

GOVERNOR THOMAS WILSON DORR OF RHODE ISLAND



1711

Joseph Dorr graduated from [Harvard College](#). He would become a minister at Mendon. By 1828, ten young men of this name “Dorr” would graduate from that institution (plus, four from other institutions). Presumably these were all descendants of the Edward Dorr, who perhaps had settled at Roxbury and founded a family in the 1680s after coming down to the [Boston](#) area from Pemaquid in Maine, where he had sworn fidelity during 1674.

When not more than 5 or 6 years old, presumably in about this timeframe, [Benjamin Franklin](#) saw a moose wandering down the city street. A bagatelle he would author on November 10th, 1779, “The Whistle,” describes how delighted he had been in tootling on a whistle he had purchased — and then how crestfallen he was upon learning that for the price paid, he might have obtained four such toys.

[John Comer \(3\)](#) attended school in [Boston](#), his teacher being Ames Angier.

John Comer

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THE “DORR WAR”

1805

➡ November 5, Tuesday: [Wilson Flagg](#) was born in Beverly, Massachusetts. His father was a grammar-school teacher and musical leader. He would be educated at Phillips Andover Academy and go on to Harvard College. He would be described as “a man of small size and light weight, not robust, ... a regular walker for pleasure of physical profit.”

[Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) was born in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), son of a wealthy businessman. The family was distinguished because his grandfather Ebenezer had been one of Paul Revere’s riding companions on that famous patriotic act of 1775.¹



Gramps

1. The name would be left out of the poetic legend as it developed, perchance for no other reason than that “Dorr” generated no very useful rhymes –“Door?” –“Roar?” –“Whore?” –“Soar?” –“Lore?” –“More?” –“Bore?” –“Four?” –“Gore?” –“Score?”

It was two by the village clock,
 When he came to a **door** in Concord.
 Ebenezer **Dorr** heard the **roar** of the flock,
 Saw the birds **soar** among the trees,
 And was **bored** by the breath of the morning breeze
 Blowing over the meadow **dour**.

And one was safe and asleep in his bed
 Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
 Who that day would be lying dead,
 Pierced by a British musket ball.

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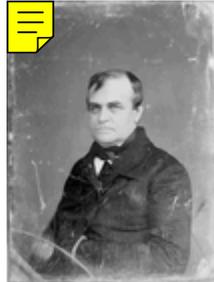
GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

1823

➡ Marshall Tufts entered [Harvard College](#) in the year of the Great Rebellion.²

One of the things he would do while in college was file a petition that he be excused from wearing the prescribed clothing for a student, a petition which was denied. Another such application filed by him would meet with the fate of being “indefinitely postponed.” At one point during his higher education he would be admonished for using disrespectful language to a college officer. Upon completion of his higher education, he, like [Henry Thoreau](#) later, would disdain to pay (in his case, \$2.⁵⁰) for a meaningless supplementary A.M. sheepskin.

According to the historian Robert Elton Berry, the Great Rebellion at [Harvard](#), after which 43 members of a graduating class of 70 would find themselves expelled, was merely an out-of-hand effort by the senior class to drive an unpopular classmate away from school.



[Thomas Dorr](#) of [Rhode Island](#) was attending during this student revolt but took no part and thus would be one of the very few in the class of 1823 actually to receive a diploma — an assignment which he prepared on April 29th, “Calculation and Projection of a Lunar Eclipse of 1825” (21 ½ x 29 ½ inches), is still on file there: <<http://oasis.harvard.edu:10080/oasis/deliver/~hua17004>>. ([Doctor Walter Channing](#) would not, for instance, be handed his bachelor’s diploma until 1867.) Dorr would return to his home town of [Providence](#) to become an attorney and a member of the Legislature —then an agitator for public reform —then a “governor” —then a revolutionary with a cannon —then a “traitor” —then a life convict at hard labor —finally a person on “early retirement.” (It’s quite a different life trajectory than usual: the dude who didn’t act up at all while a callow college youth but then grew up to make a great stir!)

The sloop *Harvard* was being used to bring firewood for the college from Maine. Nathaniel Bowditch would calculate that after the Great Rebellion of 1823 and the consequent expulsion of 43 of 70 of the graduating class, and loss of economy of scale, this practice was actually rather than saving the college money, costing the college some \$4,400 per year.

2. Refer to Samuel Eliot Morison’s “The Great Rebellion in Harvard College, and the Resignation of President Kirkland” in [Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts XXVII](#) (1929):54-112.

Professor Morison was the last Harvard historian to ride a horse to work. He taught the young Harvard men while attired in riding breeches. He refused to teach the Radcliffe girls because girls are so frivolous. He believed so passionately that the writing of history was an art that, when interrupted at his desk by the barking of a dog, he shot the dog. After WWII he taught while attired in an Admiral’s uniform.

1834

➡ At the institution of higher education which would become [Brown University](#), the original College Edifice of 1770, which is on the right in the postcard image below, had been supplemented in 1822 by the Hope College structure on the left. In this year Manning Hall was being added, between these two edifices.)



A [Providence](#) lawyer named [Thomas Dorr](#) was elected to the [Rhode Island](#) legislature.



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A facetious monody on [Sam Patch](#) of [Pawtucket](#), [Rhode Island](#) was issued by Robert C. Sands in his WRITINGS, in volume 2, on page 347.



Robert C. Sands

ROBERT C. SANDS

THE “DORR WAR”

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At this point the [Providence, Rhode Island Baptists](#) renovated their meetinghouse, removing the 126 square pews on the main floor. They tore out the old pulpit and sounding board and installed a pulpit having long slips.

[Zachariah Allen](#) invented an automatic steam-engine cutoff.

 February 19, Wednesday: The main problem of the era, or at least the main perceived problem, in [Rhode Island](#), was that the Charter of 1663 was being used to deny voting rights to thousands of men in the growing urban industrial areas of the state, thus retaining power for the old Yankee farmers.



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THE “DORR WAR”

Faced with continuing taxation without representation, the workingmen of [Providence](#) met to choose delegates to a proposed convention. Various middle-class reformers, including [Thomas Dorr](#), took part in this popular movement.



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There were of course, as always in politics, strange bedfellows. Representative [James De Wolf](#) of Bristol, he of the filthy-rich slavetrading family, would introduce a petition in the Rhode Island House of Representatives, to do away with the “freehold” qualification for voting under which an adult white male citizen could vote only if he was the holder of real estate worthing at least \$134.00. Representative De Wolf’s petition would point at the fact that our Declaration of Independence had alleged that “all men are created equal,” and that therefore there ought to be “universal” suffrage, almost as if this De Wolf family believed in equality of all before the law. (By “universal” Representative De Wolf did not of course intend to include children, or women, or the descendants of the black slaves who had been brought over from the coast of Africa on slave ships by his family. That would have been preposterous.)

[Thomas Dorr](#) was himself personally in favor of black suffrage but, at the People’s Convention, he would be able to persuade only 17 persons to vote with him on this, while 46 would vote against black suffrage. The outcome of this vote would be that the Dorrites would lose the support both of the Rhode Island blacks, and of the white abolitionists.

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February 22, Saturday: A convention of [Rhode Island](#) workingmen met in [Providence](#), drafted a set of 19 resolutions for reform, and organized a political party to support candidates for the General Assembly pledged to the reform list, to be known as the Constitutional Party.



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Cesar Franck won the First Prize in piano at the Royal Conservatory of Liege.

Senator [Daniel Webster](#) spoke before the Senate of the United States of America on the topic of “A Redeemable Paper Currency”:³

Mr. President,—The honorable member from Georgia stated yesterday, more distinctly than I have before learned it, what that experiment is which the government is now trying on the revenues and the currency, and, I may add, on the commerce, manufactures, and agriculture of this country. If I rightly apprehend him, this experiment is an attempt to return to an exclusive specie currency, first, by employing the State banks as a substitute for the Bank of the United States; and then by dispensing with the use of the State banks themselves.

This, Sir, is the experiment. I thank the gentleman for thus stating its character. He has done his duty, and dealt fairly with the people, by this exhibition of what the views of the executive government are, at this interesting moment. It is certainly most proper that the people should see distinctly to what end or for what object it is that so much suffering is already upon them, and so much more already in visible and near prospect.

And now, Sir, is it possible,—is it possible that twelve millions of intelligent people can be expected voluntarily to subject themselves to severe distress, of unknown duration, for the purpose of making trial of an experiment like this? Will a

3. Edwin P. Whipple’s THE GREAT SPEECHES AND ORATIONS OF DANIEL WEBSTER WITH AN ESSAY ON DANIEL WEBSTER AS A MASTER OF ENGLISH STYLE (Boston: Little, Brown, 1879).



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nation that is intelligent, well informed of its own interest, enlightened, and capable of self-government, submit to suffer embarrassment in all its pursuits, loss of capital, loss of employment, and a sudden and dead stop in its onward movement in the path of prosperity and wealth, until it shall be ascertained whether this new-hatched theory shall answer the hopes of those who have devised it? Is the country to be persuaded to bear every thing, and bear patiently, until the operation of such an experiment, adopted for such an avowed object, and adopted, too, without the co-operation or consent of Congress, and by the executive power alone, shall exhibit its results?

In the name of the hundreds of thousands of our suffering fellow-citizens, I ask, for what reasonable end is this experiment to be tried? What great and good object, worth so much cost, is it to accomplish? What enormous evil is to be remedied by all this inconvenience and all this suffering? What great calamity is to be averted? Have the people thronged our doors, and loaded our tables with petitions for relief against the pressure of some political mischief, some notorious misrule, which this experiment is to redress? Has it been resorted to in an hour of misfortune, calamity, or peril, to save the state? Is it a measure of remedy, yielded to the importunate cries of an agitated and distressed nation? Far, Sir, very far from all this. There was no calamity, there was no suffering, there was no peril, when these measures began. At the moment when this experiment was entered upon, these twelve millions of people were prosperous and happy, not only beyond the example of all others, but even beyond their own example in times past.

There was no pressure of public or private distress throughout the whole land. All business was prosperous, all industry was rewarded, and cheerfulness and content universally prevailed. Yet, in the midst of all this enjoyment, with so much to heighten and so little to mar it, this experiment comes upon us, to harass and oppress us at present, and to affright us for the future. Sir, it is incredible; the world abroad will not believe it; it is difficult even for us to credit, who see it with our own eyes, that the country, at such a moment, should put itself upon an experiment fraught with such immediate and overwhelming evils, and threatening the property and the employments of the people, and all their social and political blessings, with severe and long-enduring future inflictions.

And this experiment, with all its cost, is to be tried, for what? Why, simply, Sir, to enable us to try another "experiment"; and that other experiment is, to see whether an exclusive specie currency may not be better than a currency partly specie and partly bank paper! The object which it is hoped we may effect, by patiently treading this path of endurance, is to banish all bank paper, of all kinds, and to have coined money, and coined money only, as the actual currency of the country!

Now, Sir, I altogether deny that such an object is at all desirable, even if it could be attained. I know, indeed, that all paper ought to circulate on a specie basis; that all bank-notes, to be safe, must be convertible into gold and silver at the will of the holder; and I admit, too, that the issuing of very small notes by many of the State banks has too much reduced



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the amount of specie actually circulating. It may be remembered that I called the attention of Congress to this subject in 1832, and that the bill which then passed both houses for renewing the bank charter contained a provision designed to produce some restraint on the circulation of very small notes. I admit there are conveniences in making small payments in specie; and I have always, not only admitted, but contended, that, if all issues of bank-notes under five dollars were discontinued, much more specie would be retained in the country, and in the circulation; and that great security would result from this. But we are now debating about an **exclusive** specie currency; and I deny that an exclusive specie currency is the best currency for any highly commercial country; and I deny, especially, that such a currency would be best suited to the condition and circumstances of the United States. With the enlightened writers and practical statesmen of all commercial communities in modern times, I have supposed it to be admitted that a well regulated, properly restrained, safely limited paper currency, circulating on an adequate specie basis, was a thing to be desired, a political public advantage to be obtained, if it might be obtained; and, more especially, I have supposed that in a new country, with resources not yet half developed, with a rapidly increasing population and a constant demand for more and more capital,—that is to say, in just such a country as the United States are, I have supposed that it was admitted that there are particular and extraordinary advantages in a safe and well regulated paper currency; because in such a country well regulated bank paper not only supplies a convenient medium of payments and of exchange, but also, by the expansion of that medium in a reasonable and safe degree, the amount of circulation is kept more nearly commensurate with the constantly increasing amount of property; and an extended capital, in the shape of credit, comes to the aid of the enterprising and the industrious. It is precisely on this credit, created by reasonable expansion of the currency in a new country, that men of small capital carry on their business. It is exactly by means of this, that industry and enterprise are stimulated. If we were driven back to an exclusively metallic currency, the necessary and inevitable consequence would be, that all trade would fall into the hands of large capitalists. This is so plain, that no man of reflection can doubt it. I know not, therefore, in what words to express my astonishment, when I hear it said that the present measures of government are intended for the good of the many instead of the few, for the benefit of the poor, and against the rich; and when I hear it proposed, at the same moment, to do away with the whole system of credit, and place all trade and commerce, therefore, in the hands of those who have adequate capital to carry them on without the use of any credit at all. This, Sir, would be dividing society, by a precise, distinct, and well-defined line, into two classes; first, the small class, who have competent capital for trade, when credit is out of the question; and, secondly, the vastly numerous class of those whose living must become, in such a state of things, a mere manual occupation, without the use of capital or of any substitute for it. Now, Sir, it is the effect of a well-regulated system of paper credit to break in upon this line thus dividing the many from



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the few, and to enable more or less of the more numerous class to pass over it, and to participate in the profits of capital by means of a safe and convenient substitute for capital; and thus to diffuse far more widely the general earnings, and therefore the general prosperity and happiness, of society. Every man of observation must have witnessed, in this country, that men of heavy capital have constantly complained of bank circulation, and a consequent credit system, as injurious to the rights of capital. They undoubtedly feel its effects. All that is gained by the use of credit is just so much subtracted from the amount of their own accumulations, and so much the more has gone to the benefit of those who bestow their own labor and industry on capital in small amounts. To the great majority, this has been of incalculable benefit in the United States; and therefore, Sir, whoever attempts the entire overthrow of the system of bank credit aims a deadly blow at the interest of that great and industrious class, who, having some capital, cannot, nevertheless, transact business without some credit. He can mean nothing else, if he have any intelligible meaning at all, than to turn all such persons over to the long list of mere manual laborers. What else can they do, with not enough of absolute capital, and with no credit? This, Sir, this is the true tendency and the unavoidable result of these measures, which have been undertaken with the patriotic object of assisting the poor against the rich!

I am well aware that bank credit may be abused. I know that there is another extreme, exactly the opposite of that of which I have now been speaking, and no less sedulously to be avoided. I know that the issue of bank paper may become excessive; that depreciation will then follow; and that the evils, the losses, and the frauds consequent on a disordered currency fall on the rich and the poor together, but with especial weight of ruin on the poor. I know that the system of bank credit must always rest on a specie basis, and that it constantly needs to be strictly guarded and properly restrained; and it may be so guarded and restrained. We need not give up the good which belongs to it, through fear of the evils which may follow from its abuse. We have the power to take security against these evils. It is our business, as statesmen, to adopt that security; it is our business not to prostrate, or attempt to prostrate, the system, but to use those means of precaution, restraint, and correction which experience has sanctioned, and which are ready at our hands.

It would be to our everlasting reproach, it would be placing us below the general level of the intelligence of civilized states, to admit that we cannot contrive means to enjoy the benefits of bank circulation, and of avoiding, at the same time, its dangers. Indeed, Sir, no contrivance is necessary. It is **contrivance**, and the love of contrivance, that spoil all. We are destroying ourselves by a remedy which no evil called for. We are ruining perfect health by nostrums and quackery. We have lived hitherto under a well constructed, practical, and beneficial system; a system not surpassed by any in the world; and it seems to me to be presuming largely, largely indeed, on the credulity and self-denial of the people, to rush with such sudden and impetuous haste into new schemes and new theories,



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to overturn and annihilate all that we have so long found useful. Our system has hitherto been one in which paper has been circulating on the strength of a specie basis; that is to say, when every bank-note was convertible into specie at the will of the holder. This has been our guard against excess. While banks are bound to redeem their bills by paying gold and silver on demand, and are at all times able to do this, the currency is safe and convenient. Such a currency is not paper money, in its odious sense. It is not like the Continental paper of Revolutionary times; it is not like the worthless bills of banks which have suspended specie payments. On the contrary, it is the representative of gold and silver, and convertible into gold and silver on demand, and therefore answers the purposes of gold and silver; and so long as its credit is in this way sustained, it is the cheapest, the best, and the most convenient circulating medium. I have already endeavored to warn the country against irredeemable paper; against the paper of banks which do not pay specie for their own notes; against that miserable, abominable, and fraudulent policy, which attempts to give value to any paper, of any bank, one single moment longer than such paper is redeemable on demand in gold and silver. I wish most solemnly and earnestly to repeat that warning. I see danger of that state of things ahead. I see imminent danger that a portion of the State banks will stop specie payments. The late measure of the Secretary, and the infatuation with which it seems to be supported, tend directly and strongly to that result. Under pretence, then, of a design to return to a currency which shall be all specie, we are likely to have a currency in which there shall be no specie at all. We are in danger of being overwhelmed with irredeemable paper, mere paper, representing not gold nor silver; no, Sir, representing nothing but broken promises, bad faith, bankrupt corporations, cheated creditors, and a ruined people. This, I fear, Sir, may be the consequence, already alarmingly near, of this attempt, unwise if it be real, and grossly fraudulent if it be only pretended, of establishing an exclusively hard-money currency.

But, Sir, if this shock could be avoided, and if we could reach the object of an exclusive metallic circulation, we should find in that very success serious and insurmountable inconveniences. We require neither irredeemable paper, nor yet exclusively hard money. We require a mixed system. We require specie, and we require, too, good bank paper, founded on specie, representing specie, and convertible into specie on demand. We require, in short, just such a currency as we have long enjoyed, and the advantages of which we seem now, with unaccountable rashness, about to throw away.

I avow myself, therefore, decidedly against the object of a return to an exclusive specie currency. I find great difficulty, I confess, in believing any man serious in avowing such an object. It seems to me rather a subject for ridicule, at this age of the world, than for sober argument. But if it be true that any are serious for the return of the gold and silver age, I am seriously against it.

Let us, Sir, anticipate, in imagination, the accomplishment of this grand experiment. Let us suppose that, at this moment, all bank paper were out of existence, and the country full of specie.



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Where, Sir, should we put it, and what should we do with it? Should we ship it, by cargoes, every day, from New York to New Orleans, and from New Orleans back to New York? Should we encumber the turnpikes, the railroads, and the steamboats with it, whenever purchases and sales were to be made in one place of articles to be transported to another? The carriage of the money would, in some cases, cost half as much as the carriage of the goods. Sir, the very first day, under such a state of things, we should set ourselves about the creation of banks. This would immediately become necessary and unavoidable. We may assure ourselves, therefore, without danger of mistake, that the idea of an exclusively metallic currency is totally incompatible, in the existing state of the world, with an active and extensive commerce. It is inconsistent, too, with the greatest good of the greatest number; and therefore I oppose it. But, Sir, how are we to get through the first experiment, so as to be able to try that which is to be final and ultimate, that is to say, how are we to get rid of the State banks? How is this to be accomplished? Of the Bank of the United States, indeed, we may free ourselves readily; but how are we to annihilate the State banks? We did not speak them into being; we cannot speak them out of being. They did not originate in any exercise of our power; nor do they owe their continuance to our indulgence. They are responsible to the States; to us they are irresponsible. We cannot act upon them; we can only act with them; and the expectation, as it would appear, is, that, by zealously co-operating with the government in carrying into operation its new theory, they may disprove the necessity of their own existence, and fairly work themselves out of the world! Sir, I ask once more, Is a great and intelligent community to endure patiently all sorts of suffering for fantasies like these? How charmingly practicable, how delightfully probable, all this looks!

I find it impossible, Mr. President, to believe that the removal of the deposits arose in any such purpose as is now avowed. I believe all this to be an after-thought. The removal was resolved on as a strong measure against the bank; and now that it has been attended with consequences not at all apprehended from it, instead of being promptly retracted, as it should have been, it is to be justified on the ground of a grand experiment, above the reach of common sagacity, and dropped down, as it were, from the clouds, "to witch the world with noble policy." It is not credible, not possible, Sir, that, six months ago, the administration suddenly started off to astonish mankind with its new inventions in politics, and that it then began its magnificent project by removing the deposits as its first operation. No, Sir, no such thing. The removal of the deposits was a blow at the bank, and nothing more; and if it had succeeded, we should have heard nothing of any project for the final putting down of all State banks. No, Sir, not one word. We should have heard, on the contrary, only of their usefulness, their excellence, and their exact adaptation to the uses and necessities of this government. But the experiment of making successful use of State banks having failed, completely failed, in this the very first endeavor; the State banks having already proved themselves not able to fill the place and perform the duties of a national bank, although highly useful in their

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appropriate sphere; and the disastrous consequences of the measures of government coming thick and fast upon us, the professed object of the whole movement is at once changed, and the cry now is, Down with all the State banks! Down with all the State banks! and let us return to our embraces of solid gold and solid silver!

➡ April: In [Rhode Island](#), the Constitutional Party candidates in general lost badly, but one of them, [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), did manage to obtain one of the four seats from [Providence](#).



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➡ May: In [Rhode Island](#), Representative [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) presented the 19 resolutions of his Constitutional Party, but the General Assembly was able to deflect them by initiating a “Freeman’s Constitutional Convention.” This convention met to repudiate the proposals and then lapsed due to lack of a quorum. He had been stymied.



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1841

During this year [Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta](#), who had relocated from Hartford, Connecticut to Providence, [Rhode Island](#), was issuing THE RHODE-ISLAND BOOK: SELECTIONS IN PROSE AND VERSE, FROM THE WRITINGS OF RHODE-ISLAND CITIZENS (Providence: H. Fuller, 40 Westminster Street. Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Co. Knowles & Vose, Printers),

THE RHODE-ISLAND BOOK

a collection which included a piece by state politician [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) entitled “Genius Born; Not Made” as well as an essay by Sarah H. Whitman on German Literature and Transcendentalism. According to this source at least, the American Transcendental movement owed a whole lot to Mme. de Staël’s *GERMANIA*:

[next screen]



German Literature

by

Sarah H. Whitman.

IT has been said that "it is in the German nature duly to honor every thing produced by other nations." Our countrymen, we fear, are in danger of becoming, like the English, too exclusively national. We could wish that they had a little more of the German cosmopolitanism. Perhaps it is natural that whenever any attempt is made by a portion of the community to lead the public mind to new trains of thought or modes of action, to introduce new theories or point out new fields for exertion or enterprise, that an antagonist party should spring up, whose tendency it is to resist all innovation. Perhaps it is a wise provision of nature that has thus furnished every age with its sentinels and warders, as well as with its bold and adventurous pioneers; and provided they conduct themselves fairly and discreetly in their vocation, we have no desire to see their office annulled, or to interrupt them in its rightful exercise. Let the sentinels give challenge to all new claimants, but let them not refuse admittance to any who can furnish a fair passport, or make out a clear title to be received within their guarded citadel.

Since the efforts which have recently been making to introduce the German literature among us, it is not unusual to hear the most unqualified, indiscriminate opposition expressed to the study of a language of unequalled copiousness, flexibility and force, rich in every department of its literature, and entitled, in the opinion of the first European scholars, to an equal estimation with our own noble mother tongue. Yet we are rejoiced to discover, even in the bitterness of its opponents, an indication of the increasing interest with which it is regarded among us; we are in no way disturbed by the fear that its subtleties, refinements and abstractions, should exert an evil influence on our national character, the individuality of which seems in no danger of being neutralized by such antagonist principles, though it may perchance be favorably modified by them. The Germans, it is true, have their faults; but these faults, it has been well said, are as good as virtues to us, since being the exact opposites of our own, they may teach us most important lessons.

The opposers of German literature are fond of preferring the claims of common sense to those of philosophy; of elevating the actual over the ideal. They descant much and rather vaguely against Transcendentalism. They tell us of the folly of believing in innate ideas, and triumphantly quote Locke and his "tabula rasa." They are afraid of all vagueness and mysticism, and tremble like children at the shadowy appearances seen in the twilight. They will have nothing to do with that which they cannot handle. They have faith in nothing which they cannot fully comprehend. They like to see all objects clearly and sharply defined in the broad day-light of the understanding. Yet in the shadowy, twilight regions of the imagination, we may behold much that is then only visible. The near glare of the sun conceals from us those far lights of heaven, that are forever burning in the vaults of space; even as the acute shrill sounds of day prevent us from hearing the deep voices of nature. The Shekinah, which was by day only a cloud of smoke, became by night a pillar of fire.



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In literature, their favorite models are those writers who are most remarkable for clearness, polish, and precision. They seem to prefer vigorous, rather than comprehensive thinkers; --writers whose vision is clear but limited; who deal manfully with facts and events, but care not to penetrate beyond the surface of being, showing us things as they are, without questioning of the how and why. They love to pace steadily and safely along with the "smooth tongued Addison, the stately Johnson, and the sublime Burke," never deviating from the beaten path, and looking upon all who go down in diving-bells, or mount in balloons, as hair-brained tempters of fate.

They fear all new aspects of truth, and gravely tell us, that "it is better with our fallible natures and limited capacities, to rest upon certain ideas and opinions that have been received as plausible, rejecting all speculations upon subjects which can never be decided, nor farther developed, while the soul remains in the thralls of flesh."

Supposing a reflective mind could bring itself to act upon this suggestion, or rather to cease from acting, for ourselves we know of no opinions that have been universally received as "plausible," and did we know any such, we could not receive them as truths, until they had been submitted to the test of our own reason. Who shall tell us that any man or class of men have monopolized the right of thought? What is truth to another is not truth to us until our own understanding has verified it. Whatever danger there may be in leaving every man to decide for himself, there is surely far less than in any attempt to restrict the individual right of opinion, through regard to expediency or respect for authority.

We could not, if we would, have every man a philosopher, and we think there need be little fear, that our countrymen will become infected with any undue fondness for abstract researches. The mind that has never tried to grasp the great problems of human life and destiny, that has never sought to wrest a reluctant meaning from the hieroglyphic characters inscribed on the broad page of nature, needs no such restriction; the mind that has done this, will hardly be checked in its onward impulse by the "cui bono" of the utilitarian. It sounds almost like mockery to ask one who has ever caught a single ray of the warm, living light of the sun of truth, to satisfy himself with the frippery, gilt-paper toy of "plausibility." These timid counsellors remind us of Solomon's slothful man, who keeps housed and says, "there is a lion in the street, if I go forth I shall be slain." There are some who cannot be thus easily restrained; they must "go forth," even at the worst of perils --they must meet the lion, and wrestle with it as they may --and often do they find, that when they look their formidable foe calmly in the face, he loses all his terrors, and becomes at once harmless and tractable.

These persons are constantly opposing revelation to nature, and faith to reason. We cannot agree with them in apprehending any danger to Christianity from the investigation of calm, tolerant, philosophic spirits, who fear not to look at both sides of a question, lest they should meet with something opposed to established and time-hallowed opinions. The timid faith that fears to question, cannot satisfy us, --such assent is far worse than honest denial. The only fatal skepticism, as it seems to us, is that of the man who wants faith in the human soul, and fears to trust its promptings.



THE "DORR WAR"

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

For ourselves, we rejoice in the increasing number of those who are willing to follow truth wherever she may lead them, in the spirit of that child-like confidence and perfect love which casteth out fear. We look for the time when philosophy shall aid in reconciling reason and faith, not by depressing faith, but by elevating reason. When we shall be able to interpret, in all its beautiful simplicity, the word of Him who taught us to read the gospel of Nature, to observe the lilies of the field, and to seek for the kingdom of heaven within our own hearts.

The enforcement of this self-reliance, this faith in the power of the individual to discover for himself truth, is one of the leading heresies of which the "New School" is accused. Yet the highest stars of heaven may be seen mirrored within the single drop of dew that trembles within the heart of a violet.

This faith in truth and nature, this desire to free the mind from its slavery to creeds and conventionalities, though the growth of no particular school, has, it is true, within the last twenty years, been more profoundly felt and more earnestly inculcated, than at any former period. It gives a tone to all the noblest literature of the day, and is slowly but surely working a change in the character of the times. It is this which prompted the obnoxious declaration of Dr. Channing that "Man is great as man, be he what and where he may." This is what was implied by Emerson, when he said, "let a man plant himself on his instincts, and the whole world will come round to him," or in other words, work in harmony with him. It is this which illumines every page of Carlisle, as with the glory of an inspired scroll, and imparts to the apocalyptic reveries of Swedenborg whatever they possess of vivifying and converting energy.

This doctrine, which was taught by a few sincere and simple spirits, amid the darkest gloom of Jewish superstition and bigotry, has caused one of the most true hearted believers of our own day to assert that the vital truths of Christianity are too deeply inwrought into the very nature of the human soul to be in any danger from a free and zealous examination into the true character of the Christian miracles. It is this growing conviction which is beginning to render all persecution for opinions sake as disgraceful as it ever was futile, and this it is, above all, which is teaching the instructors and guardians of youth, that the great objects of education are not to be achieved by the exhibition of facts or the inculcation of theories, but by developing and strengthening the powers of the soul for individual and independent action.

Much, though not all of this, is we think attributable more or less directly to the Germans. Much that in our own literature is but faintly and dimly shadowed forth, is in this developing itself in free and luxuriant growth. In the German literature, to use one of their own expressive phrases, "man finds himself." The "sweet sad music of humanity" pervades every department of it. In its deep earnest philosophic spirit; in its fearless, trusting, transparent simplicity; in the holy fervor of its poets; the serene, spiritual, far-reaching gaze of its theologians and moralists, we may find much which even the rich, classical literature of England cannot supply.

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”

To us, Germany has ever been a bright land of promise since first in early youth we listened with kindling heart and eager sympathy to the tidings which Mme. De Staël had brought us of a people, who in an age of artificiality, had dared to follow the suggestions of their own spirits and to show us nature as she had mirrored herself within their own hearts. And now, having possessed ourselves of the golden Key which is to unlock for us this rich world of thought, we cannot but glory in our new-found treasure, and endeavour to win others to become partakers of our joy.

Seth Luther’s idea that we all have a right to cast our ballot was finding an expression, in the formation of a [Rhode Island Suffrage Association](#):

“If the sovereignty don’t [*sic*] reside in the people, where in the hell does it reside?”⁴

[Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), a lawyer and legislator in [Rhode Island](#), failing in his reform efforts, organized a People’s Party which would call a convention, rewrite the Rhode Island charter of 1836, and hold elections. The proposed new constitution was to extend suffrage and introduce a range of liberal reforms.⁵



Dorr wasn’t just some dope, and would obtain the backing of Andrew Jackson and of Martin Van Buren.

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4. It’s a rhetorical question — you needn’t grope for an answer.



THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

January: Early in this month [Orestes Augustus Brownson](#) addressed the Suffrage Association in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) in favor of an extension of suffrage. At the time Brownson was approving of the conduct of [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) in seeking to amend a charter which allowed of no amendment, not because he supposed his activities to be legitimate, but because they were not any more illegitimate than the activities of his opposition in likewise seeking to amend that charter — and because it was generally good for America that suffrage be extended.

5. [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) had been born in [Providence](#) as the son of a wealthy businessman who lived in a mansion. He was from a distinguished family, his grandfather having been one of [Paul Revere](#)'s companions on that famous ride in 1775. (His grandfather's name would be left out of the poetic, patriotic legend as it developed — because nothing much could be made to rhyme with it.) Dorr had attended Harvard College where he had definitely been not a rebellious youth; in fact, when there had been a serious student revolt in the 1820s he had taken no part in it and had thus been one of the very few in his class who actually received a diploma. He had returned to Providence to become an attorney and a member of the Legislature and had then become involved in the attempts to correct the very unjust form of government based on the old colonial Charter of 1663. The main problem of his era that the Charter was being used to deny voting rights to thousands of men in the growing urban industrial areas of the state, thus retaining power for the old Yankee farmers. Matters came to an armed struggle in this year when a People's Convention tried to stage a coup. Dorr was elected as the [Rhode Island](#) Governor but, after an involved set of events involving an armory and an old cannon, would in the following year be deposed, captured, and imprisoned. After his release he would die in 1854. The Charter would be revised into a new state Constitution. Dorr's efforts were the most dramatic in the early battle for suffrage for all disenfranchised people — immigrants, women, and racial minorities. (Unfortunately, somewhere along the way toward implementation, there being many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, his People's Party would be hijacked into being in effect a White People's Party, and his People's Constitution would be hijacked into being in effect a White People's Constitution — please don't presume that that was what he personally would actually have preferred.)

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”



(After [Mr. Dorr's](#) failure with the cannon at the arsenal, [Brownson](#) would discover to his considerable chagrin that the limitation of suffrage to a freehold qualification had been no provision of the colonial charter, but had been instead an act of the legislature, and so he would change sides, and disapprove of Dorr's conduct — not because Dorr had become a loser, oh no, but due to a technicality: “this changed the whole aspect of the case.” He would have “no apology to offer” for shifting to the side of the triumphant Law and Order Party, because “our principles have undergone no change.” “The suffrage men may have meant well, and they may have incurred no great share of moral guilt; for to moral guilt there must be a guilty moral intent, or, what is the same thing, a culpable ignorance. But they were politically rebels, and could be treated only as such by a government that respected itself, and resolved to discharge its legal functions.”)

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THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

October: [Rhode Island](#) was in turmoil. During this month a People’s Constitutional Convention met and drafted a People’s Constitution to replace the old royal colonial charter which was still in effect. There were a lot of millworkers, mostly centered around a place called Blackstone Valley or [Pawtucket](#) that you can still see without even needing to get off the freeway as you drive through [Providence](#). Almost 60% of Rhode Islanders –strike that, almost 60% of the **adult male** population of Rhode Island– were being denied the opportunity to



vote by the dominant Law-and-Order party there –a party made up to a significant degree of landowners who

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had inherited fortunes made in the slave trade– because they did not hold at least \$134.⁰⁰ in property and/or were not the eldest son of a Rhode Islander who held at least \$134.⁰⁰ in property. However, the workers who were fighting for universal (adult male) suffrage were also, generally, racists fighting to deny such suffrage to adult free black males. This made for an interesting politics. For instance, the Law-and-Order party of [Rhode Island](#) cut a deal with the large black population of [Providence](#) because “they would rather have the Negroes vote than the damned [Irish](#).” (The Irish were a threat simply because, since they had been forced to flee the [potatoes](#) and the [famines](#) of Ireland, they had become susceptible to pressures to labor longer hours for lower pay.)



Outside agitators who were in favor of equal suffrage for all adult males, outside agitators such as [Abby Kelley](#), stood accused in the newspapers of trying to “convert people to [transcendentalism](#).” [Frederick Douglass](#) later wrote of Kelley that “Her young and simple Quaker beauty, combined with her wonderful earnestness, her large knowledge and great logical power bore down all opposition, wherever she spoke, though she was pelted with foul eggs and no less foul words from the noisy mobs which attended us.”



GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”

The Law and Order party lost the election, but it was an illegal election anyway and the Law and Order party had a promise from President John Tyler of federal troops if necessary, so they put a thousand-dollar reward on the head of the winner of the election, [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), and when they arrested him they tried him for treason and sentenced him to life in prison.⁶

Population Trends

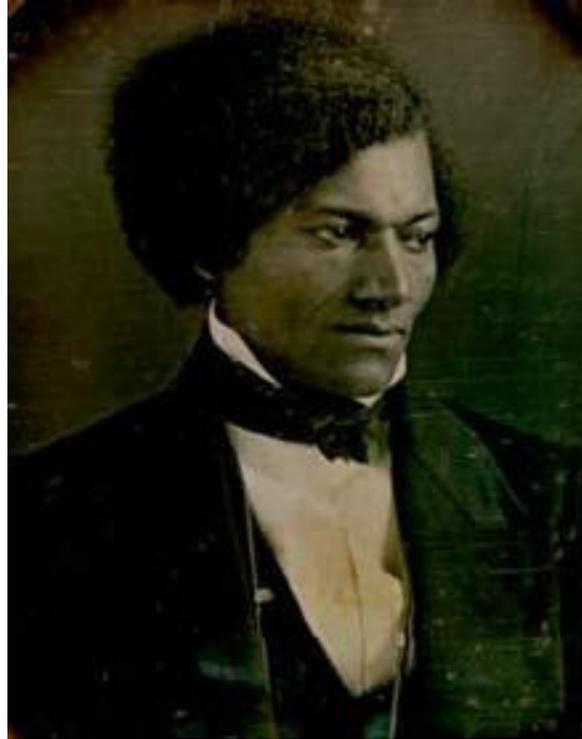
	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (blight, then famine, fever, and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000

6. It's not that bad, wouldn't you know: the Law and Order people pardoned this candidate as soon as they were firmly in control of [Rhode Island](#) again, and so actually he only spent a couple of years of his life in prison as a traitor to his country for the crime of being the political candidate who had been the best vote-getter in an election that was declared to be unauthorized.

THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

November 18, Thursday: From about the 18th to about the 20th, [Frederick Douglass](#) and [Abby Kelley](#) would be in



[Providence](#) during the Dorrite “People’s Convention,” and would be taking part in a Rhode Island Regional anti-slavery convention in [Woonsocket Falls, Rhode Island](#) intended as a protest against the Dorr constitution.



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Douglass would later write of Kelley that “Her young and simple Quaker beauty, combined with her wonderful earnestness, her large knowledge and great logical power bore down all opposition, wherever she spoke, though she was pelted with foul eggs and no less foul words from the noisy mobs which attended us.” The Law and Order party which Douglass and Kelley were backing would lose the election, but since it was an election

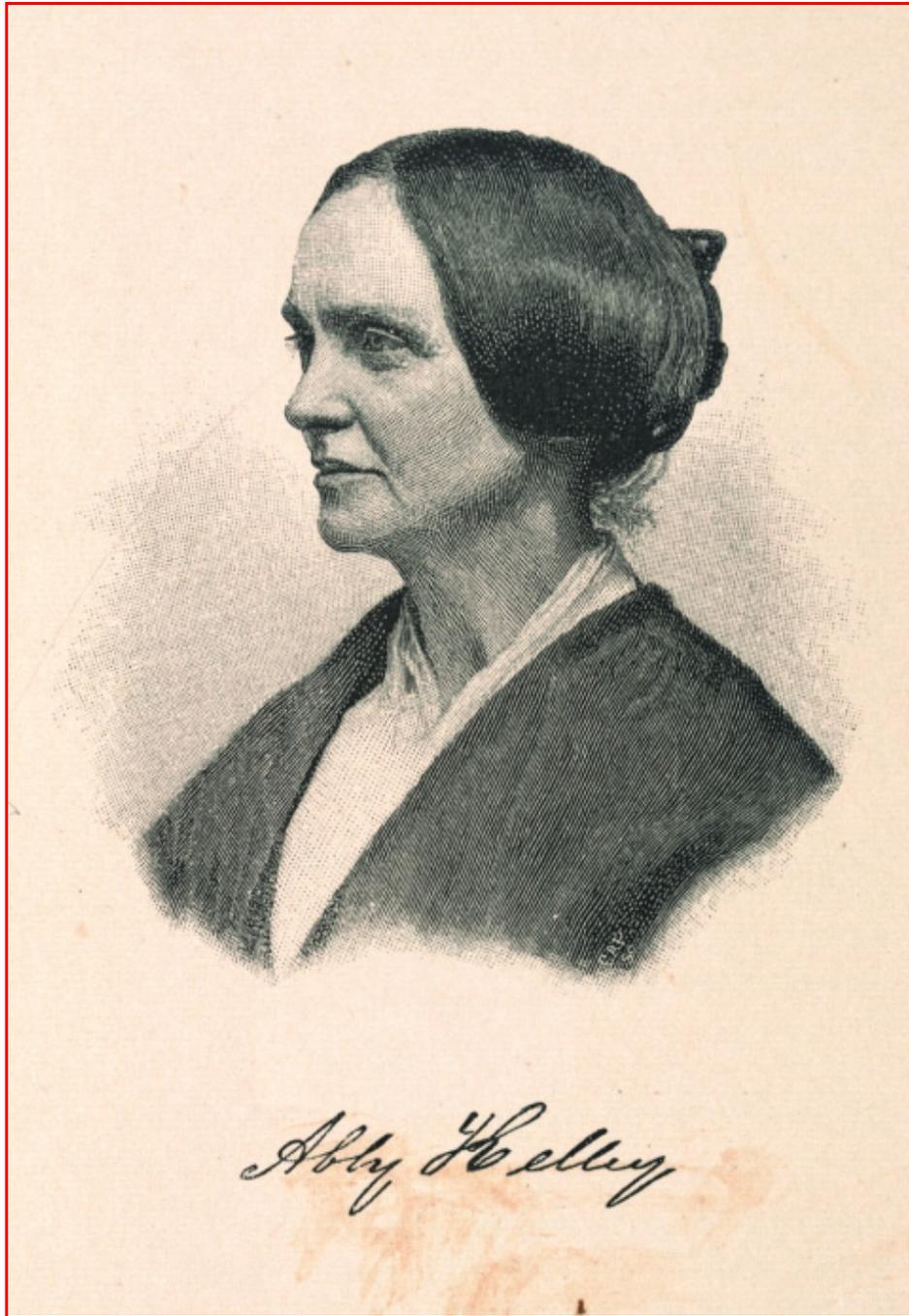
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WHAT?

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of very dubious legality, and since President John Tyler had already offered federal troops if necessary to straighten out the situation in Rhode Island, it was possible for this losing “Law and Order” party to put a thousand-dollar reward on the head of the “winner” of the election, the lawyer and legislator [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), and when they had arrested him under arms, to try him for treason and sentence him to life in prison.

(In Cabul, [Afghanistan](#), the promised animals to draw the wagons during the British retreat had never been produced and heavy snow had rendered the situation of the British even more desperate. At this point news arrived that General Sale had sallied forth from Jellalabad and driven the enemy before his forces, but had in so doing sustained considerable losses. There would be no further hope of relief from that detachment. Only the force in Kandahar might offer relief, although there was little prospect that anyone could make it from Kandahar to Cabul during that season. There was discussion of making an attack on Mahomed Khan’s fort in order to open a path to the Bala Hissar, but that idea was abandoned when Lieutenant Sturt of the engineers considered it impracticable.)

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

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December: During this month [Frederick Douglass](#) would be traveling about [Rhode Island](#) out of [Providence](#), speaking



at various regional antislavery conventions such as in [East Greenwich](#), in [Newport](#), and in [South Kingstown](#), in protest of [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#)'s party's People's Constitution.

This People's Constitution would be accepted in the referendum, despite or in part because of its racism, by a landslide vote of 13,944 over 52.

THE “DORR WAR”

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1842

February: In [Rhode Island](#), the Landholders’s Constitutional Convention reconvened and this time it drafted a new constitution. At this Law and Order convention, [Thomas Allen Jenckes](#) was a secretary.



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GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”

March The voters of [Rhode Island](#) rejected the Landholders’ Constitution by a vote of 8,689 over 8,013 — merely 676 votes difference.

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April: The General Assembly of [Rhode Island](#) passed laws to heavily fine and imprison anyone who took part in or was elected under the People’s Constitution. Two sets of elections were held: one under the legal Charter of 1663 for representatives to the General Assembly and for Governor, in which Samuel Ward King was elected to be the Governor; the other under the People’s Constitution for the People’s Legislature, in which [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) was elected to be the Governor.



Two years later, after the dust of this controversy had settled, a gazette would be issued in Rhode Island, and the gazette would sum up the controversy in one paragraph (the gazette, of course, in achieving such brevity, was siding with the winner):

1842. The Constitution called “the People’s Constitution,” adopted by the Convention, and declared to be the paramount law of the State, January 12. This Constitution was formed by a Convention of delegates chosen by the Suffrage party, in primary meetings, which were not prescribed by any legislative act or resolution. —Town meetings were held April 21, to vote for the adoption or rejection of the Landholder’s Constitution, formed by a Convention under the authority of the Legislature, and the same was rejected. —The legislature under the People’s Constitution assembled and their officers were inaugurated. This was the only session holden by that body, or under that Constitution. At the close of the session, several of the members were arrested for treason, and misdemeanor, and this city and the whole State became the theatre of a most unhappy controversy, which continued its agitation through the summer. The events of that period are of such recent occurrence as to preclude the necessity of a more minute account here.

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THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

May 3, Tuesday: The People’s Party having duly held its election and counted its ballots, it pronounced [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), the winner, to be the new governor of the state. The preexisting government of course would not recognize him, and thus for a time [Rhode Island](#) would have two administrations. The Charter government would lock his people out of the State House in [Providence](#). The People’s Legislature would meet elsewhere and draw up reform laws. Both sides would appeal to President John Tyler for support and recognition. Dorr would himself visit Washington DC to meet with the President. Then, a minor armed clash would occur.

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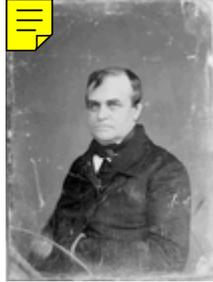
During Dorr’s rebellion [Thomas Allen Jenckes](#) would be serving the side of the “Law and Order” landholders both in a civil and in a military capacity. He was Secretary of the [Rhode Island](#) constitutional convention. When the governor’s council was established he became its secretary. In the case of *Hazard v. Ives*, involving the right of the Rhode Island legislature to direct a new trial, he convinced the legislature and carried it against its previously expressed opinion, and against all other obstacles. He may or may not have been on the side of evil, but he was good, really good.



GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE "DORR WAR"

May 16, Monday: [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) returned from Washington DC to [Rhode Island](#).



He had failed to obtain the needed legitimation of endorsement by President John Tyler.



He would therefore have to do what he would have to do.

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THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

May 18, Wednesday: Governor-elect [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), stymied by what he took to be illegal opposition after “winning” a popular election which his group had staged for the office of governor of [Rhode Island](#), appropriated two decrepit ornamental bronze cannon and led an assault by 234 persons upon a state arsenal in downtown [Providence](#). The attack fizzled when their cannon, which, it turned out, someone had primed with wet paper,⁷ proved themselves “Quaker cannon” by refusing to speak — whereupon Dorr fled the state.



In the complex political cartoon on the following screen, in the background on the left is a depiction of that state arsenal on Cranston Street in [Providence](#) (a building on the flatland and no longer in evidence — the gray turreted hillside arsenal we now see on Benefit Street had not yet been constructed).

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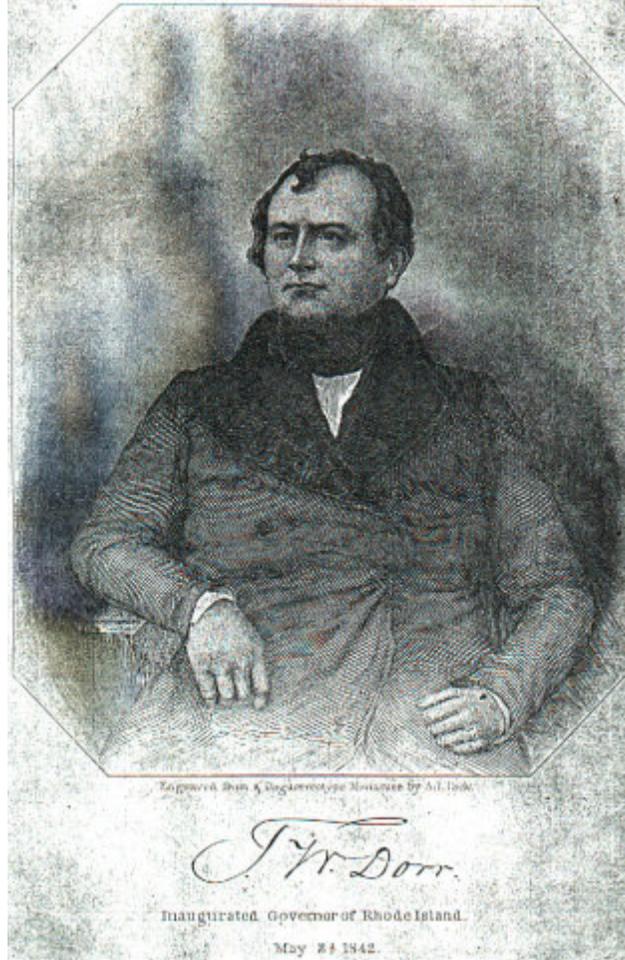
7. Conspiracies of more than three or four people at most never work, because someone always ratfinks in order to cover all their bases, or the conspiracy gets infiltrated. In this case, clearly, the Law and Order Party had managed to insert one of their group into the Dorr group as a mole, and clearly, the priming of Thomas “Oh, Darn!” Dorr’s cannon had been sabotaged to ensure that he would be able to commit no actual outrage. What would that “wet paper” have been, chewed-up newsprint make to appear as if the flash pans of the two cannon were filled with ground-up powder? –or perhaps wads of wet paper had been tamped hard into the cannon’s blowholes to prevent the passage of a spark? In fact there would be but one violent death recorded during the Dorr Rebellion. In a unit of the Charter forces, a soldier killed another soldier who was his brother-in-law (this was clearly a personal rather than a political confrontation).

THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

May 24, Tuesday: On this day and the three following days, [Frederick Douglass](#) spoke at the annual meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in Boston’s Chardon Street Chapel.

In rural [Rhode Island](#), supporters of constitutional reform were not yet ready to throw in the towel despite the fact that their hero had fled the state.



THOMAS WILSON DORR

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GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”

June: Acote’s Hill in [Glocester, Rhode Island](#) was the setting of a confrontation between [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#)’s “People’s Rights” faction and Samuel Ward King’s “Law & Order” faction that would turn out to be “armed but bloodless.” Dorr would surrender, undergo a trial, and get sentenced to life imprisonment for high treason — but because of public outcry would be released within a few years. In 1912 a monument to the memory of Dorr would be erected on Acote’s Hill.

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In the complex political cartoon on the following screen, Dorr is the person who is getting tossed into the air, and the speech bubble has him saying “Bury my bones on Acote’s Hill.”

Laban Wade
With his brigade,
And Landers with his cannon,
For Mr. Dorr
They went to war;
Foot soldier, horse, and man on.
Laban Wade
With his brigade,
And Landers with his cannon,
With spade and hatchet
Took Chepachet,
Kettle, pot, and pan on.
Laban Wade
With his brigade
And Landers with his cannon,
From Acote’s Hill
Through Burrillville,
They ran and ran and ran on.



GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE “DORR WAR”

June 23, Thursday: In the ongoing “[Dorr War](#)”, the General Assembly of [Rhode Island](#) called for another constitutional convention to meet in September.

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THE “DORR WAR”

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

[Henry Thoreau](#) was written to by Isaiah T. Williams in Buffalo, New York.

Buffalo June. 23. 1842—
Dear Thoreau
I have not written you for a long
time—but I am not going to apologize for of course
you only wish to hear when & what I wish to write
The poor thoughts that have occupied my busy
little mind since I last wrote you have been
many & often had I seen you should I have
inflicted upon your ear the sad narration of th[em], or
at least s[om]e of them—& I donot know why I should
withhold any of them they were sent by a power
above me, at the beck & bidding of another did they
come & go— I know that men have but little to
do with the affairs of this world—still I feel a res=
=ponsibility to myself for all things that befall me
in life—though to no other. To live this life well
I feel a strong desire. I also feel a presentiment that
I shall fail in part[—]if not totally fail to do so.
I donot know what it is to live well—or how
to do it if I did—between idid & idea I ~~but~~ swing
like a pendulu[m]— I know 'tis weakness, yet such
I am— But I must not disgust you by talking
too much of myself—& I know it is not well
to afflict myself with my own image. Still it
is prety much all I know—the source of most
I have ever learned. Perhaps this has been my
fault—I have often repented & as often sinned
again— What a succession of falls is life! I
wonder if that is the object of it—& this th
we may know how to stand when it is past—



GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE "DORR WAR"

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I donot suppose it is of any use to speculate about life—we know but little of it & if it were well for us to know it would be taught us[-]& I am coming more & more every day to the settled practicable [belief] that the true mode of life is to live & do from moment to moment the duty or labor before us with no questions about its fitness or end and no thought for the Morrow. I sometimes think further—that it is also best to be of men & like them while with them—to love what [they] love be interested in what they are interested—share their hopes & joys their dejection & sorrows—seek the ends & have the objects of pursuit that they have take their fortunes in life as I must in death & when the curtain shall have fallen—have to think my fortune & fate—is & has ever been that of my race— I fear it will be a hard one if it is, but "such is the sovreign doo[n] & such the will of Jove" Of one thing I am certain[.] My race have an indisputable claim upon my best—all the services I am able to render while I live—I will not withhold from them the pittance due from me— With this thought before me I have endeavoured to join in the reforms of the day— I make Temperance speeches, such as [they] are—at any rate the best I can—I go to Sabbath [s]chool & talk to & endeavour to instruct the children what I can—& where-ever I see an opportunity to do any thing for others I have a kind of general design to lend my aid—though not to interfere with my duties to myself. Whether I am taking the best course ~~for~~ to benefit myself & others—that is the question— Yet if I do as well



THE "DORR WAR"

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

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I know-& know as well as I can I shall never
accuse myself- After all I am not wholly satis-
fied with myself or with this view of things
I fear there is something beyond & higher I ought
to know & seek- Is it given to man in this state
of existence to be satisfied? Is not this very dissat-
isafaction but the breathing of an imortal nature
that whispers of eternal progress? Shall not hope
change this very dissatisfaction into the highest
fruition? Say to me in reply what these desul-
tory thoughts suggest to your mind-& as my
sheet is nearly full I will say a few words more &
fold ~~it~~ & forward it for your perusal.
Your letter of March 14 gave me much pleasure
though I need not say that I sympathize with you
most deeply in the loss you sustain by the death
of your brother- I knew him but little-yet I ~~the~~
thought I had never met with a more flowing
generous spirit- It was not fitted for a cold &
hard-hearted world like this-in such a nature
do I see a strong assurance of a better existence when
this is over. Ever will his name float down my
memory untainted by those folies & crimes I am
forced to associate with those of so many of my
race. And Mr Emerson-how did he endure the
loss of his child? It was a cruel stroke-did his
philosophy come to his aid as does the Christian
Faith to administer consolation to the bereaved? I
wish to know what were his feelings[.]for the
consolations that a christian faith [offerds] the
bereaved & [afflicted] is one of its strongest holds
upon my credulity. If there is consolation from



GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE "DORR WAR"

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his philosophy in trials like those[.]it will do much toward settling my belief- I wish to know minutely on this point[.] I think much on Death & sometimes doubt if my early impressions upon that subject are ever effaced- The fear of it occasions a thousand folies- I feel it is unmanly- but yet "that undiscovered country" [W]ho shall tell us whether to fear-or [disire] it?

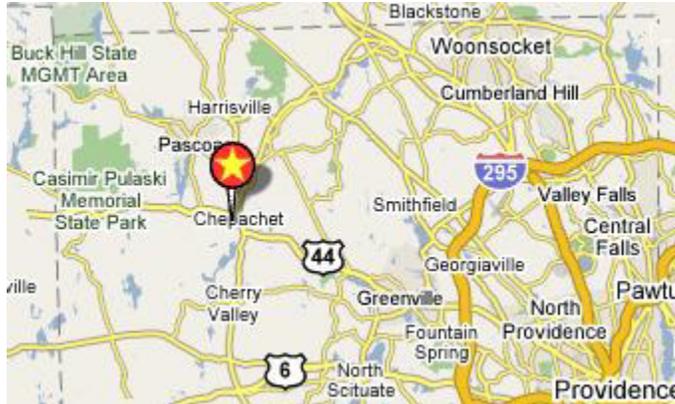
{address written perpendicular to text:
H. D. Thoreau
Concord
Mass-
Mr. Brown [3]}

As to myself-I am less homesick than at first though I am not satisfied with the west[-]nor quite with my profession- Perhaps I ought to be I often think my feelings feelish. Do you think of Law engaged in the practice the best way of [spending] ^ ones life? Let me hear from you soon- I will not be so remiss in my future correspondence- Yours &c-
I. T. Williams.

THE "DORR WAR"

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

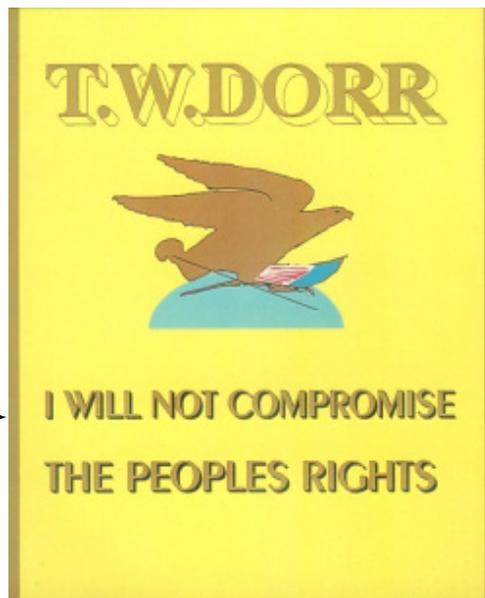
June 25, Saturday: [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) returned to [Chepachet, Rhode Island](#) to reconvene the People's Legislature



on the 4th of July. The Charter government would declare martial law, making such activities amount to

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treason. Only a few hundred of his supporters, including not one of the elected legislators, would ever make an appearance.



Design of the Rebellion's flag →

Bronson Alcott spent an hour with [Thomas Carlyle](#), and found that

Twas a dark hour with him. His wit was sombre as it was pitiless; his merriment had madness in it; his humor tragical even to tears.... His conversation was cynical, trivial, and gave no pleasure.

Carlyle did, however, invite Alcott to return.

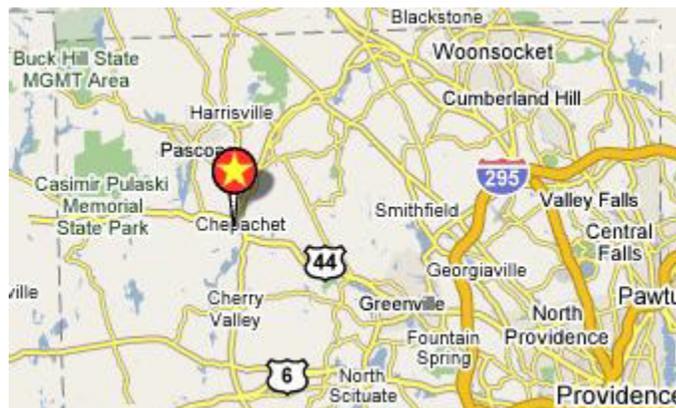
The editor of the New-York [Courier and Enquirer](#), James Watson Webb, fought a [duel](#) with US Congressman Thomas F. Marshall of Kentucky and the New-York [Herald](#) reported that:

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

THE "DORR WAR"

The duel between Thomas F. Marshall and James Watson Webb was fought this morning at four o'clock, at the old duelling ground, just this side of the State line, about seven miles north of this city. Mr. Marshall was attended by Dr. Carr of Baltimore, as second, and Dr. Gibson, of the same place, as surgeon. Mr. Morrel, of your city, acted as Webb's friend. The parties exchanged one shot without injury. Marshall demanded immediately a second pistol, and wounded Webb upon that fire, in the fleshy part of the hip, sustaining no damage himself. Marshall, who came determined to fight it out, demanded a third shot, but Webb could not stand it and the matter was made up....

June 27, Monday: [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) dismissed his "militia" and the legislature and again fled the state. The Charter government forces assaulted the town of [Chepachet, Rhode Island](#) anyway, injuring a cow and rounding up about a hundred men they suspected of being Dorrites, and marching their prisoners off to captivity in [Providence](#).



READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT



THE “DORR WAR”

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July: In “Rogue Island,” as their payoff for supporting the Law and Order party and helping to deny the right to vote to adult white males (mostly [Irish](#) machine tenders) without \$134.⁰⁰ in property during the unrest of October 1841, the black adult males of [Rhode Island](#) (well, any of them who could show they held property worth \$134.⁰⁰, which would be, today, say, roughly the value of a two-year-old Toyota) were granted the right to vote, a right which they still could not exercise in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Ohio, and which they had only to a limited degree in the state of New York. See, it sometimes does pay off to cut a deal with the powers that be! This event is known in our history books as the “[Dorr War](#)” and what is being said of it is that it “forced the state’s conservatives to abolish the Charter of 1663 and expand suffrage.”⁸

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During this month Daniel O’Connell spoke on the issue of [race slavery](#) at a meeting of the Irish Repeal Association in reply to some remarks made by a Mr. Garahan of Mobile, Alabama. This is the manner in which O’Connell’s speech would appear in the pages of William Lloyd Garrison’s [The Liberator](#) on October 7th:

Extract from a Speech of Daniel O’Connell,
At a meeting of the Irish Repeal Association, July, 1842, in reply to Mr. M’Garahan, of Mobile, Alabama.

The Lord Mayor said he felt it to be an imperative duty to arise, after the speech of the highly respectable and reverend gentleman who had just concluded. He was sorry that it was his duty to comment in any terms, except of praise, on anything falling from that Rev. gentleman, but he would be untrue to the sacred cause of freedom, with which he was identified, if he were to sit silent and hear any apology for slavery, even from the best of motives, offered in his presence. He was glad that the meeting had heard the Reverend gentleman with

ican, was kept three years only among them in a state of slavery, and such were the dreadful effects of it, that he lost the use of the English language altogether, and spoke a sort of jibbering tongue, half English, half Arabic; nay, he was six months in England before he was restored to his full faculties, or the possession of the English language. Such was the effect of slavery; and yet although 800,000 negroes were emancipated by England, not one of them was found applying for relief under a poor law, or for charity of any kind, but supported themselves by their own industry. (Hear, hear.) They were, he admitted, a little too fantastic in their dress, they were fond of gay and lively colors; but they bought their own cotton, with which they clothed themselves,

8. My own attitude is that this ludicrous episode of [Rhode Island](#) history ought to be referred to as “Douglass’s Triumph” rather than as “Dorr’s War,” because I suspect that although local historians have always treated [Frederick Douglass](#)’s black presence in the state during this period as if he had been merely some sort of naive “native informant,” going around telling white people how bad slavery was (in this sort of historical writing blacks only react, they only display affect, they never take action or exercise control, because they are, of course, merely black, and everybody knows that it is the white man who makes history), actually he was operating as a skilled politician and organizing the entire sweet package deal by which local black men gained the franchise in return for helping to prevent the immigrant Irish laboring men from exercising the franchise. I suspect that while he remained under cover and in all appearance innocuous, the whole thing was Douglass’s scheme and his great accomplishment.

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meeting had heard the Reverend gentleman with such attention and patience, for both as a stranger and as a clergyman, he was entitled to every possible indulgence at their hands. (Hear, hear.)

He came there as a friend of the cause in which they were engaged, to offer them the sympathy and support of his fellow-countrymen, and in doing so he had felt it his duty to offer some remarks in favor of the system of slavery as carried on in America.— He had stated that the slaves were well fed, well taken care of, and sleek in their appearance, and there could be no doubt that such was the fact; but if the Reverend gentleman went to the house of the greatest tyrant in the country, he would find his horses plump and well taken care of, and for precisely the same reason as that which the Rev. gentleman had assigned for the good condition of the slaves, because it was the interest of the owner to have them so. (Loud cries of hear, hear.) But let passion burst forth—let violence disturb him, and the master of that horse, notwithstanding that it is his own interest to use the animal gently and kindly, will treat it brutally and cruelly. (Hear, hear.) Although the general rule was in favor of the slave, yet, he was liable to suffer from the effects of intoxication and ill temper; he was liable to be separated from the wife of his bosom, and the children of his tender affection. They may be sold as slaves, and sent to one quarter of the globe, while he himself was sent to the other; and while that state of things existed, he would be its most determined enemy, whatever was the consequence—whether he got the sympathy or support of their American friends, or continued to be subjected to the gross guilt inflicted on his country by a continuance of the Union.— (Cheers.) He could not hear slavery praised or palliated. *Every nerve within him trembled at the idea of one man being the property of his fellow-man—of a human being treated as so much chattels, or that a being with an immortal soul should be bound to the will of any master, be he a tyrant or otherwise in the exercise of his authority.* (Cheers.) He could not bring himself to the very idea of such a state of things, and as much as he valued the sympathy and support of America in the present constitutional struggle, if it be the slightest apology for slavery, he at once abandoned it. (Cheers.) The Rev. gentleman has eloquently expressed his fears for what the result of freedom to the slaves in America might be, and the danger which existed if it should take place, of what he (the Lord Mayor) abhorred, for he never would sanction the shedding of one drop of human blood. He talked of violence, of the ven-

their own cotton, with which they clothed themselves, and if there was found a glitter around them, it was the produce of their own industry. (Hear, hear, and a laugh.) Not one of them could be found who was not perfectly able to take care of himself.— (Hear, hear.) Then as to the question of blood, if a revolution took place among the negroes, produced by their emancipation, he would give up the case if it could be shown him that one drop had been shed by those who had been admitted to their freedom. Not one had been shed—not a single case of violence had occurred, or of retaliation on their masters. O yes, they refused to take off their hats for those who were cruel to them. (A laugh.) But he stood there a historian of severity, and the assertor of that fact in the presence of Europe and of America. (Cheers.) He proclaimed that instance of peace and good order among the negro population who were set free, and he defied any one to contradict him, or to show the least particle of violence. No assault or outrage had been committed, or a single drop of blood shed. (Cheers.) Were not the negroes in America the same race—were they not of the same class? And what fears could be entertained of them? Let it be recollected that when the experiment of emancipating the slaves in the British colonies was made, it was made under unfavorable auspices, because purchased by twenty millions of the public money, one farthing of which was not given to the negro but to his masters. They were insulted by the manner in which they received their freedom, because it was not given them as a right to which they were entitled, but purchased for them from their masters. Yet no crime was committed—no violence was resorted to—no blood was shed; and oh! may the happy day arrive when America shall be convinced of these truths, and be induced to follow the example of England. (Hear, hear, and loud cheers.) She followed her 'bitter bad' example in the introduction of slavery in the first instance, (and England could not but blush at its continuance in that land)—nay, the Americans were almost coerced to introduce it: and that England should have to answer for it was just before man and Divine Providence. But Ireland was free from the foul stain—for no one slave ship ever sailed from any port in Ireland, except one which carried Irishmen themselves. (Cheers and laughter.)

He (the Lord Mayor) sincerely hoped the Rev. gentleman was convinced he spoke to him with the utmost respect—that he was not the less grateful for his coming amongst them with the happy communication of which he had been the bearer—that he was not the less grateful for the support of the



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1843

October 31, Tuesday: In [Rhode Island](#), [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) was taken into detention and accused of treason.



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[Frederick Douglass](#) continued to lecture in Lloydsville, Ohio with Charles Lenox Remond, James Monroe, and Sydney Howard Gay.

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geance which the slaves would take upon their masters if they were liberated, and of their incapacity to attend to their own affairs, or to take care of themselves. If he (the Lord Mayor) had heard that doctrine propounded for the first time, coming as it did from the revered lips and the sacred character of him who put it forward—if he had, he repeated, heard it for the first time, it might, perhaps, have staggered his judgment; he might have thought that he knew more of the matter, and that his evidence was that of description which was derived by personal knowledge and actual judgment. But he had the pleasure to tell him that he had heard that argument before—that it was brought forward in the English Parliament previous to the passing of the bill for the emancipation of the slaves in the British colonies; and blessed be God, he raised his humble voice to turn eight hundred thousand slaves into eight hundred thousand freemen—to give the mother the happiness of blessing her little one in her arms instead of trembling for its future state—to give her an assurance that, instead of its being separated from her pressing heart, he was a little freeman, and that she could say to him, 'You will yet be my protector.' (Loud cheers.) He heard it said before, 'beware of what you do; if you emancipate them it will create bloodshed; they are utterly unfit to take care of themselves, and there will be nothing but confusion throughout the length and breadth of our multitudinous islands. All this will end in blood.' And though the parties did not openly say the abolitionists in Parliament sought for blood, yet they insinuated that such was their intention. The experiment was, however, tried, and what was the consequence? (Hear, hear.) In Demerara alone, the emancipated negroes purchased three estates for which they gave ninety thousand pounds, and in Jamaica they were buying up property from day to day. 'Take care of yourselves!' Let them only try the experiment, instead of having human nature degraded by the fact of a man being held in slavery. It was as old as the days of Homer, who said that when a man was a slave, half his worth was taken from him. It was then at least three fourths, and the evil was not confined to that, for they had it on record that when the English and French governments remonstrated with the Arabs on the coast of Africa, and called on them to give up the traffic, and discontinue the practice of seizing Europeans, their answer was, that these Europeans were so degraded as scarcely to resemble man, and that they were a kind of 'monkey race.—'There they are, exclaimed the Arabs, for the last eight or ten years, and did you ever see so stupid a race? (A laugh.) A man named Adams, an Amer-

American friend of Ireland, if he kept back the expression of his feelings on the subject. (Hear, hear.) He perceived that the Rev. gentleman had alluded to a circumstance which was also reiterated in the American papers—that they, in their address for the abolition of slavery, called on the American people to join the abolitionists. Then the ill conduct of the abolitionists is set forth, and the enemies of slavery in this country were censured for the part they had just taken. When he (the Lord Mayor) signed that address, he did not mean any particular party, much less one who would act improperly or insultingly, for it was quite against the interests of those whom they called their clients to have recourse to so improper a proceeding. They did not mean to say by that phrase that the Americans ought to become what was termed 'abolitionists' in their land—they did not mean to say that they should join in any combination that would injure the property of man, but a combination which should have liberty for its object, and morality, truth, and purity of motives as its aim. (Loud cries of hear, hear.) *Man ought not to be a slave!* God had mixed and implanted in his soul, equality at his birth. All were born in the same nakedness and subject to the same infirmities—no distinction existed at that moment between the peer and the peasant, and both would descend with the same inanity to the grave. He would struggle there against every description of tyranny and despotism wherever he found it to exist; he would struggle to bring men to a constitutional equality, not to that equality which did not recognize rank or station, but to that place and equity known to the law, and to which he was entitled. (Cheers.) That equity which entitled a servant to hire with a master, and go away at the expiration of his period of service, if he chose to do so—that equity which enabled the laborer to receive the wages he was justly entitled to for his labor, and to discharge himself if that were not paid, or if he could improve his condition. But the slave gave up his labor to others—he was the property of others; and come what would, *he hated slavery in all its forms*—he would never truckle to others, or yield up the detestation in which he held it. (Cheers.) He would insult no man, but his heart was devoted to liberty, and so long as slavery existed in any quarter of the globe, he would be found among the ranks of its bitterest and most decided enemies. (Loud cheers.)

THE "DORR WAR"

GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

1844

The historian [George Bancroft](#), from his summer "cottage" Roseclyffe at [Newport](#) (see following screen), weighed into [Rhode Island](#)'s "Dorr War" on the side of Governor [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#).

BANCROFT AND DORR



The Reverend [John Stetson Barry](#) began to serve the Universalist congregation of [Pawtucket, Rhode Island](#).

At the foot of Meeting Street at the corner of Town Street, the [Friends](#) put what had been their 2d meetinghouse in [Providence \(Moshasuck\), Rhode Island](#) on heavy sledges and had it tugged (by a team of horses, we are told, although perhaps it was oxen) over snow down Town Street, then up Wickenden Street on Fox Point, and then uphill to 77 Hope Street, where it became a 2-family residence. Thus its century-and-a-quarter old foundation was cleared, to hold up the west half of a new larger meetinghouse (the east half of this 3d structure would be on top of a crawl space). This 3d meeting house would last us 112 years, until the city of Providence needed a central site for a proposed new Fire Station. Another site would be available to the city, but a brick building on it would be more expensive to clear and its location between North Main Street and Canal Street would

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offer inferior access for fire equipment. So we would sell our lot to the City, and erect a 4th-generation brick meetinghouse with a slate roof at the top of College Hill, at the corner of Olney and Morris on Friend Moses Brown’s donated property, in about 1952.

Belatedly recognizing the dangers of freebasing in your home kitchen in the presence of your children, [Perry Davis](#) purchased a building on Pond Street in which to mix up his patent vegetable painkiller consisting of [opiates](#) and [ethanol](#). It would be asserted that freebie “cases of Davis’ medicine were shipped with every [Baptist](#) missionary bound for [India](#) and [China](#).”



(Doesn’t that seem a bit like carrying coal to Newcastle? But it is not at all unusual –or so I have heard– for drug pushers to offer young people free samples in order to get them on the hook.)

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June: [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) was convicted of treason and sentenced to solitary confinement in [Rhode Island](#) at hard labor for life. (Start holding your breath now.)



[READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT](#)

October: The following article about [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) and his “[Dorr War](#)” in [Rhode Island](#) appeared in [Orestes Augustus Brownson](#)’s [Brownson’s Quarterly Review](#):

The Suffrage Party in Rhode Island

It is no pleasant task to us to review this work, a professed history of the proceedings of the late suffrage party in Rhode Island. It is a work written with intense feeling, and very considerable ability, by one for whom we entertain, and always must entertain, a very high personal regard. We find in it the spirit of a very high-toned woman, a woman’s deep sympathies, just sense of humanity, and, we may add, a woman’s reasoning, more perplexing than convincing, and better adapted to touch the heart than to satisfy the understanding. Moreover, we once ventured to call the individual principally concerned in these proceedings our personal friend. We esteemed him as a man of no mean intellectual ability, of firm principles, of ardent devotion to popular rights, a true-hearted patriot, and an honest man. And of him, personally, we have seen no cause to change our opinion. We have delighted to meet him, and felt ourselves honored by his friendship. We should regard his friendship, which unhappily we do not retain, no less now he occupies a prisoner’s cell, than formerly. We believe he acted from his convictions of right, that he was sincere in what he attempted, and that his only motive was to benefit the mass of the people of his native state.

And yet we have never for one moment approved the proceedings of the suffrage party. We, in common with the great body of the



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American people, wished to see the elective franchise extended to the great mass of those who could not be electors under the old established freehold qualification. Though not by any means accustomed to rate the elective franchise so high as do the members generally of the political party with which we are associated, and though very far from believing the acquisition of universal suffrage equivalent to the acquisition of liberty, or that universal suffrage affords any considerable guaranty, in a country where inequality of property obtains, of wise or just government,- we have yet believed it essential to the perfection of the political system adopted in this country, and have therefore always advocated its general adoption. Accordingly, we were among those who encouraged the formation of the suffrage association, believing, as we did, that its only design was to act on public opinion, and by the force of opinion, to compel the charter government to take measures for the formation and adoption of a more liberal constitution. We willingly accepted an invitation to address the association, in Providence, early in January, 1841, in favor of an extension of suffrage. We watched the progress of the movement up to the time of calling the suffrage convention, when, becoming engrossed with other matters, we paid no more attention to the subject, till about the time when the new government under the people's constitution was preparing to organize itself. We regarded the whole proceedings under that constitution as illegal and revolutionary; but we were not disposed to condemn them with much severity, because we could not perceive how any amendment could be legally introduced, or the evils complained of legally redressed. We supposed the restriction on suffrage was a provision of the charter, and, if so, it could not be altered by any legal authority in the state, as the charter did not provide for its own amendment.

Taking this view of the question, we argued, that, let the measures for the extension of suffrage, or the formation of a new constitution emanate from what source they might, from the suffrage association or from the general assembly, since not authorized by the charter from which existing authorities derive their existence and power, they must needs be, in fact, illegal and revolutionary. The people's constitution is, we said, confessedly illegal in its origin; but so also must be a constitution framed by a convention called by the general assembly, for the general assembly has no authority from the charter to call a convention. Since, then, the suffrage association have called a convention, since that convention has framed a constitution, and since a majority of the people of Rhode Island, as it is alleged, have voted for it, it is decidedly best to let it go peaceably into operation. It is not, it is true, a good constitution; it contains several very objectionable features; but as it provides for its own amendment, it may hereafter be amended; and, bad as it is, it is better than the old charter. Presuming, from the information we received, that an immense majority of the people were satisfied with it, we concluded that nothing was wanted but a little firmness on the part of Mr. Dorr and his friends in its defense, to induce the charter party to yield, and suffer the new government to go quietly into operation; and being also a



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little indignant at what we regarded the unwarrantable interference of the federal executive, we wrote to Mr. Dorr a letter, which he has since done us the honor to publish, and which we must have received a day or two before his attack on the arsenal, detailing the conversation we had with a Whig member of the Massachusetts legislature, and urging him to firmness in asserting the constitution under which he was elected. That the letter may be construed into the expression of approbation of Mr. Dorr's principle of proceeding is very possible, for it was hastily written for a special purpose; but it was not intended to express any approbation of any thing but his cause, to wit, extension of suffrage; for that was all in his proceedings we approved.

But, after Mr. Dorr's failure, it came out that the limitation of suffrage to a freehold qualification was **not a provision of the charter, but an act of the legislature**. This changed the whole aspect of the case; for now it could no longer be pretended that there was no legal authority in the state competent to extend the elective franchise to all to whom it could be advisable to extend it. We saw that we had reasoned from false premises, and had therefore come to false conclusions. And when we met with a very able pamphlet on the subject by Mr. Elisha R. Potter, at present a member of congress from Rhode Island, we found that we could not, without belying our own cherished convictions, any longer countenance, in any form or manner, the proceedings of the suffrage party. Since then, we have expressed, on various occasions, our dissent from them, and in some essays on the Origin and Ground of Government, we discussed the whole doctrine involved in them with as much thoroughness as seemed to us necessary.

We have made these personal explanations, because our course in regard to the suffrage movement in Rhode Island has been much misrepresented, and adduced as another instance of our fickleness and frequent changes of doctrine and position; and because it has been made the occasion of bringing us, to no inconsiderable extent, under the ban of our own party. We have no apology to offer, and nothing of which to accuse ourselves, but that of relying on the representations made of the charter by our suffrage friends, instead of consulting the charter itself. Had we taken the proper pains to inform ourselves of its real character, in the first instance, we should have never for a moment seemed to occupy any other position in regard to the suffrage movement than we do now; for our principles have undergone no change, and we had expressed, had even written out and published, the some doctrines as applicable to the case before, that we have since, as any one may satisfy himself by consulting Mr. Potter's pamphlet to which we have already alluded.

On one point, however, the controversy growing out of the Rhode Island suffrage movement has led us to reflect more than we had previously done, and on which our views, if not changed, have at least become clearer and more definite. We refer to what is called **the sacred right of revolution**. We believe the political sovereignty, under the spiritual sovereignty of Christ, which has always a visible embodiment and organ on earth, **resides in the body of the nation**. We say **nation** instead of **people**, because the term



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is less ambiguous. The term **nation** conveys always the idea of a corporation, an organic body; while the word **people** may mean only a numerical collection of individuals. A nation never exists without a legal constitution of some sort, written or unwritten, and some legal forms or modes for collecting the national sense. Now, since the nation has a corporate existence by virtue of the fact that it is a nation, it possesses in itself the supreme political power, which commissions all the officers of government, and to which they are responsible. When these officers, or what is called the government, betray their trust, break the fundamental laws of the nation, whether those laws are written on parchment, or in the customs of the people existing from time immemorial, the nation, acting in accordance with these laws and customs, may unmake the administrators of the government, commission new ones, and institute new guaranties against abuses, and even by force of arms, if necessary. So far as this is a right of revolution, we are advocates of that right, but no further. But so long as the legitimate administrators of the government observe the national laws, and administer the government in accordance with them, honestly, and with a single eye to the maintenance of justice, we hold all resistance to the civil authority to be criminal. A revolution, for the mere purpose of changing the form of government, of substituting one form of government for another, as monarchy for aristocracy, or democracy for monarchy, or **vice versa**, we hold to be never justifiable. The authorities must themselves transgress the national laws, and put themselves thus out of the protection of the law, before the citizen or subject can have the right to resist them. We may resist tyrants and usurpers, but never the lawful magistrate in the lawful discharge of his official functions.

The principles here laid down will justify the colonists in their separation from Great Britain, but not Mr. Dorr in his attempted revolution in Rhode Island. Our fathers took up arms to resist an aggression on their constitutional and chartered rights. They contended, not that the British government had invaded or failed to secure certain assumed abstract rights of man, but their rights as recognized by the British constitution and the colonial charters. It is against George III as a **tyrant**, as violating the national laws, that they profess to take up arms; not against the king in the legal exercise of his constitutional prerogative. But the suffrage party planted themselves on no national law of Rhode Island, written or unwritten, they alleged, and could allege, no transgression, on the part of the charter government, of any public law, no usurpation, no act of tyranny. They simply alleged that the charter government did not correspond to their notions of the best possible form of government, did not secure what they regarded as the abstract rights of man; and they took up arms, not to expel a tyrant or usurper, but to establish a new form of government, more conformable to their notions of abstract truth and justice.

Here is a broad difference between the suffrage men and the patriots of the revolution, which the author of the work before us has failed to recognize, and which would have prevented her, had she recognized it, from placing the heroes of Federal Hill



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and Chepachet on the same line with the heroes of Saratoga and Yorktown. The former were, view them in what light you will, rebels against legitimate authority; but the latter were resisting aggression, and vindicating the violated majesty of the laws. The suffrage men may have meant well, and they may have incurred no great share of moral guilt; for to moral guilt there must be a guilty moral intent, or, what is the same thing, a culpable ignorance. But they were politically rebels, and could be treated only as such by a government that respected itself, and resolved to discharge its legal functions.

We regard this question as one of vital importance in our country. The laws have, with us, their chief support in public opinion. Let that opinion become unsound or corrupt, and the laws lose their force, and we are without protection. If the doctrine once obtain among us, that legal authority may be set aside for the purpose of making the government conform to our abstract theories of human rights, there is no foreseeing the lawlessness and anarchy which will ensue. The symptoms are already threatening; and recent riots and mobs, and, worse of all, the delay and hesitancy of authority in using force for their suppression, and the very extensive doubts which obtain as to the rightfulness of resorting to force at all, are to us really not a little alarming. We are, we own, sensitive on this subject; when we reflect that we have recently come to entertain a faith extremely odious to the great majority of our countrymen, and when we see associations formed expressly for its suppression, its adherents shot down by an armed mob in the streets, and its consecrated churches in flames, while the rabble, not composed altogether of those commonly meant by the lower classes, look on and shout, we feel more and more the necessity of rebuking the mobocratic spirit, in whatever form it may manifest itself, and more and more the necessity of inculcating a reverence for law, and strict obedience to the lawful magistrate in the discharge of his lawful duties. We cannot afford, in this country, to insist on "the sacred right of insurrection," for we shall, if we do, have bands of insurgents in every town, village, and hamlet, in the land. Whatever we may think of Mr. Dorr and his friends personally, we cannot approve their measures, or defend their doctrines, without a terrible hazard to the country, to all security of peace, life, property, and conscience.

As to the proceedings of the law and order party in Rhode Island, we are far from believing that they are in all cases defensible. We are glad that that party has succeeded; but it is evident now that it magnified the real danger, and was less calm and collected than it might have been. We think the friends of the government suffered themselves to be exasperated beyond measure, and to practice, in some instances, cruelties which were as cowardly as they were uncalled for. But we must say for the people of Rhode Island of both parties, that in general they came as near making war on **Christian** principles as could be expected. They seem to have had a generous disposition to do as little harm as possible to their friends and neighbors. Still, we wish the friends of the government had shown a little more consideration to the prisoners taken at Chepachet after the war was over, and, as they had shown much tenderness of heart during



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the battle, that they had continued to show the some in the flush of victory. They must have known that the suffrage men, women, and children, however mistaken or deluded, were not really criminally disposed, and would not have espoused the cause they did, had they felt that it was **morally** wrong.

But making all abatements for the panic and the momentary cruelty, we doubt whether, upon the whole, we ought not to say that the Algerines, as they are called, conducted with singular moderation and leniency, under the circumstances. We cannot wholly approve of their doings, but we do not think that they are deserving any great severity of censure. It seems to us, that, since the panic subsided,- perhaps not an unreasonable panic,- they have been disposed to let off the offenders as easily as possible. The convictions and punishments have been very few; and we believe that there has been no one, charged only with a political offense, but could have escaped all punishment by taking an oath of allegiance to the existing government, and giving moderate bonds to keep the peace. We are sure no government was ever more moderate in its demands, or showed itself more ready to forgive and forget the past.

The case of Mr. Dorr is, we own, one of considerable hardship. Mr. Dorr had, we believe, no private ambition to gratify; we know, personally, that he very reluctantly became involved in the proceedings of the suffrage party, and we have no doubt that he himself believed that he was engaged in a great and holy cause, and perfectly justifiable in the course he took. It may be said that he ought to have known better, lawyer as he was, and this cannot be denied; but when we find such men as Mr. Van Buren, Senators Benton and Allen, Governors Hubbard and Morton, and Messrs. Bancroft, M'Neil, Rantoul, and Hallett, supporting him, and maintaining the strict justice and legality of his proceedings, we may, perhaps, find some palliation of his offence. We can easily believe him free from moral guilt. His party is so completely prostrated, and public opinion, notwithstanding appearances, is so decidedly against his proceedings, that we do not believe that considerations of public safety require his incarceration. Personally he has been at least sufficiently punished. The government of Rhode Island is as firmly established as that of any other state in the Union. Let it permit one, whose good intentions it has no reason to distrust, to tell it that it is strong enough to be generous. We own, the insane proceedings of individuals out of the state must be offensive, and that no government that respects itself can yield to their demands. They are wrong. They are cruel to Mr. Dorr, whose friends they pretend they are. They are really his worst enemies. And yet the government can disregard them, and be generous without fear of misconstruction. An act of clemency is sometimes worth more to a government than the infliction of a merited punishment. The government has done itself honor by imposing the heaviest penalty on the chief instead of the subalterns. It has vindicated the majesty of the law; it has shown its justice; now let it show its mercy, and blot out the memory of its past.

We have been assured that the authorities of Rhode Island are ready to liberate Mr. Dorr the moment he testifies his willingness to submit to the existing government, and to take



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the oath of allegiance. That he should be reluctant to do this is not strange. He holds that he has committed no offence; that the acts for which he is punished were done by him as the rightful governor of the state, in the conscientious discharge of his constitutional functions. His failure to maintain his authority before superior force did not and could not vitiate his title, or render his acts criminal. Shall he now yield, acknowledge himself guilty, and sue for pardon? No; better die on the scaffold, or rot in the dungeon. This is the view which he takes.

We hope we are able to reverence the martyr spirit wherever we see it displayed; and we frankly own, that, if we took Mr. Dorr's own view of his case, we should look upon him as a sublime example of moral heroism. But he himself must be aware that there is something to be said on the other side. Even his acceptance of the office of governor under the people's constitution was treason by the law of the state. Of this he cannot doubt. Then he was not the rightful governor of the state; and if not the rightful governor of the state, there can be no question that the acts that he performed rendered him guilty of treason. The act of the general assembly, April 6, 1842, entitled "An act in relation to offences against the sovereign power of the state," declared his attempt to exercise the office of governor to be treason; and that law was valid, because the general assembly was still in the full exercise of all its legislative functions, had been superseded by no law paramount to its own, and was, in fact, the only known legislative authority in Rhode Island. It is idle to pretend, that, on the 6th of April, 1842, the general assembly had ceased to exist, or in any sense been superseded. An association, unrecognized by any public law or any public authority, had, it is true, framed an instrument which was called a constitution, had sent it out, and a number of persons in Rhode Island, said to be a majority of all the adult males in the state, recorded their names in its favor, and certain individuals, equally unknown to all existing public authority, declared it to be the paramount law of the land. But this could not make it so. Everybody knows that it was not the paramount law of the land **de facto**. Was it the paramount law *de jure*? Its advocates say now, indeed, that it was, because a majority of the people of Rhode Island had voted for it. But to this we may reply, 1. That the fact, that a majority did vote for it, has never been legally ascertained, and is more than questionable; 2. That it is well known that the intent of large numbers who did vote for it was, not to establish it as the constitution of the state, but simply to record their opinion in favor of an extension of suffrage; and 3. That, even if a majority had voted for it with the intent to adopt it as a constitution, it would not have been the paramount law of the land, because there was no law in Rhode Island, written or unwritten, which declared the will of the majority of the adult male population the supreme law.

Furthermore, the existing public authorities **ignored** it, and its warmest and most influential friends did not hesitate to acknowledge the legality of the existing authorities, by holding seats in the general assembly, and participating in its doings. Mr. Atwill, a legal gentleman of respectable attainments, and



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subsequently Mr. Dorr's attorney general, when the question came up in the assembly, was unwilling to give it as his opinion that the people's constitution was the paramount law of the land, and even expressed a doubt to the contrary. The whole conduct of the suffrage party at the time shows that they entertained the some doubt. The propositions made respectively by Messrs. Burgess and Keech, two of Mr. Dorr's friends, to the assembly, - propositions to abandon, on certain conditions, the people's constitution, - showed that it was not regarded by them as having any legal force; for, if they had so regarded it, they could not have made propositions for setting it aside, for they would have regarded such propositions as treasonable.

But if this constitution was not at that time the paramount law of the land, as it was not, either in fact or in right, or even in the estimation of its friends, the general assembly was in full force as the supreme legislative authority of the state. Consequently, its legal acts were binding on all the citizens of the state. They were, then, binding on Mr. Dorr, and, by doing what it declared to be treason, he incurred the political guilt of treason, and therefore became obnoxious to the penalty annexed. Now, since nothing can be clearer than that he is guilty of treason according to the laws of his state, there can be no real self-abasement or want of manliness, in admitting the fact, by submitting to the existing authorities, and consenting to receive a pardon.

We say further, that, setting all this reasoning aside, Mr. Dorr is bound by his own principles to submit to the existing government, and to take the oath of allegiance. Mr. Dorr contends that the majority of the people have the inherent right to rule. This, with him, is a natural right, as least recognized as such by the American system of government. We, of course, do not admit this; but he does, and that is enough for him. The will of the majority, therefore, however expressed, is the supreme law. The people's constitution was adopted by the majority of the people; therefore it was the supreme law. He was elected governor under that constitution, and therefore he was legally elected, and therefore was the rightful governor of the state. Be it so. But, subsequently to the adoption of the people's constitution, a majority of the people of Rhode Island adopted another constitution. This subsequent constitution necessarily overrides the preceding one. Now, if the will of the majority has a right to rule, it has the right to rule through this subsequent constitution; for this is the latest expression of their will. Consequently, Mr. Dorr is bound by his own principles to recognize it as the legitimate government, and may therefore take the oath of allegiance without abandoning in the least the principles for which he has contended. We are surprised that he did not see this, and avail himself of this argument, before his trial; for we presume, that, if he had done so, and taken the oath, he would not have been brought to a trial at all.

But we have no room to extend our remarks. We have merely wished, while expressing our sympathy with Mr. Dorr, and our earnest desire for his liberation and restoration to his social and civil rights, to say a word in defence of the authorities of Rhode Island. We believe the government of Rhode Island is much



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calumniated, and that, if the American people fairly understood the case, they would by no means tolerate the abuse so liberally heaped upon it. For ourselves, we believe that the interest of humanity and social progress are fully as likely to be promoted by siding with the public authorities in the legal discharge of their legal functions, as with those who resist them. It is not the part of good citizens to take it for granted that the government is always in the wrong, and that they who resist are always in the right. As a general rule, the interests of social and individual progress and well-being require us to sustain the constituted authorities, and always when these authorities keep within the sphere of their constitutional powers.

For the book which we have introduced, we have not much to say. It is ably, in some passages eloquently, and even powerfully, written. It is not always correct in its details, and is very far from possessing the true character of an historical work. The most we can say of it is, that it is an able, an eloquent, apology for Mr. Dorr and his friends,- as able as any thing we have written on the subject. But it is so erroneous in its premises, so false in its conclusions, so dangerous in its doctrines, so well calculated to mislead, and to undermine the foundations of all proper respect for authority, for law, that we dare not recommend it to our readers.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

1845

April: A party calling itself the Liberation Party won the [Rhode Island](#) elections, with the agenda of freeing [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) and other Dorrites.



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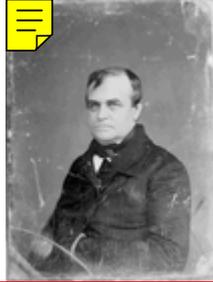
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June: [Charles James Fox](#) and [Catherine P. Abbot Fox](#) returned to Nashua, New Hampshire from their voyage to the West Indies. Charles, although he had become very ill, provided a series of letters to the [Nashua gazette and Hillsborough advertiser](#) relating their experiences on this voyage.

THE NASHUA GAZETTE

The “traitor” of [Rhode Island](#), [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#), was released from prison. “Go thou and govern no more.”



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GOVERNOR THOMAS DORR

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1847

This magnificent image was prepared of a disgraced [Providence, Rhode Island](#) politician:



THOMAS WILSON DORR

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT



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1849

In *Luther v. Borden*, the US Supreme Court decision growing out of the “Dorr War” of Spring 1842, the justices refused to opinion as to which of the [Rhode Island](#) governments was the real one. The opinion of the court was that Article IV, Section 4 having assigned to the executive and the legislative arms of the federal government rather than to the judicial arm the power to guarantee republican government in the states and to recognize lawful state governments, it was up to them under the Constitution to make any such judgment calls. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney did deliver himself of an *obiter dictum*, that it was only the existing state authority, by which he meant the Rhode Island conservatives (surprise!), that could legally resort to violence, terming this violence “martial law.”

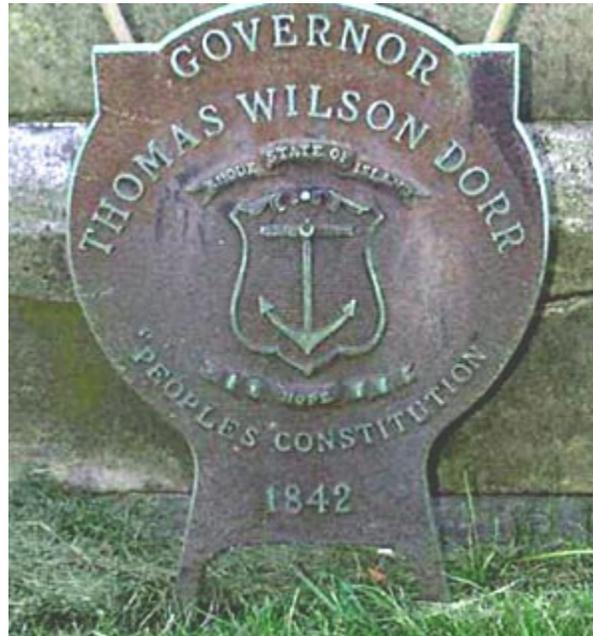
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1854

December 27, Wednesday: [Thomas Wilson Dorr](#) died in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).



[Henry Thoreau](#) took a steamer out of Hyannis port for [Nantucket Island](#), and there he spent the night at the home of Captain Edward W. Gardiner. The [New Bedford Evening Standard](#) (page 2, column 2) observed that the previous night's lecture, which it had advertised as being on the subject of "Getting a Living,"

displayed much thought, but was in some respects decidedly peculiar.



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Friend Daniel Ricketson would later write to Thoreau to advise that he had

heard several sensible people speak well of your lecture

but would conclude that the lecture

was not generally understood.

Friend Daniel's attitude was shared by Charles W. Morgan, who had been present for the lecture and who afterward wrote in his journal:



evening to the Lyceum where we had a lecture from the eccentric Henry J. [sic] Thoreau- The Hermit author very caustic against the usual avocations & employments of the world and a definition of what is true labour & true wages-audience very large & quiet-but I think he puzzled them a little-

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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."
- Remark by character "Garin Stevens" in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: December 16, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.