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“CONSERVING” THE MIDDLE GROUND: TENNESSEE’S UNIONIST PRESS IN THE SECESSION CRISIS, 1860-1861

by

Michael S. Singleton

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

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ABSTRACT

This thesis advances scholars' understanding of how newspaper editors framed and presented news during the secession crisis of 1860-1861. Methodologically, it draws on the publications of seven Unionist editors from Tennessee who initially resisted secession but later pursued different courses during the Civil War. Through this period, editors balanced their roles as journalists and political actors working to advance an ideological cause. Guided by existing practices and their unique journalistic styles, these editors presented a near unified message—influenced by Whig political culture—that framed their response to outside events. This unanimity fractured in 1861 as local pressures, business interests, and personal choices compounded to force editors to choose sides regarding secession.

This study engages with the arguments of historians Carl Osthaus, Donald Reynolds, and Berry Craig. It extends the views of all three that local concerns, Southern culture, and business interests impacted the course taken by newspaper editors, but argues against Reynold's claim regarding their general lack of political engagement. Furthermore, this work contests Osthaus' assertion that Southern editors catered to the desires of local elites in their communities. Lastly, it contradicts Reynolds and Craig's thesis that nineteenth-century newspapers mirrored their local communities. Instead, it demonstrates that many editors were fiercely ideological in their activism and editorial work, and leveraged their platform to influence readers—sometimes superseding public opinion in the process. In Tennessee, they did so with anti-elitist, populist rhetoric that spoke to the concerns of the white, middle-and lower-class readers who likely comprised their base of subscribers.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

On March 1st, 1861, Samuel P. Ivins, the editor of the Athens, Tennessee newspaper *The Athens Post*, published an editorial titled, "Hard Times," that decried the state of the political crisis then raging in the United States. Over the previous four months, seven Southern states had passed ordinances of secession that severed their allegiance to the Federal government and had taken steps to form a separate government in Montgomery, Alabama. In addition, war preparations were ongoing in those states as their legislatures appropriated funds for defense and militia units took steps to seize federal arsenals and military installations across the South. To the North, just a few days later, President-elect Abraham Lincoln would take the oath of office to become the United States' sixteenth president.[1] Ivins, of course, would have had no way of knowing how those cascading events would play out, but what he could do was reflect on the steps that over the previous years had led his country into its present crisis. Perhaps reflexively, Ivins turned his attention to what he knew best: the contributions of his fellow newspaper editors in the Southern press.

In Ivins' view, the discord then severing the country resulted from a vicious cycle of rhetorical attacks, responses, deliberate exaggerations, and outright lies broadcasted from the columns of newspapers all across the South. To his readers, Ivins asserted that "The alienation of the two sections, and the troubles now afflicting the country, are the legitimate fruits of this system of crimination and re-crimination, which has been going on for years." He further lamented how Southern journalists had consistently

[1] David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: America before the Civil War, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976), 547, 566.

misrepresented the views of the North by caustically claiming that "There is not in the South one journalist in forty that knows anything of the real state of society in the North, or of the ebb and flow of the currents of public opinion." To Ivins, his fellow Southern editors were at fault for deliberately inflaming the passions of their readers for their monetary gain and for purposely driving the two sections further apart. These editors continued to indulge "in constant crimination and labors incessantly to mislead and prejudice the people of the respective sections. And even now, when the country is trembling on the verge of dissolution, the warfare of misrepresentation and abuse is carried on with redoubled violence by the vultures who thrive and fatten on popular prejudice." In Ivin's view, these passions and prejudices would not abate until more honorable and dependable editors replaced those presently at work in the South.[2]

Ivins was not alone in this perception. Writing in April 1860 in the opening weeks of that year's presidential campaign, Ira P. Jones, the editor of the daily *Republican Banner and Whig* in Nashville, decried the tactics employed by radical Southern editors to inflame the passions of their readers. Pointing to their willful and repeated publication of Northern anti-slavery material, Jones accused the Southern press of "presenting the most exaggerated view, and consequently the view best calculated to excite discontent " amongst their Southern and pro-slavery readers. To him, editors ostensibly used these techniques of hyperbole and misrepresentation to label political opponents and other newspapers as "affiliates with abolitionism" to taint their credibility in the view of their readers. In reality, though, Jones theorized that secessionist editors employed these tactics with a darker and more malicious intent, which he styled as being "for some other

[2]*The Athens Post*, March 1, 1861.

patriotic purpose such as stimulating the South to *secede*, and the like." Taken to the extreme and repeatedly emphasized, such inflammatory content, therefore, "gives perpetuity to the sentiments" of fear and resentment and makes radical action by the South one step closer to seeming both acceptable and necessary.[3]

These claims by Ivins and Jones about the influence of radical Southern editors rested on a perception of the powerful impact that the newspaper press had on public opinion in nineteenth-century America. From the country's first publications in the early 1700s until the rise of the internet in the twentieth century, newspapers served as the primary information medium for American citizens. In what was effectively a monopoly on news distribution, journals and papers played a vital role in shaping opinion by acting as the primary source of knowledge to readers about political and social events beyond their immediate area.[4] As historian Donald Reynolds stated in his work on Southern journalism, "in the absence of radio, television, and weekly news magazines to supplement their knowledge of current events and to give them a better understanding of people in other regions of the country, Southerners learned from newspapers virtually everything they knew of events outside of their communities."[5] To be sure, other means of knowledge exchange such as books, letters, sermons, and word-of-mouth communication influenced public opinion, but no other source could compete with the regularity and the breadth of information presented by newspapers. This power placed

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[3] *Daily Republican Banner and Whig*, April 4, 1860.

[4] George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of Newspapers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), xi.

[5] Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1966), vii.

newspapers and their editors in a pivotal position as readers North and South looked to their content as a source to understand the events happening around the country.

Historians have long recognized the importance of nineteenth-century newspapers in the Civil War era, both for their value as sources to show the ideas behind the conflict and for their roles as influencers of public opinion. Nonetheless, only a handful of works directly address the roles played by editors during the pivotal months of the secession crisis from 1860-1861. In those few works, historians typically discuss Southern editors only to highlight the extreme positions of famous "fire-eaters" like Robert Barnwell Rhett in the *Charleston Mercury*, or more commonly to use their editorial work as evidence of a particular view in general political histories. Other historians sometimes reference aspects of Southern journalism in the secession crisis within more extensive pieces of history about technological and stylistic changes brought by the Civil War to the newspaper industry. Few works, however, discuss the diversity of editorial opinion within the respective sides of the secession debate in the South. Moreover, they rarely speak to the background and activities of individual editors. This shortcoming obscures valuable perspectives on how nineteenth-century editors participated in the local political process and passionately worked to use their newspapers for their ideological ends. In some cases, as will be shown in the state of Tennessee, editors could exceed popular support for their position and find themselves outliers within their local communities.

Of the works that indirectly reference the secession crisis, Hodding Carter's 1969 book *Their Words Were Bullets* is significant because he asserts that newspaper editors played a substantial role in driving the South to secession. Methodologically, Carter's study narrowly focused on the Southern press during the war and Reconstruction periods

and only fleetingly discussed the newspaper's role during the secession crisis. In his brief comments, Carter blamed the enflamed passions that led to the war on radical Southern journalists who, alongside politicians, "had all but prepared the region for armed civil conflict long before it came." This impetus was because of their often violent and apocalyptic rhetoric that significantly impacted their readers' opinions.[6] This claim is simply asserted as fact within Carter's Introduction but is not discussed further in his work. Also lacking is any mention of the numerous moderate editors like Samuel Ivins and Ira Jones in Tennessee who spoke against such rhetoric and used their newspapers to articulate a tempered, conservative view of events that tried to thwart the progress of the secession movement. Other historical examinations of the Southern press during the Civil War, such as J. Cutler Andrews's extensive *The South Reports the Civil War*, Brayton Harris's *Blue & Gray in Black & White*, and David Bulla and Gregory Borchard's *Journalism in the Civil War Era*, narrowly focus on the transformative nature of the war on the press as an institution, while giving little attention to its role in the period before the war's opening.[7]

Dwight Dumond's *Southern Editorials on Secession* is perhaps the first work to focus purely on the output of the Southern press during the secession crisis. Dumond's work was published in 1931 and is an anthology of nearly 200 editorials taken from newspapers across the South, ranging from those that argue starkly in favor of secession

[6] Hodding Carter, *Their Words Were Bullets: The Southern Press in War, Reconstruction, and Peace* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 7-8.

[7] J. Cutler Andrews. *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); David W. Bulla and Gregory A. Borchard, *Journalism in the Civil War Era* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Brayton Davis. *Blue & Gray in Black & White: Newspapers in the Civil War* (Washington: Brassey's Inc., 1999).

to those that maintained a Unionist position. As a result, his study is an outstanding resource for identifying influential newspapers, editorials, and the arguments they waged over time. Still, as an anthology, *Southern Editorials on Secession* lacks depth for understanding regional differences of opinion within the South during the months before secession. Beyond a brief introduction explaining the basic ideological positions of various newspapers and an overview of the events of the secession crisis, Dumond provides little context behind the specific editorials themselves, background information on the particular editors, or any form of analysis as to their broader significance.[8]

The most detailed work regarding the Southern press during the months of the 1860-1861 secession crisis is Donald E. Reynolds' 1996 work *Editors Make War*. His book is both comprehensive and wide-reaching, examining the material of nearly 200 newspapers from across the South during the secession crisis. Reynolds's work begins in January 1860 and charts the course of events in narrative style through the final secession of the upper South in the spring of 1861. Reynolds asserts that Southern editors held significant sway over readers' perceptions of the chaotic events of that time, as he says the press "composed a force of considerable power during the election of 1860 and the ensuing crisis." With this power, editors were able to affect Southern perceptions of the major events happening around the country, their understanding of the sentiments of Americans in the Northern states, and gradually change their feelings toward the Union.[9] Unlike Carter's brief claim to the same effect, this assertion is foundational to Reynold's

[8] Dwight L. Dumond ed., *Southern Editorials on Secession* (New York: The Century Co., 1931).

[9] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, viii, 11.

argument as he tracks the news coverage of events and discusses secessionist papers' role in inciting anger and fear in the South.

Using four analytical categories to categorize Southern newspapers, Reynolds tracks how editors framed, responded to, and argued about events across the South to understand the broader opinions of the Southern populace.[10] He ultimately concludes that secessionist sentiment in the press was triumphant because the generally agreed upon "specter of a South racially degraded at the hands of callous Northern Republicans" undermined the shallowness of Unionist appeals for moderation and compromise. Southerners read in nearly every paper "what Northerners supposedly thought and said," and therefore, with no contradictory evidence, concluded that the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln did want the immediate abolition of slavery, racial and social equality, and were together actively working to encourage slave insurrections in the South. These fears extended to southern Unionists as well who "were able to argue with conviction on behalf of the Union's perpetuation only so long as the slave states remained a unit within the Union to block in Congress any Republican attempt to tamper with the institution of slavery." With that check on Republican power removed, Reynolds theorized that most

[10] Reynolds groups Southern newspapers into four loose categories, the first of which consisted of immediate secessionist papers. He next named what he called “radical Southern-rights papers,” and a third but no less important group of “moderate Southern-rights” papers. These categories differed only in their emphasis on the conditions necessitating secession in the South, as immediate secessionist papers urged separation during the winter and spring of 1860 while radical Southern-rights papers and their more moderate counterparts either desired to wait for sufficient provocation, or were ambiguous on the issue altogether. Reynolds’ fourth category is those Unionist papers which—through their editorial coverage—tried to minimize the threat posed by the Lincoln administration and rested their paper’s positions on an often-exaggerated devotion to the Union, regardless of the events decried by papers from the other three categories. Reynolds importantly finds that sentiment toward the Union did not fall easily along political party lines, but instead was much more complicated and dramatically changed as events progressed through 1860 and into 1861. See, Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 14-15.

Southerners resigned to secession as the best course to maintain the status quo of the slave system.[11]

Two more recent works take views different from the arguments posed by Carter and Reynolds by emphasizing the limitations of editors to drastically influence public opinion because of the pressures exerted on them by the unique demands of their profession. Published in 1994, Carl Osthaus's *Partisans of the Southern Press* employed a case study approach to chart the transformation of Southern newspapers through the tumultuous decades of the 1800s. Osthaus's work began with an examination of editor Thomas Ritchie's coverage of the 1832 Nullification Crisis in the *Richmond Enquirer* and ended with a chapter-length discussion of three papers from Louisville, Charleston, and Atlanta during the transition from away Reconstruction in the 1870s and 1880s. Overall, Osthaus argued that Southern editors were largely dependent on the values and views of their communities' politically powerful slaveholders for their business survival. Thus, to Osthaus, "the editor was the voice of the politically active and economically significant section of the community" rather than lower-class Southerners who could either ill afford to pay subscriptions or who did not have the power to influence their business operations. The result of this dependency on elites was a form of cultural censorship in that Southern editors could not stray outside the mainstream views of their local elites for fear of losing backing financial support or popular support. In practice, this amounted to editorial strategies that "had to reaffirm and reiterate" the values of the local elite slaveholders

[11] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 214-217.

rather than seek to "reform or crusade" in Southern society.[12] Therefore, in Osthaus's argument, editors have little room to write radical personal opinions as they always had to balance views against the prevailing elite sentiment in their local communities.

The final and perhaps most recent work related to the Southern press in the secession crisis is Berry Craig's *Kentucky's Rebel Press*. Craig's work is a case study of pro-secession newspapers in Kentucky and follows them from the Election of 1860 to the fall of 1861. With this study, Craig confronts multiple issues already addressed by other historians. Like most, he tracks the various ideological arguments detailed by the various secessionist papers as they reported the influential events over that period. In one of his arguments, Craig implicitly aligns with Carl Osthaus by questioning the broadly influential nature of nineteenth-century newspapers. He argues that "the partisan nature of most papers would not have helped editors win converts" because most readers' fierce allegiance to their favored newspapers prevented them from taking seriously (or even reading) papers from another viewpoint. Instead, Craig asserts, "publishers and editors knew they were preaching to the choir." Like Osthaus, Craig also argues that editors had to move astride local opinion because—like other types of businesses—they needed to understand the wants and desires of their customers to sell their products. Thus, “to keep the presses running, Civil War publishers traded in 'words and ideas that would attract the readers they sought."[13] In essence, editors could only write editorials that hewed to

[12] Carl R. Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), xiii.

[13] Berry Craig, *Kentucky’s Rebel Press: Pro-Confederate Media and the Secession Crisis* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 11-12.

popular opinions regarding hot issues like slavery and secession and could ill afford to go against the desires of their readers for fear of business failure.

These relatively recent views expressed by Craig and Osthaus stand as the prevailing opinions within the historiography of the pre-Civil War press. They work in contrast to the earlier positions of Reynolds and Carter that stressed the influential role that newspapers played in building public opinion during the secession crisis. These schools of thought and a recognition of the need for further work inspired this thesis. Scholars need to understand better the multiple aspects surrounding the activities of newspaper editors and the broader information environment during the months before the Civil War. For example, as a broad synthesis, Reynolds' *Editors Make War* lacks the depth to understand how editorial positions were grounded in long-standing political traditions in their respective states that influenced the language and approach of editors as they contextualized and reported events to readers. Furthermore, Reynolds's emphasis on editorial content, while certainly the most original and often inflammatory content in a newspaper, disregards how the mechanisms of the newspaper industry like telegraphic dispatches and the newspaper exchange shaped their content and thus the available knowledge for readers of outside events. Lastly, Reynolds only gives cursory attention to the editors' activities as he only briefly discusses their work life and social pressures in his introduction. For example, in one comment, he broadly asserts that editors only rarely participated in politics outside their newspapers as they "were too busy to take the extended leaves of absence necessary to attend party conventions or to assume time-consuming political responsibilities." Instead, editors "were content to make their

influence felt with their pens."[14] In reality, such a claim undervalues the political activities of many nineteenth-century editors who were directly involved in partisan politics and widely participated in campaigning and organizing outside their newspaper offices.

Similarly, Carl Osthaus' argument about the subordination of newspaper editors to local elites necessitates reevaluation in a different political climate from Charleston, South Carolina. In his chapter on the secession crisis, Osthaus employs a comparative analysis between the editorial work of Thomas Barnwell Rhett's *Charleston Mercury* and Richard Yeadon's *Charleston Courier* from 1850 to December 1860. Through those two papers, Osthaus proves his theory about the link between elite opinion (who he classifies as a "merchant-businessman-planter relationship") and the editorial positions of newspapers. He effectively shows that the *Courier* initially pursued a Unionist outlook but caved to local demand to support a cooperative approach to secession during the debates over the Compromise of 1850 and again in the turmoil of the 1860 election season.[15] However supportive it is of his thesis, Osterhaus' treatment of the *Charleston Courier* narrowly examines a nominally Unionist paper in one of the most intensely partisan, elite-dominated, pro-secession environments in the South. To explain the broader applicability of his conclusion, Osthaus claims that "the political ideology of Charleston and South Carolina differed only in intensity and timing from the Southern mainstream; where Charlestonians led, the South followed."[16] Such a statement merits

[14] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 10-11.

[15] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 74, 91.

[16] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 71.

reevaluation in a more contested political environment like Tennessee that had significantly more strident, devoted Unionist editors than that of the *Courier* in Charleston.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by focusing on the news coverage presented in the Union-leaning newspapers during the secession crisis in Tennessee. That state serves as a compelling case study because it featured significant and protracted divisions over secession that lasted throughout the secession crisis, thus providing a unique lens through which to judge news coverage. Additionally, Tennessee contained a diametrically different culture than that of Charleston, South Carolina, as was examined by Carl Osthaus. For its white population, Tennessee in 1860 was a much more egalitarian, middle-class society with universal male suffrage and a diverse economy dominated less by large plantations and more by yeomen farmers.[17] As a result, the state is a practical laboratory to gauge Osthaus' thesis regarding elite newspaper editors' influence. Lastly, as the second most populous state in the South, Tennessee also featured an expansive and active newspaper industry spread across the whole state. Several papers featured well-known editors and also achieved widespread distribution around the South and the United States. Of these papers, Unionist-leaning publications numerically dominated secessionist journals and contain the more significant number of extant copies

[17] Mary Robertson Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-1861* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 15-18, 24. Like other Southern states Tennessee was predominantly agricultural, but unlike many of its neighbors its economy could only be classified as a "semi-plantation" based. In 1860, the average farm size was 351 acres with only 3% of the white population owning slaves. Indeed, of those who did hold slaves roughly seventy-five percent held less than ten, with a plurality (nearly fifty percent) holding four or less.

preserved today. As such, they are the best source through which to judge newspaper content and the activities of their editors during the secession crisis.

Methodologically, this work draws on seven different newspapers—five of which were published once a week while two were daily publications issued six times a week. Of these papers, two were from the Tennessee's eastern region (*The Athens Post* and *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*), three from Middle Tennessee (the *Clarksville Chronicle*, *Nashville Patriot*, and the Nashville *Republican Banner and Whig*), and two from West Tennessee (the *West Tennessee Whig* and the *Memphis Bulletin*). This selection also reflects the three distinct regions—or "grand divisions" as they are colloquially known—that separate Tennessee geographically as it extends from its eastern border with North Carolina west to the Mississippi River. These three regions each maintained distinct economies, demographic trends, and local interests that all helped to influence the course they and the state took through the secession crisis and the war that followed.[18] As such, no work regarding Tennessee's Unionist press would be complete without including a balance of papers from all three regions.

This study follows the outputs of these seven papers through the nearly twenty-month period from January 1860 through June 1861. In the process, it analyzes themes from the reader's perspective by detailing the information available to them within newspaper columns, the political ideology that undergirded the news content, and how editors targeted these ideas toward like-minded readers. Reciprocally, this study also emphasizes the editors themselves—the men who compiled the papers, made the day-to-day decisions about their operation and faced the pressures of conformity and ostracism

[18] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 12.

during the growing months of conflict. Finally, this study investigates how the prevailing practices of the newspaper industry up to 1860 influenced how newspaper editors did their job. It addresses issues of journalistic style, news collection, business operation, and interactions with subscribers.

The political content that editors typically printed in the first pages of their newspapers comprise the bulk of the material used for this study. Those pages held the most original content in each issue and served as the main attraction for readers so necessarily they were examined in greater detail. Local news like reports of speeches, political resolutions, rally notices, and other pertinent articles were also included when applicable. Much of this material is editorial writing in some fashion as many of the supplemental pieces that appear were either summaries of other articles written by the local editor, or editorials clipped from other publications and shared as "news." Whenever possible, though, this study moves beyond editorial content and incorporates submissions from the public and telegraphic dispatches to create a more comprehensive view of the newspaper practice at that time. Nearly one thousand physical newspapers were produced by these seven publications across 1860 and 1861 so, as such, any project of this nature is inherently selective. By necessity, articles and content related to numerous other occurrences in Tennessee and elsewhere are not discussed, as coverage of the influential events that led to secession drew greater emphasis. Similarly, the paid advertisements that make up nearly half of each newspaper in 1860 were not examined at length as few, if any, related to the scope of this study. Readers are encouraged to examine these newspapers for themselves to gain a fuller appreciation of both the total course of events in Tennessee, and to the intricacies of the pre-war newspaper industry.

Ultimately, this work argues that from 1860 to 1861, Tennessee's Unionist editors presented a near-unified version of the news grounded in an ideology that spoke to uniquely white, southern, Whiggish concerns about elite domination, political corruption, social disorder, and preservation of the slave system. This ideological coalition infused the editorial content of Tennessee's Unionist press throughout the secession crisis in 1861 and only fractured in the final weeks before the state's separation from the Union. Moreover, Tennessee's Unionist editors targeted their news coverage toward a predominantly middle- and lower-class audience with populist appeals against the power of wealthy, elite politicians and, in some cases, large-slaveholding planters. This outlook contradicts Carl Osthaus' absolute assertions regarding the influence of local elites on the newspaper industry and exposes a more complicated and diverse newspaper industry than he had previously acknowledged.

Additionally, in their professional practice, editors and their newspapers each reflected a diverse blend of journalistic influences that created a unique style for each publication which impacted how they reported the news. The standard practices and news-gathering mechanisms of mid-nineteenth century journalism routinely impacted how editors did their job by either giving them inaccurate information or flawed perceptions of national events. Editors confronted these in different ways that coincided with their unique journalistic styles. Lastly, on a personal level, the role of Tennessee's Unionist editors extended far outside of their newspaper offices and into the political sphere. Indeed, editors actively participated in local, state, and national politics throughout the secession crisis and used their newspapers to further their ideological cause. Some even did so under the risk of physical threat and social isolation. These

activities question the accuracy of Donald Reynold's claims regarding the relative inactivity of editors in outside politics and show that, for as much or little influence as newspapers had on sculpting public opinion, their editors certainly believed they did and worked fervently to use their platform to such an end. This ideological fervor often paralleled the views of their local readers on critical issues but sometimes also contradicted prevailing sentiment and exposed editors as outliers. This dichotomy suggests that editors were not opposed to positioning their papers against popular sentiment and instead shows that, in certain circumstances, newspapers did not fully reflect the opinion of their local communities. This fact complicates the claims of Donald Reynolds and Barry Craig, both of whom broadly assert that nineteenth-century newspapers mirrored public opinion in their localities.

In structure, this study is divided into six chapters. Chapter II consists of a broad examination of the evolution of the newspaper as an information medium in the nineteenth century, the unique features of the Southern press, a brief history of the newspaper trade in Tennessee, and lastly, biographical information on the editors of the study's seven papers. It argues that the revolutionary changes in the newspaper industry during the middle decades of the 1800s variously combined in Tennessee to create unique journalistic styles for each editor that would later guide their approaches to the secession crisis. Chapter III details news coverage of the tumultuous months in 1860, beginning with the residual fall-out from John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and concluding with the immediate reaction to Abraham Lincoln's election that November. It articulates the Whiggish influence on the Unionist press, and argues that populist rhetorical appeals by editors undermine Carl Osthaus' claims regarding elite influence on the industry.

Furthermore, this chapter shows how unique newspaper practices combined with the Whiggish outlook of Tennessee's Unionist editors to create a flawed depiction of events outside the state about the prospect for a Unionist victory in the election.

Chapter IV examines the Unionist news coverage that begins with South Carolina's secession in December 1860 and concludes with the resounding Unionist victory in Tennessee's public referendum in February 1861. It argues that the previously demonstrated Whiggish influence on Unionist news coverage continued into the early months of 1861 and framed the response of Tennessee's Unionist editors to the lower South's secession and the efforts at compromise around the nation. Furthermore, it argues that editors were far more involved in partisan politics than historians have understood and that this ideological fervor extended to their journalistic work, which sometimes exceeded public opinion in their communities. Chapter V addresses the seven papers' immediate reactions to the firing on Fort Sumter, Tennessee's turn toward secession, and the different courses pursued by each of the newspapers in the final months of the crisis. It argues that the tenets of the Whiggish worldview that had informed editors' news coverage the past year —particularly its focus on conspiracy, despotism, and a "right of revolution"— provided the exact justification needed for most of them to turn against Unionism after Abraham Lincoln's call for troops. Additionally, the chapter contends that other practical factors of the newspaper industry, such as telegraphic misinformation and flawed reporting, also contributed to an opaque information environment that possibly fueled disunionist fervor among editors and readers alike.

Collectively, these arguments address gaps with the works of Carl Osthaus, Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig. They complicate Osthaus' formulation that Southern

editors worked under the purview of local elites by showing that Tennessee's Unionist newspapermen regularly invoked anti-elitist, populist rhetoric that spoke against the supposed power of the wealthy and powerful in their region and across the South. Additionally, this study contests Reynold's assertion that editors rarely had time to participate in political activities outside their profession by showing that those in Tennessee were, in fact, intimately involved in local, state, and national politics throughout the Election of 1860 and the months of the secession crisis. The ideological fervor behind this activism and political organizing extended to their news coverage and editorial work throughout this period, which placed editors beyond the wider opinion of the public in certain circumstances. This fact complicates the consensus view of Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig that nineteenth-century newspapers reflected the views of their communities by showing that, in Tennessee at least, that was not always the case. These interventions all apply to only one state in an incredibly volatile period and draw from a particular ideological viewpoint. Nevertheless, they help expand the historiographical understanding of the nineteenth-century press and the roles and activities of newspaper editors before the Civil War.

Specific stylistic notes and source limitations need to be clearly stated before proceeding. Forty-seven newspapers were published in Tennessee from 1860-1861, of which roughly 22 adopted a position that was contrary to secession and disunion at one point or another.[19] For the sake of clarity, these newspapers are broadly characterized as "Unionist" because of their opposition to secession and explicit support of remaining in the Union. In Tennessee, most of these newspapers affiliated with the Constitutional

[19] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 228.

Union Party in the Election of 1860 and later the "Southern Rights Union Party" during the anti-secession campaigning in the winter of 1861. All of the papers in this study supported both of these parties, but it should be noted that not every "Unionist" paper in Tennessee did so. In fact, it was not unheard of for some papers that had historically supported the Democratic party through the Election of 1860 to support the Unionist cause in the secession crisis, or vice versa for once Union party papers and supporting disunion. The label "Unionist" is thus a much more complicated term when applied broadly. Nonetheless, it holds that the positions taken by the seven papers reflect those who kept to the strict Union party line throughout the crisis and comprised the core of the movement in Tennessee. Additionally, although newspapers appeared in bold text on paper, there was no “spell check” in the nineteenth century. As such, spelling errors or differences of phraseology repeatedly occur in news content. No changes have been made in this study to the wording of newspaper extracts, so any spelling or grammatical errors in evident quotations should be understood as those of the editor or type-layer who printed the paper.

Lastly, of the seven papers examined, only five contain enough preserved copies to sufficiently track the progression of news coverage throughout the entirety of the secession crisis. These surviving papers correlated with the five papers from East and Middle Tennessee: *The Athens Post*, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, *The Clarksville Chronicle*, the *Nashville Patriot*, and the *Republican Banner and Whig*. However, the two West Tennessee papers—the *West Tennessee Whig* and the *Memphis Bulletin*—do not have enough issues to sufficiently follow them through the entire scope of the study as was possible with the other papers. The *West Tennessee Whig*'s issues in 1860 are largely

lost to history, with only two copies in October preserved. However, more copies existed for multiple months in 1861 and were used during those related chapters to represent West Tennessee. The exact opposite is true for the *Memphis Bulletin,* as it has sufficient copies throughout 1860 but only two months of coverage in 1861. Whereas discussion of the same newspapers from Middle and East Tennessee carries unbroken throughout the study, readers should understand that the papers from West Tennessee vary between the different chapters covering 1860 and 1861.

The choices made by Tennessee's Unionist newspaper editors through the months of the secession crisis were many and varied from editor to editor as they individually chose what details to print and how to contextualize events for their readers. For months they worked to navigate a fine line that tried to resist disunion, conserve the status quo of slavery in the South, and achieve victory for their favored ideological cause. Their efforts failed, and their state later played a central role in the course of the brutal war that followed. An understanding of the actions of Tennessee's Unionist editors during those months—while only part of the larger equation—can nonetheless help historians and students to understand further the information environment at work throughout the secession crisis and the role that editors played in crafting it.

CHAPTER II - NEWSPAPERS, EDITORS, AND THE PRESS REVOLUTION IN TENNESSEE

"Time was, when, to the millions, the newspaper was hardly accessible. Private families never saw a daily paper, many scarce saw a weekly; But now, as the result of steam and telegraph, and the increased contents of the newspaper sheet, items of important intelligence, from one part of the world, literally flashes upon all the rest. National distinction, like time and space, seem obliterated, and all the citizens of the world become cosmopolitan. We are not merely American, or British, or French, or European…as we once were, but [now] talk about what is occurring all over the world, with as much familiarity as our fathers used to discuss their local news"

-*Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April 14, 1860

In his famous and influential 1835 work *Democracy in America*, noted French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville meditated on the unique role that the newspaper played within the political and intellectual life of nineteenth-century America. De Tocqueville, who published his work after a nine-month tour of the United States, expressed amazement at the sheer number of publications in the country compared to his home in Europe. "In the United States, there is almost no small town that does not have its newspaper," he claimed, explaining that this large quantity of papers stemmed from the lack the government licensure and registration for printers and editors that defined the European press. Without this barrier to entry, he asserted, newspapers were easily created by any American who could gather enough capital to cover the initial overhead because once started, the eventual gathering of "a few subscribers are enough for the journalist to be able to cover his costs." The effect to this European observer was a glut of newspapers and journals. So much so in fact that de Tocqueville exclaimed that "the number of periodical or semi-periodical writings in the United States passes beyond belief."[20]

[20] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., ed., Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 176-177.

While he may have expressed awe at the sheer size of the American journalistic enterprise, de Tocqueville was less sanguine about the influence of the press on the country's democratic system of governance. He theorized that because of the country's vast number of publications, no one paper held significant power over public opinion. As he saw it, the multitudes of different papers and journals diffused their collective influence so that "among so many combatants neither discipline nor unity of action can be established." In effect, he determined that American newspapers could not generate a concerted force of opinion among their readers toward a single purpose because of this enormous and differing range of voices. Nevertheless, de Tocqueville claimed that the press did have a specific purpose and power in American society in that its information and regularity "makes political life circulate in all sections of this vast territory." This political engagement by the press, therefore, kept important political ideas that had been previously distant from the eyes of everyday Americans in front of readers in an accessible manner. Additionally, while the immense number of newspapers seemingly mitigated the effects of individual newspapers on public opinion as a whole, de Tocqueville conceded that—if the press were somehow able to achieve a unified voice—the views of readers would necessarily yield to the opinions proscribed in its columns. He claimed that "when a large number of organs of the press come to advance on the same track, their influence becomes almost irresistible in the long term, and public opinion, struck always from the same side, ends by yielding under their blows." The risk of this phenomenon was low. Still, to de Tocqueville, it nonetheless was a possibility in a democratic society like America.[21]

[21]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 177-178.

In the nearly three decades that elapsed between the publication of de Tocqueville's analysis in 1835 and the secession crisis from 1860-1861, the press underwent a series of changes that nationally redefined much of the public's relationship with the newspaper as an information medium. These adjustments to the technological production and dissemination of papers, as well as the stylistic presentation of the news, happened irregularly and with varying degrees of application around the United States. This was especially true in Southern states like Tennessee. By 1860, these adaptations combined to create the means and methods with which the state's Union-affiliated editors worked to report the news to their readers. While the ideas discussed in their papers were specific to that date and time, the transformative changes brought by the "Press Revolution" of the mid-nineteenth century influenced both how newspaper editors received and disseminated the news, and the manner in which they chose to do so. For that reason, an understanding of the changes at work in journalism from 1830 to 1860 and the backgrounds of the principal editors in Tennessee, will establish the foundation for further discussion of their news coverage during the secession crisis.

In line with the numerous other transformative forces that influenced the course of events in the early and mid-nineteenth century, changes to the entire process of constructing newspapers increased that medium's involvement and place in the day-to-day life of literate Americans. These modifications ranged from alterations to the structure of newspapers, technological shifts in their targeted audience, and substantive changes to the content reported in its columns—all of which fundamentally changed the

newspaper itself and reciprocally, how readers received the news they read.[22] The effect of this transformation was—as one historian described—to place newspapers as "the key element in a web of mass production, mass consumption, and mass communication that has come to characterize life in America."[23] While no newspaper in the United States was immune to these transformative changes, significant differences existed between the publications printed in the country's major urban centers and the more prevalent "country papers" from America's rural areas and towns. In this dynamic, the urban papers published in large cities like New York and Chicago set the pace of social and technological change within the journalism field, often growing into powerful business enterprises that influenced the news published in other publications nationwide. The smaller, "country" newspapers largely lagged behind their urban counterparts in adapting to the new technology and reporting styles. These small publications—the most numerous papers in America and which dominated the more rural South—adopted at different times and places some aspects of the changes while also holding to parts of the old styles of publication that had defined the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[24]

Most distinctly, this uneven track of change differed in the powers endowed to individual editors to set the agenda and policies of their newspapers. Whereas the major urban publications that appeared in Northern cites grew to encompass large staffs of editors and workers who divided the labor—and thus their direct influence—to issue their

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[22] George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of Newspapers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 3-9.

[23] Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 56-58.

[24] Bernard A. Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) 53, 111.

papers in such numbers, small-town papers such as those in the South remained under the total control of individual editors. Many of these editors also owned portions or the entirety of the business enterprise and participated in the printing process from start to finish.[25] They made distinct decisions that controlled the content reported in the papers' columns and often wrote the entirety of its original content, thus heightening their influence over their publications relative to their counterparts in the large urban journals.[26] This unique dynamic held through the decades leading up to the Civil War and revealed itself in the events of the secession crisis. There, the "personal journalism" of small, country editors—particularly in the South—created a different style of news reporting distinct from the increasingly modern urban publications. This divergence seemingly endowed the smaller editors with a stronger hold over expressing their opinion and reporting the news to their readers.

All of these critical stylistic and technological changes, the urban vs. county divide, and the regional variations between North and South are evident in Tennessee's Unionist press in the months of the secession crisis. In their distinctive ways, each of the seven papers assessed in this study displayed tendencies that matched the new journalistic styles of the major urban publications, while still largely holding to the old style of news reporting common in the 1860s South. These distinct styles varied with the personalities and views of their editors and served as the frameworks and parameters through which they reported and contextualized the period's events for their readers. Any analysis of the role that newspapers played in the secession crisis in Tennessee, therefore, must first

[25] Douglas, *The Golden Age of Newspapers*, 56.

[26] Daly, *Covering America*, 83; Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 1.

begin with an understanding of the journalistic practices of the period, the diverse forces that influenced the period's news reporting, and most importantly, the backgrounds of the respective editors who drove the publication of their newspapers.

This chapter begins broadly with a discussion of the journalistic profession in the nineteenth century, charting in detail the different changes and styles that influenced newspaper reporting in the mid-nineteenth century. It then narrows specifically to Tennessee, describing the intricacies of the state's three regions and places each of this study's seven papers within the context of their respective communities. It does so by examining the history of each publication and the background of its editors. Through this approach, we can establish the foundation upon which to later analyze their reporting during the secession crisis of 1860-1861.

America's "Press Revolution"

When Alexis de Tocqueville published *Democracy in America* in 1835, the newspaper press he briefly examined varied slightly from its colonial-era predecessors. Beginning with America's first news publications in the early to mid-1700s, the typical newspaper was a local, weekly publication that presented an eclectic mixture of material narrowly targeted toward the predominantly affluent and politically engaged middle- and upper-class readers in American society. This population constituted the country's largest literate population and possessed the funds to pay the paper's publishers' yearly subscription. As a result, the content reported in the newspapers varied widely between expositions of literary poems, stories, jokes, and dry political or historical essays interspersed alongside coverage of local or national events.[27]

[27] Daly, *Covering America*, 13-16.

The extent to which these first papers covered "news" depended heavily on the country's nascent postal network, as printers exchanged their respective publications between cities and liberally copied and pasted material verbatim from each other's columns. By necessity, this information was outdated, inconsistently reported, and depended solely on the correctness of the copied newspaper. Whenever the clippings from other papers did not fill out the remainder of the papers' column space, printers turned to miscellaneous material such as the poems, stories, and essays noted above.[28] In total, these publications operated in a manner that journalism historian Bernard Wiesberger described as being "a unique kind of popular literary creation—something of a handbill, something of a public forum, something of a school of every subject on a down-to-earth level."[29] It would only be with the growth of major political parties in the early republic period that the American press would undergo its one significant change before 1830.

As early as the 1760s, newspaper editors and publishers began to assert their own political opinions within their newspaper columns by taking sides on individual issues and intentionally neglecting coverage of differing perspectives or views. This abandonment of the idea of an "open press" that printed news material without a political viewpoint only increased through the remainder of the eighteenth century. Such partisan

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[28] This newspaper exchange practice began in 1758 when Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter, both deputy postmasters for the American colonies, ordered that newspapers could travel from city to city through the postal network free of charge. This subsidized exchange greatly increased the flow of information across the thirteen colonies and created the first examples of national "news" reporting. Even with the eventual invention of the telegraph, the free newspaper exchange remained the primary source of news material for American editors through the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. For more, see Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*, 18-19, or Daly, *Covering America*, 49.

[29] Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*, 24.

The Knoxville Register.

No 453. KNOXVILLE, FRIDAY MORNING, APRIL 15, 1825. Vol. IX.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HEISKELL & BROWN, AUTHORISED PUBLISHERS OF THE LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES. PRICE, PER ANNUM—THREE DOLLARS.

By Authority.

AN ACT in addition to an act, entitled "An act to amend the Ordinance and Acts of Congress for the Government of the Territory of Michigan," and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Governor and Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan be, and they are hereby, authorized to divide the said Territory into townships, and incorporate [the] same, or any part thereof; to grant, define, and regulate; the privileges thereof; and to provide by law for the election of all such township and corporation officers, as may be designated within the same.

Sec. 2. *And be it further enacted*, That all county officers within said Territory shall be hereafter elected by the qualified electors residing in each county, at such time and place, and in such manner, as the said Governor and Legislative Council may from time to time direct: *Provided*, That nothing in this section contained shall authorize the electors aforesaid to elect any Judge of any Court of Record, or Clerk thereof, or any Sheriff, or Judge of Probate, or Justice of the Peace. And

MR. CLAY'S DEFENCE.

FROM THE NATIONAL JOURNAL.

To the people of the Congressional District composed of the Counties of Fayette, Woodward, and Clarke, in Kentucky.

The relations of your representative and of your neighbour in which I have so long stood, and in which I have experienced so many strong proofs of your confidence, attachment and friendship, having just been, the one terminated, and the other suspended, I avail myself of the occasion on taking, I hope a temporary, leave of you, to express my unfeigned gratitude for all your favours, and to assure you that I shall cherish a fond and unceasing recollection of them. The extraordinary circumstances in which during the late session of Congress, I have been placed and the unmerited animadversions which I have brought upon myself, for an honest and faithful discharge of my public duty, form an additional motive for this appeal to your candour and justice. If, in the office which I have just left, I have abused your confidence and betrayed your interests, I cannot deserve your support in but on the duties of which I have now entered. On the contrary, should it appear that I have been assailed without just cause, and that misguided zeal and interested passions have singled me out as a victim, I cannot doubt that I shall continue to find, in the enlightened tribunal of the public, that cheering countenance and impartial judgment, without which a public servant cannot possibly discharge with advantage the trust confided to him.

It is known to you, that my name had ties incident to this new attitude, and weighed all the facts before me, upon which my judgment was to be formed or reviewed. If the eagerness of any of the heated partizans of the respective candidates suggested a tardiness in the declaration of my intention, I believed that the new relation, in which I was placed to the subject, imposed on me an obligation to pay some respect to delicacy and decorum.

Meanwhile that very reserve supplied aliment to news-paper criticism. The critics could not comprehend how a man, standing as I had stood towards the other gentlemen, should be restrained, by a sense of propriety, from instantly fighting under the banners of one of them, against the others. Letters were issued from the manufactory at Washington, to come back, after performing long journeys for Washington consumption. These letters impute to "Mr. Clay and his friends a mysterious air, a portentous silence," &c. From dark and distant hints the progress was easy to open and bitter denunciation. Anonymous letters, full of menace and abuse, were almost daily poured in on me. Personal threats were communicated to me, through friendly organs, and I was kindly apprised of all the glories of village effigies which awaited me. A systematic attack was simultaneously commenced upon me from Boston to Charleston, with an object, present and future, which it was impossible to mistake. No man but myself could know the nature, extent, and variety of means which were employed to awe and influence me. I bore them, I trust, as *your* representative ought to have borne them, and as became me. of it clearly implied that it had not entered into his conception to have a personal affair with me; and I should have justly exposed myself to universal ridicule, if I had sought one with *him*. I determined to lay the matter before the House and respectfully to invite an investigation of my conduct. I accordingly made a communication to the House, on the same day, the motives for which I assigned. Mr. Kremer was in his place, and, when I sat down, rose and stated that he was prepared and willing to substantiate his charges against me. This was his voluntary declaration, unprompted by his aiders and abettors, who had no opportunity of previous consultation with him on that point. Here was an issue publicly and solemnly joined, in which the accused invoked an inquiry into serious charges against him, and the accuser professed an ability and a willingness to establish them. A debate ensued, on the next day, which occupied the greater part of it, during which Mr. Kremer declared to Mr. Brent, of Louisiana, a friend of mine, and to Mr. Little, of Maryland, a friend of Gen. Jackson, as they have certified, "that he never intended to charge Mr. Clay with corruption or dishonor, in his intended vote for Mr. Adams as President, or that he had transfered, or could transfer, the votes or interest of his friends; that he (Mr. Kremer) was among the last men in the nation to make such a charge *against Mr. Clay*; and that his letter was never intended to convey the idea given to it." Mr. Digges, a highly respectable inhabitant of this city, has certified to the same declarations of Mr. Kremer.

A message was also conveyed to me, objection to that jurisdiction of the House, which had been admitted, and in the popular topics of the freedom of the press, his duty to his constituents, and the inequality in the condition of the Speaker of the House and a member on the floor plausible means might be found to deceive the ignorant, and conceal his disgrace. A laboured communication was accordingly prepared by them, in Mr. Kremer's name, and transmitted to the committee, founded upon these suggestions. Thus the valiant champion, who had boldly stepped forward, and promised, as a Representative of the people, to "cry aloud and spare not," forgot all his gratuitous gallantry and boasted patriotism, and sunk at once into profound silence.

With these remarks, I will, for the present, leave him, and proceed to assign the reasons to you, to whom alone I admit myself to be officially responsible, for the vote which I gave on the Presidential election. The first inquiry which it behoved me to make, was, as to the influence which ought to be exerted on my judgment, by the relative state of the electoral votes which the three returned candidates brought into the House, from the colleges. General Jackson obtained 99, Mr. Adams 84, and Mr. Crawford 41. Ought the fact of a plurality being given to one of the candidates to have any, and what, weight? If the Constitution had intended that it should have been decisive, the Constitution would have made it decisive and interdicted the exercise of any discretion on the part of the House of Representatives. The Constitution has not so ordained, but, on the contrary, it has provided, that "from the persons having the highest numbers, not

Fig. 1. The Knoxville Register, April 15, 1825. https://www.newspapers.com/image/585793259/ (accessed September 10, 2021).

journalism eventually became the dominant journalistic style after 1800 when political parties began heavily subsidizing papers to publish on their behalf. The effect of this party involvement in the press enterprise caused a reduction of the eclectic material published in newspapers and a narrower focus on political news relating to local, national, and even some foreign events. Similarly, because the paper was beholden to parties for a percentage of its financial backing, editors were thus limited by the ideological precepts of the political party. Readers and owners alike thus came to expect a particular perspective in the papers to which they subscribed.[30]

Figure 1 is emblematic of the typical paper of this early era. One of the longest running journals in Tennessee before the Civil War, the *Register* ran continually from

[30] Daly, *Covering America*, 33, 49.

1816 until 1863 and supported the Whig party both nationally and in state politics for the majority of its tenure. [31] Published weekly, the *Register's* editions ran five columns wide and consisted of four pages of material, three of which consisted of news content typically followed by at least a page of paid advertisements. This early edition of the *Register* presented purely political material to its readers, as indicated by the reprinting of Congressional legislation and a speech by Whig politician Henry Clay shown on its first page. Such political coverage continued with little variation for the entirety of its regular issues, eschewing any content not narrowly related to local or national politics. Advertisements—the main source of revenue for the paper outside of yearly subscriptions—typically comprised the final page of the newspaper, though some publications interspersed advertisements throughout their editions. [32]

Such a narrow focus on political content like that seen in the Knoxville *Register* remained the dominant style for newspapers through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Then, beginning around 1830 and spanning through 1860 and the subsequent American Civil War, a diverse combination of factors and individual actors combined to transform many aspects of contemporary American newspapers. Many of these changes primarily affected newspapers located in the United States' major urban centers—especially in the North—and variously created a divide between the style and content of urban and "country" publications nationally and between those regionally in the North and South. In unique ways, these transformative changes affected each

[31] Jack Mooney, ed. *A History of Tennessee Newspapers* (Knoxville: Tennessee Press Association, 1996), 4.

[32] *Knoxville Register*, April 15, 1825.

newspaper enterprise differently, but together they broadly established the foundational practices around which newspaper editors in Tennessee and elsewhere would contextualize and report the news during the pivotal months of 1860 and 1861.

The first such transformation came simply in the sheer number of publications in the country by the start of the Civil War. In 1830 there were approximately 700 newspapers published regularly in the United States, 65 of which were daily publications based in urban centers. In 1860, however, this number exploded to over 3,500 papers, with 387 of them issued daily.[33] This substantial growth, in part, was driven by the rapid westward expansion of the United States because, with each new town and community, locally-owned newspapers quickly arose in tandem. Uniquely, however, this increase in the volume of published newspapers was also fueled by a series of technological inventions that dramatically increased the ability of editors and printers to mass produce newspapers. Through the colonial era and into the early-1800s, newspaper publishers were limited in the number of copies they could produce because they had to print each issue with a laborious, hand-operated press. That all changed with the invention of steam power as that technology allowed newly designed presses to print thousands of papers a day where once only a few hundred may have been possible.[34]

With this increase in the supply of physical newspapers came a surge in consumer demand for news related to local, national, and international events. Multiple factors spurned this heightened demand, the first being an increase in the pace of communication around the United States. Whereas throughout the early eighteenth century, news traveled

[33]Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*, 65, 111.

[34] Daly, *Covering America*, 16, 56-58.

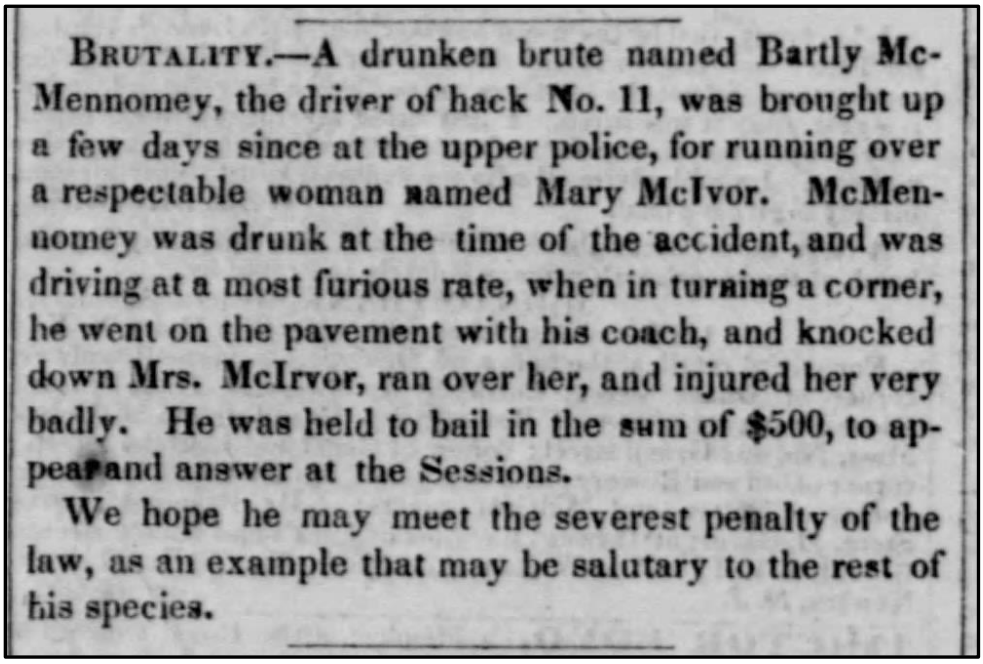
at the speed that a messenger could carry information via horse or ship, the invention of the railroad and the telegraph together combined to expedite the transfer of information like never before. While the material contained in newspapers had always been "new" relative to their readers, the information that traveled across the country's growing network of telegraph lines created a competition between newspapers for updated information and an increased expectation by their readers for "new," updated information.[35] Similarly, railroad traffic expanded the rapidity with which both individuals and physical newspapers circulated within the United States. This new transportation medium increased the pace at which the newspaper exchange between editors flowed and how quickly paying subscribers received their papers. Such an increase in physical traffic and information flow lessened the perceived distance between segments of the United States and worked to heighten readers' awareness of events outside their immediate communities. Like never before, newspaper editors could bring the news, and their own opinions of its significance, to their readers with a heightened feeling of regularity and "newness."[36] These changes would play a part in the course of events in Tennessee and elsewhere during the months of escalating tension between the North and South as readers could quickly read and respond to events and the written opinions of journalists faster than ever before.

Critically, select editors and publishers in the United States adapted to this fluctuating environment by changing how they structured their newspapers, the content reported inside their columns, and the audience they targeted in their papers. Beginning

[35] Bulla and Borchard, *Journalism in the Civil War Era*, 214.

[36] Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*, 111.

in 1833 in New York City, a group of visionary editors led by Benjamin Day of the *New York Sun* looked on the growing middle and lower classes in the city as an opportunity to sell papers. Day began issuing his paper daily—in contravention to more typical weekly issues—and included lively human-interest stories about crimes, trials, political corruption, and other unique events in the city. He dispersed this content amongst the typical coverage of local and national politics—often placing these articles under sensational headlines written in graphic or humorous detail to attract readers' attention.[37] Figure 2 below represents one such article as its sensational headline of "Brutality" and language describing the actions of a "drunken brute" during a carriage accident sought to attract attention to the paper beyond its typical political content.[38]



BRUTALITY.—A drunken brute named Bartly McMennomey, the driver of hack No. 11, was brought up a few days since at the upper police, for running over a respectable woman named Mary McIvor. McMennomey was drunk at the time of the accident, and was driving at a most furious rate, when in turning a corner, he went on the pavement with his coach, and knocked down Mrs. McIrvor, ran over her, and injured her very badly. He was held to bail in the sum of $500, to appear and answer at the Sessions.

We hope he may meet the severest penalty of the law, as an example that may be salutary to the rest of his species.

Fig. 2. A sensationalist, "penny press" style article from the New York Herald, January 9, 1836. https://www.newspapers.com/image/466514073 (accessed September 18, 2021).

[37] Daly, *Covering America*, 59.

[38] *New York Herald*, January 9, 1836.

The other major adaptation made by Benjamin Day was to change the price of his paper. Day only charged one-cent for separate issues of the *New York Sun* that were sold individually on the street by hired peddlers. This new policy ran contrary to the established practice that required a year-long subscription from readers with a cash payment of several dollars, something few Americans could afford except the affluent. This change in marketing gave name to the broader new style of journalism first adopted by papers such as Day's *Sun* as they were eventually labeled the "penny press" because of their one-cent price for individual issues.[39]

The effect of this "penny-press" style of journalism was three-fold. First, whereas the old-style newspapers narrowly targeted a subset of the population with its dry political content, the inclusion of sensational stories about murders, abnormal occurrences, and criminal procedures caused an explosion in readership for these "penny-papers," particularly among middle-and lower-class readers. Other papers in New York City like James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* adopted Day's approach and achieved enough success so that by 1860 they were massive business enterprises with circulations that reached nearly every corner of the United States.[40] Indeed, in December 1860, the *New York Herald* achieved the largest circulation of any newspaper in the world with a daily total of over 77,000 papers in print. The *Herald* was followed by the *Sun* with over 60,000 papers and Horace Greely's *New York Tribune* with over 55,000 daily copies in circulation. Such explosive growth cemented New York City as the

[39] Douglas. *The Golden Age of Newspapers,* 29.

[40] Daly, *Covering America*, 16, 56-58.

journalistic capital of the United States, though other urban daily papers elsewhere in the United States subsequently copied the penny-press approach.[41]

Second, the papers' successes brought in additional advertising revenue, which—when paired with the inclusion of the new human-interest stories—caused these "penny-papers" to grow in physical size. No longer was the standard four-page enough to hold the diverse array of material printed in penny-papers like Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. By 1860, his paper had expanded to a typical eight pages of articles that included lengthy runs of advertisements in each daily edition.[42] Third, the substantial increase in revenue from thousands of paying subscribers and advertisers allowed publishers to divorce their papers from the proprietorship of political parties, thus marking the end of the long-standing practice of direct party involvement in journalism. Political content aligned to a narrow view supporting specific parties still dominated much of the material printed in newspapers, but no longer were editors financially beholden to a narrow party line in what they wrote. Twentieth-century ideals for an "objective" press remained far in the future, but the a separation from direct party control that began with the rise of the "penny-press" style helped lay the foundation for the modern American press.[43]

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[41] Douglas. *The Golden Age of Newspapers,* 56-57.

[42] By 1860, eight pages became the common length for similar urban dailies such as those in New York City like the *New York Times* and the *New York Daily Herald*. Eight pages was by no means the rule, however. Some daily papers, such as the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, regularly published papers in excess of ten pages. For example, see the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* January 01, 1860.

[43] Daly, *Covering America*, 59.

The Southern Press in 1860

While the rise of the penny press revolutionized the style, content, and audience of many newspapers, by 1860, those changes remained heavily concentrated in the North's major cities. Only a few Southern papers adopted the new style completely, most notably the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* and the *Richmond Dispatch* located in two of the South's largest cities.[44] The influences of the technological changes spurred by the railroad, telegraphic exchanges, and steam presses had become mainly common practice in Southern journalism by 1860. Editors relied on such methods to disseminate the information that fed their columns and issue their papers to subscribers. However, such technological influence was comparably limited in the South by the dearth of reliable rail transportation and extensive telegraph lines in the region. For the smaller, "country" enterprises that predominated in the 1860s South, some antiquated hand-presses were still in use, and such papers—separate as they were from big cities and the telegraph lines connected to the Associated Press in New York —relied on their neighboring papers via the exchange for telegraphic updates to the news.[45] The result was a regional press in 1860 caught between traditional journalistic practices and the forces of modernization.

The typical Southern paper still consisted of four pages that spanned between four to eight columns of material. A standard article only spanned one column, but important

[44] The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* was the first Southern paper to adopt the "penny-press" style in the South. It did so in 1837 under the editorship of George Wilkins Kendall and Francis A. Lumsden. The *Daily Picayune* was published continuously until its merger with the New Orleans *Time-Democrat* in 1914. In 1860, the Picayune had the largest circulation of any paper in the South and editorially supported the Unionist cause throughout that year's election campaign. After the election of Abraham Lincoln that November, however, it switched positions in favor of secession. For more see Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press,* 47-68; Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 4-5, 67.

[45] Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War*, 25; Weisberger, *The American Newspaperman*, 111, 114-116.

stories frequently extended across multiple columns or even an entire page. The first page typically featured national or international news placed alongside a run of advertisements. The second page commonly included editorials published by the paper's staff and a mix of letters to the editor, additional news articles, and possibly more advertisements. Pages three and four carried more advertisements, telegraphic news (if the paper retained access to the telegraphic lines), local news, and agricultural and commercial reports detailing market prices for goods and crops.[46] Reflecting some of the changes brought by the "penny-press" style nationally, Southern editors placed varying degrees of emphasis on covering local happenings such as deaths, fires, school graduations, and local fairs. Nevertheless, political content remained the central focus of Southern newspapers in more significant numbers than the Northern press. Citing the 1860 census, Donald Reynolds asserted that an estimated 83 percent of the South's publications were primarily devoted to political coverage, compared to 74 percent in Northern publications.[47] Reynold's comment holds true with the seven papers from Tennessee selected for this study. Each of them, regardless of their location, placed political content front and center to their paper's mission. These editors each did adopt a unique style that integrated aspects of the wider "press revolution" into how they reported the news in their papers, but they nonetheless used their papers as predominantly political platforms through which to advance their Unionist cause.

[46] Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War*, 25.

[47] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 5.

By 1860, just over 800 papers—less than two-thirds of the nation's totals—were published in the eleven Southern states that eventually constituted the Confederacy.[48] These Southern publications were chiefly weekly publications published by a small editorial and printing staff and maintained smaller circulations than their Northern counterparts.[49] Whereas the *New York Herald* in 1860 regularly printed and disseminated over 70,000 papers per edition, the typical Southern journal rarely surpassed a few thousand subscribers.[50] Indeed, the *New Orleans Picayune*—the largest paper in the South—achieved a daily circulation of only 12,600 issues in 1860.[51] As paltry as those circulation numbers are, Southern newspaper publishers nonetheless maintained local dominance over their respective communities regarding news publication. In 1860, it was common for Southern towns to hold at least one newspaper that reached into the outlying rural areas, though two or more competing papers aligned behind political parties were also frequent occurrences. As was common practice, Southern editors primarily printed material that only narrowly hewed to their paper's ideological perspective. When they varied from this approach, it was often only to print opposing material as justification for future editorial attacks. As sectional tensions increased through the 1850s, though, this reprinted content was increasingly drawn only from other Southern journals, meaning that the few depictions of different perspectives beyond the South were cycled through

[48] Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War*, 25; Craig, *Kentucky's Rebel Press*, 8.

[49] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press,* 4.

[50] Douglas. *The Golden Age of Newspapers,* 13.

[51] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press,* 65.

the lens of the editor's choice of material, their editorial comments, and the general Southern worldview.[52]

Dedicated readers, of course, had the opportunity to subscribe to papers beyond their immediate community, and many did, though those papers were often limited to only other Southern publications. By 1860, few Northern papers had paying subscribers in the South, meaning that outside of editors who maintained subscriptions through the regular newspaper exchange, such publications rarely circulated on their own among the Southern population. For example, radical Northern newspapers like Greeley's *New York Tribune* notably had only 35 subscribers in Texas, 42 in Alabama, and only 21 in Mississippi.[53] Northern Democratic newspapers such as the *New York Herald* did appear in front of Southern readers, but commonly in the form of articles clipped from the exchange by editors and placed into their papers. Southern Democratic papers sometimes styled such clippings as being representative of sympathetic voices in the North or, in the case of former Whig editors, they appeared as material that they tried to refute with their own editorial content. [54] The effect of these exclusionary practices and general isolation was that few contrary opinions beyond those expressed in other Southern newspapers reached readers in that region. Those that did, such as the *New York Herald*, were cycled through the perspective of individual editors who deliberately selected what they wanted and commonly summarized selected material in their own words or attached a header with editorial comments. Such practices demonstrated the power invested in the

[52] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 5-6.

[53] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 6.

[54] Andrews. *The South Reports the Civil War*, 25.

individual editor as a source of information and opinion. Southern readers certainly made their own choices as to what to believe from their newspapers, but for those who may have desired to, it thus would have required deliberate effort to read news beyond the few perspectives presented in community and regional publications.

However, such a desire for ideological diversity was a rarity in the 1860s South for readers and editors alike. As described by Donald Reynolds, political partisanship, vitriolic language, and one-sided journalism were the "*raison de'etre* of most Southern newspapers" and were expected by readers when they picked up a paper.[55] William Brownlow, the infamous editor of *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* in Knoxville, Tennessee, reflected this outlook in June 1860 when he scoffed at the idea of a "neutral" newspaper. "We have no use for any paper that is neutral, touching the exciting issue of this day and time," he exclaimed, further asserting that "this is no age in which to be neutral, in relation to the affairs of Government or the Religion of God. Every paper in the country should be for or against the heresies of the age, and the corruptions of the men in power."[56] Of course, such deliberate partisanship as advocated by Brownlow was by no means exclusively restricted to the Southern press. Still, it nevertheless marked the conduct of nearly every Southern paper during the secession crisis in 1860 and 1861. While a few newspapers did initially try to style themselves as "independent" during the months of the secession crisis, even those few papers were eventually forced to take sides

[55] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 67.

[56] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, June 16, 1860.

amidst the tide of sectional conflict that raged in those critical months in 1860 and 1861.[57]

Tennessee's Unionist Press

Much as it does today, Tennessee in 1860 possessed a diverse collection of geographic, economic, and social factors that dictated much of the state's internal politics as well as its relations with the rest of the country. Tennessee is physically divided into three "grand divisions"—East, Middle, and West—defined by distinct geographic features and that each possess varying economic and agricultural climates. Throughout much of its early history, Tennessee's regions were largely isolated from each other by their rugged geography and remained connected by only a few roads spanning the state from east to west. This relative isolation resulted in different political cultures that combined with their distinct economic conditions to create competing interests across the state. Competition between East, Middle, and West Tennessee underscored much of the state's internal politics throughout its early decades, a fact that became especially apparent in the months of 1860 and 1861 as residents in each section broadly supported different courses of action regarding secession.[58]

Within this statewide environment, Tennessee's Unionist editors worked to report and influence the cascade of national and state events that followed in 1860 and 1861. Attaining a complete record of the number of publications that operated during this period is difficult as newspaper enterprises rose and collapsed with regularity.

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[57] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 6-7.

[58] Jonathan M. Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1841* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 14-15.

Nonetheless, several historians have provided approximate numbers for Tennessee's press. According to the 1860 Federal census, between thirty-six and sixty-one weekly newspapers operated in Tennessee along with eight daily newspapers.[59] Donald Reynolds provides the most concrete list of publications as he cited forty-seven newspapers in Tennessee from 1860 to 1861, including twenty-two that at some point supported the Union cause. An additional twenty-three papers supported Democratic candidates in the 1860 election, though these were split between seventeen that backed John C. Breckinridge's Southern Rights wing and six that supported the northern Democrat Stephen Douglas. Notably, two "independent" papers also worked during this period, one in Memphis and the other in Nashville. Such a close equivalence between Democratic and "Opposition" journals, regardless of the division between factions in the Democratic party, underscores the competitiveness of the political climate in Tennessee that its editors worked within at the start of the secession crisis.[60]

East Tennessee and its Unionist papers

East Tennessee begins in the mountainous regions along the state's eastern border with North Carolina and continues west onto the rugged Cumberland Plateau. Inside this region is a collection of low valleys and ridges that make up the "Great Tennessee Valley." Sometimes called the "Switzerland of America" because of its isolation, in 1860, East Tennessee was the least populated of the state's regions despite having been

[59] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 20.

[60] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 228.

the first area to be settled by whites the century before.[61] East Tennessee contained only two cities—Knoxville and Chattanooga—with more than three thousand residents in 1860. Both of these were centers of economic and political activity in the region and, not surprisingly, were also the location of its most influential newspapers.[62] Of the eleven newspapers published in East Tennessee, five operated in Knoxville and Chattanooga, with the rest scattered among smaller rural towns like Athens, Cleveland, or Jonesborough. Of these eleven, five newspapers in Tennessee supported the Union cause at points through the secession crisis: the *Chattanooga Gazette*, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, the *Athens Post*, the *Jonesborough Express*, and the *Jasper Sequatchie Herald*.[63] To capture the reporting of Unionist editors from the perspective of East Tennessee's urban and rural areas, this study, therefore, draws on *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* edited by William G. Brownlow and Samuel Ivin's *Athens Post*.

Brownlow's Knoxville Whig---William G. Brownlow, editor

By 1860, William G. Brownlow had worked as a newspaper editor for over 20 years. A Virginian by birth, Brownlow took up the newspaper trade in 1836 after serving as a Methodist circuit preacher. After ten years working on two different papers in northeastern Tennessee, Brownlow moved his family south to Knoxville in 1849 to found

[61] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1841*, 14-15; Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3-5.

[62] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union: 1847-1861*, 14. Both Knoxville and Chattanooga had populations in excess of 3,000 people by 1860. In 1860, both Chattanooga and Knoxville had competing newspapers that supported the Democratic party; those being *the Knoxville Register*, the *Chattanooga Advertiser*, and the *Chattanooga Reflector*. For more on Chattanooga and Knoxville as cities, see W. Todd Groce *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999) or Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[63] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 228.

a weekly publication that he named the *Whig and Independent Journal*. As he gained notoriety as an editor, Brownlow eventually changed the title of his paper to *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, the name under which he would publish the news during the secession crisis.[64]

More than any paper examined in this study, Brownlow's *Whig* adhered the closest to the "penny-press" style prevalent in urban areas around the United States. While political content still dominated, Brownlow consistently used a combination of crude and self-deprecating humor, sarcasm, catchphrases, and sensationally written stories to broaden the appeal of his paper to a larger audience. Ideologically, Brownlow was as a fierce supporter of the national Whig party and, not surprisingly, devoted significant space in his columns to militantly combatting the Democratic Party. Like in larger penny papers, Brownlow's articles routinely criticized the Democratic party supporters with inflammatory language, calling them "unwashed Locofoco," "bogus," "blackguards," or members of the "plundering Democracy," just to name a few.[65] Rare was the article that did not blame the country's ills or the outcome of specific events on the supposedly sinister machinations of Democrats. Biographer E. Merton Coulter put it best by stating that, "in the eyes of the Parson [Brownlow], the whole world was sick, and the Democrats were the cause."[66] Similarly, although he did not own any slaves,

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[64] E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 35-50.

[65] Such terms varied from issue to issue with little repetition. The diversity of language and creativity with which Brownlow editorialized undoubtedly improved the attractiveness of his paper to like-minded partisans. Similarly, it was one of the factors that led to his paper's prolonged success and widespread notoriety. For example, see the lead column in the *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 11, 1860.

[66] Coulter, *William G. Brownlow,* 115.

Brownlow was nonetheless a fierce advocate of the "common good" view of slavery and frequently used his newspaper's wide circulation to advance his views on the subject.

Such blatant partisanship was not unique among nineteenth-century editors, but the viciousness and creativity of Brownlow's rhetoric nonetheless set the *Whig* apart. This distinctive style brought Brownlow a level of business success comparable to few editors in the South. When he first launched the *Knoxville Whig* in 1849, Brownlow's paper achieved approximately 2,000 subscribers by year's end.[67] One decade later, his subscription list had exploded to nearly 12,000 weekly readers, a fact that he had no qualms promoting when he proclaimed to readers that he then had "more [subscribers] than any other political paper in this State can boast of." [68] This large circulation spanned the entire United States, a fact evidenced by the numerous letters to the editor featured in the *Knoxville Whig*. Throughout the eighteen months of reporting examined in this study, Brownlow published letters from as far away as Kansas City, Missouri, New York City, Washington D.C., and Amherst, Massachusetts. His paper also featured letters from nearly every state in the South.[69] Such a vast readership brought Brownlow a measure of financial success as his estate was valued at over $21,000 in 1860—a comfortable level

[67] Coulter, *William G. Brownlow*, 26.

[68] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860.

[69] Letters to the editor were common occurrences in nineteenth-century newspapers, and Brownlow and others often used them to supplement news content. Brownlow maintained contact with correspondents in places like New York City and Washington D.C who periodically sent him letters reporting on events in those locations. Commonly, subscribers or correspondents wrote the paper under a pseudonym, though many letters were printed unnamed. Brownlow also regularly published letters from readers who disagreed with his positions, some of which threatened him with harm or death. These letters allowed Brownlow further inflammatory material to publish as evidence of his opinion regarding secession and the Democratic party. For an example of this, see the lead article on the *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, September 8, 1860.

of wealth for a nineteenth-century editor.[70] This widespread circulation demonstrates the reach and notoriety of Brownlow both inside Tennessee and nationally. Significantly, however, it also marked him as a target for attacks from political opponents, both physically and rhetorically. Such threats would only increase in the months of the secession crisis as Brownlow loudly chose to support the Union cause.

The Athens Post, Samuel P. Ivins, editor

Like William Brownlow, Samuel P. Ivins had extensive experience in journalism before 1860. Ivins was a transplanted Northerner from Trenton, New Jersey, who moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1842 after working on various newspapers.[71] There, Ivins founded a paper named the *Knoxville Post* which he operated until 1848 when he moved it south to Athens. Ivins renamed his paper *The Athens Post* in dedication to his new home's location as a stop on the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad.[72] A long-time supporter of the Whig Party, the *Post* served as the bastion for that organization—and later Unionism—in south-central East Tennessee.

Ivins's *Post* was the archetypal nineteenth-century "country" paper. With a modest circulation of just 1400 subscribers, his paper lacked the notoriety and reach of Brownlow's *Whig* but still occupied a dominant position locally.[73] Like other country

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[70] U.S. Census Bureau, 1860 United States Federal Census, "Census Place: District 1, Knox, Tennessee; Page: 97," NARA, Publication M653, Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/19317228:7667?tid=&pid=&queryId=f60109f99d14946830ff2a6237f44cfb&_phsrc=zoY1197&_phstart=successSource (accessed April 6, 2021).

[71] *The Knoxville Journal*, June 18, 1887.

[72] Jack Mooney, ed., *A History of Tennessee Newspapers*, 5, 7, 88.

[73] Weston A. Goodspeed and John Wooldridge, *History of Tennessee from the earliest time to the Present: Together with an Historical and a Biographical Sketch of from Twenty-Five to Thirty Counties of East Tennessee, besides a valuable fund of notes, original observations, Etc., Etc.,* (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1887), 814.

papers, the *Post* rarely deviated from national and state political content, only doing so to convey information about local events such as court days, local crops, and county elections. Notably missing from the *Post* is up-to-date information conveyed through telegraphic dispatches like those seen in more affluent city papers. Instead, Ivins likely clipped much of his material from the newspaper exchange. Laments from Ivins about the haphazardness of the mail service were common occurrences as Athens' location far from major urban centers meant that he depended on the regular flow of the mail to access new material. [74]

Despite this limitation, Ivins gained notoriety in the Tennessee press for the clarity and incisiveness of his editorials. Lauded by a fellow journalist as being a "clear, crisp, practical editor," Ivins eschewed inflammatory and provocative attacks.[75] Instead, he wrote measured editorials that tried to reason with readers about political issues rather than violently criticize Democratic opponents. Ivins also favored conciseness rather than lengthy essays, "making it a point to always say what he had to say in the fewest possible words," as one writer described.[76]. Ivins regularly tried to differentiate his paper from what he saw as the inaccuracies and lies common in the press by repeatedly warning against hoaxes, rumors, and lies circulating in other papers. Moreover, Ivins promised to make his paper one that was "firm and respectful in politics" and that was "devoted to

[74] Such cases were not uncommon, like on August 17, 1860 when Ivins complained to his readers that, "The Nashville paper mails come through with exceeding irregularity.—Last week there were just two paper mails from Nashville. We can't tell where the fault is, but there is a fault somewhere." His complaints would be reiterated by other country editors in Tennessee who depended on the mails for supplemental material. See, *The Athens Post*, August 17, 1860.

[75] *The Chattanooga Sunday Times*, June 19, 1887.

[76] *The Knoxville Journal*, June 18, 1887.

news and dissemination of useful and substantial information among the people." Such a course would set his work apart from other papers whose readers "live and die in happy bliss and ignorance of what is occurring everywhere else" because of the failures of their editors to portray the news accurately.[77] Ideologically, Ivins regularly opined against disruptions to the social status quo and the institution of slavery from action by "radical" Northern and Southern political actors—a belief that likely predisposed him to support remaining in the Union throughout the secession crisis.

Middle Tennessee and its Unionist Papers

Middle Tennessee extends from the western edge of the Cumberland Plateau to its boundary on the banks of the Tennessee River. In between these boundaries is a unique area that in 1860 comprised the most populated and economically diverse region in Tennessee.[78] Middle Tennessee's economy relied on a variety of crops centered primarily on foodstuffs, though a few areas did include some cotton production. More distinctly, Middle Tennessee was known throughout the South for the quality of its livestock. The region exported vast numbers of horses, cattle, sheep, and mules all across the South, meaning that its economy and the entire region were inextricably linked. Notably, Middle Tennessee contained a much larger population of enslaved people than East Tennessee, constituting over one-fifth of the section's population.[79]

At the center of Middle Tennessee is Nashville, the state's capital, and in 1860, its second-largest city. Nashville played a crucial role in Tennessee's political and

[77] *The Athens Post*, June 22, 1860.

[78] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 12.

[79] McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 5.

commercial affairs with its crucial location on the Cumberland River and at the junction of three railroad lines.[80] Not surprisingly, it also occupied a prominent position within the state's newspaper industry. Middle Tennessee contained twenty different newspapers that operated between 1860 and 1861, five in Nashville alone. Ten newspapers in some fashion supported the Union cause, be it in the election of 1860 or afterward. To address the centrality of Nashville to the state and its newspapers, this study examines two papers from that city: the Nashville *Republican Banner and Whig* and the *Nashville Patriot*. To incorporate a rural perspective, it also includes the *Clarksville Chronicle* from Clarksville in northern Middle Tennessee.[81]

Nashville *Republican Banner and Whig*, Hiram Walker and Thomas Beaumont, editors

By 1860, the Nashville *Republican Banner and Whig* was one of the city's longest-running and most influential newspapers. The Nashville *Republican Banner* was formed in August 1837 when the owners of a daily Whig paper, the *National Banner and Nashville Advertiser*, purchased and consolidated several newspaper enterprises in the city.[82] In 1860, a joint firm titled "Bang, Walker, & Co." owned by William F. Bang and Hiram K. Walker published the paper. Bang was a very wealthy businessman, and slaveholder who owned an interest in the paper dating back to its founding in 1837[83]

[80] Atkins, Parties, *Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 16.

[81] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 228.

[82] W. W. Clayton, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880), 238.

[83] William Bang possessed a combined wealth of over $64,000 in 1860, spread between $45,400 in real estate and $18,800 in personal estate value. Census records show Bang and his family owning four slaves in the 1850 census, though no record is available for 1860. U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census*, "Census Place: Nashville Ward 4, Davidson, Tennessee; Page: 368," NARA, Publication M653, Ancestry.com (accessed July 6, 2021).

Bang served an administrative role as publisher for the paper, while Walker managed the day-to-day operations as editor. Walker—a Vermonter by birth and also a wealthy slaveowner—purchased an interest in the paper in 1856 after working in the state government as the chief clerk to the state Senate.[84] Walker was assisted in his editorial duties by Thomas Beaumont, a native Tennessean and former lawyer, who first joined the staff in July 1858. Beaumont would eventually resign his position in March 1860, leaving editorial duties exclusively to Walker.[85] Much like Samuel Ivins, Hiram Walker argued for the importance of the Union, a restoration of social harmony to the United States, and the removal of slavery as a subject in political discussion. He did so under the auspice that this program would ensure increased prosperity and progress, while likely also safeguarding his status as a wealthy slaveowner.

Under Walker and Beaumont's leadership, the Nashville *Republican Banner* operated as a daily paper publishing issues six days a week. Compared to its "country" paper counterparts, the *Banner* was a decidedly modern paper much closer in its style, content, and appearance to the urban "penny papers" in cities like New York. Though still only four pages, the daily iteration of the *Banner* contained sections covering political content, local news, market reports, telegraph dispatches, railroad schedules, and riverboat traffic. Miscellaneous articles describing items like newly published books, horse race results, and the typical penny-press article concerning brutal accidents or murders were often interspersed between these sections. The great strength and importance of the paper came in its political and editorial content, however. Located as it

[84] *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 29, 1855.

[85] *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 17, 1858.

was within the capital of Tennessee, the *Banner* regularly published records of proceedings and speeches from the state legislature when it was in session. These articles likely served as the basis for rural papers to copy material concerning the state legislature's actions. Similarly, Nashville's location along the telegraph line stretching to Louisville and the southern office of the Associated Press afforded papers like the *Banner* first crack at the dispatches traveling over the wires.[86] Along with the volume of news it disseminated, such a position afforded the *Banner* a prominent position within Tennessee's press as it eventually became one of the leading papers supporting the cause of Unionism in the secession crisis.

The *Nashville Patriot*, Ira P. Jones, William H. Smith, John E. Hatcher editors

Unlike its peer and competitor, the *Republican Banner*, the *Nashville Patriot* in 1860 was a comparatively young paper. Founded in 1856, the *Patriot* was owned and operated by a joint firm named "A. S. Camp & Co.," split between owners Anthony S. Camp and Thomas Callender as publishers and Ira P. Jones as the primary editor. Jones was aided in his duties by two additional editors in William H. Smith and John E Hatcher.

Originally from Mississippi, Jones purchased an interest in the paper in 1857 and assumed the title of editor despite not having any prior newspaper experience. When the paper hired Jones, its staff lauded him for being a "gentleman of decided ability, a fine

[86] The Associated Press was a cooperative organization formed in 1848 in New York City by its six major newspapers. This organization effectively operated as cartel for telegraphic reporting, requiring other newspapers to purchase subscriptions. Prices were often too extensive for smaller papers, leaving big city papers like the Banner to be one of the few papers able to pay the prices necessary. The southern office of the Associated Press was located in Louisville, Kentucky and disseminated dispatches south along the telegraph line that extended through Nashville to New Orleans. For more, see J. Cutler Andrews' *The South Reports the Civil War* or Ford Risley's, "Wartime News over Southern Wires: The Confederate Press Association" in *Words at War: The Civil War and American Journalism*.

scholar, and a ready, fluent, and graceful writer."[87] Similar plaudits came from the editors of the *Republican Banner*, who applauded the *Patriot* for its choice and praised Jones as being "a ready, pungent, and strong writer."[88] Jones's assistant editor William H. Smith was originally from Kentucky and was a founding member of the *Patriot's* staff in 1856. Although he sold his stake in the paper in 1859, Smith stayed on as an editor alongside Jones. Smith had previously worked as an assistant editor for the *Republican Banner* and eventually gained a reputation in Tennessee as an "able and incorruptible editor."[89] The newest member of the staff was John E. Hatcher, who joined in 1859. As an assistant editor, Hatcher worked as the "Local and Military Editor," responsible for the content presented on the paper's third page that addressed news about the city. [90] Of the *Patriot's* three editors, only Hatcher did not own slaves.[91]

Like the *Republican Banner and Whig*, the *Nashville Patriot* was a daily paper. There were few differences between the two dailies in how they structured their papers, as the *Patriot* similarly included extensive coverage of the legislature's proceedings, telegraphic reports, and commercial news. Where the two papers differed, however, was in the style and content of the paper's editorial articles. Whereas the *Banner's* editorials were concise and rarely exceeded a single column, the *Patriot's* editors expressed their opinions in lengthy and well-crafted articles that sometimes spanned multiple columns or

[87] *Nashville Patriot*, March 18, 1857.

[88] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 19, 1857.

[89] Jackson *Whig and Tribune*, April 26, 1873.

[90] *Nashville Patriot*, March 05, 1860.

[91] U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census-Slave Schedules*, NARA, Publication M653, Record Group 29, Ancestry.com (accessed July 13, 2021).

the entirety of a page. These editorials were written mainly by Jones, who often weaved extensive snips of supporting evidence to support his arguments in a manner that often resembled a legal argument. While no less partisan in his rhetoric, Jones' style would have provided readers with ample evidence to corroborate his assertions and draw their own conclusions, something lacking in the writings of other editors.

The *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, Robert W. Thomas, editor

The *Clarksville Chronicle* was founded in 1836 when the firm of Francis Ricardson & Co. purchased and renamed the existing newspaper in Clarksville. Over a decade later, in July 1849, Robert W. Thomas purchased the paper.[92] Originally from Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas supported the Whig party politically and had prior editorial experience working on the *Green River Whig* in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.[93] Thomas served as the owner and operator of the *Chronicle* for eight years until he sold his position to the pair of James S. Neblett and James A. Grant, both of whom had served as apprentices in the *Chronicle's* shop under Thomas. Despite this sale, Neblett and Grant worked as publishers for the *Chronicle* while Thomas continued as the managing editor. Of the *Chronicle's* staff, only Neblett did not hold slaves in 1860.[94]

Like Samuel Ivins in his *Athens Post*, the *Chronicle* was a weekly "country" paper similar to others in rural towns in Tennessee. Featuring the standard four pages, the *Chronicle* printed a heavy dose of political content. However, Roberts tried to diversify

[92] Weston A. Goodspeed and John Wooldridge, *History of Tennessee from the earliest time to the present: together with an historical and a biographical sketch of Montgomery, Robertson, Humphreys, Stewart, Dickson, Cheatham and Houston counties* (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1886), 817.

[93] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, April 29, 1876.

[94] U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census-Slave Schedules*, NARA, Publication M653, Record Group 29, Ancestry.com (accessed July 12, 2021).

his paper by including unique fixtures like original poetry from subscribers, literary notices, and lively reporting on local matters such as school events and town improvements. Unlike Ivins, Thomas did include telegraphic news dispatches in his columns, though such content was highly irregular and sometimes over a week later than the event described. Under Thomas' pen, the editorials printed in the *Chronicle* were unabashedly elitist in both tone and content. Such articles varied from dense treatises on political and constitutional matters to arguments that blatantly spoke against democracy, universal suffrage, and egalitarian policies. Thomas occasionally used sarcastic and acerbic language like William Brownlow to attack Democratic supporters and the town's rival paper, the *Clarksville Jeffersonian*. Similarly, Roberts was a fierce supporter of slavery and often used his columns to defend the institution against perceived agitation from Southerners and Northerners alike. As a way to preserve the existing status quo, including slavery, Thomas passionately argued for the value of the Union as it then existed and for casting slavery out of the political discourse. These elements that comprised Roberts' editorial style would direct his news coverage throughout the secession crisis in 1860 and 1861.

West Tennessee and its Union Papers

West Tennessee begins at the bank of the Tennessee River and extends to its border with Arkansas and Missouri along the Mississippi River.[95] West Tennessee was the last area in the state to be settled by whites because it was not open for immigration until an 1818 treaty with the Chickasaw ceded the entirety of the region to the United States. As a result, settlers flocked to the region to claim its fertile soil, which was ripe

[95] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 12-13.

for cultivating cash crops like cotton and tobacco. In short order, cotton dominated the region's agriculture and economy so that, by 1850, West Tennessee was the wealthiest of the state's three grand divisions. Not surprisingly, West Tennessee featured the largest concentration of slave labor in all of Tennessee, making up well over one-third of the region's total population. [96]

Compared to Middle Tennessee, the western region's population was comparatively small despite containing the state's largest urban center in Memphis. Located on the Mississippi River in the southwestern corner, by 1860, Memphis contained a population of over 25,000 residents and was a powerful commercial center for exporting cotton out of western Tennessee and northern Mississippi.[97] This critical position also made Memphis the center of journalism in the region. Of the fifteen newspapers published in West Tennessee in 1860 and 1861, five resided in Memphis. Two papers—the *Memphis Bulletin* and the Memphis *Daily Examiner*—supported the Union cause throughout the crisis. Elsewhere in the region's rural counties, only four other papers advocated for the Union in those months: the *Carroll Patriot*, the *West Tennessee Whig* in Jackson, the *Lexington Dispatch*, and the *Trenton Southern Standard*. This study examined the reporting of the *Memphis Bulletin* and the *West Tennessee Whig* to draw on voices from both West Tennessee's urban and rural areas.[98]

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[96] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee,* 17, 20.

[97] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union,* 14; McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 7.

[98] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 228.

West Tennessee Whig, William W. Gates, editor

By 1860, the *West Tennessee Whig* in Jackson, Tennessee, proudly owned the distinction of being the oldest continuously-run newspaper in the region. The *Whig* was established in 1844 by William W. Gates, a former Virginian, who had first gained journalism experience while serving as an apprentice in a newspaper shop in Paris, Tennessee. Gates bought his employer's paper in 1830 at age 18, and after several years moved it to Jackson under the name of the *West Tennessee Whig*.[99] Several papers had tried to publish in Jackson dating back to 1824, though none were successful. It was not until Gates brought the *Whig* to Jackson that the town would have a long-term, successful newspaper. By 1854, John M. Parker, a North Carolinian, joined Gates in the venture and jointly served as editor until he left the paper in October 1860.[100] Despite their comfortable wealth and location in the largest slaveholding region in Tennessee, neither Gates nor Parker owned slaves in 1860.[101]

The *West Tennessee Whig* was a four-page weekly that differed only slightly from the style of other "country" papers in Tennessee. Each issue featured a banner stating the paper's purpose, decreeing that the *Whig* was "Devoted to Politics, Agriculture, Commerce and General Information." In its style and presentation, Gates' papers largely fulfilled this

[99] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; March, 02 1891.

[100] The first available paper bearing Parker's name as editor was published on January 19, 1854. Before that, Gates had a co-editor named Richard Dashiell. Who appears on the next-earliest edition on April 7, 1853. It is unclear when exactly Parker assumed the editorial chair alongside Gates, but it is likely that Parker it happened sometime in 1853. See the *West Tennessee Whig*, January 19, 1854.

[101] According to the 1860 census, both Gates and Parker's total wealth were in excess of $14,000 each, a comfortable standing for an editor. No record exists that either man owned slaves. U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census*, "Census Place: Jackson, Madison, Tennessee; Page: 173," NARA, Publication M653, Ancestry.com (accessed July 8, 2021).

promise by providing a broad range of material in addition to its central political focus. Such material alternated between poems and songs to historical essays or humorous, literary stories. Like other papers, this supplemental material would gradually fall away amidst the demand for news as the election of 1860 and secession crisis escalated. Notably, the *Whig* lacked a section devoted to telegraphic reports, meaning that his paper solely depended on clippings from the newspaper exchange to fill out its columns in the traditional manner. Editorially, Gates' columns and news commentary lacked the vitriol and inflammatory language used by others and instead employed measured language and reason in his articles. As a long-time Whig, Gates's paper served as a bastion for that party in a region dominated by Democratic politics as he argued for progress, social harmony, and public virtue. Throughout much of 1860, at least, Gates would attempt to perform that role again.

The *Memphis Bulletin*, Jesse H. McMahon, editor

Like William Gates, by 1860, Jesse McMahon was an old-hand in the newspaper industry. Known for having a "smooth, incisive, practical and vigorous style," McMahon had experience on newspaper staffs dating back to his first job as an editor for the short-lived Jackson *Truth Teller and District Sentinel*. He moved to Memphis in 1838 and, for the next seventeen years, served as editor for the Whig-affiliated *Memphis Enquirer* and later for *the Eagle and Enquirer*. McMahon was a Catholic, so, in 1855, he resigned from his editorial role on the *Eagle and Enquirer* in protest over its owners' support for the

nativist Know-Nothing Party. After gathering financial support from an affluent supporter, McMahon founded the *Memphis Bulletin* later that year. [102]

If Gates' *West Tennessee Whig* was the oldest paper published in West Tennessee, the *Memphis Bulletin* was one of the most expansive papers in the region and possibly the entire state. Though still a weekly paper, the *Bulletin* was an eight-page edition that included a wide collection of material, including a page devoted to international news, another promoting miscellaneous articles such as literary stories and poems, and an editorial page with McMahon's original content. It also regularly contained three "general news" pages featuring letters from correspondents and telegraph dispatches alongside two pages of advertisements. With this vast array of material, the *Bulletin* rivaled in size and content the successful urban dailies in New York and provided a depth of content not seen in any other paper in this study. Beyond its length, the most notable aspect of the *Bulletin* was that it was ostensibly an "independent" newspaper. Although McMahon had previously been heavily involved in local Whig politics, he did not declare his paper for any presidential candidate in 1856 and subsequently continued this neutral policy through the intervening state and local elections.[103] This stance would prove exceedingly difficult to maintain in the months of the secession crisis.

As 1860 dawned, these seven newspapers and their editorial staff approached the upcoming year cautiously anticipating the events surrounding the upcoming presidential

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[102] B. G. Ellis, *The Moving Appeal: Mr. McClanahan, Mrs. Dill, and the Civil War's Great Newspaper Run* (Macon: Mercer University Press), 45.

[103] Weston A. Goodspeed and John Wooldridge, *History of Tennessee: From the Earliest Time to the Present; Together with an Historical and Biographical Sketch of the County of Shelby and the City of Memphis, Besides a Valuable Fund of Notes, Original Observations, Reminiscences, Etc. Etc.* (Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1887), 905.

campaign. Reflecting on the rising sectional tensions between North and South from the final months of 1859, Jesse McMahon expressed this sentiment by holding out hope that the United States would find a way through its present troubles. "The North and South are….arrayed in fearful hostility—a hostility that puts the very Government itself in peril," he wrote in his first editorial of 1860. Nevertheless, he urged his readers not to despair, exclaiming, "we are not without hope that before the year that begins this morning shall close, passion will have subsided, and the era of good feeling, so long maintained between the people of every section, [will have] return[ed] from temporary exile."[104]

Whether this hope would come to pass would have been unknowable to McMahon or his fellow editors. Still, their occupations nonetheless appeared to allow them the opportunity to report the course of events and possibly influence the opinions of their readers as a way to stave off further conflict. These Tennessee newspapermen would wage this effort within the parameters and limitations created by the convergence of the significant technological and stylistic changes of the previous two decades on the Southern newspaper industry. Some papers such as the urban dailies of the Nashville *Republican Banner* and the *Nashville Patriot*, or the weeklies of *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* or the *Memphis Weekly Bulletin,* appeared closer to the powerful and increasingly modern "penny-papers" seen in Northern cities. Their size, regularity, style, or locations in major political centers and along communication lines afforded these papers substantial influence over disseminating news statewide. Other weekly "country" papers such as the *Athens Post*, the *West Tennessee Whig,* and the *Clarksville Chronicle*—while no less important to their local readers—were limited by their locations and depended on

[104] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, January 06, 1860.

their urban counterparts for the bulk of their material. These country papers more closely resembled the traditional newspapers of the 1830s with their political focus while variously blending aspects of the modern press revolution into their reporting. These seven papers—despite their different traits—would be guided by the decisions of their editors, whose unique styles contextualized events for their readers. Be it William Brownlow's insults or Jesse McMahon's "independent" editorials, their writings would be the voice and platform with which they strove to convince readers of the validity of their opinions about the need for compromise and preventing disunion. Linked by a shared ideology grounded in the worldview of their ties to the old Whig Party, these editors appeared to present a unified front in favor of the Union. The months ahead would severely test that unity.

CHAPTER III - "AGITATORS" AND "DEMAGOGUES": UNION JOURNALISM, THE WHIG TRADITION, AND THE ELECTION OF 1860 IN TENNESSEE

"The country needs repose, and must have it. Her best interests have been lost sight of in the bitter controversies which have been forced upon the people by political demagogues and fanatics; and an era of quiet and harmony is necessary to arrest the current corruption which threatens ruin, and to inaugurate and carry out measures for the advancement and prosperity of the nation. This end cannot be attained until the slavery question is sunk to the bottom of the political sea."

-*Nashville Patriot*, April 17, 1860

On October 28, 1859, editor Robert Thomas of the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* reflected on the anger and sectional hostility then pervading his community and the United States. Seeking a way out of the conflict, Thomas blamed the country's tensions on what he saw as a corrupt system of political parties that allowed politicians to manipulate public opinion and purposely provoke strife over the issue of slavery for political gain. In his view, the simple solution was for the American people to cast aside typical party loyalties and vote outside the party framework for trustworthy, virtuous candidates. "The people must act for themselves," he asserted, "they must repudiate caucus nominees, and select their own candidates—not from among brawling demagogues, but from among those whose public services, long-tried fidelity, and wise conservatism point them out as safe depositories of political power."[105]

A few weeks later, Ira P. Jones of the *Nashville Patriot* expressed similar sentiments when he contemplated the last five years of conflict and hypothesized about the course of the following year's presidential election. To him, "the unfortunate events which have characterized our political history since 1854" stemmed from the fact that "the strength and bitterness of party spirit" had prevailed over "the sober judgment of the

[105]*Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, October 28, 1859.

great masses of the people, blinding them to a great degree to the high obligations of patriotism." Much like Roberts, Jones similarly placed his hope for the future in the actions of a suppressed majority of righteous, conservative voters whom he thought simply lacked an outlet to make their opinion heard. "Our faith in the rectitude of the national purpose still justifies the hope that a union of the honest, conservative people may be effected for the contest of next year, and a belief that the true friends of the country are yet in a majority." To Jones, the only question remaining was not *if* this mass of faithful voters existed, but instead, how could like-minded supporters go about building the party infrastructure necessary to reach them in the months ahead? Such a course was vital for Jones, as he asserted that it was the only way that Americans could "preserve and protect the Union and the constitution, and the equal and just rights of all men of all sections" from the radical designs of politicians in both the North and South bent on further agitation over the issue of slavery.[106]

Roberts and Jones published their editorials in the aftermath of John Brown's raid on the U.S. Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on October 16, 1859. That event—which saw Brown and his band of supporters seize the armory as one step in a larger plan to instigate a slave rebellion in Virginia—sparked a backlash from conservative and pro-slavery proponents around the United States, particularly in the South. Within that context, both Roberts and Jones were denouncing the actions of Democratic and Republican politicians whom they saw as profiting from the event politically by unnecessarily stoking the anger of pro-slavery advocates in the South and passions of anti-slavery voters in the North. While such theorizing by two newspaper editors can

[106] *Nashville Patriot*, December 06, 1859.

easily be dismissed as insignificant, their opinions reflected part of a worldview that in the months ahead would become the foundation of a short-lived, national movement that tried—unsuccessfully—to chart a middle course between the Democratic and Republican parties in the presidential election of 1860.

Tennessee played a prominent role in the Election of 1860 as it provided the Union party its presidential candidate in John Bell and one of its largest bases of support in the Union. Regardless of party, newspapers played an integral role in that year's political campaign, and the Union party papers in Tennessee were no different. During this period, these newspapers retained their typical role as the purveyors of the news, but they also served as a platform for disseminating and repeating the party's ideological principles. Moreover, they served as an organizing outlet for political activism and a source of expression for readers. As was common in the South, Tennessee's Unionist editors guided what to publish and likewise worked to contextualize the news for their readers. Contrary to the claims of Donald Reynolds that "most editors were too busy" to attend political conventions or to "assume time-consuming political responsibilities," Tennessee's Unionist editors waded into the fray of the state's politics and actively used their role and platforms to try and influence the course of events.[107]

Within the procedures and limitations of the contemporary Southern newspaper, these editors used their unique styles to present the news in a manner that spoke to the concerns and fears of like-minded white, conservative Tennesseans about the rising tensions between the North and South. Much of their political news and commentary centered on the threat to slavery and the need to preserve the existing social order, and

[107] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 10-11.

they did so with distinctly populist rhetoric grounded in the ideology and political culture of the defunct Whig party. Across the state, their work created a nearly unified narrative that overemphasized support for the Constitutional Union Party nationally and that highlighted the pervasive influence of supposed "agitators" and "demagogues" in creating the sectional crisis. This consensus continued through to the campaign's final months and only began to splinter in its last weeks. To their readers, the result would have been a one-sided perception of events that both understated the political realities at work and created the impression that a Union party victory was achievable.

The Whig Tradition in America

From its formation in 1834 to its death in 1854, the Whigs served as the United States' second major political party opposite the Democratic Party. Although it won the presidency only twice in 1840 and again in 1848, it nonetheless retained significant support at the congressional, state, and local levels around the country. So strong was it that it achieved relative parity with the Democratic party in almost every region of the country, particularly in the South.[108] Part of its strength lay in its policies which created a diverse coalition across the economic spectrum. For instance, the Whig party had substantial support from the Southern planter class, partly because its emphasis on internal development policies aided their ability to get their crops to market. Reciprocally, it also appealed to skilled wage workers, typically in Northern

[108] Charles Grier Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" *The American Historical Review* 59, no. 2 (1954): 336-337.

manufacturing communities, because of its pro-business and tariff stance.[109] As Michael Holt argues, such a diverse coalition gave the party its strength at its peak but also contributed to its downfall amidst the conflicts of the 1850s. Ultimately, other forces such as their distinct ideology and the practicalities of opposing Democratic governance provided the glue that held the party together.[110]

In assessing this ideological outlook, Daniel Walker Howe asserted that the American Whigs retained a distinctive "political culture" which exerted a powerful unifying influence between its supporters, even more so than the party organization itself.[111] This culture was grounded in moral principles and objectives that informed the Whigs' political approach and the specific policy prescriptions they advocated. Equally, it provided the shared language through which Whigs discussed political and social concerns and framed how they debated ideas in the public sphere. While the Whigs only existed as an organization for twenty years and achieved limited success in implementing its policies, their political culture remained salient within American politics for many years to come.[112] As shall be shown, these ideas retained significant power in states like

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[109] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 431.; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 12-13.

[110] Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiii.

[111] In his work on the thought of the American Whig Party, Daniel Howe applied a definition of "culture" that he termed as being "an evolving system of beliefs, attitudes, and techniques for solving problems, transmitted from generation to generation and finding expression in the innumerable activities that people: religion, child-rearing customs, the arts and professions, and, of course, politics." This definition is helpful for understanding the complexity underlying political thought, and any future references to culture in this study reflect Howe's definition. See: Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 2.

[112] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 3.

Tennessee that historically had a strong base of Whig support. There, during the election campaign of 1860, Whig political culture was the lens through which its Unionist newspaper editors presented and contextualized the news. It served as the foundation for the arguments they articulated in their papers and framed how they responded to events. By proxy, then, it also informed how their readers received the news and—to those agreeable to its worldview—possibly shaped their decision-making in later opposing or supporting secession.

Broadly, the Whig worldview rested on the perception that rational, disinterested individuals could manage society and actively control the forces of change. On the policy level, this belief drove their desire to enact government programs to promote "progress" and "improvement," both economically and morally. Henry Clay's famous "American System" of economic policies was reflective of this view. Advocacy for public education as a means to promote good character also matched this outlook. Undergirding these policies was a system of values and social thought—heavily influenced by Protestant Christianity—that stressed morality and personal virtue above all else. It favored limiting social conflict, maintaining existing hierarchies, and preserving social order. In both the private and public spheres, this attitude advocated self-control and the suppression of individual passions. It lauded morality and responsibility as virtues and viewed politicians' role as firstly the maintenance of order and balance in society through accommodation and slow, prudential changes.[113]

Many American Whigs self-identified as "conservatives"—a loaded word that was as hard to define then as it is today. Indeed, all seven of the Unionist editors

[113] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 18-19, 30-35.

examined in this study called themselves "conservative" in some fashion and used the term colloquially in their writings. But what did it mean in the context of the mid-nineteenth century? Politically, Whigs felt it their mission to conserve what they thought was a definite American political and cultural tradition. This intention is most evident in the choice of the name "Whig" to define their party, as its use harkened back to the English and American ideas of republicanism that informed the American Revolution and the formation of the country's system of government.[114] Whig political conservatism manifested in numerous proclivities, first of which was an incessant skepticism toward the work of political parties and other interest groups which they feared would corrupt individuals, society, and government if left unchecked. These qualms were long-standing ideas taken directly from the thinking of both the English "Country-Whig" writers from the seventeenth century and the Revolutionary generation in the United States. [115] Similarly, Whigs routinely feared the concentration of power and the subversion of the political process by "demagogic" politicians who sought to manipulate the mechanisms of power for personal or party gain. Such warnings against "conspiracies" or the malicious work of individuals was a common facet on all sides of American political discourse in that period, but it was especially prevalent in the rhetoric of American Whigs. This view rested on the old republican assumption that, all things being normal, both the American people and its institutions were inherently virtuous and that any

[114] Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 27-28.

[115] This influence of the "Country-Whigs" on American political thought, is most clearly elucidated by Bernard Bailyn in his work *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. There, he establishes the link between the writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon from the 1720s which warned against the corrupting influence of power held by individuals or factions. This idea informed part of the thinking amongst American intellectuals fifty years later during the American Revolution. See: Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

dysfunction or conflict must, therefore, stem from the malevolent work of corrupt actors.[116] The Whig's opposition to Andrew Jackson's administration in the 1830s reflected this fear of power and individual actors because they routinely accused him of executive tyranny and pejoratively labeled him "King Andrew." It also engendered persistent opposition to the patronage system in Democratic administrations, which they saw as a corrupting influence.[117] Throughout the months of the secession crisis, this perception would help spurn the Unionist backlash in Tennessee and elsewhere against the secessionist wing of the Democratic Party and the anti-slavery activism of abolitionists and Republicans.

Socially, Whig conservatism weighted maintaining order and the maintenance American cultural tradition over most other issues. Kentuckian and slaveholder Henry Clay—a moderate Whig who after his death attained a near deified status among party supporters—demonstrated this characteristic with his emphasis on compromise, prudentialism, the importance of "harmonizing" the American republic rather than introducing further discord regarding slavery. On the issue of slavery, Clay disagreed with the common Southern "positive good" view that paternalistically painted slavery as a benevolent and redeeming practice that benefited both the slaves and their masters. Instead, Clay was a consistent advocate of widespread colonization for freed slaves as a way to mitigate further racial and class conflict. As he saw it, such a course would end a thorny issue by removing blacks from the country and thus preserve good order without the prospect of a social disruption to the existing hierarchy caused their presence. With

[116] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 52, 76-80.

[117] Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 28-30.

that prudential outlook, Clay. [118] This Whiggish resistance to social disorder is best manifested in the comments of the editor of the Nashville *Republican Banner* who, during the depths of the sectional conflict, wrote that the end goal of the conservative outlook was "a restoration of national quiet—for a return of internal peace and confidence—or for a re-inauguration of those fraternal relations, socially and commercially, between the people of the North and South, so indispensable to the security, prosperity and progress of our beloved country."[119] It would be this principle that was a central tenet of the Unionist movement throughout the Election of 1860 and would come to define much the news reporting of its supporting editors.

Southern Whigs in the states of the deep South expressed similar conservative sentiments about maintaining social order. Still, they did so with the added incentives brought by their heavier participation in the South's slave society. Throughout much of the party's tenure, southern Whigs—who were primarily middle or upper-class—varied little from their Northern counterparts in supporting the party's doctrine of pro-business, bank, and tariff policies. Internal divisions existed between the majority, "National Republican" wing of the party in the upper South, and the minority "States Rights" wing in the lower South on various issues, but those divisions were superficial over the issue of

[118] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 133-135. Clay's views on the importance of social harmony are evident in his famous "Raleigh Letter," written in April 1844 during the arguments over the annexation of Texas. "I do not think Texas ought to be received into the Union," he asserted, instead, "I think it is far more wise and important to compose and harmonize the present Confederacy, as it now exists, than to introduce a new element of discord and distraction into it." See the *Weekly National Intelligencer*, April 27, 1844.

[119] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 23, 1860.

slavery.[120] When pressed, however, most Southern Whigs chose to subordinate party unity to follow the South in adhering to the socially enforced orthodoxy of pro-slavery, anti-abolition positions. Such was the case for Whig politician and future Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens. Early in his career, Stephens held private reservations about slavery but, in the growing conflict over the practice in the 1850s, publicly converted to the "common good" interpretation rather than risk transgressing the established Southern orthodoxy.[121] His course would represent the fine line that similar former Whigs like those who dominated Tennessee were forced to navigate in the months of the secession crisis.

This conservative political culture was by no means universal as Whigs around the country differed in the weight and emphasis they applied to the party's principles. Throughout the Whig Party's tenure, factions such as the more idealistic "New School" and "Conscience Whigs" stressed the importance of morality and progressive change over the strict focus on order and prudentialism. Famous Northern Whigs like Joshua Giddings, William Seward, and Horace Greeley typified this outlook as they became strident advocates for moral issues like public education, temperance, and eventually abolitionism.[122] Opposition to the governance of Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party provided the national cohesion between the conservative and "new school" factions of the Whig Party, but over time the unresolved tension between moral issues and social

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[120] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 484; Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" 343-346.

[121] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 238-244.

[122] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 483, 488-489.

order shattered the party over the issue of slavery. Whereas Southern Whigs held to the importance of upholding the social order via slavery, Whigs like Giddings and Seward viewed the institution as a morally damaging influence on American society. Though they rarely advocated full racial equality, many saw slavery as corrupting the lives of slaveowners because it caused them to act with passion and violent, authoritarian attitudes to protect their financial and social standing. This perception later manifested in Northern Whigs' constant portrayal of a "slave power" conspiracy by Southerners trying to seize federal control to ensure the protection of slavery. Their viewpoint underwrote numerous conflicts in the 1840s and early 1850s like the fights over the congressional "gag-rule," the annexation of Texas, and the Compromise of 1850. It also became a significant component of the Republican Party's pre-war ideology, within which many northern Whigs like Giddings, Seward, and Abraham Lincoln later became prominent members.[123]

In Tennessee, Whiggery occupied a prominent position in the state's politics well past the party's death in 1854. Despite the contribution of two presidents in Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, Tennessee's Democratic Party was nearly equal to the Whigs and held only a slight majority of support across the state. Both parties routinely swapped control of the Governor's chair and legislature in elections throughout the 1830s and 1840s and continued doing so even after the Whig party collapsed nationally in 1852. The local Whig party organization—including its affiliated newspapers—mobilized with effectiveness behind the cause of the nativist "Know-Nothing" party through the middle years of the 1850s. In 1858, these elements reconstituted as simply the "Opposition"

[123] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 62, 207, 275.

party, generically named for their goal of combatting the state's Democratic supporters.[124] Only months before the 1860 election campaign began, Tennessee's Opposition party won seven of the state's ten seats in Congress and had only recently narrowly lost the governorship to Democrat Isham Harris. Such a competitive environment demonstrated the existing power of the Whig, "Know-Nothing," "Opposition" alliance in Tennessee and placed the state in stark contrast to the states of the lower South where the Democratic party remained dominant.[125] Of the editors and newspapers examined in this study, all seven drew their roots from participation in Whig politics and actively supported the Opposition Party in its 1860 form. In the months ahead, these editors would use the medium of their newspapers to articulate a unified version of the news that looked backward to the Whig tradition and used its language, ideology, and historical figures to make sense of the day's problems.

Fighting for a Movement, November 1859-March 1860

In the first weeks of November 1859, the Middle Tennessee editors of the Nashville *Republican Banner* and the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* all asserted the need for a unified national movement to oppose the Democratic and Republican parties in the upcoming 1860 presidential campaign. In Clarksville, Robert Thomas editorialized that "a nucleus is needed around which a great national, conservative party may be formed." Pointing to the Opposition in Virginia as such a potential catalyst, Roberts theorized that in such an organization, "conservative men of all parties, who love the Union and

[124] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 216-217.

[125] Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: *The University of North Carolina Press*, 1989), 62-63.

deprecate sectional agitation can find a standard around which they may rally without a surrender of a single principle essential to the safety of the Union."[126] Two weeks later, Hiram Walker expressed similar sentiments by raising the specter of Southern secession if nothing was done to alleviate the current conflict. "If dissolution is to be averted," he wrote, "there is but one way in which that thing can be accomplished, and that is by a national, conservative, Union organization, equally opposed to the extreme views and impolitic, sectional tactics of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Shall we have such an organization?"[127]

Roberts and Walker published these editorials in the aftermath of John Brown's raid on the U.S. Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, on October 16, 1859. That event—which saw Brown and his band of supporters seize the armory in the hopes of instigating a slave rebellion—sparked a backlash from conservative and pro-slavery whites around the United States, particularly in slave states like Tennessee. Within that context, the "agitation" and "sectional tactics" decried by Roberts and Walker reflected a popular outlook that viewed Brown's actions—and the subsequent responses by white Southerners and Northerners—as evidence of the deliberate provocation of social conflict over slavery by both Democratic and Republican supporters. They saw this "agitation" as willful attempts by southern Democratic politicians to stoke Southern anger and eventually force secession. Reciprocally, they viewed Brown as a fanatic abolitionist who, like the "Black Republican" party, sought to advance their broader goal of eradicating slavery in the United States.

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[126] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, November 4, 1859.

[127] *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 17, 1859.

This opinion was advanced with near unanimity by the Opposition press in Tennessee as they blamed the raid less on John Brown and more on the general class of "agitators" in the North and South. "We regard the whole thing…as one of the consequences of agitation of slavery issues for political effect," decreed Ira Jones in his *Nashville Patriot*. In his view, abolitionists like Brown were once "objects of ridicule until politicians seized the question of slavery and made it an instrument to tear down and bring up parties."[128] Jones' theory matched that of *Athens Post* editor Samuel Ivins, who one week later claimed that Brown's actions were undoubtedly "the result of agitation….of which more will be produced unless agitation is promptly discountenanced and put down—put down everywhere, North and South." Moreover, Ivins predicted that further conflict and bloodshed would result if the North and South did not collectively stop such action.[129]

Much like Roberts and Walker, Ira Jones and Samuel Ivins looked hopefully for a national movement by like-minded conservatives which they felt, through unified action, could overrule the maneuvers of these loud but supposedly outnumbered agitators. "The remedy for this evil is in the hands of the conservative masses," Jones declared. "They must arise in the majesty of their strength and make much use of it, as shall save the country from further Harper's Ferry scenes."[130] Likewise, Ivins, with his editorial style of sentiment and reason, appealed to the morality and virtue of his readers to help spur them to action. He proposed that in the months ahead, "We now have a higher and better duty

[128] *Nashville Patriot*, October 20, 1859.

[129] *The Athens Post*, October 28, 1859.

[130] *Nashville Patriot*, October 20, 1859.

to perform—one that demands of us to rise above party bickerings and party prejudice, and if we are true to our trusts and just to ourselves, we will promptly yield to its urgings."[131] With their faith in the conservative "masses" and their rhetorical appeals to moderation and virtue, Walker, Ivins, Thomas, and Jones all exhibited classic characteristics of the Whig political culture that had defined their former party's ideology in the previous decades. Much like Henry Clay, who in 1850 pledged his support "for the Presidency to that man, to whatever party he may belong, who is uncontaminated by fanaticism," Tennessee's Opposition editors framed their response to Brown's raid in a manner that spoke to traditional Whiggish fears of social unrest and radical change.[132] Equally so, they presented the conflict over slavery as one instigated by factions of Northerners and Southerners who had overpowered the more numerous conservatives nationwide. In their view, only a new movement that removed the constraints on these conservative "masses" could avoid further conflict and disunion.

From December to February 1860, the failure of the U.S. House of Representatives to appoint a Speaker dominated the news coverage within Tennessee's Opposition press. Through those months, extensive runs of newspaper clippings, congressional speeches, and telegraphic dispatches conveyed the political maneuverings to readers. Amidst this coverage, editors in Tennessee also actively tried to generate momentum behind the national movement they had wished for in the previous weeks. In his first edition in 1860, Hiram Walker claimed authority to speak for the Opposition in Tennessee and proposed former senator John Bell as a candidate for that year's

[131] *The Athens Post*, November 18, 1859.

[132] Quoted in *Nashville Patriot*, June 16, 1860.

presidential election. Walker claimed that "we believe that [the] Opposition, with the name of Tennessee's greatest Statesman as a rallying point, constitute a majority of the whole people" and that if given a chance, people "would rally to his support with an earnest enthusiasm, and a fixed determination." Building on this claim, Walker predicted a return to national harmony if Bell was elected, as his success "would be a signal for the cessation of sectional discord, the restoration of confidence and goodwill between the North and South." If done, Walker forecasted a "return of that general amity and reciprocity of interest" that had once existed in the United States.[133]

The *Banner's* proposal and Bell's nomination by Opposition members in the legislature the following week were celebrated by Walker's fellow editors. Their varied responses to this development show their attachment to the Whig tradition that emphasized moral virtue and the necessity of disinterested leaders to create social harmony in the country. Citing the *Banner's* article, Ira Jones lauded Bell's character and credited him for possessing "elevated and comprehensive statesmanship." Jones further claimed that Bell's "large experience, his stern uprightness, his wisdom, prudence, firmness patriotism and devotion to the Union, mark him as the proper man to heal the distemper of the times."[134] William Brownlow repeated similar statements when he described Bell as "the Statesman and Patriot of Tennessee" and extolled "his many virtues, excellent private character, and superior talents."[135] On the one hand, such exaggerated praise is obvious campaign rhetoric meant to elevate Bell's standing in the

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[133] *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 05, 1860.

[134] *Nashville Patriot*, January 06, 1860.

[135] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 18, 1860.

eyes of readers. By emphasizing virtue, statesmanship, and character, these editors were—practically speaking—likely writing in political language that they and their readers were familiar with and expected in their newspapers. Viewed against the historical tenets of Whig political culture, the two editor's comments show that this worldview remained salient within Tennessee in 1860. Their arguments promoting John Bell indicate how Southern conservatives like Brownlow perceived the discord and corruption supposedly devastating the country meant that only a stately, disinterested candidate like Bell could save it. In the months ahead, this adulatory praise would shift to more practical concerns when Democratic newspapers would attack Bell over his record on slavery.

This optimism by Opposition editors for Bell carried through to their news coverage of the statewide Opposition convention in Nashville in late February 1860. Several of Tennessee's editors attended the convention and used their papers to report their observations back to their home readers. William Brownlow, who served as both a delegate from Knox County and a member of the Opposition National Committee, emphasized the harmony and unity of the movement in letters back to Knoxville. He proclaimed that "the spirit which prevailed, throughout, excelled any thing I ever witnessed. Enthusiasm, harmony, and openess of purpose, marked every step takin [in] the Convention." He further lauded the nomination of Bell, who he praised for his "superior qualifications for the office of President" and for his "long and distinguished public service—his broad and expansive patriotism" and lastly for his "unwavering devotion to the Union and the Constitution."[136] Unsurprisingly, the *Republican Banner's*

[136] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 03, 1860.

editors also attended the convention and similarly concluded that the convention's high turnout "indicates to us very plainly that the heart of the people has been stirred…and that the conservative masses, disgusted and … are resolved to strike hands in an earnest and determined effort to reform abuses and restore our institutions to their wonted security."[137] Similar statements extolling the movement's unity and its populist appeal would become standard fare in the news coverage of events in the coming weeks.

Almost concurrently, news broke that the Opposition Central Committee in Washington D.C. had rebranded itself as the "Constitutional Union Party" and intended to organize a national electoral campaign. In addition, the Committee announced plans for a national convention in Baltimore that May and urged states to nominate delegations. It also listed their basic platform, which centered around "removing the subject of slavery from the arena of party politics" and working to return national harmony through "reconciliation, fraternity, and forebearance," among other goals.[138] With this announcement, Tennessee's conservative newspapers—now rebranded as members of the Union party—seemingly were vindicated that the people's movement that they desired would come to fruition. Looking to the future, they quickly expanded their message

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[137] *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 24, 1860; https://www.newspapers.com/image/604209790/Ira Jones in the *Nashville Patriot* had a similar view to Walker, as he concluded that the "unaminity of sentiment which pervaded the delegations" during the convention proved to him that Bell "is still the Tribune of the people, as worthy of their affection as on the day he first responded to their summons." See, *Nashville Patriot*, February 25, 1860.

[138] The Central Committee, of which William Brownlow was an active member, issued a nationwide address to the people of the United States that outlined the vision of their party and what they saw as its path to victory. The address is a revealing document because its policies and assessment of the country's political situation matches near verbatim those advanced by Tennessee's Opposition editors and demonstrates. Its regular invocation of ideas about "agitation," a loss of tradition, the corrupting influence of party politics, and demagogic politicians all point to the salience and interconnectedness of Whiggish political culture at that time. For more, see the copy printed in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 25, 1860.

beyond Tennessee to emphasize the national nature of their party while continuing to employ Whiggish and increasingly populist rhetoric to present the news to readers.

Clashing Conventions, April to July 1860

The major event which dominated the news reporting that spring came in late April 1860 when the Democratic Party convened its national convention in Charleston, South Carolina. Historically, articles attacking and criticizing the Democratic Party for alleged financial corruption, misuse of political patronage, and their manipulation of voters' "passions" were common within Unionist newspapers. However, as 1860 progressed, those ideas were gradually superseded by accusations that painted the Democrats as a "sectional" party bent on secessionism and a conspiratorial desire to instigate disunion. This view was concretely proclaimed by Hiram Walker in January 1860 when he asserted that Democrats "from the introduction of the Kansas Nebraska Bill into Congress down to the present time, has shown a fixed determination to disrupt the Union and build upon its ruins a Southern Confederacy." As he saw it, their incendiary appeals within Southern newspapers, speeches in Congress, and manipulation of public opinion all "betray a fixed and settled determination to destroy forever the stately fabric of the Union."[139]

At the onset of the Democratic Convention, Tennessee's Unionist press was split in their predictions about what they thought would occur. The *Republican Banner* predicted that Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas would likely receive the nomination, despite the loud opposition proclaimed by Southern Democrats. This view rested on historical precedent, as the *Banner* felt that, like had occurred in 1856 with Democratic

[139] *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 13, 1860.

President James Buchanan, Southerners would not sacrifice their party's chances and would eventually fall in behind Douglas. The *Banner* predicted that Southern delegates "will make a show of opposition, but rather than sacrifice availability, and the strongest prospect of success, it will be no difficult matter for enough of them to come to his support to give him the nomination."[140] The *Banner's* neighbors at the *Patriot* took a different view, however. While Ira Jones agreed that Douglas was the strongest candidate, he took the threats of resistance by Southern Democrats seriously and felt that "it is exceedingly doubtful that he will receive the nomination." He predicted that Douglas would fail to receive a two-thirds majority of ballots, and the Southern delegates would resist his nomination "to the last extremity, even to a disruption of the convention."[141] On the whole, though, it appears that most of the Union editors agreed with the *Banner* that the convention would eventually nominate Douglas despite the claims emanating from Southern Democratic politicians and newspapers.[142]

The first telegraphic and news reports out of Charleston were sporadic and incomplete, forcing Tennessee's Union editors to navigate a murky situation without much information to communicate about what was occurring. The first indication of conflict came when the *Republican Banner* printed a telegraphic dispatch that bluntly asserted that "A rupture, either upon the platform or the candidate, is generally regarded

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[140] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 20, 1860.

[141] *Nashville Patriot*, April 19, 1860.

[142] William Brownlow predicted that Douglas would be the nominee and held this view up until the convention convened. Likewise, Sam Ivins in *The Athens Post* wagered to his readers "a dozen Havaanna Cigars that Doulas wins," and like the Banner, predicted that if nominated, the Southern democracy will really as a unit to his support in November." See, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* March 31, 1860 and *The Athens Post*, April 20, 1860.

as inevitable. There may be a row to-morrow, but there will be no nomination in any event, before Saturday or Monday."[143] Over the next two days, the *Patriot* and the *Banner*—both of whom regularly took telegraphic dispatches—alluded to their lack of clarity over what was occurring. On May 1, the *Patriot* briefly referenced that "There was a prospect for the secession of a portion of the Southern delegation," but asked for patience because, at that time, they had no information about "whether that prospect has faded away."[144] Likewise, the *Banner* flatly described the real-time telegraphic reporting from Charleston as "unintelligible" and "contradictory and unreliable." To at least print some material, the *Banner's* editors instead copied an explanatory article from the *Cincinnati Gazette*, from the newspaper exchange.[145] The familiarity with which these two editors navigated the opaque situation points to their understanding of the constraints of recent technological changes to the newspaper industry. More importantly, though, their unwillingness to print incomplete or incorrect information indicates a level of professionalism amongst the editors. Rather than printing whatever news they had, the *Banner* and *Patriot's* editors tried to gauge the accuracy of their information and cautioned their readers about its inadequacy.

When the news finally broke that most Southern Democratic delegates had withdrawn from the convention, Tennessee's Union editors reacted with equal parts surprise and delight. Almost unanimously, though, they articulated that the Democratic break-up was proof of their suspicions about Southern Democratic desires for secession.

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[143] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 29, 1860.

[144] *Nashville Patriot*, May 01, 1860.

[145] *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 01, 1860.

In the *Chronicle,* Robert Thomas expressed amazement at the development and then decried what it meant for the future. He felt that the split would allow Southern Democrats to "give full vent to their long pent-up designs of a dissolution of the Union." The country's future, thus, rested only on what former conservative Whigs in the Democratic party would do after the break-up. "Will they remain with the Southern fragment of democracy and eat fire and dissolve the Union?" he asked, "or will they come back to their old friends and aid them to stay the tide of ruin that is now gathering? We shall see."[146].

However, Ira Jones—eternally the optimist among Tennessee's Union editors—proclaimed that the event presented an opportunity for the Union Party to finally reach the mass of conservative voters he knew existed around the country. "The events of this present hour show that the signs are more auspicious for success than they have ever been heretofore," he asserted. This hope was because "the conservative masses are ready to embrace true and genuine nationality in the North and South. The extremists have pushed their experiments beyond the line of safety on both sides; and there is everything to encourage and nothing to depress."[147] Numerous other Union editors repeated this optimism as they turned their attention to their own party's convention in Baltimore, Maryland, in mid-May 1860. Of the seven newspapers examined in this study, at least three editors attended the Baltimore convention in some fashion. William Brownlow did

[146] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, May 04, 1860. Samuel Ivins in Athens similarly expressed little sympathy for the Democrats' plight when he happily proclaimed that the party could no longer claim the title of "National Democracy" because of the split. But, like Roberts, he too affirmed that the only hope to avoid further conflict rested on the ability of conservative voters to mobilize and defeat the Republican agitators in the North and disunionists in the South. See *The Athens Post*, May 04, 1860.

[147] *Nashville Patriot*, May 02, 1860.

so as a state "at large" delegate representing Tennessee, while Hiram Walker of the *Banner* and Robert Thomas of the *Chronicle* both went as observers.

What these editors reported about the Constitutional Union convention in Baltimore only seemed to confirm their earlier assertions about the viability of a conservative victory that November. Indeed, much like their reporting on the state convention in Nashville, Tennessee's editors almost unanimously emphasized that harmony and unity infused the proceedings and likewise stressed their positivity about the future. Hiram Walker emphasized, "the spirit of disinterested and patriotic devotion to the CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION AS IT IS was all pervading" and lauded the fact that delegates from all parts of the country seemed able to cast aside discussions of slavery. To him, this ability to "meet on common ground" with Northerners confirmed his view that in November "the Constitutional Union Party will be hailed as the Life Boat of the Nation, upon which thousands and thousands will take passage."[148] Robert Thomas similarly reported that his interactions with Northern delegates established that the conflict and "agitation" about slavery definitively stemmed from "corrupt and selfish demagogues who foment it for base, personal ends." Therefore, all that the country needed to do was follow the convention's example and forgo all discussion of slavery in public discourse. Only then would the Union "be secure, public virtue once more in the ascendant."[149]

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[148] *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 16, 1860.

[149] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, May 18, 1860; William Brownlow expressed similar sentiments to Thomas and Walker in a series of letters back to his paper in Knoxville. He too praised the unity and amiability between Northern and Southern and gave particular emphasis to delegates' willingness to not discuss the issue of slavery. He exclaimed that, "The slavery question has been ignored by the Convention—I mean by this, that no man North and South has brought it forward and by common consent it has been laid aside." See the letter in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 19, 1860.

This emphasis on avoiding conflict and the possibility of creating social harmony points directly to how Whig ideology served as the framework through which these Union editors reported the news during the election campaign. These editors consistently blamed the problems and adverse events they reported on the deliberate actions of self-serving "demagogues" or radicals—invariably Democrats or Republicans—or the malignant and pervasive influence of party politics. Similarly, they styled positive political news as confirmation of their worldviews, such as their repeated focus on the disinterestedness of their favored politicians or their faith in the supposed conservativeness of the American people. Furthermore, the involvement of editors like Brownlow and Walker in their party conventions indicates that the news they reported and how they did it likely stemmed as much from their Whiggish outlook as it did from a professional need to adhere to an expected style of newspaper dialogue. Both factors likely influenced their reporting in May 1860 and would continue to do so in upcoming months.

That John Bell received the Union Convention's nominations for President was greeted with great acclaim in Tennessee's Union newspapers for his "ability, integrity, conservatism, patriotism and general fitness."[150] Similar praise was heaped upon the convention's platform, which succinctly pledged to "recognize no political principle, other than THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COUNTRY, THE UNION OF THE STATES, AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAWs."[151] With this plank, the Union

[150] *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 16, 1860.

[151] This sentence comprised the headline of the platform and essentially became the mantra of the Constitutional Union Party throughout the campaign. The platform itself further elaborated on the party's values, as they swore to "maintain, protect, and defend" the principles of "public liberty and national

Party alluded to statements made by Senator Henry Clay amidst the debate over the Compromise of 1850. At that time, Clay predicted that if conflict over the issue of slavery continued, two political parties would eventually form: one that was in favor of the Union and one opposed. He then asserted that the Union party's platform would simply be "the Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the Laws."[152] With their ratification of a platform that directly paid homage to the compromising and conservative nature of Henry Clay, the Constitutional Party symbolically linked their party to the standard of the old Whig party.

Similar symbolism continued within the columns of newspapers like those in Tennessee. Using images, quotes, and anecdotes, Tennessee's Union editors routinely parlayed the memory of historical figures as tools to support their editorial arguments. The legacy of Andrew Jackson's fight against South Carolina in the 1832 Nullification Crisis was especially prevalent, as editors like William Brownlow used it as a rhetorical cudgel against secessionists. When a rally occurred in Knoxville with a pro-secession speaker, Brownlow responded with a quote from Jackson that proclaimed, "We are a Government, AND BY THE ETERNAL GOD, whoever attempts secession or disunion during my administration, shall die a Traitor." This statement from a Democratic president gave Brownlow the evidence he needed to label secessionists as traitors, which he did by asserting that "If it were treason in Gen. Jackson's day to rail out against the

safety." It further predicted a restoration of peace, justice, fraternity, and equality like that had been established by the framers of the Constitution. For the complete transcript, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 15, 1860.

[152] Quoted in *Nashville Patriot*, June 16, 1860.

Union, it is treason now."[153] George Washington's "Farewell Address" from 1796 was also a standard rhetorical tool because of its emphasis on the importance of the Union and his explicit warning about its fragility. For instance, Samuel Ivins once printed Washington's address under the auspice that a "perusal of that sacred legacy from the Father of his Country, should put to shame the un-holy crusade now being waged against the Constitution by secessionists, fire-eaters, abolitionists, and disunionists of every stripe and section."[154] Such uses of historical memory by Tennessee's editors were ubiquitous across all of the newspapers in this study. While not their primary tools for persuasion, they worked to fill up column space and support their editorial arguments favoring compromise, moderation, and the Union.

The Republican Party's convention in Chicago occurred almost concurrently with the Constitutional Union party's and attracted varying degrees of news coverage. With their daily publication style, both Nashville papers provided the most in-depth reporting of the event. In addition, these papers regularly used telegraphic dispatches for news updates which allowed them to print more up-to-date news than country editors. Before the convention, New York Senator William Seward was touted as the likely nominee, so Tennessee's editors expressed mixed views when news broke that the Republicans

[153] *Brownlow's Tri-Weekly Whig*, December 29, 1859; Hiram Walker similarly invoked Jackson's memory to question how it was that the Democratic Party had disregarded his principles in the previous decades. "A few years ago Andrew Jackson was as much revered for his efforts to preserve the Union as he was admired for his brilliant victory at New Orleans. But how is it now?" he asked. But now, he lamented, "Men who profess to derive their political principles from his teachings, have forgotten the energy with which he combatted the South Carolina nullifiers and thwarted their schemes." See *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 09, 1859 or the *Nashville Patriot*, March 15, 1860 for other references to Jackson.

[154] *The Athens Post*, August 10, 1860; Ira Jones took a similar tack when he too invoked Washington's memory by printing excerpts from his address alongside quotes from Henry Clay's speech in 1850. Referencing Washington, Jones praised him for his foresight in predicting the risks of partisanship and challenged his readers to learn from Washington's example. See, *Nashville Patriot*, September 11, 1860.

nominated Abraham Lincoln instead. The *Patriot* described Lincoln as a "strong forcible stump orator" who was best known for his senatorial campaign in 1858. It further compared him to Seward and determined that he was similarly "a believer in an 'irrepressible conflict' between freedom and slavery," but was possibly "a more dangerous candidate" than the New Yorker.[155] In the *Memphis Bulletin*, Jesse McMahon declared Lincoln to be no different from Seward, who he equated as the principal architect of Republicanism in the North. After publishing an excerpt of Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, McMahon asserted that "Old Abe Lincoln is as ultra as SEWARD and that the Chicago Convention took Sewardism without SEWARD."[156]

However, underneath this apparent partisan outlook about Lincoln is a more nuanced news presentation about the Republican Party. In his assessment of Southern journalism, Donald Reynolds argued that there was little difference ideologically between Southern editors about Republicans because they consistently "raised before their readers…the specter of a South racially degraded at the hands of callous Northern Republicans." Regardless of political orientation, the result of their reporting was a portrayal that misrepresented much of Republican beliefs and policies to Southern readers.[157] There is some truth to Reynold's argument as it pertains to Tennessee's

[155] *Nashville Patriot*, May 19, 1860.

[156] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin* June 01, 1860: Similar negative portrayals were expressed by Robert Thomas in the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, whose objections to Lincoln rested purely on him being a "sectional candidate" because represented a party confined just to the North. Such a point made him lack the qualities needed to represent the entirety of the country. See the Clarksville *Weekly Chronicle*, June 01, 1860; Hiram Walker in the *Banner* took a more negative approach by describing him as "radical" and tried to depict Lincoln as the originator of the ubiquitous term, the "irrepressible conflict" between North and South normally attributed to William Seward. See the *Republican Banner and Whig*, June 01, 1860.

[157] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 214-215.

Unionist newspaper. To be sure, the Unionist editors examined in this study—at least three of whom were slaveholders—often passionately criticized abolitionists and "Black Republicans" about slavery. However, this criticism usually focused on leaders like William Seward, Horace Greeley, or Abraham Lincoln rather than the citizens of the North in general. They portrayed these leaders as the principal "agitators" and "demagogues" who drove the Republican agenda personally. Whenever editors discussed the Republican party as a collective entity, they did so under the larger idea of "agitation" because its policies towards the Fugitive Slave Law and resisting slavery's expansion were painted as actions meant to inflame passions and strengthen the party politically.[158] Rare were articles or editorials that presented the Republican position as favoring a complete abolition of slavery or racial equality. Moreover, some papers like the *Nashville Patriot* and *Republican Banner* published complete resolutions from Republican state governments or political conventions with no comment or contextualization.[159] These approaches varied by editor and paper, but it is not entirely accurate that Southern newspaper editors wholly ignored or skewed their reporting on the Republican Party. Most did castigate Republicans in editorials in some fashion, but complete information about their policies was available to readers in Tennessee if they desired to read it.

[158] This idea is best expressed in the statements of Hiram Walker who attributed the Republican party's existence to this "agitation," but laid the blame for it on Democrats for opening the question in the first place. It was therefore the back-and-forth struggle between Democrats and Republicans that kept the party alive and gave it life. For his full argument, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 28, 1860.

[159] After the Republican conventions in May, both the *Banner* and *Patriot* printed full length articles of the Republican platform for its readers. See the *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 15, 1860 and the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 04, 1860.

The Campaign Season, June 1860 to September 1860

Throughout the summer and early fall of 1860, Tennessee's Union newspapers served as the organizing point for local efforts on behalf of John Bell. All seven papers in this study variously documented the progress of stump speaking tours, rallies, parades, and meetings in their respective communities. Some editors like Samuel Ivins and William Brownlow traveled distances to attend these events and then reported their observations via letter[160] More typical were updated lists of stump speaking engagements, notices of upcoming county or city meetings, or submissions by local organizations of their meeting minutes and resolutions. Like in the state party convention that spring, some newspaper editors actively participated in the local campaigning and exercised a role beyond simply journalism. For example, Jesse McMahon served as the Vice President of the Memphis Union Party convention, and William Brownlow served on the Constitutional Union Party's Central Committee, as well as on multiple committees during conventions at the state level.[161] Moreover, the *Patriot* and the *Banner* participated in a Nashville Union party parade in the election's final days. They both built floats with mobile printing presses to print copies of their papers and disseminate them throughout the crowd as the procession passed.[162] Such extracurricular activity demonstrates their ideological commitment to the Constitutional Union Party and shows that their editorial

[160] When Stephen Douglas launched his campaign tour through the South in the late fall of 1860, he spoke in Chattanooga the last week in October. Brownlow travelled to Chattanooga and reported their findings. See, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 03, 1860. Samuel Ivins regularly travelled a circuit around southeastern Tennessee to attend local political events or court days and likewise reported on their happenings in his paper. This circuit also allowed him to collect subscriber dues. For a report of one such trip, see his description of a "Mass Meeting" in Knoxville that he attended, see *The Athens Post*, October 05, 1860.

[161] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, June 08, 1860; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 03, 1860.

[162] *Nashville Patrio*t, November 06, 1860.

content was likely sincere in its support rather than simple business operations. Likewise, their participation in local, state, and national politics exceed Donald Reynold's generalized claim that Southern editors were too busy to participate in political activities and show that their political lives were very intertwined with their jobs as editors. [163]

Across Tennessee's Union newspapers, one of the most common features of their daily and weekly reporting was rhetorical sparring with their neighboring Democratic newspapers. These literary exchanges ranged from lengthy back and forth debates in consecutive issues to one or two-line blurbs about an issue or the other newspaper's coverage.[164] In some cases, this journalistic warfare turned into actual violence, but on the whole, it stayed within the confines of their respective newspaper sheets.[165] Throughout 1860, these journalistic exchanges appeared in every one of Tennessee's newspapers and undoubtedly served as a tool for editors to participate in the campaigning while also adding life and drama to what was otherwise dense material. Overall, the two most frequent arguments revolved around defending John Bell's record regarding slavery and attacking Democrats with accusations of disunion and secessionist impulses. While

[163] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 11.

[164] In Nashville, the Union papers opposed the city's main Democratic paper, the Nashville *Union and American*. Samuel Ivin's *Athens Post* was the only newspaper in his town, but nonetheless competed with the *Cleveland Banner* in neighboring Cleveland, Tennessee. Robert Thomas's *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* regularly dueled with the Clarksville *Jeffersonian*, the town's Democratic paper. With his notoriously inflammatory "penny press" style, William Brownlow eagerly argued with dozens of opposing newspapers from both the North and the South, but also regularly dismissed attacks from smaller papers who were looking to attract attention to boost their circulation numbers.

[165] Combativeness and bloody confrontations between journalists grew to be a stereotype about Southern editors in the nineteenth century, with some truth. In November 1860, George Poindexter (then the editor of the Nashville Union and American) shot and killed Allen Hall of the Nashville News on the street in Nashville over comments made in Hall's paper linking Poindexter to abolitionism. This event was a scandal amongst Tennessee's press and led to a trial and eventual acquittal for Poindexter. For more, see the report in the *Republican Banner*, November 19, 1859.

serving as a Senator, John Bell voted against the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the Lecompton Constitution in 1858. Both of these votes served as the rationale for Democratic attacks against Bell for being "unsound" about slavery and, thus, not a true Southerner. Some Democratic attacks went so far as to label him an abolitionist.[166] When a Democratic newspaper attacked Bell on this line, Jesse McMahon expressed chagrin at the continued use of slavery as a political issue by claiming that "the democrats subordinate all other questions to that of slavery. If a man is *sound* on that, it matters little with them what he thinks of anything else in the whole range of politics, morals or religion." McMahon then defended Bell's record on the issue by asserting that he had "never denounced slavery—never—but always upheld it as right and necessary to the development and prosperity of the country."[167] Similarly, William Brownlow argued that Bell's status as a Southerner and the fact that he had been "a slave-holder all his life long" was proof enough that Bell was indeed "sound" on the issue. Therefore, such attacks by local Democrats were only taken by "political opponents who desire to traduce and slander him for political purposes."[168]

That these debates continued unabated until the election's conclusion indicates both the pervasiveness of slavery as an issue and the reflexiveness with which white Southerners—in this case, newspaper editors—responded to accusations of violating the

[166] For elaboration on these common attacks against Bell's slavery record, see the lengthy response in the *Nashville Patriot* May 22, 1860.

[167] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, June 08, 1860.

[168] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, July 28, 1860; Beyond these simple rhetorical defenses, more measured editors like Samuel Ivins or Hiram Walker often published lengthy excerpts of John Bell's speeches during debates over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Lecompton Constitution to provide concrete evidence to their readers of explicitly pro-slavery position during both of those events. See the *Republican Banner and Whig*, July 18, 1860; *The Athens Post*, July 20, 1860.

community sanctioned orthodoxy on slavery. While their Whig ideology may have defined much of these editors' perception of the world and influenced how they reported the news, the frequency with which they discussed slavery points to the uniqueness and limits of their outlook. Much like with Alexander Stephens who ultimately capitulated to Southern pressure over slavery, when pressed, Tennessee's Union editors rose to defend their favored candidate—and likely their papers—from charges of abolitionism or "unsoundness" over the institution. As such, they engaged in partisan bickering, despite their regular diatribes against "agitation" and wishes to silence all discussion of the issue. In his work on Southern journalism, Carl Osthaus argued that Southern editors could not deviate from this Southern orthodoxy if they wished to stay afloat financially. As such, they had to align themselves with the "establishment" or the "propertied and powerful elite"—i.e., slaveholders—with their reporting.[169] Tennessee's Unionist editors support this assertion to a degree, as they repeatedly chose to write on the issue of slavery even when not defending individuals like Bell from attacks. William Brownlow, Robert Thomas, and Jesse McMahon were the most vocal of Tennessee's editors in showing their support to slavery.[170] In Tennessee, however, their discussion of the issue was sometimes presented alongside populist appeals to the "common" people—namely middle and lower-class whites—which they compared to the elitist, plantation-owning Democratic "demagogues" that they styled as the principal agitators driving conflict.[171]

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[169] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 10.

[170] See *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, December 16, 1859; *Memphis Weekly Bulletin* April 06, 1860.

[171] William Brownlow best exemplifies this tendency when he rhetorically attacked William Yancey from Alabama for representing the wealthy aristocracy of the South who desired secession for their own benefit and power. Brownlow repeatedly asserted that allowing secession would cause middle- and lower-class Tennesseans, many of who did own slaves, to lose rights and be subordinated to the slave-

This dynamic in states like Tennessee that had a lower proportion of slaveholders than in the lower South points to the complexity of how Southern editors navigated discussing slavery and complicates the broad generalization proposed by Osthaus.

When the Democratic party splintered after their second convention in Baltimore, the two factions of the Democratic Party nominated separate candidates in Stephen Douglas and John C. Breckinridge. Some Tennessee editors like William Brownlow rejoiced at this disintegration. Under a bolded headline entitled "Funeral Notice!!!" he satirically printed a eulogy for the Democratic party, which he described as having "died of a disease known as the SECESSION and DISUNION of soul and body."[172] Others like Hiram Walker turned their focus to the perpetrators of the split, who he reported as having gone to Baltimore to purposefully fracture the party. In an article describing the event, he reported that "The Southern secessionists have accomplished the object for which they have been laboring for years and advanced an important step towards the final denouncement to which they look forward when they shall… 'precipitate the cotton States into a revolution.'"[173] The final clause of Walker's account was no accident but was instead a reference to a statement written by William Lowndes Yancy in a famous letter from 1858 known at the time as the "Slaughter Letter."[174] Yancey, an Alabamian

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holding aristocracy. While likely pandering to his readers, Brownlow repeated this view throughout the fall of 1860 as secession appeared increasingly likely. See, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, September 29, 1860, or *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860.

[172] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, July 07, 1860.

[173] *Republican Banner and Whig*, June 27, 1860.

[174] This letter was written by Yancey on June 15, 1858 to a letter from James Slaughter. In it, Yancey made numerous statements about the necessity for secession, such as that no political party could save the South and that committees of safety should be formed to help create a movement. Most notably, though, Yancey stated that they would "fire the Southern heart, instruct the Southern mind, give courage to each other, and at the proper moment, by one organized, concerted action, we can precipitate the Cotton

and former Democratic member of the House of Representatives, was the most recognized "fire-eater" in the South who played a central role in the proceedings of the first Democratic Convention in Charleston, and likewise initiated the walk-out by the Alabama delegates in Baltimore.[175] For this reason, and his widely disseminated speeches favoring secession, Yancey became the central figure in the conspiracy articulated by Tennessee's newspapers.

The existence of this secessionist conspiracy was presented with near unanimity by Tennessee's Union editors. As they described it, the conspiracy got its beginning at the Nashville Convention in June 1850 with an attempt by some Southern politicians—including Yancey—to instigate secession over the Compromise of 1850. Defeated in that try, these men then initiated a campaign of subversion and agitation over the next decade that culminated in the Democratic split at Baltimore.[176] Noted "fire-eaters" like Yancey and South Carolinians Robert Barnwell Rhett and Laurence Keitt were regularly labeled as some of the conspiracy's ringleaders. As it went, these men fractured the conventions and nominated John C. Breckinridge as a patsy, fully understanding that his campaign would divide Democratic votes and ensure the election of a Republican. That event would then catalyze secession and Southern independence. William Brownlow articulated this view that July when he stated that he had evidence "from high Democratic

States into a Revolution." This was the phrase referenced by Hiram Walker and that achieved wide circulation during the Election of 1860 as proof of his conspiratorial desires. For the full letter, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, July 20, 1860.

[175] Eric W. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 73-74.

[176] This view was first advanced by the *Nashville Patriot* before the Democratic Baltimore Convention in June 1860. For a complete summation, see the *Nashville Patriot*, May 28, 1860.

authority" that "when Breckinridge was nominated, it was understood that he had no chance for an election—that Lincoln's chances of success would be increased by it, and that if elected, it would give the South a pretext for going out of the Union.!" Brownlow presented no further evidence to support his claim and readers were left to trust his presentation.[177]

Much like their Whiggish perception of a suppressed majority of conservatives in the North, Tennessee's editors articulated that William Yancey and other "fire-eaters" were manipulating and deceiving Southerners to build support for secession. Robert Thomas proposed that Yancey built his scheme on the powers of "party associations" and "the influences exerted over men's opinions by the advocacy and defense of one common cause." The result of his actions would be that the reliable Union men who Yancey had "entrapped" were "so fully identified with him, in public opinion, as well as by sympathy that but few will have the inclination, or the moral courage to desert him when his design is openly proclaimed." [178] The *Nashville Patriot* expressed similar sentiments when it proposed that "agitators" like Yancey had pounced on every minor issue "to awaken prejudice and excite hostility against the Northern people" in the hope that such work would "convince the Southern people that their constitutional rights are so endangered that they must ultimately be destroyed in the Union."[179] Thus, in the framing of these

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[177] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, July 14, 1860. That point was regularly articulated by other editors and was presented as the ultimate designs for the conspiracy. For similar statements see the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, July 20, 1860; the *Republican Banner and Whig*, August 02, 1860; or *The Athens Post*, August 24, 1860.

[178] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, July 13, 1860.

[179] To that point, the *Patriot* further assessed that the secessionists had performed their work so successfully that "the conservative Union-loving portion of the South do not see and appreciate [it]." See, *Nashville Patriot*, August 08, 1860.

editors, regular Southern Democrats were being led down a path toward disunion by the overpowering effects of party allegiance and the influence of a cabal of politicians—all classically Whig issues consistent with its political culture.

To correct this widespread confusion and misdirection, Union party editors took it on themselves to prove the conspiracy's existence and discredit Yancey in the process. Samuel Ivins attempted to reason with secession-inclined readers with his typically measured style by appealing to their sense of patriotism and responsibility. In one article, he pleaded to readers that "we tell you, in all faith and earnestness, you are being misled—that you are travelling in the wrong direction, away from the old charts and landmarks…Will you pause and think?—think like men sensible of the responsibility resting upon them, and like patriots, whose first duty is always to their country."[180] Others like Hiram Walker tried to juxtapose the Union party's position against Yancey's by claiming that "Fanaticism has deprived them [secessionists] of common sense. They have become perfectly drunk with passion, and should their counsels be followed, the South and the whole country would go to distraction in six months." Instead, every reasonable and honest man "who yet maintains his senses" should deny the secessionist platform and vote for the Union party to preserve both the South and the Union.[181]

Such alarmist articles about Yancey's conspiracy continued unabated in the waning weeks of the election campaign. So too did Tennessee's editors' numerous

[180] *The Athens Post*, August 24, 1860.

[181] *Republican Banner and Whig*, October 18, 1860.

appeals to their readers' sense of reason and Union sentiment.[182] As a contemporary issue, the existence of this conspiracy fits firmly within the worldview of Whig political culture and likely explains its salience as an issue in Unionist newspapers. William Yancey served as the manifestation of the "demagogic" agitator so often decried by Whigs, who sought to achieve radical change by maneuvering within the existing party organization to subvert the political process. Likewise, Yancey's actions appeared to manipulate the "passions" of ordinary voters who—in the Whig outlook—were inherently virtuous but susceptible to the power of partisanship. All that they had to do, then, was to expose the machinations of demagogues like Yancey and remove discussion of slavery from the public sphere, and the conservativeness of the American population would restore order. Thus, to former Whigs like Tennessee's editors, only a disinterested statesman like John Bell, whose wisdom and experience gave him the ability to prudentially work the levers of government, could achieve this feat.

Alongside coverage of the secessionist conspiracy, Tennessee's Union newspapers in the summer and fall of 1860 ran repeated articles that emphasized that the conservative resurgence their editors had forecasted appeared to be happening nationwide. After the Democratic party irrevocably split at Baltimore, editors like Jesse

[182] As a matter of historical record, there was some truth to their claims. As Eric Walther highlights, it is clear that Yancey and his fellow "fire-eaters" did seek to push the South toward disunion, and actively worked toward that end in 1860. See, Eric W. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, 6, 73-78; Additionally, throughout the summer and fall of that year, Yancey embarked on a lengthy speaking tour that took him around the South and even into parts of the North to generate support for the Breckinridge campaign. In his speeches he consistently decried Republicanism, the positions of Bell and Stephen Douglas, and mounted a passionate defense of slavery and the cause of Southern Democrats. Many of these appeals were couched in language about the preserving the Union and American values, but his efforts in Alabama and the lower South were separately targeted toward fomenting disunion. Coincidentally, Yancey spoke at Knoxville, Tennessee, in mid-September 1860 and had confrontation with William Brownlow on stage about his secessionist sentiment, an event which Brownlow repeatedly played-up in his newspapers. For Brownlow's report of the event, see *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, September 22, 1860.

McMahon reported that the prospects for success in November had dramatically improved. He predicted that with no unified Democratic candidate, conservatives in the North would fall in line behind Bell as the only candidate capable of beating Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans. "We believe Mr. BELL has a fair prospect of election by the people," he asserted. "All the indications point to him as the real antagonist of LINCOLN, and if the Southern States will back him, his success is assured."[183] Across Tennessee, other editors concurred with McMahon's appraisal based their perceptions on information gleaned from articles in the newspaper exchange, particularly from Northern papers. For instance, Hiram Walker happily reported that the ordinarily Democratic paper, the *Philadelphia Monitor*, had changed its allegiance to the Constitutional Union Party after the Baltimore split. To him, this change indicated "skies are indeed brightening for the Union party" and that "the popular tide, North and South, is settling in favor of BELL and EVERETT."[184]

Similarly, editors repeatedly printed anecdotal reports of growing Union sentiment gleaned from letters to the editor, correspondence, or through second-hand reports from friends or colleagues. That August, a subscriber on a trip to New York City posted a letter to the *Patriot* reporting his observations about the political sentiment in the North. He stated that he took straw polls from train passengers and that "As I passed through Ohio and Pennsylvania, I found upon every train a majority for Bell and Everett; and upon but one train during our whole trip to New York, had Breckinridge a majority

[183] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, July 05, 1860.

[184] *Republican Banner and Whig*, July 04, 1860; Also reported in the *Nashville Patriot*, July 03, 1860; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, July 13, 1860.

over Douglas" He further reported that among the businessmen he interacted with in New York City, "I find them all for Mr. Bell, with here and there an exception."[185] Other letters reported on the progress of Union organizing in their states, which editors reported as proof of the conservative movement's growing strength. In August, one *Banner* subscriber from Georgia reported that "The cause of BELL and the Union is gaining rapidly of Georgia. Both BELL and DOUGLAS are gaining votes from the BRECKINRIDGE crowd. We will carry GEORGIA for BELL."[186] Jesse McMahon similarly posted a letter from Philadelphia which proclaimed that "You may tell your readers that a wonderful revolution is just now going on in the Northern mind as to political affairs" because it appeared likely that Union party voters would form an alliance with conservative Democrats against Republicans.[187]

For concrete evidence to support their anecdotal accounts, though, Tennessee's editors looked to the results of state elections around the country that August to gauge the level of support for the Union party. When neighboring Kentucky elected a governor from the Union party and North Carolina narrowly elected a Democrat against immense conservative support, the *Memphis Bulletin* reported that "The news from Kentucky and North Carolina has fallen upon the Southern democrats like a shower of hail stones." [188]

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[185] *Nashville Patriot*, August 21, 1860; Train polls were reported in other papers as well, such as a subscriber to the *Banner* from Baltimore who reported to that "There was a vote taken yesterday on the Indiana Central Railroad cars between Xenia and Columbus, Ohio…which I regard a pretty good criterion of the state of politics in the central Western states" Of all the votes cast, Breckinridge received seven, Douglas thirty-one, Bell thirty-four, and Lincoln thirty-five." See, *Republican Banner and Whig*, August 01, 1860; For additional polls, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, July 19, 1860.

[186] *Republican Banner and Whig*, August 23, 1860.

[187] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, August 31, 1860.

[188] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, August 10, 1860.

Likewise, Hiram Walker listed the election results and proclaimed that "The revolution commenced in North Carolina on Thursday, was taken up in Kentucky yesterday, and the glorious banner of 'the Constitution, the Union, and the Enforcement of the Laws,' was carried through the fight and on to victory."[189] Robert Thomas drew a similar conclusion when he exclaimed that "The cheering news, from every quarter, of the rapidly brightening prospects of BELL and EVERETT, is well calculated to stimulate their friends everywhere, to unrelaxing efforts in their behalf." He predicted that in the days to come, conservatives would see the results of those state elections and rally to the Union cause.[190]

This combination of newspaper clippings, letters to the editor, and state election results combined to create a perception of surging public support behind the Union Party nationwide. The exchange carried this message from paper to paper with only slight variation. It is difficult to know how readers received these reports or what effect they had. Still, it is clear from the regularity with which editors printed them that the impression existed—in editorial offices at least—that a conservative resurgence was underway nationwide. Likewise, it would have appeared to editors and readers alike that their Whiggish perception of a suppressed conservative majority was proving correct. In reality, though, it is likely that the newspaper exchange and the practice of clipping articles wholesale contributed to this unanimous but unrealistic message. This similarity is because news of papers changing sides, personal views from subscriber letters, and accounts of political meetings all circulated from paper to paper and created a facade of

[189] *Republican Banner and Whig,* August 05, 1860.

[190] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, August 31, 1860.

broader Union party support when this evidence was primarily just anecdotal accounts. The only concrete data with which to gauge popular support were the results of the state elections, and from August until late September, those appeared to confirm their preconceptions.

Awaiting a Decision, October to November 1860

That consensus began to crack in the second week of October when results from the state elections in the North reached Tennessee. Before the elections, editors like Hiram Walker acknowledged their importance as a metric to gauge support for the Union party by acknowledging that the results in Pennsylvania and elsewhere "will be looked for with unusual interest by the true friends of the Union everywhere."[191] When voters in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana elected Republicans in large majorities, Tennessee's editors were forced to reconcile the results with their perception of widespread conservative support. Some like Samuel Ivins acknowledged that the results were unfavorable but held out hope that the general election in November would be different. "We are not willing to concede Mr. Lincoln's election as a dead sure thing by any means. Not at all," he asserted. Instead, he listed reports that a fusion of the Democratic parties in New York with Bell supporters would win the state and prevent Lincoln's victory. Likewise, he predicted that New Jersey and Rhode Island would vote for a fusion party rather than Lincoln.[192] Hiram Walker articulated a similar argument and dismissed worries about Lincoln's victory as unnecessary. He reported that "local issues, local prejudices and long standing animosities" prevented a fusion among anti-Republican

[191] *Republican Banner and Whig*, October 06, 1860.

[192] *The Athens Post*, October 12, 1860.

elements in those three states, but that the issue would be different in November. He theorized that voters would understand that the "issue in November is Union or disunion" and would therefore vote against a sectional candidate like Lincoln rather than "force upon the South a Republican President."[193] Like Ivins, he too argued that New York was the election's linchpin and predicted that a fusion between Democrats and the Union party was underway in the state.[194]

Other editors like William Brownlow were much less optimistic about the future. Two days after the Northern election results reached Knoxville, Brownlow flatly confessed that Lincoln's "chances are now better than those of any other candidate in the field." He then acknowledged the rising calls for secession in the South and theorized what he thought the state should do in response to Lincoln's election. Brownlow advocated patience and proposed that if Lincoln tried to abolish the slave trade, he would approve of revolution only after all legislative and judicial options were defeated.[195] Such a flirtation with secession was an unusual admittance from Brownlow and would prove to be inconsistent with his later views, which flatly denied its legality. Regardless, Brownlow's pessimistic position was a rarity among Union editors, as most joined Samuel Ivins and Hiram Walker in predicting that a fusion party in New York would salvage the hopes of the Union movement.

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[193] *Republican Banner and Whig*, October 11, 1860.

[194] Walker based this claim on a subscriber letter from New York on October 5, 1860 that declared that "The union of the Electoral tickets in this State of the three parties opposed to the election of Mr. Lincoln is now complete." The letter further claimed with confidence that the author felt "happy in stating it as my honest opinion that Mr. Lincoln will lose the State of New York, in which event his election is next to an impossibility, and justifies the assertion that Mr. Bell will be our next President." For the entire commentary on the letter and the election, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, October 11, 1860.

[195] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, October 13, 1860.

In the final weeks before the election, news from the campaign was sparse and reporting primarily focused on various stump speeches in the surrounding counties. To fill space and to further the Union cause, Tennessee's Union editors printed last-minute appeals to get out the vote. These proclamations featured a noticeable shift in tone from previous articles that belied an increasing acknowledgment of an impending crisis. Despite his repeated assertions professing faith in the voters in New York, Hiram Walker admitted that "This is indeed a dark hour for our country. There is a gloom, there is danger, but still there is hope." Yet, he professed his belief that the same God who had led the Israelites from captivity and who had sustained George Washington would likewise save the country in its time of peril.[196] Similarly, final articles and editorials increasingly prophesied drastic consequences if Bell was not elected. This rhetorical shift likely occurred in response to the increased discussion of secession by Democratic speakers and newspapers with the idea of scaring readers into voting for the Union party. For example, Ira Jones conjured the memory of the French Revolution when he proclaimed that secessionists were "endeavoring to introduce a reign of terror, with a view to repress the patriotic impulses of the Union loving masses." Later, he compared those who would submit to the secessionist program to slaves by claiming that for disunion to occur "they must be come servile as the slaves on the plantations, and submit to be driven as the secession overseers may dictate."[197] More typical, though, were calls for men to do their civic duty and vote. "Let each and every one do something in his own way," William Brownlow urged. "For we are on the side of Right, of Law; Order and

[196] *Republican Banner and Whig*, October 16, 1860.

[197] *Nashville Patriot*, October 27, 1860.

Religion," he urged. "Let all who can talk, speak for the cause...Let him who can write, write for this cause."[198] Thus, even as the election drew to a close and a crisis loomed, Tennessee's Union editors reverted to their Whiggish sensibilities to explain the political situation to their readers. They did so by hyperbolically extolling the evils brought by a disruption to public order and playing toward a sense of public virtue and dedication to the Union.

On Tuesday, November 7, 1860, Tennessee's voters—all white males—went to the polls and cast their ballots for the presidency. It would be several days before official results were known, but the *Nashville Patriot* felt confident enough in the result to communicate the following day that "there is scarcely any room to doubt that LINCOLN has carried almost the entire body of the non-slaveholding States of the Union and is President elect, under the forms of the Constitution of the United States."[199] In Tennessee, John Bell received 47.6% of the vote and won by a margin of less than 5,000 ballots.[200] The closeness of the election there indicated that little had changed politically from previous elections and that the Union party, while strong, had benefited from the Democratic division. Despite this, some of Tennessee's Union editors took solace in the fact that even though John Bell had lost nationally, at least their communities had done their duty and voted for the Union party. William Brownlow exemplified this when he applauded Knoxville for increasing its vote over the previous election, despite the efforts by Democrats to swing the district. "Our gain is SEVENTEEN" he celebrated, "and this

[198] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 03, 1860.

[199] *Nashville Patriot*, November 08, 1860.

[200] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans toward the Union*, 130-131.

after all the Disunion importations to the place, and the speeches of the Yancies, Wigfall Co. all reported to have revolutionized the place is glory enough for one campaign."[201]

Naturally, though, the inclination existed to ponder the future course of events in the wake of Lincoln's election. Newspapers and dispatches from South Carolina indicated that the state's legislature was then in session to debate whether to pass an ordinance of secession. Other states in the lower South also appeared postured to follow suit. But what of Tennessee? Hiram Walker proposed that Tennessee take a neutral stance, await further developments, and try to be a force for reconciliation between the North and South.[202] The editors of *Nashville Patriot* decided not to offer an opinion at all and instead asserted that the issue of what to do was "an exceedingly perplexing one; and upon it we do not propose to offer an opinion hastily formed."[203] Robert Thomas, however, articulated a position slightly more sympathetic to secession. He acknowledged that the South should act in unison in whatever response it took, and though he did not think secession was then warranted, he did acknowledge the necessity of resistance should Republicans "attempt any invasion or subversion of our rights."[204]

This variance in opinion, slight as it was days after Lincoln's election, foreshadowed the more significant fights to come within the Union movement in Tennessee. Over the previous twelve months, these editors were unified in their support for John Bell and the Constitutional Union Party. Their shared membership in the

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[201] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 10, 1860.

[202] *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 09, 1860.

[203] *Nashville Patriot*, November 08, 1860.

[204] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, November 09, 1860.

existing Opposition organization provided the apparatus around which they worked to advance Bell's campaign, and they willing used their newspapers as organizing platforms to do so. Intellectually, their shared political culture—which was grounded in the ideology of the old Whig Party—provided the filter through which they viewed and contextualized the news for their readers. These editors consistently returned to old Whig ideas surrounding the importance of social harmony, resistance to radicalism, and public virtue among citizens and voters. Likewise, they explained the threats posed by Republicans and Southern secessionists with Whiggish language, describing them as demagogues, agitators, or members of a conspiracy bent on disunion and subversion of the constitutional order. In the days and weeks ahead, though, this shared worldview and political organization would fray as the pressures over secession and a possible Civil War mounted. In that context, the course taken by Tennessee's newspaper editors would be influenced by personal decisions that balanced their roles as political actors, journalists, and businessmen.

CHAPTER IV – UNIONISM TRIUMPHANT, NOVEMBER 1860-FEBRUARY 1861

"We have simply said that Tennessee should remain in the present government; that she should not be forced out at the bidding of any set of politicians, North or South, but that she would take her own time and in her own way assert her rights in the Union, and failing to obtain them, she will then take that course which her honor and dignity demand at the hands of her people. Any other interpretation of the late election is erroneous."

--*Nashville Patriot*, February 19, 1861

On November 10, 1860, three days after the election of Abraham Lincoln, Ira Jones and his fellow editors at the *Nashville Patriot* published an editorial that reflected on the political condition of the United States and the status of public opinion in the South. "It is over," they wrote, but rather than accepting the result like in all previous elections, they found public sentiment, regardless of party affiliation, to be "gloomy and apprehensive, whilst a very large proportion of them believe that the time has come for severing the ties which bind them to the Union." The *Patriot's* editors likewise exclaimed that the atmosphere created by the Republican victory—a party which the Tennesseans asserted was "bound together by common opposition to constitutional rights of the South"— foretold evil events to come. Yet, regardless of the excitement at present, Jones promised that in the months ahead, his newspaper would "endeavor to be just to the North, and while maintaining the full measure of the rights of our native clime the South, to aid in the preservation of the National Union."[205]

Over the next five months, nearly all of Tennessee's Unionist editors took a similar outlook as they tried to leverage their positions as journalists to steer public opinion in favor of moderation and compromise to preserve the status quo in the Union. During this period, the Union party in Tennessee and the other upper-South states

[205] *Nashville Patriot*, November 10, 1860.

campaigned against the secessionist wave that swept the rest of the slave states out of the Union. This resistance culminated in the successful state election in February 1861 that seemingly defeated the secession movement and signaled its nadir nationwide. In this process, Unionist editors worked alongside the same state Union party apparatus that had successfully mobilized behind compromise candidate John Bell in the recent presidential election. Like then, these editors shared a consistent devotion to the Whiggish politics that framed their response—and their news coverage—to the ever-changing political environment. This Whig tradition provided the language, ideas, and shared assumptions that editors used to communicate to sympathetic readers and as the rhetorical justification for their different positions. In doing so, editors framed their opposition to secession in egalitarian and populist language targeted at the ordinary white, middle- and lower-class white men who comprised the state's voting population.

While advocating for this pro-compromise position, Tennessee's editors trod a fine line between supporting moderation toward the Lincoln administration and maintaining their allegiance to the South and its interests, namely the institution of slavery. Just as the *Nashville Patriot* promised to "maintain the full measure of the rights" of the South, the other Unionist papers universally presented opinions that acknowledged the perceived wrongs done to the South and laid the onus for compromise firmly on the North's hands as the ultimate decider of compromise.[206] Beneath this broader rhetorical environment, Tennessee's Unionist editors worked to balance their duties as journalists with their roles as political actors—a conflict of interest not uncommon in the nineteenth century. Just as they did with the presidential election in 1860, editors in Tennessee took

[206] *Nashville Patriot*, November 10, 1860.

prominent positions in political organizing by serving in leadership roles at public meetings within their communities. This participation demonstrates their dedication to their Unionist cause and undoubtedly translated to their work in writing editorials and contextualizing news material.

In each case, be it through their rhetorical arguments in their newspapers or outside political involvement, the actions of Tennessee's Unionist editors in the early months of the secession crisis show that they actively sought to influence public opinion in line with their personal views while still responding to the desires of their local readers. These two concerns often paralleled each other. However, in certain instances during the secession crisis, they clashed over issues like the proper course the state should take and later over the necessity of "revolution." Such complex involvement suggests that secession-era journalists—while likely still attuned to the views of their local community—nonetheless could, and did, use their platform for their own ideological purposes when necessary. Their actions during this period further complicate the argument of Donald Reynolds regarding the lack of political involvement by nineteenth-century editors and instead shows that they actively worked to influence the political environment, both with their personal actions and the content of their newspapers. Likewise, the populist arguments and rhetoric used by many editors to target white middle- and lower-class readers contests Carl Osthaus' assertion regarding the connection between elite sentiment and editors' actions. The reality in the more egalitarian Tennessee is likely that editors recognized the composition of their audience and instead crafted arguments attuned to the condition of their largest base of subscribers. Ultimately in the first four months after Abraham Lincoln's election, ideas, hope, and fear

clashed with the editors' responsibilities as journalists. How they approached these circumstances is a revealing look at the political stand taken by Unionist newspaper editors in 1861 and the complex factors that pressed them as they sought to make sense of events, report the news, and influence public opinion in their communities.

Contemplating Union or Disunion, November 1860 to January 1861

In the days after Abraham Lincoln's election, Tennessee's Unionist editors took stock of the political situation around the country and in their home state. To their chagrin, the "Black Republican" candidate they had lobbied against so strenuously would assume the presidential office in early March and thus gain control of the Federal executive branch. Simultaneously, the South Carolina legislature, which had remained in session throughout the election's final days, seemed poised to quickly move for secession with the prospect that other states could follow. The pressure of these twin crises appeared ready to spark turmoil in the South and Tennessee, and the state's Unionist editors took to their editorial columns to speak against undue panic and rash action. Some like William Brownlow appealed to reason to downplay the impact that a Republican executive branch would have on the South, its economy, and its system of slave labor. Brownlow conceded that it was true that Lincoln was a "sectional" candidate but proposed that "there is no just ground for resistance or revolutionary movement on that score" and flatly stated that the election was legitimate and that states should abide by it. "Do the Constitution or the Laws of our country require a man to receive Southern votes before he can be inaugurated President?" he asked. "Do they compel a candidate to receive votes in every State before he shall be declared our Chief Magistrate? Certainly not!" Brownlow further asserted that Lincoln was bound by his oath of office and would

act with the knowledge that any violation of the Constitution would spark secession in the South. That simple fact alone would moderate his governance and limit any risk to slavery. Thus, as he saw it, Southerners should not leap to action in response to the election because they had "no right to judge of Lincoln by any thing but his acts, and these can only be appreciated after his inauguration."[207]

Jesse McMahon in the *Memphis Bulletin* echoed Brownlow's wait-and-see attitude when he urged a "masterly inactivity—a quiet but determined waiting for the progress of developments" in response to the election. He praised the moderate course taken by Virginia and North Carolina, which both appeared resistant to secession, and urged that if Tennessee took any action, it should only be "the result of thought and careful deliberation."[208] Similar calls to honor Lincoln's election and await the course of events also appeared in the pages of the *Republican Banner* and the *Clarksville Chronicle*.[209] While seemingly accomodating to Lincoln and contradictory to their expressed opposition to the Republican platform, these opinions were entirely consistent with the course they had advocated throughout the election in the previous months. Their emphasis on prudence and caution in the light of impending conflict was a manifestation

[207] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 24, 1860.

[208] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, November 26, 1860.

[209] See the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* November 30, 1860 in which Robert Thomas criticizes secessionists for participating in the election, only to not abide by its results later. He equated them to a crooked gambler who refused to pay his losses after defeat, and asserted that their participation "bound them to abide, in good faith, the result of the election." See also *the Republican Banner*, November 24, 1860 in which H. K. Walker claimed that the South had "nothing to lose by frequent, cautious, deliberate action" and criticizes secessionists for exploiting excitement and hasty action to achieve their desired goal. Union party presidential candidate John Bell expounded on these beliefs in a letter published in the Banner in which he claimed that "Mr. Lincoln, it is well known, does not hold extreme opinions on the subject of slavery" and predicted no action by his administration against slavery except for the normal pace of agitation from anti-slavery agitators in the North. For the full transcript, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 08, 1860.

of the Whiggish political culture, which had a powerful hold in the upper South. Each of the editors had adhered to it throughout their professional careers. This conservative culture which stressed accommodation and prudential change, along with the inherent virtue of the American people, likely infused their resistance to secession and willingness to seek compromise efforts in the months of the secession crisis. Beyond this intellectual impetus, however, even Lincoln's history as a former Whig gave some Tennesseans reason to take the moderate course and await future events. As one subscriber to the Nashville *Republican Banner* noted, though he was "no sympathizer with the organization known as the Black Republican party," he understood "that Mr. Lincoln claims to be an old Clay whig, and if he was ever baptised into the glorious old whig church…it would be difficult to get the old Whig leaven so entirely purged out of him as to make him the very bad man which many of the people say he is." The South and Tennessee then should await further action, and if Lincoln took steps to violate the Constitution, it would then "be time to take such measures for redress as may be deemed expedient."[210]

That final statement by that subscriber indicating a desire to seek "redress as may be deemed expedient" expressed a subtle change in outlook regarding secession and Tennessee's future course that the state's newspaper editors also articulated. Whereas secession had been deemed illegal and even traitorous by the Unionist press during the election, they near-universally insisted that any overt action against the South would provide grounds for a response based on their natural right to "revolution." Statements delineating the difference between "secession" and "revolution" did occur throughout

[210] *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 17, 1860.

1860 but took on a renewed vigor after Lincoln's formal election that November. The editors of the *Nashville Patriot* best expressed this sentiment in an editorial that urged Abraham Lincoln to understand the difference between secession and revolution. In explanation, they asserted that "there is an ultimate right of revolution, inherent and unalienable in all people, which cannot be denied, and there is a clear line of demarkation between an insurrection, a circumscribed rebellion against the law, and the attitude of a people who have formally disavowed an existing government, and are struggling to build up a new and different one." By the *Patriot's* framing, unwarranted secession was illegal, and Lincoln maintained the authority to enforce the laws as the Chief Executive. However, if his administration violated their constitutional rights, they as citizens reserved the right to 'formally disavow" the government and establish a separate governing structure.[211]

Tennessee's Unionist editors repeatedly emphasized this subtle difference between “secession” and “revolution” in their editorials throughout the weeks after Lincoln’s election. This principle was further reiterated in letters from subscribers and in public resolutions submitted to the newspapers, showing that this idea carried weight in Unionist circles beyond the rhetorical confines of newspapers.[212] Historian Daniel Crofts proposed that Unionism in the upper South consisted of three categories. First were the absolute" or "unconditional" Unionists who resisted secession at all costs. The second were the "anticoercionists" or "extended ultimatumists" who wanted to wait out the

[211] *Nashville Patriot*, December 29, 1860.

[212] For further discussion on this topic, see the *Nashville Patriot*, January 02, 1861; the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, January 18, 1861; Resolutions from Roane County, TN in *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig* on January 19, 1860; or the letter to the editor published in *The Athens Post* on February 08, 1861.

Republican administration and work for compromise legislation to protect Southern rights, namely slavery. Finally, the "fast ultimatumists" demanded immediate concessions from Republicans and rapidly converted to secession when no action was taken.[213] Using these definitions, every newspaper in this study, except for William Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, held to this "anticoercionist" and "extended ultimatumist" camp throughout the secession crisis. Indeed, even William Brownlow, who eventually became one of the state's leading unconditional Unionists, briefly conceded the correctness of the anti-coercion position in the immediate aftermath of the 1860 election.[214] To be sure, other newspapers and readers in Tennessee held different views and moved between the Unionist camps, but the consensus expressed by the state's most influential Unionist newspaper editors shows the depth of this sentiment in Tennessee. Furthermore, it helps to explain—rhetorically at least—the dominant outlook in the state as the secession crisis began in November and December 1860.

Over one month elapsed between the election's conclusion and the secession of South Carolina, and throughout that period, Unionist editors eagerly looked to confirm the status of the secession movement in the lower South. That South Carolina favored secession was a widely acknowledged fact that editors reiterated in editorials throughout the months of the election season. Though some like Samuel Ivins expressed hope that

[213] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 104-105.

[214] See *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 24, 1860. There, Brownlow asserts that disunion is a solution to evil governments "to be resorted to in the last extremity, and as a refuge more intolerable than the desperate remedy by which they are sought to be relieved." He concedes his willingness to resist any efforts by Lincoln if Constitutional measures for compromise fail and expressed sentiment that he was individually "willing to go with the South…but we feel bound to aid in making the South herself go right!" This tacit admission of the viability of secession would be the only time that Brownlow flirted with disunion. As the secession crisis progressed conflict seemed increasingly imminent, his Unionist sympathies seemingly hardened and acted as if this digression never occurred.

"some means will yet be devised to avert the threatened calamity" before the state seceded, the majority of the other editors wrote that the lower-South state was as good as gone.[215] To the extent that South Carolina received news coverage throughout November 1860, it was through the published speeches and proceedings of the state legislature's sessions taken from other newspapers. Beyond that, however, most content related to its pending secession came in editorials, which allowed editors to rhetorically attack the principle of secession and attempt to sway readers from supporting it. These arguments were largely extensions of those the editors had made throughout the previous election season as they denounced the supposed conspiratorial motivations behind secession. They echoed the same historic Whig fears of concentrated power and corruption of public order by emphasizing the supposed evil intentions of the secessionist leaders. Temporally those fears comprised a significant feature of the Whig political culture over the previous decades and likely would have made sense to former Whig Unionists within the accepted discourse of the time.[216] However, these recent entireties differed in their tone and intent as secession had then moved past the theoretical stage to actuality. Thus, their articles were fervently targeted at the Whig readers in their communities and around the South, hoping to temper secessionist sentiment before it progressed to outright disunion.[217]

When South Carolina's state convention passed an ordinance of secession on December 20, 1860, the *Republican Banner* was the first paper to acknowledge the

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[215] *The Athens Post*, November 23, 1860.

[216] Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 78-81.

[217] For examples of these editorials on South Carolina's secession movement, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, November 13, 1860; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 24, 1860; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, November 30, 1860.

development the following day. Reactions to this news were predictably severe. Some of Tennessee's Unionist editors scorned the state for its actions and predicted evil in the future for the country. Others analyzed secession's implications for future attempts at compromise or reconciliation. The *Banner* adopted the most vitriolic response of any paper as it tried to stoke populist fears of conspiracy and elite domination as a consequence of secession. Noting that "the ambitious and shallow headed leaders of the State of South Carolina" had accomplished their thirty-year goal of fomenting disunion, Hiram Walker proclaimed that "the alleged grievances, on account of which these leaders have succeeded in firing the hearts of the masses, had nothing to do with the execution of their mad designs." Instead, they intended to destroy the government, regardless of any compromise measures, and if necessary, precipitate a violent conflict to encourage the other Southern states to secede.[218] In that framing, the *Banner* styled South Carolina's secession as the conclusion of the elite-driven conspiracy it had heralded in the months previously. It further claimed that the victims of South Carolina's nefarious actions were the "masses," the ordinary people in the state, who had been deceived and misled about the necessity of secession.[219] In such a populist framing, Walker no doubt intended to

[218] *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 22, 1860.

[219] The *Banner* held to this line of populist, rhetorical reasoning for multiple weeks by further emphasizing to readers on December 29, 1860 what it saw as the domineering and elite driven nature of South Carolina's secession. Loosely referencing statements that had appeared "in the public prints," the Banner proclaimed that South Carolina elites intended to establish an oligarchy, or even a constitutional monarchy, that would deny universal suffrage to common whites. "Their motive must, be a far-different one," the Banner wrote, theorizing that the state's secession stemmed from "their dissatisfaction with a government founded on the suffrages of the people; with a government deriving its authority from the whole mass of the governed; in short, with a democratic republic." With such rhetoric, Walker and the *Banner* were of course attempting to disparage South Carolina for its act of secession, but were likely also tacitly attacking the secession movement in Tennessee by showing that any middle- or lower-class voter that supported disunion and a Southern Confederacy risked impeding their voting rights and political power. Such reasoning would continue throughout the rest of the secession crisis. See, *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 29, 1860.

juxtapose the supposed plight of the duped “masses” in South Carolina with the middle- and lower-class readers in Tennessee who could suffer a similar fate if the secession movement gained steam. While not explicitly anti-elitist, the intent of this populist argument would be to caution readers against similar attacks and to raise suspicions of conspiratorial intentions among secessionists in Tennessee.

The *Republican Banner*'s neighboring *Nashville Patriot* took a slightly different approach by rebuking South Carolina for precipitating disunion with no attempt at cooperation or coordination with the other slave states. "Throughout her entire programme thus far South Carolina has shown her repugnance to cooperation," Ira Jones asserted. Working with "an utter blindness and deafness to the duties and obligations towards her sisters," Jones theorized that South Carolina had long been suspicious of the trustworthiness and confidence of other Southern states to act. So, it instead moved on its own and, after the fact, "turns and invites those unworthy sisters to follow her."[220] Robert Thomas in the *Chronicle* had a similar reaction as he too opposed the single-state secession but soberly predicted that there was little chance South Carolina would consent to any form of compromise. Indeed, it was the fear that the country would come to terms that prompted the state to move quickly and "thereby to precipitate the whole South into the vortex of civil war ere the sober second thought of the country can come to the rescue of the Union."[221] The arguments of the *Patriot* and the *Chronicle* both proposed similar viewpoints about the larger conspiratorial intentions of South Carolina towards the rest of the South. Together with the *Banner’s* populist outlook, they collectively show the

[220] *Nashville Patriot*, December 22, 1860.

[221] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, January 11, 1861.

Whiggish influence on the outlook of Tennessee's Unionist editors and the implicitly anti-elitist rhetorical tactics that they used to target a subset of readers to influence their opinions on secession.

Furthermore, the inclination of the *Patriot* and the *Chronicle* to consider the consequences of South Carolina's secession on compromise efforts point to the predominant thinking of Tennessee's Unionists in this period. In the final weeks of 1860 and into January 1861, Unionist editors regularly opined in favor of various ideas for reconciliation that could temper passions and create the diplomatic opportunity to reconstruct the Union. In that regard, their emphasis on compromise, moderation, and faith in the virtue of the American public had changed little since their campaign for John Bell in the previous month. In the case of these new compromise efforts, however, discussions centered on the necessity of securing guaranties from the Republican party regarding the South's grievances, namely over the issue of slavery. One commonly floated proposal was for a joint convention among the Southern states to compile their complaints and present demands for redress in the form of an ultimatum to the North. Robert Thomas in the *Chronicle* was a consistent advocate for a convention, for he reasoned that it was the best opportunity to resolve differences of opinion in the South and to present grievances in a united fashion. A convention would also absolve the South of responsibility for secession because they would have exhausted every good-faith opportunity for compromise and thus could leave the Union in good conscience.[222] Thomas was initially joined in this position by William Brownlow, who, while he

[222] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, November 30, 1860; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, January 04, 1861.

maintained his vehement position against secession, admitted the practicality of a multi-state convention if some form of action had to be taken. He theorized that through a convention, "the Southern States could be induced to delay, in anticipation of a Southern Conference, and in preparation for it, something would be gained." That "something" would be an ability to reason with representatives from the lower South by showing "them that their griefs are mostly imaginary" and that the people of the Border States like Tennessee bore the actual grievances concerning slavery. A convention would further allow the South to present an ultimatum to the North to resolve their particular grievances so that "the North would feel compelled to accept it, or to take the blame of the consequences."[223] Much like his early flirtation with conditional Unionism, Brownlow eventually dropped this early position and adopted a more absolutist position toward compromise measures and secession.

Thomas and Brownlow were far from the only individuals to propose such a course, as Unionist politicians and common voters discussed the idea for a Southern convention alike. One letter submitted by "G. W. P," a subscriber to the *Memphis Bulletin*, showed the prevalence of this idea as he reasoned that a convention of delegates freshly elected from the people would present the best opportunity to discuss the South's grievances with the North. "G. W. P" went further, though, in proposing that a national Convention could then be called, in front of which the South would present an ultimatum demanding resolution of the issue of slavery. If Republicans rejected that ultimatum, the subscriber asserted, "let the South go out of the Union in a united body."[224] Letters from

[223] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 24, 1860.

[224] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, January 04, 1861.

subscribers in the other Unionist newspapers presented comparable opinions in favor of a convention.[225] This sentiment was also exhibited in resolutions passed by public meetings held by white Tennesseans to discuss the unfolding political crisis. One held in Nashville proposed that the Tennessee legislature call a state convention to elect delegates to a Southern convention "to consider existing political troubles, and if possible to compose our sectional strifes." Former Tennessee Governor Neill S. Brown agreed in a speech in the same meeting that "there was no other mode more proper than by means of a Convention delegated by the people." In his view, it would only be after such a meeting that Tennessee could decide for itself if it would remain in the Union.[226] Such emphasis on the importance of a convention—and the conditional nature of their Unionist sentiment—show that such ideas proposed by Tennessee's editors were far from unpopular or unorthodox with their readers. Instead, at a minimum, they mirrored much of what their subscribers and local politicians supported on the issue of how Tennessee and the South should respond. This symbiotic relationship would not always be the case in the coming weeks. Then, as the pressure for secession mounted, editors and voters alike were forced to take a hard stance on the actual provisions put before the people for a

[225] See the letter from "Convention" in the *Nashville Patriot*, January 16, 1861. Also, from writer "Tennessee" in the *Nashville Patriot*, November 26, 1860. Writer "Franklin" in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 17, 1861 also expressed similar sentiments.

[226] *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 02, 1860. For other concurring public opinions, see the speech of Nashville Democratic politician Edwin Ewing in support of a Southern convention in the *Nashville Patriot*, December 03, 1860. See also the resolutions from Robertson County, Stewart County, Marion County, Montgomery County, and Sumner County, TN in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 09, 1860; Or that from Blount County, TN listed in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, December 15, 1860. Also, the Union resolution from Shelby County, TN, in the *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, January 04, 1861.

vote. At that point, some editors would move against popular sentiment and instead argue for their personal viewpoints.

The Unionist Reaction, January 1861.

Responsibility for enacting the measures in Tennessee to achieve these ends did not, of course, rest with its newspaper editors but rather the state legislature. Responding to a call from Tennessee Governor Isham Harris, the legislature convened in Nashville in early January 1861 to discuss the state's action in response to the crisis.[227] The Tennessee press widely accepted that the legislature should act, but the specifics of the response remained uncertain. With near unanimity, the seven Unionist editors in this study argued that the assembly should call a convention to debate the issue and to gauge the public's sentiment regarding secession. In its first edition of 1861, the *Nashville Patriot* favored holding a state convention, despite the paper's strong desire to hold to the Union. The *Patriot* reasoned that a convention of newly elected delegates would best exhibit the genuine opinion of Tennesseans at that moment rather than the legislature, which consisted of members elected well before the secession crisis began. The *Patriot's* editors felt that the state should call a Convention because "the people want to have their day and to give expression to their views and opinions" and thus urged the legislature to call for an election at once.[228] Samuel Ivins expressed a similar sentiment that a convention was a necessity because the "present members of the Legislature were not elected with a view to the present exigencies of affairs, and, consequently, are wholly unfit to express the sentiments of the State." Ivins acknowledged the risks a convention could have for the

[227] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 234-235.

[228] *Nashville Patriot*, January 01, 1861.

Union but stated that he hoped the prevailing idea would be "the adoption of such measures as will best preserve the Union—and we mean the *entire Union*" along with the "preservation of the institutions of the South," meaning slavery above all.[229]

Both Hiram Walker at the *Republican Banner* and Robert Thomas in Clarksville editorialized in favor of a state convention because they deemed it reasonable that the legislature take some form of action to demonstrate Tennessee's position.[230] William Gates, the editor of the *West Tennessee Whig*, also favored a convention but demanded that the legislature publicly condemn any potential coercion to force seceded states back into the Union. He proclaimed that although Tennesseans "cannot otherwise than disapprove the hasty and precipitate action of her neighboring sisters" in their declarations of secession, Tennessee nevertheless "utterly repudiates and will, in all proper ways, resist any attempt to coerce them back into a Union."[231] Gates's vehement position against coercion—a clear enunciation of his fellow editors' predominantly conditional Unionist position—presaged the arguments that would dominate the press as tensions mounted in subsequent weeks.

Even William Brownlow—the most outspoken Unionist editor in the state—accepted the usefulness of a convention, but urged the importance of electing sympathetic delegates to prevent secessionists from hastening the state out of the Union. No doubt intended to alarm readers into not voting for secessionists, Brownlow raised the specter

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[229] *The Athens Post*, December 14, 1860.

[230] *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 15, 1860; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, January 04, 1861.

[231] *West Tennessee Whig*, January 18, 1861.

of monarchical rule and aristocratic despotism if the state was to secede. He warned that "If we are voted into a Southern Confederacy, we are to live under a villainous monarchy, the laws of which will be framed by the worst act of men who ever lived in the tide of time." He further claimed that a victory for the secessionists would mean that common Tennesseans would be "ground down to the earth with taxes, to support a set of traitors in office" and forced to "fight in a servile war that God only can see the end of."[232] Much like how the *Republican Banner* employed populist rhetoric to criticize the secession of South Carolina, Brownlow likely tried to play on fears of elite domination and high taxes by appealing to the middle and lower-class whites who resided in East Tennessee and would possibly be susceptible to such claims. With Brownlow's agreement, all seven of the Unionist editors in this study agreed on the viability of a state convention to debate secession. While they differed in their reasoning, they nonetheless all took a stance and argued for it in the weeks ahead. Absent knowledge of what eventually occurred, a surface-level reading of their papers this stance would give the impression that their ideas were the mainstream view among Unionists. The next few weeks would test that perception.

On January 21, 1861, the *Nashville Patriot* first reported that state lawmakers had finally passed legislation on the issue of a state convention to deliberate secession. The act called for a statewide referendum on February 9, 1861, to give white Tennesseans the option to vote yea or nay in favor of holding a secession convention. It further directed that voters nominate delegates to attend the convention if it happened.[233] As most of

[232] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 19, 1861.

[233] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 239-241.

Tennessee's Unionist editors favored calling a convention—while also resisting secession—this action from the legislature was greeted with praise in their papers around the state. "The provisions are fair and just," the *Patriot* proclaimed, as it went on to note that the bill's regulations ultimately meant that the selection of Unionist delegates would be the most critical piece of the election. This fact necessitated that Tennesseans select "Good men, true men—men devoted to the interests of the South, but yet who are not willing ruthlessly to pull down the pillars of the temple of liberty which has so long afforded us shelter and protection."[234] The *Republican Banner* likewise lauded the passage of the convention bill and congratulated the legislature for its "calmness, deliberation, and conservatism." Furthermore, it urged that voters elect experienced and reliable Union delegates to defeat the state's secession movement, which consisted of "the vilest, most damnable, deep-laid, and treacherous conspiracy" to force the state out of the Union. "If the PEOPLE do not rise in their strength and put back meddling politicians," it warned, "the latter will chloroform them with 'sectional prejudice,' and then ride over them rough-shod before they can recover from the narcotic."[235]

In this framing—much like William Brownlow's caricature of elite domination—the *Banner* evidently sought to appeal to "the people," the honest masses of voters it saw as being railroaded by designing politicians for their secessionist desires. Such a tactic was likely aimed at stimulating the fears of middle- and lower-class voters in Tennessee who were removed from the inner workings of politics and could be possibly convinced to thwart this supposed elite conspiracy by voting for the Union. Just like previous

[234] *Nashville Patriot*, January 21, 1861.

[235] *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 22, 1861.

comments about South Carolina's secession, or the savage critiques of "fire-eaters" like William Yancey during the 1860 presidential campaigning, the *Banner* implicitly contrasted the activities of faraway elite politicians with the supposed ability of the average white American to correct issues if given a chance to vote. This populist, rhetorical approach repeatedly exhibited by editors in Tennessee points to the different political environments in Tennessee that made such arguments permissible. For if—as Carl Osthaus formulated—Southern editors worked at the discretion of local elites, then arguments aimed at stimulating the passions of the ordinary voter likely would not been allowed. That populist arguments continued unabated at each end of the state by editors like William Brownlow, Ira Jones, and Hiram Walker—many of whom were far from average financially—suggests that no such concrete relationship existed in Tennessee. Instead, editors likely tried to editorialize to the common audience in their local communities—in this case, the predominantly middle and lower-class white reader in Tennessee who possessed different interests and appeared susceptible to such rhetoric.

With the legislature's action calling for the state referendum, Tennessee's political organizations began a short but intense campaign to mobilize voters for or against the convention over the next three weeks. With some exceptions, the same political organization that campaigned on behalf of John Bell in the November 1860 presidential election—predominantly former Whigs and Know-Nothings—worked to elect Union delegates in the February 1861 vote. However, this organization lacked the official title of the Constitutional Union Party and instead adopted the title of the

"Southern Rights Union Party" for the duration of the referendum period.[236] Similarly, most, though certainly not all, of the secessionist advocates in Tennessee came from the ranks of the Democratic Party who had supported either John C. Breckinridge or Stephen Douglas in the recent campaigning.[237] As could be expected, this rough alignment also applied to the various newspapers around the state. All seven of the papers examined in this study aligned with the Unionist position throughout the referendum campaign and functionally operated in the same roles they had during the recent presidential election.

Much like with the campaigning events during the Election of 1860, several of Tennessee's Unionist editors directly participated in the political activism occurring in their various communities. With their actions, they thus stepped outside the realm of their role as journalists to join local party politics. As there was no official state party convention during the referendum campaign, much of the editors' political work centered on taking leadership roles in the local public meetings that met to nominate Unionist candidates for a convention if one occurred. For instance, editors Hiram Walker of the

[236] This title with the "Southern Rights" modifier elucidates the predominately conditional position of the self-described Unionists in Tennessee throughout the secession crisis. The *Republican Banner* put it bluntly when it asserted that "the party opposed to immediate secession is the true 'Southern Rights' party, and their policy is the only one which can preserve Southern Rights." This policy, as the *Banner* stated, consisted of opposition to the doctrine of secession adopted by South Carolina and the other lower South states, but also avowed resistance to any attempt to 'coerce' those states back into the Union. To the Banner at that time, such an attempt at coercion was not likely, however, and need not be feared. See, the *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 22, 1861.

[237] This rough alignment between Democratic and the Whig / Know-Nothing alliance in Tennessee extended through the Election of 1860 and bore out in the voting totals of the February 1861 referendum. Using regression analysis Daniel Crofts found that party affiliation was a major influence in determining opposition to secession candidates in the upper South, including among slaveholders. He found that Unionist candidates received roughly 92 percent of the votes from former Whigs with an incredibly high turnout rate of 95 percent of eligible voters. Similar tendencies were evident in North Carolina and Virginia. Interestingly though, Crofts found that more than 50 percent of Tennessee Democrats from the 1860 opposed secession in the February referendum. For his full analysis, see: Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 173-192.

Republican Banner and William Henry Smith of the *Nashville Patriot* were both nominated to serve as secretaries for the Davidson County Union party convention and thus helped draft the meeting minutes and the resolutions passed by the meeting—all of which were published in their own newspapers.[238]

In Knoxville, William Brownlow went even further, as he served as one of the featured stump speakers at the local Union party convention.[239] This speaking role undoubtedly stemmed from his notoriety as a fierce partisan for the Union and as a notable public figure in the community. Such political involvement from newspaper editors—which would increase in the months ahead with possible runs for political office—shows that their work as journalists was often intimately intertwined with the political organizing in their local communities. Indeed, more so than Donald Reynold's generalized assertion that "Most editors apparently were too busy to take the extended leaves of absence necessary to attend party conventions or assume time-consuming political responsibilities. They were content to make their influence felt with their pens"[240] Such may have been the case for regular electoral seasons, but it is evident from the activities of Tennessee's Unionist newspaper editors that they did participate in "time-consuming political responsibilities" at the state and local levels during the Election of 1860, and again during the secession crisis. Moreover, this activism shows the editors' sincere ideological commitment to the Union cause and suggests that their editorial work

[238] See the record of the "County Convention to Nominate Delegates to the State Convention" printed in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 27, 1861.

[239] See the record of the "Meeting of the Union Men of Knox" printed in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 02, 1861.

[240] Donald Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 11.

likely reflected as much of their own passionate beliefs as it did the local consensus among elites or the wider public. This ideological independence would prove critical in the weeks ahead as different decisions variously exposed their distance from the mainstream opinion and caused a dilemma over how to respond moving forward.

Throughout January, as the state legislature deliberated and the subsequent campaign surrounding the state convention raged, events outside of Tennessee added a sense of urgency to the dramatic proceedings. In short order, the lower South states of Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana followed South Carolina out of the Union. Texas followed suit on February 1, 1861.[241] These measures were individually reported throughout January and were each met with trepidation and anger in Tennessee's Unionist press. After the secession of Alabama, Ira Jones in the *Nashville Patriot* emphasized that because the state's convention voted for disunion without putting the issue to a statewide vote, it showed the intentions of the secessionist leaders to dominate the political process over the will of the people. "We are not surprised at the action of the Convention," he wrote. "The men who are leading the separate State secession movement have never intended, if they could help it, to give the people time to think, and to give voice to their calm, deliberate convictions." Instead, Jones asserted that Alabama's leaders were "following the example of South Carolina, and getting the people under the rule of the military, that free thought and free speech be prevented….[242] One week later, the *Patriot* repeated this line of attack by explicitly asserting that "We have no doubt that the whole controversy between the North and South could be settled satisfactorily and

[241] David Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 496-498.

[242] *Nashville Patriot*, January 11, 1861.

permanently, with in ten day's time, if the people themselves could have a fair opportunity of acting on the subject." Instead, the *Patriot* claimed, the fault lay with "the miserable and selfish politicians" who were the only impediment standing in the way of compromise between the North and South.[243]

Such populist statements by the *Patriot* mirrored the Whiggish perception shown by other Unionist editors throughout the 1860 election campaign, during which they invested great faith in the moderation of the average voter (i.e., white males) to solve the country's sectional troubles if only given the chance outside the normal party framework. Similarly, those editors repeatedly styled the actions of both the Republican Party and secessionists as working against the will of the American people. In the wake of secession, the course taken by lower South states like South Carolina and Alabama thus gave proof (or possibly an opening) to highlight to supposed evil designs of the elite politicians to drive the South out of the Union. Moreover, in a state like Tennessee with a more egalitarian culture and a political tradition steeped in Whiggish skepticism of concentrated power, this emphasis on elite domination likely targeted middle and lower-class men by implicitly comparing their state to a caricatured depiction of the lower South. In doing so, editors raised the specter of subjugation and a loss of individual rights for everyday readers if secession was allowed to occur.

William Brownlow similarly played on this fear of elite domination by declaring to his readers that Alabamians looked down on non-slaveholders as being little better than slaves. Pointing to an article in the *Mobile Mercury* that warned that "slaves are constantly associating with low white people who are not slave owners," Brownlow

[243] *Nashville Patriot*, January 17, 1861.

proclaimed that "This is the spirit of secession! All white people who do not own negroes are 'low white people." To slaveholding Alabamians, these common whites were thus seen as being "dangerous to any community, and ought to be made leave the cities and towns, and States where they are!"[244] Taken together, Jones' comments about elite control of the political process and Brownlow's racially charged rhetoric further show that many of Tennessee's Unionist editors resorted to populist rhetoric to alarm and persuade middle and lower-class voters over the issue of secession. Rather than moderate their comments in favor of local slaveholding elites, they tailored their editorial reporting to speak to the middle- and lower-class readers in Tennessee, who comprised a large section of the population and likely also comprised their most substantial base of subscribers.

A Unionist Victory, February 1861

In Tennessee, the campaigning for the February referendum occurred within the broader context of this seemingly constant wave of secession. As has been noted, most of the editors in this study favored calling a state convention but still faithfully resisted disunion. In their view, a convention was the most effective method to make a statement in favor of the Union and similarly use the event as a platform to present compromise measures they hoped would pull the reconstruct the Union. Thus, they instead argued that voters should focus on electing Union delegates to give the Convention its desired outcome.[245]

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[244] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 5, 1860.

[245] Samuel Ivins best exemplified this belief when he asserted that "Had the secession movement confined itself to one or two States, there might not have been any necessity for Tennessee assembling in Convention, or taking any other decided action in the premises." Instead, the secession of the six "Cotton states" and the prospect that Texas, Arkansas, and Virginia could follow meant that simply voting for inaction would be "fatally, ruinous mistaken." Ivins thus asserted that "A do nothing, stand still policy, will

As the February referendum approached, the news reported in Tennessee's papers over that month gave some hope for Unionists that a compromise agreement brokered by upper South Congressmen was feasible. While never reaching the organization or coherence that editors and subscribers desired, the actions of the remaining slave states representatives in Congress—in effect the Border States—gave some credence to their claims that they could act as mediators between the two sections. From late December 1860 through all of January 1861, members of the "Committee of Thirty-Three" in the House of Representatives and the "Committee of Thirteen" in the Senate debated various compromise proposals. Relying on a stream of dispatches from Washington and the editorial comments from other newspapers in the exchange, all of these proceedings received significant attention in Tennessee's press. Far and away, the most popular proposal among Tennessee Unionists was the "Crittenden Compromise," first put forward by Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden.[246] This bill consisted of a series of Constitutional amendments that would have prevented Federal interference with slavery in the states where it already existed and that would have revived the old Missouri Compromise line of 36 30' as the division between prospective free and slave states in the American West. It also included provisions calling for Northern states to repeal their "Personal Liberty Laws" passed in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act and for compensation for the owners of runaway slaves.[247]

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involve the State in the revolution in less than thirty days, and precipitate the very condition of affairs which the 'No-Conventionists' wish to avoid." See, *The Athens Post*, January 25, 1861.

[247] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 196-203; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 530-532.

Crittenden's proposal received widespread and hopeful approval in Tennessee when news first broke. The *Republican Banner* optimistically reported that "We believe it could be made the basis of a final and satisfactory settlement of pending difficulties, and a restoration of peace and prosperity."[248] Indeed, the legislatures of upper South states like Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee all eventually passed legislation supporting the Crittenden Compromise as a basis for future settlement.[249] Deliberations over the Crittenden proposal in the "Committee of Thirteen" failed at the turn of the New Year. Still, the bill nonetheless remained a salient point of discussion in the minds of upper South Unionists. In subsequent weeks it and its future modifications were consistently reiterated as points of emphasis among the Tennessee press as they held out hope for future compromise efforts.

Other compromise efforts such as the "Border State Plan"—an adaptation of the previous compromise efforts again proposed by Senator John J. Crittenden—and the Corwin Amendment from the "Committee of Thirty-Three" also received favorable press coverage in some papers during the days before the February Referendum.[250] This

[248] *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 22, 1860. The *Patriot* expressed similar approval as it claimed that the proposal "form the groundwork for a speedy and satisfactory adjustment of the difficulties, which if unadjusted, will certainly result in the complete disruption of the Government." See the *Nashville Patriot*, December 24, 1860.

[249] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 198.

[250] The "Border State plan" was a revised version of Crittenden's Compromise that was proposed by a group of leading Southern Unionists in Congress. It proposed several variations from the original design by prohibiting slavery above the 36 30 line by law not constitutional amendment and it prevented Federal interference with slavery rather than using governmental power to protect it. It also protected slavery where it existed by constitutional amendment and was silent on the status of slavery in newly acquired territories. These provisions were proposed to soften the Crittenden Compromise in favor of Republican desires, but it still failed in Congress after only attracting a few Republican votes. The Corwin Amendment was a proposal from the "Committee of Thirty Three" that, protected slavery where it already existed by constitutional amendment and proposed to admit New Mexico into the Union. The Corwin amendment went down in defeat as well, though both houses of the U. S. Congress did pass the

reporting became increasingly favorable as January came to a close, with many of Tennessee's Unionist papers citing dispatches and other articles that indicated that a settlement was not only likely but imminent. For instance, the *Nashville Patriot* reported that Republicans in Congress were warming to the proposed settlements, stating that "there is evidently a growing disposition on the part of Republicans, as the day for the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln approaches, to do something to adjust the controversy which is slowly and surely disintegrating the Union." Citing private letters that the paper had received, the *Patriot* urged Union men in Tennessee to be patient and remain firm in the coming weeks because it had learned that "Mr. Seward is disposed to take another step in advance and effect a settlement."[251]

Likewise, the *Republican Banner* reported to readers that same day that "Our dispatches this morning are cheering, indicating a growing prospect of an amicable and satisfactory adjustment of our sectional difficulties." As proof, the *Banner* reprinted a telegraphic dispatch that reported a meeting between Senators Stephen Douglas, William Seward, John Crittenden, and James Dixon. This account indicated that Crittenden had high hopes for success after the meeting as it asserted that "It is believed a modification of the Crittenden resolutions will be agreed upon."[252] This optimism from the Nashville papers increased the next week as they repeatedly reiterated that a compromise was just around the corner, and each renewed calls for patience and faith in the Union. Despite

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constitutional amendment protecting slavery. For further explanation, see Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 201-204, 249-250.

[251] *Nashville Patriot*, January 30, 1861.

[252] *Republican Banner and Whig*, January 30, 1861.

acknowledging that reporting it received over the wires was often contradictory, the *Patriot* stated that the information it had indicated "the chances for a settlement of our national troubles are improving materially."[253] Those thoughts were further lifted by an article reprinted from the *New York Times*, which predicted that 98 House Republicans would soon vote for the Border State Compromise. Ira Jones and the *Patriot* lauded this prediction and, referencing the article, proclaimed that "Here we have, from a republican source, a statement of the readiness of the majority of the republicans in Congress to make a compromise" and encouraged them to acknowledge the "kind and conciliatory acts" taken by Southern conservatives to bring about a settlement.[254]

The *Republican Banner* supported those thoughts a few days later when it printed a letter from Washington D. C. by Tennessee Representative Thomas A. R. Nelson, which stated that he had "a very strong hope that we will agree upon an adjustment." Nelson also emphatically asserted that Congress would adopt either the Crittenden proposal, the Border State plan, or the action pending in the Committee of Thirty Three.[255] Compounding this favorable outlook was the fact that an independent Peace Conference began assembling in Washington D. C. in the first week of February, consisting of delegates from numerous states, including Tennessee. While not the convention some editors had hoped for, its prospects were enough for the *Patriot* to proclaim that it looked "to the action of this Convention with hope and confidence."[256]

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[253] *Nashville Patriot*, February 02, 1861.

[254] *Nashville Patriot*, February 09, 1861.

[255] *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 15, 1861.

[256] *Nashville Patriot*, February 04, 1861.

The impact of such reporting on public sentiment is unclear. However, the timing of this optimistic surge so near the February referendum in Tennessee makes it an important point to highlight. For Whig-influenced editors who had long written in favor of moderation and compromise, the glimmer of hope posed by these reports likely presented a ripe opportunity to print favorable news in what was otherwise a grim political environment. Indeed, much like the way that anecdotal accounts of surging conservative support in the North received significant press coverage during the Election of 1860, it is possible that editors seized on a few scattered reports and elevated them above their actual accuracy and worth. Practically, such reporting likely also served as a rhetorical tool for editors to urge readers—many of whom probably fell into the same "anticoercionist" camp as the editors—to vote for Union delegates in the upcoming election to ensure the continuance of further deliberations. In any event, the result was that in the last days before the February secession referendum, the state's two most influential Unionist newspapers articulated an optimistic perception of the political environment in which the long-desired compromise appeared to be possible. This presentation possibly built on both the editors' sincere belief in the Whig worldview and their ideological dedication to the Union cause to make them susceptible to potential good news. Taken seriously, this shred of hope likely buoyed the hopes of Tennessee's Union-leaning readers as they went to the polls in an election that they hoped would finally decide the fact of secession.

The February referendum in Tennessee was a resounding victory for the "Southern Rights Union Party. In total, 69,387 votes, or 54 percent, were cast against holding a state convention compared to 57,798 in favor. More definitively, the state

elected Union delegates in an overwhelming majority, with nearly 89,000 votes (fully four-fifths of the returns) cast in their favor.[257] This result meant that had voters actually approved the convention, it still would have strongly voted against secession. Of the seven Unionist editors examined in this study, six editorialized in support of convening a convention but still opposed secession, while only William Brownlow professed opposition to both provisions. Compared to the opinion of the state, this viewpoint was out of step with the majority Union position which outright opposed a convention. Within their respective communities, however, the positions of the newspaper editors relative to the preference of Union voters was much more complex. Three editors—Samuel Ivins in Athens, Hiram Walker at the *Republican Banner,* and Ira Jones at the *Nashville Patriot*—took a position contrary to the majority Union opinion in their respective counties by supporting a convention.[258] Inversely, the four remaining newspapers of Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, the *Clarksville Chronicle*, the *West Tennessee Whig*, and the *Memphis Bulletin* were all in line with the majority sentiment of their county in voting for or against a convention.[259]

[257] Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 175.

[258] In McMinn County, Tennessee, where Samuel Ivins' *Athens Post* was published, 1487 votes were cast against holding a convention compared to only 439 in favor. This placed Ivins with his pro-convention stance in opposition to almost seventy-five percent of his neighbors. In Davidson County which comprised Nashville, 3083 votes were cast against the convention with 2525 votes in favor. With their support for a convention, both the *Republican Banner* and the *Nashville Patriot* in opposition to fifty-five percent of the city's Union population.

[259] Robert Thomas' *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle* in Montgomery County, Tennessee' matched the over eighty percent support for calling a convention. Similar trends held in Madison County for the *West Tennessee Whig* which saw ninety-five percent support for a convention, and the *Memphis Weekly Bulletin* in Shelby County which supported a convention with ninety-six percent of the vote. Only William Brownlow voted against a convention, though he matched the nearly eighty nine percent of voters in Knox County who similarly opposed it.

Historians have generally assumed that nineteenth-century newspaper editors reflected the opinion of their constituents as much as they did their own.[260] Donald Reynolds proposed this point when he asserted that "newspapers may well have reflected public opinion on political issues even more than they created it, a possibility widely recognized by the press itself."[261] Berry Craig agreed, as he similarly noted that "the press mainly mirrors, not drives, public opinion."[262] In both cases, this formulation rested on the premise that the social and financial pressures incumbent with running a newspaper kept editors within the bounds of what was acceptable to allow them to sell papers. In the broadest sense, that idea bears out with the positions taken by the Tennessee editors in this study as they each broadly matched the general Unionist position regarding opposition to secession and the election of Unionist delegates. That nearly half of these editors wrote against the majority opinion in their counties regarding the convention shows that they could still be out of touch with their constituents on some issues, however. It further suggests that editors took seriously the arguments they wrote in their editorials because their opinions, while not alarmingly dissimilar, nonetheless differed from the general population who likely read their papers. Had editors simply been in the business of repeating the popular sentiment, they probably would not have differed from their constituents on such a pivotal issue. This divergence would reappear in a lesser form in the months ahead as the pressure for secession reemerged in force.

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[261] Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 9.

[262] Craig, *Kentucky's Rebel Press*, 12.

In the wake of the referendum, Tennessee's Unionist editors praised the result and treated it as a hopeful sign that secessionism in the upper South had been checked. Favorable anti-secession returns from elections in other upper-South states like Virginia and North Carolina only seemed to add proof of this fact. For instance, the *Nashville Patriot* claimed that the strong Union showing in Tennessee and Virginia meant that their people were "unwilling to surrender the Federal Government, with all its blessing." The *Patriot* added a qualifying statement to this exultation, though, by insinuating that the onus for compromise rested with the North as it claimed that the result had "given their brethren non-slaveholding States full time to afford them the guarantees necessary to secure their rights, and to vindicate their equality in the Union."[263] William Brownlow similarly lauded the success of the elections. He predicted that the results, which showed the determination of the upper South to stay in the Union, would allow the Border States and the North to work together to reconstruct the nation. "Virginia has stopped the ball of Secession, and Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Missouri, will back her up in the good work," he exclaimed. "Meanwhile, the Northern States will now unite with the border states to cement such a Union as can and will be stood by in all coming time."[264]

How those states would settle a compromise that appeased the upper-South and the North and enticed the lower-South back into the Union nonetheless remained uncertain. For the moment, though, that hardly mattered because there was reason to be optimistic. Over the previous four months, Tennessee's Unionist editors had worked

[263] *Nashville Patriot*, February 11, 1861.

[264] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 16, 1861.

feverishly on behalf of the Union cause to prevent the state from leaving the Union and potentially become a mediator for compromise between the South and North. As newspaper editors, they worked to report the news to their readers while also contextualizing events in a manner to sway public opinion. They did so by emphasizing consistent Whiggish fears of corruption and conspiracy while appealing to middle- and lower-class Tennesseans with populist appeals that played on their concerns and criticized the supposed malignant action of elite politicians. As political actors, they also took the lead in shaping the political environment by participating in local organizing and activism activities. The ideological fervor with which they approached their news work—both in their populist rhetoric and political activities—suggests the sincere ideological dedication that editors brought to their profession during the secession crisis. In cases like the more significant debate over the Union, this fervor appeared in line with the prevailing sentiment in their communities. On more narrow issues such as the necessity of calling a state convention to debate secession, however, their contrary opinion showed that editors—despite their apparent consensus among themselves—could nonetheless move against the wider public. This dichotomy suggests that the historiographical agreement that nineteenth-century newspapers reflect public opinion is not always valid, and the ideological stance of the editor must be accounted for when judging their news coverage of events.

In the months ahead, much remained uncertain for Tennessee and the rest of the United States. Although many of the compromise measures and other legislation Unionist editors supported failed in Congress over the previous months, a Peace Conference consisting of delegates from around the country was only then convening in Washington

D. C. that presented a new opportunity for compromise. Most importantly, Tennessee and its neighboring upper South states had all rejected secession and sent a powerful message in favor of the Union to both North and South. Yet, unbeknownst to them, the intellectual and rhetorical justification for their state's eventual abandonment of Unionism had been laid simultaneously with their triumphant victory. It would take a series of cataclysmic events only weeks away to reveal this fact.

CHAPTER V – REPORTING REVOLUTION, FEBRUARY-JUNE 1861

"The war is not against the seceded States, but against the South and its institutions. It includes every foot of territory in all the slaveholding States. Its resolve is to make an end at once and forever by force of the peculiar institution which have rise to our differences."

-- *Nashville Patriot,* April 24, 1861

On May 17, 1861, Athens Post editor Samuel Ivins described what he saw as the only course forward for Tennessee. "The Slave States have common interest and a common destiny," he wrote. "This issue has been made up, the conflict is upon us, we cannot avoid it if we would, and we must lock shields and stand together, or all be involved in common ruin."[265] This call by Ivins to stand in defense with the rest of the South marked a stark contrast to his writings that only months before had criticized the very thought of leaving the Union. From February 1861 until that June, thousands of once passionate Unionists—including six of the seven editors in this study—all mirrored Ivins's course by flipping to supporting Tennessee's separation from the Union and connection with the Southern Confederacy. This switch was spurned by a series of cascading events outside the state that undermined the optimism Unionists felt in early February and enflamed individual passions so that by early June, an overwhelming majority of Tennesseans favored leaving the Union.

As they had in the months previously, Tennessee's newspaper editors were critical participants in this movement. As a group, they used their editorial prowess to continue their arguments in favor of compromise and moderation while also attacking the new Confederate government with an ideological approach targeted toward the middle- and lower-class white voters who made up the balance of the state's voting populace.

[265] *The Athens Post*, May 17, 1861.

This approach employed by numerous Unionist editors further contests the absolutist statements made by Carl Osthaus about the deference of Southern editors to the interests of local elites.[266] Instead, Tennessee's editors often used populist language to alarm readers and contrast the supposed elite-dominated societies of the Confederacy with the more egalitarian culture of Tennessee. This tactic speaks to a greater understanding of how nineteenth-century editors used their positions to target audiences with well-crafted arguments that played on the considerations of their communities.

As the secession crisis progressed, Tennessee's Unionist editors dealt with various circumstances that undoubtedly impacted their jobs as newspapermen. First was the necessity to keep their papers afloat as a business, which meant maintaining an expansive list of advertisers and subscribers. As the secession crisis progressed, these editors felt growing pressure as secession-leaning subscribers increasingly withdrew from their papers. Newspaper staffs managed this phenomenon differently, but in most instances, Tennessee's editors resisted this pressure by holding to their position in the face of their evident unpopularity. Their resistance to this business pressure shows the strength of editors' dedication to their ideological principles and their willingness to resist undercurrents of dissent in their communities. As such, this separation between editors and their disgruntled subscribers complicates the assertions of historians Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig that nineteenth-century newspapers reflected the views of their

[266] Osthaus argued that "No Southern editor dared appeal to a mass of readers by assuming the stance of the common man in serious opposition to the propertied and powerful elite. Southern editors survived by joining, or at least ingratiating themselves with, the establishment." While there is no doubt some truth to this statement, Osthaus' study narrowly examines Southern newspapers from major cities such as Charleston and New Orleans and does not fully incorporate the diverse array of the newspaper editors from around the region. See, Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 10.

community. It instead suggests that historians should account for the editor's ideology when using newspapers as sources rather than as broader reflections of public opinion.

Second, editors worked in an opaque and confusing environment resulting from the standard newspaper practices used to collect information, namely the exchange and the telegraph system. As the secession crisis progressed, misinformation abounded within newspaper columns that created a false understanding of national events and later served to justify disunion. In the end, this information—paired with the long-standing "unconditional Unionist" arguments about resistance to coercion and the necessity of upholding the South's slave system—provided the rhetorical justification for leaving the Union. Not every editor bought this prescription, but for those that did, the pivotal events that led to Tennessee's "revolution" in the late Spring of 1861 rested on an intellectual foundation they helped to build during the same months they had fought so hard to stay in the Union. As those editors made choices to support the Confederacy or hold to their Unionism, that some chose the latter provides further proof of their strong ideological viewpoint and the likelihood that their newspaper work reflected their views more than that of their community.

Competing Conventions, February to March 1861

In the middle of February 1861, Unionists in upper South states like Tennessee were confident that they had defeated the secession movement in their communities and that there was now a renewed opportunity for compromise. One of the events which added to this optimism was the ongoing Peace Conference that met in Washington, D. C. from February 4, 1861, to February 27, 1861. As Tennessee's Unionist editors were celebrating and analyzing the recent election returns, they also reported the day-by-day

proceedings of the Conference.[267] In their initial coverage of the Conference, many editors predicted that it would reach a settlement built on the recent Crittenden proposals in Congress and they felt would generally be satisfactory for the South. For instance, Jesse McMahon in Memphis cited the views of Tennessee's delegates and claimed that the Conference's conservative members "confidently anticipate a concession of Crittendens proposition as amended by the Peace Conference, with which Virginia will be satisfied…" He similarly pointed to a telegram sent from Tennessee's representatives in Congress that reported "a much better feeling prevails in Congress" and that they felt confident they would reach that a compromise "so as to satisfy the Border Southern States, as well as most of the other Southern States."[268] Other reports from the *Republican Banner* and the *Nashville Patriot* similarly published material that heralded the prospects of success.[269]

When the Peace Conference finally passed a resolution on February 27, 1861, and submitted its proposed settlement to Congress, the Unionist press treated the news with tentative optimism.[270] Hiram Walker in the *Republican Banner* predicted that the plan

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[267] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates,* 207-213.

[268] Reprinted in the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, February 15, 1861.

[269] The *Nashville Patriot* reprinted a telegram from a correspondent in Washington D. C. which asserted that "The CRITTENDEN PROPOSITIONS VERY POPULAR AND EVEN BETTER IF DESIRED." It additionally indicated that there was confidence in the city that the Peace Conference would reach a settlement. See, *Nashville Patriot,* February 12, 1861. Likewise, the Republican Banner proclaimed that "the prospect of a satisfactory adjustment of our difficulties grows daily and hourly" and, like Jesse McMahon, claimed that conservative members of the Conference were optimistic about the prospects for compromise. See, *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 12, 1861.

[270] The Peace Conference's proposal was very similar to the Border State plan. It sought to prohibit slavery south of the 36 30 line with a constitutional amendment and likewise constitutionally protect it where it already existed. It also proposed that both Congress and territorial legislatures would be prohibited from interfering with slavery in territories south of the line. The proposal itself narrowly passed within the Conference after much maneuvering among the state delegations. It would go on to failure in

would "be found acceptable to a large majority of the people of the border states" and would, if approved by Congress, be submitted for final ratification. The *Banner* felt assured that the American people would approve it if that vote happened, thus creating "a final settlement of the question in controversy."[271] William Brownlow reached a similar conclusion and predicted that the American people would undoubtedly approve it. He proclaimed that any failure of the Conference's proposals in Congress would thus be further proof that politicians had failed the country and would also likely result in a resurgence of the secessionist movement in Tennessee."[272]

Both of those editors identified Congress as first the crucial point of contention, which gave the once optimistic *Nashville Patriot* cause for concern. It acknowledged that the Peace Conference had performed well in its efforts but asserted that "nothing can be expected from the present Congress." Instead, it laid the blame at the feet of its Republican members who were "mere partisans," who lacked patriotism and "the qualities which constitute the true statesman." Thus, the *Patriot* predicted that instead, the country would "be rushed still nearer the verge of destruction" before Republicans realized the reality of the present crisis. [273] In the weeks ahead, the *Patriot's* predictions would be the nearest to the truth of any of the editors. The Conference's approved propositions reached Congress with only three days left in the session with no chance of quick action. It further would have required ratification in three-fourths of the states and

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Congress because the legislative term ended before the proposal could be considered and the start of the Civil War ended the necessity and appetite for compromise. See, Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 209-213.

[271] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 01, 1861.

[272] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 02, 1861.

[273] *Nashville Patriot*, March 02, 1861.

also to appease the then-seceded lower-South. Any action on the proposal would thus have to wait until a new Congress convened, an event that would occur months later in a drastically different political climate.

With these differing responses to the Peace Conference, the editors of the *Banner*, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, and the *Nashville Patriot* all exemplified the consistently egalitarian, Whiggish outlook that defined much of the Unionist news coverage in Tennessee. Just as they had expressed faith in the virtue and conservatism of the American people during the presidential campaign and again throughout the recent referendum in Tennessee, these editors again maintained that the ordinary voter—if given a chance—would instead reject secession and approve the compromise measures of the Peace Conference. To them, any divergence from this fact would prove that both the secession movement and Republican opposition stemmed from the maneuvers of politicians who worked for their own designs rather than the good of the American people. Their emphasis on the power of "the people" to resist the actions of these supposedly sinister, powerful politicians suggests that many of Tennessee's Unionist editors implicitly or directly aligned their views with an egalitarian perspective to convince white readers of the importance of resisting secession and supporting compromise efforts.

When Carl Osthaus formulated that Southern newspaper editors catered their newspaper content to not violate the strictures of the "propertied and powerful elite," he asserted that "no Southern editor dared appeal to a mass of readers by assuming the stance of the common man" against their specific interests. In Charleston he defined this elite as being a "merchant-businessman-planter partnership" that ruled the city and to

whom all other work supported.[274] Quantifying the status of a similar "elite" broadly across the state of Tennessee is difficult to extrapolate but it is likely some variation of it existed between each county and town, though possibly in a weakened state due to the large prevalence of land ownership and relatively small number of slaveowners in Tennessee.[275] Regardless, when paired with the editors' earlier attacks against politicians and large slaveholders, their consistent approach of emphasizing the "people's" power and speaking to the position of middle- and lower-class readers suggests that the press in areas of the South could and did "appeal to a mass of readers by assuming the stance of the common man." It is certainly possible that an elite-influenced press could express such sentiments as a way to manipulate readers to a desired political end. Likewise, editors could also potentially use such rhetoric to deflect attention away from their own standing—or that of the "elites" relative to their own communities—by attacking a caricature of a distant threat not readily apparent in Tennessee, but close enough to generate concern.

However, by emphasizing the ability of individuals to resist the control of influential figures, Tennessee's editors implied that readers—regardless of their socioeconomic position—could, and should, assert their will politically. That consistent approach across the breadth of the Unionist news coverage suggests that editors there felt

[274] Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 10, 70.

[275] In 1860, Tennessee contained 103,835 farmers and 25,990 farm laborers compared to only 78 planters. Among this population, the average farm size was 351 acres, suggesting a generally more equitable distribution of land within the state. Only 3.32 percent of Tennessee's population owned slaves, an of those that did, more than 75 percent held fewer than ten slaves. While inexact, this data suggests that Tennessee's white male population was likely more egalitarian in nature with less of a hold from the "propertied and powerful elite" defined by Osthaus. See, Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union*, 17, 22.

it within their power to write what they wanted free from the strictures of a more controlling, aristocratic society like in Charleston, South Carolina. If that was not the case, then the populist arguments advanced by Tennessee's Unionists implicitly undermined the very position of those with power in their society, whatever the original intention. Just as the South was a more diverse environment politically and economically than any one area, so too likely was its press environment. From the routinely populist arguments of Tennessee's Unionist editors, it is therefore certain that Osthaus' broad principle does not equally apply across the entire South, but instead likely varied from state to state, or even town to town.

Separately, the critiques of Republicans from the *Nashville Patriot* exemplify the universally conservative, pro-Southern outlook, which—for as much as they praised compromise efforts and rhetorically attacked secessionists—still charged northern Republicans with being the ultimate arbiter of compromise. In their view, the provisions of the Peace Conference proposals constituted good-faith concessions from the South, and any further deviation from that position was unacceptable. It thus fell to Republicans to accept or oppose compromise. In the weeks ahead, such maximalist logic also extended to the Unionist formulation of how to respond to potential "coercion" by the incoming Lincoln administration.

Concurrent with the Unionist electoral victories and the Peace Conference in Washington D. C., leaders from the six seceded states met in convention in Montgomery, Alabama, to organize a new government. Tennessee papers covered this development extensively for its newsworthy nature and its opportunity to critique secessionism. One of the most common critiques consisted of statements that depicted the new Southern

government as one controlled by aristocratic elites bent on holding power and dominating the ordinary citizen. For instance, Robert Thomas stated that some Confederate leaders wanted a monarchy for their form of government when he confirmed for readers that "The hints thrown out by leading men, that free government is a failure, and that a monarchy is preferable to the rickety institutions under which we have lived and prospered for nearly eighty years, are worthy of serious consideration by the people of Tennessee."[276] Such a statement bore little relationship to fact, especially after the Montgomery Convention adopted a Constitution identical to that of the United States. Nonetheless, it mirrored the argument presented by William Brownlow during the previous year's presidential election that emphasized the flirtations of secessionists—particularly South Carolinians—with calls for eschewing a republican form of government and instead establishing a constitutional monarchy.

More typically, criticism of the Confederate government hewed to a narrow attack that labeled its Constitution—and the ratification process—as being purposefully undemocratic to force the legislation on the general public. For instance, the *Republican Banner* heralded the new Confederate Congress as holding "Despotic, absolute and imperial power" because it instituted "such governments provisional and permanent as it sees fit, without giving the people a chance to vote upon the question of the formation of the government."[277] The *Banner* later built on this criticism when it questioned the government's legitimacy, saying that "it did not, like the Government of the Federal Union, derive its existence and its powers from the action of the people." Instead, the new

[276] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, February 15, 1861.

[277] *Republican Banner and Whig*, February 22, 1861.

State was created "by a faction of usurpers" who met in conventions and Congress with no opportunity for the average voter to approve their actions.[278] Thus, the illusion that a reader in Tennessee would gain from these two statements was that if their state were to secede and join the new Confederacy, they too would be dominated by its "despotic" and "imperial" power. In that regard, the *Banner's* editorial coverage again played to the same Whiggish fears of political corruption and a demagogical manipulation of the political process they had emphasized during the presidential election the month before.

William Brownlow made a similar critique as he noted that the Montgomery Convention had adopted a constitution and series of laws, but that the voting population had been "refused the privilege of voting for either!" "Wonderful Confederacy this," he noted, "into which the people are forced by leaders, but denied the right of voting upon the adoption of their Constitution and Laws!"[279] Brownlow carried this argument further by emphasizing the wealthy status of the secessionist leaders who he predicted would continue to control the Confederate government, no matter if the Border States eventually joined. "This is the sort of Confederacy Tennessee is invited to join—a Confederacy of which rich men are to be the controlling spirit," he exclaimed. Those same "rich men" who had consistently sworn allegiance to the Constitution, only to "do all in their power to destroy it."[280] Just as he had consistently done throughout the presidential campaigning with populist attacks against large-slave holding secessionists like William Yancey, Brownlow again tried to stoke classist fears within his white, middle-and lower-class

[278] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 21, 1861.

[279] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 23, 1861.

[280] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 23, 1861.

readers in East Tennessee. In his framing, it would be them who would seemingly lose their political voice in such a government dominated by "rich men," and as such, they should hold to the Union to ensure the preservation of their sacred rights. Taken together with Brownlow's previous comments and those of his fellow editors, his denigration of "rich men" and other anti-elitist rhetoric exposes the populist perspective with which they tailored their editorial comments toward the predominantly middle- and lower-class readers and further limits any application of Carl Osthaus' assertions to states like Tennessee.

While the February referendum in Tennessee proved the widespread allegiance to the Union from the state's population, there was a still sizeable number of individuals who strongly disagreed with the stance of Unionist editors. As the months of the secession crisis progressed, editors confronted the business implications of their positions as subscribers from their local communities, state, and around the South expressed their dissatisfaction by boycotting papers and withdrawing subscriptions. The absence of complete business records prevents definite judgments on the prevalence of this phenomenon. Still, it is evident from the comments of several editors that such pressures certainly existed. Not surprisingly, William Brownlow attracted the most attention and opposition, likely because of his widespread circulation around the South and his notoriously vitriolic writing style. When the secession crisis first began in December 1860, Brownlow noted that he regularly received "insulting epistles" from states like South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia that "ask a discontinuance of their papers, because we are opposed to Secession." In most cases, when he noted the loss of subscribers,

Brownlow would further claim that their withdrawal did little to hurt his business because he was commonly receiving "as many new patrons as we lose old ones."[281]

The truthfulness of that statement is unknowable, for it is possible that Brownlow hoped to downplay the impact of these withdrawals, or he could have simply been trying to attract attention by generating controversy. Proof exists, though, that Brownlow did receive "hateful epistles" from disgruntled readers because he commonly reprinted their letters to disparage the author and use them as a vehicle to attack the principle of secession. For instance, Brownlow reprinted a letter sent from Corinth, Mississippi, that stated the author's belief that he "never believed you [Brownlow] to be a Southern man, but a shrewed money-making Yankee." Most alarmingly, the author promised that when Tennessee seceded, he would "head a company of Tennesseans and Mississippians, and proceed to hang you by law or by force, if need be." Brownlow responded to this threat with one of his own, asking that whenever the author decided to come to Tennessee, he should "give me ten day's notice, and I will muster men enough in the county where I reside, to hang the last rascal among you."[282] While Brownlow clearly reveled in emphasizing such opposition, numerous other letters that variously charged him with abolitionist sentiment reported his having been burned in effigy or that pejoratively threatened him like the above statement all show that this pressure was not an isolated incident.[283]

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[281] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, December 15, 1860.

[282] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 19, 1861.

[283] For more attacks on Brownlow, see his response to a subscriber from South Carolina in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig,* February 16, 1861 or his defensive comments in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 30, 1861. Brownlow was also burn in effigy in the lower South because of his Unionist positions.

Beyond such direct attacks, other papers show similar withdrawals from subscribers. For instance, the *Republican Banner* bluntly acknowledged that "since this question of secession has been before the people we have, on account of the position we have taken, been obliged to part with some valued friends among our readers." Despite this loss, the *Banner's* editors nonetheless held their ground as Unionists by stating that they had "never seen cause to regret that position." Like William Brownlow, they subsequently acknowledged that they had gained as many new subscribers as they had lost. Samuel Ivins in Athens also admitted that "some few persons are withdrawing their names from our subscription list," but similarly stated that he had "adopted the only course which our sense of duty, patriotism, and consistency would permit is to take." [284] This form of social pressure—while likely not debilitating to business operations—nonetheless indicates the volatile environment within which editors worked during the secession crisis of 1860-1861. No longer were editors' ideological positions regarding political events free from consequences. In the face of the growing crisis in the United States, editors had to consider the real and tangible repercussions that could result from their actions, a fact that possibly weighed on their decisions as the weeks progressed and political tension mounted.

Beneath these overt indications, though, are signs of other tensions. For instance, William Gates, the editor of the *West Tennessee Whig*, felt compelled to defend his paper

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For statements on that, see *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 05, 1861 or *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, 1861.

[284] *The Athens Post*, May 10, 1861.

from accusations of being a "submissionist" and a coward for his Union stance.[285] Gates' response alludes to the prevalence of this term in the public sphere and defensively resorted to reason by lauding his prudence and asking, "Is the man who is more cautious in forming his opinions and conclusions less reliable in his action than one of opposite temperament? In all ordinary affairs of life we are apt to think he is more reliable."[286] Also not uncommon were articles published by editors bent toward reinforcing their standing as Southerners in the face of charges of abolitionism. Additionally, some editors felt it necessary to routinely clarify their political positions to Unionist readers to refute regular charges of disunionism and prove their continued allegiance. For instance, the *Nashville Patriot* ran an article that bluntly asserted that it was "Southern in every fibre of our frame" and expressed its unwillingness to "yield a fragment of our constitutional rights" to anti-slavery radicals. The *Patriot* then clarified its nuanced position as a conditional Unionist opposed to the hasty action of the lower South.[287] The necessity of the subtle nod to its Southern background points to the fine line Unionist editors trod in the months of the secession crisis as they sought to hold off charges of "submissionism" or abolitionist sympathies, all while still holding to their ideological position as Unionists. To be attacked as a Unionist came with some risk—primarily to business concerns. But to be labeled as contrary to the interests of the South regarding slavery would likely lead to real danger. For that reason, the *Patriot* and its fellow editors no

[285] The term "submissionist" was a pejorative label commonly used by secessionists to disparage the Unionist's willingness to wait for concrete action by Republicans against slavery and the South rather than unilaterally secede beforehand. For complete explanation, see Donald Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, 26.

[286] *West Tennessee Whig*, January 18, 1861.

[287] *Nashville Patriot*, January 30, 1861.

doubt felt justified in providing caveats to clarify their position in the face of this ever-present pressure.

That editors faced and managed these social pressures demonstrates the complex nature of the views they expressed in their newspapers. It is clear from how editors routinely clarified and reiterated either their Southern background or allegiance to the Union that they were conscious of the social expectations of their local communities. Reciprocally, though, it is evident that they also believed passionately in their ideological position, as is demonstrated by their outside political activism and resistance to threats or boycotts of their newspapers. Had editors simply reflected the views of their communities, they likely would not have felt it necessary to push so hard in favor of the Unionist cause or to face financial loss because of unpopular opinions. Nevertheless, the cognizance editors displayed of their community's expectations do not outweigh their protracted and consistent dedication to the ideological principles they expressed throughout the Election of 1860 and in the months of the secession crisis. Therefore, their actions during this period, at a minimum, complicate the assertions of Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig that newspapers mirrored the views of their community and instead suggest that much of what editors wrote reflected as much, if not more, of their personal views than the wider public.

A Misinformed Evacuation, March to April 1861

On March 3, 1861, Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States at a ceremony in Washington D. C. His inauguration and accompanying address were met with mixed results by Tennessee's Unionist newspapers. Some like the *Nashville Patriot*, the *Republican Banner*, and *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* took heart

from the apparently pacific comments by Lincoln toward the lower South.[288] Others like Robert Thomas criticized the address, which he noted was overly vague and did little to settle the South's questions about the administration's future policies.[289] Beyond providing rhetorical justification to Unionist claims about the unnecessary nature of secession or reciprocally enflaming secessionist fears, though, Lincoln's address did little to change the political situation in the country. For the new president, the most immediate concern beyond the broader issue of confronting the newly formed Confederate States of America was settling the crisis surrounding Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and Fort Pickens outside Pensacola, Florida. While other federal installations in the South had been either seized or turned over to Southern authorities, Forts Sumter and Pickens still retained U. S. Army garrisons and refused to surrender.[290] This standoff generated significant press coverage when it first began in late December 1860 but gradually fell out of the news in Tennessee as other issues such as debates over secession, compromise measures, and the February referendum campaign took higher priority.[291]

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[288] For positive outlooks on Lincoln's Inaugural, see the *Nashville Patriot*, March 06, 1861; *Nashville Patriot*, March 07, 1861; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 09, 1861; the *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 14, 1861.

[289] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, March 08, 1861.

[290] This standoff began in late December 1860 when the Federal commander at Fort Sumter, Major Robert Anderson, withdrew his garrison from the weaker Fort Moultrie into the stronger position of Fort Sumter. Anderson's garrison remained in Fort Sumter until its fall on April 13, 1861. Fort Pickens presented a similar situation to Sumter as its commander, Lieutenant Adam Slemmer, withdrew his command from other forts around Pensacola into the more defensible Pickens. Unlike Fort Sumter, Fort Pickens remained in Federal control for the entirety of the war. For more see Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 540—548.

[291] When Federal troops withdrew to Fort Sumter, the *Republican Banner* in Nashville speculated that the Carolinians "were determined to precipitate a revolution, and they have now committed the 'overt act.'" See, the *Republican Banner and Whig*, December 29, 1860. Likewise, Robert Thomas theorized that South Carolina desired to force a collision with the Federal government to cause the other slave States to join her in secession. See, the *Clarksville Chronicle*, January 04, 1861. Major Anderson's decision to withdraw to Fort Sumter was generally met with support from the Unionist press, which considered the

On March 11, 1861—just one week after Lincoln's election—the *Republican Banner* printed a telegram from Washington D. C. that renewed focus on the situation in Charleston. That dispatch indicated that Fort Sumter reported that "supplies of all kinds are running very low" and that the garrison only had enough provisions for a few more weeks.[292] That telegram was followed by another which reported that "political circles were feverishly excited Sunday by the report that the evacuation of Forts Sumter and Pickens was determined on by the Cabinet Saturday."[293] A similar message appeared in the *Nashville Patriot* the same day and which they reiterated in an extra edition issued the following morning.[294] Claims of an evacuation order were also repeated from widely disseminated journals like the *Cincinnati Gazette* and the *Washington Intelligencer*—both of which the Nashville Unionist papers printed as further verification of this policy change.[295]

This potential evacuation was met with surprise and approval by Tennessee's Unionist editors because of the peace policy that they thought it indicated from the Lincoln administration. Indeed, for those editors who in the past months had openly worked to prevent secession on the principle that it would buy time for compromise, Lincoln's apparent policy seemed to justify the value of their Unionist position. For instance, Samuel Ivins toyed with cheering Lincoln for this move when he wrote, "We

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action sensible and within the scope of his duties. For example, see *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 05, 1861.

[292] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 11, 1861.

[293] *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 12, 1861.

[294] *Nashville Patriot*, March 12, 1861; *Nashville Patriot*, March 13, 1861.

[295] *Nashville Patriot*, March 14, 1861; *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 14, 1861.

now begin to see into Lincoln's policy. He is going to get the seceders down very bad by just getting them along. If we were not afraid some ill-natured fool would suspect us of Black Republican proclivities, we would propose three times three and a tiger for Abraham."[296] An admittedly surprised Robert Thomas approvingly noted that the practical effect of an evacuation would allow the Border States more time to continue work on a compromise, though he came up short in paying Abraham Lincoln a comment for this policy change. He noted that, while it indicated that his interpretations of Lincoln's intentions were incorrect, the evacuation order "does not enhance our opinion of the honesty and firmness of the President" because it showed an ability to say "one thing while he means another."[297] Although Tennessee's Unionist editors could never have known it because of their dependence on outside sources and the shared newspaper network, the claims that Lincoln had decided to evacuate the forts were far from accurate.

Historians have long noted the debate that existed in Lincoln's Cabinet over the issue of evacuating or holding Forts Sumter and Pickens throughout March 1860. In truth, Abraham Lincoln was undecided on the issue until March 29, 1861, when he finally ordered the military to resupply both Fort Sumter and Pickens to hold them as long as possible. Certain members of his Cabinet, most importantly Secretary of State William Seward and U. S. Army General Winfield Scott, supported evacuation and advised Lincoln to that fact. As historian Daniel Croft notes, it is apparent that William Seward allowed word to spread through several intermediaries that the U. S. Army would

[296] *The Athens Post*, March 15, 1861.

[297] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, March 15, 1861. The *Nashville Patriot* similarly approved of the measure as it theorized the move meant that "the ultimate solution of our national difficulties is to be left to the arbitrament of reason and diplomacy." See, *Nashville Patriot*, March 12, 1861.

soon evacuate Fort Sumter to reassure Unionists that the administration had no desire to coerce the South. Whether Abraham Lincoln sanctioned this maneuver is uncertain.[298] Also unknown is the direct source which generated the flurry of telegrams in mid-March that communicated this supposed evacuation decision, including to newspapers in Tennessee. However, what is certain is that editors in Tennessee seized on this supposed development and subsequently repeated it with authority for the remainder of March. The result was a muddled information environment in which Unionist editors—like those in Tennessee—progressively reinforced the perceptions for their readers that Fort Sumter would be evacuated.[299] Indeed, despite knowledge and admissions of the unreliability of the telegraph as an information medium, few editors openly questioned the validity of these claims even as days passed and no evacuation occurred.[300] It would only be after information began to trickle out of military preparations occurring in Northern naval yards in early April that the news shattered this level of heightened expectation.

[298] For a full explanation of the internal debates within Abraham Lincoln's cabinet over evacuating Fort Sumter, see Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 273-276, 289-298.

[299] For the final two weeks of March 1861, Unionist newspapers in Tennessee continued to print telegraphic dispatches and articles with reassurances that Fort Sumter would be evacuated. For instance, the *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 21, 1861, cited the *New York Herald* to say definitively that "Orders have been forwarded for the evacuation of Fort Sumter" and that Major Anderson's command would leave the fort that Saturday. It followed the next day to say that the failure to evacuate to that point was "ascribed to technical reasons" but would nonetheless take place immediately, see *Republican Banner and Whig*, March 22, 1861. Similar claims were reiterated in the *Nashville Patriot*, March 20, 1861; *Nashville Patriot*, March 22, 1861; *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, March 29, 1861; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, March 30, 1861.

[300] Only Samuel Ivins of *The Athens Post* exhibited skepticism to some of the reports as he impugned against misleading and contradictory telegrams. While not contradicting the general consensus about evacuation, Ivins nonetheless questioned some of the fantastic reports printed elsewhere that Lincoln's cabinet was considering recognizing independence for the South, a statement about which he felt compelled to state that he had "but little faith in the report." See, *The Athens Post*, March 22, 1861.

The first rumblings of a potential shift away from the expected evacuation were posted in the *Republican Banner* on April 6, 1861, through a flurry of telegrams from Washington D. C. and New York City. These dispatches elucidated a sudden and noticeable change in tone as they moved from reports focused on the administration's prospective peace policy to alarming statements describing war preparations. One such telegram from Washington concisely stated that "Fears are expressed of collisions at Forts Sumter and Pickens." Another from New York noted that "The Government has chartered the steamers Baltic and Ariel under sealed orders…The impression at the Navy Yard is that both Sumter and Pickens will be reinforced."[301] The *Nashville Patriot* reported similar tidings the next day as it also noted the increased preparations of the U. S. Navy for an expedition.[302] Both the *Republican Banner* and the *Patriot* described the effect these developments had on the populace of Nashville, showing the evident surprise with which the news reached Tennessee. "Our city was considerably excited yesterday by the telegraphic dispatches which seem to indicate hostile intentions both on the part of the Federal Government and the Southern Confederacy," the *Banner* wrote. "There can be no doubt that these dispatches indicate preparations for hostilities. We can only hope that they are unfounded, and that a peace policy for which the country had reason to hope, may yet be adopted by both parties."[303] Such reports continued in the *Banner* and *Patriot* for the next four days as they reprinted telegrams from New York, Washington, and Charleston with cryptic descriptions of ship movements and their intended destination.

[301] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 06, 1861.

[302] *Nashville Patriot*, April 07, 1861.

[303] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 07, 1861.

Rumors and contradictory information abounded, giving little indication of what was occurring.[304]

This confusion and uncertainty carried over to the weekly newspapers, which had to make sense of the previous week's news reports for readers. Robert Thomas pessimistically noted the confusion and growing tensions over the past week as he cautioned readers that "Could we place implicit confidence in the dispatches which reached us on Wednesday, we should despair of peace." He predicted that if recent reports were accurate and Federal authorities had sent ships to Fort Sumter with provisions, then war was inevitable, and there no longer existed hope for a compromise settlement. Presaging one of the arguments that would justify secession weeks later, Thomas preemptively blamed any confrontation on the Lincoln administration because of the apparent duplicity of its apparent reversal away from evacuating Fort Sumter. "For weeks past, the public mind has been prepared for the evacuation of that Fort. Assurances to that effect have been held out to the country," he wrote. Thus, if a conflict were to begin, "The Administration can not plead not guilty of the consequence that may follow."[305] Samuel Ivins likewise noted the plethora of reports from around the country but cautioned his readers against their complete veracity. "We place but very little reliance upon these varied and various statements, although we copy a portion of them in our paper," he wrote. Nevertheless, he asserted that some action involving military forces was underway, though it was impossible to know for what purpose or their ultimate

[304] For more instances of this telegraphic confusion see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 07, 1861; the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 09, 1861; the *Nashville Patriot*, April 09, 1861.

[305] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, April 12, 1861.

destination. Instead, Ivins suggested that supporters of the Union "hold fast to the ground taken by the party" and resist being forced into hasty judgements or action.[306]

Thus, on the eve of the event that would precipitate the Civil War, the information environment in Tennessee was laced with contradictory and confusing reports trickling in from across the United States. For the state's Union-leaning editors, the sole source for updates came from the telegraph and information clipped from articles on the newspaper exchange—most of which were editorials slanted to the perspective of other editors. Similar to their coverage of the Democratic Convention in Charleston in April 1860, these two reporting methods proved inadequate to gain a coherent picture of what was occurring outside their immediate community. This fact was freely admitted by editors, as evidenced by the caution exhibited by the *Republican Banner*, Robert Thomas, and Samuel Ivins. Nevertheless, these newspapermen were left with no other choice than to print what information they had or not report at all. For editors dependent on publishing a paper for a livelihood, the latter choice was likely not an option. Hence, the result was that the newspaper industry's practices and technological limitations helped create an opaque environment for newspaper editors to do their job and, by proxy, for readers to understand the progression of events. It further meant that, in the absence of concrete information, passionate partisans like most of Tennessee's Unionist editors fell back on preconceptions and hopes to explain what was occurring. This, too, likely contributed to reader's confusion surrounding Fort Sumter's evacuation.

[306] *The Athens Post*, April 12, 1861.

A Crisis of "Coercion," April to June 1861.

Little did either Robert Thomas or Samuel Ivins know, but military hostilities had already begun in Charleston harbor as their papers went to print that day. There, in the early morning hours of April 12, 1861, Confederate batteries opened fire on Fort Sumter and began what would be a thirty-three-hour bombardment that concluded with the Federal surrender of the installation.[307] The *Republican Banner* published the first reports of the clash, which briefly stated that "Dispatches have just reached us, at this writing, that the cannonading has positively commenced at Charleston Bay, and the insane revolutionists are at this moment, perhaps, engaged in the attempt, to reduce Fort Sumter." In modern parlance, it is evident that the *Banner* "scooped" its neighboring paper the *Nashville Patriot* with this statement—possibly because they went to press later—because notice of the engagement did not appear there until the following day.

In its first reaction to the battle news, the *Banner* held to its historically moderate policy. It defended the actions of Fort Sumter's commander, Major Robert Anderson—who it praised for being "calm, dignified, and gallant"—and expressed hope that "a fearful retribution will meet his assailants."[308] The *Banner* continued this defense of "the gallant ANDERSON" in its subsequent issue by noting that he had no further course than to defend his post or be labeled a traitor and coward.[309] In Nashville, the public greeted word of the battle with excitement and alarm, a fact the *Patriot* reported in its first article on the battle by stating that the news "was sufficient to fill our city with excitement

[307] Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 582-583.

[308] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 13, 1861.

[309] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 14, 1861.

throughout the day yesterday" and was "the subject of comment on all the streets and in private circles at all points."[310] Similar reports appeared in a telegram from Memphis that the city was celebrating the start of hostilities with cannon firing, rockets, speeches, and music.[311] No editor definitively stated that public opinion was changing away from Unionism in their first papers, but it is clear that the news from Fort Sumter agitated and alarmed the white population across Tennessee.

Other than William Brownlow's *Whig*, no other Unionist paper took such an overt stance to defend the action of Major Anderson or the Federal government like the *Banner*.[312] More typical was Jesse McMahon, who initially counseled caution in response to the news. "The public is not yet in possession of the information which could enable it to form an enlightened judgement upon the causes which have led to the awful events at Charleston," he wrote.[313] The *Patriot* likewise concluded that there was no need for a revolutionary response from Tennessee as it claimed that "The time for such a decision has not, in our estimation, yet come." In explanation, the *Patriot's* editors noted that Confederate forces had opened fire on the fort, not the Federal Government. As such, there was no immediate reason for revolution. Instead, "It will remain for Mr. Lincoln to

[310] *Nashville Patriot*, April 14, 1861.

[311] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 14, 1861.

[312] Brownlow employed a reasoned defense of Major Anderson the Lincoln Administration's policy. He noted that the Federal government "as in honor and duty bound to do, had ordered Vessels round there to supply him [Anderson], but the Rebels, with a command of 7,000 men made the attack before his supplies arrived. They made the first assault." A week later, he invoked William Yancey's "Slaughter Letter" to note that the blame for sectional conflict in the South rested on South Carolina. It had "worked to bring on a collision of arms as a means of "Firing the Southern Heart,' and inciting the Border States to engage in the quarrel." See, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April 20, 1861; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April 27, 1861.

[313] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, April 18, 1861.

determine the next step," it noted. "Will he prosecute the war…?"[314] Such caution by these editors was consistent with the conservative outlook that had guided them throughout the conflict to that point. They relentlessly opined against "agitation" of the slavery issue, supported the candidacy of John Bell, invested substantial faith in the American people to rise in the moments of crisis, and had resisted secession in the hope that doing so would allow time for compromise efforts to settle the differences between North and South. Then, even in the face of the beginning of armed hostilities, they counseled prudence and judgment in the hope that war could be prevented and the status quo maintained. That resistance to alarm and willingness to praise Major Anderson for his efforts at Fort Sumter—a U.S. Army officer who would be an enemy in a few short weeks—point to the strength of the editor's Unionist sympathies and the implicitly conservative nature that guided their news coverage of events. Even in the face of public alarm and excitement in cities like Nashville and Memphis, the editors of the Unionist newspapers held to their cautious position.

This Southern conservative mindset had long had its limits, though. Tennessee's editors frequently alluded to their sympathies with the lower-South's grievances and their explicit willingness to invoke the "right of revolution" in the event of a perceived coercive act by the Federal government. For all of these editors, the limits of their Unionist resolve were finally tested on April 15, 1861, as word of Abraham Lincoln's proclamation calling for 75,000 troops to suppress the Southern rebellion began to circulate out from the Washington D. C. and New York press sources. In Tennessee and

[314] *Nashville Patriot*, April 14, 1861.

the other Border slave states, their governors flatly rejected this proclamation.[315] That refusal began a regional backlash that eventually carried Tennessee, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Virginia out of the Union. For the Unionist press, it rapidly fractured their coalition as editors each chose their individual responses to the crisis.

As daily papers, the *Republican Banner* and the *Nashville Patriot* were the first Tennessee Unionist presses to comment on the President's executive order. The *Banner* initially held to its moderate position and expressed hope that the Border States would stand together as a buffer between the lower-South and any potential Federal attack into the region. In its news coverage, the *Banner* emphasized the "great deal of unnecessary excitement" that had overtaken the city and advised that readers consider the known unreliability of reports over the telegraph. It did, however, predict that if the news proved to be accurate, then the proclamation would "unquestionably meet with the unqualified disapproval of Union men in the Border States." As to how Tennesseans should respond, the *Banner*'s editors did not advocate armed resistance but instead proposed that it was "the duty of the conservative men of Tennessee at present to preserve a 'masterly inactivity,' and not rush headlong into extremes. Let the Border States stand firm, and act together…."[316]

The following day, the *Banner* continued with this reasoning by proposing that Tennessee assume a position of "armed neutrality" with the other Border States to protect

[315] Tennessee's Governor Isham Harris responded to Simon Cameron, the U. S. Secretary of War, with a telegram that bluntly stated that "Tennessee will *not* furnish a single man for the purpose of coercion, but 50,000 if necessary for the defense of our rights, and those of our Southern brothers." See, a transcript of telegram in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 19, 1861.

[316] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 16, 1861.

its honor and interests while interceding between both sides. This moderate position was at odds with the broader public opinion in Nashville, though, a fact that the *Banner* freely admitted. "We know that we could give counsel much more acceptable perhaps to a majority of our readers at this time," its editors wrote. "But we choose rather to consult our convictions of the duty of a journalist at such a time, than what might seem to be our interest."[317] With this statement, the *Banner's* editors thus chose to move against the swell of public opinion and hold to their principles and judgment rather than cave to the desires of its readers. While limited because the *Banner* eventually supported leaving the Union, their continued resistance to disunion is further proof of the outlook with which some of Tennessee's editors approached their profession. Rather than cave to public support, the *Banner's* editors invoked their convictions as journalists to explain their position—likely implying a personal allegiance to writing what they thought regardless of outside pressure. This point further complicates the linkage between community sentiment and newspapers asserted by historians Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig because the personal principles cited by the *Banner* show that at least one group of editors felt called to a higher professional ethic than simply repeating what their readers desired.

The *Nashville Patriot* pursued a slightly more hawkish course than the *Banner* as it flatly condemned Lincoln's proclamation as "a violent and bloody crusade against the

[317] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 17, 1861. In that same issue, the *Banner* also dwelled on the path that had brought to country and directly lay the fault for the conflict on the unbridled passions of the people over the issue of slavery. In its opinion, "one man believes it is right to hold property in slaves and another believes it wrong, and so differing the become enraged and rush madly upon each other with arms in their hands. This is the lever which moves the masses at all events." This thinking reflected the same Whiggish opinion it had emphasized in the previous months that highlighted the ability of the masses to be manipulated by malevolent leaders.

South" but did not officially endorse secession. That Tennessee should respond in some fashion was a given from the *Patriot*'s perspective, but what that should be went unsaid. It instead proposed that whatever Tennessee decided to do, it should be in conjunction with the other Border States, possibly through action derived from a joint Convention. In its thinking, the *Patriot's* editors considered "it as essential that the slaveholding States should stand together in this great conflict."[318] However, in the following days, the *Patriot* increasingly became more combative by noting that Tennessee was then moving towards "a revolutionary attitude" against the Federal government and that it should take all steps to prepare for the state's defense. Accordingly, the paper called for a special session of the state legislature "to put the State in a condition of defence" and take whatever action necessary concerning the state's relations to the others in the South.[319]

Despite this call to arms, the *Patriot* did not expressly endorse leaving the Union. Instead, it admitted that in the absence of any contradictory statements from the Lincoln administration, it appeared the government was bent on "a war of subjugation." Until such clarification arrived, though, Tennessee should "prepare at once to meet the worst."[320] Thus, in its initial reactions, the *Nashville Patriot* toed the secessionist line by explicitly endorsing some form of joint action with the Border States and narrowly emphasizing the necessity of improving the state's defenses. Notably missing from its early responses was any support for joining the Southern Confederacy. Such an endorsement would come later, but it is possible that in these first days, some editors like

[318] *Nashville Patriot*, April 17, 1861.

[319] *Nashville Patriot*, April 19, 1861.

[320] *Nashville Patriot*, April 20, 1861.

those at the *Patriot* remained conflicted and therefore tried to editorially balance its opposition to Lincoln's action and their Unionist beliefs.

Outside of Nashville, the response to Lincoln's proclamation veered from fierce resistance to outright support. Jesse McMahon reacted with vigor to Lincoln's proclamation by penning a letter to the "conservative, Union-loving friends in the Free States." He attacked the "perfidy" and "sneaking and concealed 'coercion'" of the Federal administration. In his reference to "coercion," McMahon was alluding to the widely-shared claim the administration would evacuate Fort Sumter, the secret naval preparations to resupply the Fort, and Lincoln's call for troops. These, he lumped together as one concerted act that was "planned in secret and attempted to be executed through fraud upon military honor." McMahon warned that this policy would result in a war that would "make after generations shudder with horror" and asserted that Northerners had misunderstood the willingness of Southerners—even those then dedicated to the Union—to resist.[321] Like the *Patriot*, however, McMahon fell short of explicitly endorsing disunion and limited his comments to rhetorical attacks on the Lincoln administration's policy. It is likely his decision to support a move for independence came shortly after that, though, as McMahon resigned his post in a matter of weeks to join Tennessee's provisional army as its Quartermaster General.[322]

Samuel Ivins responded to the news in a similar war-like manner by emphasizing the "duplicity and bad faith" with which the Lincoln administration had acted toward the

[321] *Memphis Weekly Bulletin*, April 18, 1861.

[322] Jesse McMahon was appointed as the Assistant Quartermaster General of Tennessee by Governor Isham Harris. For notice of the nomination, see *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 18, 1861.

South, especially against the upper South states like Tennessee that had clung so long to the Union. Like McMahon, Ivins referenced the supposedly nefarious switch from a conciliatory evacuation policy to the now evident "coercion" of the South after Lincoln's proclamation. With that in mind, Ivins came out in support of armed resistance alongside the other Southern states when he wrote that 'War between the sections has been inaugurated, and Tennessee cannot long remain an idle and quiescent spectator of the contest…Action is no longer avoidable."[323] McMahon and Ivins were not alone in their references to the perceived deception and dishonesty of the Federal administration, as that claim would later be a popular point among sympathetic Tennesseans as their state moved rapidly toward joining the Confederacy.

Only William Brownlow pushed back against the growing fervor surrounding the "coercion" of Lincoln's call for troops among the editors examined in this study. "We have looked the matter full in the face," he wrote, "and we are still on the side of the Government." He professed that he supported the action taken by Lincoln in forcibly moving to suppress the rebellion and loudly condemned the actions of the Confederate government in firing on Fort Sumter. He professed that no pretext for war existed because to that point, "there has been no effort made to 'coerce' the people of any State which adopted a Secession ordinance." Quite the opposite, actually, as both Presidents Abraham Lincoln and James Buchanan had both made no unprompted attempt to arrest or punish secessionists in the lower South.[324] With this lonely support for Lincoln's

[323] *The Athens Post*, April 19, 1861.

[324] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April 20, 1861. Brownlow even turned to legal precedent to support Lincoln's action by stating that the 1795 Militia Act gave the President the ability to call militia from the states when necessary "to suppress each combinations, and to cause the laws to be duly executed."

proclamation Brownlow marked the pivotal moment in his fight against disunion. Although he had repeatedly expressed contempt for abolitionism, "Black Republicans," and had even briefly toyed with the conditional Unionist position of his fellow editors, Brownlow ultimately chose to adhere to the Union in the face of a public increasingly contrary to his viewpoint. This isolation would only continue in the weeks ahead as Brownlow doubled down on his position and constantly reiterated his support for the Union, even as physical threats and business failure increasingly loomed overhead.

Toward Revolution, April to June 1861

On April 18, 1861, Governor Isham Harris—a secessionist sympathizer—called the state legislature into session in Nashville. That call initiated a two-week deliberative period that ultimately resulted in a "Declaration of Independence" passed by the legislature with an accompanying call for a statewide referendum on June 9, 1861, to ratify the action.[325] This period was one of both uncertainty and turmoil in both the press and the general public. The legislature's proceedings occurred in secret, meaning that newspapers did not have access to the usual proceedings published by the Nashville papers. This secrecy thus forced editors to resort to rumor and conjecture to guess what was occurring. Nevertheless, public sentiment definitively moved behind separation from the Union over this period, a fact that the press exemplified when both the *Banner* and *Patriot* ceased all calls for moderation and instead acceded to demands for "revolution" and independence. So it was with the party leaders who had joined the two Nashville

Brownlow theorized that "combinations" had indeed been evident from attacks on Fort Sumter and threats to Fort Pickens and Washington D. C. and the President was therefore within his power to request troops to suppress these dangers. See, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April 27, 1861.

[325] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 246-247.

papers in seeking a middle ground between Union and secession. In the end, only William Brownlow would remain in a solidly unconditional Unionist position.

In part, this groundswell of public support separation occurred because it existed from the start. Robert Thomas indicated this when he reported that "the wildest enthusiasm pervaded the entire community" and that "every class and condition, every age and sex, united in glorification of the event" after news of Fort Sumter reached Clarksville. This fervor only increased after Lincoln's proclamation, as Thomas reported that "Every man seemed to feel it was a personal affront, so general and intense was the resentment against it."[326] The *Nashville Patriot* and the *Banner* both reported similar feelings in Nashville. They wrote that "the political excitement in the city continues unabated" and that "every night large meetings are held, in which the general sentiment is that the Union is irretrievably at an end." [327] To be sure, some hyperbole should be accounted for in these descriptions. Still, the editors' reports should nonetheless be appreciated knowing that they came from the pen of men who had argued on behalf of the Union for months and who no doubt would have felt hesitant to see and report such a spectacle.

Further proof of this support is evident in the numerous public resolutions that appear in the columns of the various newspapers. For instance, citizens from Cannon County, Tennessee, supported the refusal of Governor Harris to abide by Lincoln's

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[326] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle,* April 19, 1861.

[327] *Nashville Patriot,* April 19, 1861. The Republican Banner published a similar account in which it reported that Nashville "continues from day to day in a blaze of excitement and commotion." It asserted that there was a unity that had been achieved between secessionists and Unionists in that "whatever differences of opinion may exist here upon other points of policy, all are happily united in a determination to put the people in a condition, should the occasion offer, to welcome abolition companies to hospitable graves." See, the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 20, 1861.

proclamation and called for the organization of military companies all around the state. But, most critically, they wrote that they "express the opinion that the independence of the Southern Confederacy should be recognized."[328] A similar meeting in Monroe County, Tennessee, resolved that it condemned "the proclamation of Mr. Lincoln calling upon the states for troops to coerce our Southern sisters" and expressed their shock at the administration's "despotic war policy and will resist it even to the death."[329] Numerous other public resolutions expressed similar sentiments.[330]

A volatile information environment likely also helped to enflame this existing revolutionary sentiment as the legislature deliberated—a condition to which the Tennessee press contributed. In the aftermath of Fort Sumter and Lincoln's Proclamation, all of the seven Unionist-leaning papers in this study reprinted articles from Northern newspapers of an increasingly widespread mobilization behind the conflict. For editors who now supported disunion, those reports provided rhetorical justification to prove the inevitability of conflict and the supposed coercive intentions of the North. For instance, on April 18, 1861, the *Republican Banner* synthesized what it had seen from the Northern press as it exclaimed that "the news from the North is of a most exciting character" and noted "the eagerness for a war of subjugation, which seems to be manifested on the part

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[328] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 23, 1861.

[329] *The Athens Post*, April 26, 1861.

[330] For other resolutions, see the that from the residents of Spring Hill, Tennessee, in the *Nashville Patrio*t, April 21, 1861; the meeting of Nashville residents, and the resolution of a Nashville Ladies Society in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 24, 1861; an account of a meeting n Williamson County, Tennessee in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 30, 1861; an account from Wilson County, Tennessee in the *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 3, 1861; the report from Rutherford County in the *Nashville Patriot*, April 28, 1861; the public resolution from Blount County in the *Nashville Patriot*, May 05, 1861; the report from Meigs County in *The Athens Post*, April 26, 1861; or the resolution from Ten Mile, Tennessee in *The Athens Post*, May 03, 1861.

of the Northern States."[331] Similarly, the *Patriot* cited an article from the *Chicago Journal,* which proclaimed its desire to call "to an account the traitors who have committed the outrage upon the American Flag." To the *Patriot's* editors, this statement proved that there was little difference of opinion in the North about going to war and that the prevailing sentiment was to "crush out the rebels at all hazards." "We hear no dissenting voice," the *Patriot* stated. "Conciliation, compromise, concession have died upon Northern lips…Every tough reiterates the cry of 'vindicate the powers of the Government, and crush out the rebels at all hazards.'"[332]

It was not just city papers that emphasized Northern sentiment, as the "country" weeklies like *The Athens Post* and the *Clarksville Chronicle* did. In early May, Samuel Ivins cited an anecdote from an acquaintance who had just returned from Illinois and Missouri that claimed to have seen "troops by the thousands" volunteering to march on the South. "Men and money seemed to be abundant for the purposes of subjugation," the observer was to have said, along with the fact that large numbers were "of the lower class of foreigners."[333] The veracity of that source is, of course, unknowable. Still, the fact remains that the article sought to confirm the existing narrative that the South would soon be invaded by large numbers of Northerners and enflame passions at the prospect of hordes of "lower class foreigners" leading the attack.

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[331] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 18, 1861.

[332] *Nashville Patriot*, April 23, 1861.

[333] *The Athens Post*, May 10, 1861. In another article, Ivins took a different approach by calling attention to an article from the *New York Express*, which had recently changed from a position sympathetic to the South to one in support of the Federal government, as proof of the strength of the war fever in the North. He claimed that the paper had "been forced to yield to the swell which is threatening to inundate and subjugate the South." Such analysis of the changing sentiments of Northern newspapers was another tactic used to highlight the strength of Northern sentiment for the war. See, *The Athens Post*, May 03, 1861.

Likewise, Robert Thomas posted an abstract from *Harper's Weekly* that outlined a hypothetical campaign against the South. This article variously called for heavy-handed tactics like shelling Baltimore, a swift occupation of the Mississippi River and the state of Tennessee, and expressed apathy toward enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law and helping catch runaway slaves when the U. S. Army entered the South. To Thomas, this article not only displayed "intense hatred of the South, but, with evident pleasure, points out what it conceives to be the easiest way to subjugate this entire section, and to abolish slavery…"[334] Such Northern news material was just one facet of the information provided by Tennessee's newspapers. Whether done explicitly to shift public opinion or for from a position of genuine concern, such articles likely worked to stimulate an already seething response from white Tennesseans by confirming their preconceptions and pushing conditional Unionists closer toward revolution. Similarly, they show that the standard practices of the Northern and Southern newspaper industries with their hyperbolic, penny-press style of journalism cut both ways throughout the secession crisis as this style was routinely criticized by moderate Southern editors in 1860 only to serve as evidence to support independence months later.

The path taken by the editors themselves toward supporting secession mirrored that of the larger Unionist party in Tennessee as, within two weeks of Lincoln's call for troops, they were all—except William Brownlow—fully supportive of calls to separate from the Union. The first to support disunion was the aforementioned Jesse McMahon and Samuel Ivins, both of whom, in their first issues afterward, openly decried Lincoln's action as being duplicitous and intended to coerce the South forcefully. Robert Thomas

[334] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, May 10, 1861.

took a similar tack in his first issue by laying out what he saw as the Lincoln administration's duplicitous actions in recent weeks. Thomas likewise pinned the blame on Republicans for their obstinance and their conflicting policies toward Fort Sumter. As proof, he wrote that Republicans had acted in bad faith and had never intended to compromise from the beginning. To him, this point was evident because if the Republicans had intended to do so, they would have agreed to a settlement after the first wave of secession or could have done so at any point during compromise negotiations. The Republican administration also could have evacuated Fort Sumter as they had signaled, but instead, they secretly tried to reinforce it. "This act, Lincoln knew, would bring on a fight," Thomas asserted, "and in taking that step, he, virtually, struck the first blow, and that blow was preceded by the most shameless duplicity and bad faith." [335]

Despite his combative stance, it was not until the following week that Thomas overtly called for disunion. Thomas explained his decision in both gendered and racial rhetoric that emphasized the affronts to Tennessee's "honor and manhood" by the Federal government through its coercive policies. He stressed that point along with the North's constant desire "to hate the slave-holder, and who, under the pretence of humanity to the slave, would trample under foot the rights of the white man and drench the soil with blood." Beneath such caustic language, Thomas admitted there was no hope for peace. With that fact a given, a "united South" and "an alliance with friends" would allow Tennesseans to preserve their rights more effectively. [336]

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[335] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, April 19, 1861.

[336] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, April 26, 1861.

The *Republican Banner* gradually pulled back from its initial calls for caution to one begrudgingly supportive of independence one week after Fort Sumter. This turn ostensibly came because its editors saw little indication that war could be averted. "The restraints which the conservative position of the Border States has heretofore exercised over the Administration are now disregarded," they wrote, "A war purely of sections must inevitably be met." Therefore, at a minimum, Tennessee should resist invasion and avoid participation in the suppression of the seceded states. The *Banner* subsequently pointed to the widespread support for the war drawn from Northern newspapers as justification for its argument for resistance and urged all citizens to prepare for a large and destructive conflict.[337] The *Banner* did not explicitly support joining the Confederacy until after the Tennessee legislature passed its "Declaration of Independence" and organized a military alliance with the Southern government. The paper instead couched its statements as being in favor of resistance, revolution, and independence, but not necessarily for aligning with the Confederacy. Only after the legislature's actions did the *Banner* fall in line—but in effect, because it saw the step as the most practical one available, not out of passionate ideological support.[338] Without the personal writings of the *Banner's* editors, it is impossible to know their direct thinking during these weeks. Nonetheless, their history of Unionist support, cautionary response to Lincoln's

[337] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 21, 1861.

[338] For an example of this reluctant reasoning, see the *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 09, 1861. There the *Banner's* editors asserted that there was no reasonable argument against not approving independence, and instead focused its attention on whey they felt that Tennessee should ratify the Confederate Constitution and join the Confederacy. It asserted that to simply ally with the Southern government militarily while maintaining independence would forgo any representation or say in the conduct of the war or the affairs of the government. Full political connection would instead allow Tennessee to make its voice known and best work for its interests.

proclamation, open admission of being contrary to public opinion, and hesitancy to overtly support the Confederacy all point to the fact that the paper's editors could at best be characterized as reluctant supporters of disunion.

However, that label cannot be applied to the *Nashville Patriot* because its editors cast off their hesitancy and advocated for independence and alignment with the Confederacy within days. The *Patriot* rhetorically couched its positional change as one forced on its editors because of the apparent growth of war sentiment in the North. Pointing to the numerous articles in Northern newspapers describing enlistments and widespread mobilization, the *Patriot* wrote that the recent events had evidently "obliterated all party distinctions in the North and united the whole people of that section in support of the war of subjugation upon the South." To them, this unified front meant that war was upon Tennessee whether it liked it or not and that though they had resisted secession and always urged "peace and union," they now were forced to realize that both ideas were long gone. [339] Then, the only option was to fight with the other slaveholding states with whom they had sympathy and similar interests—namely slavery--even though they had deemed the lower-South's course toward secession as illegitimate.

The *Nashville Patriot* justified the glaring contradiction between its once fierce opposition to secession and its recent support for separation as the application of the "right for revolution" inherent to all citizens. As these former Unionists explained their willingness to leave the Union in April and May 1861, they went to great lengths to reiterate the same arguments delineating revolution versus secession that they had discussed at length throughout 1860 and early 1861. For instance, the *Patriot* defended its

[339] *Nashville Patriot*, April 24, 1861.

stance by claiming that it had long rejected "peaceable secession," but clarified that Tennesseans were now employing their right to "throw off by an act of revolution the authority of the government of the Union when by its maladministration it became intolerable to her."[340] Other editors like Samuel Ivins reiterated this line of reasoning, who sought to clarify to readers that it was not secession that Tennesseans were resorting to but revolution. "Don't be misled by the use which is made of the term," he wrote. "Tennessee does not propose to secede from the Union. She stands upon her right to be free, and intends to declare herself independent as our revolutionary ancestors did." The *Republican Banner* and the *Clarksville Chronicle* also used similar rhetorical justification.[341]

It is not the case that Tennessee's editors were the source of this belief in the right of revolution, nor were they only individuals stating it in the months of the secession crisis. One has to look no further than the Tennessee legislature to see that this theory was widespread, as they eventually passed a "Declaration of Independence" rather than an ordinance of secession like in the lower-South states. Instead, the rhetoric of Tennessee's editors likely helped keep this idea circulating in the state as they hypothesized what events could unfold in the future. In the absence of scientific polling, it is impossible to know the effect such rhetoric had on Tennessee's white population in 1860 and 1861, but it is not unreasonable to think it did influence public opinion. Just as they constantly reiterated their stance on resistance to possible "coercion" by the Federal government, the regular writings of Tennessee's editors possibly provided the intellectual

[340] *Nashville Patriot*, April 24, 1861.

[341] *Republican Banner and Whig*, April 18, 1861; the *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, June 07, 1861.

justification and rhetorical framework for politically-minded readers to explain what was occurring around the United States. In effect, when an event such as Lincoln's proclamation appeared to align with a "coercive" act, the "right of revolution" that had been repeatedly discussed seemed like the reasonable and popular option. Individuals most certainly made their own choices—as evidenced by unconditional Unionists like William Brownlow—but editors likely contributed to the justification and reasoning behind these different decisions.

Along with this discussion of abstract concepts like "coercion" and "rights of revolution," however, was the practical consideration that undergirded much of the tension surrounding the conflict: the supposed threat to slavery manifested by an assertive Republican-led government. Tennessee's editors—sometimes explicitly--supported their positions by emphasizing the importance of slavery to their society and the perceived desire of Northerners to abolish the institution forcefully. For instance, the *Nashville Patriot* bluntly asserted that the present conflict "is not against the seceded States, but against the South and its institutions. It includes every foot of territory in all the slaveholding States. Its resolve is to make an end at once and forever by force of the peculiar institution which have risen to our differences."[342] Likewise, in a mass letter written by the Nashville press supporting the push for independence, that city's editors—regardless of former party affiliation—wrote, among other justifications, that "at the bottom of all this [war] lies the insane idea, held by many of the leaders, that it is their duty to exterminate slavery, and make the 'irrepressible conflict' doctrine universal."[343]

[342] *Nashville Patriot*, April 24, 1861.

[343] *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 17, 1861.

Editors similarly resorted to racial rhetoric to play on feelings of white supremacy in their readers to influence their willingness to support disunion and recenter attention to the threat of its abolishment. For example, in May 1861, the *Patriot* scolded any remaining Unionist supporters by asserting that, "If there is a white man in the State who would vote for his own degradation, dishonor and enslavement, and against his birthright of liberty, let his skin be changed to Egyptian blankness on the spot."[344] Some likewise also compared continued adherence to the Union to a willingness "to exchange the heritage of a free ancestry for degradation and slavery."[345] As has been shown, Tennessee's editors had long asserted their sympathies and alignment with the grievances of the rest of the South, particularly regarding the issue of slavery. Their opposition to secession claimed a different viewpoint—supplied by their Whiggish political sensibility—regarding its necessity and viability. When that veneer of difference was removed in April 1861, its formerly Unionist newspaper editors—many of whom were slaveholders themselves—became further aligned with their fellow white Southerners, which meant protecting the institution of slavery. For those who no doubt lived and profited because of their feelings of white supremacy, this emphasis on the threat to slavery in their newspaper columns likely seemed a believable and compelling rhetorical tool to convince readers of the importance of supporting Tennessee's movement for independence.

When Tennessee's state assembly passed its "Declaration of Independence" and called for a referendum to approve the measure, it began the third major election

[344] *Nashville Patriot*, May 17, 1861.

[345] *Nashville Patriot*, May 09, 1861.

campaign in the state in seven months. Unlike the previous elections, however, the political coalitions that had defined the choices for voters no longer existed. Across Middle and West Tennessee, public opinion had so moved behind separation that the once strong Union party lacked the ideological force that had led it to victory statewide in November 1860 and again that February. The staff of the *Republican Banner* recognized this point as it asserted that "the once Union party of Tennessee, then, is a Union party no longer….they accept the attitude of revolutionists against the policy of the Federal Government, and are for arming the State and defending the whole South in opposition to that Government."[346] To be sure, differences of opinion on secession still existed among Middle and West Tennessee communities. Still, on the whole, the political climate had changed so much in the previous weeks that the campaigning itself did not draw as much news attention as it had in the previous iterations. One aspect driving this shift in coverage is that the outcome did not appear to be in doubt from the perspective of the Middle and West Tennessee newspaper editors. Robert Thomas was emblematic of this point when he flatly asserted only days from the referendum that "The majority in favor of Separation and Representation is large, and the fact is beyond dispute that Tennessee is going out of the Union."[347]

Only in East Tennessee was there substantial Unionist support—and that was concentrated in the central and northeastern portions of the region. Southern East

[346] *Republican Banner and Whig*, May 03, 1861. William Gates made a similar assessment when he marveled how the old party structures had disintegrated in the last few months. "The beauty of it is, that all past-party lines are obliterated, and old Whigs, old Democrats, old know nothings and all, will unite in one hearty, brave and determined effort to place Tennessee in a position of independence." See, *West Tennessee Whig*, June 07, 1861.

[347] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, May 31, 1861.

Tennessee, where Samuel Ivins resided, proved to be mainly in favor of secession.[348] Throughout the referendum campaigning in May and June 1861, William Brownlow maintained his passionate resistance to secession with streams of editorials that defended the Lincoln administration's role in the war and attacked secessionists and former Unionists alike. "We are no Lincoln man—we neither admire him nor his counsellors," he wrote. "But we deny that Lincoln began this war or that he is responsible for the consequences and the bloodshed which may follow."[349] In proper form, Brownlow often launched rhetorical attacks against those one-time Unionists in Middle and West Tennessee who had broken with him over the issue. "The Union leaders of the Middle and Western portion of the state, as well as their journals, have backed down from their convictions of right," he exclaimed. "Either you are wrong now, or you were wrong in your 'relative positions' in the late Presidential Canvas." These leaders, he felt, had sacrificed their principles and self-respect out for the sake of their interests and now advocated the exact proscription that they had denounced only weeks before.[350]

Brownlow's argument against secession differed little from what he had advocated previously. He asserted that secession was illegal and traitorous, that the whole conflict that had led to secession was driven by "misrepresentation and falsehoods" by a class of demagogic politicians, and that the Federal "subjugation" that secessionists

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[348] East Tennessee voted against separation by a vote of 32,923 to 14,780 or 69 percent of the total. The largest concentration of Union supporters was concentrated in central East Tennessee, while the counties in the southern and northern areas near Georgia and Virginia favored separation. For instance, Ivin's Monroe county voted for separation 1096 to 774, while Sullivan county near the Virginia state line voted for separation 1,586 to 627. For a fuller synopsis of the results, see Campbell, *The Attitude of Tennesseans toward the Union*, 291-291.

[349] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, April, 27, 1861.

[350] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 04, 1861.

claimed warranted separation from the Union had not occurred and was therefore illegitimate.[351] Brownlow held to this position throughout the June referendum campaign and faced increasing pressure and personal threats in his community because of it. For instance, Brownlow recalled to his readers a situation in late May 1861 in which Southern troops passing through Knoxville toward Virginia attempted to force him to take down the United States flag flying over his home. He wrote that "squads of troops, from three to twenty, have come over to my house, within the last several days, cursing the Flag in front of my house and threatening to take it down, greatly to the annoyance of my wife and children." Brownlow likewise proclaimed that he knew of a plot to arrest him and other East Tennessee Unionists after the election in June. Secessionists, he claimed, planned to carry them to Montgomery, Alabama "to guarantee the quiet surrender of the Union men of East Tennessee."[352] Of course, it is entirely possible that this conspiracy never existed. Still, the frequency with which Brownlow alluded to threats and other forms of social pressure over the previous months suggests that it was more than a common occurrence. In any regard, though, the personal stand Brownlow took against leaving the Union demonstrates the ideological dedication he had for the Unionist cause. This commitment is but further proof of the ideological nature of Tennessee's editors throughout the secession crisis and suggests that their news coverage was driven far more by their personal views than mirroring that of the general public in their communities.

[351] For discussion of these points, see *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 11, 1861; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, June, 01, 1861.

[352] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 25, 1861.

On June 8, 1861, the referendum to approve Tennessee's "Declaration of Independence" occurred as expected. Tennessee voted in favor of separation, with 102,172 votes cast in favor (68.4 percent) to only 47,238 (or 31.6 percent) in opposition. Of that 47,238 no votes, nearly 33,000 came from East Tennessee. East Tennessee was the only section to vote against separation, with Middle and West Tennessee providing the majority in favor.[353] This result was met with some measure of sadness by formerly Unionist editors, many of whom, like Robert Thomas, felt that "it is not without a feeling of sadness that we look back upon a Union once revered, but now dissevered."[354] Nonetheless, as a cohort, they near-unanimously approved of the measure, and they expressed pride at how Tennessee had held out to the end for the Union. Dwelling on how Tennessee had left the Union, the *Patriot* soberly reflected that "the step was taken with the solemnity and dignity appropriate to an act of a sovereignty deciding not only or itself but for future generations, its and their political destiny." It then turned its attention to the future war with the North, then only in its early stages. The *Patriot* called on the North to leave the state alone to pursue its own course and to "call off their dogs of war." It predicted that if this did not occur, the war that would result "cannot fail to be disastrous to all parties concerned." The *Patriot* concluded by promising that Tennessee would fight the North "till you are willing to retire, or till we are no more."[355]

With this rhetorical shift from covering—and participating in—the political maneuvering of the secession crisis to talk of war, the *Nashville Patriot* marked the course with which

[353] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 248.

[354] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, June 14, 1861.

[355] *Nashville Patriot*, June 12, 1861.

other editors in Tennessee would eventually follow. Over the previous year, these men worked on behalf of a Union party that pursued a middle course between the perceived extremes of secession and the threat of Republicanism while also trying to preserve the status quo of slavery in the South. In their roles as editors, they consistently advocated for measures of compromise and moderation and did so both in their official roles as newspaper editors and as political actors in their respective communities. In each case, they hoped to influence public opinion behind their Unionist cause with rhetoric and news coverage that reflected their adherence to Whiggish political principles. Their various actions, be it through political involvement, resistance to outside pressure, or apparent contradiction of public opinion, demonstrate the ideological nature of their journalistic outlook and question the applicability of their reporting as reflections of broader public opinion. Separately the difficulty and confusing nature of the information environment surrounding the crisis at Fort Sumter shows that the technological and practical limitations of the newspaper industry played a part in determining how, and what, editors reported. The difficulty of determining what to print forced decisions on editors who individually fell back on their preconceptions and hopes to print material likely further contributed to an already confusing situation. Then, when faced with secession, they outwardly pursued a path built on the rhetorical foundation surrounding "coercion" and "revolution" they had implicitly built over the past months. Their course reflected the individual choices of their editorial staffs, and most chose to follow Tennessee into the Confederacy. Some like Jesse McMahon resigned their position and had taken up arms in the newly forming Provisional Army of Tennessee.[356] Others such

[356] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 18, 1861.

as Ira Jones joined the Confederate Army in due time.[357] Most, however, continued work as editors and turned their attention toward covering the ongoing military preparations and burgeoning conflict elsewhere. They did not know how long the struggle would last, but most editors likely agreed with Samuel Ivins when he hypothesized that "We are confident from the general indications, that the war cannot last a twelvemonth.."[358] Only time would tell if that statement would prove to be true.

[357] Gregory Poole, *Jones, Ira Philander (1829-1897): Papers 1845-1954* (Nashville: Archives and Manuscripts Unit, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1997), 3 Ira Jones would be appointed by Tennessee Governor Isham Harris as Quartermaster General in the state's Provisional Army.

[358] *The Athens* Post, June 14, 1861.

CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION

Writing on June 13, 1861, after Tennessee publicly ratified its "Declaration of Independence," Ira Jones and the staff of the *Nashville Patriot* looked hopefully to a future in which the remaining Unionist holdouts scattered around Tennessee would submit to majority opinion and accept the state's separation from the United States. "We are persuaded that the great mass of those who voted for the Union on Saturday are prepared to discharge this duty as freely and cheerfully as if they had contributed to the result," the Patriot proclaimed. "They will accept the popular decision as binding upon them, and that they will be as ready and willing as any other class of citizens to maintain and defend the position." However, to not do so would be a violation of republican principles that placed power in the hands of majorities to control government and would alarmingly "lead to the utmost calamitous results, and inaugurate a civil strife which no patriot could contemplate but with horror."[359]

For a short time, William Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig* indicated that it would consent to this proscription. Two days after the *Patriot's* article, Brownlow reflected that though he had given the fight against secession his best effort over the past weeks, he would now devote his paper to reporting more practical matters because the issue was finally resolved. "It is folly for us to fight any longer, and therefore we shall devote our columns to the publication of Literary, Agricultural, and Miscellaneous matter, including the current War news of the day," he wrote. Given Brownlow's history of combativeness, it is not surprising that this did not happen. Just a few days later, Brownlow served as a delegate to the Unionist convention that met in Greenville, TN, and used his editorial pen

[359] *Nashville Patriot*, June 13, 1861.

to call for a legal separation of East Tennessee from the rest of the state.[360] He predicated this call based on the very principle of revolution that he had passionately contested and supposedly undergirded its revolution against the United States. In line with the convention's formal actions, Brownlow asserted that East Tennesseans had declared their opposition to leaving the Union and, because of the "corrupt and unconstitutional legislation of the State," should be allowed to leave and remain in the Union. "If this liberty is refused, civil war is inevitable," he wrote. "The free and unbought Union men of East Tennessee will fall back upon the rights guaranteed to them by God and nature…and meet the consequences let them be what they may."[361] Thus Brownlow turned in a matter of days from apparent submission to proclaiming the possibility of armed resistance against the state and Confederate governments if the legislature did not grant their request for independence. Unsurprisingly, the state assembly ignored this request, and Confederate authorities dispatched troops to quell any potential unrest from the Unionist population. For the next four years, bitter warfare would plague the region as neither Confederate nor Federal troops could adequately pacify East Tennessee.

In the months ahead, the seven editors in this study pursued different paths as the Civil War raged. As previously noted, both Jesse McMahon of the *Memphis Bulletin* and Ira Jones of the *Nashville Patriot* joined the Confederate Army under appointment by

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[360] Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee*, 252-253. This Unionist convention met in Greenville, TN, for four days from June 17 to June 20, 1861. It was the second such convention in a month, as East Tennessee loyalists had also met on May 30 in Knoxville before the state referendum on independence June 9. The first convention labeled the Tennessee legislature's "Declaration of Independence" unconstitutional and pledged to reconvene on June 17 if the measure passed. The Greenville convention ultimately passed a "Declaration of Grievances" and sent commissioners to the legislature to ask for East Tennessee's independence from the rest of the state. Unsurprisingly, this attempt gained little support from the legislature and went nowhere.

[361] *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, June 29, 1861.

Tennessee Governor Isham Harris as Quartermasters General for the state of Tennessee.[362] Both eventually returned to the newspaper trade after the war's conclusion and died in 1869 and 1897, respectively. [363] Robert Thomas worked as the editor of the *Clarksville Chronicle* until Federal troops occupied the town in early 1862. The *Chronicle* was not published for the remainder of the war and did not resume operations until July 1865. Thomas remained affiliated with the paper as senior editor until his death in April 1876 as the purportedly oldest living newspapermen in the state.[364] Hiram Walker served as the principal editor of the Nashville *Republican Banner* until September 1861, when he resigned the chair due to ill health. Walker's activities after this resignation are unclear, but he died shortly thereafter in August 1862—possibly from the same affliction that forced his resignation.[365] In his absence, the *Banner* continued publication until April 1862, when Nashville fell to the Federal army. It did not resume operations until late September 1865 under entirely new leadership.[366] William Gates continued as editor of the *West Tennessee Whig* until he ceased operations in June 1862.

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[362] List of appointments in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 18, 1861; Service Record of Jesse H. McMahon, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, and Nonregimental Enlisted, NARA, Publication Number M331, RG 109, Roll 0173, digitally accessed via fold3.com; Tennessee State Library guide to the Ira P. Jones Papers, Page 3.

[363] After the war, McMahon returned to the newspaper trade as joined the newly resurrected *Memphis Appeal* as an editor. McMahon served in this role until 1867 when was fired from the position. He briefly worked in the life insurance business after this dismissal, but died nearly destitute three years later in late January 1869. For more, see, B. G. Ellis, *The Moving Appeal*, 374-378.; Jones served as the editor of three different papers after the war. He also helped to found the Tennessee Press association and served as that institution's first president. See the Tennessee State Library guide to the Ira P. Jones Papers, Page 3.

[364] *Clarksville Weekly Chronicle*, April 29, 1876.

[365] *Republican Banner and Whig*, September 01, 1861. Grave of Hiram K. Walker, Findagrave.com, added July 22, 2021, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/229832247/hiram-k-walker.

[366] *Republican Banner*, September 27, 1865.

Four of Gates' sons served in the Confederate army during the Civil War, and William admittedly "followed them as the army receded" so that he could "administer to their personal wants." He renewed the *Whig* in October 1865 and remained affiliated with the paper until September 1874, when he resigned as editor.[367]

Samuel Ivins worked his *Athens Post* until Federal troops forced its closure in September 1863.[368] Although he did not join the Confederate Army, Ivins was arrested by the U. S. Army under charges of treason and sent to the prisoner of war camp at Camp Chase, Ohio. He was held there until his release one month later.[369] Ivins subsequently worked on multiple papers in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta until he returned to Athens to resurrect the *Post* in December 1867. Ivins remained as the *Post's* editor until his death in June 1877.[370] As the lone dissenter among the ranks of these Unionist editors, William Brownlow faced increasing pressure from Confederate authorities to temper his opposition or cease publication. Nevertheless, Brownlow continued operations until late October 1861, when he fled Knoxville after receiving word of his imminent arrest. Brownlow spent a month as a fugitive but later turned himself over to Confederate authorities. He was jailed in Knoxville with other suspected Unionists until Confederate

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[367] *West Tennessee Whig*, October 07, 1865. In 1870, Gates merged the *Whig* with the *Weekly Jackson Tribune* to form the Jackson *Whig and Tribune*. This paper ran until June 1877 when it merged with the *Jackson Sun*. This merger launched the paper that is still published under the name of *The Jackson Sun* to this day. It is one of the longest running newspapers in the state. See, *Chronicling America* "About Whig and tribune," Library of Congress, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033435/

[368] *The Athens Post*, December 06, 1867.

[369] Record of Samuel P. Ivins; *War Department Collection of Confederate Records*; NARA, Publication Number M598, RG 109.

[370] *The Athens Post*, December 06, 1867; "About the Athens post," Chronicling America, Library of Congress, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024443/; Grave of Samuel P. Ivins, Findagrave.com, added May 17, 2008, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/26890751/samuel-powell-ivins.

Secretary of War Judah Benjamin intervened to order his release. Brownlow departed for the North and did not return to Knoxville until December 1863, when Federal troops occupied the town. He relaunched his paper under the new title of *Brownlow's Whig and Rebel Ventilator* as an insult to local secessionists and continued publication until he was elected as the state's first Reconstruction governor in 1865.[371] For the remainder of his life, he remained affiliated with the newspaper industry through the *Whig* (managed by his son) and later *The Whig and Chronicle*. Brownlow continued to publish editorials until he died in 1877.[372]

The diverse paths of each of these editors could not have been foreseen when the statewide coalition of Unionist newspaper editors took up their pens to report the news in January 1860. Over the previous year and a half, their editorial and news work presented a nearly unified outlook on events built on their shared adherence to Whiggish political culture. To their readers, they stressed the prevalence of political corruption, the threat of elite domination, and a conspiratorial perception of the secession movement in the South. Likewise, much of their editorial content rested on the belief in the inherent virtue of the white American men who comprised the voting population. In the election of 1860, this outlook manifested in support for the Constitutional Union Party and the campaign of John Bell. In doing so, they emphasized the possibility of disregarding the issue of slavery altogether and appointing supposedly disinterested statesmen like Bell to return sectional harmony to the United States. Likewise, their perception of the virtuosity of the

[371] McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 101-109, 180-181.

[372] Jack Mooney, ed. *A History of Tennessee Newspapers*, 9.

American voter skewed their news reporting as it unduly emphasized the prevalence of growing Unionist support outside of the state.

In the months of the secession crisis, their Whiggish political culture undergirded their resistance to disunion. Routinely, editors wrote in favor of compromise efforts and attacked the secessionist movement and the nascent Confederate government for their supposedly conspiratorial and despotic usurpation of the constitutional order. In their rhetoric throughout this period, Unionist editors targeted their news coverage at predominantly middle- and lower-class readers who likely comprised their subscriber base. As a group, they crafted populist arguments against secession that played up fears of elite domination, subjugation of their natural rights, and subordination to the large-slaveholding class in the lower South. However, numerous editors distinguished between their belief in a natural right of revolution and their opposition to secession. When presented with the perceived duplicity of the Lincoln administration over Fort Sumter's evacuation and the subsequent call for 75,000 volunteers, the rhetorical foundation laid over the previous months provided the intellectual justification for most editors to cast aside their dedication to the Union and support independence. Only a few editors joined William Brownlow in their unconditional opposition to separation.

As individuals, Tennessee's Unionist editors were both a professionally diverse and culturally homogenous group. Each of their editorial styles and finished newspaper products reflected aspects of the changes underway in the newspaper industry over the previous decades. This variety manifested in different editorial styles that incorporated aspects of the sensationalist, penny-press style, while others eschewed such policies in favor of reasoned and measured reporting. Likewise, technological influences and

production policies varied between papers as some drew directly from telegraphic dispatches and printed papers daily, while others relied on the historical practices of the newspaper exchange and weekly publication schedules. Throughout the secession crisis, these diverse influences directly determined the type and style of information that editors relayed to their readers and thus varied from paper to paper. As Southern men—several of whom were slaveholders—Tennessee's Unionist editors all supported the conventional view of defending the legitimacy of the slave system and the necessity of upholding white supremacy in their state and communities. This belief was repeatedly stated throughout their news coverage, likely to reiterate their adherence to the cultural orthodoxy to readers and neighbors. Reciprocally, it allowed editors to navigate the volatile political environment by heading off any secessionist comparisons between support for the Union and the threat of Northern abolitionists who similarly opposed secession.

Lastly, these newspapermen worked outside their roles as editors by wading into the politics of their communities. They actively served as delegates to local, state, and national conventions and as officers at public meetings helping to draft and publish resolutions. In addition, they participated in local speeches, rallies, and parades, while also using their newspapers as organizing platforms for their local party apparatus. Such dedication to their political beliefs belies any supposed separation of editors from political participation outside of their professional roles. Likewise, it indicates that although the influence of their work on public opinion is uncertain without modern polling, editors likely approached their jobs with the belief that they could, and should, use their pens to sway their readers' views. That interpretation explains why editors so

passionately editorialized in favor of the Union and later "revolution." It also explains why William Brownlow refused to consent to disunion, despite pressure to do so.

Taken together, these conclusions expand the historiographical discussion surrounding the roles, activities, and impact of a subset of nineteenth-century newspaper editors in Tennessee. Contrary to Carl Osthaus' assertions, editors did not always subordinate their work to elite influence but instead could, and did, use their position to speak to the perspective of middle-and lower-class voters. In doing so, they often used populist rhetoric that implicitly undermined the supposed power of wealthy and powerful elites and demonstrated greater independence of thought than Osthaus formulated. Similarly, their actions throughout the secession crisis complicate the claim by Donald Reynolds that editors rarely participated in outside politics by showing that such activities were not uncommon in Tennessee. Thus, newspapermen passionately and actively worked to shape the local, state, and national political environment with personal activism and their editorial platform. The ideological fervor inferred from these actions points to a personal outlook that likely viewed their role as helping to inform and shape public opinion in line with a preferred ideological position. Lastly, the activities of Tennessee's Unionist editors call in to question the general claims by Donald Reynolds and Berry Craig that nineteenth-century newspapers reflected the views of their local communities. They show that, in certain circumstances like the February referendum in Tennessee or the final debate over separation, the political views of passionate editors could exceed that of their local community. That fact suggests that historians should treat period newspapers with skepticism about whether their news and editorials—which are

often one and the same—genuinely reflect the wider community's views or simply that of the staff of different publications.

In the end, Tennessee's long-time Unionist editors—like their state—split over the ideological necessity of defending their state against the supposed subjugation of the Lincoln administration and the threat it posed to the slave system in the South. In the war's aftermath, every one of the seven editors in this study eventually returned to their trade and took up their pens to again report and explain the news to their readers. In their own ways, they likely hoped to, in the words of Samuel Ivins, "let the past alone, make the best we can of the present, and go forward hopefully and cheerfully to battle with the future."[373] To political moderates like Ivins and his fellow editors, such a view was consistent with the same ideology that had guided their work during the secession crisis. But, just as it did in those volatile months, the years of Reconstruction ahead would prove how difficult—nay impossible—that hope would be.

[373] *The Athens Post*, December 06, 1867.

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