

MAYOR FERNANDO WOOD

"Angel of Peace"

Artist: Thomas Nast



This *Harper's Weekly* cartoon by Thomas Nast portrays Democratic congressman Fernando Wood, a former mayor of New York City (1855-1857; 1859-1861), as a devilish supporter of the Confederate cause.

During the Civil War, the Democratic party in the North was divided into two wings: the War Democrats, who supported the Union military effort, and the Peace Democrats, who favored a truce and negotiated settlement to end the war. One of the leaders of the Peace Democrats was Fernando Wood. Often unwilling to distinguish

between war opposition and treason, Republicans and other political opponents considered Wood to be a Confederate sympathizer, commonly known as a Copperhead (snake).

In this cartoon of January 2, 1864, Fernando Wood is depicted as the Angel of Peace, a dual reference to a traditional New Year's symbol as well as to the congressman's leadership role among the Peace Democrats. The cartoon reveals the innocently named Angel of Peace to be, instead, a devil, with talon-edged wings and feet, hair curled like demonic horns, and a copperhead snake entwining his legs.

In August 1864, Wood was instrumental in convincing the Democratic National Convention to adopt a peace plank in its party platform (which was, however, repudiated by their presidential nominee, General George McClellan, a War Democrat). A few months later, Wood lost his bid for reelection to Congress. In 1866, he returned to Congress, serving in the U.S. House until his death in 1881.

Source: New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/harp/0102.html#explanation>).



Fernando Wood (1812-1881)

Fernando Wood was a bundle of contradictions. Albert Shaw wrote that "the Mayor of New York was a picturesque character, with a bold imagination and with the courage to speak his mind and act on his own convictions." Shaw wrote: "He was a factional Democratic leader, sometimes in Tammany favor and sometimes out of it."¹ Biographer Jerome Mushkat wrote that the mayor "took duplicity to an extreme and made it an integral part of his operations."² Journalist Noah Brooks described Fernando Wood as "always calm, cool, and collected. His hair and mustache were dyed black, and his thin, spare face, elegant manners, and precise method of speech, gave him the appearance of a refined and scholarly man. He never lost his temper, was always agreeable, polite and even courtly."³

"Fernando Wood was one of the most extraordinary figures, and had one of the strangest careers, of almost anyone of that day and generation," wrote historian George Milton Fort. "Years later, John Bigelow, the author and statesman, who knew him well, saw Wood's portrait in the corridor of the City Hall. He gazed at it a little while, at the deep-blue eyes and the patrician features as symmetrical as though Praxiteles had chiseled them. Then he remarked: 'He was the handsomest man I ever saw, and the most corrupt man that ever sat in the Mayor's chair.'"⁴

Historian James G. Randall described Fernando Wood as a "politician, restrained, and calculating."⁵ Historian Reinhard Luthin noted: "He had risen to various terms in the City Hall via the roaring factionalism and saloon politics of Manhattan in those days of the 'Bowery b'shops.'"⁶ The leader of the Mozart Hall faction of New York Democrats "was equal measures of charm and knavery, principle and deceit," according to *American Enterprise's* Bill Kauffman. "Wood eventually became rich in the tried and true manners of American statesman: real estate speculation and marrying wealth. (His third wife was a 16-year-old heiress.) Tammany Hall's legendary Boss Tweed marveled of his rival, 'I never went to get a corner lot, that I didn't find Wood had got in ahead of me.'"⁷

Tweed biographer Alexander B. Callow, Jr. wrote that "Wood was a very real sense, Tweed's mentor although they disliked each other intensely." According to Callow, "There was much to be learned from Wood's techniques in building an organization. His position as Mayor was an excellent position to build patronage and instill party discipline. He consolidated his organization by making the Police Department his creature, and, at the same time, forming a close relationship with the underworld. He sold public offices, franchises, and city contracts to the highest bidder. To enlarge the immigrant vote, Wood established a naturalization mill for newly arrived aliens. At election time, he was an expert in strategically placing 'repeaters' in the closely contested election districts."⁸ New York City historian Oliver E. Allen wrote that Weed "had learned much from Wood's rise and fall. He saw the power that could accrue to someone who could centralize control of city departments, as Wood had attempted

with the police. More to the point, he saw that before anyone could control the city government he would have to possess absolute control of Tammany Hall and unify the Democratic party."⁹

In his pursuit of power, Wood was a model of opportunism. "Fernando Wood, in turn mayor of New York and a member of Congress from that city, was at all times and in all places a trimmer of the first order," wrote historian Rufus Rockwell Wilson. "During the first years of the war he persistently misread the underlying Union sentiment that swayed the North, and more than once proved a thorn in the side of Mr. Lincoln, but the latter always made a way to ignore or outwit him. On the other hand, while mindful of the selfish motives which often shaped Mr. Weed's actions, he was from the first keenly aware of the latter's political acumen and skill in the management of men, and exercising due caution, he never failed to enlist that acumen and skill when he felt that they would aid him in the great task of preserving the Union. In few words, Mr. Lincoln knew how to use Mr. Weed, and at the same time artfully feed the latter's sense of his own importance."¹⁰

The dapper Wood was a bar owner who bought ships and then made a fortune in California, Wood retired from business in the 1850s to devote himself to New York politics. In 1855, "certain gangs like the Empire Club and the Dead Rabbits and Tammany Hall (the Democratic machine) — organizations that to a certain extent shared the same membership — supported handsome, soft-spoken, elegant Fernando Wood for mayor. Wood won and shortly after taking office was praised as being 'the first mayor, for thirty years at least, who has set himself seriously to the work of giving the civic administration a decent appearance of common honesty,'" wrote David Black in *The King of Fifth Avenue*. "Beneath the honest appearance was corruption. Although Wood tried with indifferent success to drive the prostitutes off the streets (but not out of the brothels), reduce the sale of pornography, and prevent pickpockets from picking quite so many pockets, he stuffed ballot boxes, took bribes, and did little to discourage people from calling the Board of Aldermen 'The Forty Thieves.'"¹¹

"In the dukes-up age of antebellum American politics, Wood's more ardent fans included the Dead Rabbits, a brawling Irish gang that was in philosophical agreement with the mayor's refusal to enforce the statewide prohibition law of 1855," wrote Bill Kauffman in *American Enterprise*.¹² When Wood died, the *New York Herald* reported: "In the lower wards of the city he was very popular, especially with the roughs, over whom he exercised almost limitless influence by reason of his temperance principles, habits of sobriety and self-control."¹³ After a defeat for reelection as Mayor in 1857, Wood founded the "Mozart Hall" faction of New York Democrats opposition to "Tammany Hall" faction.

An unscrupulous politician, Wood led his group to Charleston Democrat convention in 1860 where it was allied with Southerners against Stephen Douglas. "The Republican strength, as demonstrated by the truce between Weed and anti-Weed factions and by the defection of some 'Americans' from Bell to Lincoln, alarmed the Democrats, one of whom warned: 'New York is the key to the White House, and if not seized to shut out Lincoln, it will be used to let him in.'" wrote historian Reinhard H. Luthin. "Mayor Fernando Wood of New York City, fearful of Republican success if a coalition of all anti-Lincoln factions were not effected, tendered the olive branch to his arch-foes, Dean Richmond and the Tammany leaders. His overtures were graciously received, and Wood's Mozart Hall, Richmond's Albany Regency and Tammany agreed to support Douglas. Wood endeavored to bring in the Breckinridge element, led by Daniel S. Dickinson of Binghamton, on this basis: since Douglas was strong in the North and Breckinridge was powerful in the South, only the Douglas electoral ticket should be run in the North and only the Breckinridge slate in the South. Between them they could obtain a majority of the electoral college and thus defeat Lincoln, which was the Democracy's first duty. How the votes should be apportioned among Douglas, Breckinridge or some other candidate, could be apportioned among Douglas, Breckinridge or some other candidate, could be arranged later. Wood's plan was coldly received — primarily because of the feud between Richmond and Dickinson."¹⁴

Historian James G. Randall reflected the reality of New York politics later pictured in the movie *Gangs of New York*: "Much of [Wood's] life was involved in the roaring factionalism of metropolitan politics in the days of the 'Dead Rabbits,' 'Bowery Boys,' and other riotous gangs. He was a 'democrats' with the small letter, battling against Whig conservatism, opposing nativist intolerance, and favoring free trade in opposition to protective tariff. In several terms as mayor of New York City he promoted movements for a better and more efficient city administration."¹⁵

On January 7 1861, Wood made the bizarre proposal that New York City should consider seceding itself and become a free city. Wood hoped that New York City could capitalize on the division of the country by seceding from New York State as well the country. "It would seem that a dissolution of the federal Union is inevitable," said Wood. "While other portions of our State have, unfortunately, been imbued with the fanatical spirit which actuates

a portion of the people of New England, the city of New York has unfalteringly preserved the integrity of its principles in adherence to the compromises of the constitution and the equal rights of the people of all the States."¹⁶ He then asked "why should not New York City, instead of supporting by her contributions in revenue two-thirds of the expenses of the United States, become also equally independent? As a free city, with but a nominal duty on imports, her local government could be supported without taxation upon her people...."¹⁷ In the secession crisis of 1860-61, having naturally opposed the election of Lincoln, Wood took the view that Southern withdrawal was inevitable, remembered that New York City was joined by many business links with the South, and declared that the metropolis ought to secede from the United States and set itself up as a 'free city.' This novel idea produced a flurry of discussion but went no further."¹⁸

Historian James G. Randall wrote: "Fearing loss of trade with the South and animated by general sympathy for Southerners, the mayor of New York City made the fantastic suggestion that the metropolis become a 'free city,' an independent city-state, 'with but nominal duty on imports,...free from taxes,...[with] cheap goods nearly duty free...[enjoying] the whole and united support of the Southern States.' Again it was urged that the true policy of New York City was to 'throw the weight of her influence in favor of a convention of the States.'"¹⁹ Wood's proposal drew some bitter criticism. "Fernando Wood evidently wants to be a traitor; it is lack of courage only that makes him content with being a blackguard," complained the *New York Tribune's* Horace Greeley.²⁰

Wood's proposal, wrote Bill Kauffman, "was motivated, in part, by antipathy toward the Republicans who ran Albany and were about to take over Washington. The New York state government meddled intolerantly in city affairs, even assuming control of the police department. And like many New York merchants, Wood had Southern sympathies."²¹ Historian George J. Lankevich wrote: "Wood's extraordinary proposal seemed strengthened when the state Democratic Party, convening in late January, also endorsed the concept of peaceful secession. A massive petition to Congress drawn up by many Manhattan merchants went so far as to suggest giving to the South half of all United States territories."²²

"Wood considered the national Republican assault on southern institutions, and the state Republican dismantling of metropolitan home rule back in 1857, to be co-evil assaults on local self-government," wrote historians Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace. "A declaration of independence by Manhattanites would liberate them from the meddling and plundering of upstate Puritans and free them as well from federal-dictated tariffs. By making theirs a duty-free port — apart from a nominal levy on imports that would cover the cost of local government and allow abolition of local taxes — New Yorkers would retain an 'uninterrupted intercourse with every section,' including 'our aggrieved brethern of the slave states,' and rise to new heights of prosperity."²³

As mayor, Wood was the official representative of New York City in greeting President-elect Lincoln on February 19, 1861. "Though not in sympathy with Lincoln's view, he made every effort to receive the President-elect with metropolitan hospitality," wrote Albert Shaw in his chronicle of the election.²⁴ The President-elect reciprocated by saying: "In reference to the difficulties that confront us at this time, and of which your Honor thought fit to speak so becomingly, and so justly as I suppose. I can only say that I fully concur in the sentiments expressed by the Mayor. In my devotion to the Union I hope I am behind no man in the Union; but as to the wisdom with which to conduct affairs tending to the preservation of the Union, I fear that even too great confidence may have been reposed [placed] in me. I am sure I bring a heart devoted to the work."²⁵

Wood's basic political sympathies did not change. In early April, Wood engineered a resolution by the Mozart Hall General Committee that proclaimed: "The rapid developments of the last five months have rendered the existence of the Southern confederacy a historical fact; that, excepting by the free, spontaneous act of the separate members composing it, its independent nationality can only be interfered with by violence; and that we are opposed to every form of menace, restraint, or coercion, under whatsoever pretext of enforcing law, collecting revenue, or retaking property, which may lead to a conflict with the seceded States."²⁶

Wood's public attitude about secession did change after hostilities broke out — perhaps more out of convenience than out of conviction. On April 15, New York attorney George Templeton Strong wrote: "Mayor Wood out with a 'proclamation.' He must still be talking. It is brief and commonplace, but winds up with a recommendation to everybody to obey the laws of the land. This is significant. The cunning scoundrel sees which way the cat is jumping and puts himself right on the record in a value general way, giving the least possible offence to his allies of the Southern Democracy."²⁷

"For a time, just after the Sumter outbreak, Wood spoke for vigorous and non-partisan support of the Union, but in a few months he was bitterly denouncing the Lincoln administration, opposing conscription, favoring peace

negotiation with Southern leaders, and, by the admission of his friendly biographer, coming 'dangerously close to treason.'" John Hay noted in his diary on May 3: "This morning in the Presidents mail I came across some warlike documents. One from Fernando Wood offering his services in a military capacity."²⁸ Wood had written: "I beg to tender my services in any military capacity consistent with my position as Mayor of New York- "²⁹

In the following weeks, Wood "proved surprisingly loyal to the Union and led a campaign that raised \$1 million for the war effort," wrote historian George J. Lankevich. "But too many voters had been alienated by Wood's excesses, and despite his rediscovered patriotism, he lost reelection to George Opdyke" and Tammany candidate George C. Gunther in a three-way race that December.³⁰

But Wood's course was always erratic. He wrote President Lincoln in January 1862 after Edwin M. Stanton replaced Simon Cameron as Secretary of War: "Your highly patriotic, and conservative course meets with the hearty concurrence of the Democratic masses in this state We will sustain you fully, and you may rely upon my best exertions in behalf of the administration of which you are the noble head The late change in the cabinet was opportune It has given the best proof of your own ability to govern, and also of your ex[ecutive] power and will-"³¹ In August 1862, Wood wrote President Lincoln:

The ultra radical, abolitionists of this state persistently represent me as hostile to your administration, and as in sympathy with the states in rebellion against the government I sincerely hope these allegations (false in every respect) will have no influence upon your generous mind...They originated with the *Tribune* of this city and are continued by its coworkers in destruction...You cannot have forgotten my very early tender of services to you and your autographic reply, and I ask you to rely upon my support in your efforts to maintain the integrity of the union"³²

Wood, however, was always on the lookout for political advantage. By the fall of 1862, Wood was proclaiming that the federal government was "imbecile, venal and corrupt" or it would have succeeded in crushing the Confederate forces. He told one Democratic audience that "I am going to Washington, and when I reach there I will go to the President of the United States, in my sovereign capacity as your representative,...I will tell him that without we have a change of measures, that so help me God! we will have a change of men."³³

Wood actually was trying to bring a change in policy — in his own bizarre way. "On the question of peace, and of the return of the Southern states to the Union, he wrote challenging letters to Lincoln, worrying the President with nagging demands that the President's own letters, meant to be confidential, should be published," wrote historian James G. Randall.³⁴ "A passing flurry of peace talk gave the closing weeks of 1862 a bizarre touch," wrote Historian Allan Nevins. Once again, Wood made an unorthodox proposal. "It was started by a Marylander named Chase Barney, who came home from a sojourn in Richmond with what he pretended were Southern proffers of terms for returning to the Union. The mischievous Fernando Wood shortly made a New York Speech outlining these supposed terms. They included, he said, the restoration of the old Constitution unchanged, adoption of the Crittenden Compromise, assumption of the Confederate debt, and ejection of the French from Mexico, to be followed by the annexation of that country to make nine slave States. Having made this preposterous statement, Wood maneuvered to bring about an exchange of views with Lincoln. Through Mayor George Opdyke he sent the President an impudent letter stating that he had learned from an unnamed source that the South would send members to the next Congress provided they be given full amnesty; and he begged Lincoln to let him conduct negotiations with the Confederate leaders."³⁵

Wood's impudence was part of his standard operating procedure. "In the latter part of 1862 [Wood] addressed to Mr. Lincoln a letter, in which he set forth that he was trustworthily advised that the Southern States would send representatives to the next Congress, provided that a full and general amnesty should permit them to do so," wrote presidential aide William O. Stoddard. "The trap was neither so well set nor so well baited as it seemed to be, and Mr. Lincoln was not drawn into any blunder."³⁶ In the letter on December 8, Wood wrote:

On the 25th November last I was advised by an authority which I deemed likely to be well informed, as well as reliable and truthful that the Southern States would send representatives to the next Congress, provided that a full and general amnesty should permit them to do so No guarantees or terms were asked for other than the amnesty referred to-

Deeming this information of great value if well founded I communicated it in substance to the Hon George Opdyke the mayor of this city whom I know to hold confidential relations to members of your administration, and proposing through him that if the government would permit the correspondence,

under its own inspection I would undertake to procure something definite & positive from persons connected with the so called Confederate authorities. Mr Opdyke in reply stated that several senators from New England States were then in this city on their way to Washington to whom he would at once communicate the proposition and advise me of the answer[.] Knowing that these gentlemen were your friends, and supposing that they would immediately confer with you on their arrival at the capital, and supposing that I should be speedily informed of the result I have delayed untill now from making a communication direct to you-

I now learn however from Mr Opdyke this day that he failed to see these Senators when in New York and that he had not made the propositions and that therefore you are not in possession of it as coming from myself Therefore the object of this letter.

As an humble, but loyal citizen, deeply impressed with the great necessity of restoring the Union of these States I ask your immediate attention to this subject[.] The magnitude of the interests at stake warrant some executive action predicated upon this information, if it be only to ascertain whether it be grounded upon even probable foundation

If it shall prove groundless no harm shall have been done, provided the enquiring be made as it can be without compromising the government, or injury to the glorious cause in which it is now engaged

If however it shall prove well founded, there is no estimate too high to place upon its national value-

Now therefore Mr President I suggest that gentlemen whose former social & political relations with the leaders of the southern revolt may be allowed to hold unofficial correspondence with them on this subject, the correspondence to be submitted to you It may be thus ascertained what if any credence may be given to these statements, and also whether a peaceful solution of the present struggle may not be attainable-

I am sure nothing I can say can add to your own well known desires to produce this result-

Your exalted position the embarrassments, and responsibilities which surround you upon all sides the bleeding condition of the country, becoming exhausted not only in the impoverishment of its best life blood of industrial productions, but in the determination, and consequent destruction of our political institutions; all call upon you as our chief ruler to take one step upon the road of peaceful effort by which to ascertain whether the time has not arrived when other methods than brute fighting may not accomplish what military force has failed to do[.] In the origin of this struggle you foresaw that such a time would come[.] Your Inaugural address delivered near two years ago pointed out with prophetic vision the certain results of the impending conflict of arms. Your language then was "suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always, and when after much loss on both sides and no gain on either you cease fighting the identical questions as to terms of intercourse are again upon you" You said that after a bloody and terrible struggle "the still small voice of reason" would intervene and settle the controversy-

You know that since the establishment of christian civilization negotiation [sic] and compromise have sooner or later determined every military contest It cannot be otherwise now Has not the time arrived when to quote your own language we should "cease fighting" at least long enough to ascertain whether the "identical questions" about which we began the fight may not be amicably & honourably adjusted, and "the terms of intercourse" be once more peaceably established? It is to this end that I now address you With confidence in your patriotism and with no desire to interfere with your legitimate Constitutional prerogatives...³⁷

Historian Margaret Leech wrote of Wood: "Although he was openly allied with the secessionists, he attempted to maintain a clandestine relation with the administration, and lost no opportunity to ingratiate himself with the White House."³⁸ Mr. Lincoln was justifiably chary of both Wood and the proposals he presented. The same month, he had categorized the representations of another supposed emissary from Confederate President Jefferson Davis as "a very shallow attempt at humbuggery."³⁹ The President carefully replied to Wood on December 12.

Your letter of the 8th. with the accompanying note of same date, was received yesterday. The most important paragraph in the letter, as I consider, is in these words: "On the 25th. November last I was advised by an authority which I deemed likely to be well informed, as well as reliable and truthful, that the Southern States would send representatives to the next Congress, provided that a full and general

amnesty should permit them to do so. No guaranties or terms were asked for other than the amnesty referred to."

I strongly suspect your information will prove to be groundless; nevertheless I thank you for communicating it to me.

Understanding the phrase in the paragraph above quoted "the Southern States would send representatives to the next Congress" to be substantially the same as that "the people of the Southern States would cease resistance, and would re inaugurate [sic], submit to, and maintain the national authority, within these limits of such states under the Constitution of the United States," I say, that in such case, the war would cease on the part of the United States; would cease; and that, if within a reasonable time "a full and general amnesty" were necessary to such end, it would not be withheld.

I do not think it would be proper now for me to communicate this, formally or informally, to the people of the Southern States. My belief is that they already know it; and when they choose, if ever, they can communicate with me unequivocally Nor do I think it proper now to suspend military operations to try any experiment of negotiations.

Any information you may, in your own way, obtain upon this subject, I shall be glad to receive, if you please. Any I should, nevertheless, receive with great pleasure the exact information you now have, and also such other as you may in any way obtain. Such information might be more valuable before the first of January than afterwards.

While there is nothing in this letter which I shall dread to see in history, it is perhaps, better for the present, that it's existence should not become public.

I therefore have to request that you will regard it as confidential.⁴⁰

Wood replied on December 17: "Your letter of the 12th inst.¹ was handed to me on the afternoon of the 15th inst by Mr Wakeman, the Postmaster of this City; Pardon me Mr President when I say that your reply has filled me with profound regret. It declines what I had conceived to be an innocent effort to ascertain the foundation for information in my possession of a desire in the South to return to the Union. It thus appears to be an indication on your part to continue a policy, which in my judgment is not only unwise, but in the opinion of many, is in conflict with the constitutional authority vested in the Federal Government."

Wood continued: "I think, however, that my proposition is in keeping with your own expressed conditions, upon which the war shall cease. You say that 'when the people of the Southern States would cease resistance, and would inaugurate, submit to and maintain the national authority, within the limits of such States under the Constitution of the United States, that in such case the war would cease on the part of the United States'. Admitting this position as correct, you will see, that as a condition precedent to such submission, the opportunity to do so must be afforded. It cannot be expected that the Southern people will cease resistance so long as we proclaim our intention to destroy their local institutions, their property and their lives, and accompany the declaration with corresponding legislative, executive, social and political action. They cannot cease resistance, and reinaugurate, submit to and maintain the Federal authority, if we will not let them alone long enough to do so. If they really desire acquiescence and are willing to send delegates to the next Congress, as I am advised, how can they do so, without the opportunity, and without some intimations or guaranties as to the reception of their representatives at Washington? The act of sending representatives to Congress is within itself a full compliance with your own conditions. If thus represented by their own selected agents, chosen under the forms and in pursuance of their own local State laws, governing such elections, they will compose an integral portion of the government, and thus give the assurance of an 'acquiescence and submission' of the very highest and most satisfactory character."⁴¹

The curious aspects of the Wood proposal were detailed in a February 17, 1863 diary entry by Navy Secretary Gideon Welles: "The President read to the Cabinet a correspondence between himself and Fernando Wood. The latter wrote the President on the 8th of December last that he had good reason to believe the South desired a restoration of the Union, etc. The President replied on the 12th of December that he had no confidence in the impression, but that he would receive kindly any proposition. Wood's letter was confidential; the President made his so. All was well enough, perhaps, in form and manner if such a correspondence was to take place. Wood is a Representative and his letter was brought to the President by Mayor [George] Opdyke. Mayor Opdyke and ex-

Mayor Wood are on opposite extremes of parties,—so opposite that each is, if not antagonistic, not very friendly inclined to the President. Wood now telegraphs the President that the time has arrived when the correspondence should be published. It is a piece of political machinery intended for certain party purposes."⁴²

In February 1863, Wood sought the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate — although the Democratic nominee was sure to lose to Edwin D. Morgan. Wood lost the dubious honor to Erastus Corning by a 28-20 vote in the Democratic legislative caucus. "Wood, through the alliance with Tammany in the preceding election, had gotten a sort of hold on that organization; but the Regency stood as a bar to his further advance toward the control of the forces of the state Democracy. Back of this opposition was not only rivalry between New York City and the rest of the State, but a dislike for Wood and his methods."⁴³ Wood had become a lightning rod for Union supporters — inside and outside the Democratic Party.

Among all politicians, Wood was a known provocateur -if he thought he could get away with his actions. His brother Benjamin was less subtle. He was editor of New York *Daily News* (which was closed for abetting treason in 1861-62), a strong-anti-War Democrat and critic of President Lincoln who was investigated for disloyalty by House in 1862. Fernando himself served in Congress intermittently over four decades (Democrat, 1841-43, 1863-6, 1867-81). Frank Abial Flower, biographer of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, wrote that "when Fernando Wood made a speech against the Government, Stanton heard it by telegraph with warrant in hand for his arrest if necessary; but the speaker was not molested. However, the fact that Stanton knew the substance of every disloyal speech as soon as it was uttered, and that he was ready to cut the oration short at any point if deemed that he was ready to cut the oration short at any point if deemed advisable, had a depressing effect and made his influence more potent than that of any other person in the Republic."⁴⁴

It was in New York City, rather than Washington, where Wood made his mark. Although he was no longer Mayor when Draft riots broke out in July 1863, some historians have suggested that the riots reaped seeds that Wood had sown. "The riots had been born of hatred for an unjust draft law But their beginnings had been nurtured long and were non-Catholic in origin. These people had been taught resentment. Wood, a renegade Quaker, had taught them that," wrote William Alan Bales in *Tiger in the Streets*.⁴⁵

Historian George Fort Milton observed that though Wood was in New York City at the time of the draft riots, he played little more. Milton wrote that "The Congressman had already made himself an advocate of peace at any price, looked with favor on the Knights of the Golden Circle and similar anti-Union secret societies, and had denounced Lincoln's conduct in the Vallandigham case in the severest terms. But any direct connection of this New York Copperhead Congressman with the start of the riots is not revealed by the available material. He was a master of secret politics, and had he been at the focus of such a conspiracy, his agency in it would have been verbal only — no scrap of paper would have remained to damn him. The evidence of attitude, supplied by the columns of the *Daily News*, was not so much of incitation to riot as it was of extenuation of the misdeeds of the rioters after they had begun."⁴⁶

As congressman in the years 1863 to 1865 he continued the agitation of Copperhead Congressman Clement Vallandigham, who was not in Congress during that period. In his sheer bravado and shocking inconsistency, Wood could be breathtakingly bold. He was a strong opponent of Administration politics and all attempts to forge a coalition of political parties to fight the Confederacy. "There cannot be war democrats, because that involves the necessity of supporting the policy of the war," Wood told a meeting of Mozart Hall in March 1863, adding that "any man who supports the policy of this administration cannot be a democrat. The moment democrats endorse the policy of the administration, they at once drop the characteristics of the democratic party and merge into the abolition party."⁴⁷ Historian Sidney David Brummer noted: "This man, who as a representative at Washington had played the double role of publicly opposing and privately courting the administration, shortly before delivering the speech quoted above wrote to Mr. Lincoln denying that he (wood) was hostile to the administration and in sympathy with the South, and begging the President 'to rely upon his support in his efforts to maintain the integrity of the Union."⁴⁸ Brummer noted that at an rally against the war called by Wood for early April, he that the nation confronted "one [revolution] at the South, with the sword, and the other at the North by executive and legislative usurpations....Taking advantage of the popular enthusiasm in behalf of the Union, it [the government] he, under the pretext of furthering this holy object, gradually fastened the chains of slavery upon the people."⁴⁹

Although they were politically in sync, New York's Wood and Ohio's Vallandigham were political rivals. "Fernando Wood succeeded to the leadership of the Peace Democrats in the Thirty-eighth Congress, Vallandigham not having been returned to the House. A more marked contrast between two men can hardly be imagined." Journalist Noah Brooks wrote that Wood "did not like Vallandigham, and on more than one occasion he held long

conversations with President Lincoln in regard to the then notorious Ohio Copperhead. He was especially anxious that the President should not make a martyr of Vallandigham, of whom he expressed a most contemptuous opinion, and of whom he said that, if he were let alone, he would speedily sink out of sight."⁵⁰ Vallandigham had been arrested by General Ambrose Burnside's soldiers on May 5, 1863. He was subsequently ejected from Ohio and sent across Confederate lines. He eventually made his way to Canada.

Wood sought to supplant Vallandigham as well as to use him. When Wood put together a convention of Peace Democrats in Syracuse in August 1864, Vallandigham was invited as a main speaker. Wood used the meeting to authorize his divisive and anti-war behavior later in the month at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. According to historian Ernest A. McKay, "Fernando Wood, always walking a fine line between loyalty and treason, intended to make himself heard at the state and national conventions as the leader of the peace men."⁵¹

Presidential assistant John Hay reported: "Fernando Wood said to [President Lincoln] on one occasion that he could do nothing more politic than to bring Val. back: in that case he could promise him two democratic candidates for President this year. 'These war democrats' said F.W. 'Are scoundrelly hypocrites: they want to oppose you & favor the war at once which is nonsense. There are but two sides in this fight: yours and mine — war & peace. You will succeed while the war lasts, I expect, but we shall succeed when the war is over. I intend to keep my record clear for the future."⁵²

Despite his political opposition to the Lincoln Administration, Congressman Wood was a frequent visitor to the White House — too frequent in the view of President Lincoln. Presidential aide John G. Nicolay recalled some mid-December 1863 visits by Wood:

"This morning early Edward came into the President's office and announced that Mr. [Fernando] Wood was here to see him. 'I am sorry he is here,' said the President. 'I would rather he should not come about here so much. Tell Mr. Wood that I have nothing as yet to tell him, on the subject we conversed about when he was last here.' Edward went out to deliver his message.

"'I can tell you what Wood (F.) Wants,' said the President to me. 'He came here one day last week to urge me to publish some sort of amnesty for the northern sympathizers and abettors of the rebellion, which would include Vallandigham, and permit him to return; and promised that if I would do so, they would have two Democratic candidates in the field at the next Presidential election."⁵³

On January 29, 1864, Wood gave a party that drew the attention of two of Mr. Lincoln's assistants. William O. Stoddard filed a dispatch to his New York newspaper: "Mr. Fernando Wood, of New-York, gave a grand party the other evening, which, to the surprise of some, was largely attended by Republicans and Abolitionists of the most ultra stripe. It would have been funny to have read out in the parlors the names of those guests who have, at sundry times and places, declared themselves in favor of hanging as a felon this somewhat remarkable host of the evening."⁵⁴ John Hay recorded in his diary: "Society flourishes — I couldn't begin to count the parties on all my fingers. They are beginning to double up. Phernandiwud [Fernando Wood] had a grand blow-out last night to which he didn't invite me."⁵⁵ Such events even brought the attention of Mary Todd Lincoln. Historian Margaret Leech wrote: "To the furious indignation of Mr. [Edwin M.] Stanton, she was also very attentive to the Copperhead, Fernando Wood, whose residence blossomed at the expense of the White House conservatories, when he gave his grand receptions."⁵⁶

Wood kept up his agitation to fill the vacuum which Vallandigham's exile presented. On August 24, 1864, Brooks wrote in a dispatch to his Sacramento newspaper: "Fernando Wood doesn't like Vallandigham; per contra, Val doesn't like Fernando — the reason for such mutual lack of affection being, I suppose, that two of a trade can never agree. Just after the return of Vallandigham from expatriation Wood sought an interview with the President, in which he said: 'We Peace Democrats are the only Democrats; all others are impostors and bastards; there is no such thing as a War Democrat, for that is a contradiction of terms. We don't expect, Mr. President, to elect our candidate this Fall; the people of the North are not ready for peace yet; but peace must come sooner or later, and when it does the Democratic party will be the party which will act and assimilate with the dominant party in the South, and so we shall again have our rightful ascendancy. now, Mr. President, you cannot find fault with that; it is not going to hurt you any.' The President conceded that he was disposed to be generous, and asked if Vallandigham's reported return was any part of this programme. Wood replied that it was not, and added: 'You may not believe me, but I assure you that I never knew or expected that he would return, though I acknowledge that I have had a letter from him since he got back. But I tell you frankly, Mr. President, that it will not do to make a martyr of Vallandigham. He has had more notoriety already than he deserves, and I warn you that the true policy

is that he be severely let alone.' To this the President replied: 'I don't believe that Vallandigham has returned; I never can believe it, and I never shall believe it until he forces himself offensively upon the public attention and upon my attention; then we shall have to deal with him. So long as he behaves himself decently he is as effectually in disguise as a slovenly man who went to a masquerade party with a clean face.'⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Wood pushed his Peace Democrat platform and attempted unsuccessfully to promote Governor Horatio Seymour as a potential Democratic candidate for President. That position placed him at odds with other New York City and State Democratic leaders, who backed War Democrat George B. McClellan. Wood understood the contradictions between McClellan's and party's peace platform would make an effective Democratic campaign impossible. Wood called for a new Democratic convention "to remodel the platform to suit the nominee, or nominate a candidate to suit the platform."⁵⁸ He even sought and received an appointment to see President Lincoln at the Soldiers Home on September 11, 1864.

Wood understood that the Democrats could not win and sought to position himself for the future. Wood endorsed the campaign of General George McClellan — despite the fact that McClellan had repudiated its peace plank. But the twists and turns of Wood's positions took a political toll. According to historian Jerome Mushkat, "his position had so degenerated that he was forced to run without any formal backing. Even worse, he nominally electioneered for McClellan in New England and the Midwest, but somehow mustered the gall to reassure Lincoln that 'I have faithfully executed the enterprize undertaken in Indiana, Pennsylvania, & Ohio.... *The States are safe* — My Success has been beyond expectations.' Where Wood really stood, then was so problematical that when he ran for reelection, [James Gordon] Bennett, his one-time admirer, growled, 'Fernando Wood is the nominee of Fernando Wood. Fernando Wood is patrolling the district, making speeches for Fernando Wood.'⁵⁹

In mid-November 1864, Wood wrote President Lincoln: "I hope the rumours looking to Peace are founded in fact I am an earnest, and sincere friend to this result and ask you to consider me as willing to be used in any capacity that will facilitate it If commissioners shall be appointed permit me to suggest that at least one shall be taken from my wing of the Democratic party If Peace is desired some one whose course will make him an appropriate agent should be selected You have the power, and doubtless will exercise it wisely, and patriotically-"⁶⁰

In early December, Wood again wrote the President: "I have received a letter from Mr Vallandigham in which he appears to fear arrest — He is now quietly pursuing the law, and has no connection with any political association or party I hope you will not permit any further proceedings against him I am sure there can be no good reason for it Permit me to suggest that nothing farther be done in this matter untill [sic] you see me, provided any offensive action against him is contemplated-"⁶¹

But Wood's power had peaked and he was no longer a factor in even presidential calculations. Both Fernando and Ben Wood served in Congress when the Thirteenth Amendment was voted on in January 1865. Both voted against it.

Footnotes

1. Albert Shaw, *Abraham Lincoln: The Year of His Election*, Volume II, p. 248.
2. Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, .
3. Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time: A Memoir of the Civil War Era by the Newspaperman Who Knew Lincoln Best*, p. 29.
4. George Fort Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column*, p. 242.
5. James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Midstream*, p. 97.
6. Reinhard H. Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln*, p. 377.
7. Bill Kauffman, "The Blue, The Gray and Gotham", *American Enterprise*, July-August, 2000, p. 51.
8. Alexander B. Callow, Jr., *The Tweed Ring*, p. 18.
9. Oliver E. Allen, *New York, New York: A History of the World's Most Exhilarating and Challenging City*, p. 162.
10. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 340.
11. David M. Black, *The King of Fifth Avenue*, p. 169.
12. Bill Kauffman, "The Blue, The Gray and Gotham", *American Enterprise*, July-August, 2000, p. 51.
13. William Alan Bales, *Tiger in the Streets: A City in a Time of Trouble*, p. 117.
14. Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign*, p. 212.
15. James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Midstream*, p. 97.
16. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 123-124.
17. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 124.

18. James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Midstream*, p. 97.
19. James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President, Springfield to Gettysburg*, Volume I, p. 243.
20. TBA, .
21. Bill Kauffman, "The Blue, The Gray and Gotham", *American Enterprise*, July-August, 2000, p. 51.
22. George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City*, p. 113.
23. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, p. 867-868.
24. Albert Shaw, *Abraham Lincoln: The Year of His Election*, Volume II, p. 249.
25. Roy P. Basler, editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume IV, p. 232-233 (February 20, 1861).
26. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 124 (New York Herald, April 5, 1861).
27. Allan Nevins, editor, *Diary of the Civil War, 1860-1865: George Templeton Strong*, p. 121 (April 15, 1861).
28. Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, editor, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, p. 17 (May 3, 1861).
29. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, April 29, 1861).
30. George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City*, p. 114.
31. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, January 15, 1862).
32. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, August 20, 1862).
33. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 243.
34. James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Midstream*, p. 98.
35. Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: War Becomes Revolution, 1862-1863*, p. 342.
36. William O. Stoddard, *Abraham Lincoln: The Man and the War President*, p. 361-362.
37. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, December 8, 1862).
38. Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, p. 280-281.
39. Roy P. Basler, editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, p. 517 (Memorandum Concerning J. Wesley Greene, December 1862).
40. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Fernando Wood [Draft], December 12, 1862).
41. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, December 17, 1862).
42. Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, Volume I, p. 237 (February 17, 1863).
43. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 273.
44. Frank Abial Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton*, p. 253.
45. William Alan Bales, *Tiger in the Streets: A City in a Time of Trouble*, p. 147.
46. George Fort Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column*, p. 154.
47. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 305.
48. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 305-306.
49. Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State During the Period of the Civil War*, p. 306-307.
50. Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time: A Memoir of the Civil War Era by the Newspaperman Who Knew Lincoln Best*, p. 29.
51. Ernest A. McKay, *The Civil War and New York City*, p. 237.
52. Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, editor, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, p. 208 (June 17, 1864).
53. Michael Burlingame, editor, *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865*, p. 122 (Memorandum, December 14, 1863).
54. Michael Burlingame, editor, *Dispatches from Lincoln's White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard*, p. 205 (February 1, 1864).
55. Michael Burlingame, editor, *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865*, p. 125.-126 (Letter of John Nicolay to John Hay, January 29, 1864).
56. Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, p. 309.
57. Michael Burlingame, editor, *Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks*, p. 130-131.
58. Irving Katz, *August Belmont: A Political Biography*, p. 137.

59. Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine, 1789-1865*, p. 363.
60. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, November 18, 1864).
61. Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress. Transcribed and Annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College. Galesburg, Illinois. (Letter from Fernando Wood to Abraham Lincoln, December 4, 1864).

Source: The Lincoln Institute (<http://www.mrlincolnandnewyork.org/inside.asp?ID=80&subjectID=3>).

Mayor Wood's Recommendation of the Secession of New York City

Mayor Wood
January 6, 1861

To the Honorable the Common Council:

GENTLEMEN: We are entering upon the public duties of the year under circumstances as unprecedented as they are gloomy and painful to contemplate. The great trading and producing interests of not only the city of New York, but of the entire country, are prostrated by a monetary crisis; and although similar calamities have before befallen us, it is the first time that they have emanated from causes having no other origin than that which may be traced to political disturbances. Truly, may it now be said, "We are in the midst of a revolution *bloodless* as Yet." Whether the dreadful alternative implied as probable in the conclusion of this prophetic quotation may be averted, "no human ken can divine." It is quite certain that the severity of the storm is unexampled in our history, and if the disintegration of the Federal Government, with the consequent destruction of all the material interests of the people shall not follow, it will be owing more to the interposition of Divine Providence, than to the inherent preventive power of our institutions, or the intervention of any other human agency.

It would seem that a dissolution of the Federal Union is inevitable. Having been formed originally on a basis of general and mutual protection, but separate local independence, each State reserving the entire and absolute control of its own domestic affairs, it is evidently impossible to keep them together longer than they deem themselves fairly treated by each other, or longer than the interests, honor and fraternity of the people of the several States are satisfied. Being a Government created by *opinion*, its continuance is dependent upon the continuance of the sentiment which formed it. It cannot be preserved by coercion or held together by force. A resort to this last dreadful alternative would of itself destroy not only the Government, but the lives and property of the people.

If these forebodings shall be realized, and a separation of the States shall occur, momentous considerations will be presented to the corporate authorities of this city. We must provide for the new relations which will necessarily grow out of the new condition of public affairs.

It will not only be necessary for us to settle the relations which we shall hold to other cities and States, but to establish, if we can, new ones with a portion of our own State. Being the child of the Union, having drawn our sustenance from its bosom, and arisen to our present power and strength through the vigor of our mother, when deprived of her maternal advantages, we must rely upon our own resources and assume a position predicated upon the new phase which public affairs will present, and upon the

inherent strength which our geographical, commercial, political, and financial preeminence imparts to us.

With our aggrieved brethren of the Slave States, we have friendly relations and a common sympathy. We have not participated in the warfare upon their constitutional rights or their domestic institutions. While other portions of our State have unfortunately been imbued with the fanatical spirit which actuates a portion of the people of New England, the city of New York has unfalteringly preserved the integrity of its principles of adherence to the compromises of the Constitution and the equal rights of the people of all the States. We have respected the local interests of every section, at no time oppressing, but all the while aiding in the development of the resources of the whole country. Our ships have penetrated to every clime, and so have New York capital, energy and enterprise found their way to every State, and, indeed, to almost every county and town of the American Union. If we have derived sustenance from the Union, so have we in return disseminated blessings for the common benefit of all. Therefore, New York has a right to expect, and should endeavor to preserve a continuance of uninterrupted intercourse with every section.

It is, however, folly to disguise the fact that, judging from the past, New York may have more cause of apprehension from the aggressive legislation of our own State than from external dangers. We have already largely suffered from this cause. For the past five years, our interests and corporate rights have been repeatedly trampled upon. Being an integral portion of the State, it has been assumed, and in effect tacitly admitted on our part by nonresistance, that all political and governmental power over us rested in the State Legislature. Even the common right of taxing ourselves for our own government, has been yielded, and we are not permitted to do so without this authority.

Thus it will be seen that the political connection between the people of the city and the State has been used by the latter to our injury. The Legislature, in which the present partizan majority has the power, has become the instrument by which we are plundered to enrich their speculators, lobby agents, and Abolition politicians. Laws are passed through their malign influence by which, under forms of legal enactment, our burdens have been increased, our substance eaten out, and our municipal liberties destroyed. Self—government, though guaranteed by the State Constitution, and left to every other county and city, has been taken from us by this foreign power, whose dependents have been sent among us to destroy our liberties by subverting our political system.

How we shall rid ourselves of this odious and oppressive connection, it is not for me to determine. It is certain that a dissolution cannot be peacefully accomplished, except by the consent of the Legislature itself. Whether this can be obtained or not, is, in my judgment, doubtful. Deriving so much advantage from its power over the city, it is not probable that a partizan majority will consent to a separation, and the resort to force by violence and revolution must not be thought of for an instant. We have been distinguished as an orderly and law—abiding people. Let us do nothing to forfeit this character, or to add to the present distracted condition of a public affairs.

Much, no doubt, can be said in favor of the justice and policy of a separation. It may be said that secession or revolution in any of the United States would be subversive of all Federal authority, and, so far as the Central Government is concerned, the resolving of the community into its original elements that, if part of the States form new combinations and Governments, other States may do the same. California and her sisters of the Pacific will no doubt set up an independent Republic and husband their own rich mineral resources. The Western States, equally rich in cereals and other agricultural products, will probably do the same. Then it may be said, why should not New York city, instead of supporting by her contributions in revenue two—thirds of the expenses of the United States, become also equally

independent? As a free city, with but nominal duty on imports, her local Government could be supported without taxation upon her people. Thus we could live free from taxes, and have cheap goods nearly duty free. In this she would have the whole and united support of the Southern States, as well as all the other States to whose interests and rights under the Constitution she has always been true.

It is well for individuals or communities to look every danger square in the face, and to meet it calmly and bravely. As dreadful as the severing of the bonds that have hitherto united the States has been in contemplation, it is now apparently a stern and inevitable fact. We have now to meet it with all the consequences, whatever they may be. If the Confederacy is broken up the Government is dissolved, and it behooves every distinct community, as well as every individual, to take care of themselves.

When Disunion has become a fixed and certain fact, why may not New York disrupt the bands which bind her to a venal and corrupt master to a people and a party that have plundered her revenues, attempted to ruin her and a party that have plundered her revenues, attempted to ruin her commerce, taken away the power of self—government, and destroyed the Confederacy of which she was the proud Empire City? Amid the gloom which the present and prospective condition of things must cast over the country, New York, as a *Free City*, may shed the only light and hope of a future reconstruction of our once blessed Confederacy.

But I am not prepared to recommend the violence implied in these views. In stating this argument in favor of freedom, "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must," let me not be misunderstood. The redress can be found only in appeals to the magnanimity of the people of the whole State. The events of the past two months have no doubt effected a change in the popular sentiment of the State and National politics. This change may bring us the desired relief, and we may be able to obtain a repeal of the law to which I have referred, and a consequent restoration of our corporate rights.

Fernando Wood, Major.
January 6th, 1861.

Source: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=435>