theory, men vote for one party as much because they dislike the membership of the other party as because they are responding positively to the platform of their own party. In the 1850s, the Democrats were undeniably the party of the Catholics. Hence, once the Republicans became the major anti-Democratic party, it is likely that anti-Catholics, especially those who refused to join the Know Nothing order, voted for them as much to defeat the pro-Catholic party as to defeat the Slave Power.

In my judgment, then, these two fine studies have not totally demolished the validity of the ethnocultural interpretation of the realignment of the 1850s. But they have raised penetrating questions about the entire focus of the new political history by forcefully reminding us that voters' values do not explain political change over time. Leadership decisions do. I have profited greatly from reading both books, and they fully deserve the close attention of students of the period.

Two Roads to Sumter

Exactly why seven Deep South states seceded in response to the election of Abraham Lincoln while the eight other slave states refused to do so is still unclear. Fears for slavery are normally cited, but historians disagree about how it was menaced and who was most alarmed. The determination of a small, all-powerful planter class to extend slavery to perpetuate its hegemony, fears of economic loss by the more numerous slaveholding element, and the racial anxieties of both slaveholders and nonslaveholders that Republican rule meant abolition, insurrection, and race war have all been suggested to explain secession. Planters and poor whites could, of course, have supported secession with equal fervor for different reasons. Still, all of these theories suffer from two main problems. First, they would seem to apply equally well to the states that refused to secede merely because Lincoln won as to those that did so enthusiastically. Second, by relying on the motives of entire groups, they cannot account for the divisions within Deep South states during the presidential election of 1860 and subsequent contests over secession. We have, in fact, little precise knowledge about who had the political power to effect secession, who supported it, and who balked at it, but clearly, planters, slaveholders, and whites did not act as cohesive groups. We need, in short, to develop a more sophisticated interpretation

of the forces behind secession that explains both the different behavior of groups within the Deep South states and the sharply contrasting reactions to immediate secession in the Upper and Lower South. By focusing respectively on Maryland and on Alabama and Mississippi, the excellent studies under review here provide some possibilities for, as well as illuminate some of the pitfalls in, the generation of such an interpretation.

William Barney's *The Secessionist Impulse* directly addresses the problems of why Alabama and Mississippi were divided in 1860 and why they seceded. Secession, he argues, had its immediate impetus in the presidential election, which was, in effect, a referendum on the future of the South. Alabamians and Mississippians were presented with clear ideological and political alternatives in the election. With few exceptions, the supporters of John C. Breckinridge led the drive for immediate secession, while the conservative followers of John Bell and Stephen A. Douglas tried to delay it. The Breckinridge men insisted that slavery was doomed unless it could expand. Hence they demanded a federal slave code in existing territories, the acquisition of additional territory for slavery, and, should Lincoln win, secession to keep the hope of expansion alive. In sharp contrast, conservatives denied the need for a slave code, more slave territory, or secession. The Union contained no territory suited to slavery, and the South no slave surpluses to send there. Expansion was a bogus issue agitated by disunionists.

The conservative appeal seemed pallid next to the Breckinridge ideology, Barney argues, for southerners in 1860 were convinced, with good reason, that they faced a crisis. Food shortages produced by a drought that summer, widespread rumors of slave revolts, and constant secessionist agitation by Minute Men clubs, vigilance committees, and volunteer militia companies fed that sense of alarm. But the major reasons were economic. Following closely the arguments of Eugene Genovese in *The Political Economy of Slavery*, Fabian Linden, and others, Barney insists that, despite the cotton boom of the 1850s, the South had severe economic woes.[1] Soil erosion and exhaustion diminished the availability of cotton land; scarcity and heavy demand forced the price of the remaining land

and also of slaves beyond the reach of most; profit margins of small slaveholders fell as costs rose; and in the newer cotton regions yeomen farmers were squeezed off the land when planters expanded their holdings. As opportunities shrank for the landless, the slaveless, and the aspirants to planter status who could not afford more land or slaves, they turned to expansion to satisfy their ambitions. Convinced that slavery would wither and die without expansion, nonslaveholding whites whose sense of worth depended on continued debasement of blacks through slavery and whose sense of security depended on their continued dispersal to new areas also demanded it. The Republican program of confining slavery thus menaced "the profits of the plantation, the hubris of the planter, and the racial phobias of all Southern whites" (23).

The Breckinridge-secessionist ideology, then, reflected the deepest hopes and fears of the vast majority of voters. Because the Breckinridge forces also controlled the regular Democratic machinery in heavily Democratic states, Breckinridge won easily. Utilizing their control of that machinery, the governorships, newspapers, and apolitical pressure groups, and exploiting even more racist fears that Republican rule meant black equality, the secessionists then swept their states out of the Union. The conservatives, frequently intimidated into silence, agreeing that slavery required protection and admitting the right if not the expediency of immediate secession, could offer little resistance.

Given Barney's formulation, the wonder is not that Breckinridge and the secessionists triumphed but that they faced any opposition at all. In the most original and ambitious portions of the book, Barney attempts to explain those divisions. Through quantitative analyses of the leadership and voting support of the two sides, he provides some provocative answers. The battles of 1860 pitted the young, upwardly mobile, and ambitious against older men who had already made it to the top of southern society or who had given up hope of ever getting there. Breckinridge leaders were generally younger, wealthier, and more involved in slaveholding and cotton-planting than their Bell-Douglas counterparts. Slaveholding lawyers were more prominent among Breckinridge leaders, nonslaveholding merchants among Bell-Douglas activists. The sole exception was the Mississippi Delta, an old Whig stronghold. Old wealth there supported Bell; young wealth, Breckinridge. Outside of the Whig Delta and Alabama's hill country, whose nonslaveholding whites supported

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1. Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (New York, 1965); Fabian Linden, "Economic Democracy in the Slave South: An Appraisal of Some Recent Views," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXI (1946), 140–89.

Breckinridge because of fervent party loyalty, Breckinridge's support came from the "cotton frontier" where slaveholding and cotton production grew at the fastest rates. Bell voters, in contrast, came from the older cotton areas that had passed their peak, from nonslaveholding subsistence farmers, and from town artisans and businessmen "on the periphery of Southern expectations" (97). These economic divisions became even clearer in the secession convention elections, for the Alabama hill whites, always firm unionists, now switched to the cooperationist camp while the Alabama black belt went solidly secessionist.

Although all southerners feared abolition, then, different groups perceived the Republican threat with different intensity. "The young slaveholding planters, farmers, and lawyers of the Breckinridge Democrats, the most ambitious and dynamic elements in the South's political economy" (313), believed that Republican free-soilism "imperiled [their] newly won and not yet solidified status" and denied them the "opportunity to start anew in virgin land" (93). "With their hopes for advancement not yet abandoned, still in the process of accumulating rather than protecting property, these younger social elements were prepared to believe the worst of those pledged to destroy the basis of their future wealth and position" (187). In contrast, "the older Whig planters and farmers either already enjoyed an acceptable preeminent prestige or were more rooted in their social station" (187). "With the drive and ambition of youth behind them, they had little use for an ideology that stressed growth and a widening of opportunities for slaveholders" (95).

Barney's explanations are usually plausible and often ingenious. But are they persuasive? His portrait of real economic crisis may be badly overdrawn if Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross* is correct about the prosperity of the plantation system and the resulting optimism of planters in the 1850s.[2] Even if Barney is right about the economy, one might expect the contending groups he identifies to react to slavery expansion in ways precisely the opposite of those he depicts. Why should the youngest, most prosperous planters from the booming cotton areas demand expansion while planters from declining areas whose land was indeed exhausted oppose it (138–39)? The argument that the concern

was for future growth seems refuted by his own evidence in the suggestive tables on pages 136–37. Those data show that, with the exception of the Delta, Breckinridge ran best in those areas with the greatest amounts of unimproved acreage—land that could be devoted to cotton in the future—whereas he was weakest in the areas that had the least land for additional cotton planting.

These inconsistencies stem from two related sources. One is Barney's insistence that the thirst for expansion was the major impetus behind secession. No doubt demands for slave expansion pervaded the rhetoric of the period. Democrats had made such demands for years. Yet important leaders like William L. Yancey, curiously a minor figure in Barney's book, denied the need of actual expansion. Could it be that the most salient feature of the expansion issue was not the real need for it but instead the denial of southern equality inherent in Republican prohibition of it? The southern refusal to be treated as less than equal, to accept minority status, had laid behind the insistence on the right to expand since the Wilmot Proviso. J. Mills Thornton, indeed, has brilliantly argued that the determination to protect southern equality and liberty, a symbolic issue that could be translated into Jacksonian terms, was more important in Alabama's drive for secession than either the need for expansion or fears of abolition.[3]

Second, Barney may overlook alternative explanations for his behavioral patterns because of his ahistorical analysis. He looks only at 1860, finds divisions, and attempts to explain them by economic and social variables for 1860. Long ago, however, Lee Benson warned against studying elections without some temporal perspective.[4] Habit or party identity shapes voting as much as active responses to ideologies or current issues. The patterns Barney detects could have been less the response to a referendum on secession than the product of long-term interregional and Whig-Democratic conflict in those states. Barney does not ignore tradition or political motives entirely, but he emphasizes competing ideologies to explain behavior. Yet surely the presence of young men among Breck-

2. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (2 vols.; Boston, 1974).

3. J. Mills Thornton III, "Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama 1806–1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974), 273–99, 509. Thornton's dissertation was later published as *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

4. Lee Benson, "Research Problems in American Political Historiography," in *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences*, ed. Mira Komarovsky (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), 113–83.

inridge leaders and old men among Bell leaders is as readily explained by the bankruptcy of the Whig party in those states after 1852 as by expansionist desires. Men with political, if not territorial, ambitions had no place to go but the Democratic party. Not only the collapse of Whig effectiveness at the state level, but also internal rivalries within the Democratic party are important. Thornton demonstrates, for example, that old jealousies between north and south Alabama Democrats, rivalries in which Yancey and his clique of young lawyers were key figures throughout the 1850s, accounted for the apparent shift of North Alabamians after the election. Hatred of Yancey, not unionism, caused them to oppose him at the secession convention.[5] Had Barney examined previous political developments and voting patterns, he may not have been so dependent on differing responses to expansion to explain the divisions he found.

Precisely because it places Maryland's decision not to secede in a historical context, William J. Evitts' admirable *A Matter of Allegiances* is persuasive. Evitts' major thesis is that although Marylanders always worried in the 1850s about whether to align with the South or the Union in the event of secession, they were not preoccupied with that decision. Internal problems growing out of rapid industrialization, urban growth in Baltimore, immigration, and interregional rivalries vied for their attention. National and local concerns became inextricably entangled in the political arena. The combination, but especially local issues, forced a major realignment of Maryland's voters and a reorganization of her parties. That realignment both reflected intense emotions and shaped strong allegiances to new parties that mattered as much if not more to Marylanders than the sectional conflict itself.

Maryland's politics in the 1850s followed a course remarkably similar to that in many northern states. By 1850, the Whigs had consistently dominated national elections. Strongest in Old Maryland, the southern and Eastern Shore counties where slavery was concentrated, they also carried the western counties by smaller margins because of their commitment to federal internal improvements. Baltimore City, which contained almost a third of the state's voters, was Democratic. These lines held in state elections, but enough voters in western counties switched to give those contests to the Democrats. The Democrats favored revision of the state's

5. Thornton, "Politics and Power," 510–22.

constitution and legislative reapportionment, which were enormously popular issues in the west and Baltimore, whereas the Whigs of Old Maryland opposed these measures. Between 1850 and 1852, the Democrats exploited those state issues, the disappearance of the internal improvements question with the completion of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, and Whig divisions at the national level over the Compromise of 1850 to erode Whig support and capture the presidential election in 1852. Increasing political corruption, the lackluster performance of the constitutional convention in 1851, and the issueless nature of the 1852 election also spawned an antiparty, antipolitician sentiment that led to the repudiation of both old parties as meaningless and to a demand for reform. That demand was expressed first through a plethora of independent candidates and an apolitical temperance movement in 1853, and then more successfully through the Know Nothing movement in 1854 and 1855. Frightened by economic and social changes, the rapid growth of the Catholic immigrant population, Democratic efforts to share the public school fund with parochial schools, political corruption, and the unresponsiveness of the old parties, Marylanders saw Know Nothingism as a reform movement that would clean up politics, respond to the people's will, and restore the purer political and moral values of an earlier age. Most important, the emergence of the Know Nothings worked a fundamental realignment in Maryland's voting patterns. Whig bastions in Old Maryland became Democratic, a process that had begun in 1852. Not only the slaveholding but the Catholicism of many of those old counties caused the shift. At the same time, Democratic western Maryland and Baltimore became Know Nothing strongholds.

Once in office, the Know Nothings became the target of reform, not its vehicle. They jettisoned the nativist issues that had brought them to power and relied instead on a program of fervent unionism and on massive violence, intimidation, and fraud in Baltimore to control the state until 1859. The Democrats, in turn, became more prosouthern on national issues, but during the state elections between 1856 and 1860 they demanded reform in Baltimore and an end to Know Nothing rule. Supported by anti-Baltimore voters in the rural counties and an independent reform organization in the city itself, the Democrats finally captured the legislature in 1859 and passed laws to reform Baltimore's elections that

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broke the grip of the Know Nothing machine there. In sum, state level politics in Maryland from 1850 to 1859 had real substance, a substance provided largely by the issue of reform in one version or another—revision of the constitution, the Know Nothings in mid-decade, and the anti–Know Nothings at its end.

This background shaped the results in 1860. As in Alabama and Mississippi, the race in Maryland was essentially between Bell and Breckinridge. Lincoln and Douglas were both spurned as too northern. Proclaiming that "Maryland Must and Will Be True to the South," Breckinridge men demanded a federal slave code, dismissed Bell as unsafe, and drew solid support from slaveholders. There, too, Bell men stressed unionism, denounced secessionists, and proclaimed slavery extension a phony issue. As in the Deep South, moreover, Breckinridge won, but not, Evitts insists, because of his ideology. Bell reflected the real values of Marylanders. Breckinridge triumphed because he carried Baltimore, where he had the support of the independent reform organization. The stigma of Know Nothingism cost Bell the city and thus the state. Although Evitts implies that outside of Baltimore national issues were most important, his own evidence here as throughout the book indicates that local concerns were far more important. He found stunningly high correlations between Bell's vote in the counties and the Know Nothing votes in the state elections of 1855, 1857, and 1859, elections where local concerns were clearly salient. The realignment of the 1850s, in short, forged such powerful allegiances to competing parties that they alone could have accounted for the results in 1860, no matter what the issue.

Although Minute Men formed clubs, militia companies armed, and fears of slave revolts intensified after John Brown's raid in neighboring Virginia, Maryland, unlike Alabama and Mississippi, refused to secede. Evitts offers cogent reasons why. For one, Know Nothing Governor Thomas Hicks, unlike his counterparts to the south, opposed secession and refused to call a special session of the legislature when Breckinridge men demanded it. Second, unionists simply outnumbered secessionists. The Baltimore businessmen who led the reform movement and backed Breckinridge ardently supported the Union to preserve their economic ties to the North. Finally, slavery was a much less vibrant institution in Maryland than in the Deep South. "By 1861 Maryland had evolved into a

pattern of life so different from that of the Southern states that secession was never more than a distant possibility" (190).

Without quarreling with these explanations, a political historian can suggest that the different political experiences of Maryland and the Deep South states, aside from any economic and social distinctions, offer another reason why the Upper and Lower South responded so differently to Lincoln's election. Whatever else it represented, immediate secession was a repudiation of the normal political process, a rejection not only of Republican rule but of the national Democratic party that would have controlled Congress. Even Barney notes that southerners rejected old institutions and "the legitimacy of the status quo" (237), that national Democratic leaders like Jefferson Davis and Benjamin Fitzpatrick were ignored, and that secessionists stressed that ties to corrupt and useless party organizations must be broken. In short, the Deep South states had lost faith in politics as usual, in the safety provided by party competition and the ebb and flow of elections. In its narrowest terms, what distinguished the Upper South states that refused to secede immediately, even those that later joined the Confederacy, was that, at least until Fort Sumter, they continued to have faith in normal political processes to protect the South. If Maryland was at all typical of the Upper South states, they may have had faith precisely because state level politics during the 1850s had revolved around substantive issues, the system had been responsive even if it had required a realignment, and reform had been achieved. It may be possible to apply to the antebellum South, which has always seemed exotic terrain to political historians, the theories recently advanced by such political scientists as Walter Dean Burnham and James L. Sundquist. They have argued that, historically, voter realignments have defused crisis situations growing out of the unresponsiveness of the political system to emergent public demands by forcing the old parties or creating new ones to address the needs of the voters.[6] Though startling, it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that secession was an effort to achieve reform and the overthrow of an unresponsive party system that Marylanders and

6. Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York, 1970); James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1973).

most northerners had achieved through their realignments of the 1850s. Whether this theory has wider applicability will only be determined by intensive investigations of political developments during the 1850s in other southern states. Evitts has provided a fine model for such studies.

The Problem of
Civil War Causation

Long before David Potter died in 1971, historians had impatiently awaited his volume on the coming of the Civil War for the New American Nation Series. Widely admired for the sagacity of his judgments, the clarity of his mind, and his awesome ability to dissect and simplify complex problems, Potter was without peer in the historical profession as a pure logician. He had devoted more than a decade of reading and reflection to the preparation of this study. Now, five years after his death, edited and ably completed by his colleague at Stanford University, Don E. Fehrenbacher, the product of that effort has finally appeared, and we can all be grateful. *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, is the fairest and most intelligent history of the antebellum period yet to appear in print. Because it both synthesizes and comments upon a vast body of scholarship and because it is literally crammed with penetrating insights and perceptive judgments about a host of events and controversies, it should be the first place that one looks henceforth for an assessment of those troubled years.

At the outset, Potter shrewdly evaluates the lengthy historiographical debate over the nature of the sectional conflict and clearly stakes out where he stands. Though that debate has gone in cycles, essentially there have been two sides. Fundamentalists argued that basic and irresolvable

For Adam, Erin, and Annie