

## Conclusion — The Loco Foco Party

On February 13, 1837, members of the Equal Rights Party, a Democratic splinter movement dubbed the Loco Focos by New York's Whig press, held a meeting in City Hall Park to protest the high cost of family necessities and household maintenance.<sup>1</sup> Spurred to attend by handbills that demanded "Bread, Meat, Rent, And Fuel! Their prices must come down!" thousands arrived in the cold weather. The crowd bristled and grew restless over the subject of the cost of foodstuffs, having seen flour prices rise from \$7 per barrel in September to \$12 per barrel by early February. 1

Trouble began following speeches by mayoral candidate Moses Jacques and Alexander Ming Jr., who, noticing the potential danger, exhorted the audience to "do no act which might bring into disrepute the fair fame of a New Yorker ... or the character of man."<sup>2</sup> Moments after the meeting adjourned, a group of nearly one thousand protesters broke away from the rally and marched down to the flour warehouses at 173 and 175 Washington Street owned by Eli Hart and Company. After demonstrators stole and destroyed 500 barrels of flour and 1000 bushels of wheat and repelled Mayor Lawrence and a small contingent of officers, the throng moved along to other targets, including Herrick and Company's flour store.

The riot ended within a few hours and police held fifty-three individuals in jail; yet they arrested no Loco Focos. This fact did not prevent the partisan press from excoriating the party for inciting the melee and encouraging street violence. Loco Foco leaders rebuffed the attacks and continued their campaign against monopolies and other economic institutions that threatened their domestic stability. Subsequent park meetings throughout the spring drew as many as forty thousand protesters. Leading Tammany Hall officials noticed the growing public support and in the midst of the financial panic, conceded to a number of Loco Foco demands and reunited the Democratic Party by the fall of 1837.<sup>3</sup>

Within the context of the Flour Riot, historians alternatively portray the Loco Focos as political opportunists, class-conscious labor radicals, or plebeian street thugs in order to connect the death of the mass trade union movement of the mid-1830s with the onset of the Panic of 1837.<sup>4</sup> Sean Wilentz notes that the Loco Foco Party (LFP) "updated the Owenite 'Workies' radicalism," with its anti-aristocratic positions, but ultimately was more of a political posture than a real labor movement because of its "problematic" relationship with trade unionism.<sup>5</sup> Leo Hershkowitz conversely argues that the "Loco-Focos were economic, rather than political or philosophical, radicals" because of their anti-monopoly and anti-bank principles.<sup>6</sup>

However, it is not particularly useful to merely debate whether the self-defined "extreme reformers" in the Loco Foco Party were political hacks or truly earned 5

their radical credentials.<sup>7</sup> Instead, any investigation of the Loco Foco movement, the meeting in the park before the Flour Riot, and how Loco Focos defended themselves from accusations of instigating the violence after the melee should focus on what concerns lay at the heart of their political challenge and what they meant to LFP operatives. For these organized working men, no separation existed between the home and the political arena. Whether it was radical or not, before and after the Flour Riot, Loco Focos openly challenged monopolies and public economic policies as husbands and fathers. In turn, they met the approaching Panic of 1837 in terms of its effect on their families and not merely as part of some abstract civic debate.

This chapter uses the short history of the Loco Foco Party as a case study to demonstrate how workers primarily self-identified as family men who confronted a series of economic and workplace challenges to their ability to fulfill domestic obligations and responded by forming a labor organization to confront potential household threats. While previous chapters detail individual aspects of working men's household economics and the labor movement to fully unpack each one, this discussion traces how organized men's response to perceived threats to their household-based masculinity grounded their formation and participation in one labor political party. First, this conclusion shows that Loco Focos self-identified as husbands and fathers whose masculine identity was as much dependent on their prowess in the home as in the workplace or the political arena. Because gender identity was so central to working men's political engagement, LFP boosters championed their manliness, while critics utilized epithets and political cartoons to portray party operatives as weak and emasculated. Second, this chapter illustrates how LFP rhetoric, party platforms, and the speeches delivered before the Flour Riot should be read as an organized response to the variety of seeming economic dangers to working men's fulfillment of their domestic duties.

Party members and supporters seemed to go out of their way to demonstrate Loco Focos' capacity as attentive, considerate, and even prolific fathers. Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, the party's recording secretary, fueled such portrayals by providing contemporary audiences with compelling profiles of LFP leaders in the "short characteristic sketches" section of his 1842 book, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*. He proudly depicted both Daniel Gorham and Warden Hayward, two of the leaders of the meeting before the Flour Riot, as "the father of a numerous family." Whether the Loco Focos believed there was a real link between the number of offspring a candidate fathered and his abilities as a politician is unclear, but given the centrality of household issues to the party, such a background certainly did not hurt one's standing.

Likewise, Byrdsall highlighted political speeches by individual members who focused on the orators' own fathers. He noted that when Edward Curtis, elected to Congress as a fusion Loco Foco, Whig, and Native American candidate, addressed

a party meeting in 1836, he "described the affecting scene of [his] father's death, and dying charge to [his] oldest son." Commenting on the speech, Byrdsall offered that both Curtis "and his audience were deeply moved." Robert Townsend Jr.'s September 1836 speech before the Loco Foco State Convention meeting in Utica also concerned his father, but he used the occasion to distance himself from his rich father's disrespectful treatment of his poor unwed mother. In this case, Townsend rhetorically utilized his own father's story to display a poor model of masculinity to be avoided, rather than one for other Loco Focos to follow.<sup>8</sup> One odd tribute to the LFP's fatherly persona came from an out-of-state admirer. In reference to two leading Loco Foco members—Levi Slamm and Henry Bangs—the *New York Herald* took to calling the party Slamm, Bang & Company; soon afterward, the *New Era*, a Loco Foco newspaper, reported that a Mr. Bang of Indiana had "christened his first child Slam!"<sup>9</sup> Whether or not young Slam Bang ever fully understood his moniker, the fatherly characterization of the Loco Focos certainly made an impression on political observers.

Loco Foco members also routinely cited their roles as family providers and breadwinners as they championed their vision of ideal domestic masculinity. The LFP newspaper, *The Democrat*, identified a typical party voter as a "laboring man, with a needy family" and consistently reminded readers of their duties as married men. In one poem, the paper compared bachelors who lived solitary lives, like a "tree without its leaves," with married men's household activities that made them an integral part of a blossoming relationship, like "butterflies on flavored flowers."<sup>10</sup> The verse might have been awkward, but the prescriptive message promoting marriage as a moral value was clear. *The Democrat* also included articles on properly governing children, advertisements for such home wares as "handsome furniture," and a promotion for the book "On The Management of Children in Sickness and in Health by Dr. Ackerley."<sup>11</sup> Other party publications offered readers advice on household management and finding rental homes at reasonable rates. Directly adjacent to the *New Era's* description of the Flour Riot, the paper printed an article reminding renters "not to be in a hurry to engage houses for the next year," but rather to wait because the "rents must evidently come down."<sup>12</sup> Such concerns by the party press reflected Loco Focos' self-identification as family men with real domestic obligations while demonstrating some of the contours of their model of household-based masculinity.

Upholding masculine ideals also required Loco Focos to demonstrate that they provided moral leadership for their families. While the LFP was not explicitly a religious organization, some party operatives worked to demonstrate their place as moral, if not Christian civic leaders. Fitzwilliam Byrdsall alternatively referred to the Loco Focos as the "Methodists of Democracy" and Loco Focoism as consistent with "Christian Democracy."<sup>13</sup> Such a notion did not necessarily inform any

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specific party platforms, but it did mean supporting William Leggett's definition of "Democracy" as a "divine system of Christian morals applied to politicks, embraces, in its comprehensive creed of equal rights and equal duties, the whole family of man."<sup>14</sup>

Like other organized working men, Loco Focos also demonstrated moral guidance by how they instructed and their families when they were away from work. The pamphlet *Loco-Focoism Displayed, or Government For the People*, featured a debate over the proper way to spend the Sabbath. Without demanding particular behavior from his audience, the Loco Foco spokesman made clear that his involvement in the movement was partly spiritual, noting that "there is no difference between political rights and religious rights."<sup>15</sup> This sort of ambiguous Christian language mirrored the demographic profile of Loco Focos (and other organized working men) as culturally religious while not moving too far toward the evangelical or free-thinking camp.



**Sermon  
Satirizing Loco  
Foco Religiosity**

However, claiming moral authority for a political movement, even in general terms, sometimes led to a backlash by party critics who cited the Loco Focos for being too religiously self-righteous. The best example of such a critique appeared on a billboard following the spring election of 1837. The broadside contained a satirical sermon by Reverend Jedidey Birchard, who was labeled with the initials "L.L.D., D.D. and **A.S.S.**" to properly denote his pomposity. The sermon mocked LFP mayoral candidate Moses Jacques as "Moses the Second" and noted that "the disciples were all Loco Focos—and Jesus was a leader of Loco Foco."<sup>16</sup> While much of the

humor in the broadside was relatively obscure, the overall message that Loco Focos sometimes took themselves and their crusade against monied interests too seriously was apparent.

Party portraits also emphasized Loco Focos' workplace prowess, displaying their credentials as genuine working men who upheld masculine household obligations through proper application of craft skills.<sup>17</sup> Depictions of the Hecker brothers—John, George, and Isaac—made sure to mention both that the brothers ably ran a bakery while supporting the LFP and that their father John and uncle Frederick Friend (a former Working Men's Party candidate) worked for Robert Fulton as craftsmen on the *Clermont*.<sup>18</sup> Candidate Edward Curtis attempted to gain support at one party meeting by relating the story of his father, "a blacksmith."<sup>19</sup> Paulus Hedl, one of the organizers of the February 13<sup>th</sup> meeting in City Hall Park, advertised his skills as a "house smith" in the LFP newspaper *The*

*Democrat*. He professed that "according to the quality of his work, there is no mechanic of the same trade in the city, whose work is cheaper in the long run, or more reasonable in price."<sup>20</sup> Byrdsall noted that Hedl was an "ingenious mechanic," who was "excellent as a draughtsman" and "skilful as a practical workman" before writing that such "a man could be nothing else in politics than a Loco-Foco."<sup>21</sup> Such attempts by Loco Foco operatives to present themselves as skilled working men did not attempt to deceive voters about their occupational credentials but, rather, to stake out a place in the city's economic system from which to offer particular political critiques.<sup>22</sup>

### **Opponents Challenge LFP Masculinity**

Just as Loco Focos championed their model of household-based masculinity through public displays of fatherhood, breadwinning, family morality, and craft skill, Whigs and Democrats painted the LFP as unmanly political novices who upset normal domestic gender roles. Since the party drew some of its leaders and membership from the Working Men's Party of 1829-1831, opponents frequently associated Loco Focos with the more unpopular aspects of the earlier movement. The relationship between the two parties also became confused because even though they were two distinct groups, some Loco Focos referred to the Equal Rights Party as the Workingmen's Party. Contemporary charges of Loco Foco "agrarianism" attempted to reify this bond by publicly associating the LFP with Working Man Thomas Skidmore's destabilizing vision of a world without inheritance where the state, rather than the father, measured out family property.<sup>23</sup>

Even though Skidmore died before the LFP formed and the party platform never tread near the property issue, such challenges could be effective when they targeted Loco Foco masculinity. One upstate tract charged Orestes Brownson, Alexander Ming Jr., Levi Slamm, and other party supporters with trying to rob "children of the property of their fathers. The next and last step is to *take away a man's property, at his death, from his wife and children and give it to the public!*"<sup>24</sup> Such assaults specifically questioned Loco Foco credentials as fathers and breadwinning men in order to challenge their politics by suggesting that the LFP planned to upset households by confiscating their property. **15**

Partisans also tried to discredit Loco Foco masculinity by connecting the party to controversial figure Frances "Fanny" Wright. In the wake of one of her trips to New York in the late 1830s, Whig leader Philip Hone wrote in his diary that finally, "Fanny Wright's Gone ... the apostle of infidelity, the idol of the Loco-focos, and the oracle of sub-treasury politicians. Let her go home or go to the Devil, so that she never visits us again."<sup>25</sup> A typical opposition article likewise linked Wright to the party by referring to supporter Thomas Herttell as "a loco-foco—an anti-monopoly, a Fanny Wright."<sup>26</sup> Placing the LFP and Frances Wright together not only reinforced the idea that party members proposed a radical and

subversive model of gender norms, it also painted them as politically weak because of their supposed dependence on a woman. In reality, Wright had little relationship to the Loco Focos and was not even living in New York City for most of the party's tenure, but the fact that Wright's raucous 1836 national speaking tour addressed LFP issues such as monopolies, banking, and paper money was enough to elicit a response from critics.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporary political cartoons reiterated the characterization of Loco Focos as powerless and feminized with vivid imagery. While no group officially commissioned the prints, Loco Foco opponents certainly benefited from the fact that prominent illustrators, such as Henry R. Robinson and Edward Williams Clay, supported the Whig cause.<sup>28</sup> *A Gone Case. A Scene in Wall-Street* depicted the political party conflict as personified by boys working in the street. A boy selling Loco-Foco brand matches confronted his rival declaring "Oh, you d—d Whiggy," but was met with a punch in the nose and the clever retort, "I'll loco poke you." Meanwhile, Whig supporters on the right of the image celebrated as an African American chimney sweep taunted Loco Foco supporters on the left side by asking, "Does Fanny know you're out?"<sup>29</sup> The image effectively suggested masculine Whig prowess through pugilist skills at the expense of a weak Loco Foco Party, which ends up looking inadequate and bruised. The use of the chimney sweep not only reinforced the notion that LFP activities needed Frances Wright's permission and sanction, but also demonstrated Loco Foco electoral frailty: if they could be mocked by a marginalized figure like an African American child, they obviously lacked real political strength or influence.



**Loco Foco and Whig Characters Fight in Wall Street**



**Loco Focos Portrayed as an Old Irish Woman**

*The Death of Old Tammany and His Wife* Loco Foco celebrated Whig electoral success by challenging both the vitality of the Democratic Party and Loco Foco Party masculinity, while referencing specific political personalities in order to fix its assault on particular candidates. Alexander Ming Jr., shown fleeing to the right of the illustration, commiserated with a companion that "the jig's up," as a Whig on the left side boasted "Huzza! onward, we'll bang Slamm and the rest of them this time."<sup>30</sup> The most important

representation of the LFP came from the dead center of the cartoon. The picture explicitly personified the LFP as a feeble Irish woman who was subordinate to both her Democratic Party husband and the triumphant Whigs. As the Tammany Indian collapsed from a Whig arrow to his chest, Loco Foco cried "Arrah be me soul Ould Tammany, your faithful Loco Foco will die wid you! I'm knockt all to smidereens!" Again, the cartoon paired gender

with race (in this case,



**Loco Focos Portrayed as Poor Irish Rioters**



**Whig Cartoon Portraying Loco Voter as Irish**

characterizing Loco Foco (as Irish) to emphasize the LFP's marginality, dependence, and lack of political power.

The cartoon did not contain any hidden message or underlying analysis of political ideology; it was not meant to. Such images were most effective when their satire was blunt and obvious, indicating that any potential audience well understood the place of gender identity at the heart of the critique.<sup>31</sup>

Some political cartoons eschewed the message that Loco Focos embodied a weak version of masculinity and instead focused on the danger that Loco Foco policies presented to working families. Turning the LFP's household-based platform on its head, such images tried to tie the party to domestic suffering and poverty instead of hope and the fulfillment of family obligations. *The Times*, printed by Henry Robinson in 1837, included a parody of a Loco Foco meeting in its foreground. In the parody, a gin-soaked man and a mother and child lay helpless



**New York in the Panic of 1837**

on the ground with their arms outstretched.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the image *Specie Claws*



**Loco Foco Family Affected By the Specie Clause**

featured an unemployed worker's family about to be turned out of their home due to rising rent prices. The commentary blamed the family's circumstances on the father following "Loco Foco Pledges" which have replaced the tools in his toolbox. Without subtlety, both images picture Loco Focos as immoral and lazy, while indicating that LFP support was dangerous to household comfort and a threat to the very families they claimed to be

protecting. As these images clearly demonstrate, anti-Loco Foco satirical cartoons contested a type of politics that operated on an explicitly gendered terrain where party membership and policies spoke simultaneously to one's identity as a husband, father, and citizen.

This debate between Loco Focos and their detractors about masculine credibility **20** did not occur in a vacuum, but was part of a larger contemporary discussion about gender roles, working men's civic worth, and journeymen's place in party politics. Writing just before the LFP formed, William English, a Philadelphia cordwainer, labor politician, and delegate to the New York-based National Trades' Union, emphasized the difficulties facing organized working men in the political arena:

Once a year they call us *men*; once a year we receive the proud appellation of freemen; once a year we are the *intelligent, virtuous, orderly working men*. But then they want our *votes*, and they flatter us; they want our interest, and they fawn upon us; and it grinds them to the very soul, to have their delicate fingers clenched in the friendly gripe of an honest hand, but they dare not avow it then. There is contamination in the very touch of a man who labours for his bread.<sup>33</sup>

Such fears meant that working men who ventured into politics felt pressure to demonstrate their societal worth. Loco Foco political speeches and party tracts thus championed organized men's prowess as fathers, breadwinners, moral leaders, and skilled artisans. This also meant that rather than indulge in the street violence that erupted during the Flour Riot, Loco Focos chose to seek other means of redress. Legislatively, the LFP attacked those public economic institutions that they saw as preventing them from fulfilling their household responsibilities.<sup>34</sup>

### **Party Rhetoric**

Loco Foco Party platforms and rhetoric grounded specific discussions of public economic policies in the context of their perceived threats to organized working men's ability to fulfill domestic obligations; the largest set of issues in the party program involved monopolies, paper money, and the banking system's relationship to household survival. Loco Foco spokesmen viewed monopoly and

bank power as "more dangerous to the liberties of the people than that of a standing army" because they unfairly used markets and currency to the disadvantage of working family's finances.<sup>35</sup> Loco Foco State Assemblyman Clinton Roosevelt noted simply that "banks decrease the wages of mechanics and others when they appear to rise."<sup>36</sup> Roosevelt recognized that bankers (and some merchants and auctioneers) manipulated the supply and type of paper money paid to working men in order to make profits on the discounted bills. Because soft money, unlike specie, lost value if it was not current or circulating near the bank that printed it, bosses often paid working men in bills worth less than their face value. At the end of the week, working men lost the difference between the face value and the actual worth of the bills, robbing them of money they desperately needed for household expenses.

Loco Focos likewise cited unregulated bank loans meant for investment in western lands as inimical to the economic survival of working men's families because when the loans came due, speculating New York landlords pressed for specie passed their debts onto renters without warning. At the February 13<sup>th</sup> meeting before the Flour Riot, Alexander Ming Jr. declared that "banks have fostered extravagant speculations in real estate, and consequently the enormous increase of rents." The party resolved that the "true remedy for the people" was to reduce the price of all of their familial "necessaries of life" and for "every workingman [to] refuse paper money in payment for his services, or demand specie of the banks for all notes paid to him."<sup>37</sup> The statement signaled the LFP's acknowledgement that decisions about civic financial systems and management mattered specifically because of their domestic ramifications.

Just as party discussions about public economic policy spoke to Loco Focos' domestic obligations and family ties, LFP rhetoric linked working men's craft skill with their abilities as household providers. Loco Focos expressed outrage from the vantage point of hard-working, skilled artisans who occupied an important place in the economy, but could not support their families. At a March 6<sup>th</sup> park meeting, a party committee argued that organized laborers should not face such exorbitant "prices of provisions, rent, and fuel," given that they had "not been unusually wasteful or lazy."<sup>38</sup> Such an interesting formulation by the working men acknowledged that if their workplace performance had been less than diligent and industrious, they would have no right to claim breadwinning status. Loco Focos claimed, as skilled men and household breadwinners, that only a few years earlier, "an expert artizan could earn the price of a barrel and a half to two barrels of flour per week," but currently skilled artisans could not use their craft-standing to provide for their families. They also decried the current labor market for forcing native born workers to "compete in every way with immense numbers of foreign poor."<sup>39</sup> Like trade unionists, Loco Focos cited their skill level to set themselves apart from foreign workers (and others) in order to claim a particularly important place in the economy from which vantage point they could critique contemporary

economic realities. As with unionists, the malleability of rhetoric which allowed Loco Focos to set themselves apart from others was less about strict nativist ideology than it was about trying to address what organized men saw as a constantly shifting set of challenges to their own struggling domestic economies.<sup>40</sup>

While the Loco Foco platform began with issues such as monopolies, banking, and the defense of working men's craft skills, it also contained a wide variety of minor provisions that reflected the household-based worldview of organized working men and their families. Even a proposed Loco Foco Constitution included a clause on criminal sentencing grounded in domestic relationships. Loco Focos declared that "there shall be no capital punishment" under their system; instead they wanted men convicted for "murder or unjustifiable homicide" to be sentenced to hard labor where the "net profits of said labor to be given to the dependents and relations of the person murdered."<sup>41</sup> Other constitutional clauses included similar family restitution plans for the victims of white collar felonies such as embezzlement and financial corruption. Clinton Roosevelt's political treatise, *The Science of Government, Founded on Natural Law*, likewise denounced capital punishment for murderers because it would be "wrong to disgrace their relatives."<sup>42</sup> Such ideas often met with less than enthusiastic approval (Edgar Allen Poe even wrote a scathing review of Roosevelt's book), but their success was not as important as the consistency of their approach: grounding public policy in family concerns and a domestic-based masculine identity.<sup>43</sup> 25

The Loco Foco speeches delivered at the meeting in City Hall Park before the Flour Riot consciously picked up on party themes of domestic economy and household obligations and rather than inciting chaos, specifically indicted public economic institutions that threatened the survival of working men's families. Stating very clearly that they were holding the meeting to address an immediate household crisis, they lamented that "every article of necessity—bread stuffs, flesh meats, fuel and house rents, are at exorbitant rates; and an increase is demanded beyond the means of the working and useful classes of the community." However, they did not respond to such potential threats with calls for violence directed at merchants that they suspected of hoarding flour. Instead, they criticized the immoral behavior of "avaricious monopolists" and offered political solutions such as prohibiting the issuance of bank notes under \$100 and altering tax policy to shift more of the burden on to those with larger real and personal estates.<sup>44</sup> Even though they were later blamed for riling up the crowd and promoting anarchy, the Loco Focos ran a pretty standard political rally that day, citing real threats to their domestic survival and offering economic and legislative suggestions for protecting their families.

In the wake of the public disturbance on February 13, 1837, political rivals vilified the Loco Focos for their supposed role in the Flour Riot and specifically targeted the party's failure to maintain domestic stability because they recognized the

importance of upholding family obligations to the Loco Foco platform. One disparaging article about the Flour Riot and other mob activities noted that the poor conduct of working men, as "husbands, fathers, and citizens" prevented them from any future "prosperity and happiness." For such detractors, the problem was not that the rioters (and, by extension, Loco Focos) participated in street violence, damaged property, or caused civic chaos, but that the protestors set a bad moral example for their families and children; such men should not have taken to the streets and wasted flour when they could not properly feed their own families. The critique also stated that economic and political problems had to be resolved on the domestic front because "all efforts to benefit mankind should begin in the family circle."<sup>45</sup> *The Evening Star* complained that rioters and the Loco Foco newspapers which "countenance the conduct of the rioters" failed in their duties to govern their households. The editorial remarked that "if flour is run up for speculation do not use any; eat corn bread, eat bread made out of flour from imported wheat, eat potatoes, eat rice."<sup>46</sup> While the article did not suggest "eating cake," it did chastise Loco Focos for not properly governing their households because even with surging flour prices, *proficient* household management would have averted the Flour Riot. The political debate here critically focused on organized working men's abilities as domestic providers and quite literally as breadwinners, rather than differing interpretations of public economic policy or civic institutions.

This concluding chapter has demonstrated that organized working men experienced the events surrounding the 1837 Flour Riot and the larger Loco Foco movement as husbands and fathers trying to provide for their family obligations in the face of what they saw as potential economic threats. While operating in the civic arena, Loco Focos grounded their effort in the home and developed a party platform as husbands and fathers with real perceived family duties.

Alexander Ming Jr.'s personal narrative provides perhaps the best example of how the party's interconnected household and labor political worlds functioned. More than almost any other party leader, Ming possessed legitimate family credentials in the organized working men's political world. Alexander Ming Sr. was Thomas Skidmore's closest ally and a candidate for the agrarian faction of the Working Men's Party in 1830. Alexander Jr. joined his printer-father to publish numerous radical tracts in the late 1820s and 1830s, but did not join the Working Men's Party because he remained a vital part of the Democratic Party until he led the LFP defection in 1835.<sup>47</sup> Selected to present the keynote speech at the February 13<sup>th</sup> park



**Announcement of  
a Loco Foco  
Meeting**

meeting due to both his eloquent anti-monopoly views and his "large family," he became a target for party opponents after the meeting degenerated into the Flour Riot in spite of his vehement protests against violence.<sup>48</sup> Although not one of the men charged in the riot was a Loco Foco, conservative New York newspapers called for Ming and other men who organized the meeting to be censured.<sup>49</sup>

As an office-holder in the port collector's department, Ming bore the brunt of the public's outrage because his political position rendered him vulnerable to discharge.<sup>50</sup> In response to his dismissal, Fitzwilliam Byrdsall lamented that "it is an old trick of the aristocracy to inflict suffering on the wife and children, in order, by this mode of torture, to break the spirit of independence in the husband and father. The trick failed, however, this time, for Ming's spirit would neither bend nor break." After being fired, Ming protested to his superiors in Washington D.C. that "in being *suspected* in the remotest manner, as the instigator or abettor of a mob,—I am slandered in my moral and political character, slandered as a citizen, as a husband, as a father, as a man." Commenting on the events, Byrdsall later wrote that Ming's words conveyed the "indignant language of a man, with the spirit of manhood in him, and it could not be evaded or disregarded."<sup>51</sup> Ming's remonstrance professed more than his innocence; it declared that any attempt to disrupt his occupational or political life upset his role as the head of a household. He recognized the interconnected relationship between his domestic obligations to his family and his ability to work and to be politically active, and he argued that his own masculine identity depended on the strength of that very connection. Alexander Ming's superiors in Washington eventually agreed and he resumed his position in the Custom House. **30**

Like trade unionists, Working Men's Party members, anti-bank advocates, anti-monopoly activists and other organized working men profiled in this book, Loco Focos grounded their labor movement activities and rhetoric in a household-based masculine identity which encompassed their roles as breadwinning husbands, fathers, and skilled workers. The Loco Focos did not separate such categories from one another, but rather developed public critiques, rhetoric, and plans of action in response to perceived challenges to their domestic roles. The interconnected nature of this identity stemmed from the fact that working men did not see any division between their many household and family roles and obligations and their many workplace, civic, and political roles and obligations. Organized working men self-identified as household actors and engaged the market economy as family representatives. So, "public" debates about paper money and bank speculation related closely to "private" household necessities such as rent and food, trade union demands for shorter workdays developed from the desire to spend more time governing one's family, and political disagreements over land inheritance and birth control correlated to conceptions of proper fatherhood.

**Notes:**

**Note 1:** The story of how the Loco Foco Party began is worth mentioning briefly. At the Democratic Party meeting on October 29, 1835, candidates for the upcoming election were to be chosen, but members were divided over whether to support pro-bank, pro-monopoly candidates or anti-bank, anti-monopoly candidates. When the latter group attempted to grab the floor, the bank supporters turned off the gas, darkening the room. Tipped that the lights might go out, anti-monopoly supporters pulled out a new variety of self-striking "Loco Foco Brand" matches which they brought to the meeting and continued to nominate their own splinter candidates. The new group styled itself as the Equal Rights Party, but was given the name Loco Foco Party from the hostile Whig press. See Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, *The History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party: Its Movements, Conventions, and Proceedings With Short Characteristic Sketches of Its Prominent Men* (New York: Clement and Packard, 1842), 22-28.

**Note 2:** Ibid., 101.

**Note 3:** For descriptions of the flour riot, see Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 99-108, Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York: 1712-1873* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1873), 97-110, *The New Era*, February 14, 1837, *The New Era*, February 15, 1837, *The Plaindealer*, February 18, 1837, *The Evening Star*, February 15, 1837, *Evening Post*, February 14, 1837, *Courier and Enquirer*, February 14, 1837, *Sun*, February 14, 1837, *Journal of Commerce*, February 14, 1837, *Niles' Register*, February 18, 25, 1837, *New-Yorker*, February 18, March 11, 18, 1837, and Herbert Asbury, *All Around the Town: Murder, Scandal, Riot and Mayhem in Old New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 191-197.

**Note 4:** On the Loco Focos, see William Trimble, "Diverging Tendencies in New York Democracy in the Period of the Locofocos," *American Historical Review* 24, issue 3 (April, 1919), 396-421, William Trimble, "The Social Philosophy of the Loco-Foco Democracy," *American Journal of Sociology* 26, issue 6 (May, 1921), 705-715, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945), 190-209, Carl N. Degler, "The Locofocos: Urban 'Agrarians,'" *Journal of Economic History* 16, issue 3 (September, 1956), 322-333, Leo Hershkowitz, "The Loco-Foco Party of New York: Its Origins and Career, 1835-1837," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 46, number 3 (July, 1962), 305-329, Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-1837* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), Anthony Gronowicz, *Race and Class Politics in New York City Before the Civil War* (Boston:

Northeastern University Press, 1998), 59-85, and Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 17-48.

**Note 5:** Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 235.

**Note 6:** Hershkowitz, "The Loco-Foco Party of New York," 328

**Note 7:** "Appeal of Equal Righters to Andrew Jackson," October, 1837, as cited in Reginald Charles McGrane, *The Panic of 1837: Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 153.

**Note 8:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 1, 70-1, 93, 106-107. For more on Tonwsend's unique family history, see Chapter Two.

**Note 9:** *New Era*, February 21, 1837. Another example of interesting naming among the Loco Focos comes from Manly Wells, the party's candidate for Assessor in the Eleventh Ward in the spring 1837 election. See *New Era*, March 29, 1837.

**Note 10:** *The Democrat*, March 12, 1836..

**Note 11:** *The Democrat*, March 21, 1836, April 1, 1836, April 19, 1836, and March 29, 1837.

**Note 12:** *New Era*, February 14, 1837.

**Note 13:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, vi and 189.

**Note 14:** *Plaindealer*, July 22, 1837.

**Note 15:** *Loco-Focoism Displayed, or Government For the People. In a Dialogue Between a Whig and Loco-Foco.* (New York: Piercy & Reed, 1844), 28.

**Note 16:** Jedidey Birchard, *Loco Foco forever!!! Or, Downfall of Tammany!! : Being the heads and tails of a discourse delivered by the Right Rev. Father in God, Jedidey Birchard, L.L.D., D.D. and A.S.S., at the Chatham Show Shop, on last Sabbath Ev'g.* (New York: s.n., 1837).

**Note 17:** It is difficult to estimate how many Loco Focos worked as journeymen, but Carl N. Degler found that about 60% of the main party leadership were artisans or mechanics. Certainly this number would have been higher among the rank-and-file. See Degler, "The Locofocos," 329.

**Note 18:** For more on the Hecker brothers, see Rev. Vincent F. Holden, C.S.P., *The Early Years of Isaac Thomas Hecker (1819-1844)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1939). Isaac Hecker later wrote that the Heckers would go out

and post political handbills at three in the morning, but that the "hour was not so inconvenient for us, for we were bakers." Rev. Isaac T. Hecker, "Dr. Brownson and the Working Man's Party Fifty Years Ago," *Catholic World* 45 (May, 1887), 203. See also William Leggett's statements about laboring men in *The Plaindealer*, February 18, 1837.

**Note 19:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 93.

**Note 20:** *The Democrat*, March 9, 1836.

**Note 21:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 106.

**Note 22:** Loco Focos also tried to attract firemen to their movement because of what they represented to household and neighborhood protection, but could not compete with the volunteer fire departments controlled by the Whigs and Tammany Hall. Isaac Varian, who flirted with the Loco Focos before becoming a Democratic mayor in 1838, was a fire chief, but this did not prevent him from becoming a target for Whig partisans who condemned him not protecting firemen's families. For the Whig attack on Loco Focos, see A Fireman, *Firemen, Read This! On the 9th of October Last the Common Council Passed a Resolution to Grant a Donation of \$300 to the Widow of Thomas Horton, Who Lost His Life in the Service of the City. On Taking the Question on the Adoption of the Resolution, the Vote Stood as Follows, Viz: ...* (New York: Chatterton & Cassidy printers, 1837).

**Note 23:** See 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).

**Note 24:** *Loco-Focoism: As Displayed in the Boston Magazine Against Schools and Ministers, and In Favor of Robbing Children of the Property of Their Parents! Christians! Patriots! Fathers! Read and Reflect!* (Albany: Office of the Albany Evening Journal, 1840), 3. Italics in original. For more on the relationship between Orestes Brownson and the Loco Foco Party, see Rev. Isaac T. Hecker, "Dr. Brownson and the Working Man's Party Fifty Years Ago," *Catholic World* 45 (May, 1887), 200-208.

**Note 25:** Allan Nevins, ed. *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co, 1927), 402.

**Note 26:** *New York American*, February 14, 1837. For more on the use of Wright's name as an epithet, see 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 27:** On Frances Wright's activities in the 1830s, see William Randall Waterman, "Frances Wright," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1924), 240-256.

**Note 28:** Nancy R. Davison, "E.W. Clay and the American Political Caricature Business" in David Tatham, ed., *Prints and Printmakers of New York State, 1825-1940* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 93.

**Note 29:** *A Gone Case. A Scene in Wall-Street* (New York: Henry Robinson, 1836).

**Note 30:** Edward Williams Clay, *The Death of Old Tammany and His Wife Loco Foco* (New York: Henry Robinson, 1837).

**Note 31:** The characterization of Loco Focos as Irish can also be seen in *A Democratic Voter* (New York: H. R. Robinson, 1836) and *The Would-Be Mayor Preparing to Quell a Riot* (New York: H. R. Robinson, 1837).

**Note 32:** Henry Robinson, *The Times* (New York: Henry Robinson, 1837).

**Note 33:** William English, "Oration Delivered at the Trades' Union Celebration of the 4th of July," *Radical Reformer and Working Man's Advocate*, Sept. 1, 1835, 123. (Italics in original) English himself won a seat in the Pennsylvania state legislature in the late 1830s. See Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 111.

**Note 34:** A week after the Flour Riot, William Leggett eloquently summed up this position. His writings had inspired the creation of the LFP two years earlier. He declared, "The true way to make flour cheap, and beef cheap, and all the necessaries of life cheap, is, not to attack the dealers in those articles, and strew their commodities in the streets, but to exercise, through the ballot boxes, the legitimate influence which every citizen possesses to put an end, at once and forever, to a system of moneyed monopolies, which impoverish the poor to enrich the rich." See *Plaindealer*, February 18, 1837.

**Note 35:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 101.

**Note 36:** Clinton Roosevelt, *The Mode of Protecting Domestic Industry, Consistently With the Desires Both of the South and the North, By Operating On the Currency* (New York: McElrath and Bangs, 1831), 35.

**Note 37:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 101-2.

**Note 38:** Ibid., 109-110.

**Note 39:** Ibid., 110.

**Note 40:** The speech cited above also pitied poor immigrants who "have severed the ties of country and home, hoping to acquire here, by their industry and skill, that independence which their industry and skill could never buy in the land of their fathers." Ibid., 110. Not all Loco Focos were as sympathetic and some of their candidates even accepted fusion nominations from the Native American Democratic Association, the country's first nativist political party. On nativist politics, see Leo Hershkowitz, "The Native American Democratic Association in New York City, 1835-1836," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 46, number 1 (January, 1962), 41-59 and Elliot J. Gorn, "'Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City" *Journal of American History* 74, issue 2 (September, 1987), 388-410.

**Note 41:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 166.

**Note 42:** Clinton Roosevelt, *The Science of Government, Founded on Natural Law* (New York, Dean & Trevett, 1841), 45.

**Note 43:** Poe particularly objected to Roosevelt's pompous tone and writing. See Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of New Books," *Graham's Magazine* (August, 1841), 93 and "Notices of New Books," *United States Democratic Review* 9, issue 38 (August, 1841), 199.

**Note 44:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 101.

**Note 45:** "Thoughts on the Times," *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* 9, issue 5 (May, 1837), 491-492.

**Note 46:** *The Evening Star*, February 15, 1837.

**Note 47:** Alexander Ming Sr. published, among other things, Thomas Skidmore's *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* and Alexander Ming Jr. published Thomas H. Leggett's anti-auction pamphlet, *Reasons Why the Present System of Auctions Ought to be Abolished*.

**Note 48:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 17. For more on the lives of Alexander Ming Sr. and Alexander Ming Jr., see Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class*, 90-91.

**Note 49:** Philip Hone was very critical of Ming's actions regarding the Flour Riot. See Nevins, ed. *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, 241. Joel Tyler Headley's 1873 portrait of the Flour Riot criticized Ming's speech against paper money for, among other things, stirring up the "ragged mob on the currency question." See Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 104.

**Note 50:** Ming had previously worked as a printer and bookseller.

**Note 51:** Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 108. Italics in original.