Introduction

Modern Americans no doubt think of the temperance movement as a rather dry affair. And when considering the Prohibition Era, the images most easily recalled are those of colorful resistance: flappers, gangsters, moonshine, and speakeasies. However, a competing image can be found at the Brooklyn Historical Society, deep within a collection that can only be described as the jumbled contents of a Prohibitionist's desk drawer. A photo taken at a turn-of-the-century Prohibition Party picnic stands out as modern and familiar. About three dozen women and men link arms in small groups and as couples, giving open smiles to the camera. Among the younger picnickers, hats have been cast aside or put at jaunty angles, and most leave their jackets unbuttoned. Only the white temperance ribbons festively attached to sashes and lapels give clue to the issue convening this particular group. One can easily imagine these lively Prohibitionists singing a chorus of Sam Booth and George T. Evans's flirtatious melody "The Lips that Touch Liquor Will Never Touch Mine." Promises of sobriety sealed friendships and romantic relationships alike.

Another surprise is a souvenir photograph of the 1892 Prohibition Party convention held in Cincinnati's Music Hall. The photo is part of the Library of Congress collection, and it showcases the Prohibition Party's formal politics, consisting of nominations, campaigns, and voting. The convention floor is packed with nearly a thousand delegates, and spectators fill many of the balcony seats. Banners with mottos or stars and stripes cover the woodwork, demonstrating a well-organized effort. The 1892 campaign would prove the party's most successful, with more than 270,000 Americans casting ballots in favor of Californian John T. Bidwell. The Prohibition Party aspired to govern, believing that it was

necessary to capture offices if it was ever to see anti-liquor laws enforced and, to this end, mimicked the major parties whenever an opportunity arose. If the Democrats became donkeys, and Republicans became elephants, the Prohibitionists insisted that they were camels. About the Illinois Prohibition Party's adoption of this mascot in 1908, one Prohibitionist noted that "the camel is the original water wagon, that it can discern a fresh supply of water further than any quadruped; that it can travel faster than an elephant or a donkey, and that it always has a hump on itself."[1] The race was on.

This book investigates the Prohibition Party – led by temperance advocates, women, and former abolitionists – and how its members harnessed moral aspirations to politics and partisan strategies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prohibitionists' lively debates, both internal and with other civic associations, provoked new inquiries into the role of religion in politics, the process of translating vision into policy, and the most reputable reasons for founding a new party. The party's founders sought to build on antebellum Americans' proclamation that the party system would remain an indispensable unit for organizing government and that it would generally be dominated by two major parties.[2]

Yet the Prohibition Party disputed antebellum Americans' assumption that a drive for self-preservation would encourage major parties to fight for voters by capturing new issues and movements. To be sure, in the 1830s, the Anti-Masonic Party had provoked the Whigs to incorporate anti-secret society language into their party platform.[3] On the other hand, it had required the emergence of the Republican Party around the antislavery issue to make urgent policy makers' debates.[4] When Democrats and Republicans seemingly operated on a new basis after the Civil War, guarding against the introduction of new political issues that might divide their

[1] "Camel Prohibition Emblem," *New York Times*, 23 September 1908; Advertisement, "Convention and Campaign Souvenirs," *American Advance*, 5 October 1912.

[2] On two-partyism, see Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 162–163.

[3] On the Anti-Masonic Party, see J. David Gillespie, *Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[4] Morton Keller notes that "the experience of the 1860s supported the view that parties were ephemeral things, rising and falling with the causes that gave them meaning"; *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 276.

ranks, Prohibitionists saw an opportunity to become the "new Republicans." They saw in their failure to gain traction a sign that the rules of the game had changed, threatening minor parties' role as a site for building and organizing new constituencies. Prohibitionists feared that they and other minor parties were being relegated to mere protest groups – a fear that was not unfounded.

The Politics of Prohibition has been shaped by scholars' focus on the elected politicians and high-profile political reformers who sought to change the party system, and hence to reconfigure citizens' part in American democracy.[5] Reformers exposed how party bosses and "the interests" abused their power and corrupted parties, and they urged government intervention in a wider array of public issues. Their greatest accomplishments included the secret ballot, the creation of pressure groups, new laws regulating nominating conventions, and the administrative state. Reformers provided democratic leaven to party politics by modifying parties' internal procedures, promoting party realignment, engaging in independent voting, and, at the same time, creating alternative political organizations. They weakened the party system's prestige and, arguably, its power.[6] Still, there were limits to their success that historians have

[5] Much of the best research on how political institutions changed has emerged from the new political history and from American political development, two schools that have brought historians and political scientists into closer dialogue. On changes in political institutions, including political parties, pressure groups, and the administrative state, see Samuel P. Hays, "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum," in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, rev. ed. (1967; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 152–181; V. O. Key Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1942); Peter H. Argersinger, *Structure, Process, and Party: Essays in American Political History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992); Keller, *Affairs of State*; Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Society: Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Paul Kleppner, *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893–1928* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); McCormick, *Party Period*; Sidney M. Milkis, *Political Parties and Constitutional Government: Remaking American Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Steven Skrowneck, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, rev. ed. (1973; repr. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1983); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

[6] An extensive historiography foregrounds the relationship between political leaders – both professional politicians and influential reformers – and political institutions. On the influence of national party leaders, see Scott C. James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State: A Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice, 1884–1936*

underexplored, and by taking a marginalized group of voters as its subject, this book investigates these limits. Most significantly, there is the question of how much and in what ways Democrats' and Republicans' dominance over party politics constrained the capacity of other reforms to disperse political power and ensure representative government.

The chapters that follow trace how the control of the party system by Democrats and Republicans came to be, the development of Prohibitionists' objections to this system, and the diverse responses that Prohibitionists' outcry provoked from other citizens. The starting point is a description of Prohibitionists' convictions, including an investigation of the ideas that distinguished them from other Americans who wrote and spoke about the anti-liquor movement and the party system. Chapter 1 examines antebellum drinking habits and the Prohibition Party's roots in a small but growing temperance movement. Chapter 2 analyzes the sources of Prohibitionists' dissatisfaction with the Republican Party and disgust with the Democrats and considers why reformers were often critical of Prohibitionists' goals. Chapter 3 explores why the Prohibition Party welcomed women – who remained ineligible to vote – and the ways in which women's participation opened Prohibitionists to new understandings of partisanship.

The next section explores Prohibitionists' ideas and experiences in the context of the party system's declining prestige and the reforms meant to purify it. Chapter 4 investigates the violent public response that ensued when Prohibitionists received enough votes to assure the election of a candidate unsupported by a majority of voters. Chapter 5 considers the dramatic political experiment engaged by the Prohibitionist families who built partisan cities in the 1890s. It also explores how utopian city-building shaped party leaders' responses to a new threat: state ballot laws

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On lawyers, corporate actors, professional politicians, and party bosses, see Keller, *Affairs of State*. Gilded Age Mugwumps were generally less successful at purging corruption and installing "good government" than Progressive Era reformers, but their work set a precedent. On Gilded Age reformers, see John G. Sproat, *"The Best Men": Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age*, rev. ed. (1968; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865–1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1998). On Progressive Era reformers, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review*, 86:2 (April 1981): 247–274.

that tended to disqualify minor parties from elections. Chapter 6 investigates how Prohibitionists reacted to the new political ideal of strenuousness by advocating personal health, manhood, and partisan community.

The final chapter concludes the Prohibition Party's story by depicting partisans' debate with reformers, pressure groups, and anti-prohibitionists about the relative value of nineteenth-century governance through courts and parties and twentieth-century forms of governance that prioritized professional and centralized leadership. The party's work culminated in a dramatic gesture: the refusal of formal party leadership to endorse the campaign for a national prohibition amendment.

This book is about minor parties' struggles, the ascendency of a Democratic-Republican stranglehold over party politics, and an ensuing transformation in the meaning of American mass democracy. The Prohibition Party's attempts to preserve itself and remain politically relevant provoked indignant, violent, and eventually dismissive responses from other politicians and reformers. By the twentieth century, many Americans had willingly accommodated to the idea of a Democratic-Republican political duopoly and criticized Prohibitionists' attempts to envision a form of politics that transcended customary understandings of partisanship and reached into the world of everyday relations. To Prohibitionists' critics, gestures such as celebrating women leaders, engaging in direct action protests, pressing lawsuits, building utopian societies, and organizing consumers were dangerously deviant and potentially undemocratic. Even Prohibitionists generally viewed these experiments as short-term solutions. Only because electoral participation was a disappearing option did they blur distinctions between social and political activism and boundaries between social and political movements. Left with few other means to attract attention and preserve their constituency, they would continually seek to revitalize their sense of partisan community through oratorical contests, rallies, and picnics like that featured in the Brooklyn photograph.

Prohibitionists' fears about the implications of Democratic and Republican dominance over the party system failed to rouse many of their fellow Americans to action; most voters continued to vote for the same parties that they had supported for decades and therefore did not sense a loss in their political agency when minor parties struggled. Americans widely dismissed Prohibitionists' anxieties as irrelevant even if true, instead focusing on how to advance their interests through the established political order. And perhaps most importantly, they concluded that a fixed two-party system possessed the immeasurable advantage of producing election results

that registered majority consensus rather than the confusing diversity of public opinion. They kept the donkey and the elephant while exiling the camel, leaving it to bleat protests to a dwindling audience. Ultimately, this is the story of how Americans came to embrace the idea of an adequate democracy – functional and steady, if not necessarily pure or ambitious.

PART I

BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY

1

Temperance, Prohibition, and a Party

Drinking liquor was the antebellum status quo, a practice so pervasive that there was little need to defend it. Taverns served as community centers, surplus rye and apples would rot if not distilled or fermented, and besides, Americans enjoyed imbibing. However, from the 1810s onward there flourished a growing temperance movement – that is, a movement encouraging people to limit the quantity and type of liquor they consumed. This movement nagged that the nation's alcohol consumption levels had crossed the threshold of acceptability. Newspapers highlighted incidents wherein drinkers beat their spouses and children, had fatal accidents at work, fell into poverty, and committed crimes. Gossip and fiction gave special emphasis to the specter of urban overindulgence. Tapping into widespread anxiety about the nation's developing market economy, temperance advocates imagined the fates of young migrant workers who drifted away from the surveillance of families, ministers, and neighbors. Lonely and lost in cities, how many youths would find the comforting lure of drink too tempting to resist? At the same time, some of the ambitious farmers and manufacturers who embraced the market economy's promise came to support temperance as an expression of their faith in self-improvement.[1] More and more

[1] On the early temperance movement and its connection to a growing market economy, see Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976; William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

people came to argue that liquor consumption was disrespectable and dangerous.

Temperance advocates' calculation of the scale of liquor consumption could be and often was overstated, but also had some foundation in fact. By modern standards nineteenth-century Americans drank copious amounts. In 1830 adult Americans drank somewhere between 4 and 7 gallons of pure alcohol per year as compared to modern Americans' 2.8 gallons per year.[2] Lest the implications of high consumption levels seem abstract, the Washingtonian temperance society encouraged newly sober individuals to share their tragic lives in confessional "experience speeches" throughout the 1840s. One can well imagine the impression made by a former drinker who, as remembered by one witness, "stated that for years he had loafed around the markets and wharves without any regular means of subsistence, sleeping in the markets and on the sidewalks, almost without clothes, or friends, and that all he sought for was rum."[3] Temperance advocates throughout the 1840s and 1850s sought to amplify the effects of *moral suasion* – the use of personal appeals to encourage individuals to refrain from drink – with regulations upon sales to children, Sunday tavern closings, and restrictive liquor licensing. At its most aggressive, the temperance movement secured prohibition laws in thirteen states and territories.

Reflecting upon their history, many Prohibition Party founders would recall how events surrounding the Civil War sealed their disenchantment with moral suasion's limitations. Northern reformers, in particular, were horrified by how war had exacerbated soldiers' drinking habits. No amount of distributing temperance pamphlets, offering lectures, or sponsoring ministers could undo the impression that alcohol consumption was legitimate escapism when the Union government was financing war with a liquor tax, and even granting soldiers a liquor ration.[4] On the other hand, seeing the federal government protect fugitive slaves and

[2] Thomas Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800–1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 7, 31. See also Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 7–11; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 4.

[3] Benjamin Estes, *Essay on the Necessity of Correcting the Errors Which Have Crept into the Washington Temperance Movement and of Its Bringing to Its Aid the Church of God* (New York: Job Printing Office, 1846), 6, in Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 164. See also Katherine A. Chavigny, "American Confessions: Reformed Drunkards and the Origins of Therapeutic Culture" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999).

[4] The liquor ration was finally revoked in 1862, although sutlers (civilian merchants) and medics continued to supply the troops.

freedpeople bolstered Northern temperance advocates' faith in the government's capacity to promote radical reform if so committed. National prohibition might be achieved county by county, state by state, or all at once, but it would relentlessly bring liberation to more people. Prohibition would free "self-made slaves" who were dominated by appetites, if not the lash.[5] Agreeing that prohibition's turn in the reform spotlight had come with slavery's conclusion, significant numbers of former abolitionists infused the temperance cause with their skills and prestige.

Most male temperance advocates (including those favoring prohibition) found their postwar home in the Republican Party, which claimed to hold a monopoly upon moral ideas. A few would gain prominence in its ranks during the 1860s, and many would emerge as lesser lights by serving on committees, giving lectures, and coordinating voters on election days. Nonetheless, some prohibition supporters grew frustrated with what they perceived as Republican lethargy in the face of an unprecedented opportunity to dry up the nation. Some of them drew upon the prewar Free Soil and Liberty parties' examples to inspire new allegiances, founding the Prohibition Party in 1869. In so doing, they completed their evolution from temperance advocates into (small "p") prohibitionists into partisan Prohibitionists. The new party would embody the most zealous political tendencies of a passionate social movement. It would bring energetic moral perfectionism into the world of party politics.

* * *

The Civil War era that preceded the Prohibition Party's founding might seem like a "passive interlude" in the temperance movement's history.[6] This lull can largely be explained, however, by the fact that temperance advocates were not single-issue reformers, but rather had multiple loyalties. Typical temperance advocates identified themselves as Christians – often Methodist and sometimes Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Baptist – who opposed prostitution, gambling, prizefighting, and

[5] Gerrit Smith quoted in "Temperance: Meeting of the National Convention," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 September 1869. The language of slavery and emancipation was used very frequently in dry discourse. On the gendered dimensions of this language, see Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[6] Jack S. Blocker, Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 71; Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 43–45.