

THE MARKET REVOLUTION IN AMERICA

Social, Political, and
Religious Expressions,
1800–1880

Edited by
MELVYN STOKES
and
STEPHEN CONWAY

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Introduction

MELVYN STOKES

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, growing attention has been paid by historians to the idea of a "market revolution" in early nineteenth-century America. A largely subsistence economy of small farms and tiny workshops, satisfying mostly local needs through barter and exchange, gave place to an economy in which farmers and manufacturers produced food and goods for the cash rewards of an often distant marketplace. Such a change had major implications for household arrangements, social institutions, political ideology and practice, and cultural patterns. Charles Sellers was using the concept of a market revolution at least as early as the 1960s.¹ In 1975, Sellers's Berkeley colleague Michael P. Rogin structured a chapter of his study of Jacksonian Indian policy around the market revolution.² Sean Wilentz used the term in a 1982 essay and developed a broader application of the idea eight years later.³ Harry L. Watson adopted the market revolution as a major organizing theme of his important 1990 reappraisal of Jacksonian politics. Since 1990, scholars including Daniel Feller, Paul Goodman, William E. Gienapp, Paul E. Johnson, and Donald J. Ratcliffe have incorporated it into their work.⁴ In 1991, Sellers published what is clearly destined to remain the major synthesis of early nineteenth-century history from the perspective of the market revolution.⁵

Though *market revolution* may be a relatively new term to most American historians, the ideas underpinning it are by no means original. The general characteristics of the transition from a local agricultural and handicrafts-based economic system to an industrial-type economy oriented toward markets were first mapped out by political economists around the turn of the century. These writers were concerned to apply Darwinian ideas on evolution to economics by identifying the varying "stages" of economic development. They were aware that economic changes involved modifications in human thought and behavior.⁶ They also realized that politics was affected: the last years of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the idea that early American politics could be explained as a contest between social groups at varying stages of economic development. Over a century ago, it seemed evident to one historian that American farmers of the early republic were divided on subsistence-commercial lines. Orin G. Libby, who had studied with Frederick Jackson Turner, made the differences between the two groups an

once again, by many historians for greater democracy. Yet they of their racist views of African tiz suggests a reappraisal of this erved. In the 1830s, he points orted abolitionism. These party seemed to be shoring up capi- atened the idea of equal politi- , some Democrats were attack- tions for whites. They argued, roducers had the right to com- plied this principle to blacks as titution—another major tenet llowing slavery to expand into first step on the road to aboli- ntislavery Democrats, Wilentz the slavery issue and the rac-

ner in which issues raised by nce in politics after the panic of partisan conflict in the years ange of factors, including the ethnocultural strategy delib- n power in the 1870s, and in- within each party. The growth ad prepared the ground for a re by interest group loyalties ular economic issues.

engage directly with Charles arket revolution and religion. ght—Moderate Light, antino- ids. Sellers's dismissal of ideas list ideology seems to Howe rages Sellers's conception of ers, he maintains, reifies the mic and social transformation human beings for their own ssment of the effects of the p us understand how it suc-

ceeded. He links its progress to middle-class aspirations for a better life, as reflected not only in material things but also in perceptions of manners and taste—the growth of what is called “polite culture.” In his essay, Richard Carwardine looks at Sellers’s arminian-antinomian divide in terms of Methodism. Though Sellers writes of Methodists as part of his antinomian coalition, the theology of Methodism, Carwardine points out, was fundamentally Arminian. Not all Methodists were Jacksonians, and Carwardine’s essay considers the variety of their political involvements. Though religion helped ordinary men and women deal with the results of the market revolution, and may at times have aided its advance, Carwardine believes it is false to see the religious loyalties and enthusiasms of the era purely in such functional terms.

Charles Sellers, in his essay, concludes that attitudes concerning the benefits and defects of capitalism have biased historians’ views of the results of the market revolution. He traces the growth of the consensus paradigm relating capitalism to democracy and provides reasons for rejecting that paradigm. His own interpretation, he insists, best explains—in accordance with Lee Benson’s “ascertainable facts”—the link between democracy and capitalism. The triumph of the latter, Sellers believes, shows that the majority—at least on important questions—does not rule. Yet, in a sentiment that would surely be echoed by all the contributors to this volume, he also appeals for the development of yet more paradigms to enlarge our understanding of nineteenth-century history.

NOTES

1. See Charles Sellers and Henry May, *A Synopsis of American History* (Chicago, 1963), chaps. 9–11. The idea, if not the term itself, influenced the publications of Sellers’s graduate students in later decades. See James Roger Sharp, *Jacksonians versus the Banks: Politics in the States after the Panic of 1837* (New York, 1970); Kim T. Phillips, “The Pennsylvania Origins of the Jackson Movement,” *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (1976): 489–508; Donald J. Ratcliffe, “Politics in Jacksonian Ohio: Reflections on the Ethnocultural Interpretation,” *Ohio History* 88 (1979): 5–36.
2. Michael P. Rogin, “The Market Revolution and the Reconstruction of Paternal Authority,” in his *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975).
3. Sean Wilentz, “On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America,” in Stanley I. Kutler

Capitalism and Democracy in American Historical Mythology

CHARLES SELLERS

THE PARADIGM OF DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE to a stressful market revolution in the Jacksonian United States derives from a strikingly British-American group of historians working independently along parallel lines. The 1994 Commonwealth Fund Conference at University College London brought many of us together and allowed us to vet our work with a distinguished assemblage of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. The concept of market revolution seemed to pass muster, at least to the extent of linking economic transformation with equally profound transformations of society, culture, and politics. In particular, the rich scholarship in rural social history, capped by the work of Christopher Clark, has apparently prevailed over the long-standing (and ideological) assumption that the United States never had a precapitalist populace to be transformed.

Clark's essay in this volume extends his perceptive analysis of the market revolution's social impact into the later nineteenth century, and his argument here introduces other provocative papers on the concept's post-Jacksonian reach. In addressing politics, the slavery-free-soil controversy, the South, and gender, some of these are structured by and derive insight from the concept, while others attest to its fit with analysis not greatly dependent on it. The concept organizes the remaining essays on the Jackson period, four on politics, one on religion, and one on culture. Unfortunately, the urgent task of addressing the daunting confusions that bedevil Jacksonian historiography permits more than passing reference only to those essays most critical to the market revolution paradigm.

Only Clark addresses the paradigm itself. He is surely right to warn against losing historical complexities in its overarching uniformities. Credible paradigms must be grounded in and constantly corrected by the kind of close, theoretically informed analysis he so signally demonstrates. But neither should paradigmatic meaning be lost in the manifold discontinuities of the historical reality from which it is abstracted. My conception of the market revolution would incorporate many of Clark's discontinuities as arising from

inherent and ongoing contradictions between capitalist market relations and human needs.

Clark's reluctance to see the Jacksonian market revolution as capitalist, as a process rather than a series of events, makes me uneasy that too much paradigmatic meaning may be lost. The evidence remains convincing to me that a process of capitalist market revolution impacted most relations of production, including family farming, when it "took off" in Jacksonian days as self-accelerating and hegemonic.¹ Discontinuities should not blind us to the relentlessly commodifying process of ongoing capitalist transformation, which seems unstoppable as long as its energizing Jacksonian constellation of avid capital, expanding free market, and captive polity holds.²

While Clark's keen eye for the critical theoretical issues helps scholars define their own view of the market revolution, the major point of substantive contention is the resistance this revolution met. How much was there, and how did it figure in Jacksonian politics and evangelical religion? Because this question goes to the merits of capitalism, it cannot be realistically addressed without also addressing interpretive bias. With British scrupulosity tempering Yankee zeal at the London conference, what the transnational perspective highlighted for me was Jacksonian history's special and too-little-acknowledged proneness to bias. But bias, I hope to show, has both uses and abuses.

For a century and a half American identity and destiny have been contested between capitalism and democracy, making their simultaneous Jacksonian takeoff a historical storm center. Between these two poles Jacksonian interpretation has oscillated ever since, following major swings in the political climate and caught up in the broader contention over national self-definition. Jacksonian democracy was denigrated by patrician historians as a threat to capitalist progress through the Gilded Age, then rehabilitated by "progressive" historians as a middle-class defense against capitalist abuse in the climate of Progressivism and the New Deal, and finally domesticated by "consensus" historians as a politics of democratic capitalist enterprise during the Cold War.³ Now the spirited engagement, diverse paradigms, and fresh ideas of this book herald a new round of debate over this perennially contested era.

Interpretive bias seems inescapable for the Jacksonian historian who lives in an American political world still structured by the contradictions between capitalism and democracy. As both citizen and historian, I took alarm when consensus historians armed the United States for Cold War by purging class from consciousness. Muffling exploitative capital in appealing democratic garb, their mythology of consensual democratic capitalism purged egalitarian meaning from democracy. I winced when Ronald Reagan evoked "democ-

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racy" against the Evil Empire though clearly meaning capitalism. I grieved when public discourse translated democracy into "freedom" ("liberty" in the academic mode)—typically meaning freedom to aggrandize yourself without any concern for people who lack the gumption, social advantages, or luck to do the same. The political reactions of other citizen-historians, though different, are no less heartfelt. Hence the Yankee zeal that bemuses British colleagues.

On this politically charged Jacksonian ground, the warring assumptions are particularly illuminated by Daniel Walker Howe in Chapter 10 of the present volume. The capitalist market was too manifestly beneficial to be rationally resisted, he argues. Although he acknowledges substantial costs, he thinks them outweighed by liberation from Andrew Jackson's "narrow world of patriarchy and violence" to an open world of autonomy and choice. Cultural commitments structure Howe's catalog of changes that conferred this premier market boon: more occupational choices ("especially those making use of formal education"), more consumer choices ("a form of personal empowerment"), more schools and colleges, more printed matter, more ("and more beautiful") churches, more humane child rearing, "more opportunities to encounter the arts," and "the cultivation of good taste." Howe sees self-discipline as the other great boon of market culture, and the ancillary benefits he describes include the "culture of politeness" and the array of evangelical churches and voluntary organizations that reinforced "the subordination of sexuality, along with other forms of emotional indulgence, to principled self-discipline."

The implicit argument is that rational people could not have resisted such self-evident benefits. But Howe's hierarchy of values is self-evident only within the bourgeois middle-class culture it defines. It was not self-evident to the Jacksonian majority, and it is not self-evident to this historian. The underlying conflict of values over the merits of bourgeois middle-class culture reaches to the merits of capitalism. Where Howe's assumptions suggest that I undervalue capitalism's benefits and attractions, my assumptions suggest that he underestimates its costs and coercions. Yet by standing so manifestly on the personal (and class?) values that structure his argument, this learned, fair-minded, and honest historian sets an example that could make the next round of Jacksonian debate unusually productive.

My corresponding values, I ought therefore to avow, derive in the first instance from my experience of bourgeois middle-class autonomy as driven, self-repressive, and intensely competitive. Capitalism commodifies and exploits all life, I conclude from my life and all I can learn. Relations of capitalist production wrench a commodified humanity to relentless competitive effort

and poison the more affective and altruistic relations of social reproduction that outweigh material accumulation for most human beings. A life of competitive relationships dehumanizes all.

Howe's consensus narrative—"Market delivers eager self-improvers from stifling Jacksonian barbarism"—is blind to the coerciveness of both capitalist transformation and its culture. More plausible to me is "Go-getter minority compels everybody else to play its competitive game of speedup and stretch-out or be run over." In my narrative, both conscripts and converts (including, perhaps, a few historians) need bourgeois-middle-class-evangelical culture and its mythologies both to cope with the naked egotism of capitalist life and to reinforce a new level of self-disciplined effort.

The present historic moment of bourgeois triumphalism is not auspicious for questioning capitalism, and my implicit critique is not accepted by some (for example, Richard E. Ellis) who otherwise credit my argument in *The Market Revolution*.⁴ Yet understanding capitalism's human costs, along with democracy's majoritarian limits, has never been more urgent. As corporate capital rides a spreading free market to world dominion, competitive stress intensifies, the fruits of free-enterprise autonomy sour with job flight and social breakdown, environmental disaster looms, politics gridlocks, and huckster-driven media increasingly dominate public consciousness. Democracy's last chance to challenge or chasten the capitalist market could be slipping away. The essays of John Ashworth, Christopher Clark, and Amy Dru Stanley give hope that capitalism's cost-benefit bottom line may be more realistically calculated once Cold War rigidities ease and the Stalinist bogeyman recedes as the only conceivable alternative. Meanwhile every historian may calculate it for herself or himself.

But historical understanding of the market revolution turns less on the abstract merits of capitalism than on the Jacksonian facts. Historians' primary commitment is to the "ascertainable facts," to use Lee Benson's phrase, and logical inference from them. Of course, facts would be meaningless without interpretation, and interpretation is inevitably biased by values and assumptions from personal experience, especially, in Jacksonian historiography, those of class. Historical integrity requires both self-scrutiny of one's bias and readiness to adjust interpretation and bias to the ascertainable facts.

Yet, while bias distorts, especially if unconscious or unacknowledged, it also generates the paradigms that guide us to such historical truth as we can know. Because dominant paradigms are usually biased to reinforce existing relations of power and privilege, truer history requires multiple paradigms arising from a broader range of human experience and perception. No paradigm has a wide enough lens to absorb the whole meaning of any past, while

every paradigm that is focused by honest experience and faithful to the ascertainable facts opens some new perspective on *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*.

Preeminent among the Jacksonian facts is the transformation of politics and culture by massive upwellings of populism and evangelicalism. The critical test of any paradigm is how well it fits and explains these momentous developments in politics and religion where the broadest spectrum of Americans becomes historically visible.

On the main interpretive battleground, politics, some chapters of the present volume and most current scholarship reveal that consensus history's death, like Mark Twain's, has been greatly exaggerated. In answer to Donald J. Ratcliffe's complaint in Chapter 7 of this book that I write "as if Lee Benson had never issued his call to make political history more scientific," I hope to show that so did Benson himself.⁵ Only by transcending his own injunction did he redeem short-run error with enduring insights. The consensus history that reached its definitive formulation in his *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, however misleading in substance, opened most of the new historical vistas we now explore, including that of market revolution.⁶ The problems that surface in some essays in this book must be addressed at their source in the still regnant consensus paradigm, especially as perfected by Benson.

The consensus perspective was provoked by the red flag of class when Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in *The Age of Jackson*, set off a critical feeding frenzy unparalleled in American historiography.⁷ Schlesinger was the first historian to dig so deeply into the (mainly northeastern) Jacksonian political correspondence and newspapers. There he discovered both the hard-money ideology at the core of Jacksonism and the roots of insurgent democracy in disruptive economic change. With the New Deal climate attenuating progressive historiography's ambivalence about class, he boldly announced that Jacksonian politics pitted antibank farmers and workers against credit-hungry businessmen. In his liberal paradigm, business excesses periodically mobilized the rest of society for political reform, usually through the Democratic party.

Amid relentless critical assault on *The Age of Jackson*, the consensus paradigm was enunciated in a 1948 essay by Richard Hofstadter. It was received with uncritical acclaim, although not much buttressed by research until Bray Hammond's magisterial history of the politics of banking appeared nine years later. Jacksonians were proclaimed "expectant capitalists" epitomizing an era of exploding entrepreneurial avidity. This proposition was supported less by new ascertainable facts than by an interpretive tour de force: Jackson's Democrats, Hofstadter announced, destroyed the restrictive Bank of the United

States in order to multiply free-lending state banks and entrepreneurial opportunity.⁸ A number of Hofstadter's colleagues at Columbia University mounted a flank attack on Schlesinger's claim that labor supported Jackson.⁹

The zeal to discredit Schlesinger and the uncritical enthusiasm for the consensus paradigm registered a national ideological shift intersecting a sociological shift in the production of historical scholarship. As New Deal liberalism succumbed to Cold War hysteria, an able and energetic cohort of World War II veterans flooded the historical profession, impatient to jump-start postponed careers, and often experiencing upward mobility in a flourishing academy, thanks in part to the educational generosity of the GI Bill of Rights. Consensus history validated for much of my academic generation the ideal of "careers open to talents." While meritocratic competition sharpened and research grants blossomed under federal largesse, McCarthyism muted dissent. Many scholars enlisted in the CIA's cultural Cold War to sell capitalist democracy to intelligentsias around the world by covert means.¹⁰ Consensus history was born in a Cold War academic atmosphere of intellectual mobilization and keen ideological demand for a mythology of consensual democratic capitalism. Schlesinger himself left Jacksonian class politics to its critics as he moved into anticommunist Cold War liberalism and New Deal-Camelot hagiography.¹¹

My encounter with this contested terrain as an apprentice historian best explains my understanding of how lived experience interacts with paradigm and ascertainable facts. Fresh from the brutalities of race and class in the depression South as a Harvard undergraduate, I was puzzled by an academic history oblivious to racism and class conflict, and only gradually developed the intellectual self-confidence to trust my own experience of social reality. Although I encountered Schlesinger only glancingly at Harvard, I was drawn to history by the class realism of *The Age of Jackson* and captivated at first by his rationale for a humane liberal politics.¹² Thinking him then, as I do now, more nearly right than his critics, but weak on the South and the West, I undertook to test and broaden his analysis in a dissertation on James K. Polk. My Schlesinger paradigm spoke to the ascertainable facts in focusing research and selecting facts.

But then the facts started speaking to the paradigm. They confirmed Schlesinger's class politics, though with a larger antibank, hard-money role for southern and western farmers than Schlesinger allowed and far more slippage between the pronouncements and actions of Democratic politicians. The ascertainable facts, moreover, supported many consensus themes, some not yet put forward: a rampant and bipartisan commitment to enterprise, a politically alienated working class, ethnocultural politics, and constraints imposed

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by the constitutional-party system. The sources also attested to the major economic transformation posited by both paradigms; and, in my need for a paradigm consistent with all the facts, new insights from economic history prompted speculation about a "market revolution."¹³

Meanwhile, overtaking facts were threatening Hofstadter's thesis with the reality of class. The Jacksonian centrality and broad appeal of hard money proved undeniable, not only in Bray Hammond's study of banking politics, but also in the study of Jacksonian rhetoric and ideology by Hofstadter's perceptive doctoral student Marvin Meyers. Meyers tried to explain it away. Ingeniously, he made conflict safe for consensual capitalism by banishing it from class to an ambivalent Jacksonian psyche. Destruction of the national bank resolved inner conflict, he argued, by simultaneously appeasing precapitalist conscience and unleashing state banks to satisfy capitalist appetite. Although this insight illuminates Jacksonian cross pressures, they were seldom resolved in individual breasts. Instead the genie of conflict, as the facts compelled Meyers to recognize, escaped the psychic bottle to polarize a class politics of hard money. When Meyers conceded that Whigs spoke more to capitalist hopes and Democrats to precapitalist anxieties, consensus history faltered.¹⁴

Hammond, too, abandoned Hofstadter's claim that Jacksonians in general were "expectant capitalists." But, in conceding Jackson and the Democratic rank and file to the unaccountable atavism of hard money, he turned the spotlight on Democratic politicians. Like Meyers, he was propelled by a paradigm under pressure into new insight. Hammond saved the consensus idea from class politics by blaming the destruction of Philadelphia's national bank, and therefore financial stability, on Democratic politicians linked with inflationary state banks and their would-be borrowers. At the center of this alleged conspiracy were Wall Street jealousy, Martin Van Buren's Tammany-Bucktail Democrats, and their state banks.

Hammond appropriated this narrative and much else from the partisan polemic broadcast by New York Whiggery's brilliant editor-strategist Thurlow Weed. It is contrary to fact. Andrew Jackson and his grassroots army were not, as Hammond implied, duped into destroying the Bank by scheming politicians. It was the other way around. Only voter pressure forced many Democrats to support Jackson's inexplicably popular Bank veto after a Democratic Congress rechartered the national bank. Many, and often most, Democratic congressmen braved voter retribution in standing shoulder to shoulder with united Whiggery to defend both national and state banks against their chieftain and infatuated constituents. Hammond's astute focus on Democratic politicians points, in fact, to a structural feature of capitalist, two-party

democracy that is critical to Jacksonian politics: majority rule's slippage between insurgent majorities and the business-oriented politicians (typically lawyers) who profess or attempt to represent them.¹⁵

When Lee Benson selected New York as the test case for his imaginative and wholesale reconstruction of the tottering consensus paradigm, he had obviously drunk even more deeply than Hammond from Thurlow Weed's fount of ideology and rhetoric. The problem was the need to stave off class. If Democrats could not be made the bearers of democratic capitalism, Weed presented Whigs as promising candidates—New York Whigs, that is, who were uniquely dependent on democratic Antimasonry for most of their votes. The Empire State also promised an alternative to class as the basis for party division. It was almost unrivaled in ethnic diversity and conflict, and Benson improved this advantage by deriving his analysis of voting patterns from the 1844 election, when savage nativist–Irish Catholic conflict climaxed. He did not, of course, weigh his strategic choices in this consciously ideological way. Both his errors and their longevity demonstrate instead the unconscious force of paradigm imperatives, class, and ideological climate, even for highly creative historians on full alert against the pitfalls of what Benson called “impressionistic” history. Most of us accept what we want to believe with far less scrutiny than we lavish on challenges to our assumptions.

Benson was refreshingly candid about his a priori commitment to consensual democratic capitalism. “The spirit of enterprise flourished,” he asserted on impressionistic faith, “before enterprise itself felt the invigorating effects” of economic takeoff. Egalitarianism spread with canals and railroads (the critical Weed narrative) as enterprising Americans demanded an equal chance at glittering new opportunities. Therefore, because Americans agreed on “the economic virtues of capitalist culture” (the critical Hofstadter narrative), they divided politically over a host of secondary differences. “Since the United States is highly heterogeneous, and has high social mobility,” Benson's argument wound up, “I assume that men tend to retain and be more influenced by their ethnic and religious group membership than by their membership in economic classes or groups.”¹⁶

Whiggery was the true people's party in the Weed-Benson narrative, and the true bearers of democracy were the egalitarian Antimasons who joined the Whigs to champion equal entrepreneurial opportunity. Antimasons were mainly upstate farmers of New England heritage whose patriarchal, egalitarian lifestyle was disrupted when the Erie Canal brought market revolution and its train of bankers, bosses, lawyers, land speculators, and their ilk. Upstate fury at the secret Masonic fraternity of these agents of enterprise transformed New York politics. Antimasonry—aptly characterized by Benson as

“an impassioned, leveling attack by members of the ‘lower classes’ against the village and urban ‘aristocracy’”—expressed for Yankee farmers averse to a Masonic and slaveholding president the democratic impulse that elsewhere rallied around Jackson.¹⁷

Equal opportunity was Weed’s talisman for translating the patriarchal equality cherished by antibank Antimasons into the entrepreneurial opportunity demanded by bank-hungry canal-town enterprisers. While rhetorically appropriating the Antimasons’ egalitarianism, he turned their susceptible suspicions of “monster” institutions (Masonry and the national bank) against the “aristocrats” of Martin Van Buren’s Albany Regency and their fictitious “monopoly” of “monster” state banks. Although Masons had been prominent in all political parties, Van Buren’s Bucktail-Tammany Democrats were especially vulnerable because they had been so long entrenched, as a reward for bringing white male democracy to New York, that their power reached into every village establishment. Their ties with Albany’s important Mechanics and Farmers Bank lent some credibility to Weed’s diatribes, despite the Whiggery of most banking interests. The Weed-Benson narrative purloined democracy from the vulnerable Bucktails and ascribed it instead to a rising tide of small enterprisers evoked by the spreading market and driven to egalitarian Antimasonic insurgency by resentment of monopolies and special privileges (banks allegedly Bucktail) that blocked their upward path.

Thus Weed’s brilliant opportunism divided and almost neutralized an otherwise irresistible Bucktail-antibank-democratic majority while reaping for threatened enterprise the boon of equal (that is, free-banking, soft-money) opportunity. In the process he fathered (with major input from his editorial soul mate Horace Greeley) both consensus history and the mythology of consensual democratic capitalism. Unlike Benson, the Whig ideologists knew perfectly well that they were contending against the reality of class politics. “All of the advocates of a higher destiny for labor, . . . all the social discontent of the country, has been regularly repelled from the Whig party, and attracted to its opposite,” Greeley warned Weed privately, and the Whigs were doomed unless they could counter their reputation as “the bulwarks of an outgrown aristocracy.” When the adroit polemic tailored to this purpose became the master text for Weed’s academic heirs, the “wizard of the lobby” must have chuckled in whatever Valhalla his matchless political skills ensconced him.¹⁸

Benson followed the partisan Weed-Greeley line into gross distortions of New York political history,¹⁹ and his strategy for a more scientific “multivariate analysis” was undercut by the paucity and ambiguity of available data.²⁰ In this creative historian, a genius for paradigmatic imagination competed

with a passion for scientific exactitude. He started out with a contagious enthusiasm for radically shrinking the zone of interpretive doubt and disagreement by means of the rigorously empirical methods of social science research he had learned at Columbia University.²¹ His conscious purpose, paradoxically, was more to make history scientific than to rescue the consensus paradigm whose congenial assumptions were self-evident and universally conceded in the ideological climate he inhabited.

Benson demonstrated ethnicity's importance in Jacksonian politics (especially in the Northeast) so convincingly that it could no longer be ignored. But his jerry-built, multivariate evidential base could not sustain his weighty proposition that ethnicity and religion, not class, determined most votes.²² In the two counties he selected to demonstrate this by full examination (a banner county for each party), the empirical poverty and paradigm bias of multivariate analysis are apparent. Even from his data, each seems more explicable by my understanding of class.²³

Ethnicity and class cannot be divorced, in fact, and their cross pressures, along with those of religion and culture, were complexly mixed at the Jacksonian ballot box. Antimasonic Yankee farmers were an ethnic group in Benson's terms that were acting as a class in my terms—that is to say, as a group sharing a common situation in the relations of production. And whatever the reason for their dramatic Antimasonic insurgency, it was unquestionably prompted—this much Weed and Benton concede to class, though not in my terminology—by a market revolution dramatically impacting relations of production. The Antimasons who did fit the Weed-Benson formula were sons of the rural majority like Weed who were rising as clerks, mechanics, and lawyers in booming canal towns and resented the establishment banks that denied them the credit they required for success. Invoking rural egalitarianism to support their demand for equal opportunity, they gradually drew rural kin into both commodity markets and market culture, preparing the next generation to carry Daniel Howe's bourgeois middle-class "Whig" culture to hegemony on the Great Lakes prairies.

In all these ways, Antimasonry was mainly about class (relations of production), leaving for ethnocultural factors (more cultural than ethnic in this case) to explain why Yankees were such apt adapters to the market. But culture, too, and its permutations, are rooted in class relations of production. These are among the ascertainable facts indicating (in the light of my paradigm, to be sure), that for most of Jacksonian America, including New York, politics was structured mainly by class.

Benson's flawed paradigm has proved more fruitful, I have to conclude,

than his elaborate exercise in multivariate analysis. His refurbished consensus history, although muddying the Jacksonian foreground until ascertainable facts can overtake it, has pointed historians in productive new directions, for which his multivariate facts provide some specification. Paradigm led him to ethnicity, and ethnicity led him to culture. Understanding that ethnicity involved more than ancestral genes, he devised the term *ethnocultural* to wrap it in a penumbra of culture ranging from religion, family structure, and shared experience to foodways and ghost stories. Where Benson thought of culture as mainly cohering around ethnicity and usually around religion as well, followers of his insight learned to see it more broadly, as an inherent component of human society that coheres around many social formations, including class (the early mechanic culture and later plebeian street culture of Jacksonian cities, for example), and even political parties (Daniel Howe's Whig culture versus the more raffish, libertarian, class-conscious, and racist political culture of Jean Baker's Democrats).²⁴

The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy cast a long historical shadow. From it flowed not only a new cultural history and an ethnocultural perspective that permeated and revitalized post-Jacksonian history, but a new political history that has dramatically elevated the sophistication and realism of historical political analysis. Political historians have been busy ever since exploring his pioneering insights into the dynamics of two-party politics, particularly the stability of party attachments and therefore party balance, and the critical importance of the brief realignment phases that unpredictably interrupt the two-party drift toward electoral parity at every level.²⁵ Benson and Schlesinger are the historians from whom I have learned most.

Blindness to class disarmed consensus history in the face of the critical Jacksonian question, What caused the upwelling of grassroots democracy that transformed American politics? As consensus scholarship fell back for reinforcements to Revolutionary-Jeffersonian terrain, the elements of a better answer were emerging.²⁶ A new interest in "history from the bottom up" flowered amid the ferment of the 1960s, producing rich "new" histories of labor, rural society, and women and gender. This profusion of new ascertainable facts and insights, when juxtaposed to both the explosion of entrepreneurial energy discovered by consensus history and the hard-money thrust of Jacksonian politics discovered by Schlesinger, at last promised an explanation of the upheaval that culminated in Jacksonian politics.

The only paradigm I can conceive that answers the critical Jacksonian question and is compatible with all the ascertainable facts begins with a stressful capitalist transformation astride a market galvanized overnight into

accelerating expansion. When market stresses climaxed in the panic of 1819, a confused and substantially precapitalist populace, especially subsistence farmers and urban workers, rose in political rebellion against banks, conventional politicians, and "aristocrats." Drawn to the presidential polls in 1824 on an unprecedented scale by a spectacular maverick who invoked democracy and seemed by experience and temperament more amenable to their concerns, they delivered a popular mandate for Andrew Jackson. Robbed of their victory by "bargain and corruption," they doubled 1824's turnout four years later to install their hero in the White House by the largest popular majority in the nineteenth century.²⁷

No president in American history (for reasons more personal than political) had a keener ear for the popular pulse, and none was more ready to follow popular opinion so far in defiance of all respectable opinion. This rosy morning of democratic millennium radiated the popular hope that ordinary people could rule, and in this singular historic moment they actually tried to do so. Targeting banks as epitomizing the governmental favoritism through which market forces threatened the cheap-land yeoman republic of patriarchal independence and equality, they actually tried to choke off capitalism's lifeblood, credit. They were prevented from doing so mainly by an unresponsive two-party system, which Bensonian political history enables us to understand, and by the endemic sensitivity of politicians to highly motivated, articulate, and well-heeled elites, which requires a dash of realism about class to understand. Deflated millennial expectations, as Michael Holt's long-range analysis of nineteenth-century politics in this book suggests, meant that Americans would never invest such hope in democratic politics again.

Jackson's hard-money assault on the lifeblood of enterprise becomes, in this view, the critical test of whether a majority (even of white males) can actually rule. This view calls up for reconsideration the most defining and pervasive assumptions about American history and identity. Democracy arose in resistance to capitalism, not as its natural political expression. But the majority does not seem to rule, at least on the most important matters.

The Jacksonian upwelling of evangelical Protestantism could become as important as the Jacksonian upwelling of democracy for understanding American experience—if we could only explain it. A brief final comment seems called for, therefore, about my awkward "antinomian-arminian" appropriation from theology, as discussed in earlier chapters by Richard Cardine and Daniel Walker Howe. Having wrestled with this problem ever since a senior thesis on "The Great Awakening in North Carolina," I am convinced that evangelicalism was a two-phase phenomenon, "New Light-Moderate Light" in my terminology. It began as an "antinomian" mobiliza-

tion and revitalization of traditional precapitalist culture against threatening change. Under market pressures it evolved into an "arminian" mode of adaptation to capitalist imperatives. All agree that the arminian phase encouraged striving, self-discipline, self-improvement, and the other capitalist virtues in shaping Howe's bourgeois middle-class culture.

What was centrally at stake in the original evangelical upwelling, I suggest, was spirituality—or, more broadly magic, the vividly experienced everyday presence and agency of the supernatural. As early Americans defined the problem in the available terms of Protestant theology, the antinomian conviction that God spoke directly to individuals in dispensing magical grace arose against the God-diminishing arminian doctrine of human ability. In these terms the transition to capitalism was fought out for most Americans. New Light evangelicalism tended to be rural, communal, and democratic, and Nathan O. Hatch has richly delineated its democratic thrust, but its energy derived from its antinomian spiritual core.²⁸ I understand, with Carwardine and Howe, that my terminology, unless taken in the metaphorical sense in which I proffer it, seems to bowdlerize the long and complicated history of antinomianism and Arminianism as technical theology. I struggled for, and will happily embrace, any more accessible terminology that captures as well the spiritual or magical core of cultural resistance to capitalist transformation.

I readily grant to Carwardine, from whom I learned most of what I know about Methodism, the Arminian theological core that ultimately shaped it. But I suggest, as does his rich documentation for an earlier, somewhat different Methodism, that Wesley's theology was drowned out at first by antinomian camp-meeting ecstasy. A further wealth of ascertainable facts leads John H. Wigger to argue, "For earlier American Methodists who found themselves struggling to come to terms with unprecedented social and cultural changes and with frequently hostile resistance from the broader society, popular enthusiasm in many ways represented a more important theological construct than did Arminianism."²⁹ This granted, I will look to Carwardine for understanding of how and when Methodism changed. For Methodists, like other evangelicals, this great transmutation was more than an institutional shift from "cult" to "denomination" and "more beautiful" churches. It mobilized American psyches for an anxiously competitive capitalist life.

As custodians and guarantors of collective memory, American historians owe careful consideration to the neglected issues of power and justice raised by Jacksonian history. But as successful competitors in the academic marketplace, are they too often mesmerized by a national mythology that begs for critical analysis? Why was Schlesinger's class interpretation so instantly and

massively assailed, while hosannas greeted the consensus denial of class and its errors went so long uncorrected? A history embedded in national mythology cries out for more critical perspectives.

Understanding of American society has been most distorted by the political correctness that has long banned class from history and consciousness. But the "PC" defenses of American mythology are beginning to be breached as a wider range of ethnic, class, and gender experience addresses illuminating paradigms to the American past. "Objective reality we know we can never altogether reach," as I concluded my first take on Schlesinger and his critics, but multiplying paradigms promise "ever closer vantage points for discerning its salient features."³⁰

NOTES

1. By midcentury, for example, falling birthrates and nucleating families indicated that many farmers were well along the slow road from family-powered subsistence through commodity production using supplemental hired hands to modern agriculture's highly capitalized mechanization and sweated stoop labor. Clark's least compelling argument in his chapter of this book is that new forms of collectivity counteracted market atomization. It seems more likely to me that the mass anonymity of the new spectator sports and popular culture bespeaks isolation, while churches flourished by enforcing a new level of conformity. Nor do I see the relevance, let alone the accuracy, of blaming class-based judicial instrumentalism on the ideological kit bag of Jacksonian judges, especially in view of the havoc they wrought on their venerated common law.

2. The impressionable are too easily terrified by the incomprehensible anathema "reification," which is loosed regularly against scholars who see a "Marxist" constellation of forces as driving a long series of developments.

3. Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (1958): 615-34.

4. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991).

5. Ratcliffe's Ohio studies are among the best in teasing out the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of partisan voting patterns. See especially Donald J. Ratcliffe, "Politics in Jacksonian Ohio: Reflections on the Ethnocultural Interpretation," *Ohio History* 88 (1979): 5-36. Although he works within the market revolution paradigm, he postpones its political impact to the mid-1830s boom-and-bust crisis. Political change certainly peaked during the crisis years to crystallize a durable party realignment, but it was rooted in the rising tide of democratic disaffection that was precipitated by the panic of 1819, was sharp-

ened by state struggles over banking and debtor relief during the 1820s, and gradually overcame Radcliffe's undeniably sectional organization of politics to coalesce politically around Jackson (and in "Yankee" regions of the rural northeast around Antimasonry). Other debatable aspects of current scholarship that inform his analysis are mainly attributable to Benson.

6. Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York As a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J., 1961).

7. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945).

8. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948), chap. 3; Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J., 1957).

9. They found ambiguous election returns and even greater confusion about who constituted "labor." We now understand, from the new labor history stimulated by their questions, that the old mechanic class was fracturing between rising mechanic bosses and a growing wage proletariat. Boss mechanics and rising skilled journeymen were often Whig, it seems; labor militants were skeptical about both major parties until inspired by Jackson's Bank War; and the urban unskilled probably voted preponderantly Democratic, especially after the Bank War.

10. Sociologists of historical knowledge may yet explain why consensus history emanated almost exclusively from Dwight D. Eisenhower's Columbia University, with Bray Hammond just downtown at the Federal Reserve Bank. Benson worked out his analysis under the influence of Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research. Columbia's consensus warriors (some graduate students at the time) included, besides Benson and Hofstadter, Joseph Dorfman, Walter Hugins, Marvin Meyers, Richard B. Morris, Edward Pessen, and William A. Sullivan.

11. At the dawn of the Cold War, Schlesinger helped organize Americans for Democratic Action (for which I worked briefly between college and graduate school) to purge liberalism of Communist taint. Although ADA helped put civil rights on the national agenda (with Schlesinger at the forefront, both in Washington and in his influential call for a history of slavery and abolitionism premised on human equality), it functioned mainly, as I finally understood, to blunt Henry Wallace's third-party effort against Truman, preclude any criticism of bipartisan Cold War policy beyond a discredited radical fringe, and consolidate a climate of Cold War ideological mobilization that fostered McCarthyism. My disappointment with Schlesinger for giving liberal cachet to Cold War excess in the Kennedy administration was greater because his work played a role in defining for me a liberal faith that was shattered in the civil rights and antiwar struggles of the 1960s. This experience was critical, of course, in recontouring my paradigm to revised assumptions about American society. Truth is served, I suggest, when life experience of whatever kind jostles an occasional academic historian a little beyond the bourgeois middle-class assumptions that so powerfully and unconsciously constrain our historical vision.

12. Schlesinger defined class in the conventional categories of progressive historiography: farmers, workers, and businessmen. Although these broad categories have some uses with reference to cross-class coalitions, it seems far more useful for historical purposes to define a class as those similarly situated as to mode and relations of production, regardless

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of whether they exhibit class consciousness or conflict. This definition distinguishes, for example, subsistence farmers from commercial farmers, rising entrepreneurs from those with established wealth, unskilled wage workers from mechanic bosses.

13. See, for example, George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951); Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1861* (New York, 1961).

14. "The Whig party spoke to the explicit hopes of Americans as Jacksonians addressed their diffuse fears and resentments. . . . The Whigs distinctively affirmed the material promise of American life as it was going; and they promised to make it go faster." See Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, Calif., 1957), esp. pp. 1-10 (quotation on p. 9). Similarly, the facts caused Edward Pessen to reverse consensus history's initial skepticism about the authenticity and radicalism of Jacksonian labor organizations and leaders. See Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, N.Y., 1967).

15. Hammond, *Banks and Politics*. For Hammond's errors, see Frank O. Gatell, "Sober Second Thought on Van Buren, the Albany Regency, and the Wall Street Conspiracy," *Journal of American History* 53 (1966): 19-40. As an official of the New York Federal Reserve Bank and defender of central banking against the entrepreneurial abuse of credit that perennially cripples American capitalism, Hammond was projecting into the Jacksonian period the struggle he had discovered in the early republic between the responsibly restrictive national bank and the irresponsibly inflationary state banks controlled by avid would-be borrowers. Thus he was insensitive to a critical turning point. As the Bank maneuvered for recharter early in the Jackson administration, its president, Nicholas Biddle, effected a rapprochement with the state bank interests (that is, most local business communities) by easing its restraints on credit expansion. As a result most state banks, including the Wall Street suspects, supported recharter, and a unified business perspective pervaded not only the National Republican-Whig opposition, but many if not most Democrats elected on Jackson's coattails. In addition to rechartering the Bank, Democratic Congresses resisted Jackson's removal of the federal deposits (until the Bank's irresponsibility forced even Whigs to abandon it) and sabotaged his hard-money restraints on state banks (until he roused "the people" to "take it up"). Grassroots pressure from "Democrats in principle" eventually forced "Democrats by trade" to mouth the hard-money line or bolt. The real division over banking aligned Jackson and his grassroots adherents against politicians—all Whigs and probably a majority of those who called themselves Democrats. Hammond also failed to understand that Biddle, by inflating the currency to consolidate business elites behind the Bank, set in train (along with a flood of British credit) the runaway inflation and crash of the mid-1830s. Again, following Whig polemic, Hammond (and most historians) blamed economic disaster on the inflationary irresponsibility of Democratic politicians.

16. Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 12-13, 165, 273. Cited in support of these critical assumptions are quotations from H. St. John de Crèvecoeur and Hezekiah Niles, along with the interpretations of Hofstadter and consensus history's godfather, Louis Hartz. Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955) argued that Americans differed from Europeans in being "born free," which frustrated all effort to push

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273. Cited in support of rèvecouer and Hezekiah nsus history’s godfather, 1955) argued that Ameri- strated all effort to push

political theory or debate beyond the liberal consensus. I first contested the consensus perspective in a dazzling undergraduate seminar conducted by Hartz.

17. Quotation from Benson in his *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, p. 14.

18. Michael J. Lebowitz, “The Significance of Claptrap in American History,” *Studies on the Left* (1963): 85. The more conventionally business-minded New York Whigs paid a heavy price for indispensable Antimasonic votes. Antimasonic Whigs and orthodox Whigs were constantly at loggerheads, notably over the Bank of the United States and its leading advocate, Henry Clay, a Mason who lost his best chance for the presidency in 1840 as a consequence. New York’s Antimasons will continue to puzzle historians until they are given the insightful scrutiny and “great transition” perspective that Paul Goodman has applied so fruitfully to their copartisans in New England. See Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826–1836* (New York, 1988).

19. The Weed-Benson line errs most in (1) making Van Buren an opponent of democracy rather than its critical champion in the historic constitutional convention of 1821, (2) confusing the worker radicalism of the original Workingmen’s party with the faction of boss mechanics and invading politicians who co-opted its name for Whig coalition, (3) equating Workingman-Antimasonic opposition to banks with a ruling passion for equal entrepreneurial opportunity, (4) grossly exaggerating Bucktail complicity with state banks when most banking interests were Whig, (5) explaining the Bucktails’ campaign against the national bank as a defensive response to Weed’s polemic against their alleged state banking monopoly, and (6) blurring the critical distinction between the Democratic Locofocos’ hard-money free banking and the Whigs’ soft-money version. For further discussion of these and other errors, see Lebowitz, “Significance of Claptrap,” pp. 79–94.

20. Benson’s solid data for percentages of Democratic-Whig voters by county (albeit in an election skewed by ethnic strife and a decade beyond the Jacksonian realignment) had to be compared with nonpolitical variables for which data were fugitive and crude: for religion, the number of churches or seating capacity by denomination; for wealth and class, the average value of town dwellings in 1855 and 1865; and, for both these and ethnicity, whatever his ingenious assiduity could cobble together from gazetteers, anti-quarian county histories, and other impressionistic sources. Conclusions from multi-variate data, moreover, are almost as subject to distortion by paradigm as more impressionistic data. Vast gaps in the scant data must be bridged by assumptions, estimates, and projections whose subjective imprecision is disguised by the deceptively concrete percentages in which outcomes are reported.

21. My rewarding and cordial engagement with Lee Benson began in 1960 at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He inscribed my presentation copy of *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* to “a damned fine historian, even if he is a Jacksonian.” Under his influence, I have put a lot of effort into testing the efficacy of social science perspectives for my patch of the past. I trust it is apparent that I engage his work with enormous respect.

22. Benson was able to deny class politics in upstate New York because the large class of antibank farmers were split by Antimasonry between the parties. This does not deny class politics; it hides the class politics that occurred within the parties, as well as between

them. Farmer Antimasonic Whiggery sabotaged commercial Whiggery's darling Henry Clay and blocked its dearest hope, revival of the Bank of the United States. Downstate, Benson had to concede that the correlation of wealth with Whiggery in New York City wards suggested class division. But "further analysis" exorcised the demon by ascribing the votes of most ethnically identifiable groups exclusively to their ethnicity. Although the most Democratic groups "also happened to be lower class," this is pronounced on unconvincing grounds to be "casual rather than causal." See Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 142-64.

23. Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 86-109. Democratic Rockland County seems to me a classic case of an old farming community whose Antifederalist-Republican-Democratic politics had long defended the independence and equality of its patriarchal families against taxes and outside authority. Whig Chautauqua, by contrast, was recently settled by Yankee farmers whose abnormal Whiggery expressed unusually fervent Antimasonry.

24. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979); Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983).

25. This no-longer-so-new political history refined and nationalized Benson's cycles of party balance, identifying in the process a succession of distinctive party systems that emerged from widely spaced realignment phases. It has taught us much else: how the constitutional environment structures the party system to mandate two-party politics, the inescapable heterogeneity of both party coalitions, the importance of close party competition in politicizing voters and raising turnout, and the momentum of the parties' institutional cultures and will to survive. Yet this fertile scholarship betrays its consensus origins by tendencies to muffle issues of power and justice; ascribe too much to institutional dynamics and too little to interests, electoral pressures, and class; and reinforce the illusion that politicians represent the majority. Often it smacks of inside dopester awe at such a marvelously self-regulating system for resolving conflict among interests, muting discontent, and confining politics to a safe and narrow spectrum. Here, perhaps, consensualism found its most sophisticated and insidious form.

26. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1983); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992). Richard E. Ellis's chapter in the present volume incorporates Appleby's extremely valuable insights while doing justice to the Jeffersonian majority she slights. Like Benson, the intellectually protean Wood raises more issues than can be briefly characterized. The greatest diversion of early American historical scholarship from historical reality has been the interminable flogging of ideological republicanism. Although the political language most available to the Revolutionary/Jeffersonian generation has been usefully illuminated, it is so notoriously adaptable to so many uses that its causal effect has been greatly exaggerated. Like too much intellectual history, this mystifying preoccupation smacks of resort to ideology as a refuge from class, largely ignoring the class forces that generated and sustained the ideology.

27. Richard E. Ellis is particularly insightful about the 1820s in Chapter 6 of this book.

28. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn., 1989).

29. John H. Wigger, "Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (1994): 169-94 (quotation on p. 191). Nathan Hatch, cited above, leads the acknowledgements of assistance to Wigger, who is a doctoral student in Hatch's department at Notre Dame.

30. Sellers, "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," p. 634.

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