“Realizing Democracy”:
A Study of the Regional and National Social, Political, and Economic Factors Driving Suffrage Development in the Age of the Common Man, 1820-1850

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PROSPER, MATTHEW REALIZING DEMOCRACY: A STUDY OF THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC FACTORS DRIVING SUFFRAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGE OF THE COMMON MAN, 1820-1850

The Age of the Common Man was a period of American political history lasting from 1820 to 1850 characterized by the implementation of universal white manhood suffrage by every state through removing property and tax qualifications from state constitutional suffrage laws, as well as the "common man" entering the center of much political discourse. These conventions were demanded by the political, social, economic, and in some cases physical climates and conditions of each state. To look at these factors, this thesis divides the nation into three regions, two of which are examined: the Northeast, the Northwest, and the South (the South is not examined).

In the Northeast, the conditions driving suffrage expansion were largely a result of changes to urban economies. These changes, caused by the Industrial, Transportation, and Communications Revolutions, created a class of landless urban laborers that were denied suffrage. At the same time, a new generation of Americans was replacing that of the Founding Fathers and rejected many of their predecessors' aristocratic and elitist ideals and sought to implement the democracy seemingly promised to them by the American Revolution. Urban laborers began to organize into unions which were supported and strengthened by Workingmen's Parties, local and state-level parties that advocated for the rights of laborers. These organizations created a political presence of urban laborers that politicians could not longer ignore.

In the Northwest, the egalitarian "frontier ethos" that existed from the beginning of Western settlement demanded a democratic system of leadership by persuasion and example. The creation of settlements in a vacuum of social, economic, and political hierarchies like those that existed in the East made it so that frontiersmen had to work together in a democracy to address the issues facing their society.

As all of this was happening, politics were changing at a national level. America's Second Party system was forming, creating increasingly contentious elections. Beginning in 1824, a shift from election by legislative caucus to election by popular vote caused these parties to look to the people for support and address their concerns to garner as much support as possible. In the East this meant absorbing the efforts of Workingmen's Parties and in the West this meant nominating candidates reflective of frontiersmen and the egalitarian nature of the frontier itself including Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison. The Transportation and Communications Revolutions centralized information, spreading the ideas of each region to the other.

This shift in politics at state, regional, and national levels caused state legislators to reevaluate their constitutional suffrage laws and extend the right to vote to the common man. Within a few years of the beginning and end of the Age of the Common Man, every state held a convention that resulted in the guaranteeing of suffrage for all white men.

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive look at all of the listed regional and national factors creating a national trend of democratization via suffrage reform. To do so, the works of historians and political scientists were reviewed, but more importantly documents from the time were researched in depth. These documents are newspapers from all over the country, materials surrounding state constitutions and constitutional conventions, and documents relating to the American Revolution, all of which gave unique insights into the mindsets of both common citizens and politicians.

Out of this period came the first concrete step in suffrage reform that allowed for the democratic progress since then to take place. It is in this regard that understanding the developments made between 1820 and 1850 is important, for without doing so, understanding American political development since 1850 would be impossible.

Chapter One:
Introduction

The history of democracy in the United States is a long, checkered one characterized by the ebbs and flows of progress. At different points in time, groups of people, as well as the citizenry as a whole, had varying degrees of access to the democratic system. Historically speaking, the overwhelming rhetoric of American Exceptionalism posits that the United States is the freest nation in the world, one that is founded on the equality of all men and women (particularly the political equality). Reality proves that this has not always been the case. Although the United States is far freer than the majority of the world, the use of political equality as the basis of American Exceptionalism poses problems. In general, the United States has been gradually democratizing, extending democratic rights—most importantly the right to vote—to a wider range of citizens, but this trend has been far from constant. Put best by Alexander Keyssar, "history rarely moves in simple, straight lines, and the history of suffrage is no exception."[1] More often than not, when there was a radical expansion in the democratic rights of a group of people, there followed a contraction that nullified the progress made. This project sets out to show the first expansion of democratic rights in the United States that was *not* followed by a contraction. This expansion was the implementation of universal white manhood suffrage during the Age of the Common Man, the period of American history to be examined by this project.

In the realms of history and political science, the idea of contraction following radical progress is known as the backlash thesis. The term is normally used in situations involving race, but the idea can be applied to a host of other groups. The theory posits that if radical progress clashes with societal norms, there will be a social and political backlash that can retract any gains

[1] Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* New York: Basic Books, 2000, p. 53.

made.[2] This was the case in the United States in the years immediately following the American Revolution, where in many cases African Americans and women were not explicitly barred from the right to vote. Before and during the Age of the Common Man, while suffrage laws were being written and revised to guarantee the right to vote for a larger population of white men, the right was taken away from African Americans and women.[3] It would not be until the 20th century that this right was permanently restored to both groups.

Based on the backlash thesis, it can logically be argued that incremental progress has a greater chance of permanence. "Incremental" does not suggest unsubstantial, but rather the opposite. At face value, such change may seem too small or narrow in scope to be significant, but in its permanence can be found importance. It was the incremental change of constitutionally guaranteeing white men the right to vote during the Age of the Common Man that forms the basis of this project.

The backlash thesis is by no means a perfect theory, but it should not be thrown away entirely. Joseph Lowndes argued that understanding the rise of modern-day conservatism as a backlash to white voters being pushed too far by the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—it is in studying this period that the term is most frequently used—is simplistic. It ignores entrenched and institutionalized racism that existed in the United States through the 1960s as well as the adaptability of American voters.[4] However, as the aforementioned examples of women and African Americans demonstrate, retrenchment was—and continues to be—a very real issue that poses a threat to political progress.

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[2] Michael Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Blacklash Thesis," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1, 1994): 81–118.
[3] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote,* p. 54, 55.
[4] Joseph E. Lowndes, "Beyond the Backlash Thesis," In *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism*, p. 3-5.

The right to vote is the most basic form of democratic expression, and as such is the most important democratic right. Casting one's ballot is one of the few real ways in which Americans can express themselves in politics. In comparison to debates surrounding the democratic rights of minority groups in the present, it may seem as though securing the vote for white men during this era was a small victory. The reform that took place during the Age of the Common Man was the first solid step in many toward complete democratization, something that the nation continues to grapple with today.

With all of this having been said, this project will be focusing on the incremental and permanent change in American politics that was the implementation of universal white manhood suffrage during the Age of the Common Man. The approach to doing so will be to look at two distinct geographical regions—the Northeast and the Northwest—and examine the regional and national factors that resulted in the expansion of the franchise during this period. This topic has been studied by historians and political scientists in the past, but their works usually fall victim to two main issues. The first is that some authors understate the contributions of one region while overstating those of the other. The second issue is that some authors choose to focus on a specific region, but in doing so ignore the factors that were interwoven between the two regions, thus providing an incomplete picture of the time. This project aims to look at the contributions by both regions—as is necessary in fully understanding the period—as well as the factors on a national level that united them, and in doing so hopes to provide a full, unbiased description of the regional and national factors that drove the development of suffrage during the Age of the Common Man.

The argument that this project aims to establish then has three components, the first being the regional factors of the Northeast. In this region, the laboring class that emerged as a result of the Industrial, Transportation, and Communications Revolutions drove progress through labor

organizations like unions. At the same time that labor was organizing, local Workingmen's Parties were created in major northeastern cities. Labor organizations and these Workingmen's Parties—which were eventually absorbed by the Democratic Party—created a real political presence of the formerly ignored and disenfranchised laboring class. With the absorption of Workingmen's Parties by the Democrats, attention was drawn to the laboring class from state- and national-level politicians, driving reform movements at each level of government.

In the Northwest, it was primarily the frontier ethos that contributed to trends of democratization, though other factors were at play. Frontier life in and of itself demanded democracy, and this region made advancements in expanding the right to vote earlier than did the Northeast. When communities such as those on the frontier are established, democracy emerges out of necessity. This was strengthened by, as well as a result of, the lack of preexisting class structures on the frontier and the individualism of frontiersmen. What emerged from this was a system of real democracy that gave rise to politicians representing the interests of their constituents rather than fellow politicians. On a national scale, parties attempting to appeal to the common man of the Northwest did so by nominating candidates that were seemingly of the people, namely Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison.

While all of this was happening in each region, there was a series of national factors that brought together, and in some cases shaped, the regionally specific contributions, the first of these factors being an ideological shift in the public. During this time, a new generation of Americans coming to age began to reject the aristocratic and elitist nature of the Founding Fathers' generation. Founding documents, as well as political rhetoric surrounding the Revolution, seemingly promised the implementation of the ideals of equality and freedom to the American people. The way in

which suffrage laws were written at state levels did not guarantee such freedom or equality, and instead disenfranchised the majority of the population.

The ideals of the American Revolution and the eloquent speeches and writings by our Founding Fathers may have boasted liberty and equality, but the fact of the matter is that they had a *republican* view of government that allowed for more quasi-aristocratic checks on the democratic power of the people. They were born into and raised under British colonial rule, and the elitism of their society permeated into the very way they thought and transitively how they structured the Constitution.[5] Such beliefs were made painfully clear by John Adams in an 1820 speech delivered to the Massachusetts state constitutional convention. In his oration, Adams expressed his firm position that it was dangerous to remove property ownership as a qualification for voting.[6] Further exemplifying his aristocratic attitudes was a 1776 letter to James Sullivan, in which Adams wrote that universal suffrage would destroy society.[7]

The new generation reevaluated these promises and understood that they were being deprived of their liberty. This ideological development effected the Northeast in a greater capacity, as in the Northwest the frontier ethos had already demanded such democracy at local levels.

At the same time, politics at a national level were changing. The emergence of the Second Party System and a shift toward elections by popular vote gave the people more of a say in politics. In light of the ideology of this new generation that spent their formative years absorbing the rhetoric of American Exceptionalism, representation began to reflect more the concerns of the constituents rather than those of politicians. During (or within a few years of) this national period

[5] Lucius, "Universal Suffrage - No. IV," *The National Advocate* (New York City), August 11, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[6] "Concerns of the States," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), December 22, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[7] John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, in National Archives.

of democratization championed by the common man, every state in the Union wrote or changed their constitutional suffrage laws to guarantee universal white manhood suffrage.

Accelerating all of this were the improvements in technology that resulted from the three aforementioned technological revolutions — those of the Industrial, Transportation, and Communications. The beginning stages of the Industrial Revolution disrupted urban economic structures, resulting in the creation of a laboring class in cities that prompted these cities to reevaluate their situations. The Transportation Revolution allowed the western border to expand into the "uncivilized" territories formerly inhabited by Native Americans. In these territories, new American societies would be established on a clean slate, out of which the frontier ethos emerged. Additionally, easier transportation granted Americans access to the rest of the country, and along with the movement of travelers came the movement of ideas. The Communications Revolution spread ideas throughout the established cities in the East and to the new towns and cities of the West, as well as from West to East.[8] These changes helped create and nationalize the massive shift in public sentiment that caused the public to reject the elitism of colonial society and embrace the liberties and freedoms they felt as though they were promised.

The expansion of suffrage during the Age of the Common Man may have been narrow in scope, but it was significant in that it was the first example of reform that lasted. The expansion during the 19th century was extremely important, and despite ignoring the rights of minority groups and in some cases directly targeting them to take their rights away, the changes during this time altered the path of democracy. Before the Age of the Common Man, only the "aristocracy" of the country—this term is used with hesitation, as there was no formal aristocracy like that which

[8] Carl Russel Fish, *A History of American Life*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (New York: Scribner, 1996), p. 532; D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. Vol. 2. 4 vols. *Continental America: 1800-1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 352.

existed in Europe—could rely on the security of their suffrage, and in the years leading up to this era it would be only them who could reliably vote.

Now that the main arguments of this project have been established, a few things must be clarified, beginning with what exactly the "Age of the Common Man" was. This was a period of *national* history concerning political development and lasted roughly from 1820 to 1850 and encompassed the Age of Jackson. The two terms are often used interchangeably, as both periods of time are concerned with the expansion of democratic rights beyond the upper classes, but it is important to keep in mind that the two demarcations are indeed different. The Age of Jackson relates to the years and changes immediately influenced by the Jackson Administration while the Age of the Common Man deals with a wider range of time and broader changes to society. These changes were already discussed in some detail, and were centered around the "common man."

This then begs the question of who the "common man" exactly was. The term may invoke an abstract concept of the "average American," but a term applied to such a broad and dynamic group of people cannot properly account for differences among them. Additionally, the term "common man" as it applies to the historical period being discussed is problematic, as it encompasses only a portion of the white male population, a group hardly representative of the "average" American. For the purpose of this project, there are two definitions of the common man, each one relating to either the Northeast or the Northwest. By no means are these definitions reflective of the actual population, but rather they are the group within the white male lower class that drove political discourse surrounding suffrage in each region. The common man of the Northeast can be defined as a white male urban laborer who was either landless or owned an amount of property insufficient to meet property qualifications to vote. The Northwestern

Common Man was an individualistic frontiersman (usually a farmer) with insufficient property to meet property qualifications that were common throughout the rest of the United States.

The final clarification necessary to understanding the rest of the project is which states belong to which region. For the purpose of this project, the Northeast is comprised of Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Northwest includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

The changes in American politics that have so far been laid out can be further explored in the field of American Political Development (APD), a field that is itself a subsection of the broader field of political science. Political development has been defined as "a durable shift in governing authority." Such a shift can be prompted by "liberalism, free speech, free markets, citizenship, family and gender relations, popular sovereignty, representative government, federalism, the separation of powers, checks and balances, [and] globalization."[9] That being said, *American* Political Development is a field in academia that studies these durable shifts as manifested in the United States. APD scholars tend to refrain from subscribing to the temporal boundaries of "periods" and "eras" usually established by the works of historians, instead looking at trends and developments that transcend these boundaries, giving a more complete picture of the country's political development.

The nature and scope of this project make it impossible to work outside of a set period of time as this work is an amalgamation of political science and historical work, in which the political development taking place during a certain period of time is examined. Of course, some development outside of the Age of the Common Man is examined, but not to the extent that it

[9] Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 123.

would be were this project strictly in the discipline of APD. In this regard, this is a limitation to the project, and the reader should be conscious of this. This is not to say that the arguments made by this project are necessarily wrong because of this, but it should be understood that these arguments are situated within broader trends of political development.

For the reader to properly understand the arguments that will develop in the following two chapters, this project must first be put into academic context; however, before this can be done effectively, the academic work already published by scholars must itself be contextualized. For this, we turn to Charles Grier Sellers' *Jacksonian Democracy,* published in 1958. In his book, Sellers presents the historiographical concept of "frames of reference," these being loose periods of time in which unique social and economic conditions shaped the ways in which historians interpret a topic of research.[10]

Sellers asserts three frames of reference for the Age of the Common Man, each of which was dominated by a distinct school of historiographical thought. The first, lasting from immediately after Jackson's presidency through about 1900, was what Sellers refers to as the "patrician" school of historians. These historians "spoke for the conservative, semiaristocratic, Mugwampish liberalism of the Gilded Age," and their discussions of events was jaded by the assumption that change was driven by the elite class, mainly the political elite. Following this frame, and lasting through the 1930s and early 1940s, was that of the "agrarian democratic" historians. This school emphasized and largely focused on the impacts and change driven by westward expansion and the agrarian communities that were created by it. By the 1930s and '40s, the school of "urban" historians had emerged, and lasted through the time of Sellers' writing. These were historians that came of age during the New Deal years and as such wrote mostly from the

[10] Charles Grier Sellers, *Jacksonian Democracy*. Service Center for Teachers of History, 1958, 10-11.

perspective of cities on the Eastern Seaboard. Urban historians held contributions by the labor movements and party politics of the East in a much higher regard than those by the agrarian West.[11] None of these schools of historical thought were necessarily *wrong* in their discussions and analyses of events, but it is important to maintain the understanding that these frames of reference by which each are contextualized tend to make discussions narrow and often ignore the bigger picture.

Jacksonian Democracy is now sixty-one years old, and this poses two problems. The first is that the assertion of the theory of frames of reference implicates Sellers' writing. Though conscious of the frame of reference in which he found himself, Sellers was likely affected by the urban historians surrounding him and his research. The second issue is that due to the age of the book, it may be incomplete in its listing of the frames of reference surrounding this period of time in American history. Seeing as frames of reference are structured around different social and economic conditions, there undoubtedly have emerged new ones since Sellers' writing of *Jacksonian Democracy*. It is difficult to discern new frames of reference that may have since emerged, and seeing as this is not the topic of research for this project, new ones will not be demarcated. Instead, the following discussion will explain the arguments made by more recent scholars—as well as some of Sellers' predecessors and contemporaries—to demonstrate recent developments in the historiography of the period.

Labor movements during of the time have been at the center of several authors' work. Arthur Schlesinger wrote that developments in suffrage in the East were caused by the Market Revolution and more specifically the labor movements which emerged from it. This revolution disrupted the urban artisan economy and contributed to the deterioration of working conditions,

[11] Sellers, *Jacksonian Democracy,* p. 11.

decreased wages, and the emergence of a class of urban laborers that became economically dependent on their employers (unlike the artisans who were economically independent). Labor movements, including unions, and the actions taken by them awakened the public to these worsening conditions while pushing the laborers themselves to better their situations through political channels.[12]

Sean Wilentz wrote a great deal on this subject, arguing that these movements played a huge role in democratization. He asserts that early craft and labor unions created during this time were the predecessors to those that would emerge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were important to the expansion of suffrage in the Northeast due to their operating as democratic organizations, demanding the direct participation of laborers. He contends that these organizations were even *more* democratic than the political parties of the time, and as such demonstrated the ability of the common man to partake in the democratic system. If laborers were able to act democratically within unions, then they were certainly able to do so outside of them.[13] Wilentz also asserts that the egalitarian structure of early labor unions influenced the political ideals of union members, and—like Schlesinger—that their very existence created a presence of the laboring class that could not be ignored.[14]

Related to labor unions are Workingmen's Parties. Dixon Ryan Fox (former president of Union College) posited that Workingmen's Parties themselves did not enact substantive change outside of the cities in which they were located, but rather effected such change upon their absorption into the Democratic Party. By the Democrats taking in the efforts of Workingmen's

[12] Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Political and Social History of the United States*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1927, p. 6-10.
[13] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 227-30.
[14] *ibid.*, p. 101-3, 73.

Parties, the party reoriented much of their energy toward the concerns of the working class and passed legislation at higher levels than Workingmen's Parties ever could.[15] James A. O'Brien wholly supported the arguments put forth by Fox, and included a discussion of the failures and successes of Workingmen's Parties. O'Brien, like Fox, concluded that although they were often seen as failures that could not achieve change past local levels, their adoption into the Democratic Party allowed for real change to take place, making them indirectly successful.[16] Naomi Wulf took a different approach to Workingmen's Parties, writing that they were created in direct opposition to the parties of the Second Party System. According to Wulf, Workingmen's Parties explicitly used the principles of the Revolution to spur laborers into action and to demonstrate how the Whigs and Democrats violated these principles. Wulf's evidence of this is a farewell speech by Frances Wright, in which the principles of the Revolution were directly referenced to justify the cause of the Workingmen. For Wulf, these parties provided a means for laborers to express their discontent without armed revolution, and it was the harnessing of this power that gave Workingmen's Parties success.[17]

Aside from Workingmen's Parties and labor movements, Naomi Wulf describes the change in ideology among the new generation in the United States, as do Donald Ratcliffe, Jacob Katz Cogan, and Carl Russel Fish, to some extent. Wulf takes the strongest stand of any of these authors. She posits that the War of 1812 directly resulted in the American spirit being revitalized, and in doing so prompted Americans to consciously push for the realization of revolutionary principles. This shift, Wulf contends, manifested in all of the other factors driving suffrage reform across the

[15] Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of the Aristocracy In the Politics of New York, 1801-1840* New York: Harper & Row, 1919, p. 357-8.
[16] James A. O'Brien, "The Working Men's Party of New York City, 1829-1830" (1957). Master's Theses, Paper 1656.
[17] Naomi Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress in Jacksonian Democracy," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 647–659.

nation.[18] Fish describes the widespread Americanism of the time—emphasizing largely the sentiment among western farmers—but does not attribute this to the War of 1812.[19] Cogan, unlike Fish, discusses how this ideological shift manifested itself in the East. Rather than attributing this to the War of 1812, as Wulf did, Cogan asserts that the disruption of urban economies and the creation of a large population of landless Americans prompted the public to reevaluate what it took to demonstrate one's ability to partake in the democratic system. Previously, it had been owning property that qualified one to vote, but through the rejection of the previous generation's ideals, the new generation implemented reformed laws that expanded the franchise.[20] Ratcliffe, unlike the other authors, argued that it was the politicians, rather than the public, that were using revolutionary principles to their advantage, and in doing so pushed to expand the right to vote.[21]

Moving away from factors largely specific to the East, let us now look at scholarly development of the idea of the frontier ethos—this is a term used by this project but not by the scholars that preceded it. Schlesinger wrote that the frontier was characterized by three outstanding traits: the individualism of the people, the belief in the capacity of the common man, and a strong sense of nationalism.[22] Based on these traits, a system of democracy would emerge in the West unlike any in the East. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick supported these claims, and went further in their analysis of frontier democracy. In an attempt to salvage Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, the duo posited that, while the traits described by Schlesinger were present, it was the creation of new communities that demanded democracy more than anything.[23] Elkins and

[18] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress in Jacksonian Democracy."
[19] Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 532.
[20] Jacob Katz Cogan. "The Look Within: Property, Capacity, and Suffrage in Nineteenth-Century America." *Yale Law Journal* 107 (November 1, 1997): 473–2679.
[21] Donald Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy, 1787-1828." *Journal of the Early Republic* 33, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 219–254.
[22] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History*, p. 4.
[23] Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier: Part I: Democracy in the Old Northwest," *Political Science Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (1954).

McKitrick use a sociological study by Robert K. Merton as a framework for their claims, then go on to apply this framework to settlements in the West. Stephen Aron reinforced most of these claims, and used examples from the Missouri frontier of the late 18th century as evidence.[24] Aron's examples are important in demonstrating a link between frontier societies and the development of democracy in general, but lack in their ability to be applied to the United States as, at the time, Missouri was under French ownership.

Dana Nelson also describes the developments of democracy on the frontier, but like Aron, she points to the frontier in the 18th century to do so. Unlike Aron, Nelson uses examples from the United States, but these examples are from a different region than the Northwest. She introduces the concept of "commons democracy" and describes it as an egalitarian form of democracy that emerged from and existed on the frontier prior to and during the Age of the Common Man.[25] Like Elkins and McKitrick, as well as Schlesinger to some extent, Nelson argues that the very nature of the frontier demanded democracy. Out of this developed a system of leadership based on persuasion and example rather than one based on social status, as the hierarchies to base such leadership did not exist on the frontier.[26] The idea that the frontier lacked preexisting social hierarchies, and thus a natural hierarchy of leadership, parallels arguments made by Elkins and McKitrick.

Apart from the ethos of the frontier itself, the relationship between the physical conditions of the frontier and the development of democracy forms the basis for several claims by scholars including Wilentz, Fish, and Ratcliffe. Wilentz describes pragmatic efforts to reform suffrage as a

[24] Stephen Aron, *American Confluence the Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 46.
[25] Dana D. Nelson, *Commons Democracy: Reading the Politics of Participation in the Early United States*. NEW YORK: Fordham University, 2016, 1-9.
[26] *ibid.,* 109.

result of the difficulty in surveying land and the impossibility of verifying land claims, both a result of the sheer abundance of land in the Northwest.[27] Ratcliffe supports Wilentz in these arguments, claiming that the reason suffrage reform was so widespread during this time was that the upholding of suffrage requirements, particularly property requirements, was ineffective and difficult. Because of this, there was little opposition from the government in repealing these weak laws.[28] Fish takes a different approach from Wilentz and Ratcliffe, asserting that land distribution and the homestead policy lead to increased representation of western states in Congress, ultimately spreading the democracy of the frontier to the rest of the nation.[29]

Moving away from regional factors, let us now look at scholarly development of discussions surrounding national ones, beginning with political parties. Wilentz frames his discussions of political parties in terms of "city democracy," centered around economic issues, and how this affected the outcome of a series of presidential elections.[30] Ratcliffe dives the deepest into the development of parties and examines trends beyond urban centers. He discusses at length the rise of the Second Party System, and how this made competition between parties closer and more heated. The necessity for parties to gain as much support as possible gave national parties incentive to not only gain the support of those already able to vote, but also to expand suffrage to gain even more supporters.[31] Daniel Walker Howe supports these arguments but fails to go into sufficient detail (as his work provides an overview of the time) or add anything new to the conversation.

[27] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic,* p. 101-3.
[28] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."
[29] Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 548.
[30] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 282.
[31] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."

Stephen Woodworth, unlike Wilentz, Ratcliffe, and Howe, provides insight into the expansion of suffrage's effect *on* political parties, rather than the other way around. He discussed the Election of 1840 and William Henry Harrison's "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign, and shows how this proves that parties reoriented themselves around the new pool of voters comprised of common men. Like Ratcliffe, this is also demonstrative (albeit indirectly, as Woodworth does not explicitly argue this) of parties attempting to shore up votes in light of the increasingly contentious elections of the Second Party System.

Another national factor that has been discussed by scholars in the past, as has already been mentioned, was technological improvement brought about by the Transportation and Communications Revolutions. Fish discusses the movement of people between regions, and along with them the direct spread of ideas instead of through writings and publications.[32] This is not to say that the spread of information through writing was not important according to Fish. He mentions the invention of the telegraph and how this, more than anything else, allowed for the near-instantaneous spread of information across the country.[33] Wilentz briefly discusses the Communications Revolution, particularly the role of western newspapers in swaying public sentiment. Had publishing technology not been improved during this time, the amount of newspapers in the West would have been far fewer and therefore less effective.[34] Howe, though failing to provide any new developments, supports these arguments in an overview of the revolutions.

D.W. Meinig discusses both the Transportation and Communications Revolutions, but, unlike any other author included by this project, framed his research with a geographical lens.

[32] Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 532.
[33] *ibid.,* p. 537.
[34] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy,* p. 117.

Meinig asserts that the improved technologies of each revolution allowed the United States to "conquer space," specifically the West during Manifest Destiny. This conquest was then followed by efforts to centralize and nationalize the politics and governments of the West—made possible by improved technologies—making the country as a whole more closely connected.[35] Meinig also argued that better communications technology—most important that of publishing—centralized information as books and newspapers were produced with more ease, and then were spread across the country with help from improved transportation.[36]

The authors brought into this discussion, when used together, provide a fairly complete view of the factors that were listed here. However, when standing alone, these authors often fail to provide a complete picture of the situation during the Age of the Common Man. In most cases, this is conscious and not due to negligence on behalf of the author, but it remains problematic. This project aims to join these authors together and give a complete description of the development of democratization during this time.

One aspect that all of these authors are severely lacking in is how all of these factors were manifested in debates from state constitutional conventions and the documents from which were published. Cogan does briefly mention state conventions and constitutions, arguing that it is here that American Democracy is defined. However, as for the rest of the authors so far mentioned, they fail to properly address this. In each chapter of this project that concerns a specific region, there will be a section explaining how the regional and national factors at play in each region appeared in state conventions from that region in an effort to close the gap left by these authors. This is only a part of the goal of this project, but an important one.

[35] Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, p. 352.
[36] *ibid.,* p. 415.

As it was briefly mentioned already, to give a comprehensive description of the factors driving suffrage reform during this time, this project will feature three chapters following this one, two of which will focus on a specific region in the United States. The next chapter will focus on the regional factors of the Northeast and how they contributed to national trends, as well as how those national trends affected regional factors. The chapter following that will focus on the Northwest and discuss the same types of factors as the Northeast.

For primary sources, this project will draw heavily on newspapers and documents relating to state constitutional conventions, but let us begin first with newspapers. In the 19th century, newspapers functioned as the main daily source of current events and political news at both a local and national scale. There were few national newspapers at the time, but with improved communications technologies, it became possible to reprint articles in different newspapers across the country. This ability to reprint gave people from all over the nation access to the same information at more or less the same time.

Newspapers provide a good sense of what was happening in the nation while providing the information that was available to the public. This information would affect the ways in which Americans viewed events and politics in general. Additionally, newspapers would print documents from community organizations and letters to the editor from citizens. With this having been said, newspapers can provide a decent understanding of the communities and their attitudes toward politics, although the information must not be taken at face value.

It must be kept in mind that the newspapers of today are wildly different than the newspapers of yesteryear. In today's day and age, media outlets are often criticized for being too politically biased in their coverage, but this is nothing when compared to 19th century newspapers. It was often the case that historical newspapers would be explicitly affiliated with political parties.

When looking back to historical newspapers as sources for research, sometimes party affiliation is obvious. Such is the case for publications like *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* or the *American Anti-Slavery Reporter.*[37] Other times, this affiliation is less clear, such as *The National Advocate,* a New York City-based newspaper that was affiliated with the Whigs. This bias and party affiliation does not take away from the importance of these newspapers as sources of information so long as the reader keeps in mind these biases. This bias can be understood and contextualized by books like *The Popular Press, 1833-1865.* In some cases, politically-biased newspapers may even prove to be better sources that relatively unbiased ones, as these papers can provide a sense of the goals and attitudes of a certain party—in this case those revolving around suffrage reform.

Using newspapers as the main source of primary research material poses some issues. As has been discussed already, bias, at times, is one such issue. Additionally, when looking into public sentiment and how common men approached subjects, newspapers tend to lack in this regard. Editors and other employees of newspapers, even in small towns, tended to be the elite members of society, scholars and the wealthy, whose views did not entirely align with the common people. Even letters to the editor were in many cases from scholars or elites. Regardless of these drawbacks, as long as they are kept in mind during research, newspapers provide the closest accessible understanding of public sentiment at a given time.

Fortunately, these newspapers are widely available online. Towns, libraries, and databases have digitized a massive amount of newspapers from around the nation. These websites and databases are searchable, so finding newspapers from specific regions, states, towns or one discussing certain topics is relatively easy. Naturally, there are drawbacks to such channels of

[37] William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 97, 62.

research. For one thing, despite holding thousands of entries, these archives are incomplete. It is unrealistic to assume that every issue of every newspaper nationwide is available online. Additionally, the digitization process leaves parts of newspapers unreadable due to copying errors or the newspapers themselves being damaged. The incompleteness of these archives poses some problems, but the benefits of using newspapers outweighs the problems created, so it has been determined that they will be a primary source of material for this project.

State constitutions and documents from and about state constitutional conventions are the second category of primary sources being taken advantage of for this project. The debates and other documents surrounding conventions have proven to be more useful, as they contain arguments by politicians and citizens regarding the reasons for the expansion of suffrage. These debates are crucial to understanding how suffrage was written into law. As will be shown throughout the rest of this project, the laws written as a result of these conventions expanded the right of suffrage to nearly all poor white men, and the discourse surrounding conventions shows us how these laws came to be. Newspapers documented some of these debates, but their coverage is often incomplete and cursory. Thankfully, many of these debates and conversations had during state conventions were recorded and published, and many of these publications can be found online in databases or state websites.

The state constitutions themselves are important, but far less so than the debates surrounding their creation. The constitutions show the final product, the results of the push for expanded suffrage during the Age of the Common Man, but provide no insight into how they came to be. This is why they should be viewed in conjunction with any documents relating to conventions.

Convention debates provide insight into the efforts by parties to reform suffrage laws, as it was often the case that conventions were held within state legislatures. Whether or not delegates at these conventions explicitly identified themselves in the records as members of a specific party, if they were a state legislator then more likely than not they were also a party member. As such, the arguments made by delegates are the arguments made by parties.

Like with newspapers, using convention documents as a basis for research can be problematic at times. For one thing, the recordings of the discourse within conventions is often incomplete. This is clear simply from the title of the official account of the Iowa conventions of 1844 and 1846 that was released by the State of Iowa. The account is titled *Fragments of the Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846,* a clearly incomplete document. Another problem posed is that not all states took such records of debates and discussions at their conventions, or if they did one would have to travel to the state's library to view them. Seeing as this is a relatively constricted research project, this is not a possibility. These constitutions and conventions are important nonetheless. Information can be pieced together and the gaps filled by work done by scholars of history and political science.

As this chapter comes to a close, it is hopefully clear to the reader what this project is arguing, why it is important, and how the rest of the project is structured. Moving forward from an explanation of the arguments and research, this project will now present the arguments themselves and the actual research and evidence upon which they rest. As was already mentioned, *Chapter Two* will concern the Northeast and the regional and national factors at play in regards to suffrage reform, which we will now turn to.

Chapter Two:
The Northeast

As it was mentioned already and will be discussed in further depth in the third chapter, the Northeast underwent a greater amount of change in terms of suffrage expansion during the Age of the Common Man than did the Northwest. Whereas northwestern state constitutions did not include property qualifications in their first iterations, northeastern state constitutions often included strict requirements determining who had the right to vote. As such, the Northeast saw a greater struggle to change the preexisting laws barring the common man from voting.

To examine this change and the causes that generated it, the following chapter will be divided into several sections. The first will discuss shifting attitudes toward the principles and ideals surrounding the American Revolution. Though this occurred at a national level, such a shift is included in this chapter because the changing attitudes affected the Northeast in a greater way, as these states emerged from the original colonies and were not shaped by the ideals of the frontier as was the case in the Northwest. The second section of this chapter will discuss labor movements as drivers of change. Seeing as the Northeastern Common Man was an urban laborer, these movements are important in understanding the advancement of the Northeastern Common Man in local, regional, and national politics. The third section will examine the rise of Workingmen's Parties, short-lived local- and state-level parties that had impacts beyond their fleeting existences. Following this, the fourth section will look at the ways in which regional and national political trends shaped the expansion of suffrage in the Northeast, focusing largely on the Second Party System. Finally, the fifth section will look at the manifestation of the causes laid out by the sections preceding it in state constitutions and constitutional conventions.

To understand political, social, and economic developments in regards to suffrage in the Northeast, the reader must first understand the pattern of change in the region—this change being

the end result of changes to state suffrage laws. It was not the case that state conventions held toward the beginning of this period came to more restrictive results than those that were held later, but rather the conventions of each state achieved similar results at different times. In other words, it is impossible to show change over time simply by looking at changes in states' respective constitutional suffrage laws alone, one would have to instead look at the broader picture. For example, it was not until 1845 that Connecticut had dropped property requirements for white men to vote. Massachusetts had already done this in 1821.[38] Representatives at state conventions did turn to other states for examples as to why their state should ease restrictions on voting, but this did not result in a unilaterally gradual lessening of voting restrictions, instead it was a piecemeal advancement of each state to more or less equally liberal suffrage laws.

It must additionally be understood by the reader just who exactly the common man of the Northeast was. Though the concept was defined in the previous chapter, it is important that the reader is familiar with what this term means. He was a white male urban laborer who either owned a small amount of land or none at all. During this time, the nation was still largely rural and agrarian, but the Northeast had the largest amount of major urban centers with large populations.[39] The farmers that still made up a large portion of the population were those with land, and therefore were not disenfranchised by property and tax restrictions on suffrage. It was the urban laborers who did not have access to the polls, and as such were at the center of the majority of discourse surrounding suffrage expansion in the Northeast.

[38] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, see Appendix, Table A.2.
[39] See Appendices for population data.

Shifting Attitudes Toward Revolutionary Principles

The War of 1812 provides a good marker for a paradigm shift in the United States regarding the principles and ideals of the American Revolution. The war has been regarded by some as America's "Second War for Independence." Among the scholars that believe this are Naomi Wulf, who believes that the United States' victory over England spurred a newfound sense of nationalism and so-called "Americanism." In light of this victory which to many was akin to that of the Revolution, new attitudes surrounding revolutionary principles began to emerge, at least according to Wulf.[40]

There is insufficient evidence to prove this claim, but regardless of if the War of 1812 was a cause of this shift, such a shift did occur around the time of American victory in the war. At this point in time, a new generation of Americans had come of age, one that had been born into and raised in the United States rather than in the Colonies. This generation was quickly replacing that of the Founding Fathers in the political arena. These Americans rejected many of the aristocratic ideals rooted in colonial society that were so deeply embedded in their predecessors' minds, the most important of which for the sake of this project being the importance of land ownership in relation to political capacity.[41]

The Founding Fathers' generation that had been shaped by colonial life and the Revolution believed that land ownership demonstrated one's ability to partake in the democratic system. This was because owning property not only evidenced one's permanent interest in the survival of the state, but also demonstrated one's "disinterestedness and independence." It was a concern for many in this generation that those who did not own land were economically dependent on those who did,

[40] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress in Jacksonian Democracy"; Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 532; Meinig, *The Shaping of America,* p. 527-9.
[41] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p.10-11.

and would be swayed in their political decisions by their employers.[42] John Adams, a Founding Father and one of the most influential voices of his generation, was a clear proponent of this belief as evidenced by a speech delivered by him in 1820. Adams claimed that property was the most important thing there is, and without it there would be no art, science, or society. He pointed to England, where at the time landowners comprised only five percent of the population. Had English "radicals" in favor of universal suffrage (therefore opposed to property qualifications) had their way, the landowners would be dragged from their houses and their land redistributed to the landless. For Adams, advocating for universal suffrage in the United States would be advocating for the same threat facing English landowners, and in essence would violate the right to property—an important Enlightenment principle embraced by the leaders of the Revolution.[43]

Independence and disinterestedness as a general concept was important to this generation in determining one's ability to vote, and as such owning no property was not the only concern related to this concept. The dependence of members of militias and the regular army also disqualified them for suffrage as per the Founding Fathers' generation. In the 1831 Delaware state convention, representatives debating this point argued that these servicemen were under the influence of their superiors, and as such would be swayed in their political decisions.[44]

Despite there being some merit in these arguments, the generation that was replacing their predecessors as lawmakers rejected them in light of the rapidly changing political and social climates of the nation. It was around the time of the War of 1812 that this paradigm shift began. Remember, the War of 1812 may or may not have been a *cause* of the shift, but serves as a good

[42] Cogan, "The Look Within."
[43] "Concerns of the States."
[44] Constitutional Convention of Delaware, *Debates and Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Delaware, ... Together with the Amended Constitution and Schedule and a Tabular Statement Showing the Names, Ages, Occupation, Etc., of the Members of the Convention*, G.W.S. Nicholson, 1853, p. 21.

temporal marker. The new generation had spent their formative years not in the strife and stratification of the Colonies, but in the rhetorically free United States. These men and women were arguably more "American" than their predecessors, as they were not subject to the same aristocratic ideology. Arthur Schlesinger remarked that the United States was different from England and the Colonies in a very important way: the latter operated on a system based on the relationships between landowners—completely disenfranchising the landless—while the former, America and American democracy, were rooted in the relationships between men regardless of whether or not they owned land.[45]

This distinction, coupled with the maturing of a new generation whose spirit was possibly revitalized by the War of 1812, compelled said generation to reject the importance of land ownership that was held onto so dearly by the preceding one. Some American writers, one of which went by the *nom de plume* "Lucius," saw property qualifications for suffrage as archaic and unconducive to society.[46] Those who did own enough property to qualify for suffrage were generally wealthier than those who did not, and creating a system in which only they could vote would not only be affording the wealthy special privileges—violating the concept of men being created equal—but would create the very same kind of landed aristocracy that the Revolution sought to destroy.[47]

Lucius published a series of essays around the time of the New York State constitutional convention titled "Universal Suffrage" in *The National Advocate*, a New York City newspaper, in which he expanded on his arguments against the statutory creation of an aristocracy. He saw the granting of special privileges to the wealthy—presumably those wealthy in land—as a violation of

[45] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 10-11.
[46] Lucius, "Universal Suffrage - No. IV," *The National Advocate* (New York City), August 11, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[47] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."

the revolutionary concept of consent of the governed, a principle integral to the Declaration of Independence. Though Lucius did not directly cite the Declaration, he asserted that what concerns all (i.e. the government) must be approved by all, and that landless Americans had no direct way of either approving of or disapproving of the actions made by their government, as they did not qualify to vote.[48]

This shift in American attitudes toward property requirements and the principles important to the preceding generation in general was accelerated by radical changes taking place in the American economy at the time—specifically urban economies. During the Colonial Era and the nascence of the United States, urban economies were structured around small businesses and artisans. The beginning stages of the Industrial Revolution, coupled with improved technologies emerging from the Transportation and Communications Revolutions, disrupted the status quo as artisan craftsmen could no longer compete with larger factories and bigger businesses. These businesses, usually located in or adjacent to cities, required large amounts of laborers who could be—and usually were—less skilled than the artisans they replaced. The factory model, and the increased number of laborers it necessitated, created a class of urban laborers who were by and large landless, as ownership of substantial acreage was impossible in a crowded city. These laborers were economically dependent on their employers, unlike the self-employed and self-determined artisans under the preceding economic model.[49] This creation of a new class of urban laborers, in conjunction with new attitudes toward property, made the distinction between the political capabilities of the urban laborer and the rural landowner less and less clear.

The sudden creation of a landless class of people making real contributions to society provided grounds for many to advocate for suffrage reform. One critic of property qualifications

[48] Lucius, "Universal Suffrage - No. IV."
[49] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 6-10.

remarked that owning property "no more proves him who has it, wiser or better, than it proves him taller or stronger, than him who has it not."[50] Another, Benjamin Austin of Massachusetts, failed to understand how men must wait "till they have turned their intelligence into stock" before they could vote.[51] The principle of consent of the governed became central as reform supporters maintained the idea that any man who contributed in a substantial way to society and the government should have a say in who holds power and makes decisions for them. It was quickly becoming the norm that a stake in society no longer had to be immovable (i.e. a freehold), but rather a stake in society was demonstrated by those aforementioned contributions that urban laborers were capable of making.[52] Lucius supported this idea, and looked to founding documents—namely the Declaration of Independence—to support his claims. The document recognizes that all men are equal by nature, and as such the urban mechanic has the same intellectual capabilities as the rural freeholder. If this was the case, then it only makes sense that these two groups would be equal in eligibility for suffrage.[53]

Some critics of land requirements went further in their attacks on the idea that owning a freehold somehow demonstrated political capacity. In some cases, the capabilities of laborers and mechanics were seen as purer than those of the landed elite.[54] For these reformers, the lack of land ownership was actually a good thing. This afforded the landless a flexibility that could not be said of those with immovable property. Laborers voted for their country while "aristocrats" voted for

[50] Cogan, "The Look Within."
[51] *ibid.*
[52] *ibid.*
[53] Lucius, "Universal Suffrage - No. II," *The National Advocate* (New York City), August 1, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[54] *Providence Patriot* (Providence, Rhode Island) 27, no. 26, April 1, 1829: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

the bank to protect their property.[55] These "honest" land-poor people should not be excluded from the right to vote simply because of the "accidental possession of property."[56]

Lucius took another stab at restrictions on suffrage by comparing the United States government to the British Monarchy. He argued that by giving freeholders special privileges and therefore disproportionate political power, the government and its actions were separated from the people. Similar to criticisms of the Crown in the Declaration of Independence, Lucius asserted that in such a system the government would be barely distinguishable from the tyrannical governance of the Colonies by the British, a government distant both in terms of representation (or lack thereof) and geographical location.[57]

In addition to the revolutionary principles of the equality of men and the consent of the governed, the concept of taxation without representation reentered American political discourse during the Age of the Common Man. The mechanics and laborers of urban centers were certainly subject to taxation, but the use of property ownership to distinguish an eligible voter meant that these laborers were not eligible to vote. For many proponents of suffrage reform, this was irreconcilable, as the issue of taxation without representation was at the forefront of the Founding Fathers' arguments against the legitimacy of the Crown. Some offered the use of taxation as a qualification for voting to replace that of property ownership while others argued that taxation was the most basic qualifier for suffrage, and including a specific qualification for it would be pointless.[58]

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[55] "[Attentive; American; Expectation; Evening Post; Hands; New York American]," *Evening Post* (New York, New York), no. 9847, March 17, 1834: [2], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[56] "From the Boston Post Grand Democratic Convention at Worcester," *Norfolk Democrat* (Dedham, Massachusetts) V, no. 34, September 22, 1843: [2], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[57] Lucius, "Universal Suffrage - No. III," *The National Advocate* (New York City), August 4, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[58] Cogan, "The Look Within."

The Rhinebeck Republicans, a group (as its name would suggest) located in Rhinebeck, NY, supported suffrage reform and using taxation as a basic qualification for voting. The group did not support a minimum amount one had to pay in taxes, but rather supported the enforcement of proportional taxation. In an 1820 publication by leaders of the group in *The National Advocate*, they wrote that "he who is taxed one dollar to support the *public weal* feels as sensible the burthen in proportion to his means as he who pays one hundred dollars."[59] This is to say that both parties, paying taxes proportional to their wealth, feel the same weight of the tax despite one paying objectively more than the other. If they are both affected equally, then they should be treated equally in the context of tax qualifications. The Rhinebeck Republicans also argued that the New York State Constitution is a "compact made and consummated" by the people and as such they have the right to amend it in any manner they see fit at any time to secure their own liberties and rights. This power, they posited, should not be restrained nor its execution prevented in any way.[60] In this publication, the revolutionary principles both of taxation without representation and of consent of the governed were put into action to advocate for suffrage reform, evidence that revolutionary principles were being used by Americans to oppose the encroachments of their own government rather than the British government.[61]

During Pennsylvania's 1837 convention, debate over taxation was prevalent. Some delegates present argued that any amount of taxation should be sufficient in determining one's eligibility to vote, as if one is taxed by a government then they should have representation in that

[59] Fowkes, John, and Garret Van Keuren, "Voice of the People," *The National Advocate* (New York City), December 29, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[60] *ibid.*
[61] The nature of American democracy itself was not attacked as that of the British Monarchy was; however, these Americans still opposed the tyrannical behavior that governments operating within the American democratic system were expressing at municipal, state, and federal levels.

government.[62] Others argued that suffrage was a natural right, the most important available to freemen, and the regulation of such a right through taxation crossed the line of tyranny.[63] Proponents of this idea argued that taxation is the duty of a citizen, and that suffrage is their right. Should suffrage be regulated through taxation, this would disqualify those who were exempt from taxation and open the doors for abuse of power by legislatures manipulating tax requirements. If the law could be manipulated in such a way, then this would be a violation of the tenets of a free government.[64] Delegates additionally argued that unless income taxes were implemented, then the "virtuous mechanic" would still be disenfranchised, making the switch from property qualifications to tax qualifications moot.[65]

In most northeastern states, property qualifications were eventually replaced with tax qualifications. Massachusetts did so in 1821, and in order to confront the issue of tax exemption that would later be brought up by delegates in Pennsylvania, wrote into law that if a person was specifically exempt from paying taxes then they maintained the right to vote as long as they met other qualifications.[66]

New York provides another interesting example of how the idea of taxation in relation to representation manifested in its state constitution. In 1821, during the state's constitutional convention, it was resolved that all men over the age of 21, having lived in the municipality in which they voted for six months prior to the election, with a property worth a minimum of $250 were eligible to vote (including colored people and Native Americans), and all white men who had

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[62] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution : Commenced and Held at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837.*, vol. 2, 14 vols. (Harrisburg, 1837-1839), p. 549.
[63] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates* vol. 1, p. 149-50; vol. 2, p. 529.
[64] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates* vol. 2, p. 535, 549; vol. 1, p. 149-150.
[65] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates* vol. 3, p. 131; vol. 2, p. 541.
[66] "Massachusetts's Convention," *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix*, January 20, 1821, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

regularly paid taxes of at least fifty cents were also eligible to vote.[67] Although getting rid of property qualifications for white men, the state offered a way in which minorities could still qualify by owning property; however, this requirement was more difficult for minorities to meet given the economic and social conditions of the time. This suffrage law is particularly interesting in that even though there was still a property qualification, it was framed by taxation. The freehold had to have a taxable value of $250, rather than it being worth the same amount on the market. While this distinction did little in making it easier to qualify to vote, it is interesting nonetheless that the delegates in New York chose to use taxation as a qualifier rather than intrinsic value, proving the delegates' commitment to the relationship of taxation and representation that emerged from the Revolution.

Some scholars, among them Donald Ratcliffe, have argued that the Revolution itself demanded the expansion of suffrage. Looking back to the argument that anyone who substantially contributed to society or to the government should have a voice in who governs them (previously this referred to taxation), people used this as justification to guarantee suffrage for members of militias and war veterans. One opinion column originally published by the *Saratoga Sentinel* in 1820 argued that many veterans, primarily of the Revolution, were some of the most patriotic Americans who had contributed to society far more than a person who simply paid their taxes. The author of the column wrote that aside from anything else, it was in Governor DeWitt Clinton's political interests to expand the right of suffrage:

> If monarchical distinctions are to be kept alive in our state—if the revolutionary veteran—if the patriotic citizen, whose only crime is poverty—if, indeed, a very considerable portion of our most respectable inhabitants are to be excluded the right of suffrage, they will *now* know to whom they are indebted, for this degradation—

[67] New York State Constitutional Convention, *Journal of the Convention of the State of New York: Begun and Held at the Capitol in the City of Albany, on the Twenty-Eighth Day of August, 1821*, Printed by Cantine & Leake, printers to the state, 1821, p. 128-9.

> they will now know, (and let it be recorded in the breast of every friend to equal rights) that when DE WITT CLINTON has the power of establishing liberty and equality among the people, he openly refused to exercise it![68]

While some proponents argued for the extension of the right to vote to all eligible members of the military or militias, it was more often than not the case that northeastern states adopted suffrage laws that guaranteed the right to vote only to those currently enrolled in a militia or to those who had previously served.[69] Rhode Island was one such state, with their ratified constitution guaranteeing the right to all men who had served in a militia for at least two years.[70] The use of service as a qualifier to vote expressed the merit of American servicemen while also proving that regardless of taxes or land ownership, by risking life and limb these men had contributed substantially to this country. This was specifically demanded by the Revolution, as it was often the case that its veterans were seen as the most virtuous and patriotic.[71] Although these qualifications were demanded by the Revolution, and the veterans that fought in it were often held in higher esteem than other veterans, these qualifications were extended to veterans of other wars. It should also be noted that militia qualifications did not extend to members of the regular army, as militia members remained relatively local and were under less influence than members of the regular army.

This chapter has so far focused on thinkers and writers discussing the political circumstances of the United States between 1820 and 1850. It will now turn to the ways in which the previously listed drivers of change, strengthened by the principles discussed so far, forced the conditions necessary for widespread constitutional conventions in the Northeast, beginning first with labor movements.

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[68] "Opinions," *The National Advocate* (New York City), December 15, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[69] Cogan, "The Look Within."
[70] "Legislature of Rhode-Island," *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix*, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[71] "Opinions."

Labor Movements as Drivers of Change

Despite the U.S. economy-at-large being largely agrarian during the Age of the Common Man, toward the beginning of this period urban economies were centered largely around the artisan. These artisans owned the tools of their trade and worked with one another "on terms of personal intimacy and economic equality."[72] This was changed by the introduction of new transportation technologies during the Transportation Revolution. Goods were no longer produced and sold in the same community but were instead purchased in quantity by men of industry that would then ship them across the country.[73] This shift disrupted the artisan structure of urban economies and forced these craftsmen to become dependent on what Arthur Schlesinger calls "merchant-capitalists." This dependence lowered the artisans' statuses in their communities and worsened their conditions, from longer work days to lower wages.[74]

The rapidly decreasing conditions of these artisans-turned-laborers prompted this newly discontented class of people to actively better their situation through labor organization. The two primary ways in which laborers organized was through labor unions and Workingmen's Parties—these parties will be discussed later in the chapter, for now this writing will focus on the influence of labor unions.[75]

Organization by urban laborers into unions had several effects, one of which was the politicization of this newly emerged class of people. The unions that were established during the Age of the Common Man emerged from the craft unions organized by artisans in the urban artisan-based economic system. "Artisan Republicanism" promoted rhetoric condemning corruption and promoting equality and independence. The structure of those early craft unions put forth a vision

[72] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 5.
[73] *ibid.,* p. 6.
[74] *ibid.*
[75] *ibid.,* p. 8.

of "moral order in which all craftsmen would eventually become self-governing, independent, competent masters."[76] This egalitarianism would find its way into the structures of the labor unions that would emerge during the period of time being discussed.

The new labor unions that emerged were extremely democratic institutions. During this time, unions consciously established and maintained their organizations as democratic ones. This meant that decorum and democratic procedures were of extreme importance in their functioning. These procedures took the form of union officer elections by majority vote and their removal from office should they fail to properly perform their duties. During union meetings, debates were governed by strict rules to maintain civility and efficiency including the forbidding of slurs and punishment of dilatory actions.[77] Discipline and accountability was not only demanded of union members during work hours and meetings, but also during members' free time. In some cases, provisions were included in union constitutions to punish poor behavior outside of work or meetings.[78]

This behavior within labor unions prepared laborers to act as democratic operatives in politics. The actions of union members demonstrated that they were just as capable of making responsible democratic decisions as landowners were. The self-imposed discipline and egalitarianism of unions arguably made these laborers *more* responsible than landowners who had not been a part of similar institutions. Laborers, unlike freeholders, had partaken in an organization that forced them to act as democrats at all times and shaped their views to push agendas of equality.[79]

[76] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic,* p. 102.
[77] *ibid.,* p. 228.
[78] *ibid.*
[79] *ibid.,* p. 227-30.

Aside from demonstrating the capability of laborers, unions created a political presence of this emerging class of Americans. Individual unions often worked together to make substantial changes, one example of this being the General Trades Union (GTU) in New York City. The GTU organized strikes and promoted collective bargaining, creating real change for the situation of New York laborers while making waves in politics and establishing a ubiety of laborers on the political radar.[80] This presence would later be complemented by the introduction of Workingmen's Parties in nearly every northeastern city.

The Rise of Workingmen's Parties

Workingmen's Parties were the formal counterparts to the politicized labor unions that existed during the Age of the Common Man. The first of these parties emerged in Philadelphia in 1827 and was quickly followed by the establishment of others in major northeastern cities like New York and Boston.[81] These parties were local, and despite attempts to unify—in 1830, Boston's Workingmen's Party published a call for the unification of themselves and those of other cities—these parties never became regional or national ones.[82] Instead, they remained confined to their respective cities and states to help awaken the local population to the plight of urban laborers.[83]

Before going any further in the discussion of Workingmen's Parties, it must first be clarified that these parties did not themselves pass legislation that directly resulted in the expansion of suffrage, but this is by no means to say that they are not important. The majority of these parties

[80] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic,* p. 227-30.
[81] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress."
[82] "Working Men's Party to the Editor of the Courier," *Boston Courier* (Boston, Massachusetts) V, no. 491, September 9, 1830: [1], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[83] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 6-10.

lasted less than a decade, but their progress and voting power was absorbed by the Democratic Party shortly after their respective dissolutions.[84] Workingmen's Parties did have effects in their localities, but it was the Democratic Party that enacted big-picture reforms.[85] Workingmen's Parties disrupted the Democratic Party during their respective existences, as they provided a third party geared toward specific issues that the Democrats would support, but did not advocate for at the same level as Workingmen's Parties. As per an article discussing the 1850 Massachusetts election, the Democrats "have had third parties in a great variety of phases, an Anti-Masonic party, Amory Hall party, Native American party, Abolition party, Middling Interest party, **Workingmen's party,** and many others."[86]

Support for the Workingmen's Parties and the principles for which they stood translated to voting power—either real or potential—and, if anything else, voting power was respected by politicians. An economist observed that between 1829 and 1841, "the Democratic party… was more truly a workingmen's party than has been the case with [the New York Workingmen's Party] or with any other great party in the country since." The Democrats, picking up where the Workingmen left off, "wiped out" debtor's prisons and lien laws in New York.[87]

So, it can be said that while not having a direct influence in the change of laws, Workingmen's Parties did have success in influencing the development of the Democratic Party. This shift in the Democratic platform toward the common man contributed to the creation of a political presence of laborers on state and national levels, one that could not be ignored by state convention delegates when drafting constitutions. Despite their real contributions happening

[84] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 8-9; Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress."
[85] O'Brien, "The Working Men's Party of New York City," p. 72.
[86] "Massachusetts Election," *Boston Evening Transcript* (Boston, Massachusetts) XXI, no. 6240, November 12, 1850: [2], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[87] Fox, *The Decline of the Aristocracy,* p. 357-8.

posthumously, it is still important to understand Workingmen's Parties as they existed, which the project will now discuss.

Workingmen's Parties had few goals other than to better the conditions of urban laborers. One list of "Working Men's Measures," found in the *New York Working Man's Advocate* in 1830 lists the following as demands of the New York Workingmen's Party:

> Equal universal education, abolishment of imprisonment for debt, abolition of all licensed monopolies, an entire revision or abolition of the present militia system, a less expensive law system, equal taxation of property, an effective lien law for laborers on buildings, a district system of elections, [and] no legislation on religion."[88]

It may have been noticed by the reader that this doctrine does not explicitly demand the expansion of the franchise. Their desired end in accomplishing the aforementioned goals was to make life less burdensome for laborers. In doing so, this would "create broader opportunities for the common man," among which were democratic opportunities.[89]

Despite being small in size and short-lived, Workingmen's Parties had a huge impact in the advancement of workers' rights. They nominated and elected politicians at local and state levels—the New York State Workingmen's Party enjoyed great success in Albany—and in some very rare cases to Congress.[90] Huge campaigns were undertaken to elect these officials and in the process more than fifty newspapers were established to spread awareness of their cause.[91] Using these newspapers and elected officials, Workingmen's Parties pushed for legislation that would

[88] O'Brien, "The Working Men's Party of New York City."
[89] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 9.
[90] "[Albany; Troy; New-York; New-York; New-York Daily Sentinel; New York; Philadelphia; Mechanics' Free Press]," *Columbian Register* (New Haven, Connecticut) XVIII, no. 913, May 22, 1830: [3], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*; "[Albany; Van Buren; John V. N. Yates]," *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine) XXI, no. 20, May 15, 1830: [3], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
[91] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 8.

improve not only working conditions for urban laborers but secure social rights for the laboring class as a whole.

Workingmen's Parties were established to directly combat existing political parties that were viewed to be going down the wrong path of progress. Instead, these new parties responded to only their own absolute belief in social, intellectual, and political progress in favor of the laboring class. Workingmen's Parties used the principles of the Revolution not only as an inspiration to spur laborers into action but also as evidence that the so-called progress being advanced by the Whigs and Democrats was not true progress, at least in terms of laborers.[92] They argued that the Jacksonian-Democrats, who claimed to be the intellectual heirs to Thomas Jefferson, were corrupted and that the Workingmen's Parties were the only true democratic party. Had Jefferson been alive at the time, they argued, he would have only recognized Workingmen's Parties as the legitimate heirs to his intellectual and political ideals.

Using the idea that their parties were the true protectors of revolutionary principles, leaders of Workingmen's Parties urged the laboring class to embrace and implement the ideals of the Founding Fathers that were never put into place after the Revolution. Frances Wright, a dominant figure in the New York Workingmen's Party, directed attention to the Declaration of Independence in her 1830 farewell address and called for proponents of the laborers' cause to finally put into place the ideals of the Revolution put forth by the Founders.[93] If this did not happen, party leaders agreed, "the sufferings of our Revolutionary ancestors [would] have been in vain."[94]

The success of Workingmen's Parties can be attributed to the class consciousness of urban laborers that existed during this time period. America did not experience class consciousness to

[92] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress."
[93] *ibid.*
[94] *ibid.*

the degree that, say, Russia did on the eve of their Marxist Revolution in the 20th century, but the laboring class was still conscious of their own plight. One example that proves the existence of at least mild class consciousness was the Bank War and Andrew Jackson's veto of the Bank of the United States in an attempt to shore up the votes of the lower classes.[95] Rather than express themselves through armed revolution, the discontented laboring class of the United States expressed themselves through republican rhetoric aimed at reform within the existing system.[96] It was this discontent and mode of expression that provided an opportunity for Workingmen's Parties to harness the power of the laboring class and experience their short-lived but undeniable success.

If nothing else, the mere existence of the Workingmen's Parties of the 1820s and '30s created a political presence of the laboring class that could no longer be ignored. Had this not been the case, the Democrats would not have taken the measures they did in New York, as there would have been no support for it by the party's constituents. Additionally, party support for the laboring class (primarily support from the Democrats) influenced the drafting of state constitutions, as it was often the case that delegates to state conventions were members of state legislatures, and therefore politicians involved in parties. In cases where delegates were chosen elsewhere, as was the case with the 1846 New York State convention, it was common for mechanics and other tradesmen to be elected as delegates.

In the next section, the influence of regional and national political parties will be discussed and explained. Pressure from labor movements, Workingmen's Parties, and these parties that operated on a larger scale would eventually create a political climate that would demand the call for state conventions. At these conventions, delegates would make the concrete advancements necessary to expand suffrage to the Northeastern Common Man.

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[95] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, p. 240.
[96] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress."

Regional and National Trends Applying Pressure on State Governments

There are many theories of change surrounding the expansion of suffrage during the Age of the Common Man, and these can be divided more or less into two groups. One is that change occurred from the bottom-up, meaning that it was the populace rather than the government that caused the change. The other group is that of top-down, which is the inverse of the former. One such theory from the latter, supported by Donald Ratcliffe, is that it was political parties and politicians operating on regional and national scales that forced the reform of suffrage laws, and gives little credence to the "bottom-up" forces.[97] As this project demonstrates, it was a combination of the two that drove efforts to reform suffrage laws, although it was the "top-down" forces that actually put these reforms into law.

In the years following the Election of 1824, the modern two-party system began to take shape. As the Federalist and Democratic-Republican Parties—and the First Party System within which they were situated—became obsolete, they were replaced by the Whig and Democratic Parties. It was the rise to power of the Whigs and Democrats that formed the Second Party System, the political structure providing the backdrop for much of the arguments presented in this section.

During the Second Party System, third parties were less competitive than in the First Party System, and the Whigs and Democrats were the only viable contenders for national elections. As such, it became increasingly important for each party to gather as many votes as possible to give themselves an advantage over their competitor.[98] Parties and the politicians of which they were comprised saw the state constitutional conventions that were happening at the time as a platform for them to push for the expansion of suffrage to help them harness new voter pools and further their agendas.

[97] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."
[98] *ibid.*

Prior to the Age of the Common Man, few eligible voters actually turned out to the polls. The 1789 Presidential Election saw a turnout of eligible voters of 11.6%, 1792 saw 6.3%, 1796 20.1%, and 1800 32.3%. These numbers are extremely low in comparison to the turnouts of elections like 1828, which saw a 57.3% turnout of eligible voters, and 1840 in which a whopping 80.3% of eligible voters voted. The figures presented here were "calculated from data of dubious accuracy," but are nonetheless the most accurate available.[99] Voter turnout was higher for elections centered around important or exciting issues, and seeing this, parties began to take advantage of and organize themselves around such issues to stimulate interest in voting as much as possible. At the same time, this method of party organization encouraged parties to become more cohesive units in order to make themselves more competitive while at the same time strengthening the emerging two-party system. This alone increased turnout to some degree, but until suffrage laws were reformed and the right was extended to the common man, turnout was still comparably low.[100]

Another factor stimulating voter interest and subsequent turnout was competition. Prior to the emergence of the Second Party System, an abundance of parties that were difficult to differentiate between on the basis of ideology or issues important to them meant that competition between them was uninteresting and unstimulating to voters. As the Second Party System began to take shape, and competition was now between only two major parties and a few third parties—third parties of the 19th century had a much higher chance of success than the third parties of today, but still were substantially less competitive than the two prominent ones in an election—elections became increasingly contentious and close.[101] This close competition gave voters not only a sense

[99] Michael P. McDonald, "National General Election VEP Turnout Rates, 1789-Present," United States Elections Project, http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present. As per McDonald, these numbers were taken from *Vital Statistics of American Politics.*
[100] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."
[101] *ibid.*

of excitement, but a sense of importance in the determination of an election and drove them to the polls in higher numbers.[102] Voter interest gave parties incentive to appeal to the voters in attempts to gather as much support as possible.

A good example of parties appealing to voters during contentious elections can be found in newspapers surrounding an 1829 election in New York City. In this election, the New York Workingmen's Party was running a candidate who was doing surprisingly well at the polls, likely a result of Workingmen's newspapers such as *The Working Man's Advocate* printing articles urging their supporters to vote. Under the pseudonym "Sydney," members of the party "called on poorer citizens to rise to the crisis, to decide whether they would be freemen or forever dependent on their aristocratic masters and 'the drones of the state.'"[103] Supporters of the party turned out to the polls in great numbers and in doing so worried the Democrats. The "Jacksonian Press" quickly took to the papers and urged fellow Democrats to rush to the polls in order to stem the "Workie" vote, writing in *The Morning Courier* that the recent democratic upheaval by laborers was the result of "the most alarming principles to society."[104]

Although these newspaper articles show competition between the New York Workingmen's Party and the Democratic Party, this does not take away from the argument being made about the Second Party System in terms of competition between the Whigs and Democrats. The argument is that in light of these increasingly contentious elections, the two major national parties had to appeal to voters in an attempt to gain as many votes as possible. This is still true when specific dialogue from the Democrats was not directed explicitly at the Whigs. In order to

[102] Elkins McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p. 325.
[103] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, p. 198.
[104] *ibid.*

secure their own success (against both the Workingmen and the Whigs), Democrats had to excite voters and eliminate "Workie" competition by publishing such articles.

At the same time, many politicians were becoming increasingly concerned with rising levels of corruption and fraud at the polls and as such, began to advocate for suffrage reform as a means to combat this. In contentious elections where voter turnout was high, fraud was often present. The lack of oversight and technology to monitor elections in the 19th century allowed people who were legally disenfranchised to show up to the polls and attempt to vote. Such action was encouraged by parties ravenous for votes to give themselves a competitive edge and so party-affiliated monitors of elections turned a blind eye to the fraud happening in polling places.[105] Combatting this type of fraud and dishonesty was extremely difficult at this time, as the technology to do so simply did not exist. Seeing as polls were often run by a particular party, trusting polling administrators to do honest work was unrealistic.

Combatting voter fraud by allowing more voters to cast their ballots legally diminished the population of voters that could be used fraudulently.[106] Seeing as it was generally accepted at the time that the only people who were even possibly eligible to vote were white men, it was unlikely that minorities or women would be permitted to vote regardless of administrators' commitment to honesty in elections. Extending the franchise to a larger population of white men regardless of wealth or property holdings would at least theoretically make it so that the population of those voting illegally would be too small to be used dishonestly to win elections.

The effect of regional and national parties in the advancement of suffrage expansion under the Second Party System was twofold. On the one hand, these parties and politicians wanted to reform suffrage laws to secure new voters; however, an easy workaround was simply allowing

[105] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."
[106] *ibid.*

fraud to take place at the polls. On the other hand, politicians seeking to check such fraud pragmatically advocated for the expansion of suffrage to ensure that honesty was being upheld in elections. Unlike labor movements or small, local parties, these larger and more powerful party politicians had direct access to state and national political mechanisms, the most important for the purpose of this project being state legislatures. It was mentioned in the previous section that state constitutional conventions were often held within state legislatures. Party trends on a national level of advocating for the expansion of the franchise meant that state legislators could use conventions as a platform to realize their parties' goals. Whether or not they were trying to help their party or simply regulate elections more effectively, these politicians were able to write into *constitutional* law—more permanent than statutory law—legislation that concretely guaranteed the right to vote for all white men.

Manifestation in State Constitutional Conventions

The end result of state constitutional conventions in the Northeast show that by the end of the Age of the Common Man, or in the few years following, every state constitution had repealed property as a qualification to vote and several had done the same with taxation. In many cases, taxation requirements replaced property requirements, but it was often—though not always—the case that these too were done away with in the name of universal white manhood suffrage. While these results are important to this project, it is the means by which the ends were realized that are far more important, especially in understanding political development during this period. Such means are the constitutional conventions, and the debates that occurred between delegates during them. It is in these debates that one can see the ways in which the principles and arguments made by the forces already discussed permeated political discourse that resulted in suffrage reform. For

the purpose of this project, debates surrounding property and tax qualifications for suffrage are the most important, though others will be discussed.

Unfortunately, many of these debates are lost. Though each state has a series of publications regarding each of their conventions, many of these documents provide only journals of resolutions rather than the debates themselves. Luckily, some states did publish accounts of the debates held during conventions, and it is from these documents that this project will draw material.

Delaware is one such state that has accounts of convention debates. The state had dropped property and tax qualifications in 1792, and confirmed this in 1831. Though the debates from the 1831 convention are not those surrounding the original decision to exclude such requirements, they are important nonetheless.

Opponents of tax qualifications in Delaware argued that instituting tax qualifications would cause the buying of votes, relating to the previously discussed issue of election fraud during the discussed period. These delegates insisted that there were many who were willing to pay such a tax, but unable to, and therefore would be vulnerable to a person buying their vote. These people, the delegates argued, were just as honorable as those able to pay such a tax and the inclusion of tax requirements would exclude their honorable opinions from elections. The majority of the people that fell under the category of willing-but-unable were not property owners. A sizeable portion of the veteran population also fell into this group, and delegates argued that it would be wrong to bar these men from voting for the very same reasons that have been discussed previously in this chapter.[107]

Representatives at the convention made a distinction between these men who were unable to pay such a tax and paupers. Paupers were unquestionably under the influence of others, and as

[107] Delaware, *Debates and Proceedings*, p. 16.

such were unable to make independent decisions. Similarly, those currently enlisted in the army would also be disqualified as they were under the influence of their superiors.[108] These restrictions are reminiscent of arguments made by the aforementioned opponents of universal suffrage, but the debates surrounding taxation as a qualification for voting in general show how the arguments made by drivers of change discussed in the preceding section manifested in the debates of the Delaware convention and ultimately quelled any support for tax qualifications.

Pennsylvania provides perhaps the most extensive collection of debates from any state, the collection used here being from the state's 1838 convention. Like Delaware, Pennsylvania had eliminated property and tax qualifications prior to the Age of the Common Man, but there were rich debates regarding suffrage qualifications nonetheless.

There are several explicit mentions of urban mechanics throughout the convention debates. This is interesting as Philadelphia was the birthplace of the Workingmen's Movement, and it is in this state's convention that the plight of laborers was discussed the most. One delegate argued how fraud (this is not election fraud so much as it is fraudulent government practices) cheated mechanics of their right to vote. These urban and suburban laborers, he noted, were often distinguished for their usefulness, patriotism, and love of liberty and their misrepresentation in the legislature is harmful to the state.[109] Mechanics and other urban laborers provided the basis for an argument by one delegate against the use of taxation as a qualification to vote. He argued that unless trades and occupations were taxed—at this point, the institution of the U.S. income tax was nearly a century away—a huge population of people would be barred from the right of suffrage.[110] Another delegate maintained the virtue of mechanics and their capabilities during a debate

[108] Delaware, *Debates and Proceedings*, p. 21.
[109] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates,* vol. 1, p. 187-8.
[110] *ibid.,* vol. 3, p. 131.

surrounding African American suffrage. He argued that "the chimney sweep and the boot black will eat the fruits of liberty with the virtuous mechanic, laboring man, farmer, and merchant—the master and the man contend for victory at the same poll."[111]

Many of the delegates present at the 1838 Pennsylvania convention understood that suffrage was not a natural right, but one regulated by law.[112] This is not to say that they did not view suffrage as an important right—in fact many believed suffrage to be the most important right available to a free man—but rather that laws regarding the right needed to be carefully worded to ensure its safety.[113]

In Conclusion

There were several factors at play during the Age of the Common Man that eventually drove northeastern states to hold conventions to revise or rewrite their constitutions. These constitutions would expand the vote to lower-lass white men who were landless or owned an insufficient amount of land to meet property qualifications. The Age of the Common Man was a time of changing economic and political climates. The artisan-based urban economy of years past was replaced by one centered around the factory model and bigger businesses that favored men with more capital. The nation was also experiencing a shift in attitude toward the principles presented by the Revolution and the documents that surrounded it such as the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. A new generation of Americans born into the United States rather than into the Colonies sought to implement the principles of the Revolution they felt as though they were promised.

[111] Pennsylvania, *Proceedings and Debates,* vol. 2, p. 541.
[112] *ibid.,* vol. 1, p. 549.
[113] *ibid.,* p. 149-150.

Some of the forces driving the expansion of suffrage were "bottom-up," meaning that it was the people themselves pushing for change to improve their own situations. Labor organizations are some such forces, in which laborers worked together to establish themselves as a political presence and at the same time demonstrate their ability to partake in the democratic system.

Other forces were "top-down," meaning that politicians were pushing agendas to improve the situations of their constituents. This was the case for national and regional political parties during the Second Party System. Some politicians, concerned with the rampant fraud in 19th century elections pushed for the expansion of suffrage to limit the population of people that could be fraudulently used by parties.

Other forces, such as Workingmen's Parties, laid in between the categories of bottom-up and top-down. These were parties that embraced urban laborers and made clear their plight. Alongside labor unions, though not explicitly working together, Workingmen's Parties created a presence of politicians in local and state governments that advocated for the extension of the right to vote to lower-class white men.

These factors resulted in the eventual calls for convention in every northeastern state by the end of the 1850s. The stripping away of property qualification and shift of political power to the urban white lower class may seem insignificant, but it was a concrete step in the democratization of the United States.

Chapter Three:
The Northwest

The following chapter will discuss suffrage in the Northwest before and during the Age of the Common Man. It has been mentioned already that the Northwest did not undergo the same struggle that the Northeast did to expand suffrage. In the first iterations of all northwestern state constitutions, the right to vote was guaranteed to all white men regardless of property holdings, the primary barrier to suffrage for white men during this time. The conditions of the northwestern frontier, as will be examined at length in this chapter, prompted a trend toward universal suffrage before the Age of the Common Man began. The Age of the Common Man was defined as a national trend in solidifying the right for white men to vote, and it may be problematic to some that this trend began in the Northwest prior to 1820, the start of the Age of the Common Man. Earlier democratization in the Northwest was important in the creation of a national trend of democratization via suffrage reform, as will be shown in the following sections.

This chapter will be divided into the following sections. The first will concern the "frontier ethos," a term used by this project to encapsulate the social, political, economic, and physical conditions of the frontier that played a role in the regional development of democracy. The next section will discuss the Transportation and Communications Revolutions, two technological revolutions that affected the entire nation but interacted with the Northwest to a much greater degree than anywhere else. Following that will be a section regarding Jacksonian Democracy, as the Jacksonian Era was an important component to the Age of the Common Man as a whole. The chapter will then turn to a discussion of politics on a national scale and how the concept of the Northwestern Common Man shaped political discourse. Finally, the chapter will discuss the state constitutional conventions of the Northwest and how the factors discussed throughout the rest of the chapter manifested in them.

Frontier Ethos

Arthur Schlesinger wrote in *Political and Social History* that three "outstanding traits" characterized the West and set it apart from the rest of the nation. These were the individualism of the people, the belief in the capacity of the common man, and a strong sense of nationalism among frontiersmen.[114] The abundance of land in the West, unlike in the East, meant that most men were freeholders. This did away with the distinction between landowner and renter that could give those with property a competitive edge as was the case in the East. Without such a distinction, land-based wealth was not an indicator of status in the region. Of course, large property owners did have a leg up on those with small holdings, but without established social and political hierarchies it would be difficult for one, or even a few men, to create a distinct governing class out of such an advantage.[115] A self-made man, regardless of the size of his freehold, had an apparent right to success in the Northwest.[116]

This proved to be a real possibility, especially in the early stages of settlement in the region. One such example is Francois Vallé who, although living on the Missouri River during French ownership, demonstrates social mobility early on in the region. Vallé arrived in Ste. Genevieve an impoverished immigrant who, in a matter of years, became the largest landowner and owned one quarter of all slaves in the town.[117]

Revisiting the eastern arguments that land ownership proved the independence and disinterestedness of a person, the widespread ownership of land in the West meant that men often thought of themselves and others as independent. This independence often translated into the

[114] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 4.
[115] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p, 339.
[116] Sellers, *Jacksonian Democracy,* p. 7-8.
[117] Aron, *American Confluence*, p. 46.

hatred of government aid or interference, as this would only diminish one's self-determination.[118] How, then, did the individuals of the West come to hold a strong sense of nationalism? Putting aside regional distinctions, this time in American history was characterized by widespread Americanism, possibly as a result of the United States' victory in the War of 1812.[119] This overarching nationalism was coupled with the diversity of background of those living in the Northwest. The abundance of land and lack of social hierarchies gave refuge to people from all over the United States.[120] This diversity in a time that American citizens normally thought of themselves first as citizens of their state meant that people coming from different states and countries could agree only to support an American government, that being the federal.[121]

The belief in the capacity of the common man that was so prevalent on the frontier during this time is an effect of the creation of settlements. During the establishment of these settlements, men were pushed into public activity to confront basic societal problems and out of this was derived a sense of personal competence to make a difference.[122] As Alexis de Tocqueville explained, the independence of frontiersmen had its drawbacks, but ultimately forced these men to recognize each other's ability while providing help to each other:

> …all the citizens are independent and feeble; they can hardly do anything by themselves and none of them can oblige his fellow men to lend him their assistance. They all, therefore, fall into a state of incapacity if they do not learn voluntarily to help each other.[123]

While de Tocqueville believes that if these frontiersmen remained independent they would not be able to survive, he maintains that when joined together they are capable of succeeding in their

[118] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 4.
[119] Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 527-8.
[120] Sellers, *Jacksonian Democracy,* p. 5.
[121] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 4.
[122] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p, 325.
[123] *ibid.,* p. 326.

goals. Based not only on the belief in the capacity of the individual, but the benefits of their working together, each of these men—regardless of land holdings or other restrictions on suffrage that were commonplace—should have a say in governance and leadership as long as they were a part of the community. This sentiment was proven to be alive and well in 1820 by William Rector, a candidate for delegate to the Missouri state constitutional convention. Rector took to the newspapers to express his beliefs and make his platform known, and at the center of both was the idea that community interest, rather than land ownership, should be the basis for one's ability to partake in the democratic system.[124]

The frontier ethos that emerged from all of the above factors created a system of politics unlike that of the East. While eastern politics (mainly in urban centers) were dominated by machines to ensure the maintenance of social order, the hierarchies that gave such machines power simply did not exist in the Northwest. That being said, the Northwest did not see such a distinct struggle and movement toward universal white manhood suffrage as was the case in the Northeast. While eastern states were amending or rewriting their constitutions in response to this struggle, it was often the case that in northwestern state constitutions suffrage laws were written to grant all white men the right to vote upon their admission to the Union. This is not problematic in regards to the legitimacy of the term "Age of the Common Man." Several of the northwestern states acquired their statehood between 1820 and 1850, and as such their writing of laws that guaranteed white men the right to vote coincides with the national trend of constitutionally solidifying universal white manhood suffrage.

The arguments so far made in this section may be criticized by historians and political scientists for their resemblance to Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis in that the arguments

[124] William Rector, "To the Electors of the County of St. Louis," *St. Louis Enquirer*, April 19, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

claim a link between the frontier and the development of American democracy. Turner's Thesis has been denounced by many historians, but should not be rejected entirely. The basis for most criticisms rest on Turner's vagueness and imprecision while failing to provide concrete examples for his claims. Of course, an argument structured in such a way should not be accepted by itself, but this is not to say that he was necessarily *wrong*; even his harshest critics have admitted that there likely exists some connection between the frontier and American democracy.[125]

This admission does not alone prove the legitimacy of the claims made by this section, so for proof beyond that which has already been presented (which may or may not be sufficient for the reader), we turn to Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick. The pair published a three-part series in *Political Science Quarterly* in an effort to demonstrate Turner's theory while providing a solid framework for their argument, something that Turner lacked. This used a study by sociologist Robert K. Merton that looked at two public housing communities to show how the formation of new communities necessitates the implementation of true democracy, one that demands the real—not ceremonial—participation of the masses. This community must be relatively homogenous both in terms of social and economic status, have a lack of leadership, and undergo a "time of troubles" in which a series of fundamental problems facing the community must be addressed before anything else can happen.[126] Merton's study concluded that though both public housing communities had the same characteristics that were listed before, it was only within the one that underwent a time of troubles that a system of democracy emerged.[127]

Elkins and McKitrick then posited that this was the case for thousands of newly created settlements on the frontier.[128] The democracy that was created, one that demanded the participation

[125] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p, 322-3.
[126] *ibid.,* p, 327-8, 330.
[127] *ibid.,* p. 327.
[128] *ibid.,* p. 331.

of the people, made it so that the people became "the most uncompromising task masters" of their representatives who were vigilantly scrutinized. The governments that were created were comprised of the people, and therefore their inherent authority was not respected as much as governments based on social hierarchy.[129] This argument is similar to that made by Dana Nelson, where she argues that the communal mutualism and lack of preexisting social hierarchies on the frontier created a system of leadership by example and persuasion.[130] Representatives in the region actually catering to the needs of their constituents can be evidenced by land and tax reforms that favored small landowners rather than large ones.

Such reforms included the levying of taxes on unimproved lands (thus attacking the absentee landowner), a series of taxes aimed at making delinquent landholdings cost owners more than the land's worth, and the vesting of powers to local sheriffs allowing them to auction off delinquent holdings.[131] Had politicians truly found their source of power in a ruling class, rather than the people, then laws that benefitted the less advantaged would never have come to be. Such a system made it impossible for a true ruling class to emerge.[132] Thus, as it was put by Elkins and McKitrick, "it was apparent to all that the day of the great land magnate was at an end. His operations were doomed by the very techniques of settlement and by the measures taken by the settlers themselves to thwart his designs."[133] The pair of historical political scientists then went on to say that "a land-holding élite… was rendered quite out of the question. The leadership of *this* society would have to be recruited on manifestly different terms," those terms being the public electing candidates who did the best job of addressing their concerns.[134]

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[129] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p. 335.
[130] Nelson, *Commons Democracy*, 109.
[131] *ibid.,* p. 337.
[132] *ibid.,* p. 339.
[133] *ibid.*
[134] *ibid.,* p. 338.

Apart from the social and political ethos that characterized the Northwest from the time of its settlement, there were practical concerns based on the physical conditions of the Northwest that caused the absence of property qualifications for white male suffrage. The most important of these physical conditions was the sheer abundance of land in the region. Historians, among them Donald Ratcliffe, argue that the inclusion of property qualifications in suffrage laws would have been meaningless. The reasoning behind this is that there was so much land available in the West that even the smallest landowner had enough to qualify to vote based on average property qualifications (using other states as a metric for such qualifications). According to Ratcliffe, this was especially true when such qualifications were worded in terms of acreage rather than of value.[135]

When it comes to specifics, Ratcliffe's arguments has holes. In general, it was the case that the majority of men in the region owned sufficient property to vote should property qualifications have been implemented, but it is impossible that this was true for everyone. This project is concerned with the concrete establishment of universal white manhood suffrage (though not without some exceptional cases) and one of the primary avenues of this during the time was through the lifting of freehold requirements from suffrage laws. The northwestern states, like every other state during the Age of the Common Man, excluded such requirements for white men, and it is important to understand that in doing so, suffrage was extended to all white men in the Northwest regardless of property ownership, even if the percentage of men who would not have qualified was low. Keep in mind, Ratcliffe's argument here only concerns property qualifications, not tax qualifications, which were still an issue—albeit a rare one—that could not be easily thrown away based on the profusion of land.

[135] Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."

While historians like Ratcliffe argue that it was the abundance of land alone that made property requirements meaningless, a related issue contributed to states excluding land requirements from their constitutions. At the time, surveying land was extremely difficult. Technology to do so was poor and it took a long time for surveyors to complete their task. This, coupled with the land-grabbing of Westward Expansion, made it exceedingly difficult to survey every man's property and then actually prove their respective ownerships.[136] Even if the property that a man owned was sufficient to meet the property requirements that existed in other states, it was still difficult to prove that he actually owned it. This may seem like a small issue to the modern reader, but lack of technology and proof of ownership posed real issues in terms of the enforcement of suffrage laws.

In sum, the conditions of the Northwest, outside of direct political interference, forced the need to guarantee universal white manhood suffrage. The lack of preexisting social and political hierarchies not only made it possible for the democratic frontier ethos to flourish, it demanded it. The ethos would permeate local and eventually burgeoning state governments of the Northwest in such a way that property qualifications were excluded from state constitutions. Joined with the impracticalities of enforcing property qualifications, the conditions—social, economic, political, and physical—formed one fragment of the forces that caused the guaranteeing of the right of suffrage to all white men in the Northwest.

Transportation and Communications Revolutions

Both the Transportation and Communications Revolutions played major roles in the establishment of universal white manhood suffrage in all areas of the country during the Age of

[136] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy,* p. 117; Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy."

the Common Man. The implementation of these reformed suffrage laws in all areas of the country was a national trend, and as such there were factors driving this at a national level. Both of these technological revolutions are examples of such factors. The purpose for including a section devoted entirely to them in this chapter (rather than in the previous one) is to show how the Northwest interacted with both revolutions in a far greater way than in other parts of the nation. The states on the Eastern Seaboard, having been created from the original colonies, had well established infrastructure. As the United States expanded westward, new settlements did not have any preexisting infrastructure to work with and the infrastructure built was inferior to that of the East in that it was simply more rudimentary. While the improved technologies of both the Transportation and Communications Revolutions benefitted the entirety of the United States, life and society in the West was improved to a much greater extent.

Historians like Daniel Walker Howe have asserted that the Transportation and Communications Revolutions played a far more important role in the expansion of suffrage in the Northwest than did constitutional change.[137] Despite making a good point, this argument is not entirely solid. Without changes to state constitutions, universal suffrage would never have been guaranteed meaning that regardless of anything else, these changes were the most important. The Transportation and Communications Revolutions were a means to this end, and as such were of extreme importance, as Howe argued.

This argument concerning the Transportation and Communications Revolutions is reinforced by Michel Chevalier and D.W. Meinig. Chevalier specifically underscored the importance of the Transportation Revolution, writing that improved transportation technologies had democratic implications because as people moved around, they brought with them ideas. The

[137] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 231.

movement itself was personal and individual freedom that allowed the ideas they brought with them to flow more freely.[138] Meinig examined history from a geographical standpoint and wrote that roads and canals are to the body politic what veins are to the body natural.[139] Improved transportation technologies aimed at the shipping of goods throughout the country provided opportunities for Americans to travel with greater ease as well. Easier travel meant Americans travelling in greater numbers and bringing with them their own interpretations of ideas while bringing back home different interpretations that they became familiar with during travel. Alexis de Tocqueville is one such example, although it should be noted that he was a French citizen. de Tocqueville travelled to America to study the country's prisons but instead spent time touring the country talking to people of all classes, trades, religions, and politics. He discussed and published what he learned in *Democracy in America.*[140]

Writers of the time certainly agreed that travel helped complete one's understanding of things. One article from Washington, D.C. discussed the arrival of western literature from the Western Museum Society. The article outlines some of the literature, much of it regarding science, and at the end says this:

> I cannot but regret that we do not attach more importance to journeys of observation thro' our own country. Travels of this kind were eloquently recommended, almost a century ago, by the celebrated Linnæus, and ought to make a part of the education of every young man. After having completed his scholastic, academic, or collegiate course, and acquired the rudiments of his trade or profession, he could do nothing so well calculated to enrich his mind with useful knowledge and qualify him for the practical duties of future life, as to travel through his native land.[141]

[138] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 241.
[139] Meinig, *The Shaping of America,* p. 13.
[140] Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969).
[141] "Literature of the West," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), September 9, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

While this article discusses formal educations, these "journeys of observation" were complementary to the information learned during schooling. As such, they would be useful for those not pursuing formal educations in gaining the practical knowledge mentioned to qualify him for future life duties.

Additionally, a classified in a New York newspaper advertising a series of essays suggests the necessity of travel for a deeper understanding of things. The series was titled "Essays and Sketches of Life and Character," and was written by "a Gentleman who has left his Lodgings." The specific mention of the author having left his home by itself suggests the importance of travel, but the classified goes further. It describes the essays as having been "written throughout with great facility and elegance and bear every where indufable marks of an upright and honourable mind, richly cultivated both by study and [by] travel."[142] This classified and the article discussed in the previous paragraph stressing the necessity of travel suggests that Easterners travelling West will gain a deeper understanding of different concepts by virtue of their travels. While these articles do not provide a specific example of information moving from one place to another through human contact, they do show that writers of the time believed travel to be important for this reason.

Despite such "journeys of observations" being important, Americans did not have to physically move themselves around the country for ideas and information to be spread. The improved technologies of the Communications Revolution, far and away the most important being the invention of the telegraph by Samuel Morse, allowed for information to be near-instantaneously be transmitted between two places anywhere in the United States. By 1850, it was accepted—and expected—that news be delivered from each coast to the other on a daily basis.[143]

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[142] "Multiple Classified Advertisements," *The National Advocate* (New York City), November 17, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[143] Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 537.

The telegraph clearly had democratic implications, as even a cursory look at newspapers during the period being discussed shows mass reprinting of articles from eastern newspapers in western newspapers as well as the inverse.[144] These articles ranged from current events to political debates, the latter being more important to the focus of this project. Before the invention of the telegraph, news would take a long time to reach different regions in the United States, and the news that travelled was only the most important. When it became easy to send information via the telegraph, an array of information could be sent daily.

A person in, say, Davenport, Iowa, could have read an important debate that took place in, say, Boston, without much more delay than a Bostonian reading the same debate in a local paper. In the age of the Internet, is is easy to lose sight of just how astronomical the effects of this were. No longer was the development of a person's political ideals constrained to the information available to them locally, that person now had access to the same information as people everywhere else in the nation. For the Northwest, this meant that newspapers now had speedy access to the goings on of the federal government.

A result of this was the centralization of information and, in turn, a centralization of government and politics.[145] As a quick side note, this centralization likely worked in tandem with efforts to consolidate the nation (particularly the West) following the War of 1812.[146] It was mentioned in the previous chapter that during this time, the modern American two-party system was forming, and this was made possible by these advancements. Parties likely would not have been able to expand beyond the tight-knit East Coast into the vast expanse of the West without the

[144] "Missouri Expedition," *Providence Patriot, Columbian Phenix* (Providence), January 5, 1820, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers; "The Great National Convention of Whig Young Men," *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), May 14, 1840, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[145] Meinig, *The Shaping of America,* p. 352.
[146] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress in Jacksonian Democracy."

technological infrastructure to assert their platforms and gain support. Alternatively, local parties in the West would not have been able to expand beyond their respective localities without the same technologies.

In short, as Meinig wrote, the improvements of the Transportation and Communications Revolutions allowed the United States to "conquer space" and open up the West to the rest of the nation.[147] As the trend toward democratization began in the Northwest before the Age of the Common Man, the Transportation and Communications Revolutions did little in altering northwestern attitudes toward suffrage apart from strengthening them in light of the changing attitudes in the East. The opening up of the West, and the flow of information in and (more importantly) out of it helped create the *national* trend of democratization via suffrage reform that characterized the Age of the Common Man.

Jacksonian Democracy

It would be impossible to study democratization during the Age of the Common Man without discussing Andrew Jackson and the trend of so-called "Jacksonian Democracy" that prevailed in the years surrounding his presidency. It has been mentioned already that the Jacksonian Era is a period of political history that is situated within the limits of the Age of the Common Man, and as such the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Whether Andrew Jackson and his cohorts took action that directly resulted in the expansion of suffrage during this time or if their ascension to political power was a result of ongoing trends forms the basis for much debate. It is most realistically the case that it was some combination of the two possibilities.

[147] Meinig, *The Shaping of America,* p. 352.

Naomi Wulf has argued that Jacksonian Democracy could not have meant anything other than the realization of the democracy described by the Declaration of Independence and other founding documents.[148] This argument calls to mind the discussion in the previous chapter about the change in attitudes toward revolutionary principles by a new generation of Americans. Wulf's argument is somewhat simplistic in that this likely was not a conscious goal of Jacksonians, but actions taken by them are situated in a larger trend of such democratization.

There are historians, among them Schlesinger and Howe, that argue to some merit that Jackson's rise to power was simply the result of the ongoing trends of democratization through suffrage reform framed by the common man. These historians assert that Jackson was the epitome of a frontiersman and the personification of western and frontier democracy. He was embraced by the public as a self-made man and war hero that, in comparison to the politicians he ran against, seemed to identify more with the common man and lower classes than with the economic and political elite.[149] Though Jackson was a powerful personality in politics that came onto the scene at the perfect time for such a political and personal style to thrive, this school of historians and political scientists that see him as a mere product of the times argue that had he chosen not to become politically involved, someone like him would undoubtedly have been elected president in his stead.[150] It is unclear just *who* would have been elected instead of Jackson, as there were no similar candidates at that time, but the election of William Henry Harrison some years later would suggest that this argument has some truth to it. It should be noted that Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, was by no means a man of the people. Support for Van Buren and his eventual electoral

[148] Wulf, "The Politics of Past and Progress in Jacksonian Democracy."
[149] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 13; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 205.
[150] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 13.

success can be largely attributed to Jackson passing the proverbial torch to him, as will later be discussed in more depth.

Widespread Democratic support for the ideals associated with Jackson before, during, and after his presidency do lend some more credence to the idea that a similar personality could have replaced him and succeeded. This can be evidenced by various examples from newspapers in which Democrats advocated for similar ideas to those of Jackson, and in some cases offered Jackson explicit support. In a message to fellow citizens published in 1824 by Joseph M. Street—a candidate for Elector of President and Vice President—in *The Illinois Gazette,* he expressed his support for free suffrage, western rights, and the elimination of legislative caucuses. If elected, Street promised to cast his ballot for Andrew Jackson.[151] Another 1824 article from the same paper discussed a meeting in Pittsburgh of "Democratick Republican Citizens... friendly to the election of Andrew Jackson..."Those in attendance at this meeting, like Street, not only expressed explicit support for Jackson but advocated for Jacksonian ideals including election by popular vote instead of election by legislative caucus.[152] Jackson was himself an outspoken supporter of the idea that his political legitimacy (or any president's, for that matter) came from the bottom—the common people—rather than from the political establishment.[153] This idea inherently denounces the legitimacy of nomination by caucus.

Whether it was Jackson or someone like him that had been elected to the presidency is almost unimportant in that the presence of such a personality did exist in the White House. Additionally, whether or not Jackson was actually a man of the people or his intentions to advocate

[151] Joseph M. Street, "To the Electors of the Second Electoral District, Composed of the Counties of Gallatin, White, Edwards, Lawrence Crawford, Clark, Edgar, Marion, Wayne, and Hamilton," *The Illinois Gazette* (Shawnee-Town), October 2, 1824, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[152] Charles Kenney, Joseph Gazzam, and James A. Armstrong, "Meeting at Pittsburgh," *The Illinois Gazette* (Shawnee-Town), January 17, 1824, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[153] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy,* p. 248.

for their rights were sincere does not matter. What does matter is his *perception* as a sincere and relatable man. Though he was wealthy, Jackson's election represented a battle between aristocracy and democracy. He and other Jacksonians openly endorsed the expansion of suffrage, and Jackson vowed that, once in office, he would take power and privilege from the wealthy while at the same time making the presidency so transparent and simple that any man could theoretically run for president and effectively execute the responsibilities of the office.[154] Jackson's campaign strategies showed his commitment to the common man, as throughout the election cycle Jackson held boisterous rallies geared toward the lower classes to gain their support, and in doing so made their politics and issues important on a national scale.[155] Even his inauguration party turned into a rowdy affair for the public, symbolically showing that the White House now belonged to the people.[156] This type of campaigning and focus on the lower classes as a voter base began a trend in national politics that will later be examined at length.

One problem that many have with Andrew Jackson is that there is little evidence to show that his actions did anything to directly expand the franchise. This may be true, and as he was a player at the federal level had no direct input on suffrage laws, as those were left to be determined by individual states. However, in the context of democratization during the Age of the Common Man, the very presence of a politician in the highest office so committed—at least rhetorically—to the cause of the common man is important to understand when looking at the national trend of democratization during this period.

Despite the ambiguity of change directly brought about by Jackson, his presidency was important beyond his personality's presence in the White House. The persona that surrounded

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[154] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy,* p. 307-8, 313, 514.
[155] *ibid.,* p. 248.
[156] David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, "Not a Ragged Mob; The Inauguration of 1829," The White House Historical Association, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/not-a-ragged-mob-the-inauguration-of-1829.

Jackson and his supporters in the government shifted the debate and focus to the common people, a trend which would continue through the Van Buren Administration and beyond. To compete with the successes of the Democratic Party by harnessing the power of the lower classes, their main adversary, the Whigs, would also have to reorient their focus to include the issues affecting the lower classes. This would be evidenced by William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, as well as the rise of populism later in the century.[157]

The Northwestern Common Man in National Politics

As has already been mentioned, the Age of the Common Man coincided with the emergence of the United States' Second Party System, in which the two major national parties were the Democrats and the Whigs. In the years following Jackson's presidency, the triumph of the common man, both national parties would become outspoken supporters of the expansion of suffrage. The framing of many debates surrounding elections became one of universal suffrage, and the success of a candidate would be determined by how thoroughly he advocated the issue. Whereas the Transportation and Communications Revolutions were national factors that affected the Northwest, the rise of the Second Party System was a national factor that was affected *by* the Northwest.

As in the East with the Democratic Party taking the reins from Workingmen's Parties, in the West the Democrats picked up where the Jacksonians left off, continuing to support less restrictive suffrage laws. Evidence can be found in the party's support for Van Buren and their criticisms of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler (two Whig presidents) for being what

[157] It should be remembered that in the Northwest, a formal social or economic hierarchy did not exist. References to class in this section relate to these parties as they operated in the East. In the West, the "common man" was in similar economic standing in terms of wealth to the common men of the East, though in the West the common man was far more economically independent.

Democrats perceived as opponents to suffrage reform. Democratic distaste for both Whig candidates could be seen in northwestern newspaper publications by Democratic authors. In an 1840 article from *The Ohio Statesman,* Democrats attacked Harrison by claiming that he was "willing to invade the ballot box, abridge the right of suffrage, destroy confidence in the stability of our democratic institutions, and confer upon the few, what he could wrest on the many."[158] Another *Statesman* article from the same year accused Harrison of transitively supporting white slavery by supporting property requirements for suffrage and denying the right to poor white men.[159]

The Whigs continued to boast their support for suffrage reform despite what Democratic critics had to say, and in their support used the ethos of the Northwestern Common Man to their advantage. During this time, Whigs tried to appeal to whites of all classes to shore up as many votes as possible, and one way in which they did so was to support (at least in principle) universal white manhood suffrage.[160] In 1840, the Whigs held "The Great National Convention of Whig Young Men" in Baltimore. One of the mottoes they employed was "the liberty of speech, if not the right of suffrage." It was resolved in this convention, concerned largely with suffrage reform and Harrison's "Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign," that the men present would support Harrison—who, prior to winning the presidency, held a number of political offices in the Northwest including Governor of Indiana, Senator from Ohio, and Congressman and Secretary of the Northwest Territory—during the election.[161] Harrison also found Whig support from local parties, as was the case in Chillicothe, the seat of Ross County, Ohio. There, in 1835, the county

[158] "Forty Reasons Why the People in the North Western Part of Ohio, Cannot Support Gen. William Henry Harrison, for the Presidency," *The Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), March 10, 1840, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[159] "More of Harrison's White Slavery, and Whipping to Boot—Property Qualification for Voters," *The Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), May 6, 1840, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[160] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy,* p. 484.
[161] "The Great National Convention of Whig Young Men."

held a meeting in which "the great importance of united action in the Whig Party" was expressed. A resolution passed stating that Harrison and the Whigs were to be supported in the upcoming election, citing Harrison's and Taylor's support of free, unbiased suffrage.[162]

Harrison lost the 1836 election, but he would not suffer defeat during the Election of 1840, in which one of the clearest examples of federal politicians including the Northwestern Common Man in the democratic system can be found. Harrison's 1840 campaign was dubbed the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign, and was more of an attempt to gather votes than it was a sincere appeal to the common man. Campaign rhetoric asserted that Harrison not only related to the common people but was, in fact, one of them, living in a log cabin and enjoying hard cider. The reality was that Harrison lived in a mansion and was incredibly wealthy.[163]

Nonetheless, Whigs continued to boast Harrison's "common roots" with strategies like the campaign song "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too." The song refers to Harrison as a "gallant farmer" who reclined on his "buckeye bench" to enjoy hard cider while Van Buren drank wine from "silver coolers" and "lounge[d] on his cushioned settee." The song goes on to say "…then a shout for each freeman, a shout for each state, to the plain, honest husbandman true…" to show that Harrison supported farmers, the common man of the Northwest.[164] The nickname of "Old Tippecanoe" or the "Hero of Tippecanoe" is derived from his 1811 victory at the Battle of Tippecanoe in Indiana. This victory made him a national hero, yes, but a folk hero in the Northwest as in the song he was referred to as "the iron-armed soldier, the true-hearted soldier." A 1924 article from *The Youth's Companion* remarked that when the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign began, "the uproar

[162] "Great Harrison Meeting," *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), September 30, 1835, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[163] Steven E. Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America's Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, p. 13-14.
[164] "Electioneering in the Forties," *The Youth's Companion* 98, no. 40 (October 2, 1924): ProQuest.

began in the West, but the contagion soon spread to the East." The article nostalgically sums up not only this campaign song but the 1840 election as a whole:

> It was not a Presidential campaign; it was a contest between two modes of dress, two varieties of beverage, two styles of architecture. It was lost by an inch or two of type in a newspaper and won by miles of parades. It was a jubilee of popular prejudice on wheels set to the music of atrocious ballads. It was preposterous, and it was glorious sport. It was the forties.

Regardless of the sincerity—or lack thereof—of the campaign, it was important in that the rhetoric supported by it made the common man feel important and stimulated interest among them in voting. As Elkins and McKintrick pointed out, two conditions of democracy are that the energies of the people are engaged and that the people participate in public affairs in large numbers.[165] Rallies were held similar to those held by Jackson and were frequent and boisterous events. One Whig source claimed that 30,000 people attended a single rally, though seeing as this figure came from the Whigs themselves, it is likely exaggerated.[166]

Attempts made by the Whigs during the 1840 election cycle to harness the voting power of the lower class was a good thing even if it was manipulative and insincere. The campaign itself came at the perfect time, just a few years after the Panic of 1837. Years later, Theodore Roosevelt would comment on the panic and say that in times of economic uncertainty, men (especially in the lower classes) do not act on the basis of logic, making it easier to take advantage of them.[167] Economic panic drove people to the polls, and the more interested citizens were in voting the more they were seen as important by parties that would then want them to vote. Harrison, at least

[165] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p, 325.
[166] Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, p. 16.
[167] *ibid.,* p. 25.

rhetorically, supported these citizens voting, as one published motto of his campaign was "to preserve their liberties, the people must do their own voting as well as fighting."[168]

Apart from party politics using the frontier ethos to their advantage, there were very real, practical reasons at the federal level for suffrage reform in the Northwest. Throughout the discussed period, the populations of western states were exploding, and as such these states' representation in Congress was growing.[169] Seeing as the system of politics in the Northwest was characterized by the people being "uncompromising task masters," northwestern congressional representation applied a great amount of pressure on the federal government to address the issues of the Northwest.[170] The federal government had no constitutional authority to determine suffrage eligibility, but federal support of suffrage reform certainly did not hurt reform attempts.

In addition to all this, beginning with the Election of 1824, a trend against nomination and election of politicians by legislative caucus was beginning. Instead, it was becoming the norm that politicians be elected by a popular vote. What this meant was that instead of politicians appealing to the political elite, they instead had to appeal to the citizenry that was electing them.[171] This sentiment was expressed in an article from *Niles' Weekly Register* that was reprinted in the *Daily National Journal* in Washington, D.C. The article argued that the people were being deprived of their right of suffrage to favor the interests of the caucus, and that these citizens were divested from their right to have a say in who would be their president. Legislative caucuses, the writer

[168] "The Great Procession of the People at Columbus, Feb. 22, 1840.," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, March 3, 1840, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[169] Historical census data from this time is incomplete, so it is impossible to state what the region's population was at the beginning of the Age of the Common Man and then what it was at the end. To help the reader understand population growth in the region, a table has been included in the Appendix showing the population of each northwestern state taken decennially by the United States Census between 1800 and 1850.
[170] Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 5; Fish, *A History of American Life*, p. 548.
[171] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 207.

argued, forced candidates to gather support from other politicians rather than the people.[172] In Illinois, legislative caucusing was attacked as undemocratic. An 1824 article from *The Illinois Gazette* wrote that "public sentiment emanating from the mass of our citizens, the real Democracy of the state, has put its veto upon *Legislative caucusing,* and roused the pride and republican feelings of the community."[173] This shift away from legislative caucuses forced politicians to actually listen to and advocate for issues affecting their constituents. In doing so, a system of leadership by persuasion and example that existed in the Northwest was beginning to take shape on a national scale.

Constitutional Conventions in the Northwest

It has been mentioned several times already that no states in the Northwest wrote property qualifications for white male suffrage into their original state constitutions, and only a few of them included tax qualifications.[174] More likely than not, this was a result of the factors discussed in the previous sections, as several of the northwestern states entered statehood during the Age of the Common Man. These states were Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin. As was the case for northeastern state conventions, records of debates do exist. Unlike the records from northeastern conventions, many of those from the Northwest lack debates regarding suffrage for white men. While the recorded debates that do exist are important in understanding why northwestern states opted to exclude these suffrage restrictions, the lack of them in other states are equally important. In states that debates surrounding white male suffrage are lacking, this suggests that the free

[172] "Sovereignty of the People, No. 6," *Daily National Journal* (Washington, D.C.), October 21, 1824, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[173] Nat. Rep., "Jackson in Ohio," *The Illinois Gazette* (Shawnee-Town), September 25, 1824, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[174] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote,* see Appendix, Table A.2.

suffrage of white men was taken as granted, likely a result of the political systems emerging from the previously discussed frontier ethos.

In 1818, two years before the period of time this project discusses, Illinois entered statehood, and the constitution adopted by its first state convention did not feature property or tax qualifications for white male suffrage.[175] The state held another convention in 1847 to update the document, and during this convention delegates debated the nature of suffrage in the state. One such delegate, referred to simply as Mr. G, called upon the Federalist Papers of James Madison to argue his case for universal suffrage as recorded in an official record of the debates. This usage of the Federalist Papers suggests evidence of revolutionary principles at play during the Jacksonian Era—as argued by Naomi Wulf—that strengthened the case for suffrage reform. Mr. G explained Madison's arguments that states had the absolute power to define the right of suffrage and therefore regulate the qualifications for that right, but eloquently argued against the state using this power to restrict suffrage in the following passage:

> [the state should] not exercise that power to operate against the rights of men, nor so that [the state government] should become illiberal and oppressive. We have now free suffrage, let us retain it. Do not let us follow examples of other states who have bound up this inestimable franchise by restrictions, until by lessening the right of suffrage, they have lessened the liberty of their people, have lessened their rights.[176]

In invoking Madison's writing, Mr. G. brings back into political discourse those ideals of American Revolutionaries that then became embedded in the Constitution. In addition to this, by advocating for the rights of individuals, the real participation of men in political affairs, the right of a man to choose who governs him, and against government intervention in individual affairs,

[175] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote,* see Appendix, Table A.2.
[176] *The Constitutional Debates of 1847* (Springfield, IL: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1919), Internet Archive, p. 530.

Mr. G. was in essence was advocating for western rights and those ideals that were important to frontiersmen that were laid out by Schlesinger.[177]

Indiana became a state in 1816, two years before Illinois and four years before the beginning of the Age of the Common Man (at least as defined by this project). Like Illinois, Indiana did not restrict white male suffrage by means of property or taxation requirements in their original constitution.[178] Some years later, in 1850—the final year of the Age of the Common Man—the state held a convention to revise their constitution. In one debate, a delegate framed his argument in favor of universal suffrage using the question of "negro suffrage," and in doing so showed the importance of suffrage for white men regardless of property holdings or tax payment. Suffrage, he argued, like life, liberty, and property, was a right that should be guaranteed to Americans (he presumably had white American males in mind) by birthright, and as such the right should be extended to African Americans. This is not to say that the delegate was in favor of extending the right to African Americans—he was, in fact, very much against it—but he saw no way of excluding African Americans from voting without doing the same for white men.[179] The delegate's argument, like that of Illinois' Mr. G., calls back to revolutionary principles—specifically those of John Locke—to strengthen his point. His argument also suggests his belief in the frontier ethos ideal of all men being equal in capacity, and as such should have the right to vote.

Other conventions held during this period had little or no debate at all in regards to suffrage qualifications for white men in terms of property or tax qualifications. Based on this and the fact that none of the northwestern states included property qualifications for white men to begin with,

[177] Elkins and McKitrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," p, 330; "Sovereignty of the People, No. 6."; Schlesinger, *Political and Social History,* p. 4.
[178] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote,* see Appendix, Table A.2.
[179] Constitutional Convention of Indiana, *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Indiana, 1850*, A. H. Brown, printer to the convention, 1850, p. 570.

and few did for tax qualifications, it is likely the case that universal white manhood suffrage as a general concept was seen as a given. Presumably, the drafters of these state constitutions were affected by the frontier ethos, and as such saw no reason to restrict suffrage for common white men as they were seen not only as equal on the frontier, but essential in providing bases for political support.

The general concept of universal white manhood suffrage is that white men should not be inherently divested from the right to vote, but this is not to say that restrictions did not exist that ultimately barred some white men from voting. Such restrictions included (but were not limited to) citizenship, length of residence requirements, criminal exclusions, and exclusions for "idiots" and the insane.[180] These qualifications did not depend on one's economic or social standing and could theoretically be met at some point by any sane white man without moving moving between economic classes. These restrictions did not undermine the idea that the right of suffrage is intrinsic to white men regardless of wealth.

In Conclusion

Based on the examples of regional political development in terms of suffrage, it would suggest that in the Northwest, the trend toward democratization via suffrage reform began prior to the Age of the Common Man. Such a statement, and the admitted evidence that supports it, may suggest to some the argument that the Age of the Common Man was a distinct period of the expansion of the suffrage to white men in the United States is a weak one, but this is not the case. The Age of the Common Man was a distinct period of *national* political history. It has already been argued that the national factors discussed in this chapter affected suffrage reform in the

[180] Keyssar, *The Right to Vote,* see Appendix, Table A.9.

Northwest, but these factors were also *affected by* regional factors in the Northwest. The regional development of a trend of democratization in the Northwest before the Age of the Common Man likely accelerated the spread of this trend to the rest of the nation. If this was indeed the case, then early developments in the Northwest do not take away from the legitimacy of the term "Age of the Common Man," but rather support it.

The ethos of the frontier was perhaps the most important of any of the regional and national factors discussed in this chapter in terms of democratization, not necessarily expansion. The abundance of land and the frontier ideals of freedom, individualism, and equality created local systems of leadership by persuasion and example that evolved into larger political and governing structures within states. The ideals that embodied the frontier made their way into state constitutions, as can be explicitly seen in the documents themselves. The debates surrounding the creation of these documents show the importance of frontier and western rights (some of which overlap with revolutionary principles) in the shaping of suffrage laws. The lack of debate in some conventions suggest the inherent belief in universal white manhood suffrage by delegates to those conventions.

At the federal level, growing northwestern influence in Congress due to population growth and the harnessing of the Northwestern Common Man as a voter pool by national parties and politicians put these common men at the center of much discourse. Though these efforts made by parties and politicians were often insincere in that they were many times merely attempts to shore up votes in the increasingly contentious elections of the Second Party System rather than real attempts to advocate for common men's rights on a basis of principle, these debates and elections gave the common man a real political presence at the national level. This discourse and political presence would to some extent influence those delegates at state conventions pointing to national

trends as evidence of why the right of suffrage should be constitutionally secured for the common man.

Chapter Four:
Conclusion

By dividing research into to regions of study, factors specific to each region become apparent. These regional factors are those that could not have come to be without the social, economic, and political conditions of their respective regions. As these factors were regionally unique, such factors of one region did not necessarily consciously collaborate with those of the other.

The most important regionally specific factors in the Northeast were of economic nature. The Northeastern Common Man has been defined by this project as a white male urban laborer who owned insufficient land (or none at all) to meet property qualifications for suffrage. In places where tax qualifications were used, these were normally based on property, so these laborers were unable to qualify for those as well. The beginning stages of the Industrial Revolution as well as the Communications and Transportation Revolutions disrupted urban artisan-based economies, which were replaced by those centered around the factory model and bigger businesses. As working and living conditions deteriorated for urban laborers who had become independent on their employers (unlike the economic independence of artisans), labor unions began to form. These organizations acted democratically and demonstrated the ability of landless laborers to partake in the democratic system. Additionally, the mere existence of such unions disrupting the hierarchy of power within the factory model created a presence in the economy and in politics of the urban laborer that could not be ignored.

Related to labor unions, though not operating within the economy, were Workingmen's Parties. These local parties, by electing representatives in local, state, and in extremely rare cases national levels, effected change at local levels but failed to do so in a substantial way at the state or national level. Workingmen's Parties were absorbed by the Democratic Party, and in the process

reoriented the focus of the Democratic Party to include the concerns of urban laborers. It was here that real change occurred.

In the Northeast, the regional factors were results of the political, social, economic, and *physical* conditions of the frontier. This project has hopefully upheld the idea that the frontier was directly involved in the development of American democracy—an idea that has been criticized by historians mostly because of its introduction by Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis. Though Turner's work was weak, the underlying concept that it presented has merit. The creation of communities in the frontier in the vacuum of preexisting social and economic hierarchies demanded democracy to confront issues faced by these fledgling communities. The democracy that emerged was unlike that of anywhere else in the nation, one based on egalitarianism and the real participation of the people *en masse.* Frontier democracy, rooted in this participation, was a system of leadership based on persuasion and example, and as such the concerns of the people had to be addressed by politicians seeking political success.

The physical conditions of the frontier made the restrictions on suffrage that existed in the East weak and difficult to enforce. The sheer abundance of land was the cause of this. Poor surveying technology made it nearly impossible to confirm the acreage of everyone's property, as was necessary to uphold property qualifications, especially in light of the rapid purchasing of land by homesteaders heading West. Additionally, poorly kept records made it difficult for polling administrators to ascertain one's claim to land.

The regional factors of both the Northeast and the Northwest interacted with each other while contemporarily interacting with national factors. In some cases, these national factors affected the development of regional factors, while in others were affected by regional factors. The shifting of attitudes toward Revolutionary principles and the ideals of the Founding Fathers by a

new generation of Americans (beginning around, and possibly caused by the War of 1812) is an example of a national factor affecting the development of regional ones. The rejection of aristocratic ideals such as property as a basis for one's democratic capabilities as well as a reevaluation of the concepts of consent of the governed, the relationship between taxation and representation, and the merit of veterans caused this new generation to reassess who was able to partake in the democratic system and why. Without this shift, the emergence of, and attention paid to, labor movements and Workingmen's Parties would not have taken place.

The rise of the Democratic and Whig Parties in the Second Party System, as well as the shape these parties took, resulted from the discussed regional factors. As elections were becoming increasingly contentious, party politicians looked for any opportunity to acquire more votes and turned to the common men of each region to find these votes. It was already mentioned that Workingmen's Parties were absorbed by the Democrats and reoriented their platform. In the Northwest, the frontier democracy that demanded real representation of the people made it possible for parties to find support from the Northwestern Common Man so long as they made efforts to address the concerns of the people. The electoral victories by Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison demonstrate this, as both presidents (the former a Democrat and the latter a Whig) made efforts to (at the very least, rhetorically) address the needs of the frontiersman while at the same time proclaiming themselves to be "one of them."

The Transportation and Communications Revolutions were both affected and affected by regional factors in a similar degree. In the East, as has already been mentioned, these technological revolutions caused many of the economic disruptions that created a laboring class. These revolutions had little effect in democratizing the West, as it was already relatively democratic, but opened the region up to the rest of the nation and in doing so centralized the nation both in terms

of information and politics, while at the same time opening the region to the rest of the nation to travel and experience frontier egalitarianism firsthand.

The result of all of these regional and national factors was the development of a national trend of democratization via suffrage reform, which was, of course, the Age of the Common Man. These changes were made permanent by the revision (or drafting) of suffrage laws in state constitutions during conventions, securing universal white manhood suffrage. Each state in the nation held such a convention during this time, and debates by delegates within them surrounding suffrage were shaped by all of the factors described throughout this project. Although the laws passed did not effectively guarantee suffrage to 100% of the white male population, as there still existed requirements related to citizenship, residency and other factors, the requirements that remained could theoretically be met by any man without much effort and did not undermine the inherence of white male suffrage rights.

By making these arguments and using the evidence that this project has, it has modestly been attempted to provide a comprehensive look at the regional and national factors driving the development of suffrage reform during the Age of the Common Man. In doing so, it has hopefully been made clear that the national trend of democratization that took place between 1820 and 1850 was made possible only by a combination of all of these factors, not just those specific to a region. Other historians and political scientists often either focus their research to a specific region, or overstate the contributions made by one region while understating those from the other. While these works are important in understanding this period of history, their ignoring of some factors results in the conveying of only a partial understanding of political development, as without the contributions made by those ignored factors, those examined would not have had the impact they

did. This project exists as an attempt to supplement these works by addressing the factors listed by all of the authors encountered during research and explaining how they interacted with each other to create the political environment of the Age of the Common Man.

Now that the reader hopefully has gained a better understanding of the development of suffrage reform in the United States between 1820 and 1850, the following question may come to mind: why is studying this period important today? The answer to that question lies in the *modus operandi* of APD. This was already discussed, but for the sake of the weary reader it will be restated. APD scholars try to refrain from limiting their study to strict periods of time, such as the one imposed on this project. The reason for this is that such limitation prevents a comprehensive understanding of gradual change over time in United States political history. For one to understand why American politics are the way they are today, one must first understand how they were yesterday. This project has humbly attempted to provide a vignette of American political history and give as comprehensive as possible a description of how politics changed over the course of a mere thirty years.

In the present, a time of great social and political progress, it is easy to look back on the Age of the Common Man and criticize the advancements made, as well as the players driving such advancements, for being too narrow in scope. Current progress is by no means unilateral in its advancement of the rights of everyone. but the wide scope of discourse surrounding progress to subjugated people—including, but not limited to, women, African Americans, and the LGBTQ+ community—is striking when compared to the advocacy of these groups in the past.

Objectively speaking, the argument that the scope of progress made during this time was limited is true. Subjectively, this progress was revolutionary. Although the population with which such progress was concerned was, indeed, specific—lower-class white men, the "common men"

of the early- to mid-19th century—it made huge advancements in the political rights for those people and changed the way such matters were talked about. It was during this time that the first of many durable steps toward democratization (especially through suffrage reform) were taken.

A result of this first step was the reorientation of political discourse away from the self-serving quasi-aristocracy to the "people." Within the Second Party System that was so prevalent during the Age of the Common Man, this reorientation meant that for the first time, the concerns of the lower classes—specifically lower-class white males—were extensively addressed by parties. This was caused primarily by the shift away from election by legislative caucus to popular votes and by the increasingly contentious elections of the Second Party System. Because of this, parties needed to gain the support of the people who now were electing them rather than their politicians who formerly were. Whether or not these politicians were sincere in their attempts to address the concerns of the people, these concerns were still being addressed.

It was this reorientation that opened the proverbial floodgates for other groups to do what the common men of the 19th century did. By organizing themselves, laborers in the East created a presence that was unable to be overlooked, especially by politicians seeking to harness their real or potential voting power. The appeal of potential voting power to politicians was described in an 1820 article published in *The National Advocate,* in which New York State Governor DeWitt Clinton's veto of a convention bill—despite having recently endorsed it—that would have allowed for suffrage reform was discussed. The article had this to say:

> …if, indeed, a very considerable portion of our most respectable inhabitants are to be excluded from the right of suffrage, they will now know to whom they are indebted for this degradation—they will no know, (and let it be recorded in the breast of every friend to equal rights) that when DE WITT CLINTON had the power of establishing liberty and equality among the people, he openly refused to exercise it![181]

[181] "Opinions."

This excerpt shows that refusal on behalf of a politician to support potential voter pools would result in those groups not supporting that politician should they secure the right to vote. Seeing the support of candidates like Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison by the people they at least rhetorically paid attention to, later politicians no doubt did the same with other groups that created political presences for themselves.

There are a few modern examples of this happening. A common Republican criticism of support for the rights of undocumented immigrants and the question of them voting by modern-day Democrats is that the only reason Democrats are doing so is to is to secure their votes in the future. There is no real evidence for this, but the very fact that this argument has been brought up is demonstrative of the idea posited by the above article and by sections of this project. A stronger example of this—and one that makes modern Democrats seem less conniving—is African American support for the Democratic Party. From the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, the Democrats have taken significant measures to address the concerns of the African American population, much more so than the Republican Party. In turn, the Democrats have enjoyed wholesale support from African Americans since. The same is largely true for minority groups in general. Whether or not Democratic politicians were conscious of the fact that their support of these groups would turn into political support *by* these groups is in most cases impossible to prove, but demonstrates the fact that there is incentive for politicians to support subjugated peoples, for without this incentive there would be no change.

Regardless of the sincerity of their intentions, politicians tending to the concerns of subjugated people is a good thing, and was made possible by the shift in the center of discourse during the Age of the Common Man. Both the bottom-up organization of people in an effort to secure democratic rights and the top-down incentive for politicians to support this has resulted in

concrete steps toward full democratization. Examples of such concrete steps can be found in the 14th, 15th, 19th, and 24th amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as in Supreme Court rulings and changes to state constitutional and statutory laws.

The statements and arguments made by this project are believed to be true—otherwise they would not have been included—but this is not to say that this is a perfect project. Despite making the most earnest of efforts to achieve the goals that this project set out to accomplish, it should be understood that it is limited in a number of ways. The purpose of outlining these limitations is not to implore the reader to disregard the arguments posited by this project, but to give the reader some more context. Just as the discussion of academia in *Chapter One* gave context to the reader of information available to this project, a discussion of the limitations on this project gives the reader context of the information and other factors in which it is lacking.

The largest limiting factor besetting this project is time. Had there been a greater amount of time to complete the task, this project would have delved deeper into the various factors that it discussed. For the nature of this project, it is believed that the arguments made went into sufficient detail, but had time not been a limiting factor then more could have been produced. While the lack of time undeniably limited research as a whole, the most significant casualty was the research of state constitutional conventions. Publications outlining the debates and proceedings of these conventions are rich in material, and as such are extraordinarily long. Most are over a thousand pages, and some are longer still. Though the publications used in this project were found online, and therefore were searchable, keyword searches are themselves limited in their capabilities. Had there been more time, these publications would be studied in greater detail rather than relying on searches.

Related to this is the fact that many publications, not only convention materials, have not yet been digitized, and can be found only in archives. Travelling to other states to look in these archives for more source material was simply impossible to do for this project, so it is impossible to know just what information lies within those archives. Had it been possible and practical to travel for research, there likely would have been a wider range of primary sources included, and therefore a better understanding of historical events and developments.

The very nature of this project limits research to some degree. This is an undergraduate history and political science thesis, and the guidelines for such a project demand the examination of not only a very specific topic, but a specific time period. As it has been discussed multiple times, to properly understand political development one must do his or her best to gain an understanding of a country or region's political development across a protracted length of time. This project does this to some extent, looking at developments (primarily in the Northwest) prior to 1820 and looking at some conventions and documents from after 1850, but nonetheless curbs itself largely to the three decades in between. One can gain an adequate understanding of development by looking at a prescribed period of time, but to gain the deepest understanding possible temporal boundaries must be transcended.

One final limiting factor of this project—one that the reader may have noticed—is that it does not examine the southern United States. This is largely a result of the previously discussed time constraints placed upon research. The reason for excluding the South is that in the region, race affected and complicated many of the debates and developments surrounding white male suffrage. As this project has repeatedly pointed out, regional factors interacted with each other as well as with national factors, and by omitting the South and contributions made by any regional factors at play in the region, this project is admittedly lacking in this regard. However, as was

pointed out for previous works, this does not necessarily mean that the arguments presented by this project are *wrong,* but rather that it is possible for these arguments to be elaborated on further.

The point in discussing all of these limitations is simply to convey the fact that further research can—and should—be done both by the reader and by the author. Advice for the reader would be to personally study the works of not only the authors included in this project, but also of any author writing about this topic. Useful materials would not only be those relating specifically to the Age of the Common Man, but also those relating to any of the regional and national factors discussed throughout the previous chapters. Those relating to the factors rather than the period of time itself often look at trends and developments beyond the years 1820 and 1850, giving the reader a deeper understanding than materials specific to the time period.

As for this project's author, the research that should be continued is chiefly in primary source material. The arguments surrounding improved communications technologies as a result of the Communications Revolution are evidenced by the sheer amount of newspapers and other publications from the time. Given the time, this deluge of material would be explored in greater depth, strengthening the arguments made by this project and more likely than not providing new ones. Of course, it would additionally be useful to this project to further examine the existing works of scholars, as these not only give ideas and examples, but supply primary source material that would otherwise be overlooked.

It is the hope that such further work will be done but, if not, it is urged that the reader continues his or her own research. The importance of political development taking place during the Age of the Common Man cannot be understated in regards to American political development as a whole, and as such students of history or political science, or Americans wanting to understand

more about their nation's political history, would be remiss not to explore the developments of this period.

APPENDIX A

Rural v. urban populations in the United States by total and percentage according to the United States Census, 1820-1850:[182]

	Rural Population	Urban Population	Rural, % of Total Population	Urban, % of Total Population
1820	8,945,198	693,255	92.8%	7.2%
1830	11,733,455	1,127,247	91.2%	8.8%
1840	15,218,298	1,845,055	89.2%	10.8%
1850	19,617,380	3,573,496	84.6%	15.4%

APPENDIX B

Total number of urban centers in each region according to the United States Census, 1820-1850:[183]

	Northeast	Northwest
1820	43 out of 61 total*	1 out of 61 total*
1830	59 out of 90 total*	6 out of 90 total*
1840	68 out of 100 largest**	10 out of 100 largest**
1850	65 out of 100 largest**	12 out of 100 largest**

*When a number is given out of a "total" amount, this is in regards to that year's census only listing that many urban centers.

**When a number is given out of a "largest" amount, this is in regards to that year's census including only the largest 100 urban centers.

[182] United States, Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing*. p. 5.

[183] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html.

APPENDIX C

Northwestern state populations according to the United States Census, 1800-1850:[184]

	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
Ohio	45,365	330,760	581, 434	937,903	1,519,467	1,980,329
Indiana	5,641	24,520	147,718	343,031	685,866	988,416
Illinois	-	12,282	55,211	157,445	476,183	851,470
Michigan	-	4,762	8,896	31,639	212,267	397,654
Wisconsin	-	-	-	-	30,945	305,391
Iowa	-	-	-	-	43,112	192,914
Missouri	-	19,783	66,586	140,455	383,702	682,044

[184] United States, Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, p. 26-7.

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