Two American Communities on the Eve of Civil War:
An Experiment in Form and Analysis

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This article has two goals:
* to analyze the social, economic, and political structures of two communities on the eve of the American Civil War
* to use forms of digital scholarship to present historical arguments of enhanced intricacy, depth, and connection
ANALYSIS: Narrative

The Election of 1860

The political conventions of 1860 did not create new ideas nor propose new solutions. That was not their purpose. Instead, they offered clarity by reducing indecision, by presenting clear-cut choices to voters. The candidates were now to talk as if their plans held out solutions to the conflict over slavery in the territories. This was not the time to introduce second thoughts or complexities, not the time to listen to opponents or those who claimed to mediate. Rather, this was the time to discover how deep and clear the differences ran.

Within just a few months in 1860 American politics had passed through a deep change. Before the conventions of that year, people had operated within what could be called "normal" politics. Normal politics in the United States had come to be based on fervent competition between two, and only two, parties. It depended on sharing power in Washington, guaranteed by the checks and balances of the various branches of government, by significant representation of the two parties in the House and the Senate, by the familiar ebb and flow of victors and losers in the various offices, by the ability of party leaders to enforce discipline and unity among their ranks, and by the willingness of men from the two parties to cooperate when they could. This system held the increasingly divergent regions of the United States together through decades of expansion, economic boom and bust, nativism and abolitionism.

The sharing of power in Washington depended on the replication of the two-party system throughout every other level of the political order. The men in Congress or even the White House had to be able to lay claim to a constituency who supported them and their actions or they could not expect to be in office long. Ideas, power, patronage, and money traveled up and down the political system, the high and the low giving legitimacy to one another.

This kind of normal politics proved remarkably robust. Even when the Whigs had died the system had healed itself, putting out shoots until the Republican Party proved itself the viable branch. But the fracturing of the summer of 1860 presented normal politics with challenges it could not overcome. That summer saw the birth of fractional politics. The old balances, deals, arrangements, and assumptions could not hold. The same men exercised power with the same language, the same interests, and same techniques they had long used. With four men in the field, however, all the calculations were thrown into disarray. Before, politicians had compromised with men from other places with interests different from their own. But in 1860 such expectations shattered. Some people began to use politics for other means. They spoke and acted to express grievance, to prove their righteousness, to galvanize their followers.

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The election of 1860 would not see politics as usual in Augusta County. The rise of the Republicans and the split of the Democrats confronted Augusta men of that party with a choice between one candidate,
Breckinridge, who stood for the brash Deep South's demands, and another, Douglas, who stood for vacillation and failed compromise. The Constitutional Union Party of Bell, attractive to many old Whigs and Unionists in Augusta, had no party machinery in place. Fractional politics held sway.

Augusta men, to be sure, put on a brave face. The Spectator agreed with other border-state papers that the disruption of 1860 might be just what Southern Unionists needed. With the Democrats committing suicide, perhaps the former Whigs of Virginia would finally have their chance, long overdue, within their own state. "For years and years seventy thousand gentlemen, comprising the pith and flower of the Virginia population, have been virtually disfranchised," the Spectator spat with undisguised class resentment. "Men of wealth, of learning, of influence, of the first order of ability in all things pertaining to public affairs, they have nevertheless had no more lot or part in the State government than if they had lived in China or Timbuctoo." But 1860 offered the chance of a lifetime. "A glorious hour is at hand for the Whigs of Virginia." And what was glorious for Virginia would be glorious for the Union. The great talents of Southern Union men, squandered for the last decade, would finally have a chance to save the entire country, steering it between the detested Republicans and the reviled Democrats. "A noble work, a great work, a task worthy, so unselfish, so unconquerable, so patriotic a band, is to be done."

Fortunately for the Unionists, neither Douglas nor Breckinridge had won the hearts of the men who felt bound to support them; Democratic party officials sighed and newspapers remained subdued. "The wires that once worked so smoothly and effectively are all crossed, tangled, intertwisted," the Spectator noted with satisfaction. Even the "wire workers," Democratic politicians accustomed to moving people like marionettes, "were out-of-sorts, at logger-heads, undecided, stunned, paralyzed. The rank and file of the party are in like hapless condition. The fissure widens hourly--the breach yawns welcome to the Whigs. On, on gallant gentlemen, the citadel is yours!" (Staunton Spectator, July 17, 1860, p. 2, c. 3)

Those who distrusted Douglas because he seemed to value the North over the South and slavery "should vote for Bell, who is as firm and true a friend of the 'peculiar institution' of the South as any man who was ever born upon its soil or breathed its atmosphere." Bell, from the patrician Whig point of view of Augusta, supported slavery for the right reasons: he believed that slavery possessed "the sacred sanction of the Bible--that it is religiously, morally, socially, and politically right." Bell also understood that slavery "is the fountain from which springs the vast stream of our national wealth and prosperity--that it is the Midas which converts all it touches to gold." A Southern man did not have to sell out on slavery to support the Union. (Staunton Spectator, July 17, 1860, p. 2, c. 1)

While the Constitutional Unionists spoke in quiet words of cooperation and optimism, the Democrats raged at one another. The Vindicator supported Stephen Douglas, but the Breckinridge men enjoyed the benefit of the patronage bestowed by President Buchanan. They would have no conciliation and compromise. The Breckinridge men treated Douglas like "fungi to be lopped off from the party organization."

Stephen Douglas came to Augusta in early September. All along the Virginia Central Railroad as it
crossed the Blue Ridge, "groups of men, women and children were assembled at each Depot to catch a
glimpse of the great statesman and patriot." "An immense concourse" of three thousand people greeted
Douglas as the train station in Staunton, the "largest audience we have ever seen congregated" in the
town. The Staunton Artillery escorted Douglas; the unit's captain, John Imboden, took the lead. William
H. Harman introduced Douglas, telling him that "To you, sir, all eyes are turned!" The people of the
Valley, of Virginia, and of the nation were counting on Douglas to "roll back the swelling tide of
sectionalism and fanaticism which threatens to engulf them," to preserve "this magnificent republican
edifice reared by our fathers."

Douglas, to repeated cheers, spoke modestly. He declared that "he was not courting votes for the
Presidency. If the people would put down the two sectional parties which are threatening the perpetuity
of the Union--rebuke fanaticism both North and South--he did not care who they made President."
Unlike the other men in the field, Douglas had seen all of America and knew what people had in their
hearts. He feared for the Union above all else. At the end of his speech, cheers echoing through
Staunton, Senator Douglas went by carriage to the home of M. G. Harman, where hundreds of people
came to visit and where Turner's Cornet Band serenaded the visitor. After a day of rest, Douglas headed
down the Valley to Harrisonburg to spread his warning and plea once more. (Republican Vindicator,
September 7, 1860, p. 2, c. 2)

The paper resented Yancey's ignorance of the Valley. He could not understand that Augusta could
remain unshaken both in its commitment to slavery and in its ties to the Union. "Mr. Yancey, when
down in Alabama, remote from the 'slave depopulated' border State of old Virginia (all bosh--we have
more slaves now than we had ten years ago) can write his disunion manifestoes." Yancey and the
Breckinridge Democrats could not wrap their minds around the subtlety of the situation of the Border.
Like the Republicans, they thought only in opposites, not in the shifting shades of gray that enveloped
the slaveholding Unionist South. (Republican Vindicator, October 5, 1860, p. 2, c. 3)

The Unionists mobilized Augusta. The parties formed clubs in every hamlet, fourteen of them by early
October, in Sherando, Churchville, Hamilton's School House, Middlebrook, and Mt. Solon, with
Greenville, Midway, Newport, and Craigsville soon joining in. (Spectator, October 9, 1860) They put
their tallest men on their highest horses to ride along the Valley Road. (Staunton Spectator, October 2,
1860) They rang bells at every opportunity. They advertised that seats would be provided for ladies at
the speeches. They sent children with "Bell and Everett grapes" for the editor. They brought in speakers
from other states and counties. They enlisted any local man who could screw up the nerve to stand in
front of his neighbors and speak. They printed the name of every man who came to their club meetings.

Though the fall rains had begun, and though the wind whistled down the hollows of the mountains, in
October a giant rally in support of the Union swept through Augusta. "To see long processions coming
into town simultaneously from every direction, . . . with their banners and bells, marching regularly and
'keeping step to the music of the Union,' was a spectacle worth witnessing, and one which animated
and rejoiced every patriotic heart." The people of Augusta came to Staunton in "wagons, six-horse,
four-horse and two-horse, they came in carriages, they came in buggies and on horse-back--they
came by hundreds and fifties, they came till the town was filled with the mighty host." In Staunton, hundreds lined the wet wooden sidewalks while watching "the waving of handkerchiefs from the windows of the houses by the fair hands of patriotic, Union-loving ladies." Observers could take away only one lesson from such an outpouring: "The great popular heart of Augusta throbs anxiously for the preservation of the Union, and is willing to spill the last drop of its blood in its defence." (Staunton Spectator, October 23, 1860, p. 2)

Even as the Unionists worked to get out the vote for Bell and Everett, they tried to soften the blow of what they increasingly feared would come: the election of Lincoln and the Republicans in the North. Be reasonable, they told their fellow Southerners: "Even though Lincoln should be elected, and should be disposed to commit some aggression upon the rights of the South, he could not do it. The Supreme Court is against the theories of his party. The Senate is against them and the Congress will be against them." All the secessionist warnings were nonsense--and, indeed, posed a greater threat than Lincoln himself did. "To break up the Government under these circumstances, simply because Lincoln should be elected, would be adding madness to treason." In fact, "the danger is in the Cotton States, and not in the North. The spirit of prohibition as represented by Lincoln will be impotent for mischief, but the spirit of disunion, as represented by Yancey and other extremists of the South may be potential for indescribable evils." (Staunton Spectator, October 23, 1860, p. 2, c. 4)

People worried privately as well as in public. "As to the election our prospects are gloomy enough," Lucas Thompson wrote John McCue on November 1. "Almost every person I see has despaired of defeating the Black Republican Lincoln." Thompson proclaimed himself more optimistic, though, for "I am still hopeful of the election of Bell & Everitt or some one of the antirepublican tickets, and if the worst comes and Lincoln is elected their will be neither Secession or disunion." Secession, so often threatened, could not happen because "such a consequence would be of a piece with the Madness & folly of committing suicide for fear of dying." Wait for a truly threatening act, "which I verily believe will not be committed by Lincoln." Hold "to our glorious union as long as possible consistently with honor safety & liberty, for in disunion I can foresee woes innumerable, no remedy for our grievances but rather as aggravation of them all." Disunion would be "the greatest calamity that could befall not only the U S but the cause of free government throughout the world. We shall have a grand whig rally here tomorrow." (Lucas P. Thompson to John H. McCue, November 1, 1860)

And indeed on November 2, the Union men of Augusta traveled through miserable mud and rain to the armory building in Staunton. "Though the weather was so unfavorable that we could not expect persons to leave their homes, yet they came by hundreds from all directions," exulted the Spectator. As before, they came in carriages, in wagons and on horseback--"they came with banners and bells, and made the welkin ring with loud shouts for Bell and Everett. They came to testify their deep devotion to the Union." A long procession, accompanied by Turner's Cornet Band in a wagon drawn by six fine gray horses and bearing banners, "looked like an army of Union-loving men, and would have struck terror to the heart of the bravest disunionist." The banners, many of them bearing the names of their communities, read: "Constitution, Union, and Enforcement of the Laws!" "The Union Bell-Ringers!" and "In Union There is Strength!" One banner, bearing a female touch--"a beautiful wreath encircling
the word 'UNION,' which was painted in the national colors--red, white and blue"--proclaimed that "The Belles Are for Union to a Man!" The parade marched "through the principal streets of the town, in all of which they were greeted with cheers from the men and the waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies." The young women at the Wesleyan Female Institute displayed a banner proclaiming their fidelity to the Union. At the armory "a number of ladies graced the meeting with their presence, and seemed to enjoy the speeches as intensely as the gentlemen."

State Senator Alexander H. H. Stuart, a long-time leader of the Whigs, Americans, and Unionists, spoke for an hour and thirty five minutes. "He delivered an able, clear, and eloquent address, exhibiting a great deal of accurate information upon all the questions discussed. He gave a history of the rise and progress of the slavery agitation between the North and South so clearly and succinctly that no man could fail to understand it." Stuart offered a "withering rebuke of those unworthy sons" of Virginia who would allow her to be "dragged into a common destiny with the disunion States."

Even the Democrats' Vindicator had to admit that the Union rally seemed a great success. "Bells and flags (expense being not a consideration) tossed and dingled, evidencing at least energy was not wanting in the contest." (Republican Vindicator, Nov. 2, 1860; not summarized) The Spectator, glowing with pride, had no doubt that "Those who traveled many miles through the mud and rain were more than compensated for all their toil and trouble." The moral seemed clear: "If the destiny of this country and the fate of the Union were in the control of Augusta, the watchman on the tower of Liberty might confidently exclaim: 'All is well--All is well--the country is safe!'" (Staunton Spectator, Nov. 6, 1860, not summarized)

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While the nation went through the agonies and excitements of the building election, slavery continued to do its work in Augusta. Mixed in with the lengthy and impassioned editorials on politics and constitutionalism were other dramas.

In one of its defenses of slavery during the political crisis, the Spectator bragged on the ability of hard-working slaves to earn extra money--often hundreds of dollars a year--by working overtime. Such payments, the paper proudly noted, are "practiced more or less all over the State. We know it is not uncommon in this region." Indeed, such slaves "like millions in the Southern States, are not only plentifully provided for in every way, but they are saving money to use as they may find best in coming years--and withal they seem as happy as lords." (Staunton Spectator, January 17, 1860, p. 2, c. 2) This exaggerated and romanticized scene held an element of truth: slaveowners were indeed turning toward hiring out and other kinds of payment to slaves as the 1860s began, adapting slavery to changing constraints and opportunities.

At least one Augusta slaveowner thought this process had gone much too far. "Observer" wrote an open letter to Augusta's commonwealth attorneys to protest. "Nothing is more common than to hear our
citizens declaim against the abolitionists. If a stranger comes into our midst who is even suspected of entertaining or inculcating abolition sentiments, the whole community is at once and justly in an uproar." Ironically, "we have among our own people two classes of persons who do more harm to our slave population than all the abolitionists of the North combined." The threat came from "those who stand as nominal masters for negroes, who are really free, and who are permitted to hire themselves out, and go at large at pleasure." Just as dangerous were those whites who, in the guise of friendship to black people, endangered slavery in Augusta by permitting "their slaves to live in independent houses from their owners, to keep house, work for themselves and pay to their owners a portion of their earnings," hiring them out. The real threat to Augusta slavery, in other words, lay among Augusta slaveowners grown lax and comfortable with adaptations of the institution. "Observer" insisted that the "proper authorities," including the grand jury, search out these violations of good order and put an end to the erosion of slavery in Augusta County. (Staunton Spectator, August 7, 1860, p. 2, c. 5)

Slaveholders could turn virtually any episode into evidence of their beneficence. In one especially unlikely train of logic, the Spectator drew a comforting moral from the brutal murder of a slave in another county: "On the morning of the 4th of July last, at 8 o'clock, one of the hottest days of the past Summer, Hudson stripped the woman, naked as she came into the world, tied her to a persimmon tree, and whipped her for three consecutive hours, with occasional intermissions of a few minutes, until he had worn out to stump fifty-two switches, and until the bark of the body of the tree was rubbed smooth and greasy by the attrition of the body of the victim. The ground around the tree for seven or eight feet, though it had been freshly plowed, was trodden hard." Neighbors had heard both the switch and the screams as the master beat his slave to death, but the fellow whites had done nothing. "The poor creature was buried the same afternoon only some ten inches beneath the ground, in a rough box, without any shroud." The jury found Hudson guilty of murder and sentenced him to eighteen years, the maximum sentence and one he was not likely to live out since he was 68 years old.

Then came the moral, as the judge delivered a rebuke biblical in its phrasing and weight: "You have thus committed a great crime against both human and divine law. You have outraged the feelings of the community among whom you lived." The judge named an additional crime Hudson had committed against the white community of the South: "You have enabled their enemies to fan the flame of fanaticism, by charging against them the enormity and cruelty of your hard and unfeeling heart, although that community cordially loathe and condemn cruelty and oppression towards black or white." To the Spectator, the moral seemed clear: "it is one of those cases which thoroughly vindicate the Southern character against the aspersions cast upon us by our enemies at the North. It develops what is as true of us as of any other people on the civilized globe, that we utterly detest and abhor cruelty and barbarity, whether to whites or blacks." They ignored the fact that their legal order tolerated virtually any barbarity by a slaveholder that did not end in death.

Augusta whites, under assault for their inhumanity, eagerly read of "Departure of Emancipated Negroes--Don't Want to Leave." The article told of "a crowd of not less than one thousand negroes assembled on the basin to take leave of the negroes" belonging to an estate in Lynchburg that had freed them. "The whole number set free was forty-four men women and children, but only thirty-seven left,
the balance preferring to remain in servitude in Old Virginia rather than enjoy their freedom elsewhere."
Another way to put this, of course, was that former slaves were being driven away from their families
and loved ones and that, despite their loss, only seven stayed. But the article dwelt on what it wanted to
emphasize: "when the boats started from their wharves, the freed negroes struck up 'Carry me back to
Old Virginny,' which was joined in by one and all, and in a tone which indicated plainly that if left to
their own free will, they would gladly spend the remainder of their days in servitude in the home of their
birth."

The sectional crisis encouraged Virginia leaders to do what they had done in earlier periods of crisis:
crack down on free black people, driving them from the state through legal means. While most whites
seemed to have no problem with such a strategy, one Augusta man pleaded for sympathy for some black
people. He agreed with his white neighbors that the majority of free blacks were "degenerated, degraded
creatures, without the least knowledge of virtue or the least awakening of morality." Yet those neighbors
would have to admit that "there are some who deserve the approbation and encouragement of every
friend of civilization." In fact, he would go so far as to say that some of the free blacks of Augusta "are
far better in their personal character and mode of life than the majority of the lower white class, and
whom to drive from friends that they love and a country to which they are attached, would be in
opposition to every feeling of our better nature." This white Augusta man testified that "within the
confines of our own county--aye, within my own immediate neighborhood--there are free negroes,
who, by their industrious and upright life, have amassed considerable money, and have gained the
applause of every good and honest man."

To exile these good free blacks "from their native State," driving them into the North, "would be like
driving them into a city of the plague or a den of robbers. They would be morally as well as pecuniarily
ruined. The state of inferiority in which they are held by our better citizens, and the honorable and
honest manner in which they are dealt with, is the secret of their success amongst us. But send them to a
free State, and they have no such bulwark to protect them. They are placed upon an equality with the
highest, which renders them haughty and indolent." In the kind of logic so prevalent in these years, frank
subjugation by the white South was considered "honorable and honest" while even the promise of
equality became a curse. "How many a disconsolate wail has come back to us from that land of
freedom(?)!" (Republican Vindicator, February 3, 1860, p. 1, c. 7)

While some people worried over such things, others spun dreams of moonlight and dogwoods. Alansa
Rounds moved to Augusta from New York in 1859, coming down at the encouragement of her uncle,
Jedediah Hotchkiss, the headmaster of Loch Willow Academy in Churchville, where the young Alansa
would teach. She fell in love with Augusta and the large and exciting social circle surrounding the
academy. Alansa loved to ramble in the countryside, to visit the beautiful country homes of bishops and
judges, to get to know the servants at these estates, and to meet young men and women of her age.

In the fall of 1860, Alansa traveled to Augusta's Stribling Springs, where she participated in a
tournament staged in emulation of a fabled Middle Ages. "Soul stirring band music echoed and
re-echoed through forest and from rocky mountain side," she recalled. "The knights in gay and varied

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costume mounted on their restless steeds looked handsome and 'eager for the fray'." The herald "sat his fine charger like a commanding general, as he announced the names of the riders, while one by one, each dashed forward and essayed to cast his spear through the coveted ring in the arch over his head. How hearty and contagious the cheering when the Herald announced the name of the successful knight who had won the honor of dancing with the 'Queen of Love and Beauty' at the coming Ball!" Alansa remembered how she looked: "That night I wore my black and green silk; the fashionable flowing sleeves worn with embroidered lace undersleeves having several strips of pink ribbon run through the meshes lengthwise. At my neck and in my hair were bows of the same becoming color." When the dance started at nine, the procession began: "pretty young girls beautifully gowned, brilliant lights, and gay knights in costume; the Queen in crown and diamonds; the Maids of Honor none the less lovely." The herald, Franklin F. Sterrett, a friend of her uncle's, invited Alansa to stroll with him along the piazza decorated with Chinese lanterns. "I verily believe we were the happiest couple at that Tournament Ball!"

As the fall began to turn to winter in 1860, Alansa and her friends put on charades and tableaux at Loch Willow. The third tableau one evening was "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Uncle Tom "was personated by the Sterrett's oldest slave, grey headed Uncle Kit Matthews, and Nannie Gooch made the loveliest 'Eva'." Nannie Gooch was the nine year-old daughter of H. M. Gooch, who owned 17 slaves. Alansa greatly enjoyed a cake walk and a "darkey wedding" she saw in Augusta in that winter. "Both were comical, mirthful and hilarious affairs to black and white alike. The refreshments proved 'tip top' and tony and lavishly prepared by these slaves and by them also dispensed to those 'down at the house' as well as all at the 'quarters.'"

Although Alansa Rounds became engaged to Franklin Sterrett in the winter, "fun and social recreations were fast being relegated to the background and fiery political speeches took their places." North and South "were daily growing more and more embittered and determined."

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The "Wide-Awakes" organized across the North for the 1860 election. A hundred Franklin men joined the local unit and marched at every opportunity. Each Wide-Awake wore a black glazed cap and cape and carried "a neat, convenient torch--a swinging lamp, on a pole about six feet long." (Franklin Repository and Transcript, September 5, 1860, p. 5, c. 3) The Chambersburg men "erected a nice pole, over an hundred feet high" in front of the Transcript's office. "From the top of the pole floats a small streamer composed of red, white and blue ribbons. About twelve feet from the top there is a pretty blue Streamer with the names of our candidates--LINCOLN, HAMLIN, CURTIN,--thereon, in white letters. Some twelve feet lower down is suspended a handsome national flag." (Franklin Repository and Transcript, September 12, 1860, p. 4, c. 1)

The Democrats, of course, made fun of the Wide Awakes. "Many of them, if we may judge from appearance, will not be able to vote unless they begin at 19," the Spirit laughed. "The Wide Awakes about here consist principally of capes, a small cap, a broom handle with a lamp tied to one, and a
youthful aspirant to citizenship at the other. They spend their evenings in drilling, and learning to carry their torches perpendicular, when their bodies ought to be horizontal." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit (Sept 9, 05, p. 2)) Young Republicans tossed such criticisms aside. Representative Edward McPherson's nephew wrote his uncle that "I have often heard that politics is a very dangerous subject for a 'Young American' to meddle with. If that be true, I am afraid I am pretty far gone. But lest it might lead to evil, I will close this subject by saying 'Hurrah for Lincoln.'" (John B. McPherson to Edward McPherson, Nov 9, 1860)

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As the appeal of the Wide Awakes became clearer, the Democrats stepped up their attacks. The Spirit portrayed the Wide Awakes as a secret society and charged them with disguised abolitionism. The paper imagined the order's initiation ceremony:

Q. Do you believe in a supreme political being?

A. I do; the almighty negro.

Q. What are the chief objects of the Wide Awake Society?

A. To disturb Democratic meetings, and to furnish conductors for the underground railroad.

Q. What is your opinion of the great questions of the day?

A. I believe that Abraham Lincoln was born; that he built a flat-boat, and split three million rails.

Q. If you are admitted a member of this society, do you promise to love the nigger, to cherish him as you would a brother, and cleave unto him through evil as well as good report, and hate the Democrats . . . ?

A. This I solemnly promise to perform, so help me Abraham. The candidate is then invested with cap and cape, somebody gives him a slap on the side of the head, and tells him to be Wide Awake." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, Oct 24, p. 2)

Despite such contemptuous portrayals of their enemies, the Democrats were in trouble. Their meetings, which should have been festive affairs like those of the Republicans, were instead contentious fights over the most fundamental questions: who is our candidate and what does he stand for? One meeting called for the support of Breckinridge; another for Douglas. Both sides spent more time and vitriol denouncing one another than attacking the Republicans.
The Democratic party in Franklin—and throughout Pennsylvania and the North—fell apart in the months between the aborted conventions in June and the election in November. Without the glue of party unity, every kind of self-interest, grudge, and division surfaced while their Republican opponents heckled from the sidelines. “The truth of the matter is simply this—the bone and sinew of the Democratic party are used by their leaders to vote but not think and act for themselves; they use them as the nigger-drivers of the South use their Slaves—they must come when they are called and go when they are hidden. It is to this deep depth of degradation and humiliation that the great Democratic Party has at last fallen.” (Franklin Repository and Transcript, September 26, 1860, p. 4, c. 4) The Republicans could barely contain their excitement.

The Spirit, torn between the competing loyalties of its two editors throughout the summer, finally did the unimaginable: the paper publicly changed its allegiance only a month before the election. It renounced Douglas as a maverick from party discipline and adopted Breckinridge as its candidate. Everything turned around party loyalty and solidarity, even if that meant abandoning the candidate the paper itself had championed for months in favor of a candidate for which local Democrats had little affection or trust.

So the Spirit fell into line and supported Breckinridge, but the paper offered scarcely a word about the candidate or what he stood for. The editors' hearts clearly lay with any strategy that would avoid conflict between North and South. From their perspective, they were swallowing their pride and even their principles for a higher purpose. The Democratic paper told the story this way. "For the last five years the air of the North has been surcharged with envenomed assaults upon the South. Every insulting epithet that malignant ingenuity could invent, has been applied to the Southern people." Everyone knew the insults, for they "are seen in every Republican newspaper and they are heard whenever a Republican orator opens his mouth. They can be uttered but for one object, and that object must be to exasperate the South to the point of withdrawing from the Union." The attacks on the South and slavery could only be directed toward the breakup of the Union because the Republicans "know very well that they can never set one single bondman free by all their furious declamation against slavery. They know that fierce denunciation will never induce the people of the Southern States to abolish slavery. They know that Congress cannot abolish it. They know that the Constitution of the United States guarantees the Southern people the peaceable possession of their slaves, and they know that the South will never surrender her constitutional rights."

The Republicans were not only disunionists, but, unlike their Southern counterparts, dishonest disunionists. "They do not preach disunion openly, but they employ every means at their command to drive out the South and throw upon that section the odium of dissolving the Union. They want the damming work done, but they also want to escape the responsibility of doing it." While "the impartial historian" will agree that the secessionist lighted "the funeral pile of the Union" he would also record that it was the Republicans "that built it and placed the blazing torch in his hand." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, September 12, 1860, p. 4, c.1)

The Republicans did in fact call for Northerners to emulate Southern single-mindedness and unity. "We
should practice a little more after the example of our Southern brethren," the Transcript counselled. "The people should study politics a little closer, and elect men to the Presidency and to seats in Congress who would die rather than wantonly trade off the cherished interests of their constituents." Some rudimentary mathematics showed that the North did not need to knuckle under to the South any longer. "The Free States are entitled to 183 votes in the Electoral College, while the Southern States have but 120. To elect a President by the people, 152 votes are necessary, so that the Free States can elect, and have 31 votes over." The Republicans held it "the duty of the Free States to exert their influence in the Government. Franklin Repository and Transcript, August 8, 1860, p. 4, c. 3)

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With discussions of slavery, justice, and American ideals filling its newspapers in the spring and summer of 1860, both the Democrats and the Republicans of Franklin County used black people for their own partisan purposes. Despite the high-flying rhetoric about justice, neither party displayed any sympathy toward their black neighbors.

Such callousness had a long pedigree among the Democrats. They had long exhibited Northern blacks as examples of what would happen if abolitionists, and now the Republicans, had their way. The Democrats went out of their way to make this point as the election loomed. "We believe it is the custom in Maryland, at Easter time, to allow the negroes the largest liberty," the Valley Spirit noted, when it described a group of black musicians who came into Chambersburg to play a concert. Though the musicians were almost certainly free people, the newspaper talked as if they were enslaved. And though the musicians almost certainly came into Pennsylvania to earn money before a new audience and, as the paper noted, enjoy themselves "among their 'free brethren,' on this side of the line," the paper talked as if they came to aid the proslavery cause. "This Band had the audacity, on this occasion, to come into a free State as if for no other purpose than to show the sympathizers of John Brown, deceased, that their pikes and Sharpe's Rifles were not required to improve their condition, and that all the Republican philanthropy expended on the slave could be more appropriately used in bettering the condition of the free negro in the North." The Spirit felt free to put words in the mouths of these black musicians, who supposedly "returned home to 'bondage,' in the evening train, very well convinced, we have no doubt, that the worst form of Slavery that can possibly exist may be found among the negroes of Pennsylvania." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, April 11, 1860 p. 5 c.2 )

The black people of Franklin clearly had different ideas about slavery and freedom than their white neighbors imagined. As the political heat turned up in August of 1860 black Franklin residents displayed their political allegiances in a quite public way. "It is a custom among the colored folks to celebrate the first of August in commemoration of the emancipation of the Slaves in the British West India Islands," the Spirit blandly noted. Such a demonstration showed a political awareness among black people that Franklin whites never acknowledged, a global perspective on slavery and freedom that stretched far beyond the knowledge of most whites. The celebration brought together black people from towns across Franklin, staging "a grand pic-nic, military parade, and the other fixens of a jollification in such cases made and provided."
The black celebration of abolition might have gone ignored by the Democratic paper—as it had in the past—had the Spirit not seen an aid to its own political purpose in the gathering. The Democrats sought to associate the Republicans with the "abolition celebration." They charged that the Transcript editors displayed their true loyalties "by hoisting a flag, or rather a rag, tied on a rail, from one of its port-holes, on which is the picture of a Crow with the name of Abe Lincoln underneath. It was a very fit occasion for the Transcript to show its colors and proclaim its abolition principles." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, August 8, 1860, p. 4, c. 3)

Perhaps the Transcript had indeed put out a flag for the black marchers—though fact, exaggeration, and imagination often blurred on such occasions—but if they had it would have gone against the grain of everything else they said and did. The Transcript responded to the Spirit's charges of Republican pandering to black voters by pointing out that black people could not vote in Pennsylvania because the Democrats had stripped them of the vote. "The sap-heads are too dumb to know that a few years since negroes had the right to vote in Pennsylvania; that they exercised the right, and that they voted the Locofoco ticket. We remember having seen, upon more than one occasion, in this county, certain Locofoco township politicians leading up their 'culled brethren' to the polls and voting them for Jackson, for Van Buren and, generally having them to go 'the whole hog' for the D-e-m-o-c-r-a-c-y." In the eyes of the Republicans, black voters, like immigrant voters, were tools of the Democrats. The Republicans expressed no regret at black disfranchisement. The black people of Franklin were useful in the election of 1860 only as scapegoats and the butt of jokes.

As election day approached, the Democrats and the Republicans sought to mobilize every man in Franklin County. As the summer turned into fall, all the communities within the county staged rallies for one party or the other. Wide Awakes marched and Democrats erected poles to compete with their rivals. Leading speakers traveled to school houses and church to conduct meetings of three, four, or five hours.

Franklin County could claim a central figure in the election of 1860 in their state: Alexander K. McClure. Not only did McClure serve as state senator and own the Chambersburg Repository and Transcript, but he stood as the head of the Republican State Committee during the upcoming election. That job required a young man with great energy, quick political instincts, and boundless ambition, all of which McClure had displayed throughout his adult life. This man, only in his early thirties, occupied a heady job, overseeing a powerful state machine that would play a key role in electing Abraham Lincoln president.

The work grew to a feverish pitch in Franklin. "The time for argument is passed and now comes the time for action," admonished the Transcript. "Attend the polls all day and be vigilant. See that no voter is deceived or imposed upon by Spurious Tickets." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, October 10, 1860, p. 4) Both parties charged the other with putting out ballots to trick less literate voters: tickets bearing the color or the symbol of the other party, distributing ballots that left off names of opposing candidates, or putting stickers over some names. "Watch them," the parties warned their faithful members, "for they are driven to the wall and will stoop to any thing, however humiliating and degrading." (Chambersburg Valley Spirit, November 7, 1860, p. 1)
On election day, Tuesday, November 6, the Staunton Spectator published its last issue before the balloting. "This day, which has been looked to for some months with such deep anxiety by all patriots, has now arrived," the Spectator solemnly noted. "This day is pregnant with the fate of our country for weal or for woe." (Staunton Spectator, November 6, 1860, p. 2)

More than three quarters of the eligible voters of Augusta County went to the polling places in their neighborhoods. The parties made sure that every man inclined to vote for their candidate did so, whether that mean giving him a ride in a buggy or stopping by his farm. The polling places, usually a store, church, or school, gathered a few election officials behind a book in which they recorded the votes made by the men who came before them. Curious neighbors stood about. Most men proudly voted a straight ticket unless they held a personal grudge against a candidate. They had seen their party's ticket published in the newspaper every day for weeks, they had heard the speeches. Even if they had not been engaged in all the politicking going on around them, voters could have their memory refreshed by the party men who dispensed drinks and slaps on the back.

Men traveled to Augusta's twenty polling places over the course of the day. More than a thousand men, about a fourth of those in the county, voted in Staunton. The final tally surprised no one. The Unionist John Bell handily defeated the moderate Democrat Stephen Douglas, while John C. Breckinridge was only an afterthought. Bell received 2,553 votes, Douglas 1,094, and Breckinridge 218. More than three hundred men voted in the presidential election of 1860 who had not voted in the gubernatorial election eighteen months earlier. The new voters, perhaps stirred by the momentous issues facing the country or perhaps pushed by energetic party men who would let no voter rest in November 1860, went disproportionately to the Unionists.

The convincing overall victory by Bell concealed many intricacies within Augusta. High Breckinridge precincts hugged the broad middle plain of the county and the eastern border. High Douglas precincts guarded the northern flat region of the county above Staunton. High Bell precincts formed a ring along the westernmost boundary of the county, touching the Allegheny Mountains. The precincts with the highest proportion of slaveholders and the richest farms tended to vote in higher numbers for Breckinridge while Bell predominated in poorer districts, places that had the smallest margin for error. The wealthy Breckinridge precincts may have thought themselves able to withstand the dangers of political unrest while the Bell precincts sought stability above all else.

All in all, very few Augusta or Virginia voters changed parties in 1860. The strongest Whig districts of 1859 remained the strongest Whig districts in 1860; the strongest Democratic districts remained the strongest Democratic districts. Men refused to change their loyalties despite the threatening chaos. They had read the editorials and listened to the speeches; they had talked with their neighbors, wives, and in-laws. They had calculated personal economic gains and losses that might follow the election of one man or another. They noted which candidate seemed most in line with their own religious beliefs.
After all the consideration was done, however, most men would not abandon their party even for a remarkable election such as that of 1860. They might become disgusted by in-fighting and lethargy within their own party, but to change the allegiances of a lifetime and vote for another party altogether was quite rare, even in the strange days of 1860.

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Pennsylvania Republican Senator Simon Cameron, supremely confident in the summer of 1860, had just one sweet anxiety as he wrote Abraham Lincoln of the prospects for the coming election. "I only regret that our opponents are not united." Cameron wanted the satisfaction of defeating "their great man Douglas with all their forces concentrated." As it was, however, Douglas's "friends and those of Breckinridge are now more bitter against each other then they are against us and I fear that often the elections they will try to ascribe their defeat & our victory solely to their divisions." After all the years of watching the Democrats run the country and the state, Cameron longed for a total victory. The best way to keep their defeated foes from whining afterwards was to make Lincoln's "majority a very large one." Simon Cameron wanted to make the victory so overwhelming that it would be clear that he and his man could have defeated even the most unified Democracy. (Simon Cameron to Abraham Lincoln, Aug. 1, 1860)

More than eight of ten eligible voters came to the polls distributed across the county. The fears of the Valley Spirit came to pass: about 150 Democrats abandoned the party. Furthermore, about a hundred men who had not voted Republican in October decided to join in the triumph in November. Some may have fled from the Democrats, some may have come of age, or some may been especially moved by Abraham Lincoln to vote even though they had not voted before. All in all, 56 percent of Franklin men voted for the Republican presidential candidate. The turnout, the numbers, and the winner in Franklin typified the entire North.

Party strategists might have noticed some interesting patterns as they looked over the district-by-district voting returns. The Republicans did best in the southernmost districts of Franklin, the districts where most of the black population lived. Though the black men themselves could not vote, proximity to African Americans seemed to encourage white men to vote for the party that would halt slavery's expansion. Republicans did well, too, in the towns and richer farming areas, perhaps because they liked the emphasis of the party on economic development. And it appeared that the Germans, perhaps influenced by the visit of Carl Schurz, lined up behind the new party despite the nativism of some of its founders. Finally, the Wide Awakes mobilized young men in a way the Democrats had not. In an election decided by hundreds of votes, a marginal victory in each of these groups would have given the Republicans a crucial edge.

The crucial event of the election of 1860, however, did not occur in Franklin, in Pennsylvania, or even in the North. It had taken place the summer before in Charleston, South Carolina, when the Democrats had destroyed themselves. When the Democrats could not decide on a presidential candidate who could
unite the North and the South they handed the election to the Republicans, a young party, a party assembled from diverse and even divergent materials.

Franklin Republicans and their stalwart paper, McClure's Transcript, gloried in the triumph. "The battle has been fought and the victory won! The spirit of the people rose with the fierceness of the contest!" The Republicans saw the conflict in epic terms: "No struggle, since the formation of our Government, was fraught with such important principles!" The Franklin Republicans saw only good things flowing from their victory. "The future, therefore, looks bright and cheerful. Lincoln's administration will prove the harbinger of better things to come." (Franklin Repository and Transcript, November 14, 1860)

Across the North, as in Franklin County, more than eight out of ten men went to the polls on November 6. Abraham Lincoln won by appealing to men who had been neither Republicans nor Democrats before 1860. Three fourths of those new Republicans were, like Lincoln himself, former Whigs. The rest were split about evenly between men who had been Democrats and those who had been Free Soilers. Lincoln won in part because he made inroads into the Border North, in southern Illinois, southern Indiana, and southern Ohio, where he pulled in 30 to 45 percent of the vote. Lincoln proved especially attractive to men under the age of 25. Those young voters, eligible to cast a ballot for the first time in 1860, found the Republicans tailor-made for them. The Wide Awakes drew these young men to the vigorous new party that promised opportunity in a West filled with white men. (Fogel, 382-6)

Pennsylvania proved key to Lincoln's election. The fusion between Know Nothings and Whigs, nativists and immigrants, old Free Soilers and old Democrats, so delicate at the beginning, could hardly have worked better. More men from Pennsylvania switched to the Republicans than in any other state: over 120,000 of them, 24 percent of the electorate, voted for the party in 1860 though they had not in 1856. Only 12 Pennsylvania counties, 35 fewer than in 1856, went to the Democrats. Such abrupt swings had been almost unheard of in the United States during the fiercely bipartisan political wars over the preceding three decades. It was a product of Pennsylvania's unique mixture of Protestant Germans and nativists, of fervent antislavery men in the northern counties and conservative Union men in the southern counties, of dysfunctional Democrats and shrewd Republicans.

The Republican victory was both impressive and deceptive. On the impressive side, the party won half a million more votes than four years earlier; Lincoln carried every northern state except New Jersey, which he split with Stephen Douglas; he gathered 180 electoral votes, 27 more than necessary to take the election; he would have won in the electoral college even if all his opponents had combined their votes. The Republicans, though, knew the fragility of this stirring victory: if one half of 1 percent of Northern voters in crucial places had voted differently, the election would have been thrown into the House of Representatives, where the Republicans were a minority. Abraham Lincoln, who won less than 40 percent of the popular vote in the country as a whole, would not have been president. (Fogel, 382)

Decades later, Alexander McClure would reflect in his memoirs on the meaning of this election. "A decided political revolution was generally expected in 1860, but none then dreamed that it would mean
anything more than merely halting the extension of the slave power, and liberalizing the policy of the government in the support of free industries against the slave labor of the South," he thought. "Had it been generally believed in 1860 that the election of Lincoln would bring the bloodiest civil war of modern times, and the sudden and complete overthrow of slavery at the point of the bayonet, it is doubtful whether the popular vote of the country would have invited such an appalling entertainment." Voters on both sides profoundly misunderstood and underestimated the other. "The North believed that the South was more bombastic than earnest in the threat of provoking civil war for the protection of slavery, and the South believed that the Northern people were mere money-getters, ready to yield anything rather than accept fratricidal conflict."[385-6]

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The Secession Crisis

The spokesmen for secession had somehow gained a foothold in the birthplace of Washington and Jefferson. In a blistering editorial reprinted far beyond Augusta and Virginia, S. M. Yost of the Vindicator demanded to know "Where Are Our Statesmen?" "In these dark hours of our national existence, when political throes are shaking the fundamental law of the country . . . where is the statesman of Virginia to come forward and open up some way of deliverance? Echo answers, where?" In a biting attack on his own profession, Yost charged that the Virginia press was behaving "with a puerility that is really disgusting." Weak-minded and undistinguished editors had "succeeded, by the aid of a few store-box and pot-house politicians, in raising a storm that utterly bewilders them, and which leaves them without compass or rudder to guide the vessel they have launched. The criminal ignorance or imbecility of the men who have brought about this fearful state of affairs can only properly be atoned for upon the gallows." (Republican Vindicator, November 23, 1860, p. 2, c. 4) Rather than swinging from a rope, however, the advocates of secession seemed to be gaining influence.

Everyone in the nation waited to see what South Carolina and her neighbors would do. The Unionists of Augusta waited along with everyone else. "I am glad you are proceeding with deliberation," Alex Rives wrote his friend Alexander H. H. Stuart, Augusta's state senator and long-time Unionist. "Great unquiet and apprehension, pervades the Public here. A vague fear distresses us, lest our people should be maddened by occurrences at the South and dragged after the seceding states. I am clear for keeping the State out of that vortex."

Men would say in private what they would not say in public. John Imboden, a lawyer, court clerk, militia leader, and promoter of the railroad coupler invented in Staunton, wrote to his friend John McCue, a prominent and prosperous attorney from Augusta living in the next county to the east. Both men were in their late thirties and both were substantial slaveholders. Imboden and McCue had been Whigs but now spoke in distinctly non-Unionist language. "That the entire South will speedily have to leave the Confederacy under the present Constitution I entertain no doubt whatever," Imboden acknowledged, "but I dont think S. C. has put the issue upon a defensible ground--the mere election of
a President under the Forms of law &c. Hence you have a divided South." Behind every one of these statements lay a whole set of assumptions, of imagined futures. Imboden loved the Union, but he wanted South Carolina to secede; he wanted South Carolina to secede, but he wanted it to wait to secede. This man who had, less than two weeks earlier, professed his love for the Union in the mass meeting in Staunton was already picturing Virginia out of the Union.

John Imboden--elected by the men, rich and poor, in his militia--let himself acknowledge what leading men in Augusta never said in public: slaveholders and non-slaveholders had different interests and different understandings of their interests. "You can't make the great mass of the people--especially the non slaveholders understand the political philosophy of our government, and the nice principles on which the Secessionists are now attempting to act," Imboden confided to his well-educated and well-to-do friend. "And there is great danger of creating a party with sympathies for the incoming administration, here in our midst." The Republicans, Imboden warned, might well establish a foothold in Augusta. Politics had already shifted beneath the feet of the South and no one could say how it might shift again. "The non slaveholder will fight for his section as long as the slaveholder if you can convince him that his political rights are really threatened, as a citizen. But he is not willing to leave his family & offer his life in a struggle which he believes is a mere contest between politicians in the spoils of office--and while he believes that the successful party ought to have the opportunity to develop its policy." As a result of this calculation, Imboden declared himself "opposed to immediate action. I am for preparation now- defence when the equality of my State is actually denied."

Imboden fantasized about a conversation with Abraham Lincoln. "I would say to Lincoln 'You have been elected by the vote of only about one third of the people of the U. States. Your party is revolutionary in its organization, tendencies & aims. No man of your party ought to fill any national office if it can be prevented. We--the conservative 2/3rds of the American people still control the Senate & H. of Reps. of the U. States. We will use our power in those bodies to protect ourselves.'" Imboden thought the motives of Lincoln and the Republicans as clear as could be: "the subjugation of 15 States." Because that intent was obvious, "We therefore declare war upon you & your party as you have declared war upon us. You shall have no tools of yours in office to aid you in your unholy work."

The diseased North could not possibly serve God's purposes. "There, the great substratum of society is corrupt and polluted, sending forth a stream of infidelity, heresy and blasphemy unparalleled in the history of the world." Because the North had no "permanent rule of moral action" that region was "liable to break out in the assertion of some monstrous doctrine of religious and political fanaticism, such as Millerism, Foreurism, Woman's Rightism, &c." And if the North once again demonstrated its undeniable tendency to fragment into these strange heresies, "the respect and confidence of an inferior people could not be commanded." (Republican Vindicator, December 14, 1860, p. 2, c. 3)

The Democrats, of course, saw different meanings in Lincoln's election. "It is the first time in the history of the country that its national head has been elected by a purely sectional vote. What the result of this sectional triumph will be it is not difficult to conjecture. Fifteen States are without a President--they took no part in his election, and refuse their consent to come under an administration founded upon a
sentiment hostile to their social system." The heedless insistence of the Republicans in electing a man adamantly opposed by almost half the states seemed likely to lead to fragmentation of the entire Union. After the fifteen Southern states left, "it will then have to be determined whether the Middle States will consent to remain in association with the New England States, and whether the empire of the Northwest will remain as it is, or set up for itself. Let disintegration once begin, and no man can tell where it will stop." The Democrats saw nothing good coming from Lincoln's election. Despairing, they turned to "He who holds the destiny of nations in His hands and whose high prerogative it is to change curses into blessings." (Valley Spirit, November 14, 1860, p. 4, c. 1)

To hate the Republicans was not to love the fire-eaters. "We are far from justifying the erratic, senseless, ill-digested, childish, peevish, and miserably foolish action of the State of South Carolina," the Vindicator spat. "Of all the farces that have been enacted either in comedy or tragedy, since the Christian era, South Carolina has, in her recent movements, given us the most indisputable. There never has been witnessed such an entire absence of statesmanship, foresight and common sense in the politics of any people, as that she occupies before the world." At the beginning of January 1861, the new nation South Carolina was trying to create existed only in hastily constructed trappings: "Separate from a few palmetto leaves represented on canvas, a pitiful and foresaken asterix, and a large number of brass buttons, ornamented by blue ribbon, there is nothing to indicate her nationality." (Republican Vindicator, January 4, 1860)

The same issue of the Spectator that carried Stuart's appeal for Union also carried a passionate article that discounted such appeals. "The North and the South are two different populations,," wrote "A." "The Union cannot be saved." Pretty language aside, the issue was slavery. "The time for legislation or geographical compromise has passed. The North must agree, by a permanent compact, to recognize property in slaves, and to protect it whenever our common soil extends within the limits of the Constitution." Such a declaration, ignoring everything that had happened in the politics of the nation for the last thirty years, offered the South what it really wanted: complete freedom of conscience and complete freedom of action on slavery.

If "a drop of Southern blood should be shed by a Northern Administration in the effort to force back seceding States into the Union, then be it called secession, or revolution, let her people, as one man
determine to make common cause with the oppressed." Demand complete Northern capitulation, in other words, and wage war if the North sought to impose sovereignty. "In sixty days, according to all human foresight, every Southern man will be compelled by circumstances to take a decided stand for or against the South," this anonymous author felt certain. "The middle ground will then be untenable. We must abandon it then forever. It would be more graceful, more becoming, more manly to abandon it now."

The delegates bore familiar names. John Imboden, a 37 year-old attorney with a young wife and four children as well as a flourishing business and seven slaves, was among the first to declare. Imboden was well known to the citizens of Augusta, not only serving as county court clerk but also as a captain in the militia. John Imboden and his younger brother George, also an attorney, were prominent Whigs and Bell men, but of an unusually fiery sort. Imboden had written private letters to his friend John McCue back in December, dreaming of what he would tell Abraham Lincoln, of the disdain he would direct at the Black Republican president. Becoming a delegate to the state convention would be the next best thing.

William G. Harman was even more prominent than Imboden. Harman, too, was 37, but he and his wife already had seven children. Harman owned the largest hotel in town and one of the largest plantations in the county; he was worth more than a quarter of a million dollars. His 44 slaves represented one of the largest holdings in Augusta and he hired out of a number of those slaves to his neighbors. Augusta contained 46 Harmans and they counted among their number important planters, stock dealers, and attorneys. They were a family to be taken seriously. But they were also Douglas Democrats and they had just lost Augusta the preceding fall.

Augusta people asked John B. Baldwin to come forward. A descendant of a leading Augusta family, Baldwin had excelled at the University of Virginia while still in his teens and become the law partner (and brother-in-law) of Alexander H. H. Stuart in Staunton. Forty years old and married, he and his wife had no children. Though Baldwin owned ten slaves, he possessed less wealth than his position might have suggested. Baldwin gave much of his energy to public service and the local militia, where he served as captain. He had been elected to the Virginia legislature as soon as he had reached the age of eligibility and had been known as an especially fine speaker throughout his adult life. When the moment of crisis descended on Augusta, people naturally listened to hear what he had to say. As one of the strongest Whigs and Union men in Virginia, his opinions could easily be guessed.

People in Augusta knew, too, what George Baylor was likely to say. Baylor, at 55, was older than Imboden, Harman, and Baldwin and wealthier than any of them except Harman. Another attorney, Baylor's $57,000 was impressive, as was his ownership of nine slaves. Augusta held even more Baylors than it did Harmans: 75 men, women, and children collectively owned 81 slaves. George Baylor and his kinsmen were Douglas Democrats. He had served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1851 and later as a captain in the militia. A prominent Lutheran, Baylor had given the land on which St. John's Church rested in Staunton.
The final man who agreed to run as a delegate to the convention, albeit belatedly after another candidate had dropped out, was Alexander H. H. Stuart. The Vindicator griped that Stuart should give up his seat in the state senate if he became a delegate, but Stuart's great popularity pushed such concerns aside. Everyone knew Stuart, Augusta's most famous man--former cabinet official, former United States Representative, scion of the most prominent family, possessor of a beautiful house and other property worth a hundred thousand dollars. Married to the former Frances Peyton and the father of seven beloved children (though he had recently lost his son Briscoe Baldwin Stuart on a steamship explosion), the 53 year-old Stuart seemed to have everything. His law practice flourished and he had long stood at the head of the strong Opposition party in Augusta. His ten slaves gave him a strong stake in protecting the institution and credibility when he called for the Union--as he did at every opportunity.

The men who traveled throughout Augusta in the cold of late January 1861, putting themselves before the people and debating the future of the county, state, and maybe nation, all fit the profile of what the leading men of Augusta--and Virginia and the South--looked like: lawyers, slaveholders, member of prominent families, wealthy and well-connected. Most had gone to the University of Virginia. They had property both in Staunton and in the county. They belonged to the most prominent churches (Stuart to Trinity Episcopal, Harman to First Presbyterian, and Baylor to St. John's Lutheran) and they all invoked God in their cause. None of the candidates were Breckinridge Democrats, but two--Harman and Baylor--were Douglas Democrats. Baldwin, Stuart, and Imboden were staunch Whigs. All proclaimed their respect for their fellow candidates, their good friends. They all loved Augusta, they all loved Virginia, and they all loved the Union and the Fathers who had brought it forth. They all detested the Black Republicans and viewed South Carolina with disdain. They all desired peace and they all feared war.

Despite the candidates' similarities, it soon became clear that voters trusted some of these men and not others. The Vindicator foreswore any kind of party allegiance, but obviously preferred Imboden and Harman over the other four candidates. It made sense that the former Douglas paper would support Harman, a leading Douglas man--indeed, the Little Giant's host during his triumphant visit to Augusta back in the fall, when everything was so different. But why would the Vindicator support John Imboden, an Opposition man?

Imboden's announcement to the people of Augusta revealed why. Of all the candidates, Imboden pulled the fewest punches. Virginia, Imboden reminded his readers and listeners, had always lived up to her constitutional duties, sacrificing her own interests to those of the nation. What had this sacrifice gotten Virginia?: "we this day see her and her institutions condemned and despised by an unprincipled Northern majority of wild political and religious fanatics, whose undisguised purpose it is to destroy all her future prosperity and greatness, by first subjugating her and the other slave States to the uncontrolled domination and power of the North, and finally, under the forms of the Constitution to effect the abolition of slavery and re-enact here the dark drama of St. Domingo." There it was, laid out cold: the Black Republicans were assaulting slavery and exalting black men.

The Republican attack on slavery, Imboden raged, was driven by the highest kind of hypocrisy and
would descend with immediate consequences. "They consider themselves commissioned by the Almighty to deliver the negro race from bondage and make them the equals of white men, though to accomplish this purpose it may be necessary to put arms in their hands and incite them to insurrection and the indiscriminate murder of our wives and children." John Brown's raid showed what the fruits of Republican leadership would be. While Imboden thought the deep South states had "hastily" seceded and were wrong to do so, "of that, however, it was their right to judge and act for themselves. They have gone, and we are left now in the power and at the mercy of this party of the North, who are still with us in the Union." There was no choice: "The day for a time-serving, temporizing policy has passed. This sectional controversy must be settled, and now is the time. If it is not settled, or its settlement placed beyond a doubt before the 4th of March, in my humble judgment no settlement will then ever be possible. Lincoln will attempt the subjugation of the seceding States and then a terrific struggle will commence." (Republican Vindicator, January 18, 1861)

Strong stuff, and listened to by large crowds, including "not a few ladies," wherever the delegates went. (Republican Vindicator, January 25, 1861, p. 2, c. 1) The Court House in Staunton was "crowded as closely as herrings in a barrel, and a great many were unable to get inside at all." (Staunton Spectator, January 29, 1861) While the Vindicator applauded Imboden and cheered when Harman said almost exactly the same things, the paper expressed disgust when their opponents refused to face the central issue. They "confined themselves mostly to appeals in behalf of the preservation of the Union, without defining any particular policy, except to wait for future developments. They seemed to lose sight of the fact that the Union was already dissolved." The old Union men did not serve the county well by going on sentimentally about their love of Union. "It will not do to sing paeans to the Union and the stars and stripes when the waves of revolution and disunion are surging all around us." (Republican Vindicator, January 25, 1861, p. 2, c. 3)

Everyone knew the election on February 4 would be "the most important which has ever occurred in the whole history of our State," and so "every voter should be sure to be at the polls to record his vote for the candidate of his choice." The Spectator thought the choice clear: "whether we will remain in the Union which has made us a great, free and happy people," or fall into secession and thus "into the bogs of anarchy and the bloody quagmire of civil war!" (Staunton Spectator, January 29, 1860) On the day of the election, Frank Sterrett, the fiance of Alansa Rounds, made an entry in his fiancee's diary: "Election day for State Convention, voted for Baldwin, Stuart and Baylor. Hope I gave judicious votes." In a reference to the love between this young woman from New York girl and this young man from Virginia, Sterrett noted playfully, "If Northern and Southern representatives were as friendly as two of their constituents, the prevailing difficulty could soon be settled!" (Memoir of Alansa Rounds Sterrett, Feb 4)

The three most fervent Union candidates won in a landslide in Augusta. Stuart, Baldwin, and Baylor each took more than three thousand votes; Imboden and Harman won only a few hundred each. Moreover, Augusta voted 3,394 to 263 to demand a chance to approve or reject whatever course the convention decided. The election brought more than eight of ten eligible voters to the polls, nearly as many as in the momentous presidential election four months earlier.
The Vindicator, thoroughly disgusted with the results of the election, no longer evaded the key issue. "Harman and Imboden, the States Rights candidates, are as good Union men as Baldwin, Stuart and Baylor, but because they advocated the policy of prompt and decisive action on the part of Virginia, as the course best calculated to bring about a satisfactory adjustment of our National troubles, they were regarded as dangerous men to the peace of the country." As John Imboden put it privately, "The idea got into the minds of the County that we were immediate secessionists, and it beat us to death." (Crofts, 154; John Imboden to Greenlee Davidson, Feb. 15, 1861)

In the period of enforced waiting in the late winter of 1861, tempers began to boil in Augusta. "When a man at this time deserts the South, and goes over, as the editor of the Spectator has done, bag and baggage, to the enemies of this section, the Union and their God, it does not become such a man to say aught to the supporters of anybody," a letter from "Augusta" raged in the Vindicator. "I think the times have changed since the Presidential contest. If they have not, I for one have." The language became far bloodier and more threatening than it had been just weeks earlier. "Before I'll bend my knee to Lincoln and Seward, and their Virginia cohorts, I will see this land run in rivers of blood," this anonymous writer told the editor of the Spectator. (Republican Vindicator, February 8, 1861, p. 2, c. 7)

Language became even hotter in private. George Imboden, was, like his brother John, an attorney in Staunton. But he was only 23 and could claim little money and no slaves, but "I can in a few lines tell you where I stand. I am in favor of a united South, first last and all the time. Whether right or wrong, I go with the South. I am anti-disunion and anti coercion, but the union is dissolved and what's the use to shut our eyes to the fact." George acknowledged that slavery lay at the heart of the struggle. Virginia and the states of the Confederacy "have but one and the same destiny, one and the same interest, then what's the use to deny the true state of the case, and fool & cheat the people by singing hozanahs to the union when there is no union! I am called a fire eater disunionist & c & c. but I dont care what they call me. I am going to say what I think and believe and let consequences take care of themselves." (G.W. Imboden to John McCue, February 12, 1864)

Augusta men who had talked so fervently of Union in the presidential election four months earlier now spoke publicly of seceding regardless of what the State Convention might eventually decree. "Honor, freedom, justice, good faith, all are to be crushed under the Juggernaut of abolition villainy," the Democratic paper shouted. "We put it to the farmer, the mechanic, the professional man, to men of every grade of wealth and every occupation, if this deed shall be perpetrated by the Convention with impunity?" The Vindicator claimed to answer for Augusta: "they are not now, and never will be, willing to pass from a state of freedom to a condition of vassalage-to bend their necks to the yoke of abolition servitude. The Convention cannot consign us to Northern despotism." It did not matter what the old men, the decrepit Whigs, of the Convention might do. "The Convention may delay--the Convention may jeopardize our safety--the Convention may put to useless sacrifice many valuable lives, but the people of Virginia, in the strength of that integrity and power and patriotism, high above all Conventions, will force their representatives to strike the blow in behalf of that civil, religious and political liberty which constitutes the chief glory and pride of our beloved Commonwealth." (Republican Vindicator, March 15, 1861, p. 2, c. 4)
The secessionists of the Confederacy, of Virginia, and of Augusta expertly narrowed the range of choices. "The question is not 'Union,' the Vindicator argued. "That is irretrievably, hopelessly broken up. No compromise of right--no palliation of wrong, or denunciation of its resistance, can restore its fallen columns." Only one question mattered: "where shall we go? With the North or the South?"

Once the secessionists had drawn the boundaries in that way, slavery, the fundamental issue often lost in the layer-upon-layer of constitutional debate, immediately reasserted itself in the most immediate way. It was no longer a matter of hypothetical slaves in hypothetical territories, but real slaves in Augusta County and Virginia. If we go with the North, "what are we to do with our Negroses?" the Vindicator asked rhetorically. "Converted into pests and vampyres as they soon must be in such connexion, they will suck out the very lifeblood of the Commonwealth. And there will be no help for us. The North would gloat over our distresses, while the South, in self-defense, would be compelled to close her doors against us. The 'irrepressible conflict' will then be upon us with all its horrors." The next step in the logic was clear: "who will not say, give us war, give us anything, extermination itself, rather than such a consuming life of degradation and ruin?" (Republican Vindicator, March 29, 1861, p. 2, c. 6)

Though the institution of slavery remained sturdy, it depended on a complex and extensive political and economic web to keep slave prices high. Those who read the papers of Augusta carefully might notice signs of what would happen if slavery become suspect as a long-term investment. Joseph Mitchell was selling a prime property, a 418-acre farm, lying 3 miles west of Staunton, bisected by the Virginia Central Railroad. He was also selling "Nine Young and Likely Negroes: "a Woman 33 years of age, who is a good Cook, Ironer and Washer, with a pleasant disposition; a Man 21 years of age, who is a No. one hand; the remainder are from 3 to 14 years old, all stout and well grown. The Negroes are healthy, robust and likely." Such slaves certainly did not sound like "vampyres," but what if their value plummeted overnight? What if they had to be fed and housed but were worth less each year? Would slavery prosper? Would it long endure? (Republican Vindicator, March 29, 1861, p. 3, c. 4)

John Cochran watched the convention with disgust, fearing some deal with the North. If Virginia accepted any such plan, "woe to Virginia this proud old mother of states. For close upon the heals of such a cowardly submission" would follow "a general exodous of the owners of slaves with their slaves, and with the money for their lands in their pockets. Then will come dishonor disgrace and repudiation. Then will this fair land be polluted with the presence of hoards of yankees and other such like vermin." Cochran saw Augusta's Alexander Stuart as one of the worst traitors to Virginia, who, along with his compatriots after the ruin of the Old Dominion, would "lift their heads and glory in the consciousness of having acquired high offices among their colaborers the abolitionists by selling and disgracing their native state." Cochran saw only one way "to avert such dire calamities to the old commonwealth and that is by revolution. Some will say that the remedy is worse than the disease--but sooner would I see this fair land drenched in the blood of contending brothers than to see such a fate as the submissionist are preparing for her accomplished." Cochran was "trusting in 'God and keeping my powder dry.' I intend to make the best fight I can. And I think there are enough of my way of thinking to inaugurate a revolution which will be triumphant." Cochran, like Imboden, saw revolution and civil war within Virginia. While Imboden would move to the Confederacy, Cochran vowed to stay and fight. (J.H.
Cochran to his Mother, March 3, 1861)

Stuart had not given up hope for the Northern people. He wanted Virginia to appeal across the border as well, approaching Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. He would "invite them to disconnect themselves from the extreme North and Northwest." Stuart maintained his faith in "business relations, private interests, social ties, the ties of brotherhood, the ties of intermarriage and of communication, in every form and shape in which they can take place." He felt certain that these bonds would "counterbalance this odious fanaticism." A border empire, uniting the reasonable people across the boundary of slavery, might yet save the legacy of their fathers. (Robertson, 188-203)

But Virginia would not wait. The day after Stuart's speech, April 17, the Convention voted to secede, 88 to 55. After the balloting, some delegates changed their votes to lend greater weight to the majority, making it 103 to 46. Augusta's representatives refused to change their votes; the county stood alone in the central Valley in its unanimity against immediate secession. The counties above and below Augusta split their votes, but the rest of the Valley, from near the Maryland border down to the border with Tennessee, threw themselves behind the Confederacy without a dissenting voice.

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Reading of the preponderance of Unionists in Virginia's votes for convention delegates in February 1861, Thaddeus Stevens, congressman and Franklin County iron furnace owner, chuckled: "Well, well, well, old Virginia has tucked her tail between her legs and run, and thus ends the secession farce." (Crofts, 153; quoted in Richmond Dispatch, Feb. 9, 1861) The Republicans thought they had stared down the Slave Power, breaking its will and revealing it for the sham it was. Without the enthusiastic support of the Border States, the Cotton States' 10 percent of the nation's white population could not hope to hold out for long.

All across the North, Republicans watched the unfolding events with grim satisfaction, rising blood, and churning anxiety. It was good to watch the arrogant South twist and turn, caught in its own web of intrigue and bluster. It was good to hear the bitter words between the Upper South and Lower South. And, as Thaddeus Stevens put it, it was good to watch the largest slave state ignominiously retreat from its most outrageous threats. But the satisfaction could only run so deep. The fact remained: the Union had already been divided and it might well divide more deeply. Pennsylvania, in particular, had conflicting emotions. The state had been crucial to the Republican victory the preceding fall, its remarkably large swing to the Republicans doing much to cement Lincoln's win. Yet the state's conversion to the Republicans had been recent and opposition to the party remained strong and wide.

Despite the Republicans' triumph the previous fall, nearly half of Pennsylvania voters had not voted for Lincoln or Curtin. The cascade of events in the South over the last few months had not made those Democrats lose their sympathy for their fellow white people across their border. Even the Republicans were divided. A Franklin County man wrote Senator Simon Cameron with his view of things. "All we want to save the Union, is to let the people of the north have a chance to say to the people of the south
that they are ready to so amend the constitution as to give the south all the guarantees they ask. There
are numerous men in this county who voted for Lincoln, that will vote for any amendment to the
constitution (Crittenden, Douglass) or anything else almost that has a reasonable face." Should there be
war, the Democrats could not be counted on. "Will Mr. Curtin and M'Clure undertake to compel the
democrats of this state to go south to fight their brethren. They will have a good time in doing it, I
fancy." (William Garvin to Simon Cameron, January 24, 1861)

The Democrats did not accept the constitutional theories put forward by the Republicans nor the
strategies they pursued to keep the nation together. When the state legislature came into session some
people counseled that Pennsylvania raise a million dollars to supply the soldiers of the state. "What
for?," asked the Spirit. "Pennsylvania is not threatened with an attack from any quarter." Moreover, "as a
member of the Federal Union she has no right to assail any member of the Confederacy." The mere fact
of preparation might bring on the conflict it supposedly sought to avoid. "The moment Pennsylvania
commences making military preparations, that moment will the border States take the alarm, and
proceed to arm their citizens for defence. Then the revolution will be upon us. Not cornered to the
distant cotton States; but right at home, upon our borders." (Valley Spirit, January 2, 1861, p. 4, c. 4)

The Democrats scoffed at the Republicans' portrayal of the South as impoverished and weak. The
Republicans "are ever swaggering and boasting of the superiority of the North over the South, and
would fain make people believe that the South grows nothing but 'niggers,' that they consume more than
they produce and have long ago eaten their masters out of house and lands, and that the South is only
kept up by the alms bestowed upon it by the North." (Valley Spirit, January 16, 1861, p. 4, c. 2) Though
"there are many sap-heads in the community who really believe all this," many practical men did not.
Businessmen staged meetings across Pennsylvania and the Border North to remind people how much
they depended on the South.

The Democrats of Franklin held a public meeting in February to discuss "the present fearful crisis in our
national affairs." The meeting resolved that "under the Constitution, all the States of the Union are
equally sovereign and independent." The Democrats of Franklin stood united behind the Crittenden
Compromise, happy to sanction the existence of slavery in perpetuity in exchange for the Union. J.
McD. Sharpe, a 29 year-old attorney from Chambersburg who had already amassed $22,000 of
property, delivered a long and potent address in which he calculated the costs of the Republicans'
election. The speech occupied nearly an entire page of the Spirit. Sharpe could hardly believe what was
happening before the eyes of the nation as a result of Lincoln's election. "Three months ago the domain
of the United States extended from Maine to Florida, from the Atlantic to the Pacific; now, it stops far
short of the gulf of Mexico. Three months ago 'the Stars and Stripes' waived over the forts at Pensacola,
over Moultrie and Pinkney in Charleston harbor, an honored ensign, a shield to its friends, but a terror to
its foes.--Now, " that glorious banner whose stars have so often risen upon the night of humanity, as a
beacon of hope to the oppressed, the world over, is lowered amid the howlings of Southern mobs, and
trampled in the dust, with every mark of indignity." Three months ago, "'Hail Columbia' and 'Yankee
Doodle,' thrilled with the deepest emotions of patriotism, the hearts of more than thirty millions of
people, in thirty three sovereign states; now, these same national ballads are greeted with hisses, and in
seven states of the old confederacy, have been banned and proscribed, and banished from their borders, as being the utterances of treason, against the new empire of 'the Confederate States of America.'"

In those Southern states "the heavy tread of artillery, has usurped the swift step of the tradesmen and mechanic. The pomp and circumstance of glorious war, have banished from out their borders, all the arts of peace." The Northern states had been seized with the same "military frenzy. New companies are being formed and armed. The mechanic rushes from his shop, the merchant from his store and the professional man from his office to fill up the ranks. There is a growing thirst for military fame, and an impatience of restraint or delay." Such a portrait contained no exaggeration. "I have drawn no fancy sketch," Sharpe sighed, "I have deepened no hue, nor have I added a single sombre color, to the melancholy picture."

Sharpe set aside the usual language of political rivals, the manly language of sneer and bluff and sarcasm. Instead, he begged. "I beseech the Republicans, in the name of humanity, in the name of justice, in the name of the fathers of the Republic, in the name of the children that have descended from their loins, in the name of an unborn posterity, in the name of all they hold dear on earth, or hope for in Heaven, to arise from this lethargy, and save the country." The Border States, Sharpe argued, reached out for peace. "Virginia, 'the Mother of Statesmen and of Presidents,'--Virginia, containing within her borders the grave of Washington--that Mecca of America," needed only reassurance. With Jackson's Tennessee and Clay's Kentucky holding forth the olive branch as well, dare the North reject them? "If we do, fearful will be our responsibility, for the 'sic semper tyrannis' of Virginia will become the battle-cry of the United South."

Sharpe had no fear that the South would conquer the North. "But could we conquer the South, that is the question?" The American Revolution held out a sobering possibility that the North would not be victorious. "I would remind you, that three millions of raw, badly equipped and poorly armed militia men, in the days of the revolution, trusting in the justice of their cause, during the eight long years, resisted the flower of the British army, and at last, snatched from the lion of England, a the mouth of the cannon, the brightest jewels of the crown." And the South posed a far greater force than the American patriots of the Revolution. "The South is eight millions strong, rich in resources, skilled in the art of war, and fertile in military genius." Even if the North could muster the force necessary to conquer such a vast and well-fortified land, what then? "Commerce destroyed, cities burned to the ground, fields uncultivated, the people debauched, the arts of peace banished, and the fruits of industry relinquished for the more easily acquired spoils of robbery." Moreover, "what would we do with the South, after we had conquered her. Could we hold her in the Union by force? The idea is preposterous." The South simply would never submit. "The men of the South have loved liberty too long and too well, are too much like ourselves, not to prefer to die freemen, rather than to live slaves."

So, what course of action could Sharpe possibly recommend? The Republicans should prove they really meant what they said about preserving slavery where it was; they should accept the Crittenden Compromise. State treasuries in the North should repay slaveholders whose escaped slaves were not returned. But what of the territories, the crucial issue? The Republican argument is "that all the territory
now owned by the Government must and shall be devoted to Northern settlement, and shall become the exclusive domicil and possession of the sons of the North to the total exclusion of Southern men, and their property and domestic institutions." As attractive as that prospect seemed to Northerners, it was not fair. "It will scarcely be denied, that the territories are the common property of the whole country," Sharpe argued, "purchased, as they are, with common treasure and common blood, how does the North acquire an exclusive ownership, an exclusive right to populate them?"

Sharpe thought the plan put forward by border Southerners the only honest means of dealing with the territories. Let those territories be divided between the North and the South "by a consentable line; let slavery be prohibited in all the territory north of it, and recognized as an existing institution, beyond Congressional or Legislative control, in all the territories south of it." This compromise "recognizes the equality of both sections in the Union, and will, without, doing any real harm to the cause of freedom remove that nervous sensibility, which the south very naturally feels about her constitutional rights." Slaveowners would not go into New Mexico; they were free to go there now and only 24 slaves lived in a territory the size of four Pennsylvanias. Self-interest, along with climate and land, would keep slavery out. Law was unnecessary, war even less so. "Dissolve the Union, for a mere abstraction, and the whole civilized world will cry shame on us and our children and our children's children to the latest generation will rise up and curse our memories." (Valley Spirit, February 20, 1861, p. 4, c. 1)

Letters from Chambersburg to Republican Senator Simon Cameron revealed that some Republicans agreed with this sobering prediction and plea. "I can assure you Crittendon's course is the most proper and popular at this time," John Berryhill wrote, "and if you can't compromise, so as to retain Virginia, Maryland Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri in the Union, then let the Southern Fire eaters and rabid abolitionists and uncompromising shall I say, black Republicans, go their own way to distruction for that will be their distruction and I fear of the whole country." Pennsylvania should join "the Middle Portion of the Republic" to create "a separate, Independant, and free country." The "Middle Portion of the Republic" clearly embraced both the Border North and the Border South, a land of moderation and white freedom. (John Berryhill to Simon Cameron, January 11, 1861)

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Two American Communities on the Eve of Civil War: An Experiment in Form and Analysis
Edward L. Ayers and William G. Thomas, III

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