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Conspiratorial Fears and Constitutional Threats

Massachusetts Abolitionists and Free Soil circles entrenched their rhetoric in a conspiratorial style during the political fallout of the 1854 Burns Fugitive Slave Case. Due to the conspiratorial rhetoric the legislature engaged in after the case and their framing of the South as a larger than life conspiratorial entity encroaching on the sovereignty of Northern states, the Massachusetts State House felt extralegal measures were necessary to combat the ominous Southern threat before them. This reliance on the tropes of conspiratorial language and thinking had a direct and corrosive effect on the constitutionality of the Massachusetts legislatures' proposals, including an assault on the state's independent judiciary and the retaliatory and unconstitutional Personal Liberty Law of 1855. These extralegal measures taken on the part of Northern legislatures such as Massachusetts in reaction to conspiracy echoed similarly inspired endeavors in the South. The paranoid style both politicians and the broader American public engaged with fueled a Northern idea of conspiracy, often called “Slave Power,” supposedly enacted by the Southern states, with the complicit consent of Northern politicians, to infiltrate the federal government and use it as a tool to further slave interests. Massachusetts legislatures and journalists invoked the Slave Power conspiracy directly after unsuccessful fugitive slave cases and used a rhetoric of federal infiltration by the South to further an abolitionist leaning state agenda. Immediately after the loss of one such case, the Massachusetts legislature turned its attention to the passage of the most comprehensive personal liberty laws yet seen in the country, and in 1855 established “An Act to protect the Rights and Liberties of the People of the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts," after a protracted political battle with the state judiciary and a gubernatorial veto. The political mud fight that preceded the passage of the new Personal Liberty Law, which was in direct contradiction to federal law, included an unconstitutional assault by the legislature on the independent state judiciary in the name of removing a judge entrenched in Slave Power.

Conspiratorial rhetoric, though not unique to the United States, is a staple of its political discourse, and played a significant, and often constitutionally detrimental, role in Northern identity politics, such as the passage of the 1855 Massachusetts Personal Liberty Laws. While historians previously explored the usage and effect of conspiratorial rhetoric in American politics, both broadly and through period studies, this paper will expand on that research by looking specifically at the legislation born of conspiratorial rhetoric in the aftermath of the Fugitive Slave Act with the intention of showing that such language created an environment in which legislatures felt justified in going forward with legislation that pushed the bounds of constitutionality. Richard Hofstadter explored the use of conspiratorial rhetoric in American political life in his 1965 essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." The essay began with a disclaimer that when using the term paranoid Hofstadter is not referring to the clinical definition of paranoia but merely finds "no other word adequately evokes the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy,"[1] that one finds in such conspiratorial political discourse. Hofstadter then defined commonalities in his construct of conspiratorial rhetoric and used these commonalities to dissect the political discourse of the founding generation, before turning his attention to the right wing of his day and their appliance of the paranoid style.

[1] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 3-4.

Hofstadter noted that the paranoid style typically involves a feeling of persecution, not just against oneself, but instead against one's culture and mode of living. A "vast, insidious, and preternaturally effective"[2] network of conspiracy that is the "motive force"[3] in history perpetrates the conspiracy theorist's persecution, and those who entertain this political style often reimagine history as a struggle between their values and an imagined conspiratorial foe. Finally, Hofstadter addressed that the paranoid style perpetuates a political scenario of irreconcilably opposed interests, leading to a total breakdown of normal political processes involving compromise.[4]

Hofstadter confined his exploration of the paranoid style to two periods of American history for the sake of brevity, but David Bryon Davis tied the notion of conspiratorial rhetoric to the 1850s, though he stopped short of an analysis of the specific legislative impact the rhetoric evoked. Davis used the framework Hofstadter provided by analyzing how slavery and antislavery activists used conspiratorial language to frame and sensationalize their political discourse. Davis claimed, "By the 1850's conspiratorial imagery had become a formalized staple in the political rhetoric of both North and South, used by statesmen, journalists and fanatics alike."[5] In his essay "The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," Davis elaborated on Southern fears of a vast, organized abolitionist plot in the North, as well as Northern anxiety over the infiltration of the federal government by odious slave interests. When combined with the effects of conspiratorial rhetoric as laid out by Hofstadter, Davis' analysis bears troubling

[2] *Ibid*., 14.
[3] *Ibid*., 29.
[4] *Ibid*., 39.
[5] David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 215.

implications for the constitutional quality of the work performed by legislatures in this period.

In 1850, Northerners perceived a direct constitutional attack initiated by Southern Slave Power- a threat that they believed had taken hold in Washington in the guise of the Fugitive Slave Act- and launched an almost decade long legislative pushback in Massachusetts that devolved to extralegal measures as the fight raged on. While the Fugitive Slave Clause in the Constitution had long caused contention in Northern states, the new Fugitive Slave Act, passed piecemeal in the Compromise of 1850, sparked outrage among abolitionists, Free-Soilers, and those who considered themselves neutral on the slavery issue but fervently opposed encroachment on Northern states' rights.[6] The law established federal commissioners, who acted as agents holding jurisdiction within Northern Circuit and District courts and were incentivized monetarily to catch and convict fugitive slaves and were paid less when those they apprehended went free.[7] Additionally, the law compelled not only Northern marshals, deputies, and judges to build and execute these cases, but also called on all citizens to "aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law."[8] The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was wildly unpopular for forcing ordinary citizens to be complicit in slavery, as well as provoking an outcry in the North, particularly Massachusetts, stemming from claims of its unconstitutionality. The Fugitive Slave Act trampled on rights of states that had pre-

[6] Thomas Mitchell, *Antislavery Politics in Antebellum and Civil War America* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 60.
[7] "The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850" in Rachel Shelden, "Hist 3573- Constitution and Slavery," University of Oklahoma Press, 2016, 10.
[8] *Ibid*.

existing Personal Liberty Laws and raised questions regarding the Fourth Amendment.[9] Conscience Whigs, Free-Soilers, and abolitionists saw the passage of the act as merely more evidence that Slave Power had corrupted Congress, a line of thinking consistent with that of Hofstadter; passage of the act evoked the idea of an incredibly well-connected conspiracy, capable of not just influencing historical events, but actively attacking the Northern, Free-Soil way of life.[10] Moreover, members of the Massachusetts press and legislature saw some of their own politicians as accomplices to the plot. Favorite Massachusetts son and outspoken Whig Daniel Webster conceded a legitimate need for a fugitive slave law, illustrating to the paranoid observer that Slave Power had permeated the North as well.[11]

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 provoked outrage along with cries of unconstitutionality and conspiracy from Northern politicians and papers, but as it only represented the threat of Slave Power overreach, it was not enough to elicit the visceral and unconstitutional flurry of legislation the Massachusetts legislature exhibited a taste for when provoked by the South. By 1852, the Fugitive Slave Act lost its potency as a talking point for Whigs courting the Free Soil and abolitionist vote, potentially because fugitive slave cases did not arise with any frequency.[12] That said, when slave hunters from the South brought "escaped slaves" for trial and demanded their rendition to the South, Massachusetts state legislators typically reacted with vitriol, instituting sweeping reforms by using Northern identity politics to galvanize support from their constituencies.

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[9] London Daily News, "Foreign Extracts: An English View of American Politics-Massachusetts and the Fugitive Slave Law," *New York Daily Times,* ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, June 8, 1885, Accessed October 2, 2016.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] Thomas Mitchell, *Antislavery Politics in Antebellum and Civil War America* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 58.
[12] *Ibid,* 60.

Accordingly, the Massachusetts legislature acted swiftly in the aftermath of the Latimer case in 1843, in which a fugitive slave had fled to Massachusetts, where his master apprehended him and ordered him back to the South by the Constitutional Fugitive Slave provision.[13] A series of equal rights measures dubbed "Latimer Laws" passed both houses with ease, along with Massachusetts' first Personal Liberty Laws.[14] When viewed as a reaction to an overarching Slave Power conspiracy, the Latimer Laws and the Personal Liberty Law of 1855 fall in line with Hofstadter's analysis of early Republican conspiratorial thinking, in which legislators of Massachusetts saw themselves as "fending off threats" from a conspiratorial foe to their "well-established way of life."[15]

By 1855, ten years after the passage of the Latimer Laws, the composition of the Massachusetts state legislature changed to include a partisan collection of representatives who were uniquely sensitive to the Slave Power threat, and with resentment for the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 broiling, were eager to enact defensive, and equally unconstitutional, legislation designed to fight Slave Power in the same extrajudicial realm it operated in. Thus, when a slave owner brought his escaped slave, Burns, to trial in 1854 Massachusetts and won the case, the overwhelmingly Know-Nothing Massachusetts legislature jumped at the opportunity.[16] Know-Nothings were not traditional abolitionists and were often the brunt of abolitionist attacks as involved in Slave Power because they took no firm opposition to the institution in order to maintain a competitive presence in

[13] William Lloyd Garrison, "Debate on the Marriage Bill," *The Liberator*, The Liberator Files, February 24th,1843, Boston, Accessed October 22,2016.
[14] "Massachusetts Legislature." *The Inquirer and Mirror*, Proquest Historical Newspaper, February 4th, 1843, Nantucket Accessed October 22, 2016.
[15] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 23.
[16] Thomas Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North (1780-1861)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 168.

Southern politics.[17] However, by 1855, Know-Nothings in the Massachusetts legislature were of a slightly different composition than those of the rest of the country. With the Whig party on the decline and Republicans not yet a viable party in state politics, Know-Nothings were far more likely to have Free-Soil and abolitionist leanings than any other Know-Nothing body in the country, including their governor.[18]

The Know-Nothings in the Massachusetts legislature, composed of former Whigs and soon to be Republicans, began an all-out war in the wake of the Burns case, attacking the independent state judiciary and governorship while using conspiratorial Slave Power rhetoric to justify their actions. The political battle in the Legislature began not with a volley of legislation as it did in 1843, but instead with a petition to Governor Gardner, also a member of the Know-Nothing party, to remove Judge Loring from his position as Judge Probate and Commissioner for his ruling.[19] A number of newspapers, mostly abolitionist, lauded this action and called for the immediate removal of Judge Loring from the Bench for his clear complicity in Slave Power and inaction on behalf of the Massachusetts Latimer Laws.[20] The Governor, in an attempt to uphold federal law, as well as the Constitution of Massachusetts, while also placating his angered legislative branch, brought the petition before the Massachusetts Supreme Court in an unofficial capacity. There, the Court condemned the petition as a breach of the independence of the judiciary, and the Governor included this condemnation with his own refusal to comply.[21]

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[17] William Lloyd Garrison, "The Torrysim of 1855," *The Liberator*, The Liberator Files, June 1st, 1855, Boston. Accessed October 5th, 2016.
[18] "Slavery in the United States," *The Observer*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Accessed October 2, 2015.
[19] "The Tribune on Gov. Gardner and the Loring Case" *The New York Daily Times*, May 21, 1885, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Accessed October 2, 2016.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Thomas Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North (1780-1861)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 168.

Governor Gardner's refusal to unconstitutionally compromise Massachusetts' independent judiciary to strike a blow against Slave Power in the face of what the legislature saw as an unconstitutional infringement on state's rights sealed his fate as a perceived co-conspirator with Slave Power and prompted legislative backlash of dubious constitutionality. After Governor Gardner's refusal to remove Judge Loring from the bench, lawmakers brought a new piece of legislation before the Massachusetts State House entitled, "An Act to protect the Rights and Liberties of the People of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." The proposed Personal Liberty Law had twenty-six sections, significantly expanding its 1843 predecessor, and proving to be more comprehensive than any such law in the country. This law contained provisions previously unseen in similar laws, including forbidding counsel for slave claimants and state officers from issuing warrants, as well as providing commissioners to act as a defendant to the accused fugitive.[22] The enraged legislature passed the bill with wide margins in both the Senate and House before sending it to the Governor's desk. Few doubted that the Governor would veto the bill, not least because it directly contradicted the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and faced constitutional challenges.

Objections regarding the bill's constitutionality were not enough to avert the criticism Governor Gardner drew for its veto, and implicate him in the vast Slave Power conspiracy, prompting further unconstitutional action from the state legislature. With the left flank of his party regarding his handling of the Loring case as an accusation of his Southern sympathies, his veto of the Personal Liberty laws served as an explicit confession to Gardner's involvement in Slave Power policy, prompting resounding resistance from his State House and the press. The *Worcester Spy* accused Gardner of

[22] Ibid, 169.

promoting Southern Know-Nothing agenda, striking down the legislation to prove that Virginians could trust the Know-Nothing gubernatorial candidate with Southern interests, and going so far as to ask, "Is Governor Gardner less a Governor of Massachusetts than a subject of Virginia?"[23] Another editorial from the *Worcester Spy* accused Gardner of attempting to position himself as a potential candidate for the next national election by garnishing Southern support at the expense of the people of Massachusetts, with the *National Era* and *Tribune* echoing similar allegations.[24] The conflict Free-Soilers and abolitionists perceived between their interests and that of Slave Power appeared to be irreconcilable, a factor Hofstadter posits arouses paranoid and conspiratorial rhetoric. Due to the irreconcilable nature of these interests, observers deemed the typical government mechanism of compromise as wholly unacceptable. Thusly, the Governor's veto served as proof that the tentacles of Slave Power had infiltrated not just the federal government, but the Governor of Massachusetts' office as well.

Some Northern observers of the Burns Slave Case debacle rationalized the comprehensive Personal Liberty Laws enacted in Massachusetts by ignoring the constitutional questions they posed, preferring instead to focus on the perceived Southern aggression and conspiracy in the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and gubernatorial veto of the Personal Liberty Laws. In an editorial published by the *Albany Evening Journal*, the author began his piece by reprinting the entirety of the Bill of

[23] The Worcester Spy, "Governor Gardner- Judge Loring- The Massachusetts Legislature," *The Liberator*, The Liberator Files, June 1st, 1855, Accessed October 5, 2016.
[24] National Era, "Governor Gardner- Judge Loring- The Massachusetts Legislature," *The Liberator*, The Liberator Files, June 1st, 1855, Accessed October 5, 2016.

Rights for the reader.[25] The journalist then argued, through a selective reading of the Constitution that actively ignored the Fugitive Slave Clause, that Massachusetts and other New England states needed Personal Liberty Laws to protect the fundamental liberty of Trial by Jury guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The article goes so far as to hail the one under consideration in Massachusetts as "not only right and wise, but conservative and Union-strengthening measures."[26] Despite the article's claim that Personal Liberty Laws acted as Union-strengthening measures, it acknowledged the significant Southern backlash to the laws, but only tacitly, through attempting to delegitimize Southern aggravation. The dismissal of slave interests' frustration at measures intended to weaken the Fugitive Slave Act was two-fold: Firstly, the article asserted that fugitive slave laws were unconstitutional in their own right because they denied slaves a proper trial. This position was not the strongest argument against the Fugitive Slave Act, as it failed to acknowledge the legal distinctions slave and free states made regarding slave's legal rights, and declined to engage with the part of the Slave Act that provoked the most outrage: Massachusetts citizens were not protecting slaves through Personal Liberty Laws as much as they were protecting their white citizens and officers of the court from perpetuating slavery, and the sovereignty of their state to legislate free of Slave Power influence.[27] Secondly, the article accused, not just Southern states, but "any State, North or South," that advocated the strengthening of Fugitive Slave measures of "a direct and

[25] "Personal Liberty Laws," *The Albany Evening Journal,* America's Historical Newspapers, July 29. 1855, Accessed December 8, 2016.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Thomas Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North (1780-1861)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 168.

guilty assault upon the Constitution" and "the Union."[28] By condemning both Northern and Southern states alike, the paper illustrated the pervasive nature of the Slave Power conspiracy and likely intended the comment as a veiled barb at Judge Loring and Governor Gardner.

However, not all observers of Massachusetts's politics who subscribed to the Slave Power Conspiracy viewed Judge Loring and Governor Gardner with hostility, though this lack of hostility did not absolve the men of their Slave Power attachments, with some newspapers going further than even the Massachusetts state legislature in suggesting unconstitutional remedies to the Slave Power problem. In a critique of near constant attacks by *The Tribune* of the two men, *The New York Daily Times* asserted in a May 21st piece that even had both the judge and the governor erred in their judgments, the men were merely attempting to uphold conflicting federal and state laws, and were all but compelled to acquiesce to Slave Power.[29] In a reprint of a *London Daily News* article, *The New York Daily Times* presented an entirely sympathetic picture of Governor Gardner and Judge Loring, stating, "These functionaries are really very much to be pitied. They cannot obey the contradictory laws of the Union and the State; they have been made to make their choice between them."[30] Despite the understanding the editorial exhibited towards the state officials, the article was plain in its denunciation of Slave Power. It went so far as to invoke militaristic rhetoric, questioning if it would be possible for Massachusetts to remain in the Union, calling for a "second independence," given the

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[28] "Personal Liberty Laws," *The Albany Evening Journal,* America's Historical Newspapers, July 29. 1855, Accessed December 8, 2016.
[29] "The Tribune on Gov. Gardner and the Loring Case" *The New York Daily Times*, May 21, 1885, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Accessed October 2, 2016.
[30] London Daily News, "Foreign Extracts: An English View of American Politics-Massachusetts and the Fugitive Slave Law," *New York Daily Times,* ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times, June 8, 1885, Accessed October 2, 2016.

"command of the slave-holding power, preponderant at Washington."[31] This militaristic rhetoric is consistent with Hofstadter's conclusion that conspiracies such as Slave Power provoke such apocalyptic fears that normal political channels become an impossible means of reconciliation.[32]

While Northern states such as Massachusetts reacted in a visceral and unconstitutional manner to the Slave Power conspiracy, Southern states behaved in a similarly unconstitutional manner to what they believed was a northern, abolitionist conspiratorial threat. Virginian newspapers reacted with intense distaste to Massachusetts' continued "nullification" efforts; some even intonated that a vast, international conspiracy aimed at disunion was afoot. The *Richmond Enquirer* laid out such a conspiracy in elaborate detail, citing Exeter Hall of England as not just a hotbed of abolition and the birthplace of the Know Nothing Party, but also as a seat of "jealousy and hatred" of the United States, intent on using abolition as a tool to bring about its downfall.[33] The rhetoric *The Enquirer* furthered when discussing the abolitionist conspiracy exhibits hallmarks of David Brion Davis's analysis of conspiratorial rhetoric common to the era, as it identified the Massachusetts legislature as a "subversive" entity, intent on destroying the rights of the South.[34] To provide proof of the international abolitionist conspiracy, the piece quotes the article from *The London Daily Times,* discussed above, at length, italicizing any instance in which the English article implied the time for Northern revolution was at hand.[35] Then, in a seemingly contradictory aside,

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[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 39.
[33] Ritchie, Pryor, & Dunnavant, "The Threatening Storm," *Richmond Enquirer*, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, July 6, 1855, Accessed December 10, 2016.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] *Ibid.*

The Enquirer praised England for the wisdom of recognizing the threat Massachusetts posed to the Union with its Personal Liberty Laws. Despite trying to hold both England and Massachusetts as accountable for the Nullification Crisis, *The Enquirer* held a consistent view as to who had been victim to the "insidious" abolition plot, and advocated that Southern states take action through retaliatory legislation.[36] By advancing Northern, abolitionist action as a part of a vast conspiracy against innocent slaveholders, Southern papers furthered the same framework of conspiratorial thinking that had prompted the Personal Liberty Laws in Massachusetts. While the initial overture to legislate through the problem seems innocent, the closing of the article casts considerable doubt on this assertion. *The Enquirer* asserted, "*Virginia* will do her duty in the crisis, regardless of the consequences."[37] Because of the conspiratorial nature of the threat posed by abolitionists, with a vast, international network irreconcilably at odds with Southern interest, Virginians deemed constitutionally dubious measures, such as the inclusion of private citizens in the original Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, increasingly appropriate.

Other Richmond papers, in reacting to the Massachusetts Personal Liberty Laws, were not as full-throated in their claims of conspiracy, but implied the threat nonetheless and echoed *The Richmond Enquirer's* call for retaliatory legislative measures intended to further the Fugitive Slave Act to territory of questionable legality. *The Daily Dispatch* of Richmond categorized the laws as a continuation of Massachusetts' "foul deeds," and while it made no mention of international abolitionists behind the threat, asserted that the

[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*

measures raised "real questions which may place the Union in danger."[38] *The Dispatch* failed to elaborate whether the threat of disunion rested in the hands of Massachusetts due to its inability to legislate within the confines of the Constitution, or at the hands of beleaguered Virginians who simply could no longer stand the perceived outrageous attacks on federal law. *The Dispatch* also called for the South to propose defensive, retaliatory legislation against Massachusetts, stating, "It out to be known at once whether the Constitution is to be obligatory in Virginia and invalid in Massachusetts."[39] *The Dispatch*, entrenched as it was in Southern identity politics, failed to consider the unconstitutional aspects of the expanded Fugitive Slave Act, and even if it had, likely would not have considered them an assault on Northern state's constitutional rights so much as a means of further protecting the constitutional rights of Southern slaveholders. Driven by fear of abolitionist conspiracy, Virginians grew comfortable operating under a paradigm in which the Constitution, threatened as it was by shadowy Northern conspirators, could only be protected through its selective suspension.

The inability to compromise with Slave Power, or even tacitly condone its continued existence without participating in it by default, drove the Massachusetts state legislature to take steps outside of normal political channels, which though perhaps not revolutionary, were certainly not constitutional. In reaction to the Burns Fugitive Slave Case, the Massachusetts legislature assaulted the independence of the state judiciary in calling for the removal of a judge they deemed too entrenched in Slave Power. When this step failed, the legislature focused on passing a law that directly contradicted a recently passed federal statute and severely limited that statute's original constitutional provision.

[38] "The 'Personal Liberty Bill,'" *The Daily Dispatch*, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, May 25, 1885, Accessed December 10, 2016.
[39] *Ibid*.

The Massachusetts legislature took these actions as retaliatory measures to what they believed to be a vast conspiracy perpetrated by slaveholding interests intent upon infringing Northern states rights in their quest for economic and political power. Due to the diametric opposition of abolition and Free-Soil policy and Slave Power interests, the Massachusetts legislature felt justified in taking whatever steps necessary to combat the conspiracy, unconstitutional or not. This pattern of conspiratorial thought and reactionary constitutional subversion permeated across both Northern and Southern political landscapes and escalated in each as a reaction to the other. Southern states reacted to the Fugitive Slave Laws passed by the Massachusetts legislature with the same ardent fear and belief of a broader conspiracy against their interests. This tendency towards a conspiratorial framing of abolitionist opposition fostered a Southern proclivity to rely on extralegal measures when combatting the Northern nullification threat. Ultimately, a reliance on conspiratorial thought in the years approaching the Civil War fueled sectional discord and placed the North and South on opposing, diplomatically unreachable stages. Due to the tendency of conspiratorial thinking to alienate parties against their supposed insidious foe and force the opposing parties to look to extreme, illegal measures to combat the threat, the culture of conspiracy prevalent in the 1850s undoubtedly contributed to the growing sectional dispute, opening a dialogue in which revolutionary measures seemed appropriate.

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