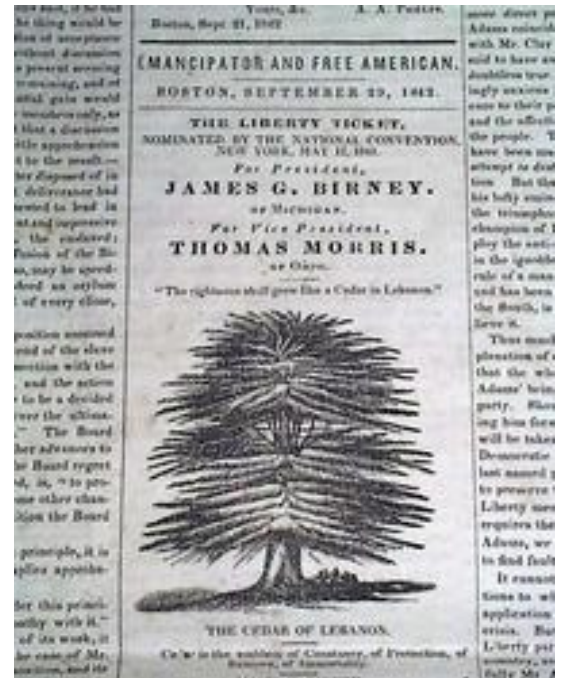


Who Would You Vote for in 1840? And Who Will You Vote for on Nov. 8?

October 27, 2016



Imagine that it is 1840 and someone approaches you on the street and hands you a flyer for James G. Birney, the presidential candidate of the new Liberty Party. The flyer says that the Liberty Party opposes slavery. It is the only party that does.

The Democrats and the Whigs—the two parties of the two-party system of that time—supported slavery, not to the same degree perhaps, but neither party opposed slavery. The Liberty Party is new and small, tiny. It's candidate Birney has absolutely no chance to win the election. But he stands opposed to slavery. Who will you vote for on voting day in 1840?

Will you argue that voting for the Liberty Party would be wasting your vote, and that instead you would vote for the Whig or Democratic parties, both of which accepted slavery?

Of course, if you vote for the Liberty Party, the Whigs or the Democrats will take power. They will appoint the Supreme Court. So what will you do? Vote the Whig Party because it is perhaps a little less a slave party than the Democrats?

Doesn't it seem right to vote for the Liberty Party, to vote against slavery? Doesn't it seem like the right thing to do, even though the party won only 6,797 votes in 1840? (Yet it should be noted that four years later Birney received 62,103 votes or 2.3 percent of the popular vote.)

Yes, it was the right thing to do. And not only morally, but also politically.

The Liberty Party and later the Free Soil Party, and other small and apparently insignificant abolitionist parties grew in influence. They were the political expression of a growing abolitionist movement that was challenging the fugitive slave law by liberating blacks from the hands of Federal marshals on the streets of American cities. The abolitionist movement and the apparently insignificant abolitionist parties eventually forced a realignment of the political system in the United

States.

If you voted for the Liberty Party in 1840, you helped to initiate the process that led to the formation of the Republican Party out of splits in the Whig and Democratic Parties. Your vote helped to create the momentum that led to the victory of the Republican Party candidate Abraham Lincoln. Your vote in 1840 helped to bring about the Civil War, a revolutionary war that led to the abolition of slavery and then to the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, ending slavery, making the former slaves citizens and giving black men the right to vote. Was your vote for a minor third party in 1840 wasted?

And Your Vote in 2016

Today in this election, someone may approach you on the street with a leaflet for Jill Stein of the Green Party. Stein is the candidate of a small party. Her party's presidential candidate has never won more than 2.7 percent, Ralph Nader's accomplishment in 2000.

Stein's leaflet will tell you that she opposes the corporate domination of America, what is, in fact, contemporary slavery. She opposes militarism and war. She pledges to take action against climate change. Yet, she hasn't got a chance of winning.

Will you then vote for Hillary Clinton, the candidate of the banks and corporations? Of militarism, invasion, and occupation abroad? The candidate of empire and war? Or will you vote for Donald Trump, the misogynist, racist who promises to make America great again on a national capitalist model? Isn't it clear now, that capitalism is the problem? And isn't it clear that Clinton and Trump both stand for capitalism with all of its attendant problems: economic inequality, poverty, racism, gender discrimination.

But isn't a vote for a third party, for Jill Stein and the Greens a wasted vote? Worse than a wasted vote isn't it in reality a vote for Trump.

No, it isn't. Like the vote for the Liberty Party in 1840, a vote for the Greens is a vote for the future. We are voting for the Greens because it is an expression, even if not a fully adequate one, of the movements we have fought in: of Immigrant Rights, of Occupy Wall Street, of Black Lives Matter. We are voting for the Green Party because it is part of the process of laying claim to the future, of building a mass, working class, socialist party.

A Third Party on the Left

The Liberty Party demonstrates perfectly the function of the third party on the left. What is it that such parties do, parties like the Liberty Party and the Green Party?

1. They develop a political analysis of the social system, revealing its class character and its oppressive nature.
2. They serve as organizing centers for reform and revolutionary movements opposed to the status quo.
3. They allow one to take a moral position against the great evils of a society, evils involving racism, economic exploitation, and abuse of political power.
4. They blaze the trail and open the way for larger, future reform or revolutionary movements to come.

5. They offer a different conception of politics, as between elections the party and its members engage in radical and militant organizing not only fighting against the status quo, but also

offering in their own behavior and activities a model of a future society.

6. They provide an alternative, a place to go, for those becoming alienated from the major political parties, thus increasing the mass and creating the gravity to help break up the old parties.

7. They stake out a new, liberationist political position, a vision of a more humane society. They hold up a utopian model of a new society, one without the class divisions, racism, and gender oppression of the world we live in.

I will not waste my vote in this election, voting for one of the two parties that represent and support the existing system. I will not simply cast a protest vote—though there is nothing wrong with taking a moral stand against a pervasive evil, since those who first take a stand convince others to do so as well. I will not waste my vote on Clinton and the past. No, I will cast my vote for the Greens, for freedom and for the future.