

## Friend and Foe: Fracturing of a Nation

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The middle of the Nineteenth Century in the United States was a turbulent time for the citizenry, immigrants, and those held in bondage. The nation's territory was expanding to the west and the population of the new young republic was exploding due to high birthrates and masses of immigrants from Europe who were fleeing from political turmoil and famine in the Old World.<sup>1</sup> During this period, conflict over whether the country was to grow as a united nation with a strong federal government or as a loose confederation of states, loyal to the Union, but also existing in a semi-autonomous state came to the forefront of debates among politicians, common citizens, and settlers in the new territories in the west. One of the biggest disagreements was in regard to the amount of authority the federal government had over the states and whether they had said authority to regulate or abolish chattel slavery in the new territories. In Northeastern Ohio those debates were just as vigorous as anywhere and were being led by a young generation of natives who by the 1860 Presidential election and American Civil War outnumbered their parents in a state bordering both northern and southern states and the new frontier in the West. Examined for this investigation of the period surrounding the 1860 election and the beginnings of the American Civil War, the personal diary of Henry S. Belden, a twenty-year old Democrat, living in Canton, Ohio, proved to be a rich source.<sup>2</sup> Framing the investigation

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph P. Ferrie, *Yankeys Now: Immigrants in the Antebellum U.S. 1840-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press 1999), 67-69.

<sup>2</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Personal Diary 1858-1864*. Never published and graciously loaned by the Belden family to the author for the purpose of research for this investigation.

are six pages of Belden's diary consisting of the text of a political speech heard by him at the Democrat Club in Canton, Ohio in June 1860, a letter he wrote to his future brother-in-law in September of the same year and a poem entitled "Compromise," penned by him two days following the first major battle of the Civil War in July 1861. At issue for the expanding nation in the years leading up to the Civil War was slavery and expansion of the institution of it in the West, property rights, and states rights versus federal authority. The fiery debates over these issues fractured the nation's political parties, families, friendships and the nation itself. Those debates were strong in Ohio where Henry S. Belden was living at the time of penning his diary.

Ohio in the early Nineteenth Century was rapidly changing. The population of the new state grew by leaps and bounds during the period, was predominately made up of young white native males, and was controlled by a few white protestant families from New England who established Ohio in 1805.<sup>3</sup> Those families controlled the expanding industries in coal mining, pig iron production, manufacturing, and shipping, which at first complimented and helped to further establish Ohio's position as a major agricultural center, but with the arrival of the railroads in 1850 and Ohio's proximity to the Erie and Ohio Canals, those industries soon overtook agriculture as the driving economic force in the state.<sup>4</sup> This pattern of economic development and population growth was particularly noticeable in Northeastern Ohio where, in the early part of the century, the areas surrounding Cleveland were dedicated to growing agricultural products to be sold in the region or shipped to cities in the East; but by the end of the 1850s, the region's economy shifted, becoming a major a center for manufacturing of agricultural tools, coal mining,

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Harry Searles, ed., *Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History* [on-line]; Internet; available from <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=675&nm=Canton-Ohio>, accessed March 5, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Searles, ed., *Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History* [on-line].

and pig iron production for railway construction.<sup>5</sup> Cleveland's early population was mostly made up of Protestants from New England, but its demographics changed when new Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Europe came in the 1830s and 1840s to take advantage of opportunities in the expanding economy; from 1810 to 1850 its population grew from 100 people to over 40,000.<sup>6</sup> Canton's growth mirrored Cleveland's. Founded in 1805 and incorporated in 1854, Canton's population grew from 300 people in 1822 to 4041 in 1860.<sup>7</sup> This growth, like the growth in the rest of the nation was partially fueled by immigrants from Europe who were not Protestant, and who like immigrants in Cleveland, were looking for jobs in the new foundries, coal mines and factories that were owned by a small group of elite families such as the Hoovers and Beldens.<sup>8</sup> Outpacing immigration in Ohio were high birthrates of white males in the 1830s and 1840s. In the 1860 United States census, the population of native born to foreign born in Ohio was 2,011,262 to 328,249, with a ratio of 104.7 males to every 100 females.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the population was dominated by young white people with 2,302,808 whites, 36,703 non-whites, and 36,673 blacks.<sup>10</sup> Because of a baby boom during the two decades preceding the census; the median age in Ohio was 19.4 years in 1860.<sup>11</sup> At the time of penning the primary source, Belden was right in line with the major demographics of the state, being a native of Ohio and twenty years of age in 1860, and who like many young men was coming of age in a time that was filled with great promise and great uncertainty for a young country on the verge of civil war.

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<sup>5</sup> David D. VanTassel, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* [on-line]; available from <http://ech.case.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=R2>; Internet; accessed 5 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> David D. VanTassel, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* [on-line].

<sup>7</sup> City of Canton, *About Us – City Statistics*. [on-line]; available from <http://www.cantonohio.gov/?pg=citystats>; Internet; accessed 5 March 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Sterling, *Images of America* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing 1998), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Susan B. Carter, et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2006), 216.

<sup>10</sup> Carter, et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States Volume 1*, 318.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

Henry S. Belden, born on July 4, 1840 in Canton, Ohio, was a recent graduate of the University of Cincinnati when he attended a meeting of Democrats and heard a speech at the Democrat Club of District No. 2 in Canton on June 12, 1860.<sup>12</sup> He was the only son of a prominent Democrat family, and like his father, Judge George Washington Belden, he practiced law, going into one of the family businesses as a junior partner at his father's firm in 1860.<sup>13</sup> Additionally the family owned coal mines and farms on the outskirts of the city. His father moved the family to Ohio in 1830 from Connecticut when he was hired to work as the lead counsel for the builders of the Ohio Canal.<sup>14</sup> He later served as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio from 1857-1861 and most likely would have had great influence over his son's life, probably bringing him into what was referred to in the speech heard by Belden at the Democrat Club, as "one great brotherhood."<sup>15</sup> The brotherhood refers to Northern Democrats who supported Stephen A. Douglas against Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 Presidential election. Douglas believed in popular sovereignty and supported the Cincinnati Platform, which would have allowed voters in a territory to decide upon drafting a constitution whether their new state would join the union as a free or slave-holding state. He won the Democrat nomination on June 18, 1860; six days after Belden heard the above noted speech and nearly two months after the once powerful Democrat Party split into separate factions at their earlier convention in April and May of 1860.<sup>16</sup> The speech Belden attended seems to be given by a stranger to the community

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<sup>12</sup> Chapman Bros., eds. *Portrait and Biographical Record of Stark County Ohio* [book on-line] (Chicago: Chapman Bros. 1892, accessed 1 March 2009); available from [http://books.google.com/books?id=fTsVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA509&lpg=PA509&dq=Mayor+Henry+Belden+Canton&source=web&ots=AFVcEhkcFb&sig=0kgiEfO2GSOmyL8P0zAOJMY5qcw&hl=en&ei=DsKGSZWkJPk2sAOOhNWoDQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=9&ct=result#PPA11,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=fTsVAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA509&lpg=PA509&dq=Mayor+Henry+Belden+Canton&source=web&ots=AFVcEhkcFb&sig=0kgiEfO2GSOmyL8P0zAOJMY5qcw&hl=en&ei=DsKGSZWkJPk2sAOOhNWoDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=9&ct=result#PPA11,M1); Authors name unavailable.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman. *Portrait and Biographical Record of Stark County Ohio* [on-line].

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Henry S Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>16</sup> The Democratic Platform. Available from

[http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch16\\_02.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch16_02.htm); Internet; Accessed 3 March 2009.

or someone who regularly visits Canton, but is not familiar with everyone at the meeting, because when he addresses the gathering he says,

Gentlemen, when I first came among you this evening and saw so many who were total strangers to me and so many who were but acquaintances as yet. I felt as it was but natural I should feel that I had no right to be here save the right which accrues out of an invitation from some of your members and the link that binds all democrats into one great brotherhood.<sup>17</sup>

The speaker's opening lines give the reader many clues as to who was speaking and who was attending the speech. Considering the separation of the sexes into the different spheres prevalent in the Nineteenth Century, the speaker was obviously a man addressing a gathering of men. Women acting in the public sphere were frowned upon by the vast majority of men and women in 1860. Twelve years earlier at the Seneca Falls Convention, women rejected only one resolution of the eleven drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to accompany the "Declaration of Sentiments." The resolution rejected was the ninth resolution which called for women's suffrage.<sup>18</sup> Little had changed between the time of Seneca and 1860. Moreover, the gathered surrounding Belden were most likely white men since Ohio law in 1860 required voters to be white, male, adult, a citizen of the United States, resident of the state for one year and resident of the township in which they voted.<sup>19</sup> Upon further inspection of the speaker's opening lines, one must pay notice to the term "one great brotherhood."<sup>20</sup> As noted before, the term seems to refer particularly to Northern Democrats and was probably used by the speaker to try and create unity amongst the gathered in support of the embattled nominee of the Democrat Party, Stephen Douglas. There is little doubt over whether Democrats, who were heading to a second

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<sup>17</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2.* Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>18</sup> The Seneca Falls Convention: July 19-20, 1848. Available from <http://www.npg.si.edu/col/seneca/senfalls1.htm>.; Internet; accessed 25 April 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1988), 28-34.

<sup>20</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2.* Personal Diary 1858-1864.

nominating convention in Baltimore, which took place six days after this speech, were concerned about the amount of unity behind Douglas and were fearful of a repeat of the breakdown and fracture of the party which occurred in Charleston, S.C. in April and May of 1860.

One of the crucial events and major fractures in the nation in 1860 was the split of the Democrat Party into factions which could not agree on a platform and candidate for the 1860 Presidential election. The first 1860 Democrat National Convention was convened in Charleston, South Carolina in April of 1860. By the time the party met it was already showing deep division. Douglas, the leading contender for the nomination had alienated Southerners two years prior in one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates with the Freeport Doctrine, which stated that it was up to voters in a territory as to whether slavery could be prevented or allowed in said territory.<sup>21</sup> This position went against the idea of popular sovereignty which proposed legislatures rather than individual voters should decide the issue of slavery in a new state and against recent Supreme Court decisions supporting Southerners who contended slaves to be property protected under the U.S. Constitution. At Charleston, Southerners argued for a platform with legislation to protect the institution of slavery in the Federal Territories, but when Northerners refused to adopt such a platform, a large group of delegates stormed out of the convention. Nominating rules said a nominee was required to receive two-thirds of the entire convention's vote to get the nomination and since many delegates had walked out, the convention was postponed until June when it would be reconvened in Baltimore, leaving Douglas and party leaders another eight weeks to negotiate a compromise.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Mack Faragher, ed. *The American Heritage Encyclopedia of American History*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (New York: Henry Holt and Company 1997), 326.

<sup>22</sup> United States Presidential Elections. *1860 Democratic Convention*. Available from <http://www.historycentral.com/elections/Conventions/1860DEM.html>; Internet; accessed 4 March 2009.

Two months later in June, Democrats who failed to reach a compromise reconvened with the same disagreements resurfacing. During the two month recess, both sides worked to bring delegates to their position. In the North, Democrats may have heard a speech like Belden heard in which the speaker said,

We are most of us young in years and young in the cause which called us together tonight, but young and inexperienced as we may be, I trust we may work together, fight together, and triumph together.<sup>23</sup>

Southerners may have heard similar speeches when delegates met the previous month in Richmond, VA and deliberated on whether to split from the party and nominate their own candidate, but decided to wait until their return to the convention in Baltimore the following month. Many delegates did not return to the convention; when replacement delegates were seated to replace those that had walked out, a new walkout ensued, but this time the rules were changed. Under the new rules, Douglas only needed two-thirds of the votes of those delegates present to receive the nomination and on the second ballot, Douglas was made the 1860 Democratic nominee for President. Southerners, who had walked out, convened their own convention and nominated Vice President John C. Breckinridge as the Southern Democratic nominee. Both factions drew up individual platforms and the party which had ruled from the White House for the majority of the time since Democrat Andrew Jackson was president, fractured.

Northern Democrats proceeded to adopt a states rights platform in Baltimore which was “the cause” referenced in the speech heard by Belden. The Northern Democrat platform of 1860 stood resolved to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Court over the constitutionality of laws made by Congress and territorial legislatures over the institution of slavery in the territories and that all branches of government enforce those decisions promptly and with fidelity. Furthermore,

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<sup>23</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

they declared the enactments of the state legislatures to defeat the faithful execution of the fugitive slave law as hostile in character, subversive of the Constitution, and revolutionary in their effect.<sup>24</sup> This platform and the reference to the 1850 fugitive slave law is particularly interesting with regard to Henry S. Belden who was eighteen years of age when his father, acting as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, prosecuted thirty seven people under the fugitive slave act in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue.<sup>25</sup> The 1860 Democrat Platform sharply contrasted the Republican Platform of that year, because comparatively, it made fewer declarations, arguing mainly for the status quo, and came out in strong support of the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S Constitution with regard to the rights of states.

The Republican Party, however, challenged the core beliefs of democrats and nearly half the nation's free people by arguing for more federal authority in 1860. The party's platform was heavily influenced by abolitionist Republicans like Charles Sumner, William Seward, and Horace Greeley and stood in stark contrast to the Democrat Platform. In it, Republicans implied, to Democrats horror, slaves to be human beings worthy of protection by the federal government from having their inalienable rights restricted. In addition, they countered the Democrat position that the Constitution protected the institution of chattel slavery. Declaring that position and certain judicial decisions to be,

...dangerous political heresy, at variance with the explicit provisions of that instrument itself, with contemporaneous exposition, and with legislative and judicial precedent; is revolutionary in its tendency, and subversive of the peace and harmony of the country.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. *Democratic Party Platform; June 18, 1860*. Available from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/dem1860.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/dem1860.asp); Internet; accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>25</sup> David D. VanTassel, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* [on-line]; available from <http://ech.cwru.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=OR>; Internet; accessed 5 March 2009.

<sup>26</sup> *Republican National Platform: Adopted at Chicago, 1860*. [on-line]; Available from <http://facweb.furman.edu/~benson/docs/repplat6.htm>; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

With their declaration of certain judicial decisions to be “subversive,” Republicans were most likely referring to the 1857 Supreme Court decision regarding Dred Scott, which in essence said slaves had no claim to freedom; they were property and not citizens and could never be citizens; they could not bring suit in federal court; and because slaves were private property, the federal government could not revoke a slave owner's right to own a slave based on where he lived. In addition, the court ruled the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to be unconstitutional, as it was judged to be in violation of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution which prohibits Congress from depriving persons of their property without due process of law.<sup>27</sup> Finally declaring their belief in the position that the Federal Government should put an end to slavery, Republicans stood resolved against the recently re-opened African slave-trade, declaring it a crime against humanity and calling on Congress to take prompt and efficient measures for the total destruction of the odious practice of buying and selling of Africans.<sup>28</sup> After establishing their radical abolitionist platform, Republicans went further in what Democrats considered an assault on their freedom by nominating “old Abe,” the “bad rail splitter,” as their nominee for president.<sup>29</sup>

Lincoln won the nomination over abolitionist William Seward on May 16, 1860 because the party viewed Lincoln as a moderate who would not inflame Southern fire-eaters who felt it was their right to save themselves from despotism by seceding.<sup>30</sup> Belden, like other Democrats, saw Lincoln not as a moderate, but as a tyrant. Penning his poem “Compromise,” Belden was obviously referring to Lincoln when he wrote “Save our Country from a Tyrant’s chain.”<sup>31</sup> The Democrat controlled Copperhead press in the North cemented the label of “tyrant” for Lincoln

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip Gavin, ed., *The Dred Scott Decision* [on-line]; available from <http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/dred.htm>; Internet; accessed 5 March 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Republican National Platform: Adopted at Chicago, 1860. [on-line].

<sup>29</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>30</sup> Public Broadcasting System. *Africans in America Part IV: Lincoln’s “House Divided” Speech*. Available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2934t.html>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Compromise..* Personal Diary 1858-1864.

after Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham leveled it at Lincoln in 1858 following Lincoln's House Divided Speech, in which he said "A house divided against itself cannot stand," when referring to the fragile state of affairs between the North and the South.<sup>32</sup> Once the platforms of Northern Democrats and Republicans were firmly established, individual citizens took up the cause, creating fractures between family members and friends.

In September of 1860 the nation was two months away from voting in a new president. The stakes were high and many felt the outcome of the election would decide the fate of the nation, slavery in the expanding West, and the issue of secession. Speakers gave emphatic unity speeches like the one Belden heard in June and stump speeches in support of their preferred candidate in halls, churches, and on public squares. It is under those conditions in which Belden wrote to his future brother-in-law A.M.S. Blake who was living in Toledo, Ohio. He begins the letter, "I feel decidedly blue this morning. In fact I was somewhat blue last evening and it has 'kept up' all night."<sup>33</sup> Belden went on explaining he was sad because Blake would not write back to him. He wrote to Blake, "In the name of reason, why don't you write to me? It disagrees with me to ask such a question, but you have been writing to others here – no matter suit your own pleasure."<sup>34</sup> Belden's comment that Blake has been writing to others, but not to him suggests a fracture in their friendship, that seems to be based on Blake's support of Lincoln, because Belden continued,

I heard several weeks ago, whilst on a visit to Cleveland that you have been making stump speeches for Lincoln and Hamlin – it is useless to say I was astounded! While I rejoice at your success, I

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<sup>32</sup> Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperhead: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 99-101.

<sup>33</sup> Belden, *Letter to A.M.S. Blake*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>34</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Letter to A.M.S. Blake*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

must weep to think it will be unavailing as it is in the wrong  
cause.<sup>35</sup>

Both Belden and Blake were probably from the same upper social class, evidence of this is suggested by the fact they both had the luxury of traveling to Cleveland, and while there they stayed in the most luxurious modern hotel in the city, the Weddell House.<sup>36</sup> Belden supplies another clue, also suggesting Blake may have previously supported Democrats. He asked of Blake and his support of Lincoln, “Why did you form your views? and ‘run after strange women’ if the question is legally put?”<sup>37</sup> The strange women reference seems to refer to Blake’s support of the Lincoln. Belden made one more reference in his letter to the previous state of their friendship and to divisions amongst friends when he wrote, “If you were here with me as autumn begins to tinge the East, we would arrange for a day of enjoyment, but instead of old friends returning to Canton, more go from it.”<sup>38</sup> The fracture of the friendship of these two men may have been common and mirrored the popular vote in Ohio where Lincoln received fifty-two percent of the vote and combined, Douglas, Breckinridge, and Bell received forty-eight percent in the election two months later.<sup>39</sup> The strong support of candidates other than Lincoln partially reflected Ohioan attitudes towards the debate in the nation during the run up to and after the election.

The divisions in the nation were not just limited to political parties, families and friends; they were also sectional and eventually led to secession and civil war partly over the institution

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<sup>35</sup> Belden, *Letter to A.M.S. Blake*.

<sup>36</sup> David D. VanTassel, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* [on-line]; available from <http://ech.cwru.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=WH2>; Internet; accessed 5 March 2009 (Weddell House opened in 1847, and was a 5-story brick-and-sandstone structure with about 200 rooms, including offices, stores, several parlors, and a large dining room on the first 2 floors. It was the best known of the early hotels built in Cleveland in the first half of the 19th century.)

<sup>37</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Letter to A.M.S. Blake*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>38</sup> Belden, *Letter to A.M.S. Blake*.

<sup>39</sup> United States Presidential Elections. *Presidential Election 1860 Popular Vote*. Available from <http://www.historycentral.com/elections/1860Pop.html>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2009.

of slavery and the humanity or perceived lack of humanity of African Americans. In states like Ohio, many were fearful of civil war, but were also fearful of freed slaves who it was believed would migrate north and take jobs away from whites if slavery was outlawed.<sup>40</sup> Exhibiting fear of the migration of African Americans to the North and blaming African Americans for the possible Civil War to come, the speaker at the Democrat Club in Canton, Ohio refers to, "...this hidraheaded [sic] monster, this wild black creature which creeps through portions of our land emitting from its nostrils an irrepreable [sic] conflict, the sweet odor of the African and disunion."<sup>41</sup> Besides displaying fear, the description employed by the speaker suggests a societal belief that African Americans were thought to be subhuman. Accompanying their perception of African Americans as subhuman, many whites in the North and South assumed paternalistic feelings for them, believing them too inferior to be able to care for themselves and often suggested that being in bondage was the best place they could be, thus leaving whites relieved from the burden of accepting them as human. One Iowa newspaper man who opposed "slavery per se" summed up this attitude when he wrote in *The Advocate* that he was confident that slaves would not benefit from freedom and that the effect their freedom would have on the white race in the Northwest would be "demoralizing."<sup>42</sup> In the northwest states of Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana, free blacks were kept from mingling with whites other than to provide some kind of service to them. To accomplish this separation of the races, there was strict segregation in education, interracial marriage was illegal, and black codes were dominant throughout the

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<sup>40</sup> Charles C. Burleigh, *Anti-Slavery Tracts #10: Slavery and the North :1855* [on-line]; Available from <http://antislavery.eserver.org/tracts/burleighslaveryandthenorth/burleighslaveryandthenorth.html>; Internet; accessed 2 March 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Henry S Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2. Personal Diary 1858-1864.*

<sup>42</sup> Jacque Voegeli, "The Northwest and the Race Issue: 1861-1862," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (1962). 237 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1902755>; accessed 12 March 2009.

region. In contrast to the paternalistic attitude many in the North had for African Americans were the feelings held there by Democrats for abolitionists and free-soilers.

Throughout the early 1850s the nation was in a state of relative calm in regard to the issue of slavery due to the Compromise of 1850. Democrat demands for federal protection of property were mollified with the Fugitive Slave Act embedded in the compromise and some abolitionists and free-soilers, but not all, were happy California joined the nation as a free state and slavery was abolished in the nation's capital. The calm was short lived when in 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed to organize those territories, allowing the transcontinental railroad to pass through and invalidating the line created by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Included in the 1854 act was the principle of popular sovereignty. As a result of its inclusion, unhappy free-soilers rushed to Kansas, avowing to make it a free state. At the same time, pro-slavery Southerners also rushed to Kansas to stop those "disrupting hords [sic],"<sup>43</sup> making sure that slavery would not be restricted by them and keeping up what Southerners believed to be the natural order of things. One member, in particular, of the "disrupting hords [sic]" was John Brown, who with his sons murdered five pro-slavery settlers in Kansas in May of 1856. After escaping from Kansas, John Brown once again arrived on the national stage three years later when in October of 1859 he led a raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia with the goal of raising a slave revolt. Many Democrats viewed Brown as an agent of powerful abolitionists in the North and felt their beliefs were validated when after his conviction and eventual execution for treason, conspiracy, and murder on December 2, 1869, Northern church bells rang in mass to honor him. While Northerners were saluting Brown, Southerners and Democrats on the other hand viewed him as a terrorist. Democrat Henry S. Belden who was at school in Cincinnati when Brown was executed would have surely read the following quote from an editorial published December 3,

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<sup>43</sup> Henry S Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

1859 by the Democrat controlled Cincinnati Enquirer, in which Brown was portrayed as a terrorist and traitor,

We rejoice that old BROWN has been hung. He was not only a murderer of innocent persons, but he attempted one of the greatest crimes against society -- the stirring up of a servile and civil war. He has paid the penalty for his crimes, and we hope his fate may be a warning to all who might have felt inclined to imitate his aggressive conduct.<sup>44</sup>

This quote may very well have been on Belden's mind when voting for president less than a year later and as he sat through the speech at the Democrat Club where he heard the speaker talk about how "democracy shall meet and in its steady onward tread, crush to earth and overwhelm the disrupting hords [sic]."<sup>45</sup>

In 1860, with the election looming, fire-eaters and Copperheads in the South were threatening secession if Lincoln were to be elected, but many in the nation on both sides of the debate attempted, to no avail, to reach compromise on the issues threatening disunion. On election day in November of 1860, the people spoke, but the electoral college controlled the dialogue and the outcome. Lincoln lost the popular vote, but won in the Electoral College, because there were more people living in the industrialized north and since a states number of electoral college members is tied to its number of representatives and senators in Congress, the Northern states had more members because they had higher representation in Congress and Lincoln prevailed. Lincoln only garnered forty percent of the popular vote nationwide, whereas if the votes of the split parties were combined behind Douglas, he would have captured sixty percent of the popular vote, but still would have lost to Lincoln in the Electoral College, because

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<sup>44</sup> Secession Era Editorials Project: *Our Harper's Ferry and Charlestown News*: Cincinnati, Ohio, Enquirer [Democratic] [on-line]. Available from <http://history.furman.edu/editorials/see.py?sequence=jbmenu&location=%20John%20Brown%27s%20Raid%20on%20Harper%27s%20Ferry&ecode=ohcejb591203a>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Henry S Belden, *Speech at Democrat Club No. 2*. Personal Diary 1858-1864.

of the high numbers of votes Lincoln received in specific highly populated states in the Northeast. In the state of Ohio where Belden cast his vote, Lincoln only won by a margin of 22,000 votes out of a total of 442,000 votes cast.<sup>46</sup> Against this backdrop, the stage was set for secession and eventually Civil War.

Southerners saw the election of Lincoln as an affront to their freedom, in response, six weeks following the election on December 24, 1860; South Carolina declared its intention to secede from the union. Many on both sides argued there was still time for compromise. Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden, from a border state, offered up the Crittenden Compromise, made up of six unchangeable Constitutional Amendments and four congressional resolutions that would have reintroduced the Missouri Compromise line repealed with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, reapplying it to land “hereafter” acquired and guaranteeing slavery below the line with backing from the federal government. It also addressed the issue of slavery on federal property within slave states, slavery in Wash. D.C., and would have provided congressional compensation to slave owners encountering interference in trying to recover slaves. Finally, it would have altered the 1850 fugitive slave act, equalizing the fee schedule for returning or releasing alleged fugitives and limiting the powers of marshals to summon citizens to aid in their capture.<sup>47</sup> After proposal in the Senate on December 18, 1860, the compromise failed in March of 1861, by which time seven states had seceded and the Confederate States of America had been established. Four more states would secede by the end of April leading to the first major land battle of the American Civil War in July of 1861.

With the nation fractured, the first major battle of the Civil War exploded on July 21, 1861 in Manassas Junction, Virginia where 25,000 troops met on the battle field, producing

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<sup>46</sup> Susan B. Carter, et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2006), 190.

<sup>47</sup> James McPhearson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), 248-252.

thousands of troops killed, injured or missing at the end of the day.<sup>48</sup> In the North, it was referred to as The Battle of Bull Run and in the South as The Battle of Manassas. Belden's response to news of the battle is curious. Two days after the battle, while still living in Canton, Belden wrote a poem entitled "Compromise." Two of the most interesting objects of the poem are the date in which it was written and the fact that he refers to Manassas Junction at the bottom of the page under his signature and "Belden & F's Off," which was in Canton, Ohio at the time.<sup>49</sup> These features suggest two points, first, the telegraph had changed the way Americans received news of the war, a change that made information available instantaneously, which is reflected in Belden's date of July 23, 1861 on the poem.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, it suggests Belden had been receiving news from a Democrat newspaper, which would have most likely referred to the battle by its Southern name. What is of note is Belden's sympathy for the South by the inclusion of the Southern name, which stands in opposition to the tone of the poem which argues for both sides to put down their pride and compromise to save the Union. Three different stanzas illustrate his tone. The first, "The fiends do shout in wild disdain, Tyrants with confidence rise again. At No Compromise!"<sup>51</sup> The fiends shouting seem to be fire-eaters in the South and the tyrants with confidence are obviously Lincoln and abolitionists in the federal government. The second, "Oh nobly act without disguise, and save our Country, as said the wise. By Compromise!"<sup>52</sup> Obviously, Belden is calling on both sides to reach an accord, acting with honesty and wisdom. Third, "Do as our Fathers did before. When distruction [sic] Thunde'rd [sic] at the door. And Compromise!"<sup>53</sup> Belden trying to invoke the wisdom of the drafters of the U.S. Constitution seems to be referring

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<sup>48</sup> David J. Eicher, *The Longest Night* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 99.

<sup>49</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Compromise..* Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>50</sup> William R. Plum, *The Military Telegraph During the Civil War in the United States* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co. 1882), 3 & 153.

<sup>51</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Compromise..* Personal Diary 1858-1864.

<sup>52</sup> Henry S. Belden, *Compromise: Personal Diary 1858-1864.*

<sup>53</sup> Belden, *Compromise.*

to the Great Compromise of 1787 which established the number of representatives in the House. In compromising, Southerners fearful of being underrepresented negotiated for slaves to be counted as three-fifths of a person when calculating population in relation to representation in the House of Representatives, and Northerners afraid Southern States would not join the union agreed to prohibit Congress from regulating the international slave trade during the following twenty years, hoping the institution itself would die out soon after. Belden's beliefs in the Democrat platform, supporting a person's rights to property are very clear from his letter and his family's position in society, but his love of an undivided United States shines bright when he writes "save our country",<sup>54</sup>

The Civil War raged for another four years, claimed the lives of over 600,000 soldiers and an uncounted number of civilians lying in its path of destruction. Henry S. Belden went on to live another sixty-one years, and served as Mayor of Canton not long after the war, had a law partnership with future president William McKinley, built a large brick making company that is still family owned and operated today and fathered a son who had a portrait of Abraham Lincoln proudly displayed in his home.<sup>55</sup>

Examining the letters, diaries, and personal notes of figures from the past, one can learn many lessons, such as how and when one must compromise and when one must stand strong for their principles. Henry S. Belden's diary provided a glimpse into the nation at a time which was turbulent for the citizenry, immigrants, and those held in bondage in 1859-1861, a time in which the nation failed to compromise and many held to principles considered morally wrong in the modern world. In 2009 as the nation is once again in turmoil, there are no longer humans held legally in bondage in the United States, and an African American man is leading the nation from

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Conversations by the author with descendents of Belden

the Office of the President. Today as the nation tries to overcome new injustices and issues not imaginable by those living in the 1860s, there is a new, but, familiar fight beginning to rage again over the amount of federal authority that is acceptable to the citizenry and to states. The ugly word secession is beginning to rear its loathsome face again as political parties, families, friends, and the nation are fracturing over the issues of civil rights and states rights versus federal authority.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> James C. McKinley, "Texas Governor's Secession Talk Stirs Furor." *The New York Times*, 17 April 2009 [newspaper on-line]; available from [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/18/us/politics/18texas.html?\\_r=1&scp=2&sq=Perry%20secession&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/18/us/politics/18texas.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=Perry%20secession&st=cse); Internet; accessed 19 April 2008.

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