

## The Ethic of Subsistence and the Origins of Southern Secession

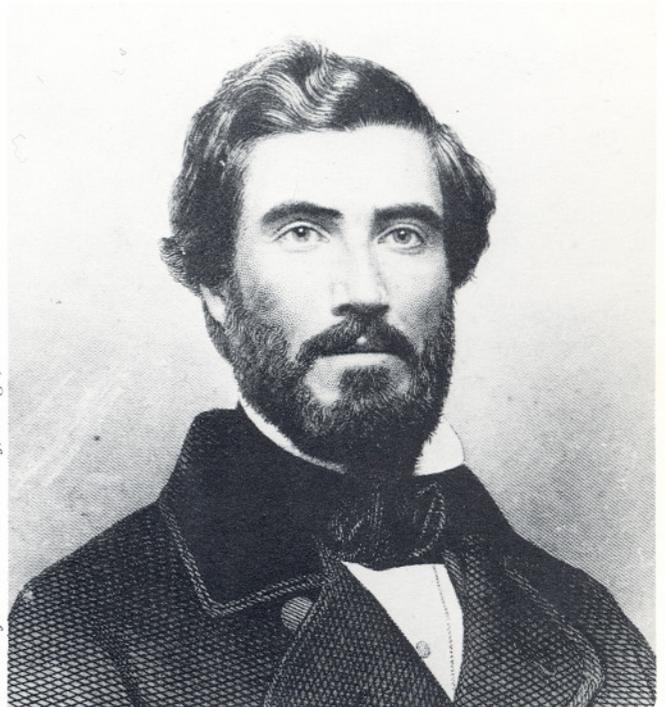
By J. Mills Thornton III

In 1982, a British general, Sir John Hackett, wrote a fascinating account of what he thought might be the course of a Third World War.<sup>1</sup> The war, as he depicted it, was confined to three weeks during August, 1985. In its initial stages the war went very badly for the western allies. Under-manned and under-equipped, the allied armies were sent reeling. In the end, the west proved able to withstand the onslaught less because of its own efforts than because of a largely unforeseen factor. Subjected to the mammoth strains of maintaining war on so immense a scale, Russian society began to crumble from within. The Soviet Union's Eastern European satellites, held within the Warsaw Pact chiefly by fear, were eager to throw off its yoke. The Soviet Union's own many national minorities seized the moment to strike for their independence. Soviet troops, now in Western Europe, began to desert in wholesale numbers. The ill-developed Russian rural economy was inadequate to the demands being made upon it, and severe food shortages therefore developed in the cities, resulting in widespread rioting. The long suppressed masses of the Russian population began to express their resentment of their wealthy Communist masters. The suddenly weakened state apparatus was thrown into confusion by these developments. Finally, after a coup within the Politburo, the Kremlin was compelled to recall its legions and to offer terms. The weakness of the Soviet Union, as it became clear, was inherent in its authoritarian structure; the real strength of the west was revealed to lie not in its arms, but in its open society.

One cannot know, of course, whether the moral which this fable seeks to teach would turn out to be true if put to the test. Very few of us are such committed empiricists that we would wish to see the experiment made. Whether wholly accurate or not, however, this British general's moral lies very near the heart of the American national faith; it has shaped our

view of our adversaries throughout the existence of the republic—and has sometimes misled us. One of those occasions on which it proved deceptive, this study will argue, was the crisis of the Union.

General Hackett's portrait of a Soviet Union coming apart at the seams which join its disparate and often deeply antagonistic constituent elements—"destroyed," to use his own phrase, "by its own inner contradictions"<sup>2</sup>—is quite directly analogous to the situation which many northern Republicans thought would arise in the South under the stress of war. For that matter, many Republicans expected something like it to arise eventually, whether there was war or



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*Hinton Rowan Helper, author of The Impending Crisis of the South, who predicted that slavery and the pretensions of the planter class would produce an internal crisis in the South.*



*Eliza fleeing across the frozen Ohio River to freedom, an incident from Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, which reinforced Northern notions of enmity between slaves and slaveholders.*

not.<sup>3</sup> They found strong support for their belief in a volume by the North Carolina abolitionist Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857). Helper argued strenuously that slavery as an institution had the effect of exploiting white non-slaveholders, preventing the development of the Southern economy, and elevating white plantation owners to the status of a ruling class. He predicted that these conditions would soon produce an internal crisis in the region. If Republicans found Helper's claims of inevitable antagonism between white slaveholders and non-slaveholders congenial, most of them were even more certain of general enmity between the slaveholders and their slaves, and particularly so after the powerful fictional portrait of the relationship by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).<sup>4</sup>

The Republicans' beliefs about Southern society implied the existence of fissures along which the South might be expected to crack in time of war. White non-slaveholders would resist secession; many would refuse to fight for the preservation of the institution which was the source of their degradation, and would desert if drafted; a substantial number

would welcome the Northern liberators who promised to deliver the South from feudalism and to bestow upon it the blessings of democracy, free labor and progress. The backward Southern economy would be unable to sustain the war effort. As the Northern armies approached, slaves promised their freedom would rise in revolt against their masters; this belief was in fact one of the sources of the Emancipation Proclamation. Non-slaveholder opposition, economic dislocation and slave insurrection all portended a rapid Southern collapse. The South would fall, as General Hackett has the Soviet Union fall, from its own internal contradictions.

In the event, this analysis was not without some objective confirmation. The most important bit of evidence that it contained elements of truth is the state of West Virginia. Populated overwhelmingly by non-slaveholding white small farmers, the western counties of Virginia strongly discountenanced secession, and when the rest of the state forced it upon them, they proclaimed their own secession from Virginia, and applied to the Congress for admission as a separate state. It was this path, or one closely resembling it, which many Republicans expected the major-

ity of the South's white yeomanry to follow.

There were echoes of West Virginia's action in the Appalachian counties of Tennessee and North Carolina, but here the situation was a great deal more complicated. As a result of political events whose roots extend back to the Jeffersonian period, the Whig party had emerged in the 1830s and 1840s as a powerful force in this area. Tennessee and North Carolina were the only two Confederate states in which Whiggery had any substantial following in Appalachia. Whigs, in these states as everywhere in the South, tended to be dubious of secession. The question of secession therefore became a part of long-standing partisan disputes in the states' highlands. The Democratic party in these counties solidly supported the Southern Rights presidential candidacy of John C. Breckinridge in 1860, while the Whigs rallied to the Tennessee Unionist John Bell. The Unionist Democrat Stephen A. Douglas received only a tiny scattering of votes in the region—indeed, considerably below the quite small percentage which he received in each state as a whole. In the secession crisis, probably a majority of Breckinridge Democrats—most prominently, Tennessee's Andrew Johnson—joined the Bell supporters in opposing the dissolution of the Union. But the area's secessionists, though a clear minority, were essentially all Democrats, while very



Tennessee Historical Society

*In the presidential election of 1860 Whigs throughout the South rallied to the candidacy of U.S. Senator John C. Bell of Tennessee. This portrait is by William Browning Cooper.*

nearly all the Whigs were Unionists, at any rate until the actual outbreak of fighting in April. It seems reasonable to maintain, then, that the opposition to secession in the states' Appalachian counties represented as much a Whig dissent as a yeoman one.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this evidence of non-slaveholders' antipathy to secession, the actions of the yeomanry generally in the South did not accord with Republican expectations. There were indeed committed Unionists among the yeoman. To focus upon the dissidents, however, is to focus upon the recessive, rather than the dominant theme. The truth about Southern society is that, though its internal divisions were real, yet through four years of war, the fissures failed to widen into fractures; the region retained its coherence substantially as well as did its Northern adversary. The yeomanry showed no widespread hostility to enlisting in the Confederate cause; often, indeed, yeomen displayed great enthusiasm for the prospect. The Confederate army was composed in great part of yeomen. There were desertions from the Confederate army, as from the Union army. But it was very rare for deserters from either army to join the other side. Usually Southern deserters simply went home, to help their families with their farms; and after a period away, they sometimes actually returned to the ranks. There was considerable antagonism towards the conscription laws, in both sections. In the



The National Portrait Gallery

*The Democratic Party in the Southern highlands solidly supported the Southern Rights presidential candidacy of John C. Breckinridge in 1860. By an unknown artist after the 1860 portrait by Benjamin Franklin Reinhardt.*



Virginia State Library

Women in Richmond, Virginia, forcing their way into a bakery during a hunger riot during the war, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 23, 1863.

South, as in the North, however, this dispute was in general contained within the bounds of political activity. The South saw individual resistance to conscription, but experienced no urban draft riots, as the North did. A study of voting patterns in the Confederate Congress, moreover, reveals that the contention over the draft, the tax-in-kind, the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, and other controversial issues, ordinarily reflected not class or partisan divisions, but divisions between representatives of occupied districts, who wanted a maximum military effort to be made to recapture their areas, and those from unoccupied districts, whose constituents would actually have to bear the burdens which the acts imposed.<sup>6</sup> As the war dragged on and the Confederate armies suffered important defeats, there was, of course, increasing disillusionment and war-weariness among Southern voters. But the same can be said of the Northern electorate; indeed, the North, unlike the South, developed a substantial and politically significant peace movement.

It is certainly true that the Southern economy was not as well developed as the Northern one, and considerable economic dislocations developed as the war progressed, particularly as a result of the Union's blockade of Southern ports and the massive inflation of the Confederate currency. There were even small food riots in some Southern cities. Despite these strains, however, the economy was remarkably successful in sustaining the war effort, and Southerners demonstrated great ingenuity in finding substitutes for goods which they could not obtain.<sup>7</sup> And of course, no slave insurrection ever developed. Though slaves very frequently fled within Union lines when the approach of the Northern army made that action possible, and though there were individual examples of resistance to, as also of genuine cooperation with, their masters, yet the slaves almost never sought to exact general vengeance in blood.<sup>8</sup>

In short, then, Republican expectations of a rapid Southern internal collapse proved inaccurate in essentially every particular. When the South was finally defeated, it was so not because of its social weaknesses, but because of hard-won and bloody Union victories on the battlefield. The South in wartime betrayed no significantly greater degree of incoherence in its society than the North did. Both societies showed strains. Neither cracked because of them.<sup>9</sup>

Virtually no Republicans were led by the failure of their analysis to reconsider its fundamental presumptions, however. Republicans easily explained the failure of the yeomanry by and large to oppose the Confederacy by observing that some, indeed, had

done so, and concluding that the majority of them had been so brutalized and beguiled by the slaveholders that they were unable to understand what policies would truly benefit them. And as for the slaves, though Republicans had longed for an insurrection to aid their military effort, yet they rightly noted that for a slave deprived of weapons to rise in revolt would simply have been foolhardy. Republicans were therefore able to take the recalcitrant reality of the South in stride. Undaunted by events, they pressed on to found their program for Southern Reconstruction upon the very same beliefs about planters, poor whites and blacks in the region which had so lately miscarried. The results would prove disastrous for all concerned.

Northern Republicans were definitely not wrong, of course, when they noted deep divisions within Southern society. In particular, they were surely correct in observing the existence of profound enmities between white slaveholders and non-slaveholders. And yet the stress of war by and large failed to split white society apart along this seam. This pair of observations inevitably leads us to ask the source of the non-slaveholders' devotion to the Confederate cause. Why did the yeomanry prove in general not to represent the ally of the free labor crusade that the Republicans had anticipated? It is my intention in the present essay to attempt to define the error which lurked at the heart of the Republicans' reading of the Southern situation. To do so requires a brief sketch of the structure of political life in the ante-bellum South. My goal is to convey some sense of what it was that frightened the mass of the Southern electorate into voting for, and then supporting, sometimes to the death, this war against Republican dogma.

The first step in understanding ante-bellum Southern politics is to distinguish the Southern reality from the Northern myth about it. The notion took firm root in the North—particularly in Republican party propaganda—in the late ante-bellum years, that Southern politics and Southern society were aristocratic. After the Civil War this peculiar idea gained acceptance among Southerners as well—both among Southerners who looked longingly back at the world which they had lost and among reformers who wished to prod the South towards their various conceptions of modernity. But before the Civil War, the idea that the South was an aristocratic region was Northern. Southerners conceived of their own section as the citadel of American democracy, and believed that the seat of aristocracy in North America was to be found in New England. These rival notions were derived from widely accepted beliefs about the character of the wealth-

iest groups within the two regions. In the North, Southern planters were associated with the Tory loyalists who had resisted the American Revolution, and hence were thought to be pro-British and contemptuous of the aspirations of the yeomanry. In the South, New England was associated with Hamiltonian Federalism, and hence was thought to have been hostile to the rise of the common man and sympathetic to the British during the War of 1812. Moreover, wealthy capitalists and industrialists from the great cities of Philadelphia, New York and Boston were depicted in the oratory of Jacksonian politicians as conniving to erect a financial oligarchy in America. Each section believed that the wealthy element in the other section held political control of its region. Each section felt that its own electorate had succeeded in holding the incipient aristocracy within it in check. Thus each section came to conceive of itself—and with increasing conviction in the years after the Mexican War—as maintaining the true precepts of the American creed, and to conceive of the other as having diverged along an un-American path.<sup>10</sup>

The Northern portrait of an aristocratic South, enshrined in late nineteenth-century accounts of the causes of the Civil War and ratified by Southern acceptance of it, persists in the popular imagination, and in historical literature, to this day.<sup>11</sup> But however strong may be its hold, it bears virtually no relation to the facts. Planters, that is, owners of twenty or more slaves, were indeed a majority of state legislators in South Carolina, a state which, uniquely in the region, retained in its constitution significant property qualifications for legislative membership. But in no other Southern state were they more than approximately a third of the lawmakers, even late in the ante-bellum period. And in many states, they were far less than that proportion: 5 percent in Texas, 7 percent in Tennessee, 10 percent in Arkansas, about 20 percent in Louisiana and Virginia, about 30 percent in Georgia and Mississippi. The median figure for the future Confederate states in 1850 was one-fourth.<sup>12</sup>

But the point to be made is far more than merely that planters were outnumbered among Southern legislators by some three to one. The real point is that Southern politics rested squarely upon the exploitation of popular resentment and hostility towards planters and other wealthy citizens. This political style had roots in early struggles to democratize state constitutions: to correct legislative malapportionment and to alter the basis of apportionment, to eliminate property qualifications for office-holding and for voting, to make more and more officials, including judges, subject to popular election, and often to

shorten their terms.<sup>13</sup> But politicians found the warning that the constitution contained aristocratic features so powerful a charge with the voters that they quickly applied variants of it to virtually every area of political conflict. On the federal level, early ante-bellum politics focused particularly on questions growing out of public land policy. On the state level, the principal concerns were the regulation of banks and the propriety of governmental assistance to corporations. Each of these subjects depended for emotional force upon the voters' fears of a growing aristocracy.<sup>14</sup>

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The source of these political divisions, and of the fears on which they were founded, is to be sought in large part in the expansion of the market economy in the years between the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Acceptance of the virtues of the national and international marketplace and resistance to its requirements each implied a conception of the meaning of freedom. For adherents of the Jacksonian or Democratic party—a party whose appeal to the ordinary voter very much derived from its symbolic defense of the ethic of subsistence agriculture, even if its more cosmopolitan state and national level leaders all too often failed fully to comprehend that fact—freedom was something which the citizenry had gained in the American Revolution and held by right, but which evil, anti-democratic forces were attempting to take away. A man was free when he was self-sufficient, dependent on no one else for his livelihood and welfare. Movements and institutions whose success would diminish the existing autonomy of the individual were thus by definition aristocratic, and inimical to the American experiment. For Whigs, freedom was not something which Americans already had, but something for which they were perpetually striving. A man became free by fulfilling his potential, by becoming all that he could be. The fetters of ignorance and poverty were his greatest enemies; the expansion of knowledge and opportunity was his principal security.

These differing definitions of freedom carried with them differing notions of the proper role of government. Whigs sought the enactment of programs intended to break the shackles which, from their perspective, held the mass of Americans in economic, social or moral bondage: programs such as governmental aid for the construction of railroads, roads and canals; protective tariffs; central regulation of the currency supply and the banking system; the establishment of public schools; the prohibition of the sale of liquor; and the creation of hospitals to treat the insane, institutions to train the deaf and blind for usefulness, and penitentiaries to redeem criminals. Jacksonians generally regarded all such efforts as the products of paternalistic elitism. That the ordinary citizen should be taxed to benefit railroads, factories and banks, that his private conduct should be regulated, that his children should be forcibly indoctrinated with alien, urban ideals, they thought intolerable.

Jacksonians campaigned for the abolition of property qualifications for voting and office-holding primarily because they hoped that a broadened electorate would be able to use the government to restrict the growth of corporations, and ultimately to destroy them. They conceived of their political party as a sort of trade union of the electorate, through which ordinary citizens, individually weak, could band together and use their numbers to counter-balance the power of the wealthy. Many Whig leaders, on the other hand, were doubtful that the poverty-stricken and the ill-educated were capable of appreciating what was actually in their own best interests. Whigs conceived of their party as a sort of religious denomination, an organization of believers met to convert and to save the society at large. Though practical political considerations soon led Whig politicians to abandon their early defense of wealth restrictions on the suffrage and on qualifications for office, they continued to insist on examinations for admission to such professions as law and medicine.

In the lower South, the origins of Whiggery lay in the use of nullificationist doctrines to assert the right of each state to expel the Indians within its boundaries. The ease with which these nullifiers embraced the broad-constructionist program of the national Whig party in the later 1830's is an index to the degree to which ideology in the region was an extension of interest. Those merchants and planters who had eagerly sought the opening of Indian lands for speculation and exploitation, were just as eager for roads, railroads, and the easy credit promised by a national banking system.



Tennessee Historical Society

*Henry Clay's "American System" embodied Whig ideas of government aid for internal improvements, protective tariffs and central regulation of the currency and banking systems. This portrait is attributed to the Kentucky artist Matthew Harris Jouett.*

While a great many planters were Whigs, planters were not the cutting edge of the party. This point is very often misunderstood, because the Northern conception of the planter as the dominant figure in the society is now so firmly entrenched in beliefs about it. The reality, however, is that the intellectual leaders of the Whiggery were the urban lawyers, merchants and factors whom the planters envied and emulated.<sup>15</sup> Planters in general led an isolated rural existence. The towns and villages of the South were the points of contact with the wider world: the places where the party newspapers were edited, the source of knowledge about changing styles and fashions, the locations in which the planter and his family received their images of status and progress. These notions the planter often absorbed from his annual visits, at harvest time, to the offices of the factors and commission merchants, and from his subscriptions to urban papers and magazines. It is true, of course, that the factors and merchants were the economic dependents of the planters, rather than *vice versa*. But in a comparable sense, industrialists were the economic dependents of the laborers in their factories, and in-

deed, planters were the economic dependents of their slaves. Social notions of dependency, it is clear, need not parallel economic relationships. The planter and his family almost always harbored a surreptitious fear of being taken for country bumpkins, and therefore eagerly internalized the values of the towns.

The strength of the Jacksonian party, in contrast, was usually to be found concentrated in those areas which were most insulated from market agriculture. The semi-subsistence farm on the fringes of the market economy was even more isolated than was the plantation—in part because roads in the hill counties and the pine barrens were very poor and railroads were only just beginning to penetrate these areas at the end of the ante-bellum period. But even more importantly, this isolation persisted because semi-subsistence agriculture simply did not require the regular contacts with urban centers which were a necessary part of growing primarily for the market.

If the relationship between planters and urban elements is frequently misconceived, the situation of the white small farmers is depicted inaccurately even more often. The first thing to be said about them is that their desire for self-sufficiency was no pipe dream. If we may take figures for the South Carolina upcountry in 1850 as reasonably typical, then the majority of hill county farms in every size classification were self-sufficient. Even among the very smallest farms, 49 or fewer improved acres, 54 percent were self-sufficient in grain and 42 percent in meat. And in all larger categories, from 50 to 200 improved acres, 80 percent to 90 percent were self-sufficient in grain, and about three-fourths in meat. Among very large farms, those of 200 or more improved acres, self-sufficiency in meat, though not in grain, fell again to 63 percent, reflecting the tendency of many planters to purchase meat from drovers. But with this exception, self-sufficiency was usual everywhere in the hills. Moreover, these figures are calculated exclusively from the farm's production. They do not reflect the ability of the small farmer to supplement his diet through hunting, fishing, and trapping, though his opportunities through these methods were very considerable. And even among tenant farmers, who were some 15 percent to 20 percent of hill county cultivators, self-sufficiency was not uncommon: 43 percent of them in grain, 28 percent in meat.

In the second place, much of the yeomanry in the ante-bellum, unlike the post-bellum, South, did not participate extensively in the growth of cotton, which was the hallmark of commercial agriculture in much of the region. Thirty percent of nonslaveholding yeomen, and 20 percent even of small slaveholders,

owners of fewer than six slaves, grew no cotton at all. And the many small farmers who did grow cotton produced only two or three bales, a level of production indicating that no more than five to ten percent of their improved acreage was devoted to the cash crop. Small farmers, instead, for the most part grew food crops, primarily to feed themselves, their families, and their livestock. If in a given year they produced a surplus after meeting these needs, they might barter it with neighbors who could supply them some service, or with the country storekeeper for "store-bought goods." But the production of a surplus to market was not their principal goal; their goal was to sustain themselves, to avoid dependency, to guard their status as freemen. They practiced what has been called "safety-first agriculture."<sup>16</sup>

The small farmers' substantial herds of livestock, in particular pigs, point to another seldom understood aspect of their social situation. Perhaps two-thirds of all acreage in farms in the region was unimproved, often heavily forested. The law in every lower South state was firm in declaring all unfenced land common grazing area. It was the responsibility of all farmers to guard their growing crops with a fence which was, in the colorful language of the Southern statutes, "horse high, bull strong and hog tight." Small farmers were thus at liberty to brand their livestock and turn them free to graze in the woods and meadows, fattening them in anticipation of the annual round-up. Because so much acreage was unimproved, farmers had access to very large areas which they did not own, even in the generally settled South Atlantic states.

And if the areas were large in the South Atlantic states, they were vast in the Old Southwest. Before the passage of the Graduation Act of 1854, immense stretches of the Gulf states—half the total land area of Alabama in 1850, for instance—remained in the public domain. This land was simply not worth the \$1.25 an acre which was the minimum purchase price that the United States could accept under the law. Thus, in the Gulf states, the small farmer had access to land which he did not own not only for grazing, but for cultivation as well. Indeed, it was much to his advantage to cultivate the public domain, because under the federal pre-emption statutes, if he cleared a part of the public domain and planted a crop on it, he thus gained a pre-emption right to purchase the surrounding 160 acres at the minimum price if later someone threatened to bid on it at auction.

But if the objective economic situation in the hill counties and the pine barrens provided the semi-subsistence farmer with a considerable measure of insulation from the vagaries of the marketplace, it by



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*The strength of the Jacksonian party was found in those areas which were most insulated from the market economy. The ethic created by the life of the semi-subsistence farmer was at the heart of the Jacksonian crusade.*

no means gave him a sense of security in his status. On the contrary, the Southern yeomanry was consumed by the stark terror that titanic and inscrutable forces were conspiring to reduce all poor farmers to serfdom. The sources of that terror are both obvious and subtle.

In the first place, the figures which I have cited indicate that the overwhelming majority of yeoman farmers were self-sufficient, but they also indicate that about a fifth of them, and among the smallest farmers perhaps as many as two-fifths of them, were not. In a given year, too little rain, too much rain, hailstorms, windstorms, insect infestations and other such unpredictable occurrences could considerably increase that proportion. Thus the yeomanry unavoidably lived always with the prospect of being suddenly precipitated into want and debt. And what was most frightening was that the individual yeoman farmer's decision each spring on whether or not to plant cotton, and if so, how much of his acreage to devote to the crop, could become the decisive factor in determining whether he retained or lost his self-sufficiency in food. If he guessed right in this annual

gamble, then the resultant cash income might enable him to buy his land, if a squatter or a tenant, or to pay off a mortgage on it and thus secure his independence, or to provide a dowry for a daughter or a farm for a son of marriageable age. But if he guessed wrong, his family might go hungry while neighboring ones did not. This was the perpetual dilemma of safety-first agriculture: when and to what extent to venture into the market.

When we understand how critical was the decision of the small farmer to raise several bales of cotton, we understand a considerable part of his fear of and hostility towards the forces of international finance which determined the price which he would receive for his few bales. The small farmer was sufficiently isolated from the market economy that its operations remained rather mysterious to him. Financial panics, suspensions of specie payment, the oscillations of the Liverpool cotton exchange, all could have the character of the occult from his perspective. But what he did know was that, unlike the rains, the winds and the insects, these misfortunes were the work of men, wealthy and, as he was easily led to believe, evil and

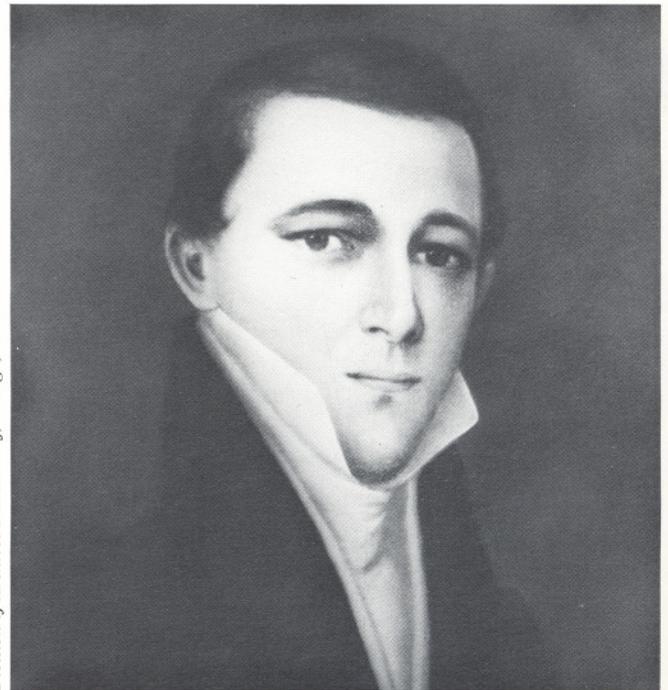
exploitative men. It was upon these emotions that the Jacksonian crusades against banks, bondholders, and paper money were largely built.

The other source of Jacksonian strength among the yeomanry is a bit more obscure. When the small farmer was deprived by events of the self-sufficiency which, in his mind, constituted the essence of his freedom, he sought to survive through bartering his labor or his skills with a neighbor for a portion of the neighbor's surplus grain or meat. And even when the farmer was in no need of food, the swapping of horses and mules, and bartering with other farmers, with ginners, millers, blacksmiths, or with the country storekeeper for any number of goods not readily made on the farm, was a way of life. Though the farmer might live on the fringes of the international agricultural market, he lived at the very heart of a constantly active local market defined in great measure by barter, reciprocity and mutual obligation. These relationships were extensive and important. Socially, his world demanded conformity to the community's values, a conformity enforced through gossip and disapproval, confession before or expulsion from the church congregation, and through the jury or the lynch mob if the farmer's transgressions went far enough. In short, the yeomanry's world was intensely and closely bound. It was this fact which caused the small farmer to respond so sympathetically to the Jacksonian warning that America's troubles proceeded from excessively powerful institutions, a lack of individualism, the indefensible inability of each citizen to determine his own destiny, to rule his own life, without interference from society.

There was an analogous pattern in the social experience of the urban Whig. Living as he did in the highly competitive, too often even cut-throat, world of trade and commerce in the cities, he was easily convinced of the accuracy of the Whiggery's diagnosis of America's principal illness: the lack of mutual cooperation and concern; the need for Americans to recognize the mutuality of their interests, to ignore the demagogic politicians who played upon class, ethnic, sectional or other divisions and jealousies, and to pull together to benefit the nation as a whole. The irony of antebellum political culture was that the Whigs advocated programs in effect conducive to urbanization and industrialization in the belief that they were pursuing the cooperative commonwealth, while the Jacksonians' enthusiasm for individualism and hostility to institutions were shaped by the defense of a way of life singularly interdependent and marked by quite rigid social, moral and intellectual conformity.<sup>17</sup>

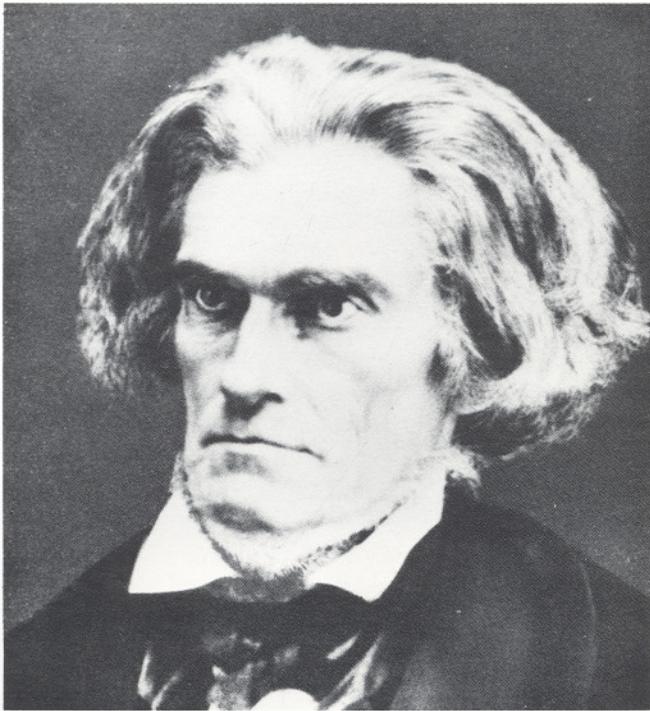
These generalizations depend for their validity, of

course, on the approximate correspondence here asserted between the Jacksonian constituency and semi-subsistence farmers, on the one hand, and the Whig constituency and commercial, professional, industrial and market-oriented agricultural interests, on the other. These correspondences, however, are far from exact. No rural county was so isolated that it did not contain a substantial number of Whigs; a desire for upward social mobility, as opposed to a passion to be left alone, was the essential factor in creating a Whiggish disposition in a voter, and that desire might be found even in the most hidden coves and hollows. In cities, the Jacksonians had many supporters; free-trade advocates, and journeymen fearful of those developments in the organization of labor which were increasingly depriving them of independence as workers, moved naturally into the Jacksonian coalition. Membership in certain religious denominations and ethnic groups predisposed a voter to the one or the other party; Roman Catholics, and especially the Irish immigrants among them, were overwhelmingly Democratic, while the Whig advocacy of moral reform movements attracted the adherence of Presbyterians, Congregationalists and other evangelical Protestants. Other more personal considerations, such as friendship with a particular candidate, could easily determine a voter's preference in a given contest.



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*U.S. Senator Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, whose dedication to strict constructionist doctrines in the early nineteenth century was followed in the ensuing years by many coastal planters.*



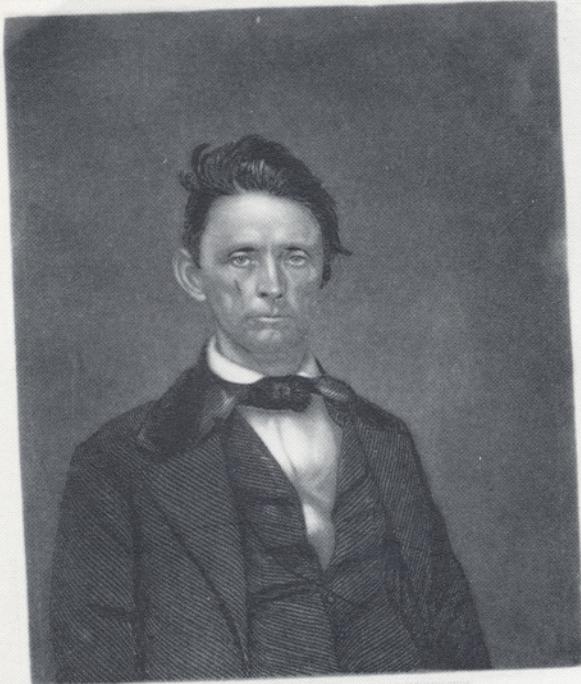
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*The extraordinary influence of Democrat John C. Calhoun skewed South Carolina's political development by making it, uniquely in this period, a one-party state.*

Moreover, in certain states the political geography was not fully consonant with the general pattern. For instance, as the introduction to this essay has already noted, in Tennessee and North Carolina the Whiggery had strong support in Appalachia. In North Carolina, many planters of the coastal plain had followed the Old Republican Senator Nathaniel Macon in the early years of the century into a firm allegiance to strict constructionist doctrines. This interpretation of the constitution led substantial numbers of them in the 1820's into the Jacksonian camp. In the meanwhile, the backcountry was becoming more thickly settled; and a portion of the yeomanry of the area came to associate the coastal counties' opposition to state assistance in the building of the transportation facilities which were needed to open the backcountry fully, with supercilious planter hostility to common folk. This yeoman resentment of lowcountry planters impelled many Appalachian farmers into the Whiggery, a party dedicated to internal improvement, and hence, in the local context, a party which seemed the friendlier one to mountain people. In Tennessee, Andrew Jackson's own state, Jackson had early associated himself politically with wealthy Nashville planters and land speculators. Jackson's identification in the arena of local politics with Middle Tennessee planting interests provided Whig spokesmen in East Tennessee with the opportunity to play upon economic and

sectional resentments, and thus to gain a significant following among the yeomanry there. Just as the powerful presence of Macon and Jackson in the formative years of the party system affected its structure in North Carolina and Tennessee, the presence of John C. Calhoun similarly distorted the course of its development in South Carolina. There Calhoun's popularity was so great that he became the head of a dominant political machine. The result was that South Carolina, uniquely in this period, became a one-party Democratic state. South Carolina's fidelity to the Democracy, however, represented simply a loyalty to Calhoun as a local leader, rather than to Jacksonianism. Calhoun's control of the Democratic party, therefore, effectively deprived the state's yeomanry of a distinct political voice.

These variations from the asserted norm, however, even though they may appear at first blush to call the accuracy of that norm into question, actually confirm the presence of the social dynamic underlying it. Irish immigrants, for instance, came to America from exactly the sort of rural and wounded society, on its guard against the domination of a more cosmopolitan and industrialized ruling power, that was likely to provide corroboration in their own emotions for the Jacksonians' warnings against the presumptuous arrogance of the sophisticated Whig capitalists and reformers. The nativism and anti-Catholicism which were usually more openly avowed in Whig circles than in Democratic ones further fortified Irish suspicions. Similarly, the journeyman artisan who saw his ability to control the pattern of his daily work giving way before the demands of larger scale production, might respond to the Jacksonian emphasis upon the necessity to preserve each citizen's personal independence and autonomy in quite the same way that the semi-subsistence farmer would. In North Carolina and in Tennessee, though the events of each state's history had shaped the local political geography into an unusual pattern, yet the rivalry between the yeomanry and the planters was nonetheless at the heart of the process which had produced this novel outcome, just as it was in all the other Southern states. Moreover, a careful study of one North Carolina Piedmont county indicates that, at the precinct level, the partisan division parallels the one which exists more broadly in the other states: the Democratic party's strength was centered in the more isolated areas of the county, the Whigs in the more urban and market-oriented precincts. In the Appalachian counties of both North Carolina and Tennessee, the Whig majority was a rather narrow one. It may well be that in these counties generally, those yeomen who did not



ENGRAVED BY T. WILSON FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

REV. W. G. BROWNLOW.

Very Respectfully,  
W. G. Brownlow

Tennessee State Library and Archives.

AMERICANISM : CONTRASTED  
WITH  
Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy.

IN THE LIGHT OF  
REASON, HISTORY, AND SCRIPTURE;

IN WHICH  
CERTAIN DEMAGOGUES IN TENNESSEE, AND ELSEWHERE,  
ARE SHOWN UP IN THEIR TRUE COLORS.

BY  
WILLIAM G. BROWNLOW,

EDITOR OF "BROWNLOW'S KNOXVILLE WHIG."

TENNESSEE.

"O to your bloody throats, ye  
Frolic—perpetrate darkness in your detestable  
Then let your altars, ye blasphemers, peel  
With thanks to Heaven, that let you loose again,  
To practice deeds with torturing fire and steel,  
No eye may search, no tongue may challenge or reveal!"

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

Nashville, Tenn.:  
PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1856.

*Nativism and anti-Catholicism were more openly expressed in Whig circles than in Democratic ones, as evidenced by the Knoxville Whig William G. Brownlow's book Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism and Bogus Democracy.*

fall under the Whiggery's influence were likely to be those who resided in the most remote areas. Finally, even in one-party South Carolina, a recent investigation has revealed that, though the conflict was not as elsewhere embodied in a partisan contest, nevertheless the politics of the state clearly reflects the clash of the yeoman and planter cultures.<sup>18</sup>

The ethic created by the life of the semi-subsistence farmer, then—the ethic of autonomy—was at the heart of the Jacksonian crusade. It is to be found at work in all areas of ante-bellum American life, whenever the modernizing tendencies of an expanding national economy encountered the more traditional values of those citizens who feared above all else the prospect of being manipulated by powerful institutions and forces beyond their community, of losing control of their lives and destinies to unseen enemies. Even when the formal structures of politics and economics do not immediately appear to exhibit this

encounter, a closer analysis will often show its presence. In the South, the particular incarnation of this antagonism was the region-wide political struggle between the planters and the yeomanry. This struggle, ordinarily manifested in the disputes of the parties, antedated the parties' existence, however, and altered only its shape, but not its fierceness, in the final ante-bellum years, when the parties began to decay.

Events of the 1850's, in fact, further exacerbated the yeoman farmer's fears. The passage of the Graduation Act of 1854 so reduced the minimum price per acre of government land that substantial acreage in the southwestern states which formerly had seemed permanently a part of the public domain, began to be bought up by private individuals. The Democratic politicians who had sponsored this legislation had thought that they were assisting the squatter to become a landowner. In fact, they succeeded chiefly in attracting the interest of land speculators to these

sections, and reducing the area upon which the small farmer could allow his livestock to forage. Grants of public land to railroad corporations in the 1850's aggravated this situation, and the railroads themselves, as they built into the yeoman areas, brought additional economic pressures to bear upon the small farmer to grow for the market. And wealthy planters and capitalists, the very embodiments of the yeomanry's fears, commenced near the end of the ante-bellum years to have increasing success in the political arena. All of these developments, but particularly the last one, were frightening ones. It was upon the yeoman farmer's poignant desire to be left alone, and upon his deep-seated dread of manipulative concentrations of power, that Jacksonian politics had always fed. In the 1850s, however, the farmer's position seemed especially insecure.

Through most of the ante-bellum era, the white yeoman farmer was repeatedly told that he was the king of Southern politics. Solicitous lawmakers rushed to give statutory form to his aspirations and anxieties. The region's tax structure, for instance, was heavily weighted against the farmer's villains, the planters and capitalists. The greatest share of Southern states' revenue was derived from the tax on slaves, a tax paid in any significant amount almost exclusively by planters. And the trappings of the planters' socioeconomic status—pleasure carriages, race horses, gold watches, silver services, private libraries and household furniture of more than two hundred dollars or so in value—all were subject to specific levies. The activities of capitalists were also taxed; there were levies, for instance, on the stock of banks and manufacturing corporations, on money lent at interest, on the purchase of bills of exchange, drafts and certificates of deposit, on the income of transportation and insurance companies, on the salaries of corporate officers, and on savings held in cash. The yeoman farmer, in contrast, would pay a small land tax—a tax held to quite low levels by the revenue from the slave tax—if he owned his farm. If he was exclusively a squatter, however, he was subject only to the nominal poll tax.<sup>19</sup> And if he fell into debt, most of his property was protected from his creditors under the "homestead exemption." The fear of concentration of power was expressed in many other ways, as well. Corporate charters, for example, often contained provisions weighting the votes of small stockholders more heavily in corporate elections. Banks and railroads were objects of particular legislative suspicion and regulation.

But Jacksonianism contained one more supreme irony at the core of its ideology: the citizenry was as

frightened of its government as it was of other power centers, and therefore refused to tolerate a level of governmental activity sufficient to check effectively the accumulation of power by the wealthy. As a result, as the ante-bellum period progressed—and particularly after the return of prosperity which accompanied the Mexican War and the discovery of gold in California—the well-to-do in the South slowly began to achieve a measure of political influence, despite all the statutory checks upon them. In Alabama, for instance, large planters, owners of fifty or more slaves, were only 7 percent of the members of the state legislature in 1830 and 10 percent in 1840, but they advanced to eighteen per cent of the legislators in 1850 and almost a fourth of them in 1860. In addition, the occupation of legislators began to shift in this period away from agriculture and toward law. Attorneys, inevitably professional agents of the world of commerce and contract, whatever their own partisan affiliation, had little natural sympathy for the instincts of a yeomanry mistrustful of the demands of the international marketplace. Alabama again provides an index to the dire implications of this change. In the Alabama Secession Convention of 1861, Cooperationists were a majority both among those delegates who were engaged in agriculture and among those delegates who were neither in agriculture nor in law. But among lawyer-delegates, immediate secessionists held a majority of two to one. The semi-subsistence small farmer, who observed the events of his world with the frightened intensity of a fugitive from impending doom, saw these developments and knew what they portended without having to be told.

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The rise of the planters to a share of political power in the 1850s was followed by the state governments' beginning to adopt programs long advocated by the Whigs. This result was only facilitated by the collapse of the national Whiggery in the middle 1850s. By about 1857, the vast majority of state legislators in the lower South called themselves Democrats. From this year total victory came the destruction of Democratic party discipline: without an opposition, party whips

had no threat with which to hold the members in line; orthodoxy became passé. These events, and the prosperity of the 1850s, produced a startling expansion of state government in the final ante-bellum decade. Expenditures rose rapidly. States adopted general programs to aid railroad construction. They established insane hospitals, schools for the deaf and dumb, and penitentiaries. Louisiana and Alabama established statewide public school systems, and all of the states greatly increased state aid to local school districts. Governmental programs multiplied on every hand. In Alabama, for instance, state expenditures in 1847 were about what they had been in 1827, but in the dozen years from 1848 to 1860, state expenditures rose fifteen-fold. Many voters, even in the hill counties and the pine barrens, increasingly were tempted away from their devotion to limitations on government by the prospect of riches. Beguiled by "progress," they remained suspicious of its larger implications.

And so, with each passing year, the small farmer could see the levees which protected his autonomy eroding, being washed away by the powerful currents of an advancing urbanized and commercialized interconnection. He saw the consequences, but he did not fully understand the cause. He searched for leaders who could explain what was happening to him. He cast about for a crusade which would slay the monsters which beset him. As it happened, too, there were politicians who believed that they possessed an explanation, and who were prepared for a crusade.

In the Jacksonian period, as this study has sought to argue, the attitudes and programs at issue between the parties in the South were the same as those at issue throughout the nation. The expansion of the market economy was a national phenomenon, and the response was national, encompassing fears and hopes as real in the South as in the North. There was one institution which did distinguish the North from the South in these years, however: the institution of slavery. In the South, slavery was an integral assumption in the ideology of each party. An understanding of how the parties viewed slavery is essential to an understanding of the electoral success of secession.

The Whig conception of slavery is easier for us today to understand, because the Whig conception of freedom as upward mobility is the more familiar of the two rival definitions of freedom to us. Whigs thought of slavery as a mechanism of social advancement, another of the many happy American institutions which facilitated the efforts of the industrious to achieve economic success. Their attitude towards slavery was, in other words, essentially an extension of their attitudes toward the values of market agri-

culture, the virtue of hard work and the moral quality of individual achievement, because their encounters with slavery were almost uniformly in these contexts.

The Jacksonians' view of slavery, on the other hand, seems as odd to us now as does their definition of freedom in terms of individual autonomy. Jacksonians conceived of slavery as protecting the communities of semi-subsistence farmers from being sucked into the vortex of the marketplace. As they saw it, with slaves to supply plantation labor, the white independent yeomanry could not be converted into a proletariat, subservient to those incipient oligarchs, the planters and capitalists. As the resolutions of a Southern Rights convention put the matter in 1852:

The total abolition of slavery would affect more injuriously the condition of the poor white man in the slaveholding States than that of the rich slaveholder; for the slaveholder, having the means which attends upon the possession of slaves, would be able to maintain his *position*, whilst the poor man would have to doff that native, free-born and independent spirit which he now possesses, and which he prizes above all wealth, and would have to become virtually the slave (barring color) of the rich man. This would be one of the consequences of the abolition of negro slavery, and the poorest white man who walks, barefoot, our hills is wise enough to see it; and though he may only leave to his children the heritage of *freedom* and *poverty*, yet he is determined that neither they nor his children's children, to the latest generation, shall ever occupy, through their remissness of duty, the position of *servants*.<sup>20</sup>

This point has not always been understood. An important group of historians, led by Professor Eugene Genovese of the University of Rochester, joins many Northern Republicans at the time in believing that, because the nonslaveholding small farmers supported, in many cases with their lives, the institution of slavery, which was the source of the economic and social power of their natural enemies, the planters, therefore the planters must have established an intellectual hegemony over the yeomanry which seduced it, in effect, into supporting its own subordination.<sup>21</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. As we have seen, farmers on the fringes of the market were acutely aware of their differing interests from the planters; the entire political structure reflected that awareness. The yeomanry's support of slavery in general did not represent its seduction by plantation values, but rather its desire to maintain its independence of the plantation system. Professor Genovese and his followers unconsciously assume, I suspect, the Whig conception of freedom as upward mobility, that the

farmers were “condemned” to subsistence agriculture, and ought to have wanted to “rise” into the market economy. But for the majority of Jacksonian yeomen, subsistence was not something to which they were condemned. It was the material reflection of an ethic, the ideal of autonomy, the status of self-sufficiency, the meaning of freedom. Thus they supported slavery not because they had accepted the values of the planters, but because they had not done so. From their perspective, slavery insulated them from becoming the economic dependents of the wealthy. Their motives for supporting slavery were wholly distinct from, even antithetical to, the motives of the slaveholders for doing so. And their motives proceeded quite as much from a conception of their own interests as did the motives of the planters. Indeed, the study of what happened to yeoman farmers after the Civil War indicates that they may well have been wiser in this regard than have many later commentators. Deprived of the insulation from involvement with the market which slavery had afforded them, and increasingly deprived as well of the use of the public domain and unimproved farmland, which had often contributed decisively to their self-sufficiency, they slipped inexorably into the dependency which had always been their greatest terror.<sup>22</sup>

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*Southern politics rested squarely upon the exploitation of popular resentment and hostility towards planters and other wealthy citizens.*

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Democrats and Whigs, then, because they differed in their understanding of freedom, therefore differed in their understanding of slavery. But because each party regarded its conception of freedom as the essence of the meaning of America, therefore both regarded slavery as essentially American, a bulwark of the liberty and democracy which were the republic's distinguishing characteristics. As a result, when proposals to exclude slavery from the Western territories gained popularity in the North, both Jacksonians and Whigs in the South concluded that the absence of slavery from the territories would lead to the establishment in them of a hierarchical, un-American society, on the Northern model. The final ante-bellum years, therefore, found Jacksonians and former Whigs

throughout most of the region united in desiring permission for slavery to go West—the Jacksonians saying that it would permit a society in which the yeomanry could be secure from the encroachments of dependency, and the Whigs concluding that it would promote the settlers' material advancement. Very few Southern slaveholders actually wanted to risk taking their own slaves to the territories. But virtually all white Southerners, slaveholders and non-slaveholders, regarded any national law forbidding them from taking slaves into the territories if they wished to do so, as a mortifying declaration that Southerners were not the equals of other Americans.

If, however, the South was united in its opposition to free soil, it was by no means united on the question of how far to go in resisting the free soilers. Former Whigs and Know-Nothings continued dubious of the radical solutions promoted by the Southern Rights leaders, while the Democrats moved in increasing numbers to embrace extremist positions. In Mississippi, about two-thirds of the supporters of John Bell who voted in the Secession Convention elections cast their ballots for the Cooperationists; in Louisiana, about three-fourths of them did so; and in Alabama, a majority of Bell voters abstained in the Convention election. Meanwhile, the Democratic supporters of John C. Breckinridge in November who voted in the convention elections some six weeks later overwhelmingly backed immediate secessionists—by an overall margin of two to one; and virtually unanimously in Louisiana and Mississippi. Those Democrats who had voted for Stephen A. Douglas were equally unanimous in supporting the Cooperationists, but they constituted only some 15 percent of the electorate in Alabama and Louisiana, and just 5 percent of it in Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> Thus, though substantial numbers of former Whigs did embrace the secessionist cause, and significant numbers of Democrats continued to resist it, yet it is clear that, in general, it was the Democratic constituency and not the Whig one which eventually came to accept the necessity for revolution. A glance at the nature of the Southern Rights propagandists' case reveals why.

The exclusion of slavery from the territories, wrote one fire-eater, was a declaration “that a free citizen of Massachusetts was a better man and entitled to more privileges than a free citizen of Alabama.” To the voters it presented the question, “Will you submit to be bridled and saddled and rode under whip and spur” or affirm, alternatively, “the great doctrine of *Equality*: Opposition to ascendancy in any form, either of classes, by way of monopolies, or of sections, by means of robbery.” The Northern political hege-

mony was manipulating its power to abridge the freedom of Southerners, to bar them from settling on the new lands, to mark them as second-class citizens. Serfdom threatened. Southern Rights Congressman David Hubbard informed the voters, "It is clear that the power to dictate what sort of property the State may allow a citizen to own and work—whether oxen, horses or negroes; or what religion he may preach, teach or practice, on account of its morality, is alike despotic and tyrannical, whether such power is obtained by conquest in battle or by a majority vote and is equally galling and oppressive upon those whose consciences are made to conform to the standard of morality which the majority sets up; and was never surpassed by the British crown during the reign of her most absolute and despotic kings." Another writer described the providential functioning of the South's slave-based economy: "Under this system of things all thrived and all were happy. From father to son, through a long succession of years, they progressed, and have gone on accumulating at a steady rate until, without apparently being aware of the fact, we, their posterity, have become a prosperous and wealthy people—not in the sense in which these terms are applied to England and the North—not by the concentration of capital in the hands of a few enterprising individuals, to whom the many are the mere 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'—but by a general diffusion of wealth and happiness over the whole community." Congressman Sampson W. Harris proclaimed, "The peace that tyranny imposes can have no charms for a freeman. The measure of his rights, injustice may not limit . . . Better, far better, a never-ending resistance to wrong, than the cold and joyless repose which awaits on conscious inferiority, and humbles the proud man's spirit to the lessons of obedience." It was because the Southern Rights men conceived the sectional conflict in these terms that an editor could write that, should the conflict be decided in favor of the South, "the people may continue free, united and happy, bearing steadily aloft the beacon-light of liberty, to conduct the wayfaring, the oppressed and downtrodden of other nations to the haven of freedom; but if decided the other way, the sun of liberty, as regulated by the eternal principles of justice, will have set in darkness, and the brighted hopes of man will be extinguished forever."<sup>24</sup>

Northerners generally failed to understand the implications of the Southern Rights argument. After all, they frequently noted, it was only the slaveholder, not poorer Southerners, who would be excluded from the territories by a free-soil policy, and even the slaveholder only if he insisted on retaining his slaves. But if

the Northern free labor system generated hierarchy, oligarchy and relationships founded upon economic dependency, then inviting Southerners to move to such a world was inviting them to surrender their American birthright in order to become a part of a crypto-European order. It was an invitation which was no invitation at all.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, free soil was a policy founded upon the assumption, explicitly stated, that the Northern system was the truly American one, to be fostered, and Southern society an aberration, subject to restriction and, in the long run, extinction. It was therefore a policy ready-made for the warning that it branded Southerners as second-class citizens, that it reduced them to intolerable inferiority in their own country, that it mocked their pretensions to equal partnership in the American experiment.

All of these arguments resonated with the fears and resentments of a yeomanry visibly losing the initiative in its struggle to preserve its way of life. And yet it doubtless is the most somber irony in a collection of ironies that, at this crucial moment in its long battle to survive, the yeomanry should have turned its antagonism outward, away from the planters and merchants against whom its antipathy had been so long directed, and towards the Republicans of the North. The reason for this development is to be found in the changing nature of Southern political leaders.

Of course the yeoman farmers' hostilities had always had a national component. The crusade against the Bank of the United States, for instance, had paralleled and co-existed with the crusades against banks and other corporations at the state level. The 1850s, however, saw not only the increasing political success of Whiggish programs and interests, but the increasing absence of Democratic politicians who wished to launch crusades against them. Leadership in the Democratic party was passing to younger men, ambitious attorneys, eager for social advancement and attuned to urban values, who became Democrats not because they understood the Jacksonian creed, but because the Democrats were the majority party, and therefore offered the easier path to office. The Democratic party not only lost its discipline in the 1850s; it lost its soul.

The farmers searched eagerly for an explanation of the developments so readily apparent to them. Their world was closing in on them; a national society was gelling around them; forces were at work which were reducing them to dependency and thus to servitude. They turned to their political leaders for an explanation. The only political leaders who had an explanation, however, the only politicians who also detected an impending despotism, were the Southern Rights



radicals. The farmers listened as the Southern Rights men told them that the guarantee of their freedom lay in their equality of citizenship under the American Constitution, but that the Republicans were intent upon stripping them of that equality, upon refusing them access to the territories, the common property of all Americans, upon marking them as moral and political inferiors. The farmers listened, and tragically, a majority of them believed. They voted for the Southern Rights politicians for the same reasons that earlier they had voted for the enemies of the Bank of the United States. Aristocracy could not be tolerated; the victory of tyranny appeared imminent. An entirely sectional majority had been able to force upon them a president committed to the notion that their region was un-American. The provocation demanded vengeance. The time had now come, as it had in 1776, when if they were to keep their freedom and equality, they would have to fight for their rights. Secession followed.

In the spring of 1984, the legislature of Maryland undertook to modify the words to the state's famous anthem, "Maryland, My Maryland," written in the far more passionate spring of 1861 by James Ryder Randall. Randall, enraged by the violence which had surrounded General Benjamin Butler's efforts in April to get his frightened Massachusetts militiamen through Baltimore, on their way to Washington, had dashed off his poem as a call to his fellow Marylanders to join the Confederate cause. His summons contained the stirring admonition, "The despot's heel is on thy shore!/His torch is at thy temple door!" These sentiments have proven too strong for the Solons who now guide Maryland's destiny. They have voted their preference instead for the following doggerel: "Oh, join we all to lift a song/To home and state we've loved so long." The author of this sanitized rhyme is a Baltimore schoolteacher, Barbara Klender. Asked by the press to explain her desire to suppress Randall's text, she said that she had found it impossible to explain to her pupils how Abraham Lincoln could have been considered a despot.<sup>26</sup>

Barbara Klender's approach to historical evidence has all too often been the refuge, as well, of professional historians: the document whose words prove inexplicable has an unfortunate tendency to disappear from the record. We should consider, though, what might have been the salutary outcome if Klender had turned her talents from bowdlerizing, and had instead asked her students to reflect seriously upon the implications of Randall's words. Imagine if she and her students had contemplated the possibility that many hundreds of thousands of Americans might indeed

have believed Abe Lincoln to be a despot. Just conceivably, the exercise might have served to call into question one of America's most enduring and delusory historical myths.

Marylanders, of course, unlike their fellow citizens in the more southerly slave states, chose in the end to close their ears to Randall's emotional plea. If Klender's pupils are ever to understand the circumstances which required the lives of 600,000 Americans in the four terrible years after Randall wrote, however, they must hear his words, and they must ponder them.

<sup>1</sup>Sir John W. Hackett, *The Third World War: The Untold Story* (New York, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 399.

<sup>3</sup>An excellent summary of Republican party ideology in this period is Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970); see especially pp. 40-72. On Republican expectations of Southern Unionists and non-slaveholders, see David M. Potter, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (New Haven, 1942).

<sup>4</sup>The relationship was in fact vastly more complex than the Republicans imagined however; see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974).

<sup>5</sup>On North Carolina politics, see Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1983), Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981), and Thomas E. Jeffrey, "The Second Party System in North Carolina, 1836-1860" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1976). On Tennessee politics, see Thomas P. Abernathy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1932), Paul H. Bergeron, *Antebellum Politics in Tennessee* (Lexington, 1982), Charles G. Sellers, *James K. Polk, Jacksonian, 1795-1843* (Princeton, 1957), and E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill, 1937).

<sup>6</sup>Thomas B. Alexander and Richard E. Beringer, *The Anatomy of the Confederate Congress: A Study of the Influences of Member Characteristics on Legislative Voting Behavior, 1861-1865* (Nashville, 1972).

<sup>7</sup>See Frank E. Vandiver, *Ploughshares into Swords: Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance* (Austin, 1977; originally published, 1952), Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy* (Columbia, 1952), and Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York, 1979), pp. 206-14.

<sup>8</sup>See Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861-1865* (New Haven, 1938).

<sup>9</sup>James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Era of the Civil War* (New York, 1988), restores the genuine contingency of the battlefield to its proper place in determining the Civil War's outcome. Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, 1987), correctly emphasizes the great similarity in the attitudes of soldiers in the two armies.

The Republican expectation that the Confederacy would be destroyed by its internal social contradictions, despite its having proved chimerical at the time, has nevertheless recently obtained a good deal of historical currency. See Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge, 1978); Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge, 1977); Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, 1986); and Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1983), pp. 116-33. For the reasons here stated, I do not find these arguments convincing.

<sup>10</sup>On the origins of ante-bellum sectional stereotypes, see William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

<sup>11</sup>A particularly aggressive statement of it, for instance, may be found in Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 1-66.

<sup>12</sup>A convenient tabular statement is in Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 49-50. In South Carolina, state representatives had to own a freehold estate worth 150 pounds sterling, and state senators a freehold estate worth 300 pounds sterling.

<sup>13</sup>On these struggles, see Fletcher M. Green, *Constitutional Development in the South Atlantic States, 1776-1860: A Study in the Evolution of Democracy* (Chapel Hill, 1930).

<sup>14</sup>Much of what follows is argued at greater length in my *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978). See also Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1983); Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*; Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*; and Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York, 1988). On the political significance of public land policy, see Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison, 1984). An excellent brief summary of ante-bellum land legislation, in both provision and practice, is Thomas Le Duc, "History and Appraisal of U.S. Land Policy to 1862," in Howard W. Ottoson, ed., *Land Use Policy and Problems in the United States* (Lincoln, 1963), 3-27.

<sup>15</sup>On this point, see Charles G. Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" *American Historical Review*, 59 (January 1954): 335-46.

<sup>16</sup>Excellent and instructive analyses of the economic and social position of the Southern yeomanry are in Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, 44-88, 244-63, and Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, pp. 15-85. The statistics in this section are adapted from Ford. Hahn, unlike Ford, greatly understates the extent of the ante-bellum yeomanry's political influence (pp. 86-116), thus marring an otherwise admirable study. Also useful on the economy of the yeoman areas are Lewis E. Atherton, *The Southern Country Store, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1949), and John T. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1716-1860" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1980).

Much of what current scholars argue about the status of the yeomanry was suggested initially, and quite correctly, by the so-called "Owsley school," though because of certain methodological flaws in their work, the contentions of these historians were widely dismissed until quite recently. See Frank L. and Harriet C. Owsley, "The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Southern History* (February 1940): 24-45; Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949); Blanche H. Clark, *The Tennessee Yeomen, 1840-1860* (Nashville, 1942); and Herbert Weaver, *Mississippi Farmers, 1850-1860* (Nashville, 1945).

<sup>17</sup>My understanding of these points has much benefited from Lawrence Frederick Kohl's superb study, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York, 1989).

<sup>18</sup>On ethno-cultural and religious divisions between the parties, see, e.g., Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, 1971) and Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York, 1970). Both of these studies, and others of their school, perhaps err, however, in overstating the extent to which the divisions were causes of, as opposed to correlates of, partisan allegiance. The divisions were less relevant to Southern politics, in any case, because immigrants formed a considerably smaller proportion of the electorate there than in the North. On the changing status of journeymen artisans, see, e.g., R. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984). On politics in North Carolina and Tennessee, see the works cited in note 5. I have reference in the text particularly to Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict*, and Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*.

<sup>19</sup>On Southern state tax policy, see my "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York, 1982), 349-94.

<sup>20</sup>Montgomery Advertiser, March 9, 1852.

<sup>21</sup>See Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1967), and his "Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," *Agricultural History*, 49 (April 1975): 331-42. Though Professor Genovese's notion of "cultural hegemony" leads him to accept, in effect, the Republicans' explanation for the behavior of the white yeomanry, yet in his *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (note 4, above), he has been in the vanguard of the effort to move historians beyond the Republicans' simplistic explanation for the absence of a slave insurrection, to appreciate the many and emotionally complicated levels of the relationship between masters and slaves. The result of Professor Genovese's work, therefore, has been to challenge the Republicans' naive view

of slavery, while at the same time lending the Republicans' equally unsophisticated understanding of relations among whites a powerful, if specious, rationalization.

<sup>22</sup>On this point, see Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 137-289.

<sup>23</sup>Peyton McCrary, Clark Miller and Dale Baum, "Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8 (Winter 1978): 429-57. In Alabama, the Secession Convention election was complicated by a fusion of the secessionist Democrats and the Know-Nothings in the southern part of the state, and internal Democratic rivalries which led many Breckinridge supporters in the hill counties to cooperate with the Douglasites. As a result, dissent in South Alabama was necessarily expressed chiefly as abstention, while in North Alabama the Breckinridge vote, uniquely, was fragmented. The failure of the McCrary group to take account of the very special political alliances in the Alabama convention election makes many of the summary data for the three states in their article less useful than the data which they give for each state individually, I believe. In the three states, four-fifths of those voters who had voted in the presidential election of 1856 and who abstained in the Secession Convention elections were Know-Nothings.

<sup>24</sup>Montgomery Advertiser, June 25, 1851, February 6, 1850, May 7, 1851, August 28, 1850, January 15, 1851.

<sup>25</sup>Though the Northern yeomanry was perhaps a bit more generally involved with market agriculture, yet its position was in quite important ways analogous to that of the Southern yeomanry, and therefore its attitude towards the extension of slavery into the territories was, not surprisingly, virtually a mirror image of the Southern one. Moreover, the belief that slavery encouraged aristocracy shaped attitudes everywhere in the North. Of the Northern working class, Professor Foner tells us, "Free white laborers of the North would never migrate to a land where labor was held to be disreputable, where social mobility was all but non-existent, and where they would have to labor in close proximity with Negro slaves" (Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 57). On the status of the Northern yeomanry, see Christopher Clark, "The Household Economy: Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," *Journal of Social History* 13, (Winter 1979): 169-89; Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1984); and John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, 1986).

<sup>26</sup>Montgomery Advertiser, March 18, 1854.

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