

Evolution of the US Democratic Party in the 1830s-1840s

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Abstract: The article focuses on the history of the Democratic Party during the bipartisan Democrat-Whig system. It shows how the nationwide issues of tariffs, slavery and expansion influenced the formation of sectional factions. Having progressed from a small-scale factional struggle, by the end of the period under review the party consisted of two major factions divided geographically by North-South. Particular attention is paid to the "Young America" movement, which originated with young and ambitious politicians who promoted infrastructure development and the idea of expanding borders. This idea came to be known as the "idea of predestination". Although the movement died out in the 1840s, the Predestination idea became the ideological basis for the invasion of Texas, California and other Mexican territories, as well as for the justification of the spread of slavery. The article examines how the controversy over the extension of slavery to the newly acquired territories caused a division of political forces in the country. "The Wilmot Proviso", which prohibited slavery in these territories, provoked protests from southern politicians, who not only began voting against the amendment in a single section, but began preparations for a convention that would decide the Southern states' secession from the United States.

Keywords: USA, XIX century, Democratic Party, "Young America", "Wilmot Proviso"

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Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States parties have played a huge role in political life. They not only expressed the interests of certain segments of the population, but also consolidated power, while performing the function of counterweights in politics. As A Schlesinger Jr. noted, the parties developed ideas, tried to regulate internal conflicts through compromises, were a career lift for many ambitious people, involved the masses in political life, Americanized immigrants (12:373–374).

When considering the development of the Party as a whole, all this is true. However, if we begin to analyze individual provisions and relate them to various stages of American

history, we can find counterexamples. In the historical period we are considering, the American two-party system did not contribute to the consolidation of American society. This was especially noticeable in the example of the relationship between the North and the South. French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville drew attention to the existence of parties that are dangerous for the future of the country. He emphasized that their rivalry is more like a confrontation between nations (11:158). Local interests were more important than national ones and more often rallied Americans along the North-South sectional lines, which eventually resulted in a party crisis and a split in the Democratic Party and in the formation of a sectional Republican Party.

Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study was the principle of historicism, which requires consideration of an event in its development; the principle of objectivity, which requires consideration of the interrelationships of various aspects of a historical event or phenomenon and their dependence on the action of a wide range of factors; the principle of scientific character, which implies the use of scientific methods of cognition and evidence-based conclusions.

Special-historical methods used in the study: historical-genetic method; historical-biographical method; comparative method. Documents of the Democratic Party, materials of the Congress, works of John O'Sullivan, J. N. Polk, Alexis de Tocqueville served as the source base for the study. Historiography is represented by the works of both domestic and foreign authors.

Results

The development of the Democratic Party before the Civil War coincides with the period that V. V. Sogrin called the second liberal-democratic transformation (10:100). This period is divided into two stages. The first stage is the Jacksonian democracy of the 1820s–1840s. The second stage is the 1850–1860s, the period of the conflict. Since the development of the Democratic Party is closely connected with the general political transformation, such a periodization generally suits it. However, if we take the factional struggle as a basis, then the splits of the party will turn out to be the key points. We can highlight several key events of the party split:

1. 1830 – E. Jackson and D. Calhoun broke up over a dispute over states' rights. D. Calhoun leaves the party;
2. 1843 – distribution of votes for a new tariff law on a geographical basis;
3. 1848 split over slavery and the "Wilmot Amendment". Van Buren's departure from the party;

4. 1854 – the formation of the Republican Party. The north wing of the Democrats sustains losses.

During the presidency of James Monroe in 1817–1825, the one-party system of the Democratic-Republican Party was established in the United States. There was an opinion that the parties as a political institution have outlived their usefulness, and this period received an eloquent name – “the era of good agreement” (1:16). But from the 1820s, a two-party “Whig Democrat” system began to take shape. According to the American historian Robert Rimini, this was the result of a change in the nature of politics. People began to see politics as a job where you can make a career. In an emerging democracy, the most effective way to advance in politics is to win elections. Special organizations began to appear in the localities to attract voters (8:133).

However, neither the transformation of politics into a profession, nor the urgent need for votes could simply lead to the transformation of the political system. Actually, if we look more broadly, this is the transformation itself. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the electoral circle has gradually expanded as it became important for politicians to attract the farmers of the northeast and northwest and the southern planters. The process of expanding the electorate accelerated after the abolition of the property qualification, and by the time of the election of Andrew Jackson in 1829, the property qualification remained in three of the 24 states.

Therefore, almost all party activity is now focused on attracting a mass of voters. The political system and parties transformed into a new system, and in 1825, after the collapse of the Democratic-Republican Party, the Democratic Party was formed.

In the South, however, the formation of the party system was slower than in the northeastern states. It is believed that this was due to the nature of political life in this region. Due to the fact that the main political events unfolded at the county level and not at the state level, there was no need for a strong party machine. And only from the 1830s did strong parties finally form here (1:65).

K.V.Minayar-Beloruchev singled out the following factors for creating a strong Democratic Party: 1. The Democrats were able to create a national party much earlier than their opponents; 2. Democrats quickly managed to rally all the factions in different parts of the country. This happened during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, when those who disagreed with his position on some issues left the party and joined the opposition (5:39).

Considering the party-political system of this period, it must be borne in mind that the parties did not have well-developed ideologies and clearly formulated programs. Before each election, party programs were developed for a new candidate. It cannot be said that the parties did not have an ideological base at all. The Democrats championed liberalism, equality of opportunity, and democracy. From this ideology flowed, for example, the fight against the national bank, the fight against tariffs, criticism of infrastructure financing at the federal level. For Democrats, government intervention in the economy was the destruction of equal opportunity for all. They believed that each state should decide for itself the problem of building roads if it needed them, the average American should not suffer because of economic interests that do not concern him. The state should help such

Americans, but not directly, but indirectly. Such assistance included the expansion of land to the west and the reduction in the price of land.

Politically, the Democratic Party advocated the active participation of Americans in government.

K.V.Minayar-Beloruchev took the geographic division as the basis for systematizing the ideas of democrats on socio-economic issues. He wrote that the southern branch of the Democratic Party was not as pro-tariff as the northern branch; that Pennsylvania and South Carolina were rivals on this issue, since the point of view of the first was similar to that of the Northern Whigs, and the second sought the abolition of trade duties. The researcher noted that the Democratic Party did not unanimously accept the State Bank, but disagreed on the issue of what should be the basis of the US financial system. The southern wing of the Democrats advocated the reduction and even the complete elimination of issuing banking powers and leaving only gold and silver as a permanent “hard” currency. The northern wing, especially the northwestern states, advocated the idea of inflationary emission, excluding in it the financial control of the government. The West Wing wanted to transfer public lands to the states for the purpose of acquiring them by local residents. The eastern wing of the Democrats was a supporter of the state sale of land (5:39).

The Democratic Party dominated during the Jacksonian Democracy. The main electoral base of the Democrats was the middle and lower strata of the population and the agrarian “peripheral” states. The Democrats were supported by slave owners, Western farmers, the commercial and financial bourgeoisie associated with the planters, and the urban petty bourgeois population (2:135).

In the 1830s, the main issue in US policy was the problem of the distribution of rights and opportunities for different groups of the population in the political and socio-economic spheres (10:130). Within the Democratic Party, this problem was realized in the struggle of factions: northern (leader – Martin Van Buren) and southern (leader – John Calhoun). Most of the pro-slavery Democrats were surrounded by J. Calhoun, Vice President of the United States. In 1830, the first split in the Democratic Party occurred when J. Calhoun and part of the southerners left the party due to disagreements with President Jackson over the rights of the states, which Calhoun defended.

Northern faction leader Van Buren sought to unite southerners and northerners by creating a cross-sectional party alliance, and hoped to avoid regional tensions in the country in this way. Thanks to this, the Democrats managed to connect different segments of the population with the help of common political and economic interests. Thus, the farmers of the North were committed to their individual freedoms and advocated the need to protect themselves from banks in the same way as the farmers of the South and West. And the merchants of New York were interested in the cotton that the planters of the South sold to them.

There were also small factions in the Democratic Party, in addition to the two largest factions. For example, Locofocos and Tammany Hall. Both factions were active in New York, the first from 1835 to the mid-1840s, the second throughout the entire period under consideration. Tammany Hall was the Democratic Party’s most powerful and enduring

institution. As a protest against Tammany Hall's attempts to influence the nomination of candidates, Lokofokos, led by writer-editor William Leggett, was formed from veterans of the Labor Party union and Democrats. Lokofokos approved the policies of Jackson and Van Buren and supported the ideas of free trade, wider circulation of money, and legal protection of trade unions. The faction opposed state banks and paper money. After the election of Van Buren, Lokofokos disappeared from the stage. However, these factions did not have a strong influence on the general party line.

Since 1845, the Young America faction has been very influential. Led by Stephen Douglas, James K. Polk, and Franklin Pierce, this faction was reformist and promoted trade, technology, and internationalism.

The economic policy of "Young America" was to support the "market revolution" and encourage capitalism; they talked about the need for a modern infrastructure of railways, highways, harbors, canals and telegraphs, believed that only free trade could lead to an improvement in the internal economic situation of the country, and saw moderate tariffs as a necessary source of state revenue. They supported an independent treasury as a way to the material well-being of all Americans, and not as a way to deprive the prosperous part of the Whigs of special privileges.

The Democratic Review, owned by John O'Sullivan, was the loudest voice of both "Young America" and the Democratic Party as a whole. O'Sullivan, in his Manifesto, published in the magazine, came forward as the author of a new theory – the "idea of predestination" for Americans, who allegedly carry a special, unique mission received from God. In modern historiography, the authorship of the idea is disputed (9:241). The Democrats already had the idea of expanding new territories, but O'Sullivan took it out of the party program. In 1845, a dispute arose over the annexation of Texas, some politicians agitated against the annexation of a new territory. At this point, the "idea of predestination" appeared. O'Sullivan spoke out against the agitators and gave the Manifesto a high pathetic character. In his essay, he spoke disparagingly of all territories that are not part of the United States. All this, O'Sullivan believed, was simply "a geographical place, nothing more than a combination of coasts, plains, mountains, valleys, forests and rivers"; after joining the United States, the territories become "part of the homeland" and cause "a thrill of patriotism in American hearts" (17:289). For the accession of Texas and other territories to the United States, according to the author of the Manifesto, the existence of American colonists on them and their desire to join the United States was enough. The arguments of other countries were not taken into account: "What could be more ridiculous than the indignation of Mexico at the violation of its rights by the annexation of Texas?" asked O'Sullivan (17:290). Thus, those who accepted the "idea of predestination" had no regard for the sovereignty of other countries. Thus, O'Sullivan and S. Douglas sought the annexation of Cuba from Spain in the midst of the Mexican War (19:102–103).

In 1840, President Van Buren attempted to withdraw federal funds from private banks to overcome the effects of the crisis of 1837. After that, another regrouping of forces in the Democratic Party took place: the southern wing was strengthened by J. Calhoun and the radical defenders of the rights of the states who returned with him, and the northern,

in the face of big business, seeing a serious threat in the actions of Van Buren, now often began to unite with the Whigs to block presidential projects. The decisive word on the eve of the next elections remained with the southern faction.

In 1840, the Democratic Party adopts the first national political platform:

- constitutionalism (resolution 1);
- liberalism in the economy and free trading (resolutions 4, 9);
- non-intervention of the federal government in the financing of the transport system (resolutions 2, 3);
- fight against the US Bank (Resolution 6);
- state autonomy (resolutions 3, 4, 6, 7);
- ban on public discussion of the issue of slavery (Resolution 7) (14).

The main idea of this document was the principle of non-interference of the federal government in the economic life of the country. Therefore, many residents of the states blamed the Democrats in general and the Van Buren administration in particular for the difficult economic situation and the inability to improve the situation. This caused many voters to leave for the Whigs.

The party acquires a regional character in the second half of the 1840s due to the aggravation of the issue of slavery. From that time on, conventions began to play a large role, turning from simple congresses for the approval of presidential candidates into a place of political battles (4:26). The northern faction was in favor of a ban on the spread of slavery outside the South, the southern was in pro-slave positions. The southern faction was beginning to gain political influence, but the issue of slavery is only a consequence, in fact, the cause was the economic difficulties that the planters experienced in the 1840s. The price of cotton fell, the problem of land development arose, the solution of which was beneficial not only to the planters, but also to the slave-owning states as a whole, since with the expansion of slaveholding and the creation of slave-owning states, the influence of these states in Congress would increase. But although power completely passed into the hands of the Whigs, from that moment on, southern planters began to strengthen their political positions. This was not least due to the disarray in the Whig party after the death of H. Harrison. The new president, J. Tyler, although a member of the Whig party, had serious disagreements with them over the State Bank, which Henry Clay intended to restore. Mr. Clay was furious because he was counting on the full support of the president, who was not a directly elected president (he replaced the deceased Harrison). J. Tyler himself was not against the State Bank, but believed that it should not act independently on the territory of the entire Union. In the end, he proposed his plan for the State Bank, but the Whigs protested, and the government resigned. In addition, President Tyler was a strong supporter of states' rights and slavery. This brought him closer to D. Calhoun and strengthened the position of slave owners in the Democratic Party. Already in 1842, in the elections to the 28th Congress, they again received the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. However, in 1843 there was a serious split in the party due to the new tariff law – they voted for it already on a geographical basis. Southern Democrats championed free trade. Northern Democrats, especially from Pennsylvania and New York, advocated higher tariffs (5:80–81).

More acute was the problem of expansion and annexation of Texas. Martin Van Buren feared a debate on the Texas issue and the issue of slavery, as this could cause a split between northern and southern Democrats.

The debate of the Democratic Party over expansion stalled at the May 27–30, 1844 convention in Baltimore. Van Buren once again tried to maintain the balance of power, and this was the reason for his defeat (6:149). Northern Democrats did not support him, preferring L. Kass, R. M. Johnson and J. Buchanan (16:167). But there was no unity in the southern democrat camp itself. D. Calhoun was a strong politician, but he led only one part of the radical southerners. Opposition to him arose in Mississippi, where by this time the economic center of the South had moved. Local planters were closely connected with northern industrialists and built economic relationships based on support and concessions to each other (2:145). But the Democrats got out of the situation by nominating James Polk, who was not a politician of national scale. J. Polk was not among the politicians considered as presidential candidates, but he had serious advantages. First, he was from Tennessee, a border state, so he was at home among both Southern and Western Democrats. Secondly, without hesitation, he supported the annexation. Thirdly, he was a close friend of Andrew Jackson and John Calhoun. Fourthly, J. Polk never opposed himself to Van Buren, and, therefore, to the Democrats of the northeastern states (5:124 125). The candidacy of J. Polk satisfied the southerners to a greater extent.

The convention showed that Van Buren and the Northeastern Democrats had lost control of the party. At the same time, the alliance of the Democrats of the northwestern and southern states, led by the southerners, strengthened. The Democrats made mutual concessions on the issue of expansion: the representatives of the northwestern states supported the annexation of Texas, and the southerners supported the annexation of Oregon. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Democrats won the election of 1844 largely due to the slogans for the annexation of Texas and California (13:160).

Along with this, the Whig Democrats' two-party system was undermined by discussions of the annexation of Texas, as it strengthened Southern slaveholders and upset the balance of power. Again there is a division of parties along geographical lines, and there is a danger of a split in society into North and South. It should be noted that during this period radical measures were not taken seriously by either the majority of the Democrats or the majority of the Whigs. Only two states, Massachusetts (North) and South Carolina (South), had politicians who called for secession. This problem was solved after the nomination of J. Polk for the presidency.

One of the most important tasks set by President Polk for his government was the annexation of California. His foreign policy towards Mexico was particularly aggressive. Polk ruled out the use of military force to annex Mexican territories, while the governments of previous presidents, Jackson and Tyler, tried to resolve this issue mainly by diplomatic pressure on the neighbor (in view of various international and domestic political reasons).

Southerners gave the president massive support. They became the most ardent followers of the aggressive US foreign policy in the South. The political influence of the planters of the South and their economic well-being, especially those who produced cotton and sugar,

directly depended on the formation of new states and the spread of slavery to them. Some industrialists and merchants of the North also supported this policy, as they were closely connected with the economy of the South. In their midst, in 1846–1847, ultra-expansionists stood out, headed by prominent politicians: K. Cushing, L. Cass, S. Douglas, and others, who insisted on the annexation of Mexican lands up to the complete annexation of Mexico. They received the support of J. Dallas and Buchanan, the US Vice President and Secretary of State, as well as some other members of the government, and had a great influence on the President.

The commercial and industrial circles of the Northeast, partly land speculators and farmers, not without reason, believed that most of the annexed land would fall into the hands of the southerners. The planters will create new slave-owning states here and push back both industrialists and farmers from the economic development of the land.

The policy of President Polk was also criticized by D. Calhoun's supporters. Even at the very beginning, D. Calhoun voted against the war with Mexico (15:654). The Calhounists believed that a further war would lead to an increase in the influence of the central government, infringement of the rights of the states, and an increase in tariffs and taxes. In addition, D. Calhoun himself did not give up hope of being elected to the presidency when he was nominated by the candidate for this post from the Democratic Party, and did not want to lose potential voters in the North.

The result of these processes was an amendment introduced by Pennsylvania Democratic Congressman D. Wilmot. On August 8, 1846, he proposed the Wilmot Amendment, according to which new territories could enter the Union only if slavery was prohibited. The amendment was outraged by President James N. Polk, who called it "harmful and stupid", writing in his diary that he did not understand "what the question of slavery has to do with peace with Mexico..." (18:138). The planters also expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the amendment. The votes in the House of Representatives and the Senate were divided geographically (3:97). The South was thus able to reject the "Wilmot Amendment".

The reaction to the "Wilmot Amendment" was very significant. The struggle that unfolded around the amendment revealed the true goals that pursued in the war with Mexico, both the majority of the Whigs and the majority of the Democrats. This led to two important consequences for both the Democratic Party and the President. The first is the formation of the left wing of the Democratic Party with the leader M. Van Buren, who decided to consistently fight against the pro-slave direction. Second, the Whig opposition party grew stronger; she defeated the Democrats in the 1846 elections to Congress and took control of its lower house. In addition, the abolitionist movement expanded, which meant a further disengagement of forces in the country. The Democratic Party split along geographical lines: Southern Democrats voted against the amendment, Northern Democrats voted in favor. In 1850, the question of the status in which to accept new territories into the States was resolved by compromise. However, according to some researchers, it was then that the northerners were forced to take a tough stance, defending their interests (7:93). The South, in turn, also rallied, thus uniting a number of large states. In 1848, as a result of the war with Mexico, Texas, Upper California and New Mexico, the northern part of the states of Sonora, Coahuila and Tamaulipas, the territories of modern Nevada, California, Utah, Arizona, New

Mexico, parts of Texas, Wyoming and Colorado, were annexed to the United States. The planters wanted to expand slavery into these new territories.

During the next election, the split in the Democratic Party, provoked by the “Wilmot Amendment”, was already evident. The party’s National Convention, which met in Baltimore in May 1848, left New York’s conservative wing to protest against the slave owners, which was only to the benefit of the Southerners. The Wilmot Amendment was rejected by the convention delegates, but the issue of slavery remained open, although some radicals tried to defend the right to non-interference in the issue of the spread of slavery. The delegates did not succumb to the pressure, and the direction of the convention as a whole was moderate. L. Kass was selected as a candidate for president, and W. Butler of Kentucky for vice president. At the same time, a significant number of slave-owning Democrats voted for the slave-owning Whig, General Z. Taylor, who suited them more than Kass (2:164).

Further, the dispute over the entry of California into the Union as a free state escalated, which worsened the position of southerners in the Senate of Congress, since it created a ratio of slave and free states of 15 to 16. Southerners began to talk about secession in case of violation of their rights. This question was discussed at a whole series of preparatory congresses and conferences. Southerners were getting ready for a general convention to be held in Nashville, Tennessee. Perhaps this was the first time they had so carefully prepared for the meeting, and although the convention was not successful, the very fact of its holding speaks of a common problem for the South and the need to solve it together. The secessionist movement began on April 19, 1849, in Tennessee, where the Democratic convention met. The delegates to the convention championed the rights of the states and tried to develop a plan of action if a law prohibiting the movement of their property was passed.

Conclusions

In this way, by the 1850s, the Democratic Party had evolved from a party based on the broad democratic masses in the 1830s, to a party controlled by its southern wing. The turning point after which the party became a pro-slave party was 1844. The growing economic contradictions between the South and the North, the growth of the regional and political self-consciousness of the South became the cause of the secessionist movement of 1850. The reason for the congress was the dispute over the newly acquired lands. On June 4, 1850, representatives of some of the slave states finally met in Nashville to protest the “Wilmot Amendment” and obtain the right to move with their property (i. e. slaves) to the territories recently taken from Mexico.

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