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Transatlantic Perceptions of Reform: The Impact of America on the Second Reform Act

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Transatlantic Perceptions of Reform:
The Impact of America on the Second Reform Act

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Humanities

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Abstract

This PhD thesis explores the influence of America on British debates about franchise reform leading up to the passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867. It explores British public discourse surrounding reform between 1832 and 1867 through analysis of travel literature, newspapers, periodicals, quarterlies, political texts by public intellectuals, election speeches, speeches from working-class reform demonstrations, and records of parliamentary debates. The thesis sets out to understand the ways in which British perceptions of America after 1832 shaped British debates over political reform that culminated in 1867 with the Second Reform Act. Throughout, it considers how British political commentators adapted the ways in which they utilised the example of the United States to suit different target audiences, with different elements of American democracy featuring in their analysis depending on where these debates took place.

Examining how the United States featured in these different facets of British reform discourse, the thesis offers insights into British political ideas and political culture in the 1860s generally, and into the Reform Act of 1867 more specifically, including how Conservative fears about Americanisation in the 1860s represented an early opportunity for the Conservative Party to wrest control of the language of patriotism from the Liberal party, as well as how Liberal divisions over the political relevance of America foreshadowed debates about the caucusization of liberal politics that came to prominence in the late 1870s. Unlike other modern European democracies and the ancient democratic republics of Greece and Rome, America was understood by many to share the same Anglo-Saxon heritage as Britain. British political commentators believed that the earliest interpreters of the U.S. Constitution had been guided by British precedents and political traditions. American politics were seen to have inherited broadly similar understandings as those in Britain. However, the

reform debates of the 1860s took place in the light of a brutal Civil War, a Presidential assassination, the suspension of civil liberties and a shift towards economic protectionism. In taking account of these significant developments, this thesis concludes that America played an important role in shaping the public debate over political reform during the 1860s and that references to the United States formed a key – and hitherto underappreciated – element of the language of public discourse about reform in this period.

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Introduction

The Old Calton Burial Ground is home to a variety of monuments and burial sites for various notable figures from Scottish history. One monument in particular that visitors will be struck by is the Scottish-American Soldiers Monument, also known as the American Civil War Memorial. The monument, designed by George Edwin Bissell, was officially unveiled in 1893 by the American Consul Wallace Bruce and is dedicated to Scots who fought in the American Civil War. The inscription found on the memorial, ‘To preserve the jewel of liberty in the framework of Freedom’, is a quote taken from a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to Governor Michael Hahn of Louisiana in March 1864.¹ The inscription refers to Lincoln’s support for Hahn’s efforts to extend the franchise to black Louisianans in 1864 and 1865. Rather than choosing an inscription that related directly to the war itself, Bissell and Bruce instead used the memorial to celebrate and commemorate a shared commitment between the two nations to the suffrage. This commitment is reinforced by the memorial’s location. Nearby is the Political Martyrs’ Monument which, erected in 1844 by ‘the Friends of Parliamentary Reform in England and Scotland’, commemorates five late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century political reformers who were arrested and sentenced to transportation for campaigning for parliamentary reform in the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions.²

The American Civil War Memorial itself depicts a standing figure of Abraham Lincoln, with a freed slave giving thanks and holding a book to indicate his education. The names of six

¹ Abraham Lincoln to Michael Hahn, 18 March 1864, quoted in Henry J. Raymond, *The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1865), 489.

² The Political Martyrs’ Monument commemorates the memory of Thomas Muir, Thomas Fyshe Palmer, William Skirving, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald.

men who fought for the Union against the Confederacy are also inscribed: Lt Col William L Duff, Sergeant Major John McEwan, Robert Steedman, James Wilkie, Robert Ferguson and Alexander Smith.³ The monument was built after the widow of Sgt Major McEwan appealed to Bruce as the United States Consul at Edinburgh in 1890, asking for assistance with funeral costs. She described how, after the Civil War, John had returned to Scotland injured and barely able to work. Groups would still gather to hear his stories of the war which he would deliver dressed in his blue Union army coat.⁴ He died in 1888 with his service gun pressed close to his heart. Moved by her plight, Bruce wrote to Edinburgh Council proposing that a burial place should be provided for soldiers who had fought in the war in the Old Calton burying ground. Delivering his speech to unveil the monument, Bruce remarked on the Anglo-Saxon bonds and shared language which tied the two nations together, arguing that British history, ‘near to the American heart’, had served as the ‘school-house’ of America’s ancestors; he concluded that the monument should stand as ‘a memorial to your heroes who fought for their adopted home beyond the sea...and as another bond of widening love and friendship between Great Britain and the United States’.⁵ The Scottish-American Soldiers Monument is the only monument dedicated to the Civil War outside the United States and was the first statue of a US President built outside America.

This story of a Scotsman who, having travelled to the other side of the Atlantic, felt compelled to enlist in the Union Army and fight for the ideals represented by the North in several battles, including the 1863 Siege of Knoxville and the 1864 Atlanta Campaign,⁶ as

³ Alexander Smith’s name was added in 1993 after research from the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Society revealed that he had fought in the 66th Regiment of the New York Volunteer Infantry.

⁴ William Blackwood, *The Lincoln Monument in Memory of Scottish-American Soldiers* (Edinburgh, 1893), 82-83.

⁵ Blackwood, *Lincoln Monument*, 15-22.

⁶ Melvin Nichols to Wallace Bruce, 21 July 1893, given in *Lincoln Monument*, 92-93; Nichols had served in the same company as McEwan – Co. H, 65th Regt. III. Vol. Infantry which came to be known as the Scotch Regiment.

well as the subsequent commemoration of figures like McEwan, is illustrative of the impact that events in the United States had in Britain during the nineteenth century and the weight which they carried in British public discourse. H. C. Allen argues that the familial nature of the Anglo-American relationship allowed it to survive the ‘period of bitterness’ following the Revolution and the War of 1812 and that over the course of the nineteenth century the initial resentment of the United States and the injured pride of Britain gradually mellowed.⁷ Similarly, John Bartlet Brebner has shown how by 1871 Britain had acquired an, albeit perhaps reluctant, respect for the United States with an increasing understanding of the complementary roles that the two countries might play ‘in the Atlantic region and in the world as a whole’.⁸ This PhD thesis sets out to explore one specific example of the Anglo-American relationship in the nineteenth century – the influence that America had on British debates about political reform between the passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and the passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867.

The term ‘reform’ has had a complex history and a variety of different meanings. Raymond Williams describes how, in its earliest uses, around the fourteenth century, reform was used in English as a verb meaning ‘to restore to its original form’ or ‘to make into a new form’. By the seventeenth century, reform began to be used as a noun of process while continuing to carry ‘implications of amending an existing state of affairs in the light of known or existing principles’.⁹ Only by the end of the eighteenth century had reform become commonly used as a definite noun for a specific measure, ‘capitalised and abstracted as a political tendency,

⁷ H. C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1952* (London, 1954), 175-176.

⁸ John Bartlet Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (London, 1945), 244.

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Oxford, 1985), 186-187.

mainly in relation to Parliament and the suffrage'.¹⁰ Debates surrounding the Great Reform Act reinforced the use of reform as a political term to describe chiefly parliamentary reform. In his survey of the history of the concept of reform in the English language between 1829 and 1850, Derek Beales concludes that 'if the word was unqualified by an adjective or its context, and especially if it had a capital R, it almost invariably meant parliamentary reform, or at any rate constitutional reform; and people wishing to speak of other types of reform had to put an adjective in front of the word'.¹¹

Other kinds of reform had to be distinguished through the use of an adjective, such as military reform or factory reform. Improvements to existing social conditions like public health and housing might be political objectives, but they were not classed as political reforms. Rather, they were seen as social reforms. Joanna Innes argues that from the 1830s 'it became more common to term all sorts of efforts to improve social conditions – especially the conditions of life of the “lower orders” – “social reforms”'.¹² Reform, as a singular term, continued to refer to the cause of parliamentary reform. Beales argues that this continued to be the case during the 1860s and that 'many more years had to pass before the predominance of this approach was seriously challenged by the notion that social reform – in a sense still...unknown to the language in 1850 – was what mattered most in British politics'.¹³ The reform debate in Britain still centred on a person's eligibility to vote and the conditions by which someone was included or excluded from the franchise. In the period that this research focuses on then, between 1832 and 1867, 'Reform' as an unqualified noun continued to be

¹⁰ Williams, *Keywords*, 187.

¹¹ Derek Beales, 'The idea of reform in British politics, 1829-1850', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 100 (1999), 161.

¹² Joanna Innes, 'Reform' in English public life', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking The Age of Reform, Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003) 96-97.

¹³ Beales, 'The idea of reform', 173.

used to refer to parliamentary reform and the suffrage and this is the definition we will use in this thesis.

Exploring the role that America played in the debate over political reform in Britain, this thesis builds on the recent move to decentralise the themes of diplomacy and economics that have dominated the historiography of Anglo-American relations. Focusing on the reform debates leading up to the passage of the Second Reform Act, the aim of this research is to assess the significance of the example of the United States to nineteenth-century Britons in their considerations about the prospect of extending the franchise. For many Victorian British political commentators democracy meant not only a form of government in which the sovereign power lay with the collective body of the people, but it also in the aftermath of Alexis de Tocqueville's highly influential *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) suggested the kind of general 'equality of conditions' which Tocqueville believed had been attained in the United States.¹⁴ Unlike other modern European democracies such as France and Switzerland and the ancient democratic republics of Greece and Rome, America shared the same Anglo-Saxon heritage as Britain making the example of American democracy uniquely relevant to British commentators. In his history of the birth of the American Republic, Edmund S. Morgan argues that this sense of a common heritage was shared on the other side of the Atlantic by Americans who still felt tied to a sense of English identity that connected them to a history that 'stretched back continuously into a golden age of Anglo-Saxon purity and freedom' and that throughout the War of Independence and after, Americans maintained that they were preserving 'the true tradition of English history'.¹⁵ American politics were seen to have started with broadly similar understandings as those in Britain and as a result America

¹⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans Arthur Goldhammer, (New York, 2004), 1-2.

¹⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89* (Chicago, 1956), 6-7.

was regarded with a closeness that the other democracies were not. Frank Prochaska has shown how the Founding Fathers turned ‘naturally’ to the example of Britain after the Revolution when seeking to create a viable constitution and were informed by British precedent when it came to constitutional questions and questions of political etiquette, retaining a liking for British ceremonial practices and customs.¹⁶ Americans, British kinsmen, had established a thriving democracy on an unprecedented scale which had defied expectations and lasted for nearly eighty years. For good or ill, America, emerging from a common point of origin, was seen as an example of Britain’s possible future. However, the reform debates of the 1860s took place in the light of new events. American democracy had produced a brutal Civil War, a Presidential assassination, the suspension of civil liberties and a shift towards Protectionism. Against this changing backdrop, the central research question that this thesis seeks to answer is: in what ways did America shape the debate among nineteenth-century Britons over political reform during the 1860s?

Historiography

In so far as this question has already been discussed, it has been in the context of two distinct historiographies – the first concerning Britain and the American Civil War, the second concerning reform and politics in nineteenth-century Britain. One of the first major accounts of Britain’s relationship with the Civil War was E. D. Adams’ *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (London, 1925). Working with diplomatic sources, in this full-scale study of Anglo-American relations during the war, Adams argued that ‘now for the first time... a fairly true estimate may be made of what the American Civil War meant to Great Britain... in the belief that the American drama had a world significance, and peculiarly a British one’.¹⁷ Closely

¹⁶ Frank Prochaska, *The Eagle and the Crown: Americans and the British Monarchy* (London, 2008), 15-19.

¹⁷ E.D. Adams, *Great Britain and the Civil War*, 2 vols, I (London, 1925), viii.

examining the British Government during the Civil War, Adams challenged the common belief in American public opinion that British policy towards the North had been unfair, instead arguing that the British government had been sincere in its efforts to maintain its neutrality and that this had been misunderstood by the Union as hostility.¹⁸ Adams established an enduring focus in the historiography on the prospect of British intervention. For Adams, British intervention in the war, in the form of an offer of mediation between the Union and the Confederacy, was most seriously considered in late 1862. However, the failure of the Confederacy to win convincingly at the Battle of Antietam created doubts about its long-term viability, while the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation connected the Civil War to the issue of slavery and in doing so won the support of much of the British public. By the start of 1863, according to Adams, the possibility of British interference in the war had passed.¹⁹ As a result of Adams' focus on this topic, many scholars in this field have since debated how close the British government was to intervening in the Civil War and at what point such intervention was closest to being realised.

Along with other historians like Donaldson Jordan and Edwin J. Pratt, Adams established an interpretation of why and how people in Britain took sides in the Civil War, which argues that support for the Confederacy tended to come from Tories, Anglicans, rural people, the established professions, the aristocracy and the upper middle class, while support for the Union tended to come from Radicals, Chartists, urban dwellers, trade unionists, the lower middle class and the working class.²⁰ The upper and middle classes are claimed to have identified with Southern landowners and were concerned by America's increasing military and economic strength. They saw an opportunity in the Civil War to halt America's progress

¹⁸ Adams, *Britain and the Civil War*, I, 113-114.

¹⁹ Adams, *Britain and the Civil War*, II, 106-115.

²⁰ Donaldson Jordan and Edwin J. Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War* (London, 1931), 132.

and supported the Confederacy in a bid to divide the country. Meanwhile, the lower-middle and working classes were anti-slavery and saw the conflict as a war over emancipation. For these historians, workers in the cotton industry who were hit by the cotton famine, created by Union blockades of the South, endured this economic disruption and continued to support the North because they identified with its commitment to progress and the emancipation of slavery and rejected the thought of British intervention on behalf of the South.

This interpretation first came under criticism in the 1930s by Frank L. Owsley. Examining Confederate diplomacy and foreign policy in relation to Britain and France, Owsley studied newly released material such as the archives of the French Foreign Office which were opened in 1927. Like Adams, Owsley worked primarily with diplomatic sources including the personal papers of notable Confederates. By looking at how the Confederacy sought to leverage the importance of Southern cotton to European markets to try and obtain European intervention, Owsley contended that Confederate foreign policy in the early years of the Civil War was based on the belief that southern cotton was essential to both Britain and France. Owsley challenged Adams' explanation as to why the British Government failed to intervene in the war as well as the idea that slavery had a significant impact on British opinion about the conflict. He also argued that upper- and middle-class support for the Confederacy was based on a belief in the right of self-determination and that there was no strong working-class support for the Union.²¹

Owsley was criticised by other historians for deemphasising the role of slavery, questioning public support for the Union and framing the conflict as a war for self-determination.

Donaldson Jordan argued that Owsley had 'made no attempt to familiarise himself with the

²¹ Frank L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1931), ch. 1, ch. 18.

European scene', prioritising economic forces and the experience of Confederate diplomats without understanding the domestic conditions that influenced European diplomats.²² As a result, the impact of domestic politics, slavery and international law on the attitudes of British and French statesmen were neglected. Owsley's work, whilst significant for examining how the South sought to leverage its ability to produce cotton, had less impact in the ongoing discussion about Anglo-American relations during the Civil War.

In the 1960s, the centenary of the Civil War saw a revival of academic interest in Britain and the American Civil War. Historians influenced by the increase in labour and radical history challenged earlier accounts by Adams, Jordan and Pratt, questioning the degree to which support for either the Union or the Confederacy could be determined by class or political sympathies. The three most influential historians in this development were D. P. Crook, Royden Harrison and Mary Ellison. Harrison, a key historian of the labour movement in Britain, began to reassess the notion of strong working-class support for the Union. His essay 'British Labour and the Confederacy' became the basis for subsequent accounts of British workers' attitudes during the Civil War. Harrison criticised the existing literature, arguing that there had been 'barely a suggestion that there were any influential people in the Labour Movement who stood by the Confederacy'. Using working-class newspapers and journals, Harrison argued that there were a number of eminent Labour leaders whose 'enmity' to the North made them friends to the Confederacy.²³ By 1965, however, he had qualified this argument, concluding that while many radical working-class groups were hostile towards the North, overall a study of the records of public meetings confirmed working-class support for

²² H. Donaldson Jordan, 'Review: King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America by Frank Lawrence Owsley', *The American Historical Review*, 38:1 (1932), 136-137.

²³ Royden Harrison, 'British Labour and the Confederacy: A Note on the Southern Sympathies of Some British Working-Class Journals and Leaders During the American Civil War', *International Review of Social History*, 2 (1957), 78-79.

the Union'.²⁴ Nevertheless, Harrison's initial essay influenced subsequent studies such as those by Crook. Crook argued that most Radicals and liberals had lost faith in America before the Civil War, and that many upper and middle-class people saw parallels between the situation of the Confederacy and that of Ireland and therefore supported the North's decision to use force to maintain their union.²⁵

The clearest challenge to earlier takes on Britain's relationship with the Civil War came from Mary Ellison. Ellison focused her attention on Lancashire, exploring local newspapers and periodicals as well as the papers of many private citizens and local societies. Ellison argued that the image of Lancashire textile workers enduring economic distress caused by the lack of Southern cotton because they were pro-Union was a myth. Looking at the activities of groups like the Southern Independence Association, she argued that there was more support for the Confederacy than there was for the Union and that this support was not restricted by political affiliations, religion and class. To support this, she cited the number of rallies and petitions in Lancashire that demanded the Government act to break the Union blockade of Southern ports to restore the flow of cotton and recognise the Confederacy as an independent nation. For Ellison, the people of Lancashire wanted British intervention to go further than just recognising the Confederacy either with an offer of mediation or armed intervention.²⁶

Ellison also sought to explain why the working classes of Lancashire were more likely to support the South than had previously been thought. Where Owsley had sought to deemphasise the impact of slavery on British attitudes, Ellison believed that Lancashire opinion on slavery was more complicated than had previously been presented. Ellison

²⁴ Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881* (London, 1965), 66.

²⁵ D. P. Crook, *The North, The South and The Powers: 1861-1865* (New York, 1974).

²⁶ Mary Ellison, *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* (Chicago, 1972), 134-154.

recognised that most people in Lancashire abhorred slavery, yet in her view there was still almost universal sympathy for the Confederacy. She reconciled this apparent contradiction by pointing to the belief expressed by many Lancashire newspaper editors that a victorious South would lead to emancipation. Ellison argued that there was a general distrust of Lincoln and the North with many workers and editorial writers believing that the North was insincere in its concern for emancipation.²⁷ Lincoln's poor image is contrasted with heroic depictions of Confederates including Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.²⁸ In Ellison's view, many saw the Civil War as a fight for southern independence, not a war over slavery, and those that supported the Confederacy believed that an independent South would not only solve the issue of slavery but would also restore the supply of cotton that Lancashire badly needed.

In so far as reform featured in these earlier works about Britain and the Civil War, it did so as a way of demarcating likely views on the Civil War. Adams, for example, noted that 'friends of the North' in Parliament were likely to be supporters of political reform.²⁹ Historians such as Adams, Jordan and Pratt held that Radicals and former Chartists were more likely to support the Union, while members of the British aristocracy, generally opposed to the idea of democratic institutions in Britain, were more likely to support the Confederacy. Labour historians of the 1960s and 1970s challenged this class-based assessment, disputing the idea of reform as a framing mechanism for views on the Civil War. For historians such as Crook, the persistence of slavery in the United States had seen Radicals and former Chartists lose faith in the ideals of American democracy, while working-class support for both reform and the Confederacy weakened the idea of a connection between pro-Union and pro-reform

²⁷ Ellison, *Support for Secession*, 56-94.

²⁸ Ellison, *Support for Secession*, 173-188.

²⁹ Adams, *Britain and the Civil War*, II, 302.

views. Crook cites notable Radical and advocate for the Union John Bright's 'lonely stand against an infuriated people' when he addressed a crowd assembled at Rochdale town hall in December 1861 to speak in support of the North.³⁰ In her work, Ellison identifies a number of Lancashire Radicals who nevertheless were sympathetic to the South.³¹

Subsequent research returned to the theme of Anglo-American relations during the Civil War, seeking to re-engage with the study of Civil War diplomacy, but these accounts mostly avoided the subject of British public opinion. Where they did engage with this, they tended to side with the views of Adams, Jordan and Pratt.³² A notable example of this can be found in the work of Phillip S. Foner. Revisiting many of the same sources, Foner challenged the link made by Ellison between pro-Confederate newspapers and meetings and the working-class or radical movements in Lancashire. Citing numerous meetings in which working men pledged their support for the North, Foner held that Ellison's conclusions were severely weakened by not taking into consideration the number of pro-Union demonstrations held in Lancashire.³³

The historiographical debate over Britain's relationship with the Civil War was reignited in the early 2000s in the work of R.J.M. Blackett and Duncan Andrew Campbell, both seeking to examine British public opinion on the conflict. Blackett challenged the view held by Ellison and others that there was extensive working-class support for the Confederacy, ultimately siding with the earlier interpretations of Adams, Jordan and Pratt. Using the press as a source of public opinion, combined with an analysis of British pro-Union and pro-Confederate organisations, Blackett argues that both the Union and the Confederacy

³⁰ Crook, *The North, The South and The Powers*, 136.

³¹ Ellison, *Support for Secession*, 8-14.

³² Examples include Brian Jenkins, *Britain & the War for the Union*, 3 vols. (Montreal, 1974-1980), and Dean B. Mahin, *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Washington, DC, 1999).

³³ Phillip S. Foner, *British Labour and the American Civil War* (New York, 1981), 21.

recognised the importance of securing public support in Britain and both sought to encourage it. Blackett examines how the issue of slavery and abolitionism impacted upon public opinion during the war, exploring the role that representatives of the Union and the Confederacy, as well as African American activists in Britain, played in influencing the public debate.³⁴ Blackett also acknowledged the long-term legacy of the war in Britain, writing that ‘no other event, not those in Poland, Hungary, or Italy, or for that matter sporadic wars in the colonies, had as decided an effect on British life as did the Civil War’.³⁵ Unlike the campaigns for Italian, Hungarian and Polish independence, the Civil War had a direct impact on the economic livelihoods of many Britons. The Union Blockade against Southern ports created unemployment in the cotton factory towns which depended on the regular supply of cotton from the South. The Morrill Tariff of 1861 introduced by the Union to prevent the Confederacy from trading also adversely affected British manufacturers; new levels of protection on specific goods made British exports of pig-iron, wool and manufactured goods to their largest market, the United States, more costly. It is important to note that Blackett looks at the period from the start of the war in 1861 to the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865. This cut off point has prevented a full appreciation of the impact of American influences on British reform. In contrast, this thesis will extend the chronology to go beyond the end of the Civil War to consider British analysis of the conflict after 1865 and how it influenced public discourse about reform. With respect to the issue of reform, Blackett ultimately echoed the view of Adams, Jordan and Pratt by arguing for a link between reform and support for the Union and emancipation, with Radicals and politically active workers and artisans forming an alliance to support the North.³⁶

³⁴ R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2001), 169-212.

³⁵ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, 4.

³⁶ Blackett, *Divided Hearts*, 238-240.

Campbell was much more sympathetic to the work of Ellison. He focuses on news coverage during key events in the Civil War that had a direct impact on people in England, such as the Morrill tariff and the blockade, the Trent Affair, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Like Blackett, Campbell's considerations stop with the end of the war in 1865, thereby preventing any assessment of the aftermath of the Civil War. Campbell sought to move discussion of public opinion during the war away from slavery. He believed that historians had focused too much on slavery, writing that 'historians who argue that slavery was the only issue at stake are prone to let it colour their views of British opinion. Emphasising slavery as the sole issue of the conflict, they tend to attribute all criticism of, or indeed, lack of support for, the North as somehow morally dubious'.³⁷ Differing from Blackett, Campbell continued to dispute the idea of a distinct link between views on reform and support for either side in the conflict, finding that the number of reformers who were pro-North has been overestimated while the number of reformers who were anti-Union or pro-Confederate has been underestimated.³⁸ Arguing that Union or Confederate sympathy was rarely based on political or social grounds, Campbell instead finds that a combination of economic concerns generated by blockades and the Morrill Tariff, diplomatic outrage in the aftermath of the Trent Affair and a prevailing anti-slavery sentiment were more direct factors in shaping British public opinion on the Civil War than views on political reform.³⁹ Consequently for Campbell, stances on political reform in Britain were not reliable indicators for suggesting which side in the conflict Britons were likely to support. Instead, Campbell maintains that most people aligned with the British Government's policy of neutrality in the war and that it was only events such as the Trent Affair, the Morrill Tariff and the Emancipation Proclamation which generated significant shifts, with anti-slavery arguments resonating with supporters of the Union while the issue of

³⁷ Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), 13.

³⁸ Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, 244.

³⁹ Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, 96.

self-determination attracted support for the Confederacy. Campbell's survey is confined to English public opinion, not British public opinion, and for most of the work London is synonymous with England. This is because his source of public opinion comes from an analysis of London-based weekly and monthly periodicals. Campbell concedes that 'this work concentrates on the English point of view – largely through the perspective of London'.⁴⁰ Apart from *The Times* no daily or regional newspapers are consulted. Campbell also excludes some publications for their perceived political alignments, avoiding the Confederate-supporting *London Standard* and the *London Herald* and the Union-supporting *Daily News* and the *Morning Star*. He also does not analyse what he terms 'blatant propaganda pamphlets' such as the pro-South *Index* and the pro-North *London American*.

Crucially these accounts have largely read the relationship between reform and British reactions to the Civil War one way, in terms of side taking and how stances on reform in Britain affected support for either the Union or the Confederacy. This research aims to reverse this by looking at how views and analysis of the Civil War informed and affected British public debate about political reform beyond the time of the conflict, placing it as part of an ongoing discussion about the wider significance and influence of America on the future of British politics that was taking place across the nineteenth century. The work of Blackett and Campbell typifies how most of the existing historiography has focused on the period of the Civil War itself. Repeatedly focusing on 1861 to 1865 has prevented a detailed examination of the after-effects of the Civil War in Britain. This has been a trend in the historiography since the seminal work of E.D. Adams. Adams' analysis ended in 1865 because at the time of his writing, this was as far as his access to diplomatic correspondence could extend. Adams himself conceded that 'before this work will have appeared the

⁴⁰ Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, 15.

limitation hitherto imposed on diplomatic correspondence will have been removed, and the date for open research have been advanced beyond 1865, the end of the Civil War'.⁴¹ The period after the war remains unexplored. This failure to look in detail beyond the end of the war is partly why there has not been a full examination of the relationship between the Civil War and the debate surrounding British political reform in the other direction, connecting how views on the conflict fed in to a larger, ongoing debate about reform and the political salience of the United States, which is the subject of this thesis. There has been much work in Civil War history to understand how the United States sought to reconstruct itself after the war and the legacy of the conflict for Americans. However, a similar undertaking has not really been attempted to understand the consequences of the Civil War in its immediate aftermath for Britain as well as the implications for public reform debates.

The wider historiography of the Civil War has recently undergone a transnational turn with research into the global significance of the conflict. This move to understand the Civil War in transnational terms represents a shift away from the focus on Anglo-American relations that has dominated the existing historiography. One such example of this work is Don H. Doyle, Jörg Nagler and Marcus Graser's *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* (Columbia, 2016) which argues that historians have still primarily taken a US-centric approach to the conflict, viewing the Civil War within a 'strictly national framework' that focuses on its domestic impact within the United States. Instead, Doyle, Nagler and Graser advocate an approach which seeks to place the war within a wider global context to understand the transnational significance of an event which, in their view, was central to the transformation of 'the modern world' in the second half of the nineteenth-century.⁴²

⁴¹ Adams, *Britain and the Civil War*, I, vi.

⁴² Don H. Doyle, Jörg Nagler and Marcus Graser, *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* (Columbia, 2016), 1-7; Other works by Doyle on this theme include Don H. Doyle, *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements* (Athens, 2010),

Transnational studies have helped place the conflict in an international context and by moving the historiography away from its focus on Anglo-American relations, it has expanded the field beyond international diplomacy and helped decentralise the issue of Britain's potential intervention in the conflict.⁴³ However, there are limits to this approach. The broader comparative framework necessitated by transnational history reduces our ability to interpret the consequences of the war for individual nations. Nagler, Doyle and Gräser concede that transnational history 'is at times incapable of explaining historical developments that take place within the nation-state since it is inherently ill-equipped to analyse particular aspects of society and politics that are created within and, hence, confined within the container of the nation-state'.⁴⁴ The British experience of the Civil War has featured in some of this work, but as part of a wider European experience.

While the transnational turn continues to unfold, there have recently been a few recent publications which return to the subject of Britain's experience of the Civil War, incorporating these historiographical developments. The themes of Anglo-American diplomacy and British intervention, which have dominated the historiography, are giving way to new searches to understand the wider meaning of the conflict in Britain. Examples of this include works by Thomas E Sebrell, Nimrod Tal, Brent E. Kinser, Hugh Dubrulle and David George. Each of these seek to examine what shaped British understandings of the war. As Dubrulle argues, 'a true estimate of British opinion cannot dwell exclusively on *who* believed *what*; rather, it must also expend some effort in studying *how* Britons believed'.⁴⁵ Sebrell's

and Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York, 2015).

⁴³ Other examples of the transnational turn in Civil War studies include David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis, *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War* (Columbia, 2014), and Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton, *The Global Lincoln* (New York, 2011).

⁴⁴ Doyle, Nagler, and Gräser, *Transnational Significance of the Civil War*, 2.

⁴⁵ Hugh Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2018), 3.

work is the first in-depth examination of the influence of Union and Confederate propaganda on British opinion, represented by the Union-supporting *London American* and the Confederate-supporting *The Index*.⁴⁶ George's study of radical figure John Baxter Langley explores the role that British radical spy rings and networks played in keeping the Northern U.S. Government informed about pro-Confederate sympathisers in Britain and Confederate efforts to construct warships in English ports.⁴⁷ Tal's work seeks to understand the long legacy of the conflict in Britain by examining how twentieth-century Britons continued to be fascinated with the Civil War long after its end; the impact of the war is seen through its effect on debates about Ireland and British military thought and its presence in British cinema and re-enactment societies.⁴⁸ Kinser's work has shown the value of studying British intellectual responses to the Civil War; however, these responses need to be situated in the wider context of reactions to the conflict in British public discourse and considered as part of ongoing analysis of the influence of America on public debates about British political reform that took place across the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ For example, Kinser does not consider the role that the many travel narratives produced in this period by British writers about the United States played, alongside more explicitly political works, in shaping British public discourse about American political life. Dubrulle's work, influenced by postcolonial studies, seeks to establish a model for analysing British opinion of the United States through the Antebellum era to the war itself and argues for a postcolonial approach to the transatlantic relationship. Within this postcolonial framework, Dubrulle contends that up until the mid-nineteenth century the legacy of the 'old imperial connection' meant that British observers could not

⁴⁶ Thomas E. Sebrell, *Persuading John Bull: Union and Confederate propaganda in Britain, 1860-1865* (Lanham, 2014), 3.

⁴⁷ David M. George, *The Radical Campaigns of John Baxter Langley: A Keen and Courageous Reformer* (Exeter, 2021), 99-106.

⁴⁸ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to the Present* (Basingstoke, 2015).

⁴⁹ Brent E. Kinser, *The American Civil War in the Shaping of British Democracy* (Farnham, 2011).

help but look on America with a mixture of pride and condescension, with America's relevant immaturity still, in their view, making it reliant on the old mother country.⁵⁰ These works, building on transnational and postcolonial approaches, have sought to advance the debate surrounding Britain and the Civil War away from diplomatic relationships and British intervention and instead towards a greater focus on what actually shaped British understandings of the conflict and explain why the war continued to resonate well into the twentieth-century. Recent research, such as that by Tal and Dubrulle, has shown the value in assessing the influence of the Civil War on other kinds of reform in Britain, particularly military reform. Tal observes that by 1900, with a large-scale conflict against Germany 'an alarming, viable possibility', British military thinkers looked to the Civil War as a useful precedent when implementing extensive reforms throughout the army to prepare it for future challenges.⁵¹ Dubrulle similarly notes that in the mid-1880s there was a resurgence of military interest in the history of the conflict with British officers keen to learn lessons from the Confederacy's loss; the majority of the British officer corps being from similar social backgrounds to those who had supported the South – gentry from small rural communities in conservative counties.⁵²

The influence of slavery on British attitudes towards America and the Civil War has been an important dividing line between different studies of Britain's relationship with the Civil War. Historians like Adams, Foner and Blackett have largely emphasised the degree to which slavery influenced British public opinion towards the Civil War. In contrast, historians such as Ellison and Campbell have either argued that American slavery was unimportant to many Britons or sought an explanation for how people reconciled a strong distaste for slavery with

⁵⁰ Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 4.

⁵¹ Tal, *Civil War in British Culture*, 33-66.

⁵² Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 162-194.

support for the South. The impact of slavery, or lack thereof, on the British consciousness remains an important element of this field. My research will therefore examine the role of slavery in shaping British opinion on America and British political reform as well as the connection drawn between the Civil War and debates about the franchise. With studies such as those by Crook and Campbell having sought to de-emphasise the role of slavery in shaping British attitudes towards the war and arguing that the persistence of slavery in America caused British radicals to lose faith in the example of the United States by the mid-nineteenth century, it is imperative that we look at the reaction of British radicals to the aftermath of the war from 1865 onwards when the Reconstruction amendments to the US constitution saw slavery abolished, the Dred Scott⁵³ decision overruled, and the prohibition of discrimination in voting rights on the basis of race or colour. These substantial developments in the United States mean that the Reconstruction era America that was viewed by British observers during the reform debates of 1866 and 1867 was quite different to the Civil War era America that much of the historiography has focused on.

The dominance of questions surrounding British intervention has limited the scope and extent of any examinations of other reasons why the Civil War mattered in Britain. Transnational histories of the Civil War and recent work by historians like Sebrell, Tal and Dubrulle have shown the value in moving beyond studies of Anglo-American diplomacy and British intervention. My research, which focuses on the war's impact on the British domestic issue of political reform, intends to add to this recent development in the historiography by reversing the direction of enquiry between reform and British responses to the Civil War to focus not

⁵³ This refers to the case of Dred Scott v. Sandford from 1857 where the US Supreme Court had ruled that the US Constitution was not meant to include American citizenship for people of African descent and that therefore they could not become citizens or enjoy the rights and benefits of citizenship. The Court's ruling was superseded by the Thirteenth Amendment (proposed in 1864 and ratified in 1865) and the Fourteenth Amendment (proposed in 1866 and ratified in 1868) to the US Constitution.

on side taking and how stances on reform affected support for either participant, but rather how perspectives on the conflict shaped public discourse about reform beyond 1865 as part of a wider discussion during the nineteenth century about Americanisation and the significance of the United States for the future of British politics.

The second set of literature this thesis engages with focuses on reform and politics in nineteenth-century Britain. Some of the first major accounts of Victorian politics, such as those by W. N. Molesworth, G. M. Trevelyan, Herbert Paul and Justin McCarthy, framed mid-Victorian parliamentary politics as part of the development of Liberalism.⁵⁴ They saw the Liberal party as the party of progress and assumed a straight path from the reforms of the 1830s to the reform initiatives of the 1860s. Maurice Cowling argued that these early histories ‘assume that Radicalism was more powerful, the gentry weaker and middle class politics uniformly more progressive than sociological analysis might suggest’.⁵⁵

In the aftermath of the First World War, the historiography of Victorian Britain began to be marked by a strong anti-Victorian sentiment with biographies and literature studies seeking to distance the present from the Victorian era. The most notable example of this was Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918). Seeking to ‘lay bare the facts of the case’, Strachey’s biographies were designed to undermine ‘the foundations on which the age that brought war had been built’ and show what he saw as the hypocrisy of the Victorian era.⁵⁶ Anti-

⁵⁴ W. N. Molesworth, *The History of England, 1830-1874* (1874); G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (1913); H. W. Paul, *A History of Modern England*, 5 vols. (1904-1906); Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences* (1899).

⁵⁵ Maurice Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1967), 1.

⁵⁶ Giles Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 2003), 6 ; Richard D. Altick, ‘Eminent Victorianism, What Lytton Strachey Hath Wrought’, *The American Scholar*, 64:1 (1995), 84; Strachey’s views on anti-Victorianism went on to influence the likes of Aldous Huxley and Esme Wingfield-Stratford, see Aldous Huxley, *Antic Hay* (1923); Aldous Huxley, *Do You What You Will* (1929); E.C. Wingfield-Stratford, *The Victorian Tragedy* (1930).

Victorianism began to be challenged in the inter-war years; poor industrial relations in Britain and the rise of fascism and communism abroad invited scholars to revisit the relative political harmony of the Victorian era. G. M. Young for example set out his own assessment of Victorian Britain, criticising the ‘flippancy and conceit’ of anti-Victorian works like those of Strachey and Wingfield-Stratford.⁵⁷ This new approach laid the foundations for the practice of Victorian Studies. However, the initial negative opinion on the Victorians remained prevalent up until the 1940s. The centenary of the 1851 Great Exhibition led scholars to reflect on this Victorian achievement and was supported by the work of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The 1950s also saw a new wave of Anglo-American Victorian studies. The launch of the journal *Victorian Studies* in 1957 was a product of this revival of interest in Victorian culture in North American academic scholarship. As the American scholarship focused on intellectuals in Victorian Britain, the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain saw scholars revisit the Victorian Era from a new approach based on the collection and analysis of quantitative data. Labour historians examined the role of mass agitation and mass action in the campaign for reform as well as the work of the trade union movements. This trend is demonstrated in the work of Royden Harrison who argued that mass demonstrations ‘transformed the harmless flutters of the fifties and early sixties into the relentless game of brag which began in February and ended in August 1867’.⁵⁸

The influence of America on nineteenth-century British politics came under serious scholarly consideration in the 1950s and 1960s. Ella Dzelzainis and Ruth Livesey argue that it was the backdrop of the Cold War which drew academic interest to the subject, writing that ‘at the

⁵⁷ G.M. Young, ‘Victorian History’, *Life and Letters*, 6 (1931), 123-145; G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age* (Oxford, 1936).

⁵⁸ Royden Harrison, ‘The 10 April of Spencer Walpole: the Problem of Revolution in Relation to Reform, 1865-1867’, *International Review of Social History*, 7 (1962), 396.

height of the Cold War, the idea of nineteenth century America as the beacon lighting the way to democratic freedom for less fortunate peoples across the Atlantic had a natural congruence with the present'.⁵⁹ Three key figures in this development were George Lillibridge, Henry Pelling and D. P. Crook. Lillibridge's study of nineteenth-century English radical newspaper and pamphlet literature, focusing chiefly on the significance of the United States for the Chartist movement, led him to conclude that Liberals and Radicals in this period looked to the American democratic experience for inspiration.⁶⁰ However, Lillibridge's understanding of the relationship between America and British politics was challenged by historians such as Frank Thistlethwaite for being too one-dimensional.⁶¹ In contrast to Lillibridge, Pelling's work charts the development of a growing sense of disillusionment with America felt by those on the Left across Europe, particularly in Britain. For Pelling, 'Radical goodwill' for the United States in the mid-nineteenth century gradually dissipated, replaced by the mid-twentieth century with a marked "'anti-American" feeling' among those on the British Left.⁶² Crook similarly questioned the degree to which English radicals and reformers had lost faith in the American example by 1850. Crook argued that prior to 1832, America had appealed to 'Radicalism as an argument against aristocracy and Establishments', however he believed that after the passage of the Great Reform Act in 1832 the political value of America to British Radicals became much more limited as they began to see 'factory owners and industrialists as a more dangerous foe than the effete nobility'.⁶³ By ending his study in 1850, however, Crook's analysis is unable to take into account the impact of the Civil War and the degree to which this affected British views on American Democracy. Within these works, the

⁵⁹ Ella Dzelzainis and Ruth Livesey, 'Introduction', in Ella Dzelzainis and Ruth Livesey (eds.), *The American experiment and the idea of democracy in British Culture, 1776-1914* (Farnham, 2013), 3.

⁶⁰ George Lillibridge, *Beacon of Freedom: The Impact of American Democracy upon Great Britain, 1830-1870* (PA, 1955), xiii-xiv.

⁶¹ Frank Thistlethwaite, 'Review - Beacon of Freedom: The Impact of American Democracy upon Great Britain, 1830-1870', *Journal of Modern History*, 28:3 (1956), 285-286.

⁶² Henry Pelling, *America and the British Left from Bright to Bevan* (London, 1956), 4.

⁶³ D.P. Crook, *American Democracy in English Politics, 1815-1850* (Oxford, 1965), 204.

tendency to focus on British Radical impressions of the United States has left Conservative assessments of America somewhat overlooked.

The 1960s saw two significant historical studies of the Second Reform Act: F. B. Smith's *The Making of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1966) and Maurice Cowling's *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1967). Prior to this, only two full-scale studies of the act had been published. The first by Homersham Cox was published to coincide with the 1868 General Election to support the Liberal Party; Cox himself conceded that the work was not intended to be historically impartial.⁶⁴ The second by J. H. Park worked with periodicals to provide a narrative account of the passage of the act.⁶⁵ In his book, Smith pointed out that the Second Reform Act had not received the historical attention that the acts of 1832 and 1884 had.⁶⁶ Both Smith and Cowling's work concentrated on the principal actors in Westminster politics, working with their private papers and personal correspondence. Smith justified this approach, writing that 'it is only by tracing the pressures behind the scenes, as reflected in [the] private papers of the protagonists...that the historian can begin to explain what happened'.⁶⁷ Cowling similarly placed leading political figures 'in the historical situations in which they were operating. From what one finds them writing and from what others wrote about them...one intuits their intentions'.⁶⁸ This approach, often characterised as the study of High Politics, helped create one of the defining historiographical debates in this literature.

⁶⁴ Homersham Cox, *A History of the Reform Bills of 1866 and 1867* (London, 1868), 282.

⁶⁵ J. H. Park, *The English Reform Bill of 1867* (New York, 1920).

⁶⁶ F. B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1966), 1.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Second Reform Bill*, 1.

⁶⁸ Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, 6-7.

This debate was formed by two fundamentally different approaches to political history. The first approach, focused on the study of High Politics, originated primarily in the work of Maurice Cowling described above. With regard to the Second Reform Act, Cowling believed that its passage could only be explained by focusing on the interactions at the highest level of British politics.⁶⁹ Cowling's approach influenced other historians such as Andrew Jones, who applied this method to the 1884 reform act, and A.B. Cooke and John Vincent who followed this interpretation to examine the decision-making process of late Victorian government during the debate over Irish Home Rule.⁷⁰

This approach is in direct contrast to that taken by political historians who favour a sociohistorical methodology. This includes the work of labour historians mentioned earlier. One of the most important works in shaping this approach was E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963). Thompson's study of the development of the English working class between 1780 and 1832 was highly influential, with Thompson believing that class could only be understood if it were seen as a social and cultural formation.⁷¹ In contrast to the study of high politics, Thompson's approach was to focus on the lowest levels of British politics.⁷² This kind of approach influenced other historians of the British working class and the labour movement.⁷³ To understand the history of the working class and its relationship to labour and radical politics, these historians have based their research on sources that give an insight into the lives of the working class such as local newspapers and pamphlets, private letters and diaries, annual reports of charities, District

⁶⁹ Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, 3.

⁷⁰ Andrew Jones, *The Politics of Reform, 1884* (Cambridge, 1972); A.B. Cooke and John Vincent, *The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain, 1885-86* (Brighton, 1974).

⁷¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), 11.

⁷² Thompson, *English Working Class* (London, 1963), 12-13.

⁷³ For example see Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000).

Committees and the Poor Law Board, the records of trade union movements and health records.

In the 1970s, this socio-historical approach saw historians turn their attention to the extraparliamentary arena and the influence of pressure groups on British politics.

Concentrating on ‘pressure from without’, edited collections such as those by Patricia Hollis and J. T. Ward brought historians together to explore the history of various extraparliamentary agitations in early Victorian England up to the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁴ D. A. Hamer’s work was a key example of this. Turning away from ‘the world of Parliament and high politics’, Hamer sought to examine the relationship between reform movements and Liberal party politics at the constituency level, from the Anti-Corn Law League to the National Education League and the Liberation Society. Hamer believed that while Victorian pressure groups had their own distinctive characteristics, when it came to their electoral strategies, the ‘employment of electoral pressure by reform movements’ constituted a recurring theme.⁷⁵

A major intervention in this historiography came in the 1980s with the linguistic turn. The linguistic turn in British social history moved the emphasis onto questions of language and meaning. This was spearheaded by the work of Gareth Stedman Jones. For Stedman Jones, Chartist ideology could not be fully understood without focusing on its linguistic form, ‘what Chartists actually said or wrote, the terms in which they addressed each other or their opponents’.⁷⁶ This, in Stedman Jones’ view, would allow for a better study of the relationship between ideology and activity. Stedman Jones also sought to reintegrate the political

⁷⁴ Patricia Hollis, *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (London, 1974); J.T. Ward, *Popular Movements, c.1830-1850* (London, 1970).

⁷⁵ D.A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Agitations* (Hassocks, 1977), vii-ix.

⁷⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 94-95.

dimension into histories of Chartism alongside socio-historical analysis, arguing that Chartism should not be seen as a response to social and economic circumstance, but as a political movement whose form ‘cannot be understood in terms of the consciousness of a particular social class’.⁷⁷ Focusing on the language of the chartists, Stedman Jones concluded that Chartism succeeded by rooting itself in older traditions of political radicalism, which attacked the corruption of the political system, and adapted this language of old radicalism to the economic discontent of the 1830s and 1840s. For Stedman Jones, the collapse of Chartism came with Peel’s social and economic reform in the 1840s which reversed economic hardship without reforming parliament and broke the link made by chartists between political reform and economic discontent. By focusing on the use of language, Stedman Jones challenged the existing orthodoxy that the success and failure of Chartism could be explained by focusing on class consciousness and the experience of the working class through industrialisation.

Stedman Jones work helped form in the 1990s what Dror Wahrman termed ‘the new political history’.⁷⁸ Influenced by the linguistic turn, advocates of this ‘new political history’ sought to reconstruct the broader cultural context around nineteenth-century British political history. Key figures in this movement were Margot C. Finn, James Vernon, James A. Epstein and Patrick Joyce. For Vernon, the linguistic turn offered possibilities for a new political history by acknowledging that it was language rather than social structure which created ‘diverse, unstable, and often contradictory identities’.⁷⁹ By focusing on the activity of a number of middle-class intellectuals and politicians in the mid-nineteenth century who acted as spokesmen for the working class, Finn demonstrated how the campaign for parliamentary reform in 1866 and 1867 united middle-class reformers and working-class radicals in support

⁷⁷ Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 95.

⁷⁸ Dror Wahrman, ‘The New Political History: A Review Essay’, *Social History*, 21:3 (1996), 343-344.

⁷⁹ James Vernon, *Politics and the People; A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), 5.

of social and political reform and in the process redefined radical interpretations of Liberalism.⁸⁰ Epstein explored how in their campaign for change and reform, early nineteenth-century Radicals looked to the past and symbols like the cap of liberty to construct ‘traditions of a culture of popular politics’.⁸¹ In his comparison of ‘working-class’ poet Edwin Waugh and ‘middle-class politician’ John Bright, Joyce held that language ‘shared by people in different conditions’ could transcend and erase supposed class distinctions.⁸²

Where Stedman Jones had advocated focusing on class as a discursive construction, in his work on nineteenth-century radicalism Miles Taylor took a different approach, arguing that while ‘the “linguistic turn” has...helped to restore politics to the analysis of radical movement’ it did not go far enough ‘in rethinking the chronology of mid-nineteenth-century radicalism’.⁸³ Taylor believed that more attention needed to be paid to the ‘continuities in ideology and strategy’ in radicalism between the 1830s and 1850s and that as a result parliamentary politics should be at the centre of analysis since ‘the rise and fall of radicalism’ was a product of the changing role of Parliament in this period.⁸⁴ Taylor’s work focused on the private papers of notable political figures, the correspondence of radical and liberal politicians and activists, radical London newspapers, quarterly reviews, parliamentary records and pamphlets. Despite sharing many of the same sources as those favoured by the school of high politics, Taylor sought to distance himself from this, concluding that ‘the force and appeal of radicalism in the 1840s and 1850s stemmed from...the wider popularity of

⁸⁰ Margot C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1884* (Cambridge, 1993), 253-254.

⁸¹ James A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), 20,149.

⁸² Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994), 86-87.

⁸³ Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995), 6.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, 8.

parliamentary institutions, and the deeply held national belief that a reformed system of representation could curb the lingering excesses of the ancien regime'.⁸⁵

Within this body of literature engaging with reform in nineteenth-century Britain, the significance of the United States for British parliamentary and popular reform politics has not been fully appreciated. Key parliamentary histories of the Second Reform Act such as those by Smith and Cowling have focused on the act primarily as the product of internal, British political debates and traditions, including high political considerations such as Disraeli's desire to 'dish the Whigs' and turn the issue of reform to the Conservative Party's advantage, thereby downplaying the ways in which external points of comparison like the American political system and external events like the Civil War were drawn upon by MPs and Peers to make their case about reform. Studies of nineteenth-century pressure groups and the extraparliamentary campaign for reform have similarly underappreciated the ways in which popular speakers drew on the example of the United States to illustrate their arguments about political reform. For example in *After Chartism*, Finn's discussion of radical working-class politics focuses on the relationship between Europe and Britain with respect to the issue of reform, particularly on the impact of events in Poland and Italy.⁸⁶ However, events in America had a far more direct effect on the economic livelihoods of the British working class than the nationalist campaigns of Italy and Poland. Eugenio F. Biagini's *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform* contains a short reference to the influence of America on British politics, however his focus is not on the subject of franchise reform but rather the impact of the Civil War on the broader Trade Union Movement.⁸⁷ D. A. Hamer's analysis of the Reform

⁸⁵ Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, 337.

⁸⁶ Finn, *After Chartism*, 188-225.

⁸⁷ Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), 69-81.

League's tactics focuses on their efforts to turn into an electoral organisation in the post-1867 reformed system rather than the international influences on their early activities before the Second Reform Act.⁸⁸ As the Reform League and the National Reform Union sought to enlist popular support for their campaign to pressure Parliament into a wider expansion of the franchise in the 1860s, this thesis will show how in their public rhetoric they looked towards the United States for inspiration.

My research, focused on the influence of America on the debate over political reform, will examine the impact on both Liberal and Conservative arguments about reform, working with sources that reflect a wide range of different political sympathies. The significance of political reform in the history of Victorian Liberalism and Conservatism has been widely demonstrated by the existing literature. For British Liberalism, the campaign for parliamentary reform united middle-class reformers with working-class radicals and within Westminster it offered the Liberal Party an opportunity to consolidate and shape Parliamentary politics. British Conservative attitudes towards reform changed during the reform debates of the 1860s, either as a result of a tactical move designed to strengthen the Conservative Party and challenge the power of Liberals in the borough seats, or as part of a conscious political strategy towards building a Tory democracy.⁸⁹ However, analysing how the example of America informed British Conservative and Liberal stances on reform adds new dimensions to the existing historiography with respect to how the parties approached the

⁸⁸ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 308-315.

⁸⁹ This is an important theme in the existing literature with historians contesting the degree to which the 1867 Conservative Reform Act represented either tactical move of political opportunism, a conscious ideological shift, or a combination of the two. For the view of Disraeli as a political opportunist see Lord Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966). For an assessment which emphasises the importance of ideas around Tory democracy and the expectation that deference would moderate newly enfranchised voters see Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867', *Journal of British Studies*, 6:1 (1966), 97-138 and Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (Cambridge, 1996). For an example of a hybrid interpretation which seeks to combine both the importance of ideas in shaping Disraeli's attitude towards reform with the extent to which 1867 represented a recognition of practical concerns around exacerbating divisions within the Liberal Party see Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

franchise, the increasing professionalisation of political life, party management, patriotism, education, constitutional matters and the connection between the Government and the governed.

The relationship between Radicalism and Liberalism in nineteenth-century Britain has been a recurring theme in the historiography. Historians such as John Vincent, Angus Hawkins and Jonathan Parry have focused their attention on developments in Westminster to explain the formation of the Liberal Party. Vincent argued that it was Palmerston's leadership, aided by Lord John Russell, which enabled a parliamentary alignment of Liberal opinion in 1859, combining Whigs, Liberals, Peelites and radicals together into one party.⁹⁰ Hawkins believed that Palmerston's cabinet of 1859 brought together 'Victorian Liberalism, Peelite morality and administrative expertise, Whig notions of moral, economic and efficient government, and radical enthusiasms...to provide a political focus for nearly all the dynamic forces of change in Victorian Britain'.⁹¹ Parry argued that while Conservatism had difficulty adjusting to reform politics after 1832, it was Liberalism which created the momentum for further political reform. For Parry, it was the leadership of Gladstone which broke this careful political balance in the Liberal Party that had been formed by Russell and Palmerston and ultimately Gladstone's commitment to radical causes like Irish Home Rule and the reform act of 1884 which threatened traditional Liberal governing ideals, driving Liberals from the Whig-Liberal tradition out of the party.⁹² This assessment of Gladstone's relationship with Liberalism was disputed by Biagini who argued that it was Gladstone's ability to mobilise and assimilate popular radicalism into Liberal party politics that helped form a working-class

⁹⁰ John Vincent, *The Formation of The British Liberal Party 1857-1868*, (Hassocks, 1966).

⁹¹ Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852-1886* (Basingstoke, 1998), 77-78.

⁹² Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1993), 306.

movement of popular liberalism. Far from destroying Liberalism, Biagini believed that Gladstone's charismatic leadership equipped Victorian Liberalism for mass democracy in an age when 'charismatic leadership was the only effective means of reaching out to the new mass electorate'.⁹³

This research, in demonstrating the ways in which comparisons to America affected Liberal Party rhetoric about reform, will show how debates associated with liberal machine politics, divisions within the Liberal Party and the politics of the caucus were beginning to form earlier than is argued in the existing historiography, for example in the work of Kathryn Rix, Naomi Lloyd-Jones, James Owen and Peter Marsh.⁹⁴ Where historical debates about splits in the Liberal Party have traditionally started with the foundation of the National Liberal Federation in 1877 and the caucusization of liberal politics in the 1870s, this thesis will show how these splits were already manifesting in the 1860s with tensions within the party as to how the example of America should be approached when thinking about the future of British political reform. We will see how Liberal splits over America and its relevance to reform informed and foreshadowed debates over the caucusization of liberal politics that came to prominence in the late 1870s.

The politics of reform has also been a significant theme in the history of Victorian Conservatism. In his work on Disraelian Conservatism, Paul Smith argued that the passage of

⁹³ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, 425.

⁹⁴ Kathryn Rix, *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880-1910* (London, 2016), 16-47; Kathryn Rix, 'Hidden workers of the party: The professional Liberal agents, 1885-1910', *Journal of Liberal History*, 52 (2006), 4-13; Naomi Lloyd-Jones, 'The 1892 general election in England: Home Rule, the Newcastle programme and positive Unionism', *History Research*, 93:259 (2020), 73-104; Naomi Lloyd-Jones, 'Liberalism, Scottish Nationalism and the Home Rule Crisis, c.1886-93', *English Historical Review*, 129:539 (2014), 862-887; James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-Class Radicalism and Organised Liberalism in England, 1868-1888* (Liverpool, 2014); Peter Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (London, 1994), 103-131; Peter Marsh, 'Tearing the Bonds: Chamberlain's Separation from the Gladstonian Liberals, 1885-6', in Bruce L. Kinzer (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays Presented to J. B. Conacher* (Toronto, 1985), 123-153.

the Second Reform Act was a key moment in the development of the Conservative Party. Smith believed that Derby and Disraeli changed their stance on parliamentary reform between 1866 and 1867 because in doing so it allowed them to improve the position of their party; neither was particularly in favour of reform, but when confronted by powerful working-class agitation for it, they decided to try and turn the situation to their advantage.⁹⁵ This assessment of Disraeli as essentially a political opportunist was established in Robert Blake's biography of the leader and shared by Maurice Cowling in his work on the 1867 Reform Act.⁹⁶ Studying the personal correspondence of party leaders to measure the impact of the Second Reform Act on the Conservative Party, E. J. Feuchtwanger concluded that where the Liberal Party was unable to contain the split between radicals and those from the Whig-Liberal tradition, the Conservative Party remained a much more homogenous entity following 1867.⁹⁷

Rather than seeing Disraeli's politics as opportunistic, Gertrude Himmelfarb found that it was more accurate to describe them as latitudinarian, arguing that Conservative conversion to the cause of reform was not the result of parliamentary tactics, but conscious political strategy to build a Tory Democracy.⁹⁸ Later studies of Disraelian Conservatism would also question the characterisation of Disraeli as a political opportunist. In 1984, P. R. Ghosh, concentrating on Conservative financial policy, argued that Disraeli's views gradually evolved throughout the 1860s. Peelite Conservatism and its focus on financial reform, which Disraeli had followed, saw the Conservatives meet electoral defeat in 1859 and 1865, while the Liberal Party

⁹⁵ Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform* (Cambridge, 1967), 28, 89. Smith would later revise this view within his biography of Disraeli which argued that Disraeli's ideas had been 'pushed to the periphery' and that earlier takes, including his own, had focused perhaps too much on the origin and function of Disraeli's ideas 'in terms of their instrumentality', Smith, *A Brief Life*, 5-6.

⁹⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, 757-766, and Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, 62-66 and 301-310.

⁹⁷ E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory party: Conservative leadership and organisation after the Second Reform Bill* (Oxford, 1968).

⁹⁸ Himmelfarb, 'The Politics of Democracy', 112-113.

increasingly placed emphasis on parliamentary reform. Ghosh concluded that Disraeli was forced to adopt a new strategy on reform 'by sheer pressure of events' and that his 'gradual evolution, effected over the best part of a decade, involving no reversal of specific views, and between two strategies of Conservative intent, can scarcely be labelled as opportunist'.⁹⁹

Despite this challenge, the dominant explanation for the change in the Conservative leadership's attitude towards parliamentary reform remained that it offered the party a tactical advantage. In his work on Tory Democracy, Richard Shannon argued that the 1867 reform bill was a political move designed to target the boroughs where the Liberals had enjoyed the most electoral success; Disraeli believed that some expansion of the franchise might weaken the Liberal hegemony and increase the success of the Conservative Party.¹⁰⁰ John Vincent questioned the degree to which Disraeli was even involved in forming the reform act, arguing that it was Derby who was responsible for developing it with Disraeli 'left to execute other men's plans'.¹⁰¹

Exploring how the United States featured in Conservative rhetoric and writing about reform in this period, this research enables us to see how the reform debates of the 1860s not only presented the Conservative Party with an electoral opportunity, as has been shown in the existing historiography, but crucially and perhaps unexpectedly how Conservatives drew on the language of American politics within these debates to develop a patriotic appeal to voters, claiming that any measure of reform should act within the spirit of the English Constitution. The shift in patriotism as a force associated with liberal radicalism to a force associated with

⁹⁹ P. R. Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism: A Financial Approach', *The English Historical Review*, 99:391 (1984), 295-296.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Shannon, *The Age of Democracy, 1868-1881: The Rise of Tory Democracy* (London, 1992).

¹⁰¹ John Vincent, *Disraeli* (London, 1990), 9.

conservative constitutionalism has been attributed by Hugh Cunningham and Robert Blake to Disraeli's leadership of the Conservative party in the 1870s and 1880s. In the post-1867 reformed system, they both argue that Disraeli sought through an appeal to patriotism to consolidate the party's appeal to the middle classes while also securing a proportion of the new urban working-class vote.¹⁰² However, focusing on the influence of America on Conservative attitudes towards reform shows not only that this development has earlier origins than is accepted in the existing historiography but significantly that the United States played a key role in the development of British Conservative patriotic rhetoric in this period. The reform debates of the 1860s represented an early opportunity for the Conservative Party to wrest control of the language of patriotism from the Liberal party, with Conservative fears about Americanisation leading them to position the United States as a kind of political "other", against which the English constitutional setup could be defined.

The 2000s saw a shift towards new studies of the impact of the reform debate on questions about gender, citizenship and race. This shift is demonstrated by Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall's *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000) which argues that the reform debates of the 1860s, both inside and outside Parliament, were concerned with defining citizenship.¹⁰³ The role of gender in discussions about reform is another important aspect of the historiography that has developed in recent years.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), 21-22; Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 160-161; See also Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970), 124, 274.

¹⁰³ Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), 180.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Anna Clark, 'Gender, Class and the Constitution: Franchise Reform in England, 1832-1928', in James Vernon (ed.), *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), 230-253; Sarah Richardson, 'The Role of Women in Electoral Politics in Yorkshire during the 1830s', *Northern History*, 32 (1996), 133-151; Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London, 1978); Martin Pugh, 'The Limits of Liberalism: Liberals and Women's Suffrage 1867-1914', in Eugenio Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and*

Building on these recent works this research seeks to integrate High Political and Low Political approaches to study the dynamics of reform in the 1860s in both extraparliamentary and parliamentary settings and explore how the worlds of high and low politics engaged with each other through public debate and discourse about the political salience of America for the future of British political reform. Studying how extraparliamentary analysis and commentary on American politics and British political reform influenced Parliamentary opinion in 1866 and 1867 reveals how the arguments made by parliamentarians about reform interpreted and built on existing ideas about the political system of the United States. Parliament's role in the reform debate must be recognised, as understanding Parliamentary opinion on reform is crucial in explaining how the Second Reform Act came to be passed. At the same time, public demonstrations must be examined both as expressions of working-class sentiment towards political reform as well as for the impact they had on parliamentary reform debates. Drawing on the influence of the linguistic turn and new political history, close attention will be paid to how America affected the language used by campaigners in political reform debates to appeal to a variety of different audiences. We must consider both Parliament's role in shaping reform legislation and the impact of external campaign groups such as the Reform League and the National Reform Union in shaping wider public reform discourse. London's centrality as a hub of political and economic activity, must be balanced by coverage of other key locations. These locations include Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, North and South Wales, Cork, Belfast and Dublin. By covering these multiple locations, I hope to represent attitudes towards the impact of America on British reform politics both at the heart of Parliament and in local and national campaign groups.

Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in British History 1865-1931 (Cambridge, 1996), 45-65; Martine Monacelli, *Male Voices on Women's Rights: an Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Texts* (Manchester, 2017); Kathryn Gleadle, 'Masculinity, Age and Life Cycle in the Age of Reform', *Parliamentary History*, 36:1 (2017), 31-45; Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge, 2012).

Only recently has the influence of America on British politics been readdressed as part of a new wave of studies that take a transatlantic or transnational approach. For many years the work of figures like Lillibridge, Crook and Pelling continued to be the main historical contributions in this area. In 2014, Peter O'Connor observed how the fact that Lillibridge's work was still a key standard point of reference in 'scholarly discussions of the meaning of American democracy in Britain' was a fair indication of the extent to which the subject has been pushed to the intellectual margins'.¹⁰⁵ This new wave, combining studies of intellectual history, politics and popular culture is demonstrated by Dzelzainis and Livesey's *The American Experiment and the Idea of Democracy in British Culture, 1776-1914* (Farnham, 2013). Seeking to re-examine Anglo-American interactions from the American Revolution to the twentieth century, Dzelzainis and Livesey's collection brought together scholars from different academic disciplines to argue that the American Republic 'was a means for British commentators to think through pressing domestic political and cultural problems by looking to a...secessionist fragment of the domestic state'.¹⁰⁶ In one of the key essays from this edited collection, Robert Saunders reconstructs how the Civil War affected the British liberal critique of America, arguing that the Second Reform Act was a measure designed to 'protect Britain from Americanisation'.¹⁰⁷ This essay was an extension of Saunders wider history of the Second Reform Act, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011) which aimed to reappraise earlier work on the subject, specifically the work of F. B. Smith and Cowling.

¹⁰⁵ Peter O'Connor, 'Review – The American experiment and the idea of democracy in British culture, 1776-1914', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 12 (2014), 349.

¹⁰⁶ Dzelzainis and Livesey, 'Introduction', 2.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Saunders, "'Let America Be the Test": Democracy and Reform in Britain, 1832-1867', in Ella Dzelzainis and Ruth Livesey (eds.), *The American Experiment and the Idea of Democracy in British Culture, 1776-1914* (Farnham, 2013), 79-92, 91.

In *Democracy and the Vote*, Saunders concentrates his attention on Parliament, but insists that this is not a return to the High Politics approach, arguing that ‘Victorian parliaments were fundamentally outward-looking’.¹⁰⁸ Saunders challenges the link made by Hall, McClelland and Rendall between citizenship and the franchise, observing that whilst this was true for some radicals, for most politicians ‘the idea that freedom lay in the exercise of political power was a Continental error’.¹⁰⁹ Saunders argues that the Second Reform Act was an anti-democratic measure designed to protect ‘the uniquely British qualities’ of the existing constitution.¹¹⁰ Saunders questions Cowling’s belief that ideology was mostly irrelevant in explaining the actions of key political figures. Instead, Saunders suggests that the influence of ideas on party leaders ‘cannot wholly be set aside’ citing diaries and letters which demonstrate a preoccupation with ‘party feeling’, ‘public opinion’ and ‘the mood of the House’.¹¹¹ Where Cowling’s approach led him to conclude that figures like Gladstone, Disraeli and Russell were to be understood ‘primarily as strategists, playing out a complex parliamentary game’ and that it was ‘idle to ask whether they self-consciously believed, personally desired or independently wanted anything in particular’, Saunders argues that this suggestion would have ‘astonished their contemporaries’.¹¹² Instead, Saunders emphasises that debates over reform in the 1860s were based on a ‘real and meaningful collision of ideas’ and that legislators in 1866 and 1867 were at least in part motivated and constrained by personal convictions they had expressed in ‘earlier struggles’ over reform alongside any thought towards managing opinion within their political parties.¹¹³ The extra-parliamentary

¹⁰⁸ Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 20.

¹¹⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 142, 159.

¹¹¹ Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, 311-312; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 18.

¹¹² Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 18, 265.

¹¹³ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 22.

campaign for reform, however, is neglected with the impact of popular protest dismissed in favour of a focus on the interplay of different groups within Westminster.

Significantly for this thesis, Saunders made a key intervention in the relevant historiography of this field by examining the influence of international points of comparison on the Second Reform Act, in the form of France and America. For Saunders, the failure of the 1860 reform bill saw the reform debate in Parliament enter a 'period of hibernation'.¹¹⁴ Without a prospective bill to be its focus, he argues that the constitutional debate over reform in Parliament manifested in other areas of parliamentary debate, chiefly relating to foreign affairs. With events in France and America dominating these debates, this provided an opportunity for those parliamentarians looking to speak about these two nations and their governing systems as examples of democracy. With respect to America, Saunders argued that the experience of the Civil War strengthened the need in Parliament to find a version of reform that would not collapse into a democracy of the American kind. He concluded that the 1866 bill failed to meet this demand, while the 1867 Act found such a mechanism in the rating franchise.¹¹⁵ Where Saunders' focus is firmly on Parliament and the factors shaping the scope for successful reform legislation, as well as how the parliamentary reform debates of the 1860s drew on comparisons with the political systems of France and the United States, this thesis seeks to place a greater emphasis on the role of extraparliamentary analysis in shaping wider public debates about America and British political reform. In doing so, this thesis demonstrates how references to the United States during parliamentary reform debates in 1866 and 1867 built on pre-existing ideas about American democracy that had been formed in travel literature, political philosophy, newspapers and periodicals as well as in contexts

¹¹⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 131.

¹¹⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 142-159.

where parliamentarians engaged with the wider public, such as during election speeches. Within Parliament particularly, this thesis challenges Saunders' argument that the influence of the Civil War was specifically to strengthen the need to find a version of reform that would not fall into a kind of American democracy by showing, for example, how the conduct of the working classes of Lancashire during the economic blockades of the Civil War also demonstrated to a number of Liberal and Radical parliamentarians their worthiness for the franchise. Where Saunders' conclusion focuses on the impact of the Civil War on Parliament and the 1866 and 1867 reform bills, this thesis, focusing more on the language used by political commentators, argues that the Civil War fed into broader concerns about American politics and its potential implications for British political life that had been developing in extraparliamentary discourse about reform since 1832.

Other works that have sought to reappraise the connection between America and British politics include those by Gregory Claeys and Murney Gerlach. Focusing more on a different aspect of reform debates in this period (land and property reform rather than franchise reform), in his essay on the impact of the United States on British socialist thought around capitalism Claeys argued that between 1820 and 1850 perceptions of inequality in America gave rise to a negative model of the United States in Radical debates, with Radical distaste for such 'a commercial entity writ large' providing impetus for socialist campaigns around property ownership and management.¹¹⁶ Focusing on a later period than that under examination in this thesis, Murney Gerlach has also shown the impact of American 'friendships, methods of government, [and] modes of behaviour' on the actions and political

¹¹⁶ Gregory Claeys, 'The Example of America a Warning to England? The Transformation of America in British Radicalism and Socialism', in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), 66-80.

thought of Liberal leaders in Britain between the settlement of the Alabama claims in 1871 and the Venezuelan boundary dispute of 1896-1897.¹¹⁷

In reflecting on the relationship between reform and democracy, this thesis also connects to recent literature on the changing meanings of democracy in mid-Victorian Britain. By the mid-nineteenth century, Innes and Philp conclude that democracy had shifted away from connotations with the past, coming to be linked with ‘the “modern” constitutional form, representative government’.¹¹⁸ Mark Philp has demonstrated how prior to the 1790s, the term ‘democracy’ was not a popular concept in general circulation and that the term faded from view with the collapse of reform societies towards the end of the eighteenth century. Consequently, he argues that when popular pressures for reform revived in the 1810s they drew on the ‘language of constitutionalism and reform’ rather than on the ‘terminology of democracy’.¹¹⁹ Saunders has shown how this complicated relationship between reform and democracy persevered in later reform debates between the 1830s and the 1860s, citing that even in debates where the franchise was a central issue, there was ‘no necessary connection between enfranchisement and democracy’ with many key supporters of reform within Parliament viewing reform as a ‘preservative against democracy’. However, he also argues that as a result of the influence of the Chartist movement ‘if a popular suffrage was not a sufficient condition for democracy, it was increasingly recognised as its most plausible instrument’.¹²⁰ In the first half of the nineteenth century, Peter Gurney has shown that while

¹¹⁷ Murney Gerlach, *British Liberalism and the United States: Political and Social Thought in the Late Victorian Age* (Basingstoke, 2001), 261.

¹¹⁸ Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, ‘“Democracy” from Book to Life: The Emergence of the Term in Active Political Debate, to 1848’, in Jussi Kurunmäki, Jeppe Nevers and Henk te Velde (eds.), *Democracy in Modern Europe: A Conceptual History* (New York, 2018), 33.

¹¹⁹ Mark Philp, ‘Talking about Democracy: Britain in the 1790s’, in Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (eds.), *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013), 113.

¹²⁰ Robert Saunders, ‘Democracy’, in David Craig and James Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013), 148.

‘democracy’ was a generally reviled concept among British social and political elites, discourses of democracy were ‘deeply embedded in the culture of the Chartist movement’, with Chartists embracing the term and appropriating the concept for themselves.¹²¹ Innes, Philp and Saunders conclude that while the adoption of the language of democracy by Chartists had little impact on elite political usage, it did fix the term ‘more firmly in the lexicon of British politics’ and reinforce the idea that ‘the natural target of democratic aspiration was the franchise’.¹²² Saunders also notes the importance of the United States in entrenching the relationship between democracy and a popular franchise in this period with the rise of the U.S. Democratic Party.¹²³ Understanding the connection between democracy and reform will be key as this thesis explores British political commentators’ perceptions and understandings of American Democracy.

Overall, this research will help position the Civil War as a worldwide historical event with transnational implications and demonstrate the influence of America on nineteenth-century British reform politics. Where the existing historical literature surrounding Britain’s involvement with the Civil War has focused on the degree to which stances on reform affected side-taking and support for the North or the South, this thesis reverses the direction of enquiry to explore the impact of the conflict on British public discourse about reform beyond 1865 as part of an ongoing debate in the nineteenth century about the political relevance of the United States and the potential implications of American democracy. This project will place nineteenth-century British attitudes towards the extension of the franchise in the context of their feelings towards American political culture. The influence of events in

¹²¹ Peter Gurney, ‘The Democratic Idiom: Languages of Democracy in the Chartist Movement’, *Journal of Modern History*, 86:3 (2014), 566-602.

¹²² Joanna Innes, Mark Philp and Robert Saunders, ‘The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s’, in Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (eds.), *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750-1850* (Oxford, 2013), 128.

¹²³ Saunders, ‘Democracy’, 145

America on reform at a time of political realignment both within political parties in Westminster and in extraparliamentary campaign groups will also be considered. By analysing the ways in which America shaped the debate among nineteenth-century Britons over political reform, this research adds a new dimension to the existing historiography to gain a greater understanding of British attitudes towards democracy, the constitution and caucus politics in this period, as well as explore how debates about the political relevance of America for British political reform in the 1860s foreshadowed developments in both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party which have generally been located in the late 1870s and 1880s in the existing historical literature.

Sources and Methodology

Concentrating on the ways in which the United States manifested in British public reform debates, this thesis takes its chronological boundaries from the dates of two significant parliamentary acts of electoral reform that reshaped the political landscape across Britain: the Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Second Reform Act of 1867. Using these two reform acts as the key chronological markers for this thesis enables us to track and evaluate changing perceptions of American democracy and its relevance for the cause of British political reform over a thirty-five year period which saw the rise of Jacksonian Democracy in the United States and the emergence of multiple extraparliamentary campaigns for reform in Britain from the Chartist movement to the Reform League and the National Reform Union. Change over time is an important element of this thesis. Rather than honing in on certain flashpoint moments in the history of Anglo-American relations in this period, such as the introduction of the protectionist Morrill Tariff just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, the diplomatic incident of the Trent Affair in 1861, or the Treaty of Washington in 1871 that settled the long running issue of the Alabama Claims and the damage done to Union merchant ships by

Confederate raiders that had been built in British shipyards, the approach adopted in this thesis, through surveying the period between 1832 and 1867, is to identify and trace the development of traits and characteristics associated with American Democracy and its relevance to British franchise reform in public discourse. This approach allows us to see the impact of wider developments in both the U.S. and the UK on British public discourse about America and reform. For example, thinking about the relative stability of democracy in America in this period, in the 1830s and 1840s it was plausible to argue that in comparison to British politics, American politics appeared to be more stable; British politics at this time being dominated by the Reform crisis and the rise of political movements such as Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League. By the late-1850s and early-1860s, however, British politics had largely stabilised while it was U.S. politics that seemed increasingly crisis-riven. The practice of slavery was also a marked difference between Britain and America in the 1860s, but perhaps less so in the 1830s. In addition, technological innovations in rail and sea travel, especially in the 1860s, opened up different parts of the United States to British visitors for exploration and study. The Great Reform Act energised public reform debates and demonstrated that parliamentary reform legislation was achievable, leaving British political commentators with questions about the implications of an expanded franchise as well as the potential for further reform legislation that they would spend the next three decades unravelling.

Geographically, this thesis is focused on public discourse that took place in the UK during this period about franchise reform. The perspective of Ireland, for example, forms part of this thesis as part of a wider analysis of public opinion across the UK in this period, with respect to the political salience of the United States for electoral reform, but the unique nature of the relationship between Ireland, Britain and the United States means that a different approach

would be required to fully examine the implications of American political developments for Irish politics more generally. This thesis is fundamentally centred on the issue of franchise reform in the UK, whereas the primary debate in Ireland with respect to reform in this period was not about the suffrage, but rather the political status of Ireland and the issue of self-government. To study the impact of the American South's attempt to secede from the Federal Union for the cause of Irish independence and self-government, as well as the role that the United States played in the development of Irish republican groups such as the Fenian Brotherhood and Clan na Gael, a different set of chronological boundaries would also be necessary with the reform acts of 1832 and 1867 not being the primary key developments with respect to Ireland's relationship with the UK.¹²⁴ However, Irish public discourse about the impact of the United States specifically on the issue of franchise reform still features in this thesis, represented by Irish newspapers and periodicals as well as extraparliamentary groups such as the Irish Reform League.

The focus of this thesis is to demonstrate the role that America played in British public discourse surrounding reform between 1832 and 1867, particularly in the build up to the Second Reform Act. This is reflected in its source base which consists of a variety of material taken from travel literature, newspapers, periodicals, quarterlies, political texts by public intellectuals, election speeches and speeches delivered at reform demonstrations, and records of parliamentary debates. References to personal correspondence, diaries and similar more private archival material are made where relevant to add context to particular public contributions, but this thesis is fundamentally centred on the dynamic, public debate about

¹²⁴ For recent scholarship on the impact of the United States and the American Civil War on Irish identity and politics outside of the cause of suffrage reform see Arthur H. Mitchell, *Fighting Irish in the American Civil War and the Invasion of Mexico: Essays* (NC, 2017) and Cian T. McMahon, *The Global Dimensions of Irish Identity: Race, Nation, and the Popular Press, 1840-1880* (NC, 2015).

reform that took place in this period. In examining these different facets of British public discourse about reform, an appropriate methodology has been adopted for each source type.

To consider the impact of America on the debate over British political reform we must consider some of the key texts that shaped British understandings of American politics and analyse what they can tell us about nineteenth-century British attitudes and assumptions towards a society that embraced a wider franchise. Many of the commentators who would argue about the benefits and costs of American democracy had never experienced it first-hand. They relied on the observations and assessments of those writers who had travelled to the United States and documented their thoughts on American political society. One of the key ways of documenting these impressions was through travel literature. This thesis explores the impressions of American political life as recorded in the travel literature of five popular writers between 1832 and 1862: Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Isabella Bird and Anthony Trollope. In the nineteenth century, visiting America and recording one's thoughts and impressions began to displace the tradition of the European grand tour that had preoccupied travel writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, it is important and necessary that we study how these widely read and influential accounts shaped public discourse in Britain about American politics. Through the close reading of these selected texts and accompanying reviews of these works in the British press, this thesis traces the development of a common set of tropes about democracy in America that would later be deployed in Britain's own debate about democratic reform.

Alongside travel literature, it is necessary to explore the role that public intellectuals played in shaping public discourse about reform through their published works and the ways in which the example of the United States informed their thinking and served as a crucial

reference point in their arguments. We will examine the work of six major and influential British public intellectuals who wrote at length about British political reform in the period between the two reform acts: Goldwin Smith, Leslie Stephen, John Dalberg-Acton, Thomas Carlyle, Walter Bagehot and J. S. Mill. These thinkers helped shape the extraparliamentary debate about political reform. Each in developing their arguments turned to the example of America to help illustrate their points to their readers. A close reading of these works reveals how conceptions and understandings about American democracy, which we have tracked the development of over the course of the thesis, began to be redeployed in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform. Rather than looking at each thinker in isolation, a thematic approach is adopted to explore the connective themes that emerged from these works and how they characterised the role that America played in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform.

Each of the British authors examined in this thesis had a significant impact in shaping public discourse around the United States or the issue of franchise reform in the UK. Their analyses of American democracy were primarily formed in the domestic context of Britain's own experimentation with the franchise and political reform. More detail on why these travel writers and public intellectuals specifically were selected can be found in chapter one and chapter three respectively. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* does not directly form part of this thesis. Unlike our chosen authors, Tocqueville was operating in a different primary context, that of his native France. As Richard Boyd and Lucien Jaume have shown, Tocqueville's study of democracy in America was framed heavily by the France of the Bourbon Restoration, the July Monarchy, Napoleon and Louis XIV.¹²⁵ France's immediate

¹²⁵ Richard Boyd, 'Introduction: Revisiting *Democracy in America* in the Twenty-First Century', in Richard Boyd (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Democracy in America* (Cambridge, 2022), 1-46; Lucien Jaume, *Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty*, trans Arthur Goldhammer (N.J., 2013), 4-5.

political context shaped his analysis, underpinned as it was by the work of liberal Doctrinaire thinkers such as François Guizot, Royer-Collard and Charles de Rémusat.¹²⁶ Tocqueville's work remained relevant for British audiences with a new edition published in 1862 featuring a preface by author and English translator of the first edition Henry Reeve, which reinterpreted Tocqueville in the context of America's recent descent into civil war.¹²⁷ As Saunders notes, however, Reeve was by inclination a Whig and privately Tocqueville complained that Reeve had 'unwittingly coloured too highly all I say against democracy'.¹²⁸ Through examining the works of our selected travel writers and public intellectuals, the influence of Tocqueville's ideas is still felt within this thesis as many sought to engage with and reevaluate his assessment of American politics. By analysing our selected texts, we can see how Tocqueville's analysis was developed further, revised and reinterpreted by British authors in the context of British political reform.

By the 1860s, newspapers, periodicals and quarterlies were beginning to replace travel literature as the main source of information on American affairs for British readers. The outbreak of the Civil War provided an opportunity for British journalists to expand their international coverage, coinciding with the abolition of various duties in the 1850s and early 1860s which saw a dramatic increase in press circulation and the number of publications available to an increasingly literate population. The varied and commercial nature of the British press in this period along with its regular release schedule allows us to see how analysis of the role of democracy in the outbreak of the Civil War by publications of different political backgrounds evolved and shifted over the course of the conflict. The press also took

¹²⁶ During the Bourbon Restoration and the July Monarchy, the Doctrinaires were a group of moderate French Royalists who hope to reconcile the monarchy with the French Revolution, advocating for constitutional monarchy.

¹²⁷ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (London, 1862).

¹²⁸ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 144; A.H. Johnson, 'Correspondence of Tocqueville and Henry Reeve', *Edinburgh Review*, 283 (1923), 289.

on an increasing role in British politics at this time with politicians and political figures seeking to develop new connections to the press. The relationships that the British press forged in this period between political movements and its own readers position it as a prime source of information for this research.

A representative sample of British and Irish newspapers, periodicals and quarterlies produced between 1860 and 1865 is examined. Where British public opinion of the Civil War has been studied, it has often focused on a single location, most commonly London or Lancashire. The decision to focus on a single area has been a prerequisite for research in this field, mostly for practical reasons of time and access. However, there is a danger in drawing national conclusions based on the experience of a single locality or region. Taking advantage of newly available digital resources, and their ready searchability, my research will cover public opinion across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Geographically, titles from across the UK have been chosen, focusing on key locations in each region: London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin. Each of these areas had active print cultures in the 1860s, served as political hubs, and many had specific connections to the United States. A range of political sympathies are reflected in the source base, from Liberal and Conservative publications, to Unionist and Nationalist papers, as well as those publications that regularly supported the Union or the Confederacy.

Working with digital archives and digitised material, the majority of the research conducted as part of this thesis was undertaken during the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the newspaper sources consulted for this thesis are largely digitised newspapers, rather than hard copy. With access to physical archives restricted during this period due to the nationwide lockdowns as a result of COVID-19, certain print-only papers such as the Reform League's

the *Commonwealth* newspaper and the secularist *National Reformer*, both known for their pro-federal views, were omitted out of necessity. The decision to focus on primarily digitised newspaper sources as a source of press opinion was motivated partly due to these physical restrictions, but also to take advantage of the benefits of using digital newspaper archives. All the press sources being digitised and fully searchable allowed me to identify relevant sections of the newspapers by employing a combined keyword search across multiple titles, focusing on the selected publications between 1860 and 1865. The first keyword is “democracy”, and variations on it such as “democratic”. The second keyword is “Civil War”. Combining these keyword terms allows us to highlight articles that reference democracy in the context of the Civil War. All articles that featured both these terms have been analysed, chiefly focusing on opinion and editorial pieces as these give us the best insight into how different publications understood the role of democracy in the Civil War and sought to inform their readers. Using digital newspaper sources in this way has allowed me to expand the parameters of this research, both geographically and chronologically, to search through a large number of publications across the UK with different audiences, release schedules, politics, prices and locations. Searching across a total number of 30 newspaper titles, 13 periodical titles and 6 quarterly titles, this research strategy produced 261 articles to be analysed, 157 from newspapers, 71 from periodicals and 33 from quarterlies.

One of the potential drawbacks of using digital-search methods in this way is the possibility of a degree of methodological determinism. Searching for articles that mention the key terms ‘America’ and ‘reform’ will naturally highlight articles that raise the subject of the United States in the context of British political reform, potentially excluding discussion of other countries or debates to which the United States was more peripheral. To address this concern, when using digital newspaper archives we must consider the political and social contexts that

contemporary newspapers were operating in. Selected articles identified through keyword searches cannot be isolated from the publications in which they were produced in, which is why this thesis takes into consideration the political affiliation, target audience and regional connection of the associated publications. This is also why newspapers are not the only primary source type analysed in this thesis. Digital searches of press publications are combined with the close reading of travel literature, political philosophy and election speeches as well as extensive parliamentary debates surrounding the reform bills of 1866 and 1867, to ensure that our study of British public discourse about reform in this period does not rely on digital press analysis alone. While the focus of this thesis is to examine fully the impact of America on British reform discourse, reading through these other source types without digital search-methods ensures that any discussion of other countries or areas where the United States featured less prominently are also taken into account as part of this research. This combined approach has allowed us to harness the benefits of digital archives, searching through a large volume of press material, encompassing a variety of different political sympathies, release schedules, primary audiences and regional associations, whilst making sure that we do not lose sight of the place of America within wider British public discourse about reform in this period including other sites of international comparison and areas in which America featured less prominently.

Speeches constitute the final element of reform discourse surveyed in this thesis. This thesis carefully examines political speeches between 1865 and 1867 about reform from three contexts: the speeches of electoral candidates for the 1865 general election in which reform was a central issue, the speeches of key figures at predominantly working-class reform demonstrations that took place between 1866 and 1867, and the speeches of MPs and Peers in parliamentary debates about reform in 1866 and 1867. Questions of audience and venue are

considered with the first two categories of speeches consisting of popular, political interactions that took place nationwide sourced from newspaper reports, while the third category of speeches consists of parliamentary oratory sourced from digitised Hansard records. The way in which politicians engaged with the public during elections was undergoing a fundamental transition at this time, moving away from the traditional confrontational hustings that had characterised eighteenth and early nineteenth-century electioneering and towards a model of mass-platform speaking which encouraged mass meetings to connect with the public and deliver political speeches which through press reporting would then reach a wider audience. By the 1860s many electoral candidates and extraparliamentary campaign groups readily utilised the platform to appeal for public support.¹²⁹ With public oratory gradually becoming a key component of the interplay between parliamentary politics and extraparliamentary politics, exploring how MPs, who would go on to sit in the Parliament which debated specific reform measures in 1866 and 1867, initially presented their stance on reform to a wider audience of electors and non-electors is vital as is examining how they used the example of the United States to engage with the public about reform. We are then able to contrast this with the speeches that many of the same speakers made in Parliament where the conventions of parliamentary debate forced MPs and Peers to delve deeper into the potential ramifications of expanding the franchise than had been the case in the extraparliamentary sphere. Rather than trying to influence public opinion to secure popular support for their arguments, speakers now sought to sway a parliamentary audience which was more aware of the extent of differences between the political frameworks of Britain and the United States. Analysing the parliamentary and extraparliamentary speeches

¹²⁹ For more on this theme see Joseph Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 2001); Andrew Robertson, *Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States & Britain, 1790-1900* (London, 2005); and Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009).

of MPs in this way allows us to see how these speakers adapted their use of America to illustrate their wider points about reform depending on the audience they were appealing to. Examining the speeches of speakers at working-class reform demonstrations organised by the Reform League and the National Reform Union allows us to see also how extraparliamentary campaign groups utilised the example of America to influence public reform discourse and try to place external pressure on Parliament through public events and affect the outcome of parliamentary debates over the 1866 and 1867 reform bills. This also enables us to see which themes were more prominent in arguments made to a parliamentary audience compared to when engaging with voters and the wider public.

Bringing these different sources together allows us to reconstruct important elements of public discourse about reform between 1832 and 1867 and in doing so enables us to examine the influence of America on the debate among nineteenth-century Britons over political reform as well as contrast how America featured in different arguments depending on the audience that was being appealed to. With the selected sources and methodology, this thesis offers insights into British political ideas and political culture in the 1860s generally, and into the Reform Act of 1867 more specifically, showing how at a variety of levels the example of the United States played a significant role in shaping British public discourse about franchise reform.

Thesis Structure

The opening chapter of the thesis begins to explore how nineteenth-century Britons understood America and its politics in the period prior to the Second Reform Act by focusing on British travel literature published in the aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act and its reception in the British press. Through examining the works of Frances Trollope, Harriet

Martineau, Charles Dickens, Isabella Bird and Anthony Trollope, we begin to identify the key aspects of American politics that stood out to British travellers, as well as the significant tropes that characterised British travel writing on America at this time, exploring how Britons understood the function of the U.S. Constitution, the traits of the democratic American citizen, and the influence of slavery on American democracy. This chapter also looks at the reaction to these works through reviews in the periodical press to analyse the impact of these assessments of American politics on British readers, as well as give us a sense of the domestic British political context that these authors were writing in and forming their opinion of American politics and the audience they were writing for. This chapter addresses the question of how Britons obtained information about the function of politics in the United States which will prove important when in later chapters we go on to look at how they then applied the example of America to their own debate about democracy, the franchise and political reform.

From here, the second chapter analyses the role of democracy in British understandings of the outbreak of the American Civil War. The outbreak of the conflict was a key moment in the history of Anglo-American relations. The Civil War called into question some of the major underlying observations about the function of American politics that we identified in chapter one. For some the outbreak of such a conflict was a logical progression from the character of American democracy that prioritised the interests of the majority and encouraged demagoguery and corruption. Radicals were forced to defend the world's leading democratic republic against the charge that democracies produced poor statesmen incapable of preventing calamities like the Civil War. This chapter investigates how Liberal, Radical and Conservative publications viewed the outbreak of the Civil War in terms of America's political system, considering the impact that the Civil War had on the reputation of the

American Constitution in Britain. This chapter also analyses the influence of American slavery on British attitudes towards American democracy in the context of the conflict, with the persistence of slavery one of the central issues at the heart of the Civil War.

In the third chapter we begin to shift away from looking at how Britons understood America, to looking at how they applied the example of the United States to the issue of British political reform. This chapter looks at the influence that America had on the attitudes of British public intellectuals towards political reform around the time of the Second Reform Act. By looking at the works of J.S. Mill, Goldwin Smith, Walter Bagehot, Thomas Carlyle, Lord Acton, and Leslie Stephen, we see how in key British political texts, public intellectuals grappled with what American democracy meant for the prospects of British political reform. By taking a thematic approach to these texts, the chapter shows how conceptions and understandings of American democracy, which we have seen develop during the thesis so far, began to be redeployed in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform.

Moving away from public intellectuals the fourth chapter considers another important aspect of the domestic context in which the parliamentary debates over British political reform would take place focusing on the relationship between popular speakers and their audiences in the extraparliamentary campaign over British political reform. In particular, the chapter explores how America influenced and informed the way they appealed to the masses to secure public support for their arguments. Examining how America manifested itself in the extraparliamentary campaign over British political reform, this chapter analyses how speakers drew on the example of the United States at mass gatherings to convince both electors and non-electors of their stance on reform, from Conservative popular rhetoric urging resistance against Americanisation to the divisions in Liberal popular attitudes to the idea of

American-style political reform and the significance of America for campaigns groups like the Reform League and the National Reform Union. In the process this will also illuminate popular attitudes towards America and its politics.

Having set the surrounding context in which the parliamentary reform debates of 1866 and 1867 took place, the final chapter digs into the parliamentary reform debates themselves, culminating with the Second Reform Act, and considers the place that America occupied within them. This chapter shows how for a number of parliamentarians, America proved a key influence in shaping their arguments about British political reform and the question of how to manage and respond to the challenges of an enlarged electorate. We explore how the example of the United States featured in debates about the potential impact of reform on the character of the House of Commons, the influence of newly enfranchised working-class voters on Government policy, concerns about demagoguery, standards of education and the degree to which any bill could settle the issue of franchise reform for a generation, as the Great Reform Act had promised to do so in 1832.

The passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867 marked the culmination of a thirty-five year period in which Britons, from parliamentarians and public intellectuals to working-class reformers and travel writers, actively analysed and interrogated the salience of the United States for the future of British politics and the fundamental relationship between the Government and the governed. To begin, we must start by looking at how nineteenth-century Britons initially understood America and its politics in the aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act.

Chapter One – Depictions of American Politics in British Travel Literature in the

Aftermath of the Great Reform Act

Introduction

The Great Reform Act changed the fabric of the British political system. Its significance to British political history has already been well established by historians. In his great Whig history of the nineteenth-century, G. M. Trevelyan observed that as a result of the reform act of 1832 ‘the “sovereignty of the people” had been established in fact, if not in law’.¹ More recently, Eric J. Evans would conclude in his assessment of the reform act that it ‘opened the door on a new political world...though the 1832 Act was profoundly anti-democratic in sentiment, its very passage showed how future pressure might bring further concession until, almost imperceptibly, democracy ceased to be one of Westminster’s rude words’.² Far from resolving the question of political reform in Britain for a generation, as had been hoped by many parliamentarians, the Great Reform Act energised reform debates in Britain by showing both pro and anti-reformers that reform was not only possible but, with political pressure, achievable.

In the aftermath of the Great Reform Act questions about the franchise became increasingly important. What effect did a wider franchise have on the political life of a nation? How strong was a democratic government? What was the national character of a society operating under universal suffrage? And could democracies avoid descending into mob rule and the tyrannical will of a political majority? In seeking answers to these questions many looked to the example offered by the democratic republic of the United States. America was an object of fascination to be seriously studied. For British political commentators, American democracy

¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After (1782-1901)*, (London, 1922), 242.

² Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870* (Harlow, 2001), 273-4.

was distinct from the other modern European democracies and the ancient democratic republics of Greece and Rome. Unlike these other examples, America was seen as sharing the same Anglo-Saxon heritage as Britain. American politics were believed to have started with broadly similar understandings as those in Britain. America was regarded with a closeness that the other democracies were not. Americans, British kinsmen, had established a thriving democracy on an unprecedented scale which had defied expectations and lasted.

For good or ill, America, emerging from a common point of origin, was seen as an example of Britain's possible future. Robert Saunders describes how 'the United States was broadly Anglo-Saxon, schooled in the same self-governing traditions on which the British prided themselves. Its democracy had evolved out of recognizably English precedents, showing not only what a democracy in Britain might look like but how it might come about'.³

Understanding the functioning of democracy in America was therefore of unique importance to British political commentators. Studying American politics was key to understanding the potential future of British politics. This practice was in part established by Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-1840). De Tocqueville's work was widely read and influential in Britain. For de Tocqueville, America was the nation where the democratic revolution had unfolded at its fullest and as a result he 'was looking for lessons from which we might profit...to identify its natural consequences and if possible discover ways of making it beneficial to man'.⁴ It was in this context that British travel writers journeyed to America in search of answers to the questions that Britons had about the effect of a wider suffrage on the fabric of a nation.

³ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 142.

⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 14.

The aim of this opening chapter is to begin to explore how nineteenth-century Britons understood America and its politics in the period between the introduction of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and the outbreak of the Civil War in the early 1860s. To do this, this chapter will focus on contemporary British travel literature and its reception in the British press. To consider the impact of America on the debate over British political reform in later chapters we must first consider some of the key texts that shaped British understandings of American politics and analyse what they can tell us about nineteenth-century British attitudes and assumptions towards a society that embraced a wider franchise. Many of the commentators who would argue about the benefits and costs of American democracy had never experienced it at first hand. They relied on the observations and assessments of those writers who had travelled to the United States and documented their thoughts on American political society. Visiting America and recording one's thoughts and impressions began to displace the tradition of the European grand tour that had preoccupied travel writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵

This chapter seeks to establish what British commentators were referring to when they spoke about American democracy, what notions and values they associated with it and what effect the political system was seen to have on the character of society. By analysing the selected texts of British travel literature and the reactions they prompted in accompanying reviews printed in the British periodical press, we can see how a common set of tropes about democracy in America were developed, tropes that would later be deployed in Britain's own debate about democratic reform. Doing this is crucial to provide context for the discussions this thesis will examine.

⁵ Helen Heineman, 'Frances Trollope in the New World: Domestic Manners of the Americans', *American Quarterly*, 21:3 (1969), 544.

The nineteenth century saw an explosion in travel with a rapidly developing tourist infrastructure offering travellers safe and comfortable journeys throughout Europe and America. Developments in steam power increased the number of people making the journey across the North Atlantic. Crossing the Atlantic became a quicker endeavour for those who could afford it as steam-power replaced sail-power, reducing the time of a transatlantic voyage from forty days to around fifteen.⁶ This can be seen in the rapid increase in immigration numbers from Europe to the United States. Between 1821 and 1830 143,000 people emigrated to America, but between 1851 and 1860 this figure had risen to 2,548,000.⁷ Once in America, technological innovations allowed these travellers to experience more of America than had previously been possible. Between 1830 and 1870 the number of miles covered by railroad track increased from 23 to 53,000, connecting American cities and allowing British visitors to experience America as never before.⁸ Rather than relying solely on New York City and the New England seaboard as an exemplar of America, travellers were now able to visit the likes of Washington DC, Cincinnati and Philadelphia for example, gaining a wider sense of American politics in action.

This era also saw a shift in the style of travel literature being published. Straightforward narrative accounts of travel were being replaced by more detailed, almost novelistic studies. Carl Thompson argues that by the mid-nineteenth century, writers now sought to recreate more fully their experience, enabling readers to share their momentary thoughts, feelings, and

⁶ Wendy Martin, 'North American Travel Writing', in Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (Cambridge, 2019), 258.

⁷ Phillip A.M. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York, 1972).

⁸ John H. White and George M. Smerk, *Wet Britches and Muddy Boots: A History of Travel in Victorian America* (Bloomington, 2013), 415.

sense impressions.⁹ The travel accounts selected for this chapter were a part of this development. For Victorian travellers and readers, the experience of travel took on greater importance. Travel writers still sought to entertain their readers but now also sought to educate them as well. As Casey Blanton has shown, travel became more of an educational experience, with travellers seeking to bring back information that would benefit their entire society.¹⁰

Travel literature is a useful starting point for this thesis because it provided British audiences with insights into daily life in America as well as extended discussions about the theory and function of American politics. In America, British travellers had the opportunity to see first-hand how a new world came into formation. In 1837, Harriet Martineau described how absorbing the experience of watching the process of world-making unfold was, and made the case for travel literature as the best medium for capturing this, arguing that ‘the position or prospects of men in a new country may best be made intelligible by accounts of what the traveller saw and heard while among them. Pictures serve the purpose better than reports’.¹¹ Examining contemporary travel literature enables us to see the author’s own experiences of the United States and their findings on the state of American politics through an extended account of their travels. However, it also enables us to see how a British audience reacted to these accounts through examining reviews of these works. Looking at the reaction to these works in reviews will also give us a sense of the domestic British political context that these authors were writing in and forming their opinion of American politics as well as the audience they were writing for. We can identify the key aspects of American politics that stood out to British travellers and explore how Britons understood the function of the U.S.

⁹ Carl Thompson, ‘Nineteenth Century Travel Writing’, in Das and Youngs (eds.) *Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, 123.

¹⁰ Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (New York, 2002), 20.

¹¹ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, 2 vols, I (London, 1837), 158-9.

Constitution. American publications will not form part of this chapter because they do not allow for this dual function. We are interested in the viewpoint of the visitor, their experience in a foreign land, how they came to understand a political system very different from their own, how they documented and recounted their observations on American politics to a British audience, and how that audience then reacted.

As a result of the source base under examination in this chapter, it will tend to focus on elite opinion. This is in the nature of travel writing. Travelling to and around the United States at this time remained expensive. The authors considered in this chapter were members of an intellectual and literary elite who travelled to America with a shared goal – to test its progress as a nation and inevitably to compare it to Britain’s own development. James Epstein concludes that America was constantly being tested against British codes and institutions.¹² The reviews of these works in the periodical press leads us to focus on the review-reading classes. However, we should remember that although it is difficult to measure, the elite opinion and assessments of travel writers did have an impact on non-elite opinion. During this period, travel literature became increasingly influential in informing and shaping popular debates, with Roy Bridges concluding that the nineteenth century saw travel writing reach a position of unparalleled influence.¹³ Non-elite opinion on America will be the focus of later chapters. It is also important to remember that three of the authors under consideration in this chapter were women writing about their experience in America. Travel gave British women the chance to escape the rigid confines of Victorian society. Thompson has shown that travel writing constituted an important route to self-empowerment and cultural authority for women

¹² James Epstein, “‘America’ in the Victorian Cultural Imagination”, in Fred Marc Leventhal and Roland E. Quinault (eds.), *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership* (Aldershot, 2000), 108.

¹³ Roy Bridges, ‘Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)’, in Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge, 2006), 67.

in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ In a society much influenced by the concept of separate spheres for men and women, travel writing gave women a voice.

The Source Base

The key source base for this chapter consists of five major pieces of travel writing produced in this period by British authors about their experiences in America:

1. Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832)
2. Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* (1837)
3. Charles Dickens *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842)
4. Isabella Bird's *The Englishwoman in America* (1856)
5. Anthony Trollope's *North America* (1862)

Each of these five authors documented their time in America and their thoughts about its character, its society, and – most importantly for us – its politics. Their accounts span a period of thirty years which takes us from the passage of the Great Reform Act to the outbreak of the American Civil War and the reform debates leading up to the Second Reform Act. By examining these accounts and the reactions they engendered in the British press, we can see how British travel writers and reviewers, operating in the aftermath of Britain's first experiment with electoral reform, viewed the world's leading exemplar of democratic government – the United States. Before continuing, I will explain why these five accounts have been selected for examination in this chapter.

¹⁴ Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (New York, 2011), 189.

Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832)

Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832) was the product of Frances Trollope's four-year stay in America. Following a failed business venture by her husband, Thomas Trollope, she relocated to the United States in 1827 amidst financial and marital strains, taking two of her daughters with her. Initially residing at the Nashoba Community project in Memphis, Tennessee, a utopian commune created by Frances Wright in 1825 as a small-scale test of an emancipation plan, she then moved on to Cincinnati, Ohio where she launched the short-lived Cincinnati Bazaar. After several attempts to establish herself financially in America ended unsuccessfully, she returned to England in 1831. The following year she published *Domestic Manners of the Americans* collecting her observations and impressions of Americans from the time that she had been there. The book was an instant success and a best-seller, transforming Trollope into a noted literary figure. Tamara Wagner records how Trollope's career as a writer began almost inadvertently 'when she turned what had at first been intended as a personal diary of her years spent unsuccessfully attempting to set up a home or business across the Atlantic into a sharply critical travel account'.¹⁵ By the end of 1832 *Domestic Manners* had run through four editions finding an audience eager to read about the effect of American politics on American society. As Trollope herself stated, the book aimed to explore 'the influence which the political system of the country has produced on the principles, tastes, and manners, of its domestic life'.¹⁶ *Domestic Manners* continued to influence British opinion on America well after its publication. Russell A. Griffin notes that the book was 'something of a "cause celebre" and that for some three decades thereafter it was the measure for all subsequent books of travel on America'.¹⁷ The work would prove particularly influential on the travel narratives of America by Dickens and Anthony Trollope. However, Trollope's

¹⁵ Tamara Wagner, 'Beyond Domestic Manners: Repositioning Frances Trollope in Literary History' in Tamara Wagner (ed.), *Frances Trollope: Beyond "Domestic Manners"* (New York, 2013), 1.

¹⁶ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 2 vols, I (London, 1832), v.

¹⁷ Russell A. Griffin, 'Mrs. Trollope and the Queen City', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37 (1950), 289.

journey to the United States was different to some of the other authors under consideration in this chapter. Unlike Dickens or her son Anthony, she was not an established author with a well-known literary reputation when she visited America. Heineman discusses how Trollope's experience of the United States was 'in many ways unique...[she] came to the United States relatively unknown, more like the average emigrant than tourist'.¹⁸ In the year that the Great Reform Act was passed, *Domestic Manners* gave British readers an insight to the effect that universal suffrage had had on American political society.

Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* (1837)

Harriet Martineau started her literary career writing articles for the *Monthly Repository*, a monthly Unitarian periodical. The *Monthly Repository* was noted for its radical political positions including support for extending the suffrage. As she sought to establish herself as a writer, she moved into writing books on politics and economics. Her 1832 work *Illustrations of Political Economy* was a success with the initial 1,500 copies produced quickly selling out. Having earned widespread acclaim for her work and securing financial independence, in 1834 Martineau travelled to the United States to see if America was living up to its democratic principles. Martineau recorded her reasons for visiting the United States at the start of *Society in America* (1837), describing her 'strong curiosity to witness the actual working of republican institutions...with a strong disposition to admire democratic institutions, but an entire ignorance how far the people of the United States lived up to, or fell below, their own theory'.¹⁹ On returning to Britain after two years spent in America, she published her findings. Martineau's account employed an analytical, more sociological approach to American politics than that used by Trollope. Her study was influenced by her

¹⁸ Heineman, 'Frances Trollope in the New World', 544.

¹⁹ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, v-vi.

reputation as a social reformer. Iain Crawford describes how ‘the rapidly evolving character of American society, with its combination of both dynamic entrepreneurship and reactionary cultural mores, thus made the new democracy an ideal object of study for someone with Martineau’s range of intellectual interests and ideological commitment to classical economics and their role in shaping social development’.²⁰ *Society in America* was received with wide acclaim, inviting comparisons with Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Lisa Pace Vetter explains how Martineau’s sociological approach differed ‘strikingly from Tocqueville’s and leads her to radically different conclusions about the ability of majority rule to address the wrongs of slavery and the oppression of women’.²¹ *Society in America* sparked debates in Britain about working-class enfranchisement, debates which Martineau’s readers continued. Amanda Claybaugh argues that through writing texts of their own and in reviews of her books, Martineau’s readers were offered an occasion ‘to articulate their own positions on slavery and suffrage’ and that through responses to Martineau’s travel books we can see ‘how Anglo-American reform movements created a context in which persons within either nation could reimagine both’.²² *Society in America* was a key work in shaping Anglo-American debates about political reform.

Charles Dickens *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842)

Unlike Trollope and Martineau, Charles Dickens arrived in America in January 1842 a well-established literary figure and celebrity. America had been on Dickens’ mind for some time prior to his journey there. The popularity and commercial success of Dickens’ work in

²⁰ Iain Crawford, ‘Dickens Martineau, and Massachusetts: The Republic They Came to See’, in Diana C. Archibald and Joel J. Brattin (eds.), *Dickens and Massachusetts: The Lasting Legacy of the Commonwealth Visits* (Amherst: MA, 2015), 180-1.

²¹ Lisa Pace Vetter, ‘Harriet Martineau on the Theory and Practice of Democracy in America’, *Political Theory*, 36 (2008), 425.

²² Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 5.

America led him to consider the idea of travelling there to record his observations of American society. Jane S. Cowden argues that ‘the American public eagerly looked forward to Dickens’ visit, for he was the most admired writer of the nineteenth-century, his work having been serialised in America as it had been in Britain...Nineteenth-century America was obsessed with British celebrities...and the American public was determined to treat Dickens as literary royalty’.²³ In 1839, in a letter to his close friend the journalist John Forster, Dickens wrote, ‘I should be ready to contract to go at any specified time...either to Ireland or to America, and to write from thence a series of papers descriptive of the places and people I see, introducing local tales, traditions, and legends’.²⁴ Michael Slater explains that ‘good sales for anything Dickens might choose to write about his American travels could be expected not only because he was the author but also because books on this topic were in great demand in post-Reform Bill Britain’.²⁵ Whilst Dickens was keen to visit America, his family were less responsive to the idea. The success of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) in America increased Dickens desire to travel there. In 1841 he again wrote to Forster, remarking that he was ‘still haunted by visions of America, night and day. To miss this opportunity would be a sad thing...But God willing, I think it must be managed somehow’.²⁶ At the end of 1841 the decision was made and in January 1842 Dickens and his wife boarded the Britannia steamer bound for Boston. Dickens set off with the aim of seeing what effect democratic institutions had on the character of society. Clare Pettitt explains how Dickens ‘left for America with every expectation of proving to himself his theory that good institutions and an active and democratically mandated state machinery would inevitably

²³ Jane S. Cowden, ‘Charles Dickens in Pennsylvania in March 1842: Imagining America’, *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 81 (2014), 52.

²⁴ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London, 1893), 86.

²⁵ Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven, 2009), 176.

²⁶ Forster, *Dickens*, 126.

produce a good and happy populace'.²⁷ Whilst a key reason for his visit there, Dickens' fame in America presented difficulties not faced by Trollope and Martineau.²⁸ He was mobbed upon his arrival and writing to Forster he described how 'if I turn into the street, I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home, the house becomes, with callers, like a fair'.²⁹

Returning at the end of June 1842, Dickens published *American Notes*. The book sold well; it went into four editions and earned Dickens £1,000. Americans held Dickens' assessment of them in high regard. On his arrival the *New York Herald* announced his appearance commenting 'his mind is American – his soul is republican – his heart is democratic'.³⁰ Forster noted that Americans claimed Dickens 'equally for their own'.³¹ His insight into American politics in this period therefore is especially relevant to this thesis.

Isabella Bird's *The Englishwoman in America* (1856)

Unlike some of the other authors considered in this chapter, Isabella Bird's journey to the United States was not prompted by political considerations. Bird had suffered from poor health since childhood. Recovering after an operation to remove a fibrous tumour in 1850, doctors urged her to undertake a sea voyage to help her recover. In 1854 Bird was invited to accompany family members to visit Prince Edward's Island. Anna M. Stoddart relates how Bird was encouraged to 'make use of the occasion to extend her travels to Canada and as much of America as was possible'.³² Bird did not set out to write a piece of travel literature about her experiences in America, but she did record her thoughts and findings about the

²⁷ Clare Pettitt, 'Dickens and the Form of the Historical Present' in Daniel Tyler (ed.), *Dickens's Style* (Cambridge, 2013), 115.

²⁸ Crawford describes how 'after greatly enjoying his initial experiences in Boston, the burden of being treated as a peripatetic superstar became increasingly oppressive' for Dickens; Crawford, 'The Republic They Came to See', 181.

²⁹ Forster, *Dickens*, 149.

³⁰ *New York Herald*, 1 February 1842.

³¹ Forster, *Dickens*, 211.

³² Anna M. Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird*, (Cambridge, 2011), 29.

place. She returned after seven months with her health much improved and was encouraged to write about how she had found America. Bird herself explains how upon her return she was 'requested by numerous friends to give an account of my travels'.³³ She approached the famous publisher John Murray who agreed to publish *The Englishwoman in America*. Stoddart notes the reaction the book received, writing that after the publication of its first edition 'the edition was very soon exhausted...very soon both daily and weekly journals were busy with Miss Bird's book...Even in America, where her strictures on slavery could not be entirely welcome, the book found many appreciative readers'.³⁴ *The Englishwoman in America* launched Bird's literary career as a travel writer. Bird's account is useful to us precisely because she did *not* set out to write about her experiences in America. This provides a useful contrast to some of the other authors selected in this chapter. Unlike them, she did not journey to America with the idea of testing it against a set of preconceived notions but instead simply reflected on her time there afterwards and wrote about how she had found it.

Anthony Trollope's *North America* (1862)

Our final work under consideration in this period is Anthony Trollope's *North America* (1862). Thirty years after his mother, Frances Trollope, had published *Domestic Manners* her son set out to revisit America. His work was intended as a corrective to his mother's observations on American society. Trollope himself conceded this at the start of *North America*:

Thirty years ago my mother wrote a book about the Americans...She saw with a woman's keen eye, and described with a woman's light but graphic pen, the social

³³ Isabella Bird, *The Englishwoman in America* (London, 1856), 1.

³⁴ Stoddart, *Life of Isabella Bird*, 38-40.

defects and absurdities which our near relatives had adopted into their domestic life...But she did not regard it as a part of her work to dilate on the nature and operation of those political arrangements which had produced the social absurdities which she saw, or to explain that though such absurdities were the natural result of those arrangements in their newness, the defects would certainly pass away, while the political arrangements, if good, would remain.³⁵

Trollope enjoyed a huge readership at this time. The 1860s saw Trollope become a prolific author. In this period alone he had an intensive output including serialised productions like *The Struggles of Brown, Jones and Robinson* (1861–2), *The Small House at Allington* (1862–4) and *The Claverings* (1866–7) as well as works published by Chapman & Hall such as *Castle Richmond* (1860), *Orley Farm* (1861–2), *Rachel Ray* (1863), *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864–5), *Miss Mackenzie* (1865) and *The Belton Estate* (1866). America had been a lifelong fascination for him. At the outset of *North America* he described how ‘it has been the ambition of my literary life to write a book about the United States’.³⁶ He set out this ambition at the end of *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859) arguing that the government and social life of Americans, ‘of that people who are our children – afford the most interesting phenomena which we find as to the new world;- the best means of prophesying...what the world will next be, and what men will next do’.³⁷ Arriving in Boston in September 1861, Trollope experienced the United States over the course of nine months against the backdrop of the American Civil War, although he strove to ensure that the Civil War would not affect his time there. Ann Marie Ross argues that ‘the elaborate preparations Trollope made for his American journey...evinced his desire to see America not as a casual

³⁵ Anthony Trollope, *North America*, 2 vols, I (London, 1862), 5-6.

³⁶ Trollope, *North America*, I, 5.

³⁷ Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London, 1859), 366.

tourist but as a professional traveller committed to as complete an accumulation of evidence as possible upon which to base his judgement of American character and culture'.³⁸ *North America* proved instantly popular, outselling *Barchester Towers* (1857), the second novel in Trollope's successful Chronicles of Barsetshire series, with second and third editions of the work being published in the same year. It was well received by the public and by critics. T. H. S. Scott writes that the book 'met with the demand of the moment' with Trollope receiving £1,250 from publishing the work.³⁹ Trollope's value to us in this chapter is his fascination with American politics and the close attention that he paid to the inner workings of the American political system and its effect on national character.

Ultimately, we are interested in the voices of British travellers, operating in the aftermath of Britain's own first experiment with political reform, their observations about a foreign country's own experience with universal suffrage and a democratic society with which they shared a complicated history, and how these findings were read and interpreted by a British audience.

Politics as a feature of everyday American life

One of the first things that would strike readers of British travel literature about America was the extent to which politics had infiltrated all levels of society and featured prominently in daily life. Writing in 1837, Martineau explained how English audiences were left with an image of American citizens who were 'always talking politics, canvassing, bustling about to make proselytes abroad, buried in newspapers at home, and hurrying to vote on election days'.⁴⁰ Throughout this period, writers of travel literature related overhead conversations

³⁸ Ann Marie Ross, 'Ploughshares into Swords: The Civil War Landscape of Trollope's North America', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1990), 59-60.

³⁹ T. H. S. Scott, *Anthony Trollope, his work, associates and literary originals* (London, 1913), 316.

⁴⁰ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 115.

about politics to their British audiences. Train carriages and steamboats acted as hubs of political conversation for these travellers. Bird and Dickens in particular would extensively recount their experience of political conversations held on the American railroad.⁴¹

Politics and party feeling affected everything in America. Americans spoke vehemently about their political system, defending it against criticisms raised by foreign visitors. As early as 1832, Frances Trollope noted how during her journey she ‘conversed...with citizens of all orders and degrees, and I never heard from any one a single disparaging word against their government’.⁴² Extending the franchise in America had brought more Americans into the political nation and given them a direct role in the legislative and executive affairs of their country. It was not surprising therefore that they were reluctant to accept foreign criticism of the political system which had given them a say in the affairs of their nation.

The American system of government, formed in the early days of a newly independent republic, had carried Americans through the difficult stages of establishing a nation to a position of economic and social success. Americans clung to it, but the fierceness with which they rejected criticism worried British commentators. How could a nation continue to progress when it refused to see its shortcomings? This question preoccupied British travellers in America throughout this period. In 1832, Frances Trollope lamented that Americans were determined in their belief that they were ‘the first and best of the human race, that nothing is to be learnt, but what they are able to teach, and that nothing is worth having, which they do not possess’.⁴³ If anything the regard which Americans had for their politics and their

⁴¹ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 2 vols, I (London, 1842), 149; Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 111.

⁴² Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 295-6.

⁴³ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 302.

Constitution only seemed to grow during this time. By 1862, Anthony Trollope described the reverence with which Americans now looked at their Constitution:

this constitution has so wound itself into the affections of the people, has become a mark for such reverence and love, has, after a trial of three quarters of a century, so recommended itself to the judgment of men, that the difficulty consists in touching it, not in keeping it...Heaven mend them, if they reverence it more...than they reverence their Bible...For them, after seventy-five years of trial, it has almost the weight of inspiration.⁴⁴

Politics appeared to British eyes to be a daily part of life in America. All institutions were, in Dickens words, ‘emphatically the people’s’.⁴⁵

Travel literature reviewers between 1832 and 1862 were left with an impression of Americans as a politically engaged, but boastful people, resistant to foreign criticism. The American political system had created a population consumed by political matters. In their review of *American Notes*, *Fraser’s Magazine* spoke of the ‘party spirit [that] infests every hamlet and homestead’.⁴⁶ In its review of *North America*, the *London Quarterly Review* was taken by the picture of an America in which ‘the Declaration of Independence is, word by word, in the memory of any of them. And throughout every class and grade of society there is a taste for politics’.⁴⁷ In its review of *Englishwoman in America*, *The Economist* spoke of ‘the national vanity of the citizens of the Great Republic’, while in a review of *Society in America*, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* noted the fondness that Americans had for ‘boasting of their country

⁴⁴ Trollope, *North America*, II, 213.

⁴⁵ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 64.

⁴⁶ *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1842, 26:155, 620.

⁴⁷ *London Quarterly Review*, October 1862, 19:37, 246.

and its institutions'.⁴⁸ British readers were left to conclude that American politics had rendered those it had enfranchised unable to accept that their system might not be as perfect as they believed it to be, that a wider franchise might have had negative consequences as well as positive ones (as we will go on to see) and that they might benefit from listening to external voices.

Americans were politically engaged and held their constitution in high regard. In its review of *North America*, the *Saturday Review* concurred with Anthony Trollope's remarks on the fondness that Americans had for their constitution: 'how passionately the Americans worship their Constitution, and how it has become a sort of Bible to them. This adherence to a printed formal document, as to a creed and final revelation of all that is right for America for ever, is something of which we have no experience this side the Atlantic'.⁴⁹ Travellers to America were expected to confirm the excellence of the American constitution, and any failure to do so was reported as being highly offensive. This was the case as early as the first of our travel accounts produced in 1832. In their review of *Domestic Manners*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* noted how every visitor was required 'at once [to] appreciate the full and unrivalled excellence of their national character and institutions'.⁵⁰ In the years following the publication of *Domestic Manners*, Britons were given to understand, much like *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, that, whatever virtues democratic Americans might possess, modesty was not among them.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Economist*, 26 January 1856, 90; *Tait's Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 409; See also the *Literary Gazette's* review of *Domestic Manners*, *Literary Gazette*, 24 March 1832, 179; and *Bradshaw's Journal's* review of *American Notes*, *Bradshaw's Journal*, December 1842, 31-32.

⁴⁹ *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 625; See also the *New Monthly Magazine's* review of *Domestic Manners* regarding 'the enthusiastic attachment' of twelve million people to their form of government, *New Monthly Magazine*, November 1832, 35:143, 447.

⁵⁰ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1832, 31:194, 834.

⁵¹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1832, 31:194, 832; See other examples like the review of *Domestic Manners* published by the *British Critic*, *British Critic*, January 1833, 13:25, 90.

Elections and the will of the majority

Elections were a common feature of travel literature on America. In this section we will examine how elections were portrayed to British audiences. Universal suffrage, as it could be found in America, was fascinating to foreign visitors, but it could also be worrying. Placing so much political power in the hands of the population generated concern. Writing in 1832, in the preface to *Domestic Manners*, Frances Trollope warned her readers against ‘the jarring tumult and universal degradation which invariably follow the wild scheme of placing all the power of the State in the hands of the populace’.⁵² Universal suffrage was seen to have infiltrated every level of the American polity. All three main aspects of the Constitution (the Presidency, the Senate and the House of Representatives) were, directly or indirectly, elected by universal male suffrage. The system of self-government favoured in America ensured mass involvement in politics. Martineau described how in America ‘all are held to have an equal interest in the principles of its institutions, and to be bound in equal duty to watch their workings’.⁵³ Population was seen by British travellers to be the basis of political representation in America. Twenty-four years after Frances Trollope visited the United States, Isabella Bird would similarly find a country in which nearly all power ‘is held to a great extent on popular sufferance; it emanates from the will of the majority, no matter how vicious or how ignorant that majority may be’.⁵⁴ Unlike other electoral systems which prioritised men with property, station, intellect or a stake in the affairs of the nation, the American franchise was perceived to prioritise numbers and numbers alone.

In the eyes of British commentators, elected American officials could not exercise their own political judgement but were reduced to delegates for the popular will. Bird warned how in

⁵² Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, I, Preface.

⁵³ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 5.

⁵⁴ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 410; Martineau had expressed a similar view nineteen years earlier, Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 5-6.

America every political figure from the President to members of the State Legislature was the delegate of a ‘tyrannical majority’ and that as a result ‘the million succeeds in exacting an amount of cringing political subserviency’.⁵⁵ The popular will checked all levels of American politics and with it came corruption. In *North America*, Anthony Trollope described to his readers how ‘this longing for universal suffrage in all things—in voting for the President, in voting for judges, in voting for the representatives, in dictating to senators, has come up since the days of President Jackson, and with it has come corruption and unclean hands’.⁵⁶

British travellers had experienced the consequences of Jacksonian democracy first-hand and were keen to present their findings to their readers. The creed of Jacksonian democracy, advocated by President Andrew Jackson and built on the principle of expanding the suffrage to all white men over the age of twenty-one, had been in its infancy during Frances Trollope’s time in America, which overlapped with Jackson’s first term as President. By the time her son visited the United States thirty years later, Jacksonian democracy had become a defining hallmark of America, with Jacksonians wielding significant political influence. Jacksonian democracy was now the central tenet of the Democratic party with Jackson being succeeded as President by notable Jacksonians like Martin Van Buren, James K. Polk and Franklin Pierce.

Elections by universal suffrage were seen to weaken the prestige of the institutions that were being elected to, a fact not lost on some Americans. Frances Trollope related that some in America ‘with the wisdom of philosophers, and the fair candour of gentlemen’ would gladly

⁵⁵ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 415.

⁵⁶ Trollope, *North America*, II, 194.

see a change to American politics.⁵⁷ Thirty years later, Anthony Trollope would write of his belief that among many Americans:

universal suffrage is not popular. Those who are the highest among the people certainly do not love it...It has been introduced into the Presidential elections by men called politicians—by men who have made it a matter of trade to dabble in state affairs, and who have gradually learned to see how the constitutional law, with reference to the Presidential electors, could be set aside without any positive breach of the constitution.⁵⁸

The violence that accompanied American elections was a recurring concern of British travellers. Bird described to her readers a scene in New York that she depicted as characteristic of American elections:

During my visit to New York a candidate for one of these offices stabbed a policeman, who died of the wound. If I might judge from the tone of the public prints, and from conversations on the subject, public feeling was not much outraged by the act itself, but it was a convenient stalking-horse for the other side.⁵⁹

Such scenes could be commonly found in America, according to travel literature. The mob exercised undue influence in proceedings. Elections generated a popular feeling or madness which became all consuming. Regular electioneering was a necessity to succeed in the American political system. Frances Trollope condemned Americans' obsessions with

⁵⁷ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 303.

⁵⁸ Trollope, *North America*, II, 216.

⁵⁹ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 340.

incessant electioneering, with ‘election fever...constantly raging through the land...It engrosses every conversation, it irritates every temper, it substitutes party spirit for personal esteem; and, in fact, vitiates the whole system of society’.⁶⁰ As a result of such feeling election riots were common. Election riots were not uncommon in Britain,⁶¹ but what concerned British travellers was that all those doing the rioting had the vote.

Such strength of feeling raised the prospect of demagoguery in the mind of travellers.

Martineau observed that it had become ‘the established method of seeking office...to declare a coincidence of opinion with the supposed majority, on the great topics on which the candidate will have to speak and act while in office’.⁶² Scenes of American elected representatives, or those seeking to be elected, excessively flattering voters were a common feature across this period. In listening to a speech made by former U.S. Secretary of State Edward Everett, Anthony Trollope noticed that ‘he was making himself an echo, a powerful and harmonious echo of what he conceived to be public opinion in Boston at that moment;— that he was neither leading nor teaching the people before him, but allowing himself to be led by them, so that he might best play his present part for their delectation’.⁶³ Twenty-five years prior, Martineau had also attended a speech given by Everett. She described how during this experience she had seen ‘one of the most learned and accomplished gentlemen in the country, a candidate for the highest office in the State, grimacing like a mountebank before the assemblage whose votes he desired to have, and delivering an address, which he supposed level to their taste and capacity...It was equally an under estimate of his hearers, and a degradation of himself’.⁶⁴ Office-seekers had often sacrificed their business, their profession

⁶⁰ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 65.

⁶¹ See for example Donald C. Richter, ‘The Role of Mob Riot in Victorian Elections, 1865-85’, *Victorian Studies*, 15 (1971), 19-28.

⁶² Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 85.

⁶³ Trollope, *North America*, I, 252.

⁶⁴ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 98-9.

and their reputation in their bid to be elected. To do so only to fail was unthinkable. As a result, candidates were forced to compromise themselves in order to be electorally successful. The popular will was deferred to over personal opinions. Martineau described this temptation to subservience as a kind of ‘dishonest silence’ which was too strong for mortal man.⁶⁵ Elections by universal suffrage had empowered a tyrannical majority to exercise their political will, reducing political representatives to mere mouthpieces for popular sentiment.

The supremacy of the majority in all things and constant deferral to the popular will was frequently noted by British periodicals in their reviews of travel literature throughout this period. A month after the Great Reform Act had been passed into law, the *Quarterly Review* expressed distaste for universal suffrage, republican institutions and frequent electioneering in America in their review of *Domestic Manners* remarking that ‘although this may be all very well for the Americans, nothing can be more utterly repugnant to the feelings and habits of Englishmen’.⁶⁶ Five years later the *Monthly Review* believed that the prevailing impression left on readers of Martineau was a country which exhibited ‘the tyranny of the many over the few in matters of opinion and practice’.⁶⁷ Martineau’s take on the tyrannical nature of the majority in America was seen to follow and develop further on the assessment of De Tocqueville. Both *The Spectator* and *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* felt that Martineau had borne out De Tocqueville’s warnings about the tyranny of the majority in America forcing private individuals out of public life and overshadowing the interests of the minority.⁶⁸ The *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic* argued that Martineau had shown that in America ‘the

⁶⁵ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 86.

⁶⁶ *Quarterly Review*, March 1832, 47:93, 68.

⁶⁷ *Monthly Review*, June 1837, 2:2, 243; See also *Eclectic Review*, July 1837, 55; *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* drew a similar conclusion from Anthony Trollope’s *North America*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1862, 92:563, 387-8; See also *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 625-6.

⁶⁸ *Spectator*, 13 May 1837, 10:463, 447; *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, 1 July 1837, 182.

most savage and intolerant despotism is exercised by the mob...if any doubt were entertained on the subject, this book would dispel that doubt'.⁶⁹

The election riots described by Bird and the general lawlessness of proceedings in New York created an unfavourable impression to British audiences. *The Economist* was most disconcerted to read Bird's reports, remarking that 'forty-four murders and seven hundred murderous assaults at New York in six months is a most alarming statement; and yet, from the revelations of a visit to the hospitals of the city, sufficiently credible. An election riot among the "free and enlightened" citizens of New York seems to be truly an appalling affair'.⁷⁰

Bradshaw's Journal agreed with the illustrations furnished by Dickens of 'the destructive extreme to which the doctrines of popular election may be carried'.⁷¹ New York was the city where the worst vices of the American character appeared to flourish. Both travel writers and reviewers concurred that a wide franchise was conducive to mob rioting.

British reviewers were particularly concerned about the scenes of demagoguery related by British travel writers. Demagoguery in America was a perennial problem for British observers and reviewers throughout the Jacksonian era in America. Towards the end of Jackson's time in office, the *Eclectic Review* noted in response to *Society in America* the duplicitous nature of those seeking election, writing that 'amongst a large portion of the office-seekers and office-holders of America, a disgraceful distinction appears to be drawn between the sentiments avowed in public and those which are held in private. The people are flattered in the one case, and despised in the other'.⁷² The spectre of demagoguery continued

⁶⁹ *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic*, June 1837, 10:6, 288; See also *Athenaeum*, 13 May 1837, 337.

⁷⁰ *Economist*, 26 January 1856, 91; For a similar assessment of New York following Anthony Trollope's publication of *North America* see *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 77.

⁷¹ *Bradshaw's Journal*, December 1842, 28.

⁷² *Eclectic Review*, July 1837, 59; See also *Tait's Edinburgh Journal* on 'the arts used by candidates in cajoling and flattering the people', *Tait's Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 407.

to alarm British reviewers in the aftermath of Jackson's presidency. In 1842, *Bradshaw's Journal* concluded from reading Dickens' *American Notes* that there was abundant evidence to demonstrate that 'there is no tyranny so despotic as that of the ignorant and selfish many over the intelligent and patriotic few, or against the weak and the abject, whose dearest inalienable rights are daily, and with the utmost impunity, trampled under foot'.⁷³ British travel literature provided reviewers and readers with a catalogue of evidence to show that in America the majority reigned supreme. Thirty years after Frances Trollope had warned British readers about the 'tumult and degradation' which would follow placing all the political power of a nation in the hands of its population, it was with great sorrow that *Fraser's Magazine* endorsed Anthony Trollope's observations of demagoguery, writing that to see American political figures like Edward Everett, 'a man of great parts, prostituting his ability, and becoming, not the leader, but the follower, of his audience, to see him putting forth his sensitive feelers to gauge the popular sentiment, and crawling and writhing in his efforts to flatter and pamper it' is a sad sight.⁷⁴ As we have seen, many others concluded the same.

The ability of American politicians

As demonstrated by Martineau and Trollope's commentary on the speeches of Edward Everett, the quality of American politicians produced by the existing political framework was a frequent topic of contemporary travel literature. Foreign visitors questioned the capability of American politicians to fulfil the basic functions of statecraft, and openly questioned why higher quality political figures failed to emerge in the United States. Americans rejected worthy candidates and instead returned a class of politicians who disgraced their own

⁷³ *Bradshaw's Journal*, December 1842, 28.

⁷⁴ *Fraser's Magazine*, August 1862, 66:392, 258.

institutions. In 1837, Martineau explained to her readers how the theory of self-government in America ‘presumes that the majority...choose the best men. This is far from being true in practice’.⁷⁵ Both Dickens in 1842 and Bird in 1856 would subsequently observe how the low nature of American politics saw the educated and the wealthy refrain from entering political life as they did in other countries.⁷⁶ The eagerness with which Americans turned on their elected officials was another factor in these assessments. Dickens lambasted Americans who had been:

Rendered...so fickle, and so given to change...for you no sooner set up an idol firmly, than you are sure to pull it down and dash it into fragments...Any man who attains a high place among you, from the President downwards, may date his downfall from that moment.⁷⁷

In America, merit, talent and competence were not seen to be enough to guarantee political success. British observers lamented the absence of the most modest, learned and conscientious men who shunned public life in the United States.⁷⁸ Instead of great statesmen, American politics was comprised of poorly dressed, dishonest lawyers both at a state and federal level. This remained the case into the 1860s. Anthony Trollope told his readers that ‘the appearance of the members of the legislature of Pennsylvania did not impress me very favourably.’⁷⁹ The political implication of this was a loss of the distinction that commentators expected from legislative assemblies. Anthony Trollope went on to argue that ‘if ever our own Parliament becomes dirty, it will lose its prestige’.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 24-5.

⁷⁶ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 292; Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 3.

⁷⁷ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 289-90.

⁷⁸ See for example Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 86.

⁷⁹ Trollope, *North America*, II, 72.

⁸⁰ Trollope, *North America*, II, 73.

Poor dress sense was not unique to American politicians; numerous British political figures were also known for being scruffy. However, what differentiated American politicians was their *dirtiness*. Dirt was a recurring presence in British travel writing on America. It was a natural by-product of a nation in the early stages of development and expansion, but to a Victorian society increasingly concerned with ideas of cleanliness, dirt was associated with poverty and the disenfranchised working classes. Americans were portrayed as an essentially ‘dirty people’ by British travellers like Anthony Trollope and the system of universal suffrage there had seen political representatives selected from among them. Criticising the poor and dirty appearance of American politicians implied shortcomings in the American political system. British travellers had hoped to find American political figures cleaner than the electorate who voted for them. Instead, they found a Congress obsessed with spitting and littered with spittoons.

Nowhere was the lack of quality statesmen more apparent than in Congress, and particularly in the House of Representatives. Across this period, British travellers described scenes of vulgarity and violence from their time visiting the House of Representatives. In 1832, Frances Trollope contrasted the architectural beauty of the House of Representatives with the low character of the members who filled it, expressing how she was mortified to find such a splendid hall filled with such unseemly men.⁸¹ After watching proceedings in the House in 1842, Dickens delivered a damning verdict on the members there, describing how he saw in them:

⁸¹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 19.

the wheels that move the meanest perversion of virtuous Political Machinery that the worst tools ever wrought...Aidings and abettings of every bad inclination in the popular mind, and artful suppressions of all its good influences...a Dishonest Faction in its most depraved and most unblushing form, stared out from every corner of the crowded hall.⁸²

Writing in 1856, Bird shared the impression of earlier British travellers, summarising how ‘the stranger visiting the United States is surprised with the entire absence of gentlemanly feeling in political affairs. They are pervaded by a coarse and repulsive vulgarity’.⁸³ Anthony Trollope wrote at length about his experience of Congress in the early 1860s, noting the rowdiness of parliamentary debates in the House of Representatives in comparison to the more prosy debates of the House of Commons.⁸⁴ Representatives were believed to be prone to violent outbursts, and proceedings were held to often break out into open hostilities.⁸⁵

In comparison to the House of Representatives, the Senate was seen as a more dignified assembly. For Frances Trollope, ‘the senators, generally speaking, look like gentlemen’.⁸⁶ Ten years later Dickens would relate how proceedings in the Senate were ‘conducted with much gravity and order’.⁸⁷ The roughness of Representatives, a product of direct and popular universal suffrage, stood in stark contrast to the more gentlemanly conduct of Senators, who had been chosen by their state legislatures.

⁸² Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 290-1.

⁸³ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 415.

⁸⁴ Trollope, *North America*, II, 44.

⁸⁵ See for example Dickens on the violence that could break out in American legislative halls, *American Notes*, II, 282.

⁸⁶ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 22.

⁸⁷ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 294.

One feature which struck foreign visitors was the powerlessness of Congress. The Federal nature of America prevented Congress from legislating on state matters, thereby limiting its legislative function. Congress appeared to British observers to be continually mired in debates over what was a state matter and what was a federal matter. As early as 1832, Frances Trollope noted that every debate she listened to in Congress was about the same subject: ‘the entire independence of each individual state, with regard to the federal government’.⁸⁸ One consequence of Senators being elected by their state legislatures was that they were expected by those state legislatures to guard against any encroachment by the Federal Government on state powers. Congress was divided between those who feared the Federal Government gaining too much power and those who feared the same about the state governments.⁸⁹ The inability of Congress to check the executive power of the Presidency was also noted.

There was little link between the American legislature and the executive. The President’s ministers did not sit in Congress and therefore were not subject to regular scrutiny. By the late 1850s and early 1860s this was becoming an even greater problem, with the growing threat of secession, the turbulent end to the Presidency of James Buchanan and the tense political climate that greeted Lincoln’s Presidency. Writing in 1862 against this backdrop, Anthony Trollope was particularly concerned. He noted how once appointed ‘the minister sits safe in his office—safe there for the term of the existing Presidency if he can keep well with the President; and therefore, even under ordinary circumstances, does not care much for the printed or written messages of Congress’.⁹⁰ Senators relied on committees to hold ministers to account but they lacked the constitutional power to enforce this. The Senate did hold some executive power but exercised it infrequently and with caution. Senators were increasingly

⁸⁸ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 20.

⁸⁹ See for example Martineau’s account of this problem in *Society in America*, I, 17.

⁹⁰ Trollope, *North America*, II, 42.

being expected to act under direction from their state legislatures which in turn were subject to the popular will. Anthony Trollope urged the Senate to reassert itself and informed his readers that ‘it is to the Senate that we must look for that conservative element which may protect the United States from the violence of demagogues on one side and from the despotism of military power on the other’.⁹¹ The powerlessness of Congress which had worried British travel writers like Frances Trollope and Martineau in the 1830s had now become an even greater problem.

British travel writers had described to reviewers a picture in which the best, most educated, wealthy or talented men declined to enter public life, leaving a vacuum for lawyers and poor politicians to fill. This image was widely accepted. Anthony Trollope and Martineau’s accounts were particularly influential on this theme. Active participation in politics was a dirty business in which many refused to partake. *North America* led the *Saturday Review* to conclude that ‘as the best men will not aim at holding this power, on account of the dirty work that must precede obtaining it and the shortness of its duration when it is obtained, the American scheme of things ends in very inferior men having very excessive temporary power’.⁹² *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* had come to a similar conclusion reading *Society in America*, remarking that ‘office in the Republic, it would appear, is beset with snares, troubles, and perplexities...It seems, too, to be often purchased at a price which the best men will not willingly pay...These drawbacks keep back the chosen spirits of the Republic from office’.⁹³ By 1862, British reviewers and audiences had come to believe that the price for

⁹¹ Trollope, *North America*, II, 218.

⁹² *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 626; For a similar conclusion see *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* which remarked on ‘the steady exclusion of merit and character from the offices of the State’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1862, 92:563, 383.

⁹³ *Tait’s Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 407; For a similar view see the *Monthly Review* which commented on the fact that in America there exists ‘a caution even on the part of the wise and the good, that prevents them from speaking aloud on the most vital questions of morality and humanity, whenever a depraved or prejudiced majority may be of a contrary mind’, *Monthly Review*, June 1837, 2:2, 243; See also *Eclectic Review*, July 1837, 59.

participating in American politics was simply too high. As a result, Congress enjoyed a fairly poor reputation among many Britons.

American politicians were seen as lacking principles and subject to the whims of the popular will. The image presented by Frances Trollope continued to resonate with audiences. In its review of *Domestic Manners*, the *Quarterly Review* had concluded from reading Frances Trollope that American politicians ‘venerate nothing, and yield, with the wildest delight, to every new flow or gust of the political storms which constitute their precarious atmosphere’.⁹⁴ *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* was similarly left with an unfavourable impression created by Martineau’s account of the orations she heard from candidates for Congress.⁹⁵ Dickens’ images of Congress proved particularly effective with *Fraser’s Magazine’s* concluding that Congress consisted ‘for the most part of vulgar, ignorant, penniless, dishonest adventurers’.⁹⁶ By 1862, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* was in no doubt that the whole political body was tainted.⁹⁷ The House of Representatives in particular was taken by British travellers to provide an indication of national character and by extension the character of a purely representative form of government. In a democratic republic, the condition and quality of the officials chosen to best represent the people spoke to their character, ability and reputation. In all respects, these candidates were found wanting by British commentators.

⁹⁴ *Quarterly Review*, March 1832, 47:93, 68.

⁹⁵ *Tait’s Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 407.

⁹⁶ *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1842, 26:155, 620-1; For similar comments see *Ainsworth’s Magazine*, July 1842, 470; also *Bradshaw’s Journal*, December 1842, 28.

⁹⁷ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1862, 92:563, 383.

Politics and the American character

Analysing and understanding the American character was a preeminent concern for Victorian society, which was increasingly preoccupied by the idea of ‘character’.⁹⁸ There were certain failings or shortcomings in the American character which struck foreign visitors. In travel literature, Americans developed a reputation for dishonesty both in their politics as well as in other facets of life. A common feature was the attitude of the Federal Government to Native Americans and how their treatment of them was seen by visitors as dishonest. British travellers visiting the United States in the 1830s and 1840s bore witness to the effect of the 1830 Native American Removal Act which empowered the Federal Government to negotiate with Native Americans to acquire their ancestral lands, forcing them west of the Mississippi river. Having been in America when the act was introduced, Frances Trollope noted that in its dealings with Native Americans, the Federal Government had acted treacherously and that ‘if the American character may be judged by their conduct in this matter, they are most lamentably deficient in every feeling of honour and integrity’.⁹⁹ Ten years later, after the act had been strongly enforced during the presidencies of Jackson and Van Buren, Dickens found himself in 1842 reviewing the treaties signed between the government and various chiefs and could not help but record his ‘many sorrowful thoughts upon the simple warriors whose hands and hearts were set there, in all truth and honesty; and who only learned in course of time from white men how to break their faith, and quibble out of forms and bonds’.¹⁰⁰

This dishonesty was also apparent in the prevalence of political corruption in America.

Politicians elected to high office in America, finding themselves unable to exercise the

⁹⁸ For more on the importance of character to Victorian society see Stefan Collini, ‘The Idea of “Character” in Victorian Political Thought’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985) 29-50; and Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven and London, 2006), 27-100.

⁹⁹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Dickens, *American Notes*, II, 38.

political power they had just acquired, without acting in accordance with the popular will, proved susceptible to corruption – or such was the perception. Both Martineau (writing in 1837) and Anthony Trollope (writing in 1862) were particularly concerned that the American political system all too often created opportunities for corruption. Anthony Trollope remarked how going back as far as the time of President Jackson ‘there has been an organized system of dishonesty in the management of all beneficial places under the control of the Government. I doubt whether any despotic court of Europe has been so corrupt in the...selection of public officers, as has been the assemblage of statesmen at Washington’.¹⁰¹

Integrity was missing in American political life. Martineau believed that ‘the hour is come when...dwellers in the new world, each in his turn a servant of society, should require [integrity] of each other and of themselves. The people of the United States are seeking after this, feebly and dimly’.¹⁰² Such corruption harmed both America’s national honour and the reputation of the form of government it represented. For Anthony Trollope, America had ‘soiled herself with political corruption’ and disgraced ‘the cause of republican government by the dirt of those whom she has placed in her high places’.¹⁰³ The prevalence of corruption in American politics was perceived to damage the cause of popular government.

The dishonesty in American politics fed into the rest of American society. Throughout this period, British observers noted how American dishonesty manifested itself in their business dealings. Writing in 1856, Bird observed how ‘that dishonesty which is so notoriously and often successfully practised in political life is not excluded from the dealings of man with man’.¹⁰⁴ Dishonesty in business dealings was presented as a common occurrence. In 1842,

¹⁰¹ Trollope, *North America*, I, 188; For Martineau’s views see *Society in America*, I, 86.

¹⁰² Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 83.

¹⁰³ Trollope, *North America*, II, 193.

¹⁰⁴ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 416.

Dickens wrote of Americans' love for swindling, or 'smart-dealing' as they called it, in business and trade.¹⁰⁵ Americans viewed such actions not as dishonest, but smart. Bird similarly recalled how 'it is jested about under the name of 'smartness', and commended under that of 'cuteness', till the rule becomes of frequent and practical application, that the disgrace attending a dishonourable transaction lies only in its detection'.¹⁰⁶ Dishonest actions were only dishonest if they were detected and punished. Dickens summarised to his readers how a man could be a public nuisance, a convicted liar, utterly dishonourable, debased and profligate yet Americans would still regard him as a smart man.¹⁰⁷ The reason for this, it was alleged, was the love of money in America.

The supremacy of the dollar over all other things for Americans was frequently remarked upon by visitors. Already in 1832, Frances Trollope compared the unity of purpose that Americans had for pursuing money to that of an ants' nest, lamenting the low morality it produced.¹⁰⁸ Speculation was a perennial problem in the United States. Martineau wrote with disappointment that 'few things are more disgraceful to American society than the carelessness with which speculators are allowed to game with other people's funds'.¹⁰⁹ This trend continued into the 1860s. In 1862, Anthony Trollope lamented how 'the love of money, or rather of making money', had been carried to an 'extreme' in the United States'.¹¹⁰ Both in politics and in business, Americans developed a reputation in travel literature for dishonesty which harmed the reputation of their national character.

¹⁰⁵ Dickens, *American Notes*, II, 291.

¹⁰⁶ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 417.

¹⁰⁷ Dickens, *American Notes*, II, 292.

¹⁰⁸ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 136-7.

¹⁰⁹ Martineau, *Society in America*, II, 145.

¹¹⁰ Trollope, *North America*, II, 322.

No figure's character mattered more than the President. The Presidency was a foreign concept for British audiences of contemporary travel literature in this period – an elected head of state, voted in by the popular will through a system of universal suffrage, an 'ordinary' citizen invested with tremendous power, serving for a limited term. The travel writers under consideration here experienced America under a variety of different Presidents from Jackson to Lincoln. Frances Trollope described witnessing the visit of Jackson to Cincinnati which caused a great popular feeling for the man, but expressed concern at the attitude displayed towards him, finding herself 'deeply disgusted by the brutal familiarity'.¹¹¹ Dickens recounted his meeting with President John Tyler describing him as 'somewhat worn and anxious...at war with everybody—but the expression of his face was mild and pleasant, and his manner was remarkably unaffected, gentlemanly, and agreeable'.¹¹² Presidents appeared simultaneously all-powerful with significant legislative and executive power, but also somewhat forlorn figures beset on all sides by competing interests and subject to the whims of the popular will.

The power of the Presidency depended on popular support. Writing towards the end of Jackson's presidency, which had championed an expansion of the franchise, Martineau argued that now an American President could do little unless he acted 'in accordance with the mind of the people. If he has any power, it is because the people are with him...If he does not proceed in accordance with public sentiment, he has no power'.¹¹³ However, as soon as a President was elected, Americans were already giving consideration to who the next one would be. Frances Trollope described how as soon as a Presidential candidate succeeded 'his virtues and his talents vanish, and, excepting those holding office under his appointment,

¹¹¹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, I, 197.

¹¹² Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 301.

¹¹³ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 56.

every man...[sets] off again full gallop to elect his successor'.¹¹⁴ Once out of office, former Presidents became irrelevant figures in American political society. Anthony Trollope remarked that 'a past President in the United States is of less consideration than a past Mayor in an English borough'.¹¹⁵ However, because of this Presidents tended to become more cavalier towards the end of their time in office since they would not be responsible for dealing with the fallout of their actions.

Other than during elections the Presidency and the Executive appeared to lack restrictions and scrutiny. The President was free to appoint his own ministers regardless of national opinion. These ministers did not sit in Congress and therefore could only be held to account by Committees. The President was able to refuse the passage of any act of Congress even if it was supported by a majority. American Presidents were regarded as temporary heads of state, free to exercise their political power without sufficient scrutiny, provided their actions could be justified in accordance with the popular will.

Readers of travel literature were thus presented with an American character which was prone to dishonesty and corruption, with a love of speculation and always chasing the next dollar. Their love of smart-dealing was a recurring feature in reviews of travellers' account, from the 1830s to the 1860s. *Fraser's Magazine* lamented how 'it has been reserved for America alone to set the "smart" man up on a pedestal, and to fall down and worship him'.¹¹⁶ Smartness, in the American sense of the word, flourished there. Dickens reminded *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* that 'Mammon...is the object of worship in America'.¹¹⁷ In New York, the almighty

¹¹⁴ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 65.

¹¹⁵ Trollope, *North America*, II, 223.

¹¹⁶ *Fraser's Magazine*, August 1862, 66:392, 258; For a similar view see *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 78; For a similar observation twenty-five years prior see *Tait's Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 409.

¹¹⁷ *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 19 November 1842, 349.

dollar was seen to reign supreme.¹¹⁸ The effect of this on the condition of Americans was clear to travel writers and reviewers. *The Economist* agreed with Bird in 1856 that ‘the haste to be rich entails a more anxious and exciting life on American men of business than is usual in England...Men accumulate, not to found a family, but to enjoy the fruit of their labours’.¹¹⁹ Six years later, the *Saturday Review* would concur with Anthony Trollope that ‘the kind of man they turn out is not the kind of man that would be relished here; for, in addition to his social defects...they are smart...deceitful for the sake of gain, and they are proud to be so’.¹²⁰

In the eyes of reviewers, Martineau and Anthony Trollope in particular had highlighted the problem of morality in America. *The Spectator* declared that Martineau had shown the morals of the United States as ‘utterly corrupt’, while *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* argued that she had confirmed the worst reports about speculation in the United States.¹²¹ In 1862, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* noted that Anthony Trollope had found that ‘the “smartness” of the people has confounded their ideas of right and wrong, and that their standard of honesty differs from that of others’ while *Fraser’s Magazine* felt that he had demonstrated ‘the rank pecuniary corruption which is eating into the vitals of the American nation’.¹²² If anything, the prevalence of corruption had gotten worse in the twenty-five years between their visits.

This lack of morality extended into their politics as well. Reports of bribery and corruption prevailing in almost all the public offices and the embezzling of public money by rich contractors and fraudulent politicians presented by Dickens in 1842 and Anthony Trollope in

¹¹⁸ *Monthly Review*, June 1837, 2:2, 243; *Dublin University Magazine* echoed this sentiment twenty-five years later *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 77-8.

¹¹⁹ *Economist*, 26 January 1856, 91.

¹²⁰ *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 625.

¹²¹ *Spectator*, 13 May 1837, 10:463, 447; *Tait’s Edinburgh Journal*, July 1837, 4:43, 417.

¹²² *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1862, 92:563, 384; *Fraser’s Magazine*, August 1862, 66:392, 257-8.

1862 were picked up on by British reviewers.¹²³ Martineau had similarly exposed the political corruption that tainted American politics. The *Eclectic Review* argued that Martineau's account of corruption in America had exposed 'the mean and contemptible arts by which popular favour is sought by the candidates for public office, and the dangers which encompass them from the moment of their object being attained'.¹²⁴ Even American Presidents were not exempt from this. In its review of *North America*, the *Saturday Review* shared Anthony Trollope's assessment that President Buchanan 'was able to commit a species of treason on a large scale, and in a quiet way, without anyone attempting to hinder him'.¹²⁵ In the minds of British readers, in their politics and their business, the American character could not escape the charge of dishonesty.

Slavery

The realities of American slavery were a frequent topic of travel literature in this period. In particular, writers noted the inherent contradiction between the frequently professed American principles of freedom and equality with the harsh reality of the continued persistence of slavery. The violence that permeated slave-owning society in America particularly struck British travel writers. Those who visited the United States in the 1830s, such as Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, were writing in the aftermath of the 1831 slave rebellion led by Nat Turner. Following the rebellion of enslaved Virginians, fifty-six slaves who were accused of participating were executed, and over a hundred, including women and children, were killed by local white militias and mobs in retaliation. Frances Trollope, who left America in 1831, noted how Americans boasted of their equality while at

¹²³ *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1842, 26:155, 621; *Examiner*, 26 July 1862, 469; *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 80.

¹²⁴ *Eclectic Review*, July 1837, 57.

¹²⁵ *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 626.

the same time owning and mistreating their slaves.¹²⁶ Martineau described slavery as the ‘compromise of the true republican principle’.¹²⁷ Slavery was an anomaly at the heart of the democratic republic which continued to be noted by British travellers into the 1840s and 1850s. Dickens painted a brutal portrait of the many Americans among whom ‘it is the Inalienable Right...to take the field after their Happiness equipped with cat and cartwhip, stocks, and iron collar, and to shout their view halloa! (always in praise of Liberty) to the music of clanking chains and bloody stripes’.¹²⁸ By 1856, Bird simply remarked that American slavery proved ‘a living lie to the imposing declaration, “All men are free and equal”’.¹²⁹ As long as slavery persisted, American principles were compromised.

Despite this contradiction, it appeared to foreign visitors that the position of slavery in America was protected by the political system. The continued existence of slavery was partly as a result of slave-owners having too much political power in the United States. Both in Congress and with the President, slave-owners had accumulated a large degree of political capital. The purchase of Florida in 1819 was cited as an example of this by Martineau, who believed that the purchase had been effected ‘for the sake of the slave-holders...the President was overwhelmed with letters from slave-owners, complaining that Florida was the refuge of their runaways; and demanding that this retreat should be put within their power’.¹³⁰ Dickens described to his readers how presidential candidates fawned over slave-owners and sought to cater for their needs, desperate for their support.¹³¹ Acquiring new territories provided slave-owners with new land to operate on and maintained their representation in Congress.

¹²⁶ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 52.

¹²⁷ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 40.

¹²⁸ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, 289.

¹²⁹ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 412.

¹³⁰ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 321.

¹³¹ Dickens, *American Notes*, II, 255.

Slavery was intertwined with the foundations of the American Constitution; divesting slavery from it would require a great deal of political will. Bird's time in America coincided with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The Act, which had caused fierce debates in the House of Representatives, centred on whether the territory of Kansas should be admitted to the Union as a slave state or a free state. The Act took the decision over whether to permit slavery in Kansas out of Congress' hands and placed it with the people of Kansas, deferring to popular sovereignty. Bird concluded that 'slavery is a part of the ratified Constitution of the States, and that the Government is bound to maintain it in its integrity. Its abolition must be procured by an important change in the constitution, which would shake, and might dislocate, the vast and unwieldy Republic'.¹³² The result of the act was that Kansas descended into its own Civil War with a series of raids, assaults and open violence between Border Ruffians and Free-Staters from 1854 to 1859, known as Bleeding Kansas. Anthony Trollope described slavery in America as a political mistake and argued to his readers that 'the founders of the great American Commonwealth made an error in omitting to provide some means for the gradual extinction of slavery throughout the States'.¹³³ In addition to writing in the aftermath of the violent confrontations of Bleeding Kansas, Anthony Trollope's reflections on American slavery followed the outcome of the Dred Scott case in which the Supreme Court had ruled in 1857 that the Constitution had never intended for persons of African descent to become citizens and that Congress did not have the power to prevent the expansion of slavery in America.

Protected by the existing political framework, slavery acted as a political and social inhibitor to the progress of the United States. The brutality that slavery introduced into society was a

¹³² Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 411.

¹³³ Trollope, *North America*, Volume 2, 314.

common feature. Slavery was seen to have a corrosive and demoralising effect on America. From 1812 to 1850, for every free-state that was admitted to the Union a slave-state was also admitted. Dickens described how ‘an air of ruin and decay’ filled all areas where slavery could be found.¹³⁴ Between Dickens’ visit in 1841 and Bird’s visit in 1854 another two slave-states had joined the Union. Bird argued that in her experience of America slavery acted ‘as an incubus on public improvement, and vitiates public morals; and it proves a very formidable obstacle to religion, advancement, and national unity’.¹³⁵ British travellers continually noted the difference between the progress of free-soil states and the poor condition of slave states. Commenting on the newly settled districts of the southern States in 1837, Martineau remarked that ‘if human life presents its fairest aspects in the retired townships of New England, - some of its very worst, perhaps are seen in the raw settlements of Alabama and Mississippi’.¹³⁶ Nineteen years later, Bird described to her readers the difference between the free state of Ohio and the slave-state of Kentucky:

They have the same soil, the same climate, and precisely the same natural advantages; yet the total absence of progress, if not the appearance of retrogression and decay, the loungers in the streets, and the peculiar appearance of the slaves, afford a contrast to the bustle on the opposite side of the river, which would strike the most unobservant.¹³⁷

The incompatibility of slavery with supposedly American principles lay at the heart of the American polity, rendering society more violent and inhibiting national progress.

¹³⁴ Dickens, *American Notes*, II, 16.

¹³⁵ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 412.

¹³⁶ Martineau, *Society in America*, I, 212.

¹³⁷ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 126.

The contradiction between the professed American principles of liberty and equality and the harsh realities of slavery made a firm impression in the minds of British audiences. The gap between American principles and American realities had been clear since 1832. The *Athenaeum* had concurred with Frances Trollope, questioning ‘how any men can imagine themselves in the full enjoyment of liberty, while they detain their fellow-creatures in slavery... These are the orators who talk eloquently of human liberty and the indefeasible rights of man’.¹³⁸ In particular, Martineau’s writing on slavery in America made a significant impression. Her accounts of American slavery were hailed by *The Spectator* who described how ‘the picture drawn of [slavery] by Miss Martineau is one of the most frightful social expositions we remember’.¹³⁹ In 1837, in responding to Martineau’s work the *Eclectic Review* would remark that ‘to hear the language of freedom and of tyranny issue from the same lips is sufficiently astounding’.¹⁴⁰ *Bradshaw’s Journal* was sickened by the reports of American slavery conveyed by Dickens.¹⁴¹ Slave-owners had been allowed to gain a sufficient advantage in American politics, one which they would fight to maintain. *Dublin University Magazine’s* review of *North America* spoke of the ascendancy that the slave-owners of the Southern States ‘which for so long a time they were allowed to exercise in the councils of the nation’.¹⁴²

The contrast drawn between the prosperity of free states and the stagnation of slave states resonated with British reviewers. In 1856, *The Spectator* was struck by Bird’s contrast

¹³⁸ *Athenaeum*, 24 March 1832, 188; See also the review of *Domestic Manners* in *Quarterly Review*, March 1832, 47:93, 72.

¹³⁹ *Spectator*, 13 May 1837, 10:463, 447; See also *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* which described how her ‘sketches of the awful mischief of slavery are harrowing beyond any thing we recollect to have ever read’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 1 July 1837, 182.

¹⁴⁰ *Eclectic Review*, July 1837, 64; See also *Court Magazine and Monthly Critic*, June 1837, 10:6, 288.

¹⁴¹ *Bradshaw’s Journal*, December 1842, 29; See also the *London Quarterly Review’s* review of *North America* referring to slavery as ‘that foul blot’ on the statute book of the South, *London Quarterly Review*, October 1862, 19:37, 240.

¹⁴² *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 76.

between Ohio and Kentucky, observing that ‘the economical contrast between Free States and Slave States has often been remarked, but we never before saw it pictured in such strong and immediate juxtaposition’.¹⁴³ British readers were left in no doubt that slavery had a corrupting and also economically deleterious influence on society. Martineau had made the corrupting effect of slavery abundantly clear. The *Monthly Review* stated its belief that Martineau’s study had shown ‘in the most masterly manner...The moral evils resulting from slavery...In the Southern States society...[is] corrupted and depraved to the very core’.¹⁴⁴ The *Metropolitan Magazine* simply noted that Martineau had shown ‘its debasing effects and the demoralising power on the enslaver’.¹⁴⁵ British audiences were left with a picture of an American society which spoke of liberty and equality, yet did not practise what they preached. The existence of slavery in the land of the free was irreconcilable.

Americans and Education

The American attitude towards education formed a considerable part of travel literature. In a system which entrusted a wide section of the population with significant political power, the education of these people was seen as being of paramount importance. Most of our travel writers were left with a sense that American education was well developed and in a much better position than education in Britain. By 1856, Bird concluded that ‘the educational system pursued in the States is worthy of the highest praise, and of an enlightened people in the nineteenth-century’.¹⁴⁶ Americans appeared to have a general level of education far above the level in Britain. This was already the case in 1837, when Martineau described how ‘there are schools provided for the training of every individual, from the earliest age; colleges to

¹⁴³ *Spectator*, 19 January 1856, 82.

¹⁴⁴ *Monthly Review*, June 1837, 2:2, 238-9; See also *Spectator*, 13 May 1837, 10:463, 448; and *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 1 July 1837, 182.

¹⁴⁵ *Metropolitan Magazine*, June 1837, 19:74, 37; See also *Athenaeum*, 13 May 1837, 337.

¹⁴⁶ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 434.

receive the élite of the schools; and lyceums, and other such institutions, for the subsequent instruction of working men'.¹⁴⁷ Dickens would go on to document his impressive experience of education in Boston and the free-schools of Cincinnati.¹⁴⁸

For British commentators, education was imperative to maintaining a democracy.

Democracies based on universal suffrage necessitated making a good standard of education available to the electorate. In turn, it was the democratic American citizen's duty to make full advantage of this access. This was already the case when British travellers visited the United States in the 1830s. Martineau in 1837 wrote at length about American education, arguing that 'in a democracy, where life and society are equally open to all, and where all have agreed to require of each other a certain amount of intellectual and moral competency, the means being provided, it becomes the duty of all to see that the means are used'.¹⁴⁹ Nearly all Americans were found to be well informed by an extensive range of newspapers, which they consumed with a ready appetite. Books from around the world were imported to the United States and American literature was developing its own notable canon of writers. Bird, Frances Trollope and Anthony Trollope all commented on the state of American literature.¹⁵⁰

Educating their people was clearly important for many Americans. They were found to frequently talk and boast about their education system. In 1832, Frances Trollope noted that in America 'a vast deal of genuine admiration is felt and expressed at the progress of mind throughout the Union... They believe themselves in all sincerity to have surpassed... the whole earth in the intellectual race'.¹⁵¹ The idea of education as an American birthright,

¹⁴⁷ Martineau, *Society in America*, II, 268.

¹⁴⁸ Dickens, *American Notes*, I, Chapter 3 and II, Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁹ Martineau, *Society in America*, II, 269.

¹⁵⁰ Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, Chapter 19; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, Chapter 29; Trollope, *North America*, II, Chapter 15.

¹⁵¹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, II, 176.

alongside the American principles of liberty and equality resonated through contemporary travel literature.¹⁵²

By the publication of *North America* in 1862, Britons could be in no doubt of the strength of education in the United States and its importance to Americans. In 1832, in its review of *Domestic Manners*, the *Literary Gazette* had spoken admirably of the ‘beautiful fugitive poetry that crowds the American papers and annuals [which]...would gain by comparison with the best of our own’.¹⁵³ In 1843, the *Edinburgh Review* concluded from reading *American Notes* that illiteracy and innumeracy were not problems in the United States owing to every state making sufficient provision for the education of its citizens.¹⁵⁴

The political importance of education in a democracy was also clear to readers. In its review of *North America*, the *Saturday Review* commented on the important link between education and a democratic system, describing how Americans ‘associate the spread of elementary instruction with the maintenance of their political system, and they seek after popular education with the keen anxiety of a personal interest’.¹⁵⁵ The commitment of Americans to opening up education to every citizen was one of the most positive elements of the United States. Every American seemed eager to take advantage of the opportunity to educate themselves. In their review of *North America*, the *London Quarterly Review* observed ‘the strong point of the Americans, – that in which they excel us beyond all doubt, – is their system of national education’.¹⁵⁶ The *Dublin University Magazine*’s conclusion that America

¹⁵² See for example Bird writing in 1856 about the importance of free education to parents in America: Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, 434.

¹⁵³ *Literary Gazette*, 24 March 1832, 179.

¹⁵⁴ *Edinburgh Review*, January 1843, 76:154, 518.

¹⁵⁵ *Saturday Review*, 31 May 1862, 13:344, 625.

¹⁵⁶ *London Quarterly Review*, October 1862, 19:37, 246; See also the review of *North America* by *Dublin University Magazine* which highlighted the craving for instruction among Americans as ‘one of the best characteristics of the American mind’, *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 80.

was 'a country where the means of education are opened liberally...to all, and as willingly accepted as offered' was shared by many.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

The aim of the chapter has been to establish what British commentators were referring to when they spoke about the American democracy, what notions and values they associated with it and what effect the political system was seen to have on the character of society. Through analysing British travel literature and accompanying reviews we have seen how British travellers conveyed to their audiences an image of an America in which universal suffrage was deeply ingrained in society. Britons conceived of Americans as a politically engaged people, obsessed by canvassing and electioneering and always keen to assert their democratic equality. At times, this often turned into boasting and a firm resistance to any criticisms made by foreign travellers of their political system. Americans revered their Constitution like a religious text and defended it with great zeal. Whilst some Americans expressed concern in private about the extent of the franchise, universal suffrage was indivisible from the American polity.

Universal suffrage was perceived by British travel writers and readers to have had a significant effect on the American character. In addition to their boastfulness, Americans had been rendered prone to corruption, both in politics and in business, developing a reputation for dishonesty in the minds of British readers. Corruption was a perennial problem for Americans, with a catalogue of examples being recorded by British observers. British travellers confirmed and developed further De Tocqueville's warnings about the tyranny of

¹⁵⁷ *Dublin University Magazine*, July 1862, 60:355, 82; See also *London Quarterly Review*, October 1862, 19:37, 248.

the majority in America which rode roughshod over minority interests. In the United States, the will of the majority and the dollar were the supreme laws which governed everything and to which all people deferred. Universal suffrage had made Americans fickle, eager to tear down their political representatives as soon as they had been elected. American politics was a precarious affair, with representatives forced to adapt to every new popular whim.

Both in contemporary travel literature and reviews, Britons exhibited a fairly low opinion of the standard of politicians elected under the American suffrage. Politics in America was seen as a dirty business and men of talent, wealth and intellect therefore declined to enter into it. American politics was incapable of producing the kind of statesmen who could command the respect of British readers. Those who made it to Congress did not impress British observers. The beauty of the buildings of Congress was contrasted with the low character of those who sat in it. The Senate, composed of representatives appointed by the State legislatures, had some respectability, but the House of Representatives elected under universal suffrage did not. Representatives were expected to serve as delegates for the popular will, not to exercise their own opinion and judgement. British travellers found themselves disgusted by scenes of those seeking office excessively flattering voters, bowing and scraping before them and desperately trying to secure their support. All too often, elections seemed to descend into chaos with election riots portrayed as a common occurrence. Elections developed a reputation for violence, with the mob exercising undue influence. If the condition of institutions like the House of Representatives was meant to reflect the national mind of America, to the minds of British travellers, this did not strengthen the argument of those who sought a purely representative form of government based on population alone.

Slavery undoubtedly complicated British understandings of American democracy. The barbarity of American slavery undoubtedly appalled many British readers. However, far more concerning for many British reviewers was the moral effect of slavery on the wider society that lived alongside it, as well as the implications of slavery for American principles. In the Southern States, slavery had made society more violent, crueller and poorer. Where free-soil states had embraced commerce and manufacturing and seemed to enjoy recurring prosperity, slave states committed to agriculture appeared to the eyes of British travellers as stagnating. Slavery exhausted the potential of the land it occupied, forcing slave-owners to continue seeking additional land in order to maintain their business. The political implications of this meant that slave-holders used the political capital they had in Congress and with the Presidency to push for new territories to expand their reach. These new territories entering the union as slave-states ensured that they could maintain the balance of representation in Congress between free-soil and slave states. The incompatibility of slavery with American principles also struck British travel writers and reviewers as most hypocritical. Americans professed their love of liberty and equality while at the same time maintaining an institution that enslaved nearly four million people by the time of the 1860 United States census. The democratic equality dearly loved and boasted of by Americans appeared to have a limit. The continued persistence of slavery in the land of the free left British readers incredulous.

Most British travellers and reviewers agreed that the best characteristic of the American was their mind. The American thirst for knowledge and natural inquisitiveness was the best trait of Americans. Americans readily sought information from their numerous newspapers. They were well-read, importing books from Britain and Europe and taking advantage of free libraries. Many books published by the authors considered in this chapter achieved high circulation figures in the United States. The travel accounts we have considered here were

famous, and sometimes infamous, among literate Americans. Americans may not have achieved the high levels of education that a privileged few reached in Britain and Europe, but there was near unanimous consent that the general diffusion of education in America surpassed that found in Britain. The links between education and a democratic system were clear. American democracy opened up access to educational institutions and American citizens readily took advantage of this opportunity. It was this system of education that allowed a wide variety of people to partake in political debates and exercise their political role. The system of free-schools left a favourable impression on British travel writers which they conveyed to their readers.

In conclusion, we have seen throughout this chapter how British travel literature about America, written in the aftermath of the Great Reform Act, and the reviews that this literature generated, created a set of significant and interlinked tropes about America, its politics and its people. An extended franchise had made Americans more educated and politically engaged. They loved their Constitution which had taken them from a newly formed independent republic to a prosperous and vast nation and were prepared to fight for it. However, this zeal that they had for their political system rendered them unable to accept any criticism by British travellers of the drawbacks that an enlarged electorate had brought with it. American politics became intertwined with corruption and poor-quality statesmen in the minds of British readers. The American political arena was filled with a frenetic atmosphere in which politicians, reduced to mere delegates, were forced to try and keep up with the latest popular whim while demagogues excited the electorate and vied for their support. In politics and in business, Americans developed a reputation for dishonesty and ‘smartness’ which Britons found distasteful, particularly in their treatment of Native Americans and African Americans to whom the often professed American commitment to liberty and equality did not seem to

extend. Slavery had rendered parts of America stagnant and served as a major issue of conflict between the North, the West and the South. De Tocqueville's warning about the tyranny of the majority in America was confirmed by reports from British travel writers and reviewers. Rather than subject themselves to the violence and mob rule that characterised the low nature of American politics, educated, wealthy and talented men preferred to withdraw from entering public life. The House of Representatives did not offer a firm endorsement of representation based on population alone to British readers.

Later in the thesis, we will see how these tropes about democracy, universal suffrage and franchise extension as it existed in America would be deployed in Britain's own debate about democratic reform. However, before this we must first consider the impact of an event which divided America, focused minds in Britain on the nature of democracy in the United States and raised new questions about the capability of a society operating under a wide franchise to govern itself and respond to urgent challenges – the outbreak of the American Civil War. The American system of government may have seen the United States through the first seventy-eight years of its existence, but whether it could survive the turmoil of the Civil War was far from certain in the minds of Britons.

Chapter Two – British Press Commentary on the Role of Democracy in the American Civil War, 1860-1865

Introduction

The scale of the American Civil War and the division it generated in American society made it a defining moment in American history. James McPherson observes that many of the issues over which the Civil War was fought including ‘matters of race and citizenship; regional rivalries; the relative powers and responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments’ still resonate today in the United States.¹ It defined the American nation and continues to shape how Americans view both their government and each other. However, the impact of the Civil War went beyond America. International histories of the Civil War have formed a small but significant part of the historiography of the conflict. One area of particular interest has been the impact of the Civil War in Britain. The American conflict attracted global attention, but nowhere more so than in Britain. Many Britons retained a keen interest in American affairs after the Revolution, and the Civil War raised unavoidable economic and political questions in Britain.

As we have seen by looking at British travel literature, closely studying events in America was already a well-established practice of British political commentators before the Civil War. In his survey of antebellum America in the British imagination, Hugh Dubrulle suggests that many commentators:

accepted that America’s future would become the civilized world’s; Britain would inevitably come to resemble the United States. How would Britain change, and what

¹ James McPherson, *The War That Forged A Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* (New York, 2015), 5.

could Britons do to prepare themselves for this transformation? These questions about the American present and future proved most interesting to British commentators.²

Conservatives, Radicals and Liberals thus looked to America's long running experiment with democracy to inform their own arguments. For many British Radicals, the success of the American political model encouraged them to continue to pursue democratic reform in their own country. British Liberals were divided on the merits of American democracy. British Conservatives argued that democracy had created a lack of talent in the highest levels of American politics. The outbreak of civil war in one of the world's leading democracies forced British commentators to consider the viability of democracy as a political system. The Civil War challenged pre-existing understandings of American politics; the continued success of the American democracy was no longer guaranteed. For supporters and opponents of political reform in Britain, the conflict in America was of paramount importance.

Before proceeding, we need to place the Civil War in the broader context of nineteenth-century reform politics. The two main points of reference are the 1848 Revolutions in Europe and the decline of the Chartist movement in Britain. In his international history of the conflict, Don H. Doyle places the war in the aftermath of the 'Age of Revolution': the period between 1789 and 1848 identified by Eric Hobsbawm in which a great revolution took place in parts of Europe and North America.³ For Doyle, the Age of Revolution had witnessed a long struggle between 'the advocates of popular sovereignty, human equality, and universal emancipation' and 'the defenders of dynastic rule, aristocratic privilege, and inherited inequality'.⁴ The failure of the 1848 revolutions weakened the cause of revolution and reform

² Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 17.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London, 1977), 13.

⁴ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 85.

and emboldened the conservative forces of dynasticism and oligarchy. In this context, the outbreak of Civil War in America took on a greater significance for European Liberals, Radicals and Conservatives. Doyle concludes that ‘Conservatives welcomed the American secessions crisis, seeing it as the coup de grâce to the republican experiment in both hemispheres. For revolutionaries and liberals, America’s war came to be seen as the crucial trial that would decide the fate of government by the people’.⁵

1848 also marked the culmination of the Chartist movement in Britain. Combined with the end of the revolutions in Europe, the failure of the Chartist petition to Parliament to secure political reform led to the decline of Chartism. Individual pockets of Chartist activity continued into the 1850s, but the national movement had collapsed. The decline of Chartism was a serious blow to the cause of political reform in Britain. The cause continued to be supported by a group of radical parliamentary reformers. In his history of parliamentary reform, Eric J. Evans identifies Joseph Hume, W.J. Fox, J.A. Roebuck and Thomas Perronet Thompson as members of this group, but argues that their predominant interest was ‘more with the distribution of seats and the form of voting than with an increase in the franchise’.⁶ During the 1850s the franchise was far away from the centre of Radical politics in Britain. Only by the end of the decade would expanding the franchise itself become a central issue in Radical politics. Miles Taylor cites the work of leading Radical politicians like John Bright in putting the issue of franchise extension at the centre of British Radicalism by raising the issue in 1859.⁷ Bright’s support for franchise reform was demonstrated during his election campaign to become MP for Birmingham. Bright had been a key figure in the Anti-Corn Law League alongside Richard Cobden, and the two subsequently led a significant group known

⁵ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 86.

⁶ Eric J. Evans, *Parliamentary Reform in Britain, c.1770-1918* (Oxford, 2013), 37-8.

⁷ Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, 309-19.

as the Manchester School. The Manchester School looked to America for inspiration, and Bright in particular saw America's success as evidence of the potential benefits of expanding the franchise in Britain. Doyle describes Bright as 'the leading voice for American-style "universal suffrage"'.⁸ However, just as British Radicals began to campaign for franchise reform in Britain, the leading example of democracy and universal suffrage in the world descended into Civil War.

This chapter focuses on the role that democracy played in British analyses of the American Civil War, and demonstrates that the conflict itself was understood to have a political salience in Britain. The Civil War was not perceived as a remote conflict and it raised questions in Britain that went beyond diplomatic relationships and economic survival. International observers had watched America's experiment with democracy unfold since it had gained independence in 1783. Having shown that democracy played an important role in British understandings of the conflict, we can then move on to exploring how the example of America was related to British debates about political reform in later chapters of the thesis.

To understand the role that democracy played in British analysis of the outbreak of the American Civil War, this chapter focuses on British and Irish newspapers, periodicals and quarterlies produced between 1860 and 1865. Focusing on the press in this period will allow us to see how contemporaries viewed the role of democracy in the Civil War as the conflict unfolded. The abolition of advertisement duty in 1853, newspaper stamp duty in 1855 and the paper duty in 1861 saw a dramatic increase in press circulation and the number of publications available to an increasingly literate population. To give some idea of the scale of this increase, in 1861 *The Bookseller* reported on how the London press had expanded

⁸ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 146.

between 1830 and 1860. In 1830 there had been 64 newspapers with an aggregate weekly circulation of 379,747, but by 1860 there were now 177 newspapers with an aggregate weekly circulation of 2,284,600.⁹ In seeking to educate and inform people, the editors of the British press actively sought not just to reflect public opinion, but to influence and shape it as well. Patterns of press consumption were also changing. Communal or associational reading began to be replaced by private reading at home. Martin Hewitt records that after the repeal of the taxes on knowledge, ‘where previously four or five had clubbed together to buy a copy of *The Times* each might now buy their own. Newspapers which previously had been read in clubs and reading rooms, or hired at public houses by the hour, could now be purchased, and brought home to be read’.¹⁰ The loss of the communal aspect of newspaper reading served to reinforce the direct connection between editors and readers and enhanced the ability of the press to influence public opinion. However, it is also important to note that the wide variety of cheap publications available meant that British consumers were free to choose the titles that best reflected their own opinions. Those publications which could not cater to their audiences would fail, and a number of them did. There were many short-lived publications launched in this period that failed to establish a large enough circulation to survive.¹¹

By the time of the Civil War, newspapers, periodicals and quarterlies were beginning to replace travel literature as the main source of information on American affairs. The outbreak of the Civil War provided an opportunity for British journalists to expand their international coverage. Joel H. Wiener argues that ‘more than any other single event, the Civil War placed a definitive imprint on transatlantic journalism...It was reported on with unexampled

⁹ J. Whitaker, *The Bookseller: The Organ of the Book Trade*, IV, (1861), 215.

¹⁰ Martin Hewitt, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain: The End of the “Taxes on Knowledge”, 1849-1869* (London, 2014), 124.

¹¹ Hewitt, *Dawn of the Cheap Press*, 118.

thoroughness and intrusiveness'.¹² The ability of the press to influence public opinion was recognised by both sides in the Civil War. Doyle argues that diplomats for the North and South understood the power the press had gained through improvements in print technology and the expansion of literacy, recognising the 'key role that journalists, intellectuals, reformers, dissident political leaders, and other opinion leaders had in influencing popular sentiment'.¹³

The press also took on an increasing role in British politics during the second half of the nineteenth century. Dubrulle notes that at this time 'politicians and centralising party organisations became increasingly interested in using newspapers to formulate programs and mobilise support among the electorate through the use of the press'.¹⁴ Politicians and political figures developed new connections to the press. Stephen Koss argues that in this period it was 'deemed mandatory' for any political movement to have its own organ to 'boom its slogans' and that it was also a matter of self-respect, for 'without adequate journalistic backing, a party neither seemed to take itself seriously nor could it expect to be taken seriously by its rivals'.¹⁵

The relationships that the British press simultaneously forged in this period between political movements and its own readers' position it as a prime source of information for this research. As publications sought to explain events in America, we will observe how different titles examined the place of democracy in the Civil War.

¹² Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism* (Basingstoke, 2012), 86.

¹³ Doyle, *Cause of All Nations*, 3.

¹⁴ Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation*, 54.

¹⁵ Stephen Koss, *Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, I (London, 1981), 9.

To refine the potential evidence base, I have formed a representative sample of contemporary newspapers, quarterlies and periodicals. Geographically, I have included titles from across the UK, focusing on key locations in each region. In England, I look at London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. London is chosen for its active press and its role as a hub of political activity, Manchester for its economic ties to America through the cotton trade and the disruption the Civil War brought to this, Liverpool as a key site of Confederate diplomacy, and Birmingham for its role in the reform debate leading up to the Second Reform Act. In Scotland, I focus on Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, each of which had an active print culture in the 1860s and played a role in shaping Scottish public opinion. A selection of Welsh titles is also considered. Finally, Irish publications from Belfast and Dublin are consulted. I have taken account of the politics of different publications so that a range of political sympathies are reflected, from Liberal and Conservative publications to Unionist and Nationalist papers. I have also reflected papers that endorsed or regularly supported the North or the South in the Civil War. In addition, I have taken account of different publication schedules including morning and evening papers and daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly titles.

All the sources have been digitised and are fully searchable through their respective archives. To build the evidence base for this chapter, I have employed a combined keyword search, focusing on the selected publications between 1860 and 1865. The first keyword is ‘democracy’, and variations on it such as ‘democratic’. The second keyword is ‘Civil War’. These keyword terms were chosen because a search that combines them will highlight articles that reference democracy in the context of the Civil War. The terms were both in use throughout the period. As we have already seen, democracy was a constant presence in British writing on America well before the outbreak of the conflict and the term continued to

be used in such writing in this period. Similarly, the potential of the situation in America to descend into a state of civil war was widely recognised even in 1860 and this meant that the term ‘civil war’ was widely used in descriptions of developments in America. Once the war began, it continued to be the preferred term to refer to the American conflict. I have analysed the resultant articles that combined these search terms, chiefly focusing on opinion and editorial pieces in the selected publications, although relevant letters to the editor and occasional news reports have been included where relevant. Opinion and editorial pieces give the best insight into the viewpoint of the publication and concentrating on these allows us to see both how these different titles understood the role of democracy in the Civil War and sought to inform their readers about this. More generally, using digital sources has allowed me to expand the parameters of this research, both geographically and chronologically, to search through a large number of publications across the UK with different audiences, release schedules, politics, prices and locations. Searching across a total number of 30 newspaper titles, 13 periodical titles and 6 quarterly titles, this research strategy produced 261 articles to be analysed, 157 from newspapers, 71 from periodicals and 33 from quarterlies.

What follows is divided into two distinct sections. The first focuses on how commentators connected democracy to the outbreak of the Civil War. The second section explores discussion over slavery’s relationship to the Civil War, specifically how people connected it to America’s political framework and the extent to which American democracy was responsible for American slavery. From these discussions it will become evident that British political commentators recognised that something relevant to them was at stake in the Civil War – that its outcome would likely have an impact on the British domestic debate over political reform.

Democracy and the Outbreak of the Civil War

As tensions built in America during 1860, *The Times* argued that democratic institutions were now ‘on their trial in America’.¹⁶ The sense that the Civil War would be a great test of the viability of democracy and democratic institutions was prevalent in the British press throughout the prelude to the conflict. Before the war had even commenced, some were quick to conclude that America’s experiment with democracy had failed. The *Liverpool Mail* remarked at the end of 1860 that ‘the boasted Union of the American States has succumbed in the hour of trial’.¹⁷ However, others believed that democracy would emerge intact from the Civil War. *The Spectator* struck a more optimistic tone, writing that ‘free institutions in America will yet survive their trial’.¹⁸ Even before the fighting began, British political commentators noted the relevance of the American conflict to British political interests. The *Irish Times*, for example, believed that ‘the present crisis in American politics ought to be an object of deep interest to us. The prosperity or failure of the greatest experiment at Democracy the world ever witnessed is of infinitely more importance to us than the condition of Italy, the independence of Switzerland, or the success of Austria in conciliating the seven races of which her subjects are composed’.¹⁹

The war led British political commentators to speculate on the reasons behind the outbreak of the conflict. Chief among them was the role of American democracy. There were two competing interpretations of events. The first made a direct connection between the outbreak of the war and democratic government. This position was articulated by leading Conservative publications which made a direct connection between democracy and the war. Opposing this, others sought to distance democracy from the war, arguing that it had little, if anything to do

¹⁶ *The Times*, 29 November 1860, 8.

¹⁷ *Liverpool Mail*, 22 December 1860, 5.

¹⁸ ‘The “Man on Horseback”’, *Spectator*, 34:1737, 12 October 1861, 1115.

¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 18 December 1860, 2.

with it. This position was articulated by influential Liberal and Radical publications which sought to remove or reduce the role of democracy in their explanations of the Civil War. By studying the debate between these two rival interpretations over the responsibility of American democracy for the outbreak of the war, we will be able to see how the Civil War highlighted points which could then be redeployed in future British reform debates.

Prior to April 1861, there was still a hope amongst elements of the Liberal and Radical press that a military conflict could be avoided; they believed that such an event was unlikely to occur in a democracy. One of the leading advocates of this argument was *Reynolds's Newspaper*. On 24 December 1860 the government of South Carolina issued a proclamation declaring its intention to secede from the United States on account of the 'increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery'.²⁰ In January 1861, as several states followed North Carolina in seceding from the Union, *Reynolds's Newspaper* argued that the situation might yet vindicate democracy, observing that should:

the secession of one or more of the Southern American States be peaceably effected, it will furnish another unanswerable argument in favour of democracy; – for if the present agitation and threatened secession had taken place under a monarch, civil war would long since have been raging.²¹

Peaceful secession would only prove the strength of the democratic system. However, following the Battle of Fort Sumter in April 1861 and the start of hostilities, the paper was forced to adapt its stance. The conflict was now portrayed as a last resort of the North – a

²⁰ 'Declaration of Immediate Causes which May Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union' (Charleston: 24 December 1860) (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp).

²¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 6 January 1861, 8.

weak government would have commenced war long before to put down any resistance to its authority; instead, the Washington Government had been forced into war to protect itself.

Reynolds's Newspaper declared that 'the forbearance of the Republican Government, so far from proving the weakness of democracy, proves the direct opposite'.²²

The British press was forced to consider how America had entered a state of civil war and what this might mean for the cause of democracy. One of the most frequently cited features of American democracy in British political commentary on the outbreak of the Civil War was its universal suffrage. By the time of the Civil War, property qualifications to vote in America had been abolished and only four states still required tax-paying qualifications. Even in these states the tax requirement was fairly small, with Kirk Harold Porter arguing that from 1860 any kind of tax requirement connected with suffrage had been 'practically nothing but a registry fee...the old-fashioned taxpaying test as a compromise with property qualifications was gone before the Civil War'.²³ As a result, most white men had the right to vote. In this case, contemporaries used the term universal suffrage to describe universal manhood suffrage.

British Conservative commentators, drawing a direct connection between the outbreak of the war and democratic government, pointed to universal suffrage in America as the reason for its present troubles. The election of President Lincoln in 1860 had brought underlying strains in the American political system to the fore. The *Liverpool Mail* reported that the outgoing President James Buchanan had concluded that the American constitution had broken down,

²² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 May 1861, 1.

²³ Kirk Harold Porter, *A History of Suffrage in the United States*, (Chicago, 1918), 111.

writing that ‘President Buchanan’s “Message” reads very like the Funeral Oration delivered over the grave of “the Constitution”’.²⁴

In *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Conservative politician Sir Edward Bruce Hamley drew a straight line between universal suffrage and the outbreak of civil war, concluding that ‘universal suffrage means, the government of a numerical majority, which means oppression – which means civil war’.²⁵ According to this approach, universal suffrage weakened the bonds which held a nation together. The *Quarterly Review* set out this argument, explaining that American history showed how ‘the suffrage once relaxed lead to greater relaxations; the restraints which the law imposed upon the multitude one by one torn down; until every organ of the State, legislative, executive, and judicial, has successively become the passive mouthpiece of mob-law’.²⁶ So-called representatives of the people had voted against the interests of the South and in doing so had left secession and war as the only option; *Fraser’s Magazine* printed an essay from ‘A White Republican’, arguing that an ‘unrestricted suffrage’ was the root of the American crisis.²⁷

In contrast, the Liberal and Radical interpretation, seeking to downplay the role of democracy in the outbreak of the Civil War, argued that universal suffrage was not responsible for America’s present troubles. Advocates of this Liberal or Radical approach pointed to the fact that universal suffrage was not the central dividing issue in the war. Neither side was fighting against democracy. The *Birmingham Daily Post* pointed out to its readers that ‘the North is not fighting to establish democratic institutions, nor is the South desirous to repudiate

²⁴ *Liverpool Mail*, 22 December 1860, 5.

²⁵ ‘Democracy Teaching by Example’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 90:552, October 1861, 405.

²⁶ ‘Democracy on its Trial’, *Quarterly Review*, 110:129, July 1861, 288.

²⁷ ‘Universal Suffrage in the United States, and Its Consequences’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 66:391, July 1862, 22.

them’.²⁸ The Boston correspondent of the *London Daily News* challenged those in the British press who had portrayed America as a wreck and universal suffrage as the cause, reminding readers that ‘the war was not a popular outbreak of the masses; it was not the fierce cry of unbridled democracy for more rights’.²⁹ For Liberal and Radical publications it was important to note that the war was not fundamentally about the suffrage and democratic government.

Conservative publications disputed this, arguing that the Civil War demonstrated the chief problem with universal suffrage – it placed too much power in the hands of an uneducated majority. America’s experiment with democracy merely provided the latest and potentially most significant example of this weakness. The *Evening Standard* proclaimed that in America ‘Universal Suffrage is at war with itself’.³⁰

The Times, believing the war to be the ‘shipwreck of democracy,’ observed that America was now ‘rushing headlong into a species of war such as no old country would ever dream of’.³¹ Democracy and universal suffrage prioritised a numerical majority over the best interests of the nation. *The Times* described how ‘the proud traditions of the great Western Republic...are to be cast to the winds when they conflict with local prejudices’.³² The Civil War, in its view, had highlighted the difference between the American electorate and the British electorate. *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* argued that where universal suffrage in America had produced ‘a democracy...expressing the mere fickle desires of an ignorant or half-taught multitude’, the

²⁸ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 February 1862, 2.

²⁹ *London Daily News*, Wednesday 4 December 1861, 5.

³⁰ *Evening Standard*, 15 January 1861, 4.

³¹ *The Times*, 21 May 1861, 8.

³² *The Times*, 29 November 1860, 8.

existing British franchise represented ‘the firm and intelligent will of a well-instructed, loyal, and united people’.³³

The Liberal *Northern Whig* challenged this view of universal suffrage as giving the vote to an uneducated multitude. Those who were excluded from the vote, chiefly the working classes, were increasingly deserving of it. *Northern Whig* argued ‘that whatever promotes the comfort and elevation of the working classes...makes it more difficult to refuse them suffrage’. To resist any move towards an American-style democracy was to deny progress. The same article informed readers that ‘Democracy is coming upon every country in the civilised world, and upon England sooner than most others...Saying...that we will not allow our institutions to be “Americanised,” means...that we will resist every one of the influences which are working changes in modern society’. In this sense, expanding the franchise was associated with other signs of modernity. According to this interpretation, the expansion of the franchise was inevitable with ‘every discovery, every invention’ from the railway and the telegraph to the cheapening of books and newspapers and the diffusion of education increasing the potential size of the electorate. To ‘Americanise’ the British constitution was simply to admit ‘the whole number of people who live under it to a share in its management’. In this way, Americanisation equipped the British working classes with the tools to improve their lives and giving them the right to vote would recognise and encourage this. Those who rejected Americanisation and opposed reform would ‘arrest at once...every attempt on the part of non-electors to improve their condition’.³⁴

³³ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 20 September 1862, 4.

³⁴ *Northern Whig*, 18 November 1861, 3.

In addition to universal suffrage, another feature of American democracy frequently discussed in British political commentary on the outbreak of the Civil War was the ballot. American politics had long since adopted the practice of voting by ballot. During elections, political parties would distribute ballot papers listing their candidates which voters could then deposit into ballot boxes. Alongside universal suffrage, the American ballot was another feature of democracy in America that was seized upon by British Conservative commentators as evidence of democracy's culpability for the outbreak of the Civil War. *Fraser's Magazine* argued that 'of all the causes which have been named as leading to the civil war in America, the ballot-box is the most radical'.³⁵ The ballot was decried for encouraging corruption on a massive scale. The *Evening Standard* declared to its readers that 'the admirers of the ballot in Great Britain are ridiculously ignorant of the working of that machine in [America]'.³⁶ In particular, the example of New York featured in several commentaries on the American Ballot. Several reports in the British Conservative press described how the ballot system had encouraged widespread corruption. The *Evening Standard* described how fraud had become so frequent that several states, including New York, now required the ballots to be deposited in 'glass globes, in order that all present may see there is no tampering with the votes'.³⁷ British Conservatives concluded that the ballot-box, in conjunction with universal suffrage, had created a corrupt electoral system which produced unqualified and inept politicians.

For British Conservative commentators, democracy had discouraged so-called 'higher minds' from entering American politics. This lack of talent had led to the Civil War which now exposed the absence of quality American politicians for the world to see. Universal suffrage and the ballot had made a system which equated the vote of the educated and wealthy with

³⁵ 'Universal Suffrage in the United States, and Its Consequences', *Fraser's Magazine*, 66:391, July 1862, 22.

³⁶ *Evening Standard*, 17 November 1860, 6.

³⁷ *Evening Standard*, 17 November 1860, 6.

the uneducated and the poorest. *Fraser's Magazine* described how in New York 'the vote of Mr. Astor, the richest man in America...is nullified by some raw and ragged emigrant who cannot even speak the American language' while in Boston 'the vote of Mr. Everett, who is not only a citizen of wealth, but who represents the learning, the refinement, and the legislative wisdom of New England, is also neutralised by a ballot cast by some newly arrived fugitive from justice'.³⁸ This was not, according to British Conservatives, what the Founding Fathers had envisaged. The *Morning Post* recorded how Alexander Hamilton had been in favour of a 'restriction of the elective franchise...opposed to that untampered democracy, based on universal suffrage...which has been so...evil in America by banishing from the...State the men best qualified to wield...power, and by establishing a pure democratic despotism'.³⁹ According to this interpretation, the quality of American politicians had been on a downward spiral ever since the days of George Washington. The absence of figures with the same standing as Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun was lamented. American democracy had failed to produce the wise minds who could have avoided the Civil War. The Civil War, according to Conservative publications, now exposed this lack of talent for the world to see. The *Evening Standard* observed that 'one of the most striking phenomena of American politics is the utter absence of first-rate talent from political life'.⁴⁰ The Civil War presented an opportunity for talented American politicians to rise to the occasion. As far as British Conservative commentators were concerned, they had failed to materialise. The *Evening Standard* noted that 'we might have supposed that the great emergency of civil war would have brought to the surface whatever political knowledge and capacity were to be found. But it is not so'.⁴¹ If an American-style democracy was imported to Britain the result would surely be the same.

³⁸ 'Universal Suffrage in the United States, and Its Consequences', *Fraser's Magazine*, 66:391, July 1862, 23.

³⁹ *Morning Post*, 22 March 1864, 7.

⁴⁰ *Evening Standard*, 9 October 1863, 4.

⁴¹ *Evening Standard*, 9 October 1863, 4.

For these reasons, proponents of the Conservative interpretation believed that the Civil War in America should serve as a lesson to British reformers on the consequences of universal suffrage and the ballot. The *Quarterly Review* warned its readers that the conflict was ‘a spectacle which we should study deeply, for so striking a warning is rarely granted to a nation. If, in spite of it, we suffer the intrigues of politicians to lure us into democracy, we shall deserve our downfall’.⁴² The *Liverpool Mail* similarly advised that it had ‘deduced a moral for those who would seek to improve our own condition by assimilating our institutions to those of America. Our own agitators, in their clamour for reform, are descending towards universal suffrage’.⁴³ *The Times* took the war as evidence of democracy’s failure to protect its citizens. Criticising those who had praised the American system as a model for reforming British politics, it concluded that:

Our extreme Liberals would have shaped the course of all British legislation exclusively by the American pattern...When we see that unlimited democracy conveys not the slightest security...we may apply the moral at home, and congratulate ourselves that the old British Constitution has not been precipitately remodelled.⁴⁴

By the end of 1861, the *Morning Post* believed that regardless of the outcome, the outbreak of civil war had proved the weakness of the American Constitution, both as a set of governing principles and as a source of inspiration to reformers..⁴⁵ They were adamant that the consequences of universal suffrage and the ballot in America must not be forgotten when the Civil War ended. The *Evening Standard* warned its readers that ‘the American struggle...will

⁴² ‘Democracy on its Trial’, *Quarterly Review*, 110:129, July 1861, 288.

⁴³ *Liverpool Mail*, 5 October 1861, 4.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 12 August 1861, 6.

⁴⁵ *Morning Post*, 12 September 1861, 2.

have some end... With its suppression democracy in this country will again lift its head... The ballot, household suffrage, the spoliation of the Church, and all the other watchwords of the Radicals, will once more sound through the land'.⁴⁶ Advocates of this Conservative argument believed that democracy had failed in America and that this lesson should be observed by reformers in Britain.

Advocates of the Liberal and Radical position disputed this connection made by Conservative commentators between universal suffrage and the ballot in America and the outbreak of the Civil War. The *Birmingham Journal* took particular issue with the approach of *The Times*. In a rebuttal to its assessment of the events of 1861, the *Birmingham Journal* attacked *The Times* for working up 'the fallacy that the country does not desire Reform and... making political capital out of the American troubles by causing some of us to believe that we all believe that they afford us a lesson in political retrogression at home. These enemies of political progress are strangely blind to all other facts, but those which have suddenly sprung into existence across the Atlantic'.⁴⁷ *The Times* was criticised for overlooking America's previous success under a democratic system and concluding solely from the recent outbreak of the Civil War that democracy and universal suffrage had failed. The *Birmingham Journal* went on to argue that 'if we listened only to their exultation over the civil war in America, and the failure of universal suffrage and democratic institutions which they infer from it, we might suppose that such a thing as a rebellion had never happened in countries where the aristocracy and the Court have their own way'.⁴⁸ According to this interpretation, the idea that democracy could be held responsible for rebellion in America when many other political systems had endured similar rebellions was palpably wrong. The link between universal suffrage, the ballot,

⁴⁶ *Evening Standard*, 25 November 1862, 4.

⁴⁷ *Birmingham Journal*, 11 January 1862, 5.

⁴⁸ *Birmingham Journal*, 11 January 1862, 5.

democracy and civil war was disputed by Liberal and Radical commentators. Conservative commentators were accused of deliberately misinterpreting the outbreak of the Civil War in America to support their case against political reform at home. The *Manchester Times* criticised conservatives for whom the American war: ‘served as a bugbear with which to frighten immature politicians and timid electors’ against ‘that horrible reform mania’.⁴⁹

As far as the *Manchester Times* was concerned, ‘to men who have thought about the American troubles, there seems to be as much connection between the civil war and the United States form of government as there is between a horse chestnut and a chestnut horse’.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the war had been seized upon by British Conservatives as evidence of the failure of democracy in America and was used to discredit the cause of political reform at home. The *Northern Whig* printed a series of essays, titled “Democracy on its trial – the lesson of the American Crisis”, which argued that prior to the start of the war, English Toryism and its opposition to reform were on the verge of extinction. In this context, the outbreak of civil war in America revitalised the Conservative case against democracy. The first essay argued that ‘English Tories’ were on the point of extermination ‘when the American catastrophe came to their relief’.⁵¹

The Liberal and Radical interpretation held that the North was acting no differently to any other system of government and that the situation in America was not unique; rebellion was not unique to democracies and could not therefore be taken as proof of its failure. Regardless of the type of government America had, the Civil War would have proceeded in the same fashion. The *Birmingham Daily Post* doubted whether ‘an aristocratic or an autocratic

⁴⁹ *Manchester Times*, 26 October 1861, 4.

⁵⁰ *Manchester Times*, 26 October 1861, 4.

⁵¹ *Northern Whig*, 31 October 1861, 2.

Government [would] act differently under the same circumstances'.⁵² In a letter to the editor of the *Northern Whig* a reader expressed his frustration on this matter, writing 'nor do I see how Englishmen can consistently make the mere fact of the rebellion a matter of reproach against the United States Government, considering that, since the close of the American war, we have had a bloody rebellion in Ireland, a rebellion in Canada, a rebellion in the Ionian Islands, and internal troubles in England itself'.⁵³ Looking for parallels to the situation in America, the *Birmingham Daily Post* questioned why American democracy had been targeted in this way: 'within the last ten or fifteen years almost every European kingdom has been plagued by revolutionary movements. Might it not have been said that Monarchical institutions were upon their trial, and that their "supreme hour" had arrived'?⁵⁴

Conservative, Liberal and Radical commentators all examined whether there were any historical or geographical comparisons for the situation in America. The memory of Britain's own civil war was a common feature in arguments on both sides. Liberal publications, like the *London Daily News*, questioned why the American Civil War was taken as evidence of the failure of democracy, yet the English Civil War was not seen as evidence of the failure of monarchy. Their Boston correspondent expressed his frustration, asking 'is it a new thing in the history of the world for a nation to be engaged in civil war? Was monarchy a failure in England when Charles the First was led to the block'?⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Conservative publications like the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* countered that these civil wars were fundamentally different and could not be compared. For this paper, civil wars in Europe had been fought for religious and political freedom: 'men rose against Charles the First because they thought he meant to establish a despotism... But the American War arose out of the

⁵² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 December 1864, 5.

⁵³ *Northern Whig*, 29 November 1861, 3.

⁵⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 February 1862, 2.

⁵⁵ *London Daily News*, Wednesday 4 December 1861, 5.

mutual jealousies of two different parts of a Confederation. Its origin was less noble, and its existence less necessary'.⁵⁶ Conservative commentators argued that the violence, scale and division generated by the conflict meant that it was without parallel, while Liberal and Radical commentators pointed to other successful democracies in the world and non-democratic nations that had experienced similar rebellions.

From the Conservative perspective, there were no historical comparisons to the crisis in America; everything from the Peloponnesian War to Britain's own civil war paled in comparison. *The Times* informed its readers that 'no parallel to the American war can be found in mere dynastic struggles or local insurrections'.⁵⁷ The *Morning Post* similarly concluded that 'in the civil wars which raged in France, in Italy, and in England, a feudal, a chivalrous, and a monarchical spirit entered into the contest, tempering the bitterness and venom of the struggle; but in the Northern States of America no such feelings have existence'.⁵⁸ For Conservative publications the American Civil War was a unique event and it was America's democratic system which had made it so. Democracies lacked a central figure to restrain the worst impulses of the masses. The *Evening Standard* argued that democratic government and the absence of such a figure were responsible for the current frenzy, writing that:

In monarchies, even during the periods of moral conflict, a conserving principle seems to be at work...The fierceness of an unbridled sovereign democracy will not acknowledge any master...The civil war in America attests the truth of the lesson that we have learnt long since from history.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 3 September 1862, 2.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 7 May 1861, 8.

⁵⁸ *Morning Post*, 30 May 1861, 4.

⁵⁹ *Evening Standard*, 30 August 1861, 5.

Where British reformers had credited democracy with America's success, the Conservative press now asked that democracy similarly should be held responsible for its failures. For example, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* observed that 'if Democracy is not to be credited with the evils of America, by what right do [Radicals] credit it with the prosperity of America'.⁶⁰

Liberal and Radical commentators, seeking to defend American democracy, argued that there were historical and international comparisons for the situation in America. Pointing to several instances in Britain's own history, *Reynolds's Newspaper* believed that 'the civil wars of our country, from the Norman Conquest to the Irish Union, were as numerous, and bloody, and cruel as any upon record'.⁶¹ The *Birmingham Journal* attacked the position of *The Times*, arguing that it and papers like it sought to represent rebellion as a recent invention, civil war as the new result of democracy: 'such a thing can only happen under universal suffrage, wild democracy, and mob government'. As a result, the paper went on, all must be 'disgusted with reform bills and reformers; political agitators are silenced for ever; we are to make no further efforts at political progress'.⁶² The *London Daily News* took a similarly satirical line, writing that 'such is the plethora of prosperity in this old England of ours...that we cannot find a nobler theme for exultation than the civil war that brings to nought "democracy" in America. It is well known that Britons were never...boastful, arrogant, or quarrelsome'.⁶³ Those who supported this argument believed that it was madness to suppose that civil war was a unique product of democracy and pointed to several historical examples to support this. They believed that those who sought to portray the Civil War as a result of American democracy

⁶⁰ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 3 September 1862, 2.

⁶¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 6 January 1861, 8.

⁶² *Birmingham Journal*, 11 January 1862, 5.

⁶³ *London Daily News*, 5 July 1862, 4.

did so in a cynical attempt to discredit the use of the American system by British reformers. *The Spectator* observed how the ‘secret enemies of Liberalism’ employed the war to attack the ‘principles of popular government, talking of restricted suffrage as if it were a moral law’, and as a result of the situation in America ‘we are bidden to reject all Reform Bills’.⁶⁴ The Civil War had been seized upon by opponents of political reform as evidence of the perils of universal suffrage.

Seeking to defend American democracy, many Liberals and Radicals centred on the example of Switzerland, one of the few major democratic republics in the world besides America. The Swiss Constitution of 1848, modelled on the American Constitution, had established Switzerland as a federal state and introduced universal male suffrage. Switzerland was cited as a successful example of democracy in action. The *Birmingham Journal*, for example, observed that those who linked democracy with the outbreak of civil war could not ‘see but one republic in the world, but one nation where universal suffrage prevails. Switzerland, which has been a republic for four centuries, has no existence on their map of Europe’.⁶⁵ Switzerland had embraced universal manhood suffrage and was an economically successful democracy. In the *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science*, editor Charles Mackay pointed out that in Switzerland ‘there is no connection between democracy and bad manners’.⁶⁶ Like America, it too had undergone a period of internal strife but had emerged all the better for it. The *London Daily News* described how the Swiss constitution had recently ‘gone through a contest very similar to that which now rages in America – a contest between the central authority and the cantonal governments. In Switzerland, as in America, the contest had to be decided by a civil war; and the result has been a revision of the

⁶⁴ ‘Democracy in Australia’, *Spectator*, 35:1752, 25 January 1862, 96.

⁶⁵ *Birmingham Journal*, 28 September 1861, 5.

⁶⁶ ‘Democracy Breaking Down’, *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science*, 6:132, 10 January 1863, 35-6.

constitution, strengthening the central Government, and rendering the union more complete'.⁶⁷ This argument proposed that far from weakening democracy, the American Civil War could actually strengthen it, providing that America survived the experience. Surrounded by European monarchies, the *Birmingham Journal* compared Switzerland to its neighbours, recording that having given every Swiss man the vote 'this republic has made greater commercial and moral progress than any of the surrounding monarchies'.⁶⁸

Some used Switzerland's own civil war to argue that it was federalism, not democracy, that had led to such internal conflict. Switzerland, like America, had formed a Federal Government to protect itself from external threats. The *Edinburgh Review* believed that it was a mistake to connect the separation of the United States with the fact that it was a democracy; outlining a scenario where the Union had consisted of a number of principalities or monarchies joined together under the common head of Congress, it argued that the causes of secession would still have manifested, regardless of the fact that the governments of these states and this union were not democracies. The publication concluded that 'the tendency to split is inherent in a confederation, where there is no external pressure to hold it together. Switzerland has continued to exist only by virtue of such pressure...but even Switzerland has not escaped a Sonderbund and a civil war'.⁶⁹ In this case, Switzerland was used to demonstrate how America's federal structure was responsible for the outbreak of civil war, not democracy.

Critics of American democracy challenged the comparison to Switzerland. For them, the Swiss experiment with democracy was on a very small scale, much smaller than the

⁶⁷ *London Daily News*, 9 October 1863, 4.

⁶⁸ *Birmingham Journal*, 28 September 1861, 5.

⁶⁹ 'The American Revolution', *Edinburgh Review*, 116:236, October 1862, 561.

American equivalent. The American Republic stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In contrast, the Swiss Cantons, as described in the *North British Review*, were a collection of cities and districts ‘all near at hand one to another...solidified by exterior pressure...they existed under conditions that, at every point, find a contrariety in the actual circumstances of the United States’.⁷⁰ *Freeman’s Journal* observed that democracy, such as that in the Swiss Cantons ‘may do well enough in small states, or civic communities such as the middle ages produced, but for societies, on a large scale, it appears unsuited’.⁷¹ Democracy in America was the first time that it had been applied on such a large scale. The *Quarterly Review* noted that the United States was the first modern instance of the application of democratic theory to a large-scale government.⁷² Switzerland’s internal conflict was dismissed as entirely different to the civil war engulfing America. As the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* concluded, the war in Switzerland had arisen ‘not from any political causes, but from the alien and intrusive intrigues of the Jesuits’.⁷³ Democracy may work in smaller states, but it could not work on a large scale. Either the Union must break into smaller democratic republics, or democracy must be superseded by a military despotism. The *Evening Standard* concluded that ‘a consolidated republic, stretching from the Lakes to the Potomac...could not exist for a single generation’.⁷⁴

The foundation of two different approaches to the political significance of the war had been laid. British Conservatives, Liberals and Radicals all noted the relevance of the situation in America to British political interests. What we have seen so far is how these two competing understandings of the role of democracy in the Civil War began to develop. The culpability of

⁷⁰ ‘The Disintegration of Empires’, *North British Review*, 38:76, May 1863, 292-3.

⁷¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 October 1861, 2.

⁷² ‘Democracy on its Trial’, *Quarterly Review*, 110:129, July 1861, 250.

⁷³ ‘Presidential Elections’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 10:258, 6 October 1860, 412.

⁷⁴ *Evening Standard*, 9 October 1863, 4.

democracy for the outbreak of the Civil War had emerged as a key area of debate and fears about the potential Americanisation of British political life had been raised. The outbreak of the war had energised a debate in the British press about the character of democracy and the nature of universal suffrage.

The Conservative interpretation saw the war as an unparalleled phenomenon that demonstrated the failure of democracy. Democracy in America had created the conditions for civil war. Universal suffrage had placed power in the hands of an uneducated majority who were unfit to wield it. The vote of the wisest and wealthiest citizens was equal to that of vagabonds, criminals and paupers. The ballot encouraged widespread electoral corruption. Together, universal suffrage and the ballot had produced a generation of talentless political figures who were unfit to face the emerging crisis in America. Unrestricted democracy discouraged the 'higher minds' who could have prevented the outbreak of the Civil War from entering American politics in the first place. As the conflict began, the emergency of the Civil War failed to bring whatever political knowledge and capacity there was to the surface. America lacked statesmen. The result of democracy was a political system that prioritised the whims of a numerical majority over the best interests of the nation. Democracies lacked a central figure or a strong central government to protect them from the worst impulses of mob-law. Universal suffrage had seen elected representatives act against the interests of the South and leave them with no recourse but rebellion and war. The violence and division of the American Civil War had no historical comparisons. They argued that democracy could not work on such a grand scale and that regardless of the outcome, the outbreak of civil war in America had proved democracy's unsuitability as a form of government, a lesson that should be heeded by British reformers. For British Conservatives, the outbreak of the Civil War had

demonstrated the failings of democracy for the whole world to see and reinforced the case against political reform at home.

By contrast, the Liberal and Radical interpretation saw the war as a reluctant endeavour by the North to protect its own interests. At first, Liberal and Radical commentators hoped that secession might be achieved peacefully, and that this would vindicate American Democracy. When this proved not to be the case, they argued that civil wars were not unique to democracies and pointed to numerous examples in Britain's own history as well as other international examples. The North was not fighting to establish democratic institutions and the South was not fighting to repudiate them. Universal suffrage was not the issue that divided the Union and the Confederacy. A monarchy would have descended into civil war much sooner, and the war would have continued regardless of whether the United States had been a democracy, a monarchy, an oligarchy or an autocracy. What Conservatives labelled as the forces of Americanisation (the railway, the telegraph, cheaper books and newspapers, the diffusion of education) were in fact the agents which allowed the working classes to improve their condition and made them more deserving of having a share in the management of the nation in which they lived. According to this interpretation, universal suffrage and the ballot were not responsible for the outbreak of the Civil War. Its proponents argued that Conservative commentators who sought to link democracy with the outbreak of the Civil War did so in a cynical attempt to discredit democracy and discourage British reformers from continuing to advocate for political reform. The conflict had been seized upon by Conservatives who were desperate for evidence of the shortcomings of democracy. In the Civil War, Conservative commentators had found a useful bugbear to frighten people away from 'that horrible reform mania'. Liberals and Radicals accused Conservatives of deliberately misinterpreting the outbreak of the Civil War in America and exploiting the

conflict to support their case against political reform at home. Liberal and Radical publications expressed the hope that the example of Switzerland demonstrated that American Democracy could emerge from the Civil War stronger. Switzerland, like America, had recently experienced a civil war and the result had been a new constitution, the establishment of universal manhood suffrage, a stronger central Government and a more complete union. But if democracy could not be held accountable for the outbreak of the Civil War, what could? The answer for British Liberals and Radicals was slavery.

Slavery: A Democratic Evil?

British political commentators recognised that slavery was an integral part of the division between the North and the South. Reflecting on the reason for the American secession, the *North British Review* observed that it was slavery that had created a “North” and a “South” well before the Civil War, noting that ‘gradually it became apparent that, however highly the slave States prized republican institutions, they prized slavery more – that slavery, instead of dwindling away, was establishing itself permanently as a commercial as well as a social institution, and allying itself with political power’.⁷⁵ Relevant to this thesis, is the extent to which the British press connected the institution of slavery in America with its democratic institutions. British commentators were divided as to whether American democracy was responsible for American slavery. Liberal and Radical commentators argued that slavery, a hangover from British monarchical rule, had contaminated American democracy. Slavery and democracy were incompatible; Civil War was the result. The Civil War was the means by which slavery could be excised from America and the result would be a purer democracy. In contrast, Conservative commentators believed that democracy in America had allowed slavery to continue and thrive. The continued presence of slavery in America only served as

⁷⁵ ‘The American Secession’, *North British Review*, 34:68, May 1861, 540.

further proof of the failure of democratic institutions. In this section, we will investigate British understandings of the relationship between democracy and slavery in America and what this meant more generally for the future of democratic governments. We will continue to build the emerging framework established in the first section of this chapter to analyse competing approaches to the role of democracy in the outbreak of the Civil War and the developing debate between a group of Conservative publications and a group of Liberal and Radical publications.

For British Liberals and Radicals, slavery was the element that had corrupted democracy in America from the very beginning. The incompatibility of slavery and democracy was described in a letter to the editor of *Reynolds's Newspaper*. Gracchus (the pen name of Reynolds's younger brother Edward Reynolds) argued that 'the present crisis in America, instead of being accepted as unfavourable evidence of the strength and durability of republican institutions, is precisely the reverse. It proves that democracy and slavery are so antagonistic, the union of one with the other being so thoroughly incompatible, that a severance must sooner or later inevitably occur'.⁷⁶ Slavery, not democracy, was the central issue that divided the Union and the Confederacy. In the early days of American independence Northern and Southern states were believed to have been relatively united on the issue of slavery. The *National Review* argued that when the U.S. Constitution was framed in 1789, both Northerners and Southerners felt that slavery was 'a social embarrassment much to be deprecated and as soon as practicable to be got rid of'.⁷⁷ In the intervening years between the American Revolution in 1789 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 however, slavery had developed into the fault line which was capable of shaking American

⁷⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 27 January 1861, 7.

⁷⁷ 'The Civil War in America', *National Review*, 13:25, July 1861, 154.

politics. Describing how slavery had become a key issue in American political life, the *National Review* explained how slavery was now in the eyes of the South ‘a “cherished institution,” a “sacred right,” an undeniable “blessing,” as well as an incurable and ineradicable fact’ while in the eyes of the North it was ‘a blunder, a mischief, a heinous crime, and a terrible disgrace...a national sin and peril, to be cleared away at all hazards’ and that even those Northerners who were not Abolitionists felt that, at least indirectly, slavery had ‘lain at the root of most of their political difficulties and quarrels’.⁷⁸ The South’s desire to maintain the institution of slavery despite the misgivings of the North was to blame for the secession of the Southern States and the subsequent outbreak of Civil War. The *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* stated to its readers that the Civil War arose out of a deep-seated difference of views on the existence of slavery in the Southern States, questioning how ‘this state of things, lamentable as it is, [was] discreditable to Democracy’?⁷⁹ As far as British Liberals and Radicals were concerned, slavery was the issue that had led America to Civil War, not democracy.

For Conservative critics of American democracy, however, the continued existence of slavery only served as further evidence of the failure of democratic institutions. They argued that democracy exacerbated the evils of slavery and the lack of a central force or figure prevented any moves towards abolition. The *Edinburgh Evening Courant* argued that the task of abolition ‘requires a central force, and a power of carrying out details, which is quite incompatible with our modern system of democracy’.⁸⁰ In a democracy, the majority reigned supreme. As a result, ‘the democracy of America...has been one of the chief causes why abolitionism has been kept down there. Where the multitude govern, their sense of superiority

⁷⁸ ‘The Civil War in America’, *National Review*, 13:25, July 1861, 154-5.

⁷⁹ “Democracy Breaking Down”, *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science*, 6:132, 10 January 1863, 35.

⁸⁰ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 23 January 1862, 2.

is strong; and a white multitude keeps down blacks, precisely from the same self-esteem which makes them hate monarchy and aristocracy'.⁸¹ American slavery was viewed with contempt; the *Liverpool Mail* described it as 'an offence alike to God and Man'.⁸² Democracy had allowed the situation in America over slavery to descend into civil war; how could British reformers continue to look to America for inspiration? The *Morning Post* concluded that 'even the most reckless stump-orator will scarcely venture to hold up the American Republic as the model of a well-constituted State, or to advocate those changes in the constitution of the British Legislature by which a closer resemblance to that model might be secured, at the very moment when America is exhibiting the spectacle of disunion, and discord, and civil war, brought about by an unchecked Democracy, in defiance of the feelings and interest of the educated classes, and encountered for the sole end of preserving and extending slavery'.⁸³

British Conservative commentators argued that every system of government must at some stage come under some severe test or trial of its competence. Addressing the issue of slavery in America was this test for American Democracy. Eighty years after gaining independence, democracy in America had proved unable to address the challenge of slavery. The institution had only grown in strength and stature. The *Quarterly Review* argued that 'a knotty point like slavery is the very touchstone to try the metal of a Government...America has fallen before the first difficulty by which the resources of her Government have been tried'.⁸⁴ British Conservatives took issue with the emphasis placed on slavery by British Liberals and Radicals as the primary factor in the outbreak of the Civil War. To portray the cause of the Union as one of abolition simply did not match reality. Whilst there were clearly vocal

⁸¹ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 July 1862, 2.

⁸² *Liverpool Mail*, 5 October 1861, 4.

⁸³ *Morning Post*, 31 January 1861, 4.

⁸⁴ 'Democracy on its Trial', *Quarterly Review*, 110:129, July 1861, 261.

Abolitionists in the Republican Party, the party as a whole was not committed to the project. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party was at the very least inclined to sympathise with the interests of the Southern States in its campaign against its Republican opponents. The *Quarterly Review* described to its readers how ‘the Supreme Court, Congress, the Republican Party, and the President, had each...hedged in the interests of the slave-owner’.⁸⁵ The recent ruling of the Supreme Court in 1857 against the case of Dred Scott, an enslaved African American who attempted to sue his owners for his freedom after he had been moved from the slave-holding state of Missouri into the “free” Missouri Territory, had reinforced that it was contrary to the U.S. Constitution to declare slavery illegal.

According to British Conservatives, it was America’s democratic system that had exacerbated the role of slavery in its politics. Evidence of this can be seen in the *Quarterly Review*, *Fraser’s Magazine* and *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. American democracy had encouraged a protectionist fiscal system which benefitted manufacturers in the North at the cost of agriculturists in the South. Seeking to overturn these tariffs, the Southern States had allied with the Democrats in opposition to the Republican Party and sought to expand their influence in Congress. According to Conservative publications it was for this reason that the Southern States had campaigned for the expansion of slavery into new territories or States. The *Quarterly Review* summarised how it was not from any ‘admiration’ of slavery itself, but in order to gain votes in the Senate and the House of Representatives that the Southern States ‘battled so desperately for the admission of new territories as slave-holding and not as free-soil States’.⁸⁶ *Fraser’s Magazine* similarly concluded that ‘when the North, from political rather than moral reasons, resolved to admit no more slave states into the Union, the South

⁸⁵ ‘The American Crisis’, *Quarterly Review*, 3:221, January 1862, 242.

⁸⁶ ‘The American Crisis’, *Quarterly Review*, 3:221, January 1862, 249.

took the alarm. With sixteen States against fifteen, thirty-two senators against thirty, they could no longer contend successfully against the Tariff policy of New England. This was the beginning of the fight...It was not so much the question of slavery as the balance of power in the Senate that imparted such interest and such bitterness'.⁸⁷ The 1860 Presidential Election demonstrated how American democracy had produced a system where the Northern States could elect a President against the wishes of the Southern States. The Northern States collectively had 183 electoral votes while the Southern States only had 120. If the North decided to act as block, the South no longer had any political power. The electoral victory of President Lincoln by the North, against the wishes of the South, represented the first occasion where the Northern States had acted collectively in a Presidential election. Conservative commentators concluded that this was why the split between North and South had occurred; the fact that American attitudes towards slavery followed the same line of division was largely coincidental. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* summarised that the difference between North and South was 'sectional and geographical – not moral...this wide and deep division is politically, and not morally, coincident with slavery'.⁸⁸ For British Conservatives, it was democracy, through concerns about the balance of power in Congress and the Presidency, not the question of slavery itself, that had led to the Civil War.

In contrast, Liberal and Radical commentators argued that the North was sincere in its commitment to abolition. The *Edinburgh Review* remarked to its readers that 'no reasonable doubt can exist as to the sincerity of the anti-slavery feeling in the Northern States' and that 'the Northern States have learnt to regard slavery as a sin, the Southern States have begun to extol it as a blessing'.⁸⁹ They argued that it was British Conservatives who sought to blame

⁸⁷ 'Universal Suffrage in the United States, and Its Consequences', *Fraser's Magazine*, 66:391, July 1862, 26.

⁸⁸ 'Spence's American Union', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 91:558, April 1862, 527.

⁸⁹ 'Election of President Lincoln and its Consequences', *Edinburgh Review*, 113:230, April 1861, 566.

democracy, instead of slavery, for the Civil War who were insincere. The *Westminster Review* criticised those who would prefer the triumph of slavery to the triumph of democracy and cited the ‘willingness’ of *The Times* to ‘defend slavery on scriptural grounds...and the absence of any protest against Southern slavery by the friends of secession here’.⁹⁰

Liberal and Radical defenders of American democracy argued that it was monarchy, not democracy, that was responsible for slavery in America. Evidence of this argument can be seen in the *London Daily News* and *Reynolds’s Newspaper*. In a letter to the editor of the *London Daily News*, a reader under the pen name of O pointed out that slavery was ‘a heritage from monarchical times, an essentially aristocratic institution, and one entirely opposed to democracy’.⁹¹ The paper would later state its own position that slavery was ‘a truly royal and aristocratic disease...bequeathed by Europe to the young blood of republican America’.⁹² *Reynolds’s Newspaper* similarly portrayed the ‘demon of slavery’ as the ‘gift of royal and aristocratic England to her colonies’.⁹³ Slavery was the product of America’s colonial past and as a result, democracy could not be blamed for its continued existence.

A detailed consideration of the monarchical character of slavery could be found in the pages of the Irish Liberal newspaper the *Northern Whig*. The paper published a series of articles by a reader, known as “The Writer of the Articles of Democracy in America”. In one such article, the writer outlined why, in their opinion, democracy could not be held responsible for slavery in America. Slavery had been established under monarchical governments in the colonies of Spain, France, Holland, and Britain. They argued that ‘negro slavery enjoys the distinction of

⁹⁰ ‘The Anti-Slavery Revolution in America’, *Westminster Review*, 28:1, July 1865, 44.

⁹¹ *London Daily News*, 7 June 1861, 3.

⁹² *London Daily News*, 9 October 1863, 4.

⁹³ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 13 January 1861, 1.

being pre-eminently a Monarchical institution'.⁹⁴ The slave trade had been forced upon the North American colonies by the British Government. According to them, the American Revolution had in fact been partly motivated by the repeated protest of the colonies against slavery, citing that 'in the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, made by Jefferson, the charge of having resisted, in the interest of the English traders engaged in it, all attempts of the colonists for its abolition, was one of the charges most solemnly made against the "King of England"'.⁹⁵ They concluded that it was impossible 'to discover a single ground on which Democracy can be made responsible for the dissolution of the Union, inasmuch as it is neither chargeable with slavery nor with diversities of climate, or soil, or temperament; nor with Protection, nor with enormous extent of territory'.⁹⁶

For its part, the *Northern Whig* did express some reservations about this argument. The evidence that slavery was a monarchical institution was circumstantial at best; most governments in history had been monarchies, therefore it made sense that in the instances where slavery existed, it must have co-existed with monarchy. Co-existence was not enough to demonstrate a strong connection between the two institutions. The *Northern Whig* argued that 'what ought to be shown...is not that the two have hitherto gone together, as a matter of fact, but that there is some intrinsic connection between them; that the one has a tendency to produce the other. We do not think this can be made out'.⁹⁷ American democracy had had nearly eighty years to address the challenge of slavery; it had failed. These were the conditions 'under which the problem of good government in America had to be solved...To urge these difficulties in excuse of their comparative failure is only, in other words, to admit

⁹⁴ *Northern Whig*, 11 November 1861, 3.

⁹⁵ *Northern Whig*, 11 November 1861, 3.

⁹⁶ *Northern Whig*, 11 November 1861, 3.

⁹⁷ *Northern Whig*, 21 November 1861, 2.

the failure'.⁹⁸ However, even if an intrinsic link between monarchy and slavery could not be proved, the same was also true for democracy and slavery. The *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* argued that 'democracy had nothing whatever to do with the existence of slavery. That institution has existed both in ancient and modern times, and does still exist, under governments of every form. It prevailed in our own possessions till within living memory. It prevails to this day in those of Spain, and it was introduced into the North American States long before they were democracies'.⁹⁹

Regardless of its origins, Liberal and Radical defenders of American democracy argued that removing slavery would make the democracy purer than it had been before. Chief amongst these was *Reynolds's Newspaper*. The crisis unfolding in America was necessary to extricate slavery from American democracy. The publication observed that 'when the devil of slavery has effected an establishment in the body politic, it cannot be expelled without painful convulsion...The great republic of the West is at this moment undergoing the agony of exorcism'.¹⁰⁰ The war offered an opportunity to rid America of slavery. *Reynolds's Newspaper* saw this as 'a providential opportunity' for getting rid of that 'leprous legacy of slavery, bequeathed by England to her transatlantic children'.¹⁰¹ Military action was, in fact, the only way to force slavery from America. *Reynolds's Newspaper* commented that 'slavery has never yet been rooted out from a country but by the sword'.¹⁰² Democracy was incompatible with slavery, and the present crisis was proof of this. The *London Daily News* printed a letter from New York which described how the South had long since decided that free institutions were 'incompatible with the safety of slavery...They seized upon the election

⁹⁸ *Northern Whig*, 21 November 1861, 2.

⁹⁹ "Democracy Breaking Down", *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science*, 6:132, 10 January 1863, 35.

¹⁰⁰ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 13 January 1861, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 May 1861, 1.

¹⁰² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 12 May 1861, 1.

of Mr. Lincoln as President as a good excuse to deceive the people about slavery and about its future'¹⁰³ and the forces of the North had risen up to realise 'the grand sight of modern times – twenty millions of people rising up as one man to vindicate law and order, to establish more firmly than ever the government of their fathers, because it was a wise and a good government, and determined by the greatest sacrifices to sustain liberty, and overthrow, or put an end to, the pretensions of slavery'.¹⁰⁴ An optimistic future of America without slavery was portrayed. *Reynolds's Newspaper* described how 'once rid of this running ulcer of negro slavery', American democracy would present itself to the world 'a pure and spotless form of government – a government better calculated than any hitherto devised by man to promote the happiness of the whole people'.¹⁰⁵ If the price of this future was the breakup of the Union, then this was a price worth paying. *Reynolds's Newspaper* argued that 'the republic, without the Slave States, will be mightier than she has ever been before'.¹⁰⁶ The *Manchester Times* printed a speech made by the Chairman of a reform meeting in Bradford, who advocated that 'the workmen, the artisans, and the yeomen of America had poured out their life's blood for the past two or three years on behalf of their country, because at this last moment they had shown by their conduct at the last voting that they even hate slavery more than they love union'.¹⁰⁷

This point was not accepted by Conservative critics of democracy in America. They argued that preserving the Union took preference over everything else, including slavery. If necessary, the North would embrace slavery to protect the Union. *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, for example, described how most American people 'would gladly throw overboard every

¹⁰³ *London Daily News*, 7 June 1861, 3.

¹⁰⁴ *London Daily News*, 7 June 1861, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 12 May 1861, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 May 1861, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Manchester Times*, 10 December 1864, 3.

feeling and every party...they would make slavery the honoured law of the land wherever the star-spangled banner floats, nay they would consent to welcome even Jefferson Davis himself as their President or Emperor at Washington, provided only they could thereby restore the Union'.¹⁰⁸ They believed that slave-owners had historically dominated the democratic institutions and any moves to abolish slavery had been prevented out of the fear that the Union might break. The *Irish Times* argued that a 'tyrant minority' of slave-owners and those connected to slavery had seen the majority 'paralysed hitherto by an apprehension that if they opposed the Slave States there would be a break-up of the Union'.¹⁰⁹

Both sides of the debate believed that British reformers had something to learn from the example of slavery in democratic America, but they differed on what conclusions should be drawn. Conservative opponents of American democracy accused British reformers of hypocrisy. Prior to the war, prominent Radicals had avoided even mentioning the existence of slavery in America. Now they had become staunch abolitionists. The *Evening Standard* argued that before 1860, the Radical leaders 'had never a word to say against slavery, and they abhorred war. Since 1860 they have become the most bloodthirsty "war Christians" – the most desperate Abolitionists, simply because they understand that the North is fighting their battle and that their interests are bound up with hers'.¹¹⁰ British reformers had identified the Northern cause as their own, and in an effort to encourage democracy had taken up the cause of abolition. Those who had held up the American model as an example to follow in Britain, should now turn away from looking to America for inspiration. The *Evening Standard* believed that observing events in America had convinced 'all those who formerly fancied democracy to be harmless, that it is in the highest degree dangerous even to the material

¹⁰⁸ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 27 September 1862, 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Times*, 20 November 1860, 2.

¹¹⁰ *Evening Standard*, 30 January 1865, 4.

prosperity of nations; and to convert an immense number of wavering Liberals into staunch and resolute Conservatives'.¹¹¹ It was democracy, after all, that had prevented abolitionism from succeeding in America.

Liberal and Radical supporters of American democracy accused its opponents of misrepresenting their support for abolition; such opponents were simply afraid that America's continued success would only increase the prospect of universal suffrage in Britain. The Chairman of a reform meeting in Bradford was recorded by the *Manchester Times* questioning why 'because those working men on the other side of the ocean had shown that they hate slavery and love their country – therefore we are constantly told, the working men and artisans of England are to be excluded from their share in government, and be excluded as pariahs from the constitution. He thought the opponents of reform ought to be ashamed of mentioning America'.¹¹² In a report of a public meeting held to support the North and President Lincoln, the *Manchester Guardian* recorded how 'those who now found fault with the North were the same who formerly blamed the democracy of the United States for maintaining slavery. They were afraid that if America continued to rise as it had in the past, and became one consolidated power over a vast continent with its affairs regulated as they had not been regulated in Europe, it would be too powerful an example for them to be able to resist manhood suffrage'.¹¹³

Slavery, therefore, played a key role in shaping contemporary British understandings of the role of democracy in the Civil War. Much like we saw in the first section of this chapter,

¹¹¹ *Evening Standard*, 15 January 1864, 4.

¹¹² *Manchester Times*, 10 December 1864, 3.

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1863, 3.

opinion divided into two different political approaches to the relationship between American slavery and American democracy.

British Liberal and Radical commentators, seeking to distance democracy from the Civil War, argued that it was slavery, not democracy, that was responsible for the conflict. Slavery was the issue that divided the North and the South. It was the root of most of their political difficulties. The South's desire to maintain the institution of slavery despite the North's sincere commitment to its abolition was to blame for the secession of the Southern States, the breakup of the Union and the outbreak of Civil War. How could democracy be held accountable in this process? Many within this group saw slavery as a fundamentally monarchical institution. It was monarchical governments who had introduced slavery into their colonies, and in America's case it had been firmly established under the rule of a British King, against the repeated protests of a large section of the American people. Addressing the problem of slavery had proved more difficult than the founders of the American Republic had originally envisaged, and America could not be expected to have abolished slavery yet, especially when America's continued economic success only served to entrench the institution even further. Even if an intrinsic link between monarchy and slavery could not be proven, the same could also be said for democracy and slavery. Slavery had existed under many different types of government and therefore they concluded that democracy could not be held accountable for the continued preservation of slavery in America. Furthermore, they argued that slavery and democracy were in fact incompatible. The Civil War was the result of this incompatibility between the two institutions. Slavery could not be abolished without resorting to war which was where America now found itself. The conflict was necessary to remove slavery from America, after which the Democracy would emerge even purer than it had been before. Slavery, a hateful, remnant of British Monarchical rule, had corrupted the

American Democracy from the beginning; the Civil War was an endeavour to excise this “demon” from the Democracy. If the South would not reject slavery, it would be better for the Union to break. They argued that the workingmen of America hated slavery even more than they loved the Union and that, if it came to it, the Democracy could thrive without the South. The conversion of British Radicals to the cause of abolition was sincere. Those in the British press who accused them of hypocrisy did so out of fear; fear that Northern success would strengthen the arguments in favour of universal suffrage and make the American example irresistible. It was argued that British Conservatives would prefer the triumph of slavery over the triumph of democracy.

Meanwhile, the Conservative publications that made a direct connection between the outbreak of the war and democratic government, also concluded that the continued existence of slavery in America was further proof of the failure of democratic institutions. For them, democracies lacked the central force needed to achieve the abolition of slavery. Indeed, democracy was what prevented abolitionism from growing in America; it gave the ‘white multitude’ a sense of superiority over black slaves. Furthermore, they argued that democracy had actually encouraged the conflict between the North and the South. The South had fought for the admission of new territories as slave-holding and not free-soil States, not out of admiration of slavery, but in order to gain votes in the Senate and the House of Representatives and preserve the balance of power between the Northern States and the Southern States. The 1860 Presidential Election and the victory of Abraham Lincoln had demonstrated that the Northern States could now block the political power of the South. Slavery was portrayed as simply another factor that divided the North and the South, not a moral division between the two. In fact, the Supreme Court, Congress, the Republican Party, and the Presidency had all recently guaranteed the interests of the slave-owner against any

potential invasion of his rights. They argued that no intrinsic link could be established between monarchy and democracy, the fact that they had co-existed did not demonstrate anything more than a circumstantial connection between them. Slavery was the great test of the capabilities of American Government. Democratic government had had eighty years to address the problem of slavery. It had failed and in doing so had proven democracy a failure. Americans would always value the preservation of the Union above all else and, if necessary, would accept the continued existence of slavery as a price for this. Democracy had allowed a 'tyrant minority' of slave-owners to dominate American politics and previous attempts to move against slavery had been prevented out of fear of the Union breaking up as a result. British Conservatives believed that Liberal and Radical reformers had previously avoided mentioning the existence of slavery in America, in case it tainted the image of American Democracy, and that they had only become abolitionists now because they recognised that the North was fighting for the survival of democracy.

Slavery's continued existence in America clearly had a large impact on British understandings about the nature of democracy. The Civil War forced the British press to consider how slavery was connected to America's existing political framework. Consequently, the British press divided into two different political approaches to the relationship between American Slavery and American Democracy. Slavery, one of the key issues that divided the North and the South, also proved crucial in shaping British attitudes towards the character and cause of democratic government.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the role that democracy played in British analyses of the outbreak of the American Civil War. From readings of British newspapers, periodicals and

quarterlies, we have seen that democracy was clearly a key feature in British understandings of the Civil War, but the conflict had different meanings depending on the politics of the publication. We have seen how two distinct political interpretations developed in the British press as to the role of democracy in the war. British Conservative publications interpreted the outbreak of Civil War in the world's leading democracy as proof of the failure of the democratic system of government. In contrast, British Liberal and Radical publications expressed the hope that the Civil War might vindicate democracy in the eyes of the world. Both sides of this debate developed counterarguments to their opponents. Liberals and Radicals, keen to defend American Democracy and distance its presence in their explanations of the conflict, argued that other systems of government had found themselves in a similar predicament and that slavery was to be held responsible for the current state of affairs in America. It was slavery that had divided the Union, created a 'North' and a 'South' in the first place and ultimately it was slavery, not democracy, that the two belligerents were now fighting over. Conservatives, taking the opportunity to discredit American democracy, argued that the violence and division generated by the war were without parallel and democracy had encouraged the tensions between North and South leading them straight into conflict. Both groups accused the other of hypocrisy and cynicism. Liberal and Radical publications portrayed Conservatives as desperate for any evidence that democracy was not inevitable and prepared to misinterpret events in America to support them. Conservative publications, by contrast, portrayed Liberals and Radicals as frightened figures who, having credited democracy with America's success, now refused to hold it accountable for America's woes and had converted to the cause of abolitionism solely because they recognised that the North was fighting their fight for the survival and future of democracy. Most importantly for this thesis, both sides connected the Civil War in America to the domestic debate over political reform.

In examining how these two approaches were formed, we have seen how the Civil War highlighted different features of democracy as it was realised in America which could then be redeployed in British reform debates. The Civil War provided commentators with an opportunity to build on the earlier analyses of American politics which we explored in the previous chapter. Universal suffrage and the quality of the electorate it produced; the ballot and its potential for encouraging corruption; the education and ability of the working classes to make an informed vote; the talent of democratically elected politicians and the lack of statesmen in democracies; the balance of power between rival parties in democratic assemblies; the ability of democracy to contain sectional interests; fears of the tyranny of the majority and the potential to descend into mob-law; the political capability of democratic governments – these were all recurring elements of contemporary press commentary on events in America which the Civil War either reinforced or shed new light on, and in the process raised salient points which were relevant to the British domestic debate over political reform. From the beginning, the impact of the outbreak of the American Civil War for political reform in Britain was already understood by the British press.

Having shown that democracy played an important role in British understandings of the Civil War, the next step is to begin to move away from looking at how Britons understood America, to consider how they then applied the example of the United States to the issue of British political reform. To start, we will look at how, in the aftermath of the conflict, America informed the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform which would shape the domestic context in which Parliament produced the Second Reform Act.

Chapter Three – America, British Public Intellectuals and Political Reform

Introduction

As gunfire broke out over at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, Britain also found itself embroiled in an internal struggle over a deeply contested issue – political reform. The extraparliamentary debate over British political reform had been fierce in the aftermath of the Great Reform Act, most notably in the activism of the Chartist movement. Petitions, demonstrations and protests characterised the extraparliamentary debate over reform in the 1830s and 1840s. However, with the peak of the movement in 1848, Chartism entered terminal decline thereafter, albeit persisting in local pockets.¹ Meanwhile, the democratic revolutions of Europe in 1848 and 1849 appeared to have produced little change to the eyes of British contemporaries. As Chartism disappeared, so too it seemed to many did the extraparliamentary movement for reform in the UK.

However, the late 1850s saw several attempts at new reform legislation in parliament; one led by Derby and Disraeli in 1859 and two led by Russell in 1854 and 1860. By 1860 the campaign for political reform found itself caught in a paradox. As Robert Saunders has argued, while popular pressure for reform had declined after 1848, support for some kind of reform within parliament had actually increased.² With new struggles emerging over the nature and extent of democratic government, this time in America rather than in Europe, the extraparliamentary debate over British reform began to revive throughout the 1860s with the birth of numerous campaign groups for reform such as the National Reform Union in 1864,

¹ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2007), 358.

² Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 7.

the Reform League in 1865 and the National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867.

Instrumental in this process was the work of British public intellectuals.

For these thinkers the United States furnished an example of how an enlarged franchise might operate and the issues that might arise from implementing a similar expansion of the suffrage in Britain. The American constitution, regarded by these thinkers as a product of the shared heritage between the two countries, had attempted to initiate an experiment with democracy on a mass scale. In the same vein as Alexis de Tocqueville, many British public intellectuals looked towards America as the nation where the democratic experiment had unfolded at its fullest, to find lessons from which mankind could benefit.³

Before we can consider the influence of America on the parliamentary debates that produced the Second Reform Act, we must first explore the influence that democracy in the United States played in the extraparliamentary debate about reform. Extraparliamentary debates played a key role in shaping the attitudes of those within Parliament towards both America and political reform. Saunders has shown how Victorian parliaments were outward-looking, open to outside opinions, with members constantly talking, thinking and reading a wide range of publications including news reports, press commentary and analysis, pamphlets and works of political philosophy.⁴ The arguments developed by the intellectuals examined in this chapter were instrumental in shaping parliamentary dispositions towards both reform and the example of America within this.

³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 14.

⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 23.

Recently, Frank Prochaska has demonstrated the value in analysing British historical views of American democracy. Believing the 2012 U.S. presidential election to be an example of ‘another impasse in American politics’, Prochaska was motivated to study the U.S. constitution’s historical ability to constrain factionalism.⁵ Starting from the conviction that the U.S. constitution ‘is a republican substitute for hereditary kingship, and, like kingship, hedged with divinity’, Prochaska argues that from the time of the Revolution to the present day, Americans have been unable to view the documents of their foundation with a critical eye.⁶ In his bid to find new insights into the impasse that appeared to characterise modern American party politics, Prochaska turned to the analysis of nineteenth-century British political thinkers who, connected but also removed, were able to cast a more critical eye over the American constitution from the other side of the Atlantic.

Prochaska’s study helps us understand why America was of interest to British intellectuals; however, this thesis explores different ground and has a different aim to that of Prochaska’s. Prochaska’s focus is ultimately to explain why factionalism continues to plague American politics, and this is reflected in the method and approach of the work. His selection of figures (J.S. Mill, Walter Bagehot, Henry Maine and James Bryce) is intended to provide critical analysis of the U.S. constitution across the entirety of the nineteenth century, with the idea that despite the fundamental changes that have taken place in the United States since then, much of their criticism remains prescient in puncturing ‘modern-days myths’ since the U.S. government retains much of its original eighteenth-century character.⁷ This is reflected in his conclusion that the blind veneration of the constitution by Americans, as observed by nineteenth-century British commentators, has prevented them from improving their

⁵ F. K. Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians on American democracy: the view from Albion* (Oxford, 2012), v.

⁶ Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 1.

⁷ Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, vi.

government.⁸ Because of this, Prochaska does not situate these authors in the domestic political context in which they were writing. The Second Reform Act in particular is not directly mentioned. Where Prochaska seeks to uncover defects in the American political system with a view to the modern day, this thesis will show how the public intellectuals under consideration in this chapter employed their analysis of the American political system to inform the immediate extraparliamentary debate over British political reform leading up to the Second Reform Act.

Rather than looking at each figure in isolation, as Prochaska has done, this chapter employs a thematic approach to explore the connective themes that emerged from contemporary publications and how they characterised the role that America played in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform. Also, by concentrating solely on political and constitutional writings, Prochaska does not take into account the effect of works which provided contemporary social commentary on American democracy. In contrast, this chapter builds on the findings of our first chapter to show how the social commentaries of writers like Frances Trollope and Charles Dickens, found in travel literature, illustrated the social and cultural implications of democracy to Britons concerned about political reform.

The Source Base

The key source base for this chapter consists of the work of six major and influential British public intellectuals who wrote at length about their views on British political reform in the period between the two reform acts. The intellectuals under consideration in this chapter are Goldwin Smith, Leslie Stephen, John Dalberg-Acton, Thomas Carlyle, Walter Bagehot and

⁸ Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 142.

J.S. Mill. Through their political publications, these thinkers helped shape the extraparlimentary debate about political reform. Each in developing their arguments turned to the example of America to help illustrate their points to their readers. Before continuing, I will go into more detail about why these six individuals and their works have been selected for examination.

Goldwin Smith (1823-1910)

The 1860s marked the beginning of Goldwin Smith's literary career with more than ten publications released in this decade. This chapter considers six of these: *The Foundation of the American Colonies* (1861); *Does the Bible Sanction American Slavery?* (1863); *A Letter to a Whig Member of the Southern Independence Association* (1864); *The Civil War in America* (1865); *England and America* (1865); and 'The Experience of the American Commonwealth' (part of *Essays on Reform*, 1867). Within these works, Smith developed his arguments about British political reform, the nature of American democracy and its relevance to Britain. For Smith the founding of self-government in America represented a great step in the progress of humanity. In the New World he saw a real Christian community, founded on the principles of diffused property and intelligence, social union and sound morality, without a privileged class and with a popular sovereignty combining order and progress. Such a community posed a threat to the position of the aristocracy of England by showing it was possible for communities to govern themselves, respect the law, industry and wealth, without the control of a hereditary order.

The existing historiography on Smith mostly concentrates on his connection with Canada and British North America, rather than the United States. Smith's love of Canada, his thoughts on democracy and social reform there and the destiny of Canada feature significantly in

Elisabeth Wallace's biography of Smith.⁹ Smith's enthusiasm for the United States and his evolving thoughts on the Civil War are referenced by Wallace in connection to his visit to the United States in 1864, notably the enthusiastic response he received there for his support for the North, but she does not link this to his views on British political reform.¹⁰ Having initially supported the South's bid for secession, Smith gradually became convinced that the conflict represented a crusade by the North against slavery which he opposed. Arnold Haultain concludes that Smith's decision to emigrate to America in 1868 was motivated by his distaste for the English aristocracy, the enthusiastic response he received during his visit in 1864, his optimism about the future of America, and the opportunity to take up a professorship at Cornell University.¹¹

Smith's time in America was short and he relocated to Canada in 1871 where he spent the second half of his life. Wallace argues that Smith found American party politics less appealing up close.¹² This sense of Smith's later disillusionment with the United States is echoed by R. Craig Brown who attributes it to the outbreak of the Spanish-American war in 1898.¹³ In Smith's own words, the American Republic, once the hope of democracy for the English-speaking race, now risked transforming from 'the great industrial commonwealth...into a filibustering war-power of the European type'.¹⁴ However, Smith's eventual disappointment with America, on which the majority of scholarly attention has focused, took place after the period under consideration in this thesis. For the time under

⁹ Elisabeth Wallace, *Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal* (London, 1957); See also Elisabeth Wallace, 'Goldwin Smith and Social Reform', *Canadian Historical Review*, 29 (1948), 363-369.

¹⁰ Wallace, *Victorian Liberal*, 32-38.

¹¹ Arnold Haultain, 'Why Goldwin Smith came to America', *North American Review*, 198 (1913), 688-697.

¹² Wallace, *Victorian Liberal*, 50.

¹³ R. Craig Brown, 'Goldwin Smith and Anti-imperialism', *Canadian Historical Review*, 43.2 (1962), 94-95.

¹⁴ Cornell University, Goldwin Smith Papers, Smith to Morley, June 9, 1898.

consideration in this chapter, Smith was an enthusiastic supporter of the United States – and the place of America in his arguments about British political reform needs exploring.

Leslie Stephen (1832-1904)

The 1860s similarly marked the start of Leslie Stephen's literary career. This chapter considers two of Stephen's publications in this period: *The "Times" on the American War: A Historical Study* (1865); and 'On the Choice of Representatives by Popular Constituencies' (part of *Essays on Reform*, 1867). Stephen was particularly animated by *The Times*' coverage of the Civil War, believing that the paper misrepresented political life in America. He was critical of *The Times*, believing that its coverage had transformed credulous rumours about occasional riots in New York into broad assertions that the entire American government was under mob rule, to make dramatic warnings to its readers about the growing despotic power of the majority. For Stephen, the implementation of democracy in England would be different to democracy in America. Where America, as a young country, had no long-standing political hierarchy, Britain had an entrenched aristocratic system ensuring the political power of the upper classes; he argued that the influence exercised by wealth, rank and social estimation in England would not be neutralised by an extension of the franchise.

The existing historiography on Stephen has not drawn a connection between his thoughts on America and his thoughts about British political reform. Frederick Maitland's biography of Stephen, looking at his correspondence, includes a section on letters written by Stephen to his mother during his visit to America in 1863, documenting his thoughts on the Civil War, various social interactions, descriptions of New York, his opinions on slavery and his impressions of Seward and Lincoln.¹⁵ This focus on private correspondence reveals an insight

¹⁵ F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 105-129.

into Stephen's mindset during his time in America, but Maitland does not explore the impact of this experience of America on his views on British reform.¹⁶ Noel Annan concludes that it was during this trip that Stephen began to 'develop a talent for friendship', forming close relationships with American intellectuals, notably Charles Eliot Norton, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell.¹⁷ By examining Stephen's published work in this chapter we will be able to examine his contribution to the wider extraparliamentary debate over political reform.

John Dalberg-Acton (1834-1902)

The 1860s were a key decade for John Dalberg-Acton's political thought. Acton's interest in liberty led him to study the federal nature of America's constitution and its ability to protect individual liberties. The Civil War was significant for Acton who believed that the experience of Americans was informative for Britons as their institutions and national character came from the same source. His commitment to liberty led him to support the South in what he saw as a campaign for states' rights against a tyrannical central government.

Acton presented what lessons he believed could be learned from America after the Civil War in a lecture to the Bridgnorth Literary and Scientific Institution titled 'The Civil War in America: Its Place in History' (1866), subsequently printed as an article in the *Bridgnorth Journal*.¹⁸ Acton argued that where America had once appeared to demonstrate to Britain that good government could be achieved in a pure democracy, without losing the security of liberty and property, in the wake of the Civil War the American constitution lay in ruins and

¹⁶ Maitland, *Life and Letters of Stephen*, 126-128.

¹⁷ Noel Gilroy Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London, 1984), 52-58.

¹⁸ The article would later be published as part of a collection of Acton's historical essays: John Dalberg-Acton, 'The Civil War in America', in John Neville Figgis and Reginal Vere Laurence (eds.), *Historical Essays & Studies by John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton* (London, 1907), 123-142.

the lessons of history had once again been confirmed that pure democracy was incompatible with liberty and the interests of society.

In the existing historiography, studies of Acton in the 1860s instead concentrate on his relationship with the Roman Catholic Church during the First Vatican Council.¹⁹ Religion is noted as a key influence on Acton. Roland Hill's biography of Acton includes references to a journey Acton made to a New York industrial exhibition in 1853, exploring his social interactions and his impressions of how wealth dominated New York society, but these impressions are not connected to his thoughts on British political reform.²⁰

Most relevant to this thesis, historians have noted the importance of the early Quaker settlers of America to Acton's political thought. Hill argues that Acton's conception of political freedom originated among his views of the Quaker settlers of Pennsylvania rather than in the forests of Germany as some of his contemporaries believed.²¹ Other studies of Acton include articles on his role as an Irish MP and his interest in the classes, society and revolutions of Latin America, but these do not touch on the connection made by Acton between the United States and British political reform.²² The influence of America on Acton's thought about British political reform in the prelude to the Second Reform Act has not been explored.

¹⁹ Damian McElrath, *Lord Acton: the decisive decade, 1864–1874* (Louvain, 1970).

²⁰ Roland Hill, *Lord Acton* (London, 2000), 63-66; See also Acton's thoughts on the world significance of the American Revolution in Owen Chadwick, *Acton and Gladstone* (Cambridge, 1998), 233.

²¹ Hill, *Acton*, 65; See also John S. Nurser, 'The religious conscience in Lord Acton's political thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22 (1961), 52.

²² James J. Auchmuty, 'Acton's election as an Irish member of parliament', *English Historical Review*, 61 (1946), 394-405; S. Paul Kramer, 'Lord Acton and Latin America', *Journal of Inter-American Studies (& World Affairs)*, 5 (1963) 39-44.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

For much of the 1860s, Thomas Carlyle was preoccupied with producing a history of Frederick the Great, but this did not prevent him from sharing his opinions on the situation in America and the seeming march of democracy in Britain. This chapter considers three of Carlyle's publications: *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850); 'Ilias (Americana) in Nuce', *Macmillan's Magazine* (1863); and *Shooting Niagara: and After* (1867). Carlyle reluctantly acknowledged that universal democracy was a fact of the time in which he lived and felt it was imperative to find a way to resist and control it. In this Carlyle was naturally drawn to the example of America. He noted the shared heritage between Britain and America, although he held that American success was attributable to British traditions. The Civil War for Carlyle was a tragedy in which American lives had been lost over a labour dispute. He warned of the dangers of seeking to emulate an untested nation, condemning what he termed the 'swarmery' which had taken hold in America and appeared to be gaining ground in Britain. He also drew parallels between the enfranchisement of African Americans and the enfranchisement of the British working classes.

Carlyle's complicated relationship with America is a feature of the existing historiography, but his views are not connected to the issue of British political reform. Fred Kaplan's biography of Carlyle notes his strong reactions in 1818 and 1830 against the idea of living in America, regarding it as a place of poverty and discontent.²³ Race is an important element of recent historical analysis of Carlyle's work. In *Dark Victorians*, Vanessa Dickerson studies Carlyle as an example of British racist-imperialist thinking and African American reactions to

²³ Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography* (1983), 76-77; 250.

explore cross-cultural influences between white Britons and black Americans during the Victorian age.²⁴

Despite his distaste for America, historians have pointed to his literary success there. Caplan, J.P. Siegel and Leon Jackson all identify *Sartor Resartus* (1836) as the work which established Carlyle's reputation as a literary figure in America.²⁵ Carlyle's views on race and slavery particularly resonated in the American South. Gerald Straka argues that the 1850s formed an important moment in the reception of Carlyle's work in the United States with his ideas on strong government, slavery and the laws of nature proving divisive; the South found a kindred spirit in Carlyle, both feeling threatened by the forces of industrialism, emancipation and democracy, while the North lost faith in someone they had previously admired.²⁶ Scholars have also detailed his firm friendships with several American literary figures, notably Ralph Waldo Emerson and Mark Twain.²⁷ Brent Kinser cites Carlyle's attacks on American democracy as a key influence on Mark Twain's *Democratic Vistas* (1871).²⁸ However, the way that Carlyle's connection between his views on America and British political reform informed the extraparliamentary debate over the franchise has been neglected.

Walter Bagehot (1826-1877)

As editor of *The Economist*, Bagehot provided extensive analysis of the Civil War and the reform debate in the 1860s. This chapter will examine these articles, as well as articles for the

²⁴ Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Dark Victorians* (Chesham, 2008), 74-94.

²⁵ Kaplan, *Carlyle*, 563; Leon Jackson, 'The Reader Retailored: Thomas Carlyle, his American Audiences, and the Politics of Evidence', *Book History*, 2 (1999), 146-147; J.P. Siegel, *Thomas Carlyle: the critical heritage* (London, 1971), 26-45.

²⁶ G.M. Straka, 'The spirit of Carlyle in the Old South', *The Historian*, 20 (1957), 39.

²⁷ Kaplan, *Carlyle*, 230-233, 249.

²⁸ Brent E. Kinser, 'Mark Twain, Thomas Carlyle, and shooting Niagara', in David R. Sorensen and Rodger L. Tarr (eds.), *The Carlyles at Home and Abroad: Essays in Honour of Kenneth J. Fielding* (Aldershot, 2004), 113-124.

National Review and Bagehot's famous *English Constitution* (1867), which was first serialised in the *Fortnightly Review* between May 1865 and January 1867. Bagehot argued that the strengths of the English constitutional system could be seen by comparing it to its greatest competitor – the American system. He believed that optimistic conclusions about the American model had been premature, with the Civil War highlighting weaknesses such as the dangers of the mob and majority rule. For Bagehot, reform along American lines risked vulgarising Parliament, and the tone, method and conduct of public business.

Scholarly attention has mostly been drawn to Bagehot's analysis of the American constitution and its culpability for the Civil War, rather than how these views were connected to his stance on British political reform. In his biography of Bagehot, Norman St John-Stevás includes a short analysis of Bagehot's interpretation of the American constitution, concluding that it was more flexible than Bagehot portrayed and that he often exaggerated its weaknesses to illustrate this.²⁹ Prochaska similarly concludes that Bagehot's critique was 'tinged by smugness about America that was typical of educated Englishmen of the day'.³⁰ This thesis is less concerned with the accuracy of Bagehot's claims than the impact they had on shaping the extraparliamentary debate about reform. More recent biographies of Bagehot have concentrated on his economic, rather than political thought. James Grant examines Bagehot's views on central banking and includes references to the financial crisis of 1857, as well as the impact of the cotton shortage created by the Civil War on English textile workers.³¹ Overall, the impact of America on Bagehot's political thought and his contributions to the extraparliamentary debate over reform needs exploring.³²

²⁹ Norman St John-Stevás, *Walter Bagehot: A Study of His life and Thought Together With A Selection From His Political Writings* (Bloomington, IA, 1959), 109.

³⁰ Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 71.

³¹ James Grant, *Bagehot: the life and times of the greatest Victorian* (New York, 2019), 129-134.

³² See for example William Selinger and Gregory Conti's 'Reappraising Walter Bagehot's Liberalism: Discussion, Public Opinion, and the Meaning of Parliamentary Government', *History of European Ideas*, 41

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

The United States was key for Mill to distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ democracies. Of our six authors, Mill had been grappling with what America’s experiment with democracy meant for Britain the longest. In the aftermath of the Great Reform Act, Mill was inspired by Tocqueville’s writings on America. The kind of democracy practised in America appeared to Mill to offer many benefits, particularly in terms of general education. Across several works, Mill sought to find how the benefits of democratic government could be obtained, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of majority rule which appeared to plague America. This chapter will examine the following works by Mill: ‘Review of De Tocqueville on Democracy in America [Vol 1]’, *London Review* (1835); ‘Review of De Tocqueville on Democracy in America [Vol 2]’, *Edinburgh Review* (1840); *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861); ‘The Contest in America’, *Fraser’s Magazine* (1862); and Mill’s *Autobiography* (1873). The experience of America transformed Mill from an advocate of pure democracy to an advocate of a more modified version of it.

The main relevant areas in the existing literature on Mill concern his views on the Civil War, his support for the North and his analysis of slavery. Biographies of Mill have placed his support for the North alongside his involvement in radical causes like Irish land reform and his role as chairman of the Jamaica committee.³³ Georgios Varouxakis argues that while Mill’s support for the North was primarily motivated by his desire to see the American experiment in democracy succeed, he was sincere in his care for American slaves and racial

(2015), 264-291, which examines Bagehot’s reflections of the different possibilities available within English parliamentarism, but does not consider the international influences on his thought and his preference for the English system over the American.

³³ Such as Michael St John Packe’s *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (New York, 1954).

equality.³⁴ Joseph Persky notes Mill's pride at the forbearance displayed by Lancashire cotton workers during the cotton shortage created by the Civil War.³⁵ Historians have also studied Mill's views on America during the Reconstruction era. John Compton has argued that Mill was optimistic about America's future after the war, hoping that it would lead to the end of slavery and other illiberal aspects of American society such as the subordinate status of women.³⁶

In terms of historical assessments of the impact of America on Mill, several works have examined how the position of women in American society affected both Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor. Evelyn Pugh has examined Mill and Taylor's interactions with the American women's rights movement and how American audiences reacted to *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869).³⁷ The influence of the United States on Mill's economic thought has been explored by Samuel Hollander, who has written about his views on the role free trade played in American society.³⁸ Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is noted for its strong influence in shaping Mill's thought, with Terence H. Qualter labelling Mill as a disciple of Tocqueville.³⁹ Studies of Mill's views on the secret ballot, such as those by Tom Theuns and Bruce Kinzer do not place Mill's thoughts in the context of the

³⁴ Georgios Varouxakis, 'Negrophilist' Crusader: John Stuart Mill on the American Civil War and Reconstruction', *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013), 730.

³⁵ Joseph Persky, *The Political Economy of Progress: John Stuart Mill and Modern Radicalism* (New York, 2016), 130.

³⁶ John W. Compton, 'The Emancipation of the American Mind: J. S. Mill on the Civil War', *Review of Politics*, 70 (2008), 221-223; See also Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 46; See also the contrast in Liberal attitudes towards Reconstruction between Mill's optimistic hopes for America and James Fitzjames Stephen's fears of further violence in Thomas E. Schneider, 'J. S. Mill and Fitzjames Stephen on the American Civil War', *History of Political Thought*, 28 (2007), 290-304.

³⁷ E. L. Pugh, 'John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor and women's rights in America 1850-1873', *Canadian Journal of History*, 13 (1978), 423-442; See also Packe, *John Stuart Mill*, 202.

³⁸ Samuel Hollander, *John Stuart Mill: Political Economist* (New Jersey, 2015), 192.

³⁹ Terence H. Qualter, 'John Stuart Mill, disciple of de Tocqueville', *Western Political Quarterly*, 13 (1960), 880-889; See also Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (London, 1970), 177; See also Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 23-28.

use of the secret ballot in parts of America.⁴⁰ The historiography surrounding Mill is large, but whereas Mill's works have typically been considered in isolation, this chapter frames his work in the context of other public intellectuals to show how together they helped develop the role that America played in British reform debates.

Within a comparative framework, this chapter will now take a thematic approach to the selected publications of these six thinkers to look at how conceptions and understanding of American democracy, which we have seen develop during this thesis, were redeployed in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform.

Anglo-Saxon origins

Hugh A. MacDougall argues that myths of origin enable people 'to locate themselves in time and space' explaining traditions by linking them to a distant past and forming the ground for belief systems and ideologies that bind a society together.⁴¹ Understandings of Anglo-Saxonism were central in framing debates about British politics and constitutionalism in the nineteenth century. This can be seen in the reverence that Victorians had for the figure of King Alfred. Joanne Parker has described how in this period Alfred's life became 'the favourite story in English nurseries'.⁴² Parallels were drawn between the life of Alfred and the reigns of current monarchs like William IV and Victoria.⁴³ Simon Keynes has written of the cult of King Alfred in British history, with Alfred regarded as 'the archetypal symbol of the nation's perception of itself'; Alfred's story of battle and heroic leadership, promoting religion and learning, and through his government holding up truth, justice and the Anglo-

⁴⁰ Tom Theuns, 'Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and the Secret Ballot: Insights from Nineteenth Century Democratic Theory', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 63 (2017), 493-507; Bruce L. Kinzer, 'J. S. Mill and the secret ballot', *Historical Reflections*, 5 (1978), 19-39.

⁴¹ H. A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1982), 1.

⁴² Joanne Parker, *'England's Darling': The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* (Manchester, 2007), ix.

⁴³ Asa Briggs, *Saxons, Normans and Victorians* (London, 1966), 3.

Saxon way resonated with Victorian Britons.⁴⁴ Victorian thinkers saw their constitution as a historical construction based on the tenets of Anglo-Saxon government, the kind represented in the life of Alfred. At its core, Anglo-Saxonism was built on the concept of the superiority of the English as a Germanic people and the belief that English political institutions were the freest in the world because of this inheritance. The Whig interpretation of history, developed in this period by the likes of Macaulay, Froude, Freeman and Stubbs traced a line from ancient times to the current day, appropriating the nation's past to understand how their constitution had come to be and find what J.W. Burrow defines as 'an abiding spirit of liberty'.⁴⁵ For Billie Melman, the remoteness of the pre-Norman era allowed it to be reconstructed to create new myths that could cut across existing loyalties and divides.⁴⁶

Within this context, the historical connection between Britain and the United States formed the foundation upon which British public intellectuals formed their understandings of American politics and their relevance to the British political reform debate. Duncan Bell has argued convincingly that as a new set of powerful global challengers emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, notably Germany, the United States, and Russia, British theorists felt the need to construct a bulwark against this seeming encroachment. This reconfiguration of national consciousness in the late Victorian world saw the United Kingdom look to consolidate its union with its 'settler colonies' in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and parts of South Africa into what Bell terms a 'Greater Britain'.⁴⁷ Against this,

⁴⁴ Simon Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 28 (1999), 225.

⁴⁵ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James the Second* (1848-55), James Anthony Froude, *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1856-70), Edward Augustus Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867-79), William Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England* (1873-8); J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), 1-3.

⁴⁶ Billie Melman, 'Claiming the Nation's Past: The Invention of an Anglo-Saxon Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26 (1991), 578.

⁴⁷ Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 2007), 12-13.

Bell contends that a competing narrative around the idea of ‘Anglo-America’ emerged between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War, with an intellectual elite arguing that instead of turning to the empire and settler colonies, Britain should instead pursue closer cooperation, and perhaps even political integration with the United States. These arguments were couched in terms of the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’ or the ‘English-speaking peoples’.⁴⁸ The idea of shared Anglo-Saxon traditions between Britain and America, which for Bell proved instrumental in forming a strand of racial utopianism after 1880, also heavily influenced the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform in the 1860s.

The sense of a shared heritage between America and Britain was a frequent presence in contemporary debates, but what did the example of a radically different and potentially disruptive polity mean for a British political culture which seemed to value continuity above all else? From Goldwin Smith to Carlyle, Americans were regarded as sharing the same Anglo-Saxon traditions that had informed British politics, and the development of the British constitution. As their institutions and national character originated from the same source, the American experience was seen as being of vital consequence to Britons, either as a guide to be followed or a warning to be avoided.⁴⁹

For some, Americans had taken these Anglo-Saxon inheritances and improved on them. Goldwin Smith was an ardent Anglo-Saxonist. Wallace concludes that Smith, born in England, domiciled in Canada, and a regular visitor to America, conceived of himself as a member of the English-speaking peoples rather than belonging to any one nation.⁵⁰ Analysing his work, we can see how Smith saw American institutions as the next great step in the

⁴⁸ Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton, 2020), 1-2.

⁴⁹ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 125.

⁵⁰ Wallace, *Victorian Liberal*, 287-288.

advance of mankind from the Old World, fulfilling the promise of England's own revolution and civil war in moving society away from feudalism and towards social justice, succeeding where England had failed.⁵¹ The democratic experiment being tried in America, placing society on a broader and more just basis, would in his view be to the benefit of mankind. The New World, for some, was still ultimately part of the Anglo-Saxon world.

For others, America had diverged away from the Anglo-Saxon path after 1783. For Carlyle, America had degenerated the further it moved away from its Anglo-Saxon roots and inheritance. Carlyle attributed America's early success to its adherence to British precedents and the British model. According to him, Americans' language, constitution and reverence for law and order were not made in America, but were ready-made from the 'Old-Puritan English workshop'. Indeed, Carlyle dismissed the United States as yet to produce anything of value by itself, only anarchy. By embracing a wider franchise the United States had departed from the continuity and stability enshrined in Anglo-Saxon traditions. Americans, he conceded, were still 'hardy Anglo-Saxon men' who might yet prove themselves 'worthy of their genealogy'.⁵² Dickerson has shown how racial theory underpinned Carlyle's work with Anglo-Saxonism influencing his assessment of the white and black population of the United States, but we can see how understandings about ideas about Anglo-Saxon traditions also affected his thought on the American political system and its relevance to British reform.⁵³

Tensions about the compatibility of democracy with Anglo-Saxon traditions had been present from the moment of independence. British intellectuals pointed to the concerns of the Founding Fathers about the dangerous instability of democracy and the need for a mechanism

⁵¹ Goldwin Smith, *A Letter to a Whig Member of the Southern Independence Association* (London, 1864), 22; Goldwin Smith, *England and America* (Manchester, 1865), 6-9.

⁵² Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London, 1850), 24-25.

⁵³ Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, 84-87.

by which the opinions of the majority could be disregarded when necessary. Bagehot pointed to Washington's creation of an electoral college, intended to be composed of the wisest people in the nation, to ensure that the wisest man in the nation was elected president.⁵⁴ This may have functioned in Washington's time, when leaders were educated gentlemen and institutions were free but not democratic; however since then democratic expansion had seen things deteriorate for Bagehot.⁵⁵ Acton similarly noted how Adams had believed the Republic would not survive unless assemblies were strong enough to resist popular feelings, while Hamilton had argued that the system proposed by the American constitution could only be temporary and that in the end a system along British lines would be needed.⁵⁶

Jefferson's presidency was seen as a key turning point by these thinkers, one that had seen the United States move away from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Whereas the earliest interpreters of the U.S. Constitution and the laws had striven to be 'guided by English precedents, and to approach as nearly as they could to the English model', Jefferson's object had been to 'restrain the administration to Republican forms and principles, and not permit the Constitution to be...warped...into all the principles and pollutions of [the] English model'.⁵⁷

Acton argued that Jefferson had pushed for more democracy in a conscious bid to move America away from the English model and that as a result nothing there was now secure against popular feeling. Anglo-Saxon traditions had proven difficult to implement in America and democracy had been the destabilising agent. Acton wrote of the inconsistency that developed over time in America between the revolutionary doctrine of democracy and its

⁵⁴ Walter Bagehot, 'The House of Commons, The English Constitution', *Fortnightly Review*, 15 March 1866, 257; See also Acton, 'The Civil War', 128.

⁵⁵ Walter Bagehot, 'What May Be in America', *Economist*, 17 August 1861, 897.

⁵⁶ Acton, 'The Civil War', 129.

⁵⁷ Acton, 'The Civil War', 131.

English inheritance. Anglo-Saxon traditions for Acton served to ‘balance one set of interests by another...Of all conceivable things that which is most alien to their spirit is to sacrifice any distinct interest or particular right to the requirements of some vague abstraction. But it was difficult for Norman kings and feudal parliaments to legislate in a manner that would satisfy the wants of American society’. Jefferson’s democratic principle meanwhile prioritised the will of the majority above all else. It was intolerable to Jefferson, according to Acton, ‘that the engagements of one generation should bind another, that any rights should be deemed too sacred to be confiscated by the vote of a majority. He desired law to be in a constant state of fluctuation, and every change to realise more and more the momentary wishes of the people’.⁵⁸ The result was an irreconcilable antagonism between Anglo-Saxon traditions and the democratic principle. In embracing democracy, America, it seemed, had departed from its Anglo-Saxon origins. Far from following America, as far as Acton, Carlyle and Bagehot were concerned, Britain needed to preserve the Anglo-Saxon traditions of continuity and stability when it came to political reform.

Ideas about an Anglo-Saxon world, which for Bell form a kind of racial utopianism after 1880,⁵⁹ were already prevalent in the 1860s in the work of British public intellectuals, as we have seen, and these ideas proved crucial in shaping British understandings of how the experience of America affected the prospects of political reform in Britain. While Bell finds evidence of members of the intellectual elite on both sides of the Atlantic discussing the superiority of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ race between 1880 and 1914, we have found that ideas about shared Anglo-Saxon traditions between Britain and America and convictions about

⁵⁸ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 130-131.

⁵⁹ Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, 1-41.

‘English-speaking peoples’ formed a key influence in intellectual debates as early as the 1860s, chiefly featuring in the extraparliamentary debate over British reform.

Mob Rule

The role of the mob in the Victorian world is keenly disputed by historians. For Frederick Mather, the nineteenth century saw the conquest of mob disorder and the gradual ‘elimination of riot from English social life’.⁶⁰ Donald Richter, in contrast, has argued that mob violence became increasingly prevalent in Britain just prior to the Second Reform Act and only intensified thereafter. For Richter, the image of Victorian society as orderly and serene was a myth, retrospectively created during the turbulence of the First World War.⁶¹ Jon Lawrence has shown how after 1867 there was an ‘increased sensitivity towards the persistence of disorder in public politics’, with the Second Reform Act introducing new powers to prevent ‘disorderly behaviour’ around polling stations in response to widespread fears about mob violence.⁶² Recent research on electoral violence by Luke Blaxill, Gidon Cohen, Gary Hutchison, Patrick M. Kuhn and Nick Vivyan has challenged the idea that Victorian elections became more peaceful as they became more democratic, arguing that after 1832 violence was ‘endemic’ in nineteenth-century elections, with a marked increase in the period between the Second and Third Reform Acts.⁶³ Much as historians have debated the extent of mob participation in electoral politics, so too did British contemporaries. The widespread mob violence that broke out during the 1865 general election pushed fears about mob rule to the forefront of British commentators’ minds, particularly in the ongoing extraparliamentary

⁶⁰ Frederick C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists* (Manchester, 1959), v.

⁶¹ Richter, ‘Role of Mob Riot’, 19-28.

⁶² Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, 44-47.

⁶³ Luke Blaxill, Gidon Cohen, Gary Hutchison, Patrick M. Kuhn and Nick Vivyan, ‘Electoral Violence in England and Wales, 1832-1914’, (Working Paper, School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA), Durham University, 2022), 1-32.

debate over political reform. Concerns about mob rule were a recurring theme when British political intellectuals looked to America to inform their arguments about British political reform.

For Carlyle, the kind of democracy seen in America appeared to produce gatherings of men in swarms, acting with unanimity and a quasi-religious conviction, prepared to follow even the stupidest ideas as articles of faith. Such ‘swarmery’ had led America into Civil War over what he deemed a labour dispute and now appeared to be taking hold in Britain to create a reform mania as well.⁶⁴ We have already seen in chapter one how British travellers were struck by the almost religious reverence Americans appeared to have for their constitution and system of government. Heeding Tocqueville’s warnings about the ‘tyranny of the majority’ in 1835, and the need to learn the lessons of America, Mill set to developing his theory of how Britain might avoid this fate – attaining the benefits of democratic government whilst also avoiding or mitigating the potential dangers. Between his first review of Tocqueville in 1835 and the publication of *Considerations on Representative Government* in 1861, Mill believed that he had found the answer. For Mill this revolved around the distinction between a ‘true democracy’ and a ‘false democracy’. The United States, according to Mill, was an example of a false democracy, one which only gave representation to local majorities, leaving the instructed minority voiceless.⁶⁵ The tyranny of the majority would not be a problem in a true democracy, in which the people had security for good government and where the people were the masters but recognised that they should employ public servants more skilful than themselves. For Mill, the example of America showed why British political reform must ensure that the new electorate chose the most instructed people as their representatives, rather

⁶⁴ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Ilias (Americana) in Nuce’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, August 1863, 301; Thomas Carlyle, ‘Shooting Niagara and after’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, August 1867, 320-321.

⁶⁵ J.S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (London, 1861), 160.

than ruling directly, so that the majority would work through the agency of an enlightened minority.⁶⁶

As we have seen, depictions of American mob violence frequently appeared in the British press. In his articles for *The Economist* during the Civil War, Bagehot contributed to these depictions. In 1861, he observed that the push for secession in Carolina had been forced by the least wealthy, the least influential and the most democratic classes of the population, against the wishes of wiser, soberer and more respectable men who urged compromise and caution, and that the whole of South Carolina was now under the rule of a frenzied, violent and enthusiastic mob, a product of American democracy.⁶⁷ For Bagehot, the American constitution had in effect facilitated the Civil War. When it came to articulating his views on the future of British political reform after the Civil War, Bagehot accepted that the supreme power to determine political matters resided in the people, but he distinguished between England which relied on a 'chosen people, a picked and selected people' and America which relied on the 'whole people, in the numerical majority'.⁶⁸

However, not all accepted the association made by the likes of Carlyle, Mill and Bagehot between mobs and American-style democracy. Leslie Stephen singled out the *Times* for what he saw as its ignorant presentation of the state of affairs in America. He argued that during its coverage of the Civil War, the paper had taken rumours about isolated and sporadic riots in New York and transformed them into broad characterisations that the government of the North was in the hands of the mob.⁶⁹ Such characterisations could not help but influence

⁶⁶ J.S. Mill, 'De Tocqueville on Democracy in America [1] 1835', in John M. Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII – Essays on Politics and Society Part 1* (London, 1977), 71-72.

⁶⁷ Walter Bagehot, 'Dissolution of the Union as Regards America', *Economist*, 26 January 1861, 86; See also Bagehot, 'What May Be in America', 897.

⁶⁸ Walter Bagehot, 'The Cabinet, The English Constitution', *Fortnightly Review*, 15 May 1865, 20.

⁶⁹ Leslie Stephen, *The "Times" on the American War: A Historical Study* (London, 1865), 55-56.

British contemporaries in the extraparliamentary debate, considering their own thoughts about political reform and the potentially despotic power of the majority. By 1867, Stephen's argument had evolved slightly, now more closely resembling Mill's. Stephen still took issue with those who believed that an extension of the British franchise would see money and the mob, the supposed supreme idols in Washington, come to dominate Britain as well, but he now contended that while universal suffrage may have failed in some parts of America by applying it to an ignorant mob, this did not mean that under a completely different set of circumstances in Britain, an extension of the suffrage could not be successful.⁷⁰

Victorian political culture emphasised stability and continuity. Jonathan Parry has argued that in the 1850s and 1860s 'British politicians, the media and public opinion were at their most self-confident about Britain's stability and economic success' and they attributed this to their constitutional arrangements.⁷¹ The kind of mob violence that democracy was seen to encourage in America threatened the stability so valued by British elite political commentators. Ultimately, the example of America was key for British thinkers in understanding the relationship between democracy and mob violence. For Mill and Stephen, lessons could be learned from America to ensure that an extension of the franchise did not lead to mob rule and electoral violence. For Carlyle and Bagehot, America demonstrated that mob violence and an enlarged suffrage were intrinsically linked. The Second Reform Act undoubtedly created the problem of a newly enlarged electorate with a million new voters to integrate into the political nation or leave vulnerable to demagogism. Concerns about the mob would only continue after 1867. As Jon Lawrence has shown, 'force was central to the dynamic of the English political meeting during the era of (partial) male democracy between

⁷⁰ Leslie Stephen, 'On the Choice of Representatives by Popular Constituencies', in *Essays on Reform* (London, 1867), 93, 100.

⁷¹ J.P. Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), 147.

1867 and 1914'.⁷² Robust 'street politics' and electioneering continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁷³ The intellectuals we have examined in this section used the example of America to highlight the potential instability that an active majority could introduce into a reformed electoral system and demonstrate the need for some mechanism by which to ameliorate this. After the Second Reform Act was passed, political parties would need to respond to the challenge these figures had raised. As John Garrard has shown in his local study of Salford after 1867, with the franchise extended, the middle class dominated parties steadily became parties of social integration or 'mass parties', with the leaders of the old parties consciously attempting to move beyond their political sphere.⁷⁴ After the Second Reform Act, political parties would prove key in 'socialising' the new mass electorate into what Lawrence terms 'the norms of the pre-existing political system'.⁷⁵ In this 'socialising', they were reacting to the concerns that we have explored of British thinkers about the implications of America for the prospects of political reform in Britain.

Independent Representatives or Elected Delegates?

Alongside fears about majority rule, the other prevailing concern displayed in British public intellectuals' work on America and British political reform was the quality of elected figures and the role that they would be expected to play. On the one hand, it was felt that representatives needed to retain a degree of independent thought, lest they be transformed into delegates for the popular will. On the other, there was a perceived risk of opening up the political system to demagogues who could seek to manipulate the popular will for personal

⁷² Jon Lawrence, 'Contesting the male polity: the suffragettes and the politics of disruption in Edwardian Britain', in Amanda Vickey (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2001), 202-203.

⁷³ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), ch.7.

⁷⁴ John A. Garrard, 'Parties, Members and Voters after 1867: A Local Study', *Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), 146.

⁷⁵ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, 163.

gain. The sentiment of Conservative philosopher Edmund Burke's speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774 on the nature of political representation in Britain continued to be felt into the nineteenth century. Emily Jones has shown how Burke's proposition that parliament was a national institution, not a 'congress of ambassadors' and that therefore an MP 'should never represent the wishes of his constituents against the welfare of others, the wider community, and "general reason" itself' was a persistent theme in nineteenth-century political writing.⁷⁶

James Vernon describes how the Radical notion of the MP as delegate, returned to parliament by his constituents in exchange for accepting certain conditions, pledging himself to advocate a series of measures and giving them an annual account of his record in parliament, rather than an independent representative of his electors, which once enjoyed widespread use in certain Radical constituencies like Tower Hamlets, Oldham, Boston and Lewes, was by the 1850s and 1860s in retreat. Vernon attributes this to the formalisation of political organisations after the Great Reform Act, making them more 'amenable to oligarchic control from above'.⁷⁷ In drawing on the example of America, our thinkers heavily influenced the extraparliamentary debate on this issue. Parry has demonstrated how young Liberal intellectuals in this period took their lead from the likes of Mill to demand reform on the basis that a larger electorate would force 'rich and powerful' leaders to be more assiduous and demonstrate more 'energy and intellectual eminence'. Key to this, for Parry, was their belief that an MP's duty was to 'respond to working-men's genuine grievances conscientiously and scientifically' and that only political reform would force them to do this.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914: an Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2017), 24-25.

⁷⁷ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 186-192.

⁷⁸ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, 207-208.

The outbreak of civil war had highlighted to British intellectuals the need for great political figures in America. Some of our thinkers utilised the crisis of the Civil War to demonstrate that good-quality statesmen could emerge under the kind of democracy present in the United States. Smith contended that in America's moment of crisis, men of intellect and refinement had come forward to stand behind Lincoln, 'the Rail-Splitter' President.⁷⁹ Even Mill conceded that the Civil War had proved that good statesmen could emerge in America. Writing in the aftermath of the Trent Affair,⁸⁰ Mill argued that the event had demonstrated that democracy was better than many Englishmen understood it to be, provided that the better instructed were bold enough to challenge the 'aberrations' of a ruling multitude.⁸¹

However, in Mill's dichotomy between true democracy and false democracy, the United States ultimately represented the great and growing danger that democracy posed: 'the substitution of delegation for representation'.⁸² America, which Mill branded a faulty model, had created a situation where highly-cultivated members of the community, refusing to become 'servile mouthpieces of their inferiors in knowledge' and unwilling to sacrifice their own opinions and judgement refused to offer themselves as candidates for Congress or even state legislatures.⁸³ Acton also wrote of the conventional wisdom in America that the people, seen to be the source of all authority, ought to control those to whom they delegate it, and that

⁷⁹ Smith, *Letter to a Whig Member*, 18. The 'Rail-Splitter' was a nickname used by supporters of Lincoln during the 1860 Presidential Election in reference to his early life growing up on the farms of the American frontier. At the 1860 Illinois state Republican Convention, Richard J. Oglesby, the then Governor of Illinois, and John Hanks, a first cousin of Lincoln's mother, presented a split-rail fence supposedly built by Lincoln in 1830 along with a sign that read, 'Abraham Lincoln/The Rail Candidate'. The split-rail fence then became a symbol of Lincoln as a self-made frontiersman.

⁸⁰ A diplomatic incident during the American Civil War which saw the U.S. Navy intercept a British mail packet, RMS *Trent*, and remove two Confederate envoys, James Murray Mason and John Slidell. This incident caused outrage in Britain and risked a new Anglo-American war. The situation was resolved when the Lincoln administration went against public opinion in the North and released the two envoys and disavowed the U.S. Navy's violation of neutral rights.

⁸¹ J. S. Mill, 'The Contest in America', *Fraser's Magazine*, (February 1862), 260

⁸² Mill, 'Tocqueville on America 1835', 74.

⁸³ Mill, *Representative Government*, 160.

‘no argument from expediency ought to be allowed to disturb the application of the Democratic principle’.⁸⁴ Leslie Stephen similarly observed that Congress functioned more like a diplomatic meeting of delegates sent to represent independent nation-like states rather than as a supreme legislature. The opportunity to act as a delegate of an American state, to vote upon a handful of points and make speeches which scarcely anyone in the country at large would read about, was not for Stephen a very enticing offer and explained why better-quality candidates did not emerge for election to Congress in America.⁸⁵

It was this fear that led Mill to support the reform proposals of political scientist Thomas Hare, including a redrawn electoral map, ideas surrounding proportional representation and the single transferable vote method.⁸⁶ F.D. Parsons has argued that Hare’s ideas around reform were of ‘serious concern to political leaders’.⁸⁷ Mill believed that had America adopted the kind of system proposed by Hare, it would have avoided many of the issues that democracy appeared to have created there.⁸⁸ Mill would go on to propose in Parliament, albeit unsuccessfully, an amendment to the 1867 reform Bill containing the single transferable vote method. Bagehot, however, challenged Mill on this. In his review of *Considerations on Representative Government*, Bagehot countered that Hare’s reform proposals, specifically the system of plural voting, reminded him of the American Electoral College system which had, in his view, led the country into political chaos and a civil war.⁸⁹ Bagehot went on to further analyse the system proposed by Hare and supported by Mill in *The English Constitution*. Bagehot believed that there was a risk that these proposals would

⁸⁴ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 132.

⁸⁵ Stephen, ‘Choice of Representatives’, 96-97.

⁸⁶ For Hare’s evolving reform proposals around this time see Thomas Hare, *The Machinery of Representation* (1857); *A Treatise on Election of Representative, Parliamentary and Municipal* (1859); and *The Election of Representatives Parliamentary and Municipal: A Treatise* (1865).

⁸⁷ F.D. Parsons, *Thomas Hare and Political Representation in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009), 2.

⁸⁸ Mill, *Representative Government*, 160.

⁸⁹ Walter Bagehot, ‘Part 2 of Review of John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government*’, *Economist*, 18 May 1861, 541.

institute a trade of constituency-making in England similar to that of President-making in America, where candidates would be chosen not for their independence and ability, but for their subservience and allegiance to their party.⁹⁰ Electioneering agencies would take on greater roles in British elections and candidates would, in effect, become party men.

This kind of professionalisation of politics, described by Bagehot, would become a matter of fact after 1867. National party organisations would begin, as Vernon has explored, to professionalise popular politics.⁹¹ British intellectuals had seen how the example of America demonstrated that with an enlarged franchise, representatives could slowly morph into delegates for the popular will. As Angus Hawkins has shown, between 1867 and 1884 the modern party system developed to take account of the new system ushered in by the Second Reform Act, with the power of choosing who should hold office passing from the House of Commons directly to the electorate, while managed by mass national parties.⁹² The ability of MPs to retain their independent judgement and the influence of their party and their constituents on this, which had so preoccupied British intellectuals, would continue to be an issue well beyond 1867.

Democracy, hierarchy, liberty and property

A central issue for public intellectuals in the extraparliamentary debate over political reform was the compatibility of democracy with other important values – notably liberty, the preservation of property, hierarchy and social order. Any measure of political reform needed to ensure that these values would be preserved. Taking each one in turn, we will see how

⁹⁰ Bagehot, 'The House of Commons', 266-269.

⁹¹ Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 142.

⁹² Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, 2.

British public intellectuals drew on the example of America to demonstrate how a reformed political system might pose a challenge to them.

Conceptions of hierarchy played a key role in the world of Victorian politics. P.F. Clarke has argued that Victorian politics were based on status and culture, rather than class.⁹³ Voters and non-voters were united, not by the material interests of the social groups they belonged to, but a sense of shared values and a collective identity. Biagini applies this framework to understand the appeal of the Liberal party to ‘subaltern’ classes.⁹⁴ Only after the Second Reform Act did a shift towards class-based voting take place, as charted by Christopher Stevens, with both old and new politics co-existing until 1918.⁹⁵ Hierarchy played an important role in framing Carlyle, Stephen and Smith’s arguments about America and British political reform.

Some interpreted the example of America as showing that democracy would force a break with hierarchy. Carlyle defined the universal order as ‘a Monarchy and Hierarchy’. With its focus on equality and promotion of universal suffrage, American democracy went against the natural, universal and hierarchical order.⁹⁶ He went on to align manhood suffrage with universal liberty, majority rule and equality, and mockingly likened manhood suffrage to horsehood or doghood suffrage.⁹⁷ The equality of men, as exemplified by the United States, was incompatible with the British political system. For Smith, American democracy represented the fulfilment of England’s own Civil War when, for one moment, the nation had broken loose from hereditary aristocracy and hierarchy, only for the effort to ultimately fail.

⁹³ P.F. Clarke, ‘Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain’, *History*, 57:189 (1972), 44-45.

⁹⁴ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, 2.

⁹⁵ Christopher Stevens, ‘The Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain Reconsidered’, *Contemporary British History*, 13:1 (1999), 62-63.

⁹⁶ Carlyle, *Pamphlets*, 27.

⁹⁷ Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara*, 321.

If America succeeded in its democratic experiment it would demonstrate to England that it was possible for communities to govern themselves without the control of a hereditary order.⁹⁸

Stephen, however, countered that democracy was compatible with hierarchy. The distinction lay in the different circumstances of the two nations. While America was a young country with no long-standing sociopolitical hierarchy, Britain had developed an entrenched aristocratic system, which for Stephen would ensure the political power of the upper classes. America had adopted the system of caucuses and conventions as an artificial substitute for a political hierarchy, to supplement the kind of great parties and recognised leaders found in England.⁹⁹ Stephen argued that the implementation of democracy in England would be different from democracy in America; the influence exercised by wealth, rank and social estimation in England could not be neutralised by an extension of the suffrage and franchise reform would not radically alter the composition of Parliament as Englishmen had an instinctive liking for gentlemen and would rather vote for them than one of their equals.¹⁰⁰ The existing hierarchy would only begin to falter if they stopped offering up candidates for electors to vote for.

Alongside hierarchy, the protection of liberty was a paramount concern of British intellectuals. Liberty, as J.C.D. Clark has argued, had been key to understanding Anglo-American relations in the early-modern period,¹⁰¹ but we can see how concerns about the preservation of liberty continued to resonate after the American Revolution and the first

⁹⁸ Smith, *England and America*, 8-13.

⁹⁹ Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 101.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 106-113.

¹⁰¹ J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, 1993), 383.

reform act when it came to British political reform. Roland Quinault has shown how liberty was important to key political leaders, with both Gladstone and Lincoln committed to the notion and referring to it in justifying their policies,¹⁰² but we will see how liberty also continued to be important in the extraparliamentary debate over reform as well as inside parliament.

For those like Acton, the experience of America confirmed the lessons of history that democracy was always incompatible with liberty and the preservation of property. Liberty was a particular concern for Acton who spent several years working on an ultimately unfinished history of liberty.¹⁰³ Hill notes that for Acton, liberty was the force that ‘overcame modern absolutism’.¹⁰⁴ Acton argued that the Union had been restored by force, ruining the constitution in the process, and rendering American democracy illiberal and tyrannical – far from a model to base British political reform on.¹⁰⁵ Liberty in America after the Civil War had come to mean the right to exercise control, rather than exemption from it.

Both Smith and Carlyle questioned what liberty actually meant in an Anglo-American context. The American constitution enshrined the idea that all men are created equal and are endowed with certain rights, including liberty. Yet this was clearly not matched by the experience of reality. Women had no political liberties with married women possessing only qualified personal liberties; slaves in America were denied their liberty, with even freed slaves lacking political liberty. At the height of the Civil War, Smith observed that it could ‘scarcely be held that liberty, political or personal, is the inalienable right of every human

¹⁰² Roland E. Quinault, ‘Anglo-American Attitudes to Democracy from Lincoln to Churchill’, in Leventhal and Quinault (eds.), *Anglo-American Attitudes*, 125.

¹⁰³ See George Watson, *Lord Acton's History of Liberty* (Aldershot, 1994) which examines Acton’s unfinished work on a history of liberty between 1877 and 1883.

¹⁰⁴ Hill, *Acton*, 400.

¹⁰⁵ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 127-133.

being'.¹⁰⁶ Parallels between freed slaves in America and the English working classes were drawn. Carlyle decried the 'swarmery' over the axiom of liberty in Britain which, while it enabled the 'good man' to carry out 'works of goodness and nobleness', also permitted the 'bad man' to be free and 'unfold himself in his particular way'.¹⁰⁷ Unrestricted liberty, the kind implied by American democracy, could only lead to chaos.

Alongside protection for liberty, the security of property would also need to be guaranteed in a reformed system. Property, as Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall have argued, was one of the key prerequisites for exercising citizenship in nineteenth-century Britain, following the passage of the Great Reform Act.¹⁰⁸ The significance of property, both as the basis for political representation and for the protection of property rights, was clear in the extraparliamentary debate over reform. For Bagehot, property played an important role as the basis for political representation. The framers of the American constitution had, according to Bagehot, been aware of the dangers of popular democracy but had failed to do the one thing which would have controlled and restrained it – place the substantial power with men of education and property as was the case, he implied, in Britain. The greatest danger for Bagehot lay in the great industrial cities where the majority had no fixed property, scarcely had a fixed home, could be excited by agitators and most importantly were not 'restrained by the Conservative instinct of land ownership'.¹⁰⁹ Acton, likewise, believed that property was no longer secure in America as a result of their political system, condemning the 'absolutists of Democracy [who]...rank their principles of government at a higher value than the purposes of society and civilisation, and create an idol to which they are ready to sacrifice the

¹⁰⁶ Goldwin Smith, *Does the Bible Sanction American Slavery?* (London, 1863), 26-27.

¹⁰⁷ Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara*, 322.

¹⁰⁸ Hall, McClelland and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 58-61.

¹⁰⁹ Walter Bagehot, 'The Practical Operation of the American Constitution at the Present Extreme Crisis', *Economist*, 1 June 1861, 592; Walter Bagehot, 'The Effect of the Political Events of 1867 Upon the Minds of Moderate Liberals', *Economist*, 21 September 1867, 1067.

safeguards of property'.¹¹⁰ For these thinkers, it was crucial that the interests of property be taken into account when considering any measure of political reform.

Goldwin Smith, however, countered that the example of America demonstrated that the rights and security of property could still be maintained in an enlarged franchise. Smith believed that despite the Civil War, property could still be protected in a democracy. He saw America as a great community, built on diffused property and intelligence, social union and sound morality which had managed an unprecedented feat: to confer full rights of citizenship to a whole people yet still securing order and property.¹¹¹ American industry and wealth had only been able to thrive as a result of the security of property there.

Hierarchy and social order, liberty and the preservation of property were key concerns in the extraparliamentary debate over reform and British intellectuals took great care to consider the implications of political reform with respect to these values. Within this analysis, the example of the United States played a major role, illustrating both the potential dangers that American-style democracy posed to these values, as well as suggesting how these dangers might be avoided or at least mitigated. The importance of creating a sense of shared values between candidates and voters would persevere well into the reformed system. John Vincent attributes the success of Lancashire Conservatives after the Second Reform Act to their ability to adapt to the kind of industrial conditions that we have seen so worried Bagehot by adopting the kind of approach recommended by Stephen: developing a populist political language that would connect with working-class traditions.¹¹² We can see a similar approach adopted by the Liberal party who drew on religion to connect with newly enfranchised working-class voters.

¹¹⁰ Acton, 'The Civil War', 133.

¹¹¹ Smith, *Letter to a Whig Member*, 14; Goldwin Smith, *The Civil War in America* (London, 1865), 27-32.

¹¹² John Vincent, 'The Effect of the Second Reform Act in Lancashire', *Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), 93.

Parry has shown how the reform movement led Liberals to embrace Protestant nonconformity to connect with working men, developing a shared ideology and set of values which distinguished between the idle (both aristocrats and paupers) and the industrious (committed to spiritual and material progress). Parry describes how radical nonconformists, positivists, academic radicals and leading working men were united by a shared vision of a radical Liberal conscience committed to diminishing privilege and working towards an ideal state of material and spiritual class harmony.¹¹³ The result was a bond of union between latitudinarian Whig-Liberals, high-church Gladstonians, radical nonconformists, Scottish Presbyterians and other smaller groups. Through these examples we can see how the extraparliamentary debate helped shape the strategies adopted by political parties in the post-reform system.

Representative Institutions

A prevailing understanding of many thinkers in this period was that a nation's political institutions were the product of that particular nation's unique conditions and circumstances. Just because a set of political institutions might suit one nation's needs and requirements, this did not necessarily mean that the same institutions would suit another nation. As we have been exploring, public intellectuals were keenly aware of the material differences between Britain and America, despite the shared heritage of the two countries. Parliament and Congress, the centre of both nation's politics and the chief legislative assemblies, epitomised these differences.

One of the key differences lay in the relationship between the executive and the legislature. In America, the executive and the legislature were kept separate to provide a check on one

¹¹³ Jonathan Parry, *Democracy & Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875* (Cambridge, 1986), 28-29, 232-239.

another. Whilst this could be seen as an advantage, the likes of Mill and Bagehot preferred the English system where the executive was chosen by the legislative assembly. Mill argued that a directly elected executive risked the country descending into a state of constant electioneering, as was the case in America where party spirit would come to dominate all public affairs.¹¹⁴ The lack of connection between the executive and the legislature in America was also a preeminent concern according to Bagehot. The English constitution derived strength from the connection between the government and parliament, something the American system lacked.¹¹⁵ In America, Congress and the presidency appeared to be in constant conflict with one another, where in England the cabinet retained the ability when necessary to compel the legislature to act. Similarly, when a great national crisis emerged in England the legislature could directly replace the head of the executive with someone more equipped to face the present danger, where in America Congress was powerless to act until the next Presidential election.

The English system was praised by Liberal thinkers for its ability to ensure great parliamentary debates. Mill had made the case for the importance of the collision of ideas in political discussions in *On Liberty* (1859), reminding his readers that ‘wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument: but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it’.¹¹⁶ Bagehot similarly held up the British parliament as ‘the great scene of debate’ with the nation ‘forced to hear two sides...And it likes to hear – it is eager to know’.¹¹⁷ It was important to these thinkers that British parliamentary debates would catch the attention of the people. For Bagehot, the people paid regular attention to politics in England because they believed that public opinion had a strong influence on

¹¹⁴ Mill, *Representative Government*, 271.

¹¹⁵ Bagehot, “The Cabinet”, 9-14.

¹¹⁶ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (London, 1859), 38-39.

¹¹⁷ Bagehot, “The Cabinet”, 14-15.

Parliament and that the debates in Parliament mattered because they could affect the government. He described how in times of need ‘the nation would assist at the discussion. A public opinion, a real judgment of the educated public, would be generated by the impact of argument...Parliament would almost indisputably share it and if it did not share it, it would almost indisputably obey it’. Parliament valued public opinion, seeking to inform and educate the people through their debates and the people listened to the facts and arguments presented to them by Parliament.¹¹⁸ Mill similarly stressed the need for debates to matter if they were to engage and educate the public. He argued that it was through political discussion ‘that the manual labourer...is taught that remote causes...have a most sensible effect even on his personal interests...and becomes consciously a member of a great community’.¹¹⁹

In contrast to British public opinion, American public opinion was perceived to be ill-informed. Bagehot believed that public opinion in America had ‘not been effectually instructed. It has heard no debate’.¹²⁰ Where British public opinion was believed to benefit from the robust debates that took place in parliament, in America the ability of the legislature to affect the presidency was limited, and the debates that took place there were seen to be pointless. Under American democracy, Bagehot observed that outside election time, the nation was ‘not incited to form an opinion like a nation under a Cabinet government...The teaching apparatus which had educated our public mind...does not exist. No Presidential country needs to form daily delicate opinions or is helped in forming them’.¹²¹ Stephen echoed these views, maintaining that the health of the political atmosphere depended on Parliament being able to fulfil its role as the centre of all important political discussion and

¹¹⁸ Walter Bagehot, ‘The Present Crisis in America, The Contrast between Parliamentary and Presidential Governments’, *Economist*, September 1865, 1054-1055; Bagehot, “The Cabinet”, 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Mill, *Representative Government*, 172-173.

¹²⁰ Bagehot, ‘The Present Crisis’, 1055.

¹²¹ Bagehot, “The Cabinet”, 16.

debate.¹²² It was thought imperative that any measure of political reform should not lead to a loss of character of English legislators and must preserve Parliament's role as the centre of political discussion.

The lack of connection between the U.S. executive and legislature also explained for some intellectuals why fewer talented figures entered public life in Congress. Congressmen had fewer opportunities for advancement than English MPs. Stephen related how while an English MP had innumerable opportunities to acquire a reputation, 'a man may fairly say he can do more good as a private citizen by encouraging education and the various institutes due to public spirit in America, than by intriguing to be sent as a delegate to spend months in settling a tariff at Washington'.¹²³ As early as 1835, Mill had observed that the everyday business of politics in America was an 'occupation little worthy of any mind of first-rate powers'.¹²⁴

In America, this absence was perceived by intellectuals to have opened the door to demagogues, seeking to excite the popular will for their own advancement. At the centre of the 'swarms' described by Carlyle lay the 'Queen Bee' who, regardless of their rank and intellect, could become 'straightway...fatted and inflated into bulk' with the swarm formed around them, acting with one heart and one mind.¹²⁵ Bagehot seized on the Civil War to show how demagogues had excited the people into frenzied mobs and argued that democratic reform in Britain would allow demagogues to influence the outcome of elections, with

¹²² Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 90.

¹²³ Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 97-98.

¹²⁴ Mill, 'Tocqueville on America 1835', 76.

¹²⁵ Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara*, 321.

democracies always promoting demagogues who would be able to lead the populace in their votes.¹²⁶

However, not all thinkers interpreted the correlation between American democracy and demagoguery in this way. Smith countered that the factiousness and demagogism present in America could already be found in Britain.¹²⁷ For him, demagogism was inherent in all representative institutions regardless of how narrow or wide the franchise was. Stephen questioned why the expansion of the franchise would necessarily ‘throw our constituencies into the hands of millionaires and demagogues’.¹²⁸ The ability of the current British system to best meet the needs of voters was also in doubt. Smith, for example, questioned the existing system of ‘virtual representation’ in Britain, where the majority of the people, particularly the unenfranchised, were represented by those whose interests were quite different from their own.¹²⁹

Maintaining the prestige, reputation and character of Parliament was of paramount concern in the extraparliamentary debate over political reform. The idea of character, as argued by Stefan Collini, enjoyed an unprecedented prominence in Victorian political thought.¹³⁰ Peter Mandler has shown how in mid-Victorian Britain there was a solid consensus as to what constituted character; character ‘encompassed both reason and emotion. It was the basis of human morality...widely held to be an innate potential of all human beings’.¹³¹ We have seen how thinkers used comparisons with the American Congress to draw out the attributes of the

¹²⁶ Bagehot, ‘Dissolution of the Union’, 86; Walter Bagehot, ‘Parliamentary Reform’, *National Review*, January 1859, 244; Walter Bagehot, ‘The Defect of America, Presidential and Ministerial Governments Compared’, *Economist*, 6 December 1862, 1346.

¹²⁷ Smith, *Letter to a Whig Member*, 14; Smith, *American Commonwealth*, 231.

¹²⁸ Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 93.

¹²⁹ Smith, *Letter to a Whig Member*, 11.

¹³⁰ Collini, ‘The Idea of “Character”’, 31.

¹³¹ Mandler, *English National Character*, 67.

existing parliamentary system which they wished to preserve in the face of reform. Victorian values, as Collini has shown, were bound up with notions of character and respectability.¹³² Within the Victorian world, it was imperative to British intellectuals that political reform did not sacrifice this in its widening of the franchise.

The effect of the Civil War

The Civil War had a notable impact on the thought of British intellectuals when it came to the subject of British political reform. Prior to the war, America appeared to British contemporaries to have achieved the unachievable – a political system which gave the mass of the people a say in the affairs of government without sacrificing property and wealth. Looking back on America before the war, Acton described how the nation had seemed to solve the problem that had previously baffled even the most enlightened nations: a government founded on the principle of equality, without surrendering the securities for property and freedom.¹³³ However, the outbreak of civil war in the world's premier testing ground for democratic government called pre-existing assessments of American democracy into question, as we saw in chapter two. When it came to divining what lessons could be learnt from American democracy in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform, the recent crisis in America could not help but impinge on the analysis of British thinkers.

For men like Acton, Carlyle and Bagehot, optimistic conclusions about the triumph of America's experiment with democracy pre-1861 and the desire of some to see a similar experiment in Britain were premature. Writing in 1861, as tensions in the United States

¹³² Collini, 'The Idea of "Character"', 32-33.

¹³³ Acton, 'The Civil War', 124.

reached breaking point, Bagehot remarked on how Americans and those who favoured America's political system had been quick to boast of their capability for self-government, but that the unfolding situation might have revealed the weaknesses in their institutions and shown that the wisdom of the Old World might yet be borne out.¹³⁴ America was ultimately a young country, yet to face the kinds of significant tests and challenges that all nations, including Britain, had had to face.

Writing in 1850, Carlyle had warned that America was yet to fight its greatest test 'as the rest of us have had to do'.¹³⁵ The Civil War proved to be this test and for these thinkers it was one that the democracy of the New World had failed to pass. Writing during the culmination of the conflict in 1865, Bagehot contended that the weaknesses of the American system had been obscured by the fact that, prior to the Civil War, Congressmen had never truly had to grapple with the kind of contentious legislation that English parliaments were used to dealing with, and that had the American system been 'tried by English legislation of the last thirty years' these weaknesses would have been much more apparent.¹³⁶ For Carlyle, the kind of swarmery encouraged by American democracy had dragged the American continent into the 'Pit of Hell' with excellent men of gifts and faculties dying in a pointless conflict over a whim to take, what in Carlyle's view, was one of the least pressing issues (slavery and abolition) and transform it into the most pressing issue among 'the Heavens and the Earth'.¹³⁷ The war had also eroded the idea that the American system could not be injurious to the security of property and local liberties. Acton argued that the much-vaunted American constitution had decimated the families who used to worship it, ravaged property, suspended individual liberties, and by resorting to force to restore the union had ruined the prospects of

¹³⁴ Walter Bagehot, 'The Bearings of American Disunion', *Economist*, 12 January 1861, 31.

¹³⁵ Carlyle, *Pamphlets*, 26.

¹³⁶ Bagehot, "The Cabinet", 14.

¹³⁷ Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara*, 322.

the American system for ever.¹³⁸ It was far too soon to view the democracy of America as a model to base British political reform on and the Civil War had confirmed the fears of these intellectuals.

Others, like Smith and Stephen, also saw the value of the Civil War to British observers, but for a different reason. They interpreted the war as part of a broader, global conflict between aristocracy and democracy. The North, according to this interpretation, was not just fighting against the South, but was fighting for democracy on behalf of the rest of the world.¹³⁹ Smith framed the conflict as a successor to England's own civil war in an ongoing battle between aristocracy and democracy – the heirs of the Cavalier being the South and the heirs of the Puritan being the North.¹⁴⁰ The Liberal successors of those who had once led the Revolution in England, so these thinkers believed, now recognised that their success and their fate were intertwined with that of America. At stake was the future organisation of political systems across the Atlantic. Reflecting in 1873, Mill recorded how he had been strongly engaged by the war, believing that it was 'destined to be a turning point'.¹⁴¹ Stephen countered the idea, presented by predominantly Conservative newspapers 'exhausting their vituperative resources', that the government of the North was always on the verge of collapse, pointing to the fact that time and time again they had achieved impossible feats obtaining ships, guns and men during the war.¹⁴² These intellectuals argued that, far from degenerating during the conflict, American democracy had endured, keeping up its legislative business as well as any English administration. The strength and resolve to achieve this had come from their people. The North drew on the great strength of their community, labouring and fighting for their

¹³⁸ Acton, 'The Civil War', 127.

¹³⁹ Smith, *England and America*, 10-11; Stephen, *Times on the American War*, 34; Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *England and America*, 10.

¹⁴¹ J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* (New York, 1924), 187.

¹⁴² Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 89.

common cause with the spirit of a united people, and it was on this spirit, for Smith, that the North had been able to prevail.¹⁴³ Giving the mass of the people a stake in their government, through the franchise, had bound the interests of the government with those of the people.

The difference between these two interpretations can be seen in their contrasting attitudes towards slavery in the United States. For Carlyle, servanthship and mastership were natural, with African Americans appointed by 'The Almighty Maker' to be servants and that 'under penalty of Heaven's curse, neither party to this pre-appointment shall neglect or misdo his duties therein', the results of which could now be seen in the Civil War.¹⁴⁴ Acton similarly wrote that slavery had been 'a mighty instrument not for evil only, but for good' too; in America specifically Acton believed that the desire of those in the South to protect slavery had made them keenly aware of the danger that majority rule posed to minority interests like the preservation of slavery, believing that 'the decomposition of Democracy was arrested in the South by the indirect influence of slavery'.¹⁴⁵ Goldwin Smith, however, took issue with the religious justifications for slavery in America. Through his analysis of the Bible, he concluded that there was no sanction for slavery there and that Christianity and slavery were 'the natural enemies of each other'.¹⁴⁶ He also drew parallels between the situation of former slaves in America and the unenfranchised working classes of Britain, both 'destitute of political liberty', hoping for a moral regeneration that would weaken the position of advocates for the South in Britain.¹⁴⁷ Mill deplored that the moral attitude in Britain towards the contending parties in the Civil War had not always been 'that which becomes a people who are as sincere enemies of slavery as the English really are'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Smith, *Civil War*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara*, 321; Carlyle, 'Ilias in Nuce', 301.

¹⁴⁵ Acton, 'The Civil War', 135-137.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *Bible Sanction American Slavery*, 126.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Bible Sanction American Slavery*, 26-27; Smith, *Civil War*, 74.

¹⁴⁸ Mill, 'Contest in America', 259.

Public intellectuals who had supported the South, like Acton, or had at the very least been dismissive of the causes behind the war, like Carlyle, were portrayed by some as supporters of an outdated system and enemies of democratic progress. In 1865, as the war was ending, Smith argued that the political class who had supported the South, primarily those from an aristocratic background or an interest in preserving the existing system, did so because they recognised that the victory of the North in their war would eventually mean defeat in their own war over political reform.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Stephen observed that the *Times* had aided in this process by laying the crimes of the war at factors associated with democracy.¹⁵⁰ Two years later, at the time of the Second Reform Act, Smith concluded that those who opposed extending the suffrage had hoped that the North would lose the war, in the process exposing the vices of democracy, and that the nation would descend into anarchy and military despotism – instead these hopes had been dashed by the victory of the North.¹⁵¹ The victory of the North, for them, emboldened the forces of democratic reform in Britain.

America, they conceded, was still a young country, as other figures argued, but they countered that this explained why democratic political reform would manifest differently in Britain than in America. Stephen believed that the youth of America explained the apparent absence of talent in political life there; in a ‘young country’ people were naturally more attracted to a practical life than thorough intellectual training.¹⁵² For Smith, this was a problem shared by numerous colonies; American legislators were rough precisely because as a new country they only had rough people to choose from.¹⁵³ Britain as an older, established

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *England and America*, 10.

¹⁵⁰ Stephen, *Times on the American War*, 34.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *American Commonwealth*, 217.

¹⁵² Stephen, *Choice of Representatives*, 95.

¹⁵³ Smith, *American Commonwealth*, 221.

nation would avoid these problems. For these thinkers, the youth of America helped explain why democracy in Britain would be different, not why it would follow the same pattern.

The Civil War, occurring so close in time to the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform, could not help but influence British public intellectuals in their analysis of what a reformed political system would look like. Pre-existing conclusions about American Democracy had to be reconsidered before they could be applied to the British reform debate.

Popular government and popular education

The relationship between popular government and popular education was a recurring theme in these works. America appeared to some to have combined the two to produce an intelligent people. The question was whether a similar level of general education could be achieved in Britain and how necessary an expansion of the franchise was in order to achieve it. As we saw in chapter one, the general level of education in America immediately struck British travellers. This impression influenced British public intellectuals when it came to political reform. Mill, for example, connected the impressions of British travellers with Tocqueville's analysis to argue that all could see that every American was a person of 'cultivated intelligence' and that 'no such wide diffusion of the ideas, tastes, and sentiments of educated minds has ever been seen elsewhere'.¹⁵⁴

The connection between popular education and popular government was clear to many; however British thinkers remained divided as to whether a similar result could be replicated in Britain by extending the franchise. For Acton, the kind of free, general education found in America was uniquely suited to the conditions there; every American committed to a system

¹⁵⁴ Mill, *Representative Government*, 171.

of instruction ‘which enabled a pupil to advance from the first rudiments of knowledge to the end of a university course...without payment of a single shilling’.¹⁵⁵ Acton was struck by the vast agricultural and mineral wealth of the new world, as compared to the old. Commercial enterprise was unrestrained there, unlike in Britain, and was not wasted on ‘objects that yield no adequate return’ on the resources of the people. Instead, Acton argued that America’s democratic system, which espoused equality and the necessity for every youth to have an equal start in life, ensured that this wealth was reserved to extend and equalise education. Acton doubted whether the same could be achieved in Britain. In America, in the absence of distinctions of class, everyone had ‘an indefinite claim to all the prizes that can be won by thought and labour’, while in Britain it was desirable that education ‘should be fitted, in nature and degree, to the special character and occupation of the several ranks in life to which each man belongs’.¹⁵⁶ The persistence of class divisions and hierarchy would make a similar advance in the level of general education in Britain more difficult, regardless of any expansion of the franchise.

In contrast, for some like Smith and Mill, general education was indivisible from the extended suffrage in America and would soon follow if such a suffrage was introduced in Britain. Popular government and popular education were seen as legacies of the Puritan settlers. Mill spoke positively of the education and habits which the first settlers in America had brought with them.¹⁵⁷ The system of common schools and colleges they had founded were now bearing real fruit in the United States. Mill understood American education to be a consequence of democracy, with one of the foremost benefits of popular government being

¹⁵⁵ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 124.

¹⁵⁶ Acton, ‘The Civil War’, 123-124.

¹⁵⁷ Mill, *1840 Review of Tocqueville*, 170.

that ‘education of the intelligence and of the sentiments is carried down to the very lowest ranks of the people’.¹⁵⁸

Meanwhile in Britain, as Smith observed, the mass of the people were still ‘wanting in the education and intelligence requisite for the exercise of political rights’.¹⁵⁹ Giving manual labourers the ability to exercise political franchise was, for Mill, the only road by which substantial mental cultivation and improvement in the mass of mankind could be achieved.¹⁶⁰ This aligned with Mill’s support for plural voting, rather than equal universal suffrage. Mill desired a system of plural voting in Britain, which would accord a certain number of votes to people according to their level of education. He argued that some kind of plural voting, which assigned to education ‘the degree of superior influence due to it’ was key to addressing the numerical weight that the least educated would have in a reformed system. This, for Mill, would ensure that the most educated in society could guide newly enfranchised voters and allow them to benefit from the educative effects of political participation.¹⁶¹ For these thinkers, then, extending the franchise was a prerequisite to lift the level of education in Britain.

Once political power was placed in the hands of the masses their education would simply become a matter of self-preservation. For Mill, subjecting public questions to the judgement of ‘every man among the people’ would allow them to fully exercise their faculties; in short the people of America, and potentially the people of Britain, would benefit by participation in government, contributing to their education.¹⁶² Smith contended that ‘when the masses have

¹⁵⁸ Mill, *Representative Government*, 170.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *Letter to a Whig Member*, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Mill, *Representative Government*, 171.

¹⁶¹ Mill, *Representative Government*, 182-189.

¹⁶² Mill, *1840 Review of Tocqueville*, 170.

political power in their hands, you can no more afford to leave them in ignorance than you can afford to leave them in the sanitary condition which breeds pestilence'.¹⁶³ If left 'uneducated', Mill feared that these newly enfranchised voters would club together to use their numerical majority to enact legislation which would only serve their interests rather than those of the nation or wider society, what he terms 'class legislation'.¹⁶⁴ With the franchise in Britain extended, political power could not be left entrusted with the uneducated, therefore their education would become of paramount concern.

However, not all our intellectuals agreed about the educational benefits of a democratic system. In Bagehot's view, the masses of America were only 'half-educated' and in many parts were as 'ignorant as those of Europe and far more ruffianly'.¹⁶⁵ In his defence of the existing system, Bagehot argued that the English constitution already exercised the teaching effect that Mill and Smith wished to see. In fact, the teaching apparatus which educated the public mind in Britain appeared to Bagehot to be completely absent in America.¹⁶⁶ Term limits and low-stakes debates in American legislatures meant that the people did not need to form daily opinions on delicate issues. Outside election time, the American people had no influence on assemblies and therefore no opportunity to exercise their intellectual faculties in a meaningful way. For Bagehot, the pre-1867 reform system already appeared to offer people the chance to play an active role in politics and the opportunity to educate themselves on matters of importance.¹⁶⁷ According to this interpretation, any measure of political reform influenced by the example of the United States, in pursuit of improving the general level of education in Britain, might actually achieve the opposite effect.

¹⁶³ Smith, *American Commonwealth*, 236.

¹⁶⁴ Mill, *Representative Government*, 141.

¹⁶⁵ Bagehot, 'What May Be in America', 897.

¹⁶⁶ Bagehot, "The Cabinet", 16.

¹⁶⁷ Bagehot, "The Cabinet", 16.

Despite these objections, when the Second Reform Act was passed into law, Smith and Mill's belief that popular education would become a paramount issue was borne out. Writing after the act was passed, Bagehot now argued that educating voters in the reformed political system was imperative. The great danger of the aggregation of uneducated men, for Bagehot the 'greatest dangers of democracy', had now been let loose.¹⁶⁸ Newly enfranchised voters now had to be educated to wield the political power they had been granted. The experience of America had been instrumental in the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform in displaying the relationship between education and democratic government, either as Mill and Smith believed in showing how free government benefited society through the education of the lowest ranks of the people, or as Acton and Bagehot believed in demonstrating the limits of a wider franchise's ability to raise the general level of education in a nation.

Conclusion

So far during this thesis, we have seen how conceptions about American democracy were developed in British travel literature and reviews and then challenged by the British press during the outbreak of the American Civil War. Over the course of this chapter, we have begun to see how these understandings of American democracy were redeployed by British public intellectuals in extraparliamentary debates in the context of British political reform. Where Prochaska contends that British 'Eminent Victorians' provided a detached, probing analysis of the American constitution,¹⁶⁹ we have seen how the attitudes and analysis of British thinkers towards American Democracy was firmly rooted in the domestic context about political reform. How they interpreted the example of America's experiment with

¹⁶⁸ Bagehot, "The effect of 1867", 1067.

¹⁶⁹ Prochaska, *Eminent Victorians*, 132.

democratic reform was directly tied to their stance on British reform. Furthermore, they utilised the example of America to inform their arguments about specific reform measures, the benefits that could be obtained in a more democratic system as well as some of the potential pitfalls to be avoided.

A sense of a shared Anglo-Saxon connection between the two nations underpinned much of the political thought of British intellectuals on this subject. The U.S. constitution was seen as a product of Anglo-Saxon traditions and America's early success could be attributed to their adherence to English precedents. The move towards more democracy under Jefferson's presidency was interpreted either as a conscious shift away from Anglo-Saxon traditions that encapsulated the doubts of the Founding Fathers over placing too much power in democratic hands, or the refinement and improvement of these traditions towards a more equal and community-based system in the New World. Looking to America allowed British thinkers to debate the role that elected representatives were meant to play in legislative assemblies, either as independent representatives using their own judgement or delegates to voice the popular will of their constituents.

By the 1860s, America now furnished some intellectuals with examples of mob rule and demagoguery in a more democratic system, although others disputed this connection, regarding factiousness and demagogism as an inherent possibility in any representative system regardless of how wide the suffrage was. The positives of extending the franchise to manual labourers that America highlighted were also noted, not least the ability of popular government to encourage popular education. The legacy of the Civil War undoubtedly affected attitudes towards American democracy with the conflict forcing commentators to revise any previous conclusions they had drawn about America's political system. The

compatibility of the kind of democracy seen in America with important values in Britain such as hierarchy and social order, liberty and the preservation of property was also fiercely debated by public intellectuals. Throughout the extraparliamentary debate over political reform, the prevailing concern that united all the figures considered here was that any measure of reform must not threaten Parliament's position as the centre of political discussion in Britain. For these thinkers, contrasting the role that Parliament played in the British constitution with the role that Congress played in the American constitution only helped elucidate this. In these varied ways, the example of America played a significant role in informing extraparliamentary British political thought on political reform.

Having seen the impact of America on this aspect of the extraparliamentary debate over British political reform, we will now turn to another aspect of the debate outside parliament: how popular speakers drew on the example of the United States at mass gatherings between 1865 and 1867 to convince audiences of both electors and non-electors of their stance on reform. Having then explored the reform debates taking place outside of Parliament, we will then turn to examine the parliamentary debates that actually produced the Second Reform Act itself and the influence of the United States on them.

Chapter Four – Speeches and Demonstrations: America and the Extraparliamentary

Campaign over British Political Reform

Introduction

If I were addressing you for the first time it might be necessary for me to dilate upon the future; but I think I may with propriety found my appeal for the continuance of your favour on a reference to the past, and to the results of the course pursued by the Government of which during the last six years I have had the honour of being a member. During those six years, notwithstanding...the severe distress which prevailed in some of the manufacturing districts in consequence of the great diminution of the supply of cotton from North America, the United Kingdom...has enjoyed a remarkable degree of progressive prosperity...How long the ministry of which I have the honour to be a member may continue to direct the affairs of this great nation must depend on the will of the Parliament now about to be elected; but I think I may be allowed to say...that a just judgement of our past administration will entitle us to the same measure of good will which has been extended to us by the Parliament now dissolved.¹

It was with this appeal to the past that Lord Palmerston addressed the electors of Tiverton at the start of the 1865 general election. Having represented the people of Tiverton in seven successive parliaments, this would be the last election the Liberal elder statesman would stand in. After delivering an eighty-seat majority and almost sixty per cent of the popular vote, four months later Palmerston would die in office, his death marking the end of an era in British politics. While Palmerston was securing the continued support of the electors of

¹ *Evening Standard*, 8 July 1865, 3.

Tiverton, his fellow Liberal colleague Gladstone was facing electoral defeat in his constituency of Oxford University. Gladstone's vocal support for political reform and the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland had alienated him from an electorate largely made up of Anglican clergymen. Palmerston had supported Gladstone's campaign in Oxford, hoping that local public opinion would constrain him. Writing to the Earl of Shaftesbury, Palmerston summarised his fears about his possible successor as leader of the party: 'he is a dangerous man, keep him in Oxford, and he is partially muzzled; but send him elsewhere, and he will run wild'.² Defeat in Oxford, however, forced Gladstone 'elsewhere' and on 18 July he arrived in Manchester to stand for South Lancashire. Proceeding to the Free Trade Hall, Gladstone began to address his new audience of electors:

At last, my friends, I am come amongst you. And I am come – to use an expression which has of late become very famous, and which, if I judge the matter rightly, is not likely soon to be forgotten – I am come among you 'unmuzzled'³

The hall, capable of holding thousands, erupted into prolonged and enthusiastic cheering. H.C.G. Matthew argues that, in this episode, Gladstone skilfully dramatized the role of popular politician which he had cultivated during the 1860s, capitalising on changes in the nature of national and local politics that had made possible the emergence of a new kind of popular politician'.⁴ The way in which politicians engaged with the public during elections was undergoing a fundamental transition at this time, moving away from the traditional confrontational hustings that had characterised eighteenth and early nineteenth-century

² Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G.* (London, 1892), 604.

³ *Speeches and Addresses Delivered at the Election of 1865 by the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.* (London, 1865), 1.

⁴ H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809-1898* (Oxford, 1997), 129.

electioneering and towards a model of mass platform speaking and election meetings.⁵ For Andrew Robertson, the greatest challenge facing both Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century was how to integrate a mass audience into meaningful political debate.⁶

This chapter will explore this relationship between speakers and their audiences in the extraparliamentary campaign over British political reform, examining the degree to which America influenced and informed the way they appealed to the masses to secure public support for their arguments. In doing so we will establish a key element of the domestic political context in which the parliamentary debates over the 1866 and 1867 reform bills occurred. First, we must understand the changing nature of public political oratory in this period with the growth of regular extraparliamentary speech-making by politicians and the significance of this for the exchange between parliamentary and extraparliamentary politics. Central to this was the significance of the mass platform.

The term platform began to find common currency in both Britain and the United States in the 1820s and 1830s. Platform speaking referred to a particular kind of public political oratory in which the speaker stood to address their audience on a temporary piece of raised flooring or platform.⁷ In the years just prior to the passage of the Second Reform Act, the relationship between electoral candidates and the public was beginning to evolve as more candidates became willing to utilise the platform in their campaigning, specifically using mass meetings to connect with the public and deliver political speeches which through press reporting would then reach a wider audience. Palmerston was aware of the power of public

⁵ This transition is explored in Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, ch1 and ch2.

⁶ Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 1.

⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, 'platform,' definitions 7a (<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/145374?rskey=WjrII3&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>), accessed 23rd September 2021.

opinion. Indeed, A.J.P. Taylor argues that Palmerston owed most of his success solely to public opinion.⁸ Palmerston frequently tried to gauge the opinion of the educated middle classes and cultivated relationships with different newspapers in an effort to influence it. During the late 1840s and early 1850s, Palmerston faced several attempts to remove him from office as a result of Parliamentary opposition to his foreign policy and each time he would court public opinion to strengthen his position in Westminster. Most notably at the height of the Crimean War, David Brown concludes that it was Palmerston 'rather than any of his rivals who carried the bulk of the newspapers with him', with a public image based on his foreign policy.⁹ However, Palmerston's engagement with popular politics was ultimately marked by, as Jon Lawrence argues, a distinctly cautious approach; Palmerston would visit the provinces to address public meetings of 'carefully selected' working men to secure a good response in the local press, but would refrain from a 'full-blooded engagement with the world of popular politics'.¹⁰

In the first half of the nineteenth century, most political figures were reluctant to use the techniques of the mass platform with its connotations of radicalism and popular protest.

There were some important precursors like George Canning who as Foreign Secretary would regularly use public meetings to address crowds in his constituency of Liverpool and explain the government's foreign policy to them. However, Canning was derided by his fellow Tories for his willingness to embrace speechifying, with Jonathan Parry noting how Canning was criticised at the time for making himself ridiculous by 'going round the country...discussing the acts and intentions of the government'.¹¹ Lawrence similarly remarks that traditional

⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, *Essays in English History* (London, 1976), 113-114.

⁹ David Brown, 'Compelling but not Controlling?: Palmerston and the Press, 1846-1855', *History*, 86:281 (2001), 54.

¹⁰ Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, 39.

¹¹ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, 40.

Tories were appalled by Canning's use of public meetings to outline government policy.¹² Public agitations around the Great Reform Act had established the platform as an important institution of British political life,¹³ but it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that more politicians came to see the electoral appeal of the platform. With fewer uncontested seats and larger electorates, candidates increasingly came under pressure to address their potential constituents. Platform speaking also allowed political speakers to engage non-electors. Joseph Meisel concludes that as the momentum for progressive extensions of the franchise built throughout the century, large platform speaking events provided 'political as well as experiential satisfaction to non-electors'.¹⁴ As David Steele has pointed out, where Palmerston led, by courting public opinion to bolster his position in Parliament, particularly during the Crimean War, Gladstone and others would follow and go further.¹⁵ Conservative figures were also beginning to see the value of the platform during Lord Derby's leadership. Meisel cites the influence of public speeches by Derby in the late 1850s in establishing a trend in which Conservatives used the platform to deliver 'important statements of policy to the party and the country'.¹⁶ Public oratory was gradually becoming a key component of the interplay between parliamentary politics and extraparliamentary politics.

While many parliamentary figures may have been slow off the mark to use the platform to reach a wider audience, extraparliamentary campaign groups were not. By the time that the Reform League and the National Reform Union were founded in the 1860s, there was already a long history of extraparliamentary groups utilising the platform to appeal for public support.

¹² Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, 229-230.

¹³ As documented in the first historical study of the platform as a political phenomenon in the late nineteenth century by Henry Jephson in *The Platform: Its Rise and Progress* (London, 1892), 97-148.

¹⁴ Meisel, *Public Speech*, 274.

¹⁵ David Steele, 'Gladstone and Palmerston, 1855-1865', in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone, Politics and Religion: a Collection of Founder's Day Lecturers delivered at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, 1967-83* (London, 1985), 118-120.

¹⁶ Meisel, *Public Speech*, 234-235.

Platform radicalism had its origins in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, illustrated by the campaigns of figures like Henry Hunt and Feargus O'Connor which sought working-class support. Platform radicalism was different to earlier forms of popular politics. Nicholas Rogers has shown how radical platform speakers 'eschewed riot and rabble-mongering', instead encouraging their audiences to be orderly, hoping to convince others by 'the persevering efforts of reason', and employed a more democratic language to do so.¹⁷ Improvements in rail transportation allowed not just national radical figures like Hunt, O'Connor and William Cobbett to travel the country and address mass crowds, but also other lesser-known reform agitators like Robert Gammage, Robert Lowery, Henry Vincent and Richard Pilling. For Humphrey Southall, it was this greater geographical mobility that brought forth an 'artisan sense of community that was national rather than local, and popular political movements with a national programme'.¹⁸ One such budding artisan was George Howell who would go on to become Secretary of the Reform League at its formation. After joining the Chartists in 1848, just as the movement began to enter its decline, Howell, a bricklayer turned shoemaker, would arrive in London in July 1855 with a letter of introduction from the Bristol YMCA and it was in London that he would become fully immersed in working-class politics, forming connections with other artisans from the provinces, like George Potter and Randal Cremer.¹⁹

Radicals struggled to use the platform in the 1820s, following legislation designed to curtail the development of platform radicalism introduced in the wake of the Peterloo massacre in

¹⁷ Nicolas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 211-212.

¹⁸ Humphrey Southall, 'Mobility, the Artisan Community and Popular Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in Gerry Kearns and Charles W. J. Withers (eds.), *Urbanising Britain: Essays on Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (1991), 129.

¹⁹ For more on Howell's political apprenticeship in London and his background as an artisan see Fred Marc Leventhal, *Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics* (London, 1971), 1-42.

1819, the so-called Six Acts,²⁰ but in the 1830s and 1840s the mass platform was a key part of Chartist campaigns. The mass platform would also be adopted by the Anti-Corn Law League who adapted the tactic to suit their style of extraparliamentary campaigning. Meisel sets out how the Anti-Corn Law League took the distinguishing feature of the radical mass platform, ‘highly visible demonstrations of popular support,’ and added new features such as focusing on a single issue and drawing on speakers who were already parliamentarians.²¹ Dissenting pressure groups like the Liberation Society, founded in 1844, adopted similar methods in their campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England with public meetings where speakers embraced a rhetorical style influenced by nonconformist preaching. A number of the speakers who took part in and helped developed the concept of platform campaigning were Nonconformist ministers or had Nonconformist backgrounds; John Bright is one such example. This was the model for the mass platform that extraparliamentary campaign groups like the Reform League and the National Reform Union inherited in the 1860s.

This chapter will analyse how America manifested itself in the extraparliamentary campaign over British political reform between 1865 and 1867. We will see how in their oratory, speakers drew on the example of the United States at mass gatherings to convince both electors and non-electors of their stance on reform. To do this we will draw on two sources of popular, political interactions that took place nationwide: the speeches of electoral candidates for the 1865 general election in which reform was a central issue, and the speeches of key

²⁰ Collectively known as the Six Acts, The Unlawful Drilling Act 1819, The Seizure of Arms Act, the Misdemeanours Act, The Seditious Meetings Act, The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act and The Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act, were designed to suppress meetings for radical reform and were only gradually repealed. The impact of the Six Acts and Peterloo on the development of the radical mass platform is explored further in Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016), 82-105.

²¹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, 238.

figures at predominantly working-class reform demonstrations that took place between 1866 and 1867.

The general election of 1865 saw 854,856 votes cast across the United Kingdom, up from 565,500 votes in 1859. In terms of candidates, 922 stood for election: 516 were Liberals and 406 were Conservatives. 303 candidates won unopposed leaving 355 seats up for contention.²² Recently, historians have begun to challenge the pervading idea that the 1865 election was dominated by local contests and that there was no major national issue at play.²³ Looking at Liberal election addresses, Kristin Zimmerman argues that reform was a marked aspect of the election with sixty per cent of Liberal candidates using their addresses to highlight political reform as a key issue.²⁴ Robert Saunders similarly concludes from an analysis of printed election addresses in *The Times* that fifty-three Conservatives and seventy-two Liberals discussed political reform.²⁵ By moving beyond printed election addresses, however, to examine the contents of election speeches themselves, delivered by candidates to mass audiences seeking their support, we will be able to see not just how reform was a recurring feature of popular, political oratory in 1865 but crucially for this thesis how the example of America influenced the popular case for and against reform.

The significance of the United States for nineteenth-century British popular reform politics around the time of the Second Reform Act has not been fully appreciated in the existing literature. Margot Finn's discussion of radical working-class politics in *After Chartism*

²² F. W. S. Craig, 'Table 1.09: General Election 1865', in Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher (eds.), *British Electoral Facts, 1832-1999* (London, 2012), 9-10.

²³ More traditional accounts of the 1865 election include Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 21 and Smith, *Second Reform Bill*, 50-55.

²⁴ Kristin Zimmerman, 'Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *English Historical Review* 118:479 (2003), 1193-1194.

²⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 186.

(1993), overlooks the influence of America, instead focusing on the impact of events in Italy and Poland, despite the fact that events in America had a far more direct effect on the economic livelihoods of the British working class than the nationalist campaigns of Italy and Poland.²⁶ Eugenio Biagini's *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform* (1992) contains a short reference to the influence of America on British politics, however his focus is not on the subject of franchise reform but rather the impact of the Civil War on the broader Trade Union Movement.²⁷ Antony Taylor does consider the relevance of European and American examples for British radicals with respect to their republicanism, rather than the impact on their campaign for franchise reform, although he concludes that British opposition to the throne in the nineteenth century was 'grounded firmly in a nativist historical current and local traditions of perceived royal wrongdoing'.²⁸ More recently, Katrina Navickas has shown the value in studying the influence of America on nineteenth-century popular politics. In *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place* (2016), Navickas argues that during the first half of the nineteenth century, restrictions on the freedom to meet and to speak in Britain, introduced in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre, caused many radicals to look to wider horizons, taking advantage of their links with political and religious dissenters who had sought exile in America.²⁹ Where Navickas' account concludes in 1848 with Chartists becoming disillusioned with America over a lack of genuine democracy there and the persistence of slavery, this chapter develops this argument further by showing how particularly after the Civil War radical working-class reform movements like the Reform League still looked to America as a source of inspiration.

²⁶ Finn, *After Chartism*, 203-217.

²⁷ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, 69-83.

²⁸ Antony Taylor, 'Down with the Crown': *British Anti-Monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), 14-15.

²⁹ Navickas, *Protest and Politics*, 306-309.

The Reform League, founded in 1865, and the National Reform Union, founded in 1864, were both formed to campaign for franchise reform; the Reform League pressing for manhood suffrage while the National Reform Union was more associated with household suffrage. Both groups were heavily influenced by the methods and tactics of the Anti-Corn Law League. In his biography of George Howell, Fred Leventhal notes that both organisations preferred to promote their arguments through education and persuasion rather than embracing more incendiary means, hoping to pressure politicians by gaining support from the people.³⁰ The Reform League had more branch associations than the National Reform Union (400 compared to 150) and employed a more populist approach to its campaigning, appealing to working-class audiences with its composition of radicals, former Chartists and trade unionists, while the National Reform Union, comprising mostly of liberal reformers, enjoyed support from more middle-class audiences, owing to its reputation as a more intellectual organisation that sought to bring pressure for reform by lobbying parliamentarians and influential society figures. Though short-lived, both organisations were instrumental in organising extraparliamentary demonstrations and speeches on reform around the time of the Second Reform Act. Through these public events, they hoped to place pressure on parliament and affect the outcome of parliamentary debates over the 1866 and 1867 reform bills. The Government certainly took notice and on several occasions, most notably over the Hyde Park demonstrations in July 1866 and May 1867, the Home Secretary, Spencer Horatio Walpole, came close to using violence, through a combination of the military and a force of special constables, to disperse the meetings.

Throughout this chapter we will see how Conservatives, Liberals and Radicals utilised America to gain public support in their extraparliamentary campaigns about political reform.

³⁰ Leventhal, *Respectable Radical*, 57-64.

Having considered this crucial aspect of the domestic political context in which parliamentary debates over reform would take place, we will then move on to exploring the parliamentary debates themselves in the next chapter.

Conservative resistance to Americanisation

In advance of the approaching election, Benjamin Disraeli set the tone for the Conservative campaign in his address to the electors of Buckinghamshire, the seat he had held since 1847. Disraeli criticised the Liberal Government for what he saw as their continued attack on the British constitution in church and state, ‘invariably originated by the party on whose support their existence, as a Ministry, depends’. By this ‘party’ Disraeli was referring to those Radical MPs who he believed were too heavily influenced by the example of democratic institutions such as those found in the United States. For Disraeli, it was imperative that any reform legislation should act in the ‘spirit of the English Constitution’, ensuring that the best of all classes would be enfranchised while avoiding the fate of democracies in which the least enlightened class tyrannised the rest.³¹ With Palmerston’s health failing, Conservatives feared that the Liberal party would soon shift in a more radical direction under Gladstone’s leadership, and that if the Liberals won the election this would give them the power to introduce a wide ranging programme of democratic reform. Believing an election to be imminent, Derby had written to Disraeli in October 1864 about the vital importance of the next election which would decide ‘the fate of parties, at all events, for *my* time’.³² The idea of the election as a choice between Derby’s conservatism and Gladstone’s radicalism was reinforced in the press. Readers of Conservative periodicals like *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, *Quarterly Review*, and the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*

³¹ *The Times*, 22 May 1865, 5; *Evening Standard*, 22 May 1865, 5.

³² M. G. Wiebe, Mary S. Millar, Ann P. Robson, and Ellen L. Hawman (eds.), *Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1860-1864* (Toronto, 2009), 373-374.

were left in no doubt that Liberal candidates at the election were not Palmerston's, but Gladstone's, and that it was for the constituencies to choose between Derby and Gladstone.³³ A liberal majority, *Blackwood's* remarked, would mean woe for the nation when its destiny depended on Gladstone and the type of cabinet he would assemble.³⁴

In the 1865 general election, Conservative candidates displayed an overwhelming resistance in their popular rhetoric to any kind of reform that could be seen to be Americanising British political institutions. Almost fifty Conservative candidates referenced America when explaining their stance on political reform to audiences of both voters and non-voters. Jonathan Parry has argued that between the late 1840s and 1886, the Liberal Party was generally more successful in presenting itself as the more reliable interpreter of the historic English constitution, while the Conservative Party struggled to project itself as a patriotic party by stressing its attachment to traditional institutions.³⁵ However, an analysis of Conservative election speeches during the 1865 election shows that in the aftermath of the American Civil War this status quo was already beginning to shift, earlier than the break point identified by Parry in the mid-1880s. Specifically in English constituencies, Conservative candidates framed the election to their audiences as a choice on reform between the Conservative party who would preserve the ancient constitution of England and the Liberal party who would embrace the democratic constitution of America. Nominating Robert Fowler as Conservative candidate for the City of London constituency, Henry H. Gibbs contrasted the Conservatives who would uphold 'the glorious constitution of England'

³³ 'The Past and Coming Parliaments', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 98:597 (July 1865), 121-136; 'The Six Year Old Parliament', *Quarterly Review*, 118:235 (July 1865), 280-295; 'The Liberal Party', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 19:502 (10 June 1865), 683-684; 'The Conservatives', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 19:502 (10 June 1865), 685-686.

³⁴ 'Past and Coming Parliaments', *Blackwood's*, 136; See also *The Times*, 12 July 1865, 7.

³⁵ Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), 10-11.

with the Liberals who would ‘imitate the destructive democracy of America,’ inviting the electorate to choose whether they would have ‘the industry, intellect, and wealth of this country represented, or swamp the constituencies of England by an indiscriminate lowering of the franchise’.³⁶

The American Civil War had a noticeable impact on Conservative popular rhetoric about reform at the election with speakers invoking images of despotism and anarchy. John Kelk, who went on to win the seat of Harwich from the Liberals, used the context of the Civil War to take aim at Radical Liberals in one of his speeches, accusing them of favouring sweeping measures of reform which would lead to ‘disturbances, like those which now, unfortunately, prevail in America,’ a claim which was met with cheers from the assembled crowd.³⁷ Future Secretary of State for India and eventual Prime Minister Lord Salisbury similarly argued to the voters of Stamford that few who looked at the present desolate state of America would want its institutions transferred here, echoing the view he had expressed earlier in the year in the *Quarterly Review* that the war in America had ‘blown the whole fabric of Democratic theory into the air’.³⁸ The United States had demonstrated for Conservative candidates that universal suffrage meant ‘universal suffering’.³⁹ These Conservatives were developing further

³⁶ *Morning Advertiser*, 11 July 1865, 2; *Morning Post*, 11 July 1865, 2; *London City Press*, 15 July 1865, 2; Arthur Charles Innes offered the voters of Newry a similar choice warning that a Radical Government would ‘introduce a democracy, such as they beheld in America...the frightful results of which they had so much reason to deplore’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 July 1865, 3.

³⁷ *Essex Standard*, 12 July 1865, 3; See also Watkins Williams-Wynn in Denbighshire, *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 24 July 1865, 6 and Frederick Hervey-Bathurst in South Wiltshire, *Bath Chronicle*, 20 July 1865, 3.

³⁸ *Morning Herald*, 12 July 1865, 6; *Quarterly Review*, 117:234, (April 1865), 542.

³⁹ In proposing Charles Williams-Wynn for Montgomery, Rev. R. J. Harrison argued that in his view the kind of manhood suffrage he believed Gladstone favoured had led to universal suffering and anarchy in America, *Eddowes’s Shrewsbury Journal*, 15 July 1865, 2; similarly Sir George Beaumont, in proposing John Manners for North Leicestershire, advanced to a cheering audience that an extension of the franchise would end in a similar situation to that of America where ‘instead of vote by ballot and universal suffrage they had had vote by bullet and universal suffering’, *Loughborough Monitor*, 20 July 1865, 1.

the connection explored in chapter two between democratic institutions and the outbreak of the Civil War which the Conservative press had sought to make during the conflict.

This is not to suggest that all Conservatives at the election were opposed to any kind of reform. Certain Conservative candidates were prepared to support an extension of the franchise, but they were against any measure that could be seen to be emulating the kind of universal manhood suffrage found in the United States. In the Southern West Riding of Yorkshire, for example, Walter Spencer-Stanhope expressed how he was prepared to support some extension of the franchise, but he objected to reforming the political institutions of the country until they resembled those of America.⁴⁰ Also in Yorkshire, William Duncombe spoke of his love for the institutions of his country, suggesting to voters ‘by all means renovate and improve them, but don’t destroy them’.⁴¹ In their popular rhetoric, Conservatives used the example of America to demonstrate that there needed to be limits on who could exercise the franchise. In Shropshire North, Charles Cust was glad to extend the vote to the ‘more intelligent classes’, but with the example of America in front of him he would not allow ‘any man without distinction to have his trust’.⁴² Americanisation was the great fear of Conservative candidates, and this was what they implored the electorate to vote against.

Without Palmerston, Conservatives argued that the Liberal party would fall under the control of Liberals like John Bright and Gladstone who they portrayed as advocates of American ideals including a franchise that would prioritise numbers over everything else including

⁴⁰ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 July 1865, 2; In South Lancashire, Algernon Egerton spoke similarly about the need to contend against that ‘spirit of democracy’ inspired by America, *Warrington Guardian*, 15 July 1865, 5.

⁴¹ William Duncombe in North Riding of Yorkshire, *Yorkshire Gazette*, 22 July 1865, 4.

⁴² *Eddowes Journal*, 15 July 1865, 3; *Eddowes Journal*, 19 July 1865, 6; See also John Hardy in Dartmouth on asking voters to beware any changes to the constitution which resembled that of America, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 14 July 1865, 2.

landed interests, wealth, status and education. While proposing John Perry-Watlington for the seat of South Essex, Thomas Chisenhale-Marsh warned the public that without Palmerston to restrain the Radical element of the Liberal party, the outcome of the election risked placing the government in the hands of men like Gladstone and Bright ‘the new apostles of American liberty, who in their love of democracy and their greed for power had determined that matter should rule over mind in England’.⁴³ Richard Benyon similarly saw the election as a choice between a moderate Conservative government led by Derby or a radical Liberal government led by Gladstone, supported by figures like Bright, Lord Russell and Thomas Milner Gibson, and invited the enthusiastic crowd assembled in Berkshire to consider: ‘is there no difference between our glorious constitution and the American democracy which Mr Bright considers the model government, or the universal suffrage which Mr Gladstone’s definition of the franchise virtually amounts to’?⁴⁴ The kind of universal suffrage favoured by this element of the Liberal party was held to be a gateway either to anarchy or despotism.⁴⁵

The shift in patriotism from a force associated with liberal radicalism to a force associated with conservative constitutionalism has been attributed by Hugh Cunningham and Robert Blake to Disraeli’s leadership of the Conservative party in the 1870s and 1880s. In the post-1867 reformed system, they both argue that Disraeli sought through an appeal to patriotism to consolidate the party’s appeal to the middle classes while also securing a proportion of the new urban working-class vote.⁴⁶ However, this debate has earlier origins than is accepted in

⁴³ *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 21 July 1865, 9; See also Michael Hicks-Beach’s warning in East Gloucestershire about the threat posed by Britain’s ‘ultra-democrats’ and their model republic in America, *Gloucester Journal*, 22 July 1865, 6.

⁴⁴ *Evening Mail*, 19 July 1865, 1; See also Robert Stayner Holford’s speech in East Gloucestershire, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 25 July 1865, 2.

⁴⁵ See the speech of Edward William Cox in Taunton where he argued to applause that if Bright and his party got into power ‘they would go in for universal suffrage, which in America had utterly destroyed all independence, and in its place there was now military despotism’, *Taunton Courier*, 12 July 1865, 5.

⁴⁶ Hugh Cunningham, ‘Language of Patriotism’, 21-22; Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 160-161; See also Blake, *The Conservative Party*, 124, 274.

the existing historiography. The 1865 election represented an early effort by Conservative candidates to wrest control of patriotism from the Liberal party, specifically by laying claim to patriotic constitutionalism.

Conservative candidates used their popular oratory to position the United States as a kind of political 'other', to use the term coined by Edward Said and then used by Linda Colley to analyse British national identity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁴⁷ against which the English constitutional setup could be defined. The ballot, a staple of American voting, was held to be inconsistent with the English character.⁴⁸ English politics, according to Conservative candidates, should always be conducted in a free and open manner, not in secret.⁴⁹ Audiences at Conservative speeches were told that there was little to fear from a comparison of the two constitutions. In South Lancashire, Charles Turner put forward that the Conservatives would fight to preserve the British constitution which ensured a freedom of speech and action that would not be possible in Republican America with its democratic institutions, the British form of government being 'able to bear the strain which the American Republic has failed to support itself under'.⁵⁰ 'Old England' could not exist under a system that encouraged mob rule.⁵¹ England had thrived under its existing political institutions which had kept the nation safe and prosperous, while America, with its universal suffrage, had just

⁴⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 1; Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31:4 (1992), 309-329; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), 17.

⁴⁸ Bruce L. Kinzer, 'The Un-Englishness of the Secret Ballot', *Albion*, 10:3 (1978), 237-256.

⁴⁹ See examples: William Anderson Rose in Southampton, *Hampshire Independent*, 12 July 1865, 2 and *Hampshire Advertiser*, 15 July 1865, 6; George Frederick Holroyd in Northampton, *Morning Herald*, 12 July 1865, 3; and Alfred Marten in Nottingham, *Nottingham Journal*, 12 July 1865, 3 and *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 14 July 1865, 9.

⁵⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 17 July 1865, 4; *Liverpool Mail*, 22 July 1865, 6; See also James Hartley in Sunderland, *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 12 July 1865, 6.

⁵¹ James Stanhope argued this to the voters of North Lincolnshire, *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 21 July 1865, 6.

sacrificed thousands of lives and was no better for the struggle, according to Conservatives.⁵² Over in West Kent, William Hart Dyke argued for the importance of freedom of speech for both candidates and voters, contrasting how in Britain ‘any man may give expression to his opinions’, while in America ‘when a man puts forth his opinion the only consolation he has is in being tarred and feathered’.⁵³ By looking at the United States, speakers invited the public to consider the kind of government they would have under universal suffrage. Power would be taken from the best educated and most respected, discouraging the upper and middle classes from taking an interest in politics, and placed with those from a labouring background who had little time to study government and would instead entrust so-called ‘adventurers’ to be their representatives, leading to increased expenditure, corruption and war.⁵⁴ Americanising British political institutions through universal suffrage risked pushing the ‘best men’ out from public life.⁵⁵

The quality of voters under the respective constitutions was also a recurring feature of Conservative popular rhetoric. In one particular instance in South Durham, the proposer for the Conservative candidate, Charles Surtees, accused the Liberal candidate, Frederick Beaumont, of wanting to admit to the franchise ‘the drunkard, the spendthrift, and the man of no character, as the universal suffrage and democracy of America did’.⁵⁶ Surtees went on to win the seat. Speaking to the electorate of Cheshire Northern, Wilbraham Egerton stated his

⁵² For examples of this rhetoric see Charles Newdegate in North Warwickshire, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 15 July 1865, 5 and *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1865, 6; Edward Fellowes in Huntingdonshire, *Cambridge Chronicle*, 15 July 1865, 8.

⁵³ *Maidstone and Kentish Journal*, 12 July 1865, 3; See also the proposal speech for Henry Lowther in Westmorland on how happy and free the people were living under the British constitution compared to those living under the American constitution, *Cumberland and Westmorland Advertiser*, 18 July 1865, 2.

⁵⁴ For examples of this message see John Trollope in South Lincolnshire, *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 21 July 1865, 6; Gerard Noel in Rutland, *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 21 July 1865, 7; William Amherst in West Kent, *Maidstone and Kentish Journal*, 17 July 1865, 2.

⁵⁵ Percy Wyndham in West Cumberland, *Carlisle Journal*, 18 July 1865, 3.

⁵⁶ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 19 July 1865, 2; In Sheffield, James Stuart-Wortley similarly was ‘far from wishing every loafer to have the vote as in America’, *Sheffield Telegraph*, 10 July 1865, 3.

belief that it was the duty of Conservatives to resist all attempts to ‘Americanise our institutions, and to give power to numbers alone to swamp the intelligence and education of the country’.⁵⁷ Conservative candidates particularly in English rural county seats now presented themselves to their electors as the true interpreters of the English constitution, painting their Liberal rivals as admirers of an un-English, American-inspired, constitutional ‘other’. In this, these candidates were utilising the framework developed by some of the key public intellectuals explored in chapter three, in which the English constitution served as the embodiment of Anglo-Saxon principles while the United States, by embracing a wider franchise, had departed from the continuity and stability of Anglo-Saxon traditions.

Opposed to the kind of universal manhood suffrage found in America, Conservatives argued that if Parliament gave in to public agitations for reform, this progression would inevitably end in an American-style democracy, a process which needed to be halted.⁵⁸ In North Warwickshire, William Bromley-Davenport lamented the idea that the ‘fine old English constitution’ could be subject to the tricks of ‘American quack medicines [which] would not do for us’.⁵⁹ American-style reform risked disenfranchising the most qualified voters by ‘swamping’ the electorate with the numerical majority of the lower classes.⁶⁰ In making this argument, these speakers were drawing from the examples that British travel writers had recorded of ‘tyrannical’ majorities influencing the outcome of American elections and candidates desperate to align their views with those of the majority. The dangers of the tyranny of the majority had similarly been explored at length by key public intellectuals. America was interpreted as a warning, with candidates urging the public to understand that

⁵⁷ *Northwich Guardian*, 22 July 1865, 2.

⁵⁸ For examples of this see William Cargill in Berwick-upon-Tweed, *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 12 July 1865, 7; Thomas Fremantle in Bristol, *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 10 July 1865, 3.

⁵⁹ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 24 July 1865, 6.

⁶⁰ Charles Yorke in Cambridgeshire, *Cambridge Chronicle*, 22 July 1865, 7.

following this example risked losing freedom of speech and expression at election time with the upper and middle classes removing themselves from British politics.⁶¹ These arguments particularly resonated with Conservative audiences in Lancashire and the North West. This is significant since Cunningham argues that Lancashire Conservatism, known for co-opting the symbols of radical patriotism in the third quarter of the nineteenth century (including roast beef and plum pudding, the Union Jack, Rule Britannia and John Bull) would serve as a model and a source of inspiration for Disraeli's formulation of Conservative patriotism in the 1870s.⁶² In 1865, Conservative candidates used their popular rhetoric to argue that only they would preserve the existing constitution against the threat of Americanisation posed by the radicals of the Liberal party.

In the end the Conservative party lost the 1865 election, however they did significantly increase their number of votes to 346,035, up from 193,232 in 1859.⁶³ The Conservative message against Americanisation, well received in the counties, had failed to secure enough popular support in the boroughs. Reflecting on the outcome, Conservative-leaning publications sought to analyse why the party had lost. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* concluded that while Conservative opinion had spread throughout the country and among the constituencies, it could not be sufficiently roused until a threat appeared imminent: 'the bulk of our Conservative constituencies will come forth from their seclusion when they are satisfied...that democracy is seeking to ride rough-shod over the other estates of the realm'.⁶⁴

The *Saturday Review* maintained that if it came to a choice between radical Liberals and the

⁶¹ For examples of America as a warning in Conservative popular rhetoric see John Pakington in *Droitwich, Bromsgrove and Droitwich Messenger*, 15 July 1865, 4; Frederick Stanley in *Preston, Preston Chronicle and Lancashire Advertiser*, 15 July 1865, 4; and Charles Cumming-Bruce in *Elginshire and Nairnshire, Elgin and Morayshire Courier*, 21 July 1865, 6.

⁶² Hugh Cunningham, 'The Conservative Party and Patriotism', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (2nd ed, London, 2014), 308-309.

⁶³ Craig, 'Table 1.08: General Election 1859' and 'Table 1.09: General Election 1865', 9-10.

⁶⁴ 'The Late Elections', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 98:598 (August 1865), 257-268.

Conservatives, the people would still support the Conservatives and that they were well placed to form an administration if divisions over reform caused the next Liberal government to collapse, remarking that if the government ‘had undertaken to propose a large measure of Reform, its inevitable defeat would have made room, not for Mr Bright and his ‘allies,’ but for Lord Derby and Mr Disraeli’.⁶⁵

Losing the election sparked conversation between Derby and Disraeli as to the future of the party, the prospect of a Gladstone ministry, and the fate of the constitution. Derby wrote to Disraeli of his fears about the prevailing ‘democratic spirit’ in metropolitan areas and borough seats, his worry that the House of Lords would be unable to resist and forced to support unpalatable reform measures, and his measured hope that when Gladstone tried to form a ‘Radical Government’ this would alarm the middle classes and force a reaction, although he believed that such a reaction would come too late for him, leaving him with ‘no prospect of any state of affairs which shall again place me at the head of a government’.

Disraeli responded by first offering his resignation as leader of the opposition in the House of Commons, an offer Derby rejected, and then setting out his advice on how to ‘facilitate the future’. Disraeli urged Derby to urgently reach out to his connections in the Liberal party who were inclined more to Whig Liberalism than Radical Liberalism and make them understand that they were prepared to form ‘an anti-revolutionary Government on a broad basis’.⁶⁶

Positioning the party as ‘anti-revolutionary’ in response to the threat of Americanisation was an extension of the campaign they had just fought. This would become key as it would allow the party to capitalise on the growing tensions in the Liberal party between Whigs and Radicals that the election would also expose, as we will see. Despite losing the election, the

⁶⁵ ‘After-Election Speeches’, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 20:512 (19 August 1865), 224-225.

⁶⁶ M. G. Wiebe, Mary S. Millar, Ann P. Robson, and Ellen L. Hawman (eds.), *Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1865-1867* (Toronto, 2013), 28-32.

Conservative party had made significant gains in English constituencies and through their popular rhetoric had formed the platform which they would take into the parliamentary reform debates in 1866 and which would affect how the party would approach forming their own reform bill in 1867.

Liberal splits: a party divided?

In May 1865, a group of Radical electors convened in Carlisle to issue an appeal to the Liberal MP John Bright to ask him what position the party would take on reform at the imminent election. Bright had developed a reputation as a Radical through his oratory against the corn laws, co-founding the Anti-Corn Law League with Richard Cobden in 1838. In his response, Bright blamed the lack of progress on political reform on Palmerston, who he criticised for not being a real Liberal, and expressed his hope that at the coming election Radical Liberal voters would ‘endeavour to bring their members up to the point of refusing to support a Government not willing to fulfil the pledges of 1859 and 1860. When it is a question of Reform or expulsion from office, the Whig statesmen will decide in favour of Reform’.⁶⁷ Through this letter, Bright illustrated the growing tensions in the Liberal party between those who adhered to the Whig tradition and those who were inclined towards radicalism. These tensions would be on full display in Liberal popular rhetoric in the 1865 election campaign.

The ‘democratic spirit’ of metropolitan borough seats much feared by Conservatives like Derby was also sensed by Liberal candidates. Reflecting on his unexpected victory in Westminster in his autobiography, John Stuart Mill recalled that during the contest he had made voters aware of his opinion on the suffrage, particularly his conviction that women

⁶⁷ ‘On Reform’, *The Public Letters of the Right Hon. John Bright, MP* (London, 1885), 96-97.

were entitled to representation in Parliament on the same terms with men. He believed it was the first time that such a doctrine had ever been mentioned to English electors and that at the time nothing ‘appeared more unlikely than that a candidate whose professions and conduct set so completely at defiance all ordinary notions of electioneering, should nevertheless be elected’. Yet he found that the audience proved receptive to his honesty and his ideas about the suffrage, going on to be elected with over 4,000 votes and a majority of seven hundred over his Conservative competitor.⁶⁸ In Calne, by contrast, Robert Lowe used his address to warn electors against ‘great organic changes in institutions’ which had been able to combine order, liberty, stability and progress ‘in a greater degree than the institutions of any other nation’.⁶⁹ Just a few months prior to the election, Lowe had expressed in Parliament his view that universal suffrage in the United States had made the working classes the masters of the political situation, acting as one compact mass against the institutions and property of the country. He despaired at the thought of making concessions against ‘the spirit of democracy’ in his own country.⁷⁰

The 1865 general election exposed splits in the Liberal party over the role that America should play in the popular debate over British reform. The influence of America was particularly felt in the speeches of Liberal candidates contesting urban, borough constituencies, with candidates offering competing interpretations of what America meant for the cause of British political reform.

There were many kinds of Liberals contesting seats in the 1865 election, but broadly speaking they fitted into three traditions: Whig Liberals, Peelites, and Radicals. During the

⁶⁸ Mill, *Autobiography*, 196-200.

⁶⁹ Robert Lowe, *Speeches and Letters on Reform: A Preface* (London, 1867), 19-20.

⁷⁰ Lowe, *Speeches and Letters*, 54-56.

nineteenth century, Whigs, Peelites and Radicals had gradually merged to form the Liberal Party,⁷¹ but the 1865 election demonstrated that there were still divisions between these different factions in how they viewed the political salience of the United States. Whig Liberals tended to be from an aristocratic background and were staunch supporters of Palmerston. The Peelites, liberal Conservatives who had split from the more protectionist-oriented Conservatives in 1846 over the repeal of the Corn Laws, could be identified by their commitment to the principles of free trade. Several ministers in Palmerston's cabinet had been leading Peelites, including Gladstone and Edward Cardwell. Radicals, also committed to free trade with many having their political origins in the Anti-Corn Law League, often came from a manufacturing background and were distinguished by their ardent support for electoral reform and a wide extension of the franchise.

Where James Owen contends that the language of American politics did not become a 'rhetorical weapon' during English election campaigns until after the formation of the National Liberal Federation (NLF) in 1877,⁷² analysis of Liberal election speeches shows that as early as the 1865 election Liberal candidates were already drawing on the example of America in their public oratory to inform how they explained their stance on political reform to both electors and non-electors. In 1865, aristocratic Whig Liberals sought to distinguish between their kind of 'English' Liberalism, which had a reverence for the existing constitution, and what they believed to be 'American' inspired Gladstonian Liberalism which espoused the virtues of universal suffrage. In Stroud, Edward Horsman sought to distinguish between the old English Radicals who were Englishmen first and foremost, ready to defend

⁷¹ The exact date for the formation of the Liberal Party is contested. For Vincent this process took place between 1859 and 1867. This view was later challenged by Parry who argued that a 'more or less coherent' Liberal Party had already emerged between 1835 and 1841: Vincent, *British Liberal Party*, xix-xx; Parry, *Rise and Fall*, 128-154.

⁷² Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, 104.

their country, and the new Radicals who were ‘a bad cross of the American democrat’. These new American inspired Radicals, according to Horsman, had ‘no admiration for our English institutions, and wanted to import everything from America’. He denied that they belonged to the Liberal party at all as ‘the Liberal party was liberal, enlightened, and tolerant; but the new English Yankee was ignorant, illiberal, and intolerant’.⁷³ The ‘English Yankee’ was a frightful concept for Whig Liberals.

Growing tensions between Whig Liberals and Radicals were illustrated by the contest in Bath. During the nomination proceedings, Councillor Taylor took to the platform to propose John Passmore Edwards for the seat, challenging the incumbent Liberal candidate, William Tite. Taylor was met with a combination of cheers and ironical laughter. He contrasted the backgrounds of Tite and Edwards, arguing that the Liberal Association had not chosen Edwards as their candidate due to his lack of rank. Edwards, like ‘Lincoln, that great man of America’, had risen from nowhere and without a title and therefore they would not have him, preferring the Whig Liberalism of Tite. Seeking popular support, Taylor implored the assembled crowd: ‘we have a multitude of good and great men who have sprung from the ranks of the people, and you will find that those men who have worked up the hill are far better than those who start from the top’. Edwards ultimately withdrew from the race with the *Bath Chronicle* thanking him for the ‘amusement’.⁷⁴ In 1865, Radical Liberal candidates did not fare well in the South West compared to their Whig Liberal counterparts.

The American Civil War had a significant impact on Liberal popular rhetoric during the election with speakers offering competing understandings of the conflict and its implications

⁷³ *Evening Mail*, 12 July 1865, 5.

⁷⁴ *Bath Chronicle*, 13 July 1865, 3.

for British political reform. For Whig Liberals, the Civil War had seen the democratic institutions of America descend into a military dictatorship. In Kirkcudbrightshire, James Mackie recorded his protest against those who wished to extend the franchise by instalments with the end goal of the ‘unconstitutional extreme’ of universal suffrage, arguing that America now ‘looked very like a military dictatorship, and these were the results of universal suffrage. He much preferred the British Constitution’.⁷⁵ Richard Brinsley Sheridan noted to the crowds assembled in Dorchester that the Civil War had ‘checked the ardour’ of many reformers.⁷⁶ Whig Liberals invited the public to compare the relative prosperity of Britain under its institutions with the tyranny of American Democracy that proved injurious to liberty. America and the Civil War had demonstrated, for them, that under universal suffrage there could be no safeguards to protect personal liberty, the freedom of the press or prudent expenditure.⁷⁷ In this they were influenced by some of the key public intellectuals we analysed in chapter three who had similarly expressed reservations about the ability of democracies to guarantee personal liberty. For Radicals, meanwhile, the Civil War had been necessary to expunge the taint of slavery from America. In the North of England, William Edward Forster informed the people of Bradford to cheers that ‘America was a warning while slavery lasted, but it was now an example to us’ and that the ‘great triumph of that true Liberal principle which had been gained by our Anglo-Saxon brethren in America’ would tell upon the present election.⁷⁸ Radicals were struck by the inconsistency of those who had brought up slavery before the Civil War as a failing of American political institutions and a reason not to look to them for inspiration, who now criticised America for having gone to

⁷⁵ *Glasgow Morning Journal*, 15 July 1865, 3.

⁷⁶ *Sherborne Mercury*, 18 July 1865, 7; See also Baron Rothschild’s speech in Kent, *Kentish Gazette*, 18 July 1865, 7; and Thomas Western’s speech in North Essex, *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 21 July 1865, 4.

⁷⁷ For examples where America was seen to be unable to protect liberty see Henry Baring Bingham’s speech in Marlborough, *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 13 July 1865, 3; and John Steel in Cockerhouth, *Carlisle Journal*, 14 July 1865, 6.

⁷⁸ *Bradford Observer*, 13 July 1865, 6.

such lengths to address the issue of slavery. In Leicester, Peter Alfred Taylor noted to a receptive crowd that there was a very real possibility that former slaves in America might well have the vote before working Englishmen did.⁷⁹ In their public oratory, those Liberals who were more positively inclined towards America found it easier in the aftermath of the Civil War to speak about with the toxicity of slavery now removed from their example.

During the tumult of the Civil War, the United States had held their regular presidential election. Against the backdrop of internal revolt, Lincoln rejected talk of postponing the election and persevered, with the fate of the Union at stake. Lincoln went on to win with a popular-vote majority of half a million, winning all the states but New Jersey, Kentucky and Delaware. Analysing the results of the election, James McPherson notes the remarkable similarity between the Union vote of 1864 and the Republican vote of 1860 in the northern states with Lincoln receiving ‘virtually the same 55 percent from the same regions and constituencies within these states that he had received four years earlier’.⁸⁰ Despite the casualties, the verdict was undoubtedly for the war to continue. The ability of American democratic institutions to conduct a relatively peaceful and orderly election in such conditions made an impression on Gladstonian Liberals including Peelites and Liberal Conservatives, particularly in their use of the ballot. For Kinzer, mid-Victorian England was marked by a wide belief in the ballot’s essential un-Englishness, derived from an intense emotional need to see oneself and one’s fellow countrymen conduct their affairs in the open and in the light of day.⁸¹ We have already seen in chapter two how in their coverage of the Civil War, the British Conservative press criticised the ballot for encouraging widespread corruption. Where the Conservative party and Whig Liberals decried the secretive and ‘un-

⁷⁹ *Loughborough Monitor*, 13 July 1865, 8.

⁸⁰ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 774-806.

⁸¹ Kinzer, ‘Un-Englishness of the Ballot’, 243.

English' nature of the ballot, these Liberals saw how the ballot could protect the voter. Over in South Wales, while proposing Henry Bruce for the constituency of Merthyr Tydfil, Charles Herbert James commented on how the ballot could be carried out in Britain 'as well as in America, where they voted by ballot at the last election for Lincoln under the most trying circumstances, and yet without such a row as occurred at Nottingham the other day'.⁸²

Similarly in South Lancashire, John Pemberton Heywood argued that having seen the ballot work well in America, the same could be achievable in Britain. He believed that the ballot would protect the voter against 'the powerful influence of the great squire or the head of large works, whilst it would also protect the working-man against organisations among the working-people themselves'.⁸³ Orderly elections conducted during the Civil War, for these Liberals, had illustrated the utility of the ballot and made a case for possibly introducing it into the British political framework.

These Liberal splits over America and British political reform foreshadow debates over the caucusization of liberal politics that came to prominence in the late 1870s with the foundation of the NLF. Debates associated with liberal machine politics and the politics of the caucus were beginning to form earlier than is posited in the existing historiography.⁸⁴ Liberals in 1865 who were more optimistic about the state of America pointed to the direct connection established there between the vote and citizenship, with an enlarged franchise encouraging better levels of general education.⁸⁵ Francis H. Herrick views the NLF as a successor to the

⁸² *Merthyr Telegraph*, 15 July 1865, 4; See also Captain Robert Ferguson's speech nominating Edmund Potter in Carlisle on the 'utmost order and decorum' of the recent election in America as evidence that the working classes of Britain were fit for the franchise, *Carlisle Journal*, 14 July 1865, 6.

⁸³ *Leigh Chronicle*, 15 July 1865, 3; See also Benjamin Thomas Williams' speech in Pembroke on behalf of Sir Hugh Owen, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 10 July 1865, 3; and William Evans in Stirling Burghs, *Dunfermline Saturday Press*, 15 July 1865, 4.

⁸⁴ For examples of this see Owen, *Labour and the Caucus* and Peter Marsh's work on Joseph Chamberlain in Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 103-131 and 'Tearing the Bonds', 123-153.

⁸⁵ See for examples Francis Crossley's speech in the Northern West Riding of Yorkshire, *Leeds Mercury*, 17 July 1865, 3; and John Stuart Mill's speech in Westminster, *Dublin Evening Mail*, 11 July 1865, 4.

National Education League formed in 1869 to campaign for elementary education for children, free from religious control.⁸⁶ The movement for national non-sectarian education had been gaining momentum since the formation of the Lancashire Public School Association in the late 1840s. In the 1865 election, Lancashire was one of the key areas where Liberal candidates who looked more favourably on the example of America, drew on this to inform their popular arguments about British political reform.⁸⁷

Whig Liberals used their oratory to argue that the political institutions of a nation should be suited to the unique conditions of that nation. Highlighting the significant material differences between America and Britain, chiefly concerning the abundance of land, they sought to explain to the electorate that while universal manhood suffrage and democratic institutions might work in the United States, this did not necessarily mean they would work in Britain. Hugh Grosvenor explained this to the people of Chester, contrasting how while England was crowded with a high level of working-class poverty, in America there were very few poor and ‘thousands of miles of land crying out for cultivators and cultivation’.⁸⁸ Newly enfranchised working-class voters in Britain, it was feared, would use this political recognition to seek to acquire land and wealth by voting for candidates in favour of land reform. The potential incompatibility of democracy with property had preoccupied the key public intellectuals we examined in chapter three. Intellectuals had worried that in the great industrial cities where the majority had no fixed property, newly enfranchised working-class voters who lacked the restraining instinct of land ownership could easily be excited by agitators to pursue land reform. With the prospect of reform legislation likely to be put before the House soon after the election, this was now a very real concern. As a result, for these

⁸⁶ Francis H. Herrick, ‘The Origins of the National Liberal Federation’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 17:2 (1945), 120.

⁸⁷ Examples include the campaigns of Henry Yates Thompson, John Pemberton Heywood and Thomas Potter.

⁸⁸ *Chester Courant*, 12 July 1865, 6.

Liberals, trying to emulate the political institutions of America in Britain would only see the worst tendencies of politics in America magnified. In Argyllshire, Alexander Struthers Finlay spoke of his concern that American-style reform would lead to situations where unless the individual went along with the multitude they would get no hearing at all.⁸⁹ For Whig Liberals, the example of America had shown the dangers of lowering the qualification for the franchise too far. Allowing the ‘drunken fellow’ to legislate for ‘respectable people’ had not made the people of America happy or free, so why, they questioned, should Britain follow suit?⁹⁰

In their public speeches, Gladstonian Liberal candidates criticised how the label of Americanisation was deployed by Conservatives as well as Whig Liberals to scare the public from embracing the cause of reform. John Henderson, for example, told the voters of Durham City that he believed the Civil War had become a ‘phantom’, used by those opposed to reform and an expansion of the democratic element to frighten people.⁹¹ In Taunton, Alexander Charles Barclay argued that while it was understandable that recent events in the United States had alarmed the public about reform, he drew a different lesson from what had happened there, noting ‘how great is the power of a people, and what sacrifices they will make when all the people of a country are interested in the government’.⁹² In doing so, these Liberal speakers were echoing the sentiments of the British Liberal press during the Civil

⁸⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 20 July 1865, 3; See also Joseph Gundry’s speech proposing Thomas Alexander Mitchell in Bridport on the propensity of democratic government to fall into despotism, *Dorset County Chronicle and Somersetshire Gazette*, 13 July 1865, 1018.

⁹⁰ In North Derbyshire, William Jackson was adamant that having been to America and seen universal suffrage in action, he would never consent to giving ‘a drunken fellow, who could not support himself or family, the right to legislate for respectable people’, *Cheshire Observer*, 22 July 1865, 3; In Calne, Robert Lowe argued that universal suffrage could not have made the people of America happy and well-governed or else they would not have descended into civil war, *Western Times*, 18 July 1865, 3.

⁹¹ *Durham County Advertiser*, 14 July 1865, 6; See also Henry Yates Thompsom in South Lancashire on how America had become a useful ‘bugbear’ for Conservatives in their opposition to the advance of democracy, *Warrington Advertiser*, 22 July 1865, 3.

⁹² *Taunton Courier*, 19 July 1865, 6.

War who had criticised the Conservative press for using the term ‘Americanisation’ to scare readers away from all methods of progress and modernity. In the following decades this same phenomenon would be repeated with the term caucus being used disparagingly by Conservative critics to describe the highly structured Liberal political machine first employed by the Birmingham Liberal Association. Trygve R. Tholfsen describes how ‘at first glance the Liberal machine seemed un-English, and the Tories gleefully imported an American epithet to describe it’.⁹³

Ultimately, the Liberal party won the 1865 election with an increased majority, but in the process growing tensions over reform and the saliency of American democracy had been exposed to the public. It was these tensions that ultimately would lead to the collapse of the Liberal government in June 1866 after failing to get reform legislation through Parliament. In their analysis of the election’s results, Liberal-leaning publications took notice of these divisions. The *Fortnightly Review* concluded that while the Government now had a majority of around eighty seats, the probable real working majority was about half that number and that as the Liberal party attempted to initiate reforms it would find that its members would not all keep step, with ‘more stragglers, more absentees, more deserters on this side at critical moments’.⁹⁴ The *Edinburgh Review* was firmly behind those Liberals opposed to following the example of America, taking issue with those who had looked to the United States and endorsed the ‘the fatalistic argument of the progress of democracy, as if the future policy of the nation had already been decided upon by the fates and destinies’.⁹⁵ The task of leading such a fragmented party and attempting to get them to coalesce around a specific reform measure would soon fall not to Gladstone, but instead to Lord John Russell. Upon

⁹³ Trygve R. Tholfsen, ‘The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus’, *Historical Journal*, 2 (1959), 161.

⁹⁴ *Fortnightly Review*, 1 August 1865, 757.

⁹⁵ ‘An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution from the Reign of Henry VII. to the Present Time’, *Edinburgh Review*, 122:249 (July 1865), 270-271.

Palmerston's death, Queen Victoria would turn to her old friend and tried minister to take up the arduous role of Prime Minister. Russell would accept, telling the Queen that the next ministry must be either 'frankly Liberal or frankly Conservative' as he did not believe that a 'mixed, colourless, characterless Ministry would have any chance of stability'.⁹⁶ In his efforts to convince the majority of the Liberal party to support a real measure of reform, Russell would enlist the support of Gladstone. In anticipation of Russell's appointment as Prime Minister, Gladstone had written to him, urging that the next Government could not 'be wholly a continuation, it must be in some degree a new commencement'.⁹⁷ In this, Gladstone was drawing on the experience he had just had in the recent election. Reflecting on the political differences between Oxford and South Lancashire in his correspondence with Henry Edward Manning, Gladstone wrote that plunging into the 'whirlpools of South Lancashire' had temporarily left him 'a stunned man' as he noted that in the current state of public affairs 'everything which moves and lives is called extreme'.⁹⁸

Designing a reform bill which could satisfy the competing demands of these recently elected Liberal MPs would prove a difficult challenge. Liberals who had been elected in constituencies in the South East and South West had secured popular support by voicing their criticisms of American politics and their reluctance to emulate their political institutions, while Liberals representing areas from the North West and North East had won their contests by using their oratory to show how the Civil War had demonstrated the strength of democratic institutions and the benefits of an enlarged franchise along the lines of an American-style suffrage. As we have seen, historical debates about splits in the Liberal party which have traditionally started with the foundation of the NLF and the caucusization of

⁹⁶ Spencer Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell* (London, 1891), 424.

⁹⁷ Walpole, *Life of Lord John Russell*, 422.

⁹⁸ 'Gladstone to Manning', 21 July 1865, in *The Correspondence of Henry Edward Manning and William Ewart Gladstone, Volume Three 1861-1875* (2013), 66-68.

liberal politics in the 1870s, instead had their origins in this period and were already beginning to be felt in the 1865 general election when candidates discussed their views on the significance of America for British political reform.

Radical demonstrations, America and the British working class

On 27 February 1865 a meeting of working-class reformers was convened at St Martin's Hall, London. At the meeting, it was resolved to establish the Reform League, a working-class group dedicated to obtaining universal manhood suffrage and the ballot. In attendance were key figures from the International Workingmen's Association, or the First International, including George Howell and George Odger. Karl Marx would later write to Friedrich Engels to advise him that the International Association had managed to constitute a majority on the Reform League's committee so that 'the whole leadership is in our hands'.⁹⁹ In May 1865, two months before the general election, Edmond Beales, the President of the Reform League, took to the stage in St Martin's Hall, London, to deliver his inaugural address. It was inexcusable, he argued, that the working classes were taxed and legislated for arbitrarily while being excluded from participating in the choice of who constituted the Parliament that taxed and legislated for them. He could not believe that such a state of things could exist in Britain 'nearly a hundred years after the establishment of manhood suffrage amongst our American brethren'. Using the ballot, the varied voters of America had shown during a moment of intense political excitement and crisis their capacity to vote in 'the most peaceful and orderly way' and in doing so had made a favourable argument for manhood suffrage and the ballot. The British working classes had demonstrated common sense and 'incorruptible independence of spirit' during the Civil War when they supported free institutions over slave institutions. Beales utilised references to American democracy, the recent election in

⁹⁹ Marx to Engels in Manchester, 25 February 1865, *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, 42 (London, 1975), 107.

America, and the conduct of the British working classes during the cotton shortage created by the Civil War to make the case for manhood suffrage. He concluded that expanding the franchise to the working classes and introducing the ballot would be in line with ‘the true spirit of the constitution’ by removing class and political disability, while warning that those who sought to exclude ‘the great majority of our people’ in fact threatened the whole fabric of the constitution’.¹⁰⁰

Through this inaugural address, Beales established the universal suffrage of the United States as a key influence on the Reform League and an integral part of their campaign for British political reform. This would be reflected in the pamphlets published by the league. As Secretary of the Reform League, Howell invited electors and non-electors to join the league, imploring his countrymen to no longer deprive themselves of manhood suffrage and the ballot, the rights enjoyed by their brethren in ‘the Great Republic of America’.¹⁰¹ The Scottish branch of the Reform League framed their campaign as seeking a restoration of the ancient Constitution and the original rights of Britons which were now enjoyed in the great American Republic.¹⁰² This was not the first time that key figures within the Reform League had used the example of America to reflect on their own political institutions. During the Civil War, Howell and Odger as part of the London Trades Council had organised a public meeting at St James’s Hall to express working-class sympathy for the North and Lincoln’s fight against slavery. London trade unionists took this as an opportunity to show that there was genuine support among workers for democratic principles.

¹⁰⁰ *Speech of Edmond Beales, ESQ., M.A., President of the Reform League at the Meeting at St Martin’s Hal, in Support of the league* (London, 1865), 3-12.

¹⁰¹ ‘The Reform League, Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot’, *JSTOR 19th Century British Pamphlets* (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/60217115>).

¹⁰² ‘Scottish National Reform League, Address by the Executive Council to the People of Scotland’, *JSTOR 19th Century British Pamphlets* (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/60217115>).

The foundation of the Reform League had also in part been motivated by the creation of the National Reform Union a year prior. In a letter to Karl Marx, the former Chartist Ernest Jones had written of the need for a manhood suffrage movement to oppose the ‘Manchester tricksters’ of the National Reform Union who were prepared to accept watered-down reform measures rather than holding out for full manhood suffrage.¹⁰³ The National Reform Union’s programme aimed for a ratepayer franchise rather than manhood suffrage, in addition to the ballot, triennial parliaments and a redistribution of seats according to property and population. They grounded their campaign in the works of key intellectuals like John Stuart Mill and De Tocqueville. A pamphlet by a member of the executive of the National Reform Union cited Mill’s contributions in Parliament and his belief, having read Tocqueville, that ‘though the various American legislatures are perpetually making mistakes, they are perpetually correcting them too, and that the evil, such as it is, is far outweighed by the salutary effects of the general tendency of their legislatures;’ the National Reform Union was convinced that granting a full and substantial measure of political power to the people of Britain would achieve a similar effect.¹⁰⁴ Comprising mostly liberal figures from Manchester, the National Reform Union appealed more to middle-class audiences due to its reputation as a more intellectual organisation. However, the National Reform Union had fewer branch associations than the Reform League (150 compared to 400). Whilst somewhat opposed to each other, as Parliament began to actively consider reform legislation in 1866 and 1867, the two groups would gradually cooperate and coordinate activities in a bid to place pressure on Parliament.

¹⁰³ Ernest Jones to Karl Marx, 7 February 1865, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 4 (1962), 12.

¹⁰⁴ ‘The Radical Party, its Principles, Objects & Leaders – Cobden, Bright, & Mill by a Member of the Executive of the National Reform Union’, *JSTOR 19th Century British Pamphlets*, 7 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/60248984>).

In 1866 and 1867, across the country, branches of the Reform League and the National Reform Union organised meetings and demonstrations to try and compel Parliament to expand the franchise by demonstrating public support for reform. Malcolm Chase has shown that the popular movement for reform in 1866 and 1867 saw a nationwide mobilisation of political opinion ‘on a scale without parallel since the 1840s’.¹⁰⁵ As part of this large-scale campaign of popular reform agitation, the public oratory at these demonstrations would often draw on the example of America. D. A. Hamer’s analysis of the Reform League’s tactics focuses on their efforts to turn into an electoral organisation in the post-1867 reformed system rather than the international influences on their early activities before the Second Reform Act.¹⁰⁶ Miles Taylor has explored the impact of America on anti-slavery sentiment in Britain,¹⁰⁷ however the influence of the United States went far beyond this with a noticeable impact on the working-class movement for political reform. At the start of the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) following the Civil War, the proposed Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution which abolished slavery, addressed citizenship rights, and prohibited discrimination in voting rights on the basis of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude gave impetus to the campaign for British political reform.

A common set of themes characterised the rhetoric of speakers at these reform demonstrations in their efforts to secure working-class support for their cause. Frequent comparisons were drawn between those campaigning for franchise reform in Britain and those campaigning for abolition in the United States. At a Norfolk demonstration held after the fall of Lord Russell’s ministry, Jacob Henry Tillet compared John Brown, the American

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm Chase, ‘The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain during the 1860s’, in Robert Saunders (ed.), *Shooting Niagara – and After? The Second Reform Act and its World*, *Parliamentary History*, 36:1 (2017), 30.

¹⁰⁶ Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 308-315.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, 180-183.

abolitionist, with Russell. Union soldiers had gone into battle singing ‘John Brown is in his grave, but his soul is marching on’ and now Russell could be said to be politically in his grave, but Tillet assured those assembled that his soul was marching on. Tillet concluded that just as that song was sung by millions who had spelt the ‘final doom’ of slavery throughout America, now in the mother country the same rallying cry would be the ‘song of triumph’ for tens of thousands.¹⁰⁸ Public attention was drawn to the fact that as part of the reconstruction process in the aftermath of the Civil War, America was on the verge of enfranchising former slaves while the working class of Britain remained without political recognition. In Birmingham, Colonel Lothian Sheffield Dickson, the Vice-President of the Reform League, invited all those assembled to join their nearest branch, remarking that ‘some day it would be telegraphed across the water that the negroes had also been privileged to vote. Would not this bring a blush to every Englishman who had not the franchise’?¹⁰⁹ James Moir, former Chartist and President of the Scottish Reform League similarly reported to a Glasgow demonstration that upon hearing that the men of the North, who had fought against the ‘slaveocracy’ were now ‘determined to have the black man free’ the only thing he was afraid of was that he would be free ‘before the white man of England’.¹¹⁰ Those who opposed political reform in Britain were aligned by radical speakers with those who had shown support for the South during the Civil War. In August 1866, Beales publicly attributed the Government’s attempts to interfere with reform demonstrations at Hyde Park to ‘the spirit of that Parliamentary faction which was the bane of the country, which had sympathised with

¹⁰⁸ *Norfolk News*, 7 July 1866, 5; The chairman of a reform demonstration in Kendal, Mr W Thompson similarly invoked the legacy of John Brown for American abolitionism arguing that the ‘spirit of reform’ in Britain was similarly marching on, *Westmorland Gazette*, 21 July 1866, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Birmingham Journal*, 1 September 1866, 3; See also John Baxter Langley in Brackley, *Northampton Mercury*, 15 December 1866, 6.

¹¹⁰ *Glasgow Daily Herald*, 17 October 1866, 3; See also Mr R Walton in North Shields, *Shields Daily Gazette*, 6 March 1867, 3; and Peter Alfred Taylor in Clerkenwell, *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 17 February 1867, 7.

the slave-owners in America'.¹¹¹ We saw in chapter two how during the Civil War the British Liberal press had sought to see the conflict not as a product of American democracy, but rather as a necessary step towards expunging the contaminant of slavery that had corrupted it from the beginning. At the time they had maintained that once slavery had been removed from America, it could then serve as a better example for British political reform. With the Civil War now over and slavery abolished by the thirteenth amendment to the US constitution, Radicals now more readily deployed the example of America when making their case for political reform, reminding audiences as the Liberal press had done during the war that those who were against reform had been advocates for the Confederacy. Elements of race and slavery were a recurring feature of these working-class reform demonstrations with connections being made between the enfranchisement of African Americans in the United States and the enfranchisement of the working classes in Britain.¹¹²

Similarly, radical speakers noted the inconsistency that the working men of Britain lacked the franchise while their transatlantic cousins in America could vote freely. Working-class attendees at various reform demonstrations were invited to consider why the descendants of working men in America were deemed fit enough to vote while the descendants of their counterparts in the mother country were not. Trade unionists and former Chartists like George Potter and Robert Meek Carter asked whether the working classes of Britain were less intelligent, less worthy or more violent than those of America?¹¹³ Instead of framing political

¹¹¹ Beales speech in Bradford, *Leeds Times*, 18 August 1866, 8; See also Handel Cossman's speech Bristol where he accused those who opposed reform on the grounds that the masses were too ignorant of being ignorant themselves for having supported the slaveholders of the South, *Western Daily Press*, 3 September 1866, 3.

¹¹² Leading the van at a reform demonstration in Nottingham and acting as a standard bearer for manhood suffrage was a freed slave carrying the stars and stripes of America, *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 26 October 1866, 3.

¹¹³ George Potter's speech in Wolverhampton, *Bee-Hive*, 2 February 1867, 1; Alderman Robert Meek Carter's speech in Bradford, *Leeds Times*, 20 April 1867, 5; See also Mr A Warren's speech in Bristol, *Western Daily Press*, 19 February 1867, 3; Mr Croft's speech in Bradford, *Leeds Times*, 20 April 1867, 5; and Rev. Charles White's speech in Merthyr Tydfil, *Merthyr Telegraph*, 24 November 1866, 3.

reform as a radical break from the past, radical speakers used their oratory at working-class demonstrations to advance that what they were campaigning for was a return to the ancient constitution. In Yorkshire, the weaver and former Chartist John Snowden made this case, insisting that the reformers only wanted to return to the ancient constitution and the ‘old plan of representation...which was in force in America’.¹¹⁴ American ideals were held to be inherently English and by emulating them they were in fact only restoring that which had been lost. In this sense, Radicals sought to use the example of America as a way of rediscovering the ancient constitution. This ability to see the ancient constitution in American democracy is what distinguished it from the examples of democracy in Europe. Radicals saw in America a more authentic polity of the kind that had once existed in their own country and rather than viewing political reform as a way of realising the future, they instead saw it as a way of returning to the past. Radicals were building on understandings of Anglo-Saxonism that had proved central in framing the debates we explored in chapter three among key public intellectuals about British politics and constitutionalism in the nineteenth century, using the Anglo-Saxon origins of the American constitution to support their argument. At a demonstration organised by the Liverpool branch of the Reform League, a Mr Planche addressed a crowd of around 60,000 people, arguing that ‘whatever was done in the way of usefulness was done by working men...why should their rights as men be kept from them? The Americans...had universal suffrage, and were Englishmen to be placed below those of other countries?’¹¹⁵ Englishmen, it was argued, were as capable of governing themselves in their own country as Englishmen were in America.

¹¹⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 9 October 1866, 7; Beales similarly remarked that they were seeking the principles of equality and self-government that had long been in operation ‘among our Anglo-Saxon brethren across the Atlantic’, *Leeds Times*, 18 August 1866, 8.

¹¹⁵ *Liverpool Mercury*, 24 September 1866, 5.

Working men could emigrate to the United States and in a short time be recognised for the value they contributed to that nation in the form of the vote. Ernest Jones described to a working-class audience in Derby an example in which there were two brothers ‘both honest, hard-working men,’ one of whom could no longer stand such an injustice and so crossed the Atlantic; this brother, Jones argued, had gone to a country ‘where a man is treated as a man... There he became a citizen, and enjoyed the right of exercising his freedom’ while the other brother ‘remained a slave, and had no power to act for himself’.¹¹⁶ This kind of familial language and discourse of masculinity, as well as references to freedom and slavery, was a recurring feature of political rhetoric aimed at working-class audiences. In Islington, Beales contended that the ‘time was speedily coming when our own countrymen would not be deemed unworthy of the political rights that were enjoyed by our transatlantic cousins’.¹¹⁷ The educational benefits of the franchise were also a key part of achieving this citizenship. Radical speakers used their oratory to note how enfranchising working men in the United States had promoted a better general level of education and it was hoped that by extending the suffrage in Britain a similar effect could be achieved.¹¹⁸ In this, they were utilising the link between popular government and popular education which as we have seen had been explored by both British travel writers and public intellectuals. Radicals took this further to argue that enfranchising working men would lead to an increase in their general level of education; granting them the ability to influence the nation’s affairs would make their

¹¹⁶ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 14 September 1866, 6; Jones made similar arguments in Lancashire, *Preston Herald*, 18 August 1866, 12; See also in Edinburgh Mr McTaggart, an ironmoulder, similarly spoke of ‘the white slaves of Great Britain’ who now demanded their political rights, *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 19 November 1866, 4; and in Sheffield, the economist Samuel Bailey argued that ‘it was a disgrace to this country that whilst the negroes of America should be empowered to vote, the honest artisans of England were shut out from that privilege’, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1867, 7.

¹¹⁷ *Clerkenwell News*, 13 September 1866, 2; In Somerset, Rev W. H. Bonner, a congregational minister and a Vice-President of the Reform League, stated his belief that America, the son, had now surpassed its father, and that reform was the only means to address this by bettering the condition of the people, *Somerset County Gazette*, 9 February 1867, 9.

¹¹⁸ For examples of speeches where the United States was used to show the connection between the franchise and education see Thomas Burt in Morpeth, *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 3 August 1866, 3; John Bright in Manchester, *British Standard*, 28 September 1866, 311.

education a priority. Drawing on the connection between citizenship and the franchise, speakers like Grant Facey described scenarios in which working-men would flee Britain, as if from a pestilence, and go to America to become citizens and secure the political rights they could not reach in their own country.¹¹⁹ Working-class demonstrations played on concerns that a mass exodus of artisans and working men to America in search of political rights could be imminent if a sufficient measure of political reform was not passed by Parliament.

Working-class audiences at these reform demonstrations proved receptive to the idea that their contributions to the wealth of the nation should be recognised. Speakers challenged the notion that democratic values and working-class enfranchisement were incompatible with the interests of wealth and capital by pointing to the prosperity that America had enjoyed and continued to enjoy whilst also operating under universal suffrage. Figures like Ernest Jones and Edward Adam Leatham set out to those assembled that manhood suffrage and working-class enfranchisement posed no threat to wealth and the rights of capital, as demonstrated by the prosperity of the American Republic, and that they would only challenge the power of the aristocracy.¹²⁰ America had prospered without the feudal tendencies that marked Britain and Radical speakers argued that by enlarging the electorate, a reformed political system would be better able to resist the influence of the aristocracy. Radicals at reform demonstrations believed that it was wrong that the working classes were the subject of taxation without also having the ability to vote for the legislators who taxed them. To make this argument speakers invoked the spirit of the American Revolution at mass gatherings with the rallying cry of ‘no

¹¹⁹ Grant Facey in Maidstone, *Maidstone Telegraph*, 3 March 1866, 2; See also Mr E Wikins in Cardiff, *Cardiff Times*, 16 November 1866, 6.

¹²⁰ Ernest Jones in Loughborough, *Leicester Chronicle*, 1 December 1866, 6; Edward Adam Leatham’s speech in Sheffield, *Sheffield Independent*, 26 January 1867, 11; See also Edmond Beales’ speech in Newcastle, *Newcastle Guardian*, 15 December 1866, 5.

taxation without representation'.¹²¹ Allowing the masses to participate in the business of American government had been beneficial to both sides. The virtues of the American voter, according to Radical speakers, were clear and made the case for enfranchising the working man in Britain: the American voter was educated, law-abiding, felt personally invested in the business of government and respected the rights of property and liberty.¹²² The benefits for the Government had been demonstrated by recent events in America. Radical speakers maintained that the Union could not have survived had it not been able to draw on the power given to it by mass participation in its politics.¹²³ It was proclaimed at radical working-class demonstrations that the strength of democratic institutions had been vindicated as they emerged from the Civil War intact.

The frequency of reform demonstrations where the example of America was cited was at its highest between August 1866 and February 1867. Arguably, this was the moment when the prospects of a satisfactory measure of political reform for these groups seemed at their lowest. The Liberal 1866 reform bill had just collapsed, the Liberal Government had lost a vote of no confidence and the Conservatives were now leading a minority ministry presided over by Lord Derby, who as we saw earlier had been urged by Disraeli to position himself as the potential head of an 'anti-revolutionary Government' in case these exact circumstances transpired. In the next chapter we will go on to analyse parliamentary debates to consider the influence of America on both the failure of the 1866 Liberal reform bill and Conservative

¹²¹ For examples see John Bright's speech in Yorkshire, *Morning Post*, 9 October 1866, 6; Mr Davis' speech in Fulham, *West Middlesex Advertiser*, 10 November 1866, 3; and Charles Shearman's speech in Tower Hamlets, *East London Observer*, 23 September 1865, 2.

¹²² For examples of speeches which illustrated the virtues of the American voter and the benefits that universal suffrage could introduce in Britain see W. E. Forster in Bradford, *Dundee People's Journal*, 25 November 1865, 4; John Bright in Birmingham, *Leeds Mercury*, 28 August 1866, 8; and Edmond Beales in Reading, *Reading Mercury*, 6 October 1866, 2.

¹²³ For examples of speeches about how universal suffrage had strengthened the American government and could similarly strengthen the British government see Wilfrid Lawson in Carlisle, *Carlisle Patriot*, 13 January 1866, 8; William Edward Baxter in Dundee, *Dundee Advertiser*, 16 January 1866, 5; and Ernest Jones in Banbury, *Oxford Times*, 24 November 1866, 7.

efforts to devise their own reform bill in 1867, but for now it is clear that American democracy played a key part in the popular case for political reform made to working-class audiences by speakers at reform demonstrations organised by extraparliamentary campaign groups. Where Navickas' account of the significance of America for nineteenth-century popular politics ended in 1848 with the collapse of the Chartists and their disillusionment with the United States, by analysing the speeches of Radical speakers at working-class reform demonstrations we have seen how in the aftermath of the Civil War, reform campaign groups like the Reform League and the National Reform Union had a renewed sense of optimism about American democracy and its implications for British political reform. The Civil War had tackled the issue of slavery which had so disenchanted British Radicals and as America made strides towards the enfranchisement of former slaves, they concluded that now surely was the time for the working men of Britain to get the vote. As British campaign groups sought to place pressure on Parliament to enact reform legislation, Radical working-class reform movements like the Reform League still looked to America as a source of inspiration.

Conclusion

We now have a clear picture of the extraparliamentary domestic political context in which the 1866 and 1867 parliamentary reform debates would take place. Despite electoral victory in 1865, the election had exposed tensions in the Liberal party with respect to the future path of political reform and the degree to which the United States should influence it. Liberals representing northern English constituencies were more optimistic about the benefits of American-style universal suffrage while Liberals representing southern constituencies expressed deep reservations. The Conservative party, despite losing the election, had taken the opportunity to present themselves as the defenders of the English constitution against the threat of Americanisation. Conservative candidates from English constituencies, particularly

those representing county seats, appealed to a sense of English patriotism when it came to charting the future of reform. It was this anti-American Conservative party which would seize government and eventually pass the Second Reform Act when the Liberal divisions described above caused the collapse of Russell's government in June 1866 following the failure of the 1866 reform bill. Meanwhile, between the two reform bills, there was an upsurge in the number of radical speakers at working-class reform demonstrations organised by the Reform League and the National Reform Union determined to place popular pressure on parliament for an expansion of the franchise. These radical speakers still looked to America to support their argument for reform. Demonstrations took place across the country, but most noticeably in the south east and the north west. Many of the areas which saw more frequent references to the example of America as part of extraparliamentary activity over reform correspond with the locations explored in chapter two where the Civil War had a noticeable impact on local affairs. London, for example, had played host to numerous debates over the position that Britain should take in the Civil War, while Lancashire had been particularly affected by the conflict; the Manchester cotton industry had been hit by shortages created by Union blockades preventing the importation of cotton from the American South, while Liverpool had been directly targeted by Confederate diplomacy with an unofficial Confederate embassy established there during the war. The Civil War's presence in British political life in these areas served as a reminder of both the strengths and weakness of American democracy and would later furnish extraparliamentary speakers with arguments for and against the future of British political reform.

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen how a variety of political figures, from aristocratic politicians to working-class Radicals, sought to use the example of American democracy in their public oratory at mass gatherings to enlist popular support for their stance

on political reform. They did so in the belief that this would help shape the course of parliamentary reform legislation. Having examined the context in which the parliamentary reform debates took place in, it is now time to analyse the parliamentary debates themselves.

Chapter Five – Managing Reform: The Place of America in Parliamentary Reform

Debates

Introduction

We have seen through the thesis so far how travel literature brought depictions of American politics to life for British audiences, how the outbreak of the Civil War affected perceptions of American democracy through British newspapers and periodicals, how political philosophers studied the American model to see what lessons could be learnt about the merits and dangers of universal suffrage, and how America manifested itself in the extraparliamentary campaign over reform between 1865 and 1867. These discussions were important in shaping the intellectual context in which Parliament approached the subject of political reform in 1866 and 1867, with the material we have analysed readily accessible to MPs and Peers sitting in the Parliament of 1865. During the parliamentary reform debates of 1866 and 1867, speakers drew on the kinds of arguments about the implications of American democracy for British political reform that we have charted the evolution of over the course of this thesis, but crucially they developed them further, introducing new elements in light of the reform measures that were actively being considered. Chiefly, the United States illustrated to MPs and Peers the impact that reform legislation could have on the character of Parliament and its ability to fulfil its constitutional role, as well as the challenges of managing a mass electorate. America was instrumental in shaping parliamentary discussions about the ability of a reformed Parliament to preserve landed interests against the threat of demagoguery, the potential influence of working-class voters on foreign and economic policy, the education of a reformed electorate and fears about a gradual shift towards democracy.

Styles of parliamentary rhetoric were evolving across the nineteenth century. Parliamentary speeches played an increasingly important role in connecting Parliament to the political nation. Kathryn Rix argues that as the relationship between Parliament and those it sought to represent evolved in the two decades after the 1832 Reform Act, there was a growing appetite for publicising parliamentary proceedings, with Radical and many Liberal MPs embracing the rhetoric of ‘parliamentary accountability and communication with the public’.¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, many parliamentarians still revered the political oratory of late eighteenth century figures like Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox. However, as Meisel argues, the growing public role of the House of Commons and its debates meant that the ‘hothouse parliamentary oratory’ of the late eighteenth century proved increasingly insufficient, with styles of parliamentary speech changing from ‘the rhetorical to the explanatory’ when debating legislative measures and from ‘the denunciatory to the deflationary’ when referring to the people.² This change in parliamentary rhetorical styles was still unfolding as parliamentarians took their place following the 1865 election to try and settle the reform question.

Constitutionally, in this period the structure of parliamentary politics was gradually moving away from a system of parliamentary government and towards a more modern party system.³ However, parties in Parliament during the reform debates of 1866 and 1867 were still fluid political associations with backbenchers retaining a considerable degree of independence.

T. A. Jenkins has shown that while a two-party alignment had begun to form in the Commons by the end of the 1830s, few members always remained loyal to their parties, with instances

¹ Kathryn Rix, “‘Whatever Passed in Parliament Ought to be Communicated to the Public’: Reporting the Proceedings of the Reformed Commons, 1833-50”, *Parliamentary History*, 33 (2014), 453-474.

² Meisel, *Public Speech*, 106.

³ For more on the theme of parliamentary government see Angus Hawkins, “‘Parliamentary government’ and Victorian political parties, c.1830-c.1880”, *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989) 638-669.

of bloc voting, ‘confined to a limited range of parliamentary divisions’.⁴ In 1866 Parliament and its members were still capable of making and breaking ministries, as demonstrated by the collapse of Russell’s ministry and the formation of Derby’s minority ministry.

Key parliamentary histories of the Second Reform Act such as those by F. B. Smith and Maurice Cowling have focused on the act as a product of domestic political concerns without exploring in depth the international influences on the reform debates and the ways in which the examples of countries with different political systems like the United States were drawn upon by MPs and Peers.⁵ More recently, Catherine Hall has shown the role that understandings of race played in the parliamentary reform debates of 1866 and 1867. Arguing that at this time older class affiliations were beginning to be displaced by newly articulated ethnic and racial identities, as Englishmen, Anglo-Saxons and members of the nation, Hall studies how MPs and Peers used the example of the Morant Bay rebellion in the colony of Jamaica in parliamentary reform debates to criticise Jamaican self-government and connect a white Anglo-Saxon identity with the ability to exercise political rights as citizens.⁶ In this context, examining British parliamentarians’ understandings of the salience of America’s political institutions for British political reform, derived as they were from a shared Anglo-Saxon tradition, is crucial. Recent work by Robert Saunders has also demonstrated the value in examining the influence of international points of comparison such as France and the United States on the passage of the Second Reform Act.⁷ Where Saunders rightly highlights the importance of the experience of the American Civil War in shaping the scope for successful reform legislation in Parliament, this chapter seeks to build on this work by

⁴ T. A. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester, 1996), 28-58; See also Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, 13-14.

⁵ Smith, *Second Reform Bill*; Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*.

⁶ Catherine Hall, ‘The nation within and without’, in Hall, McClelland and Rendall (eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 221-233.

⁷ Saunders, ‘Let America Be the Test’, 79-92; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 131-159.

showing how during parliamentary reform debates in 1866 and 1867, parliamentarians built on and developed further pre-existing ideas about American democracy that had been formed in extraparliamentary public discourse including travel literature, political philosophy, newspapers and periodicals as well as in contexts where parliamentarians engaged with the wider public, such as during election speeches.

Parliament itself was undergoing a critical transformation in this period. Following the fire of 1834 much of the palace of Westminster had required rebuilding. At this time, neoclassical architecture was increasingly popular in the United States with the US Capitol Building and the White House both built in neoclassical style. Instead of opting for Decimus Burton's vision of a neoclassical Houses of Parliament however, the Royal Commission tasked with considering proposals for the redesign instead resolved that the style of the buildings should be either Gothic or Elizabethan.⁸ The winning design for the rebuild came from Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin, who envisioned a new Gothic-Revival palace. In her biography of Pugin, Rosemary Hill points to the construction of the new palace as the moment in which 'the medieval began to become a national style'.⁹ Where neoclassical architecture had its origins in Greek and Roman styles, Victorian gothic architecture took its inspiration from medieval buildings. Roland Quinault argues that the new palace of Westminster was 'conservative by design,' with the buildings and interior decoration chosen not to house a new constitution but to serve as testimony that the constitution was still mostly old.¹⁰ Joseph Meisel similarly notes how the Gothic style was considered by some to be the 'Saxon' idiom.¹¹ Tasked with approving the interior decoration that would characterise the new

⁸ HL Deb, 15 June 1835, Vol 28, Col. 774.

⁹ Rosemary Hill, *God's architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London, 2007), 144.

¹⁰ Roland E. Quinault, 'Westminster and the Victorian Constitution', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 2 (1992), 98-103; See also Joseph Mordaunt Crook and Michael Harry Port, *The History of the King's Works, 6: 1782-1851* (London, 1973), 573-626.

¹¹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, 71.

palace, the Fine Arts Commission looked to connect the new building with the history and traditions of the past to emphasise the long continuities of English traditions of governance. Consequently the Fine Arts Commission organised several competitions for artists to display their works in Westminster Hall during the 1840s and 1850s. Examining these competitions, Simon Keynes finds that Anglo-Saxon figures were frequently the subjects of the displayed works.¹² Construction of the new palace began in 1840 with the Lord's Chamber completed in 1847 and the Common's Chamber completed in 1852, although the palace was not completely rebuilt until 1870. For Quinault, the new Houses of Parliament exhibited an 'exclusive and pre-democratic character' with the decision to rebuild on the old site prompted by 'anti-democratic considerations'; Westminster was remote from the City which could be a centre of disaffection, the proximity of the river provided a means of escape in the event of popular commotion, and the cramped nature of the site limited the space available for public seats.¹³ When parliamentarians sat in 1866 and 1867 to debate reform legislation and the significance of the United States, with its Anglo-Saxon heritage, they did so in chambers that had only been recently built according to a design which hearkened back to medieval, English political traditions, as did the decorations of the interior they were surrounded by.

We have already seen how both the reform question and the salience of American democracy played a key role in the 1865 general election which formed the Parliament that would debate these two reform bills. In the extraparliamentary arena, political figures from a range of different backgrounds cited America in their public oratory at mass gatherings to enlist popular support for their stance on reform. Having made their case to the people,

¹² Keynes, 'Cult of King Alfred', 335-340; See also T.S.R. Boase, 'The Decoration of the New Palace of Westminster, 1841-1863', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17:3/4 (1954), 319-358.

¹³ Quinault, 'Westminster and the constitution', 96.

however, it was through parliamentary debates that MPs and Peers had the ability to directly influence the course of political reform in Britain. It was Parliament that had the power to generate reform legislation, Parliament that carefully considered and shaped the text of any reform bill before it, and Parliament which would most be affected by the provisions of any such legislation by changing the composition of the electorate that elected it. The question of how far to widen the franchise was a key area of debate in 1866 and 1867. When parliamentarians came to consider the ability of working men to exercise the vote, they were drawn to looking at how certain polities, like the United States, had managed the challenges of a mass electorate. Unlike other modern European democracies which had experimented with a wider suffrage, the lessons that could be derived from the American experience were held to be uniquely relevant. Americans, British kinsmen, having started with broadly similar political understandings owing to an Anglo-Saxon heritage, had established a working democracy on an unprecedented scale which had defied expectations and lasted for nearly eighty years, despite the recent Civil War. Drawing on the example of America allowed parliamentarians to explore the issues surrounding extending the franchise to the working class.

Character and the Professionalisation of Political Life in Britain and America

The effect of political reform on the character of the House of Commons and its place in the British constitution was a major theme of parliamentary reform debates in 1866 and 1867. Since the 1830s understandings about character had become increasingly important in British politics, with the relationship between character and reform occupying a key position in the parliamentary reform debates of the 1860s which had not been the case in 1832. As Stefan Collini argues, the language of 'interests' and 'balance' which still occupied 'the centre of the

stage in 1832, had ceded considerable ground to the language of character by 1867'.¹⁴ Within the parliamentary debates of the 1860s, the American House of Representatives offered a prime example of the effects of democratic government on the character of politics and political institutions. For Conservative and Adullamite Liberal critics of political reform it served as a warning. Reform, for them, risked transforming the House of Commons into the House of Representatives – a chamber full of professional politicians, lacking a real connection to their constituents, forced to sacrifice their independence as a result of depending on the support of electioneering committees, with the inevitable consequence being that power to debate issues of national importance must be transferred to the second chamber. In 1866 and 1867, comparisons with America allowed parliamentarians to voice their opposition to the gradual shift towards a more modern party system and the increasing professionalisation of politics that was already well underway in the United States.

References to the American House of Representatives were a frequent feature of parliamentary reform debates in this period. In particular, members of the House of Lords expressed concerns about the potential impact of any measure of reform on the constitutional role of the House of Commons. In response to the Queen's Speech of 1866 which introduced a proposal to legislate for political reform, Liberal peer Earl Grey warned against any reform measures which sought to alter 'the whole existing character of the House of Commons...assimilating it to the House of Representatives of the American Congress'.¹⁵ Grey was one of the Adullamites, a term coined by John Bright at the start of the 1866 reform debate to refer to Liberals who had in Bright's view retreated to the 'political cave of Adullam' by opposing the reform bill proposed by Russell's Government.¹⁶

¹⁴ Collini, 'The Idea of "Character"', 45; see also Mandler, *English National Character*, 70-72.

¹⁵ HL Deb, 6 February 1866, Vol 181, Cols. 74-75.

¹⁶ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 219; See also F. B. Smith on the origins of the Adullamites in Smith, *Second Reform Bill*, 81-82.

Grey believed that under the existing system of representation the House of Commons was able to claim it represented a cross-section of the interests of the entire nation and that such a claim was understood and respected by its people. Any reform which changed the basis of representation, similar to the kind found in America, could see the Commons lose this respect. In the Committee Stage of the 1867 bill in the House of Lords, the Conservative peer the Duke of Marlborough warned that the proposed reform legislation had an ‘essential defect in it’ that would deprive the Commons of all its vigour by breaking ‘the simple theory which has pervaded all our institutions...which Englishmen understand’.¹⁷ For Peers such as Marlborough and Grey, the changes proposed to the existing system of representation by the 1866 and 1867 reform bills risked eroding the authority of the Commons and limiting its deliberative power. In 1867, Grey contrasted the abilities of the British Parliament with those of the American Congress to show that democracy, in prioritising the interests of a numerical majority, weakened the function of a legislature. Grey argued that when it came to meeting the objectives of a representative legislature ‘Congress is immeasurably inferior to the British Parliament...Its debates command nothing like the same interest and attention, and exercise far less influence for good on the minds of the people’.¹⁸ The consequence of this in America was that the House of Representatives occupied a smaller role in the constitution and the Senate was forced to take on an increasing role in its place.

Many MPs and Peers held that the deliberative power of a legislature was crucial. Disraeli identified it as ‘the only security for our freedom’ and the main element which had elevated ‘a rude popular assembly of the days of the Plantagenets into a Senate which commands the

¹⁷ HL Deb, 30 July 1867, Vol 189, Col. 458.

¹⁸ HL Deb, 15 March 1867, Vol 185, Col. 1906.

admiration of the world'.¹⁹ For many the power of the American House of Representatives had been weakened because of the spread of democracy. Any similar change in Britain would see the influence of the House of Commons lost to the House of Lords. This was an issue of clear concern to MPs as well as some in the House of Lords. During the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Conservative MP Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton made this connection by arguing that in lowering the standard of the constituency, the bill would transfer the 'intellectual power' of the Commons 'to some upper Chamber, whether it be an English House of Lords or an American Senate'.²⁰ When contemplating the prospect of a £7 annual rent qualification for the franchise, Bulwer-Lytton invited MPs to consider America, where everyone looked not to the House of Representatives but to the Senate to address issues of national interest; in America the safeguard against popular suffrage was the 'scantiness of the powers she leaves to her House of Representatives' leaving him to conclude that 'you might grant not only the £7 franchise, but even universal suffrage in this country...with safety to everything except genuine freedom' only if the Commons was left with as little influence, power, weight, and authority as were left to the Representative Chamber of America.²¹ If the franchise were extended to the working class, the safety of the State would necessitate that the powers and authority of the Representative Chamber were limited. In the Third Reading of the 1867 bill, Viscount Cranborne expressed reservations that the House of Lords in its current form would be able to meet the challenge of a violent popular assembly.²² Michael Bentley has shown how Cranborne's political thought had been informed by the experience of the Civil War, with Cranborne believing the moral of the conflict to be that the United States had shown what happens 'when majorities tyrannise minorities; and it was a lesson to bring home'.²³

¹⁹ HC Deb, 11 February 1867, Vol 185, Col. 232.

²⁰ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1249.

²¹ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1249.

²² HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Cols. 1544-1545.

²³ Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2001), 145-146.

The only option would be to do what they had done in America: shorten the period for which Parliament is elected, elect a Prime Minister under some other tenure by popular election, allow the Prime Minister to appoint their Cabinet without being responsible to the House of Commons, and subdivide the legislative power by creating local bodies.²⁴ Extending the franchise would begin a process where the only option would be to emulate the example of America.

Another area of concern was that reform could see the House of Commons lose its character if representatives no longer had the same connection with the particular interests of their constituencies, instead prioritising the whims of a simple numerical majority. This was a view expressed across the reform debates of this period by both Liberal and Conservative figures, from the First Reading of the 1866 bill to the Third Reading of the 1867 bill. In the First Reading of the 1866 bill, Robert Lowe, Liberal MP for Calne and one of the leading Adullamites, argued that MPs derived their character from their relationship with their constituencies, and that consequently ‘if you lower the character of the constituencies, you lower that of the representatives, and you lower the character of this House’ with the result of democratic constituencies found in all the assemblies of North America.²⁵ Jonathan Parry has shown how Lowe’s commitment to political economy made him particularly resistant to anything which might cause the House of Commons to lose its representative character and embolden working-class pressure for a redistribution of taxation on class lines.²⁶ On the final night of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Disraeli made the case that the ‘House should remain a House of Commons and not become a House of the People, the House of a mere

²⁴ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1545.

²⁵ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 156; See also Bulwer-Lytton on ‘the consequences of the measure before us...for...the permanent character of this House’, HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1238.

²⁶ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, 214-215.

indiscriminate multitude, devoid of any definite character'.²⁷ Viscount Cranborne would return to this theme during the Third Reading of the 1867 bill, warning that 'the envious spirit of democracy' would see the Commons lose the character it received through its contact with the electors'.²⁸ Making elections a more popular process led to concerns that this would discourage intelligent and educated minds from entering the political fray. As we have seen throughout the thesis so far, the perception that democracy in America had discouraged the wealthier and more educated from participating in political life there was widespread, disseminated in Britain through travel literature, newspaper coverage and works of political philosophy. Parliamentarians on both sides of the House voiced these fears in 1866 and 1867.²⁹ However, whereas popular debates and extraparliamentary discussions had focused on the idea of MPs potentially being reduced to delegates for the popular will, in Parliament, MPs and Peers were instead more concerned about MPs becoming delegates for canvassers and electioneering committees.

With the increasing professionalisation of political life and the gradual transition towards a modern party system, parliamentarians feared losing the ability to exercise their independence by placing power not in the hands of the people so much as in the hands of election agents. Reform risked changing the way in which elections were conducted. This was particularly an issue for Conservative MPs during the debates surrounding the 1867 reform bill. During the committee stage of the bill, Marlborough argued that the proposed bill would limit the active contesting of both borough and county seats by reducing the number of

²⁷ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 103.

²⁸ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1545.

²⁹ For examples of this theme see comments by Charles Adderley, Conservative MP, HC Deb, 16 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1421-1422; James Whiteside, Irish Conservative MP, HC Deb, 4 June 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1866; Earl Grey, Liberal Peer, HL Deb, 22 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1816-1817; Earl Spencer, Liberal Peer, HL Deb, 30 July 1867, Vol 189, Cols. 449-450.

candidates who would offer themselves for selection.³⁰ In this way, the method of choosing candidates to stand at elections would come to resemble the process adopted in America with electioneering committees needed to nominate candidates. The result would be that certain candidates would be selected by the most active members of the community in the form of these electioneering committees, with electors only able to choose between a narrow choice of candidates. The Duke of Marlborough observed that candidates would now be put forward on electioneering tickets, as was the case in America, concluding that adopting this American practice would ‘be fatal to the vigour of our English system of election’.³¹ In 1866, Charles Adderley, Conservative MP for Staffordshire North, had similarly observed that greatly extending the franchise would not empower voters but would instead leave elections to be decided by agents who ‘as in America... would act in elections upon a large scale as factors of votes’.³² During the Committee Stage of the 1867 bill, Cranborne similarly reflected on the danger he believed the 1866 bill had posed to the existing system of elections, when MPs had been ‘in danger of drifting into a system of nomination caucuses such as were to be seen in operation in America’.³³ To Cranborne, the 1867 bill once again raised the possibility of introducing the American principle of professionalising the process of elections. The danger of ‘following so closely in the footsteps of America’ for Cranborne was that it would leave the business of government in the hands of party managers, ‘not usually men of the purest motives or highest character’.³⁴ Reform had the potential to change the relationship between MPs and voters. Conservative MP Alexander Beresford Hope opened his speech during the

³⁰ HL Deb, 30 July 1867, Vol 189, Col.457.

³¹ HL Deb, 30 July 1867, Vol 189, Col.457.

³² HC Deb, 30 May 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1529; Adderley would return to this theme during the Committee Stage of the 1867 bill in response to a proposed amendment which he felt would substitute the organisation of elections based on English principles with those of America, HC Deb, 1 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 814.

³³ HC Deb, 30 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 1357; The idea of the caucus in British politics in the period after the Second Reform Act is explored by James Owen who shows how from 1868 more sophisticated forms of electoral machinery were introduced to manage the newly expanded electorate, with America serving as a point of comparison in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, 91-120.

³⁴ HC Deb, 30 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 1357-1358.

Committee Stage by arguing that under an enlarged suffrage candidates would lose their connections to their constituencies, becoming more reliant on the assistance ‘as in America...of committees and canvassers, whose mouthpiece and delegate he would have to make himself if he intended to succeed’.³⁵ Those who were not content to serve as the mouthpiece for their constituency association would have no choice but to avoid participating in political life. Instead of applying their knowledge and expertise to important matters of state, they would now be forced to act as delegates for the views of their electioneering committee, lest they be replaced by another candidate at the next election.

Adullamite Liberals shared these concerns about how the example of America demonstrated the low character of professional politicians who would take the place of so-called “higher minds”. In the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Lowe noted ‘we see in America...that they do not send honest, hardworking men to represent them in Congress, but traffickers in office, bankrupts, men who have lost their character and been driven from every respectable way of life, and who take up politics as a last resource’.³⁶ Newly enfranchised working-class male voters would not elect real working men. Professional politicians would seek to establish themselves by representing the voice of the working man, while in reality their only interest would be getting elected. In this, Lowe echoed the sentiments that had been expressed by Beresford-Hope who believed that the creation of working men’s constituencies would see the rise of professional politicians ‘ready to take a working man's brief’.³⁷ The result of the proposed measure of reform for Beresford-Hope was that the working man's representative would not be ‘a disinterestedly honest man, standing forward to plead the working man's

³⁵ HC Deb, 20 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 811; See also Robert Lowe, Liberal MP, HC Deb, 20 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 794; Julian Goldsmid, Liberal MP, HC Deb, 3 June 1867, Vol 187, Col. 1505; and William Beach, Conservative MP, HC Deb, 5 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1079; See also comments by the Earl of Carnarvon in the Lords, HL Deb, 30 July 1867, Vol 189, Col. 460.

³⁶ HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 2107.

³⁷ HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1691.

cause solely from his conscientious convictions, but a retained advocate who would...be speaking to his brief with ears closed to conviction'.³⁸ In 1867, Earl Grey expressed similar concerns about the emergence of a professional class of politicians who would acquire 'the virtual dominion of elections'.³⁹ For these figures, attempting to manage elections after a large extension of the franchise would see the increasing professionalisation of political life. Candidates, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the new, enlarged electorate, would be forced to seek the aid of electioneering committees to meet the rising election costs that would accompany such an expansion.

Overall, maintaining the character of the House of Commons was a preeminent concern for many parliamentarians in the reform debates of 1866 and 1867. Many Liberal and Conservative parliamentarians shared concerns that any measure of political reform which changed the system of representation in the country from one ostensibly based on a representation of all classes and interests to one based on representing the interests of a numerical majority of the population, risked changing the House of Commons into a legislature like the House of Representatives of the American Congress.

Land, Demagoguery and Reform in Britain and the United States

A key issue concerning parliamentarians in this period was how to enfranchise the working classes without disfranchising those who already had the vote. It was feared that extending political power to such a large and supposedly uniform group as the working class risked creating a 'tyrant majority'. For Conservatives, the example of America showed how in a democracy, a 'tyrant majority' would always seek to displace the interests of a minority.

³⁸ HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1691.

³⁹ HL Deb, 22 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1816.

During the Committee Stage of the 1867 bill, Conservative MP Charles Newdegate cited de Tocqueville's comments to Nassau Senior in 1854 on the danger that the U.S. Constitution posed for Britain. Reading from Nassau Senior's journal, Newdegate repeated de Tocqueville's warning against 'a further step to universal suffrage... While you preserve your aristocracy you will preserve your freedom. If that goes, you are in danger of falling into the worst of tyrannies'.⁴⁰ The political influence of an aristocratic minority was seen to be a kind of safeguard, protecting the interests of all minorities. Parry has shown the impact of concerns about plutocracy and the rise in political and social power of commercial wealth on debates about reform in the 1860s, citing how this development owed a lot to a sense of alarm at the politics of the United States, 'where wealth was the only aristocracy and an alliance of "democracy and plutocracy" seemed to have lowered morals'.⁴¹ The 1866 reform bill was criticised by Conservatives for not taking any precaution to ensure the representation of minorities.⁴² Under the rule of the majority, the interests of minorities could not be guaranteed. When proposing the Conservatives' answer to the reform question in 1867 as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Disraeli dismissed the idea of any reform measure which gave any class a preponderant power in the Commons, presenting the franchise proposed by the Conservatives' reform bill as 'a popular privilege, and not as a democratic right'.⁴³ Once created, majorities would use their popular mandate to attack any sign of opposition to their will. The example of America demonstrated the hostility with which political majorities treated any source of opposition. Adullamite Liberals like Robert Lowe concurred that in the United States 'the minority of thousands might as well not exist at all... Is this country, in like

⁴⁰ HC Deb, 5 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1089; For a similar Conservative view see the comments of James Whiteside, Irish Conservative MP, on how democracy in America had shown how 'democracy places the enlightened few at the mercy of the ignorant majority', HC Deb, 4 June 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1866.

⁴¹ Jonathan Parry, '1867 and the Rule of Wealth', in Robert Saunders (ed.), *Shooting Niagara – and After? The Second Reform Act and its World*, *Parliamentary History*, 36:1 (2017), 48-49.

⁴² For example see the speech by George Sandford on how the 1866 bill did not offer protection for minorities; Maldon also took this opportunity to remind MPs that in the United States 'they had seen minorities rising in arms against the intolerable oppression of majorities', HC Deb, 28 May 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1387.

⁴³ HC Deb, 11 February 1866, Vol 185, Col. 232.

manner, to be formed into two hostile camps?’⁴⁴ Any reform measure which emulated the example of America would naturally threaten the interests of minorities.

However, not all agreed on this interpretation. Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals in particular took issue with the argument made by Adullamite Liberals and the opposition, arguing instead that democracies were much more tolerant of minorities than had been suggested. George Shaw Lefevre denied Lowe’s suggestion that in America the minority of thousands were ignored, countering that under the American constitution ‘there was no country where the position and numbers of a minority...even when unrepresented in Congress...carried more weight in proportion to its numbers’.⁴⁵ Supporting Lefevre’s speech and taking issue with Newdegate’s comments, John Bright argued that minorities were politically represented in America, observing that there had never been a time in the history of the United States ‘when the minority in the House of Representatives has not been equally proportioned at least to the minority out of doors’.⁴⁶ For this group the experience of representative institutions like those of America demonstrated that minorities were still able to exert influence even if they were not successful at an election. In an effort to resolve this Liberal split, John Stuart Mill attempted to propose an amendment based on the reform proposals of Thomas Hare, as discussed in chapter three, to the 1867 bill during the Committee Stage which would have ensured the protection of minorities in a reformed system.⁴⁷ Believing that democratic government and the fair representation of minority interests were not irreconcilable, he proposed that his plan would ensure that ‘even universal suffrage, even the handing over of

⁴⁴ HC Deb, 4 July 1867, Vol 188, Col 1041.

⁴⁵ HC Deb, 5 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1070.

⁴⁶ HC Deb, 5 July 1867, Vol 188, Cols. 1092-1093.

⁴⁷ Based on the Hare quota, Mill’s amendment to the redistribution clauses proposed that electors would be able to vote for any candidate in the United Kingdom, putting as many names as they liked in order of preference on their voting papers, and that candidates who obtained the quota would then be elected. For more see Jenifer Hart, *Proportional Representation: Critics of the British Electoral System, 1820-1945* (Oxford, 1992), 49-53.

political predominance to the numerical majority of the whole people, would not then extinguish minorities'.⁴⁸ However, Mill later withdrew his amendment to the bill when it became clear that it would not gain enough support.

The potential for reform to empower the interests of the majority led to discussions about the risk of introducing demagoguery to the British political system. By increasing the political influence of the working classes, a reformed system would naturally increase the regard in which these claims were held by those above them. Robert Lowe turned to the writings of the Whig politician Lord Macaulay, whose speeches in favour of the 1832 Reform Act had earned him a reputation as a great Parliamentary orator. Catherine Hall argues that Macaulay's rhetoric had been driven by the belief that the new settlement post-1832 would secure English 'liberty' and 'freedom', and that ultimately 'reform would preserve order'.⁴⁹ However, where in the 1830s Macaulay had looked towards France to illustrate the kind of disaster which could follow a failure to confront the need for change, in the 1860s Lowe now used Macaulay's words to argue that importing an American-style democracy would threaten the existing system of property. Lowe cited Macaulay's response to being sent a copy of a *Life of Thomas Jefferson*, to highlight how the existing franchise in Britain, unlike the American franchise, protected property and secured order. Lowe quoted Macaulay's conclusion that in Britain, 'the supreme power is in the hands of...an educated class...which is and knows itself to be deeply interested in the security of property and the maintenance of order' while in America it was clear that their government 'will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority...the rich, who are always a minority, [are] absolutely at its mercy'.⁵⁰ In times of difficulty, demagogues could excite working people to exercise their

⁴⁸ HC Deb, 30 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 1352.

⁴⁹ Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven, 2012), 153-160.

⁵⁰ HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 2115; Lowe would return to this theme in 1867 noting America's 'fertile land, noble rivers, boundless extent of territory' while in England property was the 'work of art and of

political power through their representatives. For Lowe, the influence that demagogues could exert on the working class had been clear to Macaulay and Lowe now reminded members of his assessment of legislatures elected by working men.

Many Conservatives similarly believed that the working classes could not be counted on to resist the sway of demagogues in difficult times. Sir Thomas Bateson contended that the true motivation of Liberal and Radical reformers was to wage war against the rights of property and that they sought to enlist the support of working men to do this.⁵¹ In his concluding speech during the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Disraeli stated his belief that the conditions which made democratic institutions ‘flourish’ in America simply did not exist in England, remarking ‘if I see a great body of educated men in possession of a vast expanse of cultivated land, and behind them an illimitable region where the landless might become landowners, then I should recognize a race to whom might be intrusted the responsibility of sovereign power’.⁵² For Conservatives, the 1866 reform bill allowed demagogues to encourage newly enfranchised voters to attack the system and influence of property by returning members who would emasculate the aristocracy and the law of primogeniture. The abundance of land in America made democracy suitable there in a way that could not be said for Britain. If the working men of America demanded more land it could easily be given; land was not the cause of political disputes but the solution. In contrast, if a new reform bill allowed the working men of Britain to express their dissatisfaction about the existing

time...piled up century after century by the industry of successive generations of Englishmen...it may be overthrown in a far shorter period of time than anybody who has not given his attention to the subject would believe’, HC Deb, 20 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 795.

⁵¹ HC Deb, 4 June 1866, Vol 183, Cols. 1856; For similar views from Conservative MPs see comments by Bulwer-Lytton, HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1248; Robert Montagu, HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1284; and Sir John Pakington, HC Deb, 31 May 1866, Vol 183, Cols. 1579-1580.

⁵² HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 103.

distribution of land there was no more land to give; in Britain land would be the cause of political disputes not the solution to them.

These fears resurfaced in the 1867 reform debates; however this time they were concentrated in the House of Lords. In the Commons, Disraeli emphasised that while the reform bill he now placed before the house accepted the principle of household suffrage for the borough franchise, it had been designed with checks and counterbalances that the 1866 bill had lacked. As Paul Smith has demonstrated, the initial bill was an attempt by 'Conservative chiefs to extricate themselves from the Reform imbroglio with a measure large enough in appearance to quieten the popular clamour, but sufficiently restricted in its practical effects to be palatable to the bulk of the middle classes'.⁵³ A combination of a two-year residence qualification, a requirement that voters pay their rates in person (thereby excluding compounders who paid their rates through their landlords), and the creation of so-called 'fancy franchises' which granted extra votes to graduates, professionals and those with large savings, were deemed sufficient safeguards by Disraeli. As the bill progressed through the Commons these safeguards were gradually removed and altered by Liberal and Radical amendments. Derby's minority ministry, lacking a parliamentary majority to resist these amendments, was forced to accept them. As Cowling has explored, when Disraeli first presented the bill in March 1867, the Conservative party's relative weakness due to its lack of a majority had allowed Disraeli to convince many Conservatives to reluctantly accept the idea of household suffrage with safeguards. Whilst a number of these safeguards had been stripped away by May 1867, the prospect of a reform act which might allow for a Conservative majority government for the first time since 1846 proved sufficient to sway

⁵³ Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 90-92.

enough Conservative MPs to get the bill through the Commons.⁵⁴ Determined to avoid the same fate as Russell's ministry, Disraeli pressed on with provisions to limit the effect of these amendments.

However, when the 1867 reform bill reached the House of Lords, both Conservative and Liberal Peers questioned the sufficiency of these provisions, taking great interest in the perceived threat of demagoguery and reform to the existing system of property distribution. Arguably, as those with the greatest interest in maintaining the existing property system they had the most to lose if political reform undermined this. Over the course of two nights during the Second Reading, peers debated the threat that demagoguery posed to the influence of property in Britain, drawing on the example of America in the process. The Earl of Shaftesbury described the attitude of working men towards the distribution of property in America. Reading from a report published in *The Times*, he cited the recent comments of the President of the Senate who had concluded that once slavery had been addressed, questions about labour and capital would come to dominate the country and that a party might well rise to prominence there by campaigning for a redistribution of property.⁵⁵ Shaftesbury himself urged his fellow peers to consider that with the strong resemblance between the two countries 'may we not expect that what is going on in America will be imitated here, and that we shall come in this country to the assertion of similar principles and the agitation of similar questions'?⁵⁶ Fellow Conservative the Earl of Carnarvon remarked that 'the result of such a lowering of the franchise is to disfranchise property'.⁵⁷ Carnarvon's comments followed his resignation from the Government in March 1867 in protest at the lack of safeguards in the 1867 bill to protect the interests of property. On the other side of the House, the Earl of

⁵⁴ Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, 282-283.

⁵⁵ HL Deb, 23 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1927.

⁵⁶ HL Deb, 23 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1927.

⁵⁷ HL Deb, 22 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1834.

Harrowby proclaimed that the bill would place too much political power into the hands of the poorer classes, thereby disfranchising every other class and that as a result the influence of property would be attacked.⁵⁸ Other peers were more optimistic. The Duke of Argyll offered a more positive case for recognising the political opinions of working men, observing that while reform would increase the political influence of the working classes, it would also ‘stimulate and increase the regard in which these claims will be held by those above them’ bringing about ‘a more friendly consideration of their claims’.⁵⁹ Argyll had been a staunch supporter of the North during the American Civil War. Nevertheless, as the 1867 reform bill headed towards the committee stage in July 1867, peers such as Shaftesbury, Carnarvon and Harrowby, with the example of America in mind, were united in their conviction that enfranchising a large section of the working classes of Britain, without sufficient safeguards, would create a challenge to the existing system of property distribution in the country.

With the Reconstruction Amendments making their way through Congress, aimed at abolishing slavery and ensuring that no person was deprived life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, the possibility that democratic institutions would now embolden demagogues and working people to seek a more equal distribution of property in the United States and inspire a similar campaign in Britain led many Peers to continue to express their concerns about the impact of reform on the distribution of property. As Shaftesbury warned, the working classes felt that property was not distributed ‘as property ought to be’ and ‘in times of distress and difficulty these opinions, urged upon them by any great demagogue...would take possession of their minds and sink deeply into their hearts’.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ HL Deb, 23 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 2013.

⁵⁹ HL Deb, 23 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1958.

⁶⁰ HL Deb, 23 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1927-1928.

The ability of working-class voters to resist the sway of demagoguery and the question of whether minority interests such as land could be protected with an enlarged franchise ultimately divided Parliament. In 1866, Conservatives and Adullamite Liberals maintained that the surplus of land available in America made democracy viable there in a way that could not be said for Britain; a wider suffrage would allow demagogues to enlist popular support to alter the existing system of property distribution. Meanwhile, Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals believed that while reform would force parliamentarians to be more sympathetic to the issues facing working-class voters, they trusted that a fair representation of minority interests was still possible in a more democratic system. In 1867, the focus of this debate shifted towards the House of Lords as the prospect of a Conservative majority government combined with, as Gertrude Himmelfarb has documented, Disraeli's assurances that the aristocracy and the working class were natural allies and that 'politics and society were largely governed by traditions of leadership and deference', was enough to sway some Conservative MPs.⁶¹ However, Conservative Peers remained concerned that democratic institutions would embolden working people to seek a more equal distribution of property in both the United States and Britain.

The influence of working-class voters on foreign and economic policy

The recent context of the Civil War provided another crucial element in the parliamentary reform debates over the 1866 reform bill, in this case regarding the potential impact of political reform on British foreign policy. Adullamite Liberals who opposed franchise extension argued that granting working-class voters more political power would allow them to pressure Parliament to pursue a more interventionist foreign policy. Responding to a speech delivered by Gladstone in Liverpool, in which he had congratulated the working

⁶¹ Himmelfarb, 'The Politics of Democracy', 111.

classes for resisting the urge to demand that Britain interfere in the Civil War and spoke of the ‘magnificent spectacle of the strength put forth by democracy in the recent war’, Robert Lowe challenged this assessment in the Second Reading of the 1866 bill by arguing that instead democracy was ‘a terrible warlike power’ and that, if enfranchised, the working classes would be unable to resist their ‘generous instincts’; when confronted with cases of ‘injustice’ and ‘wickedness’ across the world they would be moved to use their newfound political power to demand that these grievances be addressed, regardless of any other concerns.⁶² According to proponents of this view, enfranchising working men would make war more likely and make the business of government more expensive as a result. Fellow Adullamite Liberal Samuel Laing similarly drew on the example of America to question whether working-class voters would be motivated by passions and emotions or more sober judgement, contending that democratic institutions ‘gave great energy to the action of the people in any cause in which their sympathies were heartily engaged’.⁶³ Adullamite Liberals like Lowe and Laing noted that when it came to navigating foreign policy issues the United States enjoyed specific circumstances that Britain did not. Unlike American foreign policy, British foreign policy had to take account of a complex set of relationships with powerful neighbours across Europe, as well as consider its position at the centre of the Empire.

Adullamite Liberals shared this view with Conservative parliamentarians. Earlier in the same debate, Bulwer-Lytton noted that universal suffrage could do more harm to British foreign policy than it might in America, believing that extending political power to working men, who would be driven by a detestation of tyranny and injustice, would be a perpetual source of danger.⁶⁴ In part, Bulwer-Lytton was informed by the experience of the Civil War. Leslie

⁶² HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 2104-2105.

⁶³ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1319.

⁶⁴ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1248.

Mitchell argues that Bulwer-Lytton ‘watched its slaughter without surprise’.⁶⁵ The House of Commons had a much greater role in the development of foreign policy than the American House of Representatives as a result of the provisions of the US Constitution. In Britain, the close link between the executive and the legislature and the fact that the government derived its mandate from an ability to command a majority in the House of Commons meant that when it came to foreign policy, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary would seek the support of the Commons. In the United States, however, the terms of the constitution meant that it was the upper house, the Senate, rather than the House of Representatives whose consent the President was compelled to seek when making treaties and appointing ambassadors. The implications of this for those opposed to further reform were clear. Adullamite Liberals and Conservatives reflected on recent crises in Poland, Italy and Denmark, insisting that a Parliament elected by a numerical majority of working men would drive the country to war, with a working-class tendency to ‘side with the weak against the strong’ demanding that Britain embroil itself in ‘a great European struggle’.⁶⁶ The aristocratic nature of the Foreign Office was held by many in Parliament to be a safeguard against the kind of costly wars that a large, unchecked expansion of the franchise might bring about. This desire to preserve the aristocratic character of the British Foreign Office is confirmed by Robert T. Nightingale’s analysis of its personnel in this period. Nightingale points to the slow permeation of the diplomatic principle into the recruitment methods of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service, in contrast to the rest of the civil service, as the direct result of a belief that diplomacy required ‘a breeding and finesse that could be found only amongst the aristocracy and the gentry’.⁶⁷ As a result, for these figures only a House of Commons elected

⁶⁵ Leslie Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London, 2003), 224.

⁶⁶ Lord Robert Montagu (Con), HC Deb, 12 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 74; Bulwer-Lytton, HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1248; Laing, HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1318-1319.

⁶⁷ Robert T. Nightingale, ‘The Personnel of the British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service, 1851-1929’, *The American Political Science Review*, 24:2 (1930), 313-314.

under the principles of the existing electoral system could take into consideration all the necessary factors when debating foreign policy. This feeling was summarised by Lowe when he urged MPs to consider that voters must be able to look ‘not merely at the injustice itself...[but] at the collateral circumstances, at what must happen to trade, revenue, and our own position in the world...Persons...who have something to lose, are less anxious to lose it than those who have little at stake often’.⁶⁸

In contrast, Radical Liberals who supported reform argued that it was the exemplary conduct of the working classes during the crisis of the American Civil War which demonstrated their worthiness to be given the right to vote. In the First Reading of the 1866 bill, Henry Fawcett observed that during the Civil War, while it had been thought by many ‘of our leading statesmen’ that the shortage of cotton would have seen the people of Lancashire rebel and demand the cessation of the American blockade, having visited Lancashire during their distress he reported that he had found the prevailing ‘noble and glorious sentiment’ was that the people ‘would far sooner that a bale of cotton should never again be woven into cloth in a Lancashire mill – than that slavery should continue’.⁶⁹ Fawcett’s comments followed on from those of Charles Pelham Villiers who maintained that the higher qualities and ‘superior wisdom’ of the working class had been exhibited by them during the Civil War in America.⁷⁰ For these Radicals, the working class had resisted efforts to induce them to demonstrate for the British Government to alter its position of non-interference in the Civil War. Villiers described how despite the best efforts of Confederate supporters in Britain, the working classes ‘could not be shaken in their steadfast conviction that it was an unrighteous war’ and thus had proven their ability to resist efforts to induce them to rally for the government to

⁶⁸ HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 2105.

⁶⁹ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 203.

⁷⁰ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 173.

break its policy of strict neutrality.⁷¹ Fellow Radical John Bright argued that it was the Conservative Party, not the working classes of Britain, which had sought to alter Britain's position of neutrality in the conflict.⁷² With the events of the Crimean War also in mind, this point particularly resonated with Radical Liberals during the Second Reading of the 1866 bill who disputed the idea that a newly enfranchised working class would be quick to push for intervention in foreign conflicts upon the slightest pretexts.⁷³ Bright in particular had been a vocal opponent of the Crimean War. For Miles Taylor, the Crimean War represented a 'watershed' moment for Radical and Liberal politics with the inconclusive end of the conflict in 1856 provoking widespread dissatisfaction with British intervention in Europe.⁷⁴ Now in 1866, Radical Liberals drew on the British experience of the American Civil War to argue that it was not the working class, but the aristocratic class whose impulsive nature was likely to drive the country into war. The economic distress in Lancashire caused by the cotton famine as a result of the Civil War, and the way in which the working classes of Lancashire had endured it, demonstrated that they merited the vote.

Through expressing this conviction, Radical Liberals sought to support Gladstone's defence of the 1866 bill. Gladstone, as MP for South Lancashire, was particularly aware of the distress that the American Civil War had caused the working classes of Lancashire. Representing the Government as the final speaker during the Second Reading of the 1866 reform bill, Gladstone proclaimed that during the suffering of the Civil War, the British working class had shown that their qualities were not those of 'a depraved multitude, but of the mass of a working community...The heroism was heroism of the mass'.⁷⁵ As Parry has

⁷¹ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 173-174.

⁷² HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Cols. 105-106.

⁷³ Other examples of contributions by Radical Liberals include those by John Maguire, HC Deb, 16 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1372; and Austen Layard, HC Deb, 16 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1443.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *Decline of British Radicalism*, 258.

⁷⁵ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 147.

argued, such language about ‘trusting the people’ was a major feature of Gladstonian Liberalism which advocated that both in domestic and foreign policy, a ‘well ordered national community’ should respect the moral conscience by venerating ‘the humanity of man’.⁷⁶ The working classes knew that the American conflict was the source of their economic difficulties, yet they had resisted the idea of seeking to change the position of the Government to remain neutral in the conflict. Labelling this as an astonishing phenomenon of self-denial, Gladstone described how they had formed ‘a conviction so still, so calm, so firm, so energetic’ that their sympathies lay with the people of the North and that despite their sufferings ‘no word should proceed from them that would hurt a cause which they so firmly believed to be just’.⁷⁷ Having met with delegations of working men representing trade unions during the 1860s, as explored by Peter Mandler, Gladstone, informed by the experience of the Civil War, advocated that this exemplary character could be extended to the working classes across the country.⁷⁸ Gladstone was joined by other members of the Liberal Government in making this point to defend the reform bill that they had placed before the House. On the second night of the Second Reading of the bill, Home Secretary and Liberal MP for Morpeth, Sir George Grey, argued that it was not enough for members in the House to congratulate the working class for their conduct during the Civil War without formally recognising their merit by giving them the vote. Grey reminded members that their conduct must be rewarded by more than just words, questioning if ‘the advance in the character and intelligence of the working classes during the last thirty years [was] to have no practical effect in leading us to enlarge the basis of the franchise’.⁷⁹ For Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals, the American Civil War had revealed the steadfast convictions of the working classes and that they would

⁷⁶ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, 102.

⁷⁷ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 148.

⁷⁸ Mandler, *English National Character*, 70.

⁷⁹ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1301.

not use their newfound recognition to pressure Parliament to pursue a more interventionist foreign policy.

In addition to foreign policy, political reform and the example of the United States also had potential implications for British economic policy. An intrinsic link between democracy and protectionism was posited by some ardent supporters of the doctrine of free trade. This was one of the first points to be raised in the reform debates of 1866. At the First Reading of the 1866 bill, after Gladstone introduced the bill to the house, fellow Liberal MP Matthew Henry Marsh immediately argued that democracy had been the opponent of commercial freedom and labelled Protection as ‘the child of democracy’.⁸⁰ He went on to draw on the example of protectionism displayed by America, citing high protective tariffs such as the Maine Liquor Law which the democratic institutions of America had allowed to become legislation.⁸¹

As with foreign policy, this concern was shared by Adullamite Liberals and Conservative members across the Commons. On the next night of debate, Viscount Cranborne argued that those in favour of political reform should consider the state of opinion in the democracies of the world on free trade. He connected democracy with protectionism, concluding that it was an established fact that ‘in proportion as you advance in democratic form of government, in that proportion is the doctrine of protection to native industry cherished’ and he recommended that those who supported free trade should study how in democratic nations like the United States which had a much wider suffrage ‘free trade doctrines are scorned’.⁸² While on the second night of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill Liberal MP Samuel Laing confessed his great sense of unease that the principles of free trade and non-intervention

⁸⁰ HC Deb, 12 March 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 60-61.

⁸¹ HC Deb, 12 March 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 61.

⁸² HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 231-232.

could not be maintained in a Parliament elected by a numerical majority of the working class. Laing argued that as nations like America ‘approached universal suffrage and manhood suffrage, the working classes were found to become Protectionists in feeling and practice’.⁸³ The existing franchise in Britain guaranteed the principles of free trade by producing a legislature that could convince people of its necessity to the prosperity of the country.

Towards the end of the Second Reading of the bill, Robert Lowe launched a sustained argument about the danger democracy posed to free trade. He described the zeal with which protectionism had become completely embedded in America, so that it now persisted ‘in sacrificing the most valuable resources...maintaining duties that provoke to wholesale smuggling rather than reduce them by a single penny.’⁸⁴ In the 1867 debates, Lowe would return to this theme, again citing the example of America as a nation where democracy had led to protectionism; the ‘spirit of protection’ was alive in America, where ‘the working classes acquiesce in allowing the masters to have protective duties to any amount’.⁸⁵ Not all parliamentarians were convinced by this argument. For example, on the third night of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, John Maguire opened the debate by contending that the passing of the £7 franchise would not sweep away the principle of free trade. He was convinced that ‘that the working classes were too much alive to the advantages which had accrued to them from the adoption of free trade, to wish in any degree to change our policy in these respects’.⁸⁶ However, for Adullamite Liberals and Conservatives, a Parliament elected by a numerical majority of working men could not guarantee the doctrine of free trade; the principle of free trade would be swept away by the influence of democracy.

⁸³ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1318.

⁸⁴ HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 2106.

⁸⁵ HC Deb, 20 May 1867, Vol 187, Col. 791.

⁸⁶ HC Deb, 16 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1372.

Overall, the consequences of an expanded franchise for British foreign and economic policy were a key area of debate, particularly surrounding the reform bill of 1866. The recent experience of the Civil War and the example of protectionist economic policies in the United States informed the arguments deployed by MPs. Conservative MPs were united in the belief that a newly enfranchised working class, motivated by a strong detestation of tyranny and injustice, would use their newfound political power to force the Government to intervene in numerous costly foreign conflicts. While the Conservative Party was relatively united on this issue, the Liberal Party remained divided. Adullamite Liberals like Laing and Lowe disagreed with Gladstone's assessment of working-class character, sharing the Conservative interpretation of the Civil War as an example of the negative effect of democratic institutions on a nation. Meanwhile other Liberals followed the lead of Gladstone, arguing that the working classes had demonstrated an exemplary character during the Civil War and that the vote should be extended to them in recognition of this. This dynamic was similarly played out when it came to the influence of working-class voters on economic policy. Whilst Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals disputed that the working classes of Britain would support protectionist tariffs, Adullamite Liberals and Conservatives, opposed to democratic reform, consistently argued that American democracy and American high protective tariffs could not be separated, to accept one was to accept the other.

Education and Artisan Emigration to America

Another theme of the reform debates in this period in which America featured significantly revolved around the issue of education. We have seen throughout the thesis so far how the relationship between the franchise and education was a recurring theme of British analysis of American democracy. In 1866 and 1867, both Conservative and Liberal MPs were similarly clear on the educational requirements for any expansion of the franchise. However, when it

came to debating the specific provisions of proposed reform legislation, what parliamentarians added to this ongoing discussion was a focus on which was a necessary precondition for the other as well as an assessment of what the consequences of failing to admit the artisan population of Britain to the franchise would be. With the prospect of an enlarged suffrage looming, the education of working-class voters who would be expected to make an informed choice in subsequent elections became increasingly important. Discussions about the existing system of education in Britain and the ability of the working classes to improve themselves once again invited comparisons with America.

For many Conservative figures, political reform was impossible without first educating those to whom it was proposed to grant the right to vote. Those who believed education was a necessary precondition for political reform contended that without sufficient education, a newly enfranchised electorate of working men would be unable to make a rational choice at elections, thereby undermining the crucial constitutional role that elections fulfilled. A strong case for this was made in the Third Reading of the 1867 bill by Viscount Cranborne. Cranborne argued that ‘from the moment that you intrust the masses with power their education becomes an absolute necessity’.⁸⁷ Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton similarly expressed this sentiment on the second night of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill.⁸⁸ Before democracies could be constructed, they must first be built on a strong foundation of education. This had been the case in America. The argument proposed was that democracy in America had only been able to function because it was preceded by a long period of education for the poorest before they were enfranchised. Bulwer-Lytton observed that in America a period of 150 years of education, ‘brought home, to the door of the poorest citizen’

⁸⁷ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1549.

⁸⁸ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1244.

preceded the establishment of a democracy.⁸⁹ The example of America demonstrated to them that education could not follow the introduction of democratic reform but must instead precede it. In 1867, when the reform bill looked set to pass having reached the Third Reading, Conservatives were forced to adapt their argument. Cranborne, who had resigned from the Government in protest over the bill, now argued strongly that having moved to extend political power to the working classes, their education must now be a paramount issue to Parliament. He concluded his speech with the refrain: ‘you have placed the Government in the hands of the masses, and you must therefore give them education. You must take education up as the very first question, and you must press it on without delay for the peace of the country’.⁹⁰ As Prime Minister, Cranborne would later go on to support the expansion of free education and introduce education legislation including the Elementary School Teachers (Superannuation) Act of 1898 and the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act of 1899. David Steele has argued that for Cranborne free education was ‘the corollary of democracy’ and the best defence against ‘the spread of radicalism and socialism’.⁹¹ Cranborne was not alone among Conservatives who, having drawn on the example of America to support their arguments about electoral reform, would go on to support education reform and legislation after 1867.⁹²

⁸⁹ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1245.

⁹⁰ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1549.

⁹¹ David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London, 1999), 235.

⁹² Charles Adderley would go on to serve on a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts of England and Wales between 1886 and 1888, see William S. Childe-Pemberton, *Life of Lord Norton* (London, 1909), 266-267. As Vice-President of the Committee on Education between 1867 and 1868, Lord Robert Montagu would advocate for the extension of technical education in the aftermath of the Second Reform Act being passed, G. Le G. Norgate and H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Lord Robert Montagu’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). Debates around the first Elementary Education Act in 1870 would see Alexander Beresford Hope, a strong supporter of denominational education, start a campaign for post-elementary education in line with church doctrines which he would maintain until his death in 1887, Michael J. Turner, “‘Respect for Settled Forms’”: Beresford Hope, the Church, and Post-Elementary Education in Britain’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 88:1 (2019), 1-29. Sir John Pakington and the Earl of Shaftesbury, both long-standing supporters of educational reform, would also support the 1870 Education Act.

For Liberal parliamentarians, improvements in education were impossible to achieve without extending political power to the working classes. For those who believed political reform was a necessary precondition for educational improvements, they contended that reform would give the working classes the tools they needed to improve and educate themselves and that extending political power to them would ensure that the Government took the necessary steps to make such means of improvement available to them. Responding to the speech by Bulwer-Lytton in the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Liberal MP and Home Secretary Sir George Grey countered that the working classes had improved immeasurably since the passage of the Great Reform Act. Grey implored his fellow MPs not to overlook the improvement that had taken place in the character, the knowledge and the information of the working classes since 1832 and all that had been done by Parliament to promote their education.⁹³ Following the last measure of political reform, the means of self-education and self-improvement had been placed within reach of the working classes and they had availed themselves of them.

America, likewise, also demonstrated that education could follow democratic reform and that the citizens of a democracy could be taught how to participate in political society after they had already been enfranchised. Speaking alongside Grey, John Stuart Mill observed the educational benefits of giving political power to the artisan class through the example of America. Mill disputed the idea that working men could not be convinced by reasoned arguments, remarking that democracy in the United States had rendered Americans ‘the most teachable people on the face of the earth’.⁹⁴ Both in America and in Britain, for figures such as Mill it was the artisan class who would benefit the most from enfranchisement. Mill believed that after reform it would be found that as in America, the educated artisans of Britain would be ‘the most teachable of all our classes’.⁹⁵ Working men could be reasoned

⁹³ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1300.

⁹⁴ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1260-1261.

⁹⁵ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1261.

with. Gladstone similarly spoke of his desire that reform would see ‘the whole of the people educated’.⁹⁶

Liberal MPs also feared that if the artisan class were not enfranchised, eventually they would leave Britain and move to somewhere they could be more valued. An example of this came in the speech of Thomas Hughes. Speaking in support of the 1866 reform bill during its Second Reading, Hughes argued that unless they were given a direct share in the representation of the country ‘before long we might find the skilled artisans estranged from their country’.⁹⁷ Were they to leave the country, their destination was clear – America. Hughes cited a newspaper article he had read recently about the recent emigration of ninety families of skilled artisans from Wales to America, noting that this was not an isolated incident.⁹⁸ James Belich has shown how from 1815 a powerful ideology of migration had developed within the Anglo-world, converting emigration from ‘an act of despair that lowered your standing to an act of hope that enhanced it’. As a result of this ‘settlerism’, Belich argues that the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a settler populism which insisted that white male common folk should be able to hold the ruling elite ‘responsible for maintaining a healthy flow of opportunities for settler lives and livings’ to account through a wide manhood suffrage.⁹⁹

Between 1861 and 1900 the number of migrants going to America is estimated at between 5 million and 7.5 million, compared to 1.1 million to Australasia and 0.8 million to Canada.

Andrew Thompson argues that for the majority of nineteenth-century British migrants it was the United States, rather than Britain’s colonies, that provided the greatest attraction mainly

⁹⁶ HC Deb, 30 May 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1480.

⁹⁷ HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1709-1710.

⁹⁸ HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1709-1710.

⁹⁹ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford, 2009), 164-166.

because ‘opportunities for advancement appeared greater there than elsewhere’.¹⁰⁰ With the emergence of this ideology of migration, Hughes and other Liberals such as Henry Fawcett believed that England was now on the brink of a precipice.¹⁰¹ The only way to discourage the artisan class from emigrating to America, where they would be recognised as “full citizens”, was to admit them to the franchise here. Unless the franchise was extended to artisans, Hughes moved that they would no longer look on their country ‘with the same feeling as their fathers; they would continue to leave us more and more’.¹⁰² In their view, the artisan elements of the working classes contributed so largely to the prosperity of the country that losing them would be disastrous. For these Liberals, the education of working men following political reform was not just desirable but a necessity. Educational improvements could follow democratic reform, instead of preceding it, but Parliament had to ensure that this would take place. In the Third Reading of the 1867 bill, Liberal MP Ralph Bernal Osborne warned that ‘you cannot Americanize our franchise, without borrowing other things from that country, and one of those things must be the education of our people’.¹⁰³ An American-style franchise must be accompanied by an America-style system of education. The reform measures proposed by the 1867 bill had gone a lot further than originally intended and an educated electorate was now the only protection against the worst impulses of a democracy. Acknowledging that the wide suffrage proposed by the reform bill could no longer be retracted, Osborne concluded that ‘having gone so far, and having committed ourselves to this extent, it is impossible for us to retract; we must go on, and our only safeguard for the future will consist not in securities and restrictions, but in the education of the people’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Thompson, *Imperial Britain: the Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932* (Harlow, 2014), 133-134.

¹⁰¹ HC Deb, 13 March 1866, Vol 182, 203-204.

¹⁰² HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1710.

¹⁰³ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1587.

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1587.

On the significance of America for the relationship between education and democratic reform, Parliament found itself divided along more traditional party lines. Conservatives largely believed that the experience of America had demonstrated that a general level of education must first be established before democratic reform could even be considered; as in America, before democracies could be constructed, they must first be built on a strong foundation of education. In contrast, Liberals felt that America had shown that educational improvement could only come about as a consequence of democratic reform; reform would give the working classes the tools they needed to educate themselves similar to how in the United States citizens had been taught to participate in a democracy after they had been enfranchised. For some Liberals, refusing to admit the artisan class to the franchise only increased the likelihood that they would emigrate to join those ‘denizens of the Wests’ who Belich argues saw themselves as ‘metropolitan, fully British or American, even as Better British or Better Americans’.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of which side of the debate they stood on, once it seemed clear that a measure of political reform would pass the House in 1867, both Conservative and Liberal figures warned that education must now become a paramount issue to both the Government and Parliament if the implementation of such a reform act was to be successful. As predicted by parliamentarians, following the passage of the Second Reform Act, the education of newly enfranchised voters would become a priority with successive Elementary Education Acts introduced between 1870 and 1893, designed to improve the general level of education in the country. We have seen how the example of the United States, as deployed in these debates about electoral reform, also affected Conservative support for education legislation after 1867 with a number of Conservatives who referenced America during 1866 and 1867 going on to back these measures.

¹⁰⁵ James Belich, ‘The Rise of the Angloworld: Settlement in North America and Australasia, 1784-1918’, in Phillip Alfred Buckner and R. D. Francis’ (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005), 52.

Gradual reform as a gateway to American democracy?

A prevailing concern among parliamentarians was the degree to which any reform bill would actually settle the issue of reform. Thirty years after the Great Reform Act had intended to settle the question of reform for a generation, MPs and Peers were now being asked to consider a further extension of the franchise. Towards the end of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, Viscount Cranborne resumed the debate by invoking the memory of 1832. To those who believed that this new reform bill would finally settle the issue of reform, Cranborne reminded them that ‘those who passed the Reform Bill of 1832 were told that after its passing Reform would never again be heard of; that the Bill was a final measure...It is ridiculous to suppose that there is anything like finality in this measure.’¹⁰⁶ This was particularly the case during the debates over the 1866 reform bill. There was a suspicion amongst Liberal and Conservative opponents of the bill that far from intending to settle the reform question, the 1866 bill was designed to be the first step towards something resembling a democracy. These opponents advanced that Radical and Gladstonian Liberals wished to introduce an American-style democracy in Britain, but recognised that they could not achieve this in one reform measure. However, what could not be achieved in a single measure, might be introduced gradually through a series of reform acts across a number of years. Speaking in the House of Lords in response to the Queen’s speech in 1866, which first established the Liberal Government’s intention to introduce a reform bill to Parliament, Earl Grey was quick to note his concern about the proposed bill. He argued that if a reform bill which represented ‘a sweeping change’ to the franchise was proposed openly and all at once, it would be rejected by both Parliament and the majority of the nation.¹⁰⁷ However, drawing on the experience of countries like America, he warned of a gradual creeping process of reform in which ‘nations

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 20.

¹⁰⁷ HL Deb, 6 February 1866, Vol 181, Col. 75.

may be brought by degrees to adopt plans which they would shrink from if pressed upon them in their full extent at once'.¹⁰⁸ As a result, it was imperative that any reform bill should be designed to settle the question of political reform permanently.

Both Adullamite Liberal and Conservative critics of the 1866 reform bill argued that Radicals viewed it as an opportunity to both expand the franchise and create demand for further reform. Adullamite Liberals now joined with Conservatives who, as we have seen, had shown a firm resistance against the Americanisation of British political institutions during the 1865 election. Lord Elcho appealed to his fellow Liberal members not to support the 1866 bill which 'tends to Americanize our institutions' and threatened to 'unmoor the constitution of these islands from its strong fastenings in the past...and send it adrift at least 2,000 miles towards the west'.¹⁰⁹ On the second night of the Second Reading, Liberal MP Samuel Laing advised that if reform was not dealt with in one great measure, but rather in the piecemeal manner proposed by the bill 'it would sweep all before it, and land them in a measure of extreme democracy'.¹¹⁰ For Adullamite Liberal MPs like Elcho, Lowe and Laing this had been the case in the United States with American democracy the product of a gradual process and the 1866 reform bill now before them appeared to contain the same threat of Americanisation and democratisation which risked destroying the very fabric of the British constitution.

¹⁰⁸ HL Deb, 6 February 1866, Vol 181, Col. 75.

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb, 19 April 1866, Vol 182, Cols. 1679-1680; Lowe issued a similar warning that if the Commons was 'democratized' it would not stay under 'under such modified circumstances until it has swept away those institutions which at present stand between the people and the Throne, and has supplied the place of them, as far as it can, by institutions deriving their origin directly from the people', HC Deb, 26 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 2114.

¹¹⁰ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1318.

Conservatives, meanwhile, looked to what assessment had been made of the 1866 bill by American audiences. James Whiteside cited the comments of an American Senator with whom he had discussed the reform bill, warning MPs that complete democracy had been gradually formed in America ‘step by step’ and that the 1866 bill would introduce the same principles in Britain.¹¹¹ Sir Hugh Cairns read from a New York journal which had described the bill as ‘the beginning of an Americanizing process in England’ that would gradually change English political life.¹¹² An American-style democracy would be rejected in one measure, but could gradually be introduced through a piecemeal process of reform. The reform bill would not settle the question, but only necessitate further reform. For these Conservatives, the 1866 bill might not introduce democracy to the British constitution immediately, but ultimately they regarded it as a move in that direction and believed that the Radicals who enthusiastically supported it understood this. Bulwer Lytton took aim at the bill’s ‘enthusiastic supporters’ both inside and outside Parliament who, he believed, understood it as an inevitable step towards American democracy in Britain.¹¹³ In 1866, Conservatives used parliamentary reform debates to align Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals with American principles. Citing analysis from American audiences, figures like John Bright were portrayed as at the head of a new Liberal, Democratic movement which sought to gradually introduce American principles to the British constitution, enfranchising thousands of working men and altering the balance of power at elections in their favour.

This Adullamite Liberal and Conservative assessment of gradual reform was countered by Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals who argued that a process of gradual reform was

¹¹¹ HC Deb, 4 June 1866, Vol 183, Cols. 1866-1867.

¹¹² HC Deb, 16 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1476; Alexander Baillie Cochrane similarly cited how a New York newspaper had been struck by the bill’s American qualities, which in their view would render British political institutions ‘more democratic even than those of America’, HC Deb, 1 June 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1738.

¹¹³ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1245.

preferable to revolution. On the second night of the Second Reading of the 1866 bill, as first speaker William Edward Baxter advanced that ‘gradual changes made in time...did not tend to bring about revolutions. It was that policy of determined resistance to all changes...which in the end endangered the constitution’.¹¹⁴ The sense that it was those Liberals, as well as Conservatives, who opposed reform who posed a greater danger to the constitution than gradual reform did, was shared by other significant Liberal figures. In his presentation of the 1866 reform bill to the House in its First Reading, Gladstone explained that while a more complete reform measure might have been preferable, the piecemeal nature of the bill was borne out of a desire to actually introduce some reform legislation after years of unfruitful debates on the subject in Parliament.¹¹⁵ Gladstone sought to portray the 1866 reform bill not as a first step down a gradual path towards American democracy, but instead as the product of parliamentary considerations to try and form a bill that might actually receive enough support to pass into law. Closing the Second Reading of the bill, Gladstone returned to defend the bill against the criticisms raised by his fellow Liberals as well as the Conservative opposition. He countered that it was the opponents of the 1866 bill who were doing more to bolster the chances of an American-style democracy being introduced in Britain.¹¹⁶ Bright himself would make the case for gradual reform in 1867. Believing political reform to be inevitable, he concluded that it was an advantage that ‘great changes should be made rather by steps than all at once’.¹¹⁷

With the 1866 Liberal reform bill on the verge of collapse, Conservatives sought to offer a different approach to the reform question. In the Commons, Disraeli now sought to initiate the ‘anti-revolutionary’ stance which he had urged Derby to adopt in the aftermath of the

¹¹⁴ HC Deb, 13 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1230.

¹¹⁵ HC Deb, 12 March 1866, Vol 182, Col. 27.

¹¹⁶ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 119.

¹¹⁷ HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1552-1553.

1865 election. On the final night of the Second Reading, as the last Conservative MP to speak against the 1866 bill, Disraeli argued that the bill was an attempt to introduce American principles into Britain. He warned MPs that attempting to introduce American institutions into England would be disastrous, believing that ‘you would not gain that which is excellent in the American system...but a most disgraceful and demoralizing accident. You would have the rule of mobs in great towns, and the sway of turbulent multitudes’.¹¹⁸ Whilst the bill itself only sought to enfranchise around 400,000 men, he described how during a meeting in Birmingham, Gladstone had argued that in principle around 4,500,000 men should have a share in the interests of the country; for Disraeli, in saying this Gladstone had confessed to ‘American principles in their widest sense...[and] propounded a policy founded upon American and not upon English principles’.¹¹⁹ To admit the principle that 4,500,000 men had an equal right to enter the English constitution was to introduce ‘American principles which must be fatal to this country’.¹²⁰

Concluding that the Liberal Government had betrayed both their party and their country by attempting to reconstruct their famous institutions on the American model, Disraeli offered an alternative path towards political reform.¹²¹ In considering the subject of political reform, Disraeli argued that the House should act in the spirit of the English constitution, questioning whether Parliament should consider reform ‘in the spirit of the English constitution, or are we to meet it in the spirit of the American constitution? I prefer to consider the question in the

¹¹⁸ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 103.

¹¹⁹ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Cols. 111-112.

¹²⁰ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 112.

¹²¹ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 113.

spirit of our own constitution'.¹²² Other Conservatives concurred that any measure of political reform must stay true to the British constitution and not represent a step towards America.¹²³ Disraeli advanced that under any reform legislation the 'House should remain a House of Commons, and not become a House of the People, the House of a mere indiscriminate multitude, devoid of any definite character'.¹²⁴ The scheme of reform envisioned by Disraeli, which for him would have been consistent with the principles and spirit of the English constitution, can be seen in the initial reform bill he presented to the Commons in March 1867. The kind of safeguards designed as part of the 1867 bill that we explored earlier (a residence qualification, the exclusion of compounders through a requirement that voters pay their rates in person, the creation of 'fancy franchises' which granted extra votes to graduates, professionals and those with large savings) were deemed sufficient by Disraeli to avoid a descent towards Americanisation. In his analysis of the initial 1867 bill, Charles Seymour argues that through the rate-paying requirements and the creation of a dual vote system, in which those who qualified under both the household and direct taxation franchises could vote twice, Disraeli ultimately used the slogan of household suffrage to 'preserve the status quo' with a bill which would have increased the electoral power of the wealthier classes.¹²⁵

In an effort to defend the 1866 reform bill, Radicals and Gladstonian Liberals argued that the bill appealed to the spirit, not of the American constitution, but of the Ancient English constitution. We have already seen how the idea of the American constitution as a more perfect exemplar of the ancient constitution and Anglo-Saxon ideals informed Liberal and

¹²² HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 103.

¹²³ For example see the comments by Jonathan Peel on his suspicion that the 1866 bill was a step towards 'that democratic form of Government which prevails in America' with Peel speaking in favour of maintaining that 'old English Constitution which has carried us through so many perils to which other forms of government have succumbed', HC Deb, 12 April 1866, Vol 182, Col. 1210.

¹²⁴ HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 103.

¹²⁵ Charles Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales* (New Haven, 1915), 258-262.

Radical popular rhetoric between 1865 and 1867. Now in Parliament, figures such as Gladstone and Bright deployed these arguments against Conservative and Adullamite Liberal opponents. According to them the 1866 reform bill, rather than an effort to alter the English constitution in an American image, was rather a return to old English ideas; the bill did not seek to emulate American principles but instead was in accordance with the historic constitution of the country.¹²⁶ As Parry has shown, across the nineteenth century the Liberals sought to present themselves as ‘the more reliable interpreters of the historic English constitution’, arguing that reform was in accordance with the English political tradition of ‘preventing the oppression of popular liberties by ending vested-interest domination of politics’.¹²⁷ Accordingly, in 1866 Radicals and Gladstonian Liberals returned to this tactic to argue that it was those who opposed the bill, including other Liberals, who were deviating from the spirit of the English constitution, not those who desired it. For Conservative MPs, Bright and Gladstone were trying to find in the ancient constitution something which was simply not there, with Bright dismissed as an admirer of American institutions and a supporter of legislation according to the American model.¹²⁸

Ultimately, Russell’s Liberal ministry and its attempts to pass the 1866 reform bill would collapse after Adullamite Liberals and Conservatives voted in favour of the Dunkellin amendment, which proposed replacing the suggested £7 rental qualification with one requiring the payment of £7 a year in rates.¹²⁹ The 1866 bill suffered a similar fate to the last

¹²⁶ See John Bright, HC Deb, 30 May 1866, Vol 183, Col. 1518; and Gladstone’s argument that ‘we are not going to import American principles. It is not an American principle to reduce the borough franchise. It is a return to old English principles—it is a restoration of the state and course of things that subsisted before, and ought to subsist again’, HC Deb, 27 April 1866, Vol 183, Col. 145.

¹²⁷ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, 10,43.

¹²⁸ Viscount Cranborne, HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1545.

¹²⁹ Introduced by Lord Dunkellin, a prominent Adullamite and Liberal MP for Galway County, the Dunkellin amendment would have considerably reduced the number of working men who would be able to vote. This followed a successful amendment proposed by Earl Grosvenor, Liberal MP for Chester, which would have required an accompanying redistribution of seats. Despite a Liberal majority in the Commons, Russell’s

reform bill that had been before Parliament, the 1860 Liberal reform bill, which had also faced opposition from Conservatives as well as other Liberals, with MPs unable to come to an agreement over how franchise reform should proceed. Unlike the 1866 bill, the 1860 reform bill failed not due to concerns over Americanisation, but rather as Saunders has shown due to Russell's insistence on a £6 rental franchise in the boroughs, rather than a rating franchise, which generated significant parliamentary opposition. A rental qualification, based upon the sum for which a property could be rented over a year, was more generous than a rating qualification, based on a deduction from the gross estimated rental.¹³⁰ Whereas in 1860 the Government opted to withdraw the bill but remain in office, thereby causing the debate over political reform to lose momentum, in 1866 the Government chose to resign, following nearly a week of deliberation and at Gladstone's insistence, in the hopes of keeping the issue of reform alive.

In the aftermath of the Government's resignation, the Conservatives would seek to form a parliamentary coalition with Adullamite Liberals; however, these attempts would prove unsuccessful with Adullamites preferring to retain their independence in Parliament. With a Conservative minority government now in place it would fall to Derby to present the Conservatives alternative answer to the question of political reform. Disraeli now forced to fulfil his promise of reform in 'the spirit of the English constitution', presented a Conservative reform bill to the Commons in March 1867, believing it contained sufficient safeguards against the threat of Americanisation.

government lost the vote over the Dunkellin amendment with 315 votes in favour of the motion and 304 against. For more on the crisis caused by the Dunkellin amendment, see Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 218-221.

¹³⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 120-130.

For some Conservatives, this alternative would prove insufficient. Viscount Cranborne and General John Peel would join the Earl of Carnarvon in resigning from the Government in protest over the bill. However, in 1867 Adullamite Liberals would find themselves with fewer Conservative allies in their campaign against any reform which, in their view, mirrored American principles. Lowe criticised those Conservatives who had shared his views on this when considering the measure of reform proposed by the Liberal Government, yet did not raise such objections when it came to the reform bill proposed by a Conservative Government. In the Committee Stage of the 1867 bill, Lowe found himself without Conservative allies, observing that:

Last year we succeeded in stopping what I believed to be the beginning of a change, the ultimate result of which I thought would be to land us exactly where we are now. These sentiments were shared by almost every Gentleman opposite me. Where are they now?¹³¹

From the Conservative benches, Cranborne remained one of the few vocal Conservative critics, concluding that with the passage of the 1867 bill ‘the example of America will no longer be a warning and a terror, for it will become of necessity our model, and we shall act wisely to imitate it’.¹³²

To understand why the 1867 bill succeeded where the 1866 bill (and other potential reform bills such as 1859 and 1860) failed, as well as the relative absence of Conservative references

¹³¹ HC Deb, 20 May 1867, Vol 187, Cols. 798-799.

¹³² HC Deb, 15 July 1867, Vol 188, Col. 1545.

to Americanisation in 1867, compared to 1866, we must consider both the substantial differences between these bills and the parliamentary context that surrounded them.

The 1867 reform bill, taking the Dunkellin amendment as its starting point, put forward a rating franchise that was radically different to the £7 franchise proposed by the 1866 reform bill. It rejected the ‘fixed line’ model embraced in the bills of 1852, 1854, 1860 and 1860,¹³³ and it adopted rating, rather than a particular rental value, as the basis of the franchise – the very issue that had brought down the 1866 bill. Disraeli’s defence of the rating franchise in 1867 was enough to convince many Conservatives that this reform bill, unlike the 1866 and 1860 reform bills, would not lead to a gradual process of reform towards American democracy. This finding supports the argument made by Saunders that in the aftermath of the Civil War, the rating franchise as a mechanism convinced parliamentarians that the 1867 reform bill offered a version of reform that would not collapse into a democracy of the American kind, something the 1866 bill failed to do.¹³⁴ For Saunders, the strength of the rating franchise for many Conservatives was that it offered a ‘bulwark against democratic encroachments’.¹³⁵ Rather than reversing the decision made in 1866, the 1867 bill built on and enacted it, with Conservatives willing to accept household suffrage as a bulwark against the encroachment of American-style democratic institutions that they had expressed so much fear and reservation about.

In addition, a desire to deliver what the Liberal Party had failed to do and potentially establish a Conservative majority government, combined with a sense that reform was, in the end, unavoidable proved enough to shift reluctant Conservatives to accept the bill. As Smith

¹³³ The borough qualification proposed by the ‘fixed line’ model was criticised for not offering enough security against further reductions; for more on the ‘fixed line’ model see Robert Saunders, ‘The Politics of Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867’, *The Historical Journal*, 50:3 (2007), 578.

¹³⁴ Saunders, ‘Let America Be the Test’, 91; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 158-159.

¹³⁵ Saunders, ‘The Politics of Reform’, 591.

concludes, in 1867 Derby and Disraeli, albeit grudgingly, acted to ‘satisfy the popular agitation, reconcile the upper strata of the working classes to the established political system, and ‘dish the Whigs’’.¹³⁶ A combination of these factors in 1867 proved sufficient to address the spectre of Americanisation that had haunted the 1866 bill.

America, of course, was not the only formative influence on parliamentarians’ attitudes towards reform. Prior to becoming an MP, for example, Robert Lowe had spent a decade in Australia, serving as a representative in the New South Wales Legislative Council between 1843 and 1849. In Australia, Lowe had supported franchise reform, while strongly resisting pressure from Australian radicals to support universal suffrage. James Winter has explored Lowe’s time in Australia and his complicated relationship with democracy and franchise reform there. Winter describes how in 1848, Lowe had been elected as the member for Sydney, supported by Australian radicals who saw him as a ‘champion of a working-class franchise’, yet his radical supporters soon found themselves disillusioned when he refused to speak publicly about democracy or universal suffrage, insisting that he identified as an ‘independent liberal’ and therefore an ‘anti-democrat’.¹³⁷ Ruth Knight has similarly sought to reconcile the impact of Lowe’s efforts in Australia, which effectively broadened the base of its democracy, with his determination in England to ‘maintain the narrow base of the Reformed Parliament of 1832’. For both Knight and Winter, the answer to this seeming inconsistency lies in the fact that for Lowe the radically different conditions between the two countries, the mother country and the colony, necessitated different approaches to the franchise.¹³⁸ What we have seen over the course of this chapter, however, is that while there were undoubtedly other formative influences on parliamentarians’ broader sentiments

¹³⁶ Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 97.

¹³⁷ James Winter, *Robert Lowe* (Toronto, 1976), 37-55.

¹³⁸ Ruth Knight, *Illiberal Liberal: Robert Lowe in New South Wales* (Melbourne, 1966), 255; Winter, *Robert Lowe*, 48-49.

towards political reform, references to America in their parliamentary rhetoric, especially in the context of the recent Civil War, proved particularly effective in shaping how the reform bills of 1866 and 1867 were perceived in Parliament.

Ultimately, concerns about Americanisation were central to the failure of the 1866 bill. The inability of the 1866 bill to convince most MPs that it provided a lasting answer to the question of political reform proved to be its undoing. Conservatives deployed their stance against reform along an American line that, as we have seen, they had been forming since the 1865 election, developing it further to attack the 1866 bill as an initial measure of reform which opened the gateway towards a gradual process of Americanisation. For them it was not the complete measure of reform needed to settle the issue for at least the next generation, but rather piecemeal reform, influenced by American-inspired Radicals, which focused on the franchise at the expense of other aspects of reform like a redistribution of seats. In making this argument they were now supported by discontented Adullamite Liberals who had developed similar reservations about Americanisation. Liberal supporters of the bill, recognising that in the limited time they had to try and pass reform legislation, had to argue for the merits of gradual reform and countered that it was those who constantly sought to delay any further reform who risked the revolutionary change they claimed they were so keen to avoid. Gladstonian Liberals argued that the 1866 reform bill had its origins in the ancient English constitution, not the American constitution. By 1867 the situation had changed with a Conservative minority government now attempting to form its own reform bill. In presenting their own bill, Conservatives attempted to show a vision of reform which was in the 'spirit of the English constitution' through a residency qualification, the exclusion of compounders and a dual vote system. As Gladstone used parliamentary reform debates in 1867 to attack and alter the provisions of the reform bill, the Liberal Opposition used this as an opportunity to

present amendments which transformed the bill into a far more radical act of reform than had been originally devised. However, this time Adullamite Liberals who had opposed the 1866 bill for its American qualities found themselves largely without their Conservative allies who had supported them then. The prospect of a Conservative majority government combined with a conviction that the rating franchise would offer protection against the encroachment of Americanisation and the opportunity to deliver a reform bill where the Liberal Party had failed proved enough to convince Conservative MPs to support the bill. Those Conservatives who continued to express reservations, such as Cranborne, Peel and Carnarvon, resigned from the Government in protest over the extent of the proposed bill, warning that with the 1867 bill set to pass into law the example of America would now become a kind of model to follow out of necessity.

Conclusion

Within Parliament, more so than in the other mediums of public discourse we have examined throughout this thesis, America played a chiefly polemical role in reform discourse. Over the course of the thesis, we have seen how between 1832 and 1867 the United States actively shaped public opinion about British political reform in extraparliamentary commentary in newspapers, periodicals, travel literature and works of political philosophy. In parliamentary reform debates, however, the primary impact of America was more rhetorical, providing parliamentarians with a useful illustrative example of the broader assertions they wished to make about what shape political reform should take. We must recognise that the adversarial character of parliamentary debates encouraged speakers to make polemical claims about their opponents' stances on reform that did not necessarily reflect their actual beliefs.

Conservatives sought to portray figures such as Gladstone as exponents of 'American principles', yet Gladstonian Liberals were not supporters of universal suffrage or manhood

suffrage. This should be understood as an attempt to use the United States to associate Gladstone and Gladstonian Liberals with a position that was politically disadvantageous to them. The correlation between the 1866 bill and claims of universal suffrage was a polemical claim made by Conservative and Liberal critics of the bill. Attempts to associate the £7 franchise proposed by the 1866 bill with universal suffrage and the American Civil War should be seen as a polemical framing, which proved effective in swaying parliamentary opinion against the bill.

While the usage of the United States in parliamentary reform debates may have been more polemical in nature, compared to the more active role it played in influencing extraparliamentary discourse about reform, this should not take away from the power that the example of the United States exerted in parliamentary reform debates. In 1866 and 1867, the conventions of parliamentary debate forced parliamentarians to delve deeper into the potential ramifications of expanding the franchise than had been the case in the extraparliamentary sphere. Rather than trying to influence public opinion to secure popular support for their arguments, MPs now sought to sway a parliamentary audience which was more aware of the extent of differences between the political frameworks of Britain and the United States as well as the existing constitutional assumptions which might need to be violated if change happened. With more MPs contributing to parliamentary debates in the second half of the nineteenth century, as shown by Meisel,¹³⁹ parliamentary speakers required more concrete evidence to convince an increasingly active audience of MPs and Peers of their arguments with respect to political reform. America, for many parliamentary speakers, served as the source for that evidence. Where Saunders argues convincingly that America manifested itself in these parliamentary reform debates with respect to the distinction between a rental

¹³⁹ Meisel, *Public Speech*, 74-75.

franchise and a rating franchise, this chapter has demonstrated that references to the United States during parliamentary reform debates in 1866 and 1867 extended beyond this theme, building on pre-existing ideas about American democracy that had been formed in travel literature, political philosophy, newspapers, periodicals, reform demonstrations and election speeches. Where Saunders' conclusion focuses on the impact of the Civil War on Parliament and the reform bills, what we have seen in this chapter is that the Civil War fed into broader concerns about American politics and its potential implications for British political life that had been developing in extraparliamentary discourse about reform since 1832.

Parliamentarians would draw on some of the arguments that had been developed by extraparliamentary commentators, adding new elements designed to gain support from their parliamentary colleagues. Reform was placed against the backdrop of the increasing professionalisation of political life in America and Britain. With land and property as the existing basis for political representation in Britain, the possibility that reform might encourage demagogues or working-class voters to attack the existing system of property distribution was considered, with speakers questioning whether the ready availability of land in the United States made democracy viable there in a way that might not be possible in Britain. The recent experience of the Civil War and the economy of the United States were seen to have potential implications for British foreign and economic policy and the influence that working-class voters might have on it. The relationship between education and democracy was emphasised, with parliamentarians on both sides acknowledging that improvements must be made to the system of education in Britain, similar to those that had been achieved in parts of the United States. Finally, there was also the question of whether any reform bill could actually meet the extraparliamentary demand for political reform, or whether this was simply opening the gateway towards a path that could only end with an American-style democracy in Britain.

By 1867, with extraparliamentary pressure for reform growing, as we have explored, and with several failed attempts at reform legislation in recent memory, the challenge of steering a reform bill through Parliament and addressing these questions would fall to Derby's Conservative Government, with Disraeli the leading presence in the House of Commons. After extensive debates, Gladstone and the Liberal Opposition would extract several amendments from the Government which would change the provisions of the bill into a more radical act than had been originally intended by the Conservatives. With the prospect of a mass electorate now on the horizon, MPs and Peers were drawn to the closest example they could find of a nation with similar political traditions that had operated with such a kind of suffrage – the United States. Americanisation was not welcome for most, but if the franchise was to be extended to such a large group of people, then the lessons of America must be heeded. Parliamentarians could not help but look for an example to understand the implications of what was now being proposed.

Ultimately, the 1867 reform bill would make it through Parliament, granting the vote to all householders in the boroughs as well as lodgers who paid rent of £10 a year or more. The property threshold in the counties was also reduced. The Second Reform Act roughly doubled the size of the electorate in England and Wales from one to two million men and would be followed by the introduction of the secret ballot with the Ballot Act 1872 and legislation designed to improve the general level of education in the country through successive Elementary Education Acts. The American example had highlighted to parliamentarians the challenges of managing an enlarged electorate, concerns which were raised in parliamentary debates between 1866 and 1867, but not all of which could be addressed with the final legislation that received royal assent on 15th August 1867. With the electorate now doubled

and fresh elections taking place under the newly reformed franchise as soon as 1868, Party leaders and parliamentarians would spend the next few decades grappling with the ramifications of the legislation they had passed and seeking to forge connections with a newly enfranchised working class.

Conclusion

Having recently passed the 150th anniversaries of both the end of the American Civil War and the passage of the Second Reform Act, it seems apt to have turned our attention to a period which saw debates in both Britain and the United States about the nature of democracy, the rights and responsibilities of political representation and the fundamental relationship between government and the governed. That interest in the Civil War continues to resonate in Britain well over a hundred and fifty years after the end of the conflict is a testament to its unique importance in the wider history of Anglo-American relations since the American colonies first declared their independence in 1776. In 2007, the Reverend Dr Bill Mackie organised the first memorial ceremony in Edinburgh for Scottish soldiers who died in the Civil War.¹ In 2012, The American Civil War Round Table UK unveiled plans to have two plaques made to commemorate the 300,000 British and Irish men who fought in the war.² Two plaques were unveiled in 2015, one at the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier in Virginia and the other in Liverpool where the Confederacy established an unofficial embassy during the war, with each plaque bearing the British, US and Confederate flags.³ In February 2022, the White House Historical Association launched a new annual tradition at the Old Calton Cemetery with wreaths laid at the memorial to mark Presidents' Day and the historic relationship between Scotland and the United States.⁴

¹ *The Scotsman*, 12 May 2007 (<https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/american-civil-war-scots-be-honoured-2463564>), accessed October 2022.

² *BBC News*, 7 November 2012 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-19520104>), accessed October 2022.

³ *Liverpool Echo*, 19 April 2015 (<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/american-civil-war-memorial-planned-9073918>), accessed October 2022; *Irish Mirror*, 18 April 2015 (<https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/world-news/american-civil-war-brits-remembered-5545575>), accessed October 2022.

⁴ *Edinburgh Reporter*, 21 February 2022 (<https://theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2022/02/presidents-day-ceremony-held-at-old-calton-cemetery/>), accessed June 2022.

Today there are two other statues of Lincoln in the UK aside from the Scottish-American Soldiers Monument with which we began the introduction to this dissertation, one in London and one in Manchester. The London statue, in Parliament Square, was formally presented in July 1920 by former U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root to Prime Minister David Lloyd George who accepted the gift on behalf of the people of Britain.⁵ The Manchester statue, in Lincoln Square (also named after the former President), was presented in September 1919 by the American Ambassador John W. Davis and received by the Lord Mayor on behalf of the city.⁶ The Manchester statue, created by George Barnard, is dedicated to ‘the support that the working people of Manchester gave in their fight for the abolition of slavery during the American Civil War’.⁷ Both statues were intended to be symbols of Anglo-American unity in the aftermath of the First World War.⁸

When Wallace Bruce, the then American Consul, unveiled the Scottish-American Soldiers Monument in 1893, he also delivered an accompanying address to the assembled crowd reflecting on the historical relationship between Britain and America:

The Atlantic, today, is narrower than yonder Forth three centuries ago... The widest ocean in the world is the English Channel. Why? Because you must needs translate your telegraphic and telephonic utterance into foreign speech twenty miles from your coast. The Atlantic cable today carries a language unchanged all round the

⁵ *The Times*, 28 July 1920, 17; *The Times*, 29 July 1920, 13-14.

⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1919, 7.

⁷ Terry Wyke and Harry Cocks, *Public Sculpture of Greater Manchester* (Liverpool, 2004), 88-93.

⁸ Confederate figures have also been the subject of British commemoration activities. After the end of the Civil War, Confederate sympathisers founded a British Jackson Monumental Fund to commemorate the death of Confederate General 'Stonewall' Jackson in 1863. A statue of Jackson, 'presented by English gentlemen, as a tribute of admiration for the soldier and patriot,' was unveiled in Richmond, Virginia in October 1875. Samuel Graber, '“British Tribute to Virginia Valor”: Unveiling the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Statue', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 9:2 (2008), 141-164; *The Times*, 28 October 1875, 5; Mary Anna Jackson, *Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson* (Louisville, Kentucky, 1895), 633.

globe...There can be no misunderstanding among peoples, and the nations will learn war no more, when the English language proclaims its final mission of universal brotherhood.⁹

Bruce's key message, that a shared language was what made the relationship between Britain and America different from the relationship between Britain and European countries, chiefly France, resonates with this thesis which has focused on the language of reform politics in the build up to the Second Reform Act and the relative ease with which British commentators drew on the example of the United States to explore the potential ramifications of franchise reform for British political life. While Bruce was referring to linguistic commonalities between the two nations, we have seen how there was also a sense of shared linguistic commonalities around the vocabulary of reform.¹⁰ In the aftermath of Britain's experiment with reform in 1832, British travel writers went to the United States to better understand the impact of democracy on American political life. During the Civil War, ideas about democracy played a key role in shaping British understandings of the conflict. British public intellectuals sought to learn the lessons of American democracy with respect to the future of British political reform. At working-class reform demonstrations, British radical speakers drew on the example of America to try and secure popular support for their campaign to place pressure on Parliament. Contrasting parliamentary and extraparliamentary speeches we see how parliamentarians adjusted the manner in which they utilised the example of America to illustrate their arguments depending on the audience they sought to convince. Ultimately, concerns about the Americanisation of British political life would help undo the 1866 reform bill. Throughout, competing tropes and understandings about American politics were

⁹ Blackwood, *Lincoln Monument*, 17-18.

¹⁰ For more on this theme of shared linguistic commonalities in the language of politics between the two countries see Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 211-219.

established that would be redeployed in later nineteenth-century British reform debates with contrasting images of America influenced by the context in which they appeared, or the politics of the commentator concerned.

America was not the only international formative influence on attitudes towards reform in this period. The example of democracy in countries such as France, Australia, Prussia and Canada would also influence broader sentiments towards political reform. However, what differentiated the experience of the United States from these other examples was the unique combination of the shared history and Anglo-Saxon inheritances that, as we have seen, was understood to link the political traditions of Britain and the U.S., together with the size and scale of America's political institutions. France's political institutions were equivalent to Britain's, and French democracy and Napoleon III's usage of plebiscites unquestionably influenced the political thought of figures such as Mill. Yet, the highpoint of France and Prussia's influence on British political reform debates arguably came with the revolutions of 1848 across Europe. The perceived failure of the 1848 Revolutions largely left European Liberals disillusioned, with a sense that the cause of reform had been weakened. By the time that Parliament debated the provisions of the Second Reform Act in 1867, the recent experience of America's Civil War was fresher in the minds of most parliamentarians. Experiments with democracy in settler colonies certainly had an impact on politicians such as Lowe, but the smaller scale of Australia and Canada's political institutions limited what lessons could be learned from them. Across extraparliamentary and parliamentary discourse about reform throughout the period between 1832 and 1867, America provided commentators with a sustained, but evolving, repository of traits and characteristics about democracy that could be drawn upon when debating the exact path that British political reform should take. At times, particularly in Parliament, America's influence may have been more rhetorical or

polemical in nature, while in other extraparliamentary settings, most notably in travel literature, political philosophy and reform demonstrations, America actively shaped opinion with commentators directly engaging with the questions raised by American democracy. Nevertheless, throughout these different mediums, this thesis has shown that in public reform debates in this period, commentators recognised that utilising references to the United States was particularly effective in shaping how reform was perceived.

From 1832 to 1867, through public discourse, Britons formed various understandings about the ways in which the United States had adapted to a wide franchise, understandings which would be redeployed in both extraparliamentary and parliamentary reform debates in the 1860s. Through travel literature, periodicals, quarterlies, works of political philosophy, and newspaper coverage, Britons encountered an America in which universal suffrage had, either positively or negatively, shaped the national character, the vibrancy of political culture, and the general standard of education among its people. British commentators were often struck by the inherent contradiction at the heart of the American Constitution and polity; how could the American self-professed commitment to democracy, liberty and equality be reconciled with the enslavement of nearly four million people? The Civil War brought this issue to the foreground, with democracy and slavery providing competing explanations for the outbreak of the conflict. In the aftermath of a brutal war, but with the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction underway, the America that popular speakers and Parliamentary orators spoke of in relation to political reform between 1865 and 1867 was not the same America that Frances Trollope had written about in 1832.

This thesis set out to explore the ways in which America shaped the debate among Britons over political reform during the 1860s. We have seen how throughout the period under

examination America furnished British political commentators with an external example with which to explore the potential ramifications that expanding the franchise might have. Yet while this was an external example, it was also one that could be understood to have evolved in the context of broadly similar political traditions inherited from its 'mother country'. The ways in which America shaped reform debates in British public discourse depended heavily on the target audience in question and the medium or venue in which these debates took place. British travel writers were largely preoccupied with the effects of democracy on the national character of a people, finding American citizens reasonably well-educated and politically engaged but prone to corruption, violence, and a mob mentality, as well as a fickleness that led to poor-quality statesmen. For British journalists writing at the height of the American Civil War, the focus was on the long-term viability of a democratic system and its ability to address and resolve national issues as they sought to explain how the United States had found themselves in such a dire predicament. British public intellectuals analysed the kind of role that elected representatives should play in legislative assemblies as they interrogated the Anglo-Saxon connection between the two polities and the degree to which the United States had either shifted away from Anglo-Saxon traditions and English precedents or represented a more perfect realisation of these traditions. In the 1865 General Election and working-class demonstrations between 1865 and 1867, the example of American democracy featured in public oratory as speakers sought to enlist popular support for their stances on political reform. With the spectre of slavery removed from the United States, Radicals looked to America with a renewed sense of optimism and questioned why the working men of America should have the vote while their cousins in Britain should be denied it. Conservatives took the opportunity to present themselves as defenders of the English constitution against the threat of what they described as Americanisation, while Liberals found themselves divided on the virtues and vices of American-style democracy. Meanwhile

within Parliament, many of the same speakers were forced to delve deeper into the potential ramifications of expanding the franchise as they sought to sway a parliamentary audience which was more aware of the extent of differences between the political frameworks of Britain and the United States. In the Parliamentary arena the primary concern was the impact that enfranchising working-class voters might have on foreign and economic policy, property distribution and the increasing professionalisation of political life in Britain. With the 1866 reform bill rejected in part because of its ‘American’ qualities in the shadow of the Civil War, parliamentarians sought in 1867 to ensure that there were sufficient safeguards in place to prevent a gradual creep into American-style democracy. However, as a series of Liberal amendments transformed the 1867 Conservative bill into a more radical plan for reform than had been intended, MPs and Peers were drawn to the closest example they could find of a nation with similar political traditions that had operated with such a kind of suffrage – the United States. With the prospect of a mass electorate now on the horizon, they sought to place their hope in the educative benefits of the franchise which had first struck British travellers in the United States as early as 1832.

By focusing on both extraparliamentary and parliamentary reform debates in the lead up to 1867, rather than studying them as separate spheres, and by looking at how the American Civil War shaped British politics, rather than how British politics shaped attitudes to the war, we see that the impact of the war had a very specific political significance, in that it shaped reform debates in an important way during the 1860s. Opening up the chronological parameters of this research has allowed us to see both the impact of the Civil War on pre-existing perceptions of American politics as well as how the experience of the Civil War continued to resonate in British public reform discourse after the end of the conflict in 1865. In doing so, we have also seen that the analysis of British political writers was rooted in the

domestic political context of the First and Second Reform Acts and that their stances on political reform could not help but influence their approach when analysing the United States. In the process, this thesis has also revealed insights about British political culture in this period, with later developments in the history of both the Liberal and Conservative parties traditionally associated with the 1870s and 1880s being foreshadowed by debates in the 1860s about the political salience of America with respect to reform in Britain. These debates exposed tensions and early fault lines within the Liberal Party over the caucus and the management of political parties and provided Conservatives with an opening to contest the Liberal Party's reputation as the 'party of patriotism' at this time. In addition, we have demonstrated how Radical disillusionment with the United States during the 1850s, began to give way to more positive rhetoric in the aftermath of the Civil War with the Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Amendments finally addressing the issue of slavery in America and settling a long-held reservation of any comparison between the two polities.

A number of new avenues for future research now present themselves. The story of British political reform did not end in 1867. One of the first avenues for future research would be to analyse how the passage of the Second Reform Act changed British analysis of American democracy. With the Second Reform Act now in effect, British political commentators were forced to consider what lessons could be learnt from the expanded franchise of the United States, with respect to voting practices like the secret ballot and advances in general education to either mitigate or enhance the effect of introducing a million new voters into the British political landscape. Contrasting how America shaped reform debates in British public discourse in the 1860s with subsequent debates over the franchise surrounding the Representation of the People Acts of 1884, 1918 and 1928, as well as debates about other acts of electoral reform such as the Ballot Act of 1872, the Corrupt and Illegal Practices

Prevention Act of 1883, and the Redistribution of Seats Act of 1885, we would be able to see how understandings about the nature, character and salience of American democracy continued to shift and evolve in Britain through continued experimentation with the franchise. Having noted the concern held by parliamentarians about the increasing professionalisation of political life, it would also be worthwhile to analyse how the management of political parties developed in this period and any key differences in styles between the two countries, with a two-party system more firmly embedded in the British and American political landscapes compared to some other nations. In doing this, we would be building on the analysis of figures such as Moisey Ostrogorski who compared the American and British political systems political system during this later period.¹¹ This kind of comparative approach to the history of electoral reform has been taken in recent years by Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook in their studies of the secret ballot.¹²

Having explored British perceptions of American democracy in this period, it would be revealing to reverse this to look at the degree to which British politics had an influence on American public discourse about reform, particularly in the Reconstruction Era following the Civil War.¹³ The difficulty in managing such a large political entity invites comparisons with the challenges faced by the British Government in managing the British Empire with the relationship between colonial legislatures and the House of Commons being somewhat reminiscent of the relationship between state legislatures and the United States Congress. Continuing with the theme of empire, if the field of study were expanded to include reform

¹¹ Moisey Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (New York, 1902).

¹² Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook, 'Ballot papers and the practice of elections: Britain, France and the United States of America, c.1500–2000', *Historical Research*, 88:241 (2015), 530-561; Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook, 'Reforming Voting Practices in a Global Age : The Making and Remaking of the Modern Secret Ballot in Britain, France and the United States, c.1600-c.1950', *Past & Present*, 212 (2011) 199-237.

¹³ For a detailed account of Reconstruction in America after the war see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 1988).

discourse across the British Empire the degree to which the federal nature of the U.S. Constitution impinged upon the thinking of political commentary about the dynamic between central and local government across the empire would also be relevant, particularly in light of the role that state legislatures played in the outbreak of the American Civil War.¹⁴

One area which could be explored further is the links between Britain and the United States with respect to the issue of women's suffrage. J. S. Mill and Harriet Taylor's connections to the American women's rights movement were referenced in chapter three and the experience of female travel writers in the United States forms part of this thesis, but the broader relationship between women's suffrage groups in the two countries and the influence they had on each other's development towards the goal of female enfranchisement should be explored further.¹⁵ By the late 1860s, partly in the aftermath of the Second Reform Act, women's suffrage gradually became a bigger issue in British public reform discourse with National Societies for Women's Suffrage formed in London, Manchester and Edinburgh in 1867, followed by the launch of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1872. The foundation of these early female suffrage societies in Britain was mirrored in the United States by the foundation of both the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. These groups in part were born out of the American Civil War in the same way that British female suffrage societies were formed in the aftermath of the Second Reform Act with the American Equal

¹⁴ This would build on recent works which explore the history of reform movements across the British Empire such as Amanda Nettelbeck, *Indigenous Rights and Colonial Subjecthood: Protection and Reform in the nineteenth-century British Empire* (Cambridge, 2019), Kevin Grant, *Last Weapons: Hunger Strikes and Fasts in the British Empire, 1890-1948* (Oakland, 2019), and Stephen Jackson, 'Mass education and the British Empire', *History Compass*, 20:1 (2022), e12709.

¹⁵ This could be integrated with recent edited collections which take a transnational approach to the history of women's suffrage within the British Empire and the Commonwealth: Laura E. Nym Mayhall, Philippa Levine and Ian Christopher Fletcher, *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London, 2000) and Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins, *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions* (London, 2021).

Rights Association established in 1866 to secure ‘equal rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, colour or sex’.¹⁶

Another area that could be expanded upon is the degree to which other political communities with British or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ inheritances featured in British debates about political reform, chiefly Canada and Australia. In comparison to the American political system, the political systems of these two nations were more in their infancy in the period examined in this thesis. The unification of Canada was not completed until just before the Second Reform Act received its royal assent, with Canadian Confederation achieved in July 1867.¹⁷ Prior to this, voting practices varied by province and the elected assemblies had relatively little power compared with the British House of Commons, with control mainly residing with governors appointed by the British Government. The British North America Act 1867 established that men over the age of 21 who owned property were able to vote in federal elections, however barriers for Indigenous people and those from non-Anglo-Saxon communities remained with the Indian Act 1876 declaring that to become enfranchised and vote in federal elections an Indigenous person had to give up their ‘Indian status’. Women were first enfranchised in 1918 with property qualifications persisting for men and women until 1920. Australian Federation was not achieved until January 1901, although there were experiments with universal male suffrage in the 1850s within the scope of the limited self-government of the Australian colonies.¹⁸ Certain colonies, however, continued to explicitly exclude Indigenous males from the vote. The Australian colonies were an early pioneer of women’s suffrage with

¹⁶ ‘Constitution of the American Equal Rights Association’, in Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Ida Husted Harper (eds.), *History of Woman Suffrage: 1861-1876* (New York, 1881), 173.

¹⁷ For more on British perceptions of Canadian Confederation see Ged Martin, *Britain and the Origins of Canadian Confederation, 1837-67* (Vancouver, 1995), 117-156.

¹⁸ Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell, ‘The advent of self-government, 1840s–90’, in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, 2013), 164-165.

female enfranchisement beginning to be legislated from the 1890s. Particularly moving beyond 1867, it would be worthwhile to consider how narratives around reform in these other territories informed British public discourse about reform towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, with a view to the Representation of the People Act 1918 which abolished practically all property qualifications for men and first enfranchised women who were over 30 and who met minimum property qualifications.¹⁹ Examining how other Anglo-Saxon political communities like Canada and Australia featured in debates about British political reform, alongside the United States, would allow us to continue to explore the ways in which nineteenth century Britons conceived of an Anglo-Saxon political community, building on Duncan Bell's work on the idea of 'Greater Britain' and James Belich's concept of the 'Anglo-World'.²⁰

* * *

The Second Reform Act would have unintended consequences; the Conservative Government that delivered on the promise of political reform would find itself defeated at the first general election under the newly reformed system. Much like the Great Reform Act of 1832 it would not settle the question of political reform for a generation as its makers had hoped. In fact, it was an act with which most were fairly unhappy. For many Radicals it did not go far enough, for many Conservatives it went too far, and for many Liberals it diverted away from the Whig

¹⁹ Recently, Edwin Jaggard has shown the value in exploring this theme by beginning to examine the impact of Australia on the introduction of the secret ballot in Britain, Edwin Jaggard, 'Britain, Australia and the Secret Ballot Act of 1872', *History*, 104:360 (2019), 209-227. See also Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, 'The National and the Transnational in British Anti-Suffragists' Views of Australian Women Voters', *History Australia*, 10:3 (2013), 51-64.

²⁰ The 'Anglo-World', defined by Belich as a 'politically divided but culturally and economically united intercontinental system' encompassed predominantly Anglophone communities in Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 9; Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, 12-19; Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, 1-6.

principle that the franchise should be qualified by property and education.²¹ Yet this unsatisfactory act brought the franchise to a million new voters and would initiate improvements in the general standard of education in the nation as legislators sought to equip these voters with the educative benefits of the franchise that had struck British travellers in the United States.

It would shortly be followed by similar acts for Scotland and Ireland in 1868. Concerns about the enlargement of the franchise that had been voiced in the 1860s through comparisons with America would go on to be addressed by subsequent legislation. The Ballot Act of 1872 would introduce the secret ballot to the British political landscape in a bid to protect newly enfranchised voters from undue influence, in the process abolishing the traditional public nomination of candidates on the hustings. The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883 would introduce campaign spending limits. Successive Elementary Education Acts between 1870 and 1893 aimed to improve the general level of education of voters in the country. Subsequent reform acts would expand the electorate further with the abolition of property qualifications for men and the introduction of limited female suffrage for women over the age of 30 in 1918, and the establishment of electoral equality between men and women in 1928.

While the UK sought to grapple with the political realities of an expanded franchise, the US sought to reconstruct itself after the division of the Civil War, beginning with the Reconstruction Amendments to the constitution which aimed to guarantee the freedom and political rights of former slaves and African-Americans. However, the so-called 'Gilded Age'

²¹ As F. B. Smith concluded about the 1867 Reform Bill, a majority of parliamentarians 'did not want it, they did not like it, they feared what it might do, but they passed it' because they 'dared not throw it out', Smith, *Second Reform Bill* (1966), 229.

which followed the Reconstruction Era would see these amendments eroded by state laws and federal court decisions throughout the late nineteenth century, enforcing racial segregation in the Southern United States. The promise of these amendments would not be recognized until the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Debates about political reform, citizenship, the right to vote and the nature of political representation may have taken centre stage in the 1860s, but these debates would extend well beyond this time.

‘A leap in the dark’ was how Derby characterised the 1867 reform bill he was responsible for during its third reading.²² In the 1870s, Russell would concur with this assessment of the bill in his political memoir.²³ However, whilst the Second Reform Act represented a significant experiment in the history of British politics, it was not perhaps quite as much of a shot in the dark as the architects of British political reform in this period made it out to be. American-style democracy was neither the target nor the destination for them, but through comparisons with America and its political system, British political commentators were able to explore the different dimensions of political reform, the potential shapes that reform could take and attempt to understand what the implications of the new reform act might be.

²² HL Deb, 6 August 1867, Vol. 189, Col. 952.

²³ John Russell, *Recollections and Suggestions 1813-1873* (London, 1875), 292.

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- *JSTOR Nineteenth-Century British Pamphlets* (<https://www.jstor.org/site/19th-century-british-pamphlets/>)
- *Liverpool Echo* (<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/>)
- *Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals* (<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/19th-century-uk-periodicals>)
- *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (<https://www.oxforddnb.com/>)
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