentiment in their own state, the Massachusetts Whig abolitionists aided rebellion in other states. Adams managed the "Conscience Whig Speakers' Bureau" which sent speakers to various states to gain support for the Free-Soil movement. Sumner played an important role in the pre-convention discussions, for he had close friends among the Barnburners and had crusaded for other reforms which had won him many admirers in the Liberty party. Sumner persuaded Van Buren to write antislavery letters and Hale to withdraw from the campaign.²⁰

The party insurrections against both Taylor and Cass seemed overwhelming when on August 9 antislavery factions from all free states flocked to the Buffalo City Park. Meeting under a spacious tent, their numbers estimated between ten and forty thousand, these men adopted a clearly stated platform.²¹ They accepted constitutional limitations which excluded interference with slavery in the states, but they declared it a national duty to prevent, by the law, the extension of slavery in national territories and no further continuance of slavery wherever governmental power extended.²² A bargain was made on the platform and on the nominee. Liberty party leaders agreed to back Van Buren if the Barnburners would support a Liberty platform. After the platform was approved amidst much waving of hats and handkerchiefs, Van Buren was nominated unanimously as the Free-Soil candidate for Presi-

²⁰ Donald, Charles Sumner, p. 164.

²¹ Pierce, Memoir, III, p. 160.

²² Ibid., p. 169.

dent. To balance the ticket, they selected Charles Francis Adams, who had presided over the convention, as their candidate for Vice-President. They had a colorful and tuneful campaign, and the Free-Soilers sang themselves hoarse by election day. The Massachusetts' Conscience men knew they had little chance of winning; their only hope was to throw the election to the House of Representatives. To Adams, it was more important that a national movement had been made.²³ Taylor's nomination offended many Whigs because he was not a statesman in the Whig tradition.

However, in the election in 1848 Taylor won and Van Buren received only one-tenth of the popular vote. The Free-Soilers elected nine members to Congress which gave them the balance of power in the House. Large numbers of antislavery Whigs gave Taylor their votes because he had stated he was against the executive use of the veto power.²⁴ Fillmore, the Whig candidate for the vice-presidency, proved harmful to Taylor in the South. The Democrats had reminded Southern Whigs that soldiers of the field did not always live long in the presidential chair.²⁵ The Whigs mostly dwelt on "Old Zack" and his war record in their campaign south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Of course the Whigs celebrated their return to power. Little did they know that Taylor would favor the policy of allowing territories to settle the slavery question for themselves without executive inter-

²³Martin B. Duberman, Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 156.

²⁴Pierce, Memoir, III, p. 168.

²⁵Arthur Charles Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington: American Historical Association, 1913), p. 131.

ferences. But it happened, and it drove those Southerners who had been his most enthusiastic supporters into complete opposition to him.²⁶ At his death, there ironically were no more sincere mourners than the antislavery men of the free states.²⁷

²⁶Ibid., p. 134.

²⁷Pierce, Memoir, II, pp. 176-177.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After the election of 1848, the Free-Soilers in many states pondered their future. The results of this election had complicated matters for them. They had only one tenth of the voters in their ranks; they lacked representatives in the electoral college; and they had failed to achieve a majority in a single Congressional district. Without success as a party in a single state, they could not expect national success. Because larger parties attracted the masses of citizens, the Free-Soilers thought they would be fortunate to keep half of their voting forces.¹ No longer could they be content "with merely a moral demonstration."² With the Whig and Democratic parties well-balanced, the Free Soilers decided they could become the "fulcrum" which could upset that balance--if the parties would help secure the election of senators and representatives in Congress committed to Free-Soil principles. By making their power felt, the Free-Soilers could obtain their ideals by coalitions.

In New Hampshire, Hale had gained his seat in the Senate by a coalition of Independent Democrats, Whig abolitionists, and Liberty men in 1846. This successful attempt became the national model and

¹Edward Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols., Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), III, p. 183.

²Ibid., p. 184.

spurred the Free-Soilers to attempt similar actions in other states. Early in 1849, the Free-Soilers in Ohio, with only two votes in the legislature, joined with the Democrats to elect Democratic judges who voided anti-Negro legislation, and to send Salmon P. Chase to the Senate. In Iowa the Free-Soilers and the Whigs united; in Connecticut and Vermont Free-Soilers and Democrats combined.

The Barnburners and the Hunker sections of the New York Democratic party reunited. Under the plurality system in that state, the Taylor Whigs, although a minority, could win control of the state. With the defection of the Barnburners, the only state Free-Soil party which had not formed coalitions, that in Massachusetts, began to reconsider its position. Charles Francis Adams, who had been the most powerful Free-Soiler in that state, found his influence waning, and he suspected that Free-Soil principles would be lost in Democratic platforms. In 1849 the Massachusetts Democrats adopted strong antislavery resolutions. The Massachusetts Free-Soilers realized that in order to eliminate the reigning "Cotton" Whigs from power they would have to unite with the Democrats. This overpowering temptation weaken Adams' position.³

John Gorham Palfrey, a close friend of Adams, ran for representative from Middlesex County under the Free-Soil banner in 1848. Palfrey did not receive a majority; therefore he had to face a run off in the summer. To help Palfrey, Adams agreed to a coalition with the Democrats. Other counties followed the Middlesex example, thereby electing a total of thirteen senators and 130 representatives; but the Democrats failed to keep their bargain in Middlesex. Adams regretted the course

³Martin G. Duberman, Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 165.

taken, and he never again associated himself with the Democrats.

When Adams visited Washington in December, 1849, he heard much discussion about the Thirty-first Congress. Although the Mexican War had already ended on the battlefield, it continued in Congress. The territory won from Mexico needed to be organized. In California, prospectors lusted for gold, and its discovery had brought settlers who clamored for statehood. While the Northern radicals demanded the Wilmot Proviso, Southern extremists openly threatened disunion. Fearing civil war, many proviso men retreated.

On December 24, 1849, President Taylor delivered his first annual message, which was surprisingly antislavery in tone. He discouraged sectional agitation by omitting any mention concerning slavery. California should be accepted as a state when it applied for admission, he said. The same method should be followed for New Mexico. Adams felt that Taylor was trying to ignore the problem of slavery rather than solve it.⁴

Later, Adams changed his position when confronted with what he considered a worse solution presented by Henry Clay in the Senate on January 29, 1850. Clay suggested California be admitted as a state under its "free" constitution. The rest of the Mexican territory should be divided into the two territorial governments of Utah and New Mexico. Pronouncement on slavery for the two territories would be withheld. The slave trade should be abolished in the District of Columbia, while Congress would have no power to restrict interstate slave trade. The boundary between Texas and New Mexico should be

⁴Ibid., p. 164.

settled, and a more stringent fugitive-slave law should be passed. The Free-Soilers violently denounced Clay's proposals, which would become the heart of the Compromise of 1850, as a compromise of moral principles. When Daniel Webster addressed the Senate on March 7, he proclaimed that arguments concerning slavery in the Mexican territory were useless; Nature had made slavery impossible in that territory. He found little backing from his home state of Massachusetts for these views, however.

In the spring of 1850 the leaders of the Democratic party lined up support for Clay's compromise. Northern Whigs except Webster favored Taylor's plan, however. When President Taylor died on July 9, 1850, the Free-Soilers lost their major ally in fighting Clay. Millard Fillmore became President, and with him came a new cabinet which included Webster as Secretary of State. During August and September the Clay measures passed Congress one by one, and became the law of the land. By the November elections in Massachusetts in 1850, Adams and many other former Whig abolitionists were thinking that the morals of the Free-Soil party had been destroyed, and they realized their roles within that party would soon end.⁵

The presidential election of 1852 in a sense served as a popular referendum on the Compromise of 1850. The Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce who had endorsed the Compromise; the Whigs, divided as always, chose the Mexican War hero, General Winfield Scott, whose position on the Compromise was uncertain. The Free-Soilers offered John P. Hale for the presidency. The Democrats carried twenty-seven states and the

⁵Ibid., p. 174.

Whigs four, while the Free-Soilers fared poorly because the Barnburners had left the party. Yet the election of 1852 deflated the Whig party so much that it never again was sufficiently strong to offer a candidate in a presidential election. In the Mid West a new organization would gradually replace the Whig and Free-Soil parties--the Republicans.

The role of the Whig abolitionists from 1841 to 1848 cannot be underestimated. Certainly they found aid and encouragement from Great Britain. In the early stage of the development of the Whig abolitionists, the questions concerning slavery were avoided in Congress by veiling ~~it~~ with a "gauze" called the Gag Rule. Southern members of Congress could avoid the slavery issue by simply enforcing the Gag Rule whenever a petition or memorial arose which related to slavery. Former President John Quincy Adams successfully fought this measure because he thought it to be a direct violation of the constitutional right of petition. Although not an abolitionist, Adams found himself a defender of abolitionist petitions. American abolitionists, such as Theodore Weld, Joshua Leavitt, and Louis Tappan, came to Washington at the request of Whig congressmen who sympathized with the antislavery cause. There the abolitionists would research and write speeches for Adams and antislavery Whigs. These abolitionists also corresponded with their British counterparts; Weld's writings against slavery made him the most respected American abolitionist in Great Britain, while Leavitt and Tappan actively represented the United States' abolitionists at the World Anti-Slavery Conventions held in London.

While in London, Leavitt and Tappan grew confident that the British abolitionists, although their extraordinary influence with the British government, were stoutly opposed to the annexation of

Texas. The British feared the extension of slavery into the new republic should the United States annex it. In these conventions the British verbally assured the American abolitionists that they would try to prevent the "slaveocracy conspiracy" from succeeding. In the United States these assurances became known to the public. Southerners, feeling their constitutional rights of property were being threatened, denounced the British scheme, while Northerners, fearing the loss of the South's cotton for their textile mills, joined the Southerners. Thus in addition to economic motives, the Northerners had political motives.

With the election of 1844 near, neither party wanted to endanger itself on the issue of slavery. Only one party definitely stood against slavery and the annexation of Texas--the Liberty party. The Whigs, whose candidate was Henry Clay, fluctuated on a vapid platform. No one knew what Clay's position would be from one day to the next. Not so with James K. Polk and the Democrats; they wanted Texas annexed. Had the Whigs and Liberty men joined forces, they might have won, but they could not do so. Because of Polk's election, Congress annexed Texas by joint resolution. The Whigs who voted for this measure did so out of political and economical expediency.

A few Democrats and Whig abolitionists had predicted that annexation of Texas would result in a war with Mexico and sectional incompatibility; their forecasts proved to be true in effect, although there was no direct cause-effect relationship. The Whig party derisively scorned the Democrats about the Mexican War while hypocritically voting for supplies and for troops to sustain a war which they denounced.

Only sixteen Whigs in Congress voted against acknowledging a state

of war with Mexico. Those Whigs came to be known under various names such as "Whig abolitionists," "Conscience Whigs," and "Young Whigs." They tried to work within their party and change it, but the possibility of political power stifled the Whig party's principles. Winning elections became more important to the Whigs than upholding principles. The Whig abolitionists found that they were not the only ones disappointed with their party's leaders; so also the Democrats, who thereby lost the election of 1848.

In the conventions of 1848 Democratic and Whig abolitionists bolted their parties. Again, their actions were based on the moral issue of slavery. The Whig abolitionists served as examples for their Democratic counterparts, but even more important, their actions had been carefully planned and deliberate. Tired of being powerless within the Whig party structure, the Conscience Whigs devised a solution to their problem: they would promote the establishment of a Northern antislavery third party which would be composed of disenchanting Democrats, Whigs, and Liberty men.

Through the initiative of the Conscience Whigs, such a party did develop, called the Free-Soil party. Although unsuccessful in presidential elections in 1848 and 1852, the Free-Soil party accomplished much. After the election of 1848 its members began to form coalitions with the party that would support the Free-Soil philosophy. Through these methods the Whig abolitionists triumphed. The result was the death of the Whig party and the birth of the Republican party. Political compromises were on the threshold of giving way to political polemics.

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