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Title of Proposal: The Price for Justice: Political Manipulation and Negro Suffrage

Abstract: This project is an investigation into the political process leading to the passage of the 1860 Negro Suffrage referendum, and its eventual defeat at the ballot box. This research will focus on the actions of the fledgling New York Republican Party, and its attempts to sway abolitionist voters through this early use of a ‘wedge’ issue. This topic, occurring as it does on the very brink of the Civil War is often overlooked, but it is felt that a concise analysis of the referendum, its proponents, and its opponents, will provide valuable insight into late antebellum New York State politics.

Section A—Objectives

The primary objectives of this research will be to identify the political sponsors of the 1860 Negro Suffrage Referendum, follow the process of this legislation from passage and placement on the ballot, to its eventual defeat by the electorate. Special attention will be paid to the role played by the politicized editorial staffs of local newspapers, and to the working relationship between members of the recently formed Republican Party and the existing Abolitionist establishment (particularly remnants of the defunct Liberty Party) in promoting the referendum. Correlations between local results in the general election and the effort made in those localities to promote the Suffrage Referendum will be sought in an effort to reveal the level of conviction within Republican Party circles for the issue. In addition to basic questions about civil rights, and the political divisions that resulted in the Civil War, this project will investigate issues of political pragmatism and the sacrifice of ideals to achieve larger political objectives.

Section B—This Work in Relation to Existing Research

New York's divided and turbulent politics during the Antebellum period have received a great deal of attention from scholars interested in the tumultuous political landscape prior to the Civil War.\(^1\) Despite this attention, very little of the

focus has been turned to the issue of Black Suffrage, or to the 1860 New York referendum, despite the obvious connections to the issues that divided the contemporary political landscape. Undoubtedly this is partly to do with the issue’s proximity to the great tragedies of the next four and a half years, and the perception that the changed post-war landscape made many the issue of black suffrage almost moot. This research will take the position that this proximity only adds to the importance of the referendum, arguing that a better understanding of the political climate that birthed the proposal provides hitherto unstudied insight into the psyche of a still unbloodied nation. It is understandable why this topic could be lost in the furor that attended the election of Abraham Lincoln and spurred the wave of secession that followed, but it does not excuse its continued absence from the literature. One rare exception is Phyllis Field, who, in *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) provides a valuable overview of the larger effort for universal (male) suffrage, but does not go into the specific detail proposed by this project. Even with Field as a trailblazer, the bulk of research in this endeavor will be comprised of primary source material, and it is hoped that the result will be a unique addition to the canon. Questions of political perspective, see Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: the Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy warriors : the Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York : Hill and Wang, 1976) and Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999). These, of course, represent only a small sampling of the vast amount of literature covering these topics.
manipulation of the electorate through the use of divisive “wedge” issues is a topic not unknown in today’s political landscape, adding a singular topicality to this research.

Section C—This Project and My Personal Goals

This research will comprise a major component of my Master’s Thesis (to be completed Spring ’08), and as such is a stepping-stone toward the eventual completion of my PhD.

Section D—Research Methodology and Project Design

This project seeks to provide a new insight into the tactics and political practicalities of New York electoral politics in the Antebellum era, focusing on the use of a wedge issue (Negro Suffrage) as a means of expanding the appeal of the nascent Republican Party and, perhaps, driving voter turnout in key districts. As such it will require the analysis of (in no particular order): contemporary newspapers (for editorial content); senate and assembly journals for the New York State Legislature; archived materials and manuscripts in various collections (Gerritt Smith, Thurlow Weed, Frederick Douglass, etc.); and electoral results on a county-by-county and, possibly, township basis. Due to the rarity and (often) fragility of many of these resources, travel to various locations will be required. The destruction of many contemporary records in the Capital Fire of 1911 (including, sadly, the very petitions that would have initiated the referendum process) precludes the use of many legislative records, requiring the need to
resort of often far-flung locales to make up for this tragic loss. It is anticipated that travel expenses could be onerous, and the alleviation of some of these costs will greatly enhance the scope of research undertaken. Lack of proper funding could be fatal to the overall goals and objectives. Once gathered, this data will provide an opportunity to analyze Republican Party efforts to organize and sustain support for the referendum against the backdrop of localized electoral results, and through the interpretation of private papers, memoirs, etc. from leading abolitionists and political operatives of the time.

Section E—Timeline of Expectations

It is fully expected that, by the end of the Spring ’07 semester, the portion of this research dealing with the analysis of editorial content from local Republican-affiliated newspapers will be completed, as will the analysis of this material in relation to statewide electoral results. In addition the gathering, compiling, and cataloging of archival and legislative records will also have been completed by this date, though the analysis and synthesis of these materials into the larger project will have only just begun. Ultimately, completion of the initial draft of the larger work—of which this proposal is only a part—is targeted for the end of the Fall ’07 semester.

Section F—Paper Presentation

It is intended that the section of this project pertinent to this funding will be presented at the Conference on New York State History, in Cooperstown, June
7-9 2007. It is also my intention to present this paper at the Quest ’07 conference here on campus. Other conferences will be sought as venues to “air” my results, and solicit responses and criticisms from my peers in the field, and publication (dependent upon the advice of history department faculty) is a further option.
Equipment Purchase: Purchase of a 2-3 gb flash drive
Equipment amount: 50.00
Equipment Rental:
Equipment Rental amount:
Photocopying: Of non-digitized source materials
Photocopying amount: 50.00
Postage:
Postage amount:
Professional Assistance:
Professional Assistance amount:
Publication Costs:
Publication Costs amount:
Software Purchase:
Software Purchase amount:
Supplies: Computer paper and other incidentals
Supplies amount: 50.00
Telephone: cell and long distance
Telephone amount: 75.00
Travel: gas, food and lodging
Travel amount: 750.00
Misc Costs:
Miscellaneous Costs Amount:
Miscellaneous Costs 2:
Miscellaneous Cost 2 Amount:
Total Funds Requested:
Total Funds Requested amount: 975.00

**Budget Justification:** Travel expenses to Albany (Archives of the New York State Library and New York Newspaper Project):
Train Fare (round trip) $82
Per diem food cost (5 days) $200
Hotel Accomodations (4 nights) $360
Travel Expenses to Syracuse (Gerritt Smith Papers, Byrd Library, and the State Supreme Court Library):
Gas (anticipated six trips of approximately 80 miles): $63.00
Meal costs (one meal of c.7.50 each visit): $45.00

Flash drive purchase is to be used with digital interfaces whenever possible to create a record that I can then upload into my computer (estimated cost listed in budget section above)

Photocopies will be definitely required when accessing materials in the archives of small local historical societies and libraries. Anticipated cost listed above.

Computer paper and etc. should be self-explanatory.
Cell and long distance costs--cell phone use is anticipated for travel periods, and long distance costs are anticipated in making travel arrangements, tracking rare or hard to find source materials, and making arrangements to access those materials. Estimated costs listed above.

Additional Funds no
Final Report no
Submit Final Report na
Annotated Bibliography of Work in Progress

Primary Sources

Books


Contains the actual act to amend the state Constitution by referendum.


Collection of letters, diary and journal entries, speeches, editorials, and etc., grouped chronologically. Contains a good deal of pertinent political speech, that, while not directly spot on to the question of suffrage, adds depth to the interpretation of contemporary political thought among free blacks.


Collection of documentary sources, mainly essays, editorials, and letters either published in black abolitionist papers, or regarding them. Should prove a valuable source for tracking and tracing the suffrage movement across the North.


A more focused take on the sources available in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*; a tighter, easier text to access but possibly not as robust a source.

Contains New York Constitution including 1846 amendments that create the referendum process used for the 1860 suffrage balloting.

Newspapers (Ordered, on order, to be ordered)²

Albany Argus 1845-46, 1857, 1860.


Cortland Republican Banner 1860.

Douglass' Monthly 1859-60.

Frederick Douglass' Paper 1855.

Livingston Democrat 1860.

Livingston Republican 1860.

New York Herald 1856-60.


Oswego Palladium 1857, 1860.

Plattsburgh Republican 1857, 1860.

Poughkeepsie Eagle 1860.

Poughkeepsie Journal and Eagle 1846.

Rochester Union and Advertiser 1860.

Syracuse Daily Standard 1860.

² Not a complete list.
Secondary Sources (Currently On Hand)

Books


Recent work with good background on New York prior to emancipation.


Thorough examination of the lives, economic, political, social, of free blacks in American urban centers in the first half of the 19th century. Useful appendices as well.


Incredibly valuable secondary source documenting the nuts and bolts of the suffrage movement before, during, and after the war. While Field considers the issue on the widest scale, her coverage of the 1860 referendum, and the political climate that surrounded it is illuminating. Her lists of newspapers used to verify county voting patterns, and the tables and charts in her appendices are indispensable. Perhaps the single most important secondary source available.


Series of essays comparing the free black experience in various communities, and under different conditions in the antebellum North. A chapter on the free black community of Buffalo seems promising.


Seminal work examining the status and lives of free blacks in the north and west prior to the war. Focuses primarily on New England and the Mid-Atlantic States, and studies the relationship of free blacks to the larger society, politically and socially.

Grand overview of the suffrage question, concentrating primarily on Western and Midwest cases. Events in New York are dealt with superficially.

Articles:


Study on the roles of whites and blacks in establishing the policy of moral suasion, the evolution of this ideology, and the influence of black abolitionists in its adoption as a strategy. Another good background piece on the political climate of the day.


An examination of the intensity of political involvement in the mid 19th century. Is this the Altschuler from the poli-sci department?


One of the many studies of mid-century political instability that will provide deeper understanding of the tumultuous climate of the time.


A study of racist language in the rhetoric of both abolitionists and pro-slavery factions in the north.


A look at the effects of labor competition on race relations between free blacks and whites.

Studies the evolution of Lincoln’s attitudes on race and emancipation; particularly valuable in its examination of Honest Abe’s pre-war political pragmatism.


An article focusing on the influence of religion on politics in the North during the thirty years preceding the Civil War. More political background.


Historical overview of discriminatory race laws from colonial to 20th century, including sections on suffrage.


Study of the factionalism that undermined unity within the politically active free black community.


This article gives a brief overview of the institutional network constructed by free blacks in New York City.


A look at free black alienation in antebellum America.


Examination of anti-immigrant though and rhetoric in the press, speeches, and correspondence of influential, prosperous, and educated free blacks in the north.

Article attributing mass political protest to three variables: economic and social conditions; free black institutional support system; and visible acts of defiance.