Piedmont Unionists: Harpers Ferry to Fort Sumter

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Late on October 16, 1859, John Brown led nineteen abolitionists from a rented Maryland farm and across the Potomac River to attack the federal arsenal in the small western Virginia town of Harpers Ferry. Brown had fought against the expansion of slave territory before, but his objective now was to destroy that institution. "Peaceful emancipation is impossible," as Brown explained to those who criticized his violent plans.[1] While Brown made tactical mistakes during the raid that ensured his capture on October 18, the impact of his failure was far-reaching. A Virginia jury quickly found Brown guilty of treason in early November, but the old abolitionist's defiant conduct captivated public attention. Prominent northerners such as Ralph Waldo Emerson predicted that Brown, whose execution was set for December 2, 1859, "will make the gallows as glorious as the cross."[2] Southern political leaders reacted to this adulation with fury.[3] The result was an explosive backdrop for the 1860 election. Brown's raid had failed, but as historian David Reynolds argues, the controversial figure "*sparked* the [Civil War] to a degree that no other American did."[4] This "spark," however, was not apparent in North Carolina, particularly in the central region of the state known as the Piedmont. While that central region exhibited the most intense reaction to Brown, this response developed slowly and did not translate into support for secession. Admittedly, most North Carolina unionists were conditional supporters of the federal union. When President Abraham Lincoln called out the nation's

[1] Quoted in William W. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, vol. 2 of *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 208.
[2] Robert A. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1949), 402. Also see John J. McDonald, "Emerson and John Brown," *The New England Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 1971): 384-396.
[3] Peter Wallenstein, "Incendiaries All: Southern Politics and the Harpers Ferry Raid," in *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).
[4] David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), ix.

militia in April 1861 after the attack on Fort Sumter, they embraced secession and the Confederacy. Yet clearly their political behavior was not determined by John Brown – an important point often overlooked in textbooks and general surveys of this period in American history.

This study examines several key figures in a critical region of a pivotal Upper South state. North Carolina unionists from the Piedmont region were unique in some ways and representative in others, but despite the abundance of Civil War era scholarship, their story has not yet been fully told. Historians such as Daniel Crofts offer models for such a study, but none have yet attempted this particular narrative. Crofts focuses on unionists from three Upper South states and examines how their perspective on the Union shifted between the November 1860 election and President Lincoln's decision on April 15, 1861.[5] Edward Ayers takes a different approach, as his recent study examines how two counties, from Virginia and Pennsylvania, changed during the period 1859 and 1863. Ayers focuses on several unionists from a Virginia county and explains their decision to accept disunion.[6] While both offer valuable insights into Upper South unionism, key changes in southern attitudes can be lost when historians examine them across several states or over several years. This study selects five unionists from a specific region of a state in order to focus on the change in their perspective during the eighteen months between Brown's raid and President Lincoln's response to the Fort Sumter attack. Other historians have focused on

[5] Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 8-36. Also see Daniel W. Crofts, *Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County, 1834-1869* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 170-197.
[6] Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America 1859-1863* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), xvii, 85-89, 95-110, 119-142.

North Carolina's reaction to Harpers Ferry, but they do not discuss unionists during the secession crisis.[7]

Yet a close study of the Piedmont and some of its residents reveals surprising connections between Brown's raid and southern unionism. A week after Brown's attack, the Fayetteville *Observer* remained confident that sectional tensions would not increase. "A great deal of good will result from the Harper's Ferry affair," as editor Edward Hale remarked.[8] Other Piedmont editors shared Hale's optimistic perspective, including the Raleigh *Register*, which in early November argued that "an overwhelming majority [of northerners held] in utter abhorrence Brown's plots, and all attempts to interfere with the tenure of slave property in the Southern States."[9] This type of response rarely earns space in American history textbooks. Robert Divine tells students that "the raid and its aftermath touched off a frenzy of fear, repression, and mobilization…within the South."[10] Yet the violent reaction Divine describes only developed in the Piedmont once residents read reports about the shift in northern opinion following Brown's trial in mid November 1859.[11] But even then, the response still occurred within the context of respect for a competitive party system. Residents of one Piedmont town, which had a federal arsenal in their

[7] Kent Blaser, "North Carolina and John Brown's Raid," *Civil War History* 24, no. 3 (September 1978); Victor B. Howard, "John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry and the Sectional Crisis in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (October 1978).
[8] "Good Out of Evil," *Fayetteville Observer*, 27 October 1859, 3: 2.
[9] "A Detailed Account of the Harper's Ferry Outrage, &c," *Weekly Register*, 2 November 1859, 1: 1.
[10] Robert A. Divine, et al, *The American Story*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007), 1: 372. Also see James L. Roark, et al, eds., *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 1: 480; J. William Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 171-173; Victoria Bissell Brown and Timothy J. Shannon, eds., *Going to the Source: The Bedford Reader in American History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 1: 254-272.
[11] Betty L. Mitchell, "Massachusetts Reacts to John Brown's Raid," *Civil War History* 19, no. 1 (March 1973), 65-79; Paul Finkelman, "Manufacturing Martyrdom: The Antislavery Response to John Brown's Raid," in *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 41-66.

community, even asked the War Department in late October 1860 to send soldiers to provide protection from abolitionist attacks that were expected in the event of a Republican victory.[12] The potential for violence in the wake of a Republican victory represented a real concern. Yet rather than accept fire-eaters' secession proposals, this southern community turned to the Union. Many southerners never distinguished Republicans from abolitionists, a perspective that Harpers Ferry only reinforced, but the vast majority of Piedmont residents still rejected secession until April 1861.[13] During these critical eighteen months, most members of this southern community considered the Union a safer home for their rights and property than any new southern republic.

Honor was also an important factor because these southerners understood competitive politics and felt honor-bound to participate in and respect election results. They believed that Democrats, even in a national minority, would provide a sufficient check to prevent Republican abuse of power. In addition, southern unionists looked ahead to the 1864 election and anticipated a Republican defeat. These southerners did not care much for Lincoln, but they were not prepared to destroy the Union just to avoid his single term in office. President Lincoln's response to the Fort Sumter attack on April 15, 1861, however, completely altered that perspective. Unionists felt betrayed because they believed Lincoln had reneged on an earlier promise of conciliation towards the South. Coercion by Republicans was simply unacceptable, no matter how legitimate or constitutional. Southern unionists understood that coercion would inevitably lead to the destruction of

[12] Various Citizens to Archibald McLean, 23 October 1860, in Noble J. Tolbert, ed., *The Papers of John Willis Ellis* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1964), 2: 518-519. Professor Pinsker assisted with the phrasing in this part.
[13] Michael Morrison, "The Road to Secession," in *A Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Lacy K. Ford (Malden, M.A.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 161.

slavery and southern society by demolishing the concept of southern hierarchy. With competitive politics unable to stop the new Republican president from asserting his sovereign power, southern unionists turned to disunion to defend their honor and communities.[14]

In order to explain how these five North Carolinians came to see their responsibilities as southerners, it is important to understand their society. North Carolina's three regions each had distinct economic and political features, but the state's white society was not particularly diverse. These southerners, as historian Marc Kruman explains, "were a remarkably homogeneous people in their nativity and in their religion." In 1850, only 2,525 North Carolinians were born outside of the United States. Most were members of either a Baptist or Methodist congregation, as these two denominations accounted for 80 percent of churches in the state. Slavery, of course, was also an integral part of society even though at least 74 percent of families did not own slaves in 1860.[15] Yet slaveowners and slaves were concentrated in the eastern coastal plain counties, a distinction which had important economic and political implications.[16] By 1860 enslaved blacks in the east represented 44.2 percent of the population and 36.2 percent of free families owned slaves.[17] As a result, plantations only developed in this region.[18] Industry also developed, but historian Joseph Sitterson explains that it was more an "accessory to agriculture."[19] While the east also had

[14] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-39, 154-213.
[15] Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina 1836 - 1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), *Parties and Politics,* 14-15.
[16] In 1860, 331,059 slaves worked in North Carolina. Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 468-69.
[17] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 15.
[18] Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 5.
[19] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 15.

the highest population in 1860, the 489,000 residents were spread out across the region, with only 24 people per square mile.[20] Western mountain counties, in comparison, were sparsely populated with 119,257 residents.[21] Enslaved blacks accounted for 10.2 percent of that population and slaveowners represented 11.3 percent of families.[22] Agriculture remained important to this region's economy, but most farms were relatively small and did not rely primarily on slave labor. While 41 percent of farms across North Carolina had less than fifty acres in 1860, almost 70 percent were under that size in the west.[23] The Piedmont, however, had similarities with the other two regions. Slaves represented 25.8 of the population while slaveowners counted for 23.5 percent of families in 1860.[24] However, Piedmont slaveowners were concentrated largely in counties close to the borders with South Carolina and Virginia.[25] Slaves in central Piedmont counties such as Rowan were 10 percent of the population while in southern Richmond county they accounted for 51.4 percent.[26] The Piedmont, as Sitterson explains, also had the "natural resources [to]…form the basis of a more diversified economic life than was possible in" the other two regions.[27] As a result, the region was home to a growing manufacturing industry and by 1860 had thirty cotton mills.[28] The economic conditions that existed in each region was important because it influenced residents' political perspective.

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[20] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 9.
[21] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 18.
[22] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 14.
[23] Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 7; John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 23.
[24] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 14-15.
[25] Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 282.
[26] Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina*, 63.
[27] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 14, 17.
[28] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 15.

The different political outlooks that developed in each region had important implications for the secession crisis. As the Piedmont "experienced constant social and economic change," Sitterson argues that one consequence was that it "constructed a conservative states' rights philosophy designed to maintain the status quo."[29] This region became the center of support for the Whig party, which was formed in the early 1830s to oppose Jacksonian Democrats.[30] Whigs in North Carolina, as Kruman explains, generally "viewed the government as a liberating force in the economy" and believed that the state should help fund major projects such as railroads.[31] Democrats, who drew considerable support from eastern counties, considered this type of government assistance as unnecessary.[32] Economic policy was not the only issue that separated the two parties, but it guaranteed conflict when Piedmont representatives in the state legislature called for the state to finance internal improvements. While Whigs were the stronger party throughout the 1840s, the situation changed after the Democratic candidate for governor won the 1850 election.

William Holden was the influential editor of the *Standard* and helped orchestrate the key Democratic victory in that election.[33] While the Whig party then underwent a period of national decline, Democrats won almost every state elections in the 1850s.[34] Yet those victories did not mark an end to competitive politics in North Carolina. Instead, Kruman explains that the Whig's defeat in 1850 marked their "transition…from a narrow majority to

[29] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 18; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 223.
[30] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 47, 131.
[31] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 5.
[32] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 6.
[33] Harris, *Holden*, 40-41; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 102-103.
[34] Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 130-140; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

a narrow minority within the state."[35] After the 1854 election, however, most supporters joined the new anti-immigrant American party.[36] That party quickly folded and in 1858 former Whigs regrouped as the Opposition. Impressive victories in the August 1859 Congressional elections gave Oppositionists hope for their political future.[37] "Conservative men…[had] a great cause to rejoice" because, as the Greensboro *Patriot* argued, these victories "ensur[ed]" that "the opposition movement" would eventually "bring about an overwhelming defeat of those now in power."[38] A new national Whig party was not created, but it was critical in North Carolina that, unlike the Lower South, a competitive political system still existed at the end of the 1850s a competitive political system remained in existence.[39] While competitive, it was hardly free or fair; historian Thomas Jeffrey calls "North Carolina's [political] system…one of the most undemocratic in the entire South."[40] Slaveowners were 25 percent of free families in 1860, but in the General Assembly they represented more than 85 percent of legislators.[41]

The persistence of antislavery sentiment in Piedmont counties also helps explain the region's particular reaction to Harpers Ferry. Public criticism of slavery was at one point accepted throughout North Carolina. When North Carolina Chief Justice William Gaston delivered a commencement address in 1831, he could express hope for the "ultimate extinction of the worst evil" without fear of public censure.[42] Even antislavery organizations,

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[35] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 144; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 62.
[36] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 13; Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina,* 245.
[37] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 178-179, 181-187; Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics*, 272.
[38] "The Result," *Greensboro Patriot*, 19 August 1859, 2: 4.
[39] Christopher Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8-9.
[40] Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861*, 10.
[41] Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 15.
[42] Quoted in Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 563.

such as the North Carolina Manumission Society, operated in public during this period.[43] However, incidents such as Nat Turner's August 1831 revolt increased concerns about the consequences of public criticism of slavery.[44] News about that violent insurrection in southern Virginia sparked rumors that North Carolina slaves planned to launch similar attacks.[45] Evidence never confirmed that news, but twelve blacks were executed and mobs killed at least another fifteen.[46] Politicians responded with laws designed to prevent future insurrections, such as one that prohibited literacy programs for slaves.[47] As outside influences became identified as *the* cause of slave insurrections, tolerance for public criticism of slavery declined.[48]

Despite new laws, pockets of antislavery sentiment remained, especially in the Piedmont. As Kruman observes, "the north-central Piedmont provided a fertile field for abolitionist preachers to plow."[49] Northern antislavery organizations considered this region a viable location for their work because of the Quaker community and other more liberal congregations.[50] Some churches even asked northern missionaries to serve as pastors, such

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[43] Hiram H. Hilty, *By Land and Sea: Quakers Confront Slavery and Its Aftermath in North Carolina* (Greensboro, N.C.: North Carolina Friends Historical Society, 1993), 42. Also see Patrick Sowle, "The North Carolina Manumission Society, 1816-1834," *North Carolina Historical Review* 42 (January 1965): 47-69.

[44] Michael Thomas Smith, *A Traitor and a Scoundrel: Benjamin Hedrick and the Cost of Dissent* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 18.

[45] David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139-144. Also see Robert N. Elliott, "The Nat Turner Insurrection as Reported in the North Carolina Press," *North Carolina Historical Review* 38 (January 1961): 1-18.; Charles Edward Morris, "Panic and Reprisal: Reaction in North Carolina to the Nat Turner Insurrection, 1831," *North Carolina Historical Review* 62 (January 1985): 29-52; Anthony E. Kaye, "Neighbors and Nat Turner: The Making of a Slave Rebel and the Unmaking of a Slave Rebellion," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Winter 2007): 705-720.

[46] Grimsted, *American Mobbing,* 139-144.

[47] Grimsted, *American Mobbing,* 144; Smith, *Benjamin Hedrick*, 17-18.

[48] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 187-188.

[49] Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 105.

[50] Noble J. Tolbert, "Daniel Worth: Tarheel Abolitionist," *North Carolina Historical Review* 39 (1962): 284; Mark Andrew Huddle, ed., "North Carolina's Forgotten Abolitionist: the American Missionary correspondence of Daniel Wilson," *North Carolina Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (October 1995): 419.

as Reverends Adam Crooks and Jesse McBride, who arrived in the late 1840s.[51] No one challenged their activities until 1850, when southern Whigs believed it was important to highlight their commitment to slavery.[52] Whig papers like the Raleigh *Register* demanded that authorities "purge" the two "foolhardy and misguided zealots" from "our communities," and after a short trial in October 1850, both men left the state within a year.[53] Yet even after that reaction, antislavery sentiment remained in the region and abolitionists continued to arrive.[54]

This background is essential for understanding the political culture that existed in a region that produced both the most intense reaction to Brown's raid and the deepest skepticism of secession. In particular, this study will focus on the stories of five southern unionists from the Piedmont region – two elected officials, two newspaper editors, and one farmer. Historians have relied on accounts of individual unionists from the Piedmont to help explain the period, but few delve into the details of how or why the events between Brown's raid and Fort Sumter changed individual perceptions about the Union and the North. This approach is a valuable one because, as historian William Barney observes, an event such as the secession crisis was "not a spontaneous outpouring of sentiment across the entire South" but rather "a process that affected Southern whites in different ways at different times."[55] Most leading historians mention major unionists such as editor William Holden, but this focus can come at the expense of other important unionist editors like

[51] Huddle, "North Carolina's Forgotten Abolitionist," 416.
[52] Smith, *Benjamin Hedrick*, 21.
[53] The *Patriot* started the attacks with an editorial in September 1850. Smith, *Benjamin Hedrick*, 21; "Beware!," *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 5 October 1850, 3: 2; "Crooks and McBride," *Greensboro Patriot,* in *Weekly Register*, 23 October 1850, 3: 2.
[54] Huddle, "North Carolina's Forgotten Abolitionist," 420; Clifton H. Johnson, "Abolitionist Missionary Activities in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 40 (1963): 306.
[55] William L. Barney, *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir's Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

Edward Jones Hale of the Fayetteville *Observer*.[56] Hale's optimistic reaction immediately after Harpers Ferry is especially important and other studies have not included it. Unionist politicians John Gilmer and Jonathan Worth also have been largely excluded.[57] Even studies that do feature them, however, fail to use their observations on the reaction to Harpers Ferry and the secession crisis to discuss the important changes in opinion. Another important source utilized here comes from a recently published diary by a poor unionist farmer.[58] Basil Thomasson commented on political events irregularly, but even these limited observations about the secession crisis are suggestive for their insights. Together, these unionists offer valuable insights and help explain the North Carolina unionist movement as a coherent story evolving from Brown's raid to Fort Sumter.

Jonathan Worth's (1802-1869) staunch opposition to secession in 1861 was part of a long commitment to the Union that first became apparent when he introduced a resolution against nullification in November 1830.[59] When Congress did not alter the conditions of the 1828 'Tariff of Abominations,' South Carolina legislators asserted in 1830 that they had the right to nullify that federal law.[60] Even though Worth also opposed that federal tariff, the twenty-eight year old freshman representative characterized the "doctrines of nullification" as an "extreme, violent and dangerous remedy."[61] Southerners had a right to protest, but

[56] Allen W. Trelease, "Review Essay: On Making Sense of William W. Holden," *North Carolina Historical Review* 65, no. 3 (July 1988): 353-358.
[57] Crofts' *Reluctant Confederates* is an important exception.
[58] Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).
[59] Richard L. Zuber, *Jonathan Worth: A Biography of a Southern Unionist* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1965), 15.
[60] John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 158-160; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 395-404.
[61] *Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina, 1830 - 31* (Raleigh: State Printer, 1831), 187; quoted in Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 17.

not in an unconstitutional way. Politics, however, were not a top priority for Worth at this point. After a second term, Worth decided to focus on his business investments and a legal career. With the exception of a single term in 1840, Worth did not return to the General Assembly until 1858. As an Oppositionist Senator, Worth once again rallied against "extreme" measures designed to take North Carolina out of the Union.

While Worth lived in a western Piedmont community, Edward Jones Hale (1802-1883) was editor of the Fayetteville *Observer*, an important Whig and unionist paper in a southern Piedmont county.[62] Editors "[often] found themselves overmatched" in comparison to William Holden's rhetorical skill, but historian William Harris argues that "the able…Hale" was a rare exception.[63] The *Observer* was first published in 1825 and eventually became a prominent Whig paper in the 1830s, but Hale refused to quickly abandon that party during its decline in the 1850s. Hale identified himself as a Whig until he changed political affiliation to American to help former Whig John Gilmer's gubernatorial campaign in 1856.[64] Several years later Hale switched to the Opposition party in preparation for the Congressional elections in August 1859.

Hale's editorials supported Opposition candidates such as John Adams Gilmer (1805-1868), a central Piedmont unionist who ultimately rejected President-elect Lincoln's offer of a position in his administration. "To understand Gilmer is to understand the paradox of southern Unionism," Crofts observes.[65] Before his entry into the political world, however, Gilmer was a successful lawyer and businessman in Greensboro. By 1860 this wealthy

[62] Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 768.
[63] Harris, *Holden*, 16.
[64] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 176.
[65] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 36.

unionist owned fifty three slaves, but financial success never hurt his appeal with his constituents in Guilford county, who he served in the state Senate for a decade.[66] Gilmer was a natural politician and had, as John Livingston observed, "laughing dark eyes" that conveyed "intelligence, energy, and kindness."[67] While unable to convert his popularity in the central Piedmont to a victory in the 1856 gubernatorial election, Gilmer recovered and was elected to the House of Representatives in August 1857. His vote on April 1, 1858 against the Lecompton Constitution, which would allow Kansas to enter the Union as slave state, ensured that his first term would be controversial.[68] Southern Democrats condemned those southerners who opposed the measure, but Gilmer won reelection in August 1859 with even more votes than in 1857.[69] While his district approved that decision, most southern politicians questioned Gilmer's loyalty and refused to support his campaign for Speaker of the House in 1859. Even though Gilmer owned at least fifty slaves in 1860, critics always returned to his Lecompton vote to question his loyalty to the South.[70]

Editor William Woods Holden (1818–1892) was among those who constantly criticized Gilmer throughout the 1850s. While responsible for the Democratic resurgence in North Carolina, Holden began his career in an unlikely place: the Raleigh *Star*, a powerful Whig paper. After a brief stint as a lawyer and a change in political loyalties, Holden secured the necessary capital in 1843 to purchase the paper he controlled until 1868.[71] While some

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[66] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 34.
[67] John Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living: With Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Their Lives and Actions*, 4 vols (New York: Cornish, Lamport, 1853-54), 1: 347, 355-56; quoted in Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 34.
[68] Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 172-173; Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant*, 141; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 68.
[69] "Fifth District," *Weekly Register*, 10 August 1859, 3: 3.
[70] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 223.
[71] Harris, *Holden*, 13. Holden claimed in April 1843 that he had been a Democrat "for some time," see William Woods Holden to William Andrew Jeffreys, 14 April 1843, in *The Papers of William Woods Holden*, ed. Horace W. Raper and Thomton W. Mitchell (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2000), 1: 2-3.

questioned whether a relatively inexperienced twenty-four year old was qualified, Democrats had to reinvigorate the party after several defeats. Holden silenced his critics since his effective strategy gave Democrats a key victory in 1850.[72] Six years later one North Carolinian considered the *Standard* the best authority…for state news."[73] "Few newspapers" in North Carolina history, as Horace Raper explains, "have [ever] wielded a more powerful influence."[74] In addition, competitors never attained the skills that Holden employed with ease. "Early [on Holden] established himself as master of devastating ridicule, virulent innuendo, eye-popping epithets, and biting sarcasm," as Harris observes.[75] Those tactics, however, did not reflect Holden's demeanor at home with his wife and children.[76] While his "gentleness and refinement rarely surfaced in his public role as…editor," Harris aruges that Holden's private display of "affection for [his family]…was deep and constant."[77] As the Democrats' official party paper in North Carolina, the *Standard* strongly defended southern rights throughout the 1850s. Yet that stance was not absolute, as in 1850 Holden compromised and accepted California's admission as a free state.[78]

Basil Thomasson (1829-1862), who owned a farm in the western Piedmont, regularly read newspapers and, as a Democrat, was likely familiar with Holden's *Standard*. Even though Thomasson struggled at times to provide sufficient food for his family, he nevertheless believed that an education was vital: "I must have [one], no matter what it

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[72] Harris, *Holden*, 40-41.
[73] Edward G. Haywood to David S. Reid, 15 March 1856, in Lindley S. Butler, ed., *The Papers of David Settle Reid* (Raleigh: Department of Cultural Resources, 1997), 2: 152.
[74] Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 10.
[75] Harris, *Holden*, 16.
[76] Harris, *Holden*, 51.
[77] Harris, *Holden*, 50-51.
[78] Harris, *Holden*, 37-38, 41.

costs."[79] Besides reading books like "David's *Elementary Algebra*," he often subscribed to at least three different papers, such as the New York *Journal* and the Cincinnati *Dollar Times*.[80] In addition, Thomasson became a teacher and actively encouraged his wife to pursue her own education.[81] This southern farmer even knitted when bad weather prevented outside work. "He was eager for learning," and as Paul Escott observes, that passion helped explain why his "attitudes….were little affected by slaveholder's hegemony or by the culture of honor."[82] Thomasson's voice was unique among these five unionists since he opposed slavery.[83]

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While Brown's attack was a key moment in American history, his actions in western Virginia did not directly translate to support for secession in North Carolina. Abolitionists and northern visitors were still safe after the attack, but once editors reported the shift in northern opinion, a "reign of terror" descended upon Piedmont communities.[84] Once residents were convinced that a real danger existed, they identified the potential threats and took action against them. This intense secondary reaction, however, did not unite politicians against a common enemy because the response played out within the competitive political system. Editors used it not only as a symbol of Republican aggression, but as a means to attack the honor and competence of their opponents. Partisan strife only intensified after Lincoln's victory caused a realignment based on whether voters saw North

[79] Diary entry, 18 March 1854, in Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 31, xiii, xix-xx.
[80] Diary entry, 4 February 1854, 20 February 1854, 13 March 1858, 5 October 1858, in *Thomasson Diary*, 26, 28, 195, 216.
[81] Escott, *Thomasson Diary,* xxxix-xli.
[82] Escott, *Thomasson Diary,* liv, liii.
[83] Escott, *Thomasson Diary,* xiv.
[84] Benjamin Hedrick to Thomas Ruffin, 16 January 1860, Thomas Ruffin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Carolina's future in the Union. Piedmont voters overwhelmingly supported unionists, which was evident in the election on February 28, 1861. Even after a Republican became President on March 4, unionists retained their support and remained confident that the Lincoln administration would not adopt policies hostile towards the South. That perspective abruptly ended on April 15 when President Lincoln called state militias to restore order in the Lower South. Almost overnight the public support for unionists in the Upper South disappeared.[85] Lincoln's proclamation, not Brown's raid, convinced unionists that the Union was no longer safe. The original unionist perspective on the Republicans was incorrect, a fact Jonathan Worth admitted when he explained in late April 1861 that secessionists had been right to warn that President Lincoln would continue "the old John Brown business of *freeing* our slaves and punishing us for the sin of having held them."[86] Where John Brown led over a dozen men in an attempt to destroy slavery, unionists believed that Lincoln wanted the 75,000 soldiers to complete that objective. President Lincoln said he wanted peace with the South, but unionists saw his actions as clear evidence that he had lied. Even though unionists held Republicans responsible for Harpers Ferry, they still considered secession as far more dangerous until Lincoln's decisions on April 15 convinced them otherwise.

[85] David H. McGee, "A Revolution in Raleigh: The Early Transformation of a Confederate State Capital, 1861," in *Inside the Confederate Nation*, eds. Lesley J. Gordon and John C. Inscoe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 41-58.
[86] Quoted in Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 338.

Chapter 2: Piedmont Unionists - Harpers Ferry to November 1860

The reaction to Harpers Ferry developed slowly in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, and even after feelings intensified following John Brown's trial and execution, the response appeared more political than passionate and can only be understood within the context of the state's competitive partisan system.[87] In addition, even as the secondary reaction intensified during the political season of 1860, no strategic consensus emerged. Leading editors offered different perspectives on the most effective means to defend the state and how to respond to the rise of Republicans as a national power. Representative John Gilmer's decision to accept a committee chair assignment from a Republican Speaker of the House in February 1860 triggered an acrimonious debate in the Piedmont over southern loyalty. The Democratic Party's failure to nominate a *national* candidate for the November 1860 election, however, revealed that North Carolina Democrats had different perspectives on what conditions justified secession. Editor William Holden, like many Piedmont residents, found himself worried about Harpers Ferry but almost equally concerned with disunion. The story of these pro-slavery, pro-union North Carolinians and their evolution between October 1859 and November 1860 offers a fascinating portrait of southerners grappling to define their competing conceptions of honor.[88]

Kent Blaser and Victor Howard, who published separate articles about North Carolina's reaction to the Harpers Ferry attack simultaneously in the late 1970s, conclude

[87] Charles Joyner discusses the impact of Brown's execution in "'Guilty of Holiest Crime:' The Passion of John Brown," in *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 299-304.

[88] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23-39, 154-213; Professor Pinsker assisted with the phrasing in this paragraph.

that secessionists took power after Brown's raid. While both historians argue that the strongest reaction occurred in the Piedmont, they present different accounts on how that response developed.[89] Howard argues that a "wave of panic…swept across" North Carolina immediately following Brown's raid because these southerners were determined to protect their rights and institutions from northern attacks. Northern sympathy for Brown was still an important factor, but ultimately not responsible for the strong response.[90] Blaser, however, contends that a strong reaction only developed after the increase in northern support for Brown.[91] Even though these historians focus only on North Carolina's strong reaction, they overlook key editorials in Edward Hale's Fayetteville *Observer*. Both historians use his paper, but the revealing editorial shifts that occurred in conjunction with the increase in northern support for Brown were not included.[92] While the intense reaction in the Piedmont was important, one would expect that type of response from southerners. Arguably the most important aspects of this story was that a strong reaction in the Piedmont did *not* develop right away, editors' were optimistic after Harpers Ferry, and that the strong response failed to alter unionists' commitment to the Union.

The weeks immediately after Brown's attack in North Carolina were not marked by violent outbursts or many signs of panic. Militia companies were not activated and abolitionists were not arrested. While Piedmont editors quickly condemned Brown's attack and filled their columns with detailed reports about the incident, they offered quite

[89] Victor B. Howard, "John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry and the Sectional Crisis in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (October 1978): 404-405; Kent Blaser, "North Carolina and John Brown's Raid," *Civil War History* 24, no. 3 (September 1978): 202-207, 210.
[90] Howard, "Brown's Raid," 396.
[91] Blaser, "Brown's Raid," 203, 209.
[92] Blaser, "Brown's Raid," 200, 203; Howard, "Brown's Raid," 412.

different interpretations of the raid's impact on future relations with the North. Influential Democratic editor William Holden, who immediately blamed the attack on Republicans and their "abolitionist doctrines," saw a sectional crisis as inevitable.[93] When reports arrived in North Carolina that news about the raid had failed to provoke outrage in the North, Holden called the lack of "more sound reflection on the subject of slavery" a bad sign for the future.[94] If a Republican became President, Holden predicted in November 1859 that it "would sound the death-knell of the union of the States."[95]

By contrast, Opposition editor Edward Hale's initial assessment was that Brown's attack would decrease sectional tensions. Other studies on North Carolina's response often include several editorials from the *Observer*, but historians have never addressed Hale's striking prediction that "a great deal of good will result from the Harper's Ferry affair."[96] One result of the attack, he claimed, would be increased security for southerners. "The South [will be] stronger…in its rights and institutions" because abolitionists would be less inclined to launch another raid now that slaves had not voluntarily participated in Brown's attack to destroy slavery.[97] Hale also cited moderate Republican outrage over Brown's violent actions as an important positive sign. While Holden held all Republicans responsible, Hale was more careful to distinguish between the party's factions. A "clear line of separation…[now existed] between the handful of Abolitionists and the great host of Republicans," Hale observed. Southerners had "consider[ed] [that line] entirely

[93] "The Outbreak at Harper's Ferry," *Weekly Standard*, 26 October 1859, 1: 3. Also see "Ossawotamie Brown," *Weekly Standard*, 2 November 1859, 3: 1.
[94] "The Insurrection at Harper's Ferry," *Weekly Standard*, 26 October 1859, 3: 1.
[95] "The 'Irrepressible Conflict," *Weekly Standard*, 2 November 1859, 1: 3.
[96] "Spirit of the Northern Press," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 27 October 1859, 3: 1. Also see "The Harper's Ferry Outrage," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 24 October 1859, 3: 1.
[97] *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 20 October 1859, 3: 2. Also see "The Insurrection at Harper's Ferry," *Weekly Register*, 26 October 1859, 3: 1.

obliterated," but Hale believed that "a more kindly spirit between the sections" was now a real possibility.[98] Hale published excerpts from moderate Republican editors to support his claims, including one that described the attack as the clear result of "the suicidal policy [that their party had] endorsed - the extreme of fanaticism" and predicted that the Republicans would soon adopt "a more…conservative policy."[99] While Hale readily acknowledged that some prominent Republicans had supported Harpers Ferry, these "extraordinary developments" failed to alter his opinion because he regarded them as a small minority of radicals.[100] Harpers Ferry created divisions within a dangerous sectional party and Hale was convinced that tensions would only decrease as a result.

While editors reported on the initial aftermath of Brown's attack in great detail, few individual North Carolinians recorded their reaction in extant letters or diaries.[101] Basil Thomasson, who regularly subscribed to at least one newspaper, never mentioned the raid in any diary entries during October and November 1859.[102] James Harper, a farmer in western North Carolina, also kept a daily journal and never noted the attack.[103] Jonathan Worth did not keep a diary, but his correspondence with the owner of a Pennsylvanian female seminary in early November 1859 revealed that he believed a crisis was not imminent. Reverend J. G. Ralston became concerned, as Worth explained, "that the excessive zeal of…impetuous Southerners" had the potential to "mar the harmony of feeling

[98] "Good Out of Evil," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 27 October 1859, 3:2.
[99] *Fort Wayne Times*, in "A Good Sign," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 3 November 1859, 3: 2.
[100] "The Harper's Ferry Affair," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 31 October 1859, 3: 2.
[101] Blaser, "Brown's Raid," 199.
[102] Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 260.
[103] Diary entries, October - December 1859, James Clarence Harper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (henceforth SHC).

between North and South."[104] Worth decided to reassure Ralston about southern opinion and asked Hale to send the *Observer* issue from November 3 to provide "some evidence" that "the general feeling here [was] favorable to fraternal relations with the North."[105] Hale's paper, as Worth informed Ralston, was "a fair specimen of public sentiment as to the slavery question and the Harper's Ferry commotion."[106]

The relative calm that followed Harpers Ferry did eventually give way to a stronger secondary reaction in the Piedmont as reports of northern support for Brown grew more credible and as political pressure increased. John Brown's address before the Virginia court on November 3 was a critical moment because he claimed the moral high ground in an impressive speech that was widely published in the North and helped to start a new wave of support.[107] Two weeks after Brown's speech William Holden explained that anyone "who read the [northern] newspapers carefully" had to conclude that "strong sympathy" now existed for "John Brown and his confederates in insurrection and murder."[108] These supporters "[were] almost entirely confined to the black Republicans and rabid abolitionists," but Holden argued that these radicals represented "a large proportion of the people of the non-slaveholding States."[109] Holden overestimated the number of supporters, but Republican victories in northern elections reinforced that erroneous conclusion for

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[104] Jonathan Worth to E. J. Hale and Sons, 5 November 1859, in *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, ed. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1909), 1: 82-83.
[105] Worth to Rev. J. G. Ralston, 5 November 1859, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 82.
[106] Worth to Ralston, 5 November 1859, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 82.
[107] Gregory Borchard, "The *New York Tribune* At Harper's Ferry: 'Horace Greeley on Trial," *American Journalism* 20, no. 1 (2003): 13-14; Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 71-84; Andrew Taylor, "Consenting to Violence: Henry David Thoreau, John Brown, and the Transcendent Intellectual," in *The Afterlife of John Brown*, ed. Andrew Taylor and Eldrid Herrington (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 89-105; Scott John Hammond, "John Brown and the Legacy of Martyrdom," in *Terrible Swift Sword: The Legacy of John Brown*, ed. Peggy A. Russo and Paul Finkelman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 79-80.
[108] "Sympathy with the Traitors," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 1: 2. Also see "Northern Fanaticism and Southern Conservatism," *Weekly Standard*, 9 November 1859, 1: 2; "Chapin an Abolitionist," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 1: 3.
[109] "Sympathy with the Traitors," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 1: 2.

southerners.[110] Holden announced that returns from the late November vote in New York clearly indicated that "the people of [that state had] deliberately pronounced…against the South."[111] No reports out of northern cities appeared that contradicted that conclusion.[112] Instead, Holden warned northerners that failure to abandon the Republicans meant that "they [had essentially]…*cut the bonds of the Union*."[113] Clearly, Holden and other Democrats used Harpers Ferry to further their own political agenda, especially to highlight why North Carolinians had to unite behind their party's candidate to ensure victory in the November 1860 presidential election. "Every friend of…the Union" had to prioritize "the continued ascendency of the Democratic party," as Holden explained.[114]

More revealing, Edward Hale's perspective on Harpers Ferry also changed as a result of the apparent shift in northern public opinion and the growing strength of the Republicans. Earlier vacillation over Brown's execution vanished and Hale now declared that "the *threats* of the North…[meant] that Brown and his gang must be hanged at all hazards." While "*three weeks ago,* we were inclined to think that the South might profit by" no execution, Hale explained that "*since that time*, the condition of affairs [had] totally changed."[115] Yet Hale still blamed Democrats for the increasing tensions. Southern Democrats "[had] unjustly charged the whole Republican party with complicity in Brown's foray" in order to maximize "political capital." Harpers Ferry could "have…heal[ed] the sectional breach," Hale argued, but reckless agitation by Democratic editors such as Holden,

[110] David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 367-369.
[111] "The Recent Elections," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 3: 1.
[112] "The Silence of the North," *Weekly Standard*, 30 November 1859, 3: 2.
[113] "Where will it End?," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 1: 2.
[114] "The North-Carolina Standard," *Weekly Standard*, 16 November 1859, 3: 1.
[115] "The Punishment of John Brown," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 21 November 1859, 3: 1.

"[had]…widened it."[116] Democrats were only interested in their own political success, even if it came at the expense of the South or the Union.

Other Opposition papers also defended their party, but those such as the Greensboro *Patriot* had even stronger criticism of the Democrats. While northern "freedom shriekers" were "immediately responsible" for Brown's attack, the *Patriot* editor argued that Democrats' "mischievous efforts" to portray "southern oppositionists [as]…abolitionists" were also "at the very foundation of…the late bloody scenes at Harper's Ferry." Inaccurate claims gave northern radicals the confidence to conduct operations in the South since they believed that some southerners were potential allies.[117] Democrats, rather than the Opposition, were the real danger to the South according to this partisan response.

The increasing tension apparent in the newspapers finally began to influence Piedmont residents' actions. In late November, Holden's newspaper reported that several "strangers," including one "with rather red hair and whiskers," had "excit[ed] strong suspicions" because he "answer[ed] the description of [fugitive raider] Owen Brown."[118] In Salisbury, which was located in Jonathan Worth's district, two Connecticut businessmen were arrested on November 23 because authorities suspected that they had interacted with slaves.[119] Eventually they were released, but only after they agreed to leave the state.[120] Sandy Tate, a local resident, caused a more serious incident several days later when he declared, as the Salisbury *Watchman* reported, "sentiments…so utterly hostile to the

[116] "Old Brown," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 14 November 1859, 3: 4.
[117] "Who is Responsible?," *Greensboro Patriot*, 4 November 1859, 2: 4. Also see "The Administration and the Harper's Ferry Affair," *Greensboro Patriot*, 18 November 1859, 1: 7.
[118] "Suspicious Characters at Henderson," *Weekly Standard*, 30 November 1859, 1: 3; "Notice to Leave," *Weekly Standard*, 30 November 1859, 3: 2.
[119] "Two Incendiaries Caught in Salisbury," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 28 November 1859, 3: 1.
[120] Howard, "Brown's Raid," 401-402.

security of the public peace."[121] Holden described that Tate "was seized, carried into a back lot, stripped to his waist, tarred and feathered, then carried through town on a pole, and then ducked in the creek."[122] Even though Tate had lived in the town for at least five years, residents still required him to leave. These reactions at the end of November 1859 marked the start of a secondary reaction that only intensified in the following months.

Editors' reactions to reports about Sandy Tate reveal that southerners had different perspectives on how to handle threats against their communities. All wanted abolitionists removed, but they disagreed on whether extralegal methods were justified. While Holden's editorials never criticized Tate's treatment, one Democratic reporter expressed regret that the Brown-sympathizer was not hung because "the necessities of the times imperatively demand terrible examples."[123] "Remember Harper's Ferry!," as another Democratic editor argued that "illusory legal justice [and]…the slow operation of inadequate laws" were not sufficient to ensure North Carolinians' safety.[124] Opposition editors also considered Tate dangerous, but they claimed that more appropriate actions were available. Hale argued that "Lynch law" was not justified since "the laws [were] ample to protect the South."[125] The disagreements would not disappear since violent reactions continued to occur in the Piedmont.

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[121] "An Outbreak," *Salisbury Watchman*, in *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 1 December 1859, 2: 6.
[122] "An Abolitionist Poled and Ducked," *Weekly Standard*, 7 December 1859, 1: 4.
[123] "Cosmo" letter of 20 November 1859, from Salisbury *Watchman* to New Bern *Progress* in William Lloyd Garrison, *New "Reign of Terror,"* 77-79; quoted in David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119.
[124] *Murfreesboro Citizen,* 23 November 1859; quoted in Blaser, "Brown's Raid," 205.
[125] "Two Incendiaries Caught in Salisbury," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 28 November 1859, 3: 1. Also see "Salisbury Items," *Greensboro Patriot*, 2 December 1859, 2: 4-5; "Suspicious Characters," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 December 1859, 5: 2.

As secondary responses intensified in December 1859 and January 1860, individuals were identified as dangerous if they posed a *potential* threat to southern society. Abolitionist missionaries such as Reverend Daniel Worth were arrested, put on trial, and forced to leave the state.[126] Even school teachers accused of harboring antislavery sympathies were rounded up and kicked out.[127] Abolitionists in the Piedmont had been targets before, but the intensity of this reaction was unprecedented. Reverend Daniel Wilson's decision to leave his home state five months after Brown's attack illustrated this point. While he had "witnessed troublesome times" during the 1850s, Reverend Wilson explained that the reaction to "Brown['s] course in Verginia [*sic*]" made life intolerable. Earlier episodes of antislavery violence had not forced Wilson to leave, but in March 1860 he announced his intention to move north and recommended that "every free Soiler…do [the same]."[128] Not all abolitionists followed Wilson's advice, including one who lived in a central Piedmont community. In May 1860 this southern abolitionist told a northern friend that he could not "circulate…[an antislavery] pamphlet [in his] neighborhood" because "the excitement [had] increased so much."[129] Reports about arrests of abolitionists declined after January 1860, but clearly the fear responsible for the strong reaction had a lasting impact.

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[126] "Arrest and Trial of Rev. Daniel Worth," *Greensboro Patriot*, 6 January 1860, 3: 3. Of the numerous arrests in the Piedmont after the raid, Reverend Worth has received the most attention: Noble J. Tolbert, "Daniel Worth: Tarheel Abolitionist," *North Carolina Historical Review* 39, no. 3 (1962): 284-304; Clifton H. Johnson, "Abolitionist Missionary Activities in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (July 1963): 295-320; Jeffrey Brooke Allen, "The Radical Thought of White North Carolina Opponents of Slavery, 1789-1876," *North Carolina Historical Review* 59, no. 1 (January 1982): 49-66; Michael Kent Curtis, *Free Speech, "The People's Darling Privilege:" Struggles for Freedom of Expression in American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 289-299.

[127] "Alamance County," *Weekly Standard*, 21 December 1859, 3: 1.

[128] Daniel Wilson to S. S. Jocelyn, 25 March 1860, in Mark Andrew Huddle, ed., "North Carolina's Forgotten Abolitionist: the American Missionary correspondence of Daniel Wilson," *North Carolina Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (October 1995): 453-54.

[129] Robert Hodgin to Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, 6 May 1860, Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers, SHC. Also see Mary Kelly Watson Smith to Hortensia Hay Watson, 30 March 1860, H. Smith Richardson Papers, SHC; "Helper's Crisis," *High Point Reporter*, in *Greensboro Patriot*, 8 June 1860, 2: 7.

Yet the intense reaction did not mean that these southerners were ready to consider secession. Even though Oppositionist Jonathan Worth supported measures against abolitionists and expressed concerns about northern support for Brown, the intense response in the Piedmont had not altered his unionist perspective. As Worth told northern businessmen, many North Carolinians interpreted "such acts as the ringing of the State House bell at Albany on occasion of the hanging of…Brown" on December 2, 1859 as a sign of "the prevalent feeling…in that city." Brown's raid would not improve sectional relations, and Worth warned that the North's pro-Brown image had to change, but he still reassured the businessmen that his criticism was not intended to threaten secession. North Carolinians who he talked to "[were] calm and talk only of Union, not disunion."[130]

Debate over militia reform during the secondary reaction illustrated the importance and influence of competitive politics in North Carolina. As residents read reports about the abolitionists arrested in the Piedmont, some became concerned that local militia companies were unprepared for an emergency. Governor John Ellis, a Democrat from the eastern region of the state, received numerous requests for supplies to outfit new militia companies, but with insufficient inventory he turned to the War Department and asked for 2,000 rifles.[131] Federal officials denied the request and noted that it was practically impossible to fulfill, as not only was it the equivalent of what the state would receive over six years, but to complete it other states would be left without any arms.[132] Instead, North

[130] Worth to Hennys, Smith, and Townsend, 15 February 1860, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 99.
[131] Joseph B. Todd to Ellis, 15 December, Marcus Erwin to Ellis, 22 December, Ellis to John B. Floyd, 10 December 1859, in Noble J. Tolbert, ed., *The Papers of John Willis Ellis* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1964), 1: 333, 335, 331.
[132] Henry K. Craig to John B. Floyd, 13 December 1859, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 1: 339. This letter was also published in "Arms for North-Carolina," *Weekly Standard*, 4 January 1860, 3: 4.

Carolina only received 311 rifles in 1860.[133] If the Governor wanted to provide militia companies with supplies, he had to wait until the General Assembly convened in November 1860 or call for a special session eight months before the gubernatorial election.

With both parties already focused on the August 1860 gubernatorial election, the question about extra funds was politically sensitive. Holden published resolutions from Democratic county party meetings that called for immediate action, including one from a central Piedmont county that formally "request[ed]" the Governor to "take the necessary steps to convene the Legislature as early…as possible."[134] Ellis, however, believed that his reelection campaign was the top priority and that a special session only gave Oppositionists an platform on which to attack his administration.[135] When Ellis announced his decision, he cast himself as a responsible moderate whose foremost concern was the country's future. A special session was inadvisable during this crisis because it would only "increase increase[ing] the excitement [that already] exist[ed]." While he acknowledged that "a sense of insecurity" existed, Ellis argued that the "ordinary police force" was more than sufficient to protect "the public peace until the" legislature reconvened in late November 1860.[136] Ellis' decision highlights important political aspects in the secondary reaction because both sides were playing politics with Harpers Ferry to a certain extent. However, it is worth noting that Opposition editors did not unanimously condemn Ellis' decision. Hale admitted that Ellis "[had] decided it wisely" since "militia [reform was] not such pressing necessity

[133] Henry K. Craig to Ellis, 17 January 1860, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 2: 352.
[134] "Important Letter from Gov. Ellis," *Weekly Standard*, 18 January 1860, 1: 2. For a similar resolution see "The Caswell Meeting," *Weekly Standard*, 18 January 1860, 1: 1.
[135] Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina 1836 - 1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 189.
[136] Ellis to Hugh Waddell, Joseph J. Jackson, Nathan A. Ramsay, 10 January 1860, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 2: 348-349. Also see "Important Letter from Gov. Ellis," *Weekly Standard*, 18 January 1860, 1: 2.

[to]…justify" a special secession.[137] On the other hand, the *Patriot*, which had argued that Democrats shared some responsibility for Harpers Ferry, was far more critical. Ellis' primary concern was his reelection, and "not [his]…duty to the country." The public statement from the Executive Office was, as the *Patriot* explained, really "a mere *ruse*…to evade the responsibility of calling an extra session."[138]

Competitive politics in North Carolina also influenced the debate over the correct response to Republicans' newfound position as a national power. After Republican William Pennington emerged from a two month debate on February 1, 1860 as Speaker of the House, he Opposition Representative John Gilmer the chair of the Committee on Elections and he quickly accepted.[139] Even though Gilmer's decision was controversial, his choice was not a surprise considering his attempt to reduce tensions in Congress four days after Brown's execution.[140] Historian Ollinger Crenshaw observes that this slaveholder introduced a resolution that asked *all* Representatives to "pledge themselves against renewal of slavery agitation."[141] If controversial issues were avoided, Gilmer hoped that the deadlock in the House could be broken and a Speaker elected. "We are national men," as Gilmer reminded his colleagues, who "crave not the honor of belonging to the extreme men of any section."[142] As his constituents in the Piedmont removed suspicious northerners from their communities, he believed it was important to elect a Speaker and to push forward with the

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[137] "The Legislature not to be Convened!," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 16 January 1860, 3: 1.
[138] "What is a Governor For?," *Greensboro Patriot*, 6 January 1860, 3: 3-4.
[139] The election for Speaker in 1855-1856 was the longest. Fred Harvey Harrington describes it in "The First Northern Victory," *Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 2 (May 1939): 186-205.
[140] Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Speakership Contest of 1859-1860: John Sherman's Election a Cause of Disruption?," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 29, no. 3 (December 1942): 323; David Brown, *Southern Outcast: Hinton Rowan Helper and The Impending Crisis of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 152-179.
[141] Crenshaw, "The Speakership Contest of 1859-1860," 324.
[142] *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 1st Session, 20.

nation's agenda.[143] Two months later when Gilmer accepted the chair assignment, the reasons were readily apparent. Even if he hated Republicans, he knew that to ignore the political party in power was not in his state's best interest. Opposition editors in the Piedmont agreed that Gilmer had made the correct choice. The *Patriot*'s editor called Gilmer "*the* man for the place" because of his "talent, laborious habits, and untiring energy."[144] Hale also agreed and pointed out in late March 1860 that Gilmer's actions as chair proved that he was not a Republican pawn, but rather a loyal and honorable southerner.[145]

Editor William Holden, however, argued that Gilmer's decision signaled disloyalty to the South. Editorials in the *Standard* quickly characterized the Speaker's offer as a reward to Gilmer for loyal service to the Republican party. Holden explained that Gilmer, who was on the Committee on Elections during previous sessions, had "served the black Republicans so well…that they have promoted him to the head of it" in February 1860.[146] Rather than serve to protect southern interests, Holden implied that Gilmer's efforts in Congress were really to help the South's worst enemy – an unpardonable offense. Editorials that questioned a leading Oppositionist loyalty and honor were another important part of Holden's campaign to convince southerners to abandon the Opposition party and join the Democrats.

The tensions in North Carolina reflected greater tensions across the nation in the spring of 1860. The Democratic Party, in particular, faced a bitter division over which candidate to nominate at its national convention in Charleston, South Carolina in late April

[143] Brown, *Southern Outcast*, 156-158.
[144] "Chairman of the Committee on Elections," *Greensboro Patriot*, 17 February 1860, 2: 4.
[145] "Mr. Gilmer," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 March 1860, 3: 3. Also see "Mr. Gilmer," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 13 February 1860, 3: 3; *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 26 January 1860, 3: 3.
[146] "Congress," *Fayetteville Observer*, 26 March 1860, 3: 3.

1860. Even three days before the Charleston convention started, a clear front runner had not emerged. Holden told his wife that "all [was still] uncertain" because "no one can predict who will be the nominee." While Holden preferred a southerner such as Vice President John Breckinridge, other delegates from northern states were convinced that Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas was the best choice.[147] Democrats had avoided a sectional split in the 1850s, but those tensions finally tore the party apart in Charleston.[148] Lower South delegates fought for a southern nominee and a platform that offered federal protection for slavery in the western territories.[149] William Yancey, a radical from Alabama who one northern reporter dubbed "the prince of the Fire-eaters," was an important leader behind that effort and was present in Charleston.[150] These southern Democrats actually wanted secession and pushed for a hard line at the convention as a precursor for what they planned for the nation if the Republican candidate won in November.[151] After the convention rejected a slave code for the territories, nearly the entire Lower South delegation walked out.[152] Holden was outraged over those actions and, as historian William Harris explains, the editor "[gave] an impassioned speech attacking the Yanceyites for their secessionist proclivities."[153] Northern and Upper South delegates who remained might have

[147] William Woods Holden to Louisa Holden, 22 April 1860, in Horace W. Raper and Thomton W. Mitchell, eds., *The Papers of William Woods Holden* (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2000), 1: 104.
[148] Yonatan Eyal explains why Democrats avoided a split in *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202-228.
[149] Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development: from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 84; Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 210-213.
[150] Murat Halstead and William Best Hesseltine, *Three against Lincoln: Murat Halstead reports the Caucuses of 1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 24; quoted in Eric H. Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey: The Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 239.
[151] Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 218-222.
[152] Walther, *Yancey*, 243-245.
[153] William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 88; Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 35.

nominated a candidate, but instead they decided to reconvene in Baltimore on June 18, 1860.[154]

Holden realized the severity of his party's crisis and his response indicated that he could abandon principles if he believed new conditions rendered them obsolete. This convention "profoundly affected Holden's outlook on the unfolding sectional crisis," as Harris explains. The editor "came to the startling conclusion that [southern] extremists…shared a major responsibility" for the sectional dispute.[155] The stubborn behavior of southern fire-eaters revealed the extent of the threat before the national party and Holden genuinely believed that "the Union [was] in imminent peril" as a result.[156] He publically attacked secessionists' attempts "to dissolve the Union by *precipitating…a revolution*" and emphasized that delegates had to select a national candidate at Baltimore.[157] In the spirit of sectional compromise, Holden then announced in May 1860 that Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas was the only option. "The choice [was]…between Douglas and…vertual disolution [*sic*]," as Holden told Thomas Tucker, a wealthy North Carolina Douglas supporter.[158]

Holden supported his appeal for unity at Baltimore with editorials that called attention to Republicans dangerous ideology. The Union would not survive under Abraham Lincoln, as Holden explained, since that candidate's positions "plac[ed] him in the light…of old John Brown himself." Lincoln was similar to that infamous abolitionist because he also

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[154] William W. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, vol. 2 of *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-86.
[155] Harris, *Holden*, 89. Also see Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 162.
[156] Holden to Reverend Calvin Henderson Wiley, 9 May 1860, Calvin Henderson Wiley Papers, SHC.
[157] "Mr. Yancey, the Disunionist," *Weekly Standard*, 16 May 1860, 1: 1; "The Charleston Convention," *Weekly Standard*, 9 May 1860, 2: 5
[158] Holden to Thomas Goode Tucker, 19 May 1860, in Raper and Mitchell, *The Papers of William Woods Holden*, 1: 109-10.

"[took] a deep personal interest in…slaves - *not in the Territories only, but in the States*." Republicans claimed they only wanted to contain slavery in territories where it already existed, but Holden was not convinced.[159]

When Democrats reconvened in Baltimore on June 13, 1860, they failed to reconcile their differences. Northern Democrats selected Senator Douglas and southerners chose Vice President Breckinridge.[160] Holden also attended the convention, but upon his return he reiterated that Douglas "was the only man who could defeat Lincoln."[161] His stance, however, directly contradicted state party leaders who wanted no further debate on that issue so they could focus on the August 1860 gubernatorial election, in which incumbent Governor John Ellis faced strong competition.[162] Adding to the pressure was the emergence of a fourth viable candidate for president, John Bell of the new Constitutional Union Party.[163] In a state such as North Carolina, Bell represented a significant threat to Breckinridge and southern Democrats because the Opposition would readily endorse the former Senator from Tennessee. Eventually Holden conceded to party pressure and endorsed Breckinridge, but he adamantly refused to attack Douglas or his supporters. Southerners, as Holden argued, "look[ed] forward to a re-union with the twelve hundred thousand Democrats in the free States."[164] He did acknowledge, however, that only "a few thousands [votes]…for Douglas" were necessary to throw "the electoral vote of the State"

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[159] "The True Issue," *Weekly Standard*, 13 June 1860, 1: 2.
[160] Freehling provides a detailed account of this convention in *Secessionists Triumphant*, 309-322.
[161] "'Union and Harmony,'" *Weekly Standard*, 18 July 1860, 1: 2. For an overview of Holden's actions at Baltimore, see Harris, *Holden*, 90-91; Raper, *Holden*, 35-36
[162] *Weekly Standard*, 20 June 1860, 3: 1.
[163] Peter Knupfer, "Aging Statesmen and the Statesmanship of an Earlier Age: The Generational Roots of the Constitutional Union Party," in *Union & Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era*, ed. David W. Blight and Brooks D. Simpson (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1997), 57-78; Don Green, "Constitutional Unionists: The Party that Tried to stop Lincoln and Save the Union," *Historian* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 231-253.
[164] "The Presidency," *Weekly Standard*, 18 July 1860, 3: 2.

to Bell, while urging readers to embrace Breckinridge.[165] Yet Holden's endorsement was not an indication that he supported secession. Editorials in the *Standard* repeatedly declared that "Mr. Breckinridge…[was] true to the Constitution and the Union."[166]

The break-up of the national Democratic Party marked a key turning point for Holden, an awakening of the real prospects for disunion. In late July 1860 editorials in the *Standard* criticized secession for the first time.[167] "Disunion [was] one of the last things to" consider because Holden believed it entailed "fraternal strife, civil and servile war, murder, arson, pillage, robbery, and fire and blood through long and cruel years."[168] While Holden argued that Democrats could defeat Republicans, the list of serious consequences indicated an important shift in his perspective on Republicans. Those who were a "menace…against" the South now only encompassed "the more radical portion of the black Republicans."[169] Holden had not distinguished among different types of Republicans after Brown's raid, but began to do so in the summer of 1860.[170] In addition, Holden addressed the possibility of a Republican victory. "If so great a calamity" occurred, Holden emphasized that honor demanded that "prudent men…[remain] firm and calm." Yet the editorials against secession also contained an important qualification. If Republicans attempted to coerce any part of the South, southerners would not hesitate "to defend…[their] honor."[171] "For every thousand men Lincoln might send for his work of subjugation [in the Lower South]," Holden predicted that "the middle States would send two thousand…to aid their Southern brethren

[165] "Think of it, Democrats," *Weekly Standard*, 10 October 1860, 1: 2. Also see "Democrats, are you Ready?," *Weekly Standard*, 31 October 1860, 3: 1.
[166] "The Presidential Election," *Weekly Standard*, 26 September 1860, 1: 2. Also see *Weekly Standard*, 3 October 1860, 3: 1.
[167] Harris, *Holden*, 91.
[168] "'A Constitutional Union," *Weekly Standard*, 11 July 1860, 3: 2.
[169] "'A Constitutional Union," *Weekly Standard*, 11 July 1860, 3: 2.
[170] Harris, *Holden*, 94.
[171] "The Impending Danger," *Weekly Standard*, 31 October 1860, 3: 2.

and to arrest Lincoln in his work of blood."[172] "There [was] no Union without the Constitution" and to Holden the coercion of southern states was unconstitutional.[173] Other Democratic editors in North Carolina did not call for secession if Lincoln won because they wanted moderate Democrats to support Breckinridge, but few joined Holden and publically criticized the disunion option.[174]

Edward Hale and other Oppositionists in North Carolina endorsed John Bell and were confident that he could win the state's electoral votes in November 1860. Even though the Opposition candidate in the August 1860 gubernatorial election had lost, the small margin of defeat gave them hope for future elections.[175] "The Democratic majority [had been reduced] to so low a figure that [the Opposition] can look forward to another contest with assurance," as Hale explained.[176] Yet Hale, who realized that Bell lacked sufficient support in some northern states to defeat Republicans, was not against "fusion" with northern Democrats. If "the Democratic [and] Whig party [in New York]…combined," Hale was confident that "such a union" could "beat the fanatics."[177] Hale remained optimistic until election returns from northern states made Lincoln's victory all but certain.[178] Unlike Holden, however, Hale never regarded Breckinridge or southern Democrats as unionists.[179] Bell and Douglas "[were the only candidates]…truly for the

[172] *Weekly Standard*, 17 October 1860, 3: 2.
[173] *Weekly Standard*, 3 October 1860, 3: 1.
[174] Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 301.
[175] Oliver H. Dockery to Edward J. Hale, 11 August 1860, in Hale Papers; quoted in Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 196.
[176] "The Result," *Fayetteville Observer*, 6 August 1860, 3: 1. Also see "Guilford County," *Greensboro Patriot*, 10 August 1860, 2: 4.
[177] "The Chances," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 2 July 1860, 3: 1.
[178] "New York," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 October 1860, 3: 2. Also see "The Coming Election," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 8 October 1860, 3: 1.
[179] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 197.

Union," as Hale explained.[180] This perspective was evident in Hale's reaction to Holden's endorsement of that candidate.[181] "The *Standard*," as Hale explained, "[had]…become…one of [William] Yancey's followers," who helped break apart the Democrats at Charleston and strongly supported secession.[182]

Three months after the Harpers Ferry attack, Basil Thomasson wondered "what will take place in these United States during the year 1860[?]" While he did not record a reaction to John Brown's raid, he predicted that "the enemy of all that's god [*sic*] [would be] be stretching every nerve for the destruction of the Union."[183] In the midst of the intense secondary reaction in late 1859, Thomasson offered one of the strongest and most direct statements in support of the Union. While his diary remained almost completely silent on political matters throughout 1860, he likely followed the actions of prominent Piedmont unionists in the newspapers that he regularly read.[184] These unionists had the ability to influence public opinion, but they offered solutions to avoid the Union's destruction through their respective political parties. Throughout 1860 their perspectives evolved within them. By November 1860 the two parties in North Carolina– the southern Democrats and the Opposition – offered their candidate as the *only* way to save the Union. Both had the same ultimate objective, yet they offered completely different means to achieve it. Abraham Lincoln's victory in November 1860 created an opportunity for a political

[180] Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics*, 301; "Not Altogether Opposition," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 10 September 1860, 3: 3. Also see "Public Opinion," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 1 November 1860, 3: 1.
[181] "A Reported Disunion Plot," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 October 1860, 3: 2. Also see "Is It Possible," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 5 November 1860, 3: 3.
[182] "A Very Pretty Quarrel," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 15 October 1860, 3: 2. *Standard* was not italicized in original.
[183] Diary entry, 27 December 1860, in *Thomasson Diary*, 264.
[184] Thomasson often subscribed to at least one paper, see for example Diary entry, 13 March 1858, in *Thomasson Diary*, 195.

realignment in North Carolina, as if unionists wanted to defeat secession Democrats, they had unite under the same banner.

Chapter 3: "'Never give up the ship.' *Never!*" Piedmont Unionists Reject Secession

Abraham Lincoln's victory in November 1860 prompted concern in Piedmont communities about the possibility of an abolitionist attack, but many still did not consider secession as a safer alternative to the Union. As unionist Democrats and Oppositionists in the Piedmont formed a unionist coalition to counter secession Democrats, many based their decision on both security and honor. As southerners, they worried about whether slavery was secure outside of the Union and about their implicit honor-bound promise to accept the results of any fair election. Not all unionists agreed on the best strategy to prevent disunion, but the convention election in February 1861 provided them with an overwhelming political victory and highlighted the Piedmont's intense resistance to secession. Yet most unionists' support had important limits. They utterly rejected coercion as a means to restore the Lower South to the Union. Military force was to unionists an unmistakable indication that President Abraham Lincoln would devastate southern society and compel *all* southern states to eliminate slavery. When President Lincoln called on April 15, 1861 for state militias to restore order after Fort Sumter, most of the North Carolina men studied here believed that his action betrayed an earlier promise to avoid coercion and that as southerners they had to resist it.

Marc Kruman and Daniel Crofts have studied North Carolina in the secession crisis and argue that a competitive political system ensured that secessionists were unable to force the state out of the Union after Lincoln's victory in November 1860. Even though Democrats had controlled the state during the 1850s, Kruman points out that their top

concern by 1859 was to ensure that they extended their grip on power into the 1860s. [185] Governor John Ellis, a Democrat, won a second term in August 1860 only by a small margin.[186] Three months later North Carolinians voted in another close election. John Breckinridge, the southern Democratic candidate, defeated Constitutional Union candidate John Bell by only 848 votes.[187] Republicans were considered a serious threat, but the close elections in 1860 convinced many North Carolinians that Lincoln's victory did not mean permanent control of the federal government.[188] These southerners understood a competitive political system and, as Kruman argues, they believed that one at the national level was sufficient to "prevent the Lincoln administration from taking actions hostile to southern interests."[189] Crofts reaches a similar conclusion, as he adds that this system became "an indispensable base" on which unionists' built support against disunion.[190] Competitive systems thrived in other Upper South states such as Virginia, but politics in Lower South states that seceded following Lincoln's election were controlled by one party.[191] Unionists existed even in South Carolina, but they lacked sufficient political influence to prevent secession in December 1860.[192] These historians' broader perspective,

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[185] Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina 1836 - 1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 189.
[186] Donald C. Butts discusses this election in "The 'Irrepressible Conflict': Slave Taxation and North Carolina's Gubernatorial Election of 1860," *North Carolina Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (January 1981): 44-66.
[187] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 199.
[188] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 198-201.
[189] Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 220.
[190] Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 130.
[191] Peyton McCrary, Clark Miller, and Dale Baum, "Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 429-457; Christopher Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-12, 169, 181, 188, 190-195; Marc Egnal, "Rethinking the Secession of the Lower South: The Clash of Two Groups," *Civil War History* 50, no. 3 (September 2004): 261 – 290.
[192] Lillian A. Kibler, "Unionist Sentiment in South Carolina in 1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 4, no. 3 (August 1938): 346-366; Lillian Adele Kibler, *Benjamin F. Perry, South Carolina Unionist* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1946); Maury Klein, *Days of Defiance: Sumter, Secession, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1997), 92, 146.

however, limit their ability to delve into the details of the secession crisis in North Carolina and overlook key events such as the unionists who requested protection from the federal government in late 1860. Both also note the reaction to John Brown's raid, but their focus does not allow them to form a coherent story about how unionists progressed from that attack in October 1859 and through President Lincoln's response to the Fort Sumter attack in April 1861.

Concerns about post-election violence did not alter unionists' arguments that North Carolina's best option was to remain in the Union, even with a Republican in the White House. Nowhere was this perspective more apparent than in the southern Piedmont town of Fayetteville.[193] Historians have missed this unique development that provides an important insight into the southern unionist perspective on the federal government. Before November, Opposition editor Edward Hale and twelve other residents asked the War Department to protect the vulnerable federal arsenal in their community, which they considered a likely target for an abolitionist attack.[194] Rather than provide specific evidence to bolster their claim, they argued that it was not necessary to prove that a threat actually existed. "The raid at Harper's ferry [*sic*]…[taught] that all mischief comes…[without] a warning beforehand," they wrote, and for them a garrison force represented the best deterrence against such an enemy.[195] After a New York artillery company arrived following Lincoln's election in mid November 1860, Hale claimed that their presence had "very materially quieted the public mind" because they quashed "any idea of a John Brown

[193] Harry L. Watson examines the political history of Fayetteville's county in *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County North Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).
[194] Archibald McLean to John B. Floyd, 25 October 1860, in Noble J. Tolbert, ed., *The Papers of John Willis Ellis* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1964), 2: 516.
[195] Various Citizens to Archibald McLean, 23 October 1860, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 2: 519.

raid."[196] Three weeks after Lincoln's victory these southerners looked *not* to the local militia for security, but instead to the United States Army. Republicans were still considered dangerous, but unionists flatly rejected secession because they believed that northern party would control the federal government for only a limited period of time. "*Lincoln cannot [remain] in office [for]…long*" because Hale believed that the President's policies would "offend" enough Republicans to "destroy" their party.[197] Unless Lincoln took action that directly threatened southern states, Hale portrayed unionism as the only honorable choice for southerners. Lincoln had not violated election rules and, as a result, *all* participants were obligated to accept the outcome. If disunion was the only acceptable response to a Republican victory, Hale argued that anyone who held that perspective was "bound in honor to refuse to participate in the election."[198] Hale's editorials sought to convince North Carolinians that to reject the Union after Lincoln's election was not only dishonorable, but unsouthern.

William Holden's newspaper also argued against disunion and its influential editor soon broke ranks over Democratic party leaders' dishonest attempts to quickly push North Carolina out of the Union. "Watch and Wait," which became the *Standard*'s "motto" in November 1860, reflected Holden's perspective that secession was justified only if Lincoln directly threatened southern interests.[199] Disunion was extremely unlikely because Holden believed that "*slavery in the [southern] states [was] in no danger*" and internal discord was

[196] "U. S. Arsenal," *Fayetteville Weekly Observer*, 26 November 1860, 3: 4.
[197] "How the Result is Received," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 12 November 1860, 3: 1.
[198] "Election of Lincoln and Hamlin!," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 8 November 1860, 3: 1. Also see *Hillsborough Recorder,* November 1860; quoted in Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1861* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 66-67.
[199] "The Election of Lincoln," *Weekly Standard*, 14 November 1860, 1: 1.

certain to "break up" the Republican party.[200] While Holden immediately attacked editors who supported disunion, direct criticism of party leaders only started after Governor Ellis called for a convention on November 20, 1860.[201] Holden utterly rejected Ellis' proposal and argued that the only objective was to push the state out of the Union without North Carolinians' consent. Voters would be left "*merely to register and carry out the disunion schemes*," as Holden warned. Secessionist legislators no longer served to represent their constituents' interests. Instead, these "demagogues" were willing to "commit the honor and the pride of [North Carolina] to disunion" in order to gain "power…in a [new] Southern Union."[202] Never before had editorials in the *Standard* contained such scathing criticism of other Democrats. Rather than abandon his party, however, he boldly proclaimed that unionist Democrats would save it.[203]

Secessionists quickly implemented several measures to deny Holden resources for his campaign. In late November 1860, legislators did not renew the *Standard*'s contract as state printer, which represented a major financial loss.[204] The "office," as state Senator Jonathan Worth explained, was "the most profitable…gift of the General Assembly."[205] Employees of the *Standard* also became outcasts and the Democratic party caucus in December 1859 was placed off limits to them.[206] Attempts to isolate the *Standard*,

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[200] "Stand Firm!," *Weekly Standard*, 14 November 1860, 1: 2; "The Feeling in South Carolina," *Weekly Standard*, 21 November 1860, 1: 3.
[201] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 201-202. Ellis' message was published in "Governor's Message," *Weekly Register*, 28 November 1860, 4.
[202] "Governor's Message," *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 1: 1.
[203] William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 93; Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 308.
[204] Harris, *Holden*, 96; Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics*, 303.
[205] Jonathan Worth to unknown recipient, presumably J. J. Jackson, December 1860, in J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1909), 1: 126.
[206] Raper, *Holden*, 37; "A 'Little Brief Authority,'" *Weekly Standard*, 5 December 1860, 1: 4.

however, became a call to arms. “The battle…between Union and disunion *[had] arrived*,” as Holden proclaimed.[207] Readers were asked to “discard party” to support unionism and Holden demonstrated his resolve during a bipartisan Union meeting on November 30.[208] He chaired a committee that created antisecession resolutions and presented them at the rally, which also featured speeches from a unionist Democrat and an Opposition Congressman.[209] Unionists would draw supporters from both parties and, despite Holden’s “appeal” to unionist Democrats, he was not against cooperation with former rivals.[210]

Secessionists also attempted to push their disunion agenda through the General Assembly in late 1860, but unionist legislators forced them to accept a measure that gave voters an opportunity to voice their opinion. A joint committee recommended on December 12 that legislators immediately call for a convention, but even though secession Democrats held a majority, they were unable to meet the requirement of support from two thirds of both houses.[211] Unionists, who were largely Opposition politicians, held enough seats to block any convention. Yet certain unionist legislators, particularly from western counties, were willing to support one if voters had final approval over any decision.[212] Debate over a convention raged for six weeks and it revealed not only unionists’ diverse perspectives on strategy and honor, but also demonstrated the critical role of a competitive political system.

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[207] "The Election of State Printer," *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 1: 2.
[208] *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 3: 2; Raper, *Holden*, 38.
[209] "Public Meetings," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 6 December 1860, 2: 2; "Another Great Union Meeting!," *Weekly Register*, 5 December 1860, 3: 3; Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 71; Joe A. Mobley, *"War Governor of the South:" North Carolina's Zeb Vance in the Confederacy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 22-23.
[210] **"**Our Course," *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 3: 1.
[211] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 205; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 204.
[212] Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics*, 308.

Secessionists at first refused to alter their proposal, but on January 14 they relented and introduced a two step election process that eventually attracted enough unionist support on January 29. February 28 was set as the day for voters to select delegates and decide whether a convention was necessary.[213] If one was approved, delegates would meet in Raleigh after March 10. Yet the convention's outcome was not final since a second election gave voters an opportunity to reject delegates' decisions.[214] Western unionists such as Congressman Zebulon Vance argued a convention was the "[best] method…to promote the peace…and the honor of [North Carolina]." Honor was at stake because Vance was convinced that "non-action will precipitate us into disunion."[215] Confident that Union delegates could secure a majority on February 28, Vance considered a convention a unique opportunity to strike a decisive blow against secession.[216] State Senator Jonathan Worth, however, cautioned that a convention represented a "revolutionary" action.[217] If approved, disunion became inevitable and Worth was honor-bound to prevent that outcome. As he took an "oath to *support*" the United States Constitution, Worth explained that he "could not vote to call a convention to *overthrow*" it.[218] Even though voters could override delegates' decision to secede, Worth believed rejecting the convention outright provided the most efficient method. Both unionists' ultimate objective was to avoid secession, but even though their decisions were based on honor, they reached different conclusions.

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[213] While the House approved the February election 86 to 27, the vote in the Senate on January 29 was 37 to 9. Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, *The Secession Movement in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 207-208.
[214] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 205-206.
[215] Zebulon Baird Vance to George N. Folk, 9 January 1861, in Frontis W. Johnson, ed., *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance* (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Achieves and History, 1963), 1: 82.
[216] Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 24.
[217] *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina*, 1860-1861, 235; quoted in Richard L. Zuber, *Jonathan Worth: A Biography of a Southern Unionist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 119; "Remarks of Mr. Worth on the Proposition to call a Convention, in the Senate, January 1861," in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 128.
[218] "Mr. Worth's Address to People of Randolph and Alamance," January or February 1861, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 130.

Unionists also had different perspectives about how to protect the state, which were reflected in their response to Governor Ellis' request for extra funds to reequip militia companies. Senator Worth still saw the Lincoln administration dangerous, but he believed that this request was a more immediate threat in December 1860. Democrats argued that immediate action was necessary to secure "guns at *cash prices*," but Worth considered these claims a "silly…pretext." The "*real object*" behind Ellis' request was to provide secessionists with an opportunity "to arm volunteers [who would] aid [South Carolinians]."[219] Worth's constituents in Randolph county shared his concerns about the request. They argued that any attempt to hide the "real object" only showed "*contempt* for the common sense of the people."[220] However, few agreed with Worth since the General Assembly approved it with little opposition.[221] Those unionist politicians who voted for it may have agreed with Holden's conclusion that "the surest way to prevent war [was] to prepare for it."[222] In addition, the potential for abolitionist attacks alarmed Holden and he wanted the militia well prepared.[223] A federal arsenal was not located close to his home in Raleigh, but he still believed that a Republican victory was enough to cause problems. While Holden argued that this perspective was similar to the position he held in January 1860, he conveniently failed to mention his editorials that called for disunion in the event that Republicans won in November 1860.[224]

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[219] Jonathan Worth to J. J. Jackson, 17 December 1860, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 126-127; "Senate," *Weekly Standard*, 26 December 1860, 4: 1; Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 115-116.
[220] "Union Meeting in Randolph County," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 3 January 1861, 2: 1.
[221] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 187. Three Senators voted against it on December 18, 1860 and twenty six Representatives on January 8, 1861.
[222] "Arming the State," *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 3: 2.
[223] Harris, *Holden*, 95.
[224] "Arming the State," *Weekly Standard*, 28 November 1860, 3: 2.

The two party competitive system allowed unionists in the General Assembly to prevent immediate disunion, but it also restrained secessionists' actions after Lincoln's election. When several militia units acted without authorization in early January 1861 and captured two unmanned federal forts on North Carolina's eastern seaboard, Governor Ellis ordered them to immediately vacate the installations.[225] Secessionist editors denounced that decision, but Ellis believed that unionists' political strength left him with no other choice.[226] Ellis told Georgia Governor Joseph Brown that secessionists already faced a "hard struggle" against unionists and that to keep the forts "would have an injurious effect upon [their] cause."[227] Ellis likely suspected that former allies such as Holden would use that type of incident to characterize secessionists as reckless and dangerous. Editorials in the *Standard* had already blamed secessionists in late December 1860 for spreading rumors about federal plans to seize the forts. "Be on your guard…fellow-citizens," as Holden warned that these false "alarms [were] part of the system" used to promote disunion.[228] Governor Ellis had to consider unionists when he debated what action to take, which ultimately restricted secessionits' ability to unilaterally push the state out of the Union.

While Ellis' letter did not specifically mention Holden, that editor was indispensable to unionists' success in North Carolina. Secessionist leaders "demanded the decapitation of Holden" in late 1860 because, as Senator Worth observed, they feared the impact that their

[225] Ellis to Colonel John L. Cantwell, 11 January 1861, Ellis to President James Buchanan, 12 January 1861, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 2: 554-555. Fort Johnson and Fort Caswell were seized on January 9 and 10, 1861 respectively.
[226] *Charlotte Bulletin*, in *Semi Weekly Register*, 26 January 1861, 3: 1.
[227] Ellis to Joseph E. Brown, 14 January 1861, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 2: 558. Secessionist Senator Thomas Bragg offered a similar opinion in Diary entry, 11 January 1861, Thomas Bragg Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (henceforth SHC).
[228] "N. C. Standard - Extra," *Weekly Standard*, 9 January 1861, 1: 1.

"most talented and…most influential" editor would have as a unionist.[229] Holden not only had considerable influence with Democrats, particularly those in the Piedmont, but invaluable experience with strategies to increase voter turnout in elections.[230] Once the *Standard* became a Union paper, Crofts argues that it "depressed support for secession among" Democratic voters and "helped to stir a surge of antiseccession feeling among Union Whig and many previous nonvoters."[231] While unionist editors such as Hale also held significant influence, none were as uniquely positioned to have such a dramatic impact on the electorate in North Carolina.

Holden's influence was evident in the overwhelming response to his appeal for support, which he used to prepare unionist Democrats for the new reality of cooperation with political rivals. Between December 5, 1860 and January 23, 1861, all but one weekly edition of the *Standard* had a 'Voice of the People' column that published "extracts from…letters [of]...patriots of all parties who…love their country and wish to save it from…secession."[232] One Piedmont Democrat argued that anyone "who [wanted to destroy]…this blessed Union without good cause" was a "traitor to mankind."[233] Others directed their praise at Holden: "Let the fire-eaters fume and rage, but expose them, and we, the people, will sustain you."[234] Holden wanted to prove that his actions had significant support, but at the same time he carefully reassured unionist Democrats that his intention

[229] Worth to unknown recipient, presumably J. J. Jackson, December 1860, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 126.
[230] Harris, *Holden*, 40-41; Raper, *Holden*, 12, 14; Holden to Ellis, 8 January 1852, in Tolbert, *Papers of John Willis Ellis*, 1: 105-106.
[231] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 145.
[232] The December 12, 1860 edition was the only exception. This column also appeared on February 13 and February 20, 1861; "The Voice of the People," *Weekly Standard*, 5 December 1860, 3: 2-3; Harris, *Holden*, 97.
[233] "The Voice of the People," *Weekly Standard*, 5 December 1860, 3: 2.
[234] "The Voice of the People," *Weekly Standard*, 26 December 1860, 1: 3.

was not the destruction of their party. Instead, his goal was "to preserve it *by keeping it clear of the taint of disunion*." Yet even if the party's "organization [was]…broken up," Holden was adamant that "its *principles* will live" on.[235] Rather than in a restored Democratic party, Holden implied that unionist Democrats future was with unionists.

The coalition between unionist Democrats and the Opposition started to coalesce in Piedmont communities as the General Assembly deliberated over the convention proposal. The six week debate was critical to that process because, as Kruman explains, it "gave Union sentiment…a chance to jell."[236] Throughout December 1860 and January 1861 unionist editors published reports about bipartisan rallies in towns across the Piedmont.[237] At least 800 "[Oppositionists] and Democrats" in Randolph county decided to put "aside party and partisan feelings" in late December 1860 to attend what Hale called "highly conservative proceedings."[238] These meetings led unionist editors to confidently predict that Piedmont voters would oppose secession by a large margin. "The Union feeling [was] overwhelming…in the [Piedmont]," as Hale declared.[239] When legislators approved a convention election on January 29, unionists were prepared for the short campaign that followed.

The political realignment in early 1861 was based on the single issue of whether North Carolina should remain in the Union. A Union party did not appear overnight, but

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[235] "Our Democracy Impeached," *Weekly Standard*, 2 January 1861, 1: 1.
[236] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 205, 206.
[237] "Public Meetings," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 10 December 1860, 3: 4; see "Public Meetings," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 13 December 1860, 3: 1; "Union Feeling in the Up Country," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 31 December 1860, 3: 3; "Public Meetings," *Weekly Standard*, 2 January 1861, 4: 6; "Union Meeting in Granville," *Semi Weekly Raleigh Register*, 9 January 1861, 3: 3; "Union Meeting in Chatham County," *Greensboro Patriot*, 16 January 1861, 3: 3.
[238] "Randolph," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 31 December 1860, 3: 3.
[239] "Public Sentiment," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 14 January 1861, 3: 2. Also see David Franklin Caldwell to Zebulon Baird Vance, 13 January 1861, in Johnson, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, 1: 83-85.

rather unionists based their organization on the old Opposition structure. Yet this coalition of Oppositionists and union Democrats could collapse if the electorate did not distinguish it as a new organization. As Crofts observes, "the creation of a new political entity required a new name…and a liberal willingness to nominate candidates from the smaller fragment."[240] When unionists nominated delegates for the February election, both former Opposition and Democrat politicians were selected.[241] Unionists in Wake county selected three candidates and, despite three prominent Oppositionists on the ballot, Holden received the most votes by a large margin.[242] While it is difficult to determine the exact number of union Democrats in Wake, Holden's comfortable margin of victory suggested that Oppositionists accepted their rivals. Hale explained that the three candidates from Wake, which included "[a] great intellect of the [Opposition] party, and…by far the most influential Democrat in the State," was an indication of unionists' great accomplishment and their future potential. Unionists' acceptance of that combination provided convincing evidence that "old party lines [had been] forgotten." The ability to disregard "party ties" was a crucial factor, as Hale believed that it represented their best hope for victory in an election in which "[the] great question…[was] Peace or civil War."[243] If former political rivals could band together as unionists to defeat the secession Democrats, they would ensure that North Carolina remained in the Union and protect their communities from war.

[240] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 147-148.
[241] Sitterson, *Secession Movement in North Carolina*, 215, 218.
[242] Holden received 29% of the votes at the meeting. "Constitutional Union Mass Meeting," *Weekly Register*, 13 February 1861, 3: 3; "Candidates for the Convention," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 18 February 1861, 3: 3. Also see Harris, *Holden*, 99.
[243] "Breaking Up of Old Parties," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 21 February 1861, 3: 1. Also see "Party Spirit," *Weekly Standard*, 13 February 1861, 3: 1.

When unionists voted on February 28, many did so confident that North Carolina's future was in the Union. The seven Lower South states that seceded after Lincoln's victory held a convention in early February 1861 to establish the Confederacy, but unionists believed that other events provided better indications of the likely outcome of the crisis.[244] Three Upper South states - Missouri, Tennessee, and Virginia - held elections before February 28 that had essentially rejected secession.[245] If those southerners could support the Union even with Lincoln's Inauguration set for March 4, editors asked why not North Carolina? When Hale reported those unionist victories, he explained that "it [was] North Carolina's turn next."[246] Reports on a compromise at the Washington Peace Conference also boosted unionists' confidence. Delegates, who arrived in the nation's capital in early February, had after several weeks of heated debate submitted their proposal to Congress on February 21.[247] Several days before North Carolinians voted, unionist papers such as the *Patriot* announced that delegates had reached an agreement "satisfactory to all sections" of the country.[248] For unionists, an end to the crisis appeared within reach. Even though Congress rejected that compromise on March 1, they voted with confidence that their state's future was with the Union.[249] Historian John Inscoe cautions that the February 1861

[244] George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 64-70.
[245] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 191-194; Christopher Phillips, *Missouri's Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identify in the Border West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 236-240; "Tennessee for the Union!," *Weekly Standard*, 13 February 1861, 3: 1; "Virginia for the Union," *Greensboro Patriot*, 14 February 1861.
[246] "Another Strong Blow for the Union," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 14 February 1861, 3: 1.
[247] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 207, 213-214; Robert G. Gunderson, "The Washington Peace Conference of 1861: Selection of Delegates," *The Journal of Southern History* 24, no. 3 (August 1958): 347-359.
[248] "The Peace Congress," *Greensboro Patriot*, 21 February 1861, 2: 1. Also see "Highly Important From Washington!," *Weekly Register*, 27 February 1861, 3: 4.
[249] Klein, *Days of Defiance*, 285-289; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 240-41; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 206.

election only "reflect[s] public sentiment at a very specific moment," but a 'snapshot' of public opinion four days before Lincoln's inaugural cannot be ignored.[250]

Unionists' won a decisive victory on February 28 that signaled an important political realignment in North Carolina. While a convention was narrowly defeated, unionist delegates won 81 of the 120 seats.[251] Western unionists supported a convention, but they too voted against secession candidates. Unionist delegates were elected in counties across the entire state, but Kruman identifies the Piedmont as the region with the "most intense unionism."[252] Voters in sixteen central Piedmont counties opposed a convention by over 70%, including 96% in Guilford county and 98% in adjacent Randolph.[253] Only five western and two eastern counties even reached the same threshold.[254] The electorate in February 1861 had changed, and as Crofts explains, historians often overlook this "major political realignment" because unionists were a factor only for this election.[255] Even though turnout in the November 1860 and February 1861 elections was similar, Democrats won the former by a small margin and suffered a significant defeat in the latter.[256] Within that three month period, a dramatic shift occurred in the electorate. As Crofts observes, "an exodus of voters from the active electorate in high-slaveowning areas took place just as previously inactive voters from low-slaveowning areas were joining it."[257] New voters were key because almost

[250] John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 248.
[251] Kruman places the margin at 661 votes, but Crofts includes "estimates…for several counties that Kruman judged too contradictory to analyze" and believes the correct figure is 994. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 181, 411; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 210.
[252] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 211-212; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 144.
[253] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 277.
[254] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 150.
[255] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 189.
[256] Turnout was 69% in November 1860 and 67% in February 1861. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 183, 190.
[257] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 189.

all were unionist. At the same time one-third of voters who traditionally supported Democrats failed to participate on February 28.[258] The nonslaveowner voters were also a critical factor since in February 1861 only 30% supported secession.[259] Basil Thomasson was among the Piedmont Democrat nonslaveowners who switched party affiliation. While in November 1860 he supported southern Democrat John Breckinridge, Thomasson wrote that on February 28 he voted for "no convention."[260]

The election results in North Carolina indicated strong support for the Union, but unionists still considered secession the appropriate response to coercion. Representative John Gilmer's interaction with President-elect Lincoln and Republican Senator William Seward highlighted the limits to conditional unionists' support. Even though "a most perilous crisis" existed in late December 1860, Gilmer was convinced that "the best Government that ever fell to the lot of man…[should] be preserved."[261] Yet when offered a position in Lincoln's administration, he declined. Senator Seward privately told Gilmer in early January 1861 about a formal offer to join the Lincoln administration**,** but Gilmer wanted the President-elect to publically signal a tolerance for slavery.[262] In addition, Crofts observes that Gilmer "made his acceptance of a cabinet post contingent on Lincoln's acceptance of compromise on the territorial question."[263] Gilmer had noted in late December 1860 that he believed "slave states…[should] have a share in this [western]

[258] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 190, 191.
[259] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 192-193.
[260] Diary entry, 6 November 1860, 28 February 1861, in Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 291, 302.
[261] Gilmer to J. M. Esq., 21 December 1860, in "Hon. John A. Gilmer," *Greensboro Patriot*, 3 January 1861, 2: 6.
[262] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 226; Gilmer to Lincoln, 29 December 1860, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress (henceforth Lincoln Papers).
[263] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 246.

territory."[264] Even though President-elect Lincoln was prepared to accept him in early 1861, Gilmer eventually declined since his condition was not met.[265] Gilmer wanted to preserve the Union, but ensuring that slavery remained intact was important. This perspective was shared by other conditional unionists and it was important to what would push Gilmer to support disunion.

Even though Gilmer rejected the offer, he continued to advise Republicans and his correspondence with Secretary of State Seward after Lincoln's Inauguration revealed the limits to conditional unionists' support. "President Lincoln should issue his proclamation [to remove] every Federal officer and solider from every Fort in the seceding states" because Gilmer argued that "collision & bloodshed must be avoided" in order to avoid the Upper South's secession. Lower South secessionists, or "traitors" as Gilmer called them, "will do all they can to bring about in some way some fighting" because it was their only means to convince other southerners to join their cause.[266] If violence occurred, President Lincoln's response could push the Upper South to secede. As Crofts observes, southern "anxieties about federal interference with slavery" were directly linked "to…any use of federal force against the seceding states."[267] If the federal government used force to compel the Lower South back into the Union, war was the inevitable result. Coercion was ineffective because Gilmer believed that the Lower South would eventually return to the Union on their own. After being "out into the cold for a while" as a separate republic, Gilmer was confident that

[264] Gilmer to J. M. Esq., 21 December 1860, in "Hon. John A. Gilmer," *Greensboro Patriot*, 3 January 1861, 2: 6. Also see Gilmer to Lincoln, 10 December 1860, Lincoln Papers.
[265] David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 263; Gilmer to Lincoln, 21 February 1861, Lincoln papers. Crofts argues that this letter was actually sent in late January or early February 1861 in *Reluctant Confederates*, 425-426.
[266] Gilmer to Seward, 9 March 1861, Lincoln Papers.
[267] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 258; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 213.

conditions would deteriorate and Confederate leaders would be unable to stop the southerners who would demand a return to the United States.[268] As long as federal troops did not march south, Gilmer supported the Union and believed that it could be restored.

Unionists' concerns about Republicans' intentions for the South and slavery led them to carefully analyze the text of Lincoln's Inaugural address.[269] On March 4, 1861, the nation was in the midst of an unprecedented crisis - Lower South states had established a Confederate government in Alabama and few believed that Lincoln would ever acknowledge. Unionists wondered whether President Lincoln would bow to northerners who demanded action against the rebels or if he would wait for Lower South states to realize that secession had been a mistake.[270] When Lincoln spoke in Washington, historian Ronald White observes that "he undertook a delicate balancing act so that within the same speech he sought both to assuage the South and to strengthen the resolve of the North."[271] North Carolina secessionists remained unconvinced that a Republican sincerely wanted peace, but most unionists believed that Lincoln had pledged to not reunite the country with force.[272] As Jonathan Worth observed, the speech "[brought] peace to any candid mind."[273] Even Thomasson, who described "gloomy times" on Easter Sunday, remained completely committed. "'Never give up the ship.' *Never! Never!,"* as Thomasson explained that "the glorious union - the price of the blood of our fathers – [was never]…to be abandoned as a

[268] Quoted in Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 259.
[269] Editors published the full text of the speech, such as in *Weekly Standard*, 13 March 1861, 4: 1-3.
[270] William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 74-75.
[271] Ronald C. White, Jr., *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln through His Words* (New York: Random House, 2005), 96. Douglas L. Wilson provides an interesting account of the Inaugural Address in *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 44-70.
[272] "Mr. Lincoln's Inaugural," *Weekly Standard*, 13 March 1861, 1: 2; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 214-215.
[273] Worth to B. G. Worth, 16 March 1861, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 134.

thing of no worth."[274] Thomasson's unionism was absolute, but even for those whose support had conditions, Lincoln's speech gave few reasons to waver.

President Lincoln's decision to restore the Lower South to the Union after the Fort Sumter attack on April 12 destroyed conditional unionists' hope that the national competitive political system would protect southern society from hostile Republican actions.[275] After South Carolina seceded in December 1860, tensions quickly rose over the federal soldiers stationed at the fort in Charleston harbor. When President James Buchanan refused to withdraw that garrison, South Carolina threatened to sink any ships that resupplied the isolated installation.[276] President Lincoln inherited this problem and, the day after his inauguration, a report indicated that basic provisions at Fort Sumter were running low. On March 29, he authorized a resupply mission.[277] South Carolina was informed on April 6 that the shipment included no military supplies, but determined to assert their independence, Confederates opted to attack the federal installation on April 12.[278] If that attack did not receive a firm response, Lincoln believed that permanent disunion was inevitable.[279] On April 15, he called on states to provide 75,000 soldiers to restore order in the Lower South. Northerners were outraged over Confederate's actions and many men rushed to enlist while the unionist movement in North Carolina collapsed.[280] Secessionists'

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[274] Diary entry, 31 March 1861, in Escott, *Thomasson Diary*, 305. The phrase "never give up the ship" also appeared in "Prospects Brightening," *Greensboro Patriot*, 24 January 1861, 2: 1.
[275] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 340.
[276] Klein, *Days of Defiance*, 320.
[277] Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America*, 80.
[278] Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant*, 2: 520-524; Daniel Crofts, "And the War Came," in *A Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction*, ed. Lacy K. Ford (Malden, M.A.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 195-197.
[279] Donald, *Lincoln*, 293-294. Gabor S. Boritt discusses Lincoln's role in the start of the war in "And the War Came"?: Abraham Lincoln and the Question of Individual Responsibility," in *Why the Civil War Came*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10-30.
[280] "Feeling through the Country," *New York Times*, 8: 4; Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America*, 81-82; Donald, *Lincoln*, 297; Andrew J. Torget, "Unions of Slavery: Slavery, Politics, and Secession in the Valley of Virginia," in *Crucible of*

hopes that a clash with the federal government would increase support for disunion were realized.

Conditional unionists were shocked to read Lincoln's proclamation and volunteer militia companies in the Piedmont were organized to protect the state against federal coercion.[281] News about Fort Sumter was cause for concern, but Crofts argues that Lincoln's response was "far more decisive" because it "forced [unionists]…to abandon the Union."[282] Only three days separated the two events, but an abrupt shift in conditional unionists' perspective was evident. With an American flag prominently displayed in the *Standard*, Holden argued on April 13 that Lincoln's "policy thus far [had] been pacific" and that he wanted to avoid "bloodshed."[283] The proclamation, however, marked the point when Holden accepted disunion. As he had always stood "against coercion," Holden asserted that "[unionists were] prepared to go as far as any one [*sic*] in *resisting* the proclamation of Abraham Lincoln."[284] Not only had the president "deceived" the South, but Holden explained that Lincoln completely rejected southern offers of "peace on honorable terms."[285] Even though he supported disunion, Holden's honor remained intact because unionists had to respond to defend their communities. "*War must be encountered*" and had to "continue as long as the foot of a federal solider rests on our soil," as Holden argued.[286] Hale, who at first demanded "some proof" that the new president "[had] fallen so low…to

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the Civil War: Virginia from Secession to Commemoration, ed. Edward L. Ayers, Gary W. Gallagher, and Andrew J. Torget (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 9-34.

[281] "Military," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 April 1861, 3: 1; "Military Movements in Raleigh," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 2: 6.

[282] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 336, 337; Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 219.

[283] "The News," *Weekly Standard*, 17 April 1861, 1: 2.

[284] "A Chance for Unionists," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 1: 3; "We must Fight!," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 2: 5.

[285] "The Border States must Unite and Act!," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 1: 2.

[286] "The Border States must Unite and Act!," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 1: 2; "We must Fight!," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 1861, 2: 5

practice the basest fraud," argued on April 18 that the proclamation "show[ed] that [Lincoln's] professions of peace were a delusion."[287] While "fratricidal war…[remained] a wrong," Hale believed that the call for soldiers represented a "change in the conditions of affairs." "War [was] to be prosecuted against the South by means of the 75,000 men" and, as "southern men," Hale argued that unionists' only option was to protect their section.[288] Lincoln's objective in 1861 was only to restore the Union, not to destroy slavery in the South.[289] Yet to conditional unionists Lincoln broke an earlier promise and they saw the destruction of southern society as the inevitable result of any attempt to restore the Union with coercion.

The abrupt shift was evident even in Piedmont counties such as Guilford that overwhelmingly rejected secession on February 28, 1861.[290] "All [in Greensboro were] astir & united against Lincoln," as longtime secessionist Revered Jacob Smith observed on April 22.[291] John Gilmer, whose prediction to Secretary Seward proved to be accurate, joined other prominent unionists at the Greensboro courthouse and delivered speeches that, as one observer described, "advocated immediate resistance."[292] These "public speeches" shocked Reverend Smith, who wrote that he "never knew such a change in sentiment."[293] Smith later suspected that Gilmer "[did] not believe the South was in the right," but that

[287] "Gov. Ellis's Course," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 15 April 1861, 3: 2; *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 18 April 1861, 3: 1.
[288] *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 18 April 1861, 3: 1.
[289] James Oliver Horton, "Slavery during Lincoln's Lifetime," in *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment,* ed. Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 15-16.
[290] Some regions of Upper South states continued to support the Union. Robert Tracy McKenzie discusses unconditional unionists who lived in Knoxville, a town in eastern Tennessee, in *Lincolnites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50-82.
[291] Diary entry, 22 April 1861, H. Smith Richardson Papers, SHC.
[292] D.N.S. to Hale, 23 April 1861, in "The Spirit of Guilford," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 25 April 1861, 3: 1.
[293] Diary entry, 25 April 1861, H. Smith Richardson Papers, SHC.

conditional unionists' correspondence with Secretary Seward revealed that the proclamation had pushed him to support disunion.[294] "All hope [for the Union was] now extinguished" because "a United North [was] against a United South, and [they were] marching to the field of blood," as Gilmer told Seward on April 21.[295] Four Upper South states joined the Confederacy after Lincoln's proclamation, which confirmed Gilmer's earlier warning against the use of military force.

Unionists' opposition to disunion disappeared virtually overnight because federal soldiers represented a major threat to the South. President Lincoln acted to restore the Union, but to unionists the northern soldiers were an army of abolitionists who would destroy their communities.[296] Both Holden and Hale cited them in editorials that explained their decision to accept disunion and war. Federal soldiers were no longer an effective deterrence against another Harpers Ferry in Fayetteville, but rather had to be immediately removed. Hale, along with other *Observer* employees, joined local militia companies that quickly surround the arsenal and forced those inside to surrender.[297] Unionists originally argued that secession was a great risk and would destroy slavery, but many reconsidered when faced with an invasion by an army with an antislavery President as commander in chief. "Lincolns [*sic*] proclamation" was the moment when one Piedmont unionist realized that "the south had either to submit to abject vassallage or assert her rights at the point of the Sword."[298] He, like most unionists, chose to resist. Even Jonathan Worth admitted that

[294] Diary entry, 24 May 1861, H. Smith Richardson Papers, SHC.
[295] Gilmer to Seward, 21 April 1861, Seward Papers; quoted in Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 340.
[296] Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 336-338.
[297] "Military," *Fayetteville Observer*, 22 April 1861, 3: 1. "The U.S. Arsenal," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 25 April 1861, 3: 1; "Gone," *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer*, 29 April 1861, 3: 1.
[298] Josiah Cowles to Calvin J. Cowles, 3 June 1861, Calvin J. Cowles Papers; quoted in Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 219.

unionists' original assumptions about Republicans were incorrect. Secessionists had been right to warn North Carolinians that Lincoln would continue "the old John Brown business of *freeing* our slaves and punishing us for the sin of having held them," as Worth explained.[299] Where Brown used less than twenty men to attack a small southern town, unionists saw Lincoln's plan as far more ambitious – thousands of abolitionists would sweep across the entire South. These southerners believed that Lincoln, like Brown, accepted violence as a legitimate means for slavery's destruction.

There was at least one North Carolina resident, however, who had no conditions for his unionist sentiment. Basil Thomasson was unique among this group because of his unique perspective on slavery.[300] Even though he was convinced that northern conditions for peace would include "freedom to the slaves," Thomasson believed that it remained a viable option after April 1861.[301] This western Piedmont farmer, as Paul Escott explains, "revered freedom as America's signal virtue."[302] While his brother suggested "selling off…and going to Tennessee," Thomasson even argued that it was "better [to] go to Indiana or Illinois" after Fort Sumter.[303] Amazingly, Thomasson remained in the Piedmont but refused to support the Confederate war effort. Thomasson skipped local muster days several times in May 1860 and did not donate money to local Confederate volunteers, even one he knew personally.[304] Others may have shared his perspective that North Carolina made the wrong decision, but they lacked a political voice and the means to influence

[299] Quoted in Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 338.
[300] Robert Tracy McKenzie discusses an unconditional unionist from Tennessee in "Contesting Secession: Parson Brownlow and the Rhetoric of Proslavery Unionism, 1860-1861," *Civil War History* 48, no. 4 (December 2002): 294-312.
[301] Diary entry, 20 April 1861, in *Thomasson Diary*, 306.
[302] Escott, *Thomasson Diary,* xiv.
[303] Basil Thomasson to Brother, April 1861, in *Thomasson Diary,* 350.
[304] Diary entry, 6 May 1861, 8 May 1861, 11 May 1861, in *Thomasson Diary*, 308.

public opinion. [305] After April 15, 1861, North Carolina political parties no longer offered unconditional unionists an alternative to disunion.

The intense reaction that developed after John Brown's raid in the Piedmont never translated into support for secession in early 1861. Disunion after Lincoln's election was considered dangerous and many unionists believed they were honor-bound to accept the results of a fair election. However, conditional unionists often warned that disunion would be the only result of coercion against the Lower South. These southerners never sought an opportunity to break away from the Union, but when reports on Lincoln's proclamation were published, they immediately accepted disunion. Not all were happy about the turn of events, yet they saw no other choice because they would never join the federal government in a war against other southern states. "With sorrow I now…unite with a majority of [secessionists in North Carolina]" because, as Jonathan Worth explained, he "[had] no other alternative but to fight for or against my section."[306] Slavery would be destroyed if the Upper South helped to coerce Lower South states. Unconditional unionists such as Thomasson had a different perspective, but there were too few of them to change public opinion in the Piedmont after April 15, 1861. If an event "sparked" the Civil War, Lincoln's proclamation was it since many southern unionists decided to abandon the Union as a result of that moment.

[305] McGee, "A Revolution in Raleigh," 43-44.
[306] Worth to H. L. Myrover, 6 May 1861, Worth to Springs, Oak & Co, 13 May 1861, in in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1: 140, 143.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

North Carolina unionists won the February 1861 election and formed a political party committed to fight secession, but after April 1861 they did not remain united. Conditional unionists formed the Conservative party and supported the Confederacy while unconditional unionists were identified in the press as traitors who supported the enemy. "Suddenly to be a unionist made one part of a self-conscious minority viewed with suspicion and hostility," as historian John Inscoe explains.[307] Yet as the Civil War entered its third year, many former conditional unionists started to demand an end to the conflict. Economic conditions had deteriorated and new restrictions on civil liberties, including suspension of habeas corpus, left many ready for peace.[308] Honor, however, led to different conclusions on what conditions were acceptable. Holden could forgo southern independence, but John Gilmer and Edward Hale, and Jonathan Worth remained committed to that original goals. As after John Brown's attack, they were once again political rivals.

Most unconditional unionists were similar to Basil Thomasson in that before his death in September 1862, he never publically voiced opposition to secession.[309] Others took action, such as a group in a Piedmont county that raised an American flag on the day of the

[307] John C. Insoce, "Introduction," in *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives on Unionists in the Civil War South*, eds. John C. Insoce and Robert C. Kenzer (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 2.
[308] Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 46-47; George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 143-44, 158-160.
[309] Paul D. Escott, ed., *North Carolina Yeoman: The Diary of Basil Armstrong Thomasson, 1853-1862* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), xiii; David H. McGee, "A Revolution in Raleigh: The Early Transformation of a Confederate State Capital, 1861," in *Inside the Confederate Nation*, eds. Lesley J. Gordon and John C. Inscoe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 44.

state's secession, but they were exception.[310] Conditional unionists, however, accepted disunion and eventually regrouped as the Conservative party. Holden's *Standard*, as historian Marc Kruman explains, became their "central paper" in their efforts "to prove that [they were]…more loyal to the Confederacy" than those who supported disunion right after Lincoln's victory.[311] Conservatives used that point in the August 1862 gubernatorial election, in which former western unionist Zebulon Vance was their candidate. Thanks in part to federal victories in eastern North Carolina and poor economic conditions, he won over 70% of the popular vote.[312] Jonathan Worth joined the administration as state Treasurer and Vance, who appreciated Holden's support during the campaign, ensured that the *Standard* became state printer again.[313] Gilmer also returned to politics on the wave of Conservative support and became a Representative to the Confederate Congress in 1863. Unionists had strived to gain control of the state government, but when they finally got the opportunity, they were committed to the Confederacy.

Secession Democrats stunning defeat in the August 1862 election indicated the extent of North Carolinians' discontent. In June and July 1863, close to 100 peace meetings were held across the state.[314] While conservatives agreed on that goal, they had different

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[310] Scott Reynolds Nelson, "Red Strings and Half Brothers: Civil Wars in Alamance County, North Carolina, 1861-1871," in Insoce and Kenzer, *Enemies of the Country*, 39-40. Also see "Neighbor against Neighbor: The Inner Civil War in the Randolph County Area of Confederate North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 61 (January 1984): 59-92.
[311] Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina 1836 - 1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 233.
[312] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 237-238; Richard E. Yates, "Zebulon B. Vance as War Governor of North Carolina, 1862-1865," *The Journal of Southern History* 3, no. 1 (February 1937): 46. Also see Judkin Browning, "Removing the Mask of Nationality: Unionism, Racism, and Federal Military Occupation in North Carolina, 1862-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 3 (August 2005): 589-620.
[313] Richard L. Zuber, *Jonathan Worth: A Biography of a Southern Unionist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 138; Joe A. Mobley, *"War Governor of the South:" North Carolina's Zeb Vance in the Confederacy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 32.
[314] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 248.

perspectives on what solutions were acceptable.[315] Southern independence was not a requirement for Holden and, by June 1863, editorials in the *Standard* discussed possibilities for two *sections*.[316] "The people of both sections [were] tired of war" and Holden explained that "[North Carolinians] desire it on terms honorable to our section."[317] Holden strongly preferred slavery to remain intact, but Kruman argues that this editor still "[left] the door ajar to the possibility of reunion."[318] In August 1863 Holden noted that if pressed, "[southerners] would rather live with than under Northern people."[319] This intraparty dispute became permanent when Holden announced his candidacy for the August 1864 gubernatorial election on March 3, 1864.[320] If he defeated Vance, Holden promised "to promote the interests, the honor, and glory of North Carolina, and to secure an honorable peace."[321] Holden believed victory was assured, but Vance accused the editor of membership in the Heroes of America, a secret militant unionist organization based in the central Piedmont, ensured defeat.[322] Established in the summer of 1861, historian William Harris describes that this group's "aim was…the overthrow of the Confederacy and the restoration of the Union."[323] Holden argued that he was loyal to the South and denied that

[315] Raper, *Holden*, 45.
[316] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 250.
[317] *Weekly Standard*, 17 June 1863; quoted in, William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 131.
[318] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 251.
[319] *Weekly Standard*, 26 August 1863; quoted in Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 251.
[320] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 260-261.
[321] *Weekly Standard*, 6 April 1864; quoted in, Harris, *Holden*, 146.
[322] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 264.
[323] Harris, *Holden*, 150; Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 42. Also see William T. Auman and David D. Scarboro, "The Heroes of America in Civil War North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 58 (Autumn 1981): 327-63.

any link connection existed, but voters likely considered such claims spurious since the *Standard* published editorials by anonymous individuals who supported that group.[324]

Holden's position on peace at the end of the war, however, helped ensure that President Andrew Johnson appointed him Provisional Governor of North Carolina in late May 1865.[325] While defeated in the November 1865 election, Holden established the Republican Party in 1867 and used it to back a successful campaign in April 1868. His new party also won the General Assembly and all but one of the Congressional elections.[326] Governor Holden's decision to fight the Ku Klux Klan in 1870, however, gave Conservatives in the General Assembly sufficient support to remove him from office in March 1871.[327] While Holden left the Republican party after a dispute with President James Garfield in 1883, he never returned to the Democrats, which he revitalized in the late 1840s.[328]

Other conservatives supported Governor Vance's position that peace was unacceptable unless a southern republic was guaranteed.[329] Confederates wanted "peace with honor," and as historian Anne Rubin explains, that required "independence [because] to accept anything less meant unacceptable weakness."[330] After Holden explained his peace plan, Edward Hale expressed concern that the *Standard*'s editor wanted to seize control of

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[324] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 264; Nelson, "Red Strings and Half Brothers," 40-43.
[325] Harris, *Holden*, 163. Michael W. Fitzgerald discuses reconstruction policies in "Reconstruction Politics and the Politics of Reconstruction," in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, ed. Thomas J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91-116.
[326] Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 284.
[327] Harris, *Holden*, 2-3, 301-309; Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 215; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 440-441; Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 135.
[328] Harris, *Holden*, 316.
[329] Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 251.
[330] Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 24.

the state government to deliver it back into the Union.[331] He offered no objections when Vance privately asked him to "pitch into [Holden]" with critical editorials in the *Observer*.[332] Honor for Hale not only demanded southern independence, but also action against those who failed to support those aims. "Deserters…[were] so bold" when they returned home because Hale believed that "there [had] been no…punishment of the rascals." Hale recommended that Governor Vance use the militia "to give them a thorough drubbing - Kill two or three dozen of them & the rest will cast off very quickly."[333] John Gilmer also believed that North Carolinians could never lose hope on the fight for independence. "To doubt is to be damned," as Gilmer told Vance.[334] For conservatives a return to the Union meant reconstruction, a process they considered the same as coercion and subjugation.[335] Neither Hale nor Gilmer were involved in politics after the Civil War, as while the *Observer* ended publication after General William Sherman's forces destroyed the press and Gilmer returned to the Piedmont to look after business interests.

Honorable peace was also important to Jonathan Worth, but his condition was practically impossible to attain. In lieu of independence, he would accept a return to the 1860 status quo, which was unacceptable to President Lincoln by the time Worth seriously considered peace in 1863.[336] Worth's relationship with Holden during the Civil War remained amicable, in stark contrast with Gilmer and Hale. As historian Richard Zuber explains, "Worth's role in the peace movement was a difficult one [because]…he did not

[331] Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 246.
[332] Zebulon B. Vance to Edward J. Hale, 11 August 1863, in Edward J. Hale Papers; quoted in Kruman, *Parties and Politics,* 253. Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 113-118.
[333] Hale to Vance, 11 August 1864, Private Collections; in Mobley, *War Governor of the South*, 168.
[334] Gilmer to Vance, 5 January 1864, Vance Papers; quoted in Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 246.
[335] Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 246.
[336] Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 179.

wish to antagonize either [Vance or Holden]….by identifying himself too closely with the other."[337] The Civil War, however, was not mark the end of Worth's political career. In November 1865 he defeated former Unionist ally Holden in the gubernatorial election and the heated campaign destroyed what remained of their friendship.[338] Then Governor Worth, who did not seek reelection in 1868 because of conflicts with his own party, died twelve months after he left office.[339]

Honor was an essential part of southern unionists identity, one that shaped their response to Brown's raid and their perspective throughout the secession crisis. To an outsider in the Piedmont, particularly in the midst of the intense reaction after Harpers Ferry, unionists' presence in that region could escape notice. An abolitionist in Guilford county, home to unionists such as John Gilmer, explained in May 1860 that he was "in the heart of slavery among the fire eaters."[340] While almost all southern unionists supported slavery, they remained committed to the Union through the intense reaction after Brown's raid. Those northerners who traveled in the Piedmont after Brown's attack in late 1859 were closely watched, but unionists still believed that competitive politics allowed the South to exist within the same country as the North. Abraham Lincoln's victory in November 1860 also generated security concerns, but unionists argued that was far more dangerous to the South. Secession was not completely ruled out, but unionists were adamant that no honorable reason existed to support such a radical action. April 15, 1861, however, was the decisive moment when many conditional unionists worst fears were realized. President

[337] Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 178.
[338] Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 191, 201-210.
[339] Zuber, *Jonathan Worth*, 274-275, 284.
[340] Robert Hodgin to Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, 6 May 1860, Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Lincoln not only lied about his plans to not use coercion, but that the competitive political system failed to prevent Republicans action that would inevitably destroy southern society. This evolution that these five unionists underwent between Harpers Ferry and Fort Sumter provides an important perspective into southern unionism and it is one that other studies have not addressed. Too often historians separate the two events when, if combined, they can provide an interesting insight into an aspect of southern unionism.

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