

Organization

Chapter Six — Working Men's Party

Formed in 1829 as one of the nation's first pro-labor political parties, the New York City Working Men's Party (WMP) quickly divided along factional lines as three separate groups—each claiming to truly represent the political face of the city's working men—soon took turns hurling abuse at one another. In the midst of the mudslinging, Thomas Skidmore, the leader of the agrarian faction, published "Rights of Children" in his newspaper, *The Friend of Equal Rights*. Skidmore noticed that "Paine and others have written in behalf of the rights of men. Miss Wolstoncraft and others in favour of the Rights of Women; but few or none have said any thing in behalf of the rights of Children. Political writers, in their theories, and governments in their practice, have considered them as scarcely having any rights at all."¹ After he detailed children's natural right to food, shelter, clothing, and mental and physical education, he contrasted these rights with what philanthropic charity provided them. 1

Like the vast majority of Working Men, Skidmore was a father and grounded his political ideology in the concerns of fatherhood and ensuring the welfare and prosperity of future generations.² Just as Chapter Five detailed how skilled working men formed and maintained trade unions in order to combat perceived threats to their family breadwinning, this chapter explores how the WMP attempted to redress potential threats to organized men's obligations as fathers. Far from divorcing the political arena from the domestic arena, Working Men developed a party platform grounded in their household-based masculinity. This chapter argues that competing visions of fatherhood and the question of how best to provide for children guided the formation and activity of the New York Working Men's Party between 1829 and 1831.

First, this chapter briefly narrates the factional drama that consumed both the WMP and those who have studied it. While detailing the machinations of this factional debate is necessary for analyzing the WMP, this process has often overwhelmed attempts to interpret the events of these chaotic few years. This analysis is not concerned with determining whether any of the three factions embodied an "authentic" and "radical" Working Men's (or Workies') agenda.³ Second, this discussion shows that the WMP movement developed through specific gendered terms, demonstrating how issues of household-based masculine identity came to the forefront of this political endeavor. It argues that the three factions embodied three discrete interpretations of what it meant to be a proper working father and that their conflict stemmed from competing visions of how best to govern their children. Third, this chapter examines the party's short life through four of its most important and contentious platform concerns: agrarianism, education, worker morality, and birth control. When one steps back

from the day-to-day wrangling of the WMP, a very different picture emerges of the party, one in which the relationship between fathers and children took center stage and accounted for the factional division that eventually led to the WMP's demise.

The Working Men's Party

The rise and fall of the New York Working Men's Party is an oft-told tale. Its first histories appeared less than a decade after the party's collapse, and it has been a topic of frequent study and speculation ever since.⁴ Following a bitterly cold and economically sluggish winter, journeymen artisans met in April 1829 in reaction to their employers' anticipated move to increase the building trades workday to eleven hours.⁵ A series of meetings convened a Committee of Fifty which worked to produce a report and plan of action over the summer, even though the issue of longer workdays seems to have quickly resolved itself. Meanwhile, Robert Dale Owen, who had moved to New York in June from his father's planned community at New Harmony, followed a summer of writing in support of the Committee of Fifty with the creation of the "Association for the Protection of Industry and for the Promotion of National Education."⁶ Led by printer George Henry Evans and Dr. Cornelius Blatchly, the Association garnered support for the passage of a state law providing for publicly supported education.⁷ The Committee of Fifty finally presented its report at a mass meeting on October 19, 1829 at Military Hall. Isaac Odell, a journeyman carpenter, chaired the meeting and Robert Dale Owen served as one of its secretaries.

Mechanic Thomas Skidmore firmly controlled the WMP that emerged from the 5
October 19th meeting. He used the evening to ratify a series of resolutions in support of his agrarian program to distribute property equally among the population.⁸ Following the meeting and a few subsequent events, the committee hastily selected a slate of candidates for the upcoming state assembly and state senate campaigns. The November election proved a stunning debut for the weeks-old Working Men's Party formed in Skidmore's image. One of its candidates, carpenter Ebenezer Ford, was elected to the Assembly and two other candidates, Skidmore and his close associate Alexander Ming, Sr., each came within fewer than thirty votes of victory. All told, the WMP garnered over 6,000 of the 21,000 votes cast.

After the November election success, factions headed by Robert Dale Owen and Noah Cook moved swiftly to challenge Skidmore's domination of the party. At a large party meeting on December 29 at Military Hall, new operatives shouted down Skidmore's followers and gained control of the party. As a result of the December meeting, the party reemerged with a new seventy-member General Executive Committee in place of the Committee of Fifty. The new structure thoroughly isolated Skidmore's faction, and although he continued to attack each of the other camps, his activities had little effect on either of their electoral fates.

Robert Dale Owen led the first group, which coalesced around his newspapers, the *Free Enquirer*, co-edited by Frances "Fanny" Wright, and the *Daily Sentinel*.⁹ George Henry Evans, editor of the *Working Man's Advocate*, and other supporters of Owen's state guardianship system of education also played influential roles in this group. Noah Cook and Henry G. Guyon, who chaired the December meeting, headed the third faction within the WMP. This group gained the endorsement of the *Evening Journal* after Cook became co-editor, as well as Cook's own paper, the *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion*, and William Goodell's evangelical temperance paper, the *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*. Active temperance and Christian morality advocates including Guyon, Adoniram Chandler, and Joseph Hoxie also assumed leadership positions in the Cook faction.¹⁰

With Skidmore out of the way, the Owenite and Cookite factions continued a power struggle for control and the name of the Working Men's Party throughout the rest of 1830 and into 1831. With superior numbers, the Cookites eventually assumed control of the General Executive Committee and the party's agenda, most evident in the vote on the education sub-committee's report. The sub-committee produced a majority report which followed Cook's plan for a moderate system of publicly-funded education for all children regardless of wealth and rejected a minority report that followed Owen's more ambitious plan for a state guardianship system. According to Owen's plan, all children, regardless of wealth, would be removed from their families at age two and sent to boarding schools where they would receive equal food, clothes, and education until they matured.

Subsequently, the competing camps held separate nominating conventions prior to the statewide election in November 1830.¹¹ Cookites, allied with the Albany Working Men's Party and other Farmers' and Working Men's groups from upstate, eventually formed a coalition with the Anti-Masonic and National Republican candidates, while Owen's and even Skidmore's faction also landed on the ballot with their own candidates. The 1830 election proved to be a victory for the Democratic Party. Tammany Hall collected about 11,000 votes, with Cook's coalition candidates pulling in just over 7,000 votes. Only 2,200 men supported Owen's slate, while Skidmore's faction mustered just over 100 votes. Some incarnations of the WMP struggled on for another year, but their base of support had evaporated.

While this overview of the party has been brief, it has pointed out that in a short **10** period, three distinct factions formed within the WMP and split over a list of wide ranging issues, from agrarianism and education to Christian worker morality and birth control. Before examining these concerns in detail, it is useful to contextualize the WMP within a contemporary moment of gendered language and ideology.

Numerous scholars show how Early Republican political culture utilized the language and imagery of masculine and feminine stereotypes to provoke certain responses regarding social order and citizenship. Likewise, ideas about gender informed a variety of political endeavors, not just the American Revolution, or Jefferson's or Jackson's political careers.¹² Gendered political discourse took on specific relevance in New York state history at the time of the WMP because of recent changes in who could consider himself as a citizen. The New York Constitutional Convention of 1821 granted near-universal white male suffrage, but it was not until the changes made to the 1828 state constitution that many journeymen and laborers engaged the political system.¹³ The new franchise was a major topic of discussion and Working Men made clear their support of an egalitarian citizenry, albeit one composed exclusively of white men.¹⁴ In this political arena, a discussion about voters became a discussion about idealized white masculinity. In the words of one party newspaper, this issue came to the forefront because, for the first time ever, "every man is a voter" and could contribute to the debate.¹⁵ This reality also accounted for some of the animosity expressed by Democratic partisans, who wrote that by "throwing open the polls to every man that walks, we have placed the power in the hands of those who have neither property, talents, nor influence in other circumstances."¹⁶ Such attacks followed the WMP throughout its life as detractors accused them of being unworthy to join the public debate about ideal civic masculinity.

Agrarianism

While it is not surprising that Working Men's Party rhetoric contained heavily gendered content, it was unique among contemporary political movements in that it focused so specifically on the issue of fatherhood. It is difficult to argue that fatherhood was more important to Working Men than it was to other political activists, but the persistence of their parental concerns demonstrates their consistent desire to address the perceived threats to their ability to guide the fate of the next generation.¹⁷ In the case of the WMP, its activities, members, and platform issues constantly returned to the debate over ideal fatherhood. Although there are numerous examples of Working Men accusing one another of being less than "honorable men," their debates revolved around more than gendered name-calling; they centered on working fathers' obligations and on competing proposals of how working men should act to best fulfill those obligations.¹⁸ The shared importance of fatherly concerns, however, did not mean that Working Men agreed on what it meant to be a good father.

Three distinct images of fatherhood emerged among the WMP, each supported by a different faction. Led by Thomas Skidmore, the first camp posited that children had inherent natural rights regardless of their fathers' abilities. Skidmore's proposed program superceded many traditional patriarchal obligations, removing such issues as property inheritance and education from the prerogative of the father in favor of the state. Robert Dale Owen's faction championed the concept

that if all children received instruction in how to be rational and just, regardless of their fathers' socioeconomic or cultural circumstances, society would have true democracy. The centerpiece of this plan was Owen's state guardianship system of education that would have removed all children from their families at age two in order to provide equal scholastic opportunity. Noah Cook's followers coalesced around a more traditional patriarchal vision: while they sought improved educational and economic opportunities for their children, they wanted to protect fathers' rights to govern their posterity and create a moral environment as they saw fit. Even though fatherly matters such as property inheritance, education, moral instruction, and birth control certainly inspired and intrigued all Working Men, divisions quickly formed over the specifics of how to address these issues politically.

Thomas Skidmore's model of fatherhood and its relationship to the next generation concerned property inheritance and his design for so-called agrarianism. Skidmore published his agrarian plan in his 400-page disquisition, *The Rights of Man to Property!*, and a later pamphlet entitled *Political Essays*, written on behalf of an organization he fronted named the New York Association for the Gratuitous Distribution of Discussion on Political Economy.¹⁹ Skidmore did not package his ideas for easy consumption and he did not offer simple answers. Scholars have correctly cited the revolutionary and grandiose nature of Skidmore's plans, even if his proposals did not actually represent many Working Men's point of view.²⁰

Sean Wilentz has argued that the Skidmore-led Working Men's Party of 1829 **15** thrived because of its ability to use men such as Thomas Paine (whose work was obviously referenced in *The Rights of Man to Property!*) to claim the legacy of the Revolution and portray themselves as defenders of Republicanism. In this view of the party, Skidmore's eventual failure resulted from his opponents' ability to label him as "an unrepublican, violent fanatic who would make all possessions collective."²¹ It is, however, interesting to note what the conservative *Southern Review* from Charleston said in reference to Skidmore's use of Thomas Jefferson's passage on the right to "life, liberty, and property." Rather than accusing Skidmore of corrupting the quotation, they wrote that while they held Jefferson in the highest esteem as the greatest leader, they "hold that part of the Declaration of Independence to be mere words without meaning; or untrue in respect of any meaning that can reasonably be attached to them. Let him defend them who can."²² Debates about Republicanism certainly appealed to readers by playing with the familiar imagery of a figure like Paine or Jefferson, but they should not be seen as the guiding principles of a political party founded for material, rather than ideological reasons. At the end of the day, it was Skidmore's statements about the duty and obligations of fathers that captivated Working Men as they sat in their homes.

The central tenet of Skidmore's agrarian ideology was that all current property claims were unnatural and illegitimate; a new state constitution should be drafted in order to abolish all debts and redistribute land to all adult citizens through a "General Division of Property."²³ The state would repeat the equal redistribution of land in successive generations and abolish inheritance until inequality and corruption died out. Since the state rather than the individual would have the power to distribute land, new understandings of property rights and the use of property would necessarily develop. For Skidmore, the main function of property was the maintenance of children. He clarified what this meant for fathers and children by writing:

If, however, the government should distribute to each family, in proportion to the number of its members, it would be to disavow the principle that a child is to look to its parent for support, and to declare that its claims rested upon the community. And this places the reliance where it ought to be, upon the *rights* of the being receiving support, and not upon the *benevolence*, of parents or others... That these children have it in their *own* right, and not in the right of their parents, is evident, not only from this, that large families have more than small families, *in proportion to their numbers*; but also from this, that those children who have lost their parents, nevertheless have as much as those whose parents are living.²⁴

Anticipating "Rights of Children," Skidmore objected to the dependent relationship of children to their fathers because it did not account for the rights of children and left their maintenance to mere patriarchal whim. Skidmore predicated his fear of parental failure on the notion that current economic conditions did not allow the individual working man the opportunity to assure his family's survival. Disparities of societal wealth stripped men of their ability to properly provide for their children's maintenance. For Skidmore, the easiest way to fix the problem of unsupported children was to have the state assume some of the obligation to care for and maintain children, while relieving fathers of the struggle to accumulate property to pass along to the next generation.

A number of immediate problems contributed to Skidmore's concern about the ability of fathers to provide for their children. The harsh winter of 1829 offered a difficult test for workers and their families. Newspaper reports from the winter and early spring recount the large number of individuals seeking firewood, food, and any type of work they could get. According to the *New York Evening Post*, more than 2,000 people sought poor relief in the Fifth Ward alone over a single weekend. The same issue mentioned the establishment of "a general Soup House for the poor of the city."²⁵ Poor economic conditions did not quickly evaporate, and individual city wards still struggled to provide food and necessities for their residents in the final days of the Working Men's Party.²⁶ The inability to find employment and support one's family obviously weighed heavily on many working men. One paper reported that "thousands of industrious mechanics, who never

before had solicited alms, were brought to the humiliating condition of applying for assistance, and with tears on their manly cheeks, confessed their inability to provide food or clothing for their families."²⁷

Skidmore reacted to the increasing difficulty fathers experienced in providing for their children when he created a plan that relieved them of such obligations. Attempting to probe Skidmore's personal psychology for other causal links is a dangerous endeavor, but a few events from his life should be considered to provide more context for his ideas about property and father-son relations. As a working teenager, Skidmore continually fought with his own poor father about being able to retain some of his wages and eventually left home over the issue. The pressure of the struggle over property between poor fathers and their sons was clear when he wrote:

... when men therefore, say they seek to supply the wants, the future wants of their children, they deceive themselves. All the fathers of any generation, under the present order of things, may be considered as engaged in a struggle, not to supply the wants, the future wants, *each* of his *own* children, out of the labor of such parents; but to compel the children of some of these fathers, (and it happens to be a great majority of them), to labor for and supply the wants of the others, while these last riot in idleness and luxury.²⁸

Whether it was out of his own distrust of fathers to properly provide for their children or a realization that it was becoming much harder for many men to do so, Skidmore's ideology reflected a desire to alter traditional ideas of fatherly obligation and responsibility. Soon other Working Men openly challenged his ideas.²⁹ **20**

The most damaging attacks on Skidmore came from other Workies with different visions of fatherhood who wanted the WMP's apparatus to promote them. During the mass meeting on December 29, 1829, Noah Cook proposed resolutions that distanced the party from Skidmore and reestablished it in a new direction. The statements made sure to amplify the WMP's objection to Skidmore's notion of property relations, inheritance, and fatherhood. In lieu of communal, State-divided property, Cook affirmed individual property rights by offering workies a more reassuring and stable vision of fatherhood and household-based masculinity. Cook noted that the Working Men had "no desire or intention of disturbing the rights of property in individuals, or the public." Instead, he said, we "consider the acquiring of property to soften the asperities of sickness, of age, and for the benefit of our posterity, as one of the greatest incentives to industry."³⁰

This model of fatherhood successfully tied hard work to a legacy for future generations and one's own peaceful retirement and at the same time recalled a classic idea of household-based masculine responsibility. Cook offered Working Men a more recognizable, if more moderate, version of fatherhood. It struck a

chord because, for most working fathers, relinquishing inheritance and property rights deprived them of domestic responsibilities that although difficult to fulfill, were central to their self-identification as husbands and fathers. The promise of relief from the pressure and obligations of parental support probably intrigued many Workies, but at the end of the day, it did not reflect their attitudes toward their roles as fathers. Skidmore never relinquished his agrarianism, but after the December meeting, few listened.³¹ Long after the mainstream WMP isolated him, Skidmore continued to send letters to the *Free Enquirer* urging the party to rethink its position on fatherhood and property. The vast majority of WMP members never came around to his way of thinking.³²

For Robert Dale Owen's and Noah Cook's factions, the danger of aligning one's political future with agrarianism and its model of household-based masculinity was apparent. George Henry Evans and other Owenites' initial tacit approval of the party's agrarian resolutions eroded within weeks. Within the month of November, Evans' *Working Man's Advocate* actually changed its banner from "All children are entitled to equal education; all adults to equal property, and all mankind to equal privileges" to "All children are entitled to equal education; all adults, to equal privileges."³³ As well as decisively rejecting agrarianism, the new banner also spoke to the ongoing battle between Skidmorites and Owenites over which system best enabled fathers to benefit their children and the next generation. Owen's supporters spelled out their warning simply: "avoid SECTARIAN DIVISION, and seek justice and equality, THROUGH EDUCATION, FOR YOUR CHILDREN, not THROUGH AGRARIAN LAWS, FOR YOURSELVES."³⁴ The argument even outlasted the WMP's political viability.

Amos Gilbert, who succeeded Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright as editor of the *Free Enquirer*, traded barbs with Thomas Skidmore on the issue for three weeks in December 1831. The exchange between Gilbert and Skidmore did not aid the Working Men's Party in the electoral arena, but it was one of the clearest examples of the difference between the two groups concerning their attitudes toward fatherhood. The debate boiled down to differing ideas on how to best ensure that coming generations would enjoy a world of equality. Skidmore insisted that all adult individuals should be given property in order to ensure the equality of their positions. He asked, "would it be *wrong* that, male and female, the children of one family should have given to them, by their parents, on arriving at the age of maturity, as much of property with which to commence their career in life, as the children of another?"³⁵ His notion of property relations had progressed from his 1829 work, but still contained the idea that children had natural property rights whether they were from wealthy or poor families.³⁶

Amos Gilbert's plan, following Robert Dale Owen's ideas on state guardianship, **25** hinged upon the notion that the next generation needed equal education before it could handle the responsibility of equal property. He stopped just short of saying

that the future was more critical than the present, writing:

I do consider the proper training of the rising generation at any time, of much greater importance than attention to the physical comfort of adults (I am thinking of our circumstances in the United States) badly as it is attended to—much as improvement is called for in that matter; the former effects one generation who have lived out half their time, and them only; the latter *directly*, concerns a generation just entered upon the arena of existence; and *indirectly*, all posterity.³⁷

This bold statement must have been hard to swallow for a number of fathers reading the paper. While it squared with the idea of parental duty, it plainly asked working fathers to sacrifice their own comfort for the benefit of future generations.

The basic disagreement between Skidmore and Gilbert (and by extension Owen) came down to this question: should society fix the adults or the children first? Their final passages summed up each man's answer. Skidmore asked a pertinent rhetorical question: "When did a nation of miserable parents bring forth a nation of happy children? ...shew me a nation of happy fathers and mothers, I will shew you a nation of happy children."³⁸ Gilbert responded, "Show me a nation of men trained in wisdom and virtue ...and I will show him one, in which not only all children are receiving rational, equal education—but one where all adults have the means of living in abundance."³⁹

Public Education

Just as Thomas Skidmore's faction tied its vision of fatherhood to its agrarian plan, Robert Dale Owen's faction championed its state guardianship system of public education. All three WMP factions agreed on the need for publicly funded education, but varied greatly in their implementation. The issue was so central to the WMP, that some even declared that there would be no need for the party after settling the issue. The December 1829 meeting pledged that "the first subject which should engross our attention, or for which the public funds should be appropriated, is education. When this shall have been effectually attended to, we will cheerfully unite in support of any other just and feasible object."⁴⁰ General resolutions at the meeting supported this call for publicly funded education, but the party delayed decisions about the party's official school program until a party subcommittee could study the issue in more depth. Not surprisingly, an educational system that satisfied all three factions of the party never materialized. The greatest difference among the Working Men's competing educational plans was the relationship each conceived between the educational apparatus and the family. Robert Dale Owen's state guardianship system was the most sweeping and original. A series of pamphlets by Owen, several public speeches by Frances Wright, numerous articles in the *Free Enquirer*, *Daily Sentinel*, and *Working Man's Advocate*, and the education subcommittee minority report detailed the plan.⁴¹

Based somewhat on Owen's recollections of his own education in Hofwyl,

Switzerland, the system called for the state to remove children from their homes at age two and send them to a boarding school where they would all receive identical food, clothing, shelter, and education following the Pestalozzian model until they matured at age sixteen.⁴² Unlike day students, they would remain at the academies without vacations and would be allowed to see their parents only on very special occasions. For Owen, the basis of the plan was that if children received an equal education they would become equal adults, and thus the contemporary problems of poverty, aristocracy, and injustice would be solved. Owen produced dozens of contemporary explanations of the plan, including the following passage:

Had equal education been given in the last generation to the child of the poor as well as the rich—to the child of the mechanic as well as the president, how many parents would have been spared the sharpest and bitterest pangs of poverty—how many would have been spared the pain of anticipating their children's future hardships and degradation ... Thus is the miserable condition of the working people to be traced to the carelessness of mankind in neglecting to train up children, when young, in the way they should go—to impress upon their minds the nature and value of their privileges as freemen.⁴³

This sentiment conveyed Owen's two main philanthropic ideas. First, an increase **30** in education would tangibly affect the quality of life and the ability of working people to succeed. Second, the importance and duties of newly-granted suffrage and citizenship needed to be taught to the rising generation so that they would know how to use them properly.

Owen acknowledged that some aspects of this system seemed harsh, but they were necessary to ensure that society eradicated inequality. In his essays on education and again in the WMP' subcommittee on education minority report, he asked:

... [whether] the children from these State Schools are to go every evening, the one to his wealthy parents' soft carpeted drawing-room, and the other to his poor father's, or widowed mother's comfortless cabin, will they return next day as friends and equals? He knows little of human nature who thinks they will. Again, if it is to be left to the parent's taste, and pecuniary means to clothe their children as they please and as they can, the one in braided broad-cloth and velvet cap, and the other in thread-bare homespun, will they meet as friends and equals?⁴⁴

The state guardianship system offered little immediate reward for working fathers or other voters, but if realized, it promised a more equal society for the next and future generations of children. This was quite a sacrifice to ask from WMP fathers. For Owen and his supporters, however, this sacrifice was the very litmus test of Working Men's commitment to their household-based masculinity. "Real" Working Men would be proud to give up their children (and taxes) to send them to an

academy that created a just and equal society. Ironically, because Owen was one of the few unmarried and childless Working Men, he could not lead by example. Owen later married and even penned a song called *'Tis Home Where'er the Heart Is*, but such measures came too little, too late for his early critics.⁴⁵

Owen's tough-love model of masculine fatherhood did not gain uniform acceptance among Working Men and the system's detractors offered alternative plans. On the surface, Thomas Skidmore's educational plan in *The Rights of Man to Property!* did not vary greatly from the state guardianship system. He too called for the state to pay for children's education, clothing, and maintenance, but he made these benefits contingent upon parents' ability "to train up their children."⁴⁶ This seemingly small difference became a major point of contention because the question of fatherly duty lay at its heart.

Given that household-based fatherhood issues grounded the Working Men's platform, even small conflicts erupted into larger discussions over masculinity. If a father's prerogative was to oversee the training of the next generation, the state guardianship system deprived him of that role. Likewise, if a father's duty was to ensure the best opportunity for his children, then perhaps recognizing the state guardianship system better fulfilled this obligation. For Skidmore, the bond between father and child meant that one should not suffer for the benefit of the other. He asked Owen whether, "an attention to the education of his children (even to the extent he has named) was the most important object that could be presented to him, at the same time that, with the madness of suicide, he forbore to look after the happiness, by demanding the rights of their father?"⁴⁷ Whereas Owen's system necessitated sacrifice by fathers, Skidmore was not prepared to subject fathers to such consequences in the cause of education.



Broadside to Working Men of the Fifth Ward, 1830

Noah Cook's faction of more moderate reformers, including Aaron L. Balch, a 35 teacher from the Fifth Ward, posed a more serious challenge to Owen's state guardianship system of education. The Cook and Owen factions aligned temporarily in late 1829 and early 1830 in order to oust Thomas Skidmore from party leadership, but the groups split decisively on the issue of education. Embracing a more traditional patriarchal model of fatherhood, Cook, Balch, and others favored a school system where parents maintained an active oversight authority. They supported the ideal of Owen's plan for boarding schools where children would be "instructed, fed and clothed alike, and that this should be all

done at the public expense," but their approval of the system contained one large caveat: parental choice.⁴⁸ Noah Cook emphatically declared:

It should be entirely VOLUNTARY on the parts of the PARENTS whether they send their children to these [boarding] schools or not. We maintain that it shall be optional with parents *where* and *when* to send their children to school, because they, and they alone, are the natural and rightful guardians of their offspring, and NO POWER ON EARTH HAS ANY RIGHT TO CONTROL THEM.⁴⁹

The proclamation's strong language asserted that a father's rights were superior to the state in regard to his children's education. Cook's faction looked positively on the potential benefits of boarding school education, even at public expense, but the important decision of whether or not to remove the child from the home rested with the father. If the state could come into the domestic arena to overstep a father's dominion, they asked, would not their families be subject to the whim of "the State guardianship of the Daily Sentinel, which 'abandons' the children of the Republic 'to the world?'"⁵⁰ While Robert Dale Owen's plan accepted that paternal control of children needed to be augmented to ensure the societal benefits of equal education, Cook's followers refused to allow such liberties. They hoped "for a republican system of education," but only supported a "plan that shall leave to the father and the affectionate mother the enjoyment of the society of their offspring."⁵¹ In place of Owen's ambitious state guardianship system, Cook's camp proposed a more moderate educational system.

Cook's followers called for publicly funded education, but their approach concentrated on less expensive and ambitious ideas in order to allow fathers more flexibility. A lengthy editorial by Cook on how to get the "attention of Parents" to best establish a useful school program focused on teacher qualifications and the importance of rural education. He argued that like any other artisan or tradesman, teachers selected to care for families' needs should be well-trained and qualified. Teacher selection particularly mattered because "three-fourths of the parents in this State, who have children at school, do not *visit* and *examine* those schools once in a year." Reflecting this concern, Cook's utilitarian educational plan proposed that, "a board of County or State Censors perhaps, who should examine and grant certificates to all teachers, would be desirable. Each district should be culpable to a certain amount for employing any other teachers, and a further penalty should be imposed upon each district which did not sustain a school."⁵²

While this particular plan lacked the overall thrust and scope of Owen's or Skidmore's approach, it seemed attainable, cost-effective, and aligned with many Working Men's model of fatherhood. Most Workies supported the idea of creating an equal society through education, but they had no desire to give up their children to the prerogative of the state to achieve educational reform. Within this reality, an improved school system that promised fathers a moderate level of

publicly funded instruction for their children certainly seemed encouraging.⁵³

The lack of educational opportunities for Working Men's children, both real and perceived, highlighted the importance of all three plans for better public school services. It is difficult to determine exactly how many children received some education in these years, but a few statistics merit close inspection. One newspaper report noted that it was "stated in the able report of the Committee to whom were referred the memorials of the trustees and other citizens, that there are 20,000 children in this city between the ages of 5 and 15, who attend no school whatever."⁵⁴ Of those who attended, many frequented only religious or charity schools. Such figures alarmed Working Men. Knowing that whatever instruction children received bolstered their chances of economic success, artisan fathers who could not afford school fees personally lamented the state of education. With the apprentice system breaking down and the de-skilling of artisanal work, fathers viewed education as a way to buttress or augment craft knowledge while engaging the work arena.⁵⁵

Philanthropist Robert Dale Owen observed public school attendance figures with a very different eye. Firstly, these figures demonstrated the pressing need for publicly funded, universal education as a means of social uplift to prevent pauperism and ignorance. Secondly, they confirmed the role that religious organizations played in the education of the next generation. For a free thinking, anti-religious man like Owen, the desire to place the state in control of the educational system was at least partly driven by an attempt to deny the clergy access to children's minds.⁵⁶ Unfortunately for him (and fortunately for Cook, who quickly exploited the plan), this irreligious view contradicted many working fathers' opinions. The conflict over education revealed that the issue of religion and worker morality lurked in the background of the divide between the Owenite and Cookite factions. **40**

Worker Morality and Religion

Even though Owen's writings played down his personal irreligiosity, for years to come detractors painted him as a dangerous free-thinking radical of questionable morality.⁵⁷ Owen served as a secretary at the October 19, 1829 WMP meeting that endorsed Skidmore's agrarian plan, and even though he later said that he was there in an informal capacity, the "agrarian" label stuck.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Owen's association with his father's failed utopian community at New Harmony and Fanny Wright's planned community at Nashoba opened Owenites up to the charge of being anti-social communitarians.⁵⁹

Dr. Cornelius Blatchly, one of Owen's allies and an unsuccessful candidate in 1829, also supported planned communities. He had been a member of the New York Society for Promoting Communities in the early 1820s (an organization associated with Robert Owen) and had even written a couple of his own radical

tracts.⁶⁰ Observing all of these coincidences, one religious newspaper differentiated between Cook's moral faction and Owen's free-thinking faction, writing that the "true workingmen have, in an open and manly manner, disavowed all connection with *agrarian infidelity* ...We hesitate not to express our opposition to a 'community of property,' and especially on the principles or by the means proposed and advocated by Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright."⁶¹ In the battle between WMP factions over the label of "true workingmen," those who objected to agrarianism boasted of their manly behavior because they rejected those parts of the platform that, in their opinion, upheld a questionable morality.

Like other foci of discord within the Working Men's Party, discussions of worker morality exposed factional differences concerning fatherhood. While a number of historical studies detail the battle between Robert Dale Owen's camp and Noah Cook's followers, they primarily join Edward Pessen in accepting Owen's view that Cook's forces who usurped the party leadership included mostly political opportunists who "had little in common with true workmen" and merely hoped to cash in on the Working Men's success in the 1829 campaign.⁶² Pessen's argument is echoed by Sean Wilentz, who writes that "Cook and Guyon would prove (in a most ungentlemanly way), anti-Jacksonian entrepreneurial causes could be advanced with the help of some very unlikely allies, amid some uncommon political circumstances."⁶³ Wilentz also tries to analyze the election results in 1830 to demonstrate that Cook's support came from aristocratic wards, but this argument is debatable. Based on per capita wealth in 1830, the poorest ward was the Thirteenth, in which Cook's faction earned 42.7% of the vote, significantly more than their overall city average of 34.9%, while Owen's faction received only 5.3% as compared to 10.7% citywide.⁶⁴ Probing the issue of worker morality and utilizing some previously uncited sources created by Cook's faction allows for an alternate reading of the situation where the household, rather than only the ballot box, becomes the site of some of the differences between the factions. This section argues that Cook's followers believed their own rhetoric about domestic morality and temperance and in turn gained control of the party by earning support from a number of religious sources critical of Owen's supposed lack of faith and family values.

Two main factors enabled Cook's men to take control of the WMP in New York City: support from religious temperance reformers and support from upstate Workies, most notably Albany's Working Men's Party. Cook easily found powerful allies to aid his assault on Owen by questioning the latter's moral fiber. Working Men did not take the endeavor of employing religious assaults lightly. One out-of-town paper even warned the WMP not to walk the path of religious wrangling, reminding them that "in pecuniary matters we may unite, but in religion we never can. Religion is a subject of practice, rather than newspaper disputation."⁶⁵ Because it was risky to bring religion (or irreligion) into politics,

religious attacks scrupulously avoided focusing on theology or biblical interpretations; instead, they tied the issue of worker morality to gender relations, family dynamics, and fatherhood.

Although Owen portrayed Cook as a lip-service Christian, the prospectus of his own newspaper, the *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion* explicitly displayed Cook's religious concerns. Alongside clearly identifiable WMP issues such as "a Republican System of Education," "Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt," and Cook's dislike of "all legal, official, and other aristocratic monopolies," the heading declared Cook's opposition to "public profligacy and immorality."⁶⁶ This did not win the support of any free-thinking Owenites, but it did match up with the prospectus of the local temperance newspaper edited by evangelical William Goodell. Goodell's newspaper, the *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, declared itself unaffiliated with any of the factions, but gave tacit support to Cook's platform. The paper advocated temperance and railed against the immorality of the public theatre while it supported "General education at public expense, in consistency with parental duties and rights; the abolition of the imprisonment of honest debtors," and opposed "a system of *monopolies*" and "the oppressions of an effeminate and knavish *aristocracy*."⁶⁷

The two papers complemented each other well: Cook's offered Christian morality for Working Men, and Goodell's offered Workie content for Christian moralizers. An example from Goodell's paper comes from the article, "Two Sorts of Workies," which recounted the story of a man returning upstate from a visit to New York City. He reported to his friends that he had attended some meetings at the "North American Hotel" (where Cook's faction met) and read many WMP newspapers. He concluded that two groups of Working Men existed, "the *cold water* workies, and the *Fanny Wright* workies; though he thought there were more dandies and rakes, than *working men* in the latter class."⁶⁸ This story served two main purposes: first, to designate Cook's faction as temperance advocates, thereby claiming their correct position as carrier of the Working Men's moral banner, and second, to label Owen's followers as individuals with questionable moral and household-based masculinity credentials. Owen's critics often used the label "Fanny Wright Men" to finger the faction as weak and under the political control of a woman. Given the supposed lack of political capital women wielded in 1830, such a comment effectively questioned the strength and independence of Owen's faction. Adding to this remark the terms "dandy and rake" also sought to expose Owen's free-thinking followers as pretenders, rather than protectors of domesticity and fatherhood. The anecdote also conveyed a more subtle message of the link between Cook's faction and upstate religious support. Owen himself recognized the pairing, referring to Cook's 1830 election ticket as the "Church and State Party."⁶⁹

By the election of 1830, Thomas Skidmore's faction was not numerically strong enough to fully influence these debates, but it can be quickly noted that some of its members offered other interesting perspectives on moral and religious issues. George Houston, one of Skidmore's closest associates earlier served two and a half years in Newgate prison for publishing the first English translation of Baron d'Holbach's irreligious text *L'Histoire de Jésus Christ* (republished by Houston as *Ecce Homo; Or a Critical Inquiry into the History of Jesus of Nazareth*) which examined the life of Jesus as a human man and not the son of God.⁷⁰ In the months leading up to the formation of the WMP, Houston's free enquiry newspaper *The Correspondent*, printed both temperance and anti-religious articles. One editorial noted both that "*Drunkness* expels reason ...causes internal, external, and *incurable* wounds; is a witch to the senses, a devil to the soul, a *thief* to the purse, the beggar's companion, a wife's *woe*, and *children's sorrow*" and that "*Religion* expels reason, destroys the memory, drowns the understanding ...is a thief to the purse, the dupe's companion ...the parent of priestcraft, a foe to learning, and the friend of tyrants."⁷¹ Falling somewhere between Cook's and Owen's views, Houston presented a secular, humanist morality, but like other Working Men, a morality concerned with household and parental relations. In the late 1820s, Houston's daughter even aided her father's activities by running the Minerva Institution, a free-thought school in New York City.⁷²

Ultimately, however, Noah Cook's faction gained dominance in the party because it formed solid alliances with upstate Working Men who responded positively to the Cookites' persona as defenders of a moderate patriarchal vision of moral and temperate fatherhood. Working Men's Parties outside the city in places like Troy, Utica, and Albany included a large percentage of men who did not subscribe to Skidmore's or Owen's radical agenda, but supported Cook's discussion of worker morality.⁷³ Whether or not Cook's religiosity was a sham, as Owen's forces claimed, it convinced those outside the city.⁷⁴ A Greenfield paper in support of Cook wrote that critics stigmatized the WMP "by asserting that they are infidels—that their object is the overthrow of religion! This base report will prove as futile as it is ridiculous. It has been promptly met and put down by the working men themselves."⁷⁵

Upstate support came most substantially from the Albany Working Men's Party which formed when mechanic and Methodist civic groups combined their interests to unseat longstanding Dutch-Calvinist merchants (the so-called "Albany Regency") from political power.⁷⁶ Just as Cook's worker morality faction aligned with Goodell's temperance message in the city, it subsequently partnered with the Albany WMP and their frequent appeals about the dangers of drinking in the country. These groups targeted fathers and husbands in particular in order to remind them about their duties to their children. One Albany Working Men's

newspaper article cited the story of a sweet, loving couple that ended up poor, sick, and violent; apparently the difficulties "had grown out of the *husband's* intemperate drinking and smoking."⁷⁷



**Working Men's
Poster to
Immigrant
Voters, 1830**

The Cook faction not only used the issue of religious morality to preach to the converted, but also aimed its attacks squarely at Robert Dale Owen and his irreligion. Such attacks focused on the way Owen's camp endangered gender norms and offered a corrupting vision to the rising generation. Critics challenged Owen's ability to act as a spokesman for working fathers because he himself lacked the political capital of having his own wife and children. Another problem for Cook was that the Owenites seemed openly hostile to the institution of marriage. One campaign poster from 1830 addressed to "adopted citizens" who were friendly to "*Robert Dale Owen and Miss Frances Wright*" and hostile

to the "North American Hotel Bourbon Mechanics" (Cookites) appealed for votes based on the faction's desire to reform divorce laws. Alongside support for other standard issues such as "State System of Education and Guardianship for all Children," the handbill championed the idea of "abolishing the Unjust Marriage Law that compels individuals to live together in opposition to their wishes."⁷⁸

Likewise, Cook expressed the fear that Owen's personal belief system adversely effected the party's position on fatherly duty, women's roles, and children's education. One newspaper correspondent insisted that Owen's writings had, "for their tendency improper objects, and insidiously inculcating doctrines which no Christian, no father, no brother, with one spark of feeling or love in his disposition, could for a moment tolerate."⁷⁹ While not overly prudish, Cook's Working Men tried to distance themselves from ideologies they deemed morally questionable. William Goodell brought these concerns together while attacking Owen's state guardianship system. He wrote:

... as *parental* authority and instruction were thus to be laid aside, and as the 'national' schools were to furnish no religious instruction, the public were promised a rising generation, freed from the shackles of religious principle. The way was thus to be prepared for that equal division of property, and unrestrained intercourse of the sexes which had been attempted by Fanny Wright, in her settlement at Nashoba.⁸⁰

This statement condemned Owen's educational plan because it conflicted with parental wishes to give children a religious education. Without religious grounding, the paper warned, children would be defenseless against immoral behavior and

the corrupting will of "infidels" like Fanny Wright and Robert Dale Owen.

Frances Wright's connection to Robert Dale Owen rendered his faction vulnerable to a wide variety of attacks over their perceived support of immoral behavior such as inverting gender norms and radically changing family dynamics.⁸¹ In a review of the pamphlet, "Fanny Wright, Unmasked by Her Own Pen," the *Genius of Temperance* exposed what they saw as the true danger of Wright's ideology. Echoing its opinion of Owen's educational system, the review feared how Wright's teachings assaulted marriage roles because:

... the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, *she* thinks, would 'promote happiness.' Therefore she spurns the restraints of matrimony. Every other human being may lawfully claim the same 'equal rights' that may be lawfully claimed by Fanny Wright.... The debauchee finds *his* pleasure and happiness in the promised paradise of Fanny Wright.⁸²

The last statement clearly linked Wright's immorality and her challenge to the institution of marriage with particular aspects of her sexual behavior. Frances Wright's persona, as well as actual behavior, received its strongest condemnation, however, concerning the relationship between morality and the rising generation. Her place as a strong, free-thinking woman in the middle of a male political movement so steeped in fatherhood made her an easy target as the



Frances Wright Portrayed as a Babbling Goose

embodiment of moral corruption. One article told the story of a respectable man forced to "confine one of his four sons, in the House of Refuge, he having essayed to throw off all restraint, moral, religious and parental, comfortably with the doctrine taught by Fanny Wright."⁸³ Apparently the boy heard some of Wright's public lectures and lost his way.⁸⁴

Similar anecdotes appeared throughout the period to warn fathers of the dangers of the irreligious Owenite faction. Because domestic maintenance was so intimately implied in political rhetoric, such discussions were not merely helpful lessons on Christian morality; they were political pitches for the soul of the Working Men's Party. Although moral Working Men attacked Robert Dale Owen and Fanny Wright for their assault on traditional marriage and corruption of youth, it was not until Owen began publishing his notions of population control that his detractors unleashed their most virulent and personal denunciations. 55

Birth Control

The conflict surrounding birth control and the Working Men's Party began when

Robert Dale Owen sent some innocuous lithographs from England to the Typographical Society of New York, an organization of small master printers, but it soon grew into a major point of political contention over the rights of fathers to govern their families. During the discussion of what was to be done with the prints, Adoniram Chandler, an evangelical temperance advocate and leader of the Cook faction, stood up and read some controversial excerpts from Richard Carlile's *Every Woman's Book, or, What is Love?* He then asked the society whether they should accept any gift from someone who sanctioned this scandalous work. Carlile's book, originally published in London in 1826, offered a number of suggestions on methods of birth control and had received a mostly positive review from Robert Dale Owen two years earlier.⁸⁵

Owen may not have totally supported Carlile's book, but his connection to the radical, irreligious author was well established. At a Fourth of July celebration in 1829 for Free Enquirers sponsored by Owen, the keynote speaker toasted "Richard Carlile—May his manly and virtuous independence in the cause of antisuperstition, meet with the cordial sympathy and imitation of the professed antisuperstitionists of the new world."⁸⁶ From Adoniram Chandler's point of view, discussion of birth control suggested a potential threat to fatherhood and the possibility of an immoral, destabilizing vision of household-based masculinity. The Typographical Society referred to itself as "men who, as husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, reverence the pure principle of *chastity* in either sex, not only as a cardinal virtue, but as the chief, the head and fountain of all other virtues."⁸⁷ Such statements supported their vision of virtuous fatherhood and expressed outrage because Owen supported Carlile's book. The attacks became more explicit as Owen formulated and wrote down his own ideas on birth control.

The argument with the Typographical Society did not occur by happenstance. Adoniram Chandler most likely used the meeting to ambush Owen, whom he intensely disliked and labeled as less than a real man, "hanging to the skirts of a deluded woman."⁸⁸ By linking Owen to Carlile, Chandler quickly enlisted the moral rage of the conservative Typographical Society and started a feud that continued in the pages of the *Free Enquirer* and other publications for months, forcing Owen to rethink and elaborate on his own ideas.⁸⁹ During the course of the debate, Owen produced *Moral Physiology; or, a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question*, the first birth control tract in American history. As a result he felt the wrath of both religious moralizing Cookites and Thomas Skidmore's personal version of Genesis 35:11 ("Be fruitful and multiply.")⁹⁰ While the blow-by-blow machinations of this argument are fascinating, this discussion demonstrates how the opposing viewpoints reflected competing versions of fatherhood.

That Robert Dale Owen even discussed limiting family size insulted Thomas Skidmore, who entered the debate attacking Owen's proposals. Well before the publication of *Moral Physiology*, Skidmore ran articles on the subject in his own

paper, *The Friend of Equal Rights* and sent letters to the *Free Enquirer* forcing Owen to write an expanded view of his ideas. Owen's biographer, Richard William Leopold, astutely wrote that it was, "Thomas Skidmore, class-conscious leader of the New York workingmen, who paved the way for the first American birth control tract."⁹¹ But before moving to Skidmore's several-fronted assault on Owen's ideas about birth control, it is important to delineate exactly what Robert Dale Owen said on the issue and the ramifications of his position for fatherhood and household-based masculinity.

In many ways, *Moral Physiology* brought together a number of different aspects **60** of Owen's philanthropic philosophy and his vision of ideal fatherhood. At least part of the tract laid down his ideas on free love and his support for more liberal views of sexuality.⁹² He intended the work to be both a scientific (physiological) work and a moral treatise; as such, he assured the reader that he was writing neither for the pleasure of "Libertines and debauchees!" nor for the consternation of "prudes and hypocrites!"⁹³ Simply stated, Owen disapproved of the way that parents produced children they could not afford to support without first thinking about the consequences. He wrote that, "children that are brought into the world owe their existence, not to deliberate conviction in their parents that their birth was really desirable, but simply to an unreasoning instinct, which men, in the mass, have not learnt either to resist or control."⁹⁴ This presented more than just an immediate problem for the parents; it caused long lasting problems for society. Owen went on to ask:

Is it not notorious, that the families of the married often increase beyond what a regard for the young beings coming into the world, or the happiness of those who give them birth, would dictate? In how many instances does the hard-working father, and more especially the mother, of a poor family, remain slaves throughout the lives, tugging at the oar of incessant labour, toiling to live, and living only to die; when, if their offspring had been limited to two or three only, they might have enjoyed comfort and comparative affluence!⁹⁵

This argument was consistent with his attitudes toward education, which favored a Pestalozzian model that tried to manage one's inherent animal instincts. Owen wrote that more than state guardianship of children was necessary to alleviate the plight of working families, because "even such an act of justice [his educational plan] would be no relief from the evils of over-population." Noting that some men "ought never to become parents," Owen accosted "fathers and mothers in humble life! To you my argument comes home, with the force of reality."⁹⁶ Once he had the attention of working families, he declared that their reproductive processes needed to be more intellectual and that they ought to take into consideration their poor economic situation before procreating.

In spite of these admonitions, Owen's work endeavored to maintain a positive tone. He wrote that his propositions did not attempt to punish poor families but,

rather, to help them. He stated that for "married persons, the power of limiting their offspring to their circumstances is most desirable. It may often promote the harmony, peace, and comfort of families; sometimes it may save from bankruptcy and ruin."⁹⁷ From start to finish the book emphasized the importance of deliberation before procreation, especially for poor parents. Into this discussion, Owen inserted a short closing to the essay that suggested withdrawal as an advisable method of birth control.⁹⁸

The frontispiece which Owen selected to represent the message of *Moral Physiology* showed a woman abandoning her baby in the front of a foundlings' hospital with the caption "Alas, that it should ever have been born!" Owen wrote that it was "exceedingly appropriate to the subject, and contains, to my feelings, one of the strongest of arguments in itself." The price difference between a pamphlet with the frontispieces and one without it reflected importance of the image: thirty-seven cents and twenty-five cents respectively. Owen did not merely protest that the mother gave up the baby (adding to the number of poverty-stricken orphans in need of philanthropic aid); he criticized that it had even been born to someone who could not afford to take care of it.⁹⁹



Frontispiece to Robert Dale Owen's Moral Physiology

While the book had plenty of detractors, it is useful to note one positive reaction and the way the reaction referenced the ideology of fatherhood. An anonymous journeyman wrote to the *Free Enquirer* stating that "I have been married nearly three years and am the father of two children." Upon reading *Moral Physiology*, "my visions of poverty and distress vanished; the present seemed gilded with new charms, and the future appeared no longer dreaded."¹⁰⁰ Unquestionably, this response was the one Owen wanted: a working father contemplating Owen's argument and readjusting the management of his domestic life as a consequence. However, for every father who enjoyed reading the book, other fathers objected to what they perceived as an attack on their parental rights and reproductive choices. Thomas Skidmore joined the fray and led this second group.

Skidmore and Owen disagreed on ideal fatherhood as it related to land 65
distribution, inheritance, and education, but the issue of birth control exposed their strongest ideological discord. While Owen worked on *Moral Physiology*, Thomas Skidmore (or his associate George Houston) anonymously published a pamphlet entitled *Robert Dale Owen Unmasked By His Own Pen*.¹⁰¹ Written from the point of view of "a husband, and a father, and a MAN," the work targeted Owen as a Carlile supporter, who tried to discredit marriage as an institution and

desired to turn all women into prostitutes.¹⁰² The pamphlet also attacked Owen's own father and his utopian community at New Harmony, Indiana. The author had likely read Paul Brown's *Twelve Months in New Harmony*, a scathing assault on the senior Owen and the failure of the community to live up to its own standards.¹⁰³

Unlike Adoniram Chandler's assault, the anonymous pamphlet declared its lack of interest in Owen's and Fanny Wright's religious lives; rather, it was a blistering personal attack on Owen's own masculinity and model of fatherhood. It explicitly stated, "let R. D. Owen, with the manliness he avows, justify, if he can, those doctrines and practices the 'Every Woman's Book' contains."¹⁰⁴ It chastised Carlile, Wright, and Owen for promoting birth control, attacking the "marriage contract," and sanctioning "promiscuous sexual intercourse."¹⁰⁵ Without the sanctity of marital vows, questions would arise about a husband's and father's dominion and, the author feared, would lead to the widespread prostitution of working men's wives and daughters. This may seem like an overreaction, but it points out the concern that some men had with Owen's vision of fatherhood and marriage and how they were affected personally by it.

When Thomas Skidmore responded to the fourth edition of *Moral Physiology* a year later, he replaced the personal attack featured in *Robert Dale Owen Unmasked By His Own Pen* with a more thoughtful and reasoned commentary. Reprinting Owen's entire uncopyrighted essay, Skidmore added his own footnotes and conclusion for the deftly-titled *Moral Physiology Exposed and Refuted, By Thomas Skidmore. Comprising the Entire Work of Robert Dale Owen On that Subject, With Critical Notes Showing Its Tendency to Degrade and Render Still More Unhappy Than it is Now, the Condition of the Working Classes, By Denying Their Right to Increase the Number of Their Children; and Recommending the Same Odious Means to Suppress Such Increase as are Contained in Carlile's: 'What is Love, or, Every Woman's Book.'*¹⁰⁶ As the title suggested, Skidmore believed that birth control would both limit working families' natural reproductive rights and further depress their lives. He questioned Owen's premise that the world was too crowded, especially in terms of Working Men and their families, writing that "the world is not now overpeopled, nor is it likely to be in hundreds of generations."¹⁰⁷

Turning Owen's argument on its head, Skidmore argued that the socioeconomic condition of Working Men, as loving fathers and husbands, actually improved with more children. The working population, he stated, "ought to be increased; because society will be the happier."¹⁰⁸ This argument set up a dichotomy between two very different visions of domestic economy and its relationship to fatherhood. Owen assumed that the fewer children a poor father provided for, the more he could do for each individually and the happier everyone in the family would be. Skidmore posited that the more children a father had, the happier he

would be, regardless of wealth, because of the domestic bond and the additional love extra family members brought. Besides, Skidmore noted, preventing reproduction limited the rights of children who would not be born. Even though these competing figures offered Working Men disparate images of fatherhood to rally around, they both tied important issues of the day to domestic economy, because Working Men entered the political arena through their household-based masculinity and on behalf of their families.

While this discussion of birth control and the place of children in society seems to drift far from the political intrigue and raucous factionalism that usually characterizes narratives of the Working Men's Party, it is very close to where this chapter began; by stating how the issue of what was best for children was an integral aspect—not just a minor aside—in the short life of the WMP. Within days of Thomas Skidmore publishing his "Rights of Children" article which the chapter began with, the *Daily Sentinel* and the *Free Enquirer* responded with "Parental Responsibility." While covering much of the same territory, the article focused on what a parent owed to his children, rather than Skidmore's idea about what natural rights a child possessed. The writer (most likely Robert Dale Owen, who edited both papers at the time) noted that, "every upright parent virtually puts this question to himself, 'How can I best promote my children's happiness?—not my own comfort, not my own self impulses—but my children's virtue and happiness.'"¹⁰⁹ Simply stated, a man's life was not his own: it belonged to his children and he needed to make decisions that best educated and guided them. It is critical to note that both Skidmore's "Rights of Children" and Owen's "Parental Responsibility" appeared between late May and early June 1830, just as the party split apart. These weeks marked the high point in the factional division over the state guardianship plan and morality issues as well as the beginning of Robert Dale Owen's frequent discussions of population and moral physiology in the *Free Enquirer*.

Arriving in the midst of such events, and given the short life of the Working Men's Party, articles such as "Parental Responsibility" did not appear as an introspective discourse on how to properly treat one's children; they were a call to political action, a political action specifically targeting the issue of fatherhood. The commentary stated that "they who never thought of politics before are the warmest politicians now. The measure agitated is practical, national. It comes home to the feeling of every disinterested parent, and of every honest citizen who knows what human nature might be, and who sees what it is."¹¹⁰ For both the producers of this message and their audience of Workies, the editorial, like all of the discussions detailed in this chapter, referred to a political movement and ideology grounded in the domestic arena. This fact did not make the WMP theoretical lightweights: from agrarianism to state guardianship and birth control, they operated on the cutting edge of contemporary notions of the state and individual rights. Both Working Men and their detractors from around the state of

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New York and the rest of the country looked to the WMP of New York City and men like Thomas Skidmore and Robert Dale Owen for cues on how to approach radical issues; however, this does not mean that a cohesive party platform ever coalesced. Three individual factions arose, each one rooting its platform and ideology in different notions of proper fatherhood and each one agreeing that "powerful—very powerful is the parental feeling."¹¹¹

As Chapters Three and Four demonstrated, working men inhabited a world where they repeatedly confronted perceived threats to their ability to provide for their families welfare and uphold their household-based vision of masculine identity. In order to collectively address the concern that their children would be doomed to economic and social inequality if they did not act, organized men formed the Working Men's Party New York between 1829 and 1831 to champion political solutions grounded in their ideas of fatherhood. During the era of the WMP, this meant that a whole set of issues (agrarianism, education, domestic morality, and birth control) came up for debate among a demographically-similar group of men who claimed that they represented the best vision of fatherhood.

Notes:

Note 1: *The Friend of Equal Rights* as quoted in *Mechanics Free Press*, July 24, 1830. Thomas Skidmore and Alexander Ming Sr. edited this daily paper that began its run on April 24, 1830; no copies are extant.

Note 2: When I compared a compiled list of over 600 Working Men with data from the 1830 federal census, the results yielded an average household size of 5.39 individuals of whom nearly 3 were under the age of 20. For more on the demographic profile of New York's organized laborers, see Chapter One.

Note 3: Contemporaries often used the term "Workies" as a nickname for those who most embodied the values of the WMP. Men from almost every occupational category in the city considered themselves Workies: the label did not reflect or imply a particular type of employment or skill.

Note 4: The most useful accounts of the WMP are Hobart Berrian, *A Brief Sketch of the Origin and Rise of the Working Men's Party in the City of New York* (Washington DC: William Greer, 1840); George Henry Evans, *History of the Origins and Progress of the Working Men's Party in New York* (New York: George Henry Evans, 1842); Frank Carlton, "The Workingmen's Party of New York City, 1829-1831," *Political Science Quarterly* 22, issue 3 (Sept., 1907), 401-415; John R. Commons and Associates, *History of Labour in the United States* vol. one, (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 171-172, 231-284; Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945), 133-143, 177-216; Seymour Savetsky, "The New York Working Men's Party" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1948); Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class:*

A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-1837 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Edward Pessen, "The Working Men's Party Revisited," *Labor History* 3 (Fall, 1963), 203-226; Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1967), 7-33, 58-79, 103-203; and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 172-216. The following narrative is largely derived from Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 12-23 and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 177-211.

Note 5: House carpenters and other builders had already worked a ten-hour day for a couple of decades by 1829. See Chapter Five.

Note 6: The organization began in September of 1829. For more on Owen, see Robert Dale Owen, "An Earnest Sowing of Wild Oats," *Atlantic Monthly* 34, number 201 (July, 1874), 67-78; Norman E. Himes, "Robert Dale Owen, the Pioneer of American Neo-Malthusianism," *American Journal of Sociology* 35, issue 4 (Jan., 1930), 529-547; Richard William Leopold, *Robert Dale Owen, a Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 85-102; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 84-85; Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 66-71; and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 178-215.

Note 7: For more on Evans, see Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 85-88; Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 71-75; and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 192-213. On Blatchly, see David Harris, *Socialist Origins in the United States: American Forerunners to Marx 1817-1832* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1966), 10-19; and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 158-167, 193-200.

Note 8: For more on Skidmore, see Harris, *Socialist Origins in the United States*, 91-139; Amos Gilbert, "A Sketch of the Life of Thomas Skidmore," in *Free Enquirer* March 30, April 6, 13, 1834; Edward Pessen, "Thomas Skidmore: Agrarian Reformer in the Early American Labor Movement," *New York History* 25 (July, 1954), 280-294; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 82-84; Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 58-66; and Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 182-216.

Note 9: Owen became managing editor of the *Daily Sentinel* in February of 1830. On Wright, see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 176-183, 192-193, 200-212; Celia Morris Eckhardt, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Lori D. Ginzberg, "'The Hearts of Your Readers Will Shudder': Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought," *American Quarterly* 46, issue 2 (June, 1994), 195-226.

Note 10: To my knowledge, the *New York Reformer* and *Genius of Temperance* have not been cited in any study of the WMP. Their inclusion largely changes the usual portrayal of the Cook faction. For more on Cook, see Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 16-21. Later in the 1830s, Cook became a big supporter of Henry Clay. See Noah Cook to Willis Hall, Nov. 29, 1837, Ullman Papers, New-York Historical Society, Manuscript Division.

Note 11: For more on the split between the Owenite and Cookite factions during the summer of 1830, see *An Address of the General Executive Committee of the Mechanics and Other Working Men of the City of New York, Read at a General Meeting of Working Men, Held at the West Chester House, Bowery, June 21, and Unanimously Approved Of* (New York: George Henry Evans, 1830).

Note 12: For the best examples, see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: the American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Bruce Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: the American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Linda Kerber, "The Paradox of Women's Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of Martin vs. Massachusetts, 1805," *American Historical Review*, 97 (April, 1992), 349-378; Norma Basch, "Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828," *Journal of American History*, 80, number 3 (Dec., 1993), 890-918; and Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History*, 78, number 4 (March, 1992), 1245-1264.

Note 13: On the extension of suffrage and the constitutional conventions see Peter J. Galie, *Ordered Liberty: A Constitutional History of New York* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 71-94; Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 19-42; Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Democracy, Liberty and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), 125-270; and Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Note 14: The 1821 convention increased, rather than decreased, voting restrictions for black men who continued to be classified as "noncitizens," and so in 1825, only 1 in about 200 black men in New York could vote. See David R.

Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso Press, 1991), 57.

Note 15: *The Working Man's Advocate* edited by a *Mechanic*, Nov. 28, 1829.

Note 16: *New York Journal of Commerce*, Nov. 7, 1829.

Note 17: Scholars have written very little on working fathers in this period and in some cases have assumed that fathers rarely spent time at home or as active parents. See Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 76-102. More has recently been written on middle-class fathers. See Shawn Johansen, *Family Men: Middle-Class Fatherhood in Early Industrializing America* (New York: Routledge Press, 2001), and Stephen Frank, *Life With Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998).

Note 18: This quotation is from an article entitled "Meanness" in the *Evening Journal* in late May or early June, 1830. It can be found in Mathew Carey, *Select Scraps, Politics* vol. xv, 421. This is from a collection of Mathew Carey's newspaper clippings housed at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Note 19: The full title of the book was Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property! Being a Proposition to Make it Equal Among the Adults of the Present Generation: And to Provide For Its Equal Transmission to Every Individual of Each Succeeding Generation, On Arriving At the Age of Maturity. Addressed to the Citizens of the State of New-York, Particularly, and to the People of Other States and Nations, Generally* (New York: Alexander Ming Sr., 1829). Skidmore's writings covered a wide range of topics including gender and racial equality. He supported women's rights and argued that, "I would give the same rights of suffrage to the red man, the black man, and the white man" and that "the black man's right to suffrage, being a personal right, is as perfect as the white man's; and, so also is his right to property." Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!*, 146 and 158.

Note 20: In fact, it was supposedly Skidmore who had prevented the original movement to maintain the ten-hour day from ending in a simple strike, instead opting for a more radical and meaningful attack on property and "aristocratic oppressors." See George Henry Evans, *History of the Origins and Progress of the Working Men's Party in New York*, 3.

Note 21: Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 205.

Note 22: "Agrarian and Education Systems," *Southern Review* 6, number 11 (Aug., 1830), 24.

Note 23: Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!*, 148. The term agrarianism derived partly from the ancient Roman agrarian law to redistribute property and

Thomas Paine's 1797 work, *Agrarian Justice Opposed to Agrarian Law, and to Agrarian Monopoly: Being a Plan for Meliorating the Condition of Man, By Creating in Every Nation a National Fund*. Paine's *Rights of Man* was also obviously referenced in the title of Skidmore's book.

Note 24: Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!*, 105. Italics in original.

Note 25: *New York Evening Post*, March 2, 1829.

Note 26: See Committee of the Fourteenth Ward, *General Meeting, to Devise a Plan to Enable the Poor to Guard Against the Distress Occasioned by Hard Winters; to be Held at Broadway Hall, No. 440 Broadway, Near Howard-Street, on Tuesday Evening, May 17, at 8 O'clock* (New York, Clayton and Van Norden, 1831).

Note 27: Quoted in Mathew Carey, *Select Excerpta* xiv, 75, Library Company of Philadelphia. The article is undated, but Helen Sumner mentions it as possibly being from the *New York Times* and includes it along with her description of the winter of 1829 in Commons and Associates, *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. one, 170-171. It is also possible that it came from *Chronicle of the Times* printed by Henry R. Piercy and Company.

Note 28: Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!*, 227-228. Italics in original. On Skidmore's childhood, see Gilbert, "A Sketch of the Life of Thomas Skidmore."

Note 29: Many attacks also came from outside the party, especially by those who thought that Skidmore's plan advocated class warfare. See "Agrarian and Education Systems," 15 and *New-York Standard*, Sept. 14, 1830.

Note 30: *The Proceedings of a Meeting of Mechanics and Other Working Men: Held at Military Hall, Wooster Street, New-York, on Tuesday Evening, Dec. 29, 1829, Including the Address, Resolutions, and Plan of Organization for the City and County of New York, Prepared by a Conference Committee of the Several Wards, and Adopted by the Meeting* (New York: n.p., 1830), 4-5. These proceedings also appeared in *Working Man's Advocate*, Jan. 16, 1830 and *Free Enquirer*, March 20, 1830.

Note 31: Skidmore's faction did not poll much, but his writings, whether due to the controversy or more general interest, sold and circulated well. Even six years after its publication, his *Rights of Man to Property* was the only book in the Mechanics' Institute library with multiple copies to borrow. Even the last pamphlet Skidmore published, *Political Essays*, quickly sold out of its run of 1,500 copies. See *Catalogue of the Library of the Mechanics Institute of the City of New-York* (New York: Windt and Conrad, 1835), 13. One of the copies was donated to the library by Edward J. Webb, a WMP candidate for state senate in 1829 and,

ironically, an ally of Robert Dale Owen.

Note 32: See letter from Skidmore (and Owen's response) about Owen misrepresenting his plans in *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 2, 1830. Skidmore was still writing to the paper about *Rights of Man to Property!* a year later; see *Free Enquirer*, June 11, 1831.

Note 33: The original banner appeared in the paper's first edition on Oct. 31, 1829, but had switched by Nov. 28, 1829, less than a month later. See *Working Man's Advocate*, Oct. 31, 1829 and Nov. 28, 1829.

Note 34: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 19, 1829. Capitalization in original. Abner Kneeland, who would later be prosecuted in Boston for blasphemy, signed the message on behalf of the Association for the Protection of Industry, and For the Promotion of National Education.

Note 35: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 10, 1831. Amos Gilbert selected the quotation from an essay entitled "Agrarianism" that was originally written by Skidmore and published as part of: New York Association for the Gratuitous Distribution of Discussions on Political Economy, *Political Essays* (New York: n.p., 1831). Italics in original.

Note 36: Skidmore's ideas about dependence on the state and parents' well-being also progressed. Well ahead of his time, he proposed "that the state could insure health as well as property" to protect "each individual from injury by the inroads of infirmity and disease." At a time when families still provided food to loved ones in some prisons, Skidmore advocated state health insurance in order to augment the family networks that usually handled such concerns. See *ibid.* Italics in original.

Note 37: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 24, 1831. Italics in original.

Note 38: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 17, 1831.

Note 39: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 24, 1831.

Note 40: *The Proceedings of a Meeting of Mechanics and Other Working Men*, 6.

Note 41: Owen's educational plan seemed to be everywhere in these couple of years. Not only did the *Free Enquirer*, *Daily Sentinel*, and *Working Man's Advocate* contain dozens of articles on the subject, but they also frequently appeared in pamphlet form, see Robert Dale Owen, *Cause of the People* (New York: Published at the Office of the Free Enquirer, 1830); Robert Dale Owen, *An Address to the Conductors of the New York Periodical Press* (New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, 1830); and Robert Dale Owen, *Six Essays on Public Education* (New

York: Office of the Daily Sentinel, 1830). Many of these articles also surfaced in other cities; for example, in *The American Manufacturer* (Pittsburgh), in May 1830 and in the *Mechanics Free Press* (Philadelphia), April 17-29, 1830.

Note 42: On Pestalozzi, see Robert Bingham Downs, *Heinrich Pestalozzi; Father of Modern Pedagogy* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1975). Pestalozzi's ideas on education did, on the whole, aim to overcome one's inherent animalistic nature by inspiring a child's internal being, rather than simply providing a functional trade. For a contemporary example of Pestalozzian instruction, see C. Mayo, *Lessons on Shells, As Given in a Pestalozzian School, at Cheam, Surrey, By the Author of 'Lessons on Objects,' 3rd American Edition*, (New York: Charles J. Folsom, 1842).

Note 43: *Working Man's Advocate edited by a Mechanic*, Nov. 28, 1829. Other examples can be found in *Working Man's Advocate edited by a Mechanic*, Oct. 31, Nov. 21, 28, Dec. 5, 1829, *Working Man's Advocate*, May 15, 22, 1830, and *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*, June 19, 1830 and Aug. 6, 1831.

Note 44: Cited in a number of places, including *New York Sentinel and Working Man's*, June 19, 1830.

Note 45: Owen married Mary Jane Robinson on April 12, 1832 just after his Working Men's Party days. The particulars of the ceremony included an unconventional marriage agreement that promised to try to escape the "barbarous relics of a feudal, despotic system." See the agreement in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881), vol. one, 295. Robert Dale Owen, *'Tis Home Where'er the Heart Is* (Baltimore: F. D. Benteen, 1845).

Note 46: Skidmore, *Rights of Man to Property!*, 143.

Note 47: *Free Enquirer*, Dec. 17, 1831.

Note 48: This quotation comes from an article in the *Evening Journal* excerpted in Mathew Carey, *Select Scraps, Politics* vol. xv, 422. While the article is undated, it must have been published in late May or early June of 1830 as the impasse over educational plans came to a head.

Note 49: *Ibid.*, 422. Capitals and italics appear in the original.

Note 50: *Ibid.*, 422. A similar point is made in a "Letter From a Mechanic" in *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion*, Sept. 10, 1830.

Note 51: *Working Man's Advocate*, May 29, 1830.

Note 52: *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion*, Sept. 10, 1830. This editorial came from a three-part series answering the question, "What do the Farmers, Mechanics, and Other Working Men Want?."

Note 53: I do not wish to downplay the Cook faction's earnest support of educational reform. Only two days after Noah Cook became editor of the *Evening Journal*, he wrote a piece entitled "Primary Education," noting many of his concerns on the issue. See *Evening Journal*, Feb. 4, 1830.

Note 54: *New York Evening Post*, March 2, 1829. Italics in original. Another report from 1825 noted that of 30,000 children in the city, 7,000 did not attend school and 10,000 attended only the free or charity schools. See *On the Establishment of Public Schools, in the City of New-York* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1825), 5.

Note 55: For more on education, instruction, and artisanal trades, see Chapter Five.

Note 56: Owen's attitude towards the clergy can be seen in a number of his writings; for example, see *Free Enquirer*, July 10, 1830. He later wrote that while "in those days neither Frances Wright nor I regarded Christ as an Inspired Teacher, both of us expressed in strong terms our respect for his exalted character." Owen, "An Earnest Sowing of Wild Oats," 72.

Note 57: Even as late as 1840, an upstate New York tract equated agrarianism and an attack on fatherhood with the Loco Foco Party and Robert Dale Owen. See *Loco-Focoism: As Displayed in the Boston Magazine Against Schools and Ministers, and In Favor of Robbing Children of the Property of the Parents! Christians! Patriots! Fathers! Read and Reflect!* (Albany: Office of the Albany Evening Journal, 1840), 3.

Note 58: In an editorial a week later, Owen wrote that the "ONLY security for the enjoyment of equal rights is, not agrarian laws or any laws whatever, but EQUAL, NATIONAL, REPUBLICAN EDUCATION." See *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 31, 1829.

Note 59: By the time she came to New York in 1829, Wright was known for controversy, but that had not always been the case. On her first and more innocuous trip to the United States a decade earlier, she was widely praised for her talents. Even Thomas Jefferson wrote her a letter praising her intelligence and grace. For her response, see Frances Wright to Thomas Jefferson, July 27, 1820, Huntington Library, Manuscript Division.

Note 60: For Blatchly and Owen's relationship to the Society, see Cornelius Camden Blatchly to Roberts Vaux, May 30, 1822, Vaux Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For Blatchly's tracts, see Cornelius Blatchly, *Some Causes of*

Popular Poverty, Derived From the Enriching Nature of Interests, Rents, Duties, Inheritances, and Church Establishments, Investigated in Their Principles and Consequences, and Agreement With Scripture (Philadelphia: S. Eastwick, 1818) and *An Essay on Common Wealths* (New York: New York Society for Promoting Communities, 1822). George Houston, a Skidmoreite also supported planned communities, helping to create the Haverstraw community in upstate New York in 1836. The 120 acre community included about 80 residents, including Abner Kneeland, and lasted about five months. See John F.C. Harrison, *Quest For the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 167.

Note 61: *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, Nov. 3, 1830. Italics in original. The newspaper spent a number of issues detailing Owen's attachment to Skidmore and agrarianism. See *ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1830, Nov. 3, 1830, Feb. 2, 1831, and Feb. 9, 1831.

Note 62: Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 19. Walter Hugins presents a more balanced look at the Cook faction, but for the most part designates them as National Republican politicians.

Note 63: Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 190.

Note 64: Even Skidmore's "Poor Man's" faction had uneven results in the 1830 election, it polled above average in the two poorest wards (Tenth and Thirteenth) and the wealthiest ward (First). Likewise, Wilentz argues that the leadership of Cook's faction had a more professional and manufacturing bent than Owen's faction, but the (n) he is working with (53 Cookites versus 223 Owenites) skews these findings, especially because these numbers reflect a percentage of the votes each faction received in 1830. Cook's faction received over 7,000 votes and Owen's faction only about 2,200. For his tables and analysis, see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 206-207, 408-409.

Note 65: *The Eclectic Observer and Working People's Advocate*, (Wheeling, VA) as reprinted in *Mechanics' Free Press*, (Philadelphia) Feb. 6, 1830. The article asked George Henry Evans to be careful when attacking the New York Tract Society's religious message.

Note 66: *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion*, Sept. 10, 1830.

Note 67: *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, Sept. 22, 1830. While there is not space to fully address the topic here, most contemporary content in support of temperance directly discussed domestic economy and the role of fathers. One example noted that "the appetite, which a father may withstand, may kill his children and children's children. ...we have just buried a

man who killed himself by drinking. He was the son of a mechanic, who had two sons, and took them both into his business when they were about fourteen years old. He drank spirit two or three times a day; his sons did the same; and before they were nineteen, they were both drunkards." *National Circular. Addressed to the Head of Each Family in the United States* (New York: n.p., [183?]), 2.

Note 68: *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, Oct. 6, 1830. Italics in original.

Note 69: *Free Enquirer*, Nov. 13, 1830. For an example of religious content in Cook's paper, see "Affliction" in *New-York Reformer, Farmers', Mechanics', and Working Men's Champion*, Sept. 10, 1830.

Note 70: For more on the controversy in England and Houston's trial, see Public Records Office, Treasury Solicitor's Papers, 11/47/183, Rex vs. Houston. Houston's Memorial to the Attorney-General, 25 May 1814, Privy Council Papers, 1/4032, Information from Houston, notes respecting *Ecce Homo* drawn up in Newgate, 29 February 1816, 5 March 1816, Privy Council Papers, 1/4032, Mitcham to Houston, 3 July 1813, Brown to Houston 1 and 21 July, 13 August, December 1813, Information from Houston, 29 February 1816, and Privy Council Papers, 1/4032, Brown to Houston, 14 and 23 September 1813. See also John Dinwiddy, "William Cobbett, George Houston, and Freethought," *Notes and Queries*, 222 (July 1977) 355-9.

Note 71: *The Correspondent*, January 12, 1828. Italics in original.

Note 72: Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 153.

Note 73: One Democratic activist, commenting in a letter to a friend on the danger of the "Fanny Wright men," made sure to remark that the "workingmen of the country are of a different stamp." See William Dwight Waterman to Hiram Barney, July 28, 1830, Hiram Barney papers, Huntington Library, Manuscript Division.

Note 74: Owen made sure to declare that even though his ideology might not have been religious, it was surely not a corrupting influence. He wrote that the "distinction between the terms Religion and Morality must be made, and made clearly and definitely too." *Free Enquirer*, June 11, 1831.

Note 75: *Freedom's Sentinel* (Greenfield, NY), July 6, 1830.

Note 76: David G. Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York 1652-1836* (New York: Oxford Press, 1991), 111-152. Hackett writes that church members might only have made up a third of the leadership of the Albany WMP, but they formed an important ideological bloc and

most likely had an influence on many men who sympathized with Christian cultural interests, but did not attend church. On the issue of upstate politics, Helen Sumner writes that "in the towns and villages of the State the high-handed methods of 'juntas' and 'combinations,' and especially the 'Albany Regency' were the subject of bitter denunciation." This denunciation played right into the political hands of the Cook faction. Commons, *History of Labour*, vol. one, 233.

Note 77: *Farmers', Mechanics', and Workingmen's Advocate* (Albany, NY), Sept. 11, 1830. Italics in original. Other newspapers in support of the Cook faction from outside the city also leaned toward the Methodist evangelical cause. One paper in Virginia contained an article on the WMP and education that noted, "We may be too ignorant but our *children* shall not be. The evils we endure shall be lessened, in the consciousness that they shall not come upon our *offspring*." On the same day the newspaper welcomed Lorenzo Dow, the evangelical minister, to the town. See *The Eclectic Observer, and Working People's Advocate* (Wheeling, VA), July 1, 1830.

Note 78: *Adopted Citizens to Your Posts!* (New York: n.p., 1830).

Note 79: *Oneida Observer* (Utica, NY), Sept. 7, 1830.

Note 80: *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, Feb. 2, 1831. Italics in original.

Note 81: Wright's role in the party was more rhetorical than actual, but critics were unconvinced. One article stated, "The Working Men's Party.—We have no sympathy with the infidel principles of the philanthropic, but deluded lady, by whom it was founded." *United States Gazette* as cited in *The Eclectic Observer, and Working People's Advocate* (Wheeling, VA), July 1, 1830.

Note 82: *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People's Advocate*, Sept. 8, 1830. Italics in original.

Note 83: *The Ulster Plebian* (Kingston, NY), June 30, 1830. Robert Dale Owen responded to the story by saying it was fabricated and that the boy's real problem was too much religious zeal. *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 30, 1830.

Note 84: *A Downright Gabbler, or a Goose That Deserves to be Hissed* (Philadelphia: J. Akin, 1829). This is a caricature of Frances Wright's 1829 lecture tour of the United States. It not only portrays Wright as a gabbling goose, but also makes sure to note how the man accompanying her has been emasculated by carrying her hat and attending to her.

Note 85: Chandler referred to a book review Robert Dale Owen had written in 1828, when he was still in Indiana. Owen's review was positive, but mixed, noting

that the book was "bold and plain," but that he was not "physiologist enough to decide on its merits." See *New Harmony Gazette*, Nov. 19, 1828 and *Free Enquirer*, Aug. 7, 1830. Carlile's work engaged the body of writing on population control that had appeared in London following the 1798 piece by Thomas Malthus, entitled *An Essay on the Principles of Population*. It was particularly directed toward Francis Place, *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population: Including an Examination of the Proposed Remedies of Mr. Malthus, and a Reply to the Objections of Mr. Godwin and Others* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822). On Chandler's activities at the meeting, see Himes, "Robert Dale Owen, The Pioneer of American Neo-Malthusianism," 533-538. Even though Himes' article is outdated in a number of ways, it has been invaluable in laying out the many factors that contributed to Owen's publication of *Moral Physiology*. On the writings of Malthus and the early labor movement in general, see Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 129-144.

Note 86: Edward Thompson, the keynote speaker at the event, actually made the toast. See Edward Thompson, *An Oration on the Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Delivered in the Large Room of the United States Hotel, New York, Fourth of July, 1829, Before the Society of Free Enquirers, and Others, Advocates for Mental and National Liberty* (New York: George H. Evans, 1829), 19.

Note 87: "Letter from the Typographical Society to Robert Dale Owen," reprinted in *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 9, 1830.

Note 88: *Working Man's Advocate*, Dec. 12, 1829. Obviously, Chandler's quotation refers to Owen's association with Fanny Wright. Wright was often used by Cookites in order to question the masculinity of Owen and his followers. Owen fought back, mocking the pseudo-religiosity of Chandler by using the Hebrew translation of the name Adoniram and referring to him as, "The high Lord Chandler." *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 2, 1830.

Note 89: For more on the fight between the groups, see Robert Dale Owen, *Moral Physiology; or, a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question*, 4th Edition (New York: Wright and Owen, 1831), preface and 47. All pages cited hereafter are from the fourth edition. The book went through eight editions within the first year, but I have chosen to use the fourth edition because that is the one Thomas Skidmore replied to in his work to be discussed later. Robert Dale Owen, *Reply to a Report of the New York Typographical Society* (New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, 1830); *Commercial Advertiser*, Sept. 29, 1830; *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 2 & 9, 1830; and Himes, "Robert Dale Owen, The Pioneer of American Neo-Malthusianism."

Note 90: Another avenue in Robert Dale Owen's journey to the publication of *Moral Physiology* was his prolonged debate with William Jackson, Jr., over the

relationship between labor-saving machinery, family size, and population growth. Owen and Jackson (a correspondent for the *Delaware Free Press*, a free-thought paper from Wilmington that supported the Delaware Working Men's Party) contested the result of new machinery on the labor market and the potential problem of a labor surplus in a series of articles and letters. See *Free Enquirer*, Sept. 25, 1830, *Free Enquirer*, June 12, 1830, and *Free Enquirer*, June 12, 1830. These issues showed the real reach of the New York WMP. Owen's and Jackson's articles appeared in the *Delaware Free Press*, *Free Enquirer*, and *Working Man's Advocate* and were also reprinted in papers in Pennsylvania. While the many Working Men's Parties of the era were local or regional in nature, such as the one in Wilmington, most of them looked to New York City as a place of vibrant intellectual inquiry when formulating their own ideas. The movements were all unique, but it is interesting to note how much content from their individual newspapers (especially about controversial issues) was comprised of articles reprinted from New York papers.

Note 91: Leopold, *Robert Dale Owen, a Biography*, 76-77.

Note 92: Gail Bederman is currently investigating Owen's relationship to the free-love movement. See "Free Love, Radical Politics, and Contraception in 1831: Why Robert Dale Owen Wrote *Moral Physiology*," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society For Historians of the Early American Republic, Berkeley, CA, July 2002. See also John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

Note 93: Owen, *Moral Physiology* 8-9. Even though he included these remarks, a large number of both groups probably read the essay. Owen later mentioned that it "had a circulation, in this country and in England, of fifty or sixty thousand copies." Owen, "An Earnest Sowing of Wild Oats," 77.

Note 94: *Ibid.*, 17.

Note 95: *Ibid.*, 32-33.

Note 96: *Ibid.*, 20, 33, and 34.

Note 97: *Ibid.*, 38.

Note 98: Other editions of the book suggested sponge devices or prophylactics to prevent pregnancy.

Note 99: *Free Enquirer*, Oct. 30, 1830. The frontispiece was important in selling the idea behind the work. Owen never copyrighted *Moral Physiology* and it was reprinted in the late 1840s by Ralph Glover, who changed the title and frontispiece in order to repackage it with Glover's own discussion of a new

contraceptive method. The new image showed a father, overcome by his woes, on a bed surrounded by his poverty-stricken wife and children. See Ralph Glover, *Every Mother's Book: or the Duty of Husband and Wife Physiologically Discussed, Being a Short Treatise on the Population Question* (New York: Ralph Glover, 1847). I would like to thank Jim Green for alerting me to this image and the edition of Owen's book.

Note 100: *Free Enquirer*, March 26, 1831.

Note 101: The full title of the pamphlet was *Robert Dale Owen Unmasked By His Own Pen. Showing His Unqualified Approbation of a Most Obscenely Indelicate Work, Entitled, 'What is Love, or, Every Woman's Book.' A Work Destructive to Conjugal Happiness—Repulsive to the Modest Mind, Equally of Man or Woman, and Recommending the Promiscuous Intercourse of Sensual Prostitution, A Work Also Approbated By the Pen of Frances Wright, the Authoress of the Celebrated Nashoba Address, Advocating the Indiscriminate Amalgamation of the Blacks and the Whites—The Contemner of Wedded Love, and the Severer of Domestic Ties* (New York: Charles Baldwin, 1830). A short time earlier George Houston wrote a similar-styled pamphlet entitled, *Fanny Wright Unmasked By Her Own Pen*.

Note 102: *Robert Dale Owen Unmasked By His Own Pen*, 6. Capitalization appears in original.

Note 103: For Paul Brown's attack on Robert Owen, see Paul Brown, *Twelve Months in New Harmony; Presenting a Faithful Account of the Principle Occurrences which Have Taken Place There Within That Period; Interspersed With Remarks* (Cincinnati: W. H. Woodward, 1827). It is notable that Brown, while living in Albany in the mid-1830s, published a rambling treatise that contained some similarities to Skidmore's ideology, see Paul Brown, *The Radical: and Advocate of Equality; Presenting a Series of Expostulatory Animadversions on the Present State of Practical Politics and Morals; With a View to an Access of Improvement* (Albany: Stone and Munsell, 1834), especially 140-157.

Note 104: *Ibid.*, 10.

Note 105: *Ibid.*, 10.

Note 106: As noted earlier, Owen never copyrighted his book, and so Skidmore chose to reprint the whole fourth edition, thinking that Owen's own words were the greatest weapon against him. Thomas Skidmore, *Moral Physiology Exposed and Refuted, By Thomas Skidmore ...*(New York: Skidmore and Jacobus, 1831).

Note 107: *Ibid.*, 9.

Note 108: *Ibid.*, 15. His logic in explaining how, if all workers eventually had

fewer children, they would be paid less is a bit confusing, but overall, his point is that limiting the population of workers, as Owen suggested, would reduce their influence on the market.

Note 109: *Daily Sentinel* quoted in the *Free Enquirer*, June 12, 1830.

Note 110: Ibid.

Note 111: The quotation in the title is taken from Robert Dale Owen, *Cause of the People* (New York: Published at the Office of the Free Enquirer, 1830), 8.