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A CALL TO ARMS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MISSISSIPPI AND KENTUCKY CITIZENS
DURING THE SECESSION CRISIS,
1859-1861

by

Amy D. Myers

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Humanities
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Many studies of the American Civil War have considered why Mississippi leaders voted to secede, while Kentucky politicians remained in the Union. Scholars have previously focused on political elites to understand the underlying motivations behind each state's decision. These same scholars have often confined their studies to a synthesis of why secession occurred nationally or at the state level. The question remains as to what the common citizen saw and believed when faced with secession and if their views matched their delegates.

This study utilizes the governors' papers of John J. Pettus and Beriah Magoffin, the Jefferson Davis papers, and Mississippi and Kentucky newspapers to compare the views of citizens from two economically and politically similar states that responded differently to secession. This thesis argues that middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians took action against a perceived Republican threat in similar ways between 1859 and 1861, but whose decisions concerning secession were ultimately affected by their identities and founding ideals. Mississippians were increasingly devoted to states' rights and sought to raise companies in order to defend their power and their state from a possible northern invasion. Meanwhile, Kentuckians refused to support the North or the Deep South, as they viewed both as having extremist ideals, and sought to protect their independency from that same extremism. This study additionally engages the arguments of historians Dwight L. Dumond, William H. Freehling, Timothy B. Smith, Elizabeth Varon, and James W. Finck who offered an in-depth analysis on the roots and causes of disunion.

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This study would not have been possible without a number of people. From the very beginning of my graduate career, they have stood beside me in multiple ways. By giving me advice, allowing me to vent, visiting, and making me laugh, they have made this journey a lot easier, and I will never be able to thank each one of you enough for all that you have done.

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moment get-togethers. They also encouraged me to believe in myself when I could not. Thank you Miranda, Blake, Chelsea, Brittney, and Amanda.

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I did not intend to skip anyone, but if I have, I want to take this moment to thank you, as well.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Henry C. Bayles, one of the most important men of my life and who always encouraged me to pursue my education. While he might have been called to Heaven only months after I began graduate school, he is never far from my heart. I strive to continue to make him proud, and I look forward to the day when I will see him again.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

As January of 1860 drew to a close, citizens of Chickasaw County, Mississippi, gathered together to discuss a series of recent resolutions that expressed a pattern of continual indecision between maintaining or severing the Union for those in the Deep and Border South. At first, Chickasaw citizens fervently expressed their loyalty to the Union, “to the requirements of the compact” created when the nation was first established, and “to the Constitution of the country.” They called to mind their respect and adherence to past compromises between the sections, as well as their continued patriotism and defense of “the rights and privileges of citizens of all portions of the Union.” They insisted that they had not, nor any southern citizen, attempted to “plot against the lives, happiness, security or property of any portion of our broad Union,” yet, in the eyes of these citizens, the same could not be said of northerners and the “abolition organization” they entertained. Instead, they were outraged by the perceived public sympathy shown to the “hireling ruffians” like John Brown, his failed attempt to incite a slave insurrection at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, in October 1859, and the continued efforts by the North, “for the purpose of dissolving our social system” in limiting slavery’s expansion to the West. At the meeting’s conclusion, Chickasaw County citizens insisted that, although they loved the Union, delegates should be elected to send to a “Southern Convention” in order to make the necessary preparations to “take control of the government” if a Republican president was elected.¹

¹ *Weekly Mississippian*, 25 January 1860.

Elsewhere, every day citizens, like Charles C. Thornton, and the young men he represented, were not concerned so much with supporting or dissuading disunion in 1859, but instead were focused solely on what they saw as far more important. Rather than disunion, Thornton emphasized protection of “Southern homes and firesides”—against what he, and other citizens alongside him in Madison County, Mississippi, saw as an “encroachment by Northern fanatics and abolition incendiaries.”² Moreover, these concerns are mirrored throughout the letters and newspapers of white, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians to their governors and politicians. While the debate over particular events and later secession was heated during this time, this thesis will highlight what was really going through the minds of every day citizens between 1859 and 1861; citizens who saw themselves as loyal to the nation yet threatened by a section whose goal it seemed was to eliminate slavery’s expansion and the South’s rights. In short, this study captures what they feared most, what they favored, how torn they were in deciding how best to protect slavery, their rights, and their futures, and how their states’ founding ultimately influenced their decisions upon the eve of war.

Furthermore, this study specifically views these rising tensions prior and during the secession crisis through the eyes of every day, middle-class citizens in Kentucky and Mississippi; citizens who comprised “commercial and professional interests” such as “bankers, merchants, doctors, teachers, lawyers, editors, dentists, and the clergy”, farmers, and other literate individuals who might have owned a few slaves and whose

² Charles C. Thornton to John J. Pettus, 13 December 1859, Box 930, Folder 1, Item 20, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

voices were readily captured by newspapers and other written sources.³ Historians have often overlooked how this particular group debated slavery, states' rights, abolition, secession, and government authority, focusing most of their attention and studies on elites instead. This study argues that white, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians were vastly similar in their views on slavery, states' rights, and the Republican Party as sectional tensions escalated after John Brown's attack in 1859. When Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency, however, they chose two different courses of action in 1861 on how best to sustain what each state valued most—independency vs. power.

Both states' middle-class citizens between 1859 and 1861 wanted to see slavery continued, demanded that the North respect the South's right to slavery, and wished to see the Republican Party and abolition prevented from growing in power. Yet, what drove middle-class Kentuckians' towards the decision of neutrality was their value of a particular type of independency, constructed upon the state's founding. In their minds, this independency meant guarding the ability to own land, providing for their households, achieving financial success by their own merit, and upholding white racial and social superiority through slavery. This value on an independence that consisted of a strong devotion to slavery, a social hierarchy it helped to develop, and beneficial, economic ties to both the North and the South pushed middle-class Kentuckians to favor neutrality even when they and elite Kentuckians originally found themselves divided on what was the best course of action for the state. Such a division followed them into the war but was not equally experienced by Mississippians until the war began.

³ Jonathan Daniel Wells and Jennifer R. Green, eds., *The Southern Middle Class in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 1, 7, 285-286.

Meanwhile, embroiled with a continual desire for social and monetary success, middle-class Mississippians' found themselves united in their choice for secession in order to maintain power. To this group, secession was seen as a method to protect this form of power that gave them control over their reputations as honorable, masculine, Christian men and over the wealth acquired through cotton and slavery, while the Union was viewed as only leading to their subjugation, poverty, and enslavement to the Republican Party. In short, by looking at these early years in Kentucky and Mississippi, and the events that occurred prior to the secession crisis, one ultimately captures the reactions and influences among these core populations and allows historians to garner a better understanding how each state's founding ideas formed during that time caused two, similar states to respond differently as war approached.

Countless historians have explored the causes of the Civil War, one of the most important events in American history. This occurrence witnessed the severing of a republic that the parents and grandparents of many Americans fought to build during the American Revolution. In fact, during the earlier decades after its formation the simple utterance of "disunion" was said to have sent chills up the spine of even the most composed politician, as it echoed the fears of a failed "representative government" and the emergence of despotism, oppression, and even slavery itself.⁴ Yet, for some radical members of Congress in the following decades, disunion and subsequently secession from a corrupt Union, was seen as a godsend, an opportunity to achieve lasting liberty for societies in dire need of freedom and protection.

⁴ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1-3.

Historians have endeavored to understand why a Union once so united as to stand against Great Britain ultimately separated by 1861. “Blundering politicians,” as historians have so often described this generation of leaders, seemed to be the root cause of disunion, where selfish and prideful representatives were viewed as incapable of finding compromise through the 1850s and 1860s, and sought to achieve their own ends.⁵ Yet, some scholars have pointed out that tensions between the sections had a history, and it was only the failure to compromise and the increasing desire of southerners to accomplish their own desires that led the southern states to secede in 1861.⁶

While these studies have included an overall understanding of the United States’ trials during the secession crisis of 1860 and 1861, other scholars have chosen to look more specifically at the states that decided to leave the Union and their reasons for doing so. Several have included comparative studies between states like Alabama and Mississippi, or intriguing analyses as to what the citizens of the North were seeing, thinking, and feeling during this crucial time. Few, however, have offered comparative studies between the border and lower South in the secession crisis, especially while looking closely at the reactions of every day, middle-class citizens through letters to their governors and local, popular newspapers.⁷ Thus, it is this study that hopes to add to these existing works concerning secession, the Border South, and the Deep South.

Mississippi and Kentucky have been the focus of many scholarly works, and historians understand why one state chose to secede while the other remained in the

⁵ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983).

⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Joanne B. Freeman, *The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War* (New York, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018).

⁷ William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

Union. Nonetheless, scholars have too often focused on elites to understand the underlying motivations behind each state's decision and have confined their studies to an overall synthesis of why secession occurred from either a national or individual state perspective. Additionally, these individual studies have also failed to fully encompass each state's reaction to the raid of John Brown and the approaching 1860 election—events that pushed the South even closer to secession than ever before and that are crucial in understanding why these state's middle-classes advocated for union or disunion. Therefore, the question remains: why did the common, middle-class citizen feel threatened by Brown's actions and later Lincoln's election? What did the common southerner see and believe when faced with secessionism and unionism? What did they want accomplished by their leaders? And were their views and desires accurately represented by their delegates? Recent scholarship underscores that secession conventions better captures the opinions of elites, and studies like this one hope to capture popular white, middle-class attitudes on secession regardless of gender.

This study utilizes the papers of governors John J. Pettus and Beriah Magoffin, the Jefferson Davis papers, and Mississippi and Kentucky newspapers to compare the views of middle-class citizens from two economically and politically similar states that responded quite differently to secession. This thesis demonstrates that middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were equally alarmed by the arrival of the Republican Party and the doctrines they supported. Each state was also strongly supportive of states', or southern, rights—a belief not only in the right to hold slavery but also in a state's right

to govern its own decisions and future.⁸ While their understanding of independence and power consisted of these particular rights, it was ultimately how to best protect these important ideas, and the practices they included, that both states began to differ over time, especially as 1861 began. Holding onto their faith in America's political system, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians sought to defeat the Republican Party through the election of 1860. When these attempts failed, they led their states onto different routes in order to protect their independency or, in the case of Mississippi, the power they held over their social and economic lives. More specifically, by 1861, Mississippians were increasingly devoted to states' rights and moved swiftly to raise companies and seek secession, as it was seen as the only solution to protect slavery, their honor, and their wealth from a section they viewed as seeking to destroy and enslave them. Middle-class Kentuckians, on the other hand, refused to support either the North or the Deep South, and viewed both as having extremist ideals that would harm the economic ties they had spent years developing between both sections, which had assisted them in achieving independency. In addition, the Bluegrass State denied secession due to the belief that it would eliminate the laws that protected slavery and refused to side with the North, as doing so would mean possibly fighting against their sister states in the South. Overall, these separate responses from Kentucky and Mississippi citizens were shaped by their value of white supremacy, honor, masculinity, and economic success which were concepts that made up their ultimate goal of achieving either independency or power over themselves, their slaves, their money, and their states.

⁸ William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2000), 137-139, 178-184, 256-258, 267-268.

This study will additionally engage the arguments of historians Dwight L. Dumond, William H. Freehling, David Potter, Timothy B. Smith, Elizabeth R. Varon, and James W. Finck, who each offer an in-depth analysis on the roots and causes of disunion. From politics to masculinity, these scholars investigate secession through different methods of interpretations and have documented the causes and effects nationwide. Yet, they have not applied these same findings at the state level, especially among middle-class citizens. While these studies help to provide an overall understanding of the events during this time, as well as the attitudes of northern and southern politicians, this thesis will subsequently add to these same arguments. It argues that middle-class citizens in Mississippi and Kentucky acted on perceived northern threats in similar ways starting in 1859, but by 1860-1861, responded differently to secession than what previous scholars have noted in politicians and elites.

Nonetheless, the historiography surrounding secession contains scholars who have noted the importance of various factors in heightening the sectional conflict, such as politics, despotism, and disunion rhetoric. Written in 1931, Dwight L. Dumond's *The Secession Movement* argues that secession was both a well thought out process by southern politicians and a failure by the North to comply with southern demands and compromises. While originally willing to negotiate, northern resistance and the later election of Lincoln solidified the southern politicians' belief that only by severing the Union could their society and the institution of slavery be conserved. This study will reveal that such an argument was true at the local level, as well, where middle-class

citizens viewed Lincoln's election as an end to negotiations with the North.⁹ More specifically, Michael F. Holt's *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* follows in Dumond's footsteps in arguing that a failed two-party system caused sectionalism to explode within the nation. Only then, it seemed, did the nation abandon national parties, accept sectional parties, and turn slavery into a disuniting topic in order to maintain political power.¹⁰

William W. Freehling in his two volume work, *The Road to Disunion*, expands previous studies by tracing disunion from the American Revolution to the Civil War. His goal is to understand why secessionists triumphed so suddenly in 1860 when compromises had always stifled fire-eaters' call for secession. According to his findings, secession occurred due to southern elites influencing events, politics, and people to get what they wanted and later push the nation towards disunion. Although united in this sense, it is later viewed that the South was, nonetheless, divided in its approach towards secession and how it should be conducted.¹¹ Far more intriguing is Elizabeth R. Varon's exposition on the power of words in driving a nation apart. Taking an interesting turn in the historiography, Varon's *Disunion!* follows the many ways in which the word "disunion" could have fed Americans' fear of a failed Union, as well as its use by politicians to discredit opposing parties between 1789 and 1859.¹² Alongside Varon, Joanne B. Freeman connects violence in Congress with the sectional crisis, stating that

⁹ Dwight L. Dumond, *The Secession Movement, 1860-1861* (New York, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1931).

¹⁰ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983); Additionally, David M. Potter's *Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York, New York: Harper Perennial, 2011) can also be consulted in order to understand the nationwide political atmosphere leading up to the secession crisis.

¹¹ William H. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), vii-ix.

¹² Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

the Civil War began in Congress as politicians, following the desires of the citizens they represented, turned to honor and violence in order to maintain their states' rights.¹³ While informative in describing the overall atmosphere of the nation at this time, it is the goal of this study to disclose how the findings of Dumond, Freehling, Varon, and Freeman might have played out quite similarly and differently at the local level, specifically among Mississippi and Kentucky middle-class citizens.

Besides scholars who have presented an overall examination of why secession occurred, others have studied individual states and their reactions towards secession. Timothy B. Smith in *The Mississippi Secession Convention* argues that the convention in Mississippi resulted in a multitude of consequences, such as the production of secessionist and cooperationist factions, a lack of communication and agreement among delegates, and the growing concern that delegates were acting upon their own desires instead of the people's will.¹⁴ Likewise, Christopher J. Olsen's *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi* examines how the state's emphasis on masculinity and male honor—formed during settlement—caused the state to favor antipartyism and later secession. In depending on personal relationships to elect delegates and prove one's masculinity, Olsen argues that Mississippians antiparty character caused them to take political insults personally, and eventually secession became the only method of

¹³ Joanne, B. Freeman, *The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018).

¹⁴ Timothy B. Smith, *The Mississippi Secession Convention: Delegates and Deliberations in Politics and War, 1861-1865* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2014); For additional information concerning the political atmosphere in Mississippi, consult William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974). Barney gives a more broad understanding of secession and politics in Mississippi, while comparing it to Alabama simultaneously.

maintaining the state's honor.¹⁵ Both of these works will be examined and added to extensively within this study, examining how white, middle-class citizens took northern actions, comments, and criticism as a threat against their honor and communities and whether Mississippi delegates at the secession convention truly represented their citizens' desires or sought to accomplish their own objectives.

Meanwhile, historians have also sought to understand Kentucky's peculiar stance as its Deep South neighbors began to leave the Union. Historian James W. Finck in *Divided Loyalties* notes the struggle Kentucky experienced as it chose to remain neutral amidst factions who spoke for or against secession. Arguing that Kentucky chose neutrality as a means to maintain its economy and keep slavery, Finck goes into immense detail in describing the stances of various factions who considered secession with hesitancy and explaining why those same factions saw neutrality as more favorable.¹⁶ Alongside Finck, Gary Matthews's title alone encompasses his argument. In *More American than Southern*, Matthews argues that based on Kentucky's original settlement and its connections to surrounding states, the state was seen as an "anomaly"—having both Northern, Southern, and Western attributes within its society. It was these same attributes, he states, that governed Kentucky's decision towards neutrality.¹⁷ Lastly, Michael D. Robinson's *A Union Indivisible* explores secession in Kentucky through a region-wide study that focuses on the entire Border South. He argues that Unionists who sought to avoid war "approached the crisis as had their forbearers," like Henry Clay, in

¹⁵ Christopher J. Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ James W. Finck, *Divided Loyalties: Kentucky's Struggle for Armed Neutrality in the Civil War* (California: Savas Beatie, 2012).

¹⁷ Gary Matthews, *More American than Southern: Kentucky, Slavery, and the War for an American Ideology, 1828-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 4-16.

order to end the political unrest caused by slavery and further prove that only the Union provided complete protection for the institution. While Robinson highlights the importance of “interstate cooperation among Unionists” to keep their states in the Union, this study hopes to reiterate the importance of middle-class citizens’ views, how each state’s ultimate decision regarding secession was mainly their own, and that the views and decisions of the middle-class and the elite were not so dissimilar.¹⁸ Overall, however, this study will add to these existing arguments, showing how their understanding of independency contributed to middle-class Kentuckians’ decision to remain neutral.

Ultimately, Smith, Olsen, Finck, Matthews, and Robinson confine their studies to political leaders and neglected to focus on the attitudes and concerns of every day citizens as compromise with the North failed and secession became more appealing. While these studies are important, as the majority of decisions made in states and the nation were directed by political leaders, it is equally valuable for one to understand that the common, middle-class citizen was not immune to these issues or remained silent during this national crisis. Citizens within these states, specifically in the South, had their own concerns and acted on those concerns in order to protect their societies, but also did not believe that secession was always the answer. This study will capture the voice and anxieties of white, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians, showing how the response to secession documented by previous scholars was experienced differently at the local level. It will also reveal that middle-class citizens from both states acted in various, and sometimes similar, ways until 1861, where viewing their state as a separate,

¹⁸ Michael D. Robinson, *A Union Indivisible: Secession and the Politics of Slavery in the Border South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 6.

independent entity in relation to the nation or as consisting of individuals who valued a certain level of power ultimately affected their decisions towards secession.

In order to fully encompass the attitudes and concerns of Mississippi and Kentucky middle-class citizens prior to the secession of the southern states, several archival sources were investigated and utilized. As this study wishes to capture the thoughts of two states, diaries and personal letters could not be the only sources relied upon. Most middle-class citizens, hoping to make a difference in the political decisions of their respective states, would write either to their governors or newspapers, and these two sources are used extensively within this study. Specifically, Newspapers.com, the Library of Congress's Chronicling America, and Genealogy Bank are websites that offered easy access to digitized newspapers. These online resources provided a method of obtaining the views and feelings of citizens who occupied the upper lower-class to the not yet elite, upper middle-class and also information on where in the state they were located, allowing one to see if particular areas within the state were more inclined to support secession or continue to cooperate with the Union. It is also important for this study to use specific newspapers in order to understand what was happening locally and within the state, as newspapers often reflected the feelings and sentiments of the public they were writing to, especially if they wanted to procure funds. Newspapers help to capture specific events occurring statewide, as well, such as the mustering of companies, local uprisings against abolitionists, economic turmoil, possible fears over slave insurrections, or invasions from surrounding states. Lastly, newspapers assist in documenting the reactions of the citizens to particular legislation, passed nationally or locally, and what steps citizens desired to be taken to enact or repel it.

Unpublished and digitized collections of Mississippi governors' papers were acquired from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History located in Jackson, Mississippi. As John Jones Pettus was the governor of Mississippi during the time of the secession crisis, his papers were sorted through in addition to his executive journal and military telegrams.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Kentucky Historical Society's Civil War Governors of Kentucky contains the digitized papers of Beriah Magoffin, as well as his executive journal and military telegrams, which have been transcribed for easy use.²⁰ The edited papers of Jefferson Davis, compiled by Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, written between 1859 and 1861 were also consulted, as letters to and from Mississippi and Kentucky were often received by Davis during these times.²¹

Nevertheless, there were weaknesses identified when using these particular primary sources. Whereas Kentucky newspapers were an invaluable resource to utilize during this study, only two newspapers from Louisville, Kentucky, were found that addressed events such as John Brown's raid, national conventions, and Lincoln's election. These two newspapers consist of both unionist and secessionist sentiments, and where possible, other state presses quoted within these Louisville newspapers were utilized. Yet, a wider variety of newspapers would need to be accessed for future studies concerning Kentucky's middle-class. In addition, while searching through each state's governor's papers, very few letters addressed the raid of John Brown. While there were a few discovered in Mississippi that addressed abolition, more letters were found that

¹⁹ John J. Pettus, State Government Records, Series 757: Correspondence and Papers, MDAH

²⁰ Beriah Magoffin Papers (Filson Historical Society, digital collection, September 16, 2019, <http://discovery.civilwargovernors.org/solr-search?q=Beriah%20Magoffin&facet=>).

²¹ Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, ed. *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Volume 6-7, 1856-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989-1992).

pertained to the events in 1860 and 1861. Therefore, in order to fully encompass the thoughts and actions of middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians, newspapers were used more often concerning John Brown's actions than in chapters to follow.

The decision to focus on the years 1859 to 1861 was affected heavily by the presence of three key events that pushed the South closer to secession and caused compromise to become almost impossible: John Brown's raid, the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, and the Presidential election of 1860. In order to understand why these events solidified sectional tensions and what was increasing or decreasing support for disunion among white, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians, local newspapers and the governors' letters were studied in-depth. Additionally, and due to the mass quantity of these resources, specific key words were chosen in order to narrow down the search. For example, key words such as John Brown, uprisings, insurrections, Lincoln, Bell, Breckenridge, Douglass, Republican National Convention, Democratic National Convention, fire eater, disunion, and secessionist were located within letters and newspaper articles throughout the research period, either by hand or through online search engines. In condensing these resources in this way, one garners exactly how citizens reacted to these events as a whole, what they believed the solution to sectional tensions were, what was in danger, who or what was threatening their state or the nation, and why secession or neutrality was chosen.

In all, this thesis will explore how middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians responded to trying events prior to disunion, and why these citizens chose secession or neutrality during the secession crisis. Chapter Two will focus entirely on the reactions of the middle-class to John Brown's raid and a perceived abolitionist threat. It begins its

analysis by offering a brief overview of Kentucky and Mississippi's formation of their own identity that valued either independence or power—ideals that consisted of many practices and later affected their decisions during the secession crisis, which will be explored further in future chapters. Next, in analyzing the raid on Harper's Ferry, this chapter argues that middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians blamed the teachings of abolitionists and the Republican Party for driving John Brown to action, yet differed when deciding what steps should be taken towards protecting slavery and their rights from future threats. Denouncing the Republican Party's doctrines and the North's rumored approval of Brown's actions, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians nevertheless acknowledged several northern cities' attempts to reassure the South of their devotion to the Union. Fearing that more insurrections might occur, however, both states reformed their state militias and increased surveillance of both slaves and suspicious individuals.²² Such methods were taken not just to protect slavery, but to maintain an independency and power that consisted of social and economic privileges for free, white males. Nevertheless, white Kentuckians maintained their faith in America's democratic system, believing that peace and union could still be achieved through appropriate compromises. Mississippians, meanwhile, found themselves split between factions that either sought to reassure the public that compromise was still possible and a more moderate group that believed the state might have to resort to secession should their rights be threatened further by the North. In the end, and despite their fears, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians continually advocated for the preservation of the Union;

²² For more information concerning the history behind Mississippi's militia and the organization of it, see Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Gregg Revivals, 1993).

although, fire eaters and more moderate advocates of secession, specifically in Mississippi, began insinuating that compromise and militias would not be enough to protect their state's rights, especially if a Republican president were elected. This visible rift among unionists and secessionists among middle-class citizens' will also add to William W. Freehling's argument that a majority of southerners desired to postpone secession until all southern states chose to secede together.

These reactions are also shown to be directly tied to each state's identity and what they cherished the most. Citizens viewed themselves not as Americans, but as southern confederates united in their efforts to sustain power over their slaves, honor, wealth, and futures or as Kentuckians, whose independence was linked to slavery's privileges and who pursued solutions that protected both this independency and institution. Such a focus will build on studies by Honor Sachs, Gary Matthews, Christopher J. Olsen, and William J. Cooper, who focus on what created citizens' identities in the South and Kentucky between 1776 and 1860 and how it influenced their lives.²³ Lastly, the governor's papers of John J. Pettus and Beriah Magoffin, and local newspapers, assist to illustrate the concerns, motivations, and actions of citizens in October 1859 to March 1860 prior to national conventions.

Chapter Three explores the Republican and Democratic Conventions during the hotly contested presidential race between April and November 1860. While middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians were preoccupied with the results of both conventions, as well as the abandonment of the Democratic convention in Charleston by southern

²³ William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2000); Honor Sachs, *Home Rule: Households, Manhood, and National Expansion on the Eighteenth-Century Kentucky Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

delegates, they were not consumed by discussions for or against the Union. Instead, this chapter argues that middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians had not lost faith in America's democratic system and believed that slavery, the Union, and southern rights could still be protected if a specific presidential nominee was elected. For instance, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians were mostly torn between John C. Breckenridge or John Bell, as either was seen as the perfect candidate to protect slavery and the Union, while deeming Lincoln and Douglas as far too radical to support. More specifically, supporters of Bell were drawn to his support for the Union and continued compromise, as choosing Breckenridge was viewed as a vote for possible disunion in the future. Supporters of Breckenridge, on the other hand, favored his strong pro-southern platform and saw Bell as a secret abolitionist who would see to slavery's extermination. Again, middle-class citizens' favor of either candidate was influenced by their desire to sustain unique ideas that each group valued and which could not survive if certain aspects, like slavery or the Union, were eliminated. In the end, middle-class, and some elite citizens believed that the nation's future would be decided by the presidential election and waited for the outcome before drastic measures could be taken. Popular newspapers, and the governors' correspondence from each state, are used to support these arguments. In addition to the use of newspapers and letters, the studies of Olsen, Finck, Matthews, and Robinson are also added to, as this chapter takes a closer look at the 1860 presidential campaign within these studies often neglected in previous studies. Overall, this chapter will emphasize that while middle-class citizens were similar in what practices and beliefs they valued, they ultimately differed in which presidential candidate they

believed would protect these beliefs and what they feared might happen should a Republican president be inaugurated.

Chapter Four examines the aftermath of the election of 1860, the rise of Abraham Lincoln as president, and the secession crisis as a whole. This chapter argues that both middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians were unsupportive of a Republican president and did not approve of his later actions at Fort Sumter. Most Mississippians believed that all hope was lost and that the power they held over their political and economic rights, social honor, and the system of slavery could not survive beneath a hostile president who insulted and threatened the South with subjugation and inequality. Thus, they saw secession a more suitable option for their state. Such a decision was affected by their desire to maintain power over their own lives, and secession was seen as that violent action, similar to dueling, that would guard this power by preventing subjugation, sustaining their honor as southern, white men, and protecting their communities and wealth from harm.

While disapproving of Lincoln, middle-class Kentuckians split in regard to what action needed to be taken following his election. Prior to Fort Sumter in April, a number of citizens favored secession, while a much larger faction supported the South's rights while also seeking compromise. Following the attack on Fort Sumter, however, the Bluegrass State saw class divisions as they determined what course should best be taken by the state. Yet, as most middle-class and elite Kentuckians were more preoccupied with protecting their independency, that is, their economic ties to both sections, slavery, and their privileges as white males from outside forces, rather than siding with a particular section, these divisions were soon discarded in favor of an option they believed protected

them the most. ²⁴ Nevertheless, while supporters of neutrality called on Governor Magoffin to provide arms, and protect the borders from runaway slaves and abolitionists, other middle-class citizens detested the legislature's decision to remain neutral, as they saw their rights as threatened by a Republican president and preferred to side completely with the South. Many even wrote to prominent figures, including Jefferson Davis and John J. Pettus, to support local, pro-secession companies preparing for war. Such actions were, too, influenced by Kentucky's peculiar identity, where citizens often identified themselves as purely Kentuckian, rather than southern, northern, or American. This identity crisis will advance the studies of Honor Sachs and Gary Matthews, who both examine Kentucky's identity between 1792 and 1861 and how the state viewed itself in relation to other states. ²⁵ Such a study will require the utilization of Governor Beriah Magoffin, Governor John J. Pettus, and the Jefferson Davis papers, as well as local newspapers, to document the concerns of Kentuckians and Mississippians from December 1860 to July 1861, completing the groundwork needed to adequately compare two fairly similar states, its middle-classes, and their decisions as war approached.

In all, scholars such as Michael Holt, William W. Freehling, Dennis J. Mitchell, Lowell H. Harrison, and James C. Klotter emphasize these instances, as well as the actions of prominent politicians and southern elites in fanning the flames of disunion, but at the local level, southern, middle-class, white citizens were often more consumed with fear and the need to protect their independency, power, and practices when it came to

²⁴ James W. Finck, *Divided Loyalties: Kentucky's Struggle for Armed Neutrality in the Civil War* (California: Savas Beatie, 2012).

²⁵ Honor Sachs, *Home Rule: Households, Manhood, and National Expansion on the Eighteenth-Century Kentucky Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Gary Matthews, *More American than Southern: Kentucky, Slavery, and the War for an American Ideology, 1828-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014).

their decisions regarding secession.²⁶ The Conclusion of this study will summarize these findings, but will also offer a synthesis of what occurred in each state after July 1861. Ultimately, this study does not overshadow the importance of politicians in leading their states into their respective decisions, and even shows that the views of politicians and the middle-class were often similar despite brief instances of class differences. Yet, while this thesis shines a light onto the thoughts and concerns of every day, middle-class citizens during the secession crisis, it also shows that what influenced the choices of politicians and middle-class citizens the most was their love of independency or power. In the end, these values, and what they consisted of, were so cherished that they caused two states that once stood side-by-side to diverge onto different paths.

²⁶ Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2014); Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

CHAPTER II – “BLOODY HANDS TO HOSPITABLE GRAVES”: KENTUCKY AND
MISSISSIPPI’S RESPONSE TO JOHN BROWN’S RAID, OCTOBER 1859-MARCH

1860

As tensions fluctuated across the nation, Kentucky’s Governor Beriah Magoffin’s December address was relayed to Mississippi newspapers, capturing the unity, disgust, disdain, and fear spreading throughout the South in late 1859. “Since the recent developments of the North, and the Harper’s Ferry affair,” he began, “Kentucky is more thoroughly sound and united than ever,” and he vowed that the state would stand by her sister states in both sections. Nonetheless, in regard to the “monstrous doctrines of the Republican Party,” Magoffin expressed the perceived threat towards slavery and southern white families, believing that “all slave states are threatened” as well as “the Constitution and the Union” by this new party. And although John Brown had been arrested and his plans for a slave insurrection thwarted, Magoffin sought to “adopt sufficient measures of protection” and also self-preservation for Kentucky.²⁷ In fact, after the raid on Harper’s Ferry in October, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians viewed John Brown’s actions as an attack on southern rights and blamed abolitionists and, more importantly, the Republican Party’s platform, for driving him to such measures. Ultimately, these citizens chose to take action against these perceived fanatics in similar and different ways in the hopes of protecting practices that made up the independency and power their ancestors had fought to obtain.

²⁷ *The Daily Mississippian*, 13 December 1859.

These two similar, yet very different, societies who saw themselves threatened found their beginnings prior to the American Revolution. At the time, colonists longed to expand the young republic into the unknown expanse of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, and for settlers such as Daniel Boone and Anthony Hutchins, that dream became a reality. Setting out “in quest of the country of Kentucke” in 1769, Boone described his adventures into the “wilderness” fraught with brutal winters, wild animals, and Indians. Yet, he continued to explore the land, seeking “domestic happiness” for his family and the opportunity to provide a young nation with the hope of growth.²⁸ Likewise, Anthony Hutchins, a native a South Carolina searching for a chance to start over with his family, ventured into the lands around modern-day Natchez, Mississippi. While French planters had failed to cultivate the area due to conflict with local Indian tribes before trading it to the British, who also abandoned it for fear of conflict with the Spanish across the Mississippi River, Hutchins successfully settled near St. Catherine’s Creek for “opportunity or political reasons.” There, along with his 500 slaves, Hutchins was able survive off of subsistence farming and slowly acquired more land from the Indians as the American Revolution began.²⁹

By the end of the revolution, more settlers poured into the yet to be established states of Kentucky and Mississippi. Settlers in Kentucky, like Boone, saw this area as much more than a place to grow crops and hunt game. To them, Kentucky offered white males with an independency that included patriarchal authority, mastery through land ownership, and economic stability that would lead to the protection and provision of their

²⁸ Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 5-6, 10-14; Sachs, *Home Rule*, 1-6.

²⁹ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 15-31.

families.³⁰ For those in Mississippi, settlers from the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Georgia fled from the “old states” to the “new Canaan” in the hopes of starting over from “failed tobacco farms” and to reap the benefits of cotton, which had already found success in Natchez.³¹ Such desires embodied the hopes of all Americans during and after the American Revolution—the opportunity to become masters of their own lives, households and fortunes. Yet, to accomplish their dreams, settlers not only had to oppose and overcome Indians and speculators, they also faced unfulfilled dreams and societies that were slowly beginning to change due to location and the success of specific crops. Their actions in response to these issues ultimately shaped their identities and their later actions in the 1860s.³²

Forming an Identity

The production of the identity as “Kentuckian,” which affected citizens’ responses to slavery and the economy later as disunion approached, was subsequently formed by the state’s original settlement and their understanding of independency. The first settlers of Kentucky in the early 1700s sought to carry on the ideas established by the American Revolution: independency through land ownership and mastery of their households. Those ideas faced a harsh reality when Virginia gentlemen secured the majority of lands and the lower classes were left as tenants depending on wage labor for survival.³³ This created a large population of powerless, landless, poor men who had nothing in common with the powerful elite, saw no need to defer to them, and could not

³⁰ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 39-40.

³¹ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 38-40, 52, 62-63.

³² Sachs, *Home Rule*, 28-40. Sachs notes that numerous speculators from Virginia’s gentry had claimed large amounts of acreage in Kentucky in the hopes of parceling it out to tenants. Settlers would later argue that because they were the individuals cultivating the lands that they were entitled to owning these lands, yet numerous court battles and laws would leave these individuals as tenants.

³³ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 8.

participate in politics. Realizing that they needed the poor's support in order to remain in power, and as they applied for statehood, elite Kentuckians crafted "a political consensus that privileged whiteness and manhood over wealth and land ownership as prerequisites for civic life."³⁴ Although this precursor did not lead to drastic changes in the dependent poor man's landless condition, it did give him power simply by being white while the elite gained the loyalty of the lesser classes. Even without land, all white males enjoyed suffrage due to the color of their skin. In addition, by 1800, slave codes were adjusted to limit the mobility of African American slaves, who found themselves unable to hire themselves out for wages. In elevating the status of poor whites through suffrage and separating the economic and social worlds of freemen and slaves, poor white men had gained a significant amount of influence and independency in Kentucky simply because of their whiteness.³⁵ In this light, Kentuckians resistance to abolition and the desire to find the best avenue to keep slavery during the secession crisis was linked to their identity as privileged white males.

Moreover, the white population in Kentucky gained economic advantages when African Americans remained in slavery. Should slavery be discontinued, and slaves given the opportunity to establish their own lives freely, whites would find themselves once again competing for jobs and watching "the value of their labor diminished" similar to the early decades of Kentucky's settlement.³⁶ Historians have also pointed out that an influential middle-class emerged after the War of 1812. Before, lower-class Kentuckians

³⁴ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 122-123

³⁵ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 123,-124, 130-134, 137-142. Honor Sachs also adds that even though this created "social stability and political legitimacy" for poor whites, it nonetheless sustained inequality. Yet, because poor whites gained "privileges through citizenship" and power through suffrage and their white skin, Sachs gives no indication that they retaliated and demanded more equality between the rich and the poor, see *Home Rule*, ch. 5.

³⁶ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 138.

found it difficult to gain wealth simply as yeoman farmers, but with the help of the market revolution, industrialization, and Kentucky's geographic location, new avenues for economic prosperity emerged. Simply put, entrepreneurship was the key. By entering the market as an artisan, manufacturer, or one associated with the mercantile enterprise and saving enough money by participating in the "merchant and manufacturing cultures", the working, middle-class, white male achieved economic independency.³⁷

Kentucky also established a diversified economy tied to both sections of the nation through agriculture, trade, and manufacturing. With its unique position, citizens were allowed to reap the benefits of its climate and create specific trade routes with both the North and the South. For instance, the Mississippi River allowed Kentucky to trade goods and foodstuffs to the South, while railroads and increased manufacturing in the North not only created substantial markets but also other options for Kentucky's white middle-class to gain wealth.³⁸ Thus, "the state's exports" became "important to both North and South."³⁹ It is possible, then, that middle-class citizens voting for neutrality later in 1861 might have done so to protect their privileges as white men, sustain the economic stability they had achieved through trade and manufacturing, and prevent further competition with African Americans. In others words, in choosing neutrality and protecting these specific privileges, they maintained their independency, whereas secession might have equaled a loss of one, if not all, of these cherished practices.

While middle-class Kentuckians were developing a society and identity strengthened by slavery and the variety of economic opportunities through trade and

³⁷ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 21-22.

³⁸ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 53; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 21-22.

³⁹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 54-55.

manufacturing, middle-class Mississippians developed their own, unique identity linked to having power over specific aspects of their lives and that eventually affected their decisions in the 1860s, as well. In the Mississippi territory, the expulsion of Indians from fertile lands allowed settlers to spread and settle rapidly throughout the territory. Even so, white development came slowly to Mississippi, and communities were often separated by long distances. Thus, white settlers relied more on their family and neighbors for survival rather than the government. Over time, they developed a sense of “mutual loyalty among men,” while establishing Mississippi’s idea of masculinity. To be considered a masculine, honorable man within society, Mississippians required courage, loyalty to one’s community, and protection and leadership of home and family. This form of masculinity was always under scrutiny by the community, and men needed to keep their reputation and identity’s intact by continually proving themselves to the community or sustaining their honor when it was challenged by another male, often through violence.⁴⁰

Mississippi’s code of honor not only instructed men to respect those of a higher class, as “wealth was a sign of inner virtue and personal success,” but it emphasized that upward mobility was possible for all white men.⁴¹ For settlers, the possibility of gaining social and economic prestige in Mississippi grew more promising with cotton’s success beginning in the late 1700s. Such economic appeal encouraged further migration into the territory and increased competition among men, as they became more focused on obtaining wealth, success, and honor through cotton growth over anything else.⁴²

⁴⁰ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 19-26.

⁴¹ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 22-26.

⁴² Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 38-40, 52.

Yet, revealing one's power over others through violence and monetary success was not the only method men used to express their masculinity, loyalty, and honor. Mississippi communities also utilized brutality and violence against slaves in order to prevent insurrections and test a man's commitment to the community and their families.⁴³ Such an emphasis on brutality and economic gain eventually affected the relationship between master and slave. Before, the frontier master and slave had once shared a "mutual respect for one another's humanity," but settlers had "lost their love of nature and their fellow man" in exchange for wealth achieved through cotton.⁴⁴ Also, relations between master and slave continued to change when a depression decreased the price of cotton. Mississippians not only temporarily turned to new agricultural practices and crops to survive until the cotton industry recovered, but also devised ways to control a much larger slave population. Stricken with the thought of being a minority, whites created strict slave laws and increased brutality.⁴⁵ In the end, while originally questioning slavery's legitimacy in the midst of the American and French revolutions, the growth of cotton, the Haitian Revolution, Christianity's justification of the institution, and Mississippi's focus on honor allowed for slavery's continuation and the protection of planters' wealth and honor.⁴⁶ To eliminate such a practice as slavery, then, would affect men's power over their own reputations, wealth, and the social hierarchy that white Mississippians benefited from, which was an option they were not willing to consider as 1861 approached.

⁴³ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 21-22.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, *The New History of Mississippi*, 108, 115.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 64-67,

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 108-115.

This emphasis on a society based on communal loyalty, masculinity, and violence affected politics in Mississippi. Because communities were so remote, and due to communities' value on face-to-face personal relationships, voters were more willing to elect those they knew personally rather than a particular party's doctrines and who would best protect the communities' interests. Therefore, it was difficult to form strong political parties within the state prior to 1860, in addition to settlers refusing to travel such long distances to attend political meetings. In the end, Mississippi politics reflected the spirit of antipartyism where political parties were unable to completely take hold of a population that valued personal relationships and communal protection over party beliefs. Olsen also argues that such developments made politics far more personal in Mississippi and in the South as compared to other sections of the nation. In other words, when politicians evaluated or insulted southern institutions, southern men often took it as a personal attack to their honor, values, and communities. In order to maintain their identity as "good men and good Christians," such insults often included violent reprisals, such as dueling, that assisted men in maintaining their honor and masculinity. As will be seen in future chapters within this study, secession and the election of Democratic politicians was also seen by middle-class Mississippians as appropriate methods of maintaining their honor, equality, and way of life in the South.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 27-37, 170-180; How southern honor affected society and the coming Civil War is also explored by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Presenting the South as a hierarchal society consisting of close communities that favored New England in the early 1700s, southerners' honor was deeply tied to public recognition and prominence, where men were willing to face immense violence to maintain high esteem among their communities. Honor also established social relations, as well as slavery and women's roles in southern society. Additionally, similar to Olsen's findings, Wyatt Brown shows how the North's attack on southern society and slavery was an insult to the southern population that could only be defended by violence and war.

By the 1840s, the state's settlement and cotton not only changed relations between the races in Mississippi, but ultimately created the state into a "patriarchal-dominated land of plantations" that shaped its growth, economy, and politics.⁴⁸ Honor and masculinity determined a man's place in society where all white men were considered equal, having the ability to vote, achieve success, and protect their community due to their skin color. Some historians, however, have argued that in reality particular groups within the antebellum South found social and economic success nearly impossible. Charles C. Bolton and Keri Leigh White's studies on poor whites in the South reveal that this group experienced landlessness, joblessness, and poverty due to slavery and the dominance of the planter class. While poor whites appreciated the privileges their white skin achieved, such as voting, this group nonetheless found it difficult to achieve social mobility due to planters using a number of methods to stifle and socially immobilize them. By defunding education, initiating poll taxes, and resorting to threats and violence, poor whites were prevented from rising up in defiance against poverty, planters, slavery, and later secession.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, as a whole, Mississippi society taught white men that monetary and social success could be achieved through effort and virtue.⁵⁰ Yet, while white Mississippians enjoyed having and maintaining considerable power over their reputations, wealth, slaves, and communities, they also

⁴⁸ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 89-90.

⁴⁹ Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994); Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 89-90, 116-118; Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 22-27. Olsen has also argued that plain folk often did not challenge the higher classes due to their shared values and the plain folk's ability to participate in Mississippi's democracy through voting and achieve economic success overnight.

created a society that took political insults personally as an attack on one's honor and values while simultaneously clashing with the rest of the nation.

The Turmoil of the 1850s

While their societies were established differently, Kentucky and Mississippi nevertheless shared stark similarities, such as superiority of the white race and a heavy dependence on slavery not only for economic gain, but also for racial dominance. Yet, the arrival of the 1850s saw those beliefs tested. Following the war with Mexico, and the possession of several new territories, both sections debated where the new states of California, New Mexico, and Utah should be classified as slave or free. Already, the South recognized “the extension of southern boundaries [as] vital for the maintenance of political power essential for protecting basic southern interests” and battled with northern politicians who had expressed their disdain for slavery's extension.⁵¹ Henry Clay, however, satisfied sectional tensions through the Compromise of 1850.⁵² Unfortunately, the establishment of popular sovereignty, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the failure of the Whig Party, the caning of Charles Sumner, and the emergence of the Republican Party only intensified animosities between the sections. By then, the South accepted the belief that the North held “the distinct idea of hostility” towards them and slavery's extension. They based this belief on the Republican Party's view of slavery as a “relic of barbarism,” as well as the publication and declaration of prominent leaders and followers of the party.⁵³

⁵¹ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 219, 232-233.

⁵² Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 233-234.

⁵³ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 255-258; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 143-149.

By the late 1850s, the South had grown even more alarmed by the Republican Party due to the publication of Hinton Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* and William H. Seward's "irrepressible conflict" speech. Published in 1857, Helper, a North Carolina native, asserted that slavery was the cause of "Southern backwardness and the South's inability to keep pace with the free states." The young writer claimed that "slaveholders [had formed] a 'tyrannical' and 'inflated oligarchy'" and urged nonslaveholders to snuff out slavery, for only a "lily-white, free labor South" would improve land prices and promote "entrepreneurial progress" on par with the North.⁵⁴ While these were the proclamations of just one man, the South grew infuriated that a fellow southerner had made these assertions, and associated Helper's teaching with the Republican Party when "over sixty House Republicans endorsed the book" in a letter written in 1859.⁵⁵

Furthermore, William H. Seward deepened southerners' beliefs that the North was out to abolish slavery completely and destroy southern society. In his Rochester speech, Seward declared that the country consisted of two sections—"one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on the basis of voluntary labor of freeman."⁵⁶ According to him, these "systems" were "incompatible;" moreover, because the "slave system" needed to obtain "all political power" and "represented principles antithetical to freedom, democracy, compromise, and repose," to which the free-labor North supported, the two sections were antagonistic and compromise was no longer possible. According to Varon, Seward thus painted a picture of the North leading a "violent conquest" where only force

⁵⁴ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 241-244; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 48; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 24 December 1859.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 48.

⁵⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 24 December 1859.

and the reclamation of “the territory they had lost and conceded” could establish free-labor throughout the nation.⁵⁷ In short, there would be “an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces” where the United States must become “either an entirely slaveholding nation or entirely a free labor nation.”⁵⁸

While the *Louisville Journal*'s editors regarded this “declaration. . .[as] intended to be regarded simply as a theory,” other Kentucky citizens insisted that this doctrine proved that “it [was] the North against the South and the South against the North.”⁵⁹ Democrats across the South believed that Seward had declared “a war of extermination against slavery” and provided “evidence that the Republicans [were] resolved to invade the South” and “exterminate southern institutions.” Writers in the *Semi-Weekly* declared that Seward had further proven his hostility towards the South when stating that Helper's book was “a work of great merit—rich, yet accurate, in statistical information, and logical in analysis.”⁶⁰ In short, these speeches and letters from prominent Republicans only increased the South's paranoia over the party's intentions for the nation's future. To most white Kentuckians and Mississippians, not only did the North intend to eliminate a practice that privileged them socially and financially, but in doing so, while this is not

⁵⁷ Varon, *Disunion!*, 317-319.

⁵⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 24 December 1859.

⁵⁹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 23 November 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 9 December 1859.

Elizabeth R. Varon, as well as many other historians, have also argued that Seward did not intend for his speech to incite an uproar among political groups and that his “rashness” had overwhelmed him. Varon goes on to argue that Seward could have also been fighting fire with fire, meeting southerners threats of disunion with the North's own disunion threats in order to maintain Republican honor and promote political victory over the South, see Varon, *Disunion!*, 319-320.

⁶⁰ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 27 December 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 23 November 1859. A general search using the key word “irrepressible conflict” resulted in over 140 matches in Kentucky and Mississippi newspapers, yet these examples capture the summative feelings throughout the states concerning this topic.

specifically stated in the sources, would eliminate their ability to express their honor, maintain wealth, and eradicate economic competition.

By 1859, however, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians watched these national issues over slavery and their fears concerning the Republican Party come to a head. In a nation reeling over recent, bloody events in Kansas where pro- and anti-slavery settlers battled over the state's future, an abolitionist set his sights on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in order to end slavery permanently. Having escaped punishment for murdering several pro-slavery settlers in the Pottawatomie Massacre in Kansas in 1856, John Brown made preparations to incite an insurrection in the slaveholding states. With over twenty men, Brown captured the federal arsenal but never acquired the swells of slaves he hoped would arise to assist him. On October 17, 1859, Brown and several of his men were captured, and although Brown had not seen the success of an insurrection, he nonetheless inspired a deep sense of fear within the Border and Deep South.⁶¹

Brown's raid became the first of three events that strengthened sectional tensions within the United States and solidified the South's fears over the Republican Party's "irrepressible conflict" doctrine, while weakening their faith in the nation's democratic system. White, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians offer useful comparative analysis of how these events, fears, and a weakening faith were expressed in the Border and Deep South. In addition, it is important not only to capture the reactions of these states' citizens to growing sectional tensions, and what they found most threatening, but also to understand what influenced two vastly similar states to split in regard to secession. Previously, past historians have sought to understand these two states' actions through

⁶¹ Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 34-35.

the study of its politicians. While such studies are crucial, it is equally vital to know what every day, middle-class citizens were concerned and fearful of the most during events like John Brown's raid and if their thoughts were similar to that of the delegates they elected. Therefore, studies into the newspapers and a few choice letters covering the raid reveal that both states were extremely alarmed by the Republican Party's abolitionist doctrines, blaming them for influencing Brown's actions and feared that more violence was to come. Although their expression of anger and fear over the Republicans, abolitionists, and future insurrections were similar, however, both states differed in regards on what action to take in order to protect the rights and practices that maintained their independency and power.

Kentucky's Response

Following Brown's arrest, Kentucky newspapers were flooded with articles from northern presses. Northern states struggled to reassure the South that they did not approve of Brown's actions, and that southerners had nothing to fear in regard to further violent actions against their treasured institutions. Following the raid, one such press assured that the "whole of the power of the country" would fight to protect the South from insurrections, while also ensuring that should fanatics—North or South—instigate revolt, the northern states would be more than willing to capture and deliver them to justice.⁶² Union meetings across New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts also sought to reassure the South that not all northern men advocated for the South's downfall. Attendees of these meetings, instead, expressed their "discountenance" towards

⁶² *Louisville Daily Journal*, October 27, 1859.

“sectionalism in all its forms” and sanctioned Brown’s punishment.⁶³ Furthermore, they voiced their desire to maintain the Constitution and “the rights of states”, believing that slavery was “a social necessity,” according to one Pennsylvanian, and that it would be “pitiless wanton barbarity to cast [slaves] loose and wild—it would be an act of self-slaughter for the whites.”⁶⁴ Other northern citizens closer to Kentucky specifically stated that Republicans were not intent on seeing slavery ended through violence, but that the matter would be settled “peaceably by an amendment of the Constitution and laws of the several Southern States themselves.”⁶⁵ These assurances, however, appeared to not quell the fear and anger that most middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians felt towards Brown, abolitionists, and the Republican Party as they continued to cover the event.

For white Kentuckians, when they were not providing coverage of Brown’s trial, they devoted most of their time pinpointing who they believed was really to blame for Brown and what the assailant’s intentions were for the South.⁶⁶ The *Louisville Daily Courier’s* editors stated that these “insurrectionary movements were the inevitable results of the building of a purely anti-slavery party” who “stood at the [ultra-abolitionists’] backs,” “encouraged them to work,” and “furnished them with means” to carry out their plans.⁶⁷ To middle-class Kentuckians, abolitionists and more specifically the Republican Party had not been satisfied with the “Kansas work” and sent “old John Brown to carry

⁶³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 14 December 1859.

⁶⁴ *Macon Beacon*, 4 January 1860.

⁶⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 24 January 1860. Other examples of Union meetings within Kentucky newspapers include *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 December 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 26 October, 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 27 October 1859; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 25 January 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 27 February, 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 17 March 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 16 March 1860.

⁶⁶ For newspapers that covered Brown’s actions at Harper’s Ferry, his trial, and the trial of his accomplices, see *Louisville Daily Journal*, 1 November 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 30 November 1859; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 4 November 1859; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 December 1859;

⁶⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 2 October 1859.

on the ‘Kansas work’ in Virginia.” These groups also believed that “stealing negroes, resisting the execution of the fugitive slave law, and fomenting insurrections” was “doing service to both God and man.”⁶⁸ Following the raid, Hardin, Rowan, Breckenridge, and Hopkins County citizens specifically regarded the attack on Harper’s Ferry as “the first gun of the ‘irrepressible conflict’” and the “abolition party” against southerners who had the right to have their slaves protected.⁶⁹ Through Brown, Republicans brought their doctrines to life and “intend[ed] to make the slave states of the Union all free,” while pursuing “continued efforts... to reduce the Southern States to the position of mere dependencies in the Union.” In turn, “their followers,” these citizens believed, “[would] endeavor, if they have the strength, to carry it out.”⁷⁰ In the end, one middle-class Kentuckian called on the state’s politicians to stand against such a party, stating that those who “would not oppose a Black Republican with all his might and main” and their doctrines would become “the most deadly enemy of the Union, and particularly of the Southern States.”⁷¹

Despite this disdain towards the Republicans and Brown, however, middle-class Kentuckians nonetheless continued to show their devotion to both slavery and the Union, viewing current events as no cause for dissolution. While Magoffin proclaimed that Kentucky’s slave property and families were threatened by “this new party with its monstrous doctrine,” and reiterated his state’s loyalty both to slavery and their friends in

⁶⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 7 November 1859.

⁶⁹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 26 October 1859; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 2 December 1859; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 19 Dec 1859; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 9 January 1860. For Kentucky and Mississippi both, there were over 1200 examples of the John Brown mentioned throughout major newspapers. While some of these matches were simply instances where the word “brown” or “john” were mentioned, the majority of these finds spoke of John Brown specifically.

⁷⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 21 December 1859.

⁷¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 4 February 1860.

the southern states, his state had also not forgotten their loyalty to the Union, as well.⁷² On February 27, 1859 at the Louisville Masonic temple, Kentucky met alongside representatives of Tennessee, Ohio, and Indiana, where they “mingled their voices together,” to express their “sentiments of patriotism, fraternity, and loyalty to the Union.” This meeting also revealed the states’ belief that the time had come for “the people of the North and South . . . [to] understand each other, [to] cultivate the sentiments of brotherhood and thus perpetuate the ancient fellowship and good will.”⁷³

Local counties, also, took the opportunity to express their devotion to upholding the Union by explicitly denouncing dissolution talk. Henry, Mason, and several other county citizens passionately resisted “to the utmost any combination of the North or South, which, in any event, look[ed] to the dissolution of the Union as a cure for the present evils of sectionalism and [declared themselves] for the Union and the Constitution.” These counties also restated their goal not to interfere “with the rights of others guaranteed to them by the Constitution and laws,” including the South.⁷⁴ Asserting that “the institution of slavery, in the States where it existed, should not be molested” and would be defended “by all the guarantees of law, of morals, or of all the physical force,” residents like those in Mason County stressed their desire “in reconciling the people of [their] common country once more.” Kentuckians also questioned secessionists on what benefit dissolution would produce, as it would not allow them to expand into the

⁷² *The Daily Mississippian*, 13 December 1859.

⁷³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 25 January 1860.

⁷⁴ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 13 February 1860. Hopkins, Cumberland, and Garrard County would also exhibit their support for upholding the union at their own democratic meetings, *Louisville Daily Journal*, 18 February 1860.

territories nor cease the outrage from northerners against slavery.⁷⁵ Ultimately, even though white Kentuckians felt an “ennobled fear that patriots [felt] for an imperiled country,” they desired that the “South obey the laws of [the] country” and to “summon the pure elements of conservatism and truth that...can [be found] in the northern states” in order to stave off disunion and civil war.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, expressing their desires to uphold the Union and slavery simultaneously did not mean that middle-class Kentuckians’ concerns over abolitionists like Brown were overlooked. Prior to 1859, Kentucky showed little tolerance for extremism and anti-slavery talk, yet abolitionist sentiment existed throughout Kentucky’s history. At the 1792 and 1799 constitutional conventions, several Presbyterian and Baptists ministers advocated for slavery’s end, labeling blacks as equal to whites, whose “moral and political virtues” were harmed through black enslavement. In 1808, the Kentucky Abolition Society was established where members worked to ban slavery, educate blacks, and publish pamphlets to educate Kentucky, as well. By 1832, Kentucky also had around thirty-one colonization societies, where members believed that instead of assimilating free blacks into society they would help these individuals leave the country. In the end, they succeeded in sending only 658 freed slaves to Africa.⁷⁷

By 1859, abolitionists and Republicans were still active in the state, as seen at the Republican State Convention in Newport, Kentucky, where representatives were elected to the national convention to be held in 1860. Yet while these representatives were “determinedly opposed to servile insurrections” and “[held] slavery . . . open to the will

⁷⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 29 February 1860.

⁷⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 24 December 1859.

⁷⁷ Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 174-176.

of the legal majorities,” Kentucky newspapers still associated them with abolitionism but regarded “this whole movement as insignificant” as Kentucky was more pro-slavery than ever before.⁷⁸ Other Republicans within the state, however, took more determined measures to spread anti-slavery sentiments, and the state reacted in open hostility towards such actions.

For example, having created a local antislavery printing press, a mob in Newport chose to destroy the printing presses in October 1859.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, John Fee, a Kentucky preacher, had established an antislavery community in 1854 in Madison County, Kentucky. After constructing fully functioning churches and schools, Fee sent his “agents” to the surrounding slaveholding and nonslaveholding homes to administer Bibles and antislavery booklets. Eventually, Fee made preparations to integrate local Berea School in order to train both black and white “pilgrims” to spread the gospel of Christ and of emancipation throughout Kentucky.⁸⁰

After Brown’s raid, however, surrounding communities saw Fee as a threat to the state and met him with violence. One Madison County resident found Fee to be a nuisance and stated that the county “had long been cursed with a number of abolitionists, which her citizens [were] determined to remove,” while others suspected Fee of housing Sharp’s rifles that had been shipped to him from the North, as if he planned to start an insurrection similar to Brown’s.⁸¹ A committee meeting of the county later decided that Fee was “an incendiary character...at war with the best interests of the community” and

⁷⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 November 1859.

⁷⁹ Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 40-41.

⁸⁰ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 222-235. Fee obtained agents and funding not only from the North, but also from Cassius Clay, who helped Fee relocate to Madison County to begin his mission to fight slavery with the Word of God and emancipate Kentucky.

⁸¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1859; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 234-235.

formed a posse to expel him from the state.⁸² Later the *Louisville Daily Courier's* writers condoned these actions, deeming them “justifiable,” as Fee’s teachings had already caused slaves to “manifest a spirit of insubordination.” In fact, in one instance, a slave refused his master’s orders and upon being reprimanded assailed his master alongside other slaves.⁸³ Driven by what had occurred in Virginia, other communities followed and ordered anti-slavery supporters “to leave Kentucky terra firma instante,” as “[they] could get along without foreign interlopers and [could] manage [their] own affairs without assistance from abroad.”⁸⁴

According to rumors in southern presses, by March 1860 these same abolitionists returned to Kentucky. A Mr. Hanson, “with 25 or 30 associates” crossed the borders into the state, but was promptly asked to leave by a Madison County committee. In response, “Hanson’s company replied by firing on the committee” before barricading themselves inside a nearby building, and the committee and the Governor sent the military to subdue the abolitionists.⁸⁵ Thus, as a result of the alarm over Republican teachings and Brown’s raid, most middle-class Kentuckians resorted to violence to prevent further insurrections from local abolitionists who threatened a practice Kentuckians’ independence depended on.

By the time these events occurred, however, more political measures were taken in order to prevent further violence within Kentucky. Ignoring the free state moderates’ condemnations of Brown, Magoffin noted the abolitionist threat in the \$100,000 worth of

⁸² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1859; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 28.

⁸³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 19 January 1860.

⁸⁴ J.M. Harris to T.F. Marshall, 27 January 1860, Governor’s Correspondence, KDLA quoted from Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 41; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 6 January 1860 quoted from Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 41.

⁸⁵ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 30 March 1860.

enslaved persons that escaped from Kentucky each year. Upon this revelation and what had occurred at Harper's Ferry, he issued a bill "to prevent free negroes from coming to the state, under any circumstances, and provid[ed] the removal of that class of population from the limits of the Commonwealth." A writer to the *Louisville Daily Courier*, who went by Timothy, simply stated that he "did not want [freemen] here," and openly supported the governor's intentions to possibly force these individuals back into slavery should they be found guilty of specific crimes.⁸⁶ Overall, however, several county residents exemplified that more measures needed to be taken in order to secure the state from abolitionists.⁸⁷

Notably, in November, as Magoffin made provisions to reorganize the state militia, one Kentuckian writing to the *Bardstown Gazette* believed that such organization was required to control future situations like that seen in Harper's Ferry.⁸⁸ Boone County residents, writing to the *Frankfort Yeoman*, stated that John Brown's raid served as a "warning" to Kentuckians and that the state militia needed to be reorganized so that Kentucky, "as a border state, may be prepared to defend her rights" while the "the free negro population," seen as a threat, should be immediately removed.⁸⁹ Additionally, Logan and Hancock counties added their growing "horror" over the teachings of the "Black Republican Party," while also calling on "all lovers of the Constitution and the Union" to stand against the abolitionists "so fraught with peril and mischief to our country" through an assemblage of a militia and the need of an "Executive" who

⁸⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 12 December 1859; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 40.

⁸⁷ When examining whether Kentuckians were concerned over more uprisings after John Brown's raid, key words "slave revolt," "insurrections," and "uprisings" were used when examining Kentucky newspapers. This search resulted in over 235 findings where these terms were mentioned.

⁸⁸ *Bardstown Gazette*, quoted from *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 3 November 1859.

⁸⁹ *Frankfort Yeoman*, quoted from *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 14 November 1859.

respected the constitutional rights of each state and not just the country as a whole.⁹⁰ Elsewhere, the editors of the *Louisville Daily Courier* insisted that the militia be assembled, trained, and armed as the “wicked machinations of anti-slavery fanatics” threatened the state, as they had in Virginia, whose militia was credited with saving the state from the “insurrection” of John Brown.⁹¹ Reassembling the militia, therefore, was not just a way to protect the state from further violence, but also a message to the North that Kentucky considered abolitionists and Republicans a real threat to their state and its ideals.

After expressing their desires to see the militia reorganized, middle-class Kentuckians soon saw those desires become a reality as citizens across the state volunteered and sought arms. As early as December 1860, Louisville city leaders boasted on the reorganization of the “Louisville Rifles” and insinuated that militia mustering would continue in the future.⁹² Also, as volunteers flooded the National Blues and Marion Rifles armories for supplies, Magoffin ordered local police forces and authorities to be strengthened. He also sought to increase “slave patrolling” across the state and asked volunteers to wait “for marching orders.”⁹³ Thus, while concluding that Brown’s actions did not warrant overt action like secession, middle-class and elite Kentuckians took measures to ensure that insurrections similar to Brown’s raid were prevented through increased watchfulness of African Americans and the reorganization of the militia.

⁹⁰ *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 5 December 1859

⁹¹ *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 November 1859.

⁹² *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 1 December 1859.

⁹³ *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 23 November 1859; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 40.

It was not uncommon, however, to see oppositional views interested in slavery's end or of secession itself. As already seen, several abolitionists established communities and compelled slaves to leave their masters before crossing the borders into freedom. Others took to the press or podium (such as Cassius M. Clay, a politician who believed that slavery stifled Kentucky and whites' economic growth) to relate their desires to see emancipation enacted.⁹⁴ Most newspaper sources, however, do not indicate that there was wide support for secession within Kentucky, oftentimes using the terms "secessionist," "disunion," "disunionist," or "fire eater" to address individuals located outside of the state—labeling them as southern fire-eaters, for example, before expressing Kentuckians' disdain at the mere thought of disunion as a solution to current affairs.⁹⁵

Writers in the *Louisville Daily Journal*, however, hinted at one instance of disunion in a neighboring newspaper, the *Democrat*, and its belief that "the Declaration of Independence sanctifies the power of a people to alter or abolish forms of government when it ceases to answer its purposes," alluding to their support of secession should the need call for it.⁹⁶ Yet, while this was only one clear example of secession talk and does not reflect a larger support for secession in Kentucky, this does not mean support did not exist. As will be seen in future chapters, those in favor of disunion became relatively outspoken about the desire to see Kentucky secede, specifically following Lincoln's

⁹⁴ Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 177; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 40-41; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1859; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 28.

⁹⁵ When investigating secessionism in Kentucky, newspapers like the *Frankfort Yeoman*, *Louisville Daily Courier*, and the *Louisville Daily Journal* produced over 144 findings. Yet, again, these words were often used to address fanatics in the North or South. Only two instances hinted at the existence of secessionism in Kentucky. A House representative, William E. Simms, was accused of embracing disunion and of being a fire eater, see *The Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, 22 March 1860. Simms neither accepted nor denied these accusations, yet in his earlier speeches in 1859, he did question how long the South and Kentucky would put up with northern hostility until something was done, see *Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 December 1859.

⁹⁶ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 14 March 1860.

election. In 1859, however, in addition to not openly supporting secession, the majority of middle-class Kentuckians had not given up hope in finding compromise in regard to the slavery question, yet were firm in their belief in the South and Kentucky's right to slavery, as well as its protection by any necessary means.

In the end, one historian deemed Kentucky to be increasingly a "proslavery Unionist" state, and newspapers and letters during 1859 agreed with such a label for the border state.⁹⁷ While not ignorant of the problems encircling the nation in regard to slavery and expansion, middle-class Kentuckians' indicated a refusal to discuss secession and chose not to give up hope in the Union when the doctrines of a seemingly hostile Republican party took shape in Brown. The majority of white Kentuckians denounced Brown's actions, abolitionists, and the doctrines of Seward and the Republican Party, demanding that the right to slavery in the South be respected. Nevertheless, they sought to have that right upheld within the confines of the Constitution and the Union itself, as other options were viewed as only harming middle-class Kentuckians' independency and the practices that went along with it, including slavery.⁹⁸ While reorganizing the militia was a method used to maintain peace and offer protection from future insurrections, white, middle-class Kentuckians continued to show a simultaneous support for both slavery *and* the Union. Such was the case because these Kentuckians were not just patriotic, they were also advocates for slavery—an institution that bolstered their independency and was believed to be best protected in the Union with its current laws, as will be seen in later chapters. Secession, they believed, would only "accelerate the

⁹⁷ Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 4-5.

⁹⁸ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 50.

extinction of slavery” and also directly affect white Kentuckians’ by increasing their competition for jobs and weakening their influence in society and politics.⁹⁹

Even so, the issues that surrounded slavery had yet to be resolved, but middle-class Kentuckians had faith in the nation’s “vibrant two-party system,” as well as the “democratic system” that would ultimately protect the citizens’ interests and find compromise about these particular issues.¹⁰⁰ In sum, middle-class Kentuckians were not anti-slavery in 1859, nor were they anti-Union. The Union was just as important as slavery, even among the Democratic Party, and far more important than siding with the North or the South, who could not offer the complete benefits they were already enjoying in terms of economic success and racial supremacy in the Union.¹⁰¹ Middle-class Mississippians, on the other hand, whose reactions to Brown’s raid were similar to Kentuckians’, were nevertheless split in regard to the Union and secession after the raid itself.

Mississippi’s Response

While past scholars have often painted Mississippi as staunchly pro-secession throughout the 1850s, findings within local newspapers in response to Brown’s raid reveal middle-class citizens responding in similar and interesting ways compared to Kentucky. While not as numerous as the border state, newspapers in Mississippi continued to recognize the presence of Union meetings in places like New York and

⁹⁹ Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ James C. Klotter, “Kentucky, the Civil War, and the Spirit of Henry Clay,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 110, nos. 3 and 4 (2012): 14-16.

¹⁰¹ *The Louisville Daily Courier*, 12 December 1859.

Detroit.¹⁰² For example, a writer in the *Ripley Advertiser* documented a union meeting at the Academy of Music in New York that “[approved] of the punishment of the Harper’s Ferry invaders,” “deplored of the introduction of the slavery question in party politics, and agreed to respect laws, truth and judicial decisions in reference to slavery.”¹⁰³ The New York mayor and several businessmen went further in creating resolutions at another Union meeting, stating that “the Constitution, the treaties, the laws of the United States, and the judicial decisions thereupon, recognize the institution of slavery as legally existing.” They also regarded the “recent outrage at Harper’s Ferry a crime” and denounced any and all acts that would “make [the] Union less perfect . . . or disturb its domestic tranquility or to mar the spirit of harmony, compromise, and concession.”¹⁰⁴ More northerners later sided with New York’s vow to the Union, “[abhorring] the crimes of John Brown and his confederates” and pledging themselves to “discountenance and [opposing] sectionalism in all its forms.”¹⁰⁵

White Mississippians were not easily convinced, however, by these pledges and vows. Instead, some argued that these union meetings were not representative of the entirety of the North. Middle-class Mississippians, therefore, devoted themselves to pointing out northern hypocrisies from the past and present to support their belief that it had always been inimical towards the South and had paved the way for Brown’s attack. For example, in response to these meetings, a writer to the *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* boldly stated that “such demonstrations poorly compensate[ed] the slaveholding states for

¹⁰² *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 30 December 1859. What was most interesting when researching newspapers that were speaking on John Brown’s Raid, Mississippi newspapers only produced 397 matches as compared to Kentucky’s 830 findings.

¹⁰³ *Ripley Advertiser*, 4 January 1860.

¹⁰⁴ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 30 December 1859.

¹⁰⁵ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 28 December 1859

the positive aggressions which they are constantly suffering at the hands of the Northern States.” In other words, the writer questioned how genuine these meetings were when “the Black Republicans carried the state elections, by overwhelming majorities” or permitted laws where “a citizen of a Southern state, for traveling within the limits of Michigan with his slave property [was] liable for imprisonment in her State Penitentiary?” To these Mississippians, “faith [would] not do without works” and the North needed to prove their devotion to the Union and respect for the South by purging abolitionists from its ranks.¹⁰⁶

Elsewhere, citizens continued to document what they saw as the North’s hypocrisy by noting instances of support for Brown’s actions in the present day. While parts of the North boasted of respecting slavery’s existence in the South, southern columnists reminded readers that “[northerners had] taught the doctrine which the Harper’s Ferry outlaws [had] sought to put into practice” and “[had] sown the seeds of disaffection, rebellion, and disunion.”¹⁰⁷ Newspapers also displayed mass meetings in Boston that “loudly applauded” and deemed Brown “an instrument in the hands of the Almighty for the accomplishment of good results,” and an Anti-Slavery Society that granted Brown “a place in the calendar of Black Republican saints,” urging its members to “observe the tragical event” of Brown’s execution and continue their work to eradicate slavery “which [was] a burning disgrace and fearful curse to the whole country”.¹⁰⁸ In Natick, Massachusetts, northerners’ believed that “resistance on part of the slave and of the North, against slaveholders, is the one great idea of the people,” believing that the

¹⁰⁶ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 30 December 1859.

¹⁰⁷ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 28 October 1859.

¹⁰⁸ *The Daily Mississippian*, 15 November 1859; *The Daily Mississippian*, 3 December 1859.

“sin of [the] nation . . . is to be taken away, not by Christ, but by Brown” and those like him.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, in addressing these disturbing instances, middle-class Mississippians looked to the North’s past legislation, its praise for Brown, and Republican teachings to show the public that this section was seemingly more devoted to seeing the South demolished rather than protected, as these union meetings had hoped to reveal. They feared “the spirit that [guided] the councils of a Black Republican Administration.” This administration, they believed, drove men like Brown to violent action, and they questioned the “great . . . calamity” that would befall the nation if a Republican was inaugurated.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, knowledgeable of these alleged instances of northern aggression, another group of middle-class Mississippians voiced their hope for continued compromise despite a possible Republican rule.

Surprisingly, throughout the state, a few counties and citizens rallied their support behind the Union and their desire to continue to maintain their rights despite the fear produced by John Brown. One columnist used resolutions created in Hickman County, Kentucky, to reveal that Mississippians desired their brethren “throughout the nation to come at once to the great landmarks of the Constitution . . . and aid in maintaining our rights and preserving the union of these states.”¹¹¹ Those in Salem, Mississippi, further embodied this unionist feeling in constructing resolutions that stated “they were not in

¹⁰⁹ *The Daily Mississippian*, 13 December 1859.

¹¹⁰ *The Daily Mississippian*, 3 December 1859. *The Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 6 March 1860, also agreed with earlier newspaper columns that all Republicans were for every word written in Helper’s book.

¹¹¹ *Weekly Mississippian*, 19 October 1859.

favor of severing the Union on any frivolous pretext, but [desired] to maintain it with our rights fully recognized.”¹¹²

Not denying that there were northern and southern extremists, a *Vicksburg Whig* writer took a more positive approach to the issues at hand in “[cherishing] an abiding faith that the Union of these States [would] continue to exist” as fanatics like those in the North “embrac[ed] only a small portion, comparatively, of the population.” This newspaper also contained an argument that most northern citizens were not abolitionists but “union-loving, patriotic, conservative men . . . ready and anxious again to organize on the platform laid down by Clay and Webster—who ardently desire to preserve the Union.”¹¹³ Additionally, Whig party members of Hinds County boldly declared their opposition “to all Disunion conventions,” and the “continuation of the present fierce and hostile agitation of the slavery question . . . [perceiving] no existing cause for a dissolution of the Union.” These writers also wanted to promote “a spirit of harmony and fraternity between the different sections of the Republic” similar to communities within Kentucky, as previously noted.¹¹⁴ One *Brandon Republican* writer even took a more comical stance on the disunion discussion, asserting that he did not “intend to go out of the Union,” but if the rest of the state did, he would be more than happy to continue writing newspaper columns for himself while establishing his own government.¹¹⁵

Upon reacting to Brown’s raid in a similar fashion as Kentucky and producing two different factions—those that pointed out the North’s perceived aggression towards

¹¹² *Ripley Advertiser*, 18 January 1860.

¹¹³ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 4 January 1860.

¹¹⁴ *Hinds County Gazette*, 8 February 1860.

¹¹⁵ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 8 February 1860. For other examples of Unionism in Mississippi, see *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 8 Feb 1860; *The Daily Mississippian*, 8 Dec 1859; *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 15 February 1860.

the South and those who advocated for unionism—middle-class Mississippians also chose to take action in the form of military preparations against insurrections *and* a possible Republican president. While expressing their outrage at the North, white Mississippians revealed several threats within the state after the raid. Following Brown's arrest, authorities discovered maps at Kennedy Farm where Brown had once resided across the Potomac River. One map included Mississippi, where nine counties were given special attention. According to the *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, "one of the insurgents at Harper's Ferry, traveled through Mississippi, and kept Brown and company posted in regard to the disposition of slaves." Not only did these travelers mark the number of whites, they added, but also the number of slaves within the county. The *Whig* writers advised both the state and other southern states to "keep a strict look out upon suspicious strangers," as these individuals might have been preparing slaves for more insurrections.¹¹⁶ Several eyewitnesses in Oxford, Mississippi, even believed that in 1857 Brown had traveled to Oxford, as "an itinerant repairer of clocks," but was really there "for the purpose of observations and laying plans to incite the slaves to insurrection."¹¹⁷

These fears only seemed to be realized as more reports came into the hands of newspaper editors and the governor himself. Following Brown's arrest, an anonymous abolitionist wrote to Governor John Jones Pettus to warn that a number of Irish and northern men had accumulated arms and munitions outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Their plan was to take Vicksburg, Jackson, and several parishes within Louisiana, forcing

¹¹⁶ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 18 January 1860.

¹¹⁷ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 11 January 1860.

the captives, like Mississippi officials, to pass laws freeing the black population.¹¹⁸

Elsewhere in Kemper County, citizens noticed the presence of two men who had been driven out of South Carolina for their abolitionist beliefs. The writer stated that “there ought to not be two opinions about the course to be pursued,” and that if these men wished to preach doctrines that forced Brown to action at Harper’s Ferry, “they ought to [be] ‘welcomed with bloody hands to hospitable graves’.”¹¹⁹ Like Kentucky, middle-class Mississippians increased surveillance of abolitionists within the state, and as they did, one Kentuckian warned that “death [was] certain” to abolitionists “who [came] into the Southern States to incite insurrection, and to arm slaves for the massacre of their masters and families.”¹²⁰

As troubling as these instances were to middle-class Mississippians, their choice to keep watch for any possible insurrections within the state was not their only course of action. They also established the means of preparing for future assaults from the North, as well. Despite the union meetings occurring northward, the *Semi-Weekly* asserted that unless the North change its ways and get rid of all abolitionism, Mississippi needed to “prepare to defend against every assault [on] her sacred rights with all the powers by which the God of nature has endowed her.”¹²¹ J. R. Anderson at Tredegar Iron Works of Virginia additionally advised Governor Pettus to begin making preparations for her defenses in order to ensure the continuation of southern society and slavery itself.¹²² R.W.

¹¹⁸ An Abolitionist to John J. Pettus, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 930, Folder 1, item 11, November 30, 1859.

¹¹⁹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 28 February 1860.

¹²⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 20 March 1860.

¹²¹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 23 December 1860.

¹²² J.R. Anderson to John. J. Pettus, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 930, Folder 2, item number 8, December 12, 1859.

James, friend of the state treasurer, even desired to deliver 3,000 rifles and muskets to better arm Mississippi, to which Pettus refused at the time.¹²³

Later, Charles C. Thornton wrote that the “signs of times” demanded that the state provide for its militia and that it was the duty of all “southern states” to summon eligible young men to serve in the militia, as they had already begun to gather in Madison County, Mississippi. In making these preparations, he believed, the North would see that the South was willing and able to stand against northern encroachment and abolition.¹²⁴ Another local Mississippian recommended that the state “at once be armed for its defense,” as John Brown and the events of Harper’s Ferry revealed the intentions of the North.¹²⁵ As a result of these petitions, and while some historians have contended that Governor Pettus did little to take military action for the state, the governor did enact laws allowing for the arrest and enslavement of all free blacks who did not leave by July the following year, as well as the removal of their right to own property in the state. Pettus also saw to legislation that collected over 4,000 muskets for the state.¹²⁶ Newspapers and letters later confirmed this movement to arm the state, as a letter from Washington D.C. to the governor gave the state permission to draw out 295 muskets for the state’s militia.¹²⁷ Alongside this legislation, the state legislature also authorized the reestablishment of the state militia by February “and appropriating \$150,000 to the purchase of arms, so as to place [the state] in readiness for whatever consequences” may

¹²³ R.W. James to John J. Pettus, December 24 1859, John J. Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives in History quoted from Robert W. Dubay, *John Jones Pettus: Mississippi Fire-Eater: His Life and Times, 1813-1867* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 39.

¹²⁴ Charles C. Thornton to John J. Pettus, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 930, Folder 1, item 20, December 13, 1859.

¹²⁵ *Weekly Mississippian*, 1 December 1859.

¹²⁶ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 152.

¹²⁷ H.K. Craig to John J. Pettus, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 930, Folder 2, item 11, 3 January 1860.

come from the North.¹²⁸ Therefore, not only did most middle-class citizens believe that it was necessary to make preparations for their defense against abolitionists, the state also took measures to keep freemen in check and defend against other hostile entities who might threaten them and the valuable institutions that gave them such power over a variety of areas in their lives. Yet, local fire-eaters pushing for secession gradually made their presence known throughout the state and the South once more, while even moderates voiced their assertions that more than the militia may be required of the state should sectional tensions escalate.

While Mississippi fire-eaters' call for immediate secession seemed drowned out by the much louder call for Union in the state's newspapers, the *Vicksburg Whig* writers specifically pointed to their active presence in areas throughout the state. According to one writer, two groups of Mississippi fire eaters existed—one that was “always angry, always excited” and who always “place public affairs in a crisis” and another group “who under the guise of devotion to the South, are constantly plotting and scheming the dissolution of the Union.”¹²⁹ Being critical of the fire eaters' “work of treason” and their continued attempts to promote secession, the *Whig* addressed the movements of the first group in highlighting their plan to schedule a southern conference in Atlanta. Through such a conference, fire eaters hoped to establish a sense of unity and create a course of action for the southern states in the future.¹³⁰ This was seen as the work “of a few dissatisfied partisans” and “not the people,” even if the governor approved of such actions and had already sent a commissioner to Virginia—a state whose “participation

¹²⁸ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 14 February 1860.

¹²⁹ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 11 January 1860.

¹³⁰ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 21 March 1860; Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 37.

was almost mandatory” due to the attack of John Brown.¹³¹ In addition, while fire eaters were attempting, and failing, at calling for an Atlanta convention, this group also supposedly “invaded the sacred precincts of learning,” ordering the removal of a northern born professor in Oxford” and advocating for only southern professors at state universities.¹³²

Yet, sources also addressed the presence of the moderate, second group of secessionists in 1859—those who supported the Union, but advocated for its destruction should southern rights continue to be threatened, especially by a Republican president, as these rights not only included slavery, but Mississippians’ ability to govern their own affairs. To them, Brown’s actions “meant much more than a mere isolated insurrection on the periphery of the Upper South. Rather, Harper’s Ferry appeared as both a precedent and a premonition” of what would come later.¹³³ One conservative politician claimed that the state “must also look at the possible, if not probable, necessity for dissolution, and firmly meet the requirements that such necessity will call forth” if hostilities continue.¹³⁴ Tippah County, Mississippi, citizens even asserted that it would choose to secede should the North not respect its rights, while a writer to the *Semi-Weekly* more specifically expressed that Mississippi would “withdraw from the Union in the event of the election of a Black Republican.”¹³⁵ In the end, the legislature itself sided with this particular

¹³¹ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 14 March 1860; Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 40.

¹³² *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 21 March 1860. Findings for the term “fire eater” “secessionist,” and “disunionist” in Mississippi newspapers number over 100. Those advocating or in support of secession were not addressed in depth in larger newspapers, and when they were addressed—as in the case of the *Vicksburg Whig*—they were often addressed negatively and as nuisances threatening the Union, as well as unrepresentative of the entire population of Mississippi.

¹³³ Donald B. Kelley, “Harper’s Ferry: Prelude to Crisis in Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXVII (November, 1965), 369-70 quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 39.

¹³⁴ *Weekly Mississippian*, 25 January 1860.

¹³⁵ *Weekly Mississippian*, 1 December 1859; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 23 December 1859.

group, presenting a resolution that vowed that the election of a Republican president whose policies they believed threatened slavery and the South's rights "[justified] the slaveholding states in taking counsel together to for their separate protection and safety," insinuating that the state would not hesitate in considering to take drastic measures or "resist . . . to the bitter end."¹³⁶ In all, Mississippi promised to hold "no quarter for those individuals who 'assumed a revolutionary position toward the South'."¹³⁷

While few in number, writers in the *Whig* and past historians have highlighted the movements of fire-eaters to move the state towards secession. Yet, as their words and actions did not seem to be in abundance following John Brown's raid, they might not have seen the event as wholly justifying secession as of yet but nonetheless sought to unify the southern states at Atlanta and portray secession as a favorable option, especially if it became probable in the future and if sectional tensions increased.¹³⁸ Thus, unionists in the state might have felt more compelled to voice their opinions and beliefs in local newspapers and towards the public in order to reassure the masses that the Union was not lost and that hope remained despite Brown and the Republicans' perceived actions against slavery and ultimately their right to have power over their institutions and lives.

Most middle-class Mississippians, therefore, were far more fractured than Kentuckians when it came to their reactions towards Brown, but stood united in their attempts to protect their power over an institution that contributed to their reputations and wealth. While the border state acknowledged the North's actions, the majority of its middle-class population held their hope in compromise. Mississippi's middle-class, on

¹³⁶ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 14 February 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 30 March 1860.

¹³⁷ *Mississippi State Journal* (1859), 227-280, 293-294, quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 43.

¹³⁸ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 32-36, 37-51.

the other hand, found itself split into groups of unionists and those who believed that secession was their only option if their right to slavery and their power continued to be threatened. While fire-eaters sought unification among the southern states in Atlanta and moderate Mississippians struggled to reassure the public that hope in the Union was still possible, citizens acknowledged their fears of further insurrections by abolitionists, slaves, and freemen. Legislation was quickly passed to ensure that the militia was ready to put down such acts, while local abolitionists and freeman were ordered to leave, either peaceably or by force. These middle-class Mississippians did not see Brown's actions as an adequate excuse to leave the Union just yet, as many mentioned secession only if hostilities intensified. Nonetheless, they pursued protection from certain groups they believed sought to eradicate an institution that gave Mississippians significant power over their social and economic lives. While some voiced their belief in secession if a Republican was elected president, and fire-eaters sought to make preparations for a unified secession movement across the South eventually, the majority of this population was not willing to advocate disunion. Instead, their eyes were set on what the future held, watching the election of 1860 approach and waiting for the results of such an event before further measures were taken.

Taken together, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians blamed the doctrines of the Republican Party in driving John Brown to raid Harper's Ferry. A few took into consideration the union meetings that occurred throughout the North in order to establish peaceful relations towards the South. Others overlooked these demonstrations and instead focused on the possibility of even more insurrections occurring, locally and regionally. Middle-class citizens in Kentucky and Mississippi also took note of

abolitionists within the state and sought to drive them out by any means necessary, insisting the North do the same. Lastly, in order to protect their homes, property, and values further, both groups saw to the reorganization of their state militias to keep insurrections and invaders at bay, while, in Mississippi's case, preparing for the possibility of a Republican president.

Yet, while some groups continually pointed out the North's actions as proof of their alleged corruption and hostility, Union talk nonetheless abounded among middle-class citizens. White Kentuckians were the more outspoken among the two states, asserting that the North should respect the South's rights, especially to slavery. These petitions were not for the sake of the South alone, however, as slavery was also a crucial practice within the border state that provided Kentuckians' with independency. Middle-class Kentuckians looked to continued compromise, also, and held onto their faith that the justice system and the Constitution would prevail in the end, as other, more fanatical measures were seen as more likely to threaten their cherished practices and ideals.

Likewise, some middle-class Mississippians also favored sustaining the Union instead of harkening to the cries of local fire-eaters—an action that defies Olsen's argument that Mississippians took any political insult or threatening action as a personal attack that needed to be violently confronted. Some individuals, however, reflected Olsen's findings and only desired the Union stay intact if their rights were respected, as they saw the loss of their rights, and of slavery, as a loss of power over their lives and the Constitution to the doctrines of a perceived abolitionist party. Mississippi, on the other hand, also contained two factions of secessionist talk—as seen in the 1860 resolutions passed by the legislature and the columnists of local newspapers. As one group took

measures to push the South towards secession, the other believed that the Union could be upheld but not under the rule of a party they viewed as pursuing the end of slavery and the subjugation of the South. In short, secession was not just a means of protection, but a greater means of sustaining white Mississippians' power over their reputations, wealth, and futures against perceived northern fanatics.

With that said, however, these examples also point to the continued faith in politics due to their focus on the presidential election and maintaining the Union. While citizens in both states abhorred the Republican Party's approval of Helper's book and Seward's "irrepressible conflict" doctrine, they nonetheless looked to voters and politicians who were devoted to their communities to eliminate Republicans and see that slavery, independency, and power was protected. While secessionist talk was present in Mississippi, and was no doubt heard by the Kentuckians who spoke out against it, middle-class citizens hoped to continue to rely on American politics to see to their protection and their further expansion into the West. This faith continued well into 1860, where delegates to national conventions gathered together to choose appropriate candidates for the presidential campaign. Before and after these conventions, however, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians still exerted their fears over Republican rule but also their continued hope in their candidates whom they entrusted with their state, and the nation's, future.

CHAPTER III - "A HORSE RACE": THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTIONS, APRIL-NOVEMBER 1860

Prior to 1860, while sectional tensions were formerly restrained through compromise, the events of John Brown's raid finally brought to reality a variety of southern fears. In the 1850s, the white South witnessed the rise of a hostile political party with an abolitionist wing whose only goal, they believed, was to eliminate their founding ideals, and the privileges that came with them. These southerners viewed the Republican Party's platform as even more offensive and antagonistic when it hinted to an "irrepressible conflict" where only war would decide whether the nation would be all free or all slave. Yet, because no events had occurred that proved that these doctrines could or would be carried out, southerners, although wary, perhaps did not believe these fears would ever be realized. John Brown revealed that not only were these doctrines able to be accomplished, but also that a following of able bodied men were capable of carrying them out. In the eyes of most southern citizens, John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry prophesied what the future might look like should a Republican president take control of the country.

The year of 1860, therefore, has been described as a "horse race" by some scholars, as presidential candidates scrambled to achieve a steady following before the fate of the country could be decided in November. Citizens, additionally, saw 1860 as a continued battle—a chance for disunion, continued compromise, or peace to be achieved between the North and the South. Nevertheless, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians used the election of 1860 to express what they valued most and what they

hoped to sustain through select presidential nominees, such as economic prosperity, slavery, southern rights, peace, and state equality with federal authority. In other words, it was a chance to see that their valued independence and power remained unharmed by electing a president who would see to their protection.

It could also be argued that the election was used by these states and individuals to determine what their next steps would be in regard to their relationship with the nation should an unfavorable candidate be elected. For instance, to white Kentuckians, the eventual results of the election did not mean disunion. Instead, they saw a continued struggle to keep the South from seceding and maintaining a peace where both sections were satisfied despite having to accept the rule of an unfavorable president. To white Mississippians, on other hand, the “dreaded catastrophe” of a Republican victory, equaled some form of resistance, mainly secession, alongside her sister states of the South who had seen every attempt at compromise fail and who viewed the Union as no longer the Union their ancestors had fought to create.¹³⁹

As a whole, however, the nation, as well as Kentucky and Mississippi, was torn between multiple, sectional parties.¹⁴⁰ While the national conventions occurring during mid-1860 chose candidates successfully, including Republican nominee, Abraham Lincoln, they also witnessed a severed Democratic party where discontented southern delegates were unable to support Stephen A. Douglas who they saw as limiting slavery’s movement into the West. As some believed that slavery should be protected indefinitely within the territories and others were supportive of popular sovereignty, multiple factions

¹³⁹ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 186.

¹⁴⁰ Lowell H. Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 4-5.

appeared within the party at the convention as a result. These groups ultimately formed around select nominees from across the South, including James Guthrie, a native of Kentucky, who desired complete protection of the South's rights, Stephen A. Douglas who denied federal protection of slavery, and John C. Breckenridge, another strong southern rights candidate who refused to allow his name to be placed on the ballot as long as Guthrie remained a candidate.¹⁴¹ At the moment when Douglas was seen as victorious, delegates of eight southern states abandoned the convention and later carried out their own convention in Baltimore, and this "Seceder's Convention" eventually elected Breckenridge as the Southern Democratic candidate. Meanwhile, Douglas was also nominated as the candidate for the now northern portion of the Democratic Party. Following these events, these three parties were joined by a more moderate group that did not favor the outcomes of any one of the three candidates already selected. Consisting of several members of the old Whig Party, and standing on the doctrine of compromise held by Henry Clay, the Constitutional Union Party was formed to stand by the Constitution and the Union as a whole. Their nomination of John Bell of Tennessee reflected their platform, as he was said to be a man who would maintain the Union "at all costs."¹⁴²

Thus, both sections of the nation had to choose between four candidates whose election determined what path the country would take in terms of western expansion, slavery, and the continuation of sectional tensions. While each state reacted to this election in its own way, Mississippi and Kentucky newspapers and letters during the

¹⁴¹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 16.

¹⁴² Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 183-184; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 176, 181; Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 55-61; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 152-153. For more, detailed information concerning the conventions, see Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. II, 288-322.

campaign season reveal two states united in their efforts to prevent Lincoln from becoming president. By favoring either Bell or Breckenridge, white, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians also revealed that independence and power were still highly valued and believed that their candidate of choice was best suited in protecting these ideas by avoiding disunion, eliminating abolition, protecting southern rights, political power, and equality, and defending slavery's existence. In this way, they favored patterns consistent with their reactions to the Harper's Ferry raid—a deep hatred towards Lincoln and the Republican Party, a need to preserve the Union that respected southern rights which included slavery and the right to control its own affairs. While a small group still advocated for the possibility of secession should the election prove deadly for the South, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians acted in one accord in regard to their beliefs, but differed in whom they believed was best suited to protect these beliefs. It was when the election results were produced in November 1860, however, that these two states were pushed apart as war approached.

Once the national conventions began, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians spent the period from March through May 1860 discussing a variety of topics within their newspapers. A few examples illustrate Kentuckians and Mississippians' perspectives on the goals of the North and the Republican Party. Accusing the northern delegates as acting like “enemies of the country,” Kentucky delegates at Congress charged that the Republicans “must not be placed in power” for they would “tear down the pillows of the temple of liberty” as well as see that slavery was not extended into the western territories.¹⁴³ Not only did northern delegates

¹⁴³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 March 1860.

denounce these beliefs and accuse the South of “having its full share in the control of Government” and “that no one was to blame for what the South complained of “except the region’s own officers, but Republicans at the Chicago national convention also rejected such accusations. Yet, they reassured that disunion and the “dogma that the Constitution . . . carries slavery into any or all the Territories” was “political heresy” and “revolutionary” at best. Hoping to stop slavery in its tracks, they sought to preserve “the integrity of the Union, and the supremacy of the Constitution...against the conspiracy of the leaders of the sectional party.” Significantly, such a platform was presented even in Newport, Kentucky, where local delegates were being sought after who supported these Republican “terms” and could be trusted to represent the public at the national convention.¹⁴⁴ Those in Mississippi, however, showed little Republican support and instead presented the party as “hostile to the rights of the South,” grounded in the teachings of the “irrepressible conflict” that hoped to start a war between the North and South, and whose rise to power necessitated dissolution.¹⁴⁵ They even believed that if such animosities, and the population of the North, continue to grow, the South would “irretrievably be overthrown,” as the North would most likely abuse its power over the government to subdue and destroy the South and its institutions.¹⁴⁶

Additionally, several citizens later commented on the events at the Democratic National Conventions, as well. The *Louisville Daily Journal*, in addition to providing coverage of the convention at Charleston that hoped to see the Union maintained, also contained several examples of newspapers across the North and South who commented

¹⁴⁴ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 May 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 26 March 1860.

¹⁴⁵ *Eastern Clarion*, 23 May 1860; *Eastern Clarion*, 25 April 1860.

¹⁴⁶ *Eastern Clarion*, 25 April 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 21 March 1860.

on the “seceders” of the Charleston convention either favorably or unfavorably. Writers to the *Journal* also focused on the struggle between delegates of the “Bolter’s convention” at Baltimore to determine if the convention was, in fact, a State’s Rights convention where delegates stood “for liberty first and the Union afterwards.”¹⁴⁷ Elsewhere, citizens within Pontotoc, Mississippi, skipped the mundane details and openly congratulated “the seceding States on the manly conduct of their delegates,” showing that the South “intend[ed] to repel all further aggressions” and hinted that such actions were “the initial steps to the formation of a Southern Confederacy.”¹⁴⁸ Democrats of Warren County, denouncing the “heresy of Popular Sovereignty,” also applauded southern delegates “for their patriotic devotion to the South,” as the South would not accept anything “less than an equivocal guaranty of protection to her citizens and their rights, including slaves and all other property in the public territories.”¹⁴⁹ In all, such actions by the southern states at Charleston did not come as much of a surprise to Mississippi, as the “Democracy” of the state in March had already created resolutions calling for the full acknowledgment and protection of slavery and the continuation of equal rights among the states—in short, the ability of the states to hold power over their own destinies and their institutions.¹⁵⁰ Should such guarantees not be presented and supported at the national convention, Mississippi was determined to present another ticket for a more favorable candidate.¹⁵¹ In the end, Mississippi, and several other delegates, carried out such a

¹⁴⁷ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 4 May 1860.

¹⁴⁸ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 22 May 1860.

¹⁴⁹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 18 May 1860.

¹⁵⁰ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 137-139, 178-184, 256-258, 267-268.

¹⁵¹ *Weekly Mississippian*, 21 March 1860.

nomination and refused to participate in the Charleston convention, seeking instead to form their own in Baltimore.

While middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians might not have had very much to say in regard to the turnout at the national conventions, they had far more to say about the candidates they now had to choose from. To Kentuckians and Mississippians, the national conventions—while important—did not have the earth-shaking capabilities as the approaching presidential election. To these middle-class citizens, it was this election that determined the nation’s fate—whether the Union, slavery, their independency, and their power would be preserved or if the South would lose faith and resort to secession to protect itself. A search of thousands of Mississippi and Kentucky newspaper articles for this period reveal that John Bell and John C. Breckenridge were the candidates favored most among these citizens, as discussion on Douglas or Lincoln often revealed middle-class citizens’ disgust of popular sovereignty, abolition, subjugation, and coercion—factors that would harm Kentuckians’ independency and Mississippians’ power over their lives and institutions.¹⁵² Ultimately, following the conclusion of the national conventions, Bell and Breckenridge supporters in both Mississippi and Kentucky discussed why they chose their particular candidate, while also expressing why opposing candidates were unfavorable and oftentimes dangerous. In doing so, these two states showed that they were similar in what they valued, including

¹⁵² Findings for Douglas in local newspapers produced over 1400 matches in Mississippi and Kentucky combined. While most of these included discussions on his presence at the national convention or instances where citizens were explaining why he was an unfavorable candidate, there were several instances of support for Douglas in these states, see *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, 18 July 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 17 October 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 1 August 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 25 July 1860, *Louisville Daily Courier*, 29 August 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 7 August 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 July 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 2 November 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 12 July 1860.

slavery, their rights, the South, and the Union, but differed in who they believed would best defend these same values.¹⁵³

Bell Supporters

Tennessee native, John Bell, had been active in politics since the 1830s, having not only been a member of the former Whig Party, but also having served in the House of Representatives and Senate. Having owned slaves himself, he won favor with citizens in both the North and South by vowing to eliminate the slave question from politics and keep the peace between the two sections, and he was especially popular among his fellow moderates in the planter class. Thus, he was an ideal candidate for the Constitutional Union Party and most border state citizens.¹⁵⁴ Yet, how middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians expressed their support for Bell reveal what policies they cherished and why Bell was seen as suitable for protecting their local and national interests. While some Mississippi and Kentucky Bell supporters expressed their support for the Union and the protection of slavery, other groups instead chose to express their favor for him by portraying Breckenridge as a secessionist who they believed would plunge the nation into disunion or see to it that slavery was not protected in the western territories.

Similar to the previous study into John Brown's raid, middle-class Mississippians continued to show unionist sentiments. Prior to Bell's nomination, *Hinds County Gazette* writers blamed the delegates of the Republican and Democratic parties for "agitating the

¹⁵³ Research into the Republican and Democratic National Conventions produced over 1200 matches that included insight into Mississippians and Kentuckians insight on the conventions, Bell, Breckenridge, Lincoln, and Douglas.

¹⁵⁴ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 26; William K. Scarborough, "Not Quite Southern—The Precarious Allegiance of Natchez Nabobs in the Sectional Crisis," *Prologue-Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 36, no. 4 (December 2004), 20-29. Scarborough also discusses the Unionist leanings of many Natchez planters who favored Bell for his plans to save both slavery and the Union which will be noted later in this study.

country by their reciprocal assaults” and who aimed for a “sectional struggle far exceeding in violence . . . the result of which may be disastrous to the country.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Democrats’ actions, specifically those committed at the Charleston Convention, had left “evidence of a . . . cold-blooded, deliberate, heartless conspiracy to break up the Union” upon the election of a Republican president.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, these writers, while exposing these truths, described the Constitutional Union Party’s unionism through its desire to remove the subject of slavery from politics, maintaining commitment to the fugitive slave law, and “[teaching] reconciliation, fraternity, and forbearance, as the great national charities by which the Union is ever preserved.”¹⁵⁷ Attracted to such declarations, many Mississippians fell in line behind this party, advocating for its support and reiterating what it could accomplish for the nation. Rankin, Amite, and Claiborne County citizens held their own meetings to express their devotion to the Union. Claiborne County citizens specifically were “opposed to the extremists of the South and Republicans of the North,” sought to banish “the discussion of slavery . . . from churches, the hustings, and the capitol,” and favored the coming together of the conservative men of the nation to “present to the people a Presidential ticket devoted to the general interests of [the] common country.”¹⁵⁸ A writer to the *Salem Gazette* even boasted of “the increased strength of Union candidates in the Southern States” but hinted that it would only work in the Republicans’ favor.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ *Hinds County Gazette*, 7 March 1860.

¹⁵⁶ *Nashville Patriot* in the *Hinds County Gazette*, 22 August 1860.

¹⁵⁷ *Hinds County Gazette*, 7 March 1860.

¹⁵⁸ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 7 March 1860.

¹⁵⁹ *Salem Gazette*, quoted from *Sunny South*, 1 November 1860.

Other citizens, however, spoke more specifically of their support for Bell as president, focusing on what they saw as his soundness on the slavery issue and his plans for maintaining the Union. Editors in Lexington, Mississippi, believed “that the only means of preventing the election of Lincoln [was] by a union of the South upon Bell and Everett, the only true national ticket” and far more favorable than the squatter sovereignty doctrines of both Douglas and Breckenridge.¹⁶⁰ Those in Richland, Mississippi, entertained a supporter of the Constitutional Union Party who assured the citizens that Bell was “sound as a dollar on the slavery question,” having owned thousands of dollars in slave property and voting against the Lecompton Constitution.¹⁶¹ A discussion in Brookhaven also pointed to Bell and Everett as “noble statesmen” who “had defended their country’s rights so long” and “should command the support of all patriots.”¹⁶² *The Weekly Mississippian* writers later reported that Vicksburg declared “with confidence” that Bell and Everett were “free from the taint of sectionalism” and “stood on the platform which ensur[ed] the perfect equality of the states, and the constitutional rights of all the people.” These citizens went on to inform the public that they had gathered trustworthy information that Bell would carry the state in November and insisted Union clubs be established in every county.¹⁶³ In sum, one citizen embodied the visions of all Bell supporters in the state, believing that “if [Mississippians] would preserve the Union and protect the rights and interests of all sections of [the] common country,” they should vote for the only “safe, sound, and reliable” ticket under Bell and Everett.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ *Lexington Advertiser*, 29 June 1860.

¹⁶¹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 4 September 1860.

¹⁶² *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 17 October 1860.

¹⁶³ *Weekly Mississippian*, 25 July 1860.

¹⁶⁴ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 11 July 1860; *Vicksburg Whig*, 3 October 1860.

Those in Kentucky also expressed their favor of Bell through an emphasis on unionism. One writer in the *Louisville Daily Journal* insisted that Kentuckians must be “as one for the Union,” “crushing now and forever the foul heresies which define the old parties” by electing Bell and Everett to the presidency and the vice presidency. Calling on men of all ages, the writer additionally called on women to stand by their men and reassure them that Bell’s success would produce “peaceful homes and happy hearthstones,” while bringing an end to fanaticism.¹⁶⁵ In hoping to prevent the election of Lincoln by rallying support from northern states like New York and Maine, other Kentuckians ensured that “there would be no Disunion if Bell and Everett were elected,” as Lincoln’s election would only give secessionists in the South a chance to see secession achieved.¹⁶⁶ An unknown writer even commented that the sectional parties were in favor of Bell winning if they could not, not only because they could not stand seeing another sectional party gaining victory, but also because Bell and Everett had “established a broad, liberal, national platform,” and would prove to be the nation’s “sustainers and champions” in the end.¹⁶⁷ To middle-class Kentuckians, “the names of Bell and Everett [had] become towers of strength,”—“an available middle ground” that would lead to an end to sectional tensions while “peace [would] be expected once more to smile over a distracted and divided country.”¹⁶⁸

Yet, while middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians expressed their belief in Bell’s ability to save the union and rights that included slavery, while keeping secession at bay, these supporters also took it upon themselves to reveal that the alternative—

¹⁶⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 16 October 1860.

¹⁶⁶ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 22 August 1860.

¹⁶⁷ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 14 July 1860.

¹⁶⁸ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 2 October 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 September 1860.

Breckenridge—was unacceptable and would lead to chaos upon his election. To Mississippi voters, what they feared most were the rumors and evidences that Breckenridge was supportive of “squatter sovereignty.” One of the reasons many Southern Democrats and middle-class Mississippians refused to support Douglas was due to his belief in popular sovereignty and that Congress should not offer protection to slavery, which would hinder the rights Mississippians’ mentioned in earlier sources, as well as their honor and wealth. The *Vicksburg Whig*, a leading union organ, not only pointed out that Breckenridge’s party members were all disunionists, but more importantly presented evidence of Breckenridge stating that individuals had “the full right to establish or prohibit slavery” and that he was not connected to a party “that [had] for its object the extension of slavery.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, he looked “with but little favor upon the true doctrine of protection of slavery in the territories by Congress,” and suggested resolutions within Kentucky that made slavery “wholly local,” that “any legislation on the subject of slavery . . . was not within the power of Congress,” and that “people of the territories [were] free to say for themselves whether they should have slavery or not.”¹⁷⁰

Middle-class Kentuckians, on the other hand, were not so much concerned with Breckenridge’s supposed endorsement of popular sovereignty as they were of stopping his and the more radical-wing of the Democratic Party’s disunionist schemes. Some simply believed that he was not for the Union, while others insisted he led a “military

¹⁶⁹ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 3 October 1860.

¹⁷⁰ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 27 June 1860; *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 12 September 1860; *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 11 July 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 4 September 1860; There were several instances where Mississippians pointed out Breckenridge’s possible secessionism, see *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 11 July 1860; *Lexington Advertiser*, 29 June 1860; *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 17 October 1860. While important in noting that some Mississippians took notice of the rumors surrounding Breckenridge’s favor of disunion, his support of squatter sovereignty dominated most conversations in these newspapers.

conspiracy”, whose “disunion party” was “hurrying the country into civil war” by inciting states to purchase arms. This would plunge the nation into a “seven years’ war” should the African slave trade not be reopened and their demands met. Others saw Breckenridge and the Democratic Party as “secretly desir[ing] the success of Lincoln and Hamlin, from the belief that it would enable them to bring about the dissolution of the Union.”¹⁷¹ Evidence gathered by Kentuckians also fed these same rumors that Breckenridge supporters were intentionally voting for Lincoln “to get [him] elected and then dissolve the Union.”¹⁷² In short, some Kentuckians believed that “every vote for Breckenridge . . . is in its practical effect a vote for disunion and civil war,” a scenario that would negatively affect the economic and social practices that gave middle-class Kentuckians depended on.¹⁷³

Thus, Bell supporters in both Mississippi and Kentucky supported unionism, but a union that protected slavery. Voters were attracted to Bell’s nationalist policies and his vow to see that the Union was preserved and brought at once to peace. Moreover, some middle-class Mississippians were increasingly attracted to his intentions of keeping the slavery question out of politics while simultaneously keeping it and their rights protected, an act that would also see to their continued power in society and their personal lives. Some middle-class Kentuckians, while certainly not uncaring when it came to slavery’s future, were far more focused on electing a candidate that they believed would keep the Union in one piece while avoiding secession, something they could not say for the other

¹⁷¹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 14 July 1860.

¹⁷² *Louisville Daily Journal*, 16 October 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 22 August 1860.

¹⁷³ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 16 October 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 25 October 1860.

candidates who either threatened slavery and citizens' independency or desired to see the Union dissolved.

Such findings not only add to the existing historiography concerning the months prior to the election of 1860, which often lack in detail concerning each state's stance on presidential candidates, but also support Christopher Olsen's findings which argue that, for some Kentuckians, Bell was the "national hope" for compromise and preventing secession. On the other hand, Mississippians support for Bell hinted at their "lukewarm unionism"—a unionism that fell in line with the beliefs of figures such as Jefferson Davis and wealthy "Northern-oriented" planters along the Mississippi River. These individuals were tied to the northeast through familial and economic ties and believed in the right of secession, but did not see a reason for it and sought compromise within the Union to save the nation and their financial interests. Nevertheless, it was seen that such unionism fell short as secession approached and as all compromise efforts failed.¹⁷⁴ Such an argument will be explored in a later chapter, but over all, these sources have shown that Bell supporters desired a strong, continuous Union that included protection of slavery, their rights to it, and an end to secessionism. Such desires, they believed, could only be accomplished through their candidate, resulting in the preservation of ideas each state valued the most. Contrarily, Breckenridge supporters found other, more promising

¹⁷⁴ Scarborough, "Not Quite Southern," 22-29; Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 274-275.

Scarborough argues that these "Northern-oriented" planters in Natchez, Mississippi, who originated from the North, never fully adopted southern ideals and practices; therefore, they never truly became "southern," and this caused them to have strong Unionist sentiments before and as secession approached. Similar sentiments were held by Jefferson Davis, who attempted to prevent secession and keep the southern states in the Union until his political interests in Mississippi, Lincoln's election, and failed compromises drove him to accept secession and leave the U.S. Senate. William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

benefits in their choice, while also pointing out what they believed as the deadly consequences of a Bell victory.

Breckenridge Supporters

Even though some middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were attracted to Bell's devotion to the Union, others were drawn to native Kentuckian, John C. Breckenridge, who stood for an amorphous concept that most citizens had been advocating for some time—southern rights, or the belief that southerners held in their right to own slaves and to have the power to govern their own state's destiny, decisions, and slave-holder interests.¹⁷⁵ Having studied law for many years and representing the U.S. in the Mexican War, Breckenridge had served as a southern rights Democrat for many years in the Kentucky State Legislature and in Congress. Although he did not own slaves at the time of the election, both states did not question his stance on slavery and southern rights; however, what citizens did question was his loyalty to the Union.¹⁷⁶ As already noted, Bell supporters glanced at Breckenridge's party members and his past statements concerning particular legislation to prove that he led a secessionist party, but also leaned towards supporting Douglas's popular sovereignty, as well. Despite these particular accusations, however, Breckenridge fought to reveal that he was, in fact, for keeping the Union together while also fighting for the South's rights.¹⁷⁷ For some middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians, these rumors of Breckenridge supporting secession fell on deaf ears, and they instead expressed their intentions of voting for Breckenridge,

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 137-139, 178-184, 256-258, 267-268.

¹⁷⁶ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 24-27; Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 184.

¹⁷⁷ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 186-189; Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 27-29; Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 61-65.

as he seemed far more suitable in protecting southerners' rights than a John Bell, who they believed would see to slavery's end.

Passing through several southern states, including Mississippi, a gentleman took note of “the enthusiasm for Breckenridge and [his running mate] Lane” that “unbounded” within these areas. “Battling for the great cause of the Democracy,” the people were said to have “gathered by the thousands at the little towns” to listen to speeches and attend the poles.¹⁷⁸ White Mississippians, then, rallied support for Breckenridge across the state, believing him to be “a Union man”—“a defender of the institution of slavery” who opposed emancipationists and stood “with and for the South upon every question affecting her rights and honor.”¹⁷⁹ More locally, Sardis and Oktibbeha “resolv[ed] to have a National Democratic Rally and Barbecue,” advocating not solely for Breckenridge and Lane, but also “Southern Rights and State Equality,” while Neshoba County, in addition to Clinton and Clark counties, rejoiced at their support for Breckenridge and laid out resolutions that supported the seceding delegates and all they stood for at the national convention.¹⁸⁰ Marshall County citizens also ratified Breckenridge and supported the Democratic delegates' actions, vowing to get Breckenridge elected at all costs.¹⁸¹ Lastly, citizens of Raleigh, Mississippi, were “aroused by a shout, loud, long, and vociferous” from a large company that traveled down the road under a “Beautiful Flag . . . with the

¹⁷⁸ *Sunny South*, 1 November 1860.

¹⁷⁹ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 27 June 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 28 August 1860.

¹⁸⁰ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 4 September 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 21 August 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 25 July 1860.

¹⁸¹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 17 July 1860

names Breckenridge and Lane inscribed thereon in beautiful letters” as electors were escorted into town to discuss the candidates and their platforms in detail.¹⁸²

Nonetheless, while some middle-class Mississippians showed their support for Breckenridge by pointing to his backing of slavery and subsequently the South’s rights, other citizens presented evidence of what they saw as Bell’s abolitionism and how he was no different than Lincoln in order to increase Breckenridge’s popularity. Oftentimes, citizens cited Bell’s past speeches to prove that he believed Congress had the power to abolish slavery in the territories. For example, in 1850 and 1858, Bell, speaking specifically on slavery’s abolition, stated that “it was a desirable object, if it could be done on safe principles, to remove that apple of discord between the North and the South.”¹⁸³ Voters noticed that Bell had also “received abolition petitions” in the early 1850s, while citizens in Trenton were seen abandoning their support for the candidate for his “obnoxious sentiments on the slavery question” and doctrines that “submitt[ed] and encourag[ed] northern aggression” while pushing the nation even closer to disunion.¹⁸⁴ Mississippians also pointed to Edward Everett, who was rumored to be an “advocate for negro equality” and spoke on the “advantages of . . . immediate emancipation,” as well as other individuals in the Constitutional Union Party who believed that “negroes [were] citizens of the United States” and “who [stood] opposed to the South and her constitutional rights.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 28 August 1860.

¹⁸³ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 16 October 1860.

¹⁸⁴ *Weekly Mississippian*, 6 June 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 24 August 1860.

¹⁸⁵ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 24 August 1860; *Sunny South*, 1 November 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 4 September 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 27 April 1860.

In sum, even though these Mississippians were vocal in their support for Breckenridge as a man who they saw as promoting southern rights, he was also a candidate that did not advocate for slavery's disappearance. To these citizens, who glanced at John Bell's past actions in Tennessee and in the walls of Congress, Bell was simply another Lincoln who would either see slavery abolished, push the nation into disunion, and bring harm middle-class Mississippians' power, wealth, and futures. These beliefs were mirrored by choice voters in Kentucky who readily agreed that Breckenridge was far more suitable for the presidency than Bell and Everett or Douglas.

Declared the "democracy's champion, Kentucky's favorite" and "the nation's pride," multiple cities and counties across Kentucky endeavored to show their support for Breckenridge locally.¹⁸⁶ Voters believed that Breckenridge's party was the only one that protected slavery, while openly offering "an overzealous devotion to the rights of the South and the States."¹⁸⁷ In lamenting, and sometimes rejoicing, over the actions of the seceding delegates at Charleston, as well as denouncing Douglas's "unjust and pernicious Squatter Sovereignty doctrines," Kenton, Boone, and Pendleton County threw their support behind Breckenridge, "a sound National Democrat," (should Guthrie not be nominated) believing that "the South [had] clear constitutional rights" in regard to slavery.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, standing under a platform that embodied the Constitution itself which secured "equal rights to all," Lyon County asserted that Breckenridge would be

¹⁸⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 30 June 1860.

¹⁸⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 31 October 1860.

¹⁸⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 May 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 June 1860.

“the harbinger of a new era of peace and quietude to the nation.”¹⁸⁹ Likewise, delegates from the “First Appellate District of Kentucky”—thirty-one counties in total supposedly—confirmed their support for Breckenridge’s nomination, while Mason County, Madison County, and Georgetown, Kentucky, insisted that anyone who valued “the safety of the South, and the continuance of Democratic rule” should vote for Breckenridge and Lane.¹⁹⁰ Other middle-class Kentuckians believed that to preserve the Union, prevent Lincoln’s election which would “reduce fifteen sovereign states of the confederation to the level of conquered provinces,” and maintain “equality in the Union,” citizens must vote for Breckenridge.¹⁹¹

Ultimately, these middle-class Kentuckians were drawn to Breckenridge’s strong support for the white South, its rights to practices that they believed the North was trying to stifle, and preserving the Union. Yet, while voicing their favor for Breckenridge, other Kentuckians briefly pointed out, in passing, their disinterest of Douglas, but more intensely, their fear of Bell. Those in Pendleton County added that Douglas’s efforts to win their support were in vain, as they could not back such “radical” and “unconstitutional doctrines in regard to Popular Sovereignty in the Territories,” while the *Kenton County Democrat* writers believed that Douglas could not carry the state and sought to get Breckenridge elected.¹⁹² Bath County simply accused Douglas of “trickery” and “heresy” within the Democratic Party, while the *Maysville Express* of Mason County

¹⁸⁹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 July 1860. In this same issue of the *Courier*, Livingston, Marshall, Franklin, Bracken, Newcastle, Calloway, and Woodford Counties would confirm their support for Breckenridge.

¹⁹⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 7 July 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 30 June 1860.

¹⁹¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 22 October 1860. See also *Louisville Daily Courier*, 28 June 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 August 1860.

¹⁹² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 June 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 9 July 1860.

pointed to Douglas and his followers as being “co-fanatics of the Black Republicans.”¹⁹³ Kenton and Boone Counties saw his doctrine as “at war with the rights of one section of the republic,” while Douglas himself was “in every respect obnoxious to the South.”¹⁹⁴ In the end, it was Douglas’s popular sovereignty doctrines that limited his success among Kentucky voters.

More commonly, however, Breckenridge supporters in Kentucky debated John Bell’s inadequacy as president by discussing his views on subjects like slavery and disunion. Some middle-class citizens questioned Bell and his stance on slavery, asking if he “be a suitable person to be placed at the head of this great nation, half of which enjoy the institution of slavery.”¹⁹⁵ As if hoping to answer the questions, others printed records of Bell’s time in Congress, revealing where he had supposedly cast votes with the Republicans, “materially affecting the institution of slavery.” Additionally, while voicing that some were “gloriously disappointed” in Bell’s nomination, Kentuckians also pointed to his running mate, Edward Everett, “an anti-slavery man” who “never let an occasion pass in which” to “thrust at the South and Southern men.” Rumors were also presented of Everett supposedly supporting a “free Kansas” in the past and admitting in 1839 that Congress had the power to abolish slavery, that the slave trade should not be permitted between the states, and that no new states should be permitted to join the Union with slavery—confessions, they believed, Everett had yet to deny in 1860.¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere, some witnessed how split the votes were between the four candidates and urged Kentuckians to

¹⁹³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 30 June 1860.

¹⁹⁴ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 May 1860.

¹⁹⁵ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 22 October 1860.

¹⁹⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 31 October 1860. *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 May 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 3 August 1860.

restrain themselves from voting for Bell, as it would “directly [weaken] Breckenridge, and indirectly [help] Lincoln” in seeing to the South’s subjugation.¹⁹⁷ Paducah, speaking directly to its German residents, asked if they were “willing to fall into line with the Know-Nothing Party” and elect a man who would “be unwilling to concede to them the right of suffrage.”¹⁹⁸ In short, one writer in Kentucky stated that Douglas and Bell were “not worthy of consideration” as they did not have the slightest chance of winning, not just because of their platforms, but because votes for either man would “be giving greater chances for Lincoln.” Thus, in these middle-class Kentuckians’ eyes, Breckenridge was the only candidate who had the nerve to rebuke abolitionism, “administer the Government purely and justly,” and subsequently keep their independence intact.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, Breckenridge supporters in both Mississippi and Kentucky shared close similarities in 1860. Throughout these sources, voters continually voiced their desires to elect an individual who they believed would protect the white South’s rights and equality, which consisted of their ability to govern their own decisions and institutions, such as slavery—an institution that made middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians’ power and independency possible. Disregarding rumors that Breckenridge was a disunionist, his supporters emphasized his devotion to the South, both past and present, as well as to the institution of slavery. On the other hand, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians hoped to reiterate to the rest of the states’ residents that choosing Bell would end only in disaster. To these individuals, by voting for such a candidate, and even for Douglas, they were seeing to the end of slavery, disunion, and the

¹⁹⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 22 October 1860.

¹⁹⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 3 August 1860.

¹⁹⁹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 September 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 5 November 1860.

South's journey to servitude to the northern states and the Republican Party by the elimination of their rights. Ultimately, voting for either candidate was not only seeing to the end of their rights and practices, but also their independency and power. In addition to this, however, when they were not using Bell or Douglas as examples of these frightening scenarios, they were explaining in detail what might happen should Lincoln be elected.

The Consequences of Lincoln's Election

Already both states were aware of the consequences of having more than two candidates running for the presidency. With the votes split so drastically, middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians feared that if white southerners did not unite under a single candidate—maybe even two—then they paved the way for Lincoln's election.²⁰⁰ Simultaneously, however, they were also made aware of what they believed the consequences of his election would be for the nation, and some citizens were making preparations to face such an event. In Mississippi, Lincoln was seen as “the author of antagonism” and “the Great Agitator,” who in joining the abolitionists “signalized the narrowness of his views, and his opposition to the South, by voting for every scheme which had for its object the degradation of the South, for her rightful position of equality in the Union”—actions middle-class Mississippians saw as only intensifying upon his election. In addition, he was seen as a firm supporter of the “irrepressible doctrine,” believing that the nation would either become all slave or all free, led a party that “consist[ed] of men who regar[ed] slavery as a curse and a crime,” and hoped to “revolutionize the Government” alongside his party members.²⁰¹ A writer in the *Weekly*

²⁰⁰ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 21-29.

²⁰¹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 19 June 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 29 May 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 7 November 1860.

Mississippian, presenting a piece written by Republican member, Daniel E. Somes, emphasized further what this party would accomplish upon its rise to power. In addition to the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia, they believed that Lincoln and the Republicans would enact the “ultimate emancipation of the Slave States by the introduction of free speech and free press” while establishing “a new civilization in the South” despite the region’s violent resistance.²⁰²

In believing of how harmful a Republican president would be, citizens exclusively voiced their favor of secession if Lincoln were elected, one speaker insisting that Lincoln’s victory would “make secession a necessity.”²⁰³ Citizens of Lowndes County, Mississippi, agreed, believing that a Republican president would be “hostile to political equality and security of the Southern States,” and “an act so offensive and aggressive as to justify” disunion.²⁰⁴ A Neshoba County election banner promoted “Death rather than submission to a Black Republican government,” while another citizen exclaimed that secession, a “firm resolve, one bold and manly move,” would preserve Mississippi’s honor and a Mississippian’s manliness in the wake of a Republican takeover.²⁰⁵ To middle-class Mississippians, and even to some more moderate followers of Bell, Lincoln’s election would “be an affront to their honor and manly equality,” whereas secession was seen as a true expression of manliness—a method that should certainly be

²⁰² *Weekly Mississippian*, 7 November 1860. For other examples of what Mississippians thought of Lincoln, see the *Oxford Intelligencer*, 24 October 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 17 October 1860.

²⁰³ Richard T. Archer, *Speech by Richard T. Archer, August 10, 1860, at Port Gibson, Mississippi* (Port Gibson, 1860), 6, quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 62.

²⁰⁴ Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession, 1856-1861* (New York, 1938), 96-102, quoted from Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 186.

²⁰⁵ *Eastern Clarion*, 14 November 1860, quoted from Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 187; *Mississippian*, 18 December 1860, quoted from Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 188.

used should Breckenridge not win and all compromise fail.²⁰⁶ Yet, beyond talk, other Mississippi counties were taking more active measures to prepare for the future of the state.

While newspapers discussed the election in depth in 1860, military action was seen throughout Mississippi as the event approached. Historians have reported that Governor John Jones Pettus had kept a close watch of military matters by summoning generals and captains to a conference in Jackson. This additionally caused a widespread movement of buffering the state's defenses, and several letters to the governor attest to these actions.²⁰⁷ Citizens across Mississippi wrote to Governor Pettus about local company formations and obtaining arms, including L.C. Moore of Vicksburg who desired the governor supply a volunteer company with about seventy-five "rifle muskets" in Vicksburg.²⁰⁸ J.G. Hamer of Salem, Mississippi later reminded the governor that he had "executed a Bond of thirty five hundred dollars" to him for the purchase of forty-two cavalry arms for his company and was sorely disappointed that his men had to drill without them.²⁰⁹ In order to ease the "anxiety and impatience" of his men waiting for arms, Thomas W. Harris of Holly Springs requested a reply to his letter concerning his earlier request for arms, so as to "preserve and increase the strength of my . . . company and the volunteers corps of the State."²¹⁰ Others, like T.A. Graves, desired copies of the "regulations and by laws which [they were] to be governed by—also what kind of arms

²⁰⁶ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 186-189.

²⁰⁷ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 60.

²⁰⁸ L.C. Moore to John J. Pettus, 15 May 1860, Box 930, Folder 5, Item 31, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

²⁰⁹ J.G. Hamer to Governor John J. Pettus, 23 June 1860, Box 930, Folder 6, Item 15, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

²¹⁰ Thomas W. Harris to John J. Pettus, 20 October 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 24, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

[they were] supposed to get” in order to form an appropriate company in Hazlehurst, Mississippi.²¹¹ Lastly, J.M. Thomson of Houston, Mississippi, after hearing word that Lincoln may win the election, asked Governor Pettus to deliver a “minnie-rifle” that could be used against “the Black Republicans and the Irrepressible Conflict gentry” of the North.²¹²

Whether these company formations were constructed based on the fear of Lincoln’s elections is unknown, however. Past historians have noted the continuance of paranoia around possible slave insurrections enacted by outsiders during this time. Mississippi newspapers often pointed out suspicious outsiders in the state, and one famous account of a slave insurrection was viewed in the *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* in Plattsburg, Mississippi. Several slaves and one traveler from the North were arrested after confessing to the plot, but historians have argued that this was the exception. Although rumors abounded, these revolts were rarely grounded in actual fact; nonetheless, vigilance committees were created readily during 1860 to monitor slaves and visitors, so it is possible that these volunteer companies were seen as a method to dissuade slave revolts.²¹³ Even so, it is important to note that counties throughout Mississippi were preparing themselves militarily in 1860 and prior to the election.²¹⁴

²¹¹ T.A. Graves to John J. Pettus, 22 October 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 25, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

²¹² J.M. Thomson to John J. Pettus, 16 August 1860, Box 930, Folder 7, Item 6, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. For more examples of company formations, see Et al. to John J. Pettus, 17 September 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 2, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; L.B. Walker to John J. Pettus, 18 September 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 5, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; T.A. Graves to John J. Pettus, 21 September 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 9, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Thomas W. Harris to John J. Pettus, 8 October 1860, Box 930, Folder 8, Item 18, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

²¹³ Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse*, 163-180; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 9 October 1860.

²¹⁴ For more information concerning militia formation in Mississippi, see Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse*, 112-117. In addition to having \$150,000 to buy arms and establish volunteer companies, Barney

Elsewhere, evidence within local newspapers and letters does not show the Bluegrass State forming companies or fighting local slave insurrections. While these events may have been occurring and were simply not reported, it seems middle-class Kentuckians did not see the need for such military formations or did not see war approaching and believed that the Union could still be saved. Newspapers in Kentucky did, however, cover slave insurrections in other states like Arkansas, Texas, and Mississippi. While not stating their personal thoughts on these particular issues and events, Kentuckians also do not indicate that they were fearful of possible slave revolts.²¹⁵

Middle-class Kentuckians, however, did spend their time voicing their fears on what Lincoln's election might produce, such as secession in the South or efforts made by the North to coerce the South back into the Union through force, resulting in civil war. On the other hand, some citizens believed that if secession did not occur, an "Abolition Congress" would slowly begin to "pass one act to another till all its present purposes were accomplished" and slavery was eliminated with the aid of "'conservative' defenders of Lincoln," and southern abolitionists who had previously been kept silent.²¹⁶ They also sought to express "Disunion doctrines" of the South within their newspapers, such as those from Mr. Toombs of Georgia, who stated that Lincoln's election "would be the last feather" on his back, and those in Alabama, who vowed to rise up against the United

also points out that the majority of military leaders in the companies were Breckenridge supporters, were heavily involved in the politics of their counties, and most held a small amount of slaves in their possession. He also offers in depth details of the general make-up of volunteers, giving one example where half the volunteers owned no slaves, and those who did held 10 or less, while their occupations varied.

²¹⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 5 November 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 11 July 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 August 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 10 September 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 12 July 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 4 August 1860; *Louisville Daily*, 15 October 1860.

²¹⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 19 May 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 September 1860.

States government as it enforced unfavorable laws upon the South, “until civil war, with all its horrible butcheries, envelopes the land in a shroud of blood and carnage.”²¹⁷

Ultimately, most middle-class Kentuckians feared what the southern states would do in the end, hoping they would not resort to secession and the North would not use force against the South. Nevertheless, a few citizens voiced that they would follow the South into disunion if the “wolves” of the North came knocking at their doors. Humphrey Marshall, a former Kentucky congressman, stated that he would rather leave the state than witness the “surrender and sacrifice of the constitutional rights of [his] people” if the Republicans won.²¹⁸ Another Kentuckian, as the election drew closer, sorrowfully believed that “nothing but a fight [would] save the South.” “The sooner the better,” he later stated, but these few examples of secessionist talk in the state did not dominate large groups of Kentuckians.²¹⁹ In fact, one visitor to Kentucky “discovered . . . no evidence of Southern radicalism among any group of Kentuckians” and believed that secession would not be accepted if Lincoln was elected.²²⁰ While these observations prove interesting, future evidence will prove that “Southern radicalism” certainly existed in Kentucky, but was simply waiting for the right moment to surface.

While their views of what would happen if Lincoln was elected were slightly different, in viewing middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians’ fears of his election, it can be determined that both groups shared beliefs that Lincoln was not a favorable

²¹⁷ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 24 September 1860; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 13 July 1860. For more thoughts on Lincoln from Kentucky citizens, see *Louisville Daily Courier*, 20 June 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 September 1860.

²¹⁸ “Speech of Hon. Humphrey Marshall, of Ky.,” in National Democratic Executive Committee, *Speeches of Hon. Humphrey Marshall & Hon. B.F. Hallett*, 3-4, quoted from Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 77.

²¹⁹ W.T.H. to J. Warren Grigsby, November 5, 1860, Grigsby Collection, FHS, quoted from Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 78.

²²⁰ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 188.

president and whose election would only lead to intensified animosities between the sections, if not disunion. Both middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians feared how Lincoln's election would affect slavery, some believing that he would enact the immediate abolition of the practice throughout the country while simultaneously threatening the South with coercion and slave insurrections, produced not only by Lincoln's victory, but also slavery's end. Specifically, in Mississippi, a Republican victory not only meant a possible loss of rights and equality, but also denoted a loss of local control. For instance, nominees had always depended on southern votes to win elections in the past, yet the Republican Party in 1860 simply needed to win the electoral vote of the North to claim victory, disregarding the South's votes entirely. Thus, to the majority of middle-class Mississippians, the election of Lincoln and the possible abolition of slavery meant a loss of power over their own decisions, interests, the Union, and liberty within the nation—a perceived loss that would drive them into secession as a form of protection and control, which will be explored in detail later.²²¹

Elsewhere, middle-class Kentuckians feared for the nation as a whole, hoping that the South would act with reason and not secede, while also hoping that a Republican would not be elected or the party's doctrines not be as violent as they were often portrayed. To most Kentuckians, secession meant that slavery, and the slave laws, would become nonexistent and that an imminent civil war would occur between the sections

²²¹ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 256-257. Southerners had begun to see this loss of local control and the futility of their votes earlier in the elections of 1856 when Republicans claimed 11 of 16 Free states in the North. As Cooper states, it "traumatized" southerners and caused them to begin considering secession and freedom from a political party that didn't even need their votes to rise to power.

with Kentucky caught in the middle.²²² Some, however, were determined to secede themselves should Lincoln prove victorious, sharing the same views as middle-class Mississippians who found Lincoln's presidency unacceptable and who believed that slavery, their rights, and possibly their independency were better protected in their own confederacy. Nonetheless, despite conflicting views among its own people concerning Kentucky's fate, middle-class Kentuckians as a whole agreed with middle-class Mississippians' belief that Lincoln's election would lead to complications, and the Bluegrass State watched with anticipation as November drew even closer.

Ultimately, as the national conventions for both the Republican and the Democratic Parties came to a close, Mississippi and Kentucky, and their middle-class citizens, again showed just how similar they were by openly voicing what needed protecting, even if they did not agree on the same presidential candidate. Not only did their dislike of Lincoln continue, but it also produced a greater fear of his election, especially as it became more of a reality with the election split between four candidates. Additionally, despite splitting in regard to who they believed was better suited as president and why, both middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians nonetheless shared a continued devotion to southern rights, which involved slavery's protection, by preventing the enactment of popular sovereignty and abolition—harmful practices they believed would not just affect their states' institutions and futures, but also their citizens' valued independency and power. They also further emphasized slavery's importance by pointing out flaws in other candidates, such as Bell, who was rumored to have supported

²²² Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 47-56. This discussion on how slavery's survival in the state affected Kentucky's later decision to not side with either the North or the South will be discussed further in the following chapter.

legislation that stood against slavery, or Douglas, who left slavery without federal protection. Furthermore, hints of unionism could still be seen in Mississippi and especially in Kentucky, as Bell and Breckenridge supporters put their faith in men they believed would hold the nation together and bring peace by protecting slavery and southern rights, while simultaneously speaking out against opposing candidates who might be supporting disunion. In all, however, neither state pushed solely for the nation's dissolution. In fact, they chose separate candidates whom they believed protected the Union, promoted peace, protected southern rights, and kept slavery as an active practice.

These findings add to the current historiography surrounding the 1860 campaign season within Mississippi and Kentucky. Some historians have emphasized the secession of delegates at the Charleston Convention, but have failed to fully describe what was happening in border and southern states during the presidential campaign. When this period is discussed, it is often confined to presidential candidates or local politicians, such as their campaign speeches, travels, and responses to difficult topics like slavery. In more recent studies, specifically when discussing particular states, this event is briefly summarized before moving on to the election's results and the response to it or is grouped within studies involving other states, which only leads to overshadowing how individual states uniquely reacted to the election campaign. These studies are important, as they fully encompass what these politicians stood for and hoped to accomplish and what ultimately occurred as the election ended. Yet, studying middle-class citizens' thoughts and opinions during this period is also crucial, especially in states like Kentucky and Mississippi, as it emphasizes just why specific candidates were favored among citizens, what policies they valued most, and what they hoped the future would look like

should their candidate become president. Such an emphasis also reveals that while they differed on which candidate they supported, the majority of middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were vastly similar in regard to their support for the Union, but to some, a Union that protected southern rights and slavery. This chapter, thus, hopes to fill in the gaps and adds to previous studies, offering in detail who middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians favored the most for president, why, what they valued, and what they hoped to protect or sustain as a nation and as a state.

Come November, and as the election drew to a close and both states cast their votes, Bell dominated Kentucky, while Breckenridge claimed Mississippi. According to historians, Constitutional Unionists had the greatest advantage in the Bluegrass State because of their ties to Henry Clay and their emphasis on slavery's protection within the Union. "That heritage, along with a general public understanding that secession created a real threat of civil war," captured Kentuckians who preferred preservation and compromise over secession, war, and the loss of slavery.²²³ While secessionist talk existed, though it was not the dominate force at the time, middle-class Kentuckians revealed that they neither identified themselves as completely southern, nor entirely American, as in their eyes either identity consisted of a radicalism that threatened Kentuckians' independency with abolition, war, and/or economic ruin. Instead, as "proslavery Unionists" favoring a Union that kept slavery in a peaceful manner, they cast themselves as solely "Kentuckian," seeking a platform that protected their independency

²²³ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 184; Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 26-39. Historian James W. Finck argued that the majority of Kentuckians voting for Bell were slaveowners, as the Constitutional Union Party stood for not only for the Union, but for slavery and Southern rights, as well. Thus, Kentuckians desired a Union that protected slavery and their rights instead of a country led by the doctrines of the Republican Party or even the Democratic Party that supported secession outright.

and more specifically, slavery and their economic connections between both sections of the state. In this case, supporting Bell and the Constitutional Union Party offered that assurance.²²⁴

As for Mississippi, Breckenridge's victory revealed the state's ultimate goal of seeing that the South was equally represented within the nation by a man who had proven his devotion to the South and slavery's protection. Middle-class Mississippians, then, were swayed once more by their strong antipartyism, choosing a strong, pro-southern rights candidate who best suited their interests and protected their power over slavery and the state's future even if he did not represent the Democratic Party. While some historians have contended that Mississippi's choice for Breckenridge revealed their strong support for secession, and that even Bell supporters, later known as the cooperationist faction, favored secession in some form should the North continue to neglect the South's rights, such findings will be addressed in this study later and are beyond the scope of this current chapter.²²⁵ Instead, Breckenridge's victory simply revealed what was most important to the state—slavery's ultimate preservation, the ability to control a state's own decisions and future, and protecting the South from subjugation to the North, resulting in their ultimate goal of maintaining power.

Despite their similarities, and despite both states' faith and hope that the election of 1860 would stave off secession and produce a president who was devoted to southern rights and slavery, these hopes faded rapidly. In discovering that Lincoln had won the presidency, South Carolina began its move to leave the Union permanently. Soon after,

²²⁴ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 50-56. This matter will be further discussed in the following chapter, specifically how slavery continuation and Kentucky's geographical position pushed their decision to avoid secession.

²²⁵ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 179-189.

Mississippi followed in the Palmetto State's footsteps, but the Bluegrass State hesitated, scrambling to find solutions not only to keep the Union intact, but also to protect itself. From November 1860 to the end of July 1861, several events occurred, and middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians, having once acted in unison in their beliefs since John Brown's Raid, grew vastly different. It would be these citizens, writing to their governors and local newspapers, who voiced the reasons why Mississippi seceded and Kentucky remained neutral, revealing just how their identities and founding ideas affected those same decisions.

CHAPTER IV – “WE MUST HAVE PROTECTION”: KENTUCKY, MISSISSIPPI,
AND THE SECESSION CRISIS, DECEMBER 1860-JULY 1861

On May 28, 1861, a young Maysville, Kentucky, citizen wrote to Governor Beriah Magoffin, alerting him of a very important matter, while simultaneously calling on his aid. This Kentuckian informed Magoffin that “the youths” of Maysville had organized themselves into a company, and the captain requested a sword and belt be sent to him immediately. While the formation of companies such as this was not a unique matter during 1861, the *reason* these Maysville citizens organized is what is most telling of what was occurring in the state following Lincoln’s election. The writer stated that the main reason for this company’s formation was “for the protection of the Neutrality of our state.”²²⁶ Elsewhere, the citizens of DeSoto County, Mississippi, met to discuss what had transpired in the nation following the 1860 presidential election. These Mississippians vowed to cast aside all differences in opinion in order to “arrest the progress of abolitionism” and agreed that there seemed to be no assurance that their rights would be respected under Lincoln. Therefore, they hoped to “sustain and protect these rights by timely and manly resistance” and declared their belief in the right of a state to sever its ties with the Union in order to keep those rights.²²⁷ Such letters not only capture the mood in each state during the secession crisis, but they also represent the thoughts and feelings of most middle-class white Kentuckians and Mississippians.

²²⁶ H. M. Pearce to Beriah Magoffin, 28 May 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-107 to MG5-108, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0057, (accessed November 5, 2019).

²²⁷ *Weekly Mississippian*, 12 December 1860.

In addition to a focus on protecting themselves from hostile entities in these specific examples, other letters to and from the governors' desks of Kentucky and Mississippi, as well as local newspapers, further shine a light onto the responses of white, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians following November 1860. In their efforts to see that John Bell or John C. Breckenridge were elected, both states had scrambled to explain to the public why their support should be in either candidate.²²⁸ Although hopeful that other states would follow their lead, Kentucky and Mississippi were nonetheless met with disappointment when the election results announced Lincoln's success.

Immediately, the southern states began to push the South further towards disunion. Several political leaders and local fire eaters attempted to convince the South that Lincoln and other abolitionists had, in their eyes, the power to see an end to slavery and the southerner's way of life. They believed the South would be reduced to conquered territory beneath the North, where white, southern men would be forced into slavery under former slaves who would be free to ravish white women.²²⁹ As noted in previous chapters, such fears reverberated throughout the southern states, including Kentucky and Mississippi, yet in a movement "unprecedented in the annals of the American Republic," South Carolina took the lead and "opened the flood gates" by seceding in late December 1860. Coaxing other southern states to follow them, the Palmetto State believed that they and "slavery [were] doomed within the Union" now that a Republican president had been elected.²³⁰

²²⁸ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 29; Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 65.

²²⁹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 29, 41-42.

²³⁰ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 65-66.

Kentucky and Mississippi did not turn a blind eye to South Carolina's actions nor the reasoning of fire eaters as they advocated for secession. Both states seemed appalled by the Republican Party's doctrines and the acts of abolitionists, like John Brown, prior to the election, where teachings of slave emancipation and an "irrepressible conflict" seemed to threaten white southerners' right to carry their slaves into the West. In an attempt to prevent abolitionism from growing in strength and to keep a Republican away from the presidency, both states turned to America's democratic system, which they believed would succeed in protecting slavery and their rights to it in the end. Yet, despite vigorous campaigns prior to November 1860, white Kentuckians and Mississippians saw their efforts thwarted by a Republican victory. Suddenly, to these states, their ultimate fears of losing not just slavery and their rights, but also their independency and power, had come to fruition and all avenues of compromise, to some, seemed exhausted. Yet, instead of acting in unison in their reactions as they had after John Brown's raid in October 1859 and during the presidential campaign of 1860, Kentucky and Mississippi found themselves traveling down different paths as Lincoln was inaugurated. Both states agreed that slavery and southern rights were important, but it was on how best to protect them that they differed greatly. In the end, each state's decision was ultimately affected by their unique identities and founding ideas formed upon the state's establishment, which were grounded in a vibrant economy and their views on honor, white privilege, slavery, community, and masculinity. Even though these decisions were solidified by the summer of 1861, however, both states discovered that their troubles were far from over, as not only did they anticipate open war outside of their borders, but sources also hint at a struggle from within and among their own citizens.

Kentucky's Response

After Lincoln's election, Kentucky immediately made efforts to not only reassure citizens of the state's stance towards what appeared to be an impending crisis, but also to make plans to face this crisis. Calling for an extra session of the state legislature, middle-class Kentuckians forebodingly believed that "we are on the eve of great events." They regarded Lincoln's election "in no other light" than an "open declaration of war against slavery and the slave states" by the North. Yet despite several southern states, including South Carolina and Mississippi, making plans to "withdraw from the Union," most Kentuckians seemed determined to preserve slavery and their rights while in the Union instead and "by any means consistent with their peace, honor, and safety," hoping to convince the "Northern States to retrace their steps and return to the Constitution they have so long ignored."²³¹ Further extending the cause for Union, the writers in the *Louisville Daily Courier* inquired upon John Bell and Governor Magoffin's opinion on the subject of secession. Both men agreed that although Lincoln had been elected on what they saw as a solely sectional ticket, while representing a party that desired to see slavery eradicated in their eyes, Bell believed that his election did not "furnish...sufficient cause for a State to withdraw from the Union." Bell's reasoning was based on his belief that Lincoln "does not hold extreme opinions" and that the Republicans would not garner enough support in Congress during his four years in Congress.²³² Magoffin shared such beliefs, stating that Kentucky should remain in the Union until Lincoln "crosses my fence

²³¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 1 December 1860.

²³² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1860. See also James P. Martin to Beriah Magoffin, 8 January 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-40 to MG5-41, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0005, (accessed December 8, 2019).

and advances on my property to execute the threat—then will be time enough, and then will I be justified in shooting down the villain.” Non-elite Kentuckians reading these declarations, however, did not agree with these statements. The “Fire Eater” commenting on Magoffin’s statements clearly stated that “there may be good reason to sustain the position of [Governor] Magoffin; but if so, he has not given them,” possibly pointing to the governor’s failed attempts to convince some of his citizens how unnecessary secession was.²³³ Furthermore, the commentators on Bell’s statements argued that if Lincoln did not have the power to attack slavery and the South while in office and if abolitionism had not strengthened, then they would not have won the 1860 election at all.²³⁴

While elites might have appeared to not openly support immediate secession after the election, the following months continued to highlight middle-class Kentuckians’ distaste for Lincoln’s election and the danger he appeared to disclose towards slavery and the South.²³⁵ For instance, citizens reminded others of Lincoln’s supposed efforts in Congress to support abolition societies and the abolishment of slavery in the District of Columbia. Now that he was in office, they believed that he would “use the power of his administration to abolish slavery within the District of Columbia” and “will have both Houses within his favor by very decided majorities” to see that “not another foot of territory shall ever be dedicated to slavery.” The majority would be led to conquer the minority, Kentuckians alleged, and the state needed to decide whether they would be an

²³³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 December 1860.

²³⁴ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1860.

²³⁵ Research into local newspapers produced over 1,000 matches for Lincoln between December 1860 and July 1861. These matches also included examples of Unionist and secessionist sentiments in Kentucky throughout this period and that will be emphasized later in this chapter.

“inferior in the Northern Confederacy with a certain extinction of her property in two hundred millions dollars’ worth of slaves” or “will take her position where all the other slave states will be found.”²³⁶ A few middle-class Kentuckians called on “people of all parties in this State” “to resist in last the extremity any attempt to carry out the doctrines of the Chicago platform,” as Lincoln “cannot and will not recede one inch from the principles” that would see to slavery exclusion in the West.²³⁷ In addition to a loss of slavery, sources also reveal that white Kentuckians were alerted over the prospect of war between the North and the current seven seceded states, using Lincoln’s own speeches as evidence.

Following a speech in Indianapolis, middle-class Kentuckians viewed Lincoln’s words as a mirror image of his “future policy” and what might become of the nation.²³⁸ To these citizens, not only did Lincoln seemingly avow that the majority in the country, “not the people of the States” nor the Supreme Court, was “to determine whether Kentucky and Tennessee and Virginia have any rights, and if so, what they are,” but he also voiced his intent to reclaim the forts, collect revenue, and enforce the laws of the United States in the southern states.²³⁹ In short, the language of his speeches were “not of a patriot, nor are his positions that of a statesman” to most citizens in the state at the time.²⁴⁰ Instead, upper and middle-class Kentuckians believed that Lincoln’s speeches at both Indianapolis and his inauguration in March pointed to one thing: war. For example, they saw Lincoln’s speeches as a proclamation of “war without the declaration of war,

²³⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 1 January 1861.

²³⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 January 1861.

²³⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 16 February 1861.

²³⁹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 February 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 16 February 1861.

²⁴⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 14 February 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 6 March 1861.

waged under false pretenses, and justifiable only to that fanaticism of which [he] is at once the embodiment and representative” after Indianapolis.²⁴¹ Elsewhere, one writer declared that “the policy foreshadowed can only result in war”, while the *Frankfort Yeoman* commentator described it as “a policy which, if carried out, will drench the country in blood.” A citizen writing to the *Paris Flag* also stated that Lincoln’s inauguration speech was “war without disguise” as it aimed to not only fulfill the doctrines of the Chicago platform but also “enforce the laws against the eight Southern States, compel them to pay taxes and conquer out of their possession the forts and other property which is in and around their territory.”²⁴²

Therefore, middle-class Kentuckians continued to hold onto to their beliefs that Lincoln seemed to threaten the nation, specifically the South, and slavery, as they had in previous years. Yet, when it came to their own fate in regards to Lincoln’s presidency and policies, they appeared to be torn. As already seen, sources following the election of 1860 reveal elites’ and middle-class citizens’ willingness to continue to promote peace and the maintenance of the Union.²⁴³ Moreover, some newspapers in December 1860 and into 1861 later showed that middle-class Kentuckians also would “do what [it] can for peace” and compromise, believing that “war should be avoided at every expedient” and using “all the energies of the statesmen, in our domestic councils and in Washington” for “the preservation of peace.”²⁴⁴ Elsewhere, they voiced their desire to keep searching for suitable compromises and unify the Union once more even though several southern states

²⁴¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 February 1861.

²⁴² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 14 February 1861; *Frankfort Yeoman*, quoted from *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 March 1861; *Paris Flag*, quoted from *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 March 1861.

²⁴³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 1 December 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 December 1860.

²⁴⁴ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 25 February 1861.

had already seceded. Certain that war would occur between the sections, one Kentuckian urged Kentucky and the border states to “avoid the dreadful calamities of war,” that “wise and calm counsels will prevail,” and that Lincoln was ready to agree to “some equivalent terms” that would possibly preserve the Union and coax the Southern states out of secession. Yet, the writer hoped Kentucky would not be “precipitated into revolution” but would “stand by the Union and the Constitution and the Enforcement of the Laws,” seeing to the protection of the rights of all states.²⁴⁵

Also, in early 1861, continued support of the Union was seen through elites and yeomen’s active support of a peace conference aimed at amending the Constitution and saving the nation from further calamities. For instance, James Larmon wrote to Magoffin in January, insisting that the South unite as one body to present “proper amendments on Slavery revenue and Navigation Laws.” In doing so, he believed the nation would continue as half slave, half free.²⁴⁶ In Frankfort, Kentucky, a peace congress was organized to present such suitable compromises to both sections, and several representatives argued that Kentucky “had a deep and abiding in the perpetuity of the union of the States with all our constitutional rights . . . to heal the existing breach, cement it together upon its original principles, and thus destroy the irrepressible conflict now being waged by Northern and by Southern fanatics.” Representatives then continued to proclaim the state’s desire to stay in the Union and promote peace by creating

²⁴⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 23 February 1861.

²⁴⁶ James Larmon to Beriah Magoffin, 19 January 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-45 to MG5-46, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0008, (accessed November 27, 2019).

amendments that would settle the slave question and protect the rights of the South.²⁴⁷ Daring to hope, Kentucky newspapers later noted the successful passage of amendments to be presented to Congress and the President after the peace conference.²⁴⁸ An unknown correspondent, confident that some moderate Republicans “sympathize[ed] with the seceders” and were willing to negotiate, optimistically wrote that “whatever the Peace Conference may do will be sustained by the people” if they were able to vote on their amendments presented for the Constitution.²⁴⁹ Another Kentuckian, believing that Lincoln would not harm slavery, stated that once the seceded states were invited to vote on these amendments, “the Union men” of the South would be inspired “to such an organization” as to force the “Disunion men” of these states to present the amendments to the people for a vote. To this Kentucky citizen, it was in this way that the Union would be saved, as “whatever plan may be recommended to Congress and the constituents of Congress, will be largely sustained at the polls.”²⁵⁰ Lastly, Pulaski County citizens also placed their hope and support in the Union and these compromises in a county meeting stating that “a time for revolution has not arrived” for Kentucky. Devoting themselves “for the Union under the Constitution,” these Kentuckians refused “any action on the part of [the] State Legislature” that would “sanction further dismemberment of the States.” Instead, they stood by the peaceful resolutions of John J. Crittenden, “compromises” that would be the “basis for the adjustment of our political troubles.”²⁵¹ In the end, most

²⁴⁷ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 22 January 1861.

²⁴⁸ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 1 March 1861.

²⁴⁹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 1 March 1861.

²⁵⁰ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 21 February 1861.

²⁵¹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 18 February 1861. See also Beriah Magoffin to Thomas L. Crittenden, 29 April 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, 1859-1862, MG1-246, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*,

middle and upper-class Kentuckians, deeply concerned about slavery and the Union's fate, pushed to see the United States sustained and had hopes that compromise efforts committed by John J. Crittenden, the Committee of Thirty-Three, the Committee the Thirteen, or the Peace Convention between January and March 1861 would be successful.²⁵² Yet, the writer of the *Louisville Daily Journal* questioned whether such peace efforts would be accepted, doubting that the seceded states would accept such terms that "would not give peace to the country" and where slavery was left as "an open question" in the territories.²⁵³

While some middle-class Kentuckians put their continued faith in the Union and hoped that peace efforts would settle tensions, several meetings were held not just to voice their support for the Union, but a Union that respected southern rights. In addition, these meetings also revealed what middle-class, and possibly some upper-class, Kentuckians hoped would become of the state should compromise fail and war commence between the North and the South. "Without distinction of parties," the citizens in Boyle, Lincoln and Mercer counties endeavored to have a "Southern Rights Meeting" in Danville. "Opposed to coercion and in favor of the equality of the states under the Federal Constitution," they hoped that countless citizens who favored "peace and

discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-023-0056, (accessed December 8, 2019); David Walker to Beriah Magoffin, 29 March 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, 1859-1862, MG1-227 to MG1-228, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-023-0041, (accessed December 8, 2019).

²⁵² The Committee of Thirty-Three, the Committee of Thirteen, the Crittenden Compromise, and the Peace Conventions were all efforts led by the House of Representatives, Senate, and John J. Crittenden to find some solution to secession and slavery. Each movement was, however, was rejected due to the lack of attendance by delegates or the refusal by some political party members to accept proposed amendments. For more information concerning these events, see Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 185-186; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, vol. II*, 463-475; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 116-145.

²⁵³ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 1 March 1861.

equality” attended.²⁵⁴ In Lexington, Kentucky, citizens spoke of a “glorious Southern Rights meeting” held in the city. Viewing the “fearful distractions of our common country,” these Kentuckians created resolutions where they pledged their “lives,” “fortunes,” and “honor” “to obtain [their] rights under the Constitution.” Hoping such rights would be recognized by the North, they desired to “bring back [their] Southern brethren” and “reconstruct the Federal Union on a basis of justice and equality.” In addition, and forebodingly, these Kentuckians announced that if their northern neighbors marched through the state of Kentucky to subdue the South, they would be met with “bloody hands to hospitable graves” before the state joined the South.²⁵⁵ A southern rights meeting in Lagrange, supposedly consisting of the entire Seventh Congressional District, vowed that if “president Lincoln should at any time presume the aspect of war for the subjugation of the seceding states,” “Kentucky would promptly unsheathe the sword” for a common cause and “take up arms against the invading force.”²⁵⁶

Others southern rights Kentuckians wondered whether the state would “help pay the expenses of the war” for the North during such a war or present “a bold and united front, compel an early recognition of her independence,” and side with the South, as it was “less expensive, less disastrous in its immediate effects.”²⁵⁷ W.D. McKay, a native Kentuckian writing to Magoffin and believing that a time for compromise had passed, expressed his fears that his company may have to escort a group of “Yankees” into Mississippi. As a result, he believed that any form of “coercion against a seceding state”

²⁵⁴ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 25 February 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 1 March 1861.

²⁵⁵ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 21 March 1861.

²⁵⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 31 May 1861. For additional sources regarding Kentuckians standing both for the Union and Southern rights, see *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 March 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 2 March 1861.

²⁵⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 13 February 1861.

would cause Kentuckians to force the legislature to take immediate action, but for what McKay does not specify.²⁵⁸ Another citizen advised “our people to array themselves with the South and fight with the South,” as Kentucky’s interests and the Constitution itself laid with the region.²⁵⁹ Lastly, other citizens declared that “if [war] should come,” the state would be better off standing with their southern states “in a struggle for privilege and rights common to all the States.”²⁶⁰

Therefore, prior to the attack of Fort Sumter, Kentucky appeared to still exhibit the characteristics it had shown during John Brown’s Raid and the election campaign of 1860. Not only were most middle- and upper-class Kentuckians making a concerted effort to see the Union held together and war avoided through appropriate amendments, but believed that these amendments and compromises should respect southerners’ right to slavery and also remove the slave question entirely from the political equation. Such efforts were not made simply because of Kentucky’s devotion to the South, but due to slavery being seen as a crucial factor to their own independence, as without it, they too would find themselves losing cherished privileges and freedoms. Additionally, seeing that war might commence, other white, middle-class Kentuckians made clear their belief that any attempt to coerce the South back into the Union through force, or march over Kentucky lands to do so, would be met with resistance and possibly secession. By mid-April 1861, however, as Charleston, South Carolina, shook under the heavy gunfire heard from Fort Sumter while Federal and Confederate forces clashed, Kentucky revealed a rift

²⁵⁸ W.D. McKay to John J. Pettus, 4 February 1861, Box 931, Folder 4, Item 17, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

²⁵⁹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 8 March 1861.

²⁶⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 25 February 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 December 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 December 1860; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 7 March 1861.

between its citizens' will and its representatives' decisions. Aggravated by Lincoln's actions in South Carolina, both elite and middle-class Kentuckians seemed to be torn on whether to support a state secession convention or accept a new, more favorable option: neutrality.

The event at Fort Sumter itself began with President Lincoln torn over what to do with the federal forts lying within Charleston Harbor and to which secessionists believed now belonged to the Confederacy. Historians have contended that because Lincoln did not wish to bow down to secessionists nor demoralize the Republican Party, he refused to withdraw federal forces. Instead, he made preparations to resupply Federal Major Robert Anderson's troops stationed within Fort Sumter. A request sent to Confederate President, and former Mississippi senator, Jefferson Davis to permit the delivery of such provisions resulted in a response from Davis that requested either Fort Sumter's federal forces reduced or Major Anderson peacefully evacuating all together. Anderson agreed, but only if his supplies arrived after April 15. On April 12, 1861, in fact, federal ships were seen in Charleston Harbor and at 4:30 a.m., the first Confederate shot was heard over Fort Sumter. It was as the sun rose over Charleston that the nation witnessed the beginning of a war.²⁶¹

While various states reacted in their own way to this event, middle-class Kentuckians' specific responses appeared to be focused solely on denouncing Lincoln's actions and fortifying the state's defenses. The citizens of Louisville met to declare themselves "unanimously opposed to the war policy of the Lincoln Administration" and

²⁶¹ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, vol. II*, 520-524. See also, Maury Klein, *Days of Defiance: Sumter, Secession, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 403-420; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 212-215. Research into local newspapers' coverage of the battle at Fort Sumter also produced over 200 findings.

that if such attempts to subjugate the South be not abandoned, the state “shall at once arrange herself side by side with her Southern sisters” “in defending their soil from hostile invasions.” Nevertheless, while also stating that “it is the immediate and imperative duty of this State to arm” and that Kentucky would not permit forces to cross their borders in order to invade the South, Louisville citizens also “implore[ed] conservative men of all parties of the Free States . . . to arrest the mad, frenzied and suicidal course of the Lincoln administration” first and foremost.²⁶² Another local meeting, voicing their abhorrence to Lincoln’s actions, called on the state to “maintain our position as mediator, and preserve the blessings of peace to our State and to the Union.” Fighting neither for the North or the South, citizens insisted that the state “stand for the Union, cry peace, hold fast” upon its own soil, but nonetheless arm the state so that it may defend itself should forces invade her borders.²⁶³ The *Louisville Daily Journal* commentators, acknowledging a meeting called by a group of gentlemen to stand against the actions of Lincoln, also urged Kentuckians to remain for the Union and not give in to the cries of secessionists who wanted to see the state fall into disunion.²⁶⁴ The men of Keysburg even took it upon themselves to raise a home guard in order that they may be prepared for emergencies due to the current state of the nation. They also asked Magoffin to issue arms to defend themselves.²⁶⁵ John O. McReynolds also sought arms for the company being formed to defend Kentucky—a request Magoffin denied as this particular

²⁶² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 April 1861.

²⁶³ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 19 April 1861.

²⁶⁴ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 16 April 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 April 1861.

²⁶⁵ D. T. Porter to Beriah Magoffin, 26 April 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-52 to MG5-53, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0024, (accessed December 8, 2019).

company being organized was not considered a state guard.²⁶⁶ W.D. Pope of Bracken County called for arms, as well, for a company of “100 able bodied men” due to the “present exciting and threatening attitude and condition” of the country.²⁶⁷

It was as May approached, however, that scholars and this study begin to question whether the state’s delegates heeded the requests and desires of its citizens. Prior to April 12, middle and upper-class citizens seemingly desired that Kentucky continue the fight for the Union, but pro-southern rights Kentuckians had also declared that if the North took action against the South or invaded the state, Kentucky would take action to defend itself and side with the South. Yet, in viewing the sources speaking on Fort Sumter, and the strong support for the Union they contain, a questions remains: what happened to the citizens that once advocated for Kentucky joining the South? Why did the state not immediately join the South? Perhaps, for these Kentuckians, the battle at Fort Sumter was not an excuse for the state to secede, as Federal forces had not stepped foot onto Kentucky soil. Historians, however, have noted that this alone was not stopping the state from seceding. In fact, past studies, letters, and newspapers sources, which show continued support for the South, also reveal that if given the chance, Kentucky might have joined the Confederate States through secession. Yet, another option had been presented to the citizens in the early months of 1861 which swayed them away from

²⁶⁶ John O. McReynolds et al. to Beriah Magoffin, 26 April 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-63 to MG5-64, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0018, (accessed December 8, 2019).

²⁶⁷ W. D. Pope to Beriah Magoffin, 28 April 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-61, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via *the Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0016, (accessed December 8, 2019). Research into local newspapers’ coverage of the battle at Fort Sumter also produced over 200 examples of Kentuckians’ reactions to the events at Fort Sumter.

secession entirely, as it not only gave them a chance to continue standing for the Union their ancestors had fought for, but also to secure the institutions, privileges, and economy that gave middle-class Kentuckians independency.

Specifically, Kentucky was one state that refused to have a state convention to vote for or against secession. Such was the case because the state's legislature seemed to be unable to come to a consensus and agree to call a convention. This result appeared to be highly influenced by a power struggle between the Democratic Union Party and the States Rights Party of Kentucky at the time and that might have pushed the state away from calling a convention. Local secessionists seemed to have already pointed to this issue, pressuring Governor Magoffin to call for a state convention, as they believed that the current legislature did not embody the will of the whole state. Although this is but one instance, in viewing previous sources showing pro-southern rights Kentuckians wanting to side with the South should the North take hostile steps towards the region, this declaration might have been true.²⁶⁸ Once the legislature convened on March 20 to decide for this, however, neither the Democratic Unionists nor the States Righters gathered enough votes to force a convention. Thus, the legislature never voted successfully for a state convention like other southern states due to a lack of confidence and ability by each party to win. One citizen explained this lack of success by either party in stating that the legislature simply "did not know what to do," and that legislators were not willing "to leave their comfort zone and do anything that might be seen as rash."²⁶⁹

State Rights party supporters later hoped that such northern aggression in April would push Kentuckians to support a state convention, but the state's May elections and

²⁶⁸ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 6 March 1861 found in Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 94.

²⁶⁹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 97-98; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 119-122.

the introduction of neutrality proved otherwise. During this time, also, the border states were making plans to summon a border state convention to decide on an appropriate plan to unite the nation. The States Rights Party of Kentucky created a platform for the convention which supported the Crittenden Compromise, and if not accepted by the North, Kentucky would secede. Democratic Unionists, on the other hand, supposedly fearing that the secessionists had far too much power in the state already, pushed the idea of neutrality in order to keep Kentucky from accepting such a proposal and ultimately seceding. Such a concept was attractive to most middle-class Kentuckians once it was presented, historians have argued, for neutrality meant peace, continued efforts to create compromises concerning slavery and the Union, and consistent trade with both sections. In sum, neutrality offered middle-class and elite Kentuckians with security for the valuable practices that enabled their independency, while other options, such as secession, would only harm these values. Also, since Kentucky was a state directly situated between northern and southern states, neutrality also meant preventing either side from using the state as a battleground should war commence.²⁷⁰

Once this option was presented, middle-class Kentuckians against secession went into detail to explain why such an act was viewed as a mistake to them and neutrality as more favorable. Although admitting that it was uncertain what Kentucky would look like if she seceded, these Kentuckians believed that the state would become “more than Tennessee, more than Virginia...more than any dozen states in the country, the

²⁷⁰ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 102-103, 110-112; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 158-160. Robinson argued that Beriah Magoffin never intended for neutrality to be a forgone conclusion for Kentucky, but instead a method for the state to find compromise for the sections and for the state to decide for itself what to do.

battleground of the hosts of the warring sections.”²⁷¹ Additionally, Kentucky would be “cut off from all intercourse with the United States, cut off from commerce by land and water from twenty-three states...and, more and worse, she would not be, as she now is, at peace.”²⁷² More so, others believed that “secession is undoubtedly the emancipation of every slave in our state” and would “interfere with...and put an end to” the return of fugitive slaves to the state.²⁷³ Using census returns from 1860 on escaped slaves as a comparison, middle-class Kentuckians against secession argued that the number of escaped slaves, which had increased to over a thousand in 1861, would only increase more so; thus, these citizens questioned how effective secession would be in protecting the state and slavery if so many were supposedly escaping from the South already.²⁷⁴ Thus, secession was seen as not only destroying the state’s economic relations and slavery, but forcing citizens back into a state of dependency where they held no social and racial privileges as white men, nor were able to enjoy the variety of methods to achieve economic success.

On the other hand, to some white middle and upper-class Kentuckians, neutrality was seen “as the only position she could take for herself and the Union” so as to avoid “a desolating war destructive to her institutions, her property, her liberty, and perhaps, her

²⁷¹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 19 June 1861.

²⁷² *Louisville Daily Journal*, 25 June 1861.

²⁷³ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 11 May 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 7 May 1861.

²⁷⁴ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 18 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 25 July 1861; There were also several instances of Unionist sentiment in the state, but it is important to note that when Kentuckians stated that they were for the “Union” they were not speaking of siding with the North specifically. As seen throughout this chapter and this study, Kentuckians did not approve of the North’s actions against the South, whom they believed deserved to have their rights respected. Kentuckians, instead, when speaking of the “Union” meant the United States as whole, whose Constitution and democratic system was suitable enough to protect their interests. For more examples, see *Louisville Daily Courier*, 5 February 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 16 April 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 7 May 1861.

religion, without any possible benefit to herself.”²⁷⁵ The *Frankfort Yeoman* writers viewed neutrality as a way for “Kentucky to take up arms for neither for the one section or for the other,” but continue to “perform all her legal and constitutional duties as a state of the United States.”²⁷⁶ Others saw the act as having “kept war from her fair and innocent borders, and preserved the peace amongst her people.”²⁷⁷ Several county citizens also saw neutrality as a chance for the State to avoid war and to arm itself instead “to act upon the defensive,” and “repel attack.” They believed it was imperative for the state to acquire arms in order to “place the soldiers of Kentucky in a position to defend the honor and soil of their State”, while another writer stated that the state must be “armed to the teeth” in order to keep from having to “furnish [Lincoln] aid or supplies of no kind for carrying on his war.”²⁷⁸ One press boldly stated “No North, no South, but one Union,” for Kentucky should remain as a mediator between the sections, stay part of the Union, furnish the South with supplies if need be, and “find friends in the North to aid us against Lincoln” while neutral.²⁷⁹ In this way, it did not have to risk fighting alongside the North to put down their sister states in the South, nor risk losing their independency (or the slaves and economic prosperity that went along with it) by seceding, but was still considered a part of the Union it so determinedly supported.²⁸⁰ Some middle-class citizens later declared that neutrality was working, as they were “the only state owning

²⁷⁵ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 27 June 1861.

²⁷⁶ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 28 May 1861.

²⁷⁷ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 15 July 1861.

²⁷⁸ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 17 April 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 17 May 1861.

²⁷⁹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 19 April 1861.

²⁸⁰ For more examples of Kentucky’s support of armed neutrality, see *Louisville Daily Journal*, 28 May 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 28 May 1861.

slaves that is not rent by civil war and strife” and that “there is no crater that is about to burst forth in our State” that would force them out of neutrality.²⁸¹

Therefore, in May 1861, scholars have argued that citizens understood that a vote for the States Rights Party meant a vote for war, while voting for the Democratic Unionists had meant a vote for peace, and such a belief produced an overwhelming victory for the Democratic Union Party for the border state convention. In addition, the States Rights Party chose not to denounce the idea of neutrality because it was so widely supported and they feared being accused as the war party and losing support. Even so, this party believed the citizens would better support secession later should sectional tensions escalate.²⁸² Upon closer inspection, however, it is shown the State Rights supporters simply refused to vote in the May elections because they believed that “peace had come and gone” and saw “no point in holding a border state convention.” One party member saw that participating in an election for a border state convention and “[talk of compromise] is . . . nonsense & child play . . . for there is no earthly reason to restore the Union & Kentucky is compelled to take position with the seceded states.” In fact, over 106,000 registered voters—most of which came from counties who had voted for Breckenridge in 1860—refused to vote in the election, and most of these votes were believed to belong to the States Rights Party.²⁸³

Based on these sources, it is presumed then that prior to the events at Fort Sumter the majority of middle-class Kentuckians, and some elites, not only supported the Union

²⁸¹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 26 June 1861. Over 262 examples within local newspapers were discovered that discussed neutrality in the state, as well.

²⁸² Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 101-102.

²⁸³ Blanton Duncan to W.C.P. Breckenridge, Apr.6, 1861, Breckenridge Family Papers, LOC, quoted from Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 171; Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 111.

but also desired to stand by the South should the North attempt to move against the region. Had Kentucky succeeded in calling for a state convention in the early months of 1861 the state might have seceded. In addition, had missing voters participated in the state elections after the attack at Fort Sumter, the Democratic Unionists might not have celebrated such a massive victory and the border state convention could have been more likely to push for States' Rights platform for the Crittenden Compromise and possibly secession.²⁸⁴

Additionally, to further reveal that secessionist sentiment in Kentucky and the anxiety Democratic Unionists seemingly held over the strength of the State Rights Party might have been stronger than previously documented, both parties in the state erected their own state militias. Already, the state had created the State Guard in March 1860, a militia system that consisted of men who had “Southern loyalties” and were pro-secession. The number of militia increased to sixty-one companies in April 1861, and supposedly alarmed by the growing strength of this force led by an “officer corps . . . [with] an overwhelming majority of secessionists,” scholars have argued that Democratic Unionists created their own militia, the Home Guard, and ensured the passage a military bill that split funds for arms between both militias. Additionally, they also created a military board that excluded Governor Magoffin—an individual Unionists feared would force the state into disunion with the use of the State Guard. Moreover, Kentucky Unionists also secretly began strengthening their own Home Guard by accepting arms

²⁸⁴ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 110-117; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 120-121, 171-172.

from the North, distributing them to citizens across the state “in order to achieve their contradictory objective of keeping the state safely in the Union.”²⁸⁵

In short, scholars have argued that Kentucky was not as pro-Union as some have contended. If it were, Democratic Unionists would not have presented the idea of neutrality to the public in order to keep secession at bay. Additionally, sources prior to April 1861 and Democratic Unionists’ actions during the May elections continually showed that there might have been a stronger support for secession in the state after all by how quickly they presented neutrality and began to raise their own militia and weapons to overpower the State Guard’s strength in the state.²⁸⁶ Letters and newspapers sources also add to this argument in revealing continued support for the South and secession by middle-class, and possibly some elite, Kentuckians following Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers, while simultaneously explaining why neutrality was seen as a mistake by other citizens.

Several counties, learning of the attack on Fort Sumter, boldly reasserted their support of the South and secession. Citizens of Logan, Lyon, Scott, Fayette, and Mercer counties all exhibited “a unanimous southern feeling.” “Secession feeling is gaining rapidly,” locals declared, waving Confederate flags, supporting the arming of Kentucky and its immediate secession, and believing that “in a united South is our only hope” against the North.²⁸⁷ Additionally, Nelson, Hardin, Hickman, and Simpson county citizens echoed one another in their hatred towards Lincoln’s war policy and informed newspapers that they were gathering volunteers for the “Southern Army” and vowing

²⁸⁵ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 124- 132; Robinson, *A Union Indivisible*, 173.

²⁸⁶ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 132.

²⁸⁷ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 19 April 1861.

“resistance to the last drop.”²⁸⁸ Moreover, countless meetings were occurring throughout the state in support of secession. Harrodsburg, “a majority of the Guards being secessionists” in the town, noted a meeting of masked members of the Knights of the Golden Circle and several secessionists in the town and questioned “what sort of work can it be that makes men huddle together under ‘the blanket of the dark.’”²⁸⁹ The Knights of the Golden Circle also proclaimed that “Kentuckians will never desert the South” and pleaded with their fellow brethren to “organize and save the state for the white man and the struggling brothers in the South.”²⁹⁰ Elsewhere, an unknown writer called on men to gather at a local courthouse who were “resolved to stand by their Southern brethren to the end, if the attempt to subjugate them is not abandoned.”²⁹¹ Military companies began organizing around Louisville, also, “for the protection of the City,” and writers in the *Louisville Daily Courier* highlighted the presence of companies who were leaving the state “to fight for the cause of the South” and would do “honor to the ancient fame of Kentucky.”²⁹² Lastly, southern rights Kentuckians of Bloomsfield, Kentucky, were seen displaying a “Southern Rights flag, a true symbol of Constitutional liberty” in the town, while Paducah, Kentucky, originally believing that the secession feeling had died out locally, witnessed “young men running to their mothers, fathers, and family, saying—Farewell, I may never see you again” and that “some of the volunteers of this place will soon make a break South.”²⁹³

²⁸⁸ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 18 April 1861.

²⁸⁹ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 14 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 11 July 1861.

²⁹⁰ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 April 1861.

²⁹¹ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 April 1861.

²⁹² *Louisville Daily Courier*, 24 April 1861.

²⁹³ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 6 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 31 May 1861. See also B.W. Sharpe to John J. Pettus, 14 April 1861, Box 931, Folder 9, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; James P. Martin to Beriah Magoffin, 8 January 1861, Office of the

Yet, in regard to neutrality and believing “it would be destructive of every material interest of the Commonwealth and oppressive and ruinous to her people,” some pro-secession Kentuckians chose to nonetheless accept it “as a temporary measure, a position to be occupied until the people can act directly on the question,” hoping that Kentucky would eventually secede.²⁹⁴ The *Louisville Daily Courier* editors, denouncing the actions of Lincoln against the South as, in their view, a war against slavery, believed that the “neutrality men” had deceived the people of Kentucky and pushed them into “the embraces of the great Black Republican Party” in voting to give men and money “for the subjugation of their Southern brethren” unbeknownst to Kentuckians. The *Courier* commentators feared that unless “the eyes of every man and woman in Kentucky . . . be opened” and fight against neutrality, the state would “bear the doom of the Slaveholding States, without the honor of having struck one blow for freedom and her God-given rights.”²⁹⁵ In short, pro-secession Kentuckians believed that “armed neutrality was nothing more than armed rebellion” and only led to an “invasion either by the North or South.” They sought to defend their reasoning in stating that “if they do not admit the doctrine that a State has a right to secede,” then what right have they “to take arms and

Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-40 to MG5-41, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0005, (accessed December 8, 2019); Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, eds, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, vol. 7, 1861* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 116, 202, 278.

²⁹⁴ *Louisville Daily Journal*, 29 May 1861.

²⁹⁵ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 20 July 1861; *Louisville Daily Journal*, 28 May 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 10 July 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 16 May 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 27 June 1861.

refuse and support the Government to which they propose to owe paramount allegiance.”²⁹⁶

Therefore, it is possible that there was a disconnect between elite politicians and middle- to working-class Kentuckians between Lincoln’s election and the events at Fort Sumter, as citizens’ representatives might have been focusing more on remaining in power. It is also possible that had the supporters of the States Rights Party voted within the May elections, the state might have witnessed a different outcome for the elections and later the border state convention. Nevertheless, despite this and numerous pro-secession Kentuckians sympathizing and fighting alongside the South both before and after Fort Sumter, it cannot be denied that neutrality was an attractive option for middle-class Kentuckians who favored peace and continued relations between both sections, as both elite and middle-class Kentuckians had readily fought to for the Union prior to 1861. In the end, the majority of elite and middle-class Kentuckians came together in their choice for neutrality in order to keep slavery and maintain their economic privileges, assurances they believed were not offered through secession or fighting with the South. Whether or not the state’s fate might have looked differently had certain events or actions occurred, in the end, the state chose neutrality on May 20, 1861 for a multitude of reasons that would result in the protection of their cherished independency. Mississippi, contrarily, sought no such option, and its people were seen as more united in their decision to secede as 1861 began.

²⁹⁶ *Louisville Daily Courier*, 11 May 1861. In all, over 400 matches were found when researching secession in Kentucky between January and July 1861.

Mississippi's Response

Lincoln's election created in Mississippi what some have called "an air of semi-intoxication," as not only the legislature but counties scrambled to make preparations for the state's protection for both its citizens and institutions—an image that looked starkly different from Kentucky's response.²⁹⁷ On the 26 of November, Governor Pettus desired an extra session of the legislature to be held. There, he hoped not only to gather funds to arm the state, but also to call a state convention to decide Mississippi's future. The legislature agreed, requesting the election of delegates while simultaneously sending out envoys to other slave states to convince them to follow Mississippi's lead into disunion.²⁹⁸ Overall, it was clear that while Kentucky might have first advocated for continued compromise in the Union, elite and middle-class Mississippians readily shouted for secession in the following months, as many believed that "the Union is dead" or that "safety could no longer be found in the union."²⁹⁹

Local Mississippi newspapers and letters showed this growing need among white to secede and prepare for the state's defense following the election. Due to "the bad faith of the non-slaveholding members," the *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* editors saw that "the Union has been broken and virtually dissolved." Believing that separation and the creation of a "Southern Confederacy" was imminent, the editors also hoped that other slaveholding states would "cooperate in the resistance movement which has been

²⁹⁷ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 66; Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 192.

²⁹⁸ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 66-72.

²⁹⁹ Montgomery, *Reminisces of a Mississippian*, 36, quoted from Dubay, 66; *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, November 28, 1860, quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 66. Overall, when using the keyword "Union" to research Mississippians' thoughts on union and disunion, over 1,045 matches were found. These findings, however, revealed that Mississippians were mostly discussing their favor of disunion with the exception of the *Vicksburg Whig*, which often printed pro-union pieces within its daily and weekly issues. Additionally, using key word "citizen's meeting," over 101 matches revealed Mississippians' continued efforts to promote secession in the state, as well as militia movements.

resolved upon by Mississippi” while also stating that states like Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana were prepared to act immediately, as well.³⁰⁰ Moreover, various counties across the state began to hold their own county meetings to voice their views concerning current events.

Citizens of Yazoo, DeSoto, Jefferson, Winston, and Jackson counties immediately voiced their concern over Lincoln’s election, as well as their support for the current meeting of the legislature and ultimately secession. “To take into consideration the current dangers by which the South is threatened,” Yazoo County believed that the Republican Party might now use all their power to eliminate slavery and “their just participation in the benefits of our Government,” and that they supported “any effectual measure which looks to the security of our rights, our peace, and our safety.” In Winston County, in order to protect “Southern Rights and Southern Institutions from the encroachment of the Black Republican party who are about to overturn the principles of Equality,” middle-class citizens saw it fit that Mississippi should “sever the bonds that unite the Northern and Southern States, and throw ourselves back on our original sovereignty and independence.”³⁰¹ Viewing the North as having done little to preserve the Union and acknowledging the “humiliation of compromise and concession has come from the South,” Copiah County citizens ruled that they would no longer “submit, and beg and sue for room to live here upon the soil our fathers won.”³⁰² Claiborne County also showed wide support for the election of delegates to the state convention “in favor of prompt and separate State action, and the formation of a Southern Confederacy”

³⁰⁰ *The Daily Mississippian*, 1 December 1860.

³⁰¹ *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 7 December 1860.

³⁰² *Weekly Mississippian*, 5 December 1860.

alongside citizens of DeSoto County who believed in the “right of a State to withdraw from the Union” and become an “independent sovereign State.”³⁰³ Clearly, these Mississippians believed that they were no longer safe with Lincoln as president, as he was not only threatening slavery but the rights which allowed them to participate in government and determine their state’s future.

Besides meeting and creating resolutions asserting their views, however, white middle-class Mississippians also expressed their support for the South through the organization of military companies in response to the election. Writing to Governor Pettus, James A. Penn informed him of the creation of the “Brandon Artillery” due to the “Critical condition of political affairs of the country” and readily sent the unit’s resolutions.³⁰⁴ More specifically, J.T.W. Hairston rendered his services to the state, believing that “some decisive action upon the part of all true men of the State and of the South” should be taken for the “safety and perpetuation of the institutions of the State, and of the South.”³⁰⁵ Several citizens in Columbus, Mississippi, also joined Hairston in offering their services “in defense of Mississippi and the South,” asking Pettus to arm them quickly with the “Sabre Bayonet Rifle” so they may begin drilling and be ready for the “Minute Call.”³⁰⁶ W.G. Paxton of Vicksburg informed Pettus of the “large majority in

³⁰³ *Weekly Mississippian*, 12 December 1860. See also *Weekly Mississippian*, 12 December 1860; *Weekly Mississippian*, 7 November 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 25 December 1860; *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*, 14 December 1860; J.B. Hancock to John J. Pettus, 14 November 1860, Box 930, Folder 10, Item 15, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; G. Harrison to John J. Pettus, 18 November 1860, Box 930, Folder 10, Item 21, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Charles D. Fontaine to John J. Pettus, 12 November 1860, Box 930, Folder 10, Item 08, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁰⁴ James A. Penn to John J. Pettus, 27 December 1860, Box 931, Folder 1, Item 16, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁰⁵ J.T.W. Hairston to John J. Pettus, 12 November 1860 Box 930, Folder 10, Item 9, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁰⁶ Et al to John J. Pettus, 29 November 1860, Box 930, Folder 11, Item 11, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

favor of immediate secession” as he requested arms for the ever increasing “Warren Guards,” while James Whitfield revealed that Lowndes County was filled with “the right spirit” as it prepared to arm a company of sixty men and delegates to be sent to the state convention.³⁰⁷

Yet, while secession sentiments were readily voiced in the state, there were a few instances where middle-class citizens pleaded with the state to either remain in the Union or at least wait to secede with other southern states. Similar to the beliefs of some middle-class Kentuckians, several middle-class Mississippians believed that “secession was no remedy,” as it was seen as destructive to slavery, would “shut us out, forever, from the occupation of new territories,” increase the number of fugitive slaves, and cause the nation to “abandon our position as a mighty power among the nations.” Instead, a few citizens suggested that “amendments of the Constitution can be suggested, which will secure slave property and the peace of the South” as the current Union had always accomplished more than they could have every asked for in the past.³⁰⁸

Elsewhere, the *Vicksburg Daily Whig* writers questioned what would happen to Mississippi, Virginia, Kentucky, and other southern states should they secede—whether they would become their own nation or combine to form a new confederacy. This press

³⁰⁷ W.G. Paxton to John J. Pettus, 11 December 1860, Box 930, Folder 11, Item 25, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; James Whitfield to John J. Pettus, 17 December 1860, Box 930, Folder 12, Item 09, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. See also Arthur Clayton to John J. Pettus, 16 December 1860, Box 930, Folder 12, Item 07, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; R.O. Perrin to John J. Pettus, 21 December 1860, Box 931, Folder 1, Item 4, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; C. H. Mott to John J. Pettus, 21 December 1860, Box 931, Folder 1, Item 5, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; W. C. Falkner to John J. Pettus, 28 December 1860, Box 931, Folder 1, Item 19, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; William M. Strickland to John J. Pettus, 4 December 1860, Box 930, Folder 11, Item 17, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁰⁸ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 19 December 1860; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 8 December 1860; *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 19 December 1860.

also stated that “there should be no separate state secession,” but instead a conference of all aggrieved states should agree to send “constitutional obligations to the Northern people,—or upon its final rejection will go out of the Confederacy as a unit.”³⁰⁹ Madison County citizens agreed, believing there was no reason for Mississippi to secede and that her people should “plan wisely and act deliberately in concert with all the slave states” and continue to “resist, by all Constitutional modes, any and every aggression upon the rights of the South” while demand[ing] “equality in the Union, or independence out of it.”³¹⁰ Citizens in Tippah, Lafayette, Hinds, Warren, and Issaquena counties echoed these beliefs, voting for cooperationist delegates to the state convention to stop immediate secession, while other middle-class Mississippians viewed the gathering of all slave states the more favorable option, as by seceding alone, a state would “by hasty, rash, immature counsels, divide the slave states and leave a portion of them to the mercy of the Black Republicans” while also weakening slavery simultaneously.³¹¹

In short, while there were a few middle-class, and some upper-class citizens who argued against the idea of immediate secession, it must also be noted that these citizens were not arguing against secession itself. Instead, they wanted the state to act alongside its fellow slave states, and if all avenues of compromise were exhausted, then they could secede. In doing so, they believed slavery and the state would be kept from further harm. Unfortunately, while some counties might have hoped that their cooperationist delegates would be successful at the January secession convention, the results nevertheless dashed

³⁰⁹ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 8 December 1860.

³¹⁰ *Weekly Vicksburg Whig*, 19 December 1860.

³¹¹ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 12 December 1860; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 19 December 1860; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 8 December 1860; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, 15 December 1860. For more information concerning the Unionist sentiment in Mississippi, see Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 192-194; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 153.

their hopes.³¹² While the convention might have encountered issues of its own at the State Capitol, delegates eventually agreed, altered, and signed the Ordinance of Secession, consisting of four sections which emphasized that Mississippi's secession was caused by the threat to slavery, on January 15, 1861.³¹³

While politicians struggled to work out the fine details of Mississippi's new independence, white, middle-class Mississippians flooded newspapers on their thoughts and feelings before and after secession was finalized. Some viewed Mississippi as having "declared, by a vote approaching unanimity, that she will not continue to be a member of the Union," and that "the voice of our people is unmistakable" and "will lend all their energies to perfecting and making effectual, the policy that may be determined upon by the Convention." In addition, these Mississippians hoped that cooperationists of the Convention would "make its action unanimous" by voting also for secession and following the "popular will" of the people.³¹⁴ In Oxford, local citizens witnessed "over the secession of Mississippi," that a band "could not play 'Dixie' often enough for enthusiastic crowd," which they considered to be "the new song of the Confederacy."³¹⁵

The students of the University of Mississippi might have been present during such

³¹² Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 84-87; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 153; Timothy Smith, *The Mississippi Secession Convention: Delegates and Deliberations in Politics and War, 1861-1865* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2014,) 31-44. Some historians have described the convention as "mostly in the hands of commoners," but in all it consisted of mostly planters, lawyers, farmers, and politicians who held an average of thirty-four slaves, with fifteen percent owning no slaves. Additionally, while planters and lawyers might have dominated the assembly, delegates from six counties represented the cooperationist ticket for the largest slaveholding counties in the state, indicating how unsupportive some of the richest slaveowners were of secession.

³¹³ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 87; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 153. Timothy Smith's, *The Mississippi Secession Convention*, goes into Mississippi secession convention goes into immense detail on what was occurring among the delegates and what difficulties they encountered. These included cooperationists' attempts to stall secession as long as possible, countless amendments that failed, questions on how to alter the state's constitution, how the state would handle being independent, and the fear that the convention was becoming an oligarchy that no longer heeded the peoples' wishes.

³¹⁴ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 2 January 1861.

³¹⁵ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 23 January 1861.

festivities, but nonetheless celebrated Mississippi's secession by marching through the streets playing various instruments, while a Kosciusko secessionist, "stock lock and barrel," revealed the continued fervor to organize local companies in the state when he mentioned the presence of a local militia ready to march to South Carolina "in pursuit of glory on the field of honor."³¹⁶ Others declared that due to the actions of the North in what they viewed as preventing slavery's extension and ultimately the South's rights, "the idea of reconstruction" of the Union "is preposterous. To entertain it, even, partakes of the character of moral treason."³¹⁷

While the majority of its middle-class citizens were pleased with the state's independence and as Jefferson Davis bid farewell the Senate to fulfill his duty as President to the new Confederacy, Mississippi did not experience immediate peace and prosperity.³¹⁸ In addition to rumors of slave insurrections and "vigilance committees" to keep slave revolts in check, the state also dealt with an influx of military companies that had no war to fight.³¹⁹ The *Daily Mississippian* commentators reported a rumor in December 1860 that upon secession, the southern states, including Mississippi, "would be whipped into submission—aye, whipped and cowed like slaves by . . . a hireling army led

³¹⁶ Clifford Dowdey, *The Land They Fought For: The Story of the South as the Confederacy, 1832-1865* (New York, 1955), 82, quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 88; William H. McClanahan to Joseph Stapp, January 14, 1861, in Joseph D. Stapp Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C., quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 88.

³¹⁷ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 6 February 1861. See also, *Eastern Clarion*, 15 March 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 20 February 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 20 March 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 27 February 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 16 January 1861.

³¹⁸ Crist and Dix, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 18-23. Jefferson Davis, a Mississippi senator who participated in previous efforts to find compromise between the sections, addressed the Senate on January 21, 1861, approving of Mississippi's act of secession as justifiable, right, and an effort to protect her slave institutions before surrendering his duties and later accepting the presidency in the Confederate States of America.

³¹⁹ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 158-159; Mitchell details an instance of a slave insurrection in Adams, Jefferson, and Natchez, Mississippi, where half a dozen black slaves and whites were hanged in May 1861, and even more in September, over a possible plot to revolt against local planters.

on and directed by abolitionists.”³²⁰ In Illinois, a resident wrote to Governor Pettus on the organization of the “Mississippi Society” consisting of a group of men who intended to infiltrate the state as overseers to cause a slave insurrection similar to John Brown’s raid.³²¹ Elsewhere W. H. McCardle of Vicksburg warned the Mississippi governor that “a raid similar to that of Harper’s Ferry” might occur in Issaquena County and asked for suitable arms for his citizens to deal with the matter quickly.³²² Moreover, the *Oxford Intelligencer* seemed convinced that “Lincoln has his agents in every Southern locality.” Although their reasons for doing so were not mentioned, the press nonetheless advised that “strangers . . . should be closely watched, and, if necessary, prevented from leaving.”³²³

While acknowledging these warnings, Governor Pettus in the early months of 1861 made military preparations in the form of troops sent to “federal installations at Florida”, the creation of a state armory, by sending military companies to Mobile, Alabama, and the acquirement of weapons from surrounding states. It was said that “war fever” had captured the minds of citizens by March, as well, as seen by their quick formation of over eighty companies in the state when only four to seven companies were needed for service at the time. In addition, several counties failed to plant an appropriate amount of crops, causing starvation and bankruptcy to which the state leaders “responded in a wholly inadequate manner” by requesting these areas issue bonds to the treasury as a

³²⁰ *Daily Mississippian*, 1 December 1860.

³²¹ Anonymous to Pettus, 22 February 1861, C.B. New to Pettus, January 14, 1861, in Governor’s Correspondence, Vol. LI, quoted from Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 92.

³²² W.H. McCardle to John J. Pettus, 19 December 1860, Box 930, Folder 12, Item 14, State Government Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³²³ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 29 May 1861.

solution.³²⁴ Governor Pettus himself was left with inappropriate legislation to handle these issues and had little assistance from the Military Board, created to keep him from overextending his military ambitions, or from the Confederate government, who often lost messages or took too long to respond.³²⁵ Nevertheless, the governor continued to request firearms for the growing number of companies in the state eager to fight despite having inadequate funds to support the state's hospitals, fortifications, and lighthouses.³²⁶ Yet, while having to work through these trying issues, Mississippi found itself in the new Confederacy on March 29, 1861, whereas most of its elite and middle-class citizens continued to show that war had already begun with a northern enemy whose intentions against slavery and southern rights, they believed, were clear.

Before the battle at Fort Sumter, an unknown Mississippi county believed that “the political weathercock . . . is now unmistakably pointing in the direction of war.” Citizens had seen “many vessels, laden with troops and munitions of war, have left Northern ports under sealed orders,” yet, “war has no terrors” for citizens would not “shrink from the contest, when their rights shall be invaded by the foe.” In the county “five hundred more will promptly go forward to meet the enemy” should they be called.³²⁷ Unbelieving at first, one unknown Mississippian stated that “war has actually commenced” and “the problem of peace and war is now solved” after Fort Sumter's capture. While Mississippi and the other Confederate States might have preferred peace, this writer assumed, “if the Lincolnites are not to be satisfied without testing their mettle on the battle field, the Confederates will be ready” “to repel any attempt to subjugate

³²⁴ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 96, 99-100.

³²⁵ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 92-102.

³²⁶ Dubay, *John Jones Pettus*, 101-102.

³²⁷ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 10 April 1861.

them.”³²⁸ This writer assumed that the North had declared “to preserve the connection regardless of your rights and interests—we will send our fleets and armies to keep you in the Union, and subjugate you if necessary,” but that the southern people would nevertheless unite and “endure with composure and fortitude the evils and sufferings the war may entail, in order to vindicate their rights and maintain their honor.”³²⁹ Elsewhere, the *Eastern Clarion* wrote that “the real cause of the present day fury of the North, is the impending ruin of their commerce and manufactures” due to the loss of the South, and fearing “the downfall of the greatness and glory,” “it seeks to hold [the South] by force” instead.”³³⁰ Others simply wished that Lincoln and those in Washington face the fact of secession and accept it. If not, in calling for seventy-five thousand volunteers, “Mr. Lincoln will meet difficulties in every step in his attempt to coerce the South and reconstruct the old Union by force,” for he would find no supporters in the South, as those who had once resisted secession now stood “zealous and determined to see it out to the bitter end” alongside the rest of Mississippi and the South.³³¹

Yet while elite and yeomen across the state were organizing and accepting that war had come, northern presses—similar to John Brown’s Raid—tried to convince the South that few northerners approved of Lincoln’s current war policy. Reporting from Connecticut, one northern press insisted that “public opinion in the North seemed to be gradually settling down in favor of the recognition of the new Confederacy.” To other northern citizens, “the thought of bloody and protracted civil war . . . was abhorrent to all

³²⁸ *Daily Evening Citizen*, 15 April 1861.

³²⁹ *Eastern Clarion*, 12 April 1861.

³³⁰ *Eastern Clarion*, 31 May 1861.

³³¹ *Eastern Clarion*, 19 April 1861. See also *Eastern Clarion*, 10 May 1861; *Vicksburg Weekly Citizen*, 22 April 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 10 April 1861. Findings for Fort Sumter in Mississippi newspapers produced over 108 matches on the event, as well as discussions on Mississippians’ expectations of war between the North and the South.

and its issues may be as perilous to the victor as the vanquished.”³³² Furthermore, by forcing the South back into the Union, some northerners believed that it would involve “great expenditure of treasure and life” and would result only in “changing the present alienation to deadly hostility and incurable hate.” The democrats of Newark, New Jersey, also declared that they were “in favor of the speediest possible termination of the war,” while a citizen in Maine, whose “livelihood is so intimately associated with ship building and the cotton trade,” feared what the consequences of war would be if England were to establish trade relations with the South and eastern vessels . . . thrown out of employment.”³³³ In sum, several northern presses believed that “the North has been deceived . . . and misled in every particular relating to the force, the ability and the courage of the foe.” Viewing the South as far more capable of participating in a war, both militarily, financially, and economically, than northerners were seemingly led to believe by “Northern Republican presses,” they insisted that “there is little hope of an end of the war by a decisive battle or a short campaign.” The writers of the *Concord Standard* of New Hampshire believed that the fault lay solely on select members of the Republican Party, such as William H. Seward, who if the war lasted more than three years, “will be obliged to flee their country or receive a traitor’s fate.”³³⁴

Sources do not clearly show middle-class Mississippians responding to these northern presses, but their presence alone might indicate that some Mississippi presses were attempting to reassure the public that reconciliation with the North remained.

³³² *Vicksburg Whig*, 8 May 1861; *Vicksburg Weekly Citizen*, 22 July 1861.

³³³ *Vicksburg Weekly Citizen*, 3 June 1861; *Eastern Clarion*, 7 June 1861.

³³⁴ *Vicksburg Weekly Citizen*, 22 July 1861. For more information about the North’s response to secession, see Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008; Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).

Regardless, most middle-class Mississippians seemed unperturbed by these instances and were more preoccupied with preparing themselves for their defense as a part of a new Confederacy. Throughout the state, citizens were seen organizing companies and awaiting orders. For example, Oxford, Mississippi, witnessed “the scene of a regular military encampment, from the numerous companies of volunteers who have arrived here from Alabama and North Mississippi, on their way to Fort Morgan and Pensacola,” as if answering the call of Governor Pettus for eight thousand troops “to resist the coercive measures of the Washington Administration.”³³⁵ Several Mississippi counties also began to raise, arm, and send off companies of men to battle. Citizens of Jasper County desired to call a meeting “for the purpose of raising a military company for the service of the Confederacy,” and lamented that the county had not already begun raising such a military unit.³³⁶ Oak Bowery, Mississippi also called for a meeting to raise “a company of ‘Home Guards,’” whereas the *Daily Evening Citizen* of Vicksburg issued several ads in its paper calling for more men to enlist in local companies and promising the appropriate supplies and equipment if they did.³³⁷ Franklin County also boasted that the “war spirit so prevalent throughout the entire regions of the South” had manifested in the country, as well. As a result, “an array of volunteers,” such as the “Franklin Guards” and the “Beauregards,” had gathered and proved that the county was not as submissive as many men had suspected.³³⁸

Local presses additionally revealed that some of these companies were already on the move in and outside the state. Vicksburg pointed to the arrival of the “Claiborne

³³⁵ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 3 April 1861; *Natchez Daily Courier*, 20 April 1861.

³³⁶ *Brandon Republican*, quoted from the *Natchez Daily Courier*, 1 May 1861.

³³⁷ *Eastern Clarion*, 10 May 1861; *Daily Evening Citizen*, 20 May 1861.

³³⁸ *Natchez Daily Courier*, 12 July 1861.

Guards” from a steamer bound for Corinth and two additional Mississippi regiments “ordered into camp.”³³⁹ The “Noxubee Rifles” of Paulding, Mississippi, upon arriving in Tennessee, wrote to the *Eastern Clarion* to inform citizens of the strong secessionist sentiment in the state, the fervor of local women who “seemed to exceed the men in zeal for the good cause,” and the soldiers’ encounters with Union men.³⁴⁰ Both Natchez and Vicksburg citizens drew attention to the departure of the “Volunteer Southrons” and the “Adams Troop,” “who go forth to battle for our rights, our liberties, and our honor” and were leaving behind “the luxuries and appliances of wealth, the pleasant companionship of friends...for the rough fare of a soldier, the constant fatigue of camp, and the inevitable dangers of the battle field.”³⁴¹ Lastly, Canton, Mississippi, citizens welcomed the “Madison Guards” in July 1861, whose captain called “upon the people to contribute their money for the benefit of this company” before leaving for Virginia.³⁴²

Help, in fact, was what some elite and middle-class Mississippians were willing to offer to assist soldiers and men who had refused to enlist themselves. A wealthy citizen of Warren County sought to donate five thousand dollars “to uniform and equip our volunteer companies,” and vowed that “his whole estates...will be expended to maintain Southern rights, honor and independence.”³⁴³ The ladies of Oxford, all who were able to “ply a needle or ‘speak out in a meeting,’” were asked to meet at Cumberland Church “for the purpose of organizing a society to assist the army of the Confederacy.” Knowing that there were several ladies who had been “sewing for the troops,” Oxford insisted that

³³⁹ *Vicksburg Whig*, 8 May 1861.

³⁴⁰ *Eastern Clarion*, 24 May 1861.

³⁴¹ *Daily Evening Citizen*, 28 May 1861; *Natchez Daily Courier*, 12 June 1861.

³⁴² *American Citizen*, 20 July 1861; See also *Natchez Daily Courier*, 26 April 1861; *Oxford Intelligencer*, 3 April 1861; *Weekly Panola Star*, 6 June 1861; *Vicksburg Whig*, 1 May 1861.

³⁴³ *Daily Evening Citizen*, 3 May 1861.

this organization would be “more convenient and beneficial.”³⁴⁴ Ladies in Mount Albon and Bovina, however, found travel to these meetings in Vicksburg tedious and began preparations for creating their own organization that would serve as “an auxiliary to the Vicksburg Association.” Yet, when the ladies and various men of the state were not contributing to the war effort through appropriate funds and organizations, others ladies of South Mississippi chose to express their disdain towards the young men who refused to participate in the war “by sending hoopskirts, nightcaps, &c” and the *Weekly Panola Star* suggested they send some north, as well, for the “several who need them, as they have nothing else to do but wear them.”³⁴⁵

Therefore, it is seen that following the election of Abraham Lincoln, most white, middle and upper-class Mississippians seemed united in the effort to see their state secede, as they saw it as the only method of maintaining their power over important practices that benefited them socially and financially. In viewing Lincoln’s election as both unacceptable and threatening, White Mississippians immediately sought ways to arm the state, and while there were a few middle-class Mississippians who desired that the state wait, delegates of the secession convention accepted secession as the state’s best option in keeping slavery, their rights, and in all, their power. Afterwards, middle-class citizens’ activities consisted mostly of organizing and drilling companies, while a few had the pleasure of being sent to places like Mobile, Alabama, Pensacola, Florida, or other states north of Mississippi. While these activities were not without its frustrations, they nevertheless accepted that war would and had come, especially after the attack on

³⁴⁴ *Oxford Intelligencer*, 15 May 1861.

³⁴⁵ *Vicksburg Weekly Citizen*, 24 June 1861; *Weekly Panola Star*, 6 June 1861; Mitchell, *A New History of Kentucky*, 155-157; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 12-29.

Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops. Ultimately, middle-class Mississippians' wide support of secession after 1860 was not a thoughtless decision based solely on fear or economic gain. Instead, Mississippi's decision to abandon compromise efforts and secede was widely based on their desire to protect their power over to their slaves, honor, and their futures as white Mississippians.

The Meaning Behind “Kentuckian” and “Mississippian”

As already examined, middle-class Kentuckians and Mississippians had different, and various, reactions to the election of Abraham Lincoln and later the attack of Fort Sumter in April 1861. Yet, why did two seemingly similar states, who acted in accordance with one another during John Brown's Raid and the campaign season of 1860, choose two very different paths in 1861? Why would middle-class Mississippians, who in part held unionist sentiments in 1859 and 1860, decide to leave the Union? Why did middle-class Kentuckians, so devoted it seemed to stand by their allies in the South, decide for neutrality? One might immediately assume from the evidence seen in previous chapters that Kentucky and Mississippi would venture into secession together due to their anxieties over the Republican Party's doctrines, which they saw as threatening valuable practices that gave them so many social and economic privileges. Yet, the outcome revealed different results.

The reason behind middle-class Kentuckians' unique decision in 1861 lay behind an identity that was grounded in the idea of independency, formed during the state's establishment and which relied upon select practices in order to survive, such as slavery and economic success. In comparison to states like Mississippi, Kentucky's population only constituted nineteen percent of slaves, while only twenty-eight percent of the white

population owned slaves. In addition, Kentucky's economy was not solely dependent on slavery to survive. Because of the state's climate, crops like corn, tobacco, hemp, and other food products were more successful and did not require large groups of slaves to cultivate and harvest. Raising livestock, another staple activity in the state, also did not require many slaves. In addition to the climate, Kentucky farmers also felt the need to diversify their crops, unlike southern planters, in order to cater to the surrounding market. Thus, Kentucky often found itself with an overabundance of slaves that were either rented to nonslaveowners or sold "down river" to the Deep South.³⁴⁶ Therefore, elite and middle-class Kentuckians' defense of slavery during the events prior to and during the secession crisis was tied exclusively to racial and social control.

Historians have argued that Kentucky as a whole in the 1860s did not see slavery as a positive good, nor believed it was completely required for the state's economy. Furthermore, scholars state that some of its citizens believed that African Americans contained the same "natural rights" as whites, but slavery was nonetheless needed in order to "ensure the safety and well-being of both races." Such was the case because white Kentuckians had determined that "African Americans had become institutionalized by slavery," and that "generational slavery" made them "lazy, hostile, corrupt, and . . . inferior to white people," and such hostility inbred a natural hatred towards whites." Freedom to slaves also constituted the belief that economic competition between the two races would strengthen and that an "amalgamation" between African American males

³⁴⁶ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 52-53, 54-57; Leasing of slaves also gave African Americans the ability to negotiate the terms of their employment and who they worked for. In addition, most slaves also were able to learn new skills based on this type of employment, but this mobility was still limited due to slave codes and ordinances within Kentucky, see Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 56-57.

and white women might occur, as well.³⁴⁷ Lastly, as noted in previous chapters, white Kentuckians were granted social and political influence due to their skin color, which could be threatened should slavery not exist.³⁴⁸ Thus, in the eyes of most upper and middle-class Kentuckians writing between 1859 and 1861 in response to Brown's raid and the presidential election, slavery needed to be protected in order to sustain peace and control, but other historians have argued that these theories were tied to the single belief among Kentuckians that African Americans were not equal to whites.³⁴⁹ Taken together then, disdaining the thought of sharing their social, economic, and political rights with slaves and fearing that a freed black population would lead to insurrections, middle-class and elite Kentuckians sought to keep slavery intact by any means possible in order to maintain "social and racial control."³⁵⁰

Yet slavery and its protection alone did not solely influence Kentucky's decision in 1861. Kentucky at this time held an economy that depended on and was relied upon by both sections of the nation. Through rivers and railroads, planters and yeomen in the state could easily make a profit off of farming and slavery, selling products southward, or by investing in the ever growing manufacturing industry that had its roots in the North. This allowed not only for the elites to continue growing in wealth, but also for middle and working-class Kentuckians to obtain an honest living without slaves and possibly increase their own wealth.³⁵¹ Moreover, as the secession crisis began and Kentucky factions debated over secession, the Union, and the effect of each on the state's economy,

³⁴⁷ Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 28-30.

³⁴⁸ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 123,-124, 130-134, 137-142.

³⁴⁹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 45-47.

³⁵⁰ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 50.

³⁵¹ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 53; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 21-22.

Kentucky Unionists argued that the North was a more viable customer due to its large population and whose high tariffs would be unaffordable should Kentucky side with the South. Additionally, a seceded South still needed to continue trade with Kentucky, as the Bluegrass State provided the majority of its food supplies. Secessionists, on the other hand, believed that in siding with the South Kentucky's trade would increase in profitability, as they would no longer be competing with Midwestern states in the trade of food or the North in textile production. Instead, Kentucky would be the leader in providing the South with supplies and manufactured goods.³⁵²

In the end, studies have shown that Kentucky's decision stood with which section could protect slavery *and* their diversified economy the most, unlike the Deep South where protecting slavery *was* protecting their economy.³⁵³ Already in 1861, and as more states in the Upper South seceded, Kentucky saw its economy greatly affected. Sales in slaves dropped and one Kentucky woman even wrote of starvation, lack of food for stock, and the inability of merchants to collect and supply food.³⁵⁴ Yet, coming to a decision in the midst of a torn nation, sources have revealed that middle-class Kentuckians themselves were split, as they saw both the Unionist and secessionist parties with convincing arguments on whether to side with the North or the South, but each decision would also result in harmful effects on slavery, Kentucky's economy, and their people.³⁵⁵ Additionally, choosing one side over the other still likely led to war and destruction of Kentucky property. By this point then, a growing number of white, elite and middle-class

³⁵² Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 54-55.

³⁵³ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 50, 53; Finck's analysis stated that because choosing either side would cause economic instability in some form or fashion, many manufacturers would chose neutrality.

³⁵⁴ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 52; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 3 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 15 June 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, 20 June 1861.

³⁵⁵ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 52-56;

Kentuckians viewed neutrality as best serving the interests of the state and reducing the possibility of harming slavery, the economy, and other practices which contributed to their day to day lives. One historian noted that Kentuckians were far from scared during this crisis, but “acted cautiously” and believed that the best choice was no choice at all. In a neutral position, while simultaneously seeking peace and compromise, middle-class Kentuckians reasoned that slavery would remain intact, trade on each side would continue, and war would remain a hollow threat. Lastly, citizens would remain in the United States, holding onto the Union and standing alongside it as American patriots, as if following in the footsteps of their predecessor, Henry Clay.³⁵⁶

In all, it was not just their need to protect themselves, slavery, and their economy that influenced middle-class Kentuckians’ decision in 1861. It was also the idea they hoped to protect by securing these practices. By viewing themselves as solely “Kentuckian,” and defending the perceived privileges mentioned above, middle-class and elite Kentuckians were also guarding the founding idea they cherished above all else: independency. While this study has shown middle-class Kentuckians favoring southern rights, slavery, and the Union from 1859 to 1861, sources have also shown that their allegiances lied first and foremost with Kentucky itself. In comparison to Mississippi, where citizens consistently addressed themselves as bound to other southern states, by 1861, middle-class Kentuckians, as well as elites, discussed the defense of their own state from invaders more in their communications with the governor and the public rather than the Confederacy or the Union, specifically after neutrality was introduced. They sought to

³⁵⁶ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 56; Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 186-189; Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 93-103; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 221-223.

protect their own self-interests, rather than take sides and initiate war that might lead to the state's ruin.

Such is the case because this identity of “Kentuckian,”—an identity formed through settlement within the Ohio River Valley—carried with it the strong desire for independency and the privileges that were needed to obtain it. As discussed earlier, while that independency might have been threatened by Virginia gentry, who forced most settlers into tenancy in the 1700s, middle- and working-class Kentuckians regained power over their lives through the superiority of their white skin.³⁵⁷ Racial and social control for the protection of the white population and the immobility of black slaves aided white middle- and working-class Kentuckians in gaining racial, political, and economic superiority, along with the emergence of industrialization, active markets, and the position of the state between both sections of the nations. These factors alone produced an environment in Kentucky where white citizens could achieve the independency early settlers had longed for—a value that depended on a person's skin color, the enslavement of blacks, and active trade throughout the nation. Neutrality, then, was an isolated decision made by middle-class and elite Kentuckians to protect this independency and its attributes, as sources point to many citizens arguing that secession would only lead to slavery's end, violence, the decimation of Kentucky's vibrant economy, and possibly the reversion of Kentuckians back to the state of dependency they had once held under the Virginia gentry. While most Kentucky citizens held no ill will towards the South, nor condoned the North's actions, they believed that through neutrality not only might war be avoided and the state's loyalty to the nation it had fought to create maintained, but such a

³⁵⁷ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 8, 122-123.

decision also protected their independency and the benefits white Kentuckians enjoyed.

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Secession, however, was to middle-class Mississippians an opportunity to defend their understanding of power, which from settlement included their right to slaves, the right to govern their own states, and control over their wealth and futures. As previously noted, Mississippi's settlement created close-knit communities that valued personal relationships over political parties. Mississippians felt that their interests were best represented by men they knew personally and who best protected what they valued, also known as antipartyism. Additionally, a Mississippian's identity was dependent on one's reputation that was shaped by how masculine, honorable, and trustworthy an individual was in the community. Any remark or action that insulted a man's reputation or community, or questioned his honor and masculinity, was often met with violence. For example, when "free soil" ideology and the Republican Party "questioned the moral character of individual southerners" and "their social system," that is, their use of slavery, southern men, and Mississippians as a whole, felt their honor as good, Christian individuals threatened.³⁵⁹

Furthermore, when the Republican Party accused the South's institutions as "a relic of barbarism" and supposedly "no longer respected [Mississippians] as equal Americans, white men, and Christians" because of slavery, Mississippians sought "satisfaction" through violent action.³⁶⁰ Simply put, white Mississippians, especially the middle and upper-classes, seemed to believe that Free Soil supporters, abolitionists, and

³⁵⁸ Sachs, *Home Rule*, 123-124, 130-134, 137-142; Matthews, *More American Than Southern*, 21-22.

³⁵⁹ Olsen, 19-26, 27-37, 48-49.

³⁶⁰ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 179.

the North in general, did not see them as moral Christians who deserved equality as American patriots who helped shape the nation. To them, “Republican propaganda labeled . . . their way of life as inferior, morally degenerate, and unworthy of national experience,” and sought to remove the ability to move slavery westward into new territories. Seeing no wrong in slavery’s practice—believing that Christianity defended it—viewing themselves as individuals whose ancestors had fought to establish the nation in the past, and hoping to reassert themselves as patriotic Christians, white Mississippians, specifically men, turned to violence to reclaim their honor and reputations. After all, it was rumored that “more men died violently in Mississippi than in all six New England states” simply because they took political rhetoric personally, valued their reputations, and were quick to prove themselves in ways they saw as manly, courageous, and worthy of the public’s respect. Ultimately, then, Mississippians “called for an open, aggressive, and appropriately manly response” to these accusations, and they chose secession as that action.³⁶¹

Yet, leading the state into disunion was not simply a response by male, white, Mississippians to reassert power over their reputations. It was also a way to protect their right to a labor institution that had brought great wealth to the state. Mississippi itself contained the majority of slaveholding households in the South, and “Free Soil Republicanism” threatened that wealth, might increase competition between blacks and middle- to working-class Mississippians, and also eliminate the possibility of increasing one’s wealth and social status over time, similar to the belief of white Kentuckians. To eliminate slavery meant an end to prosperity and also a chance to expand into territories

³⁶¹ Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 170-179, 182-185.

with soil that has not been worn out by cotton. In addition, the freeing of slaves created a fear in the minds of upper- and middle-class Mississippians of racial warfare—an event they had been prevented through violence and brutality by a minority surrounded by a larger, slave majority.³⁶² Moreover, blocking slavery’s extension also meant the end to “local control,” yet they also viewed its loss of the South’s ability to make their own decisions and govern their futures—that is, a loss of southern rights. Therefore, the South, and Mississippi included, believed that they would have no power in national decisions, or the financial and social futures of their states, if a Republican president was in office, as he would see to the destruction of the rights that allowed them to accomplish these tasks. More specifically, white most elite and middle-class Mississippians between 1859 and 1861 believed that preventing the movements or eliminating slavery, a loss of local control over a state’s destiny, and the questioning of the South’s honor and “American heritage” was a direct attack to the power they held over their lives and which threatened to degrade them to mere slaves themselves under the control of the North.³⁶³ Therefore, in an attempt to save this power over their wealth, liberty, and honor as men and Americans, elite politicians and middle-class Mississippians chose secession, whereas in the eyes of some middle-class Kentuckians, secession was no clear solution and even threatened what they held dear.

Secession also brought with it the possibility of not only regaining power, but also untold prosperity. Some historians have contended that Mississippi was planning and waiting for the opportunity to expand the region southward decades earlier, as they

³⁶² Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, 172, 179-180; Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 154.

³⁶³ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 219-220, 255-258.

believed that there might not be any hope to move slavery into the West. By separating from the Union, elite citizens believed they could initiate plans to expand into places like Cuba, South America, and the Caribbean, while eliminating excessive taxing and reopening the slave trade. Ultimately, their hope was to build a confederacy that would “rival Rome in its palmy days, ” for the “enormous wealth [Mississippi] is now pouring into the lap of the North, would at once be withdrawn and become tributary to Southern prosperity and Southern power.”³⁶⁴ While these ideas had been defeated between 1837 and 1859, scholars argue that by 1860, Mississippians were convinced that their success was hindered while in the Union and believed that the state would be better off economically outside of the Union.³⁶⁵

Both elite and middle-class Mississippians’ support of secession was highly influenced by their value on power and its dependence on honor and slavery as an institution that not only brought prosperity to the state, but also provided great wealth to any citizen who aspired to it. Viewing the Republican Party as hostile to the state’s hopes of expanding westward, these groups believed themselves to be hindered economically and threatened by the prospect of seeing slavery come to an end and becoming slaves themselves to the North. Additionally, white Mississippians took the ideals of abolitionists and the doctrines of Republicans as insulting to southerners’ honor—an insult that needed to be reprimanded through violence in order to show the North that Mississippians were moral, Christian Americans worthy of a voice in the nation and their

³⁶⁴ *Vicksburg Weekly Sun*, 29 October 1860, quoted from P.L. Rainwater, “Economic Benefits of Secession: Opinions in Mississippi in the 1850s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 1, no 4 (November 1935), 459-464.

³⁶⁵ Rainwater, “Economic Benefits of Secession,” 464-469; Rainwater also demonstrates the amount of opposition within the state to the reopening of the slave trade, as well as an examination into the significance of railroads and taxing.

state's future. Therefore, white Mississippians of both classes viewed secession as a violent act to maintain their power over their honor, their slaves, their wealth, and their white privileges.

Ultimately, between John Brown's raid and the secession crisis of 1860 and 1861, Kentucky and Mississippi showed vast similarities. Both cherished slavery as an institution that not only made up the majority of each state's wealth, but also provided social privileges to whites. These states also valued southern rights—the ability of southern states to have a say in decisions that directly affected their states and to hold slaves—and believed that the Republican Party, and later Lincoln's policies, were a threat to the South. Yet, even though these states valued their slaves, their rights, and their wealth, Kentucky and Mississippi chose different paths when it came to secession in 1861. Instead of following other southern states into disunion, Kentucky continued to hold onto hope that America's democratic system would prevail in silencing the sectional tensions racking the nation, even as the Deep South began to separate itself from the Union one state at a time. Also, Kentucky, in valuing slavery, believed that the Lincoln administration would not have the ability to eradicate the practice, while also trusting that the Union's current laws concerning slavery protected it the most. While it has been shown that middle-class citizens might have led the state into secession had a convention soon after Lincoln's election, or even after Fort Sumter, this group nonetheless saw how detrimental secession and war might be, rendering the state a battlefield while its slaves escaped in increased numbers with no reassurance that they would be returned. Therefore, in disapproving of the North's actions towards the South, while also dissuaded by the threats secession might ensue, the majority of middle-class Kentuckians chose the

middle ground—neutrality, in order to protect their independency which depended on slavery, the economy, and white privileges.

As for elite and middle-class Mississippians, what they saw as continued northern aggression, as well as a Republican victory, seemed to be a personal attack to their power and the practices they depended on to improve the economy, their wealth, and their social statuses. Holding onto the belief that insults to one's honor and reputation should be met with violent action, middle-class Mississippians chose secession to reassert themselves as American patriots and as men. In addition, Mississippians, mainly the elite, also saw secession as an opportunity to expand the South and slavery into the Caribbean and South America, increasing the state's wealth and keeping themselves from becoming slaves also. In sum, secession was seen by elite and middle-class Mississippians as the only way to sustain and reassert their power over slavery, their honor, their wealth, and their rights, while also freeing themselves from a Union that they believed was stifling further economic prosperity, slavery's expansion, and their liberty.

Despite the events that followed July 1861, which are beyond this particular study, both states eventually found themselves in the middle of a war that possibly fulfilled their worst fears. Both states witnessed devastation to their populations, crops, livestock, churches, schools, and ultimately to slavery itself. Moreover, while Kentucky experienced class conflict prior to neutrality, Mississippi witnessed this same conflict, yet during the war and in the form of conscription laws and desertions made by its once enthusiastic, loyal soldiers. In the end, however, both states, regardless of the outcomes they faced, shared yet another similarity by the fall of 1861 by finding themselves

involved in a war that altered not just their own, respective states, but the nation as a whole.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Kentucky ended its neutral position on September 11, 1861 after forces from both sections invaded the state. Believing that the South had been the first to break neutrality, Kentucky sided with the Union, but an influx in enlistments revealed a continued division among Kentuckians as over 90,000 troops fought for the Union and 30,000-40,000 joined Confederate units. Even more demonstrative of these divisions were the unsatisfied secessionists who chose to create their own provisional legislature in Bowling Green, Kentucky, which was eventually accepted into the Confederacy and fulfilled the long awaited vision of some middle-class Kentuckians who longed to defend southern rights and fight for the Confederate States. Yet, with a total of seventy-one percent of the population of the state choosing not to participate in the war, it can be argued that both elite and middle-class Kentuckians, ingrained with the belief in the superiority of whiteness, the economic independency achieved through hard work, and a devotion to the state itself, perhaps still believed in neutrality even as the state sided with the Union.³⁶⁶

On the other hand, Mississippi, having raised 170 companies by July 1861, defended their beliefs at a collection of battles in cities like Corinth, Jackson, and Vicksburg. Yet, as the Confederate Army suffered a series of defeats, the once great enthusiasm that captivated the population evolved into a determination to simply survive. While Kentucky might have witnessed class conflict prior to neutrality, Mississippi saw its social classes divide during the war, with yeomen losing faith in elite leaders who

³⁶⁶ Finck, *Divided Loyalties*, 186-187, 194-195.

forced the poor to fight through threats and later conscription laws.³⁶⁷ As a result, and having too long been separated from their families, Mississippi soldiers resorted to desertion to return home and provide for their kinfolks. Mississippi's economy also became "shattered beyond repair" with a debt that grew to nine millions dollars, the destruction of the state's rich agriculture, the growth of political polarization, and the emancipation of slaves. Nevertheless, despite such events, scholars have argued that Mississippians retained an air of "passionate rebellion," specifically towards emancipation, and refused to accept the freedom of slaves and the loss of their own racial superiority in ways that affected society well into the twentieth century.³⁶⁸

While the Civil War might have witnessed these two, similar states to venture in two different directions, this study has used John Brown's raid, the 1860 election, and the secession crisis to reveal just how similar middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were but also how their identities and founding ideas caused them to choose their own, respective paths in 1861. Following John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry, upper, middle, and working-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were vastly similar in their belief that the Republican Party's doctrines drove Brown to action, forcing them to take measures to refortify their defenses to keep a close watch on their slaves and prevent further insurrections in each state. Yet, while each state might have acknowledged the supposed threat that the Republicans and abolitionists might have held on their institutions, they differed on what other steps needed to be taken in order to protect the social and economic privileges white Mississippians and Kentuckians enjoyed.

³⁶⁷ Mitchell, *A New Mississippi History*, 182-183; Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 290-293, 306-322.

³⁶⁸ Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi*, 183-184; Allen Dennis, "Mississippi", *Journal of Confederate History Series X*, 13-15, 27; Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Middle-class Kentuckians held onto its faith in the democratic system to protect its state's rights, and while some Mississippi unionists joined them in such a belief, other middle-class Mississippians insinuated that secession was the state's only option, especially if Lincoln was elected. Nonetheless, sources reveal two states mostly advocating for the maintenance of the union in 1859, and as the 1860 election approached, citizens believed that choice candidates were the only hope in helping to keep slavery active and themselves protected from a perceived northern threat. During the campaign season, white Mississippians and Kentuckians advocated for two particular candidates—John Bell and John C. Breckenridge—believing that these men could protect slavery, southern rights, and/or the Union as a whole. Specifically, Bell supporters favored his vow to maintain the Union, while removing the slave question from politics, while Breckenridge was seen as secessionist just waiting for the opportune moment to destroy the Union. Breckenridge supporters, on the other hand, detailed his strengths as a pro-southern rights man who would protect the South's interests, while Bell's perceived abolitionist tendencies often garnered much distaste among this particular group. Ultimately, it was in these men that middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians placed their hopes, but as Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in November 1860, these hopes were dashed and these two states began to drift apart.

It was not, however, that middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians were suddenly unlike during the secession crisis. Both groups still valued slavery and southern rights and did not approve of Lincoln nor his actions at Fort Sumter in April 1861, but it was how best to protect themselves and their founding ideas that they differed. Viewing Lincoln's election as unacceptable and the Union as no longer the

nation their ancestors had fought for, Mississippi accepted secession as a manly, violent alternative that would protect their southern honor and communities from subjugation and inequality, while also sustaining their wealth, slavery, futures, and most of all, their power over all these practices. Kentucky, joining Mississippi in its disapproval of Lincoln, saw class divisions emerge as the state struggled to decide what to do. While compromise efforts were tirelessly sought prior to April 1861, the battle at Fort Sumter caused Kentucky to quicken its decision. Fearing a loss of power, however, the political parties of the state presented neutrality as a safer, temporary option for the state, and some middle-class Kentuckians favored this decision, as it protected their independency which valued northern and southern economic ties and the white privileges enjoyed through slavery. Secessionists, however, believed that their rights as southerners were threatened, disapproved of politicians' support of neutrality, and advocated for secession, if not leaving the state entirely to fight for the Confederacy.

Such decisions, this study has argued, were the direct result of the identities and founding ideas of independency and power that Mississippi and Kentucky created upon settlement in the 1700s. Mississippi consisted of southern confederates who valued not only the institution of slavery, but most of all power over their slaves, honor, and liberty. To both upper- and middle-class Mississippians, Lincoln's election meant a loss of that power and the ability to have a say in the decisions that affected their reputations, wealth, and the state's future, while opening the door to possibly becoming slaves themselves to the North. Citizens also took the Republican's attack on slavery as an attack on their honor, which could only be sustained, they believed, by an equally violent action. For this state, that violent action was secession itself. As for Kentucky, its decision to remain

neutral was influenced by middle-class citizens' viewing themselves as neither southern nor American, but as solely Kentuckian. To be a Kentuckian, in their eyes, meant to value the Union, the state's diversified economy, and the system of slavery which credited white males with economic and racial superiority, but most importantly, independency. To the majority of middle- and working-class Kentuckian, choosing one section over the other meant directly harming this independency by going against their sister states in the South, losing economic relations with the North or South, emancipating slaves, or abandoning white superiority. Additionally, citizens were unwilling to watch their state become a battlefield between both sections; thus, they chose the middle ground to not only keep the war out, but also to maintain their independency and their social and economic privileges.

Later, J. M. Alexander wrote "I pledge myself to defend the state of Kentucky," to Kentucky's Governor, Beriah Magoffin, while informing him of the formation of the "Independent Rangers." Acknowledging the "Fifty Sprightly young men good horsemen and Sharp-Shooters," Fulton County attested to Alexander's loyalty, but also their further need during such trying times, wanting "this company for our own protection" as Kentucky pursued neutrality.³⁶⁹ Contrarily, Hinds County, Mississippi, witnessed just how much anger Mississippians held towards Lincoln's victory. Wiley P. Harris, a secessionist candidate for the secession convention in the county, stated that despite running against cooperationists, all candidates "professed to be united on secession as the

³⁶⁹ J. M. Alexander to Beriah Magoffin, 23 May 1861, Office of the Governor, Beriah Magoffin: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Military Correspondence, 1859-1862, MG5-100 to MG5-101, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY. Accessed via the *Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition*, discovery.civilwargovernors.org/document/KYR-0001-019-0053, (accessed December 6, 2019).

ultimate remedy.” Eventually voting for the secession ticket, Hinds County declared a “basic, unanimous belief that resistance, and probably secession, was the proper response to a Republican ascendancy.”³⁷⁰ While brief, these few examples represent the larger differences between Mississippi and Kentucky as 1861 drew to a close as outlined in this study. While Mississippians stood united in their goals to retain their power and secede, Kentuckians chose to remain neutral in order to protect their privileges, institutions, and independency. Even so, the paths these states’ citizens chose morphed as the war carried on far longer than anticipated, specifically in the case of Kentucky, but it cannot be denied that what both middle-class Mississippians and Kentuckians valued was similar. Both states cherished their belief in slavery as a constitutional right, as well as the belief in a state’s ability to govern its own decisions and interests, but each state’s founding ideas caused these once similar states to deter away from one another. In the end, they pursued pathways that they believed protected these ideas, and what each consisted of, the most even if it meant severing ties with their sister states in the South or with the Union that they had fought and sacrificed for so long.

³⁷⁰ Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession, 1856-1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1938), 193-194, quoted from Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession*, 193-194; Broad sides Collection, MDAH, December 1860, quoted from Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession*, 193-194.

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