

Exterminating Southerners and Their Odious Ways:

“Yankees viewed Southerners with fully as much contempt as Englishmen viewed Celts. Before the Civil War a Northerner, with typical Anglo-Saxon arrogance, advised Yankees to “mingle freely” with Southerners, “and....strive to bring up their habits, by a successful example, to the New England standard.” When that proved impossible, stronger measures were recommended.

“I believe,” announced a saintly Northerner, “that the great conception of a Christian society, which was in the minds of the Pilgrims of the Mayflower....is to displace and blot out the foul [South]...., with all its heaven-offending enormities; that....our vast and heterogeneous....population is either to be subdued and won to its principles and blessings or to give place to the seed of the righteous.”

A Massachusetts soldier favored a policy of genocide toward Southerners. “I would exterminate them root and branch,” he wrote just after the war. “They have often said they preferred it to subjugation, and, with the help of God, I would give it to them. I am only saying what thousands say every day.”

In calls to exterminate Southerners and their “odious ways,” Northerners sounded much like English Puritans who advocated the obliteration of their “barbaric” Celtic neighbors. It may be no coincidence that Irish-born reporter William Howard Russell described Federal Secretary of War Edwin Stanton as “excessively vain....a rude, rough, vigorous Oliver Cromwell sort of man.”

Typically, Yankees referred to Confederates as dirty and ignorant, just as the English had spoken of the Irish, Welsh and Scots. A Minnesotan called Confederate soldiers “vagabonds,” while another Yank denounced them as “ruffians and desperadoes.” Several Federals spoke of Southerners as “savages,” and one Connecticut soldier informed his sister that “the Rebels are Barbarians and savages.”

(Attack and Die, Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage, Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson, University of Alabama Press, 1982, pp. 181-182)

