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A Practical Alternative: Swiss and American Republicanism in the 'Age of
Revolution' and Beyond

By

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In the spring of 1866, the Swiss Federal Council sent Frank Buchser, an eminent Solothurn painter, to the United States to sketch the leading personalities of the post-war United States. His mission was to prepare material for a large mural depicting the heroes of the Union to accompany one that portrayed prominent men of Swiss history in the Federal Palace at Bern. Buchser's commission was a manifestation of the strong sense of community that then existed between the two "sister republics," and its failure to take shape speaks to the limits of this imagined community. By the time Buchser returned to Switzerland in 1871, the special bond that united the "sister republics" had lost its importance. Unified Italy enjoyed a constitutional monarchy, in France the Third Republic promised greater stability and moderation than its predecessors, and the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 indicated that political progress was no longer the exclusive privilege of Switzerland and the United States. The "sister republics" bond was unlike the "special relationship" shared by the United States and United Kingdom following World War II. Their exchanges rarely exceed the borrowing of political practices and proclamations of solidarity, but these easily overlooked connections speak to an effort to direct republicanism past the problems exposed by the failures of the French Revolution without abandoning liberalism or republicanism for more radical alternatives.

As federal republics, Switzerland and the United States faced similar obstacles in their attempts to democratize and centralize political authority. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the two countries frequently appealed to the example of their fellow republic to help guide a course to a

desirable form of government and eventually established highly similar political institutions long before such arrangements became commonplace. American democracy in practice did much to illuminate the tensions between democracy, republicanism, individual rights, federalism, centralization and the host of problems that arise in popular government. This proved important and fortunate for Switzerland, where many political leaders rejected the utopianism that defined 1848 in the rest of Europe. Their aim was to institute practicable changes acceptable to a diverse population and the United States provided the only viable example of such a government.

Switzerland's adoption of a new constitution in 1848, inspired in part by American constitutionalism, strengthened the sense of republican community that existed between the two distant countries. Politico-cultural affinity drove Switzerland's liberal-radical authorities to immediately establish a treaty of friendship, commerce and extradition with the United States, which they did in 1855, long before contracting similar treaties with powerful neighbors France, Austria-Hungary or the German states. When the American Civil war threatened the viability of moderate liberal republicanism, Swiss liberals watched with apprehension, while Americans appealed to the example of Switzerland's recent civil war to understand events at home.

What made events overseas seem so relevant to Swiss and Americans alike was their then exceptional political arrangements. They were isolated republics in a world of monarchies and unstable states oscillating between republicanism and despotism. Although their political principles were not

identical, there was a similar pragmatic republicanism in Switzerland and the United States that balanced or synthesized competing economic, political and ideological interests. This was not by chance, as the Swiss Confederation served as both a positive and negative model of a constitutional arrangement for America's founding fathers. Furthermore, Switzerland's 1848 Constitution has rightly been described as the "*Verschweizerung*" or Swissification of the American model of constitutional government.¹

During the "age of revolution", a variety of republican alternatives existed. Rather than a discrete concept, there was a spectrum of republican thought ranging from traditional theories of autonomy and collective liberty to liberal rights-based notions. Prior to the French Revolution, republicanism in Switzerland guaranteed self-rule through the communal authority of the collective, but individual autonomy figured only vaguely. This communal republicanism, it was argued, was true Swiss liberty and was inherited from the primitive *Eidgenossen* of the thirteenth-century. Despite certain continuities, such as the citizen's military obligation and government's responsibility for the needs of the governed, the idea that Switzerland's republican tradition extends unbroken to the Middle Ages is mythic.²

¹ Gottfried Guggenbühl, *Geschichte der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft*, vol. 2 (Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1948), 416-20.

² Thomas Maissen, *Die Geburt der Republik, Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). Pace J. G. A. Pocock, Maissen rejects the notion of "Machiavellian moments" and the stability of classical political language, arguing modern republicanism represents a total break with prior conceptions of democracy and republicanism. In this argument, the Old Swiss Confederation was a republic in that it was a commonwealth, though this had no implications concerning its form of government.

Rather than being an endogenic development as national myth suggests, the emergence of republicanism in Switzerland was the product of a long process spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Thomas Maissen has described, it was from the beginning reliant on foreign influence. Dutch and French thinkers such as Hugo Grotius and Jean Bodin provided the language and ideology employed by the Swiss to justify their assertions of sovereignty. Previously, Switzerland lingered in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the Holy Roman Empire up to the late seventeenth-century. It was only with the emergence of sovereign aristocracies and democracies that republicanism began to emerge in Switzerland.

Despite varying greatly from one another, the Swiss cantons' republicanism at the time rested upon three main points: self-rule, the citizen's military obligation and the governments' obligation to the governed. To be a republic was to be a polyarchic *Freistaat*. Individual rights mattered little and it remained unsettled who among the populace were integral members of the republic, and thus entitled to the full rights of citizenship. Agitation against the inequality of inhabitants in much of the country resulted in a populist movement that employed the rationalist language of natural rights to justify their inclusion. Thus began the modernization of traditional Swiss republicanism, as individual rights, popular assemblies and democratic absolutism became its hallmarks. This occurred unevenly to be sure, as individual cantons were more or less willing to

alter their political customs, but the French Revolution suddenly overtook internal developments.³

The growing demand for democratization and individual rights coincided with the French occupation and consequential collapse of Switzerland's *ancien regime*. For many Swiss, the Helvetic Republic forced the changes they desired, but like the French they were divided over the conceptual tensions Pierre Rosanvallon identifies as having undermined the revolutionary project. Political voluntarism opposed rationalist liberalism, or, if one is less generous, terroristic democracy opposed elitist liberalism with little middle ground. In addition to the xenophobia that is often identified as crucial to the failure of the French imposed experiment, it ought to be added that the troubles that plagued the centralized Helvetic Republic resulted from the binary opposition of the two competing modes of democracy.

According to Rosanvallon, the Terror and the French Revolution's ultimate failure discredited political voluntarism and led, in France, to the "Triumph of elitist, rationalist liberalism."⁴ Along with the restoration of the old Swiss Confederation and political devolution came the reestablishment of the divide between advocates of pure democracy and rationalist liberalism. For those who remained devoted to the centralization and modernization of the Confederation, there remained one model not tainted by the failures of competing extremes: American democracy.

³ Thomas Maissen, "Inventing the Sovereign Republic: Imperial Structures, French Challenges, Dutch Models and the Early Modern Swiss Confederation" in *The Republican Alternative*, (Holenstein: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 125-150.

⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 134.

Maissen suggests the Swiss continually borrowed from foreign models, first the Dutch, then the French and, finally, with considerable reference to the American model, Swiss liberals and radicals settled on a hybrid republicanism that avoided the two extremes of political voluntarism and rationalist liberalism. What they most admired about the American system was that it seemed to work. Although not a paradigm of an ideal republic, it effectively balanced competing interests, respected the individual rights of its citizens, left a measure of sovereignty with individual states, and, perhaps most importantly, the democratization of the Jacksonian era "gave the lie to the old assumption that a democratic country would inevitably degenerate into mob rule."⁵ The polymathic philosopher-scientist Paul Ignaz Vital Troxler was among the first to identify the constitutional principles of the United States as a possible antidote to the degeneration of the revolutionary impulse in Switzerland following the malfunctions of the Helvetic Republic. In 1815, he published a pamphlet advocating constitutional change along American lines, but momentum for such change was slow to build.

The French Revolution of 1830 demonstrated the inability of the Holy Alliance to enforce Restoration policies and halt democratic reforms. Swiss liberals led a string of cantonal *coups d'état* that established new governments based on popular sovereignty, beginning what is commonly referred to as the period of Regeneration. They introduced liberal cantonal constitutions in much of the country, took seats in the Federal Diet and pushed for a new federal

⁵ George Billias, *American Constitutionalism Heard Round the World, 1776-1989* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 142.

constitution. Various models with varying degrees of centralization were proffered, but each canton possessed the right to unilaterally veto any proposal put before the Federal Diet, making change practically impossible. The secession of seven conservative-Catholic cantons (the *Sonderbund* or separate alliance) and subsequent civil war provided the liberals and radicals with the opportunity to enact the constitutional changes they desired. A constitutional commission composed exclusively of liberals and radicals was established following the war's conclusion. Their deliberations resulted in the adoption of a constitution that blended American bicameralism and traditional Swiss practices of direct democracy. This strengthened the sense of republican solidarity shared by the United States and Switzerland, a development marked by a sharp increase in the use of the term "sister republics".

The history of the term "sister republics" demonstrates the referential shift away from France to the United States that occurred in Switzerland. "Sister republic" was first used to describe the client states, like the Helvetic Republic, set up by the French in the years following the Revolution. It was occasionally extended to include the United States used during the early years of the French Revolution, though in this context it expressed solidarity rather than vassalage.⁶ After 1815, the term was nearly exclusively used by Swiss and Americans to convey camaraderie with their sole republican counterpart.

Although Americans were less disposed to proclamations of solidarity with Switzerland, they were keenly aware of Switzerland and its republican and

⁶ Pierre Serna ed., *Republiques Soeurs: Le Directoire et la Révolution atlantique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

federalist traditions. The founding documents of the United States are marked by the influence of Swiss philosophers, particularly Jean-Jaques Burlamaqui.⁷ Swiss Historian Urs Hammer detects two competing visions of Switzerland existing in the United States from the time of the Constitutional Convention and throughout the nineteenth century.⁸ For the federalists, the Swiss Confederation was overly weak and wholly unsuitable for imitation, while the anti-federalists held a romantic notion of a peaceful, honest and thriving republic. William Tell was central to this idyllic vision of a virtuous Alpine republic, representing patriotism, freedom, and simplicity, and he was frequently likened to George Washington. Although the federalists were victorious politically, the romantic vision of Switzerland held sway with most Americans and was further enhanced by the Swiss adoption of a constitution modeled on that of the United States.

Little more than a decade after the Swiss ratified the 1848 Constitution, the United States descended into civil war. Many Swiss viewed this challenge to the federal model of republicanism as a repetition of their own history on a larger scale and as threat to the republican experiment. That a war of secession could occur under a system the Swiss had adopted in part to avoid just such strife caused great doubt in many quarters and the Union's victory was seen as a global victory for republicanism, democracy and liberalism.

⁷ The notion of the "pursuit of happiness" as a natural right and the concept of balancing the powers of government can be traced to the thought of the Genèveis Burlamaqui. See Olivier Meuwly, *Les penseurs politiques du 19e siècle: Les combats d'idées à l'origine de la Suisse moderne* (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2007), 15-20.

⁸ Urs Hammer, *Vom Alpenidyll zum modernen Musterstaat. Der Mythos der Schweiz als "Alpine Sister Republic" in den USA des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1995)

Historians such as William Rappard and George Müller examined the republican bond that connected Switzerland with the United States, but the popularity of such histories has declined in the decades since their works were published. Though first-rate, Urs Hammer's study provides only the American perspective. Marc Lerner, in his recent study of political culture in 18th and 19th century Switzerland, details the rise of republicanism in Switzerland, but does so without due consideration of the possibilities of republican government represented by the very existence of the United States and its political institutions. Lerner emphasizes the xenophobia that existed in Switzerland after the failure of the French imposed Helvetic Republic, but overstates Swiss insularity and only hints at the importance of the United States' example in directing Switzerland toward a modern republican democracy.

Another recent development in the historiography of Swiss-American relations is to emphasize economic connections and to diminish the importance of politico-cultural sympathy. Cédric Humair's examination of the origins of the 1850 Convention of Friendship, Commerce and Extradition Between the United States and Switzerland reflects this development. He cites the primary importance of the United States as a market for Swiss exports and the significant role played by Switzerland as a crucial European entrepôt for American tobacco and as a source of much needed finance capital. The diminishment of trade between the two countries that occurred in the 1860s, Humair argues, explains the reduced sense of republican solidarity that had previously united Switzerland and the

United States.⁹ Although Humair's work adds an important and often overlooked dimension, he fails to dislodge ideological affinity as the primary determinant. Economic considerations were essential, yet although he distinguishes between economic policy and politico-cultural attitudes, he fails to demonstrate the instrumentality of ideology. Political ideologies invariably involve economic implications and it is to be expected that political sympathy would entail economic compatibility and a desire to promote the economy of a favored nation.

One critique of contemporary English language literature on republicanism is its excessive focus on Atlantic republicanism and the exclusion of Germanic traditions from consideration.¹⁰ Although developments in Switzerland were strongly influenced by Atlantic republicanism, they were equally rooted to their Germanic past, as evident in their adhesion to collective liberty and the institution of the commune. What the Swiss added to the Atlantic tradition were these traditions in modified form. By accounting for this variant of republicanism and placing its development in a transnational context, we can broaden our perspective to include examples beyond well-trodden ground.

The pragmatic republican ideal that emerged from Swiss-American discourse and political comparisons was formed across a great distance, articulated in several languages, and parochially understood by even the most cosmopolitan thinkers. These factors functioned as noise in the transnational communication of information and ideas between Switzerland and the United

⁹ Cédric Humair, "À l'apogée de la première perspective atlantique: le traité de 1850 entre les "sister republics," *Revue d'histoire* 2 (2005): 147-161.

¹⁰ Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, "The Limits of Present-day Historiography of Republicanism," *De Achttiende Eeuw* 37 (2005): 75.

States as it was extremely rare for one to have a sound understanding of conditions overseas. A secondary intervention of this essay is an effort to account for this noise and to analyze what the errors of interpretation and points of emphasis chosen by Swiss and American thinkers reveal about local circumstances. Apparent similarities, particularly the belief that both countries were at similar stages in a unidirectional progression to modernity, obscured the specific contingencies that caused the political institutions of Switzerland and the United States to resemble one another. Additionally, the histories of both countries were instrumentalized and rhetoricized for local purposes that must be accounted for.

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of this republican community, its limits as well as its areas of greatest affinity. Newspaper reports, contemporary monographs, and memoirs of notable individuals function as the basis for examination of the similarities of the two nations' struggles with democracy, liberalism, centralization and modernization. The social, political and intellectual aspects of Swiss-American intercourse are emphasized, though diplomatic and economic connections are not entirely neglected. The first section focuses on the leading Swiss radical theoretician Daniel-Henry Druey's engagement with American politics in his effort to formulate a workable political system for Switzerland. Articles from his newspaper, the *Nouvelliste vaudois*, through which he propagated his political agenda and ideology are analyzed to demonstrate how consideration of American political customs informed Druey's effort to formulate a desirable and workable political system for his country. Next

is an examination of the American Civil War based on comparisons made in the letters and memoirs of Swiss soldiers who fought in the United States and newspaper reports in both countries. This period witnessed the height of the Swiss-American sense of republican community, as their histories seemed to be running in parallel, albeit on much different scales. The numerous declarations of republican solidarity produced during this time demonstrate that ideological affinity, not economic ties, remained the principle bond uniting the two countries in the 1860s. The final section is similar to the preceding, though it focuses on a single monograph from 1863 comparing secession and civil war in the two countries, written by John Watts de Peyster of New York. This work demonstrates how the notion of "sister republics" and the affinity it implies survived the decline of commercial ties that Humair suggests united the two countries and shows how the transnational approach of examination from the outside often reveals as much about the observer as the observed.

The choice to focus on three separate sections is intended to show how Switzerland and the United States came to view one another as "sister republics", and then to demonstrate how this identification subsequently informed domestic politics in both countries. It is to be admitted that the Swiss experience did not occupy the minds of Americans anxious about the future of democratic republics as much as events elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, several of the shared qualities of the American and Swiss experience made Switzerland a point of comparison disproportionate to its size and geopolitical significance. American Whigs and later Republicans shared with Swiss liberals and radicals the principles

of order, legitimate governmental authority, peace, prosperity, and individual rights. Rather than endeavoring to establish ideal republics, they sought to address practical problems relating to majority rule, local autonomy against central authority, the role of religion in secular society and individual rights. This is partly what distinguishes the Swiss and American civil wars from the 1848 revolutions they are often linked with and can easily be lost when focusing on economic influences.

Daniel-Henri Druey and American Democracy: Lessons in Republican Government

The example of the leading radical and one of the principle architects of the 1848 constitution, Daniel-Henri Druey, provides an interesting lens through which to examine the influence Swiss perceptions of American democracy on domestic politics. Unlike more enthusiastic imitators, Druey's admiration of America's political institutions and civic virtues was tempered by both realism and localism. While others dismissed the American model solely for its foreignness or for ideological reasons, the Hegelian Druey proposed a synthesis that localized and democratized American constitutionalism to satisfy the needs and traditionalism of Switzerland. It is often noted that revolutions blur the lines between practice and ideology and this was especially true of Druey. The *Sonderbundskrieg* presented an opportunity for Druey and his fellow radicals to unify the country, but Druey was unwilling to impose a unitary state on people whose primary attachment was to their home canton. Many of his liberal and radical comrades aimed merely to centralize political authority to facilitate trade and the development of internal markets, but Druey's primary commitment was to

popular sovereignty and the public good. He perceived the United States as a place where sound political philosophy spawned institutions that were on the whole admirable, but which did not always serve the common people. The efforts of Andrew Jackson and his followers to democratize American politics demonstrated the flexibility of the American system and highlighted the possibility of working from such a foundation to construct the more populist arrangement he sought. Druey was thus able to conceive of adjustments to American constitutionalism that reified popular sovereignty in borrowed political institutions.

One possible outcome that Druey and other radicals were determined to avoid was the disappointing aftermath of the July Revolution in France, where moderate liberals transitioned from opposition into government and forswore any commitment to democracy or republicanism. While François Guizot and Louis Philippe could boast of having struck a "*juste milieu*, equally far from the excesses of popular power and the abuses of royal power", Druey's aim was to move Switzerland beyond this halfway stage.¹¹ To many, it seemed the only legacy of the French Revolution to survive was the centralization of political authority and its expanded purview. What Druey hoped was that, like in the United States, centralization might proceed under the supremacy of the people without overriding Switzerland's traditional local rights. Pierre Rosanvallon has observed that in France the period from 1814-1848 represented the triumph of

¹¹ Guizot, Quoted by Guy Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2002), 713. «Nous chercherons à nous tenir dans un *juste milieu*, également éloigné des excès du pouvoir populaire et des abus du pouvoir royal»

elitist liberalism over political voluntarism.¹² This was precisely Druey's view and he projected it onto American politics. He characterized Jackson and the Democrats as champions of political voluntarism, while the Whigs were unfavorably labeled as elitist liberals. Yet despite his measured admiration for American politics, Druey believed it necessary to introduce additional instruments of direct democracy to ensure democratization would proceed.

In Francophone Switzerland, one of the most important radical journals was Druey's *Le Nouvelliste Vaudois*, the vehicle of his thoughts and a key instrument in the popularization of Swiss radicalism. Examination of *Le Nouvelliste Vaudois'* reports on the United States from the early 1830s to 1848 reveals how political and social developments in the United States informed Druey's conception of the possibilities of democratic government. The purpose of this section is to recreate Druey's evolving position on republicanism and constitutional law as expressed in his newspaper's reports on American events. The minutes of the 1848 constitutional commission Druey participated in are anonymous, making it impossible to state with certainty which proposals originated from specific members. It is, however, widely acknowledged that as one of its two authors, Druey's influence on the 1848 Constitution was among the foremost and his political ideology informs much of the document.¹³

The "communications revolution" that swept the world in the 19th century began earlier in Switzerland than in the rest of Europe. In 1829, when the Federal Diet chose to leave regulation of the press to the cantons, a new political forum

¹² Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, 358-359.

¹³ William E. Rappard, *La constitution fédérale de la Suisse, 1848-1948: Ses origines, son élaboration, son évolution* (Neuchâtel: A La Baconnière, 1948).

emerged as the proliferation of newspapers extended the public sphere deeper into the countryside. The young and highly educated radicals were the political faction that best used the new communications technologies and their iconoclastic platform could only be voiced in a free press. Radical journals appeared all over Switzerland and were crucial in catalyzing the Regeneration period and the establishment party politics.¹⁴

After receiving his law degree from the University of Lausanne, Druey finished his education in Germany, partly under G.W.F. Hegel at the University of Berlin and Hegel's idealist philosophy profoundly marked Druey. His politics were essentially a collection of syntheses: nostalgia with rationalism, liberalism with nascent socialism, freedom and order, direct and representative democracy, and theoretical revolutionary doctrines with *Landsgemeinde* traditions.¹⁵ Like Hegel, Druey favored a strong public authority and a free and non-stratified population. He came to politics as a democratic conservative, but joined Vaud's Liberals in an 1830 revolution to establish a new constitution in that canton. He grew deeply unsatisfied with the urban liberalism of his political allies, as his democratic idealism clashed with the French-inspired *juste milieu* the Vaudois revolution settled into. He pushed to democratize Swiss liberalism and theorized a liberal-socialist synthesis that became the radical platform.

¹⁴ For more information see Meuwly Olivier, *Histoire de la presse politique en Suisse romande au XIXe siècle* (Gollion, Switzerland: Infolio, 2011).

¹⁵ Meuwly, *Les penseurs*, 70-74.

Druey led the radical opposition to Vaud's Liberal government, which remained a strong minority until the Jesuit Affair.¹⁶ Like his Liberal opponents, Druey initially argued that Lucerne's cantonal sovereignty should not be violated and worried about the precedent of resorting to "despotism in service of liberty".¹⁷ When it emerged that in Lucerne's referendum on the Jesuit question nonvoters were counted as supporters, Druey performed an about-face as this practice made a sham of popular sovereignty. While the Liberals of Vaud continued to hesitate, Druey and his radical cohort mustered popular support but proved unable to convince the cantonal legislature, the Grand Council, to support the expulsion of the Jesuits. The populist Druey denounced the legislature for ignoring the manifest will of the people, arguing that the representative conception of popular sovereignty was undemocratic. When in 1845, 6000-7000 people took to the streets of Lausanne to demand their will be served, Druey and other radicals resigned from the Grand Council and led a cantonal coup that established a provisional government with its authority based on a modernized conception of popular sovereignty derived from the Swiss tradition of the popular assembly. They introduced a new constitution that guaranteed popular sovereignty and many individual freedoms, including universal male suffrage along with other conventional liberal rights.¹⁸ Excluding the bicameral legislature and the structure

¹⁶ In 1844, Joseph Leu, the Conservative leader of Lucerne, was convinced that only a militant group like the Jesuits could counter the radical threat. Against the warnings of Church authorities Lucerne's cantonal government recalled the Jesuits to administer religious education. See Joachim Remak, *A Very Civil War: The Swiss Sonderbund War of 1847* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 23-27.

¹⁷ *Nouvelliste vaudois*, 6 June 1844, «cela ne vaut pas mieux que le despotisme au profit de la liberté.»

¹⁸ Marc Lerner, *A Laboratory of Liberty: The Transformation of Political Culture in Republican Switzerland, 1750-1848* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 273-288.

of the Federal Council, Vaud's 1845 constitution strongly resembles the combination of traditional and liberal-democratic practices codified in the 1848 Federal Constitution. Druey subsequently proceeded from cantonal politics to the Federal Diet, where he helped lead opposition to the *Sonderbund* and guided the development of the new Federal Constitution.

Throughout this period Druey, James Fazy, Paul Ignax Vital Troxler and other Swiss proponents of constitutional revision observed political practices and culture in the United States with an eye toward local application. Although Druey, like other radicals, admired much about American politics and society, he did not view the United States as the "City upon a Hill" grandiloquent patriots have imagined. Rather the American example served as both a positive and a negative model of a federal republic. Druey shared the principles of the Enlightenment on which the United States Constitution was founded, but once put into practice that constitution produced unanticipated results he deemed undesirable for Switzerland. Unlike Troxler and Fazy, Druey's support for the adoption of an American style constitution was never heartfelt or enthusiastic, but resulted from a combination of his ideological background and practical consideration of Swiss political society.

Druey personally favored a more unified and directly democratic system, but was respectful enough of the people's devotion to cantonal sovereignty to reconsider his position. He developed a satisfactory compromise between tradition and idealism inspired largely by the United States, where "American

wisdom... established theories only in consultation with experience."¹⁹ Druey understood the United States' Constitution balanced federalism against centralization and democracy against liberal individualism in a way that all segments of the Swiss public could consent to and he pragmatically tempered his political agenda to this end. Druey and other liberals and radicals who favored a stronger central state saw in the United States proof that their ambitious schemes could be realized in a federal republic. Radicals were constantly accused of being utopian dreamers, developing their political agenda on untried theories, not tradition and experience as Swiss custom valued. It was with great assurance that they could appeal to the political experiments of their "sister republic" to dispel such objections. In such articles, the very real parallels of the two countries' recent histories are exaggerated to the point that it is clear readers were intended to apply lessons to their local situation.

During the constitutional debates of the 1830s, America was frequently appealed to as "le pays légal par excellence!"²⁰ This impression was due, in large part, to the perceived republican simplicity of American politics. Andrew Jackson's reelection in 1832 was presented as proof that popular support could effectively counterpose the interests of privileged elites, while encouraging economic development in a way that benefited common citizens. The radicals were thorough egalitarians who believed it crucial to prevent elites, be they wealthy merchants, landed aristocrats, or industrialists, from influencing economic policy for the exclusive benefit of their class. Fortunately, from the

¹⁹ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, January 15, 1833 «cette sagesse américaine qui n'établit les theories qu'en consultant l'expérience.»

²⁰ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, June 24, 1831.

perspective of Druey and his fellow editors, they could appeal to the "happy people of the United States" as living proof of the viability of their political program.²¹ As George Billias, in his study of American constitutionalism abroad, asserts "The Jacksonian movement in the United States... gave the lie to the old assumption that a democratic country would inevitably degenerate into mob rule."²² Given the Swiss infatuation with precedent, America's ostensibly successful navigation of the tensions between liberalism, republicanism and democracy were crucial evidence of the feasibility of the radicals' agenda.

For Swiss reformers, the American Constitution's appeal was in large part due to the fact that it demonstrated the possibility of unifying the country to a greater extent than the Federal Pact did without diminishing diversity among the states. "We speak of differences in mores, in religion, in language; but these differences are found on a much greater scale in North America, and the Americans prefer a federated state to a confederation of states" wrote Druey in 1834 when revision of the Federal Pact seemed possible, hoping to allay worries that traditional liberties would be threatened by their proposed constitution.²³ Druey accused his opponents of demagoguery, arguing that reactionaries opposed his proposed system because representatives to the Federal Diet would be chosen by the people, not because of their commitment to political traditions. He continued by equating aristocratic privilege with Southern slaveholding, which despite being disliked by the majority of Americans continued to survive. "Like in

²¹ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, April 20 1832, «les heureux habitants des Etats-Unis.»

²² Billias, 142.

²³ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, June 03, 1834, «on a parlé des différences de moeurs, de religion, de langage; mais ces différences se trouvent sur une échelle bien plus grande dans l'Amérique du nord, et les Américains ont préféré l'état federative à une confederation d'états.»

America" such privileges could continue to exist within individual cantons so long as the people willed it and it was "difficult" for Druey and his supporters "to be more conciliatory."²⁴

For Druey, conciliation was not limited to a qualified acceptance of traditional privileges. The radicals were inheritors of the unitarian opposition to conservative federalism, but were attuned to popular will which favored the maintenance of a high degree of cantonal sovereignty. Happily, as the Geneva radical James Fazy wrote in a series of letters to the *Nouvelliste Vaudois* "reconciling cantonal and federal interests is not as difficult as some think." Fazy proceeded to discuss the virtues of America's bicameral legislature, a "grand example" for Switzerland in which the upper house is designed for the purpose of guaranteeing a high degree of state sovereignty through equal representation.²⁵ America, "in a situation totally resembling" Regeneration era Switzerland, "found a solution to resolve this problem" and it was clear to Fazy that Switzerland should follow the example. He accused conservative leaders of provoking "false shame" in Swiss people, by emphasizing native tradition and rejecting imitation of a foreign model, a point Fazy countered by assuring readers that imitation would not be servile and was certainly more desirable than the present strife.²⁶

Like Fazy, Druey appealed to the Swiss people to see through the obscurantist rhetoric of their religious and political leaders in order to appreciate

²⁴ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, January 09, 1835, «comme en Amérique... Il est difficile d'être plus conciliant.»

²⁵ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, May 08, 1840, «La conciliation de l'intérêt cantonal et fédéral n'est donc point si difficile qu'on le pense.»

²⁶ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, June 16, 1840, «parce que les Américains, dans une situation toute semblable, ont trouvé la formule qui résout ce problème, faut-il avoir la fausse honte de ne pas l'adopter, pour ne pas paraître faire de l'imitation? D'ailleurs qui demande que cette imitation soit servile?»

how they might benefit from revisions to the Federal Pact. In October 1835, *Le Nouvelliste Vaudois* printed the full text of the American Constitution, accompanied by a brief history of American constitutionalism that paralleled developments in Switzerland. Druey began by considering the Articles of Confederation, which had all the faults of "our Federal Pact", as each state "wanted to be sovereign and independent... only seeing their particular interests".²⁷ In short, "the American people were victims of the jealousy of the diverse state governments and their pretensions to sovereignty."²⁸ Even more so than in Switzerland, he suggested, the American confederation was on the point of dissolution until the new constitution was adopted, under which the American people had lived "free and happy for forty-seven years." America was thus "living proof" that states of a confederation "could keep their particular constitutions, their laws, their authorities, their finances, their liberty above all, while forming a single nation".²⁹ Druey concluded by remarking that the American constitution was not without faults and many of its particulars were proper only for America. What was to be admired about the American Constitution was the civic spirit it engendered, a "frank, simple, consequential and energetic" politics.³⁰

Compared with the obscurantism Druey and others perceived in the conservative and liberal rhetoric of European politics, the language of American

²⁷ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, February 10, 1835, «notre Pacte fédéral» «de vouloir être souverains et indépendants, de ne voir que leurs intérêts particuliers ou cantonaux»

²⁸ Ibid., «le peuple américain était victime de la jalousie des gouvernements des divers états et de leur prétentions à la souveraineté.»

²⁹ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, February 10, 1835, «preuve vivante... que des Etats, membres d'une confederation, peuvent conserver leurs constitutions particuliers, leurs lois, leurs autorites, leurs finances, leur liberte surtout, et cependant former une seule et meme nation, mettre en commun ce qui appartient a tous»

³⁰ Ibid., «une politique franche, simple, consequente et energique»

politics was refreshing. Excerpts from Andrew Jackson's 1833 State of the Union were reprinted in *Le Nouvelliste Vaudois* and presented as a model of republican candidness. Jackson's forthright accounts of negotiations with foreign powers, the sober details and statistics he presented and his open discussion of political economy revealed him to be a spokesman of his fellow citizens, unlike in Europe where vagueness and deception veiled interests. Readers were implored to profit from the example of Jackson and the American people, as they would surely "find its immediate applicability to the situation of Switzerland."³¹

The dynamism of American society was also much admired by the radicals who were troubled by the complacency of many Swiss. In an editorial written in 1835, Druey located the source of this in the fact that in America there was a "sentiment that each individual can and must influence... public affairs" which gave America a more active "political life than any other country". Druey optimistically remarked that in America, the Federal Constitution no longer had "any adversaries", as "the two parties known by the names *fédéralistes* and *nullificateurs* no longer exist except historically."³² All quarters of the country, he imagined, were enjoying rising material prosperity and were naturally unwilling to harm the government that enabled them to thrive. Writing three years after the Nullification Crisis, Druey overstates the political harmony of the United States, but he did so, perhaps intentionally, in order to make it clear that the discord between unitarians and federalists could be overcome if a stronger central

³¹ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, January 15, 1833, «trouvent leur application immédiate à la situation de la Suisse.»

³² *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, September 25, 1835, «n'a point d'adversaires... les deux partis connus sous les noms de *fédéralistes* et de *nullificateurs*, n'existent plus guère que historiquement»

government could inspire the same sense of security and promote a national economy that tied together the interests of the whole.

By the late 1830s, it became clear that if the radicals were to have their way it would be necessary to diminish the influence of the various churches involved in Swiss politics, particularly in the Catholic cantons. One legacy of the French Revolution was an impression of inherent antagonism between revolutionary republicanism and religion. Once again, the example of the United States, where "the church and the state are completely separated" without "politics repudiating religion", served as an antidote to both extreme anticlericalism and ultramontanist.³³ Although opposed to clerical authority, Druey was nonetheless profoundly religious and chafed at accusations of impiety. In 1838 he wrote an editorial explaining his position on the desirable relationship of religious and political authority. The Hegelian Druey argued for a dialectical progression directing the affiliation of church and state through five periods. He lamented that his home canton Vaud, the rest of Switzerland, all of Europe, in fact, were yet to achieve "complete separation of the state and the church, like in the United States of America", where it became established as a central characteristic of a truly modern society.³⁴ This line of argument had the twofold effect of reassuring religious Swiss that separation of church and state would lead to greater national unity and that this next stage of development was not only certain but would resemble the supposedly peaceable society of the United States.

³³ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, November 09, 1838 «aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique l'église et l'état sont complètement séparés comme société et institution, sans que pour cela la politique répudie la religion.»

³⁴ *Ibid.*, «La troisième période est celle de la séparation complète de l'état et de l'église, comme dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique.»

Eric Hobsbawm wrote of the French and American Revolutions secularizing "major political and social transformation", which in recent times had been "discussed and fought out in the traditional language of Christianity, orthodox, schismatic"³⁵. This is largely correct, considering neither depended ideologically on Christianity, but the American Revolution was also not hostile to the religions cherished by the common people who made revolutions. Druey understood this, and his aim in advocating imitation of America's separation of church and state was to keep them from clashing, not to replace religious mores with bourgeois values, but to allow them to have their cake and eat it too. "Without a doubt, nobody wants to retrogress towards theocracy" Druey concludes, so progress it must be.³⁶

Despite the best efforts of Druey, Fazy and Paul Ignaz Vital Troxler to promote the American Constitution as a suitable model for the Swiss to emulate, little progress was made in this regard. In addition to calling them dreamers, imitators, and cretins, their opponents also sought to correct their romantic image of the United States. When Aargau moved to shut down convents, James Fazy wrote about the happy situation of convents in the United States but his opponents were quick to point to the growing anti-Catholicism of the American public.³⁷ Freedom of religion did nothing to prevent religious antagonism and, worse still, left religion unregulated, allowing it to fall into the hands of perceived fanatics like the Mormons. Meanwhile, conservative liberals argued that America was in decline, its golden age having passed with the Federalist Party. What followed,

³⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), 220.

³⁶ Ibid., «Personne ne voudra sans doute rétrograder vers la théocratie.»

³⁷ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, May 11, 1841 and June 07, 1844.

they argued, was excessive democratization, blind financial speculation and excessive materialism. Druey countered by stating that what such critics admired about the Early Republic was its "bourgeois aristocratic doctrinarism", the decline of which he welcomed. He identified the Whigs and Federalists as elitist liberals, inheritors of an "English prejudice... of bigotry and a spirit of oppression" that Jeffersonians and then Jacksonians, in the true spirit of the Constitution, had overcome.³⁸ Swiss political traditions gave a similar prejudice to opponents of centralization and it was crucial for Druey that the Swiss people relax their adhesion to outmoded institutions that did not serve their individual interests, nor defend their rights.

One concern that divided the radicals was the desirability of a powerful and vigorous executive, a dilemma made clear in news reports of Jackson's war against the national bank. James Fazy's radical organ the *Journal de Genève* expressed unalloyed sympathy with the Democrats in their "struggle where popular authority... finds itself face to face with the extralegal pretensions of an invasive aristocracy. Is it not an admirable spectacle this man... leading the people by the hand to... protect the general interest against the encroachment of the interests of a coterie."³⁹ Fazy's position is not surprising considering the situation in Geneva, where the main opposition to radical liberalism was a merchant-banker aristocracy. Druey had a more qualified regard for Jackson's Bank War. He

³⁸ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, June 19, 1840, «d'aristocratie bourgeoise doctrinaire» «la constitution fédérale a vaincu tout ce que les préjugés anglais avaient laissé en Amérique de bigoterie et d'esprit d'oppression»

³⁹ *Journal de Genève*, May 05, 1834 «cette lutte où l'autorité populaire... se trouve face à face avec les prétentions extralégales d'une aristocratie envahissante.» «n'est-ce pas un admirable spectacle que celui d'un homme... tenant le peuple par la main... pour protéger les intérêts généraux contre l'envahissement des intérêts de coterie.»

similarly feared the "moneyed aristocracy", but the implied powers that allowed Jackson to impose his agenda caused Druey to question the wisdom of structuring the Swiss executive similarly.⁴⁰ While he admired the aims of Jackson's populist campaign, the means Jackson employed to achieve those ends were unacceptable. The desirable alternative was to empower the people such that no strongman would be required to implement their political desires.

Druey responded to the conservative refrain that exaggerated the already immense powers of the president to denounce Fazy and others for their advocacy of the American model by advocating the addition of direct democracy to the American model. His vision was much less imitative and more qualified than that of Fazy. He even agreed "Executive power, among others, could be essentially different".⁴¹ But as the constitutional debates continued in the Federal Diet, Druey sought a compromise between a vigorous executive and the ineffective assembly he aimed to replace.

During the Jesuit Crisis of 1845, Druey pointed to the fact that in America the executive had proved essential to diffusing internal crises and to the defense of the country from outside powers. One editorial declared "in America there is a radical party that attempts to weaken and break the federal bonds, and to claim the absolute sovereignty of states." In Druey's mind "what saved" the America's federal government was that "at its head there is one man... not an assembly obliged to demand cooperation." Thus, America was able to stifle the minority opposed to a strong federal government, while "In Switzerland" where "the

⁴⁰ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, March 03, 1835, «l'aristocratie de l'argent»

⁴¹ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, April 19, 1840, «Le pouvoir exécutif, entr'autres, pourrait être essentiellement différent»

executive is weak from top to bottom... the ultramontanist party puts in practice the theories of the American radicals!"⁴² While Druey recognized the need for a powerful executive to defuse national crises, he maintained that its purview must be specifically stipulated, with all residual powers resting with the cantons.

Druey by this time synthesized *Landsgemeinde* practices with social contract theory and argued for "the right of the people to exercise their sovereignty at every moment", insisting that "Their supreme will cannot be restricted by the Constitution."⁴³ Therefore, even if Lucerne was within its rights, as Druey previously held, the will of the people was manifest and it demanded the expulsion of the Jesuits. Druey was roundly criticized in the conservative press for changing his mind and his opponents also tried to turn his admiration for the United States against him. Critics noted that America was one of the few places where the Jesuits were welcome, to which Druey responded by saying "we make a lot of noise about the tolerance the Jesuits enjoy in the United States of America. This fact is far from having the value attributed to it." He continued by remarking that in the United States, the diversity of religions kept the influence of any one faith from dominating, while in confessionally homogeneous cantons like Lucerne there was no counterinfluence.⁴⁴ In the minds of liberals and radicals,

⁴²*Nouvelliste Vaudois*, August 19, 1845 «Il y a en Amérique un parti radical qui s'efforce d'affaiblir, de rompre le lien fédéral, et de faire prévaloir la souveraineté absolue des Etats... Ce qui l'a sauvée... c'est qu'à sa tête il a un homme et non pas un assemblée... obligée de réclamer le concours» «En Suisse, le système fédéral est faible en haut en en bas... en Suisse, le parti ultramontain met en pratique les théories des radicaux américains!»

⁴³ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, November 05, 1844, «reconnait au peuple le droit d'exercer sa souveraineté a chaque instant, comme il veut; sa volonté suprême ne pouvant pas être liée par la Constitution»

⁴⁴ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, September 01, 1846, «On fait grand bruit de la tolérance dont les Jésuites jouissent... aux Etats-Unis de l'Amérique du Nord. Ces faits sont loin d'avoir la valeur qu'on leur attribue.»

single-faith domination could only be moderated by a better integrated national culture and politics.

The formation of the *Sonderbund* simultaneously emphasized the need for a more unified and energetic national government while creating the possibility for its creation. While the *Sonderbund* was a clear violation of the Federal Pact, its illegality alone was not enough to move the remaining cantons to act. In the ensuing debates, Druey appealed to members of the Federal Diet to consider how the world's other federal republic would proceed, presciently claiming "a separate alliance would not be tolerated in the United States" and similarly "will not be accepted in the Swiss Confederation".⁴⁵ Once the Confederation moved against the *Sonderbund* and rapidly quashed its secession, Druey and the victorious liberals and radicals moved quickly to enact a new constitution without the interference of the ostracized conservatives. To this end, a special constitutional commission was elected by the Federal Diet, against the wishes of Druey and other likeminded radicals, who would have preferred popularly elected representatives.

William Rappard, in an excellent study of the Swiss constitution, argues that the constitution produced by the special commission was a compromise document accepted for expediency rather than conviction.⁴⁶ This was certainly true for Druey, who was obliged to concede a number of points, but it is important to note that he succeeded in injecting good-minded political philosophy into a document that largely reflected the material interests of the victorious liberals and

⁴⁵ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, July 23, 1847, «Une alliance séparée qu'on ne tolèrait ni dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique... ne saurait être supportée dans la Confédération suisse»

⁴⁶ William Rappard, *La Constitution fédérale de la Suisse*, 119.

radicals. In one debate he stated "if one casts an eye on world history, one will be convinced that institutions that correspond to the ideas and needs of an epoch will not fulfill new ideas and new needs" as they emerge. Druey believed that only if political institutions were founded on the "most fundamental and most inherent traits of the people's character" would they have any staying power.⁴⁷ He continued by attributing the breakdown of the Act of Mediation to its failure to do exactly this, and Druey's cosmopolitanism did not insulate him from the general xenophobia of his milieu. He was willing to imitate some elements of the American Constitution, but insisted that it be supplemented by something corresponding with the character of the people, namely direct democracy.

In some treatments of this historic episode, the inclusion of elements of direct democracy represents a concession to the traditionalist *Landsgemeinde* cantons, but it was radicals like Druey that insisted on these measures. Although Druey compromised on some practical points, certain aspects of the 1848 Constitution ensured that with the passage of time Switzerland's political institutions would grow to resemble his vision of a unified nation.

Like his intellectual progenitor Hegel, Druey was leery of rapid revolutions and their potential to devolve into anarchy or extreme bloodshed. He favored empowering the people to proceed gradually toward rational political objectives and the structure of the national government following 1848 did exactly that. The provisos pertaining to the appointment of the executive (Federal

⁴⁷ *Nouvelliste Vaudois*, August 20, 1847, «si l'on jette un coup d'oeil sur l'histoire du monde, on se convaincra que des institutions qui correspondaient aux idées et aux besoins d'une époque ne satisfont plus à des idées nouvelles et à des besoins nouveaux. Si l'on peut distinguer dans les institutions des traits plus fondamentaux et plus inhérents au caractère du peuple...»

Council) and judiciary (Federal Supreme Court) by the national legislature (Federal Assembly) gave great power to the people. In the legislature, the members of the upper house were to be popularly elected, while the mode of election for the lower house was to be determined by the cantons, it was invariably by popular election, meaning all three branches of government received their mandate from the people. Furthermore, the judiciary was not to review acts of the legislature, as popular referenda fulfill the functions of judicial review and in a civil law system judges merely apply the law without establishing legal principles.⁴⁸

While maintaining his convictions, the broad-minded Druey continually modified his vision for the future of Switzerland. With reference to foreign examples he helped Switzerland transition from a loose confederation to a modern federal state. Although Druey was not entirely satisfied with the new constitution, his determination to create a malleable arrangement that could be modified to meet the developing needs of a society is evident in several of its articles stipulating the absolute sovereignty of the people. The differences between the American Constitution and the Swiss Constitution of 1848 that did not originate from Swiss political traditions can be explained by Druey's observations of American politics and political culture. For example, his misgivings concerning a powerful singular executive informed the decision to divide executive powers among seven Federal Councilors. While some dismiss the importance of the American model by noting it was *only* bicameralism that drawn directly from the

⁴⁸ It should be noted that the power to review laws is not explicitly granted in the U.S. Federal Constitution.

United States, it is important to consider the easily overlooked ways in which American politics served as a negative example to the makers of modern Switzerland.

The American Sonderbund

The American Civil War occurred at the height of Swiss-American relations. Many in the two "sister republics" viewed the Confederacy as threat to the political values of both nations and a threat to mankind's experiment in democracy. The Swiss were inclined to sympathy with the Union for several reasons, not least of which was the secession crisis of their recent history. At the outbreak of hostilities William H. Seward instructed his representative in Bern to assure the Swiss "that with God's blessing we will preserve this model of federal republican government... Switzerland and the United States shall be honored... as the founders of the only true and beneficent system of human government."⁴⁹ Melchior Josef Martin Knüsel, then president of the Swiss Confederation, assured his American comrades of his nation's sympathy, replying "Switzerland passed through a similar crisis fourteen years ago, which threatened to tear asunder the then loose connection of the twenty-two cantons... May God grant... that the United States may also emerge renewed and strengthened out of this crisis."⁵⁰ Reassurances of this sort guaranteed that Switzerland would be of little concern to Lincoln's government, but the same was not true of the public. Throughout the Civil War and into reconstruction, writers in both countries drew comparisons

⁴⁹ FRUS, 1861, 330.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 337.

between their civil wars and, despite their obvious differences, found instructive lessons could be drawn. Many of these writings reveal the existence of a sense of republican community and self-identification as vanguards in the historic struggle against reaction and arbitrary power. The nature and limits of this imagined community will be explored by three means: examination of newspaper reports in the two countries, the testimonies of Swiss veterans of the American Civil War, and official government exchanges. The first section will focus on Swiss reactions to the Civil War, before shifting attention to America, where the example of the *Sonderbundskrieg* was considered by some as a potential model for reunification and reconstruction.

When news of the commencement of hostilities reached Switzerland, the reaction of the *Gazette de Lausanne's* American correspondent typified and molded the common attitude of the Swiss public: "the United States is faced with the same crisis we passed through in 1847, in the *Sonderbund* War. In Switzerland, the quarrel was over the Jesuits; in the United States it is about blacks. The result will probably be the same: the consolidation and aggrandizement of the central power."⁵¹ George Müller, in his excellent study of Swiss opinion on the American Civil War, identified among Swiss radicals a conviction that the Union cause was their own, that the South "threaten[ed]

⁵¹ *Gazette de Lausanne*, 30.05.1861, «Les Etats Unis entrent dans la crise que nous avons traversée en 1847, dans la guerre du Sonderbund. En Suisse, la querelle avait commencé par les jésuites; ici, c'est par les nègres; le résultat sera probablement le même: l'affermissement et l'agrandissement du pouvoir central... C'est la répétition en grand de notre histoire pendant les années 1845 à 1848.»

freedom even in their own house".⁵² This attitude is evident in the *Journal de Genève*'s assertion that for Swiss in the Union Army "in defending their new country, it is still the old soil of their fathers they defend".⁵³ They understood slavery to be the "sole cause of the war" and were not persuaded by arguments suggesting tariffs or states' rights were the root of the conflict. Such obfuscation had been used to denounce the radicals during the *Sonderbund* crisis, and their unequivocal support for the North stood on ideological grounds. They perceived the war as a clash of contradictory principles and part of a supranational battle for liberty. The diminishment of states' rights, even if that were the Union's aim, would not have troubled them, nor would have the spread of commerce and industry the Union's victory ultimately entailed.

Common principles also led many Swiss to question the extralegal powers Lincoln assumed in the course of the war. The *Journal de Genève* worried that "the grand democratic experiment of our century" might become a "new edition to the old history" of republics degenerating into dictatorships, Abraham Lincoln another Oliver Cromwell.⁵⁴ Similarly, the *Gazette de Lausanne* questioned the wisdom of allowing Lincoln to recruit soldiers from the states without their accession, to print money at will, and for congress to invest in him the powers of "a complete and absolute dictator."⁵⁵ Swiss radicals hoped the United States would emerge reunified, but not at the cost of its democratic principles. There was

⁵² George Müller, *Der amerikanische Sezessionskrieg in der schweizerischen öffentlichen Meinung* (Basel, 1944), 43.

⁵³ *Journal de Genève*, June 12, 1861, «en défendent sa nouvelle patrie, c'est encore le vieux sol de ses pères qu'il defend».

⁵⁴ *Journal de Genève*, August 02, 1862, «la grande expérience démocratique de notre siècle... nouvelle édition de la vieille histoire d'une dictature».

⁵⁵ *Gazette de Lausanne*, March 30, 1863, «d'une dictateur complète et absolue.»

a sense that America had grown too quickly and in its rush to fill the continent had allowed material interests to flourish at the expense of more noble principles. For the same to happen at the highest level of its government would be a catastrophe for freedom around the world.

There were, of course, less sympathetic segments of the Swiss populace. Among the Catholic-Conservatives of the former Sonderbund cantons perceptions were ambivalent. They were naturally supportive of states' rights, but opposed slavery on religious and ideological grounds. An 1864 editorial in the *Confédéré du Valais* argued for the right to liberty and revolution, but maintained that the Confederacy failed to meet the criteria of a just revolution as it had not "exhausted constitutional means" and did not have justice or liberty "as its goal".⁵⁶ Thus while they distinguished between their own recent conflict and American secession, they, nonetheless, imagined the American Civil War in the language of their own history. In the Canton of Valais, newspaper reports termed the Confederates "*Sonderbundiens*" and emphasized the centralizing force of the Union.⁵⁷ Yet, in none of these places was there unalloyed sympathy with the Confederacy.

In Zurich, however, business interests completely superseded liberal ideology, as commercial security was the paramount interest of the moderate liberals of Zurich. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which George Müller classified as the organ of Zurich's commercial interests, made little effort to conceal their material concerns. They emphasized tariffs protecting Northern business interests

⁵⁶ *Confédéré du Valais*, July 14, 1864, «deux conditions constituent ce droit, la révolution doit avoir pour but la justice, la liberté... après avoir épuisé les moyens constitutionnels.»

⁵⁷ Ibid.

as the primary cause for Southern agitation, and already in June 1861, were anxious about cotton imports yet to be disrupted.⁵⁸ Although they referred to the Confederacy as a "*Sonderbund*", analogies with the recent Swiss conflict were seemingly avoided, so as not to remind Zurich's residents that many of the same principles they went to war for were being tested on the battlefields of America. In May 1865, a mass gathering was called in celebration of the Union victory, but the citizens of Zurich failed to respond in numbers, leading the United States Consul in Zurich to remark "The attendance was large and though but few Swiss were present the meeting suffered not at all in consequence, as it is a well know fact that most of the able men to be found here are Germans."⁵⁹

Zurichers uncomfortable position vis-à-vis slavery was evident in an editorial run in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* celebrating the abolition of slavery. Its words ring hollow given that journal's previous stance, and the cause of their celebration was the assumption that the Civil War's conclusion augured the renewal of the transatlantic cotton trade. A similar attitude was manifest in the Genevan Jacques Henri Serment's treatise on the subject of Southern reconstruction in which he stated one need not be a humanitarian to wish for the enfranchisement of former slaves, as the sooner it happened the sooner they would return to farming cotton for export to Europe.⁶⁰ It must, however, be remarked that such sentiments were uncommon in most of Switzerland, where the

⁵⁸ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 8, 1861 & August 7, 1861.

⁵⁹ J. Remington Fairlamb, Consular Dispatch, May 5, 1865, quoted in Heinz K. Meier, *The United States and Switzerland in the Nineteenth Century* (The Hague: Morton & Co., 1963), 75.

⁶⁰ Jacques Henri Serment, *La Question des Nègres et la Reconstruction du Sud aux Etats-Unis* (Geneva: 1866; reprint, Cornell University Press).

abolition of slavery was viewed as a good in itself and the Union victory as the triumph of "the cause of political and social freedom."⁶¹

The assassination of Lincoln occasioned a tremendous outburst of sympathy from the Swiss people. Hundreds of letters of condolence and congratulations were sent from communities all over Switzerland, ranging from political leaders in Bern to choral societies in small towns. The people of Geneva hoped America would continue to "stretch a hand to the liberties of all peoples", while another letter spoke of the sympathy of the Swiss "national heart which has ever beat in unison with that of the United States," and with its "great principles of free government".⁶²

This sentiment was also evident among the many Swiss immigrants in America. During the Civil War an estimated 53,000 Swiss lived in the United States, with over 50,000 residing in the North.⁶³ Perhaps not surprisingly, their perceptions of the ongoing war were remarkably similar to those being published back home. Around 6000 Swiss men served in the Union army, mostly draftees, though many joined simply for gainful employment or, as Rudolf Aschmann, a Swiss Union officer, claimed "Love of the military was an added factor; no Swiss can ever stand by idly while shots are fired and trumpets are sounding."⁶⁴ There were, however, others who claimed high-minded motivations, including Emil

⁶¹ *Basler Volksfreund*, April 29, 1865, «die Ursache für politische und soziale Freiheit.»

⁶² *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Late President of the United States of America, and the Attempted Assassination of William H. Seward, Secretary of State, and Frederick W. Seward, Assistant Secretary, on the Evening of the 14th of April, 1865: Expressions of Condolence and Sympathy Inspired by These Events*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1866) 552-578.

⁶³ Exact numbers are difficult to calculate as many Swiss emigrated through Germany and were generally not distinguished from fellow speakers of their languages.

⁶⁴ Aschmann, 24-25.

Frey, a future president of the Swiss Confederation, who later testified that he was motivated by the conviction that "The dismemberment of the Union would seriously injure the cause of liberty in the world."⁶⁵

The thousands of Swiss who fought for the Union gave proof to these grand sentiments. Francis Joliat in Missouri, organized and commanded the Fifteenth Missouri Volunteer Infantry, a unit referred to as the "Swiss Rifles", who despite the name were mostly Germans. In the *Anzeiger des Westens*, Missouri's leading German language newspaper, Joliat published an appeal to the Swiss of Illinois and Missouri to take up arms for "our adopted country America, which finds itself faced with another Sonderbund."⁶⁶ Likewise, Hermann Lieb of Thurgau, who rose from the rank of private to colonel and trained a negro regiment of 1800 men which he commanded in battle, saw parallels between the two wars. The aforementioned Rudolf Aschmann distinguished himself in the Army of the Potomac before losing a leg shortly before his term of service concluded. *Drei Jahre in der Potomac Armee*, Aschmann's memoirs of his years in service to the Union, is replete with the superficial comparisons of Swiss history one might expect.

There was nothing ordinary about the Basler Emil Frey's experience in America. His story is particularly illuminating as it reveals the limits of the affinity between Swiss and American ideals, which, ironically, Frey would later be held to be the exemplar of in a 1912 *New York Times* article titled "How Libby

⁶⁵ Quoted in Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2002), 47.

⁶⁶ Francis Joliat, *Anzeiger des Westens*, July 29, 1861, "Unsere Wahlheimat Amerika, vis-à-vis anderen Sonderbund ist heute".

Prison Gave Switzerland a President". Later in life, Frey would contribute to this idealized *fable convenu* by never betraying his earlier apprehensions about Republicanism and outright distaste for American society. While living in the United States, however, he spared no scorn, referring to the country as "Malheurmerica" a portmanteau of the French word *malheur* (misfortune) and America, which was for him a land of misfortune. Frey arrived in America in 1860 looking for adventure with no real intention of settling. His wealthy father was a leading political light in Basel Country who imbued his son with "bourgeois radicalism" and a "sense of social responsibility".⁶⁷ These values were tested as soon as he stepped foot on American soil. In a letter home, he informed his father "I do not like America and I will and never can like it... I hate this kind of sloppily dressed, finger-snotting, spitting, stinking personal freedom... I shall return to Europe a confirmed aristocrat". He tentatively identified himself among the "so-called Republicans", so-called because he likened others' commitment to freedom to the "way the farmer loves his cow: when she gives him no more milk, he'll sell her."⁶⁸ "Politics in this country" he wrote in another letter to his family in Basel "is determined mostly (only!) by commercial interests" and "the political views of the individual depend on the condition of his business".⁶⁹ His opinions were typical of well-heeled European visitors to America, unsettled by the rough manners of its people.

⁶⁷ Hedwig Rappolt, trans., *An American Apprenticeship: The Letters of Emil Frey, 1860-1865* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 211.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

Another source of his revulsion to American materialism was perhaps that it rubbed off on him. Frey struggled to find work in the United States, travelling as a farm hand occasionally and being swindled often by miserly employers. In desperation he considered the South might "hold the greatest promise" stating he "wouldn't mind—may God forgive... the sin—accepting a position as overseer of slaves on a plantation; after all the position of a deputy manager on an estate in East Mecklenburg or East Prussia is not much different."⁷⁰ When the Civil War began, Frey joined the Union Army, not because of any principled stance but because a family friend, Freidrich Hecker, a German veteran of 1848, was organizing a regiment in Illinois and Frey was desperately in need of money. He assured his family the war was likely to be over before he finished training, though he was indeed eager to "teach the slave barons a lesson."⁷¹ He was frustrated by the moderation of the Union's initial response to secession and absorbed camp gossip to a disconcerting degree. He viewed Lincoln as a "dunderhead and traitor" directed by his "secessionist" wife and was convinced that "when the contractors and supply merchants have all filled their pockets, Seward the fox will come and make peace, and the imbecile traitor Lincoln is going to sign it."⁷² He identified with the radicalism of Generals John Fremont and Benjamin Butler and considered their dismissal proof of the Union's moral bankruptcy. He even, tongue-in-cheek one hopes, recommended a purge, writing to a friend in Canton Vaud "We need a Robespierre, he would be master of the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁷¹ Ibid., 95.

⁷² Ibid., 99-100.

situation. A nation which disavows a Frémont and relieves a Butler of his command must be chastised by a Robespierre."⁷³

Despite harboring certain misgivings, Frey fought bravely, rising to the rank of captain before being captured at Gettysburg. For eighteen months he was interned at Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, where he suffered extreme deprivation, finding sustenance in rats with whom he and two others shared a cell. This experience hardened his already considerable contempt for the South, its institutions and, above all, its slaveholding masters. Frey's experience received much attention from journalists in Switzerland and the United States and he became a symbol of the "sister republics" kinship. He refrained from contradicting such proclamations and perhaps even came to believe what his younger self had outright rejected. He never repeated his criticisms of Union generals and American mores and, once back in Switzerland, propagated the notion that the Sonderbund and American Civil War had been concomitant conflicts in the general struggle for freedom and democracy.⁷⁴

In addition to Henry Wirz, the notorious commandant of Camp Sumter and one of only three men executed following the war, another notable Swiss in the service to the Confederacy was the Zurich-born propagandist Henry Hötze. Born in 1834, Hötze's worldview was defined by the political crisis of his youth and an early interest in scientific racism. He was a Jesuit-educated Catholic in Protestant dominated Zurich and as such was intensely committed to minority rights, which in mid-nineteenth century Switzerland entailed an equally intense

⁷³ Ibid, 139.

⁷⁴ Müller, 85.

commitment to cantonal rights. When he moved to Alabama around 1850, Hötze arrived already convinced of white supremacy and of the vital importance of states' rights in federal republics. As he would later write in response to one *Mobile Tribune* editor's comment that as a foreigner he ought not involve himself in American politics, Switzerland "has a system of confederated government similar... to that of the United States", Hötze retorted, and "States Rights and Federal powers were discussed over [my] cradle as much as over that of the *Tribune's* editor."⁷⁵

Hötze was, therefore, perfectly suited to propagating the Confederacy's message abroad and in 1861 he was sent to England to do what King Cotton could not, sway British public opinion. He wrote extensively in a weekly journal he created, *The Index*, and was also published in several local newspapers. He brought an elevated sophistication to Confederate propaganda, defending the Confederacy with the language of nineteenth-century nationalism, liberalism, and Swiss political rhetoric. He portrayed the Confederacy as the political manifestation of a distinct Southern nation, a crucial point in his effort to appeal to European liberals sympathetic to the notion of national sovereignty. Slavery figures as a positive good in his writings, where he argued it would minimize social inequality among whites and empower the Southern nation to achieve self-determination and avoid the "foreign yoke" of the Northern states.⁷⁶

Although Americans did so much less frequently than their Swiss counterparts, they also ventured to draw analogies between the two wars of

⁷⁵ Lonnie A. Burnett, *Henry Hotze, Confederate Propagandist: Selected Writings on Revolution, Recognition, and Race* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

secession. With one notable exception that will be examined at length in the following section, most of these accounts were generally superficial until Reconstruction, when the Swiss example gained pertinence. The typical wartime article resembled one published in the *New York Times* on May 29, 1861, titled "European Precedent for America". This article provided readers with a general overview of the Sonderbund War, which it was claimed "Forever put down the odious doctrine that minorities may rule." The victory of the "only Government in the world which resembles ours in all its essential features" against an opponent espousing "excellent Southern rights' doctrine" and the relative peace that ensued were held as evidence that the United States could hope for a similar fate.⁷⁷

The *Cincinnati Daily Press* responded to an outrageous article from the *London Times* that celebrated America's descent into chaos as proof of the misguidedness of its institutions. The London paper absurdly suggested "To get to days of civil war in Europe, we must go back hundreds of years. It is such a spectacle as Europe has not seen since dark ages of history." This raised the hairs of the *Cincinnati Daily Press* who gleefully pointed to the Sonderbund War to refute the *Times* article, before adding "that there is no State in America so purely democratic as some of the Swiss cantons" to dispel any notion of America violating the rights of its citizens by refusing the right of secession.⁷⁸

Surprisingly few articles on the subject appeared in subsequent years, that is until the Civil War's conclusion. Reconstruction divided Americans over how to proceed. One gets a sense that people were desperate to find some sort of

⁷⁷ "European Precedent for America," *New York Times*, May 29, 1861.

⁷⁸ *Cincinnati Daily Press*, June 15, 1866.

precedent to guide them through Reconstruction. Most found nothing satisfactory, though others latched on to the Swiss experience to advocate their position. Some articles written on the subject were well-reasoned, particularly one published in Henry J. Raymond's *New York Times*, that reflected Raymond's moderate Republican stance toward the defeated South. It advised imitation of the Swiss example where "It was never claimed that the cantons had forfeited their right as states to the confederacy."⁷⁹ Its position was that the longer the states of the confederacy were excluded the more profound would become the animosities that had divided them.

The majority of other similar articles were clumsy works of sophistry that reflect a romantic view of Switzerland as peaceful even at war. The most remarkable of these was published in the *St. Louis Republican* in May 1866 and reprinted in newspapers around the country. It began with a realistic and accurate perspective, noting "The war in both cases was commenced for the maintenance of a principle to which a majority... would not agree... the seceders submitted only because they were overpowered, and not because they were convinced of the injustice of their principles." Accuracy ended there, however, as the proceeding paragraphs seem to have been invented out of whole cloth. The author continued by suggesting "in Switzerland nobody thought either of revenge or of exclusion of the seceders... Here the greater duration of the struggle... created the unfortunate and anti-democratic idea of imposing a series of conditions on to the vanquished." He continued by falsely stating that in Switzerland everyone was included in

⁷⁹ "A Swiss Precedent as to the Results of an Unsuccessful Attempt at Secession," *New York Times*, February 19, 1866.

drawing up the 1848 Constitution, "Whilst here the war has been used as a pretext for the change of a most admirable national Constitution for the benefit of some Eastern states." At this time, only the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments had been introduced, making clear what they referred to as "measures that no imaginable force on earth could make us agree to."⁸⁰ This sentiment was echoed and embellished in other Southern newspapers, notably the *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, which admonished the *St. Louis Republican* for understating the generosity of the Swiss toward their erstwhile opponents.⁸¹ They practically begged to be treated as the cantons of the *Sonderbund* had been, but in their ignorance had no concept of what it was they requested.

The Southerners who argued thusly were ironically echoing the bifurcated national myth of general unity following civil war established by the victorious liberals and radicals following the *Sonderbund*. It is difficult to blame them for doing so, as information on recent Swiss history did not abound, but they ought to have recognized the ascendancy of the radicals in the years following the *Sonderbund*. So thorough was the radicals' domination of Swiss politics that it was not until 1891 that a Catholic conservative was elected to the seven-member Federal Council. Despite being left to manage affairs within their cantons, where they were quickly reelected after the puppet representatives the radicals needed to approve the constitution had fulfilled their purpose, they were completely unable to resist the centralizing state. What some Americans mistook for political harmony was single-faction dominance.

⁸⁰ Reprinted in *Ottawa Free Trader* (Illinois), May 12, 1866.

⁸¹ "An Historical Parallel," *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, June 11, 1866.

It was not only the radical-liberal ascendancy that gave the lie to the national myth of post-Sonderbund national harmony. Socially Catholics were marginalized to such an extent that one scholar has gone so far as to assert that Catholic Conservatives relegated to a "veritable cultural and social ghetto".⁸² Ellen Lovell Evans, in a study of Catholic political parties in Europe discusses the *Kulturkampf* phenomenon of the nineteenth-century and describes the various misdeeds committed against Catholics and Conservatives following the *Sonderbundskrieg*. In some areas, unscrupulous liberals and radicals engaged in gerrymandering and voter manipulation, neither of which would shock Americans accustomed to such practices, but much worse occurred as well. Exiles, imprisonments, and the confiscation of ecclesiastic and private property occurred when former rebels refused to swear loyalty to the Confederation.⁸³ Informal censorship prevented Anton Philipp von Segesser, a former Sonderbund leader, from publishing a brochure critical of the liberal constitution Lucerne adopted following the war.⁸⁴ What gave an appearance of consent and approval was that the victorious party in Switzerland was more unified in their project and rapidly imposed its will, while in America radical republicans and proponents of more moderate policies clashed incessantly.

In addition to the extensive list of oppressive measures that could be further enumerated, the most important aspect of Swiss reconstruction Americans

⁸² Humair, 1848, 77, "Le monde catholique continue ainsi à vivre en marge de la société et des institutions libérales-radicales, se construisant un véritable ghetto social et culturel"

⁸³ Ellen Lovell Evans, *The Cross and the Ballot: Catholic Political Parties in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, 1785-1985*, (Boston: Humanities Press, 1999), 78-92.

⁸⁴ Pierre du Bois, *La Guerre du Sonderbund: La Suisse de 1847*. (Paris: Alvik Editions, 2002), 174.

advocating imitation of the Swiss overlooked were the indemnity payments the defeated cantons, as well as neutrals Neuchâtel and Appenzell Innerrhoden, were obliged to pay. A total of several million francs was paid, some by a nationwide public subscription that demonstrated a spirit of reconciliation, before payments were suspended. The exorbitant costs accrued in the protracted American Civil War, combined with the devastation of the Southern economy, led politicians to rarely consider war reparations and, more generally the Swiss model of national reintegration.

In light of the manifest sense of politico-cultural solidarity that informed Swiss perceptions of the American Civil War and American's frequent appeals to Swiss history for guidance, it can be said with certainty that many in the "sister republics" continued to identify as kindred republicans. The notion "sister republics" could support rhetoric, and so long as one did not look too closely, much could be assumed from superficial similarities. But as will be seen in the following section where the writings of John Watts de Peyster are examined, seams become visible under close examination of particulars.

John Watts de Peyster: Secession in Switzerland and the United States Compared

During the early years of the American Civil War, articles comparing the Sonderbund with the present conflict appeared in journals all over the United States. Most of these are unremarkable as they present the Sonderbund as less of a lesson for Americans to learn from and more as a neat fact to keep in mind. Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly most thorough, contemporary attempt

to compare the history of the Swiss and American civil wars is the sententious John Watt de Peyster's *Secession in Switzerland and the United States Compared*. The scion of a distinguished Knickerbocker family, de Peyster was a noted military historian and lawyer strongly committed to the Union cause he and his three sons served.⁸⁵ Originally delivered as the 1863 annual address of the Vermont State Historical Society, this polemical monograph is remarkable for its absolute and unqualified assertion of the "perfect" parallel between the two conflicts, "even to particulars".⁸⁶

His very desire to discover an analogous set of events was born from his belief in progress and a set course towards liberalism, democracy and modernity, which were one and the same in his mind. He quoted Thomas Macaulay who likened "Liberty" to:

the Fairy of Ariosto who, by some mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear at certain seasons in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those who injured her during the period of her disguise, were forever excluded from participation in the blessings which she bestowed... Such a Spirit is Liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile... woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her! And happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and glory.⁸⁷

Implied in this tumid analogy is the conviction that liberty, loosely defined and understood, would mark the end of historical development.

Like Macaulay, de Peyster classified historical actors in two categories: those who impelled progress, understood as moral and material improvement, and

⁸⁵For more information on the life of John Watts de Peyster see Frank Allaben, *John Watts de Peyster, Volume 1 & 2* (New York: Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, 1908).

⁸⁶ John Watts de Peyster, *Secession in Switzerland and in the United States Compared: Being the Annual Address, Delivered Oct. 20th, 1863, Before the Vermont State Historical Society in the Hall of Representatives, Capitol, Montpelier* (Catskill, NY: Joseph Joesbury, 1863), 37.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

those who impeded it. This binary informs de Peyster's teleological notion of the historical process as a certain progression toward liberty and a rationally ordered society. This belief was manifest in his assertion that "human events repeat themselves, even as to details".⁸⁸ The failure of recent experiments in republicanism, particularly the Republic of the United Netherlands, a once "mighty republic" now "sunk into a third rate monarchy", fueled doubts about the compatibility of "freedom in government" with "human existence".⁸⁹ Fortunately for the United States, de Peyster could announce "Switzerland has solved the problem on a small scale" and the United States must follow its example, albeit "on a grand scale."⁹⁰

Like the Swiss liberals and radicals who modeled their constitution on that of the United States, de Peyster was convinced that "Republics... must learn from republics" and "the federation of the Swiss cantons is the only one worthy to be named alongside of the great American experiment." He dismissed the "Nominal republics" of Latin America as "little better than anarchies", leaving Switzerland and the United States as the only states worthy of comparison. To this end, de Peyster endeavored to deduce "rules and axioms" from the Swiss experience to illuminate a path out of war. The number of parallels de Peyster manages to force into his comparison is almost comical. Feudalism is likened to slavery, the Reformation to abolitionism, the Free Corps raid on Lucerne to John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Huldrych Zwingli to George Washington and he even refers to

⁸⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 36.

Zug as "the Georgia, as to location, of the Sonderbund".⁹¹ His efforts speak to a recurring theme of this essay: cosmopolitan minded thinkers flattening the complexities of foreign societies to make them understandable through the prism of local experience.

Although there certainly were some interesting parallels between the two secession movements and civil wars, his faith in their "perfect" affinity was formed more by a projection of parochial biases and local experience than by his admittedly thorough examination of Swiss history. A Protestant Republican imbued with the anti-Catholic sentiments of his milieu, de Peyster was overly keen to equate the two rebel groups, viewing the "dextrous, unrelenting and bigoted" Jesuits as "not unlike the Southern disunion leaders" in "political cunning, recklessness and energy". Untroubled by the fact that secession in both cases generally had popular support, he accuses the leaders of both secession movements of manipulating "that part of the population... not affected by the improvements of the age... who live apart from the civilizing influence of commerce and intellectual pursuits" into rebellion.⁹²

His equation of the "slavocrat-oligarchy"⁹³ of the South with the Jesuits, who are given a role in events disproportionate to their actual involvement, is based on a tendentious understanding of the Protestant Reformation, to which he attributes all "liberal elevating and regenerating influences", including abolition.⁹⁴ He goes so far as to suggest "The Reformation was Anti-Slavery in *intent*; the

⁹¹ Ibid., 60.

⁹² Ibid., 11-12.

⁹³ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 30.

dominant church then Pro-Slavery in *effect*" (italics in original) (27), allowing him to associate two disparate factions possibly for the sake of his narrative, but certainly to reinforce his moralized reading of history.

De Peyster's opinions on the relationships between religion, republicanism and modernity were hardly unique. Protestantism inspired a multitude of eighteenth and nineteenth century political innovations and social reforms, many of which are considered hallmarks of modernity.⁹⁵ Rationality determined the nature of these reforms to a large degree and Daniel Walker Howe and other scholars argue that the sense of individual autonomy Protestantism fostered was responsible for this and "issues of morality and religion were built into the second party system from its inception". It is therefore a mistake, albeit a common one, to dismiss the role of ideology as a determinant of political allegiance in antebellum American.⁹⁶

This link, though often overlooked today, was evident at the time, particularly to Alexis de Tocqueville. He detected in the beliefs of American Protestants "a form of Christianity which" he could not "better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion." Its tendency was to behave as if "every principle of the moral world is fixed and determinate, although the

⁹⁵ There is much scholarly debate on the connections between reform, Protestantism, and capitalism. David Brion Davis has argued that, inadvertently though it might have been, abolitionists promoted bourgeois capitalism by supporting free labor. Thomas Haskell argues that it was capitalism that generated the humanitarian impulse that drove reform by expanding individuals causal perception and encouraging people "to attend to the remote consequences of their actions." The facts are somewhat immaterial to the present project as perception is of greater value to an intellectual history than truth and the debate surrounding the relationship of ideas and institutions is seemingly irresolvable.

⁹⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, "Religion and Politics in the Antebellum North," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

political world is abandoned to the debates and experiments of men." The products of these debates and experiments were rationally constructed policies rooted in fixed morality, not determined by a religious authority as many imagined the politics of Catholics to be. Thus, as their political ideology originated from their religious morals "Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other."⁹⁷

Many of the leading political issues of the nineteenth century were related to economic policy, matters which Calvin, Luther, and the Bible were largely silent on. Protestants were, therefore, free to rationalize their own political and economic order. And *order* it was, for they largely supported the Whig's American system, which Howe asserts was logical, for, like their faith, it gave order to the economy, directing the energies of American society toward a consciously planned goal, in contrast to the rather haphazard laissez-faire policies of the Democrats. The dominant forms of nineteenth century Protestantism emphasized the need for individuals to take control of their lives and it was only natural that their political expression was active support for planned economic growth.

The cultural values Howe and others identify with Whiggery, and later Republicanism, such as the emphasis placed on the cosmopolitan and national over the local, rationalized order over traditional customs and irrational spontaneity, and prioritizing individual autonomy over communal rights were

⁹⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America Vol. 2*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Vintage, 1990), 300-306.

linked to a Protestant notion of personal salvation. As Howe describes it "Voluntary discipline represented Protestantism's alternative to the authoritarianism of traditional society".⁹⁸ De Peyster's writings reflect a sense that in the North people were furthering progress through mastery of their passions, while Southern slavery spoke to the hedonism of a dissipating society. Thus, what de Peyster and other Republican reformers regarded as moral discipline Southerners equated to tyranny.

Many Protestants in Europe and in North America regarded Catholicism as a menace to true Christianity, not as an acceptable alternative denomination. Catholics' acceptance of received religious authority led to questions about their ability to adapt to a political system that demanded the exercise of individual conscience. Furthermore, like many Americans at the time, de Peyster imagined Catholics to be part of an anti-democratic conspiracy against modernity, incommensurate with the Catholic Church's actual opposition to liberalism and democracy. To understand the religious antagonism that was still intense in the nineteenth century, one must keep in mind that de Peyster was a man contemptuous of all things Catholic who harbored a three hundred-year-old grudge over the dispersal of Zwingli's ashes to the wind "mixed with those of swine".⁹⁹ It was thus with ease that he positioned Catholic Swiss with the infinitely more reprehensible slaveholders of the American South as "enemies of progress".¹⁰⁰ For de Peyster "Switzerland presented a perfect picture of the *Status* of Romanism and Retrograde Tendencies and Protestantism and Liberal

⁹⁸ Howe, 126.

⁹⁹ De Peyster, 36.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Progression".¹⁰¹ Substitute "Romanism" for Confederacy and "Protestantism" for Union, as de Peyster hoped his audience would, and one sees how he managed to project the political issues of his time, namely abolition, anti-Catholicism, and economic development onto a situation where they were only partly applicable.

De Peyster's conviction of the "civilizing influence of commerce" and admiration for Zurich as "the cradle of the reformation" blinds him to the attitude of the majority of Zurichers toward the Union cause. George Müller noted in his study of Swiss public opinion toward the American Civil War, that the moderate Liberals of Zurich were the sole non-Catholic group sympathetic to the Confederacy. Like the Copperheads in de Peyster's native New York, the financial interests of Zurich's merchants and industrialists were tied up with the cotton trade and the interruption of that trade led to some economic hardship. They hoped that an independent South would endorse a policy of free trade and do away with the protectionism of the North and their economic concerns superseded whatever disquiet they had regarding support for a slave society. De Peyster spares no scorn for similarly minded urban New Yorkers, whose selfishness he contrasts with the men of "rural New York... true as steel to the Constitution and Union". Yet in ignorance he held Zurich as Switzerland's "home of liberal ideas". Thus, he overlooks an interesting parallel that demonstrates how some of the Swiss liberals de Peyster so admired were not nearly as high-minded as he fancied them to be.

De Peyster's enthusiasm for drawing parallels truly gets the better of him when he asserts that "Just as this Reaction in religious and political matters,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 28.

permitted in certain Cantons, sought to invade and rule in more Liberal Cantons, just so *Slavery* endeavored to invade the Free States and impose and continue a succession of corrupt administrations upon our *free North*"¹⁰² and "Spiritual avarice, if the term be admissable [sic], lent that vigor to the Sonderbund that the thirst for material wealth... had infused into the lords and champions of Cottondom."¹⁰³ As discussed above, the Sonderbund's very reason for being was to refute the notion that a canton's internal affairs could be interfered with by its confederates. In no way did they intend to impose their religion on Protestant Swiss and some of their number were in fact Protestant, yet de Peyster forces them into the mold of the secessionists he knew best.

As a military historian, de Peyster had much to say on the practical execution of the American Civil War and the lessons that could be drawn from Switzerland. Switzerland and its militias were a pet interest of his. He wrote extensively on the subject, publishing essays in the *Army and Navy Journal* and elsewhere, and also attempted to reform the New York State Militia according to the Swiss example.¹⁰⁴ The Sonderbund was, for de Peyster, instructive in two ways: it showed the value of "a Militia so admirably organized" that it could rapidly quash a rebellion and demonstrated that only a hard-fought victory of patriotic citizen soldiers would allow the nation to cherish more dearly the freedoms for which they fought. This second point was especially pertinent to America in 1863, as de Peyster cautioned against "the organization of a

¹⁰² Ibid., 33.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁰⁴ Frank Allaben, *John Watts De Peyster*, vol. 2 (New York: Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, 1908), 66.

disproportionate army of blacks" which would be "unworthy of a free people". He was not categorically opposed to the inclusion of blacks in the Union Army and in fact credited himself with being "the first, in print, to suggest their organization"; rather he was "opposed to a negro army outnumbering that composed of whites." He allowed that "The rough edge of the work may be taken off by our black auxiliaries", but for Americans to appreciate the significance of the freedoms they were fighting for "the finishing touches must be put on by ourselves, by our white brethren".¹⁰⁵

Despite being an abolitionist, de Peyster's concept of the American nation excluded blacks who, even in the uniform of the Union Army, would remain "hireling hands". It is likely that his exclusion of blacks from the American nation is what allows him to be so convinced of the perfect similarity of the two wars. Americans were divided over the Union's aims in fighting the civil war and, like many of his compatriots, de Peyster prioritized reunification and abolition, but, at least in 1863, he could not imagine the inclusion of millions of former slaves in the American body politic. He recognized the evil of slavery, but his primary concern was its "fatal influences... upon our free institutions".¹⁰⁶ In his mind, slavery was similar to Catholicism in that both impeded the flourishing of democratic institutions and inhibited civic virtues from taking root. In his statements regarding enlistment of blacks, de Peyster articulates a particular line of Free Soil ideology that emphasized the demoralizing effects of slavery on *masters*. He extends this thinking to the military in arguing that to enlist former

¹⁰⁵ de Peyster, 10-11.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

slaves to fight the Union cause would subject all Americans to the moral dissipation that prevented the majority of Southerners from becoming virtuous citizens of the Union.

Ironically, de Peyster's ascribes a similar notion of republican virtue to all of Switzerland, while in reality it was a notion of *Freiheit* received from the primitive Swiss cantons. De Peyster uncritically accepted a concept of republicanism that Marc Lerner describes as the "perceived ancient link between military service, citizenship and public virtue" without recognizing it was part of an ethical system he viewed as outmoded and counterprogressive.¹⁰⁷ In every Swiss canton there was a similar conception of citizens' martial duty, but outside the *Landsgemeinde* cantons this duty more closely resembled Rousseau's social contract theory, which it partly inspired, not the semi-mythical notion of freedom granted by God and maintained by virtuous behavior rewarded on the battlefield. De Peyster was trapped somewhere between these two models, as his religiosity lent him faith in Providential deliverance, while his liberalism privileged individuals' responsibility. Thus, despite being a self-proclaimed republican, his thought was essentially antithetical to communal aspects of republicanism, as his support for a modern state composed of atomized individuals was opposed the conservative concept of republicanism that led to the Sonderbund and the Confederacy.

De Peyster was similarly of two minds in his understanding of progress, vacillating between faith in its inevitability and dread that those who aimed to halt what could not be resisted might succeed. His main purpose in drawing attention

¹⁰⁷ Lerner, 17-18.

to the Swiss experience was to reassure loyal Americans that their struggle would be rewarded. He had faith that "Providence" would "conduct our affairs to the same happy result he vouchsafed in the case of the Swiss" and perceived the Sonderbund and the Confederacy as intent on halting "the progress of the age" and on restoring "abuses for the benefit of the few to the suffering of the many". In Switzerland, their efforts "had a directly opposite result" and he was confident that "The fiery trial through which we as a people are now passing, will eventuate not only in a restored UNITY, but if need be, in a STRONGER DEMOCRATIC-REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT, better fitted to perform its great work, and hold its commanding position among the Nations." (72) For de Peyster, the Swiss example was proof that ardent patriotism would overcome sectional zeal.

Much of de Peyster's argument strikes modern readers as hyperbolic, but his contemporaries praised his perceptiveness. A reviewer in the *New York Times* called it a "comprehensive and learned monograph" and found solace in de Peyster's argument that the "occasional license and sporadic excesses of liberal institutions should neither disgust nor discourage thinking men."¹⁰⁸ This was an important lesson for Americans anxious lest their republic be shattered. That de Peyster and his audience were imperceptive of the significant differences of the two wars of secession and their causes was irrelevant, for in both countries perception served the role of reality.

¹⁰⁸ "Secession Historical Parallels" *New York Times*, May 1, 1864.

Conclusion

In the fall of 1866, Swiss authorities were worried their country might somehow be drawn into the Austro-Prussian War. Although the Congress of Vienna guaranteed Switzerland's neutrality, European powers continually interfered in Swiss internal affairs over the subsequent fifty years. As anxieties mounted, an editorial appeared in *Der Bund*, the semiofficial newspaper of Bern, which considered the possibility of seeking foreign alliances. It concluded that Switzerland "would find the most efficacious succor on the other side of the Atlantic... the American Union has a real interest in maintaining the only republic which exists in Europe. That could be a sufficient reason for extending her Monroe Doctrine to Switzerland."¹⁰⁹ This extraordinary proclamation was an expression of a belief in republican solidarity and of the affinity between Swiss radical ideology and American political practices. For the United States, it was impossible to imagine extending the Monroe Doctrine to Europe, as it was merely as examples of the practical possibilities of republican government that Switzerland and the United States functioned as "sister republics".

As the exceptionalism of their political arrangements diminished with the proliferation of republics, there continued to be some exchange of political practices between the two countries. Several American states adopted referenda and plebiscites in direct imitation of the Swiss and American influence largely decided the placement of the League of Nations in Geneva.¹¹⁰ Although none of

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Despatches from United States Ministers to Switzerland, vol. VII (Oct. 16, 1866).

¹¹⁰ Thomas Cronin, *Direct Democracy: The Politics of Initiative, Referendum, and Recall* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3.

these exchanges warrant a total reconsideration of the Age of Revolutions or a wholly unique republican ideology, they do reveal that the two countries shared more than merely a bicameral legislature. They represented a practical republican alternative that endures to this day. In this light, one can hardly consider the history of either country as divorced from larger historical trends that shaped the modernity elsewhere. By placing Swiss and American history in transnational context, notions of American exceptionalism and the old joke about Switzerland being an island surrounded by land are exposed as false. The two countries had distinct political cultures, but similar circumstances made them more alike than is commonly acknowledged.

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