

“History is Nothing but a Pack of Lies We Play Upon the Dead.”

By William Cawthon on Mar 2, 2015



Henry Timrod, the greatest Southern poet next to Edgar Allan Poe, the “Poet Laureate of the Confederacy,” died during Reconstruction in 1867 at the young age of 38. Dr. James E. Kibler, an outstanding authority on all things Carolinian and a noted author and Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Georgia, tells me that Timrod died of starvation. After the war he worked as a correspondent for a new Charleston newspaper, which did not have the money to pay him. Dr. Rayburn Moore of the University of Georgia (whom I knew, a very courteous and genteel old Southern gentleman of traditional Southern values), wrote in the article on Timrod in the Poetry Foundation biographical series that after the War Timrod and his family “lived from hand to mouth, selling family furniture and silver and reluctantly accepting money from friends, including William Gilmore Simms and Hayne.”

Simms himself during a time during Reconstruction lived in a garret room in Charleston with some of his children. Simms writes of having to sell prized books to have enough money to eat. He sold his extremely valuable autograph collection to Yankees to help support himself. And Simms inherited from his wife, who died during the War, a large plantation, but a plantation of even thousands of acres without adequate labour and an economy productive of prosperity cannot provide much in the way of

material support other than a bare subsistence living. These times and conditions of Southern poverty after the War bred the wide known Southern expression, “Land Poor.”

When Sherman’s Invading Army came through Barnwell County, the Yankee soldiers burned Woodlands, Simms beautiful plantation dwelling house, to the ground, except for one wing which the slaves saved by putting out the fire. Unfortunately, the wing which contained Simms’ library of 10,700 volumes, one of the largest libraries of the United States, the Yankees burned to the ground, destroying Simms’ exceptionally fine library.

The library of my third Great Grandfather, Dr. Horatio Bowen, of Clinton, Georgia, was also completely destroyed by Sherman’s troops. The books were housed in a separate building from the dwelling house. The Yankees set fire to the library building. Reputedly, Dr. Bowen’s library was one of the largest in a wide area, perhaps in all of Middle Georgia, then the leading section of Georgia. Interestingly, fine library books are in the background of an oil portrait of Dr. Bowen which an 85 year old cousin has recently entrusted to my care.

Details of the destruction of the South wrought not only by Sherman but also by many other invading Yankee armies across the length and breadth of our Southland would fill many volumes, and then many acts of vandalism and pure hatred of the South and destruction will be lost to history.

Southerners have been brought up with the constant refrain that the South was historically the poorest region “of the country.” This has been true only since the massive Yankee conquest and laying waste of the South in the War for Our Independence as a People.

Before the War, the South was the Wealthiest region of the U. S., far and away. This is not Southern pride and puffing, this is actual fact, based on the U. S. Censuses of 1860 and of 1870, which required that every head of a household give his total wealth, divided into personal and real property. In 1860, immediately before the War, the people of the South, other than the slaves — and this includes thousands of blacks were free people — were twice as wealthy on a per capita basis than were the people of the North. Think about that! In 1870, the first Federal Census taken after the War, the people of the North were twice as wealthy as were the Southern people.

Literally, for Southerners, it was a world turned upside down, in just about every way imaginable.

In 1860, every Southern State of the eleven principal Confederate States was wealthier per capita of the free population than was the wealthiest Northern State. That takes a time to really soak in. Mississippi, today the poorest State per capita, was in 1860 the wealthiest U. S. State per capita. Truly amazing, is it not. Even including all of the slaves, the wealthiest U. S. counties were Southern counties. And the slaves, though no wealth was recorded for them, did have some wealth. Many planters allowed their slaves to grow patches of cotton, which the blacks, as slaves, sold for cash, which they kept. Often planters purchased the cotton from their own slaves. The black slaves almost everywhere had their own vegetable gardens, and many planters allowed them to sell their produce at market, retaining the proceeds. The slaves also commonly hunted for game in the woods, and, again, frequently sold it if they so chose, though mainly they supplemented their diets by the wild game they themselves hunted, often with guns and rifles.

A female tutor of South Carolina was given as a present from the slave mauma jewelry which the slave had purchased with her own money.

So many livestock were killed by the Invading Northern Armies that the number of livestock in the entire South did not reach the pre-War levels for twenty years, or longer, even though the Southern population had increased fairly substantially between 1870 and 1880.

South Carolina did not pay off the debt the Reconstruction government had saddled her with until the 1950s.

The South has, in truth, not recovered from the economic, physical, mental, and psychological destruction and scares of the War to this day. In order to do so, the per capital wealth of the South would have to be significantly greater than that of the U. S. as a whole. Southerners would be leaders, not followers, of major trends. Southerners would not be cowed, afraid to speak their minds on subjects of the first importance. The educational level of Southerners would be far higher. Before the War, in 1860, again, with the U. S. Census figures, the proportion of Southern youth who went to college was twice the proportion of Northern youth.

Before the North's wholesale laying waste to the South, two of the best plant nurseries of the United States were Southern nurseries, the long well known Fruitland Nursery of Augusta, Georgia [the Augusta National occupies the site] and Pomaria Nursery of rural Newberry County, South Carolina, in every way as fine a nursery as Fruitland, overall offering as wide a variety of and as many plants, of the same high quality, and in some areas, offering more plants.

Dr. Kibler's work has brought to light in recent decades the importance and standing of Pomaria Nursery; previously, no one except a handful of South Carolinians, had ever heard of Pomaria Nursery, just one of thousands of examples of how the South's defeat in the epic War of American history — an epic War of World history — has so impoverished the South. Much of this is our own fault. We should have cared more about and taught our own history much more than we have done. But since the sharp Leftward turn of the U. S., the most proximate origin of which was the radical decade of the 'Sixties, our public schools have been taken over to a large extent by the Central Regime which has undertaken a thorough Reconstruction of Southern Education. Our history in the public schools, and in many private schools as well, which often mirror much in American culture, is taught as a story of major oppression and darkness. The American Regime is literally, through many channels, destroying what remains of a distinctive South, and is nowhere more effective than in its education of Southern youth, teaching them to hold in contempt and loathing the historic South.

The crippling of the South by the North's vicious conquest goes on and on. Before the War, as the exceedingly well respected historians Eugene Genovese and Michael O'Brien have shown, Southern intellectuals in field after field matched and in some cases overmatched their Northern counterparts. Many Southern intellectuals were recognized leaders in their fields. After the War, the South was "so poor," as Southerners are wont to say, that we could barely fund education. Many of the best minds of the South had perished in the War, killed or died of disease, and, as in Timrod's case, this destruction continued after the War. Many other of the best brains of the South left the South after the War, so hopeless and helpless did the South's situation seem. The LeConte brothers, professors at both what are now the University of Georgia and the University of South Carolina before the War, left the South during Reconstruction and became major founders of the University of California, at Berkeley, the major university of California. And so it went. It has been estimated that 100,000 Southerners emigrated from the South after the War, a significant number never to return. The brilliant Judah P. Benjamin, who had served as a U. S. Senator from Louisiana and in several important Cabinet positions in the Confederate government, escaped to England where he became one of Great Britain's leading barristers. Even a son of Robert E. Lee moved to New York City, as did Varina Davis,

Jefferson Davis' widow, after her husband's death. Jefferson Davis' descendants moved to Colorado, where Bertram Hayes Davis, the principal representative of the family today, lived until a few years ago, when he moved to Dallas, Texas.

The Southern Diaspora bled the South for generations, and still does to an extent, as the major cities of the U. S. are outside the South.

We have been brainwashed to believe, and this was true to an extent even of the early generations after the War, and certainly of twentieth century generations, that the South is inferior in almost every material and intellectual facet of life. Southerners commonly joke about how poor and "country" — meaning unsophisticated and homely, for lack of a better word, we are. Now I understand that the rural life is often a very good life. Southerners of the rural and small town South have, shall we say, a wholesome acceptance of life and are traditionally a good and moral people, and ever ready to defend their personal honour. But what the defeat wrought which has been so devastating is the widespread deterioration in the belief of Southern moral superiority and, frankly, Southern intellectual superiority, or, at the least, that the South is fully competent and capable of not only managing her own affairs in all ways but is a leader, that we could flourish as an Independent Southern Nation in fact, if need be.

Take the case of gardening and horticulture.

Dr. Kibler says just think of the state of gardening and horticulture in the South today if we had won the War. Columbia, South Carolina, the Capital City of the Palmetto State, before the War for Southern Independence was known for its many beautiful gardens and street plantings. Sherman burned Columbia, destroying this notable aspect of Columbia.

Many accounts, not a few by Yankee soldiers themselves with the accompanying Invading Armies, noted the beauty of Southern houses and gardens and streetscapes. These descriptions were given for not only major urban centers like Columbia but also for many county seat towns and for the rural areas of the South.

The countryside was often described by the Invading Yankees as a beautiful garden, so well kept and orderly were the farms and plantations they encountered. A Yankee soldier with Sherman's columns, viewing the scene down the Macon Road from the high hill where Captain Bonner's "beautiful residence" was located (burned by Sherman) in Clinton, Georgia, described the scene as one of great pastoral beauty. S. H. Griswold, the grandson of the famed cotton gin manufacturer, Samuel Griswold of Clinton and manufacturer of the famed Confederate Colt Revolver during the War, wrote c. 1909 that before the War the Monticello Road north of Clinton was a picture of complete orderliness and beauty, a veritable "Garden of Eden," so well kept were the plantations. These types of descriptions of the Southern landscape before the Yankee hordes descended upon the South are found fairly frequently.

The picture of the Old South that Southerners have been taught is so at odds with the reality that it brings to mind Voltaire's dictum: "Don't give me history, history is nothing but a pack of lies we play upon the dead."

<http://www.abbevilleinstitute.org/blog/history-is-nothing-but-a-pack-of-lies-we-play-upon-the-dead/>