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# Loyalty and Disloyalty in Urban America: A Comparative Study of New York City and Philadelphia Politics

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## **Abstract**

This article examined the similarities and differences between the politics of New York City and Philadelphia during the American Civil War. As the war progressed, both cities diverged, with Philadelphia remaining relatively politically stable and politically united throughout, while New York City for much of the war was divided and prone to violence and political extremism. The central question of this paper, therefore, was why did Philadelphia and New York City diverge so sharply and if and how did conceptions of loyalty and disloyalty play a role? This article is unique in focusing on how the politics of each city were defined by a conflict over defining loyalty to the Union and the war effort, definitions that evolved as the war progressed. Additionally, it is unique for being the only available work that directly compares New York City and Philadelphia during the war. Through a mix of primary and secondary sources, a comparative portrait of New York City and Philadelphia was created that showed where key figures in each city agreed and where they disagreed. From this methodology, I was able to answer my central question: what separated New York City and Philadelphia was that while the former was driven to violence and political instability by vicious interparty and intraparty feuds, the latter was able to establish a popular, bipartisan consensus.

*Keywords:* Civil War, New York City, Philadelphia, Politics, Urban History, American History, Political Parties, Elections

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## **Introduction**

The decades before the American Civil War would be a period of great change for America's two largest cities, New York City and Philadelphia. For long-time and immigrant residents alike, the Civil War, and the resulting political and social changes to their city, would be a time of reckoning for their long-held beliefs. Comparatively studying New York City and Philadelphia reveals the fascinating differences with which politically active citizens, especially elected officials and party leaders, positioned themselves in relation to the war effort. Neither New York City nor Philadelphia fit into the perfect picture of the "loyal city" or "disloyal city" that they have been placed into by popular memory. Both cities faced pitched electoral clashes that could have easily taken their cities in different political directions, and no political outcome in either city was preordained. Yet, one facet that united political actors divided by different viewpoints and residing in different cities was their use of definitions of loyalty and disloyalty. Analyzing either city through definitions of loyalty and disloyalty is a rare historiographical occurrence; nevertheless, conceptions of loyalty and disloyalty are crucial for this study. In a conflict as divisive as the Civil War, both cities were split between many vocal factions that argued they were the only ones truly loyal to the nation while their opponents were just disloyal agitators. They also sought to control and alter situations when the disloyalty label was directed at them.

Thus, this work will be a critical reinterpretation of how we, now over 155 years since the end of the Civil War, see those who practiced politics in New York City and Philadelphia during the conflict. While there are too many crucial political figures to cover in detail, this work will examine many based on their connections to the different intraparty factions of both cities. The politics of both cities were defined by constant party feuds that at times allowed for political and electoral success, but most often led to disaster. Besides political leaders, and their parties and coalitions, both cities had a rich heterogeneous mix of newspapers that were important for the politicization of those who led and were led alike. As Edward Dicey, a British journalist visiting America during the Civil War, put it, "In truth, the most remarkable feature about the American press is its quantity rather than its quality. The American might be defined as a newspaper-reading animal...Reading is so universal an acquirement here, that a far larger, and also a far lower, class reads the newspapers than is the case with us."<sup>i</sup> With such well-read, but, as today, ideologically siloed, consumers of news, who controlled each newspaper, what their views were, and if and how they evolved over the course of the Civil War played a decisive role in the changing or stagnant attitudes of everyday people.

This paper, part of a larger work encompassing the years 1859-1865, covers 1859-1861, examining how the quick rhetorical shifting, by both parties, from opposition to civil war to full-throated pro-war, anti-South oratory obscured remaining divisions. In truth, throughout the war there was no simple answer about what loyalty and disloyalty meant. Many in both parties would vehemently resist any definition but their own. One's loyalty and disloyalty could not be judged by one's partisan identification or political allies. It especially cannot be judged by one's rhetoric, which was often vague at best and deceitful of one's true intentions at worst. In fact, if

there is one conclusion that this paper easily makes, it is that there were no universally agreed upon, or even mostly agreed upon, definitions of what constituted loyalty and disloyalty, only subjective opinions altered by time and animated by politics.

### **New York City and Philadelphia: The Early Days of the Split**

For New York City and Philadelphia Democrats and Republicans leaders alike, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1861, would mark a turning point from their pre-war attitudes towards the Union, secession, and other contentious issues. However, to best understand where both parties and their heterogeneous factions would end up by 1862, it is necessary first to determine where they started. For both cities, the years immediately preceding the war were marked by political turbulence. Old political alliances and ideologies were chaotically rejected and replaced, as different groups and ideas jockeyed for power. The result would be the transformation of Philadelphia into a one-party city, a party defined by support for the Union over traditional party lines, though with a sizable minority of Democrats and Republicans opposing the consensus, and of New York City into a city politically partitioned into three nearly equal parts. Thus, even though both cities entered the war in relatively similar ideological positions, they would, thanks to these wartime dynamics, exit the year completely dissimilar.

For a city north of the Mason-Dixon line, pre-war Philadelphia was in many ways a Southern city. With its manufacturing capital greater than the combination of 11 states that would become the Confederacy, it received great economic investment from wealthy Southerners. These Southerners did not just send money to Philadelphia; in fact, many Southerners married into Philadelphia families and directed their manufacturing empires from within the city. They then employed poor whites, often immigrants, and allied with them

politically by focusing on a supposedly shared hatred for the city's growing free black population. For decades before the war, these ties to the South manifested in clear voting preferences for Southern economic interests and led to massive Democratic electoral success in the city. In the city's 1856 presidential election, Republican John C. Fremont received only 11% of the vote.<sup>ii</sup> As Charles Godfrey Leland, a Philadelphia satirist, put it, "everything Southern was exalted and worshipped."<sup>iii</sup>

The rise to power of an opposition party after such a Democratic landslide in 1856 illustrated how quickly new alliances could be created, be successful, and then immediately face the possibility of dissolution. It may be surprising that out of this virulently pro-Democrat, pro-South, and anti-black political structure, the Democratic Party would be displaced just two years later by an upstart party that stood against most of its core tenets. The Peoples Party avoided the fate that befell other anti-Democrat coalitions by promising to ignore both slavery and nativism. Rather than focus on what divided them, they focused on what they agreed on: the party portrayed Democrats as the aggressors on the question of slavery in an appeal to those who may nominally be Democrats, but still worried that slavery was bringing the country to the brink of Civil War.<sup>iv</sup> The Democratic Party was still a strong force, castigating the Peoples Party as the "'Mulatto' Party, offspring of miscegenation between the Americans and 'Black Republicans.'" One Democratic speaker at an 1858 rally even argued that if the Peoples Party won, the state should go with the South before Republicans destroyed the national confederacy.<sup>v</sup> Yet, in 1858 the new party would notch its first major electoral success, defeating the incumbent Democratic mayor and replacing him with one of their own, Alexander Henry.

Alexander Henry, a wealthy young lawyer, hoped his term could avoid controversy while using his power to focus on his main legislative priority: improving the city's public transportation. That his main policy goal was completely divorced from national politics reveals the tightrope that the Peoples Party sought to walk. Despite his victory, however, Henry's influence and power over the city was tenuous at best. At any moment, the fragile alliance that brought him to power could collapse over internal divisions, allowing the Democratic Party to regain its usual power. Furthermore, the Peoples Party cannot be equated with the Republican Party; a separate political organization used the Republican name with the hope of pushing Henry and his allies towards a more candid antislavery position.<sup>vi</sup> His balancing act became more difficult after John Brown's raid the next year. The raid would greatly polarize Philadelphia, convincing the city's previously quiet abolitionists to schedule a public meeting at Independence Hall on the day of his execution. The audience at the meeting was divided between abolitionists, black residents, and Southern sympathizers, and order was only ensured by the 120 policemen sent by Mayor Henry to attend the event. He would later use the police again to bar abolitionists from meeting Brown's body when it passed through the city after his death and to stop Democrats from attacking New York abolitionist George Curtis as he lectured at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Fair.<sup>vii</sup>

Henry's use of the city's police force to maintain calm between divided factions would later become a hallmark of his administration and of the power of the Philadelphia mayoralty. However, despite trying to evenly utilize force against and on behalf of all political factions, Henry's measures were wildly unpopular with much of the city in 1859 and into 1860. Democratic opponents saw him as a closet abolitionist who should have instead suppressed the

anti-slavery meetings. Henry seemingly supported this argument by joining Curtis on stage at his lecture as a symbol of municipal authority and fairness. He was quickly rebuked in a 16-5 vote by the city's Select Council, and about a third of the city's medical students from the South withdrew from their schools in protest. His political allies were not much better at supporting him, with many joining the city's Republican Party rather than continue suppressing their views on issues surrounding slavery.<sup>viii</sup> As his re-election campaign approached, Henry's power nearly evaporated. Based on precinct returns from the May 1860 election for the mayoral race, A.K. McClure, a prominent Philadelphia Republican politician during the war and an ally of Henry, admitted years later that Henry was only re-elected because of falsified election returns, though there is no direct evidence of voter fraud or of Henry's knowledge of any falsification.<sup>ix</sup> Perhaps to show he was still moderate, or out of legitimate ideological desires, Henry would end up supporting the Constitution Unionist, John Bell, over the Republican, Abraham Lincoln, in the 1860 presidential election. However, the latter's large victory in the city, a sign of its continued drift away from the Democratic Party, would serve as a warning. For the mayor, his power as 1861 began was a far cry from the mandate he was seemingly given just three years earlier.

New York City was also greatly divided politically in the lead-up to the Civil War, and, like Philadelphia, residents faced the question about how close to align their city to the South. Wealthy New Yorkers, predominantly Democrats after the collapse of the Whig Party, had a vested economic interest in the South. New York City, more so than Philadelphia, was a part of a global trading network, and the most common good it unloaded in the decades before the war was Southern cotton. As part of a national party, New York Democrats were also asked to

swallow any misgivings they had about Southern priorities like slavery and free trade because those in the North could only win and influence national policy by courting and winning in the Solid South.<sup>x</sup> Thus began a divisive internal party debate about how accommodating to be, and three camps were formed. “Hards” were parrots of Southern rhetoric, arguing the Union had to fully accommodate Southern expansionist desires. “Softs” advocated for popular sovereignty, a system devised by Illinois’ Stephen Douglas that allowed territories to choose for themselves if they wanted slavery. Those who refused most or any accommodations with the South or slavery were “Barnburners,” though most Barnburners eventually fled to other parties or swallowed their misgivings. These cleavages would mostly last through the war, though the factions took different names.<sup>xi</sup>

Though he was not the cause of the divisions, perhaps no one embodied these internal divisions better than Fernando Wood. At the start of the war, Wood was a veteran New York City politician in his third nonconsecutive term as mayor. He was also a local, state, and national Democratic power broker who tried to maintain influence as the city, and his party, careened through crisis after crisis. All in all, the one constant of Wood’s political power was that it was never constant. In part this was because Wood had generally chosen no ideological side in the great debate over accommodation to the South; he was neither a Hard nor a Soft. In 1849 he allied with the Softs in exchange for being the party’s nominee the next year, though he lost because he refused to endorse the Compromise of 1850 as most other Softs did.<sup>xii</sup> When he finally won the mayoralty in 1854, he quickly alienated his supporters within the party with his patronage choices and public desire to be named Vice President in 1856. After failing to achieve that position, New York City Democrats in charge of overseeing the city’s elections shortened

Wood's term by a year to allow for a new election as soon as possible, with the explicit goal of replacing him.<sup>xiii</sup>

All this hostility resulted in Wood being voted out of office in an 1857 landslide thanks to an unprecedented fusion of the Know-Nothing and Republican parties with the anti-Wood members of the Democratic Party behind one candidate.<sup>xiv</sup> This anti-Wood coalition was primarily composed of members of Tammany Hall, the city's Democratic machine for much of the century. Wood nominally controlled the machine during his two terms, but after his loss Tammany Hall replaced one of Wood's close allies, Gideon Tucker, as a sachem and forced Wood out as Grand Sachem. Rather than try again to regain control of the city's existing Democratic organization, Wood decided to form his own political organization within the Democratic Party. Wood had been somewhat of a political kingmaker before by virtue of being Mayor, but most of his efforts were futile. For instance, his attempts in 1855 to form an alliance with Barnburner Democrats did not come to fruition as both they and Tammany Hall were happy to have them leave the party.<sup>xv</sup> Up until that point, even with the party's internal divisions, patronage, and platforms, candidates were almost universally determined by unelected leaders of Tammany Hall and not by elected officials like Wood.

But Wood sought, even in defeat, to make himself the decider. He would form Mozart Hall in 1858 to directly challenge Tammany Hall "until it opened its doors" to his appointments.<sup>xvi</sup> Wood's first major success was not political, but in print. He and his brother bought a failing newspaper called the *New York Daily News*, and quickly turned it into a well-read mouthpiece for Mozart Hall.<sup>xvii</sup> Throughout this time period, newspapers were often the chief mouthpiece for political parties and actors to present their ideas and positions to voters,

to attack their opponents, and rally their supporters to their side. As will be discussed later, this allowed newspaper editors to possess a great deal of political leverage and wield great political capital — but the same held true for elected officials. Wood knew that a newspaper supporting Mozart Hall would greatly increase his reach and impact in city politics. As a supporter articulated in a letter shortly before the Woods bought the *New York Daily News*, “What strikes you of the project? In case of your approval I would undertake it at once & provide the necessary materials & force — editorially & otherwise — to make it worthy of democratic patronage & second to none of its contemporaries in point of spirit...” For Wood and his new backers, a newspaper was a crucial tool to regain their lost influence.<sup>xviii</sup>

The problem for Wood, besides the trouble of trying to supplant an organization with a history and tradition of success for decades, was that he had no ideological base of support. Wood likely underestimated how his constant evolutions had alienated most political allies and overestimated their willingness to defect from Tammany too. For example, veteran city naval leader Prosper Wetmore declined to ally with Wood in the 1860 elections, saying the offer Wood proffered was beneath his age and experience.<sup>xix</sup> Thus, Wood charted a new path towards being a kingmaker: identity politics among the city’s Irish. This was not the only strategy he employed though; for instance, he had used John Brown’s Harpers Ferry raid that year to great effect as supposed evidence of the dangers of Republican rule.<sup>xx</sup>

Wood had always pandered to the city’s Irish community, somewhat ironically since he had also joined a local nativist group in an attempt to coalesce more support for his 1854 run.<sup>xxi</sup> Although their poverty in Ireland and desire for American prosperity may have led them towards Republican free labor ideology, they resented Republican alliances with nativists.<sup>xxii</sup>

Since the mass immigration of the Irish began in the 1840s, the Democratic Party had been their political home. But, after forming Mozart Hall, Wood would especially echo their rhetoric. He was a vocal opponent of prohibition, seen by many Irish immigrants at the time as a nativist talking point.<sup>xxiii</sup> He repeatedly denigrated his opposition as beholden to “British stockjobbers,” a clear ploy for Anglophobic Irish sentiment.<sup>xxiv</sup> But perhaps most importantly, he played on Irish fears of free Black people as the Southerners did in Philadelphia and throughout the North, convincing them of future economic and social turmoil from greater Black rights. Wood’s appeals to the Irish would also serve to fill the ranks of leadership in Mozart Hall since most of the defecting Tammany leaders, like Charles Daly, Judge of the Common Court of Pleas, were Irish themselves.<sup>xxv</sup>

Tammany Hall made a concerted effort leading up to the 1859 mayoral election to court Wood’s Irish base, promising them the share of patronage that had originally prompted Wood to form Mozart Hall. But Tammany Hall was still an imperfect messenger for Irish interests, choosing to nominate William Havemeyer, a German businessman, over the Irish community’s and Mozart Hall’s preferred candidate, William Kennedy, an Irish merchant. Havemeyer, and his candidate for the city’s Corporation Attorney, Samuel Tilden, called themselves “Fifth Avenue Democrats” based on their residence within the city’s upper economic echelon anchored at the city’s Fifth Avenue. They saw their wealth and social presence within the city as an asset, but most immigrants saw it in a negative political light. Wood’s mouthpiece, the *New York Daily News*, repeatedly referred to Fifth Avenue Democrats “as a kid-glove, scented, silk stocking, poodle-headed, degenerate aristocracy.” They were also accused of not being Democrats, having supported the Free-Soil wing of the party in the prior decade.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Displeased with Tammany Hall's decision, Wood declared his candidacy, which he was not previously planning to do. Originally running against the coalition that had defeated him in 1857, his candidacy was aided by the Republican Party's decision to nominate their own candidate. Their nominee, George Opdyke, hoped to appeal to independents and former Democrats upset by the Party's pro-Southern stances. However, the Republicans were still too weak, and ended up siphoning enough votes from Havemeyer that Wood would shock many by winning the mayoralty again by a comfortable margin. But Wood wanted more than the political comeback he had surprisingly achieved; he still wanted to be a national power player. Wood was what his biographer Jerome Mushkat would call New York City's first "prototypical modern municipal leader, a professional politician seeking to get, keep, maintain, and expand power."<sup>xxvii</sup>

Already established as not content with the mayoralty, as his predecessors were, he initially hoped to be nominated for President at the 1860 Democratic National Convention in Charleston, a long-shot bid quickly quashed when the national party recognized Tammany Hall, not Mozart Hall, as the New York Democratic delegation. Yet Wood decided to travel to Charleston anyway, hoping to be nominated as Vice President for John C. Breckinridge, President Buchanan's sitting Vice President, who Wood called "a live & ambitious man, with a *clear excellent & geographic status*" to advance his candidacy.<sup>xxviii</sup> But Breckinridge, and his alliance with Southern "ultras," best known for their support for secession over the past decade, made him anathema to much of the North. Tammany Hall publicly backed Stephen Douglas, whose popular sovereignty was increasingly anathema to much of the South. Wood, perhaps, could have helped convince his Southern allies to support Douglas as their standard-

bearer. However, Wood refused, publicly calling Douglas the “bob-tailed pony from Illinois.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Tammany Hall would not compromise either, supporting a resolution to mandate two-thirds of the delegates endorse the nominee. The goal of the resolution was to prevent a Southern candidate from winning a simple majority without any Northern support, but the plan backfired when Stephen Douglas was unable to reach two-thirds as well.

After 57 failed ballots the convention was postponed, and a second convention was called, this time in Baltimore. An attempt by Douglas to withdraw for a candidate capable of winning Northern and Southern delegates when the Democrats met again was rejected by Tammany Hall. With no hope of winning, Breckinridge’s allies left the convention and nominated him on a separate ticket, creating two rival Democratic campaigns for the 1860 presidential election. Wood tried to work with the two tickets to fuse in states where the Republicans would win otherwise, but his efforts mostly failed. Lincoln would be elected by a narrow plurality achieved by winning states that Democrats, if united, would have otherwise won.<sup>xxx</sup> While Wood’s more sympathetic biographer would wholly blame Tammany, Wood’s other biographer, the generally unsympathetic Samuel Pleasants, would wholly blame Wood. This historiographical discrepancy shows how one’s view of Wood clouds assigning blame for the Democratic debacle.<sup>xxxi</sup> Nevertheless, both sides of the New York Democratic divide were principally responsible for the party’s split and loss because they chose candidates that had no chance of winning and refused to abandon them when this became clear.

Once Lincoln was elected, Wood faced new and political challenges more dire than his fading national fortunes. As mayor of New York City, his first major challenge in 1861 was deciding how to respond to the growing calls from his city’s business community to forge some

compromise to preserve the Union and the city's economic relationship with the South. New York City's business community was generally supportive of Republican protectionist measures versus Democrat free trade, but they worried that President Lincoln would stifle trade with their biggest market, the South.<sup>xxxii</sup> Wood struggled to allay their concerns; this tension would manifest most clearly before the war in his infamous "Free City" speech. In this speech, Wood advocated that New York City secede from the state of New York and pledge neutrality in the inevitable upcoming war between North and South. First, Wood argued that New York City must stand "with our aggrieved brethren of the slaves states" whom they owed "friendly relations and common sympathy." Second, Wood argued that a free city status would finally sever New York City from the wrongs of the state leaders (whom he claimed were more dangerous than Southern secessionists) and attain security and prosperity. Finally, Wood qualified his pronouncement, saying that no violence should be utilized to help the city secede, but it should be done peacefully once war began.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

What is most surprising about Wood's speech is how little notice it received in the moment. Partially this was the result of few thinking a free city would be accomplished; in fact, other than reported discussions with "certain wise men" of the merchant community at Wood's residence, no tangible legislative or executive actions occurred.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Yet this lack of coverage may be due to a contemporary perception that the speech was not as dubious as it appeared. Many biographers of Wood, in fact, argue that his Free City speech was not a controversial political manifesto, but simply either a "trial balloon" to see what rhetoric was permissible at that unique moment of history or a simple continuation of New York's downstate-upstate feud.<sup>xxxv</sup> Feuds regarding "home rule" for New York City, how much control the city should have

independent of state oversight, were constant. This intrastate tension flared every time new taxes were debated or new regulations were proposed, every time legislative reapportionment was necessary, and especially every time that political patronage was doled out. Wood's three terms as mayor were defined by a rivalry between New York City and the rest of the state that, even today, often transcends party lines. Therefore, Wood's speech is often described as little more than perhaps an ill-timed continuation of this conflict, and not an accurate reflection of his ideological attitudes.

However, this argument is dubious since this would not be the end of Wood's questionable actions and rhetoric towards the South in the months before the war. His prior Thanksgiving proclamation urged citizens to pray that Republicans stop violating "the federal compact."<sup>xxxvi</sup> He issued a formal apology in January to the Governor of Georgia when New York state authorities found 25 muskets were heading south to aid the rebellion.<sup>xxxvii</sup> His brother even demanded "total acquiescence in all Southern demands."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Some of Wood's allies and base were even secession apologists. At a December 15th meeting, some Democrats passed a resolution extending "heartfelt sympathy" to Southerners "engaged in the holy cause of American liberty and trying to hold back the avalanche of Britishism..."<sup>xxxix</sup> It seemed that Wood and his allies would be a constant thorn in the side of Unionists until reconciliation was achieved.

Despite this, both Philadelphia and New York, already established as, despite their political diversity, broadly sympathetic to Southern attitudes and positions, changed their rhetoric dramatically with the attack on Fort Sumter April 12th, 1861. In Philadelphia, excited crowds began peacefully roaming the streets to debate the latest reports from the South and

exclaim their glee at the prospect of war. Quickly however, these gatherings became more sinister in behavior. According to the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, originally an anti-slavery newspaper that under new ownership became virulently pro-Confederate until it was sold in 1864, “everyone who hinted any sympathy with the secession was made to make an unequivocal stand.” Some, like an intoxicated man who in a drunken stupor made the mistake of declaring himself a Southern sympathizer, went unharmed after leading “three cheers for the thirty United States.”<sup>xi</sup> After a local newspaper published the names and addresses of several wealthy Southerners, these crowds marched to their homes, demanding shows of patriotism. When one of the Southerners, Colonel Robert Patterson, refused, his windows were smashed. Others deemed disloyal took refuge in the Court House or fled to police protection. Those unable to flee in time were roughed up, with reports of one man having his clothes ripped off and another having his head put in a noose.<sup>xii</sup> Clearly, the attack on Fort Sumter had lit a spark of pro-Union anti-Southern sentiment in the city, and anyone on the wrong side of that divide was in physical danger.

To stem the growing violence, Mayor Henry put his political fortunes on the line again with his use of his powers over the city police. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, a pro-Union mob “swelled to many hundreds” outside the office of a notoriously pro-Southern newspaper, the *Palmetto Flag*, seeking more violence against Southern sympathizers. Henry arrived with the chief of police and the Reserve Corps to restore order. As the crowd clamored for a speech, Henry deftly calmed the crowd with the following:

Your devotion to the flag of your country satisfies me that you are equally devoted to the maintenance of the laws, and to the preservation of order. I see that there are no

traitors among you, and I rejoice to know that treason cannot rear its head in this city.

The flag is an emblem of the Government, and I hope that all citizens who feel loyal to it will show their respect for it and the laws and retire to their respective homes.<sup>xlii</sup>

Later, he issued an executive proclamation asking residents to identify any persons suspected of aiding the enemy. This order required “that all persons shall refrain from assembly...unlawfully, riotously, or tumultuously, warning them that the same will be at their peril.”<sup>xliii</sup> For Henry, order and loyalty were one and the same. Active secessionists in his city and rioting anti-secessionists were both disloyal to him, their city, and the new war effort. Rather than alienate Unionists with his executive crackdown, Henry’s popularity skyrocketed, and the city calmed. By April 18<sup>th</sup>, the streets were clear and Union flags adorned the homes of those of all political persuasions. While some Southerners left town, most retreated into silence, knowing that they were outnumbered, but protected if they kept quiet.<sup>xliv</sup>

Residents and attitudes in New York City also saw a sea change in sentiment after Fort Sumter. At a massive rally on April 20<sup>th</sup>, an estimated 50,000 packed Union Square for a public pro-war meeting carried out by a wide and bipartisan group of the city’s political and economic leaders. Organizers included all three mayoral candidates in 1859, Havemeyer, Opdyke, and Wood, and the dueling Republican newspapermen, Henry Raymond and Horace Greeley. Tammany Hall would soon take their own actions, formally adopting resolutions declaring they were “heartily united to uphold the constitution, enforce the laws, maintain the Union, defend the flag...the Union must and shall be preserved.”<sup>xlv</sup> For the most part, Tammany Hall would publicly remain strong Unionists throughout the war, highlighting their views on the war to deflect later charges of disloyalty from both parties. In the battle of the presses, Horace Greeley

gained an edge, according to noted diarist George Templeton Strong, since “the Greeley wing of Republicanism” was the chief driver of war in the first place, leaving Raymond’s “conservative” wing looking like a follower. Greeley’s harsh rhetoric towards the South long before Fort Sumter was vindicated by the attack, while Raymond’s moderation, plus his ally Seward’s desire for political compromise, were now obsolete as the nation sought revenge against the “‘chivalric’ bullies and braggarts” of the South.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Even Fernando Wood was swept up in the patriotic fervor. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, he issued a proclamation summoning citizens “irrespective of all other considerations and prejudices” to obey the law, preserve order, and protect property. Attending the city’s first “Union Rally” the next day, he literally draped himself with the American flag while exhorting “every man, whatever had been his sympathies, to make one great phalanx in this controversy, to proceed to conquer a peace. I am with you in this contest. We have no party now.” He made similar remarks at the rally on the 20<sup>th</sup> and proposed a special million-dollar tax to support the war effort and create a “Mozart Regiment” under his command.<sup>xlvii</sup> To some, this sudden transformation was clearly a sham and a political ploy, with one unnamed critic growling, “The cunning scoundrel sees which way the cat is jumping, and put himself right on the record in a vague, general way, giving the least offense to his allies of the Southern Democracy.” Wood, perhaps indicating this hedging, argued in that same flag-draped speech that whether the Union would be reunited “by fratricidal warfare or by concession, conciliation, and sacrifice” was still unanswered.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Regardless, Wood clearly hoped that his party and his base, like he was publicly trying to do, could support the war without having to support all of Lincoln’s policies. He also hoped they

could do so within the new demands of loyalty to the Union. Yet, voices remained within the Democratic Party that rejected the entire legitimacy of the war and any bipartisan accommodations with it or Lincoln. Wood's brother, Benjamin, was perhaps the loudest of these voices. Benjamin Wood directly opposed his brother's transformation, using the *Daily News*, of which he was now the sole editor due to his brother's re-election, to scold Mozart Hall's war platform, and maintaining that only "friends of Peace" were true Democrats.<sup>xlix</sup> In this battle between the Woods, the publisher would beat the politician. Mozart Hall formally endorsed Benjamin Wood's sentiments, though they would agree to work with Tammany Hall on nominating a united slate in the fall elections if possible. This defeat by his own organization would send a chilling message for Fernando Wood about straying from his new political base, a message he would long remember going forward.

Thus, under Wood's leadership in 1861, not only would the Democratic Party not unite in its role as "the loyal opposition," but its anti-war voices were as loud, powerful, and effective at rallying their base as ever. It was at this point that New York City and Philadelphia both began to irrevocably diverge on their journey through the war. Philadelphia came out of the first few months more united and peaceful than before, while New York City remained as divided as ever, if not more than before. The blame for the continued divisiveness of New York City politics is not solely Wood's, but he played a crucial role. Though he had publicly backed much of the pro-war zeal that engulfed the city after the attack on Fort Sumter, he privately capitulated to his anti-war backers, especially his own brother. Furthermore, unlike his counterpart in Philadelphia, he did not seek to foster bipartisan loyalty to the war effort or allow his political coalition to grow with pro-war voices. By and large and in part thanks to

Wood, New York City's political situation looked little different in the fall of 1861 than it did in the winter of 1861.

New York City, additionally, had a crucial and divisive mayoral election to endure that year, another reason for its continued political divisions. Fernando Wood entered his re-election campaign in a precarious position. His "conversion" to Unionism caused distrust and defections from Mozart Hall without gaining him new allies. While his opponents once again refused a coalition, both Tammany Hall and the Republican Party were emboldened by the popularity of the war, and both called for its vigorous execution. Tammany Hall even declared at their state convention "the first and most sacred duty of every man" is to "devote his energies and his means, with all his heart and soul, to the earnest and resistless prosecution of the war, until the rebellion is utterly suppressed." Furthermore, President Lincoln "is imperatively required...to take every step...which may be necessary to secure the triumph of our arms...and that his measures will be passed upon by a generous and patriotic people...without party spirit."<sup>i</sup> Boldly, every Tammany candidate statewide publicly endorsed these sentiments.<sup>ii</sup> Tammany Hall was also emboldened by a new interparty consensus. Unlike in 1859 when campaign attacks were primarily directed at Havemeyer and Opdyke, Tammany Hall and the GOP reached an unofficial *détente*, training their fire solely on Wood, his views on the war, and his policies.<sup>iii</sup>

Severely weakened, Wood, in a curious development, fired off a defensive letter to Secretary of State and fellow New Yorker William Seward. Despite what others were saying about him, he was "for a vigorous prosecution of the war, for sustaining the administration by every power at our command and for the restoration of peace only if it can be done

consistently with the safety, honor, and unity of the entire government.”<sup>liii</sup> Even with a Republican in the race, Wood claimed that he deserved their support for his campaign since he best articulated Unionist ideals. There are two possible reasons for this letter. One is that Wood sincerely believed that, despite his history of controversial comments, including his speech that very day, he was loyal to the Union and deserving of Lincoln’s support. That idea prompts another question: why were this or the fairly pleasant reply from Seward’s son thanking Wood for his support for the Union not released to the public, since they could have swayed enough skeptics to re-embrace him? Thus, the second reason is most likely: Wood was simply a shrewd politician hoping to utilize the Lincoln administration and its vast political resources, or at least keep them from being used against him.

The fact that no evidence exists of Lincoln or Seward publicly bashing Wood during the campaign or diverting energy to helping elect the Republican indicates that Wood’s letter may have been effective. For example, Seward did not respond to entreaties from the New York Metropolitan Police, a force under state Republican control, to arrest Wood for the content of his speech.<sup>liv</sup> Furthermore, Thurlow Weed had privately requested a meeting with Wood the month before “if it would not make too much talk,” perhaps to discuss the race, though no record exists of if the meeting occurred.<sup>lv</sup> However, the lack of effort may also indicate that the Lincoln administration had little confidence a Republican could be elected as Mayor of New York City, and there was good reason to assume this. The Republicans had once again nominated George Opdyke. A wealthy clothing manufacturer, his primary pre-war income came from selling clothes to slaves down South, and his Whiggish politics inspired few allies. He did gain some Republican approval after his 1859 loss for working with loyal businessmen during

the secession crisis to prevent the city's businessmen from committing "a compromise of principle" to assuage the South.<sup>lvi</sup> But, as a vocal Republican, he faced constant labeling by Democrats as a "black Republican" hoping to emancipate Blacks and subjugate whites.<sup>lvii</sup> Like Wood, he was also perceived as a politician first, civic leader second. George Templeton Strong, though a Republican, nonetheless described him as a "pushing, intriguing man, fond of power and position."<sup>lviii</sup> Thus, Opdyke, like Wood, had critical ideological and character faults, resulting in limited confidence the former could defeat the latter, even with rising Unionist sentiment.

The enigma in the race was the Tammany Hall candidate, Charles Godfrey Gunther. Like Opdyke, he was a rich merchant. Thus, many assumed he would be closer in policy outlook and personality to the Fifth Avenue Democrats. However, Gunther was a prominent German activist and organizer. Though Wood was primarily concerned with the Irish, German immigrants made up a prominent part of his anti-war coalition, so it was assumed that Gunther could bring parts of Mozart Hall's base back into Tammany Hall. As for Gunther's appeal to pro-war Democrats, that was less clear. Civil War historian Ernest McKay claims that despite being a member of Tammany Hall, the "War Democrats," on specific war policies Gunther differed little from the reunited Wood brothers.<sup>lix</sup> Thus, he too inspired little confidence amongst New Yorkers. In the end, many New Yorkers cared little about which anti-Wood faction won, so long as Wood was gone. As New York political historian Sidney Brummer put it, in the minds of many critics of Wood and his policies, "Whether to vote for Opdyke or for Gunther, was with many simply a question of which had a better chance of defeating Wood."<sup>lx</sup>

Election Day finally came on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1861, and few intimated to guess who would win. Early returns indicated a Gunther victory, but by 10:00 a.m. Opdyke was declared the

winner with little more than six hundred votes over Gunther and 1200 over Wood. Opdyke won nine of the city's wards, mostly dominated by Republicans, but he also embarrassingly won Wood's home ward by one percent and did especially well in wards populated by former Know Nothings. Gunther, as expected, won the four German wards from Wood, but did not win all of the Irish wards, splitting them with Wood and costing Tammany Hall the race.<sup>lxi</sup> Without the Democratic split, especially over immigrant votes, it is safe to assume either Wood or Gunther would have easily won, but with the split New York City had just had its closest three-way race ever and elected its first Republican mayor. In what must have been an awkward transition, Wood and Opdyke civilly exchanged letters and agreed to meet at some point in December.<sup>lxii</sup>

Perhaps real change could be imparted on the city's policies and its relationships with the war effort and Albany. Some Republicans were optimistic, with Henry Bellows regarding Opdyke's election as "an augury of national strength."<sup>lxiii</sup> Some, like Strong, while happy that Wood lost, saw Opdyke as little more than the lesser of evils.<sup>lxiv</sup> But most were worried. Even with a Republican mayor, the Republicans who controlled Albany were unlikely to grant more power to the city; most remaining appointed and elected municipal officials were Tammany or Mozart allies; and there was still a hotbed of anti-war, anti-Black, anti-Lincoln newspapers and activism throughout the city. To say that Opdyke's tenure would be divisive and contested would be an understatement, though what happened would likely have been more tumultuous than most would have anticipated.<sup>lxv</sup> If 1861 was a year for Republican gains and Democratic divisions, in both cities, then 1862 and 1863 would show the power Democrats could wield if they united, but also the dangers that unity posed and how fragile it would be.

## **Conclusion**

This work has sought to compare and contrast New York City and Philadelphia politics by looking at how the cities, in similar positions demographically, politically, and socially before the war, reacted to the conflict. The primary framework for doing so has been examining how political actors in both cities, from elected officials and party leaders to everyday voters, defined loyalty and disloyalty during an event so all-encompassing and divisive. This examination of the years 1859-1861 promised no easy answers about the types of definitions of loyalty and disloyalty employed during the Civil War, nor about the reasons why each city ended up on the trajectory it did. As I stated earlier, throughout the war there was no simple answer about what loyalty and disloyalty meant, and therefore there is no simple reason for the fates of the actors and groups from Philadelphia and New York City that have been discussed. In the end, we must recognize that even if we treat the years around the Civil War as being on some clear arc destined to bend in a certain direction, there will always be bumps and always be outliers. All historians and readers of the era can do is try to pull back the curtain of time, reevaluate long-standing historical assumptions, increase the prominence of forgotten leaders and groups of people, and try to understand it all the best we can, as I have sought to do.

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<sup>i</sup> Edward Dicey, *Six Months in the Federal States*, (London: Cambridge, Macmillan and Co., 1863), 43

<sup>ii</sup> William Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856-1865*, 42

<sup>iii</sup> Russell Weigley, "The Border City in Civil War 1854-1865," 383

<sup>iv</sup> William Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856-1865*, 61

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, 76-78

<sup>vi</sup> Russell Weigley, "The Border City in Civil War 1854-1865," 391

<sup>vii</sup> William Dusinger, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1856-1865*, 85-89

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid*, 90-91

<sup>ix</sup> A.K. McClure, *Old time notes of Pennsylvania: a connected & chronological record of the commercial, industrial & educational advancement of Pennsylvania, & the inner history of all political movements since the adoption of the constitution of 1838*, Volume I, 402.

<sup>x</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, 16

- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, 17
- <sup>xii</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 27
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid*, 66
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 87-88
- <sup>xv</sup> Gideon Tucker to Fernando Wood, December 29, 1855, Fernando Wood Letters and Documents, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library
- <sup>xvi</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 90
- <sup>xvii</sup> John Strausbaugh, *City of Sedition: The History of New York City During the Civil War*, 117.
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- <sup>xxi</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 34-36.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Iwan Morgan and Philip John Davies, *Reconfiguring the Union: Civil War Transformations*, 145
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 55
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, 13.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Charles Daly to Fernando Wood, October 3, 1859, Fernando Wood Letters and Documents, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *New York Daily News*, October 6, 14, November 21,23, 24 1859
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, 56
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Fernando Wood to Robert Tyler, March 8. 1860, Fernando Wood Letters and Documents, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library. Italics are Wood's
- <sup>xxix</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 107.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, 101-107.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid*, 108; Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 109.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Tyler Anbinder, "Fernando Wood and New York City's Secession from the Union: A Political Reappraisal," 85
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Samuel August Pleasants, *Fernando Wood of New York*, 113-114.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> *Ibid*, 115.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid*; Tyler Anbinder's work is the best example of this ideologically neutral vein in the historiography.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *New York Tribune*, November 25, 1860.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> John Strausbaugh, *City of Sedition: The History of New York City During the Civil War*, 139.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy*, 23.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1860.
- <sup>xl</sup> *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, April 15, 1861.
- <sup>xli</sup> J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War*, 170-171.
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, April 16, 1861.
- <sup>xliii</sup> *Ibid*, April 17, 1861.
- <sup>xliv</sup> J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia During the Civil War*, 172-173.
- <sup>xlv</sup> *New York Tribune*, April 27, 1861.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> George Templeton Strong, *Diary of the Civil War 1860-1865*, March 11, 1861.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, 116-117.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *New York Sun*, April 16, 1861.
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- <sup>li</sup> *Ibid*, November 5, 1861.
- <sup>lii</sup> Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State during the Period of the Civil War*, 77.
- <sup>liii</sup> Fernando Wood to Seward, November 27, 1861, Fernando Wood Letters and Documents, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

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- <sup>lvi</sup> Philip Foner, *Business and Slavery: The New York City Merchants & The Irrepressible Conflict*, 233.
- <sup>lvii</sup> John Strausbaugh, *City of Sediton: The History of New York City During the Civil War*, 205.
- <sup>lviii</sup> George Templeton Strong, *Diary of the Civil War 1860-1865*, July 17, 1861.
- <sup>lix</sup> Ernest McKay, *The Civil War and New York City*, 111.
- <sup>lx</sup> Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State during the Period of the Civil War*, 177.
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