8. Conclusion

A READER MAY ASK WHETHER PHILADELPHIA WAS AT ALL representative of the North. At first glance the city seems atypical because of its proximity to slave states, its trade and family connections with the South, and its comparatively large Negro population. But pro-Southern and anti-Negro sentiments were to be found in other places as well. For example, New York City's mayor talked of seceding with the South; its *Daily News* radically criticized wartime policies long before the *Age* was founded in Philadelphia; and its elected officials permitted anti-Negro passions to get out of hand in wild draft riots. Wartime anti-Negro riots also occurred in Brooklyn. New Jersey (where in 1860 Lincoln did not capture all the electoral votes) had little enough antislavery spirit that it fostered a Peoples rather than a Republican Party. This state was the home of Democratic leaders such as James Wall, whose Philadelphia speech in May, 1863, was more pro-Southern than even the *Age* would endorse. James Buchanan, Attorney-General Jeremiah Black, Judge George Woodward, and the 1862 Democratic state chairman, Francis Hughes, were some of Pennsylvania's outstanding anti-Negro leaders, residents of central or southern parts of the state, whose careers attested to racist influence outside Philadelphia. Cincinnati was noted for its Southern atmosphere. Ohio's Democrats in-

cluded Clement Vallandigham, the North's leading war critic, and George Pendleton, the party's vice-presidential candidate in 1864, whose truce policy would have led to Southern independence. Anti-war "Copperheadism" was prevalent through southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The last-named state had a law banning immigration of free Negroes, and the speeches of its most famous Democratic leader, Stephen Douglas, abounded in racist appeals. Anti-Negro sentiment, we may infer, was strong all the way from New York City to the southern part of Illinois. This was an area which contained perhaps one-fourth of the population of the free states—whose population, that is, was nearly as large as the total free population of the Southern Confederacy. Philadelphia's experience should prove suggestive for this considerable portion of the North.

A reader may next ask what inferences can be drawn from the study of Philadelphia. To answer this question, we need to sketch a general view of the causes of the Civil War, different from the three main theories indicated in the introduction, one which proves to be consistent with Philadelphia's experience; and then to show how our knowledge of conditions in Philadelphia can supplement this general view.

The deep South, it seems clear, seceded to preserve slavery—valued for economic reasons and deemed indispensable as a means of subordinating a feared race. The impulse to secession was given by the election of a Republican President, whose party was the focus of Southern fears for their institutions. The Republican electoral success was caused by Northerners' desire to change the spirit of the national administration, a desire which resulted mainly from the government's having favored the proslavery party in the territorial slavery dispute. Northerners went to war

not to destroy slavery but to rebuff an affront to the government's authority, and to preserve the Union, to which they were attached by nationalistic sentiment and which they valued for fear of the military, political, and economic consequences of having a powerful, hostile, independent Southern neighbor.

If we follow the idea that the "North" be considered not as a unit but as an upper three-quarters and a lower one-quarter, many details of Philadelphia's experience will have an important bearing on the question, How can the general framework sketched above be most accurately filled out? We refer here especially to feelings about race, to the forces behind the growth of Republicanism, to the attitudes of Northern Negroes, to the policy of President Lincoln, and to the actions of the Democrats.

It is worth recollecting some of the evidence of anti-Negro feeling in Philadelphia. The reader will recall the *Pennsylvanian*'s talk of white men's being jostled onto the street by odoriferous Republicans; the Democrats' labelling their opponents the "Mulatto" Party in 1858; Benjamin Brewster's striking appeal to race hatred at the pro-secessionist meeting in January 1861; and Congressman Biddle's assertion that hostility to "Negro equality" was as great in the Middle States as in the South. Among anti-Democrats, we recollect William Kelley's accusing a Southerner of trying to make "niggerism" the only element in the 1856 election; the welcome which the *Daily News*, a supporter of the American Party, extended to the Dred Scott decision's denial of Negro citizenship; and John Forney's advocating, in 1862, colonization of Negroes, on the grounds of their permanent inferiority. An important element in the system of race beliefs was the expectation of Negro revolt, or of a war between the races, if Negroes were not

suppressed. We have found that before the war this expectation was used both to justify slavery and to prove that secession was not in the interest of the slaveowners. It shaped reactions to the John Brown raid, affected the whole discussion of wartime emancipation, and was a prime factor in Democratic opposition to the Negro troop policy.

The question arises, how widespread were the feelings of antipathy to Negroes? On the one hand, there can be no doubt of the sentiments of Democratic leaders such as Edward Ingersoll, Charles Biddle, and Charles Carrigan. The overwhelming rejection of the streetcar desegregation proposal indicates that sympathy for Negroes' aspirations was not widespread among either Democratic or Peoples Party voters. It is worth remembering the estimate of public attitudes implied in the *Inquirer*'s argument for wartime antislavery measures: "Without a particle of that sentimental negro philism know as Abolitionism, we endorse this policy."

On the other side was the attitude of abolitionists, of the several hundred Peoples Party voters who signed the petition to end streetcar desegregation, and of some Peoples Party leaders, such as the judge who appealed to Lincoln to protect local Negroes against a draft riot. One wonders whether other leaders of the Peoples Party had strong, humane feelings toward Negroes, which they preferred not to reveal. To judge whether this was the case, we need to look more closely at the motives of the party's four most prominent representatives, John Forney, Alexander Henry, Morton McMichael, and William Kelley.

Forney was hostile to slavery and to extreme proslavery politicians, but there is no evidence that he ever cared for Negroes—his aims appear to have been to hurt the South-

erners, and to find the most powerful arguments to uphold the policies of the party to which he was attached. Though Mayor Henry may sometimes have felt compassion for Negroes, this feeling does not ever appear to have influenced his official conduct. Maintaining both public order and as much political freedom as possible, conciliating the South before the war, and concentrating in a nonpartisan way on winning the war once it started—these were his motives in prohibiting John Brown's body's being detained in Philadelphia; in protecting the subsequent Curtis lecture; in avoiding reference to emancipation in his speech of January 1, 1863; and throughout his career. McMichael probably felt greater concern for Negroes, as suggested by his publishing the communication from the Negro abolitionist, William Still, in 1859, but other motives were much stronger. The editor sought to advance the political and economic interests of the well-to-do class of old Whigs, and therefore to promote the success of an anti-Democratic party within which propertied men could exert a major influence. When he himself aspired to political office in 1865 (he was elected mayor that year) he was careful not to commit himself on the streetcar issue. Kelley was more closely associated with Negroes' interests than the other three leaders, but his occasional appeals to anti-Negro feelings suggest complex motives. The strongest was probably a desire to vanquish Southerners, at first politically, later militarily. Fellow feeling for Negroes thus does not appear to have ranked high among the motives of the chief Peoples Party leaders.

Consistent with all these conclusions is the evidence of the initial weakness of the local antislavery movement. We recall that Fremont obtained, under his own name, scarcely more than a tenth of the ballots in 1856. Philadelphia

acquiesced in conscientious enforcement of the fugitive slave law—an extraordinary attempt to meet slaveowners' claims, considering what was demanded. The Dred Scott decision provoked little furor, and anti-Democrats avoided the slavery issue when Wilmot ran for governor in 1857. As late as October, 1860, the majority of Philadelphians cast their votes for the Democratic Party. The desire to avoid offense to Southern customers was a factor in weakening the local antislavery movement, but the anti-Negro temper of Democrats and Americans seems to have been a much more important influence.

Philadelphia's antislavery movement, it is clear, did not thrive until actions of proslavery partisans infused it with life. The frauds in Kansas and the caning of Senator Sumner gave a certain impulse, and Buchanan's Lecompton policy led to a Peoples Party electoral success. Secession increased the attachment of Peoples Party ward politicians to Republican principles. After the outbreak of war, Southern victories stimulated a desire to turn the slaves against their masters, and the military contribution of Philadelphia Negroes was eventually accepted as a means of hurting the South.

In the shift toward the Republican Party, Constitutional Unionists played a critical role. These former Whigs were so concerned to conciliate the South that most of them voted Democratic in 1856. Alienated by the Lecompton policy, they ran their own candidates instead of fusing with Democrats for the congressional elections of 1860, thus facilitating the triumph of certain antislavery spokesmen.[1] The Constitutional Unionists, however, supported the

[1] The total vote for Democratic and Constitutional Unionist congressional candidates was 42,300, for Peoples Party nominees 39,500; yet only one Democrat was elected as against four Peoples Party men, including the radical antislavery candidates, W. Morris Davis and William Kelley.

Democratic gubernatorial candidates in 1860, and it was only the attack on Sumter which drove them definitively into joining with the Republicans.

Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, the interests and feelings of local Negroes conflicted with what most white Philadelphians felt to be their own interests. The main political issue for Negroes could be only how much to express their dislike for the ascendant policies. They were discouraged from strong political action by their fear of whites. This fear was evident in the extent to which they submitted to the execution of the fugitive slave law, in their anxiety as to colonization, in the privacy of their celebration of emancipation, and in the degree to which they expressed their interests through non-political associations—especially in churches—which were less offensive to their white neighbors than political groups. That moderate tactics found favor among Negroes was shown also in the surprising opposition, at the meeting after the Dred Scott decision, to the proposal that Negroes should refuse their support to the government; and in the fact that certain Negroes tried to volunteer for the army prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. Southern actions finally introduced a period, which lasted until about 1870, when a substantial number of Northern white men understood that their interests ran parallel to those of Negroes. This was the brief era during which Peoples Party leaders, though not greatly moved by humane feeling, helped to secure less humiliating conditions for Negroes.

The situation in Philadelphia presents a useful point of departure for interpreting the career of Lincoln, who has sometimes been portrayed as conservative and opportunistic in his antislavery policy. When Lincoln, in the debates with Douglas in 1858, was attacking popular sovereignty on the grounds that territorial slavery should be conclusively pro-

hibited, Philadelphia's Peoples Party upheld popular sovereignty as its rallying point against Buchanan. In February, 1861, Lincoln's Philadelphia speech favoring Negro rights contrasted remarkably with the prevailing local tone. The new President appointed the most radical of the city's important Republicans as head of the custom house. His decision to supply Fort Sumter was more decisively unionist than was editorial opinion in Philadelphia at the moment. William Witte's speech at the Democratic meeting in 1862 makes the President's well-known letter to Horace Greeley appear as an astute move to disarm the growing opposition, while preparing the grounds for emancipation. After the proclamation was finally issued, the *Ledger*'s opposition, the *Inquirer*'s hesitation to declare itself, and Mayor Henry's later silence, all showed how far Lincoln's action was beyond the expectation of most local residents. In 1863 the President appointed a Massachusetts general, who felt deep sympathy for Negro soldiers, to command in Philadelphia, and only later replaced this officer with a man whose views corresponded more closely to the local temper. When the strength of Democratic opposition to administration policies is taken into account, the President's actions appear all the less conservative. Against the Philadelphia background, Lincoln seems remarkable for his resolution in maintaining the Union, for his concern for Negroes, and for his steady promotion, within constitutional and political limits, of antislavery principles.

Sharply contrasted to the policies of the Republican and Peoples parties were those of Philadelphia's Democratic organization. The local leaders went far to meet the wishes of their Southern allies, as shown in their acceptance of the denial of popular sovereignty in Kansas; in a local meeting's endorsement of the territorial slave code as early

as 1857; in a considerable portion of the local delegation's voting with Southerners at the 1860 national convention; and in the state committee's authorizing electors to vote for Breckinridge. Pro-secessionist forces were influential in the city, and the Buchanan administration was surprisingly closely associated with these forces. During the secession crisis moderate Democrats (resembling in this respect most Constitutional Unionists and a few Peoples Party men) were willing to accept and excuse secessionist arguments. A movement for a truce with the South attained considerable strength just prior to Gettysburg, and even afterwards the Democratic program of repealing the Emancipation Proclamation differed radically from the administration policy. This goes to show that, contrary to the opinion of some revisionist historians, differences between the parties were far more important than factional conflicts within each party—even though both parties were influenced by the prevailing anti-Negro temper. Considering the vigor of the Democratic opposition to Republican measures, and remembering the inadequate volunteering, the great number of deserters, and the necessity for military precautions against draft rioting, one must ask how much Democratic hostility to administration policies may have contributed to the catastrophic way in which the North conducted the war.

So sharp were party differences that mob action and the threat of widespread rioting frequently recurred. Public order was fragile, civil liberty insecure. Democrats attempted to suppress abolitionist meetings during the prewar crisis; anti-Democrats tried to throttle their opponents during the war; and some leaders advocated a wholesale setting aside of constitutional practices. Defiance by the threatened minorities and resolute action by responsible

officials helped to limit the violations of free expression.

It is a disputed question whether historians should attempt to judge the men of an earlier age. Without discussing how far this amounts to the disputed kind of historical judgment, we find it useful to place ourselves in the situation of a mid-nineteenth century Philadelphian, to face the issues and choices which confronted him, and then to define an attitude toward the local leaders—and thus to the political issues—of the era.

A person of liberal persuasion may be disposed to think well of the abolitionists, with their successful assistance to fugitive slaves and their recognition of the human rights of Negroes. Their outstanding representative was James McKim, the most active leader in reorganizing the underground railroad in 1852, in arranging aid to destitute Southern Negroes in 1862, and in promoting the streetcar desegregation movement in 1865. One is likely to be alienated, however, by the abolitionists' disregard for political calculation, especially at the time of the John Brown raid, when their unnecessary provocation of the Southern whites played a great part in aggravating the crisis.

Extreme Democratic leaders, such as Robert Tyler or Charles Ingersoll, are not likely to win our confidence in their political wisdom, nor to gain our support for their suggested policies. Among moderate Democratic politicians one of the most able was the state chairman in 1863, Charles Biddle, a person of extraordinary intelligence and cultivation, who had dissented from Buchanan's Lecompton policy and had quickly put his military experience at the government's disposal after Sumter. Biddle distinguished himself also, however, by anti-Negro declamations, by justifications for Southern resistance ("American white men

do not submit easily to terms like these"), and by zealous seeking of biblical authority for slavery.

As to the more radical of the Peoples Party leaders, one is likely, in the first place, to be struck unpleasantly by Forney's unscrupulousness and insincerity. Kelley was talented in persuading white men to recognize Negroes' interests, yet his demagogy and deviousness stir one's distrust of his motives and judgments. A more forthright leader was William Thomas, Philadelphia's first Republican mayoralty candidate, a man of sincere antislavery conviction who largely financed the local Republican Party during its infancy, and who kept up at his own expense the first local militia regiment to respond during the military crisis of 1863. But Thomas' political activities and writings show that he lacked the understanding and realism to be a major politician.

One turns then to the more conservative Peoples Party leaders, Mayor Henry and Morton McMichael. To be sure, neither was effectual in preventing the domination of the local party organization by corrupt ward politicians, nor did either show regard for workingmen's movements. McMichael cared little for protecting freedom of dissent during wartime, and Henry showed neither resolution during the secession crisis nor sympathy in his relation to Negroes. Mayor Henry did, however, display courage and great skill in maintaining order and freedom during the difficult seven and a half years of his administration, while McMichael was the most important local spokesman for a group of men who asserted Northern rights resolutely yet not irrationally, and who acknowledged, to a degree, the human rights of Negroes.

Philadelphia's experience does not fill one with complacency at the glories of the era. On the contrary, there

was much meanness, ugliness, and cause for shame, and there was no hero. Yet one sees that the combined efforts of men such as McKim, Kelley, Henry, and McMichael—every one of whom had his failings—resulted in notable achievements, and that a number of important, though hesitant, first steps were taken toward the solution of what is still the country's most serious domestic problem.