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John Slidell and the Community He Represented in the Senate, 1853-1861.

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Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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JOHN SLIDELL

AND THE COMMUNITY HE REPRESENTED IN THE SENATE,

1853-1861

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Albert Lewie Diket
B.A., Tulane University, 1951
M.A., University of Oregon, 1954
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The career of John Slidell was much too prominent to be neglected by posterity. Yet, the scarcity of materials he left behind in his own hand has undoubtedly discouraged close investigation into the part he played in the political development of his country. To achieve its purposes, therefore, this study of Slidell's life between the years 1855 and 1861 has utilized one rather small collection of Slidell letters but has relied chiefly upon New Orleans newspapers and the Congressional Globe.

The dissertation fittingly opens with a brief sketch of Slidell's position in the world by 1853 and how he attained such a high estate, which embraced wealth, political power, and membership by marriage in a prominent Creole family. Included in the resume are mentions of the national attention he received from his participation in the "Plaquemines frauds" and his performance as the special minister of James K. Polk to Mexico, the prelude to the war of 1845. Along with the outline of Slidell's life previous to 1853 is a glance at the peculiar position of Louisiana as a part of America and the Cotton Kingdom. In 1853 Louisiana was just completing its change from a Whig stronghold to a state in which the strongest politicians were Democrats. Two of these were old enemies: Pierre
Soule and Slidell. Ironically, it was Soule's acceptance of a Spanish ministry which gave Slidell his opportunity to achieve his long-sought-after Senate seat.

Its background completed, the study then proceeds along three general lines, each of which is connected with the other two. One deals with developments in Louisiana, economic and political. Economically, the state was especially concerned during the period with the baleful influence of Eastern-bound railroads on Mississippi-river traffic. Schemes, like the Tehuantepec route, were concocted to relieve the situation. Most failed. An outstanding success was the Jackson railroad. The feature of political trends in Louisiana at this time was their consistency. Slidell and the Democracy increased their statewide strength at the expense of their enemies. In New Orleans the American Party predominated.

Another part of this dissertation concerns Slidell's career as a national politician, which reached its climax in 1856, when he helped to put James Buchanan into the White House. Thereafter Slidell was among those conservatives who fought the free-soil movement within and without his party and finally decided that a Republican victory justified secession. These views brought Slidell a powerful enemy, Stephen Douglas. The intensity of the fight between Slidell's associates and Douglas's friends...
was attested to by the Brainard affair, the "Houmas Fraud," in both of which Slidell's good name suffered, and the proceedings of the Charleston convention, where Douglas routed his enemies.

Finally existed Slidell's labors in the Senate, which could be listed under three main headings, his effectiveness with regard to routine matters and committee work; his exertions to get Federal assistance for Louisiana's economic needs, of which his bill for dredging the Mississippi river's mouths was an outstanding example; and his protests of a strict constructionist against many appropriation bills. He introduced also two measures whose purpose was the acquisition of Cuba by the United States.

One conclusion suggested by this study seems unquestionable, that the views and actions of Slidell and the community he represented in Congress were generally in harmony with each other. Under the pressure of events Louisiana like Slidell proceeded from political conservatism and noticable deviations in its existence from the usual Southern pattern to a position typically Southern and radical. Both the state and its Senator were quite ready in 1861 for secession and possible war.
CHAPTER I
SLIDELL ACHIEVES A PLACE IN THE WORLD

Even his worst enemies in 1853 could hardly have denied that by and large John Slidell was a successful man. He was wealthy. He was an influential and powerful political figure. He was acquainted with many of the leading personalities of his time.

He was related by blood or marriage to people who also were in some manner rich, powerful, or influential. Matthew C. Perry, commander of the naval squadron which forced Japan to trade with the United States, was a brother-in-law.¹ A nephew by marriage was Auguste Belmont, financier and representative of the Rothschilds, powerful European banking firm.² A brother was Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, Captain in the United States Navy and successful author.³ Another brother was Thomas Slidell, who in 1853 capped a fruitful legal practice by becoming the chief justice of the Louisiana

²Louis M. Sears, John Slidell (Durham, 1925), 6.
³Ibid., 20-22.
Supreme Court. John Slidell's marriage had united him with a family of important Louisiana Creole planters and members of a French-speaking group of much power in Louisiana's political and financial affairs.

Slidell's associates and acquaintances were generally of a class equal to that of his family. He sat with them on the board of the University of Louisiana. With them he formed and was active in several exclusive clubs. With Glendy Burke, educator and lawyer, he inaugurated the first all-male organization of this type in New Orleans. In 1853 he was serving as an officer in a recently formed club in New Orleans. His interest in social groups of this nature was not confined to the Louisiana city. He belonged also to the Union Club, foremost of its kind in New York City.

In Louisiana, politics and business brought him into

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4 Craig, "John Slidell," 3; New Orleans Delta, Apr. 5, 1853.
6 New Orleans Bee, July 28, 1853.
7 New Orleans Times-Picayune, Oct. 28, 1905.
9 Robert D. Meade, Judah P. Benjamin (New York, 1943), 82-83.
intimate contact with some of the more affluent members of his community. His political aides included the Claibornes, descendants of the first governor of Louisiana and the Marignys, a family already long in Louisiana when Andrew Jackson fought the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. His chief lieutenant was Emile La Sère, who had already served a term in the United States House of Representatives. In his business activities he was on intimate terms with outstanding Louisiana Whigs like James Robb and Senator Judah P. Benjamin. Robb was already known for his work as a pioneer railroad builder. He was president and Slidell a director of the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern railroad. Benjamin also served on the Jackson railroad's board. In addition, he was associated throughout much of his career with Thomas Slidell, John Slidell's brother.

Outside of Louisiana, as his membership in the Union Club showed, Slidell was not unknown. In his travels as businessman, lawyer, and politician he had become acquainted with Presidents and would-be Presidents. As a

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10 New Orleans Crescent, May 4, 1853.
11 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 4, 1851.
12 New Orleans Crescent, May 4, 1853.
special minister for President James K. Polk he had sent reports which had served as a reason for beginning the Mexican War. James Buchanan was a personal friend. To foster Buchanan's candidacy for President, Slidell was expending all the considerable skill the Louisianian had acquired in many campaigns.

While John Slidell's position in life was probably higher than his father's, he had hardly started from a mean social state. Born in New York City, he received the benefits provided by a family which steadily bettered its situation. His father became president of the Trademan's Insurance Company and the Mechanics' Bank and was chosen "alderman vestryman" in Grace Episcopal Church. By 1825 the Slidells were in the brokerage business.

John Slidell, therefore, was fortunate enough to go to college. He graduated from Columbia College in 1810. Almost immediately after graduation he was employed as the European representative of a New York firm. His travels while pursuing his duties gave him opportunities to demon-


15See below, p. 23-29.

strate a marked aptitude for learning foreign languages. He mastered French and attained a close familiarity with Spanish and Italian. He also studied law. In 1817 his life was suddenly altered by the failure of his firm. He returned to New York.17

During his stay in New York his later life was determined by two decisions and one unfortunate event. The decisions were his own. One was to abandon his ambition of a career in the diplomatic corps. The other was to study law with greater industry. The result was that he passed the bar examination of his state. The unfortunate event involved an enraged theatrical producer, who discovered his wife and Slidell in an embarrassing situation. A duel followed, in which both participants were wounded. Shortly afterward, Slidell left New York. No evidence exists to show a definite connection between his departure and the duel.18

Sometime soon after leaving his native city, Slidell reached New Orleans. The exact day is unknown. It is certain that he was in the Southern city on June 21, 1823, for on that date he received a certificate to practice law in Louisiana. He was probably, therefore, in the

18Ibid., 4-5.
neighborhood for some time before this date. Louisiana's laws were based on Napoleon's version of the civil code. Slidell was schooled in the common law. Consequently, he must have spent many days in study before applying for his license.\footnote{Ibid., 5.}

John Slidell's fortunes in his new home took a sharp turn for the better soon after his admission to the Louisiana bar. His connections in New York and his knowledge of maritime law helped considerably to lift his income to ten thousand dollars a year. In 1840 he felt that he was rich enough to retire from his law office. His investments were sufficient to support him and his family.\footnote{Ibid.}

Part of his wealth had resulted from speculation. For instance, he was a heavy investor in land in the Carrollton subdivision of New Orleans and in stock issued by the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad Company.\footnote{Ibid., 9-10.} Occasionally, as in the Houmas affair,\footnote{See below, pp. 392-97.} his gambling in real estate involved him in trouble. But generally it must have provided a rich yield. By the time of the Civil War he was
the greatest single owner of real estate in New Orleans. He was also the city's richest man. He therefore suffered considerably when the Federal government confiscated his property after its forces captured New Orleans in 1862. In 1864 his 844 lots and ten squares of land "with all the buildings and improvements thereon" were sold at auction by government officials at prices that contemporary observers thought ridiculously low.²³

Slidell did not devote all his hours during this period to improving his station in life. New Orleans was hardly New York; but even though it was loyal to King Cotton, slavery, and the code duello, it was hardly a typical Southern city -- that is, if there was any other Southern city. The atmosphere of the second greatest port in America -- and at times the greatest exporting port²⁴ -- was urbane, Catholic, and somewhat libertine. Its situation near the mouth of the Mississippi river, the main outlet for the vast valley between the Appalachian and Rocky mountains, was but one of the influences which made its


outlook often more national than sectional. Its observance of the Sabbath was the alleged horror of the rest of Dixie. Editorial appearances in the city's newspapers favoring internal improvements and defending factors and commerce. The typical Southern pattern in 1853 was rural, Protestant, introvert, and Puritanical. Moreover, the Southerner usually viewed ideas of internal improvements as among the most dangerous in his country. Again, New Orleans violated the purity of the Dixie strain with its departure from the usual Southern homogeneous structure of society. Its population included considerable numbers of Creoles, Americans of English origin, Germans, Irish, Italians, Portuguese and other Indo-European groups. Consequently, within its boundaries newspapers were published and plays


26 New Orleans Delta, Dec. 1, 1853; New Orleans True Delta, July 4, 1855; Clement C. Eaton, Freedom of Thought in the Old South (Durham, 1940), 327.


28 Eaton, Freedom of Thought in the Old South, 327; New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 28, 1855.

presented in three languages. 30

By 1861 New Orleans' urbane character was displayed in many ways. Its intellectual side appeared in its half-dozen widely-read and generally favorably-regarded dailies, 31 in its opera, the best in America, 32 in the writings of editors who knew their *Iliad* and could upon occasion pen a thoughtful criticism of Shakespeare, 33 in the existence of at least one noted jurist, 34 in J. W. B De Bow's *Review*, the persistent advocate of bringing industry into the South, in the demonstrated skill of the world's foremost chess player, 35 and in the genius of America's first


33 *New Orleans Orleanian*, Apr. 25, 1854.


great musician. Its wealth and love of amusement was shown in its five important hotels, its several banks, its factors, who serviced planters' needs, its laborers' high wages, its annual yacht regattas, and its regular racing meets, where for awhile Lecompte the American champion ran. And its philanthropic and enlightened nature was displayed in the character of three distinguished philanthropists, in a good school system, in two medical colleges and two medical magazines, in a

36 Roberts, Lake Pontchartrain, 206.
37 New Orleans Crescent, May 13, 1853.
39 New Orleans Crescent, May 19, 1853.
40 New Orleans True Delta, July 13, 1854; New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 28, 1856.
41 New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 8, 1854.
43 New Orleans Bee, May 22, 1854; Eaton, Freedom of Thought in the Old South, 76.
busy relief organization (the Howard Society), in the Charity Hospital, and in a liberal and humane policy toward the city's considerable number of free Negroes.

New Orleans was therefore quite obviously a city. That fact could also be discovered in the many ills which the town shared with many another American metropolis of the mid-nineteenth century, namely, high prices, a class of very poor people, strikes, public brawls and riots, filthy streets, bad water, tremendous fires, high taxes, and a large municipal debt. It suffered perhaps

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45 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Aug. 15, 1858.
46 New Orleans True Delta, Jan. 31, 1855.
47 New Orleans Orleanian, June 14, 23, 1854.
48 Ibid., July 30, 1854.
49 Ibid., Jan. 5, 1855.
50 New Orleans Crescent, June 6, 1853; New Orleans Bee, May 7, 1855.
53 New Orleans Delta, May 1, 1855; New Orleans Picayune, May 13, 1855.
54 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 21, 1855.
55 New Orleans Delta, Feb. 12, 1854.
56 New Orleans Crescent, Oct. 20, 1855.
an exclusive pain for a city, that of being the financial captive of another city, New York. Other headaches came from the economic trends of the times — which forecast the apparent unlikelihood of any future improvement of the city's economic position in America.

The atmosphere was obviously one in which Slidell, bred in New York and familiar with Continental capitals, could hardly feel out of place. He soon became one of the town's most eligible bachelors. He frequented his clubs and sponsored racing meets. He became one of those men whom one source has called gentlemen of a character somewhat blind to social abuse but devoted to the practice of commerce upon the principle that the "law of merchants is the law of honor." In a word, he was a Louisianian in character as well as by residence. Then he more or less completed his transformation when on November 19, 1836, at a civil ceremony in Saint John the Baptist Parish, he married Marie Mathilde Deslonde, a Creole girl of twenty years. He was forty-two.

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57 Congressional Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., Appendix, 27.

58 See below, pp. 37-38.

59 Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1939), 114, 154; Meade, Judah P. Benjamin, 82-83.

60 Craig, "John Slidell," 7.
The Creoles and their neighbors of rural South Louisiana were another group of nonconformists to the usual Southern pattern. Planters of sugar cane and builders of lofty mansions, they were often likely to be Whiggish in their political and economic thinking. Among them were loose constructionists and advocates of the principles of Alexander Hamilton, especially on the subject of a tariff on sugar. Long in control of their state's political destiny, their votes still made certain that the Congressman from the Second District was their man; and their views set the tone for leaders of all parties. 61

For practical purposes, therefore, Slidell's marriage was a fortunate one. Marie Mathilda proved a happy choice. She was a gifted hostess, and her dinners and other entertainments undoubtedly furthered her husband's career. Her soirées in Washington were recalled with pleasure years after the Slidells had left the United States. 62 With Marie Mathilde went entree into her family's mansion at Belle Pointe near Bonnet Carre, St. John the Baptist

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62 Thomas E. De Leon, Belles, Beaux, and Brains of the 60's (New York, 1907), 174.
Parish. Thereafter Slidell spent considerable time there. Undoubtedly he expected to be buried in the nearby cemetery, where a large tomb bearing the name Slidell still exists. Instead, his last resting place lay thousands of miles away.\textsuperscript{62}

CHAPTER II
SLIDELL'S RISE AS A POLITICIAN

When Slidell retired from practicing law, he was already a seasoned politician. And henceforth politics was to be his principal activity. He was, of course, a Democrat, a Jacksonian Democrat.\(^1\) Jackson's personality, especially during canvasses when he was a candidate for the presidency, aroused perhaps even greater emotional response in New Orleans than elsewhere (excepting, of course, South Carolina during the Nullification controversy). Jacksonian Democrats remembered the general's successful defense of New Orleans against the British in late December, 1814 and early January, 1815. Whigs and other unfriendly critics recalled his tyrannous actions against the local judiciary and civil authority. He had banished Judge Dominick A. Hall from his jurisdiction, for which action Jackson had later been forced to pay a fine. He had disregarded the rights and authority of a state legislature.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Craig, "John Slidell," 15; Sears, John Slidell, 18-19.

When Jackson became President in 1829, Slidell's already long service in the general's behalf earned the reward of the district attorneyship for the Eastern District of Louisiana. This appointment was undoubtedly some compensation for his defeat in the race for Congressman from the First District. But apparently it was not sufficient compensation for the lost position. Slidell's old ambition returned. He requested a diplomatic post. Instead, he received a disappointment. The New Orleans collector of customs, Martin Gordon, a political rival, turned Jackson against Slidell. He convinced the general that Slidell sympathized with Calhoun and South Carolina in the nullification struggle. Slidell, a short while before, on June 23, 1832, signed a petition against nullification; but apparently this carried little weight in the White House. Slidell did not get the position he sought.

Slidell's reaction to this reversal was a typical manifestation of his nature. He lost neither his respect for Jackson nor his admiration for Martin Van Buren. He opposed Van Buren only after the "Red Fox" went over to the Free-Soilers in 1848, and then replaced him

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3 Craig, "John Slidell," 17.
4 Ibid., 22-25.
5 Sears, John Slidell, 18-19.
with another Jacksonian, James Buchanan, who retained Slidell's loyalty and unstinting service until Slidell led his state out of the Union in 1861.  

Although its electoral votes went to Jackson, conservative Louisiana was generally Whig until 1852. Nevertheless, in 1832 Slidell began a long, discouraging struggle for election to the United States Senate. He suffered defeat in 1834 and 1836. However, in the latter year he managed to achieve his first elected office when he received the majority vote for a seat in the lower house of the Louisiana legislature. His margin of victory was the greatest thus far given any candidate in which he ran.  

In the legislature he exhibited the traits with which he would be identified the rest of his career as a lawmaker. He made few speeches on the floor. Instead, he expended considerable energy on labor in committees, particularly in the judiciary committee. Among the bills with which he was associated was one which put commercial and financial corporations under strict state control.

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6 Ibid.; see below, 519-20.
He also spoke in favor of restricting the issue of paper money and offered a resolution (in 1838) against a national bank, which passed by a narrow margin.

In 1838 he tried once more for a place in the United States Senate. The platform on which he ran stressed government control of banks. The campaign was a bitter one. Again Slidell was beaten.

In 1840 Slidell lost his seat in the legislature and in 1843 failed once more to win a senate seat. Then his luck changed. In 1845 Louisiana's gain in population earned it an additional seat in the United States House of Representatives. Slidell ran to represent the newly re-apportioned First District and won.

His performances in Congress were consistent with those he exhibited in the Louisiana legislature. He worked hard in committees. He seldom spoke on the floor. A few speeches, however, were worthy of mention. His first was in favor of a bill to reimburse Andrew Jackson for the fine imposed upon him by Judge Hall after the

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Ibid., 41-44.

Ibid., 46-47.

Ibid., 49-50.
Battle of New Orleans. In another he eulogized Louisiana Creoles (his inspiration was the occurrence of the deaths of Senator Alexander Porter and Congressman Pierre Bossier). A third address advocated a tariff for revenue only, excepting, of course, the duty on imported sugar. His district evidently approved his convictions. In 1844 there were no candidates to oppose his re-election.

Within two years of his return to the House, Slidell was a nationally known figure. Two not completely unrelated events combined to bring about this recognition. The first was the "Plaquemine frauds." Plaquemines was a parish below New Orleans. During the Presidential election of 1844 several persons, mostly of foreign origin, were refused admission to the polling booths by the Whig-controlled New Orleans election commissioners. They were thereupon transported to Plaquemines on a boat arranged for by Democratic leaders. Once debarked, they proceeded to make their votes help carry Louisiana for

12 *Globe*, 28 Cong. 1 Sess., 87, 89, Appendix, 32-35.
13 Ibid., 223-24, 558.
14 Ibid., Appendix, 386-93.
15 Craig, "John Slidell," 60.
James K. Polk. According to the Democratic leaders, the action was legal since Plaquemines was in the same election district as New Orleans. Before an investigating committee of the state legislature they made no attempt to deny the part they had played in the matter. Instead, they claimed that three Whig justices from New Orleans had previously set a precedent by voting outside the city's boundaries.

The Whigs labeled the action fraudulent, and Slidell received most of the credit for it. But there was no official condemnation. The Whig-dominated committee failed to come to an agreement. Senator Alexander Barrow protested strongly in the Senate, but Slidell answered him in the House by pointing out that in the Baton Rouge area the Whigs had perpetrated some frauds themselves. The Plaquemines visitors' votes did not carry Louisiana for Polk. The stand taken against the annexation of Texas by the Whig candidate Henry Clay was probably the greatest

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17Craig, "John Slidell," 69; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 5, 1853.
18Craig, "John Slidell," 69.
19Globe, 28 Cong. 2 Sess., 233, 243.
reason why Louisiana went Democratic in 1844. But an unsavory aroma remained associated with the name Slidell for the rest of the Democratic leader's career.

The succeeding year saw Slidell performing his first significant service for his nation. From James Buchanan, the man whom he was to guide to the Presidency, he received Polk's appointment as special envoy to Mexico. He was expected to use his "perfect knowledge" of Spanish, his "firmness and ability" and his "taste and talent for society" to effect the settling of the Texas question and the purchase of California. As the Mexican War, which followed immediately after Slidell's mission, proved, the trip was a complete failure. Slidell never received an opportunity to exercise his gifts. The Mexican officials considered his presence an affront and refused to receive him. After a long series of futile negotiations, Slidell's patience finally snapped. He favored his country's declaration of war. He was also incensed

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21 Biographical and Historical Memoires of Louisiana, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1892), I, 51-52.

22 Sears, John Slidell, 49.
over the actions of the Mexican representatives of France, Spain, and England, whose influence, he felt, had been mainly responsible for the conduct of the Mexican officials. 23

Slidell returned to Louisiana. He concentrated on attaining the seat in the Senate which had eluded him for so long. In 1848 a vacancy occurred. When the legislature met to fill it, the choice appeared to be between Slidell of the Democrats and Duncan F. Kenner of the Whigs. Kenner at the outset had an apparent margin of two votes; but one Whig absented himself and another voted for Slidell. If the remaining Democrats voted as expected, Slidell had every right to be certain of election. But another surprise appeared when Maunsell White of Plaquemines Parish cast his vote. White, who would henceforth be an associate of Soule, wasted his ballot on a Democrat who had little or no chance to win. The count stood 64 to 64. On the next ballot Soule's name was introduced into the contest. Slidell, ever loyal to his party, immediately threw his votes to the new nominee. White and five Whigs followed his example.

23Ibid., 58-72; Craig, "John Slidell," 75-101.
and Soule was the new Senator from Louisiana.  

It was widely assumed that Slidell could have been elected had he been willing to support the Whig candidate for President in 1848, Zachary Taylor.  Slidell's whole career was a testimony to the fact that crossing party lines was an act impossible for him to perform. Nor apparently, did he have much regard for the "Taylor Democrats," who had deserted the Democratic candidate Lewis Cass. In 1852 he made a speech against these bolters, in which he called for the restoration of "the ancient discipline of the Democracy." He evidently included Soule among them; for the two men were by that time and thereafter political enemies.

During the same period, between 1846 and 1853, Slidell had not much better success in attaining another goal upon which his heart was set. He had determined that James Buchanan must be elected President of the United States. It was hardly surprising that he and the Pennsylvania statesman and diplomat would be attracted

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25Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 53.

26Ibid., 100-101.
to each other, for they had many traits in common. Besides, Buchanan, the one bachelor President, was a great admirer of Mrs. Slidell. In 1852 he wrote his niece Miss Harriet Lane:

Mrs. Slidell is the most gay, brilliant & fashionable lady at the springs; & as I am her admirer and attached to her party I am thus rendered a little more conspicuous in the beau monde than I could desire.

From 1846 onward Slidell apparently took over the management of Buchanan's political fortunes. In 1847 he advised him not to accept an appointment to the Supreme Court and stated his personal conviction that Buchanan's conservatism was the greatest asset for a candidate to possess during the next election. When Cass carried off the nomination in 1848, Slidell did not relinquish his task. He felt sure Buchanan was certain of the prize in 1852. He foretold the split within the ranks of the Whigs and the end of the dominance of such elder statesman as Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun. Taking

their place would be politicians, among whom he evidently placed Buchanan, who would understand better the "manifest destiny" of slavery and "the necessity of its fulfillment." 30

As 1852 drew nearer, Slidell's activities in his candidate's service increased. His advice began to resemble orders. In 1850 he told Buchanan he must come to New York. There was a room already reserved for him at the Astor House, where the Slidells were staying. In summer, 1851, Buchanan was admonished quite frankly to make an attempt to overcome his "dread of locomotion." It was necessary that a candidate get out and mix with people, particularly those at Saratoga, rendezvous of politicians. He must also come to an understanding with William Marcy, New York political leader. Although New York was a lost cause, a residue of united Democratic action must be maintained there to keep the Whig margin of victory from increasing. Buchanan should turn on his natural charm (here Slidell was wise enough to assure his friend that he was making a frank appraisal and not flattering). 32 In September he was in New York


32 Slidell to Buchanan, May 9, 1851. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
arranging for the publication of a Democratic newspaper there. He wrote Buchanan at this time asking his advice about the paper and telling him that Belmont had received pledges of financial support from the city's most wealthy merchants. In a letter sent in November Buchanan's dislike of "locomotion" again became a subject of discussion in the correspondence between the two men. Buchanan had visited Marcy in accordance with Slidell's wishes. But he had failed to learn what had passed between Marcy and Belmont. Marcy later became an active candidate himself. Slidell blamed this undesired development on Buchanan's "inaction."33

Slidell still hoped for success. His flow of letters continued undiminished. Two of them gave more than hints about the character of their author. One went to the Southern moderate and nationalist Howell Cobb. It offered Buchanan's conservatism as the best remedy to throttle forever the attempts of both Northern and Southern radicals to split the Union. There could be no peaceful secession. Such a concept was an impossible "abstraction . . . one of those harmless follies" heard often in times of great

The other letter was addressed to Buchanan. In it Slidell approved of Cass's candidacy but not that of Stephen A. Douglas. Douglas, the idol of "Young America," to whom Cass and Buchanan represented "Old Fogyism," was to Slidell the possessor of unsound ideas. His associates gave the Louisianian the impression they were motivated by questionable ethics. Slidell in a later note confirmed this judgment and observed that Douglas was the recent purchaser of four newspapers in Louisiana. This was probably even more disturbing news to him. Douglas and Soulé combined would be a strong challenge to his position in the political picture obtaining in Louisiana, especially if Douglas became President.

Later, Slidell felt easier about Douglas. As he went to Baltimore to put personal pressure on the wavering Marcy, his worries dealt mainly with Buchanan's record on the


Missouri Compromise. 36

When his man lost in the convention at the Maryland city, the disconsolate manager refused to voice his state's vote for Franklin Pierce. He told Buchanan that only the opportunities 1856 might provide kept him from retiring forever from politics. Marcy's conduct in the convention had provided cause for alienation. Slidell would support Franklin Pierce and Rufus King but without enthusiasm. 37

By September Slidell was already beginning to lay his foundations for the convention of 1856. He knew the Whig party was dead, but showed no awareness of the powerful force which would replace it in national politics. 38 Later, he was pleased that he had been mentioned for a cabinet post. At the same time he was shocked that Buchanan's claims to a similar position had been overlooked. 39 In March, 1853, the new minister to Great Britain, James


Buchanan wrote Marcy a request that Belmont be given the new diplomatic post at Naples. It was hardly beyond the realm of possibility that Slidell was the inspiration for the note. 40

Throughout the period Slidell's defeats had really obscured the true political trends in Louisiana. Actually, he was capturing his state from both Whig and Democratic opponents. He was aided by the steady immigration into Louisiana of swarms of yeoman farmers, holders of small cotton farms and Jacksonian Democrats. The Louisiana constitution of 1845 also helped by broadening the suffrage and abolishing property qualifications for holding state office. The reactionary constitution of 1852 gave the large plantation owners more voting power but did not seriously alter the direction of the state's politics. 41

Meanwhile, Slidell had to bide his time, awaiting a suitable opening. Soule seemed to provide one in 1850, when he denounced the Compromise and talked secession. His state was horrified. The Democracy felt even worse

40Sears, John Slidell, 96.

knowing that his speeches were handing Louisiana back to the Whigs. For even the leader of the more radical Democratic farmers of northern Louisiana, Solomon W. Downs, hated extremists.42

The true political picture of Louisiana became quite clear in 1852. In that year the Slidell faction routed its opponents within the Democracy.43 At the same time Slidell and Benjamin began to draw close to each other. Slidell was given credit for Benjamin's election to the Senate that year.44 The defeated faction in the Democratic Party began to talk about influencing Slidell to accept a diplomatic or cabinet post.45

So, in 1853 John Slidell was a success in politics as he was in his other pursuits. Only the Senate seat remained elusive. His power in his state was attested to by two events. The first was the appointment of his candidate, A. G. Penn, instead of Soule's brother-in-law to the

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43Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 108-109.

44Meade, Judah P. Benjamin, 79.

45Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 109.
position of collector of the port of New Orleans. The second was the offer in April of a Central American diplomatic post.

Slidell went to Washington. He did not accept Pierce's offer. When he refused, Soulé was offered the Spanish ministry. Soulé accepted the post. This action left Soulé's seat in the Senate vacant. Slidell was thus presented with a fine opportunity to attain the overwhelming ambition of his career. He left Washington for Baton Rouge and the Louisiana legislature in session there.

On Wednesday, April 27, 1853, the Democrats met in caucus to nominate their candidate for Senator. A rather tired and anxious Slidell had arrived in time from Washington. On the first ballot Governor Paul O. Hebert received twenty-five, Slidell nineteen, and Lieutenant-Governor W. W. Farmer fourteen votes. The next four tallies amounted to about the same figures. Before the sixth

49 New Orleans Crescent, May 2, 1853.
50 Ibid., Apr. 29, 1853.
ballot a consultation was held between the followers of Hebert and those of Farmer. Then the leading candidate’s name was withdrawn. On the next poll Slidell had twenty-four votes, Farmer twenty-two, and a new candidate, Alexander Mouton, nine. Three votes were scattered. Mouton thereupon withdrew. On the eighth and final ballot Slidell won with thirty-nine votes to Farmer’s twenty-four. Hebert immediately endorsed the action of his friends and Slidell’s nomination was assured.

The election was held in the legislature during the following day. It was hardly a contest. Slidell received seventy votes to his Whig opponent Theodore G. Hunt’s thirty. His margin was more than the Democratic majority in both houses combined.

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51 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 28, 1853; New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1853; Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 109-12.
Louisiana's first politician was now in possession of one of the top offices his state could bestow. He had justified the observations and predictions made about him by A. Oakey Hall, a popular writer of the day, a few years before, when he called Slidell the Van Buren of Southern politicians ... the successful lawyer and ex-diplomatist, who as his adopted State grows older, will yet play a more prominent part in her political history, unless the restless eye and abstracted look of reflection are poor physiognomical interpreters of steady ambition. 1

His election gave his constituents a good opportunity to make revaluations of his worth to the state and nation. In 1851 he had made an indirect appraisal of what he considered among his strong points. In a letter to Buchanan he had expressed the desire to be once more a resident of New York; for he was sure that "a strong will with some tact could effect a great deal" among the quarreling

1A. Oakey Hall, The Manhattaner in New Orleans (New York, 1851), 96.
Democrats of that state. Now in 1853 could be found even Whig editors who would agree with his self-appraisal. They admitted his undoubted abilities. He was a good politician. He was popular; even Whigs voted for him. He had united the great majority of the Democracy into an efficient whole. He was effective and influential as a host, when he regaled the impressionable guest with "good dinners, with excellent entrees, good dishes and splendid wines." He could be many things to many men: "John Slidell to Young America; Johannis Schlidathl to the German, Jean Slidelle to the Frenchman; Slidelli to the Spaniard; and plain Jack to the Irishman." But in the eyes of his critics these assets were liabilities for the job to which he had just been elected. Louisiana was sending to the Senate a manipulator and not a statesman.

The Courier, Slidell's voice among the New Orleans journals, was quite lonely in its approval of the new

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2Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 8, 1851. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

3New Orleans Crescent, May 2, 1853.

4New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 24, 1853.

5New Orleans Crescent, May 2, 1853; New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 29, 1853; New Orleans True Delta, May 11, 1853.
Senator. It called attention to a declaration he made after his election, when he endorsed a recent resolution of a Democratic convention in favor of states rights and interposition. But the Crescent thought his statement merely another example of his usual practice of using many words that said nothing or could be interpreted in any particular way convenient for Slidell.  

Most of the editorial spleen, however, was reserved for criticism of the Democratic caucus's proceedings. Governor Hebert had offered no complaint; but other observers were not so magnanimous. They could not understand how without corruption and fraud the name of the leader in the balloting (Hebert) should have been withdrawn. The True Delta was certain that the Whig vote for Slidell proved something unsavory had occurred. It also wondered how country representatives had been able to vote for a nominee from the city.

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6 New Orleans Delta, May 7, 1853; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 30, 1853.

7 New Orleans Crescent, May 10, 1853.

8 New Orleans True Delta, May 11, 14, 1853; New Orleans Bee, Apr. 28, 29, 1853; Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 108-109.

9 New Orleans True Delta, May 11, 14, 1853.
Critics tried but failed to link Soule with the proceedings at Baton Rouge. Before the balloting began, he had quieted rumors that he had an "understanding" with Slidell. The idea was impossible, he said. Slidell was a personal and political enemy. Moreover, he added, he had not expected his rival to refuse the South American diplomatic post. This allegation was probably true. Charles Sumner, Senator from Massachusetts and almost certainly unaware of what was occurring that moment in Louisiana, verified Soule's statement in a letter written about this time.

With Soule safely out of reach the searchers for fraud settled on the person of Hebert's lieutenant, William McKay, as the probable culprit. McKay was accused of withdrawing Hebert's name without necessity or authority. A fairer evaluation, however, was supplied by the Whig Picayune. In its opinion, Slidell was the only candidate who could have received his party's majority vote.

At the same time that the New Orleans press was up in arms over the person of the new Senator and the method by which he was elected, an opinion on the quality of the

10 New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 27, 1853.
12 New Orleans Bee, Apr. 28, 29, 1853; New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1853.
state's choice was being rendered in Tennessee. George W. Jones writing to Howell Cobb said: "Slidell for Soule in the Senate is certainly not a bad exchange." In Jones's eyes a moderate in place of an "ultra" was good for the country. 13

The next session of the Senate was eight long months away but Slidell would not remain idle in the interim. For one thing there was a statewide election scheduled for the fall. Should it return more Whigs than Democrats to the legislature, Slidell would not be re-elected in 1855, when his present term of office ended.

Before the canvass began, Slidell went to London with James Robb with a view of selling bonds of the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern railroad to European bankers.

New Orleans and Louisiana were finally beginning to realize that their location at the end of the world's greatest river system was not sufficient to meet the challenge of the railroads. 14 Every year more and more of


the port's business was being diverted to the Atlantic coast. The river, moreover, was fickle. Its mouths were often impassible. In the summer it was too shallow for boats to travel far upstream. Business therefore came to a virtual standstill in New Orleans. In the spring there were devastating floods. If the railroads suffered calamities, so did steamboats. Above all, there was little doubt which of the two transportation systems, the railroads and the river, was the steadier, surer, and faster means of moving goods and persons.

Almost twenty years before this time Louisiana had passed up an opportunity to put itself into an excellent position with regard to the newer form of transportation.

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15 New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 2, 1857.
17 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 4, 1858, Mar. 25, 1859.
In 1837 the state legislature had allowed itself to be intimidated by the prevailing bad financial conditions into cancelling financial help to the New Orleans and Nashville railroad, whose track construction had proceeded far.  

Now, perhaps too late, the state was trying to catch up with the more progressive sections of America. Two ribbons of track in 1853 were inching their way from New Orleans in opposite directions. One, the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western, was headed west from Algiers across the Mississippi from New Orleans. The other, under the direction of Robb, was the Jackson railroad. It was aimed east and north. Its directors expected it to connect New Orleans with trunk lines to the east coast. 

Louisiana's railways had lately become involved in politics. The state legislature in its last session voted a property tax, the proceeds from which were to be used to assist railroads in paying for their heavy construction costs. In the beginning of 1853 Slidell and Benjamin

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formally stated their opinion that the assessment was legal. On June 13 the Louisiana Supreme Court, in a decision given by Chief Justice Thomas Slidell, agreed with them. But as July 1, the date of first collection, neared, there was undoubtedly an undercurrent of resentment stirring.

Slidell's journey was therefore of some importance to him. The realization of a large sum of money from it would do much to ease the tension in Louisiana, perhaps make unnecessary the collecting of the tax.

Along with Slidell, Buchanan, Belmont, and Soule were scheduled to cross the Atlantic that summer, each going to his new post of duty. Slidell would have liked to accompany Buchanan to England but could not wait for him. A favorable money market was alleged to exist in London and he and Robb must rush to take advantage of it.

On June 28 he wrote Buchanan from New York. He regretted that Buchanan would not be in London when Slidell and Robb

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20 *New Orleans Crescent*, May 4, 1853.

21 *New Orleans Bee*, June 14, 1853.

22 *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1853; *New Orleans Orleanian*, June 16, 1853.

23 *New Orleans Bee*, June 16, 1853; *New Orleans Orleanian*, June 24, 1853; *New Orleans Picayune*, July 20, 1853.

arrived. The endorsement of the United States minister to Great Britain would have been an undoubted aid in the sale of the Jackson bonds. Probably Slidell was remembering that the bad credit rating of Mississippi, through which the Jackson line would build many miles of track, would have an adverse effect on what he and Robb were trying to accomplish. Slidell probably did meet Buchanan, at Liverpool, shortly before he, Slidell, took passage to New York.

The returning bond salesmen landed in America during the first week in September and headed home over the same route by which they had traveled north. They did not anticipate a happy homecoming. They had failed to sell

26 New Orleans Picayune, Aug. 5, 1853.
28 New Orleans Crescent, Sept. 8, 1853.
29 New Orleans Picayune, Sept. 17, 1853; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 6, 1853.
a single bond. They blamed the unsettled state of European finance, which scared off potential investors. Their only achievement had been the receipt of a promise that purchasers for the bonds would be found when a hundred miles of track were laid by the Jackson company.  

A merely tentative agreement concerning action in the dim future was hardly strong enough evidence of success to stifle criticism. Skeptics demanded proof that the true facts were those the two travelers reported. During the summer past charges of fraud had been made in the city council regarding the sale of certificates to the financial house of Nathan and Company at rates "considerably below par." Robb and Slidell were said to hold some of them.

When the council demanded an explanation from the railroad company, the latter's representative, Benjamin, advised the city government that it mind its own business. But when the salesmen returned, they found that the council was still not certain that they, Robb and Slidell,

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30 New Orleans Picayune, Sept. 16, 1853.
31 New Orleans Orleanian, Oct. 4, 1853.
32 New Orleans Delta, Sept. 21, 1853. See also New Orleans Bee, July 7, 1853.
33 New Orleans Bee, July 4, 1853.
were entirely innocent of the charges which had been made.\footnote{34}{New Orleans Delta, Sept. 21, 1853.}

Robb assumed most of the burden of defending Slidell and himself.\footnote{35}{New Orleans Delta, Nov. 30, 1853; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 30, 1853.} But the Senator evidently felt he had to answer the charges that he had purchased bonds at illegally low prices. He wrote the Delta a letter which the paper published. In it he stated that the deal with the Nathan company was legitimate. Also, it was, in his opinion, the best bargain possible at the time it was transacted. Since he held no bonds, he could hardly have made any money from the transactions.

In spite of Benjamin's adamant stand, it soon appeared that the Jackson company was willing to take into consideration the public's dislike of taxes directly applied to the road's welfare. In spring, 1854, Robb led his company and fellow citizens in applying to the legislature for a change in the law. The result was the passage of a bill which repealed the tax. Substituted for it was authority for the state to issue certificates, the money from whose sale was

\footnote{36}{New Orleans Delta, Sept. 21, 1853.}
to be turned over to the railroads.\textsuperscript{37}

The following summer (1834) saw the Jackson company once more back in the political picture. At this time action was to be taken on the application of the Pontchartrain railroad for state assistance. The Pontchartrain was trying to link up with and become a part of the Mobile and New Orleans line, which was pushing westward from Alabama's principal port. Robb and his associates opposed the granting of state funds for what they considered a stockjobbing operation.\textsuperscript{38} After a spirited campaign the Pontchartrain received its money.\textsuperscript{39} But those citizens who voted in the affirmative on election day lived to regret their action when the Mobile and New Orleans railroad suddenly crumbled into a mass of indebtedness and frozen assets.\textsuperscript{40} Particularly disappointed were many of the residents of the Downtown, or French section of the city. They looked forward to the day

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{New Orleans Picayune}, Feb. 12, 1854; New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 22, 1854; New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 18, 1854.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{New Orleans Commercial Bulletin}, May 2, 1854; New Orleans True Delta, May 7, 1854; New Orleans Crescent, May 13, 1854.

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{New Orleans Orleanian}, June 30, 1854.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{New Orleans Crescent}, Nov. 12, 1855; New Orleans Delta, Jan. 4, 1855.
when the Mobile and New Orleans would connect through the Third District ferry with the Opelousas railroad directly across the Mississippi in Algiers. Then, when the Opelousas was part of a line to the Pacific, their section of town would be the center of a transportation system unbroken from coast to coast. 41 This hope was not to be realized during the period. Of all the railroads centering about New Orleans, only the Jackson became more than a local service unit.

The controversy over the railroads in 1853 was but a prelude to that begun by the fall canvass. Not only were seats in the state legislature at stake but also those of members of Congress. Slidell arrived in the city about October 4, just in time to participate. 42 He came into town at the end of one of the worst yellow fever plagues in the history of New Orleans. Official figures published later put the number of those killed by the disease as 7,896. 43 How many of these casualties were registered voters was apparently not known by election time. If that

41 New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 25, June 17, July 23, Aug. 24, 1854.

42 Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 112-15; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 6, 1853.

43 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 28, 1856.
statistic could have been discovered it would have shed much light on the value of subsequent charges and protests.

In the campaign preceding the election date the Whigs made their last stand in New Orleans.\(^4^4\) As the Commercial Bulletin noted sadly, their position without patronage and adequate funds was unenviable.\(^4^5\) The Whig candidates were more important than the issues they brought before the voters. Heading the Whig ticket, for example, was Theodore G. Hunt, Slidell's opponent for Senator in the recent election and a politician admired even by his opponents. The issues dealt with comparatively inconsequential matters like alleged Democratic "cliqueism" and exactions upon the pay of office holders.\(^4^6\)

As usual, the Democratic True Delta outdid the Whigs in vehement opposition to Slidell and his lieutenants, whom it labeled "the Doge" and "Council of Ten."\(^4^7\) The True Delta did not believe in pulling its punches. It also seemed to enjoy its usual role of opposition, which it played against even respected citizens like Robb and popular

\(^{4^4}\) Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 112.

\(^{4^5}\) New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, Nov. 3, 1853.


\(^{4^7}\) New Orleans True Delta, Oct. 18, 1853.
enterprises like the Jackson railroad. The True Delta professed to be Jacksonian and the "People's Organ." It seemed to be the voice of the Irish workers on the river, mainstays of the local Democratic machine. The paper certainly did not like railroads or Know-Nothings. It showed as little regard for Slidell and those in the Democratic Party who followed his direction. It favored Soule, Stephen Douglas of Illinois, and Miles Taylor, who became Congressman from the Second District. But it was never for Slidell. Now, in 1853, it turned against the new Senator its undoubtedly gifted talents. These included the manipulation of unsubstantial rumors, dark hints, and downright gossip as grounds for violent accusation. It ran a series of articles by an anonymous contributor, which raked up various kinds of cooled political ashes. In one of these articles Slidell was accused of helping kill a bill which would have enfranchised persons in Louisiana who did not own property. 48

Slidell waited until the last days of the canvass before answering. His rebuttal exposed the writer of the True Delta articles as an old enemy, Thomas J. Durant, and disposed of the accusations concerning the suffrage bill. Slidell reminded the anonymous writer that fifteen years

48 New Orleans True Delta, Oct. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 1853.
before he, Durant, had been forced to admit this very accusation false. The truth was that he, Slidell, refused to bestow the vote upon those who neither lived nor owned property in the State.\(^49\)

Generally Slidell relied upon the **Courier** to carry the burden of attack and defense of himself and party. The opposition did not neglect to revive the old Plaquemines frauds for voters to recall. In answer, the **Courier** published the sworn affidavits presented by the leaders of the expedition to the state legislature's committee in 1845.\(^50\) When the **Crescent** accused Slidell of threatening a clerk in the Federal service with dismissal because he was not obeying the dictations of Democratic leaders, the **Courier** demanded proof. The request was ignored.\(^51\)

The election of November 7 was an almost complete Democratic success. Even Whig strongholds caved in. Only the faithful Second District responded as before by giving Hunt its majority vote.\(^52\)

The opposition, however, were not prepared to accept the result as a true expression of the public will. To

\(^{49}\) *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Nov. 1, 1853.

\(^{50}\) *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 4, 5, 1853.


\(^{52}\) *Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861*, 114-15; *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Nov. 9, 1853.
the contrary, they screamed fraud and corruption. Where, asked the *Bee*, had the Democracy found all those votes after the decimation of the population by the recent plague? Only the inclusion of the votes of those who had gone into the cemetery could have swollen the total vote to the size it had attained.53

Slidell received most of the credit for bringing the dead out of their tombs and into the polls. He became now the "Napoleon of politics,"54 the "resurrectionist,"55 who in spite of a plague had gathered three thousand more votes than ever before. Obviously, concluded the sarcastic articles, nothing could withstand him.56 The echoes of these remonstrances were still ringing when Slidell and Benjamin left for Washington on November 22.57 Perhaps the general impression created by them somewhat altered for the better when on November 30 the *Delta*, previously neutral, spoke of the current Louisiana Senators as

53New Orleans *Bee*, Nov. 9, 10, 1853; New Orleans Commercial *Bulletin*, Nov. 9, Dec. 14, 15, 1853.
54New Orleans *Bee*, Nov. 17, 1853.
55New Orleans *True Delta*, Nov. 9, 1853.
56New Orleans *Bee*, Nov. 17, 1853.
57New Orleans *Delta*, Nov. 26, 1853.
outstanding representatives of their state. 58

During the campaign the Bee had observed that a split in the ranks of the Democracy was becoming serious and permanent. 59 The Whig newspaper's judgment received dramatic verification directly after the election when Charles Gayarre, known to posterity as one of the outstanding historians of the Old South, published a pamphlet on the recent election. Gayarre was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress. In heated phrases his tract told how the regular Democracy had received 4,000 fraudulent votes. Gayarre mentioned no names but a least a few readers felt certain that his very personal remarks were directed at Slidell and Emile La Sere. 60 The Creole paid heavily for his castigation of his party's leaders. He was bombarded with answering attacks. 61 One anonymous letter in French was particularly severe upon his character, fairness,
and judgment. The Delta implied he was a traitor. Under severe pressure he denied any allusion to La Sere. When the smoke of battle had cleared, Gayarre awoke to find that his career as a Democratic politician had ended before it had well begun.

Slidell left New Orleans with the city apparently safe for the Democracy. But when he returned after his first session in Congress, he found that the political atmosphere had undergone a severe change. Its beginnings were not difficult to follow in the city's press. Not long after the election there appeared an article attacking the rule of a minority "aristocracy of loafers of grog-shops, bullies, and incapable brawlers," who, "marshalled by persons of social responsibility," victimized all political parties. Moreover, the operations of these parties were screened by the injection of national issues into local matters.

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62 New Orleans Orleanian, Dec. 21, 1853.
63 New Orleans Delta, Dec. 19, 1853.
64 New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 26, 1853.
66 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 11, 1854.
Then on March 15, 1854, there appeared a notice in several newspapers. This invited citizens to a forthcoming meeting, whose purpose was to separate "the interest of the city" from that of the "Federal politicians." By an odd coincidence, on the same day the Bee described the rituals, rules, and pass signs of the brand-new Know-Nothing political party. To the paper the various distinguishing marks of the organization were "the harmless fungi of a rank freedom."  

The meeting was carried off successfully on March 15. Reactions in the press were instantaneous. The Courier, which not many days before had spoke smugly of changing the Democratic party into something like an exclusive private club, awoke with a jolt. The True Delta called the newly

67 New Orleans Bee, Mar. 15, 1854; New Orleans Courier, Mar. 15, 1854.
68 New Orleans Bee, Mar. 15, 1854.
69 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 22, 1853.
70 Ibid., Mar. 16, 1854.
formed group the nucleus of another Native-American move-
ment. The Delta seemed to be of the same opinion when
it noted that the oldest adopted citizens were not invited
to join their fellow citizens in purifying their city's poli-
tics. Then there appeared a rather ominous article
in the Crescent against foreigners. The sentiments ex-
pressed -- that European immigrants were liable for the
present bad conditions in New Orleans -- seemed to con-
firm the worst fears of the editors of the True Delta and
the Orleanian. Both newspapers immediately published
facts and figures demonstrating that the jobs held by the
foreign-born citizens were usually low in degree and few
in number.

The arguments pro and con caused by the meeting of
March 15 gave a hint of the complexity of the city's po-
litical picture. In it French-speaking Creoles of the
Second and Third Districts eyed distrustfully the dominant
English-speaking business men of the First District.

71 New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 18, 1854.
72 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 16, 1854.
73 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 21, 1854.
74 New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 22, 1854; New
Orleans True Delta, Mar. 23, 1854.
75 McLure, "Elections of 1860 in Louisiana," Louisi-
ana Historical Quarterly, IX (Oct., 1926), 602-603.
Native-born citizens voiced disapproval of immigrants, especially if the natives were Whigs and the immigrants Democrats, for whom obliging judges made naturalization and the suffrage not overly difficult to obtain.  

Hitherto Slidell had evidently known how to deal with problems presented by the structure of the New Orleans electorate. Soule was an outstanding champion of the Creoles. He was a sponsor of the St. Louis Hotel, French New Orleans' rival to the St. Charles Hotel on the south side of Canal street. But Slidell was married to a Creole. His household spoke French exclusively. He lived in the Vieux Carré. On the other hand, his club activities, his politics, his legal career, and his use of the St. Charles Hotel attested to his influence on the "American" side of town. He had apparently, therefore, succeeded where Soule had failed. He had performed a successful reconciliation of opposite extremes. Now events were

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77. Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 18.
78. See below, pp. 13-14.
80. See below, p. 484.
promising a different future for his status as a vote getter in New Orleans.

The first climax of the new political situation in the city occurred on election day, March 27. On that day the reform party carried the majority of the local offices. About the only consolation the Democracy had was that they had elected their candidate for mayor. On May 9, in another election of local officials, this victory was repeated by wide margins.

The resultant change in the city's administration may have been a desirable and healthy sign of democratic processes in operation. But other events accompanying these elections could not be so easily welcomed or approved. Newspapers reporting the first election told of killings at the polling places. The wounded casualties of the day's brawls included the Irish chief of police. This exhibi-

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81 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 29, 1854.
82 New Orleans Delta, May 8, 1854; New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, May 9, 1854.
83 Greer, Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861, 16-18; New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 29, 1854; New Orleans Delta, Mar. 26, 1854.
84 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 28, 1854.
tion was but the beginning of a long series of election disorders in New Orleans.

On March 29 Louisiana's chief city received the Democratic foe, former Whig President Millard Fillmore in the grand manner, with music, speeches, and pretty girls. The New Orleans which received him may, as the winners of the recent election proclaimed, have been "recaptured" from the Irish by its citizens. The "Dutch" may well have taken Holland. But perhaps a more ascertainable fact was that a party at least partly devoted to Native-American sentiments was headed for ascendency in the greatest Roman Catholic and most foreign city in the United States. This ironic situation, moreover, was to persevere. For seven long years more New Orleans was comparatively barren ground for the Democracy and its leader, John Slidell.

85 New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 30, 1854; New Orleans Bee, Apr. 1, 1855.
86 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 29, 1854.
CHAPTER IV
THE FIRST SESSION OF THE THIRTY-THIRD CONGRESS

Slidell began his Senatorial career in an unorthodox manner. His credentials had not arrived. Benjamin introduced him to the chair without them, observing that the whole world knew Slidell had won the right to represent Louisiana in the Senior House. The chair agreed.¹

Once accepted, Slidell was soon busy at his new duties. These included membership on the Committee on Foreign Relations, on which he served with leading statesmen like James M. Mason of Virginia, Stephen A. Douglas, and John M. Clayton of Delaware. His other committee was Roads and Canals.² Slidell liked his new life. As he wrote Buchanan in January, 1854, he felt himself at last in his true element.³

2. Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 27.
The Thirty-Third Congress in its first session sat from December, 1853, until September, 1854. During this period appeared the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which Douglas and his supporters guided successfully through both Houses. The measure contained Archibald Dixon's amendment which abolished the provision in the Missouri Compromise that confined slavery in the United States to territory south of the line of latitude at thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes. The accomplishments of this act were hardly worth the labors of its sponsors. Strife in Kansas and the Republican Party soon followed to insure what the Kansas-Nebraska Act had legislated away. The ultimate price was a split Democratic Party and civil war.

Slidell therefore entered into a situation that began almost immediately to disintegrate. He may have had a hand in setting off the processes of destruction. One source credited him with suggesting Dixon's amendment to Douglas at a private dinner party. However, he performed little work for it on the Senate floor, confining his activities

\[4\] Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 252, 532.
\[5\] Ibid., 125.
to supporting Douglas's maneuvers.7

The Homestead bill was another important issue in the session which set the North and South against each other. Slidell's position was neither Northern -- for the bill -- nor Southern -- against the bill. He showed loyalty to his party (at least in Louisiana) by opposing the Clayton amendment to limit the franchise in territories to citizens only. But, on the other hand, he demanded that aliens be forbidden the right to homestead unless they declared their intention to become citizens within sixty days after the passage of the bill.8

Slidell's ideas were presented in the form of an amendment to the Homestead bill. They brought forth the opposition of Charles W. Stuart, Democrat from Michigan, who thought a man hurt himself and not his country when he refused to become a citizen. However, Slidell's amendment stood, 53-18.10 The amendment was later altered by Benjamin's proposal that the children of immigrants be

7For example, see Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 291, 532.
8Ibid., 1321.
9Ibid., 1748.
10Ibid., 1748-49.
permitted to acquire land. Through a misunderstanding of the measure's contents, Slidell went into opposition. Benjamin hastily whispered an explanation. When he had concluded, Slidell apologized and changed his vote.  

Of more interest to his constituents, probably, was William M. Gwin of California's Pacific railroad bill, which proposed one main line with several eastern branches. A report of a survey of the possible routes for the proposed line to the West undoubtedly heightened Slidell's interest. Made under the supervision of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, it recommended the southern route.

The Gadsden Purchase, approved at this session, was therefore of prime importance to Louisiana. Its acquisition of land in the Southwest provided the mountain passes necessary for the proposed southern route, at whose end Louisiana hoped New Orleans would be.

Slidell's state was also interested in another provision of the Gadsden treaty. This gave the United States the

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11Ibid., 1746, 1760.
13Ibid., 85.
right to build a road and railway across the Tehuantepec peninsula. The closest large port to Tehuantepec was without question New Orleans. The treaty, therefore, provided possibilities for removing Louisiana’s chief city from the edge and placing it in the center of the American economic world. It might conceivably become the economic capital of an international empire of trade and finance centered about the Gulf of Mexico.

There were, however, serious impediments which must be removed before the possibilities in Tehuantepec became realities. Two rival companies in 1853 were contending for the exclusive right to develop the Mexican peninsula. The original concession by the Mexican government to Don José de Garay had been too generous. After six years it was cancelled. By this time, P. A. Hargous and Company of New York had acquired the option and was selling shares in New Orleans. One of the most interested purchasers of the company's stock was Judah P. Benjamin, who in 1848 became chairman of the New Orleans, or Tehuantepec company.

15 Ibid.
16 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 23, 1853; Russel, "Pacific Railway in Politics Prior to the Civil War," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XII (Sept., 1923), 187-201.
a temporary business organization, which was never incorporated.\textsuperscript{17}

When the Mexican government cancelled the Garay grant, it assigned the Tehuantepec concession on much less generous terms to a promoter, Albert G. Sloo. This action bound the route up with legal and financial knots almost impossible to untie. Sloo, little more than an adventurer,\textsuperscript{18} had no capital. On practically nothing else but promises he borrowed the money Mexico demanded for his concession. He organized a corporation in Louisiana. Then he failed to pay the loan. Meanwhile, Hargous had been petitioning the United States to insist that Mexico live up to its original contract for the route across Tehuantepec. Otherwise, American citizens stood to lose investments due to default of a signed agreement, supposedly made in good faith.\textsuperscript{19}

The Senate, therefore, was the inheritor of an involved question when it met in executive sessions to discuss the Gadsden treaty. Before long the prolonged and stubborn fight between Hargous and Sloo sympathizers in

\textsuperscript{17}Garber, \textit{Gadsden Treaty}, 43-61.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 59-60.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 60-64.
the legislative body threatened to wreck the whole proceedings.20 There were the bare outlines of a dispute along sectional lines in this discussion. William H. Seward, for example, agreed with Mexico that the original grant had been overly generous.21

Slidell's interest in the project was undoubtedly of less intensity than Benjamin's. But it certainly was of some moment. His committee, Foreign Relations, and his state were involved. At any rate, the typically sketchy report of the executive sessions which decided the fate of the treaty showed Slidell participating in the business relating to Tehuantepec. He appeared to be less interested in the fight between the factions than in helping to insure that the grant became a part of the treaty.22 According to the New Orleans Courier, it was common knowledge that the final success achieved on this score derived mostly from his activities.23

While these bills furnished the most important materials for the creations of future historians, they were hardly the only business of the session. A large portion

20Ibid., 118-26.
21Ibid., 118-20.
23New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Aug. 28, 1854.
of time was devoted to the many details necessary for ef-
icient operation of the Senate. In this field Slidell
was perhaps as conspicuous as he was inconspicuous in
most discussions on the floor. He watched over matters
of procedure. He introduced and guided a multitude
of minor bills. He caught errors in documents. He
introduced two measures for improvement of the Senate’s
business. One provided that all unfinished business of
one session be carried over to the one succeeding. Then
it could be taken up as if there had been no adjournment.
The other resolution dealt with the secrecy then surround-
ing all Senate action on Executive appointments. Slidell
asked that the results of voting on such matters be pub-
lished immediately. It appeared to him and other
observers that there were too many ‘leaky vessels’ in

24 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 303, 861, 1905, 2078.
25 Ibid., 27, 81, 97, 106, 200, 206, 212, 307,
355, 362, 775.
26 Ibid., 2023.
27 Ibid., 2078.
28 Ibid., 302.
29 New Orleans Crescent, Feb. 9, 1854.
the Senate for secrecy to be maintained. Newspapers had little trouble discovering details of supposedly closed discussions. 30

Slidell’s reputed regard for party regularity 31 and his loyalty to his adopted section of the United States (Louisiana and the South) appeared in his actions with relation to many miscellaneous bills which appeared during the session. For example, he voted for the Pierce-backed Robert Armstrong for Senate printer when many other Democrats were helping elect Beverly Tucker to the office. 32 He opposed granting Winfield Scott, senior army officer, the brevet rank of Lieutenant-General. 33 Scott was the whig candidate for President in 1852. Slidell spoke against the payment of a sum of money to William T. G. Morton, Charles T. Jackson, and Horace Wells for their “discovery” of “practical anaesthesia.” Slidell opposed this measure because he had received evidence that the Georgian Dr. Crawford W. Long was the real inventor of

31 See above, p. 23.
33 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 86.
the pain killer.  

Another kind of loyalty appeared in another service Slidell performed in January. At that time he presented a petition "to place naval and marine officers stationed in the Gulf during the Mexican War upon the same footing as those who served on Mexican and California coasts and not belonging to the squadron operating in the Japan seas." A beneficiary of this proposal would be Matthew C. Perry, Slidell's brother-in-law. The bill went to the Committee on Naval Affairs for action.  

Except in two cases, which furnish the subject of the succeeding chapter, Slidell's further efforts during the first session of the Thirty-Third Congress may be classified into two general groups. One dealt with appropriations for Louisiana. The other consisted of efforts by Slidell to prevent what he seemed to regard as illegal raids on the United States Treasury.  

The outstanding bill Slidell originated at this time for helping his community was the one he introduced for the dredging of the mouths of the Mississippi river; for his action attempted to establish the responsibility of

34 Ibid., 943-44.
35 Ibid., 239, 1854.
36 See below, pp. 79-110.
the Federal government for the efficient flow of the principal river system of North America. The measure was in reality two bills, introduced December 22 and 27, 1853, one for dredging the river at Southwest Pass and Pass à l'Autre and the other for the establishment of a navy yard at New Orleans. The Washington correspondent of the New Orleans Picayune explained why two bills were offered. Both proposals, he wrote, had to pass for either to be valid. New Orleans had no naval base because of the river's shallow passages. At the same time, the navy yard made Federal expenditures for dredging undoubtedly legal.

The Picayune writer spoke much of Slidell's attitude concerning the bill. The Senator had the kind of faith in his project "which merits, and will go far to secure success." Indeed, Slidell felt "quite sanguine that both bills will become laws ere Congress adjourns." Benja-

37 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 81, 97.
38 New Orleans Picayune, Jan 8, 1854. For a good description of the condition of the river's passes, see New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, May 3, 4, 1854.
39 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 8, 1854.
40 See below, p. 72.
Slidell. This fact was demonstrated in another report from Washington which told that Slidell was holding up his Mississippi river bill until Benjamin could be present and "ready to impress the Senate with the importance of the passage of the bill." 41

But neither Benjamin's assistance nor Slidell's optimism was sufficient to insure success. The bill for the New Orleans navy yard passed without significant debate. $100,000 were appropriated. 42 The other measure, unfortunately, suffered a different fate. Stuart of Michigan and John Bell of Tennessee wanted a general harbors and rivers policy expressed in one bill. A host of individual appropriations, said Stuart, played into the hands of a strong minority in the Senate and House who were against all river and harbor improvements. An "omnibus" bill, on the other hand, would defeat them. 43 Slidell acceded to the wishes of the two Senators. Benjamin made the motion of withdrawal, stating at the same time that the Louisiana delegation would vote for the

41 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 30, 1853.
42 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 2171.
43 Ibid., 448.
all-inclusive plan. The scheme was successful in Congress but not in the executive mansion, where Pierce vetoed it. The President said he discerned in several places too many elements of the "pork-barrel" variety. According to one observation made in January by the Picayune's correspondent, Pierce was willing to permit Louisiana to levy a tax on vessels to be applied to the cost of dredging, which the state would assume. Meanwhile, ships would have to get over the bars as best they could.

Bills for grants of land for the railroads of Louisiana occupied quite a bit of the time of both Louisiana Senators. Benjamin introduced one measure which established a port and place of delivery on the terminus of the Jefferson and Lake Pontchartrain railway. Slidell did not permit even the prejudice of the Jackson railroad officials against the New Orleans and Mobile to deter him from seeking the same privileges for the Pontchartrain

44 Ibid.
45 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Aug. 12, 1854.
46 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 8, 1854.
48 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 506-507.
railroad. That he strove to obtain for the other Louisiana utilities.

The land bill for the Opelousas railroad, which Slidell introduced on February 7, 1854, ran into opposition. Slidell went to the floor to explain. The soundness of the line's financial structure made the Senator's task a comparatively light one. He said the railroad would ask for no more aid than that provided by this bill under discussion. Already well secured by subscriptions, it had contracted for two hundred miles of track and expected to complete its construction activities the following year.

Opposition developed from Senators from the Atlantic coast, north and south. William C. Dawson of Georgia and Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, for example, spoke against the measure. Dawson seemed to be trying to establish that the bill was a stockjobbing deal. Hamlin insinuated that the railroad under question was already built and the measure an attempt to extract some extra money from the

49 Ibid., 1335.
50 Ibid., 28, 686.
51 Ibid., 355.
52 Kendall, History of New Orleans, II, 747.
53 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 355-56.
Dawson appeared a second time to "explain" his opposition. The "new states," he complained, were securing free public lands at the expense of the "old" states. He insisted Slidell go into more details on the matter.

Slidell undertook the defense of the bill against these attacks. He debated with Hamlin. He gave Dawson the details asked for by the Georgian. The Louisiana railroad, he explained, under the terms of the bill would receive 120 sections of land for each 20 miles of completed construction. The state was then to sell this land and apply the proceeds exclusively to the project. Precedents, he added, learned opinion on the principles involved, and the itemized list of expenses he held in his hand at the moment all pronounced the bill legal and ethical. A proposal which benefitted the whole country was national in scope. This one belonged in that category since the railroad's existence brought greater value to any adjacent public lands. His speech ended the debate. The bill passed the following day.

54 Ibid., 356-57.
55 Ibid., 364-65.
56 Ibid., 357, 365; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 17, 1854.
57 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 377.
Slideell's introduction of another railroad land bill--for the Shreveport line--ran into another debate of similar nature. This time William Seward of New York rebuked new-state Senators for their discourtesy to representatives from "the old thirteen" states. Augustus A. C. Dodge of Iowa answered that he in turn did not particularly relish Seward's "lecture." 58

Other measures in Louisiana's interest were of varied nature. In helping them to pass Benjamin and Slideell operated as a smoothly working team, whose "Siamese proceedings" inspired the True Delta to comment wryly on the picture of a Whig and a democrat working in harmony. 59 Slideell sought to raise the salaries of employees in the New Orleans customhouse. 60 He tried in vain to secure an appropriation of $50,000 for a fortification at Proctorsville, Louisiana. The recommendations of two Secretaries of War apparently had no effect on Congress. 61 Benjamin guided through to passage a bill for extending the port of New Orleans. 62 Both he and Slideell spent much time

58 Ibid., 407-410.
59 New Orleans True Delta, Feb. 19, 1864.
60 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 1867, 1869, 1862.
61 Ibid., 2077-79.
securing confirmation of various land claims in Louisiana, particularly those lying in the Bastrop and Maison Rouge estates. This last matter was important enough to be a political issue in Louisiana. Bills for the relief of clients and navigational aids for the waters of their state rounded off the labors of the two representatives. Louisiana received a total of slightly less than $500,000 that session.

Just as Slidell was assiduous in securing Louisiana's share of the Federal appropriation, so was he also a watchdog of the Treasury with regard to bills in which his state had no interest.

Miscellaneous bills to which he objected varied in nature. They included a bill for the improvement of rivers and harbors in North Carolina, construction of water works in the District of Columbia, bonuses for

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63 *Globe*, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 66, 265, 638, 2146.
65 *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Apr. 3, 1854.
69 *Globe*, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 1943.
seamen who performed heroic acts, and mail contracts. Slidell went so far as to attempt a reduction in the President's office.

Something of Slidell's philosophy of government came out of the debates in which he engaged concerning these matters. Slidell, as in the debate on the Mississippi river bill, claimed to have tender feelings where the Constitution was concerned. He refused to permit Secretary of War Davis to have the power to disregard bills of a suspicious nature in the line of internal improvements. However, he had no objections to the President's use of such power. In the bill for the District water works he introduced an amendment to make the Washington residents contribute one-third of the cost. To make this appropriation easier he would consent to the city's contracting a twenty-year loan secured by a tax to be applied exclusively to its redemption. The system was under construction, but Slidell felt no embarrassment

71 Ibid., 974-75.
72 Ibid., 2091.
73 Ibid., 1903-1906.
74 Ibid., Appendix, 1162.
over the possibilities that it might be halted because of his efforts. Generally speaking, he asserted, the whole project was an illustration of obvious waste and inefficiency. Moreover, the Federal government, in his opinion, was under no greater obligation to supply the nation's capital with water "than we are to supply them with bread." 75

Constitutional scruples dictated also his opposition to a proposal to grant land for the education of the deaf and dumb and blind. He objected to the right granted the Federal government by the bill to supervise the sales of lands and the funds derived therefrom. This measure to him, therefore, was a direct affront to states' rights. 76 The Slidell speech against the proposal was made during an attempt to override a Pierce veto. Before he finished speaking, he noted that in taking his present stand he was acting contrary to a resolution passed by the Louisiana legislature. He therefore felt that he should explain his attitude in face of this expression of his state's will. He said he acknowledged the authority of Louisiana's lawmaker body to dictate its wishes to him. But at the same time he was certain that it was ignorant of some aspects of

75Ibid., 1879-83.
76Ibid., 1620.
the present bill. If he was not sure of that fact he would have given a "silent vote," even though he knew the bill violated the clear Constitutional stipulation that education was strictly a function of the states. However, he continued, the measure also went into "minute details" regarding inspection and reports. By implication it gave federal officers power over the allocation of funds derived from land sales, which was an insult to his state's dignity. The Louisiana legislature could not possibly have known these particulars. 77

Probably Slidell experienced unspoken twinges of regret for having deprived handicapped people of an opportunity for self-improvement. If so, he had a like experience during the debate on another bill, which would have given bonuses to the captains and crews of three ships for acts of heroism in rescuing survivors of a recent sea disaster. 78 He regretted, he said, to oppose a measure like this one. However, he could not vote for the bill which had returned from committee. It authorized the expenditure of $100,000 with no strings attached. To him, Slidell informed the Senate, the lack of specific

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77Ibid., 1620-21.
78Ibid., 974.
instructions meant that the President would have to spend the whole amount. Slidell would vote in the affirmative only if the President was permitted the discretion of disbursing as much or as little as he felt suitable. However, he had no objection if the total appropriation was lowered to $20,000.\textsuperscript{79}

In further debate on the bill he was adamant to all appeals from his colleagues.\textsuperscript{80} He achieved partial success when the total amount appropriated was cut to $50,000.

Slidell experienced one of his few embarrassing moments of the session when he opposed a mail contract between Louisville and New Orleans. When he spoke, he was acting in defense of the policy of the Postmaster General. Jones of Tennessee objected when Slidell castigated the mail contractors as inefficient and their services expensive. The Tennessee Senator expressed the opinion that Slidell's interpretation revealed a complete ignorance of the subject. Slidell seemed to resent the implication, but could not shake the impression Jones left of him as an

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., 975-76.

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 976-77.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., 977.
officious meddler in affairs about which he knew little or nothing.\textsuperscript{82}

Yet, any embarrassments he may have suffered in this exchange could hardly obscure the fact that with the addition of Slidell to its roster the Senate had brought within its doors an important and influential figure, whose opinion in future debates would have to be taken into account by friend and foe alike.

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., 2091.
Slidell's most strenuous efforts of the First Session of the Thirty-Third Congress were performed on two measures dealing with foreign affairs. Both became subjects for debate with a report of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

One of these bills was for relief of claimants of the armed brig General Armstrong. According to Slidell's report to his colleagues, which he rendered on June 23, 1854, the General Armstrong was an American privateer during the War of 1812. In the harbor of Fayal, port in the Azores, its crew for days held at bay a squadron of British warships and transports. Since these vessels were destined to aid General Sir Edward Packenham at New Orleans, the privateer may have performed a real service for its country in reducing the forces Andrew Jackson faced in his successful defense on January 8, 1815. At the same time, the owners and crew suffered the loss of their property.

Since Portugal was a neutral country it could be held

1Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 206; New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 4, 1854.
liable. The Latin country, however, did not collect damages from Britain nor did it pay the claimants. Under pressure from the United States it agreed at last to submit the case to Louis Napoleon, President of France, for arbitration. Obviously, not only money entered into the consideration of the matter. A decision for the Americans would be at the same time a condemnation of the British navy's actions. Napoleon saved Britain from embarrassment by deciding for Portugal. Now the victims of the incident were asking Congress to give them relief.

Slidell's interest in the matter probably stemmed from the fact that the sole agent of the claimants, Samuel C. Reid, Jr., was from New Orleans. He was also at the time attempting to prevent his country from agreeing to the outlawing of privateers, which he held vital for his country's defense, especially if England was the enemy. At any rate, he took the matter in charge and fought to get it approved by the Senate.

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2 Senate Reports of Committees, No. 157, 33 Cong. 1 Sess.
3 New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 4, 1854.
4 Buchanan to Slidell, May 23, 1854, Moore, Works of James Buchanan, IX, 202.
Slidell's report and speech gave the main reasons why the claimants and himself thought the claim should be paid by the United States. First, the government had submitted the case to arbitrations without permission of the claimants and was therefore liable to them for losses incurred as a result. Second, if the government established and insisted upon "the avowed principle that our citizens are always to be compensated for injuries they may suffer from the violation by belligerents of the law of nations, other countries will be more earnest in maintaining the inviolability of their territory." Third, the British claims that the Armstrong began the fight were proven false by the wounds suffered by the Armstrong's crew. These showed that the allegedly unarmed British boats, which approached the Armstrong on the day the action began, were an attaching party. Fourth, one American Secretary of State after another, including John Quincy Adams, had pressed demands for payment.5

Former Secretary of State Clayton followed Slidell and corroborated most of what the Louisianian had said.6 But thereafter Slidell faced a host of objections to the claim.

5Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 866, 1486-87.
6Ibid., 1487-88.
Robert Toombs of Georgia said Portugal was not responsible for the damages inflicted by the British. Moreover, he continued, since the United States had been powerless to demand restitution from Britain at the peace table in 1814, it was not obliged to compensate the claimants. Thomas G. Pratt of Maryland thought the evidence warranted Napoleon's decision. Seward and Bell thought little of Slidell's reasons why the claim should be paid; but they were willing to reward the claimants anyway for the service they had performed. Salmon P. Chase of Ohio thought the case weak. Wishing to dispose of it as quickly as possible, he called for the yeas and nays.

Slidell and Clayton combined to answer these arguments. Clayton contested Toombs interpretation. Slidell told Pratt that Napoleon had refused to let the claimants testify. To Clement C. Clay, Jr., of Alabama's question as to whether the aspects of the matter were legal or moral, Slidell replied

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7Ibid., 1488-89.
8Ibid., 1490-91.
9Ibid., 1491-93.
10Ibid., 1493.
11Ibid., 1489-90.
12Ibid., 1491.
that the first of the terms applied.\textsuperscript{13}

At this point, a letter from Marcy, dated February 11, 1854, was introduced. It stated that the claimants made no protest when the question was submitted to the French official. Marcy also denied the government’s responsibility for paying the claim. \textsuperscript{14} The majority of the Senate agreed with this opinion. The bill lost, 12-21.\textsuperscript{15}

The other bill connected with foreign affairs which Sli­dell introduced this session stirred up more excitement than the Armstrong debate. It made its appearance on May 1, 1854, in the form of a resolution that the Committee on Foreign Relations be requested to inquire into the expediency of authorizing the President of the United States during any future recess of Congress to suspend the operation of the neutrality laws, which protected Latin America from American intervention. \textsuperscript{16}

Slidell’s resolution, which would have permitted a fili­bustering raid on Cuba from the United States,\textsuperscript{17} was a result of and a part of the spirit of Manifest Destiny, which had

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 1493-94.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 1494.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 1021.
\item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., See below,
\end{itemize}
considerable strength in Louisiana. The annexation of Cuba, of course, was a prime object for those who believed in the inevitability of the United States' ultimate acquisition of the whole of North America. Manifest Destiny served also to offer the South new areas from which new slave states could be created.

Slidell was interested in Cuba as a place for further expansion. Soule also was in favor of annexing the island, and when he went to Spain, he did so with the idea of extracting it from its possessor. His labors instead involved him in a duel, a result of the studied insults of the Marquis de Turgot, French ambassador to Spain, and a witticism from the Count of Monlijo regarding Mrs. Soule's gown at a ball. Soule's foe in the duel, Turgot, received

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18 See below, pp. 93-94.


wounds that maimed him for life.22

The news of this business brought reactions in New Orleans, where it became part of the general excitement then reigning in the city. Rumors stated that the British and French were in close cooperation to wrest Cuba from Spain and "Africanize" the island with native and imported free negroes. 23 The duel was connected with this collusion. It was a maneuver to embarrass the American minister.24 Proof of this fact was held to be obvious. The British envoy to Spain, Lord Howden, said the anonymous reports, had been second to Turgot at the duel.25

In the face of the conjectures, Louisiana citizens looked for "Young America" in the persons of Franklin Pierce and Jefferson Davis26 to initiate some meaningful action.27 to further this expected activity the Louisiana legislature obeyed its Governor's request by passing a resolution against dangers

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25 Ibid., New Orleans Bee, Dec. 21, 1853.

26 New Orleans Crescent, Aug. 17, 1853.

27 Ibid., Nov. 5, 1853.
residing in recent Cuban developments. 28

Slidell's actions in Washington reflected what was happening in his state. One reporter saw him "busy as the devil in a gale of wind" and "industriously disseminating the idea in private conversation" of his constituency's indignation over Cuba. 29

Then occurred the climactic incident of the Black Warrior, in which an American vessel and its crew were held by Cuban officials for technical violation of the island's customs laws. 30 This affair strengthened the Louisiana resolution. It gave more power to Soule, who would hardly assist Spain to escape its dangerous position without permitting Cuba to go to the United States. It gave many of Slidell's constituents positive proof of Spain's unfriendliness towards their country and expectation that Cuba would soon be America's. 31 And it put Slidell into formal action.

28 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 23, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 15, 1854.
29 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 11, 1854.
30 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 252-54.
31 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 15, 23, 1854; New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 21, 1854; New Orleans Delta, Mar. 21, 1854; New Orleans Bee, Mar. 22, 1854; New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 25, 1854.
By March 15, when Pierce sent Congress a warlike message, 32 Slidell was already deep in executive sessions. 33 That he was then laboring hard on the subject of his state's recent resolution appeared in his letter of March 25 to Buchanan. 34 In it he asked the minister if he could send back positive evidence of a treaty between England, France, and Spain. He suggested that Buchanan enlist Belmont's aid for the purpose.

In the same letter Slidell showed also one reason why he had not seemed too interested in the land purchase that had been a part of the Gadsden treaty, then under consideration. He said he would not put obstacles in the way of the $15,000,000 required for the exchange of territory; nevertheless he would vote for this provision with reluctance, for, "we may have occasion to employ fifteen millions . . . in expenditures of more urgent necessity." 35 The "more urgent necessity" was undoubtedly Cuba. On April 3

32 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 256-57.

33 Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 610.


35 Ibid.
Marcy ordered Soule to buy the island for $130,000,000. If this offer was not acceptable to Spain, the minister was to use some other method to "detach" the island from its present owner.

Yet, the days went by without significant action. Rumors flew that the President's strong message was being lulled "in the cradle of the Committee on Foreign Relation." Then, on May 1, 1854, Slidell introduced his resolution to give filibusters free rein to invade Cuba.

Slidell's opening remarks consisted of a modest recognition of the great responsibility he had assumed and an outline of the speech he was about to deliver. He was going to show the evidence which had convinced him that Spain was going to free Cuban slaves and permit them to dominate their present masters, the white Creoles. Beneficiaries of this act, he contended, would be Spain, France, and England, but hardly the United States.

Slidell's evidence came from official British sources. They included communication between British Foreign Secretaries Palmerston and Malmesbury and their representa-

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36 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 246-47.
37 New Orleans Bee, Apr. 14, 1854.
tives abroad, a speech by Lord Clarendon in the House of Lords, exchanges between Britain and Spain, and events in Cuba. In Slidell's address they proceeded as follows:

1. Palmerston to Lord Howden in Madrid, October 20, 1851: Defended the idea of freeing Cuba's slaves. By such means the island would be kept out of American hands.

2. Howden to Palmerston, January 9, 1852: Confirmed a previously expressed opinion that Spain wanted a declaration that all interested parties sign a convention in which they would renounce any intention to seize Cuba.

3. Malmesbury to his Washington minister, April 6, 1852: Urged that steps be taken to join the French diplomat in proposing a tripartite convention with the United States along the lines suggested by Howden on January 9.


5. Iusturitz to Malmesbury, July, 1855: Urged a declaration, in case the United States refused the offer, that England and France would never allow any other power to possess Cuba.

6. Speech by Clarendon in the House of Lords: Contained the statement that Britain and France had understandings between themselves which "no portion of the two hemispheres lay outside."38

The implications residing in these pieces of evidence, continued Slidell, were ably substantiated by exchanges between the United States and Great Britain. Daniel Webster, American Secretary of State under Fillmore, refused to give

38Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 1021-22.
a definite answer to the British proposal. His successor, Edward Everett, also declined, in a paper "forever remarkable" for "its high-toned nationality." Thus rebuffed, the English government retorted that it now felt itself free to act singly or in conjunction with other powers as it deemed fit. Howden, Slidell noted, had recently written a letter to an American friend, in which he denied the existence in his government of any hostile attitude toward the United States. But, continued the Louisianian, he conveniently forgot Palmerston's letter of October 20. He also overlooked a letter he wrote to the Spanish official Miraflores, which proved false Howden's claim that his activities in Spain regarding Cuba had been limited to legitimate diplomatic protests over the slave trade and religious tests. Moreover, Slidell recalled, Howden had broken British laws by seconding Turgot in his duel with Soule; yet, his government had not recalled him. Here to Slidell was another bit of proof that Howden's actions were officially condoned by the envoy's government.

Next, Slidell turned to Cuba, whose Creole subjects lived, he said, under a perpetual threat of loss of their property in slaves. He could state from personal observation, he told his colleagues, that most of the white Cubans desired independence.

39 Ibid., 1022.
40 Ibid.
The recent events on the island which were disturbing to Sli-
dell were as follows:

1. A recent article in the rigidly controlled is-
land press: spoke of the importation of "apprentices"
with the long view of promoting a transition from labor
"entirely compulsory" to one with "complete freedom."

2. A late decree by the Captain General: authorized
two years' "unlimited importation of the apprenticed
laborers from Spain, India, Yucatan, and the Chinese
Empire," and for the purpose altered maritime regula-
tions to permit crowding aboard ships. The island
government was therefore sponsoring the same kind of
system now existing in the Southern United States,
except that it was enticing people into bondage by
giving the false impression that their destination
was the California gold fields.

3. An article in a newspaper, December last:
said that only blacks could be employed usefully in
Cuba.

4. Authenticated copies of official circulars and
orders of recent date: spoke of the idea that the
Captain General was under instruction from Madrid to
bring about the emancipation as something of which
there was no longer any doubt; and permitted slaves
to hire out their time at eight dollars a month.

Meanwhile, said Slidell concluding his recitation of his evi-
dence, the slave trade flourished as the British relaxed their
41
guard.

Now, Slidell began in summary, the only possible target for
all this activity was the United States. While the present war
between the "effete" Turk and Russia's "vigorous barbarism"

41Ibid., 1022-23.
meant little to him,\textsuperscript{42} he saw a definite threat to European liberalism if Napoleon III dictated the peace terms finally agreed upon by the contending nations. At the same time, the British fleet was a clear menace to American security. Let the President now acquire the power "to unfetter the limbs of our people,"\textsuperscript{43} so that they could prevent a second Haiti from appearing. Then, said Slidell, "individual enterprise and liberality will at once furnish the men and the material that will enable the native population of Cuba to shake off the yoke of their trans-Atlantic tyrants.\textsuperscript{44} Let Cubans have time enough to indicate their desire to act for freedom; then, success would be theirs in six months. The citizens of America would rush to their rescue, and no Democratic President would care to stop them.\textsuperscript{45}

Finally, Slidell spoke of the menace to America which he felt a black-controlled Cuba would present. Contrariwise, he said, the island under United States protection would offer many opportunities for sound financial investment. Even now, the value of its products was $\$$30,000,000. This figure, Slidell continued, could easily be doubled when

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 1023.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
the island was governed properly. Meanwhile, Cuba remained under Spain, and Spain moved as France and England wished. The Black Warrior to him was the last bit of evidence on this score. Without the support of these two countries, Spain would never have dared seize that vessel. Diplomatic negotiations with her over such matters were therefore useless. On the other hand "direct action" would have already produced the results diplomacy was still attempting to achieve.  

Slidell was followed by Benjamin, who stated his conviction that Spain was preparing to Africanize Cuba. He was for some kind of action, although at the moment not necessarily that advocated by Slidell. When Benjamin sat down, debate ended. Mason, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations was absent. Therefore, it was necessary to postpone discussion one week.  

The reaction to Slidell's speech in the New Orleans press showed that the Senator had voiced the sentiments of a wide segment of his constituents. Since March, Young America, a journal advocating the annexation of all Latin America, had appeared in the city. Now there were few or

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46 Ibid., 1023-24.
47 Ibid., 1024-25.
48 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 3, 1854.
no disagreements with Slidell's facts and arguments. 49 Some faultfinding appeared with regard to the proposal to suspend the neutrality laws. The Crescent went into decided opposition on the matter. 50 Other sources approved only a formal invasion by American armed forces and condemned an attack by an undisciplined private army. 51 The Bulletin, moreover, doubted that filibusters would have sufficient self-control to wait for Cubans to make the first move. 52 The Bee's views on the subject were more severe. It found Slidell's speech little better than demagoguery. Its goal, said the paper, was to ruin the Cuban sugar crop for the benefit of Louisiana planters. 53 But these opinions were in the minority, as the Crescent admitted. 54 The Delta struck out at the Bee, accusing it of bad faith. 55 Another source stated that Cuba's entry into the Union would help Louisiana by ending all agitation over foreign free sugar. 56

49 See New Orleans Picayune, May 6, 1854.
50 New Orleans Crescent, May 9, 1854.
53 New Orleans Bee, May 10, 11, 1854.
54 New Orleans Crescent, May 31, 1854.
55 New Orleans Bee, May 27, 1854.
56 New Orleans Picayune, May 7, 1854.
The conservative and commercial Picayune had no serious objections to the scheme and the loyal Courier approved wholeheartedly.

As New Orleans awaited expectantly and rumors flew of filibustering expeditions, Slidell transmitted a copy of his printed speech to Buchanan. In his note accompanying the message he complained of Marcy's "reticence." In Buchanan's reply of May 23, the minister told Slidell that the Secretary's actions would be understandable if he, Slidell, had read some of Buchanan's recent correspondence. The diplomat was probably referring to the administration's instructions to Soule to buy Cuba for $150,000,000. At any rate, he regretted Slidell had not had this information before the speech on the neutrality laws. Now Buchanan had some other important recent developments to relate. Clarendon had given "every assurance that a man could give" that his

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57 Ibid., May 6, 1854.
58 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 10, 1854.
59 New Orleans Delta, June 3, 1854; New Orleans Bee, June 2, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 31, 1854; New Orleans Crescent, June 10, 1854.
60 Slidell to Buchanan, May 4, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
62 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 246-47.
"ill-guarded" statements in the House of Lords did not signify Britain had some "understanding or treaty with France over Cuba." Moreover, continued the letter, the British government was preparing its people for American seizure of Cuba. It certainly would not risk financial ruin to its country's manufactures by fighting to save the island for Spain. France, however, was another story. The Empress, stated Buchanan, was still at heart a Spaniard. Serious dangers would arise once Russia was beaten in the Crimean War.

Before closing, Buchanan spoke of a plan for accomplishing Slidell's objectives, "first suggested to me by Mr. Belmont." This was a scheme for having the holders of Spanish bonds put pressure on the Iberian government to sell Cuba. Buchanan said he had already presented the plan to Pierce.

As the month of May drew to its close, Slidell's bill was still in the Committee on Foreign Relations. The "well-informed" correspondent of the Baltimore Sun was certain it would die before reaching the Senate floor. At the same time, it was being assaulted in debate. On May 22, Clayton

63 Buchanan to Slidell, May 23, 1854; Moore, Works of James Buchanan, IX, 200.
64 Ibid., 200-201.
65 Ibid., 201.
66 New Orleans Bee, May 25, 1854.
proposed a countermeasure, for American consuls in Cuba to lose the right to issue sea letters to ships of their country. Many of these vessels, claimed Clayton, were slavers, and, he added, it was they who were mostly responsible for the smuggling into Cuba of black human chattels. On May 23 this measure went to the Committee on Foreign Relations, where it and Slidell's proposal opposed each other. One newspaper report said that the committee was split evenly, with Mason, Clayton, and Everett on one side and Slidell, Douglas, and John B. Weller of California on the other.

Slidell was also making trips to the White House and State Department at this time. He urged Marcy to obtain reports from London and Paris. He suggested contact with Belmont. The President, however, had evidently come to a dead stop on the matter. Solid disapproval of the North, Marcy's opposition, and an expected hostile majority in the House made Pierce reluctant to proceed further.

67 *Globe*, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 1257-61.
69 *Nevins, Ordeal of the Union*, II, 353-54.
70 Slidell to Buchanan, June 17, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
71 Ibid.
Black Warrior incident was settled amicably on May 7. By that time Soule's threats were no longer the potent force in Spain that they had been a few weeks earlier. By June 1 Pierce had made up his mind. One week later the Louisiana Courier published an Executive proclamation forbidding filibustering and hostile demonstrations against Spain.

An exclusive report by a Washington correspondent in the Delta of June 16 told what happened before the issuance of the President's order. It seems that the Committee on Foreign Relations, had decided that "it would be neither respectful to the President, nor in keeping with the position of the Senate" to "take the initiative in any proceedings which might be deemed advisable against Spain," since that responsibility was the President's. The group had therefore determined not to recommend the passage of Slidell's resolutions at this time. Next morning, Pierce called them to the White House. He told them he was issuing a proclamation and that when Congress convened again, he would request funds for the appointment of commissioners to "assist" Soule. Slidell, continued the correspondent, vehemently opposed the proclamation as much as Mason.

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73 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 350; Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 278.
74 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 268.
75 New Orleans Delta, June 6, 1854.
76 Ibid., June 24, 1854.
applauded it. Seeing that his protests were futile, Slidell then insisted that the proclamation at least be delayed until after the message regarding the commission to Spain had been publicized. He also demanded the inclusion of a full and clear statement of "outrages" perpetrated by Spain against this country and of the measures taken for redress. Pierce refused to give definite assurances. He spoke "after the manner of a Fourth of July orator," about his high hopes for the Spanish commission. If it failed, he would ask for an appropriation to enable him to deal with any emergency occurring during recess.

Slidell confirmed the report in a letter to Buchanan dated June 17, 1854, in which he confessed his anger at the "leak" from the President's inner council. He said that he had besought the Chief Executive to issue a special message to Congress, which would state Pierce's intention to pursue an energetic policy. This assurance, Slidell felt, would calm the New Orleans people and ward off a filibustering expedition. Pierce suggested instead that Slidell himself telegraph the district attorney at New Orleans that such a course would be followed. The Louisiana Senator refused to perform this unofficial and useless gesture. The incident, he told Buchanan,

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
had finished him with the administration. Loyalty alone prevented his speaking out in public. The meeting in the White House, therefore, must have confirmed what was in Slidell's mind months before the incident. On January 14, 1854, he had expressed the belief to Buchanan that Pierce was the "de jure" and not the "de facto" head of his party. Marcy and Davis, Slidell believed, ruled the President.

However, although Slidell and March, who resented Slidell's officious meddling but disliked to lose the Louisianian's assistance, were no longer intimate, there was no relenting in the fight over the Cuban resolution. Slidell continued to try to promote action by the government, if with steadily diminishing hopes.

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81 Sears, John Slidell, 111-12.
82 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 354.
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81 Sears, John Slidell, 111-12.
82 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 354.
An example of Slidell's maneuvers occurred May 29, and June 13, when he submitted a report which advocated that the United States abrogate the Webster-Ashburton treaty by calling home the American African squadron. These ships cooperated with squadrons of other European nations in searching for slavers operating from the Dark Continent. He presented a pile of evidence showing that the enterprise was expensive and ineffectual. The movement of slaves, he said, obeyed only the laws of supply and demand. The motion, report, and discussion occurred in executive sessions and therefore did not appear in print until two years later. Yet, within twenty-four hours the country knew what had occurred.

83 Senate Executive Documents, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., IX, 354-76; Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1477, 1856.
84 Senate Executive Documents, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., IX, 354-76; Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1477, 1856.
85 New Orleans Crescent, June 23, 1854; New Orleans Picayune, June 29, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 7, 1854.
Those against his proposition also did not give up. A report on July 7 said Seward was holding back the African Squadron bill from consideration. Sometime later, Mason requested the President for information on the Cuban government. He received in reply a castigation of the Spanish government and the statement that nothing new had occurred to change what had appeared in Pierce's message to Congress. No specific action was urged. According to Slidell, who had now arrived at a point where he was going over Marcy's head to Pierce, this whole drama -- Mason's request and Pierce's answer -- was staged and written in the White House.

The President's reply reached the Committee on Foreign Relations. What occurred there was told in Slidell's letter to Buchanan. He said he now felt that little could be accomplished during the present session and urged that action

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86 *New Orleans Picayune*, July 15, 1854.

87 Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 6, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

88 Ibid.
be indefinitely postponed. Mason, Douglas, and Weller, however, combined to overrule him. As a result, Slidell informed his friend, on August 2, 1854, the committee reported out an amendment to the military bill granting the President $10,000,000 for use in an emergency during the recess of Congress.\(^8^9\) He voted with the majority, Slidell wrote, although he knew the President was running the risk of a rebuff.

Slidell's predictions, according to his letter of August 6, turned out to be accurate. The House, he wrote, voted down the measure. Then, Weller changed sides when Mason informed him that the appropriation might encounter difficulties even in the Senate. Slidell's suggestion was substituted.\(^9^0\) The committee's reply of August 3 to Pierce's message merely agreed with his sentiments and asked to be discharged from any further consideration of the subject.\(^9^1\)

By this time Slidell's attitude had leaked out to the press. On August 4, he was reported to have given up on his proposal to do away with the African squadron.\(^9^2\)

\(^8^9\)Ibid. See New Orleans Bee Aug. 10, 1854.

\(^9^0\)Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 6, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

\(^9^1\)Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., 2178.

\(^9^2\)New Orleans Bee, Aug. 4, 1854.
While Slidell labored in Washington, New Orleans was still undergoing spasms of excitement. Rumors averred that Cuba was practically in America's grasp. Pierce was prudently awaiting a favorable moment to act. Other reports told of a Spanish squadron about to sail for Cuba and possibly an attack on the Gulf ports. There were so many whispers of American expeditions being fitted out for invading Cuba that a local writer E. C. Wharton in mid-June staged a comedy entitled *Those 15,000 Filibusters* at Dan Rice's Theater. The author's wit responded primarily to the investigation then being conducted by the Federal grand jury under Judge John A. Campbell. The object of the inquiry was to discover whether or not there existed a filibustering organization gathered in the vicinity. The proceedings created something of a

93 New Orleans Delta, June 25, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 7, Aug. 15, 1854; New Orleans Bee, Oct. 6, 1854.

94 New Orleans Picayune, July 9, 1854.


96 New Orleans Delta, June 23, July 5, 1854; New Orleans Bee, July 7, 1854.

97 New Orleans Delta, June 14, 1854.

98 New Orleans Picayune, June 25, 1854.
national sensation. Campbell charged the jury in a manner which indicated his belief that several of the witnesses were guilty. Several persons declined to answer questions put to them. They were soon in the local jail. Among these was John A Quitman of Mississippi, who later admitted his guilt in a blazing answer to Campbell.

By September, rumors of Soule's resignation appeared in the American press. With the passage of time his chances of success rapidly decreased. Pierce's contemplated committee to help Soule never materialized. A Spanish "revolution" brought forth a stronger government than before. A new and efficient Cuban governor lessened the possibility of a successful invasion of the island.

100 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 27, 1854.
101 New Orleans True Delta, June 22; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 8, 1854; New Orleans Delta, June 23, 1854.
102 New Orleans Delta, Aug. 23, 1854. See also ibid. for complete report of the minutes of the inquiry.
103 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Sept. 30, 1854.
104 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 281.
105 New Orleans Bee, Aug. 24, 1854.
106 Ibid., July 15, 1854.
Bad will resulted from the American bombing of Greytown, Nicaragua, and the pronounced pro-Russian utterances by the retiring American minister to St. Petersburg.

Soule, however, had not surrendered. He engaged in one more activity whose purpose was to get Cuba for America. This became known in history as the Ostend Manifesto. Slidell has been singled out as the "moving force" behind this document. He could have been. It was evidently he who first told Buchanan about its projection. This information went in a letter in which he also informed Buchanan that he, Slidell, in accordance with Buchanan's ideas, had requested that Belmont be invited to the meeting. Slidell also went to the President over Marcy's head to insure that Buchanan received adequate information on Cuba. And his expressed disgust over Marcy's act of killing the Ostend resolutions was Slidell's notice.

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107 New Orleans Picayune, Aug. 18, 1854.
110 Sears, John Slidell, 111-12.
111 Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 6, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
112 Ibid.
that he would no longer cooperate with the administration. But the final form of the Manifesto was probably Soule's work edited by Buchanan. Buchanan was against the conference. Like Slidell, he favored the exclusive use of financial pressure along the lines suggested by Belmont. Later, Soule took great pleasure in recalling how he forced the other two signers of the document into such a position that they did not dare deny its provisions. Otherwise they would have acknowledged that Soule had "twisted them around his finger."

The Ostend declaration did not remain long a secret. Soon American journals were printed unauthenticated reports about its existence. It melded with other news events to keep up American interest in Spain and Cuba. These included France's refusal to permit Soule to cross its borders on his return from Ostend to Spain and the appearance in the daily press of the Soule correspondence on the subject of

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114 Ettinger, Mission to Spain of Pierre Soule, 365-68.
115 Buchanan to Pierce, Sept. 1, 1854, Moore, Works of James Buchanan, IX, 351.
116 Maunsell B. Field, Memories of Many Men and Some Women (New York, 1875), 97-98.
117 New Orleans Picayune, Nov. 18, 1854.
Cuba, a leak from supposedly closed meetings of Congress. But by the time the Manifesto was officially released to the public (March 15, 1855), it and other related events of the past year were moribund.

The whole business therefore dissolved slowly but steadily into oblivion, leaving behind some feelings of frustration. Soule resigned December 17, 1854, and left on February 2, 1855, for Washington. He lingered in the nation's capital long enough to blame the administration for his failures and then set out for New Orleans to attend to his law practice and interest in the Sloo Tehuantepec Company. He was wise enough, however, to maintain cordial relations with the President, a policy which brought him nice returns. His successor, Horatio J. Perry, managed to make American-Spanish relations a little

118 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 26, 1854.
121 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 13, 1855.
122 New Orleans Bee, Apr. 23, 1855.
123 See below,
less tense, but he lost his position in June, 1855, perhaps because Pierce wished to placate the irate Soule. Quitman received his last rebuff from the administration upon a trip to Washington in November, 1854. By spring, 1855, he was resigned to the hopelessness of trying any further.

In the Gulf area, expectation that Cuba would soon be Southern undoubtedly died hard. Eventually came recognition by Louisianians that the difference between Spain and the United States would be settled peacefully. There appeared in New Orleans papers a show of resentment against not only Northern representatives in Congress but also those from the border and Atlantic Coast Southern states.

Slidell gave perhaps the last words on the Cuban busi-

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125 Perry was Soule's secretary in the Spanish ministry. He probably worked against his superior. His wife was Dona Carolina de Coronado, outstanding Spanish poetess, who furnished Lord Howden with secrets from the American Legation. See ibid., 281-86, 454.
126 New Orleans Picayune, June 14, 1855.
127 Ibid.
129 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 22, 1855; New Orleans Delta, Apr. 27, 1855.
ness when on April 3, 1855, he wrote Buchanan. In his letter he voiced his approval of the Manifesto's form and substance. He agreed with Buchanan's objections to what both considered unnecessary: the formality and publicity that accompanied the document's creation. Slidell thought Marcy's ambition for the Presidency had dictated the State Department's course of action regarding the Manifesto. To Slidell, Marcy's desires were hopeless of attainment. Each member of the administration, he felt, could no longer count on the confidence of his own party.

This last observation was significant. Slidell was already, it seemed, pointing for 1856 and the White House for James Buchanan.

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CHAPTER VI

LOUISIANA POLITICS AND THE SENATE, 1854-1855

The years immediately following the adjournment of the First Session of the Thirty-Third Congress were momentous ones in Slidell's life. The most important series of events from the Senator's viewpoint was his management of Buchanan's successful candidacy for the Presidency, which forms the subject of succeeding chapters. But other occurrences were also important for his future. In Louisiana as a whole the Democracy grew stronger. But in New Orleans it grew more impotent before the increasing might of the American Party, just as it gave ground in the North to the onrushing Republican Party. William Walker, the Nicaraguan filibuster, began his career as an American political issue and Albert G. Sloo's company failed in

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1 See below, pp. 157-210.
2 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 27, 1855.
3 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 344.
4 See below, p. 112.
Tehuantepec,\(^5\) thus giving Benjamin's rival corporation
an opportunity to recoup its losses.

Walker went to Nicaragua in June, 1855,\(^6\) a hireling
of one of the factions engaged in a current civil war.
He gradually eliminated his rival colleagues until he
was supreme in the Latin-American country.\(^7\) His succes­ses attained their summit with the recognition by the
United States of his minister, Padre Vijil, in May, 1856.\(^8\)
New Orleans reacted favorably to Walker's actions almost
immediately after they heard of them.\(^9\) Volunteers soon
began leaving the city for Nicaragua.\(^10\)

The changes in the national political front
penetrated into Louisiana in many places. As early as
November, 1854, members of the New Orleans Whig press were
expressing disillusionment with the Kansas-Nebraska Act.
The Bee, for one, insisted at this time that the South

\(^5\)New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 3, 1854.

\(^6\)William O. Scroggs, Filibusters and Financiers:
The Story of William Walker and His Associates (New York,
1916), 108.

\(^7\)Ibid., 109-76, 196-229.

\(^8\)New Orleans Picayune, May 15, 1856.

\(^9\)New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 29, 1854.

\(^10\)Ibid., Dec. 15, 1855, Feb. 14, Apr. 26, 1856; New
Orleans Crescent, Jan. 15, 1856; New Orleans Bee, Feb. 29, 1856.
gained nothing from the measure. The *Crescent* called for a return of the Missouri Compromise line. The subsequent violences in Kansas brought forth from these conservative journals expressions of shock and surprise. Then these old enemies of the Democratic Party received another kind of shock in August, 1855, when Judah P. Benjamin left the Whig party and called for a united Southern party.

He was obviously on his way to the Democratic party, which he joined on May 2, 1856, in his speech on the Kansas bill. The *Picayune* had predicted this action in December, 1855. In his address, Benjamin said the Whig party was dead and that the Democrats were the only group who were "National, Constitutional, and Conservative."

Another sign of the altering state of national affairs were the notices in the New Orleans press of what one source termed "snarling" references to the city by

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11 New Orleans *Bee*, Nov. 4, 1854.
12 New Orleans *Crescent*, Nov. 15, 1854.
17 *Globe*, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1092-94.
18 New Orleans *Crescent*, July 19, 1855.
Northern editors. One of these claimed that the New Orleans customhouse was "gradually sinking into the marsh of the Mississippi." Another report -- accredited to the New York Tribune -- called attention to New Orleans' unwholesome climate. A third castigated Creoles for their balls, their religion, and their card playing. The press of the Crescent City retaliated by calling attention to alleged Yankee failings. In Northern industry, claimed the Orleanian, there existed "greater brutes . . . as overseers over the whites . . . than ever disgraced our plantation fields, notwithstanding the holy horror with which the 'philanthropists' regard every thing in the South." The Crescent wondered why it was that not one humanitarian like Greeley, Hale, Wendell Phillips, or Chase "had contributed money towards purchasing the freedom of a slave," while just recently many Louisiana blacks were emancipated with permission to remain in the state. On December 20, 1855, the word "Black Republican"

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19 Ibid.
20 New Orleans Picayune, Sept. 29, 1855.
21 New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 10, 1855.
22 Ibid., Apr. 4, 1855.
23 New Orleans Crescent, July 30, 1855.
began its notorious career in New Orleans newspapers. During 1854, 1855, and 1856 riots continued at the New Orleans polls. A particularly bad disturbance occurred in September, 1854. During a later instance of violence, Thomas Slidell was "thugged." The event evidently escaped the notice of the New Orleans newspapers, but it was a serious matter for Slidell. In May, 1855 he announced his resignation from his judgeship. By February, 1858, he was an inmate of an institution for the insane. At the time of the last event, the Orleanian recalled that the blow on Slidell's head was responsible for the end of his career. Sometime later, the Washington correspondent of the True Delta named a local politician, Benjamin Harrison, as the person who had hit the former Chief Justice.

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26 "Celebration of the Centenary of the Supreme Court of Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, IV (Jan., 1921), 43-44.
27 *New Orleans Bee*, May 14, 1855.
Four results of the latest trends in New Orleans became obvious in late 1854 and 1855. 1. The Whig newspapers began to defend the American Party and to blame the Democratic Irish for the election riots. 2. Agitation for the removal of the city's Irish chief of police appeared (he was put out of office in August, 1854, by the police board but later restored). 3. An unsuccessful attempt was made in the state legislature to change the city's charter so that election riots might be more easily curbed. 4. Foreign-born citizens began to stay away from the polls. 5. The city administration threatened to replace the local volunteer fire force with professional companies. This last occurrence brought consternation in some quarters. They feared the result might be the burning down of a helpless New Orleans.

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29 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 12, 1855; New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 25, 1855; New Orleans Crescent, Sept. 12, 1854; New Orleans Bee, Aug. 20, Sept. 29, 1854.
30 New Orleans Picayune, Aug. 27, 1854; New Orleans True Delta, Sept. 3, 1854.
32 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 10, 1855.
33 New Orleans Orleanian, Nov. 28, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 7, 1856.
34 New Orleans True Delta, Oct. 5, 1854.
Other important political news at the time was Stephen Douglas's visit to New Orleans in December, at which time the *True Delta* led the praise which was printed in his honor,\(^{35}\) and the death of Solomon W. Downs, Democratic leader of northern Louisiana and at the moment collector of customs at New Orleans.\(^{36}\)

But of more lasting significance for Slidell's political career were his re-election to the Senate in January, 1855, and the trial of William S. Kendall, New Orleans postmaster for common theft.\(^{38}\) Slidell's election was not accompanied by a great amount of political fireworks. The New Orleans *Delta* gave him a hand by urging that he be returned to the Senate.\(^{39}\) Another paper which said that Slidell's record as a Senator had influenced it to change its mind and support him was the *Farmersville Enquirer*.\(^{40}\) The Baton Rouge *Advocate* tried

\(^{35}\) Ibid., Dec. 3, 7, 1854.


\(^{38}\) *New Orleans Delta*, May 13, 1855.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., Jan. 15, 1855.

\(^{40}\) *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Aug. 15, 1854.
to lead a movement for Governor Paul O. Hebert. 41 The Bee gave the Baton Rouge newspaper's desires publicity in New Orleans. 42 But the campaign against Slidell proved weak when he received seventy-four votes to his nearest opponent's thirty-eight. His party nominated him by acclaim. The margin of victory in the legislature would have been even greater if several members had not been delayed coming up the river from New Orleans. 43

Slidell was in Baton Rouge immediately after his re-election. He had not intended to leave the Senate at this time since he felt that he was certain of victory. Nevertheless, he yielded to frantic calls from his friends and returned to Louisiana. He would not go to Baton Rouge, however, until after the verdict was reached in the state legislature. 44

If the election of Slidell signified anything, it was that the Louisiana Democrats were becoming more tightly knit. The trial of Kendall, on the contrary, seemed to work for schism and discord within the party. The amount

41 Baton Rouge Advocate, Dec. 21, 1854; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 27, 1854.
42 New Orleans Bee, Jan. 13, 1855.
Kendall allegedly stole was admittedly small. The subsequent events stirred up by his trial, on the contrary, were hardly inconsequential. The United States district attorney, E. Warren Moise, resigned under pressure from his superiors. Moise was "the associate of Mr. Slidell in the cleverly arranged campaign for Buchanan." The inference was obvious to many observers that the government did not believe Moise would prosecute Kendall with sufficient zeal to procure a verdict signifying his guilt. To the Picayune, however, the removal was political in nature. That politics was in some way involved in the case appeared in several ways. The editor and the owner of the True Delta both testified for the prosecution and tried to influence judge and jury in their paper's columns. In Washington the administration's Union opposed opinions appearing in New York in the Journal of Commerce, the Union defending Pierce and the

45 New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 28, 1855.
47 New Orleans Delta, May 31, 1855.
48 New Orleans Picayune, May 29, 1855.
49 New Orleans Delta, May 13, 1855.
50 New Orleans True Delta, May 4, 27, 1855.
Eventually Kendall was acquitted. Meanwhile, in fall, 1855, Moise ran against Isaac Morse, who had succeeded Moise as Federal district attorney, and won. In June, 1855, Slidell told Buchanan that the trial had completed his alienation from Pierce. The "immediate cause" of his present attitude, he wrote, "was the outrage put upon my friend Moise & which has not been explained or repaired."

The removal of Moise from his post was perhaps the most dramatic in a number of similar experiences suffered by the Slidell forces at this time. In March, 1855, the Delta under "Queries" asked if those who elected Slidell were being up out of their jobs by the governor for that reason. If there was any connection between the state administration and Pierce, the lack of employment may have had its compensations for the jobless. According to one opinion, any connection with the Federal administration then in power was political suicide.

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51 Ibid., June 16, 1855.
52 Ibid., May 24, 1856.
53 Ibid., Apr. 28, 1855; New Orleans Picayune, June 21, 1855; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 13, 1855.
54 Slidell to Buchanan, June 17, 1855. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
55 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 6, 1855.
56 Ibid., June 17, 1855.
The mixed state of the Louisiana Democracy became obvious in the gubernatorial campaign of 1855. The candidates of the party included Robert C. Wickliffe for governor and Miles Taylor for T. G. Hunt's seat in Congress from the Second District. Both Taylor and Wickliffe later included themselves with the opposition to Slidell within their party. Both the Bee -- a leading voice now for the Louisiana Americans -- and the supposedly neutral Delta agreed that Taylor was more Whig than Democrat. The Democratic True Delta, on the contrary, threw the weight of its columns wholeheartedly behind Taylor. Running on the same ticket with Wickliffe and Taylor was Moise, an undoubted follower of Slidell. And the Democratic convention refused to endorse any other actions of Pierce except his votes. The appearance of Moise on the Democratic ballot and the convention's actions to the Delta were "so significant that the Administration cannot mistake its direct and

57 *New Orleans Picayune*, June 21, 1855.

58 *See below, 494, 497.*

59 *New Orleans Bee*, June 30, 1855.


61 *New Orleans True Delta*, Aug. 29, 1855.
obvious import. 62

Features of the canvass of fall, 1855, were not particularly exciting in the state as a whole. In New Orleans, however, there was no noticeable letdown. Thomas Slidell made "a brief, dignified and effective address" to the gathering at one rally. 63 The Democrats tried to still the old charges, upon which the Americans were now capitalizing, that immigrants were receiving citizenship and the right to vote in illegal ways. 64 The Democratic state central committee therefore called upon the American party to meet with it and arbitrate the matter. 65 The offer was refused. 66 Then the Democrats called upon "distinguished members" of the bar, like Benjamin and George Eustis, to give their opinions on the requirements for citizenship and voting. 67 But the embarrassment suffered by Democrats

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62 New Orleans Delta, June 20, 1855.
63 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 3, 1855.
64 New Orleans Crescent, Oct. 27, 1855; New Orleans Bee, Nov. 5, 1855. The Bee claimed eleven hundred and fifty-four immigrants had been naturalized between July and Nov. 4. See New Orleans Bee, Nov. 5, 1855.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., Oct. 5, 1855.
in Louisiana over this matter was more than counterbalanced by the news received in New Orleans in early June that the Louisiana delegation to the American Party's national convention had been expelled because they were Catholics.68 This action almost wrecked the Louisiana Americans.69 In an election held to decide a judgeship, the Democratic candidate carried New Orleans.70 But by the middle of July the party was intact again,71 with a Catholic (Charles Derbigny) heading its ticket.72 This strange situation (a Catholic leading a Know-Nothing organization) gave the True Delta the evident pleasure of helping to publicize a party of "Genuine Americans," who were against Catholics.73 Something of a counterweight to this irritant for the Americans was another pamphlet by Gayarre, who said the Whigs were dead and the Democrats wrecked. Completely divorcing himself from Jackson's party at this moment, the former Democrat in effect passed the former Whig Benjamin going in

68 Ibid., June 24, 1855.
69 New Orleans Bee, June 19, 1855.
70 New Orleans Crescent, July 12, 1854.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.; New Orleans Bee, July 7, 1855.
the opposite direction. 74

Two of the Courier's principal tasks were to unite the Democrats and to induce Old-Line Whigs to join the newspaper's party. 75 Both efforts were at least partially successful. Democratic compliments of their old opponents became so ardent and numerous that they embarrassed the Bee. "For the sake of common decency and common consist­ency," protested the now American daily, let the remnants of the whig party slumber in peace without awaking them to the painful humiliation of receiving and enduring Demo­cratic compliments." 76 At the end of the campaign many former Whigs had crossed over into the Democratic camp. 77 One of these was Duncan F. Kenner, leading Whig in the Louisiana legislature. 78

But if the Courier stressed harmony and appeasement when it spoke of Democrats and Whigs, it did not speak in the same manner when it referred to its present opponents. It led the New Orleans Democratic press in striking hard

74 Ibid., Sept. 25, 1855. See below 191-192.
75 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 15, 1855; New Orleans Orleanian, Oct. 12, 1855.
76 New Orleans Bee, July 21, 1855.
77 New Orleans Crescent, May 12, 1856.
78 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Aug. 16, 1855.
and often at the American Party, employing terms like "midnight assassins" and "dark lanterns" to describe them.\footnote{New Orleans \textit{Bee}, Sept. 13, 1855; New Orleans \textit{Crescent}, Sept. 6, 1855.}

Toward the end of the campaign a battle of words began between the \textit{Crescent} and the \textit{Courier}. The \textit{Crescent} originated it by calling on its party to withstand foreign "visitors" from out of town on election day. In making this appeal the American paper claimed it was attempting to maintain the purity of the ballot box.\footnote{New Orleans \textit{Crescent}, Oct. 27, 1855.} The \textit{Courier}, on the other hand, said the true object was fraud and riot.\footnote{New Orleans \textit{Louisiana Courier}, Oct. 29, 1855.} Another charge against the Americans appeared in the \textit{Orleanian}. It claimed that the Know-Nothings were planning to carry the elections even if they had to employ mob rule to do it.\footnote{New Orleans \textit{Orleanian}, Sept. 18, 1855.} This prediction seemed to be on the way to realization when on the night before election riotous mobs roamed the streets of New Orleans.\footnote{New Orleans \textit{Picayune}, Nov. 8, 1855.}

The results of the election were hardly surprising. The Democrats carried off the majority of the state offices.
contended for. Wickliffe, Taylor, and Morse all won. 84

In New Orleans the Americans led in almost every case. 85

There were violences again at the New Orleans polling places. 86 The most notable instances occurred in the seventh and ninth precincts of the Third District, where ballot boxes were destroyed after an unofficial count had given Wickliffe and John M. Bell, Democratic candidate for sheriff, the most votes. 87 Bell claimed victory in both precincts and in the whole city and went to court. 88 Benjamin was his attorney. Eventually, after a preliminary ruling against him, Bell's suit was successful in the Louisiana Supreme Court. 90 Two of the election commissioners received jail sentences for contempt of

84 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 13, 1855.
85 Ibid.
86 New Orleans Delta, Nov. 6, 1855.
87 New Orleans Crescent, Nov. 8, 1855; New Orleans Delta, Nov. 9, 1855.
88 New Orleans Crescent, Nov. 10, 1855.
89 Ibid., Nov. 11, 1855.
The Democratic party was undoubtedly united one day during the early part of 1856. On February 9 of that year Clark Mills' statue of Andrew Jackson was dedicated with elaborate ceremony. The unity displayed in honoring the expired General, however, was belied by the actions of the True Delta and its candidate Taylor in the late campaign. Taylor kept very quiet throughout most of the canvass. The True Delta wound up its campaign with specific praise only for Taylor and Soule. By December 11 the newspaper criticized the incoming Democratic administration it supposedly had just helped elect. In February it was hitting at "sculking Democratic cabals" and professing its "independence."

Slidell took little part in the gubernatorial campaign of his state. But La Sere was in charge and he was

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91 New Orleans Crescent, Nov. 19, 1855.
92 New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 9, 1856.
93 New Orleans Bee, Sept. 24, 1855.
94 New Orleans True Delta, Nov. 4, 1855.
95 Ibid., Dec. 11, 1855.
96 Ibid., Feb. 1, 1856.
Slidell's chief aid. Except for his quick trip home from Congress in January to insure his election, Slidell evidently remained close to Washington.

By now some favorable appraisals of his value had appeared in various places. In June, 1854, Albert Gallatin Brown, Senator from Mississippi, had described Slidell as "a bold, independent man," who was "as far above a mean or little thing as the stars are above the clouds of the field." Upon Slidell's return from Louisiana in January, the Portsmouth, Virginia, Transcript called him a "proud, high-toned, fearless Senator, and an amiable gentleman." The Picayune's Washington correspondent, as a rule hardly a particularly friendly source, agreed that Slidell's work and attitude had earned "the confidence of his associates, who rely upon his judgment and legislative tact as much as upon his ability and integrity."

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100 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 13, 1855.
101 New Orleans Picayune, Sept. 5, 1854.
Slidell's labors in the Thirty-Third Congress's second session were confined more or less to routine and minor matters. The Congress itself was hardly outstanding. The Picayune correspondent called it a do-nothing Congress, which performed most of its work in the last forty-eight hours of its existence. Slidell voted for the bill for the General Armstrong claimants, which passed, then was recalled upon reconsideration by Benjamin and laid on the table. The Senate gave $300,000 for dredging the Mississippi river's mouths but the bill did not become law. Slidell showed his usual regard for details. By February, he had mastered the Senate's rules to the extent that could give advice on procedure. He introduced a resolution that the President Pro Tem in the Senate be authorized to fill vacancies in Senate committees or reduce other committees to their usual number. Another bill of the same type permitted present standing committees to remain in a new session of the Senate as they had been in the one previous. Slidell was engaged also in some unspeci-

102 Ibid., Mar. 2, 11, 14, 1855.
103 Globe, 33 Cong. 2 Sess., 761.
104 New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 7, 1855.
105 Globe, 33 Cong. 2 Sess., 984.
106 Ibid., 20.
107 Ibid., 4.
fied business relating to Perry's Japanese expedition and treaty. 108 He reported from the committees of which he was a member. One of these was a report of fifty-nine pages from the Roads and Canals committee. It sought to improve navigation at the falls of the Ohio river by building a canal about the obstructions. It provided for the use of the power which would be generated by the project. A Federal arsenal would be constructed. The canal would charge tolls to an amount not exceeding the cost of upkeep. 109

For Louisiana Slidell procured passage of several acts. The Proctor's Landing military defenses bill became law February 24, 1855. 110 To the Civil Diplomatic bill he attached an amendment which increased the salary of clerks at the New Orleans mint from $1,500 to $1,800 a year. 111 Another amendment he added to the same act appropriated funds to repair the New Orleans mint. 112 An independent bill for Louisiana's welfare changed the design...

108 Ibid., 8, 15.
109 Senate Reports of Committees, No. 545, 33 Cong. 2 Sess.
111 Ibid., 1121-22.
112 Ibid., 1122-23.
of the New Orleans customhouse. It passed in February. It provided that iron be substituted for marble in part of the superstructure of the building. The reason given for the alteration was that there was need to lighten the load on the foundation, which had sunk somewhat in the comparatively soft soil of the Mississippi delta area.\(^{113}\) Slidell also asked for the results of a survey of the Red River, which eventually became the basis for a bill.\(^{114}\)

Moving in a wider sphere and yet in harmony with his state's interest was a petition Slidell presented advocating that Americans abroad have the privilege of practicing their religion and burying their dead according to the dictates of their conscience.\(^{115}\) The petition originated in a Louisiana Baptist State convention.\(^{116}\) Another measure under the same heading dealt with examination of applicants for the Army medical staff. This asked that the entire United States receive facilities equivalent to that prevailing in the Atlantic states.\(^{117}\)


\(^{114}\) *Ibid.*, 783.


\(^{116}\) *New Orleans Orleanian*, Dec. 24, 1854.

\(^{117}\) *Globe*, 33 Cong. 2 Sess., 622.
Committee on Commerce of the Senate be instructed to see what legislation was necessary to prevent a conflict between the laws of the several states in reference to pilotage. 118

Two of the many other bills 119 of sundry nature for which Slidell exhibited special interest were meaningful in relation to an important issue in Slidell's later political life. Both were land bills. In one Slidell refused to vote to permit John Erwin to keep his lands in Bastrop, Louisiana, which Erwin claimed merely on the fact that he had settled and improved them. 120 In the other proposal, which involved purchasers of swamplands, Slidell advocated that the government exert its "moral influence" in favor of the first purchaser of its land with doubtful titles. 121

Slidell's close scrutiny of money bills showed in at least three cases worthy of mention. He voted against granting railroads three years to pay duty on imported steel. The measure passed after a spirited debate. 122 He opposed the majority will of his own Committee on Foreign

118 Ibid., 105.
119 Ibid., 920, 924, 1034, 1051, 1070, 1107.
120 Ibid., 768.
121 Ibid., 968.
122 Ibid., 886.
Relations that the Hudson Bay Company be paid $300,000 as compensation for land titles. The bill was to satisfy the treaty of June 15, 1846, with Great Britain. Slidell's objection, according to his statement to his colleagues, rested on a conviction that the titles to the land were doubtful.\textsuperscript{123} The third measure relating to appropriations cost Slidell more energy on the floor than any other bill that session. It proposed to reimburse Captain Philip F. Voorhies for meals he had furnished United States diplomatic agents to various quarters of the globe. Slidell said he hated to oppose the bill, but there were too many of the type appearing during the meeting. The practice of naval commanders refusing to accept money from traveling diplomats and then requesting relief from Congress should be stopped. Slidell then mentioned that Voorhies had been court-martialed. When other Senators objected to bringing the character of the claimant into the matter, Slidell countered that in his opinion the naval commander was making "a job out of this business." Lewis Cass rose to say a few words in behalf of Slidell's sentiments. When he had finished, Slidell returned to call attention to the fact that he, Slidell, was an experienced diplomat and would be "grossly insulted" if anyone had

\textsuperscript{123}\textit{Ibid.}, 1094.
asked Congress to pay his expenses. After some discussion as to whether there were precedents, in which Slidell revealed a grasp of intricate details, the bill was tabled, 29-15.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., 761-62.
CHAPTER VII

THE THIRTY-FOURTH CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

If the Congressional session of 1854-1855 was comparatively quiet for both Slidell and the United States, the next meeting of the legislative body, which began in December, 1855, produced excitement equal or superior to that of two years previous.

Historians would probably place the Kansas bill, introduced at this time by Douglas, as one of the great producers of turmoil inside and outside Congress. Two factions in Kansas — one representing slavery and the other free-soil — competed violently with each other for control of their government. Pierce requested a law to insure orderly elections in Kansas for the framing of a constitution. On February 13, 1856, he issued a proclamation against violences in the Territory. Within Congress two bills opposed each other. One was introduced by Douglas. It provided for Kansas's entry into the Union when its population was large enough. The other, authored

1 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Mar. 21, 1856.
2 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 28, 1856; New Orleans True Delta, Sept. 7, 1856.
3 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 3, 1856; New Orleans Crescent, Feb. 21, 1856; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 419-23.
by Seward, would have permitted the Territory to become a state immediately and in accordance with the laws passed by the illegal free-soil Topeka convention. The debate soon became warm and at times abusive.  

One of the most vituperative speeches delivered during the debates on the Kansas bill was that of Charles Sumner of Massachusetts which soon bore the title, "The Crime against Kansas." Sumner's references to Senator Butler of South Carolina during this oration earned him a caning at the hands of Representative Preston Brooks of Butler's state.  

The Kansas question was, generally speaking, of the greatest importance in the future of Slidell, Louisiana, and the South. Slidell, therefore, fought the efforts of the opposition to substitute Seward's bill for Douglas's. He showed he had not changed his opinion of two years previous when he voted against a resolution to deprive

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4 New Orleans Picayune, July 10, 1856.  
5 Craven, Growth of Southern Nationalism, 223.  
6 New Orleans Crescent, May 29, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 6, 1856.  
7 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 14, July 2, 11, 1856.  
8 See above, p. 59.
Kansas foreign-born of their right to vote when they filed their declaration to become citizens. They voted for the successful Douglas measure when it left the Senate to die in the House. When the day of adjournment (August 18) arrived, the Free-Soil majority in the House had placed an "unnatural" amendment to the appropriation bill for the army. This called for a free state of Kansas. Its rejection left American ground forces without funds. Pierce had to recall Congress into a special session. Slidell was among the Senators on the committee of conference regarding the measure. During the debate on August 16, 1856, a statement of Hamilton Fish of New York gave Slidell an opportunity to show his opinion of the tactics being employed by his opponents. Fish cautioned Senators to vote lest the army appropriations be lost. Slidell retorted that if Fish's remarks were "intended to be a threat," he, for one, would state that he "only regretted that the same

9New Orleans Picayune, July 10, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 10, 1856.

10Globe, 34 Cong. 1, Sess., 1539; New Orleans Picayune, July 10, 1856.

11New Orleans Crescent, Aug. 26, 1856.

12Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 2209.
provisions have not been affixed to every appropriation bill sent from the House." The sooner, Slidell continued, the issue over the "revolutionary" measure was settled, the better he would feel. Fish hastened to deny he was threatening the Senate.

More embarrassing, certainly, to Slidell was the connection of his name with the caning of Sumner by Brooks. On the very eve of the Cincinnati convention of his party Slidell was forced to defend himself from at least inferences that he had helped along a "plot" to degrade Sumner with a public whipping.

The facts surrounding the matter demanded an explanation from Slidell. The specific accusation, which Sumner had made before a committee of the House of Representatives, was that when he recovered consciousness, he saw Slidell standing in the ante-room of the Senate and that Slidell had "retreated." The charge had been picked up by the Baltimore Sun. Sumner and Slidell were not strangers.

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13Ibid., 2209-10.
14Ibid., 2210.
15Ibid., 1304-1305.
16New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 5, 1856.
and Sumner had performed a service for Slidell's family by defending Matthew C. Perry at Saratoga.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, Slidell had refused to meet Sumner while staying at the same hotel with him.\textsuperscript{18}

Accordingly, Slidell began his address by stating that its purpose was to destroy the false impression he felt Sumner was trying to create.\textsuperscript{19} He would disregard the motives involved and confine his words to explaining his own position.

Proceeding then to his version of what happened, Slidell told of his movements from the moment he heard of Brooks's assault until the time he "retreated." He said he was in the anteroom of the Senate with Douglas, Benjamin Fitzpatrick of Alabama, and J. Glancy Jones of Pennsylvania and engaged in a conversation of "an interesting character." A messenger rushed in and announced that someone was coming Sumner. "We heard this remark," continued Slidell, "without any particular emotion; for my part I had none. I am not disposed to participate in broils of any kind." Some moments later with the arrival of another person, Slidell said, he heard Brooks's

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Haynes, \textit{Charles Sumner}, 74.
\item \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess.}, 1304.
\end{itemize}
name mentioned for the first time. The action, Slidell learned, was over. Now, Slidell said, he felt concern. This was no "ordinary scuffle." He went into the Senate chamber. There he saw a large group about the prostrate Sumner. Slidell said he asked a few questions and returned to the anteroom and resumed his interesting conversation. Much later, he continued, he decided to leave the building. He approached the Senate reception room. There he met Sumner, his face bloody, being supported by two men who were strangers to Slidell. Now, Slidell pointed out to his colleagues, he was in the way. He did not like such scenes. He had not spoken to Sumner in two years and therefore could think of no reason why he should offer condolences. Therefore, he said, he sought another exit door. He would not, he repeated, go into motives but he was certain the Sun's article and Sumner's testimony were "calculated" to give a spurious interpretation of the event for public consumption. Slidell said he had had no previous knowledge of Brooks's intentions and, he concluded, he had had no contact with Sumner's assailant before or since the occurrence. 20

Douglas followed Slidell to corroborate the

20 Ibid., 1304-1305.
Louisianian's statements. He and Robert Toombs of Georgia, who followed Douglas on the floor, both denied being at Brooks's side during his encounter with Sumner and in any way connected with the action involved.\textsuperscript{21}

The address was one of the rare formal speeches Slidell delivered during his career as a Senator. But it was hardly the only departure during the session from his usual reluctance to make floor speeches. A number of appropriation bills, including one he led to passage over Pierce's veto, a host of minor bills, and an able defense of Matthew C. Perry testified to a busy and successful Slidell, who in his third year as a Senator was beginning to emerge as a leading member of his party.

The defense of Perry was a heated affair. Perry was placed under charges that the Naval Board which he headed was guilty of tyrannous and unfair actions in its decisions against its fellow officers of the navy.\textsuperscript{22} The board was set up by Congress in June, 1855. It sat in judgment on every officer in the service suspected of being unfit or incompetent. It had the power to recommend removal or retirement from the active rolls of those whom it

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 1305-1306.

\textsuperscript{22}New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 19, 1856; New Orleans Picayune, June 9, 1855.
felt were detrimental to the good of the service.\textsuperscript{23}
Naturally the board's labors were hardly of the kind to assure
popularity for its members. The protests of its victims
were bound to reach Congress. In the Senate several
memorials appeared hitting the Retiring Board "for con­
founding the innocent with the guilty" in its recommenda­
tions.\textsuperscript{24} Two champions of ousted naval officers appeared,
in the persons of Mason of Virginia and Iverson of Georgia.
Mason's interest said the correspondent of the \textit{Bee}, origi­
nated when the board retired his brother.\textsuperscript{25} Iverson
assailed the board in "very harsh terms" and introduced a
resolution that a commission be appointed to summon before
it members of the board "for examination of their recent
doings, the evidence they examined, and reasons for their
action in dropping certain officers."\textsuperscript{26} Both Senators were
given aid from Hale of New Hampshire, who, said the
\textit{Picayune}'s correspondent, was attempting to make political

\textsuperscript{23}New Orleans Picayune, June 9, 1855; Sears, \textit{John Slidell}, 125.
\textsuperscript{24}New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 19, 1856.
\textsuperscript{25}New Orleans Bee, Feb. 23, 1856.
\textsuperscript{26}Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 785-86; New Orleans
Louisiana Courier, Apr. 23, 1856.
capital at the expense of the administration.\footnote{New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 24, 1856.} Iverson's address was given on March 31, 1856.\footnote{Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., Supplement, 311.} When he had finished, Slidell rose to answer him.

The Slidell, delivering the rebuttal to Iverson's claims was not the usual model of diplomatic suavity and courtesy but a hard-hitting attorney for the defense. His opening remarks, therefore, were directed at the judgment and fairness of the last speaker on the floor. Slidell was now a member of the Committee on Naval Affairs.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} Consequently, he could state with some show of authority, therefore, that Iverson's proposal would "rebuke a Senate standing committee."\footnote{Ibid., Supplement 314.} Indeed, he continued, Iverson's speech showed the Georgian up as a person "least able" to question members of the navy board in a fair and impartial hearing. "God save the poor naval board," exclaimed Slidell, "if they were placed before such a tribunal as they are promised in the person of the Senator from Georgia and those who think with him."\footnote{Ibid.}
Next, Slidell sought to destroy Iverson's most dangerous evidence, which was, that Perry in a letter to one of the discharged naval officers, Foxhall A. Parker, Jr., had said he hoped "the time will come when that monstrous injustice that had been done to him (Parker) . . . and others would be corrected." This intelligence had appeared in a communication to the New York Herald from a certain Lieutenant Bartlett, another retired officer. Slidell in answer to this letter now denied that Bartlett had quoted Perry correctly. The unwilling Iverson was forced to read the letter to the Herald, after he had denied he had a copy on hand. When Iverson sat down, Slidell immediately read Perry's original letter, which Parker had sent to Mallory in protest against the Bartlett version. The pertinent last section was quite dissimilar to that published in the New York newspaper. Slidell now had a good foundation to proceed further in his rebuttal. He pointed out that although Perry had reluctantly served on the board, he had nevertheless approved of seventy-five percent of the decisions reached. Moreover, the great preponderance of the findings were unanimous. Finally, the ultimate decision

32 Ibid., Supplement, 311.
33 Ibid., Supplement, 314.
rested with the President, who could correct errors in judgment. 34

Next Slidell turned to the reasons why the board came into existence. He had voted for its creation, he said, and he had approved of its members. He had agreed with its proceedings and findings. His judgments, he continued, were based on the conditions then existing in the navy when the board began its labors. The service at that time, Slidell recalled, was what generally resulted from twenty years of lax administration. Drunkenness, insubordination, inefficiency, and dead weight at the top of the service’s ranks were features that for decades had begged for the kind of action the board had produced. Some of the navy’s officers were “skulks,” experts at remaining on shore while able and willing sea commanders waited until they were ready for retirement before receiving a promotion to command rank. So, said Slidell, the board had only to ask the senior officers of the navy for the information it needed to perform its functions. Furthermore, to insure against injustices its members had carefully perused personnel records. No minutes of the meetings were kept, Slidell continued, because over Slidell’s objections, Congress had decided against open

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34 Ibid., Supplement, 314-15.
hearings. Injustices in a few cases were not unlikely, he admitted. He knew of one instance in which the board permitted an officer's age to blind it to his years of honorable service. There were probably other cases of like nature. But, Slidell said in conclusion, it were better that the navy be disbanded before it returned to its state of two years previous.35

The proponents of the measure did not relax their efforts in its behalf.36 Eventually they pushed Slidell into the extreme statement that Bartlett and the Herald were vicious purveyors of lies.37 Then, as if on second thought, Slidell apologized for having participated in the debates, claiming that the mention of Perry's name had brought his appearance on the floor.38

An amendment to the law which created the naval board passed on July 15, 1856. It gave the President power to review the board's findings and correct any abuses which had resulted from them. Slidell was not recorded as present for the poll. Benjamin voted in the affirmative.39

35Ibid., Supplement, 315-16.
36Ibid., Supplement, 315-16.
37Ibid., Supplement, 320-24.
38Ibid., Supplement, 324.
39Ibid., 1639.
The other outstanding efforts of Slidell this session dealt with improving Louisiana's welfare. One bill for such purpose passed over Pierce's veto. This was the proposal Slidell introduced on March 17, 1856, for the third time. It provided for an appropriation of $300,000 for removing obstacles and $330,000 for "continuing the improvement" at the Mississippi river's mouths.\textsuperscript{40} Eventually, the measure was reduced to one amendment of $330,000 for removing obstructions at the river's end, at which time, May 13, 1856, it passed.\textsuperscript{41} It returned with a Pierce veto attached to it.\textsuperscript{42}

Slidell brought up the measure for overriding the President's action on June 30 and July 7, 1856.\textsuperscript{43} When he did so, his way was already prepared for him by Benjamin, who on May 22 accused the President of inconsistency. The last time the measure was before Pierce, observed Benjamin, the President had vetoed it because it was part

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 558, 665-66.
\item \textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 1201.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 1321.
\item \textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 1507, 1542.
\end{itemize}
of an "omnibus" bill which contained both good and bad projects. Now, continued the Louisiana Senator, Pierce's reason for the same action was that any system of internal improvements was unconstitutional, no matter where it was, a statement, said Benjamin, that was a clear denial of national internal improvements. 44

Slidell, accordingly, followed along the lines his colleague had laid out. He said he agreed with the President's views regarding the "omnibus" scheme. He had voted for it, Slidell confessed, strictly from a selfish outlook, and he recognized the Chief Executive's duty to take the contrary national viewpoint. However, continued Slidell, he had felt certain that in view of the message which accompanied the veto of the "omnibus" bill, Pierce would sign the single bill now up for reconsideration. If Slidell had known Pierce's present thoughts on the matter, he would never, he told his colleagues, have reintroduced it. However, he had done so in the belief that the measure was constitutional. The New Orleans navy yard awaited construction. Its site was already purchased. But Congress, stated Slidell, would grant no more money

44New Orleans Crescent, May 29, 1856.
because of the bars of the Mississippi's mouths. As for Pierce's idea for Louisiana to levy tolls, Slidell was convinced it was constitutionally impossible. His state, he insisted, did not have such power. The act admitting Louisiana as a state (April 8, 1812) made the Mississippi a free highway. The right to levy duties, therefore, in Slidell's opinion, needed common consent of all the states. The conclusion was clear and undeniable to him: "the mouths of the Mississippi can only be deepened by the action of the General Government." Finally, Slidell denied the President's "slur" that the Louisianian's bill was part of a general log-rolling scheme. He would vote on every internal improvement bill, he said, on its merits alone.

What Slidell and Pierce were probably referring to was the fact that Cass was aiding Slidell— he spoke in favor of overriding the veto when Slidell sat down — in his fight and at the same time seeking money for deepening the St. Clair Flats in Michigan.

The vote on the measure was 31-12. This was easily

45 *Globe*, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1542-43.
48 *New Orleans Crescent*, Mar. 28, 1856.
two-thirds of the members present. But immediately after
the count opponents pointed out that thirty-one votes were
not two-thirds of the entire Senate personnel. Benjamin
bore the burden of rebuttal in the debate which followed. The chair ruled in Benjamin's favor and the majority of
the members on hand sustained the decision, 34-7.

Another important bill Slidell introduced for the
betterment of Louisiana's economic life appeared June 26,
1856, in the Senate. It was in the form of a joint resolu-
tion, prepared under the direction of the Secretary of the
Treasury, which proposed an appropriation of $15,000 for
the purchase from the world's best sources of a fresh
stock of sugar cane to be given to Louisiana -- and other,
if any -- sugar growers. Another provision of the bill
permitted steamers carrying sugar cane seed to proceed
directly to plantations without inspection by customs
officials at ports of entry. In introducing the measure

49 Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1544.
50 Ibid., 1544-48.
51 Ibid., 1548-50.
52 Ibid., 1550.
53 Ibid., 1485-86; New Orleans Louisiana Courier
July 4, 1856.
Slidell included two letters. One was from D. Jay Brown of the Patent Office, who gave details on why Louisiana sugar cane was in such a sad state and the localities where the best cuttings could be procured. The other came from Secretary of the Navy J. C. Dobbin, who freely offered the use of his ships to the project.

Slidell had to go to the floor again for the bill on August 14, 1856. At that time Hunter of Virginia tried to slash $50,000 from the House bill, which had placed Slidell's proposal in a $75,000 appropriation to procure other kinds of seed as well. Slidell pointed out to Hunter that the Louisiana seed cane would only use up $20,000 of the money allotted. Moreover, his bill would cut the price of sugar, grown exorbitant because of crop shortages.

To Iverson's request as to where in the Constitution was there authority to furnish Louisiana planters with free seed cane, Slidell found a precedent in previous distributions of seed corn. Slidell triumphed in this instance when the amendment failed.

When Pierce vetoed the Mississippi river appropria-

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54 Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1485-86.
55 Ibid., 1485.
56 Ibid., 2113-14.
tion, Louisiana already had received $636,000 of a total of $925,000 already passed by the Senate. Obviously, the Louisiana delegation to the Senate had not been idle that session. The Red and Atchafalaya rivers and Bayou Lafourche all received Federal money for improvement of their channels. Bayou Lafourche had been waiting for this action since 1814, when Andrew Jackson put down obstructions in its channel during the British invasion.

Louisiana railroads at last received their allotments of land. Slidell also introduced a bill for "the final adjudication of question of title to swamp-lands between private claimants and the State of Louisiana." As Slidell explained to the Senate, the Commissioner of the General Land Office felt he had no power to pass upon land claimed by individuals in Louisiana under Spanish grants. The bill therefore gave power to the state's courts to decide. Among the lands thus put under the

57 Ibid., 1321.
58 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 4, 1856.
59 Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1858.
60 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 20, 1856; Globe 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 818.
61 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 20, 1856.
62 Globe, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., Laws, 7. See above, p. 69.
jurisdiction of Louisiana's courts were those known as the "Houmas" grant. The measure passed, but this would not be the last time Congress or Slidell would hear about the Houmas tract.

Two more bills among the many introduced during this session for Slidell's constituents merit mention. One granted bounty land to certain officers and soldiers employed "in the protection of public property at Baton Rouge and during the Florida Indian war." The other carried out the directions of the Louisiana legislature in opposing the grant of patents to the Cyrus McCormick organization.

Slidell also assisted Benjamin (who was sick for awhile) on appropriations for the New Orleans marine hospital and for changing the contract for the mail between New Orleans and San Francisco. At the moment the route went by way of Vera Cruz. Slidell asked that it pass through "some other port on the Gulf of Mexico." He wanted also a stipulation placed in the contract calling for the mail to be delivered in one-third less time than

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63 *Globe*, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1643-44.
64 See below, pp. 436-442.
65 *Globe*, 34 Cong. 1 Sess., 1204, 1288.
present. Seward opposed Slidell's ideas. The exchange between the two men was courteous, although the implications behind the polite utterances were that one of the debaters was lying. Another mail bill sponsored by Benjamin brought Slidell to the floor to seek a cancellation of the contract for mail service between New Orleans and Cairo. The possessor of the present contract, Slidell contended, had not lived up to the agreement in many ways. Slidell was appeased when Jones told him there was a stipulation in the law to make the owners conform. Later, Slidell found that Benjamin was for the bill as it stood. He therefore voted for it. It lost anyway, 13-26.

The measures thus far enumerated in this chapter were probably the most important for Slidell's political career, but they were a small part of a vast array of bills in which he showed interest. He continued to watch for attempts to pass what he considered illegal appropriations.

66 Ibid., 2178-79.
67 Ibid., 2204.
68 Ibid., 2172-76.
69 Ibid., 2176.
70 Ibid., 31, 73, 131, 247, 961, 1072, 1280, 1423, 1436, 1581, 2077.
Therefore he went on record against a bill presented by Hamlin for granting claims by Maine citizens for damages "imputed to the War of 1812." The bill passed but with considerable amendment.\(^7_1\) He spoke with success against paying diplomats an "outfit." As he explained on July 26, 1856, to his colleagues in the Senate, an outfit of $9,000 paid at the beginning of a diplomat's tour of duty encouraged persons to resign after a short stay in office.\(^7_2\) He opposed another measure, which provided extra pay to members of naval expeditions to the Bering straits and China seas.\(^7_3\) He was, however, not completely the miser with regard to the public purse. When his committee on Roads and Canals was abolished, he spoke against cutting off its clerk from his position without notice.\(^7_4\) He put an amendment to the Pensions Appropriation Act for paying pensions to invalids who were wounded while serving on privateers during the War of 1812. The fund had become exhausted, he said, because of payments to persons to whom the original act did not apply. Against the authority

\(^{71}\text{Ibid.}, 964-66.\)
\(^{72}\text{Ibid.}, 1942-43.\)
\(^{73}\text{Ibid.}, 2060-61.\)
\(^{74}\text{Ibid.}, 182.\)
of Hunter of the Committee on Finance he opposed the words of Pearce of Maryland, also of the Committee on Finance. He won when the vote was taken.\textsuperscript{75}

Of his routine measures not directly connected with his state's welfare on economy, little need be said. His attention to details and routine business continued. It was he who introduced the measure by which the Senate adjourned three days so that its members could attend their parties' conventions.\textsuperscript{76} He demonstrated to Seward and the Senate that the New York Senator's recent amendment on a bill was illegal by going through the same motions on another bill and then voting against himself.\textsuperscript{77} He guided to passage a bill that amended existing pilotage laws so that they did not apply to ocean vessels or in cases where they conflicted with state laws.\textsuperscript{78}

Generally speaking, therefore, Louisiana received undoubtedly just compensation that session for the trouble it had taken in returning Slidell to his seat in February, 1855.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 756-57.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 1424.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 2029.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 481, 502.
CHAPTER VIII
SLIDELL Prepares FOR THE CINCINNATI CONVENTION

During the period covered by the preceding two chapters Slidell was engaged in a sustained exchange of letters with Buchanan in London. The tone of the letters was intimate, but nowhere in them appeared information whose disclosure to Slidell would have violated the trust Buchanan's government placed in him.

Politics was, of course, a legitimate subject for discussion and therefore a constant feature in these exchanges. The contents of Slidell's earlier writings stressed how the Pierce administration was losing with the rank and file of the Democratic party. Slidell, therefore, was not surprised or particularly discouraged when the November, 1854, elections resulted in a decisive loss for his party. He wrote:

I always regretted the too easy victory of the last presidential campaign. A strong minority is always necessary to the preservation of harmony and discipline in the ranks of the majority. We wanted the wholesome pressure from without, so indispensable to sound party organization. The lesson is a severe one, but its ultimate effects will be salutary if we have sufficient discretion to make proper use of it. It is fortunate that it did not come late. We have abundant time to clear the wreck and repair damages before the presidential election . . . . 1

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1 Slidell to Buchanan, Oct. 18, 1854. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
Slidell was probably thinking also of what had occurred in Louisiana, where there were many more applicants for office than jobs to fill. Slidell was receiving the blame for the situation from the disappointed office seekers. But to Buchanan he emphasized the guilt of the national administration for his party's present situation. He advised Buchanan to remain in England unless there were insurmountable objects in the minister's remaining. The political atmosphere, he said, was "malarious."

The tone of Buchanan's reply signified in the writer a weariness and reluctance to compete any more for the Presidency. The Washington atmosphere, replied Buchanan, held no especial terrors for him. He would come home, he said, at the end of the period he had consented to serve, which would be during the summer of 1855. Slidell well knew, Buchanan wrote, that he, Buchanan, "had not the remotest idea of again placing" himself as a candidate for the Presidency. He was sixty-three years old. He came from a family whose members rarely lived to a ripe old age. He believed that the selection of "any man of my age as President" would be an "extremely hazardous" risk. Buchanan hoped, therefore, that his friends would

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2 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 18, 20, 1854.

accept his decision as final. 4

Slidell paid little attention to these statements. In January he told Buchanan, "you cannot well be in a better position than you are now." He asked for a statement defending the Compromise of 1854 as necessary because of Northern violations of the Missouri Compromise. Buchanan should also say that barring slaves from the territories would violate the spirit of the Constitution. The idea of having Buchanan make these statements had originated with Cobb, who apparently was now a member of the team backing the Pennsylvanian. 5

Several sides of Slidell's nature came out in the series of personal exchanges that would hardly have been ascertainable in the Louisianian's public statements. In a letter written in September Slidell gave a significant glance at his own character and political creed. The subject was John Forney, Pennsylvania newspaperman and politician. Forney was a member of the Pierce administration whom Pennsylvania newspapers were saying had betrayed Buchanan's confidence. In reply to these accusations Slidell wrote Buchanan:

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Forney is much & justly incensed at the abuse heaped upon him by the Herald & other papers for an alleged betrayal of your confidence in giving currency to your private letters. He has written to you fully explaining all the circumstances. His explanation will I am sure be entirely satisfactory to you as it has been to me. Many, perhaps most persons intimately acquainted with him, give credence to these charges and nothing will relieve him effectually from the odium but a full & hearty endorsement of him by you. Your testimony in his favor, based as it will be on a long intimate acquaintance, will place him where he ought to stand, on high ground. I hope that you will not accuse me of officiously intending counsel, but I feel that under existing circumstances I owe it to our old friendship to express my opinion. Forney is your devoted friend. As the world goes, such men are unfortunately but too rare.

Another Slidell trait, optimism, came out in his letter to Buchanan dated April 3, 1855, in which he congratulated Buchanan on the Ostend Manifesto, blamed Marcy's Presidential ambitions for its failure, and informed the minister that in reply to Slidell's formal note, the President had signified that the Pennsylvanian could resign from his London post. While blaming the administration for the party's precarious state, Slidell also affirmed his faith in the true strength of the Democracy and its chances for victory in 1856.


But the note of optimism had been somewhat tempered by September, 1855, when Slidell wrote Buchanan of a recent experience at Newport. There he had learned to his surprise, he told his friend in London, that the visitors to the resort were paying less attention to the Crimean War than to Kansas troubles and Know-Nothingsm. His chagrin was somewhat softened by his observation that the "more intelligent & wealthy Whigs" seemed to be "heartily ashamed of the results of their truckling to negrophilism & the other cants of the day & will," Slidell thought, "hereafter with great unanimity affiliate with the democracy." But Slidell's mood was generally one of depression and gloom. "Whether they [the Whigs] can now remedy the mischief they have caused," he wrote, "is to my mind extremely doubtful, & trustful as I have been of the perpetuity of the Union, I begin to look forward to a dissolution as a not very remote probability."8

The sentiments thus expressed were repeated in a formal note Slidell wrote about this time to Philadelphia Democrats. Invited to address a political meeting at the Pennsylvania city, Slidell refused because, he said, of

the pressure of business in Congress. However, he told the recipients of his communication, he looked forward with "deep solicitude" to the issues that would decide the approaching Pennsylvania election. The aspect of "our political affairs" were in Slidell's eyes "gloomy." Unless what seemed to him "the predominate (free-soil) sentiment of the North" ceased to exist or decreased in strength, "the days of the Union are numbered." Therefore, the contest in Pennsylvania "must exercise a potent influence for good or for evil upon the future destinies. The battle," Slidell explained, "must be fought by the Democracy of the non-slave holding States." The Keystone State was "the centre of the glorious army of the defenders of the Constitution. If Pennsylvania loses -- where may one hope for victory? For," he concluded, "if you fail, we shall have no other resource than to dissolve a connection which cannot be maintained without honor."

Lewis Cass in another letter to the same addressees expressed similar sentiments.9

Besides drawing their inspiration from the fears a Southern conservative would experience from the

9 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Sept. 25, 1855.
observation of current trends, Slidell's pessimistic expressions fitted in well with his campaign for Buchanan. In his letter of September, 1855, Slidell told his candidate that events of the period made Buchanan's candidacy imperative for the welfare of his party and country. "How different would have been our position," he asserted, had Buchanan been the nominee in 1852. Politics were definitely visible in another communication Slidell sent to a Democratic meeting at Frederick, Maryland, held on October 11, 1855. The target this time was the Know-Nothing party, as successful in Baltimore as in New Orleans. Undoubtedly, therefore, the speech was aimed for the benefit of voters in both Louisiana and Maryland. It contained a reference to the anti-Catholic sentiment of the Know-Nothing party in the North and its advocacy of religious tolerance in Louisiana. Evidently, reminded Slidell, the party's views were hardly consistent. He appealed to the Whigs to remember Talleyrand's dictum that neutrality in times of stress "is worse than a fault, it is almost a crime."

By October 11, 1855, therefore, Slidell's campaign strategy had assumed well-defined aspects. These were the

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stressing of nationalism, concentration on the Old-Line Whigs, and threats of disunion if a party representing only one section of the country got control of the national government. The last of these points was bound to interest the timid and fearful and the business man with investments in the South. Slidell could hardly claim the right to monopolize the idea. 12 But he could feel by the time he was sending his letter of October 11, 1855, that his methods were proving good. He told Buchanan of the "glorious victory in Pennsylvania," which assured "our triumph at the next Presidential election." Every challenge, he wrote, had been met "& the glove thrown down to all the issues combined." The election was "another conclusive proof that it is safer as well as nobler to stand upon principle than to attempt to compromise the disaffected & the timid." Evidently the combination of expediency and pressure of events were bringing Slidell to a position on the leading questions of his day from which there could be no easy retreat. 13

In December, 1855, Slidell decided that the man whom he believed to be the choice of the people and politicians from all over America must end his period of silence.

12 See below, pp. 194-96.

Now was the time, he informed Buchanan, for a declaration from the Pennsylvanian that would undo his previous statements that he was not a candidate for the Presidency. "You should write to some discreet friend or friends a letter," advised Slidell, in which Buchanan would signify that he was obeying a public demand that he stand for office. There need be no concern for or reconciliation with the still ambitious Pierce, whose chances, Slidell believed, were slim. Pierce, continued the Louisianian, had hallucinations that he was popular, but the Senate, whose attitude represented the true state of affairs, regarded him with contempt.¹⁴

The letter Slidell received in reply showed a Buchanan still professing a reluctance to run for office. He had previously consented, he reminded Slidell, merely to refrain from denying his candidacy. He was much too old, he said once more, for both ambition and the Presidency. However, he added, Slidell was not to suppose the job was too difficult for a man of Buchanan's experience and fitness. "Unchangeable firmness, tempered by prudent discretion, would," Buchanan thought, "in a great degree put down the slavery question." In fact, he continued, the question was already settled by Congress's erasing the

line of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes in 1854. However, Buchanan would not campaign on a platform denouncing the Missouri Compromise.

The letter therefore belied its tone of reluctance and resignation by giving Slidell the statement he had requested. It also gave hints as to the high regard with which Buchanan held Slidell: "I have now written to you more freely than to any other friend the real sentiments of my heart." He would not, Buchanan wrote his friend, declare his candidacy "even to you." The statement he made, undoubtedly was good enough for Slidell. The qualities of firmness and tact that Buchanan had stressed were the foundations upon which Slidell had built a political empire in Louisiana.

On January 17, Slidell wrote a brief note of acknowledgement of the receipt of Buchanan's answer. Cobb and Forney, he informed Buchanan, were not in favor of "communicating it to any but the most reliable friends." Cobb liked the message but wanted also a statement that the Missouri Compromise was rejected first by the "Northern opponents" of the Democrats and that "the South would

have been willing to adhere to it if there had been any disposition shown by its enemies to carry out its principles in good faith" instead of invoking it only "to exclude Southern emigration & labor from the territories." Slidell, however, was not too certain that it was expedient right now to write anything for the public eye: "You cannot well be in a better position than you are now, & those who are not satisfied with your antecedents cannot be made so by any explanations."\(^{16}\)

In his next letter at the end of January, Slidell told Buchanan he was soon "to be released from" his "prison house." He assured the candidate that he need have no worries about the Cincinnati convention's adopting a declaration concerning the unconstitutionality of the Missouri Compromise "or any other doctrine to which you cannot fully subscribe." The South would be satisfied with the Georgia platform and the North would not object to it. He believed a sufficient number of state delegations were falling into line for Buchanan to be certain of his fate — "make up your mind, my dear Sir, that the cup

will not be permitted to pass from you & endeavor to bear your cross with as much patience as you can command."

Evidently, the campaign was officially underway.

In February, Slidell gave Buchanan a view of the general political picture then before him. Cass, the candidate of 1848 had already withdrawn from the race.

Now, Slidell assured Buchanan, Cass "gave me distinctly to understand that he would be gratified to see you nominated." He felt "sore" about Douglas, in the writer's opinion a more formidable opponent than Pierce. Slidell could also tell his friend at this time that Bright, who controlled Indiana, would be among Buchanan's friends when his and Hunter's chances were no longer apparent. Another piece of good news was that Maine also was for the Pennsylvanian. Now, concluded Slidell, Buchanan would do well to come home in early May, before the convention

17 Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 30, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society. In spite of this correspondence Buchanan wrote his niece Harriet Lane on February 8, 1856, "I should infer that my Presidential stock is declining in the market. I do not now receive so many love letters on the subject as formerly, always excepting the ever faithful Van Dyke & a few others." Buchanan to Miss Lane, Feb. 8, 1856, Moore (ed.), Works of James Buchanan, X, 41.

and the spring storms for which the North Atlantic was notorious.

By this time Slidell and his candidate had become a source of news for political observers. On February 7, the Crescent printed a report of its Washington correspondent which said in part,

Mr. B. will receive material assistance in the South from the Ajax of the Louisiana Democracy — Senator John Slidell — who is universally regarded as the shrewdest, sharpest and most sagacious politician in the United States. The personal and political relations between these two gentlemen are said to be of the most intimate character.

Buchanan and Slidell as the next Democratic ticket was not an impossibility, said the writer. The correspondent of the Picayune saw Buchanan as an easy victor at Cincinnati. The South and Pennsylvania would put him over. Another reporter called attention to a quick trip Slidell and Bright made to Philadelphia toward the end of February. On March 6 a "Washington Gossip" column reported to its readers that "A United States Senator from Louisiana, known as a warm friend of Mr. Buchanan, has employed a

20 New Orleans Crescent, Feb. 7, 1856.
22 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 6, 1856.
gentleman to write a biography of Pennsylvania's favorite son, to be distributed previous to the assembling of the Cincinnati Convention."23

The opposition were also in motion, with the goal of stopping Buchanan from dominating the convention. Administration spokesmen released notices giving broad hints that recent British-American misunderstandings were the direct result of bungling diplomats. However, the formidability of Buchanan's candidacy was acknowledged and the desertion of Forney and other Democrats from Pierce's side more than suspected.24

In March Buchanan forsook his duties as United States minister to Great Britain. From London he went to Paris for a short visit with Mason.25 Before he left, he probably received Slidell's latest letter, which contained the erroneous information that Douglas could now be numbered among Buchanan's supporters. Slidell also informed the returning diplomat that the Northwest outside

23New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 8, 1856.

24New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Mar. 2, 1856.

25Buchanan to Miss Lane, Mar. 27, 1856, Moore (ed.), Works of James Buchanan, X, 76.
of Illinois was already safe, that two New England states had come over, and that Henry A. Wise wished to make a deal. Wise's agreement would have given Virginia's votes to Buchanan until the Pennsylvanian's strength waned in return for Buchanan's votes thereafter. Slidell said he had made no commitment. Wise, he felt, would "never do for Commander in Chief." Meanwhile, he wrote, he was keeping a sharp eye on the maneuverings of the President's advisers. Not that he was particularly worried about what they might do. Buchanan "stood on such impregnable ground that" his enemies would "scarcely dare attempt" a false move against him. Slidell had also changed his mind on Buchanan's coming home as soon as the Senator had suggested earlier. However, he left the matter for his friend to decide. This letter ended the correspondence across the sea between the two men. The recently retired British minister arrived in New York on April 24, 1856.

While waiting for Buchanan to appear, Slidell wrote a speech dated March 15, for delivery when the Louisiana Democrats met to name delegates to the Cincinnati convention. Its theme was an extenuation of his previously

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26 Slidell to Buchanan, Mar. 11, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

27 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 30, 1856.
expressed sentiments. The South, he wrote, was now suffer-
ing indignities from Republican-controlled states. What,
then, could it expect if it became comparatively weaker and
more defenseless under a Republican President and Congress?
The speeches of Seward, said Slidell, gave a hint of the
South's fate under such a regime. Seward, Slidell pointed
out, was a conservative who "always weighs well his words,
and knows the full import of them." He was "invariably
courteous and respectful in his language and deportment
and carefully "abstained" from saying anything personally
offensive to Southern men." Yet, Slidell continued, Seward's
moderate demeanor made him more dangerous. He also
indicated his party's future plans when he said "I expect
to see this Union stand until there not be a footstep of
a slave impressed upon the soil that it protects." Seward
believed, Slidell concluded, this change would come within
fifteen years. Free-soilers need but wait for a suffici-
ent number of new states to enter the federation.

Another letter Slidell sent to Louisiana about this
time contained a more informal and practical tone than did the message to the Louisiana convention. It was addressed
to James A. McHatton, Louisiana sugar planter, whose name

28 Ibid., Mar. 26, 1856.
would receive national prominence during the Lincoln-Douglas campaign in 1858 for Douglas's seat in the Senate. It read as follows:

Washington
April 11, 1856

My dear Sir:

I have yours of 29 Ulto. I send you the proceedings of the Harrisburg convention. Pray have the resolutions and address inserted in the Advocate. It is now absolutely certain that Buchanan will be by far the strongest man in the convention. No other named man has a chance for a 2/3 vote. Keep on the best possible terms with Douglass' friends -- he may defeat Buchanan by destroying himself. But I have every reason to hope that he will be with us. Pierce will be nowhere after the first ballots. If I prove mistaken in this set me down for an ass. If Virginia go with us, as we have every right to expect, Buchanan is sure to be the nominee.

Yours faithfully
John Slidell

Also during April, 1856, occurred what an observer called a master stroke by Slidell. It was employed to render harmless an accusation of the Pierce forces against Buchanan. In a heated debate between the columns of the Washington Union, spokesman for the administration, and the Philadelphia Pennsylvanian, the Union said Buchanan opposed the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

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29See below, pp. 328-29.

30Slidell to James A. McHatton, Apr. 11, 1856. Benjamin F. Flanders Collection, Archives, Louisiana State University.
Slidell immediately released Buchanan's letter endorsing the bill as the final resolution of the slavery controversy. In reporting the incident, the *Bee*’s correspondent noted the astute manner in which the tables had been turned on Pierce’s backers. “Mr. Pierce,” he said, “with ten thousand Unions to back him could not venture to measure weapons with our Louisiana strategist. He can out-general the whole crowd of petty politicians and smirking syco­phants.”

The big moment before the convention for Buchanan’s followers was undoubtedly their candidate’s homecoming. For awhile it appeared that the Know-Nothing majority in the New York City government, where Buchanan should have received an appropriate welcome upon his arrival in that city, would refuse to appropriate the funds needed to greet the returning minister properly. But by the time the *Arago* docked, the money had been voted. Slidell was on hand to witness his friend’s arrival and the demonstration which followed it. With a number of other especially invited guests he sat down at eight o’clock in the evening of April 24, 1856, to the dinner at Mayor Fernando

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*31 New Orleans Bee*, Apr. 12, 1856.

Wood's residence. By May 20, Buchanan was safely domiciled at his home "Wheatland." Letters from Slidell to Buchanan following this event showed that the Louisianian was not slackening his efforts in his candidate's behalf. He sent Glancy Jones and Cobb to Lancaster to brief Buchanan on the latest Washington developments. He urged the Pennsylvanian to reconcile Douglas by taking a definite stand on the Kansas-Nebraska Act. If Douglas remained adamant, Buchanan's actions would at least "spike his guns." Slidell also insisted — and probably the same reasons — on "a distinct declaration based on personal reasons that on no account would Buchanan "consent to be a candidate for a second term." The impending visit of the Democratic State Committee of Pennsylvania, Slidell suggested, would create an excellent opportunity for publishing this "manifesto." Later the Louisianian urged Buchanan to send to some "discreet" person a letter explaining his position on these two points. "There may be no occasion to

33Ibid., Apr. 30, 1856.
34Ibid., May 22, 28, 1856.
36Ibid.
make use of it," he wrote, "but it should be in discreet hands to be produced if necessary." 37

Obviously, Slidell was a careful politician. But his attempts to anticipate future crises still did not signify he was growing less confident. His letters were always written in an optimistic tone. In one message he related that La Sere had visited Washington "in high spirits & anxious for the fight." Toombs, Isaac Toucey, Tennessee and Maine were all, he said, behind Buchanan. Good reports were coming in from all points of the compass. 38

Then to Wheatland from Slidell came a letter with a tone somewhat different from before. Rumors were passing through the ranks of the politicians jamming their way into Washington on their way to the Cincinnati convention that a Northwest unit for Douglas or Pierce was forming, and that Douglas and Hunter were combining to support Pierce. In any case, Buchanan's candidacy would suffer. Slidell had therefore written his note in great haste preparatory to leave for Cincinnati to marshal his forces. 39


38 Slidell to Buchanan, May 2, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

CHAPTER IX
THE ELECTION OF JAMES BUCHANAN

As January, 1856, approached, Louisiana began to show awareness of the approaching Presidential campaign. Newspaper columns, however, did not reveal any great amount of agitation for individual candidates. In December, 1855, Slidell's name was mentioned for Vice-President and predictions made that in four years he would be in line for the Presidency. But until the state convention met, the official Democratic journal, the Courier, endorsed all the candidates of its party, saying it would accept any "sound" man.

The statewide convention was held at Baton Rouge on March 9, 1856. It sent Soule, Alexander Mouton, Emile La Sere, A. Derbes, Dr. Thomas Cottman, W. W. Pugh, F. W. Hatch, William S. Parham, Alcibiades De Blanc, John L. Lewis, Charles McHatton, and P. A. Morse to represent the state at Cincinnati. Mouton, Cottman, and Soule were leaders of the faction within the Democratic party which

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1 New Orleans Orleanian, Dec. 28, 1855.
2 Ibid., Apr. 30, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 5, 1856.
3 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 1, 1856.
4 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 12, 13, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Mar. 13, 1856.
opposed Slidell. According to newspaper reports, the convention's proceedings were far from harmonious. There was a "violent struggle" between Buchanan and Douglas forces over the seating of the temporary president of the gathering.\(^5\) During the entire meeting Soule spoke often and appeared to some observers to be master of the situation.\(^6\) Delegates went to Cincinnati uninstructed for any candidate. To the Crescent these facts meant a "revolt against the arbitrary rule of Talleyrand and his regents."\(^7\)

At first the Crescent felt that in spite of the strong opposition, "Talleyrand" would win.\(^8\) Later, however, the newspaper changed its mind and led other members of the New Orleans press into accepting what they considered impossible, the idea that Slidell had been unseated as undisputed leader of the Louisiana Democracy.\(^9\) The Bee reported "A Complete Overthrow" of "old fogy and office-holding locofocoism." Perhaps, the journal suggested, the absence of the Senator's "invincible strength of

\(^5\)New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Mar. 11, 1856.
\(^6\)New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 12, 1856.
\(^7\)Ibid., Mar. 11, 1856.
\(^8\)Ibid.
\(^9\)Ibid., Mar. 13, 1856.
will," his "extraordinary self-command," and "his ample means" might have brought about the defeat of his forces. However, the American daily noted, when his name was proposed as a delegate, it was received in silence, while Soule's nomination evoked enthusiastic approval. The Bee believed the delegation to be equally divided between Pierce and Douglas. It wondered what "Achilles" would do now -- stay in his tent and brood? The True Delta exulted even more than the Bee. "Ah, Ah, Ah!" ran its headlines, "Good by John!" "Nobody," continued the journal, "ever supposed that the Honorable John Slidell had any personal popularity because nobody was such a fool as not to know that he had never in his political life performed an act beneficial or creditable to the State, or any act whatever that did not directly enure to his own advantage."

Other accounts of the results of the Democratic meeting were not quite sure that Slidell had suffered a major catastrophe. One reason for such interpretations was recognition by the New Orleans newspapers of Slidell's value to his party. Even the Bee admitted that its

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10 New Orleans Bee, Mar. 15, 1856.
11 New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 18, 1856.
opponents had lost a potent weapon. The Orleanian had once lamented Slidell's entry into the Senate. Now it questioned that conclusions like those of the True Delta were really true. "Without John Slidell, Emile Lasere, and the Exchange alley confraternity," asked the Orleanian, "can it be expected, that, as a party, democracy will ever be successful in the city or state?" How, wondered the journal, could so many Democrats get such pleasure out of their leader's defeat? He was their guide to victory. If his methods were sometimes not of the highest neither were those of his opponents. The main objection, stated the Orleanian, was the control of jobs by a small clique, but lying behind all the discord was the fact that there just were not enough jobs to go around. These views were stated in two articles on successive days. In its second article the former Whig journal quoted an article from the Baton Rouge Advocate, which emphasized the good Slidell had accomplished for his state. This good, the Orleanian agreed, was "more . . . than the efforts of all predecessors combined." "Can it be," concluded the journal, "that in these degenerate days his virtues evoke hostility,

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12 New Orleans Bee, Mar. 15, 1856.
13 See above, p. 34.
14 New Orleans Orleanian, Mar. 15, 16, 1856.
or that like some of Rome's noblest senators, his worth incites to ostracism? Slidell had made a new capture.

The Orleanian could have saved its tears for a situation better suited for them. The Crescent realized the bitter truth on April 23, 1856. The political enemies of Slidell had "halloed" in Baton Rouge, said the journal, "before they were out of the woods" and "rejoiced when they should have mourned." Slidell, admitted the Crescent, had the majority of the delegates in his pocket. Two weeks later the Crescent made the flat prediction that the "vote of Louisiana, in the Democratic National Convention will be cast for Messrs. Buchanan and Slidell!" The state therefore belonged to the "king." The American daily said it would "not object much to the ownership, if" it was "positively certain he would manage the public estate as he manages his own private estate." Then, riches would flow.

In the meantime, the Courier almost completely ignored by the opposition press had insisted that the convention's deliberations had not signified a Slidell defeat. Slidell, averred the Courier, did not control the delegation,

\[15\] Ibid., Mar. 16, 1856.
\[16\] New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 26, 1856.
\[17\] Ibid., May 17, 1856.
but most of them were for Buchanan anyway. A portion were for Douglas and Soule, but even some of these were not necessarily against Slidell and his candidate. Furthermore, the Senator did not wish to be Vice-President and did not believe members of Congress should be delegates to national conventions. His name, accordingly, was withdrawn at the Baton Rouge meeting on the request of a personal friend of his.18

The Courier's remarks concerning the relative standing of the various candidates among members of the delegation Louisiana sent to Cincinnati proved correct. Operating under the unit rule they cast a solid vote for Buchanan. The shocked Bee could hardly believe the dispatch from the convention. It called the actions of the Louisiana delegates "the most shameless illustration of political tergiversation we have ever beheld." The fault, said the Bee, lay in the convention's failure to instruct the delegation.19 The former Old-Line Whig journal would not have been so deceived if it had observed as closely as the Crescent. This paper had noted while the convention was in progress that sitting next to Soule was La Sere. La Sere, admitted the Crescent, was undoubtedly the weaker

18 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Mar. 15, 16, 1856.
19 New Orleans Bee, June 13, 1856.
of the two men in oratorical ability. But in managing a political gathering he was in Louisiana second only to Slidell, the greatest manipulator of all. 20

Along with Louisiana went the majority of the members of the Democratic convention at Cincinnati, where on June 6, 1856, Buchanan received the nomination of his party for President of the United States. 21 Effecting this result required some skillful maneuvering by the Pennsylvanian's backers. A writer of the period stated with regard to this gathering that the "preliminary intriguing has probably never been greater in any national nominating convention than it was at that time." 22 However, he did not go into details. A visitor to Cincinnati on business unconnected with the convention wrote on May 29, 1856, that Pierce and Douglas were combined against Buchanan but that Pennsylvania delegates seemed to "absorb all other" delegations. The zeal of Buchanan's followers appeared to the observer to "surpass all conception" and in his eyes showed their determination to "carry

20 New Orleans Crescent, May 23, 1856.
21 New Orleans Picayune, June 10, 1856.
22 Edward Stanwood, A History of the Presidency (Boston, 1903), 198.
things by storm." Their headquarters were an immense hall on Fourth Street.23

The most important source for Slidell's activities after he arrived in Cincinnati from Washington to forestall Douglas's and Pierce's maneuverings is G. I. Curtis's Life of James Buchanan. Curtis received his information from S. M. Barlow, who was an eye witness to Slidell's movements at this crucial moment of the Senator's life. According to Barlow, Slidell took charge of a desperate situation. Buchanan's friends were disorganized. They only consented to go to Cincinnati at the last moment. The South was antagonistic. Slidell thereupon took over the management of affairs and pushed on to victory.24

Obviously, this relation was colored by the passage of many intervening years. In many ways it was open to question. Slidell was hardly at the convention all the time. It was during this period that he delivered his defense against insinuations that he gave at least silent consent to Brooks's caning of Sumner.25 As

23 New Orleans Picayune, June 11, 1856.


25 See above, pp. 138-40.
preceding pages have shown, the foundations for Buchanan's victory had been laid long before the convention opened. Slidell's confidence showed in his letters to his candidate. They were echoed by his public utterances. On June 3, 1856, he released to the press a prediction that Buchanan would be nominated on the first ballot.

Other Barlow statements may be taken with fewer objections. There were, he wrote Curtis, two headquarters for the Buchanan forces. One was the Burnet House, where Senator Bright and the Washington financier W. W. Corcoran entertained lavishly. The other and more important place was the residence temporarily rented by Barlow. There Slidell, Benjamin, Bayard, and Bright lived. The last three men with the assistance of Wise performed yeoman service. But the leader was the Louisiana Senator, whose "calmness, shrewdness and earnest friendship for Mr. Buchanan," said Barlow, "were recognized by all, and whatever he advised was promptly assented to." Another trait of Slidell unmentioned by Barlow but which appeared on the occasion was prudence. He carried on his person two letters from his candidate, which, he instructed Buchanan

26 See above, pp. 157-76.
27 New Orleans Picayune, June 4, 1856.
28 Curtis, Life of James Buchanan, II, 172.
later, proved potent weapons at strategic moments. One, whose contents Slidell did not specify, was sent by Buchanan to the Senator at the convention. It had proven in Slidell's opinion "of great service with the Southern delegation." The other was the letter of December, 1855, in which Buchanan took his stand on the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Slidell believed it successfully counteracted attempts of Buchanan's opponents in the convention to establish the claim that Slidell's candidate was against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise line.

The Pennsylvania delegation's leadership in packing the galleries and buttonholing delegates undoubtedly played an important part in the Buchanan victory. But the Slidell forces concentrated their attention principally in the organization committees. There every state was equally represented and the administration power at its lowest. The strategy worked out by Buchanan's managers succeeded. Bayard was elected chairman of the committee on credentials. To this committee went the all-important question as to which of the two competing New York delegations -- the Softs, who were for Douglas or the

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29 Slidell to Buchanan, June 14, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
Hards, who would vote for Buchanan -- should be admitted. The majority of the committee decided in favor of the Softs, but Bayard offered a compromise, to divide the New York strength equally between the two factions. This proposal became the minority report of the committee.

When taken to the floor, it was chosen by the delegates over the majority report. Then the Softs accepted this verdict and in so doing gave Buchanan a big boost toward his party's nomination. The Pennsylvanian achieved victory on the seventeenth ballot. 30

Once victory was gained, the next important thing was to heal up the wounds suffered by the rank and file of the defeated. Cheers rang out as one Southern state after another eulogized Douglas in recording their assent to a unanimous approval of Buchanan's nomination. 31 Then, John C. Breckinridge was named for Vice-President. Breckinridge had previously been identified as a leading spirit for Douglas, who was "hard at work for the 'little giant.'" 32 Now Louisiana took the "honor" of nominating

31 New Orleans Picayune, June 10, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 10, 1856.
32 New Orleans Picayune, May 29, 1856.
Breckinridge. 33 How this event came to pass was told by Slidell in a later letter to the new Vice-President candidate. Slidell told Breckinridge that he was induced to urge Breckinridge's candidacy by "the earnest appeal of (William) Richardson of Illinois," Richardson's "bearing & conduct" during the convention, which Slidell thought "most manly & straightforward," and the Louisiana Senator's conviction that Breckinridge's selection was "a graceful & merited compliment to the friends of Douglas." 34

Finally, on June 17, Slidell advised Buchanan to write something appropriate to Pierce for the fine manner in which the President had endorsed the results of the convention's labors. 35

However, in the same letter Slidell wrote that Buchanan might have to denounce the administration, which was considering the withdrawal of troops from Kansas. This in Slidell's opinion might prolong troubles in the Territory and cost Buchanan victory in November. Slidell

33 New Orleans Delta, June 24, 1856.
34 Sears, John Slidell, 124.
blamed Secretary of War Davis for the idea. Cass, he informed Buchanan, had already remonstrated to the President. Slidell said he had asked Douglas also to take a similar action. If their weight failed to tell, Buchanan must break with Pierce — "this might perhaps weaken us somewhat South but it is absolutely necessary to keep the party together at the North."  

Slidell did not congratulate Buchanan at this time. This happy task he delayed performing until the occasion of a personal interview after the election. Barlow again was a witness. He testified that Slidell told Buchanan he had received the Presidency without any embarrassing pledges made during the convention.  

The platform of the Democratic party, indeed, contained few surprises. It reaffirmed the idea of strict construction. It denounced internal improvements. It was for a low tariff. It castigated Know-Nothingism and alien and sedition acts. It endorsed the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It strongly favored the Monroe Doctrine. Its fifth resolution demanded

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36 Ibid.
37 Curtis, Life of James Buchanan, II, 172.
American ascendency in the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{38}

Louisiana observers noted only one important complaint regarding the results of the convention's deliberations, and this was that the filibuster leader Quitman had not received the nomination for Vice-President.\textsuperscript{39}

A footnote to the record of the proceedings at Cincinnati appeared in a report by the correspondent of the Baltimore American. It went as follows:

The course of Mr. Soule in the convention occasioned considerable conversation. He was in his seat every day, but took no part in any of the debates, and was indeed a silent spectator throughout. He took his seat in an obscure position, and never left it but to go out of the hall. So soon as the nomination of Buchanan was effected, there was a general call for him to address the Convention, but he could not be found; and again, when the Vice-President was nominated he left the hall amid cries for a speech from him.

The writer surmised that Soule did not speak because of an agreement among Southerners to remain quiet while permitting the other sections to do the talking.\textsuperscript{40}

Buchanan was not yet President, and he soon had formidable opposition from John C. Fremont of the Republican

\textsuperscript{38}New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 5, 1856.
\textsuperscript{39}New Orleans Delta, June 26, 1856.
\textsuperscript{40}New Orleans Bee, June 20, 1855.
Party and former President Millard Fillmore of the American Party. Features of the campaign from the Democratic standpoint included efforts to raise money and to spread the Democratic gospel in strategic places of the North, the covering up of two unfortunate utterances associated with Buchanan's name, reconciliation of Old-Line Whigs, and the stressing of unity, nationalism, and the danger of catastrophe in case of a free-soil victory.

With regard to the dissemination of arguments for the case of the Democracy, Durant Da Ponte in June was already in New York, preparing to set up the Campaign Democrat, weekly campaign sheet. Da Ponte had but recently been associated with the New Orleans Louisiana Courier. Now he promised that his new enterprise could continue in operation until the close of the campaign, when its last edition would "foot up the majority" given Buchanan and Breckinridge. Apparently this journal proved to be insufficient for the needs of the New York Democracy. In July, Robert S. Walker was attempting to raise money for the purpose of starting a daily. In August the New York

41 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 20, 1856.
42 Slidell to Buchanan, July 17, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
Day Book was offering to print a daily each morning if the party could guarantee three thousand subscribers paid in advance.  

The campaign to capture the sympathy of the Old-Line Whigs also began early. On June 14, Slidell urged Buchanan not to forget to include in his acceptance speech to his party's committee of notification "something agreeable" to the remnants of Henry Clay's old party. On June 22, the Courier expressed its happiness in reporting that when news of Buchanan's victory reached Wheatland, a procession of eight hundred former Whigs called upon the mansion with torches and a band of music. Then they offered their congratulations and promises of support. In July Slidell wrote Buchanan of his disappointment that sickness was slowing down this phase of the campaign.  

Slidell wanted Buchanan to make no public utterances

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43 New Orleans Orleanian, Aug. 17, 1856.

44 Slidell to Buchanan, June 14, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

45 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 22, 1856.

during the campaign. Buchanan accordingly remained at home. However, he did entertain. John V. L. Fruyn of New York was at one of the candidate's receptions. Later, he wrote that he saw Slidell there at the host's elbow. The urbane Louisianian, said Fruyn, was pleasant, sociable, and engaged in an intellectual discussion on a wide variety of subjects.47

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to keep Buchanan completely out of the public eye. First, either he or the editor of the Lancaster Intelligencer, acting without instructions, committed almost a fatal blunder early in the campaign. Thomas Hart Benton, old Jacksonian from Missouri, endorsed Buchanan and the Intelligencer accepted the statement as a sincere expression of Benton's feelings. Repercussions followed immediately. Benton had long been out of favor with the conservatives of his party. From Missouri came word that loyal Buchanan men felt that the newspaper article would strengthen Benton at their expense in the coming August elections in their state. It also came close to causing the loss of the services of Robert Walker, who at the time was attempting to raise the money necessary for the New York Democratic journal Slidell re-

47Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 502.
garded as imperative for the party's success. Walker hated Benton worse than Slidell did. Therefore, Slidell urged his friend to write the proud and sensitive former Secretary of the Treasury at his New York address. Buchanan should insist that Walker visit Wheatland, where a reconciliation might be effected. The Benton incident undoubtedly was a healthy warning to Slidell not to put down his guard. He urged Buchanan to consider carefully whether Francis J. Grund, leader of the Northwest German populace, should be accepted as a member of the Buchanan staff. Slidell did not trust him but conceded that Grund's newly discovered wealth might have rendered him an honest man.

The other slip that originated close to Buchanan was old in origin. In June, there appeared in the Nashville Banner some statements Andrew Jackson had sent to Major William B. Lewis, member of the former President's "Kitchen Cabinet," which seemed to indicate Buchanan lied in 1845 when he denied that in 1825 he thought a "Bargain and Sale" deal existed between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay. Moreover, the Banner's publication seemed to indicate

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49 Ibid.
that in the general's eyes Buchanan displayed a want of moral courage by suggesting the use of the same tactics by Jackson. The apparent originator of this "expose" was Francis P. Blair, another member of Jackson's unofficial body of advisers. 50

Upon hearing of this new turn the campaign was taking, Slidell alerted Buchanan and his party. However, he advised that the necessary answer be delayed. 51 Buchanan replied to the charges on September 8, in a letter to William B. Reed. In it he claimed the story arose from the old President's "misapprehension . . . of as innocent a conversation on the street, on my part, as I ever had with any person." 52 After the campaign was over, Andrew Jackson, adopted son of his namesake, declared Lewis's letters were "mutilated to suit the Fillmore organs." 53

The part of the campaign of the national Democratic party

50 New Orleans Crescent, Aug. 27, 1856; Slidell to Buchanan, July 4, 1856. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.


which stressed unity, nationality, and the horror that would result from a Republican victory could have drawn inspiration from Louisiana, where these features received intense treatment. There the American press adopted a policy of emphasizing the unreliability of the Northern Democracy for Southern trust and the genuineness of the American's party claim to a real and complete national character. The New Orleans Bee told how at a Buchanan meeting in Middletown, Connecticut, the Black Republican motto of "Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Kansas" was changed to read "All the 'Frees' but Fremont." Now, asked the New Orleans journal sarcastically, "Are they not the 'Natural Allies' of the South? Bah!" The Democratic Delta, meanwhile, was outdoing everyone else except the Charleston Mercury in the fight against the control of the government by representatives of only one section of the country. The Delta was


55 New Orleans Bee, Sept. 6, 1856.
suspected by Slidell of being a Soule and Douglas sympathizer. 56 It did speak well of Douglas and cast aspersions on Buchanan's candidacy. 57 Soule, whom Slidell feared and distrusted during the campaign, 58 did little for Buchanan's candidacy. 59 He spent most of the time of the campaign in visiting William Walker in Nicaragua. 60

At any rate, the Delta now urged the end of the Union unless the majority North were willing to give specific guarantees to the minority South. The paper's reputation as fire-eater grew to such an extent that Jefferson Davis later had to make a public denial that he was the author of the Delta's excited columns. 61 Actually, if a later account can be accepted, the originators were the Delta's editor and his assistant Joseph Brenan, a poet in his


57 New Orleans Delta, Aug. 23, Sept. 21, 1856; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 29, 1856.


59 New Orleans Orleanian, Oct. 4, 1856.


61 New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 16, 1857.
spare moments. According to writings of these two men, the South would have been better off outside the Union than in. Then, its peculiar institution, slavery, could begin again to expand in the right direction, southward. The Delta at one point felt sure its campaign was succeeding, when it noted the opinion of James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald that the South was beginning to let Buchanan "slide." The political atmosphere of New Orleans was therefore becoming heavily charged. The development of this condition, however, had not prevented the American Party from carrying New Orleans in summer, 1856. Now, Slidell on September 8 undoubtedly created even more tenseness with a letter he sent to a mass meeting of the Democratic Party of his state. He regretted that his health (Slidell had been sick during the summer) and duties would not

62 Ibid.
63 New Orleans Delta, Aug. 23, Oct. 4, 1856.
64 Ibid., Oct. 11, 1856.
65 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 5, 1856.
permit his attendance. But he assured his fellow Louisianians that with the Whigs coming into the Democratic party Louisiana was "safe." Nevertheless, he warned, the continued ruffianism in New Orleans elections was a blotch on his state's political picture. Slidell then proceeded to praise Fillmore just enough to damn him as unreliable and hopelessly beaten. He asked his constituents to give Buchanan a majority large enough to settle all questions permanently. Finally he made the statement which neutralized the Delta campaign and exploded about the nation: "I do not hesitate to declare that, if Fremont be elected, the Union cannot and ought not to be preserved."

This quotation created a deep impression. The prominent historian and Democrat George Bancroft was shocked and indignant at its substance. Abraham Lincoln employed it for his own uses in his 1856 campaign against Douglas. The Picayune contrasted it with the teachings left behind

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67 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Sept. 9, 1856.


by George Washington on the blessings of unity and called it the "insane ebullition of heated partisanship." The Bee's reaction was more rational and observant. The message, it observed, was at least partly a carefully calculated attempt to terrify the South and Northern conservative elements into voting "right." The Delta, too, noted Slidell's "tolerable share of political prescience." The Senator was, it stated, merely echoing what the Delta had been advocating for weeks. Actually, Slidell's communication was little different in content from the utterances of other prominent Southerners at the time. It also harmonized well with previous statements of his own. Just two months before he had sent a letter to the Tammany Hall Society of New York in place of going there in person. In it he stated that he had to remain in Washington because of Republican tactics in connection with the Kansas bill. Should this

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70 New Orleans Picayune, Oct. 8, 1856.
71 New Orleans Bee, Sept. 26, 1856.
72 New Orleans Delta, Sept. 10, 1856.
73 Craven, Growth of Southern Nationalism, 244.
74 See above, pp. 160-62.
75 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 19, 1856.
bill not pass, he wrote, the Republicans in the House would prove to the American people that they were "determined to prolong a dangerous agitation" for political purposes. Slidell congratulated the New York Democrats for forgetting their differences and uniting at a time when the Union was in danger. The presidential race could, he admitted, be carried without the Empire State's electoral votes. But the victory then would be "incomplete." 76

Finally in the campaign was the matter of money. Money was needed to contract for a portrait of Buchanan by A. G. Powers to be sent to the doubtful New Orleans area. 77 It furnished the means whereby pounds of propaganda material streamed out of Democratic headquarters through the use of techniques approaching those employed by modern mail-order houses. One of these pieces of literature was a pamphlet entitled "The slavery agitation, who commenced it, who can end it?" Forty thousand copies of it were distributed in Louisiana alone. 79

76 Ibid.
78 New Orleans Crescent, Aug. 30, 1856.
79 Ibid., Oct. 2, 1856.
The name of Slidell and money, therefore, were often linked in reports on the campaign's progress. One told of the caucus he held on July 16 for making sure of the "Congressional Assessment." Another said he won the "Wall St. War" against supposedly inexperienced Republicans. He was, according to a third account, strewing money about with a liberal hand. Belmont's money bags were his reputed source of supply. The Washington correspondent of the Crescent told how a traveler from New Orleans called Slidell Louisiana's worshipped "little god." Slidell, moreover, said the visitor to Washington, was about to make sure of his state's vote with his plentiful supply of cash. Years later, the True Delta claimed that the New York Herald had admitted that Pennsylvania went Democratic in October because Belmont and other Democrats succeeded in outspending Thurlow Weed and his associates. More reliable, perhaps, was the report from an observer who thought victory in the Keystone State came

80 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 17, 1856.
81 Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 504.
82 New Orleans Crescent, Sept. 24, 1856.
83 Ibid., Sept. 24, 1856.
84 New Orleans True Delta, Aug. 10, 1861.
from the votes of Germans and Irish, whom he saw transported from outlying places to city courts for purposes of naturalization and enfranchisement. 85

The degree to which money resolved the political contest in Pennsylvania would probably be difficult to ascertain. But that Slidell raised funds to carry this state and that he considered the contest there crucial cannot be denied. It was undoubtedly in Pennsylvania that the "Wall St. victory" counted most. As the Keystone State's contest neared, Slidell changed from optimist to alarmist. On August 12, he thought the world was in good order -- "Everything," he wrote Buchanan, "looks bright & even the croakers are silent." 86 Then disturbing reports began to arrive in Washington. Charles E. Stuart of Michigan confessed on September 18 that if there was any unencumbered money in Washington it had better be spent in Pennsylvania. The party in New York and Michigan might be affected if Buchanan's home state became lost. 87 Another letter warned that if Pennsylvania failed in October, Tennessee and

85 New Orleans Picayune, Oct. 27, 1856.
Kentucky might waver in November. Contrariwise, a victory there might bring the South and the doubtful states elsewhere into the Democratic column. Slidell sent these notes to Buchanan. They reflected, he wrote, his own opinions. Every dollar contributed for Pennsylvania, he said, "would economize ten in New York," where the Democrats were making gains.

Further evidence of the concern of Slidell for money and its use in Pennsylvania existed in the report of mid-September which appeared in the New York Evening Post and was copied in the New Orleans Crescent. It told of invitations dated September 17 and marked "Private and Confidential" which bid the addressee to meet a few of the friends of Buchanan and Breckinridge at Room 220 of the New York Hotel at 7:30 p.m. of the next day. The purpose of the gathering was said to be for "consultation." The Evening Post did not have a representative at the meeting. But it "understood" that the "lion" there was Slidell. He was, however, said the writer of the article, acting more like a hare than the king of beasts by "betraying

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the greatest alarm at the declining fortunes of his friend, Mr. Buchanan." New York, he was supposed to have insisted, had to raise $50,000 at once or Pennsylvania was surely Republican in October. The Evening Post said it was glad about the whole matter and hoped the money was collected and spent for the purpose Slidell intended. Every dollar, the journal felt, meant that many more votes for the Republicans in New York. When the Philadelphia Bulletin heard of the meeting, it expressed surprise at the smallness of the alleged amount. It knew that $1,000,000 had been spent in Maine. The Crescent added only its own surprise over the "tenderness" which Black Republican editors had employed when they handled the reputation of the Louisiana Democrat.

As the Pennsylvania elections grew closer, Slidell became even more gloomy. He made a quick trip to Philadelphia toward the end of September. He returned from there to Washington on October 4. His report to Buchanan stated that the majority anticipated by Pennsylvania leaders amounted to little more than 4,400 votes. This expectation, he

90 New Orleans Crescent, Sept. 30, 1856.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
confessed, did not inspire him with the amount of enthusiasm professed by the Philadelphia Democrats with whom he had consulted. Moreover, he had failed to induce Fillmore's people in New York to insist that their party withdraw from their fusion with Keystone State Republicans. "For the first time since your nomination," he told the Democratic nominee, "I have felt alarmed." 93

Possibly Slidell had tasted too many defeats in his life to expect that he would really succeed this time. At any rate, his fears turned out to be groundless. Pennsylvania in October went Democratic by a good margin. 94 On October 17 he sent congratulations to Buchanan. The Union, he admitted, was safe. New energies should now be expended in making the coming majority as large as possible. Slidell was going to New York to try and heal up the dissension there. He said he would be discreet and refrain from linking Buchanan's name with these activities if doing so would


94 New Orleans Bee, Oct. 18, 1856.
injure the party's chances in November. He felt even better on October 31, when he reported his conviction that the tide was running strong in New York for the Democracy. This time he was more optimistic than the local observers. New York, he believed, would do far better than politicians expected. Only one Congressional district remained split. A footnote of the letter added that the "financial question has been attended to." He had now no doubt of the coming victory. The only question remaining in his mind was whether the victory would or would not be overwhelming.

The election of Buchanan to the Presidency occurred on November 4, 1856. Slidell delayed his congratulations until November 13, because he wished first to get the final verdict from Louisiana. He was therefore happy to report that his state had given an even greater margin to his candidate than he had predicted. The New Orleans area had, unfortunately, not done well at all. On election day groups of mounted "Indians" had galloped through the

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streets as part of a series of acts of terror, which kept frightened foreign-born voters away from the polls. The Courier was raided by a squadron of the inimical New Orleans police. Native Democrats were "thugged." Slidell was not yet quite convinced that these actions reflected the majority will of New Orleans and the surrounding parishes. If there had been "fair" elections held down there, he told Buchanan, Louisiana Democrats would have rolled up a greater margin of victory than the party had achieved in Virginia and Georgia.99

It was a happy moment for both men, candidate and manager, a time for prediction and self-evaluation. Slidell told Buchanan that the next President would not "lie on a bed of roses"; however, Slidell was certain of the electee's ability to "build up and consolidate a sound homogeneous national democracy that will defy the attacks of fanatics north & south." The Senator said he had "as little sympathy with the Rhett school of politicians as with the Know Nothing ruffians of Baltimore & New Orleans."100

98 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 5, 1856; New Orleans Delta, Nov. 5, 1856; New Orleans Crescent, Nov. 13, 1856.


100 Ibid.
An old enemy of Slidell also was indulging in evaluations and prognostications at this time. Under the title, "Mr. Slidell and the President Elect," the New Orleans Bee stated:

The Hon. John Slidell has won the title of the Warwick of America, and deserves to wear it. To him undoubtedly, more than to any other politician in the country, is Mr. Buchanan indebted for his nomination; and to his prodigious, untiring exertions, his shrewdness of calculation, his vast electioneering experience, and his unrivaled tact, does the Sage of Wheatland chiefly owe his election. These facts, the paper claimed, were attested to by the most critical journals which covered the late campaign. Looking ahead, the Bee realized that Slidell would be offered his pick of all the Federal jobs at Buchanan's disposal but that he would not take any. His contributions would be in the field of policy. Now, asked the former Whig daily, what did he stand for? Well, it answered itself, he was until recently classified as an "old fogy" by radicals like Soule and Jefferson Davis. Did his sword rattling in the recent political race signify he had changed? The Bee did not think so. His "letter" to the Louisiana Democracy advocating disunion, the paper felt, "was a skillfully devised ad captandum document, but his whole policy contradicts its sentiments." So, the Bee expected the coming policy to be one devoted to soothing the overwrought nerves and reconciling the often conflict-
ing desires of the various sections of the country.\textsuperscript{101}

Ten days after this article the \textit{Orleanian} praised Emile La Sère for almost the same virtues that made the \textit{Bee} trust Slidell with the nation's keeping. Evidently they were the ones most prized by the community both politicians served.\textsuperscript{102}

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\textsuperscript{101} New Orleans \textit{Bee}, Nov. 19, 1856. \\
\textsuperscript{102} New Orleans \textit{Orleanian}, Nov. 29, 1856.
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CHAPTER X
THE END OF THE PIERCE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE BUCHANAN ADMINISTRATIONS

The Second Session of the Thirty-Fourth Congress in the opinion of political-minded Americans was probably not nearly so important as the probable actions of those who would head and direct the administration which would take office March 4, 1857.

Yet, the legislative work had to be performed and even the alleged guiding genius of the coming regime, Slidell, could not expect to be excused. Not that the session brought forth any historic measure. Its most important act was probably the Senate's negative reaction to the Dallas-Clarendon Convention of October 17, 1856.¹ This agreement sought to define the mutual rights of Great Britain and the United States in the Central American area.² Those opposed to it in the Senate -- and Slidell was included

¹Senate Executive Documents (34 Cong. 2 Sess.), X, 243-48.
²Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York, 1955), 301.
among their number — managed to achieve a virtual rejection by loading the measure for its approval with emasculating amendments.3

Slidell's attitude on the Dallas-Clarendon Convention was in keeping with his past actions and expressed thoughts. He wrote Buchanan that he "could only be induced to give" his "vote for its ratification by the desire to relieve your administration from embarrassment." And not even loyalty could bring him to vote in the affirmative if a certain section in the treaty was not stricken out. This passage, he informed Buchanan, stated that "the contracting parties have the right to impose whatever conditions they may think proper on any or all the States of Central America." To Slidell this clause could serve as a precedent for the nations to do the same to "any other government not strong enough to assert & vindicate its independence." Slidell promised to do his best to remove the passage before Buchanan took office.4

The Washington correspondent of the Crescent stated his belief that the Dallas-Clarendon Convention was a device to combine the United States and Great Britain

3 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Feb. 16, 1857.
against Walker in Nicaragua.\(^5\) Perhaps the same idea inspired Slidell's opposition.

As usual Slidell was busy with routine and minor matters, many of which were carry-overs from previous sessions of Congress.\(^6\)

Legislation for Louisiana constituents included a bill to establish warehouses for use by vessels detained in the quarantine zone on the Mississippi river below New Orleans.\(^7\) The zone had recently been established by Louisiana law.\(^8\)

Also under this category was a bill Benjamin originated as an amendment to the Civil Appropriation bill. Its object was to permit the appointment of another appraiser to the Federal district to which New Orleans belonged.

The proposal concerning the New Orleans customhouse brought on a brief debate, in which Slidell took a part. Hunter wanted to know if the customs officials had asked for another appraiser in New Orleans. Slidell's answer included charges that the nation's second port, New Orleans, was being victimized for the benefit of the


\(^6\)Globe, 34 Cong. 2 Sess., 43, 257, 299, 303, 323, 332, 385, 414, 462, 503, 556, 566, 591, 640, 661, 662, 687, 779, 781, 782, 807, 866, 920, 1100, 1101, 1108, 1109, 1114.

\(^7\)Ibid., 661.

\(^8\)Ibid., 1081.
country's first port, New York. Under the present system, he said, New Orleans had an appraiser only in winter. In summer it was under the direction of the New York custom­house, an indignity, said Slidell, that was not to be endured by his community without complaint. Indeed, Slidell continued, the New Orleans customhouse was subservient to New York in too many ways. The Federal government re­tained officers "confessedly incompetent" in the Southern city. So, three or four clerks from New York were sent down to perform the tasks necessary for the operation of the activity for which these inefficient executives were supposed to be responsible. Consequently, New Orleans merchants complained there was "no independent existence at all in our part of the country." The amendment passed.

Slidell took advantage of another opportunity, which presented itself later, to demonstrate his belief that the Federal government favored New York over New Orleans. The occasion was the introduction of a measure which sought to remit custom dues on goods fire had destroyed in the New York customhouse. Slidell moved an amendment to sub­stitute the words "New Orleans" for the terms "New York."

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9Ibid.
10Ibid.
Besides giving special privilege to New York, he said, the bill favored the imprudent at the expense of the careful importer, who insured his goods. It held out a "premium to the improvident and careless merchant, who exposed himself to bankruptcy by neglecting the ordinary and usual precautions of trade." Slidell's objections came too late in the session to be successful. His amendment failed.

Slidell, as usual, went on record against appropriation bills he did not like. He also continued to demonstrate his interest in foreign affairs. One proposal by Slidell relating to the diplomatic service was out of the ordinary. It seems that the Dutch minister to Washington had refused to testify in a murder trial. Slidell called for the papers in the matter. He said that he wanted to publicize the facts in order to establish a precedent for the future. The victims of his vigilance with regard to private money bills included a naval officer, who wanted to be paid for the rank higher than his own which he had

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11 Ibid., 1113-14.
12 Ibid., 1114.
held without authorization, a scientist on the Perry expedition to the Orient, who wanted extra compensation, and Horatio J. Perry, Soule's secretary and successor as minister at Madrid. Slidell opposed the scientist's claims because, he said, the measure to pay them overlooked the equally worthy claims of other scientists on the trip. He appeared to be a little ashamed of opposing Perry's request for an outfit of \$4,500. But, although he regretted to deprive the almost destitute Perry of the money, Slidell still refused to concur in a measure which, he said, in its present form would cost the government several hundred thousand dollars.

The remainder of Slidell's more conspicuous activities in the Senate during this session consisted of a speech in favor of permitting James Harlan, Iowa Republican, to take his seat and addresses directed against two members of Pierce's cabinet, Postmaster James Campbell and Secretary of State Marcy. In the first of these appearances Slidell

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14Globe, 34 Cong. 2 Sess., 679-81.
15Ibid., 706.
16Ibid., 1029.
17Ibid., 706-707.
18Ibid., 1030.
opposed the majority will of the Judiciary committee. Harlan had been elected by the convention formed by both houses of his state's legislature, but only after the members of the upper house had walked out in protest. The retiring delegation's motives for their action lay in their belief that Harlan had to receive the majority vote of both houses of the Iowa legislature to become Senator. A simple majority of the convention, they claimed, was not sufficient. Outvoted by the other members present in the convention, the delegates from the upper house left the meeting. Slidell, when he took the floor to insure Harlan his seat, said the claims of the Iowa upper house were not valid. It did not matter to him who came from Harlan's state, because, Slidell reminded his colleagues, if Harlan was returned, the Iowans would elect another Black Republican. On the other hand, he said, the principles involved forced his speaking. In his opinion, when the Iowa senators entered the convention they were no longer senators but individual delegates to an independent creation of their legislature. Slidell admitted that he was mostly concerned with the effects of the measure on Louisiana. Louisiana's conventions, he said, were part of her constitution. If the Federal government could

19 Ibid., 287-89
dictate to Iowa in this matter, it would be able also to tamper with Louisiana's laws. Slidell's arguments were ineffectual as far as the Senate was concerned. It declared Harlan's seat vacant.

The castigation of Brown occurred February 27, 1857, following the introduction by Thomas J. Rusk of Texas of an amendment granting the incoming Postmaster General the power to review fines bestowed by the present incumbent, James Campbell. The bill to which Rusk affixed his amendment was for improving the Mississippi river mails. The Texan's proposal followed a eulogy of Campbell by William Bigler of Pennsylvania, who claimed that the retiring official was always actuated by "high, just, and honorable principles." Rusk's and Bigler's efforts may perhaps have brought back to Slidell's memory the occasion of the Kendall trial in New Orleans, when on Campbell's orders Moise was removed from his job as Federal district attorney in Louisiana and branded by implication as an untrustworthy public official. At any rate, Slidell stated now in the

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20 Ibid., 288-89.
21 Ibid., 289.
22 Ibid., Appendix, 304.
23 See above, pp. 117-20.
Senate that he was not against Rusk's bill but wished anyway to "put" his "disclaimer upon the record." He had no intention of making "any particular attack" upon Campbell. He merely wished to say that in his "own experience" he "had reason to know, or to have the firmest conviction, that" Campbell "has not acted upon the principles claimed for him." 24

The attack on Marcy occurred on a day when Slidell entered the Senate after the session had already begun for some time. The measure under discussion was for the creation of a new mission to Persia. Benjamin, in Slidell's absence, had spoken against it, calling it an effort of Marcy to "create a place." Upon learning what was transpiring on the Senate floor, Slidell asked the name of the committee which had reported on the bill. He discovered it had been handled by Finance. Slidell was indignant. There was money involved in the bill but the field of legislature in which the measure belonged, he felt, was foreign relations. The proper committee had therefore, Slidell concluded, been passed by. He regretted this "lack of courtesy in the Administration." Now, he asked, "what good is to be produced by this mission and what

24Globe (34 Cong. 2 Sess.), Appendix, 304.
mischief may result from it? The answers to these ques-
tions, in his opinion, did not put the administration in
a good light. Absolutely no good could come from the
creation of this foreign post, averred Slidell. The pork-
barrel system, he claimed, was entering international
affairs. Moreover, much mischief could result when the
Persian sinecure came into existence. We had no commer-
cial relations with Persia, explained Slidell, and any
occurring in the future could be handled by "ordinary
consular agents." A minister there would spend his time
in idleness. There was even a worse alternative if he
found something with which to occupy himself. Persia was
a buffer between Russian and English possessions. The
otherwise idle American minister might be tempted to amuse
himself by engaging in all sorts of intrigue that might
benefit himself and hurt his country. At any rate, Marcy
had deliberately insulted the committee set up to handle
matters like this. 25

Mason, chairman of Foreign Relations, followed
Slidell. He denied that Marcy had intentionally affronted
the Senate committee. 26 This inspired Slidell to soften
his blows. He now wished his colleagues to know that

26 Ibid., 1021.
he had only the kindest of feeling for Marcy and did not wish to imply any want of character in the Secretary. He merely meant that a mistake had occurred in the State department. He still voted against the bill, however.

It passed anyway.

For Buchanan's inauguration there was a special session. An incident of this short meeting showed the new position of Slidell as compared with his old, when Pierce controlled the government. On March 10, Pugh's resolution to adjourn on the fourteenth sine die ran into an objection from Stuart. Stuart was afraid that the measure could be interpreted as an insult to the new Executive since it would pass before Buchanan informed the Senate that the purposes of the special session had been complied with. Slidell assured him that no insult was intended. This rejoinder failed to quiet the discussion, however. Two days later, therefore, Slidell returned to the floor. He was "authorized to say" that it "would not be disagreeable to the Executive" to fix March 14 as an adjournment

27 Ibid., 1021-23.
28 Ibid., 1023.
29 Ibid., Appendix, 386.
30 Ibid., Appendix, 389, 390.
day. The measure immediately carried, 25-12. It may therefore be said to have been Slidell's first accomplishment as his party's "whip." He ended the session in a typical manner, trying to secure sixty days' additional salary for clerks of recently disbanded committees. He succeeded during the last few hours before adjournment.

More meaningful for the future was Slidell's work for his party and its newly elected candidate. It began early after the election and lasted until the time of the inauguration. The Washington correspondent of the *Orleanian* saw him in Washington in the fall, in apparent good health. His illness during the late campaign apparently had left him. The *Orleanian* writer said also that everyone now realized that Slidell was a conservative who would help the new President "steer clear of the Charybdis of fanaticism on the one hand, and the Scylla of ultra secessionism on the other." According to this observer, Washington further believed that Slidell would perform these services without leaving his Senate seat.

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31 Ibid., Appendix, 391.
32 Ibid., Appendix, 390, 391, 397-98.
33 Ibid., Appendix, 398.
34 New Orleans *Orleanian*, Nov. 28, 1856.
This account agreed at least partly with a later observation of the Crescent's representative in Washington, who said that there was not a chance for a member of the Southern Rights party to find a place on Buchanan's staff.

Another reporter, Alpha of the True Delta, discovered additional reason for the belief that the new administration was conservative. He said that Buchanan's election had brought about a surprising number of reconciliations. "As one instance," he continued, "among hundreds occurring weekly I may mention that of the Secretary of War, and the Senior Senator from your State, who have been for some time, it is understood, anything but friendly." Proof of this altered state of affairs, said Alpha, would be seen in the handling of the patronage in the New Orleans custom-house. One of Davis's friends had recently resigned from his position with the customs service in the Crescent City in order that Slidell's brother-in-law, R. W. Adams, could succeed him. At the same time, a brother-in-law of Davis would remain as a deputy. The administration of "the old sage of Pennsylvania will be a genuine Union one, not

alone in trampling upon sectional movements." It appeared also that the spirit of reconciliation was catching and Alpha allergic. Referring to Benjamin's bad reception at Wheatland, he wrote, "notwithstanding he is no favorite of yours [the editor of the True Delta], I regret, as in society, I have found him agreeable and courteous, and remarkably intelligent."  

During the holidays the Slidell household undoubtedly furthered the spirit of forgiveness and unity that was in the air. Washington correspondents of New Orleans journals sent back glowing reports of the Slidell receptions on Christmas and New Year's days. One account included among the mansions which threw open their doors on January 1 "that of Senator Slidell, whose accomplished lady exchanged the compliments of the season with a host of friends, and entertained them with the inimitable grace and sparkling vivacity for which she is no less admired than for her superior intelligence." Another account said that the "most splendid entertainment and the entire

36New Orleans True Delta, Dec. 16, 1856.  
37See below, p. 230.  
38New Orleans True Delta, Dec. 16, 1856.  
beau monde were at Senator Slidell's. What went on at receptions like these in the Slidell residence can be glimpsed from a later account of Washington during this period. "The ante-bellum receptions, like those of Mrs. Slidell," according to this source, "were nearer approaches to those of Roland and Adams than the country had yet seen. But that was, perhaps, because they neither attempted nor announced imitation. They bade clever, cultured and original people come and entertain themselves and each other."

With the holidays gone and inauguration day drawing close the attention of the nation's press was directed toward thoughts of what the new President's new cabinet would contain. Slidell's name was often mentioned in such speculations. Some predictions were hardly in keeping with obvious facts. The Crescent's Washington observer believed Slidell would accept a cabinet position in the new administration and the Picayune's reporter suggested the Louisiana Senator would not even have a little influence.

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40 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 10, 1857.
41 Thomas C. DeLeon, Belles, Beaux, and Brains of the 60's (New York, 1907), 174-75.
42 New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 8, 1856.
with the incoming President. When Slidell and Wise returned from a visit to the Pennsylvanian at Wheatland, said the Picayune writer, they showed "much less satisfaction than [when] they heard of his election." But most editors evidently believed that Slidell would have much to say concerning the personnel of the administration about to take office. In a letter to Buchanan, Slidell begged his friend to believe there was no foundation to the widespread reports that said Slidell was "very busy constructing your cabinet."

Slidell did, however, make recommendations that assisted Buchanan in making up his mind on this subject. In early January he wrote the new President at Wheatland that he must come to Washington in late January or early February. "Your friends," Slidell insisted, "expect to see you here . . . & will be much disappointed if you do not come." Buchanan would, Slidell knew, "be immensely annoyed, but, Slidell felt sure, you cannot correctly feel the public pulse any where else."

\[\text{43} \text{ New Orleans Bee, Dec. 6, 1856.}\]

\[\text{44} \text{ Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 5, 1857. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.}\]

\[\text{45} \text{ Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 5, 1857. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.}\]
followed this advice and visited Washington, his stay was widely assumed to be for the purpose of interviewing prospective members of his cabinet. 46

With regard to specific recommendations for the next President's staff Slidell was successful in advocating the dropping of two names from the list of eligibles and in urging the appointing of Cass as Marcy's successor. He was most effective in practically forcing the acceptance of Isaac Toucey by Buchanan. He quite noticeably failed to get Buchanan to take Benjamin. And he ended by facing a hurricane of dissension which broke out following Douglas's disappointment about not securing a cabinet post for one of his followers.

The two men whose names he urged Buchanan not to consider were Bright and Robert S. Walker. Slidell wanted Bright to remain in the Senate where the Louisianian felt he would do most good for the administration. He did not undervalue Walker's abilities. The Mississippian's business activities were, however, something else. To Slidell, Walker's speculations in Pacific railroad schemes had not been of a highly ethical nature. Slidell also felt that the

former Secretary of the Treasury was an intimate of greedy New York politicians who would attach themselves to the government only for purposes of plunder. Furthermore, Slidell was commissioned by Robert M. McLane to write Buchanan that Southern Senators overwhelmingly opposed Walker's appointment.

Once Buchanan accepted the idea that Walker must be passed by, the way was open for Cobb, who became the next Secretary of the Treasury. Slidell was heartily in favor of the choice.

Slidell served as intermediary between Buchanan and Cass, who gave up the right to name his second in command. Slidell urged this appointment. Because of the old Jacksonian's age, he wrote, Buchanan might "occasionally be compelled to take the laboring oar out of the ordinary course of duty." But he could still "get along with the


48Phillips (ed.), Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb, 395 and n. 1. Cobb did not want the Treasury job if Walker was appointed to lead the State Department. About the only person he would consider as having superior claims to his own was Cass. Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 69-70.


General better than any other person." However, Slidell reminded Buchanan, "a first-rate man for Assistant Secretary" would relieve the President of some of the burden. Buchanan appointed John Appleton of Maine to this post. Appleton was Buchanan's confidential advisor.

With regard to Toucey's selection, Slidell wrote a brief note on February 25, which stated, "Allow me to say that the regret & disappointment at the omission of Mr. Toucey's name would be greater than you can well imagine & that it will be most sensibly felt by Your faithful friends & John Slidell." A wire on the same day read, "Great disappointment and embarrassing difficulties would result from any change of policy about Toucey." Toucey became

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52 Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 68.


Secretary of the Navy. 55

Benjamin's failure to impress Buchanan at an interview was reported by the True Delta's Washington correspondent, Alpha. Why Buchanan would not appoint the former Whig Senator appeared in a later Slidell letter to the President-elect:

I regret exceedingly your change of opinion as to the policy of having an old line whig in your cabinet. It has been generally supposed that you would have one & I fear that a failure to gratify that expectation may alienate much support upon which you could otherwise rely. Let me say one word about Benjamin. I believe that he would be more generally acceptable than any other Whig. I do not think that he should be ostracised because he has the misfortune of having an unfaithful wife on the other side of the Atlantic. I am very sure that she will never visit Washington. She is now living in Paris with her father, who is a man of independent fortune & the man for whom she abandoned her husband is the French minister in Switzerland. So that scandal has passed.56

The tone of the Benjamin letter was the usual one employed by Slidell in his recommendations to Buchanan. The imperative strain in the Toucey correspondence was almost unique. Usually, Slidell told his friend in

55Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 72, 73.
Wheatland to "satisfy yourself" in the matter of appointments. 57

Cass was appointed in order to include in the cabinet a Northwesterner whose presence would not constitute an insult to Douglas or Bright. Douglas and Bright were mortal political enemies and the incoming administration was forced as a consequence either to appoint a representative of each of these men or exclude the followers of both. Otherwise serious dissension would follow. Slidell felt sure that Cass's inclusion in the Buchanan cabinet would end the bickerings of the two Senators. 58

Slidell proved to be only half right. Bright was willing to stay in the Senate but Douglas became belligerent. He told Slidell that he, Douglas, "was the proper representative not only of Illinois, but of the entire North-west." Slidell wrote Buchanan about the incident. Douglas, he said, was "just now in a very morbid state of mind, believing or affecting to believe that there was a general conspiracy to put him down." This idea Slidell considered "a mere figment" of Douglas's brain. "I do not believe,"

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Slidell continued, "that he had a more sincere friend than I was. But since you left here he has been disposed like a Malay maddened by opium to 'run a muck' against any one who showed a disposition to defend Bright during his absence against the most cruel & unprovoked attacks. He has especially singled me out as the chief of the conspiracy." Slidell had been forced, he told Buchanan, to "be very cool to prevent an open rupture with" Douglas. Finally, Slidell concluded, "I was obliged to tell him that when I ceased to be his friend & became his enemy, it would not be necessary to have recourse to third parties, but he would discover it by my altered bearing." Slidell said he told Douglas of his regret at the turn events were taking. He promised the Illinois Senator he would try to avoid "any interruptions of our friendly relations." But Douglas "must decide what they should be in the future."\(^{59}\)

But even Douglas's possible defection was a minor calamity when compared with what almost happened when Buchanan visited Washington in late January and early February. Buchanan stayed at the National Hotel. Before he left he contracted a "persistent and debilitating diarrhea which would not yield to the unskilled treatment

\(^{59}\)Ibid.
of the day." The President-elect barely escaped death. Months went by before he was completely cured. For awhile Slidell must have wondered if he would ever play his supposed role of "Warwick" in the next administration, especially when Buchanan's friendship for the proprietor of the National Hotel prompted him to decide to make the establishment his headquarters when he returned for his inauguration. Slidell pleaded that Buchanan had no right to indulge this feeling of loyalty "at the imminent ruin of your health." The desperate manager expressed the hope that Buchanan would put himself "in the hands of the Committee of Arrangements." "If," Slidell continued, "you will go to the National, at least avoid sleeping or eating there." Notwithstanding the events leading up to it, the inauguration functioned smoothly. The most exciting part of the new President's message was probably where he gave an indication that he already knew the decision of the Supreme Court with regard to the Dred Scott case, which was

60 Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York, 1948), 63.
61 Ibid.
rendered formally two days later, March 6, 1857. Slidell left Washington in late March for New Orleans. Before he left, he sent a note to Buchanan. He said he was going home for political purposes and requested "as a personal favor (the only one probably that I shall ask)," that the President appoint Robert E. McHatton postmaster of New Orleans. Buchanan, Slidell understood, was plagued by office seekers. So, wrote the Louisianan, he would ordinarily refrain from bothering the busy executive at this time. But his "just pride" would be "wounded" if the present holder of the postmastership in the Crescent City continued in office. Even more important, continued Slidell, was the fact that he had to demonstrate his "ability to secure such nominations" as the one for which he was now asking. For, thereby could be insured "the election of a Senator friendly to your administration." This was Benjamin's seat. Slidell had much to do. He promised Buchanan to return to Washington in July.

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63 Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 88-89, 90, 91.
64 New Orleans Delta, Mar. 27, 1857.
CHAPTER XI

DEVELOPMENTS IN LOUISIANA DURING 1857 AND
THEIR IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES

When Slidell reached home in early spring, 1857, he found his community stirred in varying degrees by several developments financial and political in nature.

None of these was more exciting than the events associated with the filibuster William Walker at this time. By spring, 1857, Walker had made two important enemies. One of these was the shipowner Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, the ships of whose Transit Company Walker seized.¹ The other was Don Domingo de Goicouria, a Nicaraguan army officer whom Walker had discharged from his position.² Vanderbilt was a dangerous enemy for anyone to make. Goicouria's enmity proved also a potent force. He published documents in American journals which alleged that Walker was concerned most with his

¹Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 182-83.
²New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 5, 1856.
own fortune and not at all with the expansion of the United States. This lowered the filibuster's prestige somewhat. However, Goicouria's allegations may have lost some of their sharpness when a letter from John P. Heiss, former editor of the Delta, claimed that Vanderbilt told him personally that Goicouria was the Commodore's agent.

At any rate, by the time Slidell reached Louisiana, Walker was fighting for his very existence in Nicaragua. By May he was finished as ruler of the Latin-American country. On May 10 the members of the Boston Club of New Orleans contributed $500 which reimbursed the British Captain Dunlop of His Majesty's ship Tartar for the money he had expended in hiring a barge for transporting Walker's returning soldiers up the Mississippi to New Orleans. The Tartar had brought the Americans from Nicaragua. Walker returned on May 26 aboard the Empire City.

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4 New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 5, 1856.
5 New Orleans Picayune, May 10, 1857.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.; May 27, 1857.
The political significance of Walker's presence in the United States was not difficult to understand. During the revolution which drove him from Nicaragua the majority of the papers in the New Orleans area seemed to be on his side. Even the Picayune showed alarm at the possibility of his defeat. Exceptions were the Bulletin, which refrained from voicing approval, and the Advocate, which blamed Walker's failure on his "blundering and incapacity." The Advocate had lately become a spokesman for Slidell and the administration in Washington. Obviously, then, the Slidell forces were opposing a popular measure. The same statement could not be made to apply to Slidell's old rival, Soule. Walker and Soule were by now fast friends. Soule was in Washington on May 14. While he was there, reports reached New Orleans that he was speaking with "high quarters" about receiving indirect aid for his "filibustering movements." Rumors spread that his

8 Ibid., Apr. 19, 1857.
9 Baton Rouge Advocate, May 27, 1857.
11 New Orleans Orleanian, July 4, 1857.
12 Ibid., May 23, 1857.
influence paved the way for Walker's reception by Buchanan on June 20. 13

The aftermath of these developments were hardly surprising when the elements involved are considered. Buchanan and Slidell and Walker and Soule could hardly work in harmony with each other. In November, 1857, during a visit to New Orleans, Walker was arrested on charges that he was in the act of launching another expedition to Nicaragua. He was represented legally by Soule, who arranged for bail. 14 Once free, Walker secretly took to sea with 700 or 800 followers. His destination was the country which had cast him out six months before. 15 Walker's illegal exit from the United States caused more political complications to follow. The administration relieved United States District Attorney Franklin H. Clack of his position in Louisiana. 16 Clack was a Soule affiliate. Then, Commodore Hiram Paulding, United States Navy, sent forces into Nicaragua and

14 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 11, 1857.
15 Ibid., Nov. 18, 1857.
16 Ibid., Dec. 11, 1857.
17 Baton Rouge Advocate, Apr. 8, 1859.
brought Walker and his men back to New York. Repercussions in Louisiana followed immediately, as a storm of protest appeared. Prominent among the protesters were Soule supporters like Maunsel White and Donatien Augustin. Walker had become something vital in the political life of Slidell.

Also important to many residents of Louisiana was the contemplated road across the Tehuantepec peninsula, whose plans had been hampered so long by the struggle between the Sloo and the Garay factions. Not long after Slidell arrived in Louisiana, the climax of this long fight began to evolve. In April, 1857 Emile La Sere and John M. Bell were elected to the board of directors of the Tehuantepec company chartered in Louisiana. Then, La Sere assumed the presidency of the corporation. To contemporary observers these events signified that the "southern wing" of the company had triumphed over the

19 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 1, 1858; New Orleans Delta, Jan. 3, 1858.
20 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 1, 1858.
21 See above, pp. 60-63.
22 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 19, 21, 1858.
Sloo forces, who, meanwhile, had further complicated matters by divorcing themselves of their leader.

Before he left office, the retiring president of the company, Walter Nicol, gave more than a hint as to why he and his associates had gotten rid of Sloo. The New York promoter, Nicol said in his report, had depleted the company's funds by agreements he had made with irresponsible persons. At least, however, the road across the peninsula was completed.

The new directors, therefore, were beginning their labors under rather trying circumstances. But the future held brighter promise. In July a report stated that in the presence of Attorney General Jeremiah Black at Washington La Sere and the opposing faction within the Tehuantepec corporation had come to terms. New Orleans had thus secured entire control of the enterprise. Unfortunately, the liabilities of the new corporation were staggering. They amounted to about $4,000,000. Then, Benjamin joined La Sere in

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23 New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 21, 1858.
24 New Orleans Delta, June 12, 1857.
a trip to Mexico, where after some trouble they secured from General Comonfort an annulment of the Sloo grant and a conformation of their privileges in the form of a new concession which was based on the one just cancelled. The good fortune of the Tehuantepec company had still not come to its end. In April, 1858, the corporation was solvent following the severe money crisis of the beginning of the year. In June, 1858, it received a mail contract from the government. The agreement was to go into effect on October 1, 1858. The company agreed to provide semi-monthly service between New Orleans and San Francisco. Benjamin and La Sere, therefore, went to New York to arrange for vessels to operate the route between New Orleans and the Gulf terminus of the isthmus road. Workers later began leaving New Orleans to begin work on the contemplated railroad.

27 New Orleans True Delta, Sept. 13, 1857.
28 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 23, 1858.
29 New Orleans Delta, June 16, 1858; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 30, 1858.
30 New Orleans Delta, June 22, 1858.
31 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 4, 1858.
32 Ibid., Oct. 27, 1858.
The political side of the Tehuantepec company had long been evident, as for example, when the Gadsden treaty was being discussed in the Senate. It could be glimpsed in reports of the granting of the government contract which stated that at last New York shipping interests had been ignored. More obvious political implications, at least as far as Louisiana was concerned, appeared in the list of the officers and chief stockholders of the corporation published October 17, 1857. They included Benjamin, Bell, Alfred G. Penn, Duncan F. Kenner, and John Slidell (who owned fifty shares). These names were all on the same side in politics.

The most obvious connection of Tehuantepec and politics was the fact that Soule followed La Sere and Benjamin to Mexico and used his undoubtedly able talents to try to persuade Comonfort not to accede to La Sere and Benjamin's petition. He received aid in this enterprise from John Forsyth, American minister to

33 See above, pp. 60-63.
34 New Orleans Delta, May 12, 1858.
Mexico, who for some time had been attempting to force Mexico to grant the United States very liberal conces-
sions. Unfortunately for Forsyth, his actions hurt him. Like Soule he proved to be no match for Benjamin. Then, the Louisiana Senator sent a hot note of protest over Forsyth's actions to Slidell. Slidell took the message over to Cass in the State Department. Apparently, Forsyth had disregarded explicit instructions from Cass that he help La Sere and Benjamin. Consequently, he was later released from his post of duty. He returned to his newspaper, the Mobile Register, which became like him a supporter of Douglas.

In March, 1857, another project, important for New Orleans' future but at the moment only in a minor way connected with politics, was the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern railroad, which was rapidly pushing forward in Mississippi toward its goal of Jackson, Tennessee, and connections with Eastern railroads.

38 New Orleans Bee, Oct. 12, 1857.
40 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 18, 1858.
41 See below, pp. 479-80.
The goal of the road's builders was approaching close. On April 17, 1857, James Robb, the Jackson's guiding spirit returned from the East. Except for two short stretches in Mississippi he traveled completely on rails.

By now the amount of interest Robb had placed in the Jackson could at least be estimated. In 1856 a battle between two factions of the corporation's stockholders brought out the information that Robb and Company had advanced $501,975.27 to the Jackson line. Robb was in the grip of financial troubles at the time and had foreclosed on the railroad. 

By the time Slidell returned from Washington in 1857, Robb and the Jackson's contrasting fortunes (his on the downgrade, the road's on the upgrade) were proceeding as before. In late summer, 1856, Robb succeeded in floating a loan of a half-million dollars in London. In March, 1857, he dissolved his New York co-partnership with Hallett & Co. and P. Wilson. In March, 1858, an engine named James

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42 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 17, 1857.
43 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 11, 1856; New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 27, 1856.
44 New Orleans Picayune, Sept. 23, 1856.
45 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 3, 1857.
Robb pulled several coaches filled with passengers into Jackson, Mississippi. This insured the success of the railroad. The namesake of the engine was aboard. Then, Robb and his associates were ousted from control of the Jackson line on the issue of whether the construction of the road should push forward to the rendezvous with trunk lines to the East. Robb wanted to retrench for awhile until the Jackson railroad was stronger financially.

On the issue which put Robb among the minority group within the Jackson corporation, the fortunes of this activity again became tied up in politics. The Democratic state administration agreed with Robb. The government of the City of New Orleans insisted on the road's proceeding forward at once to Jackson, Tennessee.

The Opelousas railroad, meanwhile, had reached Berwick's Bay, Louisiana, where chartered steamers connected with the Texas coast. It still had far to go,

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46 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 2, 1858; Meade, Judah P. Benjamin, 71-72.
47 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 8, 17, 1858; New Orleans Delta, May 8, 1858.
48 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 14, 1858; New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 15, 1858.
49 New Orleans Bee, May 6, 16, 1858.
but insufficient money and a difficult terrain had combined to bring construction almost to a standstill. On the other hand a thriving freight and passenger business was rolling over the railroad's 80 miles of track. During the period of Slidell's visit, in June, 1857, the directors of the enterprise reaffirmed their original intention to push construction to the state line. They announced also their plan to put more certificates on the market. They were sending engineers ahead to select the route to Louisiana's western boundary line. Two years later the Opelousas corporation issued bonds to the amount of $2,000,000.

The Opelousas railroad, therefore, aroused no undue excitement, political or otherwise. The same assertion could hardly be applied to the Southern Pacific railroad. This company was formed to take advantage of a generous bounty of land offered by the Texas legislature to any railroad which serve the state and connect it by rail

50 *New Orleans Bee*, May 15, 1858.
51 *New Orleans Picayune*, June 21, 1857.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Nov. 1, 1859.
with the Pacific Coast. It was not the first organization of its kind to try to qualify for the financial aid thus granted by the Lone Star State. Robert Walker had in 1857 but recently headed a company which had gone bankrupt in such an attempt. By the time Slidell was thinking of leaving Washington, in March, 1857, the Southern Pacific Company had completed the first requirement for the Texas bounty by finishing the construction of ten miles of graded track, which had been inspected and approved. On April 1, 1857, its offices were set up in New Orleans. George S. Yerger served as president. Its charter permitted it to build as far as El Paso. It possessed the generous grant of land. It was running trains regularly delivering cotton over its short line. By April 14, the corporation had raised in subscriptions the $300,000 it needed to carry forward its construction work. In June it gave a contract for building and ironing twenty-eight miles between the Louisiana line

55 New Orleans Delta, July 24, 1854.
57 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 3, 1857.
and Marshall, Texas and for grading and preparing forty-two miles beyond Marshall. The contractor it chose for the job was fresh from the successful completion of a similar project for the Jackson railroad. He had to finish his task by January, 1859.

In spite of these intimations of a happy future, however, the months to come were to furnish the Southern Pacific Company with few consequences that could be said to be of the fortunate variety. In November, 1857, reports appeared stating that the corporation had transferred all its rights and privileges to William Bradford and John K. Yerger on a "Deed of Trust." This was executed on October 20 by the president, George S. Yerger. The reason given for this action was financial troubles. Then, in May, 1858, President Yerger called a meeting to try to save the railroad, which had performed its contract but remained deeply in debt. Finally, after various expedients had failed to keep the company from

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60. Ibid., June 14, 1857.
62. Ibid.
63. New Orleans Delta, May 9, 1858; New Orleans Crescent, May 17, 1848.
falling and after many indignation meetings, which were held as far away as Louisville and Cincinnati, the Southern Pacific was sold for a fraction of the value of its equipment. The meetings had heard charges voiced that the road's demise was a direct result of stockjobbing and swindling operations which had originated in New York. $350,000 of honest investment money was the estimated loss, many expended "in payment of some rather dubious 'Northern claims'."

Another unfortunate circumstance in the process of manufacture at the time of Slidell's visit to his community in spring and summer, 1857, was an awkward money situation. This condition did not manifest itself strongly until after his return to the nation's capital. By September the financial crisis had advanced to the point where reports were streaming into the Crescent City

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64 New Orleans Crescent, May 17, 1858.
65 Ibid., June 10, 1858; New Orleans Delta, June 2, 10, 16, 1858.
66 New Orleans Crescent, June 2, 1858.
67 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 27, 1858.
about the number of Eastern banking houses closing their
doors in failure. 68 By October 15 the situation had New
Orleans in its tightest grip. The solvency of the Cres­
cent City's banks was being tested to the limit. 69 In
the midst of the trouble two dispatches arrived from
Washington, dated October 13. One was from Howell Cobb
to Logan McKnight. It informed the addressee that the
"treasurer of the branch mint (at New Orleans) has been
authorized to purchase two hundred thousand dollars in
silver bullion at the established rate, and to pay for
it in gold coin." By such means, explained the Orlean­
ian, which reported the matter, the four chartered banks
in the city had been enriched $50,000 in the basic metals. 70
The other dispatch came from Slidell. It stated:

An order has been given by telegraph, to
purchase two thousand dollars in silver,
payable in gold coin. More will be ordered
when the coin is received from Little Rock.
Drafts on New York cannot be sent, as all
funds are required there. 71

68 New Orleans Delta, Sept. 25, 1857.
69 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 10, 11,
1857.
71 Ibid.
The political effect this money panic had in Louisiana lay in the lessons that were drawn from its overcoming by Crescent City banks. "Cotton is king again," claimed the Orleanian. Other newspapers credited Louisiana's strict control of its banks as the reason why the vast majority of the financial institutions within its boundaries were again operating normally. The Courier spoke with pride of New Orleans as a "specie-paving city with a surely specie-paving currency." Its system had conquered over "KING PANIC" where the false, paper-controlled economics of New York had failed. Economics, in many ways a binder of the sections of America, was therefore, in this case at least, working in the opposite direction.

Such were the forces and trends operating in the background as Slidell moved about Louisiana between March and June, 1857, with the purpose in mind of insuring the control of the Creole state by his party

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72 Ibid., Oct. 21, 1857.
74 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 6, 1857.
and himself. As expected, Robert E. McHatton became New Orleans postmaster. Into office with him went other Slidell followers, like Frank H. Hatch, who became collector of the customs at New Orleans, and Alfred G. Penn, who took over the position of superintendent of the customhouse. Harmony and good will became the watchwords. The governor in his annual message and the Courier both stressed these assets to party solidarity.

The forces of discord, however, were still in operation in Louisiana. They appeared in attempts to form a "Southern Rights" party, in a sketch by Gayarre of Andrew Jackson, who, with the aid of Gayarre's pen, warned readers of the article against "king caucus," in the report of a "Sicilian hunt" by thugs in the Second District of New Orleans during March, and in the joining of Pierre Soule, Democrat, with Christian

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75 New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 25, 1857; Baton Rouge Advocate, Mar. 13, 1857.
76 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 21, 1857.
77 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 14, 1857.
78 Ibid., Sept. 9, 1857.
80 Baton Rouge Advocate, Mar. 30, 1857.
Roselius, Old-Line Whig Jurist, and Thomas J. Durant, Know-Nothing, in honoring the Democrat Donatien Augustin for his work as justice of the Fifth District Court.

More meaningful sounds of discontent within the Democratic party appeared in the Clinton (East Feliciana Parish) Democrat on March 28, 1857, but a few days after Slidell's arrival in New Orleans. On this day the journal spoke disapprovingly of a "wheel within a wheel," which for the past four or five years had controlled the Louisiana Democrats. It had ruthlessly attacked any persons deviating from what it termed "orthodoxy" and refusing to "bow submissively" to every command and decision. The Crescent interpreted the article to mean that the "wheel within a wheel" was in the control of every job the President had at his disposal. It would rotate out of office every Soule man and direct its movement against any counteraction offered by any States Rights or Independent Democrat. Its opponents would be ground to powder. When "Senator Slidell took a pinch of snuff, the Central Committee

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81 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 4, 1857.
82 New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 6, 1857.
83 Ibid.
sneezed" along with the rest of the party's leaders. He was in town now, said the Crescent, and "we will wager the finest summer hat that can be found that he arranges things in the May Democratic State Convention in a manner entirely pleasant to himself and friends." 84

The press of New Orleans, particularly the opposition, therefore, proceeded to keep track of the Senator's movements. Less than ten days after the Crescent article, a report told how he was about to leave New Orleans and become a "Country Visitor" to Donaldsonville, a town in the Second Congressional District, where he was expected to placate Dr. Cottman, who had been rejected for the position of collector of the customs at New Orleans. 85 On April 17, Slidell was reported making a tour of the northern and western parishes. 86 His alleged visit to Congressman John Sandidge, successor to Solomon B. Downs in the Red River vicinity, inspired rumors that Sandidge was to replace the supposedly retiring Benjamin. 87 The reason for this surprising turn of events was obvious

84 Ibid.
85 New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 15, 1857.
86 New Orleans Orleanian, Apr. 17, 1857.
87 New Orleans Bee, May 1, 1857.
to the Bee. Sandidge was loyal, said the American journal, and Slidell knew Benjamin had "not a ghost of a chance of success" in a Democratic legislature. Moreover, by such means the loyalty of the Fourth District could be safely insured.

"The Progress of the Mighty Pilgrim" continued to be the source of news in Louisiana newspapers. The Crescent discovered to its readers that Slidell had been in Monroe, Shreveport, and Alexandria. The journal felt sure it knew what the "shrewdest, keenest, cutest, aptest, most indefatigable, indomitable and unconquerable political manager in all Christendom" was doing. Sandidge, it felt, was going to relieve Slidell of his duties in the Senate. What then was to become of Slidell? "Why, bless your unsophisticated, innocent soul," stated the Crescent, "if the next Legislature is 'all right,' Senator Slidell will go Minister to France or Spain, negotiate for the purchase of Cuba, take bold and popular ground about Central America and the isles of the Spanish seas, improve upon the Monroe doctrine, and if he doesn't succeed, 'kick up a great bobbery,"

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38 Ibid.
generally, return home and run for next President." The Buchanan administration would back him. If he failed, one of his friends, "for whom he has done so much will resign" and return him to the Senate.

The observation of the American daily that Slidell treated his friends well and in turn received their strong loyalty might have seemed a strange passage to the Crescent's readers. But an even stronger admission of the Senator's good points appeared in a later article in the same paper. After reporting Slidell's presence in the town of Bayou Sara on May 30, the Crescent stated that while it disapproved of his treatment of Soule and his followers, it felt that "that is his business; and as we never have, we never shall seek to detract from his real merits as a citizen or as a Senator."90

The Crescent, however, was still for Soule, even though it recognized Slidell's triple assets, "tact," "management," and "the appliances of 'material aid.'" With the German daily Die Tagliche Deutsche Zeitung it recognized that Slidell and Soule were in the process

89 New Orleans Crescent, May 12, 1857.
90 Ibid., June 2, 1857.
of waging a crucial battle against each other for the control of Louisiana. The scene chosen for the opening of the engagement was the Third District, home of the Clinton Democrat. The issue was the candidacy of Thomas Green Davidson, incumbent Congressman and Democratic wheelhorse in the Florida parishes. He was renominated on April 28 in the parish courthouse at Clinton but opposition sprang up immediately among party members from his own (East Feliciana), Livingston, and St. Tammany parishes. Then the fight shifted to Baton Rouge, where on May 18 the final nomination would occur after the meeting of the State Democratic Party convention.

When the group met, the great contention lay in the desire of the Davidson faction to eliminate the proxy votes. Eventually they had their way. But meanwhile the convention had split into two distinguishable groups, one adhering to Davidson and the other advancing the claims of Andrew H. Herron to the Congressman's seat. The meeting was postponed to June 15.

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91 New Orleans Die Taegliche Deutsche Zeitung, June 18, 1857.
92 New Orleans Delta, May 5, 1857.
93 New Orleans True Delta, May 20, 1857.
representatives reconvened in Baton Rouge, Herron had the indorsement of the Independent Democrats and Governor Wickliffe. Seldom before, said one observer, had there appeared so much "ungovernable insubordination in the ranks of any party." The crisis came with the question of deciding which of two sets of delegates from Tammany parish should be seated. Following a bitter debate both sets were permitted to cast their parish's vote. When this action occurred, the Herron faction, led by Angus Bowie walked out. According to the True Delta, Bowie had lost a recent election for judge because of Davidson's active opposition. When other delegates followed his faction out of the convention, Davidson easily captured the nomination.

Reactions in the press to the Baton Rouge meeting were mixed. Critics of the convention's deliberations


95 New Orleans Delta, June 16, 17, 1857.
96 New Orleans True Delta, June 16, 1857.
97 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 16, 1857; New Orleans True Delta, June 17, 1857.
blamed La Sere and Slidell for the discord and election of Davidson. Other observers disagreed. They pointed out that the Tammany parish votes had not affected the result. This interpretation exposed the seceders to the charge that their walkout was at best good political propaganda designed to prove the existence of "a wheel within a wheel" in Louisiana. The Delta thought that Bowie's revolt represented an important segment of the voters of his District. The election, it claimed, would go against the split Democrats. The Crescent thought differently. "The disaffected," it said, "injured their own cause by bolting," for they thereby laid themselves open to charges that they were adopting "rule or ruin" tactics. There was talk of another convention, continued the journal. The idea was foolish. Another meeting would be illegal. So, concluded the Crescent, the defeated section of the Democrats might as well drink the "bitter brew" which had been "cunning concocted by the master hand and mind of 'Achilles.'" There was no use in making "ugly faces." In a later article the Crescent stated its belief that

98 New Orleans True Delta, June 17, 25, 1857.
99 New Orleans Delta, June 18, 1857.
100 New Orleans Crescent, June 19, 1857.
Davidson was more popular than "aspiring politicians would have one believe." Walking out of conventions, thought the newspaper, was an old political trick of defeated factions who hoped by such action to gain new friends for their cause. Davidson, concluded the *Crescent*, was the rightful candidate according to the wishes of the majority of the delegates to the Baton Rouge convention. The *Courier*, meanwhile, was insisting that Slidell never made a promise he failed to keep, showed a "tone of authority," or acted the part of dictator.

The next move of the Herron group was a meeting they held on August 1, 1857. There they repudiated the nomination of Davidson. They also castigated interference by outsiders, "even though they are United States Senators and Customhouse officers." On August 31 representatives of five of the sixteen parishes which had nominated Davidson met and nominated L. J. Sigur as his opponent.

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102 New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, July 9, 1857.
The campaign which followed proceeded without the presence of Slidell, who by this time was in the East trying to get Buchanan to meet important people.\textsuperscript{105} In his absence the three most obviously significant occurrences before the November election were the strange actions of the \textit{Courier}, the suit by the American party's mayor of New Orleans against the election laws recently imposed on the city by the state legislature, and the "Cat Island Scandal."

The suit of the administration of New Orleans in itself caused no undue hardship but for awhile it had politicians worried that New Orleans would not be able to open its polling booths on election day.\textsuperscript{106}

The \textit{Courier}'s course of action consisted in its departure from "orthodoxy." It did protest against the actions of Herron and his followers.\textsuperscript{107} But when the Baton Rouge \textit{Advocate} advised it to speak its mind openly on the leading issues of the day, the old, reliable organ of "Conservative Democracy" denied it was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{105}New Orleans \textit{Bee}, July 8, 1857; New Orleans \textit{Louisiana Courier}, Aug. 7, 1856; Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 12, 1857. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
  \item \textsuperscript{106}New Orleans \textit{Crescent}, July 24, Aug. 29, 1847.
  \item \textsuperscript{107}New Orleans \textit{Louisiana Courier}, Sept. 2, 1857.
\end{itemize}
the official paper of its party. The statement caused the *Delta* to wonder what lay behind the journal's statement. 108 Then the *Courier* began urging the South to forget about Kansas and look "towards tropical climes" for the future extension of slavery. 109 After the late administration stand on Walker's filibustering activities this sort of advocacy veered more toward Douglas than in the direction of Buchanan. For the present, however, the newspaper did not make any clear statement of the direction in which it was moving. It continued to stress the necessity of unity within the Democratic party. 110

Cat Island was in the vicinity of the Atchafalaya river. It contained tens of thousands of acres of swamplands which had been granted the state of Louisiana by the Federal government. On September 14, 1857, the *Crescent* gave this information to its readers. It also told in the same article that Commissioner G. B. Miller of the Second District had by his own admission bought over 14,000 acres of swamplands in this area for John Slidell and used his official position to contract for levees

110 Ibid., Sept. 9, 1857.
and drainage. This agreement, said the Crescent, cost the state a total of $150,000. It received from the sale of the lands the amount of $30,000. The loss to Louisiana, therefore, was clearly $120,000. Here concluded the writer of the article, was a typical example of Democratic extravagance.

The sale and drainage of the Cat Island lands became even more obviously a political issue in October. Then, Glendy Burke, American party candidate against Miles Taylor for the Democrat's seat in Congress, repeated the charge during a debate with his opponent. He said Slidell procured a legislative enactment authorizing the expenditure of $10 per acre for protecting lands that the Senator had purchased at the rate of $1.25 an acre.

Two published letters attempted to answer these charges. The first, signed by "Fiat Justitia," denied that Slidell's purchases were on Cat Island. They lay, he claimed, some distance away. Moreover, their worth at government prices was only about $19,000. Slidell,

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111 New Orleans Crescent, Sept. 19, 1857.
112 New Orleans True Delta, Oct. 6, 1857.
continued the writer, did not have the power old enemies like Sigur and Maunsel White ascribed to him. 113

The second letter in rebuttal against the idea that Slidell was using his great political might to secure illegal profits for himself was written by Thomas Allen Clarke. Clarke explained that Slidell, James Robb, and Miller entered into an agreement in May, 1853, to "furnish the means for the entry of swamplands, to be made in the name of the former upon stipulations of proportionate interests in all three." Later Robb relinquished his share to Slidell, who, in Washington at the time, asked Miller to prepare the papers. These dealt with "14,290 88/100 acres" in a location "quite remote" from Cat Island. Clarke was "informed" and convinced that the state had made no improvements to benefit them. The entries Slidell had commissioned Miller to make provided the only contract between the two men. Moreover, Miller became land commissioner in 1854, months after his business with Slidell. Finally, Slidell owned no land on Cat Island. 114

The election for a change went off quietly in

113 Ibid.
November and with results little different than before. The American Party carried New Orleans and elected the Congressman from the First District. Miles Taylor in the Second District was forced to depend on Soule's "pocket boroughs" in the country to overcome Glendy Burke's lead in New Orleans.\footnote{115}

The Democrats in the city appeared to be listless and almost uninterested in winning.\footnote{116} Elsewhere the Democratic party was supreme. In the contest which sent Davidson back to Congress Sigur ran last in a three-way race.\footnote{117} Thereafter the American party's only significant strength lay in the Crescent City.\footnote{118}

The next day after the election the financial columns of the \textit{Crescent} reported the "Talk on 'Change" regarding the results. One person, it seemed, wanted to know if Slidell preferred New York to New Orleans, since "he has not resided in New Orleans for two or three years past." Another inquiry concerned the whereabouts of "Our late Chief Justice 'Tom'" who,

said the one seeking the information, had sold all his real estate in New Orleans and taken his departure forever. "Jack", however, was still an enigma. No one really seemed to care if he won or lost the election. People were much more concerned over whether he could do something about improving the local mail service and that between New Orleans and Darien, Tampico, and Vera Cruz.

119 _New Orleans Crescent_, Nov. 4, 1857.
CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE BUCHANAN ADMINISTRATION

During the interval between the time Slidell reached Washington and the opening of the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress in December, 1857, Slidell, like the rest of the nation, was becoming more and more aware of the continuing troubles in Kansas. The new governor of this Territory, Robert Walker, proved to be little more successful than his predecessors in quieting Kansas and removing it from the field of national politics.\(^1\) Moreover, a series of speeches he made for the purpose of placating free-soilers, irritated and estranged many Southerners.\(^2\) On December 15, 1857, he resigned in a letter to Buchanan.\(^3\) Meanwhile, the pro-slavery Le- compton Constitution, which was passed by a minority of Kansas voters in December, was on its way to becoming probably the greatest issue in the coming Congress. Presented to

\(^1\)Nichols, *Disruption of American Democracy*, 103-24, 154.

\(^2\)Ibid., 108-10.

\(^3\)Ibid., 154.
Kansans in a way that deprived free-soilers of the opportunity to express their desires for a completely free state, its entrance into Congress split the Democratic party into two hostile sides, North and South. This discord was undoubtedly furthered by the clear indication that the majority of Kansas voters wanted a free state.

Slidell's reactions to Walker's actions and other occurrences in Kansas were hardly other than would be expected from a representative in Congress from his section of the country. During the summer he transmitted to Buchanan his displeasure and that of his acquaintances in White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, over Walker's doings in the Territory. After a later conversation in which Slidell engaged in Washington, Colonel T. L. Claiborne returned to Louisiana with the impression that the Senator had become an extremist on issues in which the rights of the South were involved. In less friendly eyes Slidell

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6 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 31, 1858.


8 New Orleans Delta, Oct. 28, 1857.
assumed the figure of a Southern intriguer almost continuously engaged in what was to him a delightful enterprise.  

More positive evidence of Slidell's feelings on the Kansas issue occurred during Congress. There he showed marked antipathy for the altered position of Stephen Douglas in at least one instance, and in another instance made a notable defense of Buchanan's attitude on the Lecompton Constitution. Slidell opposed Douglas because the Illinois Senator was leading his followers in opposing the administration's policy of approving the Lecompton document. Douglas's defection in the light of Buchanan's expressed opinion, therefore, was a serious matter, which the administration could not ignore with deprecating statements. The President's evaluation of it as "of no consequence" fooled few, if any, persons. Douglas helped direct Republican strategy against the Lecompton Constitution. The result was the defeat of the measure in

\[9\] Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 127.


the House. This sort of activity would hardly endear Douglas to Slidell, the advocate of party regularity. The "altered bearing" of the Louisiana Senator, therefore, was not long in making its appearance upon the Senate floor.

The encounter with the Illinois Democrat came on May 31. It occurred when Douglas offered an amendment to the Civil Appropriation bill to pay Robert Walker $7,000 for "extraordinary expenses," to which the former governor was subject in the Territory. Objection was made that it was a private claim and out of place as an amendment to the bill under consideration. Douglas denied the allegation. His proposal was, he insisted, for payment of contingent expenses of the executive department of the Kansas Territory. This interpretation brought forth derisive laughter from at least one part of the Senate chamber.

Douglas immediately turned on those whom he thought were ridiculing him. He confessed his dislike of "the mode of trying to laugh down propositions. If gentlemen can answer them," he said, "it is one thing; but to laugh

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13 See above, p. 232.
them down, is another." The remark caused Slidell to answer. He said he did not like "at all" the tone of Douglas. "Very well," answered Douglas. Slidell continued: "It is extremely arrogant and offensive."

It was obviously up to Douglas to explain his remarks. He said that the laughter he had heard was extremely annoying. He never interrupted people on the rostrum. So, he rebuked what he considered a practice unbecoming to the Senate's deliberations.

Slidell then followed with an explanation of his actions. "If the gentleman wants an answer," he informed the chair, "he shall have it. I should be paying a very poor compliment to his good sense," he went on, "at the expense of his ingenuousness and fairness, if he did not admit that this was a private claim." Slidell admitted laughing. But, he added, he was not the only member who did so. Douglas had attracted the "universal attention of the Chamber." But, regardless, concluded Slidell, if "the Senator from Illinois chooses to single me out for any criticisms of that sort, he will find me ready to respond on all occasions, at all times, and in every way."

Slidell's remarks seemed to have put out some of the fire of his opponent's rage. Douglas remembered that
Slidell sat quite near him. If Slidell made any remarks, therefore, they could easily be heard by Douglas. The Illinois Senator thought the ones he had heard had been discourteous and improper. Therefore, he had called attention to them. He did not doubt Slidell's responsibility in the matter -- but there was nothing unusual in that fact. Certainly he was not the only one who had laughed.  

Douglas's motion was voted down, but this action did not completely end the matter since there was some talk of a possible duel between the two men. Then, these rumors were swallowed up in the interest that attended a severe altercation between Benjamin and Davis, which occurred about a week later.

The speech Slidell made in favor of the Lecompton constitution was also serious in its implications. But it was delivered after a few moments that brought comic relief to the tense atmosphere then prevailing in Congress. It occurred during the early morning hours of March 15, 1858. Congress had remained in session all night. There were not sufficient Senators present to

\[14\] Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 2536.
\[15\] Ibid.; New Orleans Crescent, June 9, 1858.
\[16\] New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 9, 16, 1858.
constitute a quorum. As the sergeant at arms searched Washington for the absent members, those within the Senate chamber idled away the time. The lateness of the hour must have affected Slidell. He asked for an adjournment on the grounds that while he had expected to vote on the Kansas bill that night, he could now see that nothing could be accomplished during the present sitting. Toombs immediately asked for the yeas and nays. When the secretary called the roll, Slidell found that he was voting with an almost solid line of Republicans. Quickly he changed sides and voted against his own measure. 17 Somewhat later, he took the chair. The Senate was almost empty. Harlan of Iowa noted to Bigler, who occupied the floor, that the time was 3:30 a.m. Slidell refused to entertain a motion to adjourn. No proposal was in order, he ruled, until a quorum was reached. A Senator could speak only with the permission of the rest of the members. William P. Fessenden of Maine protested in vain about having to wait for the rest of the members of the Senate to appear. The, Slidell said with obvious humor, "And now the chair would be very happy to be relieved from his arduous duties." Fessenden was just as ironic in

17Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., Appendix, 112.
protesting the retirement of so efficient an officer.

Slidell replied that "If any gentleman will take the Chair, and it be the pleasure of the Senate, I may as well say now a few words I have to say on the main question." Gwin took the chair.

Slidell's prepared address in the opinion of one commentator stood "almost alone in its commendable brevity." Slidell recognized its shortness in his opening remarks. After so many speeches on the subject, he intimated, he could hardly add anything new. He was merely going to tell why he was going to vote for the Lecompton constitution. Previously he had acceded to the "judgment of the Senator from Illinois," he said. But now, even though he realized that Kansas would become a free state, he was voting against Douglas and the Kansas majority. His reasons, he said, addressing himself to the opposition, were quite explicit:

We are struggling for the maintenance of a principle, barren, it is true, of present practical fruits, but indispensable for our future protection -- one which we are determined never to yield. You are not willing even that Kansas shall become a free state, unless you can at the same time inflict a gratuitous insult on the South.

Kansas, explained Slidell, could not enter the Union because

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18 Ibid., Appendix, 114-15.

19 John Savage, Our Living Representative Men. From Official and Original Sources (Philadelphia, 1860), 447.
it had a constitution that permitted slavery. The South, therefore, in the future would have to adopt a "stern, uncompromising adherence to the absolute, unqualified principle of nonintervention on the part of Congress in the question of slavery." Its principles and honor had been challenged and insulted during the present deliberations by the Northern majority, even when there was no possibility of one slave being created in the Territory. For, he explained, the expedients resorted to by the Kansas minority to prevent the majority from voting on slavery was useless. "The right of a people to be exercised through a majority of their legislature" was "absolute and inalienable." Moreover, he felt sure that the second article of the Territory's bill of rights guaranteed this right. He was quite ready to vote for any amendment that would remove all doubts and scruples on this account.20

Next, Slidell turned to Louisiana's position within the framework of Southern orthodoxy, whose principles he had just finished expounding. Louisiana was a conservative state, he said. It was devoted to the Union but also, he added, to the idea of "States having equal rights and privileges." As for Slidell himself, he professed that at the moment he had not belonged to the "ultra school

20Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., Appendix, 116.
of politics." But if "unfortunately the time for action" should arrive, he would remember that his peers would judge him by his deeds. For, whatever the deviation of individual persons and states from the average view, anything which touched "the rights or honor of the South" would whip up "an undivided front to resist encroachment, be the consequences what they may."

Slidell then called attention to the possibility that if the bill was rejected, the "agitation gotten up by plotting and unscrupulous politicians, operating on the passions and prejudices of the people of the free States, will be prolonged and aggravated until a peaceful solution of this vital question of slavery will be impossible." He recognized that already there was between the North and the South "as deep a feeling of alienation -- I might say of animosity -- as ever existed between England and France." The fate of the Kansas measure, he suggested, might conceivably decide whether the Union would split in two.

Before he left the floor, Slidell said that he wanted his colleagues to understand that his speech implied "no spirit of bravado or menace." He rendered it "more in sorrow than in anger and with a full sense of the responsibility
which attaches to it." It would do well for Northerners, he continued, to recognize that the South's attitude ran along the same lines. The silence of the section, he warned, should not be mistaken for indifference. Its coolness, indeed, should alarm those who really loved the Union, for it thereby showed its "quiet, fixed determined purpose, not wasting itself in idle words, infinitely more portentous of evil than the most clamorous demonstrations." Slidell did not fear that his uttering the truth would brand him a traitor. If the facts "were not told now," he concluded, "it might be too late to avert the danger that threatens the existence of a Union which in better days I was wont to believe would be perpetual."\(^{21}\)

It may be well to mention at this point that Slidell was undoubtedly working hard behind the scenes to insure the passage of the Lecompton bill. A note to Buchanan showed that he was closely observing the situation developing in the House of Representatives with regard to the measure.\(^ {22}\) An even more obvious manifestation of his

\(^{21}\)bid., Appendix, 116-17.

\(^{22}\)Slidell to Buchanan, Mar. 18, 1858. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
backstage maneuverings appeared in the Senate's minutes of April 6, 1858. On that day, a week after the House had rejected the measure, Stuart rose and told his colleagues that four days after the Senate had repassed the bill, it still remained in its Secretary's hands. In a few moments Slidell admitted he was the one causing this delay in transit. He said he was reserving his right to move to reconsider the vote. Stuart objected to this obvious example of delaying tactics. Seward also protested on the grounds that no formal action in the matter had been taken on the floor.23

These remonstrances brought Slidell to the floor to explain his conduct. In the midst of a series of warm exchanges he claimed that under the rules he had the right to hold back the measure until the close of the day's business. He refused to say what he intended to do. The course of events would govern his actions. He might or might not ask for reconsideration. He could see good reasons for changing the rules which permitted his present course of action, but until they were amended he had

23Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 1479.
the right to make use of them.24

Slidell's exposition merely brought on further debate. Stuart protested Slidell's interpretation as putting the Senate in the power of a single member. Bayard, on the other hand, spoke for Slidell. Douglas hoped for Slidell's "own reputation and the good of the country" that the delay was, as the Louisiana Senator said, for a chance to reconsider. However, he disagreed with Slidell's version of the Senate's regulations. The Secretary of the Senate, thought Douglas, was bound to report a bill to the House immediately after action was taken on it. Bayard disagreed with the Illinois Democrat. Finally the President Pro Temp, Benjamin Fitzpatrick of Alabama accepted responsibility for Slidell's maneuver. He had held back the bill, he said, in accordance with advice given him by the clerk and the conviction that the Senate would not wish to show discourtesy to one of its members by ordering out a bill "when any Senator wished to avail himself of" the right to reconsider his previous vote.25 This explanation did not quite

24 Ibid., 1479-81.
25 Ibid., 1481-86.
still the protest against Slidell's holding back the bill. But there was little outside of voicing their displeasure that the complainers could do about the matter.  

Slidell may have felt that the Lecompton bill had to be passed without serious alteration. But he still voted for the English-Crittenden compromise bill, which gave Kansas a generous land grant in return for approval of its constitution. This measure passed both houses.  

Slidell could work for the Lecompton measure without much fear of contradiction from the majority of the Louisiana voters. But another issue during the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress must have given him some moments of fear that he was opposing the will of his community. This was concerned with the person of William Walker. In May, 1858, Walker went to trial in New Orleans on charges of leaving the country illegally. A jury of Louisianians acquitted him. At the

26Ibid., 1486.
27Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 296-301; New Orleans Crescent, May 14, 1858.
28New Orleans Delta, June 2, 3, 1858.
same time in the Senate there were two competing bills, one condemning Commander Paulding for illegal seizure and the other granting him a medal for gallant and conspicuous action. 29 The administration was on the surface taking no particular side in the matter. In response to a call for the papers relating to the incident involving the filibuster and his captor, Buchanan labeled Paulding's act a serious error but one that was patriotically inspired. At the same time, Walker's activities were called a "crime," which had hurt the prestige of the United States in Central and South America. 30 The President's report and the two bills then disappeared into the secret sessions of the Committee on Foreign Relations, of which Slidell was still an important member. On January 25, 1858, the committee reported. It said that the Executive had power enough to make arrests on the high seas. While it felt that the arrest was illegal, it nevertheless recommended that there should be no censure beyond that needed to keep Paulding's action from serving as

29Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 265.
30New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 8, 16, 1858.
a precedent.  

One dissenter within the committee on this question was Douglas, whose attitude was little different from that of Soule, who in May would defend Walker in his trial at New Orleans.  

Slidell took his first open action in connection with Walker and Paulding on January 28, 1858. He said he would vote for the motion of censure but would put off discussing his reasons for such action until the time set for debate on the committee's report. Then Slidell gave an official notice that must have reminded his hearers of his attempt in 1854 to aid the would-be invaders of Cuba. He said that he would renew his effort of four years previous to give the President power, under certain restrictions, to suspend the neutrality laws. He sustained the Executive's expressed determination to enforce these statutes as long as they were in effect. But, at the same time, he considered them suicidal.

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31 Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 378.
32 Ibid., 223; New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 2, 1858.
33 Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 461.
34 See above, pp. 83-84.
In effect they deprived the United States of "the faculty to aid the struggles of oppressed and suffering communities against the despotism of their rulers." 35

Slidell continued: He disapproved of Paulding's action and believed the officer should be deprived of "his very delicate and responsible command." But, Slidell wanted it understood that he had no sympathy with Walker's late movements or future plans. "Were his object a good one," said Slidell, "and his intended means of attaining it lawful, I consider him as altogether unfit for its successful consummation." Walker's expedition proved to Slidell that he was "neither a good soldier nor a prudent administrator." 36

Slidell's follow-up address was delivered on April 8. He opened it by stating its purpose. He was going, he said, to defend the administration's actions in connection with Paulding's capture of Walker. These actions, according to Slidell's exposition, included the branding of Walker as an outlaw, the censuring of Commander Chatard of the U. S. S. Saratoga for permitting Walker's Fashion

to pass without challenge under the stern of his ship, and the recall from his post of duty of Paulding for not exercising the proper degree of restraint in carrying out his orders. Chatard's offense in Slidell's eyes was neglect of duty. But Paulding's failing seemed to the Senator an exhibition of almost criminal stupidity in the performance of a job which required the utmost tact and diplomacy. Paulding's blundering tactics, explained Slidell, had managed to set a martyr's crown on a man who did not have a chance for success. Without their assistance, he continued, Walker would have returned from his adventure in Nicaragua a "broken-down and harmless Quixote" and devoid of the large amount of "false sympathy" he was now receiving in America.37

Next, Slidell turned his attention to Walker. He admitted that he could say nothing derogatory about the filibuster's character and courage. But Walker's ability in the field, said Slidell, left much to be desired. He was also a man of blood and a ruthless bespoiler of the unfortunate victims who opposed him. Every expedition, claimed the Louisiana Senator, commanded by Walker had proved a failure. Given an opportunity to perform the role

37Ibid., 1538.
of a statesman in Nicaragua, he had instead confiscated the property of Americans engaged in transporting passengers across the isthmus. When he performed this act, Slidell pointed out, he conveniently forgot that the same facilities had furnished him essential services in conveying his troops and supplies. He had also dispossessed original proprietors of their "domains," and, continued Slidell, distributed them among his followers. Finally, charged the Senator, who based his allegations upon a communication dated August 12, 1856, which Walker had sent to General Goicouria, the filibuster intended a permanent military government in Nicaragua. He contemplated forming an alliance with Great Britain "to cut the expanding and expansive Democracy of the North" off from succeeding him in Nicaragua. And, said Slidell, departing briefly from the line of thought he was pursuing, he, Slidell, was not speaking now in retaliation against an address Walker had delivered in Mobile on January 25, which supposedly contained an attack on the Senator. Slidell said he had the Mobile Mercury of January 26, which contained Walker's speech. There was no mention in it of Slidell's name. That was interpolated when the Delta, after a hurried conference on January 28, the very day of the Senator's first speech in the Senate, reprinted Walker's address.
Walker had claimed that his actions were lawful and that as a citizen of a foreign country he could not be arrested on the high seas by the United States government. Slidell told his colleagues in the Senate that this allegation was false. He quoted a long line of authorities, including Grotius, to prove his point, that in foreign waters sovereignty went with the flag. One precedent was the law of March 3, 1819, against the slave traders, which, Slidell claimed, gave the President the right to order ships anywhere. And regardless of whether or not Walker was a citizen of the United States, continued the Louisianian, his offense began when he placed arms aboard the _Fashion_. He had therefore broken the law while still within the boundaries of the United States and was consequently answerable to the Federal government for his actions.\(^{38}\)

Now Slidell turned to what he said was the most important part of his address. He reminded his hearers of his speech of four years before, which, he said, still spoke his mind. He believed just as strongly as ever, he continued, that Spain was desirous of Africanizing Cuba and that the residents of the island wanted freedom.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., 1538-39.
However, now he realized that Cubans would no longer fight to rid themselves of their oppressors. So, the measure he was introducing -- to give the President power to suspend the neutrality acts -- had nothing to do with them. It was designed instead to relieve the United States of the disadvantage it suffered from being deprived of "the faculty of doing that which all writers admit to be strictly consistent with neutrality -- the granting to belligerents equal facilities, within our territory, for the enlistment of troops and fitting out of armed vessels within our territorial limits."

Real neutrality, said Slidell, consisted in "affording no greater advantage to one party than the other."

South American countries were usually at the mercy of European invaders. The neutrality laws therefore operated against these Southern neighbors of the United States.

Slidell next discovered precedents for his proposal in the practices of the British nation. When British citizens, as they often did, engaged in aiding other people, asserted Slidell, their government did not hamper their actions. In fact, continued the Senator, during the Portuguese rebellion of 1832, the British had suspended the execution of their country's enlistment laws.
Finally, he pointed out the place in the world where his measure might prove beneficial. Spain, said Slidell, might invade Mexico and attempt to place Santa Anna in charge of the Mexican government. Should this action take place, continued Slidell, the neutrality laws might work measureless harm. He said he felt so strongly on the subject that should his proposal fail, he was willing that all laws relating to foreign affairs, save those necessary to fulfill treaties, be repealed. However, he realized quite well that the measure could not pass. But at least, he concluded, he was performing his duty in calling the country's attention to an important need. He spoke, he said, only for himself.\(^{39}\)

Walker's speech of January 25, or at least the Delta's version of it, had insisted that the filibuster was being castigated by Slidell because Soule had opposed Benjamin and La Sère when they went to Mexico City to ask Comonfort for a new charter for their Tehuantepec corporation. The President, continued Walker, had once treated him as an equal. But now his administration wished to turn the country's attention to Mexico

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 1539-41.
After Slidell's address in the Senate Walker again rushed into print. His letter, dated April 27, appeared the next day in the Delta's columns. Addressed to Slidell, it read:

Sir:

I have read a printed copy of your speech, delivered in the Senate on the 8th inst., sent to a gentleman in this city under your frank. It is, therefore, a copy approved by yourself.

In that speech you take occasion to assail my public character. You industriously disclaim any intention to asperse my private reputation; and I am, therefore, obliged to consider your language concerning me as used in a political sense and for political purposes.

Considered in this light, justice to the cause I represent compels me to say that your speech, so far as it relates to my acts, is a tissue of misstatements, and that its insinuations are as false as its facts are groundless.

Your obedient servant

Wm. Walker

With relation to this duel of words between Slidell and Walker, perhaps the usually conservative Bee gave

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40 Mobile Mercury, Jan. 26, 1858.

41 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 28, 1858.
a good insight into the New Orleans viewpoint. The Bee said it was glad Slidell had found courage to speak the sentiments of his friend in the White House and himself. Nevertheless, continued the journal, "that Mr. Slidell misrepresents the people of Louisiana in his sentiments respecting General Walker is a foregone conclusion."

Slidell's latest display of loyalty, however, did not surprise the Bee's editors. The quality, they admitted, had featured his entire career as a politician. The Bee agreed with a previous article in the Picayune that the whole purpose of Buchanan's foreign policy was the purchase of Cuba. It also felt that "the honorable Senator is as deeply enamored of Cuba as the President himself. But he would court her as the lion courts his bride, not by inviting caresses and amorous dalliance, but by compelling her to share his couch." The paper concluded that if private filibustering was censorable, so was the kind Slidell advocated.

Another peculiar interest of Louisiana in the line of foreign affairs appeared in Congress, where during a lengthy

42 New Orleans Bee, Apr. 19, 1858.
43 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 23, 1857.
44 New Orleans Bee, Apr. 19, 1858.
concentration on "recent outrages on American vessels" in the waters below the southern coast of the United States, the subject of the Tehuantepec contract was brought up for discussion. Much energy was expended on the first subject down to the closing moments of the special session which followed the close of the regular meeting. At this time, on June 16, Mason's measure giving the Executive authority to protect the rights of Americans abroad and to redress "wrongs and outrages perpetrated upon us by foreign nations" passed. The interest in Tehuantepec began with Pugh's resolution of May 19 calling for information as to whether the Sloo grant had been annulled, another substituted, and a contract given for mail, troops, and munitions transportation across the isthmus. On May 26 Pugh presented another resolution in the form of a memorial from Sloo asking for a contract for transporting mail over the route. Sloo claimed he had been deprived of his rights and

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45*Globe*, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 1059.


48*Globe*, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 2237.
several hundred thousand dollars which he had expended on his concession. He prayed Congress not to permit him to be sacrificed "to the sinister interference of one department of his government or the apathy of the others." 49

Before the Senate adjourned, the President complied with Pugh's request. One of the pieces of correspondence he sent was a letter from Cass to Forsyth informing the minister of the importance of La Sère and Benjamin's mission and urging that he render them every kind of assistance at his command. Another was Benjamin's angry protest over Forsyth's aid to Soule. Forsyth on his part answered these complaints in a later communication. He claimed he could have obtained even fuller rights than his instructions contemplated, "amounting," he said, "to a virtual protectorate and military occupation by the United States." This boon, he insisted, had been thrown away to favor the desires of a private corporation. He said his authority had been impinged by orders to consult with La Sère and Benjamin. Cass answered him in a tone which implied that Forsyth's days as a minister were numbered. The Secretary curtly

49 Ibid., 2399.
informed his subordinate that the President strongly
disapproved his actions.50

50Ibid., 3051; William R. Manning (ed.),
Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Inter-
American Affairs, 1831-1860, 12 vols. (Washington, 1932-
1939), IX, 238-47.
The measures connected with Walker and the Kansas constitution were undoubtedly the most sensational of the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress. But they were not the only instances where Slidell engaged in debate. He was involved in intense discussions also in matters affecting Louisiana and the armed forces. He was also busy performing his reputed task as "watchdog of the Treasury."\(^1\) He was an obvious expediter of the Senate's business.\(^2\)

Bills concerning Slidell's state included the usual run of proposals for improving its economic situation.\(^3\) One relieved the contractors dredging the mouths of the Mississippi of financial embarrassment they may have

\(^1\)Sears, John Slidell, 146.

\(^2\)Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 25, 111, 155, 215, 716, 792, 1303, 1445, 1626, 1900, 1913, 1936, 2201, 2217, 2260-61, 2289, 2565, 2666, 2724, 2993-94, 3039, 3051, 3061.

\(^3\)Ibid., 264, 287, 314, 427, 735, 918, 1626, 2659.
suffered had they been forced to wait until they had completed their task before receiving their money. A pro rata arrangement was substituted. Slidell's bill was the last legislative action connected with the project. The committee in charge was discharged from further consideration of it on June 16, 1858. Other Slidell resolutions included one that the Collins line of steamers be continued on their regular trips, another that steam cutters be established at the mouth of the Mississippi, and a third that a line of mail ships be started between New Orleans and Bordeaux. A fourth, sponsored by Slidell and Benjamin, was for settling questions arising from land warrants given the Marquis de Lafayette in 1804.

Serious debates over measures involving Louisiana during the session concerned the New Orleans customhouse

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4Ibid., 3060-61.
5Ibid., 3061.
6Ibid., 492.
7Ibid., 264, 492.
8New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 28, 1858.
9Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 803, 829.
and the sugar tariff. The argument on the tariff was short but intense. Lyman Trumbull of Illinois introduced an amendment repealing the import tax on the product which supported the planters of south Louisiana. Slidell in opposing this proposal said he would "simply give notice now, that if this amendment be adopted," he would "move further to extend it to all textile fabrics; and if it be necessary," would "vote for abolition of all customhouses and all duties on imports."^ Long and more involved were the deliberations on the other two measures involving Slidell's constituency.

The bill brought up during the session for continuing the appropriation for construction of the New Orleans customhouse failed to pass in the House. In the Senate, disapproval of expending more money for this building took the form of a motion by Henry Wilson of Massachusetts. On May 22, 1858, he asked the Secretary of the Treasury to inform the Senate "under what authority Alexander G. Penn and Emile La Sere were appointed disbursing agents of the Government at New Orleans," what was the nature of

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^ New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 10, 1858.
their work, and "the reasons for fixing the compensation of Mr. La Sere at sixteen dollars per day and the compensation of Mr. Penn at thirty-two dollars per day."\(^{12}\)

This motion was striking close to Slidell. He rose immediately in protest. If the Senator, he began had asked (Slidell did not mean to infer "that he was under any obligations to do it"), Slidell could have showed him that his facts were wrong. La Sere asserted Slidell, received eight and Penn sixteen dollars a day, the usual fees during Federal construction.

Wilson was unimpressed by Slidell's statement. He said that his figures came from a report of the Treasury Department. However, he was willing to leave out references as to the amounts of money received by La Sere and Penn. Then, on May 29, he tried to introduce into the customhouse bill an amendment to combine the jobs held by La Sere and Penn into one. He claimed he was thinking of the high cost of the Federal building. It had thus far caused the expenditure of \$3,000,000, three times the price paid for the New York customs building. He was therefore against the expenditure of \$6,000 a year to employees for the disbursement of the money appropria-

\(^{12}\) *Globe*, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 2297.
Wilson's second motion brought Slidell back on the floor. Penn's salary, he informed Wilson, was doubled for a good reason:

The superintendent of the customhouse is Major Beauregard, one of the most distinguished officers in the engineer corps. He for many years has been in rather indifferent health, and it has been occasionally found necessary, on the advice of his physicians, that he be absent for several months. 

Penn, explained Slidell, acted in Beauregard's place and as a result received fitting compensation. As for La Sèrè, continued Slidell, he disbursed not only for the New Orleans marine hospital but also for the mint, both of which required payments of almost a half-million dollars.

Next, Slidell defended the expenditures which had been made on the construction of the New Orleans customhouse. It was, he asserted, next to the Capitol, the largest public building in the United States. Its

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 2503.
15 Ibid.
foundations had to be massive because of the condition of the soil upon which it lay. The reason for the large amount of money spent for the entire structure was in keeping with the generous grant of land, worth not less than $2,000,000, which the city of New Orleans had given to the Federal government for the building's site. Surely, he contended, it was not inconceivable that the government made its generous commitment in order to match the city's magnanimity.

Moreover, continued Slidell, Wilson's speech had given other false impressions based on erroneous information. The New York customhouse, he told his colleagues, had cost $2,000,000, not $1,000,000, and three commissioners at a cost of eight dollars per diem supervised its construction. If all the materials in the New Orleans project did not come as now from the distant North, the expenses might not be so high. The funds he was asking his fellow Senators to grant would, he claimed, hardly bring much advantage to New Orleans mechanics since they were for payment of existing contracts with Northern firms. If these monies were not appropriated, he explained, workers of granite in New Hampshire and iron in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York would not be paid, "and," Slidell continued, "I would suggest to the Senator from
Massachusetts that if he were to strike out this appropriation he would probably affect his own constituents much more than mine."¹⁶

The debate on the subject was continued the same day, May 29, and on June 1. By this time apparently, the illegality of the salaries of La Sere and Penn was no longer a subject for discussion. Efforts now were expended in trying to set up a new system of disbursement in connection with the construction of Federal projects. Prominent in the discussion at this point was Hamlin of Maine. He thought that the salaries of customhouse disbursing agents generally were too high. And specifically in the case of the New Orleans Federal building, he expressed doubt that the employee handling the government disbursements there expended sufficient labor to earn his salary. Slidell answered that Hamlin's conjecture was not based on fact. La Sere, he said, was on the job seven hours almost every working day.¹⁷ Wilson introduced a bill to let collectors of the customs act as paymasters with

¹⁶Ibid.
¹⁷Ibid., 2503.
a commission up to two-and-one-half percent for all disbursements made by them. A ceiling of $400 per annum was set on the allowance to these officers. Slidell returned once more to the floor. He wished to explain, he said, that he had joined the discussion only because Wilson had "struck at the disbursing officers at New Orleans, and New Orleans alone." In truth, Slidell informed his colleagues, the system was an old and universal one. Even the Secretaries of the Treasury who had given out the contracts for federal construction were innocent. But, continued the Louisiana Democrat, the Republican Senator from Maine "was somewhat eloquent on the subject of these abuses." In performing this service for his constituents, however, said Slidell, Hamlin had neglected to include the fact that in 1855 he had employed his office to procure over $4,600 to pay for the services of two men in the Bangor custom-house. In the Senator from Massachusetts' state two men at Boston received $25,000 for their labors and in New York two others got eight dollars per diem. But, continued Slidell, his object was not to impede the progress of the bill taking shape. He would vote for it although he believed a fairer treatment of the
collectors would be to give them one-quarter of one percent under control of the Secretary of the Treasury. 18

Slidell was still not quite finished with the subject. He praised the characters of Penn and La Sère for the record. Then he informed his colleagues that La Sère was in Washington at the moment and had spoken in favor of the amendment under consideration. In fact, he had informed his fellow Louisianian that if he were in Slidell's seat in the Senate, he would "very probably vote for it." Finally, with a last verbal glance at the "gentlemen on the other side," Slidell said that any movement on their part to reduce expenditures would "find no more hearty co-operation than they will in me." 19

The Republicans with whom Slidell had debated returned to show that they could be as magnanimous and conciliatory as their opponent. Hamlin admitted the practice under discussion was old and not the administration's special handicraft. Wilson disclaimed any personal feeling in the matter and acknowledged

18Ibid., 2585-86.
19Ibid., 2586.
Slidell's figures on salaries as correct. He was glad to hear that the Louisiana Senator desired to cut expenses and abuses. He would neither accept nor oppose the amendment. In the end all proposals, including Slidell's passed.20

The other measure concerning the New Orleans custom-house appeared under the sponsorship of Toombs. It was to provide for the relief of Simon Vesser and Jose Villarubia of New Orleans for losses they occurred from the illegal actions of their employee Charles Metéye. Metéye's task was to receive and pay the duty on the sugar imports of his employers. He proceeded to make "mistakes" which reduced his firm's tariff $2,000 on one invoice alone. The total amount lost to the United States by his machinations was perhaps as high as $30,000. This Metéye pocketed and carried with him beyond reach of the law. The Federal government thereupon sued his employers for the tax money he had stolen. When the case reached court, the jury decided in favor of the defendants. Now the government was appealing to the circuit court. 21

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., Appendix, 363.
In introducing his bill Toombs claimed that his object was to prevent the negligent customs officers and clerks at New Orleans from receiving their share of the forfeiture charges due them according to law if Vesser and Villarubia lost their case. There was little doubt in the mind of the Senator from Georgia that these officials were mainly responsible for Meteye's embezzlements. He was decidedly against their receiving forfeiture charges and half of the hundreds of thousand dollars' worth of seized sugar which would also be theirs if the United States won the suit. When Slidell took the floor, he stated that an employer was responsible for its employees and that, while the firm under discussion was undoubtedly honest, the customs people had a "vested right" in the seizure. Toombs disagreed; he countered that there was no such thing as a "vested right" in such cases until the courts had handed down a decision.22

A series of exchanges now took place on the Senate floor. Then Slidell rose to explain the difficulty the customs officers had encountered in keeping track of sugar imported from Cuba. His object, it seemed, was

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22Ibid., Appendix, 363-64.
to expose Toombs' attack as "rather harsh, and in some instances gratuitous." Cuban sugar, he explained, was sold by the arrobas at so many reals apiece. The invoices, he continued, read so many boxes, at sixteen arrobas the box, at so many reals the arrobas. Obviously, said Slidell, unless expert and "minute critical examination was made, a trusted employee like Meteýe would get away with fraudulent figures for some time. But, Slidell contended, Meteýe was a full partner in the corporation which he represented in the customhouse. His firm should have noted how well he was living while drawing a relatively modest salary, and so it was responsible for his actions.

Not only, it appeared, was the theft difficult to catch. Slidell also believed that it was caused by the undermanned condition of the New Orleans customhouse, which forced its personnel to rely upon the good faith of importers. This condition evidently had been aggravated by the previous senior customs officer in New Orleans, whom Slidell now called "the most incompetent collector that has ever filled any position of equal importance under the Government." Hatch, the present holder of the position, explained Slidell, entered upon his duties only immediately before the
discovery of Méteye's fraudulent practices.

After interruptions by Benjamin and Pugh, Slidell then proceeded to explain why the verdict in favor of Vesser and Villarubia in the lower courts had failed to influence his opinion and how Méteye had managed to escape from arrest. The judge at the trial, Slidell explained, had instructed the jury that the act under which the goods were seized did not apply. Thus he had killed any possible judgment in the government's favor. Méteye had not been apprehended when discovered, averred Slidell, because the day was Saturday and the Federal attorney of the district could not be found until Monday.24

Toombs contested some of Slidell's claims. The Georgian accused the New Orleans customs officers of not examining Méteye's accounts. Slidell debated with him, demanding the name of one officer who had neglected his duty. Toombs in reply named "Joseph Genois!" Slidell agreed that Genois had not examined any accounts. He was the naval officer. Toombs called off other names of persons who apparently were more responsible for

23Ibid., Appendix, 364-66.
24Ibid., Appendix, 366-68.
auditing customs figures. Slidell replied by explaining that when the customs officials became suspicious of Météyé's books, they went immediately to work checking his entries. After a weekend of labor they discovered by Monday morning the full extent of his frauds.25

After further rather heated debate by several Senators Toombs's bill passed. But by this time it contained a stipulation demanded by Iverson that the firm pay the the customs bill. Slidell voted for it, Benjamin against.26

However, Slidell had not heard the last of the case. The next day after the passage of Toombs's measure, Preston King of New York asked for a report of the action, if any, which had been taken to "investigate and punish the complicity of custom house officers at New Orleans" with Météyé. To Slidell, who objected immediately, this was an indictment of a group of officials who "must not be condemned before they are heard." Slidell thereupon dictated the word "alleged" into the resolution and denied King's assertion that he and Benjamin thought there was complicity involved in the case.

25Ibid., Appendix, 366, 368.
26Ibid., Appendix, 267-68.
matter. After he sat down, Bigler's objection killed the measure, but it was repeated by Wilson later when he moved that the Secretary of the Treasury supply information as to the alleged complicity of officers of the New Orleans customhouse in a case of "frauds upon the revenue by means of false invoices and false computations of values." The Meteyé incident probably also lay behind Slidell's resolution of February 4 that the Committee on Commerce inquire into the expediency of "defining more precisely by law whether by date of shipment or departure from foreign ports, the value of merchandise imported into the United States shall be fixed for purpose of estimating duties thereon."28

The bills dealing with the armed forces which attracted Slidell's attention on the floor consisted of two relating to the Naval Board and its successors, the Courts of Inquiry, set up by Congress on June 16, 1857, and one involving army firing pieces.

The first of the measures for the navy began as a resolution Slidell introduced on December 22, 1857,

27 Ibid., 2159-60.
28 Ibid., 566.
29 See above, pp. 141-46.
that the President transmit to the Senate the records of
the proceedings of the Courts of Inquiry. Crittenden
objected to the proposal. The President, he said, might
not have had time enough to make his decisions with
regard to the courts' findings. Slidell did not agree
that his action was premature. Most of the cases, he
informed Crittenden, were already confirmed. On the
other hand, he contended, the Committee on Naval Affairs
would need time to go over the voluminous records.

However, he did not press for a vote on his resolution.

It reappeared on the floor for discussion on January 4,
1858, with regard to whether the originals should be
sent or money spent for printing copies. Two days later
Slidell announced that his resolution was no longer
necessary. The President had already sent him the de-
sired materials.

The second bill involving the naval forces saw
light when Slidell rose to speak on January 11, 1858.
At this time he advocated that Congress grant the
President the power, with the advice and consent of the
Senate, to restore to the active and reserved lists of

30 *Globe*, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 136.
31 *Ibid.*, 175, 205.
the navy any officer dropped by the various naval courts. Slidell said his purpose was to dispute the contention that the President already had the power. In his opinion this supplement to previous laws was necessary to correct any abuses the President might think detrimental to the service's best interest. Buchanan's squeamish constitutional interpretations, Slidell insisted, would never permit him to exercise such authority under the present laws. Moreover, Slidell continued, the Senate would not approve if he did. Certainly, said Slidell, Buchanan had no power to make redress even if he knew injustice had been done. The Senator could also assure his colleagues that the President would rely on Senate approval if he made any new appointments. The proposal passed, 32
25-22.

The measure involving army guns was undoubtedly somewhat out of Slidell's line of experience. On May 20, 1858, it appeared in the form of a resolution offered by him that the Secretary of War give his opinion as to whether it would be expedient to convert any portion of the arms on hand into breach-loading guns, the cost thereof, and what appropriation would be necessary for

32 Ibid., 237, 240-41, 246.
the purpose. Slidell also attached a request that the Secretary of the Navy inform the Senate as to the present condition of the New Orleans customhouse, what sums would be necessary for its completion, and the appropriation required for payment of present outstanding liabilities connected with its construction.

The second part of this resolution received no significant action during the session. The first part brought on considerable debate, which perhaps was enlivened somewhat by the rumor circulating at the time that one of Slidell's constituents was the inventor of a firearm which the Louisiana Senator was trying to influence the Senate to adopt. When Slidell took the floor on the matter, his very first utterance was an indignant denial of this allegation and an affirmation that he would never introduce a measure for the sole benefit of an individual.

Argument on the bill began soon after its introduction on the floor. It soon became obvious that there were two competing proposals. One favored the purchase of

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33 Ibid., 2780.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
new rifles at forty dollars each. The other, in line with Slidell's resolution, was for conducting experiments with the ultimate object of converting the old army pieces at the cost of two dollars and fifty cents apiece. Jefferson Davis was leader of those who advocated the first measure and felt that tampering with the efficient old equipment would produce breechloaders that were inefficient and useless for the American armed forces. 36

Slidell had been accused of seeking to aid an individual by his measure. In turn he accused outside influences of operating upon those who opposed him. He claimed that a Morse rifle — evidently that of his alleged constituent 37 — had been judged best by the Secretary of War. But, he complained, "a large combination, a lobby interest" were trying to prevent its testing. For this purpose they were exerting pressure on Senate members. Slidell said he did not believe that any single weapon, including Morse's, should be granted an exclusive contract.

These accusations brought some surprising results. James A. Pearce of Maryland stood to deny the existence

36 Ibid., 2780-34.
37 Ibid., 2782.
of these "outside influences." Slidell denied he was referring to Pearce. "Nobody, of course," he replied, "would attempt to influence the Senator from Maryland." He may, however, continued Slidell, have heard of opposition among the competing inventors in the matter.

Pearce answered with another denial. Slidell then protested that surely he was not expected to name names. He said he was not referring to Davis, but there were "others." Seward stood up. He asked simply: "Was it i?" Slidell answered that he was not referring to Seward in particular, but from the conversation the two had had the day before, Slidell inferred that the New York Senator had been approached. Seward said he must have misled Slidell. He was against the Morse weapon, he asserted, because of an adverse report. But it was the "other party," by which Seward meant the Morse faction, who had tried to influence his vote. If this unexpected reply nettled Slidell, he had recovered his composure somewhat later when James S. Simmons of Rhode island asked for the inclusion of cavalry breechloaders in the measure. In reply Slidell provoked laughter by saying that he thought he might be disposed to "consent to that if it were not

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38 Ibid., 2784-85.
that it might subject me to the charge of bargain and corruption." The reference, of course, was to Buchanan's connection with Jackson's old charge against Clay and Adams, which had cropped up once more in the campaign of less than two years previous.40

In the end a Benjamin amendment permitting equal appropriations for the purchases of the new rifle and conversions of the muzzle-loaders prevailed, but the latter provision was stricken out in a later vote, 26-23. Slidell, however, refused to give up. He introduced an amendment which would give the Secretary of War discretionary power to purchase new arms or convert old ones, only to learn that parliamentary rules made such a measure a new bill and a new bill increasing an appropriation was out of order. Since this situation had come about because of Slidell's courtesy in withdrawing his original measure so that Davis could pass one of his, the Louisianian's feelings would hardly be difficult to judge. He threatened: "I will state very frankly that if my amendment now does not prevail, I shall vote against the whole appropriation for the purchase. His

39 Ibid., 2785.
40 See above, pp. 194-95.
tactics worked. A way was discovered for the passage of Slidell's orphan. It was given the shelter of a House bill and the procedure involved was ruled in order by the chair. It passed by a voice vote.41

Slidell's attention to keeping what he considered unnecessary appropriations from passing appeared especially in his attempted reform of government printing contracts, in his opposition to two private bills, one for reimbursing an alleged victim of the Mexican War and the other for granting a pension to the wife of a naval hero, and in the speech where he reversed his position on internal improvements.

The widow referred to above was the wife of the late Commander William Lewis Herndon, United States Navy, who gave his life doing rescue work during a hurricane on September 12, 1857. Slidell opposed giving Mrs. Herndon more than the usual one-year's pay. He said that other persons in her category received financial help only for the period allowable by law and he would play no favorites.42

The supposed victim of the war during Polk's administration was Alexander J. Atocha. An American citizen

41Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2785, 2788.
42Ibid., 1960-61.
in Mexico at that time, Atocha claimed to have suffered heavy losses when the Mexican government ordered him to leave the country in eight days. But the board of commissioners appointed pursuant to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo rejected his plea on the ground that he was an agent for Santa Anna, who was then resisting the government in power.

In telling his colleagues why he opposed the measure for paying Atocha for his alleged losses, Slidell claimed that the action of the board, whose decision Atocha was now appealing, represented the final authority unless new testimony appeared in his behalf. Slidell said that Atocha was not illegally expelled. Therefore, he was not entitled to damages. Slidell regretted that he must now speak against the claims of a person with whom he had experienced many personal contacts in New Orleans during the ten years Atocha had resided there. But he could not find very much wrong with the board’s findings. The sum of $300,000, which Atocha claimed represented the loss of his brokerage business was ridiculously high. Technically, Slidell admitted, Atocha was probably an American citizen in 1845, but, Slidell believed, he

43Ibid., 37, 188-89.
was also certainly at the time a "denizen of Mexico." Slidell branded as untrue the claim that the money if un­paid would revert to Mexico. All the funds reserved by the agreement for the payment of claims, Slidell in­formed his colleagues belonged outright to the United States. Once more the Louisiana Senator repeated his belief that Atocha's relations with Santa Anna had been at least suspicious. He tried to attach an amendment permitting the accounting officers of the Treasury Depart­ment to decide if Atocha was entitled to the payment allowed by the bill under consideration but agreed to permit the case to go to the Court of Claims. 44

Slidell shifted his position with regard to internal improvements in a speech he made on June 3, 1858, when the Senate was considering a bill for the improving of the St. Clair Flats. First, he reminded his colleagues of his speech of two years previous, when he had stated that the dredging of the Mississippi's silt deposits was a Federal project. Since then, he said, he had experi­enced great difficulty deciding where the line lay between national and local objects. And now, he concluded,

44Ibid., 182-89, 190, 192, 193.
the economic condition of the country precluded passage of anything not absolute necessary for the general welfare. He had accordingly arrived at a position in which he looked upon the whole system of internal improvements as a mischievous practice in which good and worthy bills could not be passed unless coupled with those of the opposite character. 45

These sentiments did not necessarily mean that Slidell would go to any lengths to hold back money bills. In one case, at least, he made a magnanimous gesture. The proposal was for the "captors of the Brig Caledonia." Bell asked Slidell why he was continually objecting to consideration of the measure. In reply, Slidell put it on the floor, amended it so that only direct heir were benefitted by it, guided it to passage, and voted against it. 46

Slidell's efforts in connection with the public printing consisted of two bills. One would have discontinued the "extravagant" free issue of printed materials by the government. 47 The other was an attempt to amend the

45 Ibid., 2673.
46 Ibid., 2998-99.
47 Ibid., 1023.
Post Office bill by giving the government's printing to the "lowest responsible bidder." Davis and Seward aided him in this effort. Other Senators, however, feared the measure would hurt the Public Printer, and it lost, 14-30, with Slidell and Benjamin voting with the minority. 48

The last measure above looked to the future. 49 Two other bills associated with Slidell during the first Session of the Thirty-fifth Congress also would reflect to the years ahead. One originated as a report from a committee Slidell headed, which was appointed to investigate the condition of Washington corporations and associations acting as banks with the view of preventing the issuance of bank notes of less than fifty dollars by these organizations. The consideration of the committee's report was laid over to the next session. 50

When it was introduced, according to the New York Herald's correspondent, it caused "a terrible sensation among the bankers and shinplaster establishments" in

48Ibid., 2894-95.
49See below, pp. 443-56.
50Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 27, 61, 453.
the nation's capital.  

The other proposal was for the extension of the amount of silver coinage in the United States, so that such currency could be made legal tender for debts not exceeding twenty dollars. In introducing it Slidell assured his colleagues that it would not be inflationary and therefore injurious to the poor. The present price of silver, he said, would insure against that eventual-ity. On the contrary, he continued, an increase in the number of coins would help exclude the circulation of small bank notes, which did tend to reduce the value of the currency.

Slidell rose again in behalf of the bill when it returned from Hunter's Committee on Finance with an adverse recommendation. He said he wished to have an opportunity before the session ended to explain his reasons for introducing the measure. His action in speaking, he felt, was especially in order since there was a "great division" in committee. The proposal was consequently put on the calendar for February 15,

51New Orleans Delta, Feb. 7, 1858.
52Globe, 35 Cong. 1 Sess., 188.
53Ibid., 517.
but it never again saw the light of day during the meeting. The philosophy behind it, however, returned two years later in the report and speech of Slidell and the debate on the bill for controlling the banks and the paper money in Washington.  

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54 Ibid.

55 See below, pp. 429-32.
CHAPTER XIV

THE BRAINARD AFFAIR AND ITS CONNECTIONS IN LOUISIANA

During 1858 Slidell's attention was apparently directed mostly on national affairs. Even while he was in Louisiana for a brief period in November, he could not put Washington politics out of his mind. For it was at this time that the Brainard affair reached the Louisiana press and the nation at large.¹

Even so, if the actions of the Louisiana legislature during spring, 1858, furnished a criterion, Slidell's power, or the usually conservative spirit that moved it, was not completely missing from Louisiana's confines. There a bill for the introduction of African "apprentices" failed to pass by one vote in the Senate.² Another radical measure, to

¹ See below, pp. 333-50.
² New Orleans Crescent, Mar. 17, 23, 1858.
expel native free men of color from Louisiana, also did not carry. A discussion of the swampland controversy, which had earned Slidell and his party severe criticism during the last statewide campaign, merely brought forth evidence, in the form of previous Whig speeches in the Louisiana legislature, that the evils in the state's land policy could be laid at the doors of both parties. An article in the Courier, which had the ring of truth, informed Louisiana voters that the swamplands served as a convenient device for the state to escape paying interest on borrowed money. The lands were given to creditors, who exploited them for personal profit.

Direct connection of Slidell's name with the legislature's action appeared in one comment by the Crescent. The African Apprentice bill, it claimed, had failed because one Senator -- who originally was a leader in favor of the measure -- changed his vote at the last moment. To the newspaper this action meant that "Washington City has done its work." 

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3Greer, *Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861*, 171.
4See above, pp. 262-64.
5New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, Feb. 27, 1858.
6Ibid., May 23, 1858.
7New Orleans *Crescent*, Mar. 17, 1858.
One reason, probably, why Slidell did not devote much time to Louisiana politics in 1858, was the fact that the year was a quiet one so far as statewide elections were concerned. New Orleans experienced a few tempestuous days of political turmoil, but there was probably little Slidell could do to affect the current trends in the Crescent City's politics.

For, this time, hardly anyone would have denied that the opponents of the American Party in New Orleans put up a spirited campaign in the city's election of local officials in June. They began their activities on May 25 in a public request to Major G. T. Beauregard that he run as an independent in the coming mayoralty campaign. Beauregard accepted this invitation and promise of support. The campaign thereafter was quiet until June 3. Then, notices

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8 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 26, 1858.

9 Ibid.
appeared in the New Orleans newspapers giving the information that five hundred of Beauregard's backers, the "Independents," had seized the city's arsenal, municipal court, and jail at Jackson Square. They called themselves a "Vigilance Committee" and said they were "setting up the barricades" to free the city of its ruffians and "Thugs." Threats of various kinds by Mayor Charles W. Waterman proved useless. The usurpers abandoned their captures only when the city administration made some of their members a part of the local police force on the day of election.

Unfortunately, for all their efforts, the Vigilance Committee failed to achieve a significant victory on election day, June 7. Gerard Stith beat Beauregard for mayor, 689-389, by piling up a margin of victory in the Third District so large that his opponent had little chance of catching up with him by reason of the vote elsewhere in the city.

More important than local and state politics were

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10 Baton Rouge Advocate, June 4, 1858; New Orleans Delta, June 3, 1858; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 4, 1858; John S. Kendall, "The Municipal Elections of 1858," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, V (July, 1922), 357-75.

11 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 5, 1858.

12 Ibid., June 8, 1858.
other events which occurred in and about south Louisiana. These could be classified into the fortunate and the unfortunate for those whom they affected.

The fortunate events included the obvious progress of the Jackson railroad and the Tehuantepec corporation. By the end of 1858 the Jackson line was maintaining a regular schedule between New Orleans and Jackson, Mississippi. Its activities were coming to be commonplace items in the daily newspapers. The Tehuantepec company, on the other hand, still attracted special notice. In August, 1858, it was prepared for carrying out the provisions of its government mail contract. By now, Auguste Belmont was a rumored investor in its welfare. He had, the Courier claimed, advance $170,000 with only the subsidy as security. The correspondent of the New York Times evidently agreed with Belmont's judgment. He foresaw prosperity for both company and Mexico in the years ahead. The present directors, he believed, furnished a pleasant contrast to previous operators, when Tehuantepec

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13 New Orleans Delta, Nov. 25, 1858.
14 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Aug. 10, 1858.
was the pawn of unprincipled adventurers.

Details of how the corporation would fulfill their government contract appeared around the time, October 27, 1858, when the Quaker City made the first of the regularly scheduled semi-monthly trips south to the Mexican peninsula. The ship's destination was Minatitlan. There it would transfer passengers and freight to the Suckil. The Suckil would then proceed inland to within a short distance of Ventosa on the Pacific Coast. At Ventosa a vessel of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was waiting to make the last portion of the journey to San Francisco. The transportation between the furthest point reached by the Suckil and Ventosa was performed by stagecoach. Aboard the Quaker City on its first trip for the Tehuantepec corporation were La Sere, Mandeville Marigny, and William Moreau.

The trip must not have shaken the faith of these three official inspectors. In December, 1858, with the encouragement of the great majority of the members of the New Orleans press, the company was negotiating to pur-

15 New Orleans Bee, Sept. 21, 1858.
16 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Sept. 22, 1858.
17 Ibid., Oct. 27, 1858.
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chase two more steamers. But there were ominous reports
coming from the south. Mexico was experiencing another
series of disorders, which undoubtedly strengthened the
arguments of those who wanted to establish a virtual pro-
tectorate over the unhappy country. Also began the dis-
turbing reports of the activities of the Frenchman Felix
Belly and his Parisian corporation, Milland & Co.

Belly, it appeared, had secured from Costa Rica and
Nicaragua the right to build an interoceanic canal within
their borders. Moreover, the pact was said to contain an
appended declaration which appealed to France, England,
and Sardinia "not any longer to leave the coasts of Central
America without defence, its rich countries in the hands
of barbarians." Buchanan was reported to be preparing a
protest regarding this obvious hint that the United States
was connected in some way with Walker's filibustering

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New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 30, 1859;
New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 10, 1859.

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New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 9, 1858.

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Ibid., Dec. 25, 1858, Jan. 6, 1859.
expeditions.

The threats posed by Mexico's instability and Belly's contract eventually proved to be of no consequence. The Mexican government never repudiated its agreement. Belly's activities had no official connection with the French government. Then, in fall, 1859, the concern of the New Orleans newspapers in the matter was put to rest by the news that Belly was an adventurer with little chance for success.

More numerous and even more significant were the unfortunate events that occupied the attention of the area about New Orleans in 1858. These included the demise of the Southern Pacific railroad, a return of the yellow fever to plague proportions, one of the worst floods in Louisiana's history, another adventure of William Walker,

21 Ibid., June 25, July 2, 1858; New Orleans Picayune, June 27, 1858.
22 Bailey, Diplomatic History of the American People, 289, n. 18.
23 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 23, 1858.
24 Ibid., Oct. 7, 1859.
25 See above, pp. 246-49.
26 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, July 10, Sept. 24, 1858; Baton Rouge Advocate, July 15, 1858.
and the outbreak of news connected with the Brainard affair.

The fever this time was not quite so devastating as it had been in 1853. Yet it numbered almost 5,000 victims. On October 1 it had killed nearly 2,500 people, almost half the number dead during the same period in 1853. New Orleans had the appearance of a ghost town. At one point in the epidemic's progress the Courier published an appeal that strangers stay away from the city. Finally, on November 7, 1858, the same journal reported a "killing frost" and advised those who had forsaken New Orleans that they could return to their homes in safety.

Walker's third attempt to return to Nicaragua followed a recruiting tour he made across the nation. Walker was encountering increasing difficulty in getting his enterprises

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27 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 28, 1858.
28 Ibid., Oct. 3, 1858.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1858.
31 Ibid., Nov. 7, 1858.
away from American shores and into Nicaragua's confines.
By the end of October the British navy was patrolling the
Gulf of Mexico in expectation of the filibuster's rumored
expedition.33 President Buchanan was alerting his subor-
dinates with a proclamation against illegal exit from
America. Walker, it seemed, claimed his men were "emi-
grants." Buchanan noted this allegation but said in reply
that persons in that category would need passports to get
out of the country.34 This service the Nicaragua minister,
Yrissari, would hardly be likely to perform. On November
9, consequently, Walker was in Washington protesting against
the administration's actions.35 In Mobile were the members
of the "Southern Emigrant Aid Society," whose vessel, the
Susan, could not sail because the local collector of the
customs had refused clearance to it. The reason given
by the official was that those scheduled to sail aboard
the ship did not have the necessary papers for leaving
the shores of the United States. Secretary Cobb, ac-
cording to one report, personally relayed this information

33 Ibid., Oct. 29, 1858.
34 Ibid., Nov. 2, 1858.
35 Ibid., Nov. 9, 1858.
to Walker himself.\textsuperscript{36}

The government's attitude neither stilled the excitement in New Orleans and Mobile nor dampened the spirits of Walker and his men. On December 7, 1858, newspapers in the Crescent City carried the information that the \textit{Susan} was on the open seas with 175 "emigrants" aboard. No mention was made of Walker himself.\textsuperscript{37} Reports of the expedition were probably not nearly as informative as newspaper readers desired. One related that Captain S. Morrison of the revenue cutter \textit{Robert McLelland} had boarded the \textit{Susan} in American waters. But, continued the account, Captain Harry Maury of the boarded vessel had informed the Federal officers that he would not surrender even if he were fired upon. Moreover, Maury had taken along with him an officer of the cutter as a "guest." The government vessel, it appeared, had thereupon run aground. The \textit{Susan} quickly escaped to the open sea.\textsuperscript{38}

Rumor and silence followed the above account in the New Orleans newspapers. Alleged searches by the British

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, Nov. 14, 19, 20, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, Dec. 5, 1858.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}, Dec. 8, 9, 10, 1858.
\end{itemize}
of American vessels brought forth indignant protest from 39 editors. Meanwhile, the Susan was said to be returning after an unsuccessful attempt to land its passengers in Nicaragua. Elsewhere appeared another statement that the vessel had delivered its passengers and returned to Pensacola, where it and its crew were detained by port authorities.

Finally, came the true information about Walker's expedition. The Susan had been wrecked on the reefs of British Honduras. Sir Frederick Seymour, British governor in the area, had rescued the passengers and sent them back to Mobile.

The Brainard controversy, because it affected him personally, was of more importance to Slidell than all the foregoing events put together. The story broke in Louisiana between November 10 and November 26, the time of Slidell's short visit home. It stated that immediately following a

39 Ibid., Dec. 11, 14, 15, 18, 22, 1858.
40 Ibid., Dec. 29, 1858.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., Jan. 4, 1859.
43 New Orleans Delta, Nov. 10, 1858; New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 20, 1859.
brief stay in Chicago by Slidell, a rumor had passed about the Illinois city that slaves on a plantation Douglas owned in the Baton Rouge area in Louisiana were victims of disgraceful treatment. They were farmed out, said the report, and worked like machines without adequate provisions made for their maintenance. \[44\]

Occurring at the time in Illinois was the campaign for the Senate seat of Douglas, whose claims for being returned to Washington by the Illinois legislature were being contested by Abraham Lincoln. Douglas's candidacy was also being opposed by the Buchanan administration. Slidell as a part of the President's unofficial advisory staff, therefore, made his trip to Chicago for the purpose of raising up an anti-Douglas Democratic faction in Illinois. \[45\]

Slidell was in Chicago for two days, sometime in late July. He had been delayed in Washington for some time after the Senate finished its session. \[46\] In late July he went


\[45\] Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 213-15.

\[46\] New Orleans Delta, July 24, 1858.
with his immediate family and a party of intimates like Bright and Belmont on a tour which included a short stay at Atlantic City and a boat trip on Lake Superior. He was reported in Chicago by the New Orleans *Crescent* in its issue of August 10, 1858. The newspaper believed at the time that he was campaigning for his own candidacy for the Presidency in 1860. On August 8 he was reported in Saratoga. In September his name was included in a list of passengers on a train which had been wrecked near Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. On November 10 he was in New Orleans.

Slidell apparently did not hold much hope that his visit to Chicago would yield immediate results. He was looking forward to 1860 and was not certain that even then Douglas's opponents within the Democratic party would be able to curb his growing power. Slidell explained his views on the matter in a letter he wrote to Buchanan on August 8, 1858. He was writing, he said, concerning "the policy you have indicated of replacing Douglas office holders by friends

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49 *New Orleans Delta*, Aug. 25, 1858.
50 *New Orleans Picayune*, Sept. 9, 1858.
of the administration." Unfortunately, continued Slidell, the time for such action had passed. "Had this course been adopted six months since," he told Buchanan, "Douglas would now have but few followers in Illinois & even he would probably have given in his adhesion." But, cautioned Slidell, even if it was "too late perhaps to do any good by removing his partisans from office," yet "a vast deal of mischief may yet be prevented not only in Illinois, but in all the North Western States." Evidently the anti-Douglas Democrats also did not expect to beat Douglas. Slidell's letter merely mentioned that they believed they could carry their state, if Douglas were deprived of the Federal patronage in Illinois, in 1860. Slidell was not so optimistic as they were. But he agreed that throwing the Douglas faction out of Federal jobs was "the only course which will afford us a chance of success." For, he told the President, "thousands of sound democrats in Illinois" believed that Douglas still possessed Buchanan's "confidence & friendship." Moreover, "every device" was being "resorted to for the purpose of keeping up that delusion." 51

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51 Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 8, 1858. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
At any rate, Slidell could not have left Chicago very long before the rumor of Douglas's slaves began spreading through Illinois. Actually, the property in Louisiana belonged to Douglas's newly acquired bride. He gave general direction to its management but relied upon an overseer to provide personal supervision. But if these facts were known they were disregarded. Republican and administration orators passed along the charge. It appeared in the Illinois Republican convention that fall, where the character of its alleged originator emerged. He was said to be a "very distinguished Southern man who had lately been in Chicago."

Finally, the rumor reached print. A few weeks before the election the Republican Chicago Press and Tribune took Douglas to task over the matter. The Senator later claimed he was out of Chicago at the time and had not seen or heard of the article until after the election. At any rate, he did not answer it. The source given by the Republican journal for its allegations was "a distinguished southern senator."

52 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 14, 1858.
When Slidell came to New Orleans in November, Douglas had already been assured of his reelection to the Senate. Upon his arrival in his home city the Louisiana Senator was shown a letter that had been received by what Slidell described as an editor of a Douglas paper not particularly against Slidell. The letter was from James B. Sheridan, amanuensis for Douglas. It accused Slidell in severe terms of originating the alleged libel against Douglas. Once he had learned the name of the writer, which he had received only after a display of much resistance on the part of the Douglas editor, Slidell determined he would have to answer Sheridan.

Consequently, on December 9, 1858, two letters appeared in the Advocate. The earlier communication, dated November 12, bore Slidell's signature. It read:

You have probably seen an article in a Chicago paper, attributing to me assertions about the maltreating of Mr. Douglas' slaves. I need scarcely say to you, that it an absolute fabrication, without the semblance of a foundation in truth. All I ever heard of Mr. Douglas' slaves was that they were in your possession, and of course, in every way well treated and cared for.

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54 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan 15, 1859; Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 396-97.
55 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 20, 1859.
The letter was addressed to James A McHatton. McHatton was the person to whom Slidell had sent the intimate letter, dated April 1, 1856, which was quoted above. The mention of McHatton's name must have brought to the minds of some readers in Louisiana the realization that for awhile the McHattons of the Baton Rouge area were contractors for the labor of the prisoners in the Louisiana state prison. The charges against Douglas were therefore probably a confusion of McHatton as an overseer of slaves and McHatton as an employer of convict labor.

The second letter to the Advocate was from McHatton. It was he who had forwarded Slidell's note. He informed the Baton Rouge journal's editor that he was confident that Slidell had nothing to do with the report publicized by the Press and Tribune. Instead, it had originated, he said, with "partizans who wished to make political capital against Judge Douglas." McHatton asserted further that he was "well known in the South" and that he was very confident there was "not a man in Louisiana or Mississippi, who would make such a charge against me." In a postscript he claimed to have in his possession certificates from the practicing

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56 Baton Rouge Advocate, Dec. 9, 1858. See above, p. 173.
57 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 4, 1857.
physician on the plantation and also from planters of the surrounding territory. An examination of these papers, he said, would prove the falsity of the charges made by the Chicago Journal.

Strangely, not one New Orleans newspaper of the opposition to Slidell within and without the Democratic party attempted to make political capital out of Sheridan's letter. The Picayune called McHatton "a popular and humane gentleman and planter." It was certain that "none will ever believe that Mr. Slidell would stoop so low as to utter a deliberate falsehood to an abolition editor, to injure Mr. Douglas."

Another American Party daily, the Crescent, called Slidell "too cool and politic, if not too honorable to be betrayed into such a gross impropriety." It was unfair, continued the Crescent, that Slidell be permitted to remain in such a bad light without defense. In Baton Rouge the Democratic Advocate gave Slidell its unqualified confidence. The

58Baton Rouge Advocate, Dec. 9, 1858.
59New Orleans Picayune, Dec. 12, 1858.
60New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 29, 1858.
story, said the journal, was the "coinage of some reckless and unprincipled Abolitionist, intent upon injuring Mr. Douglas and inflaming the resentment of his friends against Mr. Slidell." The *Advocate* noted for the benefit of its readers that even the Douglas journal, the Washington *States*, had stated its belief that "The story was no doubt manufactured for election day." Moreover, the *Advocate* continued, the *States* was a good witness in Slidell's defense when it said: "There is no person who knows Mr. Slidell but will at once relieve him from the responsibility of having made such a statement. He is recognized as an honorable gentleman, and the last man to injure even his worst enemy by such an infamous charge."  

The charges of "lie" hurled by the press of South Louisiana stirred the *Press and Tribune* into action. It said:

> We have only to say that the story came to us from a personal friend of Mr. Slidell -- a gentleman of character and influence in this city -- and he assured us that he had the statement from Slidell himself, during his visit to Chicago, while the last canvass was going on. His name is at the service of anyone authorized to demand.  

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61. *Baton Rouge Advocate*, Nov. 20, 1858.  
It was at this point that the central character of the affair came into public view. He was Dr. Daniel Brainard, surgeon general of the Rush Medical College of Chicago until the purge of the Douglas followers in Illinois. Then he became surgeon in the Chicago Marine Hospital. The Press and Tribune forced him to admit that he was the source for the newspaper's article against Douglas. But he denied that he had given Slidell as his authority. The Press and Tribune in reply intimated that Brainard was a liar. It continued to rely on the accuracy of its original statement, that Brainard told it the story and gave Slidell as its source.

Slidell's reputation was, therefore, far from being cleared. Apparently the Senator must have realized this fact, for on December 13, 1858, he released another statement which the Washington Union printed. In it he struck at the authenticity of the Republican newspaper's assertions. Slidell noted the appearance of Brainard's name as

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63 Ibid., 442; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 18, 1858.
a new development in the matter. He said that he did not have in his possession the issues of the journal in which the doctor's name had appeared but assumed that Brainard had not disavowed the declaration imputed to him. Slidell said he never noticed "anonymous attacks" upon himself. But these came as a result of the statements of a respectable member of the Chicago community and therefore required an answer.

Next, Slidell contrasted his previous relations with the two most important personages in the controversy. McHatton was "one of my most intimate personal and political friends." The statement about him was "a base fabrication, in whole and in part, without the shadow of foundation in truth." On the other hand, Brainard was a mere acquaintance. Slidell saw him one time, he said, at the New York Hotel in June, in the company of a "gentleman from Chicago." Slidell insisted he had had no dealings with Brainard. When the Senator visited Chicago, he recalled, Brainard had called and left his card. Slidell thought he might have sent his card in return, but he did not visit the doctor. No further communication, he insisted, followed. It there had been, asserted Slidell, Brainard was free to publish it. Meanwhile, the evidence forced Slidell "to believe either that Dr. Brainard did
not make the statement attributed to him . . . or that he has been guilty of a deliberate and malicious falsehood."

Finally, Slidell defined how the Brainard affair had affected his relations with Douglas. He said he had not gone to Chicago on political business. He had hoped and expected Vice-President Breckinridge to accompany him to the Illinois city and act as a shield that would protect Slidell from the "suspicion" that the Louisiana Senator was "engaged in a political crusade against Mr. Douglas." Now, however, Slidell felt that he need worry no longer about giving offense. He believed that Douglas had authorized and permitted his secretary's anonymous attacks on Slidell. The Illinois Senator, therefore, in Slidell's eyes, had lost "all claim to the explanations that I would otherwise have promptly volunteered to give him."

Douglas answered Slidell in a letter published by the Washington States on January 7. The Illinois Senator said he learned of Slidell's Union letter only upon his recent arrival in New York. Slidell in his denial, wrote Douglas, "does justice to himself," and in his denial of the truth of the Press and Tribune's allegations.

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64 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 25, 1858.
"does justice to me." But, Douglas continued, other parts of Slidell's communication deserved an answer. Consequently, Douglas now denied that he had "authorized or countenanced anonymous attacks upon Mr. Slidell." Brainard was his enemy, declared Douglas, and when he spread his lie and gave Slidell as authority, Douglas had denied it and "expressed the opinion to my friends that it should be copied and circulated for the purpose of showing the base means employed to defeat my election." He believed also at the time that such publicity would expose the "real author of the calumny." Slidell's letter, concluded Douglas, had accomplished this object.

Slidell gave his last words on the subject in an answer to Douglas which appeared on January 12 in the Union. First he reminded Douglas that he had had an opportunity to quiet Slidell's fears that Douglas believed the Louisiana to be the source for Brainard's assertion. Douglas had arrived in New Orleans right after Slidell's departure from there for Washington. During this visit, continued Slidell, Douglas could not have missed seeing McHatton and the editor who had informed Slidell of the letter from Douglas's secretary.

Ibid., Jan. 18, 1859.
He must also have learned of Slidell's denial in the Advocate on December 9. And he must have realized that Slidell believed Sherman's letter bore at least Douglas's approval, especially since it was mailed under the Illinois lawmaker's frank.

So, Slidell intimated in the second part of his letter, he could not escape the feeling that Douglas was behind the attack upon him. The Illinois Senator, he claimed, had neither communicated with Slidell nor disclaimed having countenanced the anonymous attack on him—"Nay, there is a paragraph," continued Slidell, "in his card of yesterday which fairly admits the construction that he denounced me in Chicago as a calumniator," on authority of Brainard's statement. Douglas, charged Slidell, had not even called on the physician to find out if there was any foundation for linking Slidell's name with his charges, "when the event proves that Dr. Brainard, if called upon, would have shown the whole story to be a fabrication." It seemed to Slidell that "a sense of the common courtesies of life, and of our position as Senators, should have dictated the propriety of calling on me either to deny the statement or to vindicate its truth." Yet, asserted Slidell, "it never

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66 These facts were true. See New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 3, 4, 5, 1858; Jan. 18, 1859; New Orleans Picayune, Dec. 2, 1858; Baton Rouge Advocate, Dec. 9, 1858.
occurred to Mr. Douglas to suggest even a doubt of my having been capable of originating such a calumny." Finally, he had received no assurance from any source that Douglas regretted denouncing him in Chicago. Slidell knew of no indication that Douglas had "the slightest desire to deceive" him, that is, if Slidell "had, indeed, been deceived" when he believed that Douglas felt differently now than he had when he first learned of the Press and Tribune's report. As for his own actions in the matter, Slidell explained that he had had no opportunity to call upon Douglas in person nor any means of knowing when the Illinois Senator would arrive in Washington. So, he had released his statement of December 18.  

When Slidell published this letter, rumors existed that "provocative" communications like Slidell's were part of a Southern plot to entice Douglas into a duel which would prove fatal to his life and the cause with which he was associated. The evidence of Slidell's association with this alleged plot, however, is completely lacking.

One more note ended the matter. It was from Sheridan to the editor of the States, and written on January 14, 1859.

67 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 20, 1859.
68 Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, I, 451.
Sheridan denied that he had sent out any anonymous reports. He always, he said, signed his mail. So, Slidell could not have been referring to him as the writer of the letter to the New Orleans editor. However, he continued, he had written a letter on his own responsibility to the Crescent City. Douglas, claimed Sheridan, had not known a word of its contents.

Next, the writer told something fresh about Brainard. The doctor, said Sheridan, was a bitter enemy of Douglas and an administration man on the Kansas question. He had circulated a report, wrote Sheridan, that in an interview with Slidell in New York during June he, Brainard, had learned that Buchanan and his cabinet had determined on war to the death with Douglas. Agreements were made, Sheridan averred, that the physician was to succeed the present chief of the Chicago Marine Hospital, and Slidell was to make a trip to Chicago to advise upon the plan of campaign. Brainard had afterward gone into the hospital position and in Sheridan's eyes thereby verified what he had said would take place. And, said Douglas's secretary, Slidell had come to Chicago, where he "spent several days in close communication with the federal office-holders," who were united with the abolitionists to defeat Douglas. Then, right after Slidell's departure the report of Douglas's slaves, which Brainard credited
to Slidell, circulated. Moreover, continued Sheridan, Brainard went so far as to say that the Louisiana Senator felt a "certain delicacy" in the matter because the overseer of the slaves was a personal friend. The story seemed plausible to Sheridan at the time. The Louisianaian, he felt, was about the only possible person to know the facts. Furthermore, continued Sheridan, Slidell had remained the author without question until after the election. So, Sheridan had sent the report of the Brainard affair to Louisiana along with what he considered appropriate remarks about Slidell's conduct. Finally, he said, he did not use Douglas's mailing frank but instead paid for his own postage.

Sheridan's accusations certainly sounded plausible. They more often than Slidell's explanations resembled later but still contemporary accounts of the Brainard controversy. Of course, some of these interpretations, sometimes used as sources, were somewhat discredited by their connections with politics. Work like these included James W. Sheahan's

69 New Orleans Delta, Jan. 22, 1859.

Life of Stephen Douglas, which was a campaign document freely passed around the Charleston convention and John S. Foote's Casket of Reminiscences, who demonstrated his pro-Douglas leanings and anti-Slidell prejudice during a Louisiana political campaign.

However, Slidell has left behind one piece of evidence to answer Sheridan. This was his letter of August 8, 1858. In it was the following passage:

I regret to be obliged to say that the distrust of Dr. Brainard is universal & I have learned various facts that satisfy me of its being well founded. Dr. I. C. Keenan is an applicant for the Surgency of the Marine Hospital. He is most favorably spoken of, is the son in law of C. I. Wanetta ... one of the most respectable citizens of Chicago, an old line democrat who presided at the late meeting of our friends.

Furthermore, the importance of the Chicago trip to Slidell could be seen in the following lines:

I shall go to Atlantic City towards the close of this week & shall not have the pleasure of seeing you until September, when I shall pass a few days in Washington on my way to Louisiana.

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71 Murat Halstead, A History of the National Political Conventions of the Current Presidental Campaign (Columbus, Ohio, 1860), 5.

72 New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 16, 1859.

73 Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 8, 1858. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.
So, unless the letter was a deliberate covering up of his tracks, Slidell on August 8 had apparently put the Douglas campaign out of his mind. And he hardly recommended Brainard for any job, as one authority has stated.  

74 Sears, John Slidell, 151.
CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND SESSION OF THE THIRTY-FIFTH CONGRESS

The short session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress was a meeting in which disappointment and frustration appeared at almost every important vote. It was hardly possible, therefore, for it to have proved more contrary in spirit to the address of Vice-President Breckinridge delivered on the occasion of the removal of the Senate from its old to its new, recently-constructed chamber. At this time Breckinridge reminded Senators of the many historic events which had taken place in the old room and prayed for God "to bind the nation together" in its present crises.¹ The harmony entreated for by the Vice-President, however, did not prevail in the Senate's deliberations. Before the session ended, Slidell with undoubted assistance from

¹Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 202-204.
Buchanan led the way in removing Douglas from his seat as chairman of the Committee on Territories. Then Slidell turned on Buchanan and helped deny the President's pleas for an increase in the tariff. In turn, the President frustrated the desires of the overwhelming majority of the Northern members in Congress by his veto of a bill granting land to states for the support of colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts. He went against the wishes of Louisiana in another veto, of a Benjamin-sponsored measure for continuing the dredging at the mouths of the Mississippi. Slidell received a serious setback when for the first time the Senate refused to continue the appropriation for the construction of the New Orleans customhouse. The South endured a defeat when a combination of an adverse decision in the House of Representatives and Republican tactics in the Senate defeated Slidell's proposal for purchasing the island of Cuba. And the entire administration suffered a significant embarrassment when disagreements over protocol between the two bodies of Congress caused the defeat of the

\[\text{Ibid., 1555, 1570-71.}\]
appropriation for the maintenance of the Post Office de­
partment of the government.3

Douglas was officially ousted on December 13, 1858,
when James S. Green of Missouri was elected to the chair
of the Committee on Territories.4 The real decision was
made, however, in Democratic party caucuses, which met
between December 8 and 10, 1858. Slidell was a leader in
these conferences. He was reported to be the Senator who
made the motion that Green be substituted for Douglas.5
He was supposed to have told Green at this time that he
liked Douglas and wanted the Illinois Senator to remain
in the party, but that he, Slidell, felt also that the cau­
cus "must elect one" of their members who was "without
doubt or suspicion." Otherwise, he was reported as saying,
the deliberations of the caucus would not "satisfy the ma­
jority" of the Democrats in the Senate.6

Buchanan's request for an increase of the tariff was
part of a vigorous message which also recommended an appro­
priation for the purchase of Cuba and the establishment of

3 Ibid., 1633-34, 1656, 1687.
4 Ibid., 45.
5 New Orleans Picayune, Dec. 18, 1858.
6 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Dec. 18, 1858.
military posts in Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico. While the President included sugar in his recommendations, he undoubtedly had most in mind the clamor from his own state, Pennsylvania, the Keystone State of 1856, for an increase in the import duties on iron. The wishes of Buchanan and Pennsylvania were wasted on Slidell and Hunter of Virginia, chairman of the Committee on Finance. When Bigler of Pennsylvania introduced a bill for raising the tariff, Hunter moved that the Senate go on record as believing that to make any changes in the tariff during the current session was "inexpedient." On the same day of Hunter's proposal, January 29, 1859, the nation's press was carrying reports of another Democratic caucus. In it Slidell was supposed to have said that he "was in favor of retrenchment," that he "preferred the reduction of the expenses of the government rather than an increase of the revenue by a protective tariff," and that he was therefore "opposed to

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7 *Globe*, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 1-8.  
8 See above, pp. 203-207.  
9 *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Mar. 25, 1859.  
any alteration of the tariff at present." Eventually, most of the Democratic Senators were with Slidell and Hunter. In a caucus held during the last days of January Hunter's resolution received only one dissenting vote. In place of raising the tariff the Senate majority passed a bill that authorized the issue of twenty million dollars in treasury notes. This passed on March 2.

With regard to the measure giving public lands for the establishment of schools, Slidell was on the side of the President. But he took no significant action, except to vote against it. He did present a petition regarding the public lands which may have had some subtle connection with the proposal. This petition was from New York citizens. It denounced the "monopoly" of public lands and asked that grants be made to actual settlers only.

The bill for the New Orleans customhouse was the obvious victim of the economy that Slidell had already gone on record as favoring with regard to government

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11 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 30, 1859.
12 Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 1556, 1571.
13 Ibid., 95, 687.
14 Ibid., 772.
spending. When the proposal reached the floor, therefore, Hunter voiced objection to it. The New Orleans building, he stated, was sinking in the soft silt upon which much of New Orleans rested. Consequently, continued Hunter, no harm would result if the construction was "kept in a state of preservation" for some time.  

In his reply Slidell showed there was more than one way to judge what was true economy. He repeated many of his previous arguments, particularly his claim that the generosity of the Federal government should match that of the New Orleans citizenry in granting valuable land for the building's site. His main points now, however, concerned the losses and inconveniences which would result if construction was stopped now. He admitted that the custom-house had sunk a bit and was willing to grant that the design may have been too elaborate. But the settling, he insisted, was even, and stoppage of the work on the roofless but almost completed building would be an almost criminal waste of the public's money already expended on the project. Another consideration, he added, was "a total prostration of the business of the immediate neighborhood of that custom-house," from which New Orleans businessmen suffered.

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because of streets blocked by construction material and equipment.17

Slidell's speech, however, did not quiet opposition based upon alleged fears that the New Orleans customhouse was sinking and cracking. Trumbull, Douglas's Republican partner from Illinois, expressed much concern over this danger. Benjamin called his attention to the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans, which, Benjamin said, had sunk two whole feet without a crack resulting in its superstructure.18 Slidell reminded Trumbull of the bill the Louisiana Senator had introduced for changing the customhouse's dome from granite to iron.19 This measure resulted from the advice of "the engineer" of the construction, who, said Slidell, was "one of the most valuable men in the country, one of the most scientific and experienced engineers in the country."20 This reference to Beauregard had no effect on Trumbull. Neither was his judgment affected when Slidell stated his willingness to accept Bigler's amendment, which

17Ibid.
18Ibid., 1572-73.
19Ibid., 1573.
20Ibid. See Beauregard to R. Delafield and others, Sept. 10, 1852. Beauregard Papers, Archives, Louisiana State University.
reduced the amount of the appropriation from $350,000 to $200,000. Trumbull wanted an estimate of what was needed and a cessation of work until the settling had stopped. To him a sinking of three-and-a-half inches a year was outrageous. The cost so far, he added, was exorbitant. And, he asked, what was the explanation of the fact that as of September, 1858, the unexpended balance on the customhouse's books was almost $350,000? Slidell explained in answer that by June 30 only $48,000 would remain. The work had been delayed by the yellow fever epidemic of 1858. In his reply, Trumbull conceded nothing to his opponent. In the end his arguments evidently told more than Slidell's. The measure lost, 16-27.

There were many bills introduced during the session advocating important action by the United States below its southern frontiers. But the prize was undoubtedly the one Slidell introduced on January 10, that the President

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21Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess. 1574.
22Ibid.
23Ibid., 94, 104-106, 257, 303, 475.
be granted $30,000,000 in advance for the purpose of acquiring Cuba by negotiation. In introducing the resolution, Slidell absolved the administration of all responsibility for its origination. Yet, it was in accord with the message Buchanan sent to Congress at the beginning of the session. Later, the measure left the Committee on Foreign Relations in a form agreeable to Slidell. On January 24, 1859, the Louisiana Senator gave it a lengthy introduction to his colleagues.

Slidell's speech stressed three main points. The first dealt with the propriety of the measure he was sponsoring. He drew upon as a precedent the act of March 3, 1847, which, according to Slidell's interpretation, provided for an appropriation given in advance to the Chief Executive for bringing the Mexican war to a conclusion in accordance with the best interests of the United States. The past also yielded reasons to Slidell why Cuba should become American, even if bayonets were

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24 Ibid., 227.
25 Ibid., 1-8.
26 Ibid., 538.
27 Ibid., Appendix, 90-95; Senate Reports of Committees, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., No. 351.
employed in acquiring it. Such action would be necessary, Slidell felt, "for self-preservation." For, he continued, ultimate possession of the island "may be considered as a fixed purpose of the United States." Because of "geographical and political necessities," the United States had to expand, its very existence depended upon it. These facts, Slidell claimed, were "recognized by all parties and all administrations" and endorsed by popular vote. And, he believed, the history of Britain and Russia showed the wisdom of this policy. So, Slidell concluded this part of his address, the fruit which was not quite ripe in John Quincy Adams' day -- should it now be permitted to fall untasted to the ground?

The second point dealt with Spain's claim to her last possession in the New World. Slidell maintained that Spain could not long keep Cuba as a possession. With the first sign of a European war, he said, the island would fall away from the mother country. This event would leave but three possible alternatives for Cuba's future. It would become the property of a new
European master. It would become independent, which in effect would signify that the new country was a "disguised" protectorate of the United States. Or, it would be annexed outright as a result of conquest or purchase by America. In any case, it never would return to Spain. So, Spanish pride had no bearing in the matter, asserted Slidell, for, its government, he claimed, had known for years the intentions of the United States in this matter. Nor, also, he continued, should opponents of the slave trade object to Spain's loss. They should back an opportunity to strike a fatal blow at the last area in the world where the sale of human beings was profitable and to promote better treatment of those already slaves. Certainly also, concluded Slidell, would the measure help to end outrages on American property and persons. It would also raise the standard of living in the island over what it had been thus far under the Spanish masters.

Finally, Slidell assured his colleagues against fears of giving too much power to the President with this measure. The resolution, he said, permitted a narrower range of discretion to the Executive than the acts of 1803 and 1806 had granted to Jefferson. Offers to Spain would not be made until "the favorable moment." Who knew, asked Slidell,
when that might occur. Sudden war or revolution, he stated, might make the "perfect" opportunity.

Opponents of Slidell's bill were not long in appearing. The first of them to speak was Mason, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Mason spoke against the majority voice of his own committee. He denied that it was "natural" for a state to want to expand. Sometime later, Mason introduced an opposing motion to Slidell's bill. This was in the form of an amendment which stipulated that Spain be given notice that if she should ever be ready to part with Cuba, the United States stood ready to accept its cession on fair and liberal terms; also that the United States would never permit it to pass from Spain into the hands of any other European power. Another member of the committee who was against the measure was Seward. He presented a substitute bill, for the President to inform the Senate on the state of the relations between the United States

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28 Senate Reports of Committees, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., No. 351; Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 90-95.
and Spain, the condition of the Treasury, the status of any negotiations going on for cession of Cuba, and the condition of the army and navy. This information was to assist Congress in determining if it should "adopt any extraordinary measures to maintain the rights and promote the interests of the United States, connected with or growing out of their relations to Spain." Seward also wanted Congress convened if any such eventuality occurred. He expressed personal concern over what he considered the President's attempt to seize power, the poverty of the Treasury, and the loss of prestige to the Senate. He was bothered also about the status of Cuba after it became a part of the Union and he felt that since Spain would hardly be willing to hand over Cuba to the United States, Congress in passing this bill would "authorize the President of the United States" to "offer an indignity to" the island's present owner.

Reactions in the press, as the measure was introduced and the shape of the coming battle in the Senate could be ascertained, gave perhaps significant insights. One of the first interpretations among those representing the Louisiana press in Washington -- and one which was

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30 Ibid., 539-40.
never quite wholly written off as erroneous -- seems to have been that Slidell was not serious. The Picayune representative in the nation's capital said that even the opposition refused to accept the resolution as a real issue. The Crescent's observer wrote that Spain would refuse Slidell's $30,000,000 for Cuba. War, he continued, would result. Of course if "we did not want war, we could use $20,000,000 to pay off the annual deficit and have $10,000,000 left as a first installment." The trouble was, concluded the correspondent, the money would have to be borrowed first.

This interpretation, that Slidell was insincere, must have seemed somewhat inaccurate when the Senator's action was endorsed by a Democratic caucus, was introduced as a separate bill in the House of Representatives, and was denounced so vehemently by Seward. The Picayune's correspondent changed his mind and believed Slidell's

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32 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 18, 1859.
33 Ibid., Jan. 31, 1859.
bill a sincere gesture on his and Buchanan's part. Other writers began to see politics at its root. The Advocate's representative believed that the Cuban bill would furnish the means whereby the Democrats would walk into office in 1860. The Crescent's reporter saw the measure as a device to unite the disputing sections of the Democratic Party. It would "take the wind out of the sails of Douglas," who was already paying the role, asserted the correspondent, of the obedient party man to win back the favor of Southerners. Seward's speech brought back memories to the Washington reporter of the Advocate of the last time America had expanded southward. Seward's remarks, he wrote, were nothing particularly brilliant or original. They were, in his opinion, the same arguments employed by the Whigs when Texas was seeking annexation.

Once his bill was on the Senate calendar, Slidell's greatest task was in getting it up for consideration and a vote. He faced a host of enemies to his plans, since

35 New Orleans Picayune, Feb. 8, 1859.
36 Baton Rouge Advocate, Feb. 3, 1859.
37 New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 28, 1859.
38 Baton Rouge Advocate, Feb. 3, 1859.
in the short session there was competition among all members to have their measures taken up first. Otherwise, their bills might have to await the next session for passage. No member of the Senior House worked harder than Hunter, chairman of the Committee on Finance. And in working long and hard for appropriations, Hunter became the indefatiguable enemy of Slidell's attempt to get his Cuban measure up for a vote.

Also, the Republican strategy, to talk the Cuban bill to death, stood in Slidell's way and made certain that he was going to have difficulty in getting the Senate to express its majority will on the subject of the purchase of Cuba. Thus, Solomon Foot of Vermont prevented consideration on January 31, 1859, by speaking about Paulding's capture of Walker. Hale's speech of February 9 was almost a copy of Seward's remarks of January 24. Crittenden's long speech of February 15, certainly aided the Republican strategy. In it he questioned whether Buchanan was the proper person to

\[39\] Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess. xi.
\[40\] Ibid., 687.
\[41\] Ibid., 904.
handle the purchase of Cuba. Spain, he felt, would hardly wish to treat with one of the signers of the Ostand Manifesto. Crittenden viewed with concern the possible seizing of Chihuahua. He thought Cuba desirable but not particularly necessary for the defense of the United States. He was "too proud of his country," he said, to admit anything so "humiliating." 42

The tactics of the opposition, moreover, were aided by some Democratic Senators, like Mason, and even, perhaps, by Slidell himself. At one point in the debate Slidell noted, "we certainly are not as well disciplined on this side of the House, as on the other." 43 His own possible contribution against his cause lay in his reluctance to impart very much information on the subject. He claimed such facts were better withheld and that the President felt they should not be exposed to public view until actually needed. However, Slidell told his colleagues, they might rest assured that the measure was "in exact conformity with the spirit of Buchanan's recommendation." 44

42 Ibid., Appendix, 155-60, 160-69.
43 Ibid., 787.
44 Ibid., 858.
In spite of the opposition from so many different kinds of sources, Slidell kept doggedly on his course. At one point he threatened Hunter with an amendment that would kill the Virginian's whole appropriation program. He expedited the appearance on the floor of those Republicans who wished to record their views on the matter. And he tried to answer, or at least to reconcile their and other opposing arguments against his project for the purchase of Cuba. He asked Crittenden if he would be willing to accept an amendment which would keep the money appropriated by the bill out of the Executive's control until the contemplated treaty with Spain was completed. Seward then spoke in an effort to turn this gesture of compromise into a requirement that funds be held back until the Senate ratified any transaction. Slidell in reply said that he had not meant to retreat that far. He would be in favor of delay only until the moment when Spain approved the sale of Cuba. Later, Slidell reminded Crittenden that Buchanan could no

\[45\text{Ibid.}, 687-88, 694, 885, 903-904, 909, 923, 933, 959, 1023, 1074, 1124, 1141, 1203, 1206.\]

\[46\text{Ibid.}, 658.\]

\[47\text{Ibid.}, \text{Appendix}, 159-60.\]
more employ the funds to purchase Cuba unlawfully than he could any other money at the disposal of the Treasury. Crittenden asked Slidell to "suppose" that Buchanan was willing to take the responsibility for an illegal expenditure. Slidell's answer was brief but to the point: "I cannot suppose it," he said. On another occasion Jacob Collamer of Vermont voiced his dread of the slave trade and his disgust that the government could not lawfully arrest a slave illegally brought into the country. Slidell told Collamer that he could support such a proposal if the Republican would introduce it. The South, he add, was against the slave trade unless others, like the Cuban planters, could purchase them cheaply. When that occurred, said Slidell, many Americans who did not now like the slave trade would change their minds. As laughter rang out in the chamber, Collamer objected to what he termed the interjection into his speech of remarks "in favor of the African slave trade." 49

Slidell, of course, was not alone in his fight.

48 Ibid., Appendix, 169.
49 Ibid., 1184.
He received invaluable help from several hands. One bit of assistance came from Benjamin. Benjamin's speech in favor of the purchase of Cuba was acknowledged by at least one commentator as the best of the session. The "impersonation of eloquence," as he was called at this time, dwelt on the horrors he thought would result from the emancipation of Cuban slaves. He recalled for his colleagues the experiences, which, he said, the British West Indies had suffered. What had occurred in these islands, he said, made him certain that freed Negroes were of little value as laborers. The institution of slavery, therefore, concluded Benjamin, was the only possible means of maintaining production in a plantation economy. Moreover, he added, the desires of the Cubans should prevail, and their wishes were to join the United States.

Even more helpful was the action of Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi, whose motion decided the ultimate

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50 Baton Rouge Advocate, Feb. 26, 1859.
51 Ibid., Feb. 25, 1859. The source for the quotation was the Louisville Courier.
52 Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 960-64.
fate of the Cuban bill. Brown performed his service towards the close of a meeting that was threatening to last all night. Without it, it was quite possible that the Republican strategy to prevent a vote on the measure before the session's closing date would have succeeded.

At any rate, on February 25, 1859, Slidell decided to have a vote on his measure before the Senators left their seats that day, even if procuring this action meant sitting until sunrise the next morning. He ran into a combination of reluctant Republican speakers, motions to adjourn, and attempts to get the bill set aside. At nine o'clock in the evening Wade was showing his displeasure at being forced to remain in the Senate. He said he was not desirous of speaking at this time. Following him, James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin tried to postpone discussion of the Cuban bill and to take up the Homestead bill in its place. He began making a speech in favor of the Homestead measure until Slidell cut him short with an objection to the chair. Joseph Lane of Oregon wanted

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53 Ibid., 1326-47, 1351.  
54 Ibid., 1351-52.
also to object but Slidell waved him down. He told Lane to stop helping out the delaying actions of the Republicans.\footnote{Ibid., 1352.} As time wore on, the Republicans continued the same tactics. Doolittle kept on trying to get the Homestead bill to be considered. Slidell went on the floor in protest. Democrats called for order and Republicans objected to being forced to vote at this time for the measure under discussion and called for the substitution of Doolittle's motion.\footnote{Ibid., 1353-57.} A series of maneuvers brought the matter up for decision by the chair. The chair ruled in favor of the Republicans. Slidell went to the floor once more. He overturned the ruling by a vote of the members present.\footnote{Ibid., 1357-58.} But his opponents did not cease their tactics. Finally, at fifteen minutes after midnight, another Doolittle motion to substitute discussion of his measure for debate on the Cuban bill failed once more, a Wilson bill was laid on the table, and another motion to adjourn turned down.\footnote{Ibid., 1358-63.} Then, Brown stood up and made his motion.
Brown's speech was not very long. He had been heard on one occasion thus far. Doolittle at one point in the discussion had protested that he had not been permitted to say anything on the measure under consideration. Brown's short retort had intimated that Doolittle did not understand what the session was all about -- he was not supposed to say anything, said the Mississippi Senator. Now, Brown asked if he could put through a motion to lay the Cuban bill on the table without its undergoing any debate. The chair said that the rules permitted such procedure. Thereupon, Brown made his motion. This action meant that Brown would have to vote with the Republicans and against his own desires. His remarks showed why he was willing to go against his own wishes and probably expressed the thoughts of many of the other Senators who sympathized with him:

I am for the bill as it came from the committee, and I am against the amendment proposed by the Senator from Virginia, though I would take that rather than get nothing. I am for the acquisition of Cuba, and I want to advertise to all the world that we mean to have it -- peaceably

\[59\text{Ibid., 1358.}\]
if we can, forcibly if we must. I am willing to pay for it, or I am willing to fight for it. I would advertise to the world that we mean to have it; and I look upon this bill as nothing more than a mere advertisement that the United States desire Cuba, and mean to have it.

The Republicans, he continued, had no speeches to make or nothing to offer in reply. They were making "a sort of guerilla warfare, moving to postpone this bill and take up something else, and so on." The nearest approach to a test vote was the method being employed now by himself.

The vote against Brown's motion to table was 18-30. This meant that almost two-thirds of the members present were in favor of the Cuban measure. Slidell immediately voiced his approval of the results. He said he had given his consent to Brown's motion after a hurried consultation with the Mississippian. Now, he continued, he was willing for adjournment. Pugh delayed matters just long enough to put in an amendment that no money could be spent in the purchase of Cuba until after the treaty of cession was completed. Then the Senate adjourned. The time was one o'clock.

60 Ibid., 1363.
61 Ibid.
When the Senate opened its doors again, Slidell ended the discussion on the matter with a brief message. He mentioned what had happened during the previous meeting. In view of Republican delaying tactics and their clamor against what they called a dictatorship of the majority, he said, he had put down what he wished to say in writing. Thereby he would insure against any misunderstandings or distortions of his words. Now, he continued, in view of the fact, that "the sense of the Senate had been expressed with as much distinctness as if there had been a final vote," he thought it "injudicious" to call up the Cuban measure again. Such action, he feared, might endanger the many appropriation bills not yet passed. He gave notice, however, that he would reintroduce the proposal on the first day of the next session.

The Republican response was principally in the form of a short speech by Fessenden. Fessenden denied that the Republicans were trying to prevent a vote on whether the President should be given money to negotiate for Cuba. Their tactics, he averred, came about because of the lateness

62Ibid., 1385.
of the hour of the previous session and the short space of
time that had been devoted to debate. He did not deny, however, that the tactics had been dilatory.

The session, of course, was not a complete waste of Slidell's time and effort. The passage at last of the General Armstrong bill was one notable achievement. The appropriation for the mail contract of the Tehuantepec corporation was renewed. Slidell was, as usual, busy in routine affairs and in expediting a few bills for the benefit of his constituents. He was also connected with three bills interesting enough, perhaps, for particular, if brief, mention. The first of these concerned the late New Orleans postmaster Kendall, whose trial had caused Slidell's final break with the Pierce administration.

63 Ibid., 1386.
64 Ibid., 811.
65 Ibid., 1613, 1616.
66 Ibid., 13, 21, 214, 258, 599, 653-54, 894, 896, 921, 1013, 1019, 1140, 1353.
68 See above, pp. 73-74.
It proposed to relieve Kendall’s sureties, Arnold Harris and Samuel F. Butterworth of having to pay an additional $5,000 discrepancy which had recently been discovered. Slidell pointed out in his remarks that Harris and Butterworth had already paid $10,000 for Kendall, who had now left the country. The proposal passed. 69

The other two measures were in the field of foreign relations. In one of these Slidell forestalled an attempt by Pugh to overturn what Slidell called a long tradition by preventing the President from paying new diplomats without previous authority from Congress. Slidell pointed out to his colleagues that the measure would have stopped the President from paying new diplomats if he did not have specific authority from Congress. With Mason’s assistance Slidell secured — with a few concessions to placate Pugh and Hale — a general appropriation upon which the President could draw for the purpose. 70 Slidell’s other action

69 Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 654.
70 Ibid., 1176.
in this field was a brief speech he made concerning a measure to establish diplomatic posts in Italy. During its discussion, Slidell made the observation that the chief mission should be placed in Savoy and not Rome. The first of these two states, said Slidell, would be the Italian power of the future.

\[71\] Ibid., 1088.
CHAPTER XVI

POLITICS IN LOUISIANA, JANUARY-JUNE, 1859

Between January and June, 1859, occurred some of the most intense excitement in Louisiana's political history. Unsurprisingly, much of this excitement centered on the political personality of Slidell, sometimes in association with Benjamin or La Sere.

When the Louisiana Senator returned home in March, he came in expectation of facing a battle with his political enemies in the Democratic Party of his state. As events proved, his anticipations rested upon a solid foundation. Before he left Louisiana again, he had engaged in what was almost a death struggle with two inveterate antagonists of his, Soule and Hugh Kennedy, editor of the True Delta.\(^1\) This action was over the selection of candidates to represent the Louisiana Democratic Party in the coming statewide elections. These were chosen in a convention.

\(^1\)See above, pp. 46-48.
at Baton Rouge, which began its deliberations on May 25. Whoever controlled the convention, therefore, named the party's choices. So, before May 25 arrived, Slidell's foes revolted in a meeting held April 4 in Odd Fellows' Hall in New Orleans. They then entered into a violent contest with the Slidell Democrats over which of the two factions would send delegates from New Orleans to the convention. They injected into this contest Slidell's supposed ambition to run for the Presidency in 1860 and his allegedly fraudulent actions in connection with the Houmas land tract in Louisiana. And they received aid from another feature of the campaign, the defection of the Louisiana Courier from its former allegiance to the Slidell faction. They might even have made some political capital from the press reports concerning Benjamin's re-election to the Senate.

Benjamin was re-elected in the face of persistent rumors that Slidell had thrown him over for John Sandidge, representative from Louisiana in the Federal House of Representatives. The belief was published as far back as spring, 1857. During Slidell's swift trip around Louisiana at that time, he was supposed to have promised
Sandidge a Senate seat in 1859. And as late as December 28, 1858, the story of Sandidge's replacing Benjamin received notice in an article by the Washington correspondent of the New York Times.  

These views may have been accurate to some extent. Slidell wrote Buchanan a letter in August, 1858, in which he recommended Benjamin for appointment to the Spanish ministry. He did not say his colleague was unavailable. However, during the weeks preceding the election there appeared opinion that denied that Slidell was behind Sandidge. In November, 1858, the Bayou Sara Ledger censured New Orleans newspapers for claiming that Slidell had stated his preference for one of the competing candidates. Both men, stated the Ledger, were the Senator's friends. Therefore, he "could not and would not meddle with their claims." The Crescent took issue with the views of the Times' correspondent. Benjamin, said the New Orleans journal, was a friend of Slidell, and Slidell

\[2\text{See above, p. 255.} \]
\[3\text{New Orleans Crescent, Jan. 5, 1859.} \]
\[4\text{Ibid., Nov. 17, 1858.} \]
never deserted his friends. After Benjamin's election the Picayune received a report from its Baton Rouge observer. His opinion was that Slidell was not against either Benjamin or Sandidge. However, asserted the reporter, Slidell would rather have seen Sandidge elected. Thereby would have been laid to rest the demands of the citizens of north Louisiana for a Senator from their section.

The nomination proceeding in the Democratic caucuses held between January 22 and 24, 1859, provided no clear insight as to Slidell's preference between Sandidge and Benjamin. After twenty-four ballots three candidates, Sandidge, Benjamin, and Henry Gray, divided the votes of their party almost equally among themselves. On the twenty-fifth ballot Benjamin threw his strength to Sandidge, who then needed but one vote more to attain victory. But the Gray faction upset all agreements by walking out of the meeting and refusing to return. They claimed that the last balloting had violated an understanding among all the contending groups for an adjournment before any more attempts

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5 Ibid., Jan. 5, 1859.
6 New Orleans Picayune, Jan. 30, 1859.
were made to arrive at a decision. This maneuver put Benjamin's followers in the ascendency. They proceeded to elect the former Whig, 26-23. In the later formal vote in the legislature Benjamin beat Gray, 57-50. Slidell consequently had the undoubted honor of submitting Benjamin's credentials in the Senate on the last day of the current session.

Slidell came home immediately after the Senate adjourned. His arrival was quite enough to put the year's campaign into motion. On March 12, 1859, he appeared in the Louisiana Senate. The next day the Advocate tried to anticipate Slidell's critics by assuring its readers that Slidell during his visit to the legislature did not "to our knowledge buy any body." The Slidell organ was wise in taking precautions. As Slidell was in the act of taking another quick trip about the state, the Baton Rouge Gazette and Comet, copying the True Delta, complained of his "officious meddling." The source of the journal's irritation lay in the publication of a list of Democratic candidates for the

7 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 26, 1859.
8 Ibid.
9 Globe, 35 Cong. 2 Sess., 1553.
10 Baton Rouge Advocate, Mar. 13, 1859.
coming election. It was headed by the name of Thomas O. Moore for governor. If tickets were to be selected ahead of time, asked the Gazette and Comet, why call a convention? The Advocate answered this protest by lampooning the inclination of Slidell opponents to see corrupting influences in every move he made. In this case, said the Advocate, the "King" of Louisiana was "as innocent of that ticket announced by our correspondent" and "as ignorant of the author of it as is the King of Dahomy." The ticket, insisted the Advocate, was merely the creation of the mind of "Old Liner," the writer of the article that irked the Gazette and Comet.

Undoubtedly Slidell's enemies had good reason to watch his every move. He was by April 4 showing his usual energy and organizing powers, which apparently were needed in New Orleans. On this date the Crescent said that the "Chief Engineer" of the "anti-Americans" was in town and expending his gifts in visiting various political elements in the city. But, noted the Crescent,

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11 Ibid., Mar. 24, 1859.
12 Ibid., Mar. 28, 1859.
he was meeting resistance. Indeed, the paper suggested, he might not be able to reconcile the warring elements in his party. However, continued the journal, it was necessary that his opponents combine, agree, and fix themselves upon a single goal. Then they would have a chance for victory. Otherwise, his minority but better organized faction, asserted the Crescent, would overwhelm them. Meanwhile, the paper said it would content itself to observe the fireworks about to make their appearance.

The expected moves of the opposition began in sudden and dramatic fashion on April 4, 1859. On this date notices appeared in several New Orleans newspapers telling of a meeting to be held that night at Odd Fellows' Hall "for the purpose of organizing the party in the parish and to prepare for selection of delegates to the State Convention to be holden at Baton Rouge on the 4th Wednesday of May next." Prominent among the hundred-odd names was that of Pierre Soule. 13

13New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 4, 1859. See also New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 14, 1859.

14New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 4, 1859.
The meeting followed the paths suggested by the notice. Maunsel White became President and Soulé gave the principal address. The speech featured an attack on the "unprincipled gang of speculators and blacklegs" from whose "thralldom" Soulé urged New Orleans Democrats to "disentangle themselves." Louisiana, he asserted, was under the "direction and management of the few miscreants who claim absolute control over it." Some of them, Soulé claimed, "fattened on public patronage and preferment." Others plundered the public trust. The rest bought legislatures and conventions. In such gatherings, said the speaker, votes were put up to auction or sold via the faro table. In the orator's mind, therefore, the time for a change seemed overdue. He called for an end to "the abject and crushing servility to which a machiavellian discipline had trained" the members of the Louisiana Democratic Party. He had also, he intimated, no particular love for those who "talk of patriotism and aspire to have their names among those of a Washington, an Adams, a Jefferson, a Monroe."

This last reference — hardly directed to any other Louisiana politician besides Slidell — undoubtedly helped

15 Ibid., Apr. 5, 1859.
stimulate the participants of the meeting to significant action. Before the group left Odd Fellows' Hall, they had adopted a motto and a series of resolutions.

The motto proclaimed what members of the meeting stood for and decried what they were against. It called for "States-rights! The rights of the States as united by the Constitution; a union of sovereigns in a confederacy of equals." It denounced "the federalists of the Democracy," and corruption like the Houmas affair.

The resolutions followed in the spirit of the motto. They extolled states rights. They denounced the American Party, Buchanan's "weak" foreign policy, and any employment of patronage for the control of a political party. They stamped "with eternal reprobation such delegates as abuse their trust by legislating for their own advancement, or the promotion of their pecuniary interests, or sordid object." This last reference could be nothing other than the Houmas amendment that Benjamin had sponsored in the Senate.

16 Ibid.
17 See below, pp. 391-96.
18 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 5, 1859.
But the really significant points in the series of resolutions, however, were the last seven. Upon the premise that all power resided in the people these demanded that

the attempt to forestall the action of the delegates of the people, freely and fairly chosen to represent them in the Democratic State Convention, to meet at Baton Rouge on the fourth Monday of May, by agreeing upon a ticket, dictated and composed by traffickers in politics, is repudiated and condemned by this meeting.

The group was therefore going to disregard the authority of the State Central Committee by sending its own delegates to Baton Rouge as representatives of the New Orleans area. Accordingly, a committee of twenty-four was appointed to give notice of primary meetings to be held in the city's precincts. It would also direct the new party within the Democratic Party of New Orleans until the November elections.

Slidell's opposition in Louisiana had injected into the campaign the fact that for some time newspaper observers had considered Slidell as a distinct possibility for the Presidency in 1860. In speaking of persons who aspired "to have their names among those of a Washington, an Adams, a

19 Ibid.
Jefferson, a Monroe," Soule, therefore, was not seeking to advance only his own cause. He was also aiding Douglas, the chief aspirant for the Democratic nomination in the next Presidential race. Soule was already identified with Douglas's group. He was therefore the politician most likely to carry out in Louisiana what the Washington reporter of the New York Times claimed was the plan behind the trip Douglas made to New Orleans in late fall, 1858. According to the writer this project was "to make a demonstration against Mr. Slidell, to pay the latter off for his Illinois election." Moreover, this reporter had predicted, Soule would be connected with the Douglas attack on Slidell. Only, the newspaperman had expected it to appear in the form of an attempt to defeat Benjamin for re-election.  

Soule's mention of Slidell's alleged ambition occurred exactly one year after a "biography" of Slidell had appeared in the True Delta, also committed to Douglas. This piece was a quite obvious attempt by the newspaper to neutralize the effect of a recent sketch of Slidell's public life which had appeared in Harper's Weekly magazine.

20 New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 14, 1858.

21 Ibid.
in March, 1858. Its potentialities for attaining its objective were undoubtedly formidable. Coming from Slidell's home city, the statements in the article could hardly fail to have a ring of authenticity.

The first notice of the Harper's sketch of Slidell's past appeared in the Bee. This journal pretended amusement over what it termed the excessive flattery of the magazine's writer. It was particularly amused by two statements in the article. One of these was to the effect that Slidell's success in the New Orleans bar had been "unparalleled even in that city of sudden successes." The other had protested against the "modesty of the United States Senator from Louisiana," which had made the biographer's task excessively difficult.

The True Delta's biography of Slidell continued at the place where the Bee stopped. In the same humorous tone the True Delta brought forth a picture of a scheming, grafting, and lucky opportunist, whose money had paved the way for a nonexistent ability. In the eyes of the author of this piece, any actions of Slidell's opponents against the Senator were high virtues. On the other hand, suggested the writer, even Slidell's loyalty to his friends

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22 New Orleans Bee, Mar. 30, 1858.
probably had some unsavory motive lying at its base. Thus, he pointed out, Slidell's interest in the Kendall case came about because Slidell knew that the postmaster was trying desperately to recover the money "won from him at the gaming table by Colonel S." Now, continued the writer, Slidell was putting himself up for President, a job only he thought he deserved. Harper's, noted the biographer, had employed Brady to photograph Slidell. Brady, however, had not, in the writer's opinion, obtained a good likeness. So, the True Delta was printing one more true to life.23

The mention of the Houmas "scandal" in the motto and resolutions adopted in the meeting at the Odd Fellows' Hall also looked backward to an article in the True Delta. On March 8, 1859, the Washington correspondent of the journal sent down a report which told that during the late session of Congress a group of Louisiana citizens representing settlers on the Houmas tract, lying to the east of the Mississippi river directly above New Orleans, had appeared in protest before Benjamin's Committee on Land Claims. They had presented a formal memorial, stated the article, which condemned an amendment Benjamin had attached to a bill for the settling of land claims in Missouri during

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23 New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 4, 1858.
the 1857-1858 session. The measure, said the petitioners, had sought to quiet the long controversy over the Houmas lands by a method hardly ethical. It had favored earlier buyers, whose claims had been disallowed afterward, by stipulating that later settlers and purchasers had the burden of entering suit in Louisiana courts to prove their right to their property. Otherwise the property would be considered as belonging to the earlier owner.

These were not the most damaging charges made in the *True Delta*'s report from Washington. Its correspondent then proceeded to give his version of what else had transpired at the committee hearing besides the presentation of the memorial: Congressman Taylor had appeared with the delegation, who were his constituents. He had spoken with indignation for half an hour. He would, he told the committee, offer a bill at the next session for the repeal of the measure being protested against. But right now, "he owed it to himself and the committee to place himself right upon a bill which had passed at the last session of Congress, purporting to locate certain private land claims in Missouri." Taylor said he had had no particular interest in a provision for Missouri. He had not suspected that "an attempt would be made, in such a bill to legislate on large claims in the State of
Louisiana affecting seriously his constituents." So, now he was certain that the way in which the bill was introduced and passed was not legitimate. It was trickery, utilized to put a measure through Congress in a way that the Louisiana representation would not be aware of its nature. It was an attempt to overrule a recent decision of the Federal courts. He recalled that two years previous to the passage of the bill, a similar measure had aroused the opposition of Sandidge and himself. And at that time, he recalled, he had had to make a careful examination to realize that it pertained to the Houmas tract. "Why then," said he now, "was the act put in the shape it is, instead of declaring its true object, which was to confirm the Houmas claims?" The answer, to his thinking, was that the amendment was a trick to prevent the close scrutiny of it by the representatives of those who would be hurt by its provisions.

Another charge, against Benjamin, according to the correspondent of the True Delta, came from Frederick W. Hart, a member of the protesting delegation. Benjamin, he claimed, had an interest in the bill he had guided through Congress. He was an attorney for those whom it favored. He had defended them in suits. This accusation,

24Ibid., Mar. 8, 1859.
like Taylor's speech, impressed the reporter, who added in conclusion that the whole business was as brazen a piece of sleight-of-hand as was ever exposed.

The account in the True Delta was probably accurate in its rendition of what had passed before the Senate committee. For, on February 19, 1859, Benjamin had anticipated it with a public denial that there had been anything out of the ordinary when the bill protested by the Louisiana delegation before his committee was passed. It had been introduced, he said, in 1856, 1857, and 1858. It had passed on a day when "a single objection" would have defeated it. Therefore, the measure could hardly be said to have been "smuggled through both houses of Congress," which had had plenty of opportunities to examine it before it finished its course through the regular channels. As to the idea that he was not to do his "public duty, in causing the titles of our citizens to be confirmed to vast possessions owned by them for generations," it was "so ineffably absurd" that he felt "degraded in refuting it."

In the Benjamin letter was a quotation from a

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25 Ibid.
communication Benjamin had received from Slidell. It gave the information that Slidell owned land in the Houmas tract but that its title was clear. But nothing Slidell or Benjamin wrote had any effect on the True Delta's policy. On the same day that it printed the report about the protest before Committee on Land Claims, it ran an editorial entitled "The Attempted Houmas Fraud."

This editorial used as authority the "Washington correspondent of the Baltimore Exchange" in reciting its version of the history of the grant. The Houmas tract, the article said, was once Indian land. Disputes over it originated in complicated and vague Spanish grants. In 1846 a suit brought into Federal district court at New Orleans received a decision that voided all the previous titles held on the tract and ordered all patents returned to the clerk of court for cancellation. The lands so returned to the public domain were subsequently sold to settlers, who, however, the True Delta admitted, needed an act of Congress to get a perfect title for their purchases. Now, complained the editorial, the Benjamin-sponsored amendment of the last session of the

\[26\] Baton Rouge Advocate, Feb. 13, 1859.
Senate had destroyed their hopes for final recognition of their claims to their purchases. Five hundred families stood in danger of being deprived of their land. And for whose benefit were they being dispossessed? The paper answered that question by stating that Slidell owned 22,000 acres of Houmas land. And, continued the True Delta, he had once admitted that he had no legal title to this property, in a suit in which he alleged fraud against those who had sold it to him. He had lost his case, asserted the journal; but, instead of abandoning a title he considered worthless he had held on, until now, the True Delta informed its readers, he was enriched "more than a million of dollars" by the bill Benjamin had rushed through Congress.

Thereafter, the character of "Houmas John" became a central issue in the campaign. The True Delta had discovered the level at which it would fight. The word "Fraud" in the True Delta article of March 8 became "Swindle" in the paper's article of April 5, which mentioned also "Plaquemine frauds, cab votes, Gallatin street assassinations and Thuggery." On April 12, the theme of

27 New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 8, 1859.
28 Ibid., Apr. 5, 1859.
a True Delta piece was Slidell's love of gambling. 29

The same newspaper published a notice on March 23, 1859, which appeared to offer additional proof that the Louisiana delegation to the Senate was not overly concerned with the needs of their constituents. The report was from a committee of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce. They told how they had gone to Washington to further the bill for dredging the mouths of the Mississippi river. 30 When Buchanan vetoed it, their hopes were destroyed. They were also very disappointed, they said, by the reasons Buchanan gave for his action. So, continued the statement, through Seward they obtained a resolution calling upon the Secretary of War for all information relating to the provisions in the lost bill. Besides Seward, the committee felt under obligations to Senators Douglas, Houston, . . . and Fessenden, for their assurances of support and interest manifested in the objects of our mission, and give willing testimony to the constant and untiring efforts of Hon. Miles Taylor and George Eustis, who placed every moment of their unoccupied time at our disposition.

At the same time, the New Orleans delegation regretted that the two Senators from Louisiana had been the only

29 Ibid., Apr. 12, 1859.
30 See above, p. 353.
persons appealed to who had discouraged the enterprise as impossible at present. 31

Next came alleged proof from outside Louisiana that the state's Senatorial representation could stand improvement. Henry S. Foote, the future author of Casket of Reminiscences, made a speech in Memphis which either was aimed at Louisiana or showed that the struggle in the Creole state had important national significance. The Crescent and the Advocate in mid-April took notice of it. It said in part:

John Slidell, of Louisiana, the notorious author of the Plaquemine frauds, the man who goes about the country buying up corrupt and venal letters ... the man who proposed to give the President $30,000,000 of the people's money as a corruption fund, the conscience-keeper of the President -- this man, John Slidell, the embodiment of political dishonesty, was at the head of the Democratic machine -- the power behind King Caucus.

Foote then proceeded to indicate that when he meant King Caucus he might have meant the type of organization that had thrown Douglas out of his committee chairmanship at the beginning of the session of Congress. Only Slidell, he said, approved of Buchanan's "corruption" of Illinois Democrats. After Slidell returned from Illinois, asserted Foote, he paid a visit to the staff of the Memphis Appeal.

31 New Orleans True Delta, Mar. 23, 1859. See also ibid., Apr. 1, 1859.
While there, continued Foote, he tried to defend such acts and ran upon one man who had the courage to rebuke him severely. Foote, it seemed, also did not lack fortitude. Slidell, he claimed, had personally demanded an explanation from Foote about the latter's accusations against the Louisiana Senator. In answer, Foote said, he had told Slidell that he would be willing to argue the matter in public, either in debate or exchange of letters. \(^{32}\)

Finally came attack from a source that was probably most difficult of all for Slidell to accept as an enemy, the *Louisiana Courier*. Up to the moment Douglas went against Buchanan on the issue of the Lecompton Constitution, \(^{33}\) this journal had emphasized unity within the party's ranks. \(^{34}\) Then, when Douglas's rebellion could not be ignored, the paper took a circuitous course of weeping for his sins, \(^{35}\) refusing to attack him, \(^{36}\) returning to his side, \(^{37}\) refusing to believe that Buchanan was against

\(^{32}\) *New Orleans Crescent*, Apr. 16, 1859.

\(^{33}\) See above, p. 269.

\(^{34}\) See above, pp. 261-62.

\(^{35}\) *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, Mar. 4, 1858.


him, and, finally, attacking the administration.

Then on August 25, 1858, the Courier demonstrated that its connection with Slidell had altered perhaps radically. In denying a statement in the Washington States that the New Orleans journal was a Slidell organ, the Courier said that the assertion would raise a smile on the face of any well-informed politician from this state. The lackeys and bootlickers of that gentleman have been for some years hard at work to injure this paper . . . . And the fact that the gentleman himself usually follows the political course of the Courier closely, and that his speeches, where he does not get out of his depth, are mainly drawn from our editorials, is only an additional indication of the shrewdness he is known to possess, and of the uniform soundness of our Democracy.

The joke, continued the Courier, was on the Delta, which was about to become the Senator's paper on a "Union-love-our-brethren-at-the-North ground." This statement was undoubtedly based upon some fact. The Slidell Democrats were probably looking for a journal in New Orleans to express their views. In May, 1858, a report stated that

38Ibid., Sept. 5, 1858.
39Ibid., Oct. 17, 1858.
40Ibid., Aug. 25, 1858.
the Delta had passed into new hands, "a joint stock association, of which Durante Da Ponte, Esq., is the principal shareholder." In December, 1858, the newspaper denied that Slidell owned $16,000 worth of its stock. Thereafter it was referred to by the True Delta as Slidell's "hypothecated" journal.

The Courier had not yet attacked Slidell. But this final step it took in two articles, on April 14 and 17, 1859. On the first date it castigated both branches of the Democracy in Louisiana for splitting the party. It thus conveniently forgot that such action had come from the Soule group. Then the paper called the attention of its readers to a "Democrat club ... composed mainly of the personal adherents of the distinguished Senator who represents the federalistic branch of the party, with terms of admission so high pecuniarily as to exclude all Democrats of modest fortune or limited means." Rumor said, continued the Courier, that "over their champagne" the aristocratic members of the organization would arrange for the distribution of offices to those loyal to them in

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41 Baton Rouge Advocate, May 6, 1858.  
42 New Orleans Delta, Dec. 21, 1858.  
43 New Orleans True Delta, Apr. 14, 1859.
the coming election.

The second article was more direct. In it the Courier deliberated on which of the two competing Democratic factions to support. It did not feel, however, that its decision would make much difference in the convention. For, if "the Louisiana Club" had determined the nominees of the party, "of course they must be" the ones chosen. "If not," continued the Courier, "the duty on sugar may be removed, that on machinery and wrought iron increased" and New Orleans lose its privilege as port of entry "to Bonne Carre Bend." Any distress endured by New Orleans, "would, of course, be more than compensated by the advantage to the most distinguished men of our State, and other holders of the Houmas grant" would also be compensated sufficiently to permit them to pay "rents to an amount which will entitle them to the entree of society in Washington, Bermuda, and New York, whatever may be their social position here."45

Thereafter during the fight between the Soule and the Slidell forces, the Courier used its pages to urge the Central Committee to agree with their opponents on an election date.46

44 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 14, 1859.
46 Ibid., Apr. 20, 1859.
Straffed and raked as he was from almost every direction, Slidell remained confident and unruffled -- or so he tried to appear on May 2, when he wrote Buchanan a letter. At this time he predicted an overwhelming victory when the Democratic convention met on May 25. His enemies, he claimed, were a mixture of Know-Nothings and a minority of disaffected Democrats, who had always existed in the background before Soule drove them into the open with his "furious ... onslaught on you and your friends." But, Slidell assured the President,

I have long desired that they should take this course, & that the line of demarcation would be drawn. We have little to fear from them as acknowledged foes. We were in constant danger while they were admitted to participation in our primary meetings, conventions, &c. I had been so little at home for the last eighteen months that I could not judge correctly of the extent of the disaffection & would not venture to express an opinion respecting it until I had surveyed the whole ground. This I have done with great care & am now prepared to speak with as much confidence as one will ever do who has a long experience in politics.

He would be greatly surprised, he said, if the convention did not "nominate a complete State ticket of old line democrats,
endorse your administration & drive the Souleites for ever from our ranks." He expected a new delegation in the house of Representatives, perhaps without Taylor, whose nomination he was working to defeat, and Davidson, to whose claims he was indifferent but not antagonistic. 47

Slidell's optimism, however, was not overconfidence. In his next letter he complained rather strongly to Buchanan that Cobb was keeping enemies of the administration on the Treasury payroll. He asked that they be replaced immediately by friends of the President's cause. 48

Slidell's confidence was not ill-founded. As events proved, he had more friends than enemies in Louisiana. On the very day of the Odd Fellows Hall meeting a notice appeared in newspapers bearing more signatures than the Soulé group had obtained for their announcement. This took notice of the impending meeting. It also called attention to what it said was an established rule of many years' standing, for the State Central Committee to direct

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the Democracy and designate the dates for elections. The new movement, said the signers of the notice, would undoubtedly divide the party. Therefore, they urged, Democrats should not attend it. 49

Slidell also received valuable support from the newspapers, some on his side and others not usually numbered among his opponents. Those from the ranks of his enemies who came forward now to his defense included the Bee and the Crescent. The Bee, with an obvious tongue-in-cheek attitude, answered the speech, the motto, and the resolutions of the Odd Fellows' Hall meeting. It could not understand, it said how the Soule faction could belabor their fellow Democrats in such a fashion. When these rebels confronted Slidell with his crimes, asserted the Bee, "he might answer in the language of Desdemona, 'They are loves I bear to thee"" Soule, concluded the American Party journal, would be more consistent in leaving "Mr. Slidell to be berated and abused by the Whigs and Know-Nothings." 50

The Crescent was stirred into action by Foote's speech

49 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 4, 1859.
50 New Orleans Bee, May 2, 1859.
in Memphis. "Look who's talking," it said to its readers. The Crescent admitted that it was an enemy of Slidell, but said that it prided itself on fighting honorably and fairly. Now, for Louisiana's sake, it asserted, it would defend him against unjust censure. The newspaper advised Foote to stay out of Louisiana. Politicians there, it warned, considered his "intrusion" in their affairs unwarranted and undesired. Louisianians, concluded the Crescent, would handle their own affairs, including Slidell's tyranny, without outside influence.

The Delta, on the other hand, was undoubtedly the Slidell paper in New Orleans. Its reaction to the Odd Fellows' Hall meeting was more restrained than that of the other principal voice of the Regular Democrats in Southern Louisiana, the Baton Rouge Advocate. It followed the reasoning of the Bee by saying that since Soulé's forces were but recently with Slidell, they must take some responsibility for the acts they now condemned. But it also pointed out that with the last two governors of Louisiana against him, Slidell was hardly the state's

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51 New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 16, 1859.
dispenser of patronage. His crime, thought the paper, lay in his "having grown in the favor of the people" to such an extent that "all attempts to oust him" were "impossible." Indeed, said the Delta, his "loyalty, to friends and party, ever," even when it meant supporting his enemies, now "gave him the palm." Therefore, to the paper, Soule's "railing and frothing" from a platform against his successful political rival was not a particularly pleasant spectacle.  

The Advocate discovered an undoubtedly gifted writer for its New Orleans correspondent. "Letter Rip" became his pen name. Rip's sharp sense of humor could not have failed to provide readers of the Advocate with some of the most biting humor of the current political campaign. A special victim of this column was the True Delta and Hugh Kennedy its editor. Rip made the rival Democratic sheet pay for the fun it had doubtless derived from castigating Slidell. Kennedy, who was an apothecary as well as an editor, was satirized by the name of "Pilgaric."  

52 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 17, 1859.  
53 Baton Rouge Advocate, Apr. 16, 1859.
was pilloried as the gentleman "who published a Southern journal for Southern circulation alone, and gets it printed in the North at half price." And Soule himself did not escape Rip's barbs.

Letter Rip was at his best in describing various aspects of what he thought was an important part of the political situation in New Orleans, the competition of party members for jobs. In one column he spoke of the Crescent City as "this political Sodom," where "one of your own brethren would kill you for a fat office." At another moment he advised the Soule faction that they were wasting their time trying to intimidate office holders into quitting. "The Custom House, Postoffice, Mint and Marshall's brigades," he asserted, "would prefer a moderate Thugging, with the chances, before they will tamely surrender the spoils. Those that have places will fight for them; those that desire and expect places, will resist manfully -- of this you may be assured."
Rip also agreed with a Delta observation that during the latter part of Pierce's administration Soule had held the power of directing the patronage in Louisiana. "Was it not notorious," he said, that Soule had "directed every appointment for the city of New Orleans" and, continued the writer, "did any Slidell man get an office, save perhaps one or two?" If true, this statement shut off the possibilities that Slidell had corrupted Louisiana at that time with Federal jobs. Rip did not deny that at the present time Slidell was in charge of Federal political plums in Louisiana. He told the Soule followers that now the tables were turned and the "outs" were "in." 58

To answer the charges in connection with the Houmas tract, Slidell relied on no one but himself. An old friend, John Claiborne, served as a means to give Slidell his opportunity to state his version of the matter. Claiborne fulfilled this function by publishing a letter in the Advocate of April 20, 1859. Enclosed with it was a communication from Slidell to Claiborne.

58 Ibid., Apr. 30, 1859.
Slidell's answer to the *True Delta*'s charges stated that the Senator wanted a complete public airing of the case. He would therefore introduce at the next session of Congress the resolutions of the delegation which had appeared before Benjamin's committee. By such means, he promised, a full report would be made and exposed to public view. Benjamin, he continued, had already blocked the carrying out of the act of June 2, 1858. There was no time at present, he said, for a full investigation. But, this assertion of a fact, he insisted, did not mean that anyone was trying to kill an investigation of the Houmas affair. He and Benjamin could easily have performed this action already if they had wanted to.

Next, Slidell called the attention of the reader to what he said were the political implications behind the whole series of charges connected with the Houmas land tract. The petition brought to Washington, he claimed, "was concocted by persons having no pecuniary interest in the matter, and gotten up for purposes purely political."
It's charges included "assertions which their authors knew to be false." Slidell said he owned 8,000 not 22,000 acres of land in the Houmas area. According to the tax bill, they were worth $15,000 not $1,000,000. Furthermore, continued Slidell, Judge Campbell set aside the patents on this land not because the title to them was faulty. The true reason was that the official believed the Secretary of the Treasury had signed the papers without authority of the law. Slidell enclosed a copy of the judgment to back this statement. Besides, he said, "no patent was ever issued for the William Conway tract, in which I am interested, and consequently no suit was brought in relation to it."

Now, Slidell spoke of the "five hundred families," who were supposed to be living on the claim. In truth, he averred, there were not nearly so many. And if there were, he said, "each and all of them made their settlements with the full knowledge that they were trespassers and invaders of rights as sacred and complete as those of any proprietor in Louisiana."

Finally, Slidell offered to get rid of his holdings. They had cost him around $70,000. Now he authorized Olborne to sell them for him. He would, he said "gladly
The state convention provided the next-to-final answer to Slidell's foes. The Regular Democracy had elected their delegates to the convention on May 16, 1859, two days after the Soulé forces had elected theirs. Then, another unusual series of events occurred on the very eve of the meeting. Stephen A. Douglas arrived in New Orleans. He stayed but briefly in the Crescent City. From there he departed for his plantation, which lay near the convention city Baton Rouge. The Courier told its readers at this time that the purpose of Douglas's visit was "pour assister à la convention Démocratique qui se réunit aujourd'hui." Slidell was at the meeting. And he and his faction turned out to be invincible. First W. W. Pugh was chosen president over G. W. Munday. Then La Sere was elected to the committee which investigated the claims of contesting delegations for recognition. At five-thirty in the evening of May 26, the committee made its recommendations.

59 Ibid., Apr. 20, 1859.
60 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 17, 1859.
61 Ibid., May 25, 1859; New Orleans Delta, May 25, 1859.
regarding the conflicting claims of the two delegations from New Orleans. It directed the seating of the Slidell delegates from all the precincts in New Orleans except three, where, the committee acknowledged, the Soule faction had won. This decision was accepted by a floor vote. At three o'clock in the afternoon of May 27 the convention adjourned. The ticket it had adopted was that "de la Vialle Democratie," headed by John O. Moore. It had also passed a resolution that expressed complete confidence in the Buchanan administration.

In the comment following the rout of Soule, the names of La Sere and Slidell were prominent. La Sere received credit from one source for his tactical leadership on the floor. He had castigated the opposition delegation from New Orleans as illegal intruders and "extollers of Squatter Sovereignty." The opposition had been unable to withstand him and his followers. Soule and Douglas had disappeared almost as quickly as

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63 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, May 26, 27, 28, 1859.
64 Ibid., May 28, 1859.
they had appeared. But, also, noted one reporter, "Field Marshall (horse sense) John Slidell was on the ground. The mere statement of this fact," he continued, was "sufficient to prove no foolery was permitted in his ranks." 67

Letter Rip was jubilant. "The long agony is over," he wrote. "The Tehuantepecers have carried the day." 68

Slidell wrote Buchanan on May 30 his report of the state of Louisiana politics. When he did so, the Courier had shut down its presses. For some time the public had been conscious that the journal was having troubles of some nature. It seemed that J. W. Vernon claimed an interest in the journal and was warning the paper's debtors "not to pay to John B. Breckinridge any thing due" the Courier. The matter was in the courts. Three weeks later, the French side of the journal was praising the Regular Democracy and asking its leaders to

66 Baton Rouge Advocate, May 28, 1859.
69 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 23, 1859.
pardon the transgression of the rebels. Then, on May 29, without warning or explanation, the Courier suspended operation.

It was not until June 5 and 7 that an explanation of this action appeared. On the second date the Courier published its first English edition since May 29. In it was an editorial under the title, "The Courier to the Public." This article told of the "innumerable obstacles" that had plagued the newspaper. These, it claimed, had caused rejoicing among "that hybrid caste yclept political tricksters." But the Courier, continued the writer of the piece, could not fall so easily:

The Courier has passed, within a week, into other hands, it is true; its proprietorship has radically changed; but its principles remain unchanged. It at present stands in the position which it formerly so creditably maintained. Democracy and the Louisiana Courier are terms synonymous. True, it is, that for some time past, it has been frequently weighed and found wanting in the discussion of questions of the highest importance to the National Democracy, but we all know that it is human to err and never too late to amend.

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70 Ibid., May 17, 1859.
71 See the Delta's column where it usually informed its readers what the local newspapers were featuring that day. On May 29, 1859 there is no mention of the Courier. New Orleans Delta, May 29, 1859.
Now, the anonymous author promised, the paper would return to its old rules and principles. Once more it would emphasize "the Palladium of the sacred bond of Union." The party, he pointed out, had endured and survived the "whimsical schisms" which had "howled" about it. Now, he said, the Courier would abandon "political tricksters" and support "good men and true who" were "prepared strenuously and vigorously to resist all opposition from the enemies of the Constitution and the Union." Henceforth, the writer asserted, the journal would "burst upon" any "astonished factionists with the suddenness of the thunderclap at calm noon-tide." It would defend the President, and with regard to matters in territories it would advocate the principles of non-intervention of Congress and the protection of the courts for the rights of all citizens.

The editorial announced that the paper was suspending operation for a little while more. It returned with new equipment on September 18, 1859. Its editor was Emile Hiriart, who carried out before the year's end one of the promises of the article of June 7, by one of the most...

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72 New Orleans Courier, June 5 (French only), June 7 (includes English), 1859.
blistering attacks the *True Delta* and Hugh Kennedy could ever have received. Hiriart was probably not very concerned by the possible danger that Kennedy might demand "satisfaction." The editor had previously defended his opinion on a rather inconsequential matter in three duels on three successive mornings. Moreover, he had thrice emerged the victor.

The editorial of June 7 apparently justified the tone of Slidell's letter of May 30 to Buchanan, which was almost boastful. "Soule is completely annihilated," Slidell told the President, "or rather the insignificant extent of his influence demonstrated." Soule, continued Slidell was "now abandoned and abused even by those with whom he has heretofore acted. They denounce him as the chief cause of their defeat." Soule was not taking this treatment supinely, asserted Slidell. He "in turn denounces them as traitors & cowards." The Senator then went on to tell the President the details of what had transpired in the convention. The resolutions, which he said he knew were pleasing to Buchanan, had "passed unanimously."

This expression of faith in the administration, he admitted,

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*Roberts, Lake Pontchartrain*, 155.
had occurred without dissent because no "division" had been called. However, he felt sure that "if the roll had been taken they would have passed by at least ten to one." Moreover, the "entire state ticket (with one exception) are what they call here Slidell men." Slidell claimed that he had not wished the fight he had recently won. The struggle had been forced on him and his friends. And now, he had no reason to regret that it had occurred. At last he could forget about political matters in Louisiana and turn his thoughts to one still unfilled ambition. 75

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST SESSION OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH CONGRESS

The ambition to which Slidell referred in his letter of May 30, 1859, to Buchanan was hardly a secret. For months the press had carried stories to the effect that Buchanan wanted Slidell to become the American minister to Paris. The same reports had often stated also that Slidell would not accept this position even though he wanted it.\(^1\) Soule still was a potential threat to Slidell's power in Louisiana. The Senator, therefore, was not apt to leave his state for long periods of time.\(^2\)

But now that he had settled political matters in Louisiana to his satisfaction, Slidell felt that at last he could cheerfully offer his services. The tone of his letter showed also that he expected them to be accepted by


the President. However, he soon learned that he had acted too late. Buchanan informed Slidell that to ask Mason to resign at this time would be embarrassing for all the parties concerned in the matter. Of course, the President assured Slidell, if the Senator was sure he wanted the job, then it would be his. Buchanan also dampened Slidell's hopes for employing the French post as a means for putting pressure on Spain to give up Cuba to the United States. Spain, wrote Buchanan, was under Napoleon's influence and the French ruler was not friendly to America. Slidell, accordingly, beat a quick retreat. He was undoubtedly disappointed, but he professed an unwillingness to embarrass the President.

Slidell had also had bad luck in his recommendations

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4 Buchanan to Slidell, June 8, 24, 1859. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

5 Buchanan to Slidell, June 8, 1859. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

of friends for foreign posts. He had suggested Benjamin for Spain. Benjamin had declined Buchanan's offer. Then, Slidell had recommended Belmont for the same post and La Sere for a French consulship, but the applications of these men had not received favorable action from Buchanan.

The rest of Slidell's stay in Louisiana showed that he had about reached his limits in politics, at least for the present time. He remained until the November elections with the obvious purpose of trying to make New Orleans Democratic again. As events proved, there was no doubt that outside of the New Orleans area the Slidell ticket would win easily. And under his guidance the New Orleans Democrats showed a much improved spirit. However, when election day came, the city was carried again by the candidates of the American Party. La Sere, who ran for Congressman in the First District, lost. Miles Taylor,

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7New Orleans Crescent, Dec. 9, 1858; Slidell to Buchanan, Aug. 22, 1858; Buchanan to Slidell, Aug. 20, 1858. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.


10New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 13, 1859.

11Ibid., Sept. 18, 24, Oct. 25, 1859.

12Ibid., Nov. 13, 1859.
who was now definitely in Soule's camp, who was now definitely in Soule's camp,\textsuperscript{13} won.\textsuperscript{14}

The atmosphere of Louisiana indeed, appeared to be somewhat malignant for ambitious undertakings. Benjamin’s Tehuantepec corporation lost its mail contract at this time, because, said the new Postmaster General Joseph Holt, Congress had refused to pass the Post Office appropriation during the last session.\textsuperscript{15} Before very long the corporation was bankrupt.\textsuperscript{16} During 1859 also, James Robb permanently left New Orleans. By this time he no longer owned his bank.\textsuperscript{17} William Walker in October failed to get his forces out of Louisiana.\textsuperscript{18} One year later, he was to

\textsuperscript{13}New Orleans Crescent, Oct. 4, 1859.
\textsuperscript{14}New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 13, 1859.
\textsuperscript{15}Abid., Sept. 24, Oct. 8, 1859.
\textsuperscript{16}House of Representatives Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 648, p. 819.
\textsuperscript{17}New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 30, 1859.
\textsuperscript{18}New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 8, 1859.
reach Nicaragua, only to meet death there from a firing squad.\textsuperscript{19}

When Congress met in December, the administration could hardly even pretend that the House was under its control.\textsuperscript{20} As free-soilism gained strength, Douglas picked up new followers. Among these new-found friends were John Forney, angry over the loss of an expected Senate seat and an argument with Buchanan,\textsuperscript{21} and Belmont, disappointed over Buchanan's refusal to give him the Spanish ministry.\textsuperscript{22}

Belmont had broken with Buchanan in a harsh note, which he had asked Slidell to deliver for him. Slidell had refused to perform the task. He told Belmont that the letter should be destroyed. Belmont had thereupon ended his relations with Slidell. The Senator wrote Buchanan that he regretted to lose Belmont as a friend and ally but that he would do nothing to alter matters as they stood.\textsuperscript{23}

Slidell was also quite aware by this time that Douglas

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, Oct. 15, 1860.

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln}, II, 123.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy}, 86-87, 342; \textit{New Orleans Louisiana Courier}, Aug. 21, 1859; \textit{Baton Rouge Advocate}, Apr. 21, 1859.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Slidell to Buchanan}, June 30, 1859. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}
was apparently attempting to dictate terms to his enemies within the Democratic Party. Buchanan called Slidell's attention to this trend in a letter dated June 24, 1859. Douglas, wrote Buchanan, had sent a note to a Dubuque editor on June 2, 1859. In it he had insisted that the next Democratic platform contain no radical demands of Southern origin. The principles of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Cincinnati Convention, Douglas had written, must govern. Otherwise, the President continued, Douglas threatened to refuse the nomination and to work for the defeat of anyone else who took his place. To Buchanan this statement was an almost unbelievable display of obstinacy on Douglas's part. Was Douglas, the President asked Slidell, persisting in a theory that "would enable the first settlers who rush into a Territory to deprive their fellow settlers of their property in slaves through unfriendly territorial legislation?" Slidell agreed with these sentiments. He also thought Buchanan correct in his opinion that Douglas would probably break away from the Democratic party and run against the Democratic nominee of 1860.

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The Compendium of Hinton R. Helper's *Impending Crisis*\(^{26}\) and John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry\(^{27}\) were powerful stimulants in the new Congress when it met in December, 1859. The House of Representatives, for example, went into a high state of excitement over the election of its Speaker.\(^{28}\) In the Senate Douglas and his Democratic enemies renewed their war.\(^{29}\) But none of these indications of a splitting country directly touched Slidell's labors on the Senate floor. The bitter rivalries of the times affected him mostly in the form of charges that he evidently thought serious enough to warrant outspoken defenses on his part. These allegations involved Louisiana, Buchanan, and Slidell, himself. The object of the accusers was supposedly the correction of abuses of the public trust by government officials. On the other hand, when Slidell attempted reforms or savings for the government's benefit, he encountered resistance from his crusader opponents, who were suspicious even of his attempt to adjourn the Senate for the party


\(^{27}\) New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, Oct. 21, 1859.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., Dec. 4, 1859, Feb. 2, 1860.

\(^{29}\) Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 180; Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2155-56, 3159, 3179.
conventions in a manner that would not require approval of the House.

The last measure was an expedient Slidell had previously employed to keep the Senate adjourned over the Christmas holidays. It provided for a quorum of the Senate to meet every fourth day just long enough to adjourn for three days more. Three days' adjournment was the maximum time the law permitted each house of Congress to remain away from its labors during a session without the consent of the other house. Slidell explained that the other chamber of the legislature would never agree to a joint resolution for adjournment during the periods the conventions met. So, his substitute proposal was necessary. Certain members of the Senate, he continued, like Bayard of Delaware, had important duties in the party gatherings. And if they all felt like Bayard, he explained, they would not wish to be absent from the Senate when important business was up for debate. Slidell's arguments were futile against the objections of Lyman Trumbull and other Republicans, whose arguments were echoed on the Senate floor by Robert Toombs. The bill lost.

30 See Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 214, for history of idea.

31 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 1748, 1767-69.
Of his two most notable attempts at reform one was partially successful, the other unsuccessful. The partial victory occurred when he spoke his opposition to a proposed franchise for the Pennsylvania and Georgetown railway. He wanted an amendment attached which would require the holder of the franchise to turn over its property to the community it served after thirty years. Otherwise, he said, the "inconvenience to the public may . . . be great." He called Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania as a witness to a precedent, a canal from New Orleans to Lake Pontchartrain, which was eventually returned to the public. Cameron amended Slidell's version somewhat. The canal was given back by the bank which owned it as a bonus in exchange for the charter. Besides, continued Cameron, the canal at the time it was returned by the bank no longer was of any value as a source of revenue. When Cameron sat down, Slidell proposed a compromise, to permit the railway to keep its rolling stock and materials. This was adopted, at least temporarily. 32

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32Ibid., 1599.
from the session of two years previous, to abolish the issuance of bank notes by corporations operating within the District of Columbia and to forbid the circulation thereof any bills under twenty dollars. Penalties for infringement of the measure's provisions included fines and imprisonment.

In his report, delivered on January 17, Slidell explained the history which had prompted the investigation his special committee had made. The banks of the District were incorporated in accordance with a measure passed in March, 1817, which contained two important provisions. One governed the incorporation of financial institutions and the other regulated the currency they might issue. Subsequent acts were based on this law until the passage of the Act of July 3, 1844, which liquidated these corporations because of their wretched condition following the panic in 1837. The District bankers, according to Slidell's report, were not particularly disturbed by this legislation. They appointed liquidators friendly to them, perhaps even employees of theirs. The result was that their

33 See above, pp. 319-20.

34 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 375, 470.
property was returned to them by these liquidators and they continued operating as before. Their paper still passed as legal tender in defiance of the law of 1817, which, claimed Slidell, invested such rights only in authorized corporations. Court action brought a ruling in the case of Merrick v. Trustees of the Bank of Metropolis that later acts operated to repeal both sections of the original act of incorporation, including that which protected the community from irresponsible issues of currency. This conclusion the majority of Slidell's committee denied. They believed the section of the law of 1817 dealing with the regulation of bills was permanent. Later acts dealt only with charters and liquidations of banks. 35

In opening debate on the measure on February 16, 1860, Slidell observed that the amount of paper involved was low, that he was not opposed to rechartering the banks, except that he knew the House would never act on such a measure during the current session, and that at the present time no laws were in operation to protect the District

35 Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 29.
from illegal bank-note issues.

Mason spoke first in opposition to the bill. He inter­
preted it as an instance of taxes without representation.
He also invoked Gresham's law. With this act the cheap
money from outside the District would soon drive out the
good already within it. Mason was answered by Bayard and
Benjamin. Bayard told his colleague that every state
regulated its paper money. Congress was in charge of the
District of Columbia. Should it not regulate the area's
currency? Benjamin recommended the strict control
Louisiana exercised over bank notes as an example to guide
Congress in the matter.37

The chief voice of the opposition, however, was
James F. Simmons of Rhode Island. During the course of
several speeches and rebuttals Simmons revealed what appeared
to be an intimate knowledge of banks and banking laws.
His attitude, therefore, approached that of the banker and
corporation lawyer. He claimed that the trustees were not
responsible for any actions committed by the corporations
before the trustees took charge. Apparently Simmons felt
that this principle applied even if both corporation and
trusteeship were operated by the same officers. Banks,

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36 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 300-801.
37 Ibid., 801-806.
he continued, were assets to the community. It was therefore unfair in his eyes that they be crippled for the benefit of the laboring classes, who were "not acquainted with credit." He was also certain that the poor would be the first victims of any legislative acts which tampered with the "natural" laws of exchange. Simmons wanted banks regulated by law but he relied most on the good name of a corporation. In fact, he seemed to put more faith in Washington banks than in the members of his own body of Congress. When Slidell complained of the non-cooperation of District bankers with members of his investigating board, Simmons retorted that those of whom Slidell complained had a right to refuse information to a committee that was prying where it had no business to go. He also denied that banks were responsible for money panics and that Washington financial corporations had broken the law when there was none in existence. 38

Slidell’s arguments had included moral judgments. They had considered possible social implications lying at the base of the bill. Simmons had disregarded these points. Undoubtedly his faith in the "laws" of economic

38Ibid., 851, 865-66.
determinism and laissez faire rather mystified the Louisiana Senator. Slidell indicated that Simmons was a little careless in his definitions and in maintaining a clearly defined position in his argument. And undoubtedly stung by Simmons remarks, Slidell finished out his part in the debate by suggesting that the bankers were dealers in frauds. For example, he said, they circulated money that they admitted was illegally issued, but in print so small that the user would be certain to miss reading it. Finally he advocated and voted for two amendments which in effect abolished all paper currency from the district. All Slidell's efforts to counteract the moves of his opponents, however, proved useless. He could never get his bill on the floor again that session for final passage.

He had about the same amount of success when he tried to protect the government's interest in bills involving appropriations to be paid to individuals. Thus he fought

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39 Ibid., 865.
40 Ibid., 865-66.
41 Ibid., 1396, 2456.
a proposal for compensating David Myerle for experiments on hemp that the latter had made in Kentucky. Slidell objected to the Secretary of the Navy's supposed promise to Myerle that the experimenter would be compensated by Congress for his time and labor expended on the job. This action, Slidell contended was illegal. The executive branch of the government, he said, could not impose future moral obligations on the Senate. Furthermore, he continued, the payment was too high. He felt also that the contract entered into by the government and Myerle was not in the best interests of the United States since it gave the country all the loses and Myerle all the profits from the experiments. He offered an amendment to reduce the cost of this contract. It lost and the original proposal passed, 24-17, with both Louisiana Senators against it.

Another attempt of Slidell to save the Treasury money shared the same fate. The bill in question this time was designed to give a pay raise to personnel of the Navy. Slidell offered an amendment to forestall the filling of current vacancies in the service's chaplain corps. He claimed that there were already too many clergymen on the navy's payroll. Iverson complained that the amendment was

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42 Ibid., 1703-1707.
aimed at two particular appointments now up for the Senate's confirmation. Slidell noted in reply that Iverson in giving this information was demonstrating another violation of the rule that deliberations in committee was secret. He also denied the allegation. His opinion, he said, was that of the Committee on Naval Affairs and existed before the appointments were made. Personally, he admitted, he no longer revered navy chaplains so much since he had heard that their position was a monopoly of members of the Episcopal faith. Slidell's amendment lost, 15-23. 43

He did, however, manage to prevent a fleet surgeon from receiving compensation for expenses incurred while accompanying a sick flag officer home. Slidell's report on the matter claimed that an officer of the high rank of fleet surgeon was not necessary for the performance of such a task. The Senate agreed. 44

Obviously, Slidell was quite busy during the session in defending Louisiana, the administration, and himself. By the time he was performing these actions, the Southern wing of the Democratic Party had walked out of the Charles-

43 Ibid., 1375-76.
44 Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 269; Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2803.
ton convention almost by invitation of the Douglas faction. The Republicans were undoubtedly beginning to sense a victory in the fall. These occurrences were bound to bear some influence on subsequent debates in the Senate. And they certainly helped make Slidell's appearances on the floor hardly pleasurable experiences for him.

The defenses of himself consisted first of all in his reply to the charges and insinuations about his connection with the Benjamin amendment to the Missouri land act, which had allegedly favored the earlier of the contesting purchasers of the Houmas tract in Louisiana. The opportunity came with consideration of the petition from citizens of Ascension and Iberville parishes in Louisiana, who prayed that the amendment be repealed and an investigation made into the circumstances attending its passage.

True to his word in his letter to John Claiborne in the Advocate, Slidell early in the session moved that the petition be withdrawn from the files of the Senate. He noted that both Louisiana Senators were involved in the action it condemned. For this reason, he requested that the resolution not be sent -- as ordinarily it would be --

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45 See below, pp. 425-76.

46 See above, pp. 276-77.
to the Committee on Private Land Claims, of which Benjamin
was chairman. He suggested the Judiciary as a good
substitute committee. However, he asserted, he would leave
the selection entirely to his colleagues. After some dis-
cussion, Toombs somewhat reluctantly on a later day
accepted the chairmanship of a select committee to deal with
the matter.

Toombs reported on March 23, 1860. The majority of his
committee, he stated, thought Benjamin's amendment unfair.
It gave "a great and unjust advantage to the claimants, for
which your committee see no sound reason either in justice
or sound policy." It furnished "the Houmas grantees
paramount title to the lands in dispute" and required "all
diverse claimants to make good their titles by suits at
law; and if they fail, for any reason whatever, to show a
perfect title in themselves, their lands all fall to the
Houmas grantees." Toombs's committee also found the titles
to the tract imperfect and deserving of court review, and
recommended a law which would throw the lands under
question into Federal courts for final disposition. Then,
if claimants failed to commence judicial proceedings within

47 *Globe*, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 297-98.
two years the acreage would return to the public domain. 49

Toombs's report had therefore agreed almost completely with the petition his committee had considered. It was obviously time for the Louisiana Senators to answer what practically amounted, on the surface at least, to a condemnation of Benjamin, and perhaps Slidell. Benjamin spoke first. He noted on April 16 that Toombs was at last in his seat. Now, Benjamin demanded that he be informed by Toombs if the report on the amendment concerning the Houmas tract meant to infer any detrimental conduct on the part of the bill's sponsor "as a man and as a legislator." Dispatches to New Orleans, said Benjamin, were claiming that it did.

Toombs hastened to explain that his investigation was concerned only with the question of law. He said he was happy to tell Benjamin that he knew of nothing connected with the matter his committee had considered that cast any doubts on the character of either Louisiana Senator. 50

Slidell stood up when Toombs finished speaking. He asked for consideration on the first Monday in May,

49 Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 150; Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2430; New Orleans Courier, Mar. 28, 1860.

50 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 1730.
when he would "expose the real sources and motives", which had brought within the Senate's doors the calumnies against him and his colleague. But it was not until May 29, that Slidell had his opportunity to live up to his promise of April 16.

The newspapers reporting Slidell's address of May 29, told their readers that it was received by a "hushed" audience. It was short. It summarized the history of the grant and told the important details of his purchases. But Slidell's main interest, he said, was in exposing the sources for the implied charges which he was now in the act of answering.

First he disposed of the assortment of allegations against him. He recalled his letter of April 14 to Claiborne. In it, he reminded his colleagues, he had offered to sell his holdings for $40,000. So far he had had no takers. If true, this statement gave conclusive evidence that the claim was not worth $1,000,000. As for the allegations that he knew the titles to his land were invalid, Slidell continued, he could prove by the published proceedings of Slidell v Righter that he expressed the belief that they

51Ibid., 1730-31.
52New Orleans Delta, June 3, 1860.
were good. Actually, he claimed, the validity of the section in which they were located had twice received vindication in the courts. The petitioners, he suggested, had purchased land they knew was already legally the property of those who had bought the land before them. Finally, said the Louisiana Senator, there could be no truth in assertions that Benjamin and he had colluded to push the bill through Congress. Slidell admitted that he approved the bill's provisions. Therefore, he said, he would not take a stand against it merely because it brought him a profit in "an amount which does not weigh a feather in my estimation against that in which I hold my own self-respect."

Now Slidell turned to the principal part of his address. As it evolved, it showed that Slidell believed that Louisiana politics lay at the base of the insinuations against himself and Benjamin. First, he examined Miles Taylor's testimony before Benjamin's committee, particularly Taylor's statement that the amendment regarding the Houmas tract had passed through both houses of Congress so fast that Louisiana Congressmen had voted for it without knowing anything about its provisions. If this allegation was true, said Slidell, Taylor had shown "gross inattention to his duties." But worse still would
be the fact that he had known what he was doing. For, in that case, "his attempt now to screen himself from his responsibility to his constituents on New River, by insinuations of trick and concealment," averred Slidell, could "only be qualified by terms which it would be very bad taste to express, but which are not the less deserved."

This last statement was not exactly direct accusation. But Slidell was not quite finished with his subject. He said he had sent Taylor a letter on the matter. It still remained unanswered. This occurrence had determined Slidell's final opinion of Taylor's part in the matter under discussion. He was forced to conclude, he told the Senate, that Taylor was a party to the "libelous assaults" by "presses with which he is known to have close affiliation." Slidell did not mention these papers nor any person connected with them. But readers in Louisiana would have recognized that among these journals was the True Delta. The direction of Slidell's remarks was unmistakable. He was thinking mostly of Hugh Kennedy. Finally, Slidell mentioned that either he or Benjamin could have kept the bill from entering the Senate's chamber.53

Benjamin followed Slidell's in a longer speech.

He answered Toombs's report by stating that the persons represented by the petitioners -- "squatters," Benjamin called them -- knew when they settled on the Houmas lands that court action had already settled the question of ownership in the area.\footnote{Ibid., 2424-33.}

On June 6, 1860, the Toombs amendment was put to a vote. It passed. Benjamin voted nay. Slidell did not answer the roll call.\footnote{Ibid., 2663; New Orleans Picayune, June 12, 1860.}

Much shorter were Slidell's second and third defenses of his personal conduct in or out of the Senate. One occurred on May 9, almost immediately after Slidell's return from the Charleston convention. At this time, he arose to tell his colleagues about some statements which, he claimed, had appeared in a "libelous sheet in New York." The newspaper, continued Slidell, had alleged that he and Joseph Lane of Oregon had financial interests in the Oregon war debt bill. Indeed, said Slidell, the journal asserted that with the passage of this measure the two Senators would carry off "plunder to the amount of four or five million

\footnote{Ibid., 2424-33.}

\footnote{Ibid., 2663; New Orleans Picayune, June 12, 1860.}
dollars." In answer, Slidell first insisted that Lane be given the floor to defend himself. Then the Louisiana Senator stated quite simply that he was against the Oregon war debt bill unless it was greatly modified. The other attack upon Slidell was more indirect. On May 22, George E. Pugh of Ohio, Douglas's chief lieutenant in the Senate, informed the Senate that two members of the Louisiana delegation at Charleston protested in writing that they were forced to submit to the tyranny of the unit rule by those in control of their contingent. Why Pugh offered this information was not difficult to guess. At the Charleston convention the Douglas faction had won with a motion that the members of all delegations not specifically instructed to vote as a unit could cast individual ballots. Slidell was one of those opposing Douglas who claimed that this measure was an illegal and unfair procedure. Now, Slidell refuted Pugh's allegations by reading the statement of the two men. When Louisiana walked out of the Charleston

56Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 1889.

57Ibid., 2229.

58See below, p. 473.

59See below, pp. 477-78.
convention hall, they said, they would have preferred to remain. Otherwise, they stated, they thoroughly approved all the other decisions made by their delegation at the meeting.60

Slidell's outstanding defense of Buchanan during the session grew out of a resolution Preston King of New York introduced early in the meeting for an investigation into the possibility that large sums of money set aside for the public printing had with administration approval become a source of graft and corruption. A special committee resulted. King was chairman and Slidell a member.61 When the committee reported, the chairman was among the minority of the group. Slidell read the findings of the majority.62

Some of the most important facts in the case were as follows: In 1852, a printer failed to fulfill the contract he had with the government. Congress was in session at the time. Accordingly, it passed an act which provided for a superintendent of public printing and a printer for each house of Congress. The superintendent was a public

60 Globe, 36 Cong. Sess., 2229.
61 Ibid., 323-24.
62 Ibid., 2456-57.
functionary. He supervised the placing of the various orders for the government. Printers were persons with whom the superintendent made contracts. They were responsible for carrying out the provisions of the agreements. But they were not necessarily the actual printers of the material contracted for. In fact, they usually let the work out on subcontract.

The cost of this system proved to be very high. The government, according to one estimate, lost as much as or more than $400,000. A particularly good source for milking extra profits from the contracts was the Post Office blanks. The law permitted double charges on any printing of these forms which involved a change on a plate. Printers soon learned how to make this provision pay them rich returns.63

The outstanding personality connected with this business was Cornelius Wendell. Wendell was the former publisher of the Union and the performer of most of the printing business for the government. Wendell had been a part of the new system since its inception. The first superintendent of printing, who had acted in collusion

63Ibid., 2494-95, 2497-98; Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 205, pp. 1-13, 15-35, 205, 212, 214.
with him, had earned an indictment and dismissal.\textsuperscript{64} Then the next superintendent, George W. Bowman, began instituting reforms. The double prices for the Post Office blanks disappeared.\textsuperscript{65} Wendell had been forced at times to appeal over Bowman's head to the House Committee on Printing.\textsuperscript{66}

Then came the series of events that caused Wendell to lose his paper and eventually his contracts.\textsuperscript{67} In 1857 both branches of Congress gave the printer all the public printing except the Post Office blanks. These went to William Rice, editor of the Philadelphia \textit{Pennsylvaniaian}. Rice immediately made a contract with Wendell,\textsuperscript{68} who in turn subcontracted the work to J. T. Crowell in Rahway, New Jersey, where the actual printing occurred.\textsuperscript{69} In return for his contracts Wendell promised to support the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64}Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 205, pp. 67-68.
\item \textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 68-69.
\item \textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 347-48.
\item \textsuperscript{67}Ibid., 13-14.
\item \textsuperscript{68}Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2491.
\item \textsuperscript{69}Ibid., 2495; Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 205, p. 104.
\end{itemize}
Washington Union and Rice's Pennsylvanian. Then, sometime before August, 1858, Wendell stopped paying Rice some of the money due him under the agreement. Instead, the printer diverted a considerable portion to the Philadelphia Argus, another Democratic newspaper, under the editorship of Joseph Severus. By January, 1859, Rice was showing signs of desperation at his altered state of affairs. He tried to get the printing contract for himself. Postmaster General Brown refused him. Then Rice offered to get rid of the Pennsylvanian. Wendell agreed to accept this offer if he could dispose of the Union, which was becoming an increasing liability under the new stringent regulations of the public printing. Thereupon, on May 26, 1859, Bowman took over the Union and changed its name to the Constitution. This followed a very complicated agreement by which Wendell got the printing and agreed to continue paying as before. Right before the investigation he lost his printing privileges when Congress began letting out the government's printing to the lowest bidder.

These were the facts. The questions were whether

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70Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2496.
71Ibid., 2496-98.
Buchanan knew of the exorbitant profits printers were extorting from the government, of Wendell's outlays to the Democratic newspapers, and of the agreement whereby Bowman took the Union off Wendell's hands. There were also the implications apparent in two statements, one emanating from Wendell and the other from William Pettibone, a binder who wanted the government's business. Wendell's deposition was to the effect that the President had directed Joseph B. Baker, collector of the port of Philadelphia, to obtain Wendell's signature to some writing on a card which Baker brought to the printer. The card was in answer to an article in the New York Times of December 9, 1858, which alleged that the President had ordered Wendell's payment to the Argua. Wendell said the wording on the card denied the Times's accusation. He said also that he signed it even though he knew he was putting his name to a lie. 72

Pettibone's testimony also convicted Buchanan of duplicity. He said that when he visited the President, he received a promise that Buchanan would write an endorse-

72 House of Representatives Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 648, pp. 138-50; Senate Reports of Committees, No. 205, pp. 19-20.
ment on Pettibone's formal protest that the law prevented
the contractor who printed for the government to bind also.
This endorsement would be to the Attorney General and would
request an opinion on the law that applied to the matter.
Instead, Pettibone testified, the endorsement read "Referred
to the Attorney General, but not for an opinion." Then,
he said, the damaging evidence of the President's double-
dealing was removed by erasure. 73

Wendell and Pettibone alone with a multitude of
witnesses appeared before the King committee and the Covode
committee of the House. The first of these two investigating
bodies is now more a part of the sideglances of history
while the second lies much nearer the center of the main
focus. The Covode committee covered a much greater area
then did the King committee. Its majority report gave a
sensational indictment of the administration: The govern-
ment knew of and directed the activities and agreements of
Wendell, it knew of the high prices charged by the
government's printers, Buchanan directed Wendell to sign the
"lie" to the Times article, and Pettibone's evidence

73 Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess.,
No. 205, p. 122; House of Representatives Reports of
convicted the President of falsehood and deception. 74

Finally, the Covode group produced a witness, Robert Walker, who, testifying with regard to his term as Governor of Kansas Territory, read a letter that seemed without question to brand Buchanan as a liar. 75

In the Senate's investigation of the printing situation King could do little better than follow the lead of the House group. His charges, therefore, were very similar to the majority report of the Covode committee. 76

There were, however, answers to the majority report of the House's investigators. The first was the minority report from the same committee. Written by Warren Winslow, it claimed that since Buchanan was not impeached as a result of the inquiry, the report of the majority must have had a political basis for its existence. Winslow complained also of the shortness of the time permitted for the examination of "seven serious and broad questions." Finally, Winslow alleged that the investigation was conducted in an atmosphere that encouraged the "gratification

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76 *Senate Reports of Committees*, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 205, pp. 15-35; *Globe*, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2494-98.
of passion, spleen, and malignity, and rendering a defense, in like measure, onerous and difficult." This last criticism was apparently justified somewhat by Benjamin's experience before the investigating group. A part of the inquiry was into the illegal pressure the administration was alleged to have exerted on behalf of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company. Benjamin's position as a Senator probably aided him to wreck what he showed to be an obvious attempt of the Sloo faction for revenge.77

The second answer to the Covode group's accusations came from Buchanan. He demanded an impeachment. Then, he wrote, he would at least have an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses.78

The third answer came from Slidell's majority report of the King committee. King's minority report had eliminated the charges voiced by Pettibone for a good reason. Slidell and his colleagues on the committee had completely discredited this testimony. Pettibone had repeated his charges about the endorsement the President had given him and about the later erasures. He had been

77House of Representatives Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 648, pp. 30-33, 37-49.
78House of Representatives Executive Documents, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., No. 102.
confronted with the very letter. Pettibone could find no erasures on it. Neither could he discover the words, "but not for an opinion." Slidell spoke of this incident in his address to the Senate. He also invoked the authority of Attorney General Black and three other witnesses for his statement that Buchanan knew nothing about the government's printing contracts and about the agreement between Bowman and Wendell. In the latter case, there appeared to be little doubt, however, that Black had acted in some capacity. He claimed he was an unofficial advisor. Slidell apparently accepted the statement as true. Then Slidell concentrated on Wendell's testimony. During the proceedings of the committee Slidell had found out that Wendell paid out money to other political organizations besides the Democracy. He learned also that Wendell thought more of the old Union, the supposedly unbearable financial burden he had been forced to rid himself of, than he had previously stated. At the time of the investigation he was suing Bowman for its return. Now on the floor Slidell demonstrated that Wendell had made two statements that disagreed with each other. One accused the President of forcing Wendell to sign the card that, according to this version, falsely answered the Times. The other corroborated Baker's statement that Wendell had willingly signed what the printer
said at the time was a true rendition of the facts in the matter. With this finding as a premise, Slidell then gave his opinion that Wendell was a victim of his own "disappointed hopes and personal hostility." It was he, not the President, concluded the Senator, who decided that Rice should receive no more money.

The two star witnesses disposed of to his satisfaction, Slidell now pressed to the attack. Republican crusaders, he said, could hardly point their shaming fingers at anyone. Just recently in the House, he claimed, members of their party had voted for John D. Defrees to become the legislative body's printer after he had promised to give them half of his profits for their campaign fund.

Defrees's promise, continued Slidell, proved what was wrong with the government's printing. The fault, he said, lay not in the actions of a party but in the system itself. There was, in a word, too much profit to be derived from it. The first of two resolutions submitted in the majority report, therefore, he asserted, flowed naturally from this discovery. It read,

Resolved, That the laws regulating the prices and mode of public printing, and the abuses necessarily growing out of the expenditure thereof, require reform.
The second resolution gave a specific way in which this action could be accomplished. It proposed the letting out of contracts to the lowest bidder, who would have to put up security as guarantee for the performance of the obligation he undertook. 79

King's report followed Slidell's to the floor. 80 When the New York Senator sat down, he was succeeded by another Republican, Henry B. Anthony, who was the second member of the minority of the committee King headed. Anthony accepted King's contentions that the evidence indicted the President and his cabinet for permitting and aiding corruption in high places. In addition he offered advice, which he said came from years of experience as a newspaperman. The Democratic Party, he explained, had learned in a most embarrassing way what every journalist evidently knew, that any newspaper which did not earn the public's support should be put out of business by its backers. 81

Both of these Republican speakers agreed that the second resolution offered by the majority report was

79 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2491-94; Senate Reports of Committees, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 1-13.
80 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2494-98.
81 Ibid. 2498-2500.
needed. Further debate, therefore, occurred only in connection with the first resolution. Republicans did not want the whitewashing word "necessarily" to remain in it. After some discussion of the matter, Slidell succeeded in carrying the measure, 25-24, without change. King confessed himself shocked at the decision of his colleagues. \(^\text{82}\) Thereupon, Slidell, perhaps in retaliation to this statement, refused his consent to the printing of the minority report. Finally, however, he yielded to King's request and the document was ordered to the press. \(^\text{83}\)

Apparently Slidell was still nettled because of the investigation, the minority report, and King's attitude. Twice more he returned to the Senate floor to discuss the Senate's printing problems. The first time was in connection with a contract which had been granted to Gales and Seaton. This agreement, he told the Senate, was milking the government of $140,000. To his mind it showed that the old system had not disappeared. Mason asked Slidell to explain now what he meant by the word "necessarily."

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 2811-13.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 2813, 2873-74.
Mason also expressed the view that the chaotic government printing system would never be remedied. Slidell answered the question. He said the word expressed the opinion that under a "perfect and pure administration" nothing scandalous would result from the manner in which the printing was contracted for at present. But, he continued, there would always be "imbeciles and rogues in public places." So, the system referred to in the resolution would perpetually bring forth abuses, no matter which party was in power. 84

Action in the House of Representatives presented him with his second opportunity to discredit the operations of the enemy. Near the end of the session, Slidell arose to remind his colleagues that by right the Senate printer after adjournment printed the documents for both houses of Congress in cases where the Senate had ordered first. Now, Slidell said, the House was in the act of passing an amendment which required that the House printer print 300,000 copies of the Patent Office report. To Slidell this action showed another evil side of the system Congress was trying to eradicate at this time. It was an attempt to "abrogate the law regulating the public printing."

84 Ibid., 2874-78.
Its purpose, averred Slidell, was obvious, to insure that "one half of the profits of the public printing should go for the electioneering fund of the Republican party." 85

Slidell's last floor action on the subject during the session was performed jointly with King and Hamlin. It consisted of a motion to reduce the cost of the public printing twenty-five percent. It passed. 86

The defense of Louisiana's interest came about following Slidell's introduction of another measure to secure money for the completion of the New Orleans customhouse. Once more the Republicans protested that the building was too elaborate and expensive and that it was sinking into the Louisiana mud. Slidell in answer repeated his previous arguments. Once more he assured his listeners that the building was sound. He said also that he had a new estimate from Beauregard that $600,000 more would complete the project. It would therefore be foolish, he repeated again, to throw away the money previously spent by leaving the building in its present state while its equipment rotted in the streets that bordered it. He described in greater

85 Ibid., 3140-41.
86 Ibid., 3142, 3143, 3144-45.
detail than before how much inconvenience New Orleans suffered from this equipment, which was blocking the easy flow of traffic on some of the most important streets of the city. He said he had a personal interest in the matter. He owned property near the building and its value was below its normal figure because of the chaotic condition of the streets in the neighborhood. He said also that if the Federal government did not want the customhouse, Louisiana would be glad to relieve the government of its embarrassment. The building would make a fine state house, asserted Slidell, when New Orleans became Louisiana's capital city again. Finally, he demonstrated that the Republicans' figures on the amount of sinking were misleading. He asserted that they did not represent the sinking of two years' duration, as the opposition claimed, but that of several years.

The measure, which appropriated $300,000, passed the Senate. It had no chance for success in the House.

These were Slidell's major efforts on the Senate floor

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87 Ibid., 2743, 2814-16.
88 Ibid., 2818.
during the current session. In addition, he was his usual busy self in routine matters.\(^{89}\) He introduced several bills, other than the one for the New Orleans customhouse, for the benefit of his constituents.\(^{90}\) Two of these were notable failures. The first of this pair was for granting Louisiana the privilege of levying tonnage duties on vessels using the channels at the mouth of the Mississippi. Once he had stated his belief that Louisiana could not charge such tolls without violating the terms of the Louisiana Purchase treaty. This resolution never became law.\(^{91}\) The second bill sought to provide direct mail service between New Orleans and Havana. This measure evidently failed. The majority of the Senate felt that Charleston was a closer and more practical port for the purpose.\(^{92}\)

In matters dealing with foreign affairs, Slidell's efforts on the Senate floor were comparatively minor. He

\[\text{\textsuperscript{89}}\text{Ibid., 849, 850, 851, 861, 863, 865, 876, 1099, 1116, 1141, 1146, 1172, 1247, 1354, 1395, 1396, 1427, 1430, 1444, 1507, 1659, 1661, 1707, 1721, 1754, 1755, 1860, 2031, 2117, 2142, 2193, 2194, 2207, 2302, 2454, 2456, 2490, 2725, 2744, 2745, 2755, 2759, 2856, 2862, 2872, 2912, 2955, 3032, 3056, 3144, 3294, 3295, 3298.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{90}}\text{Ibid., 900,1117, 1290, 1342, 1611, 1765, 1935, 2031, 2309, 2759, 3296.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{91}}\text{New Orleans Crescent, Apr. 3, 1860. See above, pp. 92-93.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{92}}\text{Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 2372-73.}\]
re-introduced the proposal that had kindled so much excitement during the previous session, to furnish the President with capital sufficient to treat with Spain for the purchase of Cuba. A report from Washington was to the effect that he was working hard in the Committee on Foreign Relations for the adoption of the McLane-Ocampo agreement, which gave the United States important concessions in Mexico. Slidell also introduced a resolution for the investigation of the circumstances surrounding the capture of certain Mexican vessels by vessels of the United States Navy.

Two more comparatively minor efforts on his part may be mentioned. The first was in connection with the Homestead bill, which finally passed but received a Presidential veto. Slidell registered his approval of the measure the first time it came up for a vote but later sustained the veto by voting against the motion for overriding the President's action. In announcing that he was paired against the latter bill, Slidell did not state why

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93 Ibid., 36, 53, 199, 2456.
95 Globe, 36 Cong. 1 Sess., 1442.
96 Ibid., 2043, 3179.
he had apparently changed his mind. Perhaps, like many other Southerners, he had only voted for the original proposal because he expected Buchanan to veto it. During the debate on the measure he stood to offer one protest, in connection with a statement by Henry M. Rice of Minnesota that a survey of public lands depended strictly upon "executive will or caprice." Slidell told Rice that surveys had not been made of some public lands in Minnesota because of "the earnest instance of the Senators and Representatives of Minnesota herself." The other bill of miscellaneous nature which attracted Slidell's appearance on the floor increased the bounty paid personnel of the navy for the capture of slavers. Slidell rose to tell the Senate that the bill's sponsors were showing poor courtesy to the Committee on Naval Affairs by trying to bypass them with this measure. Moreover, the proposal was "a very poor compliment to the service." The men of the navy, he said, would perform their duty willingly without

97 Ibid., 3179.
98 Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, II, 191.
special inducements. 100

100 Ibid., 2211.
CHAPTER XVIII
THE CAMPAIGN OF 1860

While Congress was sitting, during the first half of 1860, the preliminaries to one of the most fateful Presidential campaigns in the history of the United States took place. Slidell's part in this series of events was important but not as easily discoverable as was his work in the Senate.

The story of his participation in the events leading up to the Democratic convention may be said to have begun in Louisiana. Slidell's state was growing tense under the lash of the times. Its representatives in Congress were feeling the necessity to explain any action of theirs that might be construed as aiding the Republican cause. One Louisiana Congressman invoked the authority of Slidell and Benjamin to justify a vote he had cast during the proceedings of the House. Evidently, the Senators were above

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1New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Jan. 22, 1860.
2New Orleans True Delta, Jan. 23, 1860.
suspicion. This fact did not signify that Slidell's opposition had melted away. The Soule faction had undoubtedly helped the American Party carry New Orleans in the last election. 3 Miles Taylor was no longer even technically a member of the Regular Democratic Party in Louisiana. 4 Rumors were to the effect that he would soon become a Senator, once the Louisiana legislature had an opportunity to elect him. 5 Another member of the Louisiana representation in Congress, Bouligny, had already deserted to Douglas from the American Party. 6 Now came proof that Slidell's opposition within his party were going to fight him once more for control. On January 31, 1860, a notice appeared in the New Orleans Crescent calling for a meeting of all those who believed that the delegation to Charleston should represent the entire Democratic Party in Louisiana. One of the sponsors of this invitation was Edward S. Herron. 7 Herron had but recently been a leader at a parish convention which had adopted two resolutions. One of these had bound all

3 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 26, 1859.
4 Ibid., Nov. 9, 1859, Feb. 5, Mar. 1, 1860.
5 Ibid., Feb. 4, 1860.
6 Ibid., Mar. 8, 1860.
7 Ibid., Feb. 1, 1860.
those present to support any nominee of the national Democratic convention. The other had stated the opposition of the delegates to any pledge that would give Slidell Louisiana's support for the nomination of his party for the Presidency.  

The meeting announced in the Crescent turned out to be lively in resolutions and denunciations. Its members showed their anti-administration bias by the name they bestowed upon their faction, "States Rights." However, on March 5, 1860, when the state convention met, the "States Rights" group could do little to help their cause. A solid array of Slidell delegates, like La Sere, Richard Taylor, and James A. McHatton were sent to represent Louisiana at the Charleston convention. The state meeting also adopted a resolution which read,

That while refusing instruction to your delegates in the desire that they may proceed to Charleston untrammeled, yet the Democracy of Louisiana have the utmost confidence in the patriotism and ability of the Hon. John Slidell, and consider him eminently qualified for the office of President of the United States.  

A rather strange sequence occurred when news of this resolution reached New Orleans. The Picayune forgot

8Ibid.
9Ibid., Mar. 7, 1860.
its usual decorum and assaulted Slidell in an article that included mention of the Houmas resolution, then being studied by the Toombs committee. Thereupon, the Crescent in turn forgot on whose side it belonged, by telling its American-Party colleague that the article had no reason for existence. The Crescent agreed with the Picayune that the convention's resolution was a dictation of the "King," himself. But, said the Crescent, that fact should not have brought forth the display of bitterness appearing in the Picayune's columns, even in "these degenerate times."

How seriously Slidell regarded his chances for emulating Martin Van Buren by rising from party manager to party nominee can hardly be ascertained. The declaration of the Louisiana convention may have resulted from the lack of a definite candidate which Buchanan and his followers could put against Douglas. At any rate, Slidell soon sent a letter to Augustus Talbot, member of the delegation to the convention, in which he declined the honor. "I need not

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10 New Orleans Picayune, Mar. 24, 1860.
11 See above, pp. 437-38.
13 Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 294-95.
say to you," he wrote, "how profoundly grateful I am to the Democracy of Louisiana for this last and highest evidence of their confidence and attachment. It will be for me and my children the proudest recollection of our lives." However, Slidell continued, he preferred to remain in the Senate. Moreover, the South needed to unite behind a candidate at Charleston whom the Northern branch of the Democratic Party would accept. Slidell told also of the type of man the South would insist upon. He must be "a stern, uncompromising supporter of our Constitutional rights." Unless the convention selected this kind of candidate, Slidell predicted, a Black Republican would assume the "helm of government." His personal nominations, concluded Slidell, were Joseph Lane of Oregon, Isaac Toucey of Connecticut, Daniel S. Dickinson and Horatio Seymour of New York, and almost any Southerner. He was certain that Southern opposition would keep Douglas from attaining the prize.

As the convention at Charleston approached and when it finally threw open its doors, Slidell's actions furnished the subject of many articles which appeared in the press.

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14 New Orleans Delta, May 8, 1860.
"Not a politician of the North and West arrives here," said the Washington correspondent of the New York Tribune, "but instantly he is approached by some emissary of the anti-Douglas cabal, of which the Louisiana Senator is the cogitating brain and the animating soul." From Charleston a reporter sent back an account that quoted Slidell as admitting that his opposition to Douglas was personal. Another observation was to the effect that he was likely to be the "compromise candidate" which the convention was sure to choose. He was supposed to have refused a mere "complimentary vote." He was said to be rarely in the convention hall. Yet, continued the article, his presence was more than felt by delegates. A dispatch quoted a belief that he, Bright, and W. W. Corcoran, the Washington banker, had indicated their willingness to invest $200,000 to insure the defeat of Douglas.

These accounts were little more than unsubstantiated

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15 Nevins, Emergence of Lincoln, II, 202.
16 New Orleans True Delta, May 18, 1860.
17 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 29, 1860.
18 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Apr. 23, 1860.
19 New Orleans Crescent, May 2, 1860.
rumors. But there appeared other bits of evidence about Slidell which were more concrete. Slidell arrived in Charleston on or before April 21, 1860. There he established a headquarters where he, Bayard, and Bright, the victorious team at Cincinnati, labored. The location was an ancient mansion, provided by S. L. M. Barlow, the same person who had furnished the headquarters for Slidell and his friends four years before. And it was here that Murat Halstead, author and reporter, discovered Slidell and described him for posterity:

Within, seated at a round table on which books, newspaper, and writing material are scattered about, is a gentleman with long thin, white hair, through which the top of his head bluses like the shell of a boiled lobster. The gentleman has also a cherry-red face, the color being that produced by good health and good living jointed to a florid temperament. His features are well cut, and the expression is that of a thoughtful, hard-working, resolute man of the world.

Halstead continued his account with a sketch of Slidell's life and statements that explained what the Senator was doing at the convention. Slidell was not very eloquent in the Senate, admitted the writer, but "his ability" was

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21 New Orleans Delta, Apr. 29, 1860; Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 294.
"unquestioned." Slidell was, indeed, the "power behind the throne, greater than the throne itself." Buchanan was "as wax in his fingers." Halstead expanded on Slidell's gifts as a political manager. The Senator, Halstead explained, manipulated men in such a way that they believed that "they" had "arrived at the conclusion now coming uppermost in their minds in their own way." Slidell was a "matchless wire-worker," whose very approach at the convention caused "a flutter" among those standing nearby. And, asserted Halstead, Slidell's presence meant "war to the knife" with the Douglas forces. It also meant, apparently, war to the last dollar. Douglas's backers, according to the writer, were expressing alarm that "Slidell & Co. were willing to buy all" of the Douglas votes up for sale. Evidently Halstead believed that the Douglas faction's fears were based on some fact. The "revenues of King Caucus," he said in another place of his account of the convention, "are bribes."23

According to Halstead, Slidell was, along with other leaders opposed to Douglas, somewhat overconfident as to how the convention's deliberations would come out. In fact,

22 Ibid., 7, 12-13, 60.
23 Ibid., 60.
continued the writer, Slidell had only come to the convention at the last minute. He "was urged last week to come down and attend to the extermination of his enemy, but said at first he would not -- for there was no danger of the nomination of the obnoxious individual." Slidell, asserted Halstead, had changed his mind when demonstrations of the Douglas followers in Washington had demonstrated the great strength of their candidate. Then, wrote Halstead, "'Old Houmas,' as his enemies style him," decided to attend the convention in person. Even after he arrived, continued the reporter, Slidell was one of those who still "scouted" any idea that Douglas would win. The candidate from Illinois, Slidell's headquarters predicted to the press, could hope for no more than one hundred and six votes on the first ballot. Thereafter, like Pierce in 1856, Halstead quoted Douglas's enemies as saying, he would fade. Halstead asserted that the prediction proceeded from the conviction that the vote of Pennsylvania and New York would go against Douglas and thereby ruin his chances.

This overconfidence, however, did not, according to Halstead, mitigate the hate the three Senators bore for the

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24 Ibid., 7.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 11-12.
leading contender for the nomination of the Democratic Party. Accordingly, the "play" in the convention, he reported, was rough and direct. But the atmosphere at Charleston was not the same as that which had prevailed at Cincinnati. The Douglas managers were efficient. They utilized every possible device to aid their candidate's chances. Halstead felt he was witnessing in "this Douglas game for the Presidency" what he described as "a bold game and splendid impudence for an imperial stake." And he found "abundant evidence" that pointed to "infinite rottenness and corruption under it." 27 This corruption may have been necessary because of what the author also observed, that the Douglas backers were "not so stiff in their backs nor so strong in the faith" as the Southerners, who were anchored to their "principles." 28 At any rate, it worked. In the end, Halstead reported, the Little Giant easily outgeneraled his amazed opponents.

There were three elements which decided the direction taken by the convention. The first was the solid unity of

27Ibid., 60.
28Ibid., 5.
29Ibid., 59.
the Northwest for Douglas. The second was the imposition of the unit rule upon most of the Douglas delegations by the states which sent them to the meeting. The third was the key position occupied by New York. New York was committed to the unit rule. But while it voted for Douglas, he was not their first choice. The leader of the New York group, Dean Richmond, was a Soft and a member of the Albany Regency. He and the thirty votes he controlled were going along with Douglas until Horatio Seymour began to show signs of strength. Then New York's fifty votes were to shift to the candidate from their state. On the other hand, the minority twenty votes were the voices of Richmond's enemies in New York. In order to get them to agree to the unit rule, Richmond had been forced to promise that should Daniel S. Dickinson's vote begin to assume important proportions, New York would cast its fifty votes for him.

Thus, if the anti-Douglas leaders were ever to break

30 Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 290.
31 Ibid., 297.
through the solid Douglas wall of delegations, New York was the place for Slidell and his friends to begin.

The three Senators commenced their attack with the employment of the tactics which had succeeded so well at Cincinnati. Once more they sought to control those committees where each state had one vote. The combined ballots of the South, California, and Oregon brought some victories and concessions. Caleb Cushing was elected chairman of the convention. Then Douglas's managers agreed that the platform should be taken up before the candidates were chosen. After a long fight, the Little Giant's popular-sovereignty principle was discarded from the statement of the party's stand on current issues. In its place was a provision favoring the appeal of all questions concerning slavery in territories to the Federal courts.295

But running concurrently with and succeeding these evidences of the skill and strength of the forces at the disposal of Slidell and his colleagues were the events which scuttled the plans of Douglas's opposition. A resolution

appeared on the convention floor which permitted members of all delegations not specifically instructed by their states to vote as a unit to cast individual ballots. This motion when passed gave Douglas votes, even from the Southern states. The opponents of Douglas proved to be powerless to stop the convention from adopting it. But then they took a step which to the experienced eye of Halstead seemed foolish. According to him they "threw themselves away without sufficient cause" by fighting an obvious majority with a request that New York and Illinois be refused participation in the meeting until the committee on credentials had reported. The vote on this measure was six to one against them. Finally came the speech of Senator Stuart of Michigan, second in command of the Douglas forces. This address so insulted Douglas's opposition that when it was finished, William L. Yancey led the great majority of the Southern states out of the convention. The walkout was in keeping with instructions from some states and an

34 Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 297.
35 Halstead, Caucuses of 1860, 19.
36 Ibid., 73-76; Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 304-305.
agreement previously made in a caucus, over which Alexander Mouton of Louisiana had presided. 37

These acts of secession occurred on May 1, 1860. According to Richard Taylor, Louisiana delegate and son of Zachary Taylor, action involving himself and Slidell almost forestalled what amounted to the wrecking of the Democratic Party. On the night of Saturday, April 29, Taylor wrote some years after the event, "anxious forebodings" kept him awake. He visited Slidell, Bayard, and Bright at their dwelling. "There, after pointing out the certain consequences of Alabama's impending action," Taylor "made an earnest appeal for peace and harmony, and with success." The three Senators sent for Yancey. He agreed to talk to his delegates that very night and to try and extract from them a promise to disregard their instructions. Slidell, Bayard, Bright, and Taylor then "waited until near dawn for Yancey's return, but," asserted Taylor, "his efforts failed of success." Later, Taylor wrote, he learned that the key man in the Alabama group was a Douglas follower, John A. Winston. Winston was originally against obeying instructions. Now, it seemed, he had changed his mind. Evidently the followers of the Illinois Senator wanted their opponents

37 New Orleans Picayune, Apr. 24, 1860.
to take a walk. Winston was a member of the pro-Douglas Alabama group which were seated by the Baltimore convention in place of Yancey's delegation.  

The decision of the remainder of the delegates in the convention hall to postpone deliberations until June 18, 1860, and to meet then in Baltimore undoubtedly did not make the three Buchanan managers happy. They probably realized that Douglas could not get a two-thirds vote with so many of the original delegates missing. Now, with the postponement, their hopes for a compromise candidate were dashed to pieces, for awhile at least. And their delegations would have to return home and fight for a right to return to the convention when it met in Baltimore.

Slidell was quick to help the members of his delegation. He wrote a letter for this purpose to A. G. Carter on May 19. In it he gave his "full, unqualified and emphatic approval" of the actions of Louisiana's delegation to Charleston. He protested Douglas's imposition of individual voting to delegations which had no specific instruction to cast its ballots as units. New Jersey, for example, Slidell wrote, had "recommended" the use of the unit-rule system.

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A vote on the floor, protested Slidell, had disregarded this direction and also a favorable ruling by the chair. Moreover, wrote Slidell, if New Jersey had been permitted the right to exercise the unit rule on this one ballot, the decision of the chair would not have been overturned. Slidell also protested that the rules governing representation in the conventions were unfair. They permitted delegates from states which would be Republican in the fall to dictate to other states who would prove thoroughly Democratic. He believed that an additional vote should be given each state for every Democratic representative it had in Congress at the time it elected its delegates.

The rest of Slidell's letter looked to the future. He spoke of an "address to the National Democracy," which, he said, bore his signature. This document was in essence a concession to Douglas. It castigated the acts of the majority of the delegates at Charleston but it also saw possibilities for compromise. It urged the seceded delegations to go first to Richmond, Virginia. They could then adjourn "over to a day subsequent to that fixed for" the Baltimore meeting of the party.

Slidell claimed to be disappointed also by the
nomination of Abraham Lincoln in the Republican convention in Chicago on May 18, the day before Slidell wrote his letter. Slidell asserted that he had wanted Seward to be the opponent of the Democratic nominee. To Slidell, Seward represented everything Republicanism stood for and the South hated. Lincoln was unknown. His record, stated Slidell, was undoubtedly hostile but not as clearly marked as Seward's. It would therefore, claimed Slidell, not present "as absolute and unmistakable a test of Northern sentiment," especially if the ranks of the Democratic party were split.  

The next important political action by which Slidell was affected occurred in Louisiana. There the "National Democracy of Louisiana," was formed to replace the "States Rights Party." This group then on its own authority sent delegates to an assembly at Donaldsonville. The purpose of this meeting was clear, to disavow the actions of the seceders from the convention and to replace the members of the Louisiana delegation with another group committed to Douglas. On the same day, May 6, a state convention at

40 Ibid., May 24, 1860.
41 New Orleans True Delta, May 9, 1860.
42 New Orleans Crescent, May 22, 1860; New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 8, 1860.
Baton Rouge gave its approval to the actions that the Donaldsonville assembly condemned. It also voted to send the same men to Baltimore. Two delegations, therefore, went to Baltimore, the old one, headed by La Sère, and the new one, led by Soule. Soule's colleague, Miles Taylor, was already on Douglas's campaign committee.

When the convention opened its doors again in its new location, the situation had not altered so far as the New York delegation was concerned. The Southern faction still had no particular candidate to offer. What was different was the fact that Douglas could now win if he could seat the new, contesting delegates from the states of the seceding delegations. These included one from Alabama led by Forsyth and Soule's contingent from Louisiana. Forsyth and Soule's presence in the convention, indeed, were signs of victory in the eyes of Douglas's followers, who "assumed an arrogance of tone that precluded the hope of amicable adjustment of difficulties."

Slidell, Bayard, and Bright, however, were once again on hand. And in spite of the insuperable odds they came

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43 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 5, 6, 7, 1860.
44 Ibid., May 24, 1860.
45 Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 314.
46 Halstead, Caucuses of 1860, 159.
47 New Orleans Delta, June 21, 1860.
close to success. On the fifth day, June 23, of the convention, the majority report of the credentials committee recommended the replacement of the Louisiana and Alabama delegations by the alternate groups. It wanted the Arkansas and Georgia representation divided evenly between the administration and the Douglas men. It was accepted. Then came the usual motion to reconsider. Before this proposal was voted upon, Richmond in a surprise move cast New York's fifty votes against laying the minority report on the table. Now, with the very fate of the Union in his hands, Richmond hesitated. Then, just at this point Douglas's withdrawal from the contest reached his manager, William A. Richardson of Illinois. And right after this, Slidell sent an ultimatum to Richardson. The Louisiana Senator had been laboring long on the New York delegation, pleading with them not to throw out the original Southern representatives to the convention. So far he had enjoyed no success. Now, he begged no more. Douglas, he told the


49 New Orleans *Picayune*, June 27, 1860.


Douglas managers, must be put aside. Either Seymour or Cobb would make at least acceptable substitutes.

The offer was just what Richmond wanted. He implored Richardson to take Seymour. Richardson disregarded both Douglas's letter and Richmond's plea. And Richmond refused to make the Albany Regency a martyr in the party's cause. The Democracy was a result was split in two. Soule and Forsyth walked in and Virginia led the South out of the convention. A little later Soule gave what was said to be the best speech in the convention. Thus, according to Halstead, the Douglas faction forced their leader to "permit the destruction of the Democratic party." The Northwest, he reported, took pride from the thought that no longer could they be called the South's "serfs." One Democratic delegate in Baltimore wanted Lincoln "to make them sweat" during his coming term. He was, therefore, in Halstead's eyes one of the men from the Northwest who were "more

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52 Alexander, Political History of the State of New York, II, 297-301.
53 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, June 24, 1860.
54 Halstead, Caucuses of 1860, 206-207.
Northern than Democratic.\textsuperscript{55}

The seceders went to the Maryland Institute, where they chose John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky for President and Senator Lane of Oregon for Vice-President.\textsuperscript{56} Twenty-two states were represented at this meeting.\textsuperscript{57} On June 26, the Richmond convention where Southerners were assembled and since June 21 had been meeting and adjourning from day to day, accepted the decision of the gathering in the Maryland Institute.\textsuperscript{58}

In the ensuing campaign Slidell was not so conspicuous nationally as he had been in 1856. He was not a member of his party's national committee. He did serve on its committee for financing the campaign. On June 30 he signed an appeal by this committee for funds.\textsuperscript{59} Before returning to Louisiana he made a brief visit to Saratoga, which was said to have "rejuvenated" him, and a call upon the headquarters of the Louisiana Democratic Club in the Nation's Capital.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{56} New Orleans \textit{Louisiana Courier}, June 24, 1860.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., June 26, 1860.
\textsuperscript{58} Halstead, \textit{Caucuses of 1860}, 231.
\textsuperscript{59} Reproduced in Nevins, \textit{Emergence of Lincoln}, II, 283.
\textsuperscript{60} New Orleans \textit{Delta}, July 31, 1860.
By September 17 he was in New Orleans. Evidently he remained there until December.

Slidell received a royal welcome home. The Courier expressed its elation over his visit to the newspaper. On the night of September 17 he was given a serenade by the Young Men's Breckinridge and Lane Club with thousands of people in attendance. Slidell was staying at the St. Charles Hotel. In the early evening hours St. Charles street, upon which the hotel faced, began to fill with persons. Finally, the street was choked with the crowd. A band appeared and began to play. Suddenly, there was a call for Slidell, who had appeared on the hotel's balcony, to say a few words. He was hoarse and exhausted from his journey, he said. But he responded anyway.

The short address Slidell then delivered gave an indication as to how the coming campaign would be waged. The first part settled the question, so far as Slidell's mind was concerned, as to which of the Louisiana political leaders should be branded traitor by their state, Soule, who

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61 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Sept. 18, 1860.
62 Ibid.
had gone against the Democratic Central Committee of Louisiana, or Slidell, who had walked out of a convention of the national Democracy. He showed how he felt on this matter by recalling how in the old days "political apostacy was rare" and a leader faced the enemy without worrying about his "friends" on his flanks. However, continued Slidell, these turncoats meant nothing in the coming struggle. On the other hand, he felt he could justify his conduct at Charleston and Baltimore. Radical differences of opinion had brought dissension there. And, he insisted, where this kind of situation developed, the interested parties had the right to "call for an explicit enunciation of principles." This demand had been denied at Charleston, he said, and reconciliation rejected at Baltimore. Indeed, at Baltimore, the "bogus" delegation of the Donaldsonville "mock Convention" had replaced the one which truly represented Louisiana. And even these illegal expedients, he claimed, had failed to give Douglas the two-thirds of the total number of delegates. So, the "true" nominees of the Democratic Party were Breckinridge and Lane.

Next Slidell gave an indication as to how, in his opinion, the November elections would result with regard to the candidates. He spoke first of Douglas. Douglas, said Slidell, was the weakest of all the contenders and would not
carry a single state. Slidell noted the appearance of the candidates of the American Party, John M. Bell and Edward Everett. Douglas, in Slidell's opinion, was only running in Louisiana to help the American ticket and to create an impression of strength where in reality he had none. Bell, for his part, could hope for just about the same kind of success in the North. He might carry New Jersey and Pennsylvania if he merged with Douglas's party, but these two states were his only hope. Personally, admitted Slidell, Bell had many qualities that deserved respect. But Bell's principles gave the South no guarantee of "conservatism" guiding his administration once he was elected. Also, said Slidell, Bell lacked the power and nerve to lead in the present critical times. In summation, Slidell said he believed that if the election went into the House of Representatatives, the order of the candidates would be Lincoln, Breckinridge, and Bell. But he also felt that should the Northern Democracy, the Douglas group, be willing to combine with their opponents within the party, New Jersey and Pennsylvania could go Democratic and deprive the Republicans of their first Presidential victory.
Slidell ceased speaking. The crowd, many of whom had hardly heard a word of the address, cheered wildly. The band prepared to strike up another musical number. As they did so, Slidell waved to the crowd and disappeared. 63

From New Orleans Slidell went to Belle Pointe. From there he sent, about a week after he left the city, a message which was printed in the Democratic newspapers. In this communication, Slidell noted to his readers that he wished at this time to avoid excessive partisan enthusiasm and the "indulgence of exaggerated statements or personal invective." It was therefore, apparently, to be a sober message for the careful contemplation of the Louisiana voter.

The first part of Slidell's letter contrasted what Slidell felt was the decadent condition of the politics of his natal state, New York, with the healthy condition politically of his adopted home, Louisiana. He was happy, he wrote, that Louisiana would be spared the "disgrace and mortification" of a Republican ticket within its borders. The state's political health, he intimated, was not perfect. Slidell admitted he would be practicing self-deceit if he believed that with regard to Lincoln's party "we have no materials for such . . . among us," once Federal

63 Ibid.
patronage was available. Again New Orleans was a troubled spot for the Democratic Party. Slidell expected that the city and its surrounding area would give Bell a plurality. Nevertheless, he said, the state had never before been so united and strong in its loyalties to the Democratic Party. He was glad that Soule's "secret opposition" had been exposed. The desertion of Soule's "mock representations of fabulous constituencies" at Baltimore would be more than compensated for by "the accession of the very elite of the old-line Whig party."

On the other hand, the New York Democratic Party, said Slidell, had "developed those traits of baseness, duplicity and mendacity, which have rendered their names a by-word and a reproach with all honest men." Slidell recalled the days before New York sent such representatives to national conventions. Then, apparently, they would not have sacrificed Seymour, Dickinson, or any other feasible candidate from their state in a convention which, Slidell insisted, they could have controlled any time they chose to assert their will. Instead, they had insured the nomination of a candidate who was sure to lose the free states to Lincoln and the slave states to Bell and thus bring about the end of the Democratic Party.
Next Slidell turned to a close analysis of the candidates in the race, their chances, their qualifications, and what might be expected from each of their administrations once they went into office. First came a general statement of how the campaign was developing at the moment. Slidell said he was now able to place California and Oregon on the doubtful list, which meant that the Democratic Party might carry them. But, he continued, the value of this good fortune had been lowered by Douglas's obstinate refusal to accept any offers of compromise in the doubtful states East. Slidell said he still did not believe Douglas had any chances for victory. Bell could not carry the border states. So the fight was still between Breckinridge and Lincoln.

Slidell next examined the candidates individually in something of a descending order, according to his personal estimation of their qualities. First, naturally, was Breckinridge. Breckinridge's principal asset, began Slidell, was the fact that he alone could be chosen President in the House of Representatives without the aid of the Black Republicans. Nevertheless, Slidell continued, Breckinridge would probably not be elected. Indeed, there was a possibility that the House would fail to select any candi-
date from among the leading three. If that eventuality
arrived, he predicted, the Senate would decide the contest.
It would choose Lane as Vice-President. Then, in the absence
of a President on March 4, 1861, Lane would automatically
(by the Twelfth Amendment) become the Chief Executive. And
if Lane became President, Slidell felt that all would be
well. Never before in the history of the United States, he
stated, could the "reins of government" have been confined
"to safer, steadier, and firmer hands" than those possessed
now by Lane.

Second in Slidell's estimation, evidently, was Bell.
Slidell now explained what he meant when he spoke about
this candidate in the speech at the St. Charles Hotel.
Bell, said the Louisiana Senator, had a long record of vot­
ing against Southern interests. And, Slidell added in the
form of a rhetorical question, Catholics would hardly vote
for a man with his Know-Nothing sympathies. They would
recall Bell's "ill-concealed exultation" over riots in
Louisville between the native- and the foreign-born voters
of that city, bloody raids, which had gone in favor of the
first group.

Third on the list came Douglas, in Slidell's eyes
the archtraitor in the campaign. First, Slidell admitted his bias and political hostility toward the Illinois Democrat. He also reminded his readers of Douglas's long and faithful service for his party, service which had earned Slidell's respect in former times. But, like Lucifer, Douglas, in Slidell's opinion, had fallen from his high estate. "Overwhelming vanity" and "a temper impatient of all counsel or control," said Slidell, had turned Douglas into an active and unscrupulous intriguer. Now Douglas would ruin his party because it had denied him the Presidency. He had gathered to himself followers who were for the most part embryo profiteers and exploiters. They were using him as a "convenient half-way lodgment on the road to the Abolition camp." From this group, predicted Slidell, would come most of the vindictive utterances in the campaign.

Slidell mentioned occurrences which he undoubtedly felt documented his statement that Douglas's primary purpose for running was to wreck the Democratic Party. The first, he claimed, was a report that was circulating widely through the country. Douglas, according to the story, had gone to John Covode, chairman of the House committee whose findings had caused Buchanan so much embarrassment. To Covode, continued Slidell, Douglas had made the request that
the Congressman go to Trumbull, Republican Senator from Douglas's state, and make an agreement whereby Douglas would help the Republicans in 1860 in return for their support at a later time. Then, sometime after this incident Douglas had an interview with another Republican. At this meeting he was quoted as saying:

Burlingame, I am elected Senator for six years; I have got Joe Lane's head in a basket, and shall soon have Slidell's, Bright's and Fitch's. Won't it be a splendid sight, Burlingame, to see McDougal returned from California, Baker from Oregon, and Douglas and Old Abe all at Washington together? For the next President is to come from Illinois.

Slidell said he wanted it understood that he was not claiming that the reports were true. They might not be a faithful rendition of fact. But he thought they should be published in order that Douglas would be furnished an opportunity to deny or affirm them. Such a statement, indeed, asserted Slidell, might throw some light on speeches Douglas was making, like the recent one at Rocky Point, Rhode Island, in which he emphatically refused any offers of fusion with his opponents in the Democratic Party.

The candidacy of Lincoln should have come next in Slidell's analysis. However, it did not receive any direct notice. Actually, its possibilities had been present under
the surface of every paragraph Slidell had written. Now, toward the close of Slidell's address, Lincoln came into close but not quite clear view. The Louisiana Senator said he could not end his communication without considering the possibility of secession, unpleasant as the thought was to him. And secession, he felt, was quite possible in the not-too-distant future. For, unless there was a radical change in Northern sentiment, he continued, the South could not "with safety and honor continue the connection" any longer with those who hated its ways. The principal virtues for the South in these trying times, he thought, were firmness and strength. The worst advisers in the section to Slidell, therefore, were the "Submissionists" and the "Union men 'à tout prix!" For his constituents he recommended the exercise by them of calm deliberation and tolerance for each other's opinion during the coming campaign. Each man and his neighbor, said Slidell, "may, perhaps, be soon called upon to act together under a common flag and against common enemies." As for himself, concluded Slidell, he would not "intrude" his "advice" regarding Louisiana's future course of action. His duty, he asserted, was "to obey, to follow, not to lead." Whatever might be the command of his state, he said, "I shall be found, as I have ever been, prepared to carry it out faithfully."
At the bottom of the communication were many items of documentation, which Slidell had attached in an obvious attempt to substantiate his charges that Douglas was a traitor to his party. 64

Slidell's "Address" set the tone of the succeeding campaign for his party. This contest proved to be a lively one. The Democracy's principal enemy in the country was the Soulé faction, who sought to elect Douglas. Of them, Miles Taylor and Dr. Thomas Cottman were on the Little Giant's Central Committee. 65 In New Orleans, however, the Old-Line Whig newspapers quickly forgot their temporary backing of Douglas and jumped on the more congenial bandwagon of Bell. 66 They thereby left the True Delta a lonely, if spirited and shrill, exclusive advocate of Douglas in the Crescent City. Huge meetings were held in New Orleans. The "Bellites" gave some of their best speeches before the recently completed statue of Henry Clay on Canal Street. 67 A notable occasion for the Democratic Party was the rally at which Yancey gave

64 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 5, 6, 1860.
65 New Orleans Crescent, July 3, 1860.
67 Ibid., Aug. 3, 1860.
the major address.

Certain new features emerged as the canvass progressed. One was the apparent desertion of the German press from their connection with the Regular Democratic Party. A sign of the direction in which the New Orleans Germans were headed was the rapid rise of Michael Hahn in the estimation of his German friends and neighbors. Hahn was destined to be a future governor of Louisiana under the guidance of the Union army, conqueror of Louisiana in 1862.69

Another sign of the changing times was the military aspects that the campaign soon assumed. In New Orleans, organizations like the Lane Dragoons and the Association of the Young Democrats were formed. One such military organization paraded before the Louisiana Club on St. Charles street on October 11, 1860. On the balcony was Slidell. The marchers called for a speech from the Senator. He

68Ibid., Oct. 31, 1860.

obliged by means of a brief talk, which in effect urged 
them to be ready for the impending crisis. On another 
oclass, a meeting which featured the oratory of Albert 
Gallatin Brown, the captain of a military organization 
accepted a banner from the hands of several young ladies 
from the Second District. In thanking the donors, the 
captain said: "Terrible sera le combat; mais votre cause 
est juste et vous ne devez rien craindre. . . . A l'oeuvre 
donc, à l'oeuvre! Concentrez vos forces et soyez prêts 
pour le jour du combat. Votre pays, vos foyers, et 
Breckinridge et Lane."71

Strangely, while his world was crashing about him, 
Slidell's correspondence with Buchanan seemed to be con­ 
cerned most of all with the case of the New Orleans Post­
master, S. F. Marks. Marks's accounts were supposedly 
several thousands of dollars in arrears. The True Delta 
announced his dismissal on July 31, 1860.72 Notwithstand­
ing these circumstances, Slidell strove to protect Marks 
from what the Senator called a harshness "altogether

70 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 12, 1860.
72 New Orleans True Delta, July 31, 1860.
unusual." Marks's reputation wrote Slidell to Buchanan, proved the former postmaster incapable of stealing a penny. He was, continued Slidell, a victim of dishonest clerks, who had taken advantage of their superior's inexperience. The real culprit in the matter, Slidell evidently felt, was the new Postmaster General, Holt. Holt, Slidell informed Buchanan, wanted another victim to sacrifice on the altar of Post-Office efficiency. His persecuting action against Marks, Slidell suggested, stemmed probably from the fact that Holt's brother-in-law was ex-Governor Wickliffe of Louisiana. Wickliffe, claimed Slidell, was an old enemy of the dismissed postmaster. Slidell might have been successful in his endeavor. After a few letters the subject was suddenly dropped without comment. 73

When Slidell was addressing the marching group from the Louisiana Club's balcony and telling them to ready themselves for the coming emergency, he undoubtedly knew that the recent October elections in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa had insured Republican victory in November. 74

The Courier possessed this knowledge also before November


74 New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Oct. 12, 1860.
arrived. So, probably, did many other Louisianians. On October 17, 1860, Governor Moore in a formal interview said that Lincoln's election justified secession.76

Yet the campaign was carried on down to the last moment. The Courier skipped its edition scheduled for the Sunday before the Tuesday election. It said it wanted to be waving the Democratic colors until the final moment of the campaign.77 On the sixth of November it probably confirmed what its readers knew long before the moment they read that "We have met the enemy and we are theirs." New Orleans belonged to Bell, and the nation to the Black Republicans. But the Democratic Party, continued the Courier had not undergone a defeat "without glory and honor." In addition, there were tiny rays of sunshine in the midst of the gloom. Breckinridge and Lane had captured Louisiana's electoral vote. Gains had been scored for the Regular Democracy in the city and state. For these

75Ibid.
76Ibid., Oct. 17, 1860.
77Ibid., Nov. 6, 1860.
advances in fortune the *Courier* was thankful. 78

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Ibid., Nov. 7, 1860.
CHAPTER XIX
SLIDELL LEAVES THE SENATE FOREVER

On November 13, 1860, Slidell wrote Buchanan a letter in which he told his friend of their victory in Louisiana. The Senator also showed his recognition of the fact that soon his state and himself would no longer be a part of the Union:

I deeply regret the embarrassments which will surround you during the remainder of your term and I need scarcely say that I will do everything in my power to modify them as much as possible & to avert any hostile action during your administration. I see no probability of preserving the Union, nor indeed do I consider it desirable to do so if we could. My only regret will be the separation from the small but gallant band of democrats who have stood by us so manfully in the final contest.

Slidell also said that he expected to remain home until January. The governor of Louisiana, he told the President, would probably soon convene the legislature in order to authorize the holding of a convention, which would "appoint delegates to confer with the other Slave States." But, asserted Buchanan's former political
manager, "if you think my presence necessary in Washington, I will endeavor to leave here towards the close of this month."\(^1\)

As Slidell was penning these lines, New Orleans was reflecting the changing times. Troops marched on review in the *Place d'Armes.*\(^2\) Military balls were nightly features.\(^3\) The nickname for the Louisiana military man, "Bob Whiffles," appeared often in newspapers.\(^4\) The subjects of "la scission, la depression des fonds publics et le théâtre," said one source, were driving all other thoughts out of the public's mind.\(^5\)

Slidell must have received word from his friend to come to Washington. Or perhaps the necessity to rid himself of his investments in land in the Northwest called him away from Louisiana.\(^6\) At any rate, he left New

\(^1\) Slidell to Buchanan, Nov. 13, 1860. Buchanan Manuscripts, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

\(^2\) New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, Nov. 24, 1860.

\(^3\) New Orleans *Delta*, Nov. 26, Dec. 3, 1860.

\(^4\) New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, Nov. 24, 1860.

\(^5\) Ibid.

Orleans on November 27, 1860. Two days before this date, the Courier permanently closed down its presses. Henceforth its place in New Orleans was taken by the Delta.

Slidell's labors in the nation's capital were of two kinds, one performed inside, the other outside the Senate's doors. For the most part, each type complimented the other. An exception to this general rule pitted him against an old adversary in debates on appropriation bills, Iverson of Georgia. On December 13 Iverson called up a bill he had introduced earlier for claims against Mexico in accordance with the treaty of 1848. He had produced the measure, it appeared, in the belief that there existed a continuing fund to pay claimants. Slidell rose to correct what he felt was a misunderstanding on Iverson's part. As he recalled the matter, he told the Senate, the United States agreed to pay claims on Mexico to the amount of $3,250,000. A board was therefore set up to examine the various demands for compensation under the act. Their labors ended the matter. Mexico, continued Slidell, had no right to any unexpended money, and new claims would require new appropriations. No one, therefore, concluded Slidell, could invoke the provisions

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7Globe, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 84-85.
of the old treaty for any reasons whatsoever. Iverson disagreed with Slidell's interpretation of the matter.

Mexico, he said, received $11,750,000 and the United States retained $3,250,000. In answer, Slidell read the twelfth section of the pact. This stipulated that Mexico was to be paid five installments of $3,000,000 each. Iverson still could not see why the claim should not be paid. It was an obligation that Mexico should meet. Bayard stood up to disagree with Iverson. No vote was ever taken on the matter.8

The other major performances of Slidell in the Senate at this time dealt in some way with the present crisis. His most important act, probably, was one of abstention. It occurred on January 16, 1861. At this time, the Senate was considering the Crittenden compromise measure, which granted the South concessions that probably would have been sufficient to prevent disunion.9 At one point in the debate, Daniel Clark offered an amendment to the Crittenden proposal. It substituted for all the provisions of the Kentucky Senator's bill the simple statement that the Constitution already provided sufficient safeguards

8Ibid., 137.

9Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 406-407.
against interference of Southern institutions by the North and that efforts to change it were "dangerous, illusory and destructive." When this amendment was voted upon, Slidell joined Benjamin, Iverson, Johnson of Arkansas, and the two Texas Senators, Hemphill and Wigfall in refusing to cast a ballot. According to one source, if the amendment had failed, the Crittenden plan would have been brought to a direct vote. The action of Slidell and his Southern colleagues, therefore, helped end the last real hope of reconciliation between the sections of the United States who would soon be at war with each other.

Slidell appeared on the Senate floor during the session in connection with four important matters, all of which arose from the fact that he was a leader of those who would soon renounce allegiance to the United States. The first of Slidell's performances was an answer to Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, who had just contended that no state had the right to withdraw from the Union. Slidell assured Johnson that he need have no fears that Louisiana intended to stop the flow of traffic on the

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10 *Globe*, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 408-409.
11 *Moore*, *Works of Buchanan*, XII, 125.
The second subject which occupied Slidell's attention at this time was a telegraphic report which, he told the Senate, had quoted him as accusing Buchanan of "imbecility" and of being "the cause of the present troubles and the authorship of the present crisis."

Slidell disposed of the claims in the dispatch by the simple statement that "This is not the appropriate time for me to pass that eulogium upon the character of the President that my feelings would prompt." But he was not so brief in remarks and actions with regard to the perpetrator of the libel. He demanded the name of the person from the telegraph company. He said he knew the reason for the message. It was, he told his colleagues, to influence the present campaign in Louisiana for the election of delegates to the state convention. The deliberations of this assembly when it met, he claimed, he already knew "in advance." Evidently Slidell was more irritated by the message than worried about its effect in his state. At any rate, he now told the Senate that the falsified communication was the

12Globe, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 136.
second of its kind which had appeared lately in connection with a Louisiana Senator. When the Louisiana legislature convened recently to set up the machinery necessary for the calling of a convention, he explained, it heard that Benjamin was about to make a strong speech in behalf of the continuance of the Union. Next, Slidell examined the part played in this affair by the "associated press." This organization, he asserted, was notorious for its bias against "the great national Democratic party of this country." Its staff members, he continued, were "but too ready, too prone, to receive and credit, or perhaps to fabricate, what they may consider would tend to the detriment of that party and to the advantage of the other."

When Slidell finished speaking, Gwin succeeded him on the floor to state that Slidell and he were victims of a report that they had gone to Buchanan to induce the President to resign. Furthermore, continued Gwin, the rumor had claimed that "very angry words" had passed between the three men when Buchanan refused to comply with the request of the Senators. The whole story, said the California Democrat, was a "bareface slander."\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 131-32.
The Louisiana Senator made two more appearances on the Senate floor concerning the matter. On December 20, 1860, he informed the Senate that he had received a letter from the Washington agent of the wire service involved in the incident. This employee had convinced Slidell that he had had nothing to do with the lying dispatch. However, continued Slidell, excuses like this one meant nothing. There were agents of the communication organization all over the country. "A common responsibility," therefore, the speaker felt, "should attach to them all." He offered a resolution, consequently, which denounced the incident and indicted the company. However, he said, he would not press for action before three or four days had gone by.14

His final speech on the subject was the longest and most elaborate. He told his colleagues that "a gentleman by the name of Gobright," a representative of the wire service, had called upon him. In the interview which followed, Slidell explained, Gobright had declined to investigate and thus discover who had sent the message. In Slidell's eyes, therefore, Gobright had thus become "personally responsible for the act itself." The agent

14Ibid., 156-57.
had also reneged on the one promise he had made to Slidell, to correct the mistaken communication. He had not written New York, which Gobright had admitted to be the source of the report. And, Slidell emphasized, not one employee of the corporation Gobright represented had been discharged nor had the Senator received an apology.

Now, he wished his colleagues to understand, the incident meant little to Benjamin and himself, who were, he said, awaiting "other and higher duties to perform, perhaps upon some other theater." His one purpose of continuing the discussion on the matter, he asserted, was to establish the fact that the press had been proven liars in their reports of the business transacted in the Senate. This state of affairs, Slidell informed his colleagues, obviously must not be permitted to continue. Seward and other Republicans thereupon rose to combat the acceptance of the resolution by the Senate. When they had finished, Slidell spoke again. Since, he said, "the mendacity of the reporters of the associated press" was "so notorious" and "so patent throughout the country that every Senator on this floor" admitted it, he had "obtained everything" he wished. He withdrew his motion.15

15Ibid., 249-50.
Slidell had defended Buchanan in his opening address with regard to the false dispatch. Before he left the Senate, however, he was to question the President's authority, to appoint Holt, the Postmaster General, to relieve John B. Floyd as Secretary of War. Scandals in his department had proved too much for Floyd's remaining in the position.\(^\text{16}\) Holt was no friend of Southerners about to secede from the Union.\(^\text{17}\) Therefore, on January 9, 1861, Slidell signified the displeasure of himself and his Southern colleagues over Holt's appointment. On that date he introduced a resolution that the President inform the Senate if Floyd still held office and if he did not, who had succeeded him. Furthermore, stated the resolution, if an acting Secretary of War had been appointed, the Senate would like to know by what authority it was made and why the Senate had not been informed of the action.\(^\text{18}\)

The motion was laid over when Trumbull objected to Slidell's request for its immediate consideration. When Slidell brought up the matter the following day, he pro-

\(^{16}\)Nichols, *Disruption of American Democracy*, 423-33.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 433.

\(^{18}\)Globe, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 283.
voked considerable debate. Crittenden wanted to know the meaning of the words "unusual and extraordinary" with which Slidell had described Holt's appointment in the resolution. Bigler said the act of 1795 gave a President the right to make appointments of six months' duration without the advice and consent of the Senate. Slidell answered these critics of his motion. He informed Crittenden that there had "been a gross violation of the Constitution of the United States by the appointment of an acting Secretary of War" without the approval of the Senate. To Bigler he explained that in his opinion the act of 1795 applied only at times when the Senate was not in session. Otherwise, the present holder of the office could retain his position until the end of Buchanan's term and then if Buchanan's successor wished, continue in the job for six months more. Slidell also reminded his colleagues that he was only making an inquiry as to who was the Secretary of War. For, he continued, if it was the person who was performing the duties of the position now, that individual would never have been able to have his appointment confirmed by the Senior House.19

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19Ibid., 304.
Buchanan's answer of January 16 to Slidell's resolution cited numerous precedents that justified the President's action in the case. But this reply did not satisfy the Louisiana Senator. He still wanted an investigation. On January 23, accordingly, the matter was sent to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Slidell's other important act in the Senate was his farewell speech, which because it was his final official act in Washington for his community and culminated all his actions during this period is given below.

Outside of Congress Slidell had much to occupy his attention. South Carolina seceded December 22. Louisiana was not to be too far behind in emulating the action of her sister Southern state. Slidell's character was beginning to assume somewhat of a sinister aspect in the minds of many persons. He was "Old Metternich," one of the powers behind the throne. He was "the persevering enemy of Floyd" who had been held in check only because the administration had wanted to defeat Douglas

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20 New Orleans Delta, Jan. 23, 1861.
21 Globe, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 317.
22 See below, pp. 526-33.
23 Nichols, Disruption of American Democracy, 402-404.
in the last election. He was one of those who no longer able to use the administration for their own purposes, turned on Buchanan with "angry reproaches." It was he who inspired the President to voice the alarm that there would be a slave uprising on March 4. It was he who favored secession even when Jefferson Davis was counseling moderation. So ran the reports, all probably of about the same worth as the one about Floyd, which was obviously erroneous.

More concrete evidence of his activities at this time other than those he performed in the Senate included an incident connected with the "Declaration of the Southern Senators," which he signed on December 14, 1860. This document informed the constituents of the Senators that all arguments concerning the South's demands had been exhausted. No hope remained for reconciliation with the North. Therefore, the Southern Senators recommended, their states should join together into a "Southern Confederacy" following a "speedy and absolute separation"

26 Ibid., 253.
from the "union with hostile states." According to Senator Pugh, who with Senator Wigfall of Texas wrote the document under Davis's editorship, the sponsors of the declaration were troubled by our fears that Senator Slidell would refuse to sign the address, and Senator Wigfall and myself decided that Senator Davis would have more influence than any one else in securing Senator Slidell's signature.

Davis, Benjamin, Wigfall, and Pugh, therefore, went to Slidell's residence. He was in deep consultation, wrote Pugh, with Sartigues, the French minister. In reply to their request, he took the paper, signed it, and without a word of comment returned it to the four Senators.

Later, Slidell was among those appointed in a caucus held on January 14, 1861, to carry out the provisions of the "Declaration" and the decision of the caucus, which was for "each state to secede as soon as may be" and to hold a convention at Montgomery not later than February 15, 1861. Another topic in the

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caucus was whether the participants should remain at their posts in the Senate until March 4, 1861, in order to defeat any legislation hostile to the South.\(^30\)

Accordingly, on January 14, 1861, Slidell and the majority of the Louisiana delegation to Congress addressed a "Declaration" of their own to their state’s convention, which was to convene nine days later. Miles Taylor and Bouligny did not sign this paper. It urged immediate secession and recommended that Louisiana take charge of all forts and arsenals within its borders. This last action was necessary because of the appointment of an open and virulent enemy of the South as Secretary of War, without the advice and consent of the Senate, and, indeed, without its official knowledge of the fact of such appointment,

and

the almost dictatorial powers which are now exercised by this unconstitutional head of the War Department, under the inspiration of Lieutenant-General Scott, who is well known to have submitted to the Executive a plan of a campaign on a gigantic scale for the subjugation of the seceding States.\(^31\)

This was not the first time that Slidell had been con-

\(^30\)Ibid., VII, 461.

\(^31\)New Orleans Delta, Jan. 26, 1861.
cerned with the possibility that military action might follow secession. On December 29, 1860, he had been commissioned by Louisiana to contact one Major Hardie, en route to Europe at the time, for the purpose of enlist ing the services of the major to purchase arms for Slidell's state. 32

The declaration next glimpsed the future consequences of the withdrawal of the South from the Union. Its writers saw the creation of a "homogeneous confederacy," to which "the laws of political gravitation" would soon attract other parts of what was now the United States of America. By this sentence the signers were thinking particularly of the "neighbors" of the South in "the valley of the Mississippi." At the same time that the South was growing larger, continued the document, the free states would be discovering that they might have

more to fear from their laborers depending on their daily wages for their daily bread, than we have from our contented slaves, whom it is our duty as our privilege to care for in adversity and prosperity, in want or in plenty, in sickness or in health.

In the meantime, concluded the declaration, the Mississippi would be kept "free to the citizens of

32Ibid., Jan. 10, 1861.
every State whose waters find their way to the Gulf of Mexico by the great river and its tributaries." Also, no duty or imposition, import or export, would be levied on goods going to or coming from states outside the Confederacy.  

Another performance by Slidell before he left Washington for the last time occurred when he acted with Benjamin, Davis, and seven other Senators as contact between Buchanan and Colonel Isaac W. Hayne of South Carolina over the question of Fort Sumter. The series of letters involved in this business lasted from January 15 to February 6, 1861. The general attitude of the group of intermediaries was one of moderation. They did not want Major Anderson's presence in Charleston harbor to be the beginning of a war. They stated this desire on January 15 in a letter to Hayne. Hayne wrote them an answer in which he asserted that he was forwarding their note to his governor. The Senators immediately sent a copy of Hayne's reply to the White House. They received in response a message dated January 22, 1861, from Holt, who told them that the President could make no bargain with South Carolina and that only Congress had the power  

33Ibid., Jan. 26, 1861.
to declare war. For the present, no aid to Sumter was contemplated. When Hayne received his copy of Holt's statement from the go-betweens, he pronounced its contents unsatisfactory. He wrote the Senators that he had only sent it on to South Carolina because they had stated that they considered it a pledge. Slidell forwarded Hayne's rejoinder to Buchanan. Then, on January 31 Pugh went to the White House with Governor Francis W. Pickens's ultimatum. The answer to the South Carolina official came from Holt. The Secretary told the Senators that the matter was already settled by the letter of January 22 and that the discussion would "not now be renewed."³⁴

Similar to these proceedings was Slidell's participation in what occurred following the receipt in Washington

³⁴Buchanan to Holt, Dec. 28, 1860; Jefferson Davis, Slidell, and eight others to Colonel I. W. Hayne, Jan. 16, 1861; Hayne to Davis, Slidell, etc., Jan. 17, 1861; Slidell, Fitzpatrick, and Mallory to Buchanan, Jan. 19, 1861; Holt to Slidell, Fitzpatrick, and Mallory, Jan. 21, 1861; Hayne to Slidell and six others, Jan. 24, 1861; Slidell to Buchanan, Jan. 28, 1861; Hayne, inclosing letter from F. W. Pickens, Jan. 12, 1861, to Buchanan, Jan. 31, 1861; Holt to Hayne, Feb. 6, 1861. In House of Representatives Documents, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., No. 61. See also Moore, Works of James Buchanan, XII, 183.
of a telegraphic dispatch dated January 28, 1861, sent by Senator Mallory from Pensacola, Florida. This message told of the intense excitement which had been stirred up in Mallory's state by rumors that the United States Ship Brooklyn was going to Pensacola harbor to give Fort Pickens there any help it might need if trouble broke out. Mallory begged Slidell and Bigler to ask the President not to begin hostilities in Florida. He gave his word that the fort would not undergo attack. Once more Bigler went over to the President's office. The result was a joint dispatch by Secretaries Toucey and Holt to their subordinates concerned in this matter forbidding any hostile acts by army and navy units which received assurances that they would not be assaulted.35

A note in Buchanan's handwriting gave the instructions for the above order. But Bigler evidently did not see the President. Instead, he dictated to Buchanan's private secretary, A. J. Glosbrenner, the following message, which the amanuensis took down in longhand:

I have seen Mr. Slidell and Mr. Hunter. They both think it very important that collisions be avoided, and have no doubt of the truth of all that Mr. Mallory has said. They think also that the Brooklyn might very properly be kept there to succor the fort in case of attack. Of course, no despatch will be sent to Mr. Mallory, unless authorized by you. You might send such a despatch to the Senate Chamber, as you may desire to have sent. 36

Pugh had gone to the White House in place of Slidell for a good reason. By January 29, 1861, the Louisiana Senator and his old friend had broken with each other. This act was accomplished by two short letters. The first was dated January 27 and bore Slidell's signature. It read,

My Dear Sir: --

I have seen in the Star, and heard from other parties, that Major Beauregard, who had been ordered to West Point as Superintendent of the Military Academy, and had entered on the discharge of his duties there, had been relieved of his command. May I take the liberty of asking you if this has been done with your approvation?

The second message came with Buchanan's name signed at the bottom. It was dated January 29, 1861. It answered Slidell by stating,

My Dear Sir: —

With every sentiment of personal friendship and regard, I am obliged to say, in answer to your note of Sunday, that I have full confidence in the Secretary of War; and his acts in the line of his duty, are my own acts, for which I am responsible.37

Holt claimed to be the real author of the second letter. He said he was with Buchanan when Slidell's communication reached the President. Shocked at what he considered its impertinent tone, he wrote, he demanded that the President answer in a fitting strain. With the President's permission, thereupon, stated Holt, he laid down the reply's broad outlines, which guided Buchanan's pen in relaying the desired information to Slidell.38

There was now nothing further for Slidell to do outside Congress but wait for Louisiana to act. Indeed, by January 29, 1861, Louisiana had already acted. The governor had called the legislature into special session and the legislature had called for a convention.39 Opponents to secession claimed that neither the majority of

37 Philip G. Auchampaugh, James Buchanan and His Cabinet on the Eve of Secession (Duluth, 1926), 81-82.
38 Ibid.
the legislature or the state wanted to leave the Union and hinted at fraud. But there was little doubt at the end of January that the great majority of Louisiana's citizens were for secession. In the city of New Orleans only the Picayune and the True Delta were still Unionist. A Southern States Rights Association came into existence at a meeting held November 24, 1860, with William C. Claiborne in the chair and members of all political parties in attendance. On December 22 the Louisiana national flag appeared over the Association's headquarters.

Opposition to secession, or at least to the manner in which Louisiana was accomplishing this action, originated publicly in a notice which appeared on December 22, 1860. It told of a "Co-Operation Meeting" to be held that night on Canal street. From this meeting, said the notice, would come nominees of the group to run in the election of delegates to the forthcoming convention. Pierre Soulé was a

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42New Orleans Louisiana Courier, Nov. 24, 1860.


44Ibid.
Co-Operationist, which meant that he felt no state should leave the Union independently. Instead, he believed, it should wait until a general conference of the interested states had decided what action all should take. Soule attributed the opposing idea of "separate secession" to "the wily maneuvers and the reckless aspirations of the unprincipled politicians who have placed the South in the unfortunate dilemma of abject submission or open resistance." The ranks of the Co-Operationists included also those old antagonists of Slidell, Thomas J. Durant and Theodore G. Hunt. They and their colleagues were soon the victims of a name their opponents fastened upon them, "Submissionists."

The Co-Operationists should have realized what their fate would be. Stephen Douglas had visited New Orleans in November and received a chilly reception. And in the election of January 7, 1861, twenty of the twenty-five delegates chosen were of the Southern Rights Association.

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46 Ibid., Dec. 26, 1860.
48 Ibid.
The candidate who received the lowest vote of all the Co-Operationists was Pierre Soule. When the convention met, eighty of its members were committed to secession and forty-four to co-operation. The views of the six remaining delegates were unknown. That party influence was a negligible factor was shown when J. O. Nixon of the Crescent was elected printer by unanimous consent.

When the meeting began its deliberations, one of the measures it passed was the request by the Louisiana delegation to Congress regarding free "egress and ingress" to the citizens and goods of all friendly states lying along the Mississippi. Then, after only three days' deliberation, at 2:10 p.m. on January 26, 1861, by a vote of one hundred and thirteen to seventeen there came into existence what the President of the convention announced as "the freedom, independence and sovereignty of the State of Louisiana." The "Pelican flag" was unfurled on the platform as cheers rang out. The convention then adjourned to meet again in New Orleans on January 29.

50 New Orleans Delta, Jan. 8, 9, 1861.
51 Ibid., Jan. 18, 1861.
52 Ibid., Jan 23, 1861.
53 Ibid., Jan. 27, 1861.
54 Ibid., Jan. 29, 1861.
Opposition, it appeared, had centered mostly in the person of Christian Roselius, Whig jurist. Roselius had denied the legality of recent captures by Louisiana troops of Federal installations.\textsuperscript{55} He had seconded Durant's questioning of the governor's right to convene the convention by means of a special session of the legislature.\textsuperscript{56} And he had delivered a strong address which backed Charles Bienvenu's contention that the convention had no right to deny the people of Louisiana the opportunity to vote on the decisions taken during its meeting.\textsuperscript{57}

When the convention opened its doors in New Orleans, it proceeded to select its representatives to Montgomery. According to the \textit{Delta}, the ones chosen for this purpose were "old political hands" who for some time had been associated with no particular political party.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{True Delta}, however, thought their selection meant a defeat for Slidell. Slidell's name, it reported, was one of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 27, 1861.
\item \textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 31, 1861.
\end{itemize}
those nominated for the delegation going to Montgomery, but received only nine votes. At least, the Senator was still popular with the legislature. That body re-elected him to his seat in the Senate, which would soon be nonexistent.

Louisiana had seceded officially. It had captured the Federal installations within its borders. Now only one more action was necessary to make the break complete. And it was performed February 5, 1861, when Slidell placed the Louisiana act of secession in the hands of the clerk of the Senate and accompanied the action with a short address. He was followed on the floor by the more eloquent Benjamin.

Benjamin assailed the South's opposition for their lack of honesty, fairness, and honor. For, he said, in threatening to deprive the slave states of the right to take their property into new territories, the Republicans were promising to perform a violation of the agreement the United States made with France in the Louisiana Purchase. The French had conveyed to America sovereignty over Louisiana. And this could not be handed over, he

59 New Orleans True Delta, Jan. 30, 31, 1861.
60 Ibid., Jan. 29, 1861.
continued, "otherwise than in trust,"\textsuperscript{62} by which he meant that the United States owned the land but not the people of Louisiana.

Slidell's address with its absence of "art" offended the young James G. Blaine, who was more impressed with Benjamin's "tone of moderation.\textsuperscript{63} Blaine's impression was understandable. Slidell was no orator in his brief speech but a district attorney arraigning a prisoner before the bar of justice. The message was devoid of sentiment. Clearly and bluntly it stated the position of the speaker and the state he represented in the Senate. He opened it by having the Secretary of the Senate read the resolutions of secession passed by the Louisiana convention. Then, he told his colleagues that the occasion justified, if it did not call for, "some parting words." He proceeded by describing what sort of nation was coming into existence. Then, he talked of what would happen if war came. When he finished with that subject, he explained why Louisiana had seceded from the Union. This topic led him into a few parting shots at the Republicans, to whom he expressed the loathing and hatred they apparently inspired in him. In contrast was the

\textsuperscript{62}Globe, 36 Cong. 2 Sess., 721-24.

\textsuperscript{63}Blaine, \textit{Twenty Years of Congress}, I, 248-50.
succeeding eulogy of the friends Slidell was about to leave behind in the Senate. Finally he predicted a bright future for the party whose guidance would no longer be his concern. He finished with tears in his eyes and, as he walked from the rostrum, fell into the arms of an old friend. ⁶⁴

Slidell began the first portion of his address by stating his opinion of how fortunate were the seceding states. They had not come into being by means of violent action or anarchic conditions like other states. True, he admitted, they lacked the money possessed by the North. But, in Slidell's eyes, they possessed other assets much more valuable,

a people bold, hardy, homogeneous in interests and sentiments, a fertile soil, an extensive territory, the capacity and the will to govern themselves through the forms and in the spirit of the Constitution under which they have been born and educated.

Such assets were "the elements of greatness." This nation, therefore, continued Slidell, would not try to improve on the principles of the Constitution of the United States. It would adopt all the existing treaties, including the one with regard to the African trade. It was willing to assume a "just proportion" of the present debt of the United States. It would "account for the

⁶⁴Meade, Judah P. Benjamin, 154.
cost of all the forts and other property of the United States, which we have been compelled to seize in self defense," if the value of these installations was above the South's share in the national store of property. It would consider "such States of the Union as may not choose to unite their destinies with ours" as "enemies in war," and "in peace, friends." It wanted peace but it would leave the question of whether there would be war or peace in America to "the people of the non-slaveholding States."

Slidell said he could not tell what would happen with regard to the future relationships of the North and the South. But he knew what would happen if trouble developed between them. He felt that if the people above the Mason and Dixon line received a fair presentation of the facts surrounding the present crisis, a peaceful separation and a partial "reconstruction, on a basis satisfactory to us and honorable to them" would occur. But he believed a danger existed that the Northern representatives to Congress would keep the truth from their constituents. In that eventuality, the South "must be prepared to resist coercion" that came openly or "under the more insidious, and therefore more dangerous pretext of enforcing the laws, protecting public property, or collecting the
revenue." Whatever the phrase used to justify force, said Slidell, the South would "be prepared to act accordingly: utroque arbitro parati." The collecting of revenue or the enforcing of law might serve as a screen to an attempt to subjugate the South. But it would mean war. And, Slidell warned, let not the North think it could rely solely on its navy and a blockade to strangulate the new nation. The South, he told his colleagues, would wage war "with different and equally efficient weapons":

We will not permit the consumption or introduction of any of your manufactures; every sea will swarm with our volunteer militia of the ocean, with the striped bunting floating over their heads, for we do not mean to give up that flag without a bloody struggle; and although for a time more stars may shine on your banner, our children, if not we, will rally under a constellation more numerous and more resplendent than yours.

Where would the South get these ships? Slidell told his listeners that they should not smile at his statements as an impotent boast. "If we need ships and men for privateering," he asserted, the Confederacy would "be amply supplied from the same sources as now almost exclusively furnish the means for carrying on, with such unexampled vigor, the African slave trade -- New York and New England." Thus, apparently, Yankee greed would overcome Yankee scruples against secession. Slidell continued on the same topic. Once the South's privateers were in action,
the merchant marine of the United States "must either sail under foreign flags or rot at your wharves." Finally, Slidell asserted, European nations would not long permit "the great staple, which is the most important basis of their manufacturing industry," to be denied them by "a mere paper blockade" of a fifth-rate power weakened by a war waged against it by a considerable portion of its former roster of states.

Now, Slidell turned to the question of what was responsible for the secession of Louisiana and her sister states. He warned enemies of the South not to seek comfort in the thought that the movement was the work of "political managers," whose "selfish object" was mere "personal aggrandizement." Secession, he asserted, was a popular movement which had long been in action before party leaders were prepared to recognize it. It had come about not because Lincoln's person was distasteful to the South but because "a decided majority" in every non-slaveholding state -- "noble, gallant New Jersey alone excepted" -- had introduced into the White House a man of Lincoln's "avowed principles and purposes." This action had proven to Slidell and his constituents the "determined hostility of the Northern masses to our institutions."

The new President, said Slidell, "conscientiously enter-
tained these prejudices." He would therefore "honestly en-
deavor to carry them into execution." And his inauguration,
Slidell predicted, would undoubtedly be the signal for a
slave uprising, the putting down of which would cost many
lives.

Now, Slidell had a word for his enemies, the Republi-
cans. He recommended to them a close reading of the
tragedy of *Macbeth* if they wished to know what their future
would be like. If the "weird sisters of the great dramatic
poet," stated Slidell, could be conjured up from their
resting place, they would show the Republicans their
future "deep damnation." These destroyers of the Consti-
tution, continued Slidell, would find too late that they
"but placed upon their heads a fruitless crown, and put a
barren scepter in their gripe, no sons of theirs suc-
ceeding."

Finally, the Louisiana Senator spoke a word to the
colleagues whom he said he would hate to leave. Many of
these, he admitted, had disagreed with him on "this, the
great question of the age." The thought of them pro-
voked Slidell's memory. He recalled other old "comrades,"
who had been thrust out of the Senate on the slavery
issue and would never return. "They have, one after the
other," he said, "fallen in their heroic struggle against
a blind fanaticism until now," he noted, "few -- alas!
how few! -- remain to fight the battle of the Constitution."
Moreover, Slidell continued, with the passage of "one short month" more of them would be gone, and replaced by men holding opinions "diametrically opposite" and in accord with "the suffrages of their States." Soon, the "four or five last survivors of that gallant band," he stated, would all have disappeared.

But, Slidell told these yet remaining survivors, he had at least "one consoling reflection" to sustain him. This was the knowledge that

our departure, realizing all their predictions of ill to the Republic, opens a new era of triumph for the Democratic party of the North, and will, we firmly believe, re-establish the ascendancy in most of the non-slaveholding States.65

Thus in effect, the Senator laid down his badges of office. He walked out of the Senior House that day and into a new life.

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