

Civil War Causes

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APOLOGIA

The material here presented is meant to illuminate certain aspects of American history from the Civil War era, but it is also meant to establish arguments and to answer other arguments, either among professional historians or average Americans.

Civil War Causes

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Some of the chapters will give due appreciation of the military effort put forth by the South -- both in comparison to the North and in its own right -- establish the legitimacy of the South's bid for independence, and encourage respect for the will to fight shown by the people of the Southern states. Others will re-emphasize that racism and slavery were, and remain, national experiences. Still others will give economics and politics their proper roles as causes of the American Civil War.

I am born and raised in the North; I have no moonlight-and-magnolias sentimental attachment to the ante-bellum South. I live in an urban neighborhood, and I teach my child to judge the people around him by their deeds and character, not their pigment. I have no moral argument to make in favor of American slavery, though, unlike some, I won't condemn every slaveowner in history as a monster.

These sort of disclaimers must be made. Anyone, even the most respected historian, who defends or even speaks objectively about the Old South or the Confederacy is liable to be shouted down. The great historian Avery O. Craven, son of Quaker parents who left the South because of their opposition to slavery, faced an avalanche of

"Confederate sympathizer" charges after he published *"The Coming of the Civil War"* in 1942. In defending his book, Craven wrote:

"My book is not greatly concerned with the causes of the war or with war guilt. It is an attempt to show how the democratic process broke down under an unusual strain I did not set out to defend slavery. I do not attempt to do so; I do not even believe that it can be defended. I simply attempted to explain a section's institution in terms of its own day and to present both its advantages and disadvantages as a labor system."

More than 40 years later, Gary W. Gallagher had to make extensive denials before writing his 1997 assessment of the South's war effort in *"The Confederate War"*:

"Any historian who argues that the Confederate people demonstrated robust devotion to their slave-based republic, possessed feelings of national community, and sacrificed more than any other segment of white society in United States history runs the risk of being labeled a neo-Confederate. As a native of Los Angeles who grew up on a farm in southern Colorado, I can claim complete freedom from any pro-Confederate special pleading during my formative years. Moreover, not a single ancestor fought in the war, a fact I lamented as a boy reading books by Bruce Catton and Douglas Southall Freeman and wanting desperately to have some direct connection to the events that fascinated me. In reaching my conclusions, I have gone where the sources led me. My

assertions and speculations certainly are open to challenge, but they emerged from an effort to understand the Confederate experience through the actions and words of the people who lived it." Eugene Genovese is another who has observed that, in today's academic climate, "to speak positively of any part of this southern tradition is to invite charges of being a racist and an apologist for slavery and segregation." When Bernard Bailyn wrote the word "fanaticism" to refer to abolitionist beliefs, he was attacked for using "the vocabulary of proslavery apologists."^[1]

One stands up for the South with a resignation to being splattered by rotten vegetables. So why bother?

Because many otherwise thoughtful and open-minded Americans only see the South, past and present, as a failed society, poisoned by slavery and racism, peopled by evil masters and wretched rednecks -- Simon Legrees and "Deliverance" extras. Any love or respect for anything Southern, to these people, is just a transparent mask for racism. This is palpably false. And it is destructive. First, because objective historical inquiry is an essential aspect of a free, thinking people. To ask, "was slavery profitable?" is not to say, "slavery was justified," even if the answer you come up with is, "yes, it was." Moral abhorrence does not preclude honest study. The historian's job is not to tell you the way things ought to have been, but the way they were.

My second objection to unthinking South-bashing is more personal and patriotic. I have seen too many people shift the blame for America's modern race mess, and its violent past, onto that one-third of the nation that lies below the Mason-Dixon Line. This psychological shell game absolves the whole by cheating a part. Behind this scapegoating, perhaps, is frustration at a race problem that won't go away. We've given up on dialogue and understanding, and now we just hope to placate the demon with sacrifices. I have had conversations with sane, intelligent, liberal-hearted men who, without a trace of irony, have said that Jefferson and Madison should have been slaughtered by their slaves, and that this would have been fitting and proper and the best possible course of American history.

Scapegoating the South trains the mind to think the race problem is one that happens somewhere else, in someone else's town. Particularly, it encourages those of us outside the South to overlook our own communities. It ignores the oft-told truth -- told by Frederick Douglass and Alexis de Tocqueville and Martin Luther King Jr. -- that racism in the Northern cities has always been far more virulent than that in the Southern countryside.

Trash-talking the South also incidentally sanctifies a New England-based political and moral culture that is the root of much that is wrong in modern America. The North was a great deal more than just abolitionists and Freedom Riders, just as the South was more than the slave auction block and the lynch mob. Manichaeian history does no justice to America's complexity.

Dealing with American history on this level requires patience and the ability to get past attitudes unwilling to go further than, "They had slaves, slaves were wrong, the South deserves everything it got." The American Civil War was "about" slavery like the Boston Tea Party was "about" tea. Slavery became the symbol and character of all sectional differences. It was the emotional gasoline on the sectional fires. Its moral and social implications colored every issue in terms of right and rights. William Seward, the Republican leader whose party made so much of this, recognized the fact: "Every question, political, civil, or ecclesiastical, however foreign to the subject of slavery, brings up slavery as an incident, and the incident supplants the principal question."

Those who make the mistake of treating modern American racism as some perverse peculiarity of Southern white culture often make the same mistake about slavery. Slavery originally existed in all the

colonies (as well as European, Middle Eastern, and African nations). In the United States, it took root in one region and not the other; an accident of climate and geographical economics having nothing to do with inherent moral qualities. Slavery was profitable, and its profits enriched all sections of late 18th and early 19th century America. The South was stripped and plundered and impoverished after 1865, but Northern communities and institutions still enjoy the legacy of their wealth.

But if the Civil War wasn't about slavery, what was it about? My favorite (historical) Latin professor, Basil L. Gildersleeve, put forth the proposition that the Civil War was fought over a question of grammar -- whether "the United States" is a singular or plural noun.[2] The American union was like a marriage, and the South wanted a divorce. She got herself together and left the jealous spouse who abused her and took her money. But she was dragged back. I have found nothing in the writings of Southerners to match what I read this week in a file of unpublished letters of Thaddeus Stevens. The words are echoed in plenty of published correspondence, of course. On Sept. 5, 1862, Stevens hoped the leadership in Washington had "a sufficient grasp of mind, and sufficient moral courage, to treat this as a radical revolution, and remodel our institutions It would involve the desolation of the South as well as emancipation; and a re:peopling of half the Continent. This ought to be done but it startles most men."

The CSA was a bid to form an independent nation out of a region that had a common enemy and some collective regional identity. But the CSA comprised many sub-cultures (a few of them didn't want to be there), and it had a leadership that sometimes confused self-interest with public policy. It had its fair share of charlatans and profiteers and criminal opportunists. It had some brilliant generals and a great many men in uniform who would be the pride of any army in human history. It was committed to 18th century republican values that were incompatible with fighting a modern war, and it had internal social conflicts that the war aggravated.

In nearly all of this it was entirely like the American Revolutionaries. The colonists in 1776: one-third for independence, one-third against, one-third uncommitted. That must be the standard for legitimacy, or else our United States lacks it. The CSA fought a much larger enemy than George III, mostly on its own soil, without a Dutch loan or a French fleet to aid it, and the majority, in spite of internal divisions, put up a herculean effort, won spectacular victories, made shift with what little it had, and held out till the place was literally gutted and blood-drained by its foe.

The four-year history of the CSA is not necessarily the place to seek an example of the values Southerners sought to uphold. Any nation fighting for survival from the cradle, invaded and blockaded all its life, doesn't get a chance to express the finer points of democracy and civil culture. If all we knew of Americans was how they actually behaved from 1776 to 1783, we wouldn't think much of our sense of "democracy" or commitment to "personal freedom."

And since it is impossible to rewind the tape of history and see how it would have played out under a different script, I can't say "the South would have been X, Y, Z today if it had been allowed to separate in peace." That being said, I'd assert there was a tremendous level of self-sacrifice evident in the civilian sector of the South during the war. Southerners endured more and sacrificed more during those years than any large population of Americans has, before or since.

And, even amid the hell of losing a destructive war on home soil, the Southern government remained more true to its own constitution on matters like habeas corpus and freedom of the press than the Northern administration did. In the South I see nothing like the war-profiteer fortunes piled up in the North, or the vast government bounty system that bribed men into the army.

1. He was called that by Gary Nash, a fine historian who has made controversial arguments about Northern political leadership and slavery in the late 18th century. I find his position compelling, and there's a [page](#) in this site that explains some of it.
2. The quote sometimes is misattributed to Mark Twain.

SLAVERY or TARIFF?

"It is curious how indifferent historians have been to the South's complaint about the tariff, often dismissing it as a scapegoat for the section's own economic shortcomings or as a disguised form of slavery conflict," writes historian Clyde N. Wilson (in his section of *"Slavery, Secession, and Southern History"*). "But the plain truth is that [John C.] Calhoun was entirely correct in his opposition to the tariff. Debates about the actual macro- and micro-economic effects of antebellum protection are beside the point. The South, providing the bulk of the Union's exports, sold in an unprotected world market, while all American consumers bought in a highly protected one. And this was to the benefit of one class, no matter how plausibly disguised as a public boon.

"Such exactions are hard to justify at any time, but especially so in a federal Union in which economic interests are regionalized in such a way that the exploitive effect is concentrated. Americans had fought a revolution for smaller grievances. Not to mention, as Calhoun pointed out in the *South Carolina Exposition*, to the agreement of free traders, that the tariff's 'tendency is, to make the poor poorer and the rich richer.'

"But the tariff, like abolition, was also a question of honor. The disingenuous arguments of the protectionists tended, like those of the abolitionists, to dwell upon the moral inferiority and stupidity of southerners in comparison with wise, righteous, industrious New Englanders. Calhoun did not engage in that type of polemic, but he replied to it, again in the *Exposition*: 'We are told, by those who pretend to understand our interest better than we do, that the excess of production and not the Tariff, is the evil which afflicts us. ... We would feel more disposed to respect the spirit in which the advice is offered, if those from whom it comes accompanied it with the weight of their example. *They* also, occasionally, complain of low prices; but instead of diminishing the supply, as a remedy for the evil, demand an enlargement of the market, by the exclusion of all competition.' "[1]

The commercial and industrial rise of New England in the early 19th century was not an accident. It was a deliberate scheme, in which the South at first willingly participated. All was outlined at the inception of the republic by Alexander Hamilton, and the goal was to increase the prosperity and independence of the whole nation. But the result, from the South's point of view, turned out rather differently.

Southern New England was the first section of America to become overcrowded. At the end of the Revolution, it had too many families, not enough farmland, and too few jobs. The federal government set out deliberately to encourage there the commercial trades, especially ship-building and shipping, to save the region from sinking into poverty. The raw material for Northern factories, and the cargoes of Northern merchantmen, would come from the South.

Washington's *"Farewell Address"* makes this economic trade-off the chief practical argument for a continued union of the sections:

"The *North*, in an unrestrained intercourse with the *South*, protected by the equal Laws of a common government, finds in the productions of the latter, great additional resources of Maritime [sic] and

commercial enterprise and precious materials of manufacturing industry. The *South* in the same Intercourse, benefitting by the Agency of the *North*, sees its agriculture grow and its commerce expand."

The July 4, 1789, tariff was the first substantive legislation passed by the new American government. But in addition to the new duties, it reduced by 10 percent or more the tariff paid for goods arriving in American craft. It also required domestic construction for American ship registry. Navigation acts in the same decade stipulated that foreign-built and foreign-owned vessels were taxed 50 cents per ton when entering U.S. ports, while U.S.-built and -owned ones paid only six cents per ton. Furthermore, the U.S. ones paid annually, while foreign ones paid upon every entry.

This effectively blocked off U.S. coastal trade to all but vessels built and owned in the United States. The navigation act of 1817 made it official, providing "that no goods, wares, or merchandise shall be imported under penalty of forfeiture thereof, from one port in the United States to another port in the United States, in a vessel belonging wholly or in part to a subject of any foreign power."

The point of all this was to protect and grow the shipping industry of New England, and it worked. By 1795, the combination of foreign complication and American protection put 92 percent of all imports and 86 percent of all exports in American-flag vessels. American shipowners' annual earnings shot up between 1790 and 1807, from \$5.9 million to \$42.1 million.

New England shipping took a severe hit during the War of 1812 and the embargo. After the war ended, the British flooded America with manufactured goods to try to drive out the nascent American industries. They chose the port of New York for their dumping ground, in part because the British had been feeding cargoes to Boston all through the war to encourage anti-war sentiment in New England. New York was the more starved, therefore it became the port of choice. And the dumping bankrupted many towns, but it assured New York of its sea-trading supremacy. In the decades to come. New Yorkers made the most of the chance.

Four Northern and Mid-Atlantic ports still had the lion's share of the shipping. But Boston and Baltimore mainly served regional markets (though Boston sucked up a lot of Southern cotton and shipped out a lot of fish). Philadelphia's shipping interest had built up trade with the major seaports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, especially as Pennsylvania's coal regions opened up in the 1820s. But New York was king. Its merchants had the ready money, it had a superior harbor, it kept freight rates down, and by 1825 some 4,000 coastal trade vessels per year arrived there. In 1828 it was estimated that the clearances from New York to ports on the Delaware Bay alone were 16,508 tons, and to the Chesapeake Bay 51,000 tons.

Early and mid-19th century Atlantic trade was based on "packet lines" -- groups of vessels offering scheduled services. It was a coastal trade at first, but when the Black Ball Line started running between New York and Liverpool in 1817, it became the way to do business across the pond.

The trick was to have a good cargo going each way. The New York packet lines succeeded because they sucked in all the eastbound cotton cargoes from the U.S. The northeast didn't have enough volume of paying freight on its own. So American vessels, usually owned in the Northeast, sailed off to a cotton port, carrying goods for the southern market. There they loaded cotton (or occasionally naval stores or timber) for Europe. They steamed back from Europe loaded with manufactured goods, raw materials like hemp or coal, and occasionally immigrants.

Since this "triangle trade" involved a domestic leg, foreign vessels were excluded from it (under the 1817 law), except a few English ones that could substitute a Canadian port for a Northern U.S. one.

And since it was subsidized by the U.S. government, it was going to continue to be the only game in town.

Robert Greenhalgh Albion, in his laudatory history of the Port of New York, openly boasts of this selfish monopoly. "By creating a three-cornered trade in the 'cotton triangle,' New York dragged the commerce between the southern ports and Europe out of its normal course some two hundred miles to collect a heavy toll upon it. This trade might perfectly well have taken the form of direct shuttles between Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, or New Orleans on the one hand and Liverpool or Havre on the other, leaving New York far to one side had it not interfered in this way. To clinch this abnormal arrangement, moreover, New York developed the coastal packet lines without which it would have been extremely difficult to make the east-bound trips of the ocean packets profitable." [2]

Even when the Southern cotton bound for Europe didn't put in at the wharves of Sandy Hook or the East River, unloading and reloading, the combined income from interests, commissions, freight, insurance, and other profits took perhaps 40 cents into New York of every dollar paid for southern cotton.

The record shows that ports with moderate quantities of outbound freight couldn't keep up with the New York competition. Remember, this is a triangle trade. Boston started a packet line in 1833 that, to secure outbound cargo, detoured to Charleston for cotton. But about the only other local commodity it could find to move to Europe was Bostonians. Since most passengers en route to England found little attraction in a layover in South Carolina, the lines failed. [3]

As for the cotton ports themselves, they did not crave enough imports to justify packet lines until 1851, when New Orleans hosted one sailing to Liverpool. Yet New York by the mid-1850s could claim sixteen lines to Liverpool, three to London, three to Havre, two to Antwerp, and one each to Glasgow, Rotterdam, and Marseilles. Subsidized, it must be remembered, by the federal post office patronage boondogle.

U.S. foreign trade rose in value from \$134 million in 1830 to \$318 million in 1850. It would triple again in the 1850s. Between two-thirds and three-fourths of those imports entered through the port of New York. Which meant that any trading the South did, had to go through New York. Trade from Charleston and Savannah during this period was stagnant. The total shipping entered from foreign countries in 1851 in the port of Charleston was 92,000 tons, in the port of New York, 1,448,000. You'd find relatively little tariff money coming in from Charleston. According to a Treasury report, the net revenue of all the ports of South Carolina during 1859 was a mere \$234,237; during 1860 it was \$309,222. [4]

The TARIFF

The commercial boom collapsed in 1807 when the war of nerves with Britain began and American merchant ships no longer enjoyed immunity. Coincidentally, the clock ran out on the lucrative slave trade. New England capital shifted from commerce to manufacturing ventures that exploited wage labor. The textile mill system of southern New England grew up under the embargo and the subsequent British blockade during the War of 1812. Capitalists hired whole families displaced by agricultural disruption and quickly reduced them to debt peonage.

The product was sold in large lots to Southern slaveowners or to "slop shops" that clothed the urban poor. The mechanics' old values gave way to the new ones of cost-cutting, access to merchant capital, and willingness to subdivide work and exploit unskilled labor. The boom turned a few mechanics into bosses and many into wage laborers. By 1816, 100,000 factory workers, two-thirds of them women

and children, produced more than \$40 million worth of manufactured goods a year. Capital investment in textile manufacturing, sugar refining, and other industries totaled \$100 million.

The war ended in 1815, and American markets reopened to the cheaper, better made British products. In spite of the protective Tariff of 1816, the American economy collapsed in 1819. Fortunes vanished. Recovery took years. And Northern capitalists vowed never again to be without protection. From then on, they used political power for protection purposes; they convinced the voters that the crumbs that dribbled from the industrialists' tables were their essential interests, and had to be protected at all costs.

"Commercial boom made government promotion of economic growth the central dynamic of American politics. Entrepreneurial elites needed the state to guarantee property; to enforce contracts; to provide juridical, financial, and transport infrastructures; to mobilize society's resources as investment capital; and to load the legal dice for enterprise in countless ways. Especially they strove for a powerful gentry-led national state, through whose developmental policies they dreamed of rivaling British wealth and might."

Once they were in place, protective duties accounted for an estimated three-fourths of textile manufacturing's value added. Without them, half the New England industrial sector would have gone bankrupt.[5] It took until the 1840s for the New England regional market to really emerge. But sectional divergence of the boom-bust cycle was apparent by 1825-6, when cotton prices tumbled and the North suffered no ill effects. Economically, America was two nations at war with one another from this point on.

Calhoun and other Southerners had supported the tariff of 1816 as a fair recompense to New Englanders whose interests had been damaged by the embargo and the war. "This support was part of his pursuit of harmony and reciprocity," Wilson writes. "... Had reciprocity been forthcoming from the other side, how different might the course of American history have been."

Was the South economically backwards?

Statistical tables can't compete with harrowing narratives of runaway slaves. Perhaps that's why economic history isn't taught in our schools. Yet the economic picture is essential for anyone who wants to really understand, rather than simply be entertained. Turner's image of ante-bellum America was an empire like the British, whose "sections" took the place of "individual kingdoms." The role of the South was to devote itself to pouring out the raw material for New England's looms and for the bulk of America's export trade. This was laid out by Alexander Hamilton's *"Report on the Subject of Manufactures"* (1791, the blueprint for young America's economic program), and enshrined in Henry Clay's "American System," enacted in the mid-1820s with the support of Midwestern farmers as well as North Atlantic manufacturers.

That this was done most effectively by slave labor plantations was, after about 1800, no secret to anyone -- North, South, American, British. Robert Russell, the observant British traveller, wrote that slavery was "a necessary evil attending upon the great good of cheap cotton."

The shift of so much land and effort into cotton-growing meant that the people of the South relied on the West for much of their food and livestock, and on the North Atlantic states for most of their clothing and machinery. In turn, they provided more than two-thirds of the entire nation's exports, which brought in the specie that allowed commerce and growth in all sections.

"After 1830 the industrial North had become wedded, not only to the South's production of cotton, but to the institution of slave labor which made such valuable production possible." Northern

factories based their profits on a steady flow of cotton.[6] The price of raw cotton was low during this period, and lagged behind the price of cotton goods. Northern bankers grew rich by extending liberal (but risky) credit to Southern planters against next year's crop. Cotton was already America's leading export by 1821. By 1850, Southern cotton accounted for nearly 60 percent of the nation's total exports, and was a major factor in Northern shipping prospects. While the looms of Lawrence and Lowell sucked up raw cotton, the ships of Boston bulged with it as they crossed the Atlantic, and their owners looked forward to increasing production on the slave plantations, which meant increased profit for them.

Northern politicians were ever ready to sacrifice whatever anti-slavery sentiments they had for the sake of a tariff deal. Rumors after the Compromise of 1850 linked it to logrolling for tariff protection. Illinois votes for the Compromise were connected to railroad land grants that Illinois obtained in 1850. Southern congressmen claimed to have won over Pennsylvania's delegation by promising to repay a vote for the Compromise with "adjustments" in the tariff rates. At the same time, the Pennsylvania legislature voted to repeal laws that handicapped efforts to recapture fugitive slaves.

In the 1820s or '30s, no one would disagree that the tariff was the chief political issue disturbing the United States. But it was not then purely a regional split: many Northern farmers and merchants joined the Southern planters to oppose high tariffs. After the Missouri Compromise, slavery was a deeply troubling, but minor, irritant on the political scene. So how, in 25 years or so, did this national conflict shift to Southern slavery -- which was the same thing it had been in 1820 and '30 -- so much so that the declarations of independence of the various Southern states in 1860 and '61 seem to make it their chief reason for secession?

The answer is the combination of economic self interest and political machination which was itself, rather than slavery, the power that split the country. In opposition to the Democratic Party, the Whigs made a high tariff their strongest plank. But it wasn't enough.

"[T]he values of a dominant national party had to represent more than the transparent self-interest of the manufacturer in having a good transportation system, a protective tariff, a stable currency, and a dependable work force. In order to achieve national support, the manufacturers' values had to be anchored in a social issue of paramount national concern. That issue was the politicization of the moral struggle between North and South over the extension (or contraction) of slavery." [7]

The Free Soil movement of the late 1840s began the shift. Manufacturers needed a steady flow of laborers from overseas to man their machinery. The wages weren't better than in Britain, and the work was just as back-breaking. But in America, immigrant workers were willing to endure a few years of drudgery, secure in the knowledge that they could then take their small savings and set up as homesteaders in the Western territories. "The availability of free soil was functionally necessary to the manufacturing interests because it contributed to the maintenance of a highly productive factory labor force with high morale. Thus the initial transformation of the tariff issue was into a regional issue that involved free soil as well as protective tariffs." [8]



"With northern manufacturers and workers solidly aligned on the tariff and free soil issues, all that was needed to cement the alliance was a sense of moral outrage at the South." And office-seekers on plenty were ready to help whip it up.

The addition of slavery to the prevailing economic issues was fuel on the pyre of the Union. This was what Robert Toombs (right) outlined in his report to the Georgia convention considering secession in 1860:

The material prosperity of the North was greatly dependent on the Federal Government; that of the South not at all. In the first years of the Republic, the navigating, commercial and manufacturing interests of the North, began to seek profit and aggrandizement at the expense of the agricultural interests. Even the owners of fishing smacks, sought and obtained bounties for pursuing their own business, which yet continue -- and half a million of dollars are now paid them annually out of the Treasury.

The navigating interests begged for protection against foreign ship builders, and against competition in the coasting trade; Congress granted both requests, and by prohibitory acts, gave an absolute monopoly of this business to each of their interests, which they enjoy without diminution to this day. Not content with these great and unjust advantages, they have sought to throw the legitimate burthens of their business as much as possible upon the public; they have succeeded in throwing the cost of light-houses, buoys, and the maintenance of their seamen, upon the Treasury, and the Government now pays above two millions annually for the support of these objects.

These interests in connection with the commercial and manufacturing classes, have also succeeded, by means of subventions to mail steamers, and the reduction of postage, in relieving their business from the payment of about seven millions of dollars annually, throwing it upon the public Treasury, under the name of postal deficiency.

The manufacturing interest entered into the same struggle early, and has clamored steadily for Government bounties and special favors. This interest was confined mainly to the Eastern and Middle non-slaveholding States. Wielding these great States, it held great power and influence, and its demands were in full proportion to its power. The manufacturers and miners wisely based their demands upon special facts and reasons, rather than upon general principles, and thereby mollified much of the opposition of the opposing interest. They pleaded in their favor, the infancy of their business in this country, the scarcity of labor and capital, the hostile legislation of other countries towards them, the great necessity of their fabrics in the time of war, and the necessity of high duties to pay the debt incurred in our war for independence; these reasons prevailed, and they received for many years enormous bounties by the general acquiescence of the whole country.

But when these reasons ceased, they were no less clamorous for government protection; but their clamors were less heeded, -- the country had put the principle of protection upon trial, and condemned it. After having enjoyed protection to the extent of from fifteen to two hundred per cent, upon their entire business, for above thirty years, the Act of 1846 was passed. It avoided sudden change, but the principle was settled, and free-trade, low duties, and economy in public expenditures was the verdict of the American people.

The South, and the Northwestern States sustained this policy. There was but small hope of its reversal, -- upon the direct issue, none at all. All these classes saw this, and felt it, and cast about for new allies. The anti-slavery sentiment of the North offered the best chance for success. An anti-slavery party must necessarily look to the North alone for support; but a united North was now strong enough to control the government in all of its departments, and a sectional party was therefore determined upon.

Time, and issues upon slavery were necessary to its completion and final triumph. The feeling of anti-slavery, which it was well known was very general among the people of the North, had been long dormant or passive, -- it needed only a question to arouse it into aggressive activity. This question was before us: we had acquired a large territory by successful war with Mexico; Congress had to govern it, how -- in relation to slavery -- was the question, then demanding solution. This state of facts gave form and shape to the anti-slavery sentiment throughout the North, and the conflict began.

Northern anti-slavery men of all parties asserted the right to exclude slavery from the territory by Congressional legislation, and demanded the prompt and efficient exercise of this power to that end. This insulting and unconstitutional demand was met with great moderation and firmness by the South. We had shed our blood and paid our money for its acquisition; we demanded a division of it, on the line of the Missouri restriction, or an equal participation in the whole of it. These propositions were refused, the agitation became general, and the public danger great. The case of the South was impregnable. The price of the acquisition was the blood and treasure of both sections -- of all; and therefore it belonged to all, upon the principles of equity and justice.

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 2. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, **The Rise of New York Port [1815-1860]**, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, p.95.
 3. K. Jack Bauer, **A Maritime History of the United States**, University of South Carolina Press, pp.74-75.
 4. *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2nd Ses., Appendix, p.70.
 5. Mark Bills, "Tariff Protection and Production in the Early U.S. Cotton Textile Industry," *Journal of Economic History*, 44, Dec. 1984, pp.1033-45.
 6. Thomas H. O'Connor, **Lords of the Loom**, New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1968, p.47.
 7. Anthony F.C. Wallace, **Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution**, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972, p.422.
 8. *ibid.*, p.423.

YANKEE CANARDS

Education

One of the oft-heard put-downs of the Old South was its lack of education, by which is usually meant free public education, which was well-established in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states by 1860 but had barely dented the South. Thus, it is said that the South was uneducated. Yet literacy among white Southerners before the war was more than 80 percent, slightly below that of Northerners but better than the rate in Britain or any European country except Sweden and Denmark.

But this was a Massachusetts affair, and New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey tended to let parochial schools and private classical academies handle whatever education was wanted, while the Southern colonies relied on apprenticeships and pauper schools. Writers on early education in America tend to break it down into three regional solutions, not a straight North-South split.

In the early 19th century, Massachusetts educators began the push to make free schools an American institution. The battle over tax-supported, publicly controlled, non-sectarian schools was waged between 1825 and 1850, and it was second only to the slavery debate in intensity and bitterness. The public school advocates waged their fight state by state, and they had a bitter battle in every one of them, usually settling for local option compromises (as in New York 1849-50; Pennsylvania 1834). Public schools were not truly free to all and "universal" until 1867 in New York, 1871 in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Michigan, and New Jersey; and 1873 in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania was a typical case. Intellectuals and the working class generally supported the idea, along with people in the northern tier of the state who had roots in New England. But they were far outnumbered by the opponents, including the wealthy, who resented being taxed to pay for the education of the children of the poor; church people, who feared secular education; and the Pennsylvania Dutch, who fretted that public schools would erase their linguistic and cultural identity.

The move for free schools was hampered in these states by the fact that the first ones set up were, frankly, not very good when compared to the old subscription schools. The editor of the leading newspaper in one town that had tried the free schools in the 1830s and rejected them wrote, "Many of our citizens imagine that the character of the schools deteriorate under the public school system -- the cognizance of the Directors being less efficient in holding teachers to a rigid accountability than when they are brought into direct connection with the parents. We do not believe the school system will be efficient until the directors receive a pecuniary compensation for their labors and teachers are better rewarded."

And "free" hardly meant "universal." Attendance at these schools was not required. In Pennsylvania, right up until the few years before the Civil War, the children of the poor generally continued to stay home and work, while the children of the rich continued to attend private academies. Northern workers also probably found it hard to appreciate the virtues of free education when millions of their children were at work at dawn on the looms and carding machines of the textile factories by the age of 7 or 8. Children of poor factory workers may have theoretically had access to the common schools, but the children of blacks usually were shunted off to barely functioning backroom schools. The Irish immigrants whenever possible sent their children to parochial schools rather than to the free public ones, where the daily Bible lesson was from the (Protestant) King James Version, rather than the Douay translation. This was the spark that ignited the deadly Kensington riots in Philadelphia in 1844.

Yet the free school system was slowly making its way from being a Massachusetts institution to being a national one. It was advancing out of New England and heading south and west. That it happened to have made few inroads into the Southern states at the time the war began does not mean it would not have ever done so, and the fact that the inroads it had made there were strongest in Maryland and Virginia suggest that the movement was heading that way.

Certainly the Northern conquest didn't help matters for Southern education. Fifteen years after the war ended, white literacy showed no noticeable gain and 70 percent of Southern blacks still could not read. The slowness of the South to adopt free public schools after the war can be laid in part to the massive disruption wrought by the war itself as much as to any inborn feature in Southern culture.

Moral effects of Slave-ownership

A common argument among abolitionists, North and South, ran something like this: "Southern whites were corrupted and made lazy by being slave owners." But the logic is flawed. Cause and consequence are connected by a presumption: Slavery is immoral, therefore its effects must be baleful. People once thought the same of masturbation.

True, the Southern aristocrats did not devote their hours to productive work. But then neither did the mill owners of Massachusetts. And the Southerner had to organize his plantation as a whole community, while the Northern capitalist at the end of the day simply turned out his girls, locked the gates, and left them to find food and shelter as they could.

Yet the plantation-keeping could be delegated, and slave ownership would certainly allow a life of indulgence and ease. But it did not require it. The vigorous careers and astonishing accomplishments of Washington, Jefferson, and Madison (slaveowners all) speak against that assumption of universal laziness. The masterful skill of Confederate generals and cavalry (into which ranks the slaveowning minority was generally drawn) speaks against it being at all widespread. Periclean Athens, with its 172,000 citizens and 115,000 slaves, was hardly moribund. King Alfred's Anglo-Saxons, and the Vikings who founded settlements from Newfoundland to Russia, were hardly effete, decadent peoples. Yet both had slavery in the core of their culture and economy. Spartan slavery was even more comparable to the American model than that of Athens. No one would accuse the Spartans of being a bunch of soft layabouts.

Rousseau, in his section on "*Deputies or Representatives*" in "***The Social Contract***," has a penetrating digression on slavery and democracy:

Among the Greeks, all that the people had to do, it did itself; it was continuously assembled in the market place. The Greek people lived in a mild climate; it was not at all avaricious; slaves did the work; its chief concern was freedom. Without the same advantages, how can the same rights be preserved? Your harsher climates create more necessities; six months of the year the public places are uninhabitable; your muted tongues cannot make themselves heard in the open air; you care more for your profits than your freedom; and you fear slavery less than you fear poverty.

What? Is freedom to be maintained only with the support of slavery? Perhaps. The two extremes meet. Everything outside nature has its disadvantages, civil society more than all the rest. There are some situations so unfortunate that one can preserve one's freedom only at the expense of the freedom of someone else; and the citizen can be perfectly free only if the slave is absolutely a slave. Such was the situation of Sparta. You peoples of the modern world, you have no slaves, but you are slaves yourselves; you pay for their liberty with your own. It is in vain that you boast of this preference; I see more cowardice than humanity in it.

I do not mean by all this to suggest that slaves are necessary or that the right of slavery is legitimate, for I have proved the contrary. I simply state the reasons why peoples of the modern world, believing themselves to be free, have representatives, and why peoples of the ancient world did not.

Railroad mileage

The lack of railroad track mileage is another canard against the South. By mid-century, the comparison stood at 112 miles per state in the South and 442 miles per free state. Yet the South in 1860, when it set out to be an independent nation, would have been second in the world in railroad mileage per capita, behind only the North.

The South had fewer railroads in part because it had less need of them. One-crop plantations generate less rail freight than more diverse Northern farms. And wide, navigable rivers penetrate deep into the South in almost all regions.

In fact, those miles of Northern railroads, the much-vaunted framework of Yankee economic might, tended to be selfish, local, and often useless to all but a few rich men. Railroad schemes in populous

areas were got up for investment purposes. Towns fearful of being bypassed by a technology that promised a vague prosperity would rush to subscribe public money to the railroads, and the resulting tracks often zig-zagged across the map, in search of municipal bonds.

States joined in as well. From 1850 to 1857, American railroads got 25 million acres of public land for free, and millions in bonds -- loans -- from state legislatures. In Wisconsin in 1856, the LaCrosse and Milwaukee Railroad got 1 million acres for free by distributing about \$900,000 in stock and bonds to 59 assemblymen, 13 senators, and the governor. Two years later the railroad was bankrupt and the bonds were worthless. The "Tapeworm Railroad" was a state-subsidized project in Pennsylvania, sponsored by Thaddeus Stevens when he was a state legislator. According to a government inquiry, the road "literally commences in the woods, where not a recognized track of man marks the origin of such stupendous folly," proceeds "through a wild and mountainous region ... uninhabitable by man," and terminates "in a diminutive village detached by at least 43 miles from any public work." But it happened to connect Stevens' ironworks with the Baltimore and Ohio line.

When the North's railroad miles had any larger function, it often was the strangling of Southern ports. The North used public money -- federal money, when it could get it -- to build transportation systems to intercept the flow of western commodities down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, and divert it to Eastern coastal cities. Wheat and flour shipped east via the Erie Canal alone rose from the equivalent of 268,000 barrels of flour in 1835 to 1,000,000 in 1840. Shipments to New York exceeded those to New Orleans by 1838.

The South was not nearly as poor and backwards as is often assumed: in 1860 it would have been fifth in the world in cotton textile production, behind Great Britain, the North, Switzerland, Belgium, and France. In per capita income, it would have tied with Switzerland for fourth place, behind Australia, the North, and Great Britain. The Southern states of 1860 would have formed the fourth-wealthiest nation in the world, with an inflation-adjusted per capita income not seen in some European nations till World War II. The per-capita-income growth of the South 1840-60 was 1.7 percent per annum -- 30 percent more rapid than the growth in the North.

Modern statistical analysis of economic data for census years 1840-1860 began in the 1950s and is still ongoing. It shows that the 25 percent income gap between the regions reflects the tremendous wealth of one corner of the North, rather than the supposed poverty of the South. Only compared with the Northeast was the South (and the Midwest) "stagnant" in 1860. Compared to any other spot on the globe except England, it was a rich, thriving, diverse economy.

Interestingly, much of the abolitionist critique of Southern economics, supposedly retarded by slavery, is lifted wholesale from DeBow and others who thought like him. They wrote jeremiads about Southern "backwardness" that were meant to scare readers and motivate change. They can hardly be taken as objective economic analysis, with no awareness of their source in internal Southern debates about economic policy.

DeBow was banging that drum so hard and long to awaken the South to the hegemonistic designs of powerful forces in the North that were slowly reducing the South to the position of an economic vassal, via federal policies that gave an economic edge to the North.

Dueling

The South is damned for trying to develop or maintain a culture of personal honor that often led to violence. It reminds me of the *Iliad*. But what's bad about an ethic that puts some stock in honor? Those same slave-owning hotheads in the *Iliad* in a few generations developed into the people who invented theater, physics, and democracy.

It seems to me something good can be done along the lines of human accomplishment by people who strive for honor, as an ideal. It will get you farther along that line than, "what's in it for me?" [Yankee trader]. A "what's in it for me?" nation that can't think of anything better to do with its honor-possessed section than humiliate it and exterminate it is likely to find its collective legacy to humanity will be Supersize french fries, "*Rocky I*" through "*Rocky V*," and the Monopoly board game.

MULATTOES

One of the interesting things about Mary Boykin Chestnut's resentment over barely concealed slaveowner dalliances with slaves is that it was directed at the wrongs she saw committed against white women, who were made to suffer in silence their husbands' infidelity.

The lingering view of slave plantations as personal harems for their owners is a relic of antebellum abolitionist rhetoric, written by upper-class New Englanders with little practical experience in the South or with blacks. Built into it is the racist assumption that black women were more promiscuous and lascivious than white women, were less inclined to resist advances, and that laboring folk of any sort -- Irish peasants included -- were carnal by nature.

Nobody denies that it happened. But even if all the reports are true -- and many are mere hearsay -- of slaveowners having mistresses in the quarters or beloved mulatto children around the house, they amount to a few hundred in a population of millions. The question remains, were these cases the tip of an iceberg, or rare events that were much gossiped about?

Some people seem to assume that, just because the law allowed owners to ravish slave girls, it had to be going on all over the place. This ignores the other forces (social, moral, religious, economic) that were involved. For instance, the seduction of the wife or daughter of a slave would undermine the plantation's discipline, which the planters worked hard to maintain. It would also undermine the planter's reputation both in the slave quarters, in his own home, and in the whole white community.

If a man wanted an outlet to sexually exploit women, there were easier and more accepted ways to do it. Big slave-owners were rich men, who could easily afford to maintain a mistress in town or patronize high-class brothels.

Likewise, a slave overseer who was caught abusing the boss's property like that was basically out of a career. "Never employ an overseer who will equalize himself with the negro women," one planter advised his children. "Besides the morality of it, there are evils too numerous to be now mentioned."

Another unpleasant fact of 19th century America also enters into the picture: pervasive racism. The sense of black inferiority, often to the point of inhumanity, inhibited the lust of white men for black women as sexual partners. In Nashville -- the only Southern city for which data on prostitution is available -- in 1860 just 4.3 percent of the prostitutes were black, although a fifth of the city was black. All the black prostitutes were free and light-skinned. The absence of slave women in brothels is in itself a telling sign about the nature of desire.

Distribution of ages of slave mothers at the time of birth of their first surviving child also turns the myth on its head. Average age at first birth was 22.5; median age was 20.8. In a well-fed, non-contraceptive population, this doesn't indicate a wanton pool of unmarried teen-age girls getting knocked up by their masters, or by anybody else. Quite the opposite. Sexual mores of the slaves were not promiscuous, but prudish, in spite of the lurid racist claims of abolitionists.

Instead, the issue is one of the subjugation of women in American culture of that time. Women were chattels in the eyes of the law in most states, North and South. They were legally dependent on a father or husband, and could not control property or children. Slave women were vulnerable to their masters, but they were equally vulnerable to black sexual aggression. A slave's rape of a black woman would be ignored by state law.

Men North and South, black and white, satisfied their sexual desires by taking mistresses and concubines, seducing young girls, and patronizing prostitutes. Black women were not the only women so exploited. It is unlikely that black women were even more exploited than white women, despite the assumption that, just because planters had total control over slaves, they used it sexually.

Slaves were a subject population. So were women. Sexuality can be a ladder out of that. There were slave women who maintained long-term relationships with white men that came close to common-law marriages. Others voluntarily formed shorter-term liaisons for a variety of motives. These relationships were clearly based on more than overt use of physical force by planters.

The presence of mulattoes is supposed to support the old notion of the plantation-as-harem. Northern travellers in the South often remarked at how light-skinned the slaves were, certainly much lighter than the robust black skin of the Guinea coast Africans.

But mulattoes were not evenly distributed through the South; they were concentrated in the cities, and especially among freemen. According to the 1860 census, 39 percent of freedmen in Southern cities were mulattoes. Among urban slaves, the proportion of mulattoes was 20 percent. One out of every four black people in a Southern city was a mulatto. The travellers who noted a high proportion of mulattoes in the South evidently had much more contact with city populations, and freedmen, which makes sense given the nature of travel. But 95 percent of the slaves did not live in the cities.

As a legal or census definition, "mulatto" meant not just the product of a union of a white parent and a black one, but also of the union of a black and a mulatto. The child of any slave who had one white grandparent, whether by a white or black spouse, would be a mulatto.

Other bodies of data support the conclusion from the census. In the W.P.A. survey of former slaves, of those who identified parentage, only 4.5 percent indicated a white parent. And the work of geneticists lowers the number even further: measures of DNA mutations that are identifiably African or European among modern Southern rural blacks indicate that the share of black children fathered by whites on slave plantations probably averaged between 1 and 2 percent.

There is an intriguing discrepancy in the 1860 census publications of 1862 and 1864. In the "Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census, 1860," published in 1862, Census Superintendent Joseph C. G. Kennedy concluded, "In a simple statement, when viewed apart from the liberations or manumission in the southern States, the aggregate free colored in this country must represent nearly what is termed 'a stationary population,' characterized by an equality of the current of births and deaths." (Kennedy was a disciple of the influential Dr. Josiah Clark Nott, who wrote extensively on racial purity and posited a theory of "mulatto inferiority." According to Nott, the mulatto population could never have equality of births and deaths and would eventually die out because of frailty and sterility.)

In "Population of the United States in 1860," published in 1864, Kennedy altered his previous viewpoint by stating, "These developments of the census, to a good degree, explain the slow progress of the free colored population in the northern States, and indicate, with unerring certainty, the gradual extinction of that people the more rapidly as, whether free or slave, they become diffused among the dominant race."

Kennedy made his 1862 statement before all of the data were tabulated; however, this is all the more significant in light of the fact that the 1862 figure for the "Free Colored" increase was 10.97% compared to a higher 12.32% in 1864. For Kennedy's statements to be in accord with his statistics, these two figures should have been reversed.

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RACE in the NORTH

Sept. ye 15, 1682

To ye Aged and Beloved Mr. John Higginson:

There is now a ship at sea called the Welcome, which has on board a hundred or more of the heritics and malignants called Quakers, with W. Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head of them.

The General Court has accordingly given secret orders to master Malachi Huscott, of the brig Porpose, to waylay the said Welcome, slyly as near the Cape of Cod as may be, and make captive the said Penn and his ungodly crew, so that the Lord may be glorified, and not mocked on the soil of this new country with the heathen worship of these people.

Much spoil can be made by selling the whole lot to Barbados, where slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar, and we shall not only do the Lord great service by punishing the wicked, but we shall make great good for his minister and people.

Master Huscott feels hopeful and I will set down the news when the ship comes back.

Cotton Mather [*]

You can feel chilled by that letter even if you don't have several ancestors on the "Welcome" (as I do). But it's an accurate insight into the mindset of the New England Puritans, whom we honor among the founders of the country, and hold up as models in contrast to the nefarious slave-owners of the South.

De Tocqueville observed that "race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where slavery was never known."

The word "racism" in all its variants is a 20th century invention. Lincoln never heard it. What we would now call "racism" was so pervasive and universal in 19th century America -- North and South and West -- that no one felt a need to coin a word for it. The mere fact that we have a word "racism" in our vocabulary now is a way to rope off a certain attitude or behavior, and that is a first step to moving beyond it. It's a sign of progress.

I dislike the idea of making modern moral labels retroactive. I can no more condemn George Washington as immoral for owning slaves in Virginia in the 1790s than I can call Aristotle stupid for not knowing that the Sun is a star. Modern people sometimes like to trot out some racist statements by Abraham Lincoln. I'm impressed that Lincoln was less racist than the generality of people in the place he was born and raised in, the pre-war U.S. Midwest.



The abolitionists -- that is, the extremists among them who advocated not just emancipation but social equality of the races -- had a uphill fight to persuade popular opinion in the North, South, West and all points that blacks and white were equal in any real sense.

To get an idea of how strongly the North, as a section, despised abolitionists in the 1830s, consider the career of Lydia Maria Child. Born and raised in Massachusetts, in 1824, when she was just 22, she published the first historical novel printed in the United States. It made her an instant celebrity. She spun out novels and stories that the public gobbled up, and she became editor of "*The Juvenile Miscellany*," a new and popular children's magazine, again one of the first of its kind. Her book **The Frugal Housewife** was an immensely popular manual.

But in the 1830s Child got involved with Garrison's abolitionist movement, and she dedicated herself to it. She published **An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans** in 1833. The work condemned slavery in the standard abolitionist terms, pointing out its contradiction with Christian teachings, and its moral and physical degradation of slaves and owners alike. She also railed at miscegenation, and she took shots at the North for its share of responsibility for the system.

And it stopped her career cold. The views were considered so extreme that the public dropped her. Sales of her books plummeted, publishers refused to take anything she wrote, and she lost her editorial post with "*The Juvenile Miscellany*." This pioneer of American publishing is now utterly obscure, and most people who see her name have no idea that she wrote, for instance, the Thanksgiving poem that begins, "Over the river and through the woods"

To prove the pervasiveness of any opinion, in the days before Gallup polls, you have to introduce masses and masses of documentary evidence, and even then, no matter how many gallons of ink you drain, you're open to a charge of selective bias.

The editorial opinions of anti-administration Northern newspapers during the Civil War were obviously full of a virulent racism. It was there for political purposes, primarily, and the editors of those newspapers often had personal relationships to the blacks in their communities that were at least as benevolent and sincere as those of their Republican enemies.

Their attempt was to stir up resentment of the party in power. And the reason they played on that particular string, and play it so long and loud, is that they were sure it resonated with the voters.

One of the Pennsylvania newspapers I studied was full of race-baiting that makes me cringe even now. It slandered Lincoln, too, calling him every name in the book. But nobody made trouble for the editor until the summer of 1861, when he printed his opinion that the North had gone to war with the ultimate goal of freeing the slaves. This was considered so outrageous and offensive that **soldiers just back from their three-months regiments attacked the office and sacked it.**

I spent a long time reading letters, journals, newspapers and diaries in a region of Pennsylvania so noted for its abolitionism that it's now marketing historical tourism based on the Underground Railroad. But in all that reading I found almost nothing that would not be considered hard-core racism today.

I wasn't writing about race per se, but the book had to touch on the topic. It became painful at times, reading one thing after another, and I wondered if it wasn't undoing all the rest of my work in trying to paint a vivid, sympathetic picture of a bygone Northern place. Like Thomas Jefferson's slaves, the one fact begins to crowd out all the others. At times it did seem to me to poison every positive quality, in the men, women, and institutions of that whole community.

I could only explain it by remembering the degree of degradation that must have been brought on the black community by lack of education and poverty, and by the pervasive racist views of the day that were passed off as either scientific fact or the immutable word of God. But remember, this was the North, not the South.

From 1843, an appeal trying to drum up public donations to keep open a public school for black children:

"Education is said to be the chief defense of nations, and in the case of white people it is supposed to be a great preventive of crime. It is respectfully submitted that what is so good for white people may also be beneficial for the colored race.

"We know there is a feeling of hostility and prejudice existing against this people, and a wish is often expressed by many, that they could be removed from amongst us. It might be desirable to have them away, but there are many things desirable which are not practicable. They are here, and are likely to remain here, and the question to be asked is, whether it is better to let children of this class grow up in utter ignorance or to bring the purifying influence of Education to bear upon them.

"... They are a kind of people which white persons do not care to be much acquainted with, and whose character they have not thought it worth while to study. They are a degraded people, but they are not *all* degraded, they are a vicious people, but they are not *all* vicious, and it is believed that if they could have a schoolhouse and lot of their own, in which the best judging among them could place a teacher of their own choosing, they would be able to keep a good school the whole year, aided of course by the annual appropriation from school directors.

"... Do you care nothing for the colored people and their children? If you do not, still you perhaps desire the welfare of your own children, and upon observing the superiority of educated colored children over those brought up in ignorance, you will readily perceive that it would be much better to have your own offspring brought up in a community where the first are found than to expose them to the pernicious influence of the latter class.

"For your own sake then, contribute to enlighten a population which you cannot remove from among you, that the burden of this disagreeable contact may be rendered as light as possible."

This is a moderate, mainstream -- liberal -- voice in that community. I suspect it was written by a Quaker, perhaps a member of an abolition society.

There are voiciferous and sometimes violent people in the world today who claim that circuses and slaughterhouses and animal testing of new medical techniques are sins against nature and God. In 100 or 1,000 years it may be an obvious opinion that they were right -- I would not be surprised. But then PETA research lab bombers will be the only heroes in our generation. All the rest of us will be written off as immoral or worse.

A VERMONT STORY

From a speech on emancipation, by Sen. J.R. Doolittle of Wisconsin, March 19, 1862 [Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd session, vol. IV, appendix, p.84, col. 3]

I can give you a case directly in point. A very distinguished gentleman from Vermont was first elected to Congress, I believe, about 1843. One of the well-to-do farmers in his neighborhood called upon him, the evening before he was to leave for Washington, to pay his respects. He found him in his office, and told him that he came for that purpose, and to bid him good bye.

"And now, judge," said he, "when you get to Washington, I want to have you take hold of this negro business, and dispose of it in some way or other; have slavery abolished, and be done with it."

"Well," said the judge, "as the people who own these slaves, or claim to own them, have paid their money for them, and hold them as property under their State laws, would it not be just, if we abolish slavery, that some provision should be made to make them compensation?"

He hesitated, thought earnestly for a while, and, in a serious tone, replied: "Yes, I think that would be just, and I will stand my share of the taxes." Although a very close and economical man, he was willing to bear his portion of the taxes.

"But," said the judge, "there is one other question; when the negroes are emancipated, what shall be done with them? They are a poor people; they will have nothing; there must be some place for them to live. Do you think it would be any more than fair that we should take our share of them?"

"Well, what would be our share in the town of Woodstock?" he inquired.

The judge replied: "There are about two thousand five hundred people in Woodstock; and if you take the census and make the computation, you will find that there would be about one for every five white persons; so that here in Woodstock our share would be about five hundred."

"What!" said he, "five hundred negroes in Woodstock! Judge, I called to pay my respects; I bid you good evening;" and he started for the door, and mounted his horse. As he was about to leave, he turned round and said: "Judge, I guess you need not do anything more about that negro business on my account." [Laughter.]

Mr. President, perhaps I am not going too far when I say that honorable gentleman sits before me now.

Mr. [Jacob] COLLAMER [R-Vt.]. As the gentleman has called me out, I may be allowed to say that the inhabitants of the town were about three thousand, and the proportion was about one to six.

[] I have seen this letter in different books -- including, curiously, Joseph Campbell's "Hero with a Thousand Faces," which cites it in a scholarly study of American government -- but did not find it in the collection of Mather's writings I consulted, which was published in the 19th century. It is possible the letter is not genuine, or is considered doubtful. The wording varies somewhat in the published versions I have seen. It also is possible it was left out of the 19th century collection out of embarrassment.*

SLAVERY as HISTORY

One of the gulfs between most of the modern historians I read and many of the older ones is that the earlier historians were able and willing to look at slavery as an economic institution, and at the enforcement of fugitive slave laws as a legal process between the sections.

It is necessary to do this to understand the coming of the Civil War. But it's also not easy or entirely pleasant to do so. We who do it stand in an exposed position, not in terms of historical realities -- because in doing so we're more true to those realities than our opponents -- but in terms of modern moralities.

To grapple with slavery as a dynamic force between North and South in America, you have to think of it in terms of its meaning to two groups of white people. To do that does not ignore the humanity of the slaves, or the fact that slavery was the central aspect of a slave's life. But it does set it aside for the duration of the argument.

That "setting aside," after the 20th century, is something we feel as horrible. It is a mental process akin to the one that allows genocides. I suspect it is a natural muscle in the human mind, but it is one we're desperately trying not to exercise.

A similar grappling goes on in literature, dealt with more openly but no less emotionally. Readers, writers, and critics anguish over writing they know is good, and that actually opens minds in the dominant race toward the downtrodden one, yet it relies on stereotypes to do so, and it takes that other race, ultimately, as a backdrop or a symbol.

In America, we have the "problem" of "*Huck Finn*." The British and the Europeans have the same ambivalence toward Joseph Conrad, especially "*Heart of Darkness*."

Chinua Achebe, father of modern African literature, has long argued that Conrad was nothing more than "a thoroughgoing racist." Caryl Phillips, an author and writer who admires both Conrad and his great African detractor, sat down with Achebe one day and tried to hash out his outrage for a book she respects. The results were published [Feb. 24, 2003] in a long and fascinating article in the British newspaper *The Guardian*. One of the things Phillips, and most modern Westerners, like about "*Heart of Darkness*" is its grim questions about the colonizing mission that so many Europeans of Conrad's day took for granted as the proper ordering of God's creation.

Achebe understands this, but he finds it insufficient. He tells her:

"Africa as setting and backdrop, which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?"

Later, he tells her,

"I am an African. What interests me is what I learn in Conrad about myself. To use me as a symbol may be bright or clever, but if it reduces my humanity by the smallest fraction I don't like it."

She answers him.

"Conrad does present Africans as having 'rudimentary' souls."

Achebe draws himself upright.

"Yes, you will notice that the European traders have 'tainted' souls, Marlow has a 'pure' soul, but I am to accept that mine is 'rudimentary'?" He shakes his head. "Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a very short-lived period of ambivalence about the certainty of this colonising mission, and *Heart of Darkness* falls into this period. But you cannot compromise my humanity in order that you explore your own ambiguity. I cannot accept that. My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems."

The realisation hits me with force. I am not an African. Were I an African I suspect I would feel the same way as my host. But I was raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the

stereotypically reductive images of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilisation. I feel momentarily ashamed that I might have become caught up with this theme and subsequently overlooked how offensive this novel might be to a man such as Chinua Achebe and to millions of other Africans. Achebe is right; to the African reader the price of Conrad's eloquent denunciation of colonisation is the recycling of racist notions of the "dark" continent and her people. Those of us who are not from Africa may be prepared to pay this price, but this price is far too high for Achebe. However lofty Conrad's mission, he has, in keeping with times past and present, compromised African humanity in order to examine the European psyche. Achebe's response is understandably personal.

And those of us who muck around in history have it harder than Caryl Phillips. A literature student can walk away from a novel, even a beloved one, and take up another. But we have only the one past. And if you find it too soul-destroying to enter into a state of mind that can feel white supremacy as God's law, or if you aren't willing sometimes to think of slaves as a sort of property-with-free-will, I can certainly understand that. But you'll never understand the whys and hows of the Civil War without it.

Which leads inevitably to the question, does the strong leftist, social progressive, personal ideology of a Eugene Genovese or an Eric Foner (before you accuse me of stereotyping, read their own autobiographical stories) color their historical writing? I would be amazed if it didn't. History isn't written by emotionless pod people. What they choose to investigate, what they choose to see, is very deliberate. In most cases, they will cheerfully acknowledge this. Read their addresses to one another in the professional organizations. They write the past, but they live the present, and their academic work is done with a view to a future they would like to shape.

Listen to Genovese, answering the interviewer's question, "You grew up in a working-class family. Did this experience influence your scholarship? If so, how?"

"Undoubtedly it did in a big way. The specifics, however, are hard to come by. To take a direct example, my discussion of the driver in 'Roll, Jordan, Roll' drew upon the stories that my father, a wood caulker, told me of the contradictory roles of foremen on the docks in the port of New York. More broadly, growing up with workers and in a working-class neighborhood provided a strong antidote to the romanticism that characterizes a good deal of the 'new labor history.'

"I entered the communist movement in 1945 at age fifteen and spent summers working in shops as an organizer for Communist-led unions. It was a valuable experience, which reinforced my hard class attitudes but also my resistance to romanticism. ... In any case, I grew up in a class-conscious home -- class-conscious but by no means ideologically driven. I hated the bourgeoisie with the terrible passion that perhaps only a child can muster. When I came across some Communists at age fifteen and read the Communist Manifesto and some other pamphlets, I suddenly had a precise focus for my hatred. I would happily have sent the bastards to firing squads in large numbers, and their wives and children along with them.

"... My biggest problem as a historian has always been, I suppose, the conscious effort to rein in that hatred and not let it distort my reading of the historical record. I am sure that it has taken a toll, but I hope I have kept that toll to a minimum."^[1]

As he hints, his practical side later rebelled against doctrinaire Marxism (it ultimately led him to Catholicism), and cost him banishment from leftist academic historical circles. He emerged, recently, as one who has been able to write with some sympathy and understanding of the Southern "master

class" and to separate slavery from racism and say the latter, not the former, is the real American tragedy.

Yet I still think there is a lot more doctrinaire tone here than most people will be comfortable with who are interested in knowing history as what really happened. Describing one written work of his, Genovese states his goal like this: "I was trying to help develop a left-wing orientation toward the re-emerging problem of black nationalism so that the white Left could prepare itself to contribute constructively to emerging struggles." And looking back on the entire body of work he and his contemporaries accomplished, he concludes, "Whatever our errors and inadequacies, I think we can claim to have accomplished what we set out to do: to reorient the study of southern slave society and to compel a confrontation with a new set of questions."

1. "Eugene D. Genovese and History: An Interview," in **Slavery, Secession, and Southern History**, ed. Robert Louis Paquette and Louis A Ferleger, University Press of Virginia, 2000, p.197.

The VIEW from the SOUTH

During the 1840s, slavery became the symbol and character of all sectional differences. It was the emotional gasoline on the sectional fires. Its moral and social implications colored every issue in terms of right and rights. William Seward, the Republican leader, recognized the fact: "Every question, political, civil, or ecclesiastical, however foreign to the subject of slavery, brings up slavery as an incident, and the incident supplants the principal question."

White Americans had been grappling with the slavery problem since the Revolution. But the classic image of the absolutist "abolitionist" was a late development. Organized antislavery in the early 19th century, as a historian has written, "differed strikingly from the caustic brand Garrison and his colleagues would promote after 1830. It was concentrated in the upper South, was conciliatory to the master, and had minimal sympathy for blacks." [1] It stressed gradual manumission, minimal economic disruption, and repatriation to Africa. Its most prominent organization was the American Colonization Society.

On Jan. 1, 1831, William Lloyd Garrison published the first issue of "*The Liberator*" in Boston. Garrison's rhetoric was abrasive and vituperative, and poured out loathing for the Southern slavemasters. And if the drift began before he emerged, he certainly hammered the wedge in with all he had. Unlike earlier "abolitionists," Garrison and his followers insisted that the process of emancipation begin immediately. They were narrow, self-righteous, and morally firm. That's always been an appealing combination to a lot of Americans.

The New England Anti-Slavery Society formed in 1832 with the Garrison doctrine at its core. A little over a year later, the American Anti-Slavery Society formed, and gave the abolitionists a national organization. Thanks to the Tappans and other wealthy abolitionists, at least three-quarters of a million pieces of anti-slavery propaganda were sent out by 1838. The mass mailings sparked riots in South Carolina.

Anti-abolitionist mob violence, Lovejoy's murder, and the Gag Resolution all helped steer sympathy to the abolitionist cause and created, in the Northern mind, the spectre of "slave power," the unyielding and irrational force that supposedly motivated the leadership of the South.

Nat Turner's bloody slave uprising came seven months after the debut of *"The Liberator."* Despite a lack of evidence for a connection, these two events were firmly connected in the minds of Southerners and solidified the specter of a powerful Northern movement that would literally rejoice in the massacre of Southern whites.

The abolition movement fell apart in 1840 over "the woman question" among other matters of tactics, and the Garrison wing further lost credibility when it (ironically, considering how things turned out) embraced "disunionism" in 1844 -- the notion that the free states should withdraw from the union and have nothing to do with slavery.

Most Protestant denominations in the early 19th century seemed to regard slavery as not consistent with Christianity, but they were tepid about it. As the conflict became more acrimonious, the Methodists and the Baptists split over it into northern and southern branches. The Presbyterians were already in a schism over a different theological matter. But the abolitionists were always regarded with great disdain by the traditionally pious folk who made up the majority of America. Their flirtations with other causes, such as free love and socialism, made them anathema. They were obviously guilty of sins such as allowing Lucy Stone and the Grimke sisters to address mixed-gender audiences. Their women sometimes wore bloomer pants and smoked cigarettes.

The vocal defenders of slavery generally tried to present slavery as a moral institution, in terms that were understood all over America in the 1850s:

"The white is the superior race, and the black the inferior; and subordination, with or without law, will be the status of the African in this mixed society; and, therefore, it is in the interest of both, and especially of the black race, and of the whole society, that this status should be fixed, controlled, and protected by law."

You may call that speech insidious and odious. Today, it is so, and perhaps that means it was also so in 1856, when Sen. Toombs of Georgia spoke it. But it is also true that the assumptions in his speech were obvious ones to most Americans. Toombs wasn't speaking to an audience of fire-eating Charleston secessionists. He was speaking at the Tremont Temple in Boston.

Containing Slavery

There are assumptions behind the common view of 1850s America that seem to amount to a double standard. It seems to regard the movement of non-slaveholding settlers into the western territories as a natural state of things, and the movement of slaveholding settlers into those same territories as "expansion," driven by some class interest. This is the view of the Republican Party, which put forth its candidates on a platform of slavery "containment."

The Northern movement into the west was in many cases calculated and subsidized by special interests such as the New England Emigrant Aid Society. And many Southern families who brought a few slaves into Kansas were simply Americans looking for a better chance in life. The Southern states had as good a claim to share in America's future as the Northern ones. Regiments from the Southern states fought in the Revolutionary campaigns in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania (I have yet to read of New England regiments defending Charleston or Savannah in 1780). But they felt themselves being cut off from it and forced down into inferiority. They did the bulk of the fighting in the war with Mexico, which brought many of these new territories into the nation.

If you peel back this slave-holder vs. anti-slavery fight over Western territories, you again meet a clash of economic interests. Why did the North fight so hard to prevent slaveholders being allowed to carry their institution into Missouri or Kansas or other western territories? I'd answer that question by

asking another one: Why would a textile mill worker in Lancashire, England, undertake the expense and hazard of a voyage to America, only to go to work on the same mule, for the same wage, in an American mill? Because cheap land in the western territories offered him the prospect of making just enough to quit the factory and set himself up as a farmer.

Hamilton, in his 1791 *"Report on Manufactures,"* anticipated this: "Many, whom Manufacturing views would induce to emigrate, would afterwards yield to the temptations, which the particular situation of this Country holds out to Agricultural pursuits."

That's why New England mill owners resisted the expansion of slave labor and cotton plantations into the Louisiana Purchase territories and the land acquired from Mexico. Immigrants didn't flock to Alabama and Mississippi, because the plantation system that had been created there didn't provide the lure of cheap land for family farms. If Kansas and Nebraska had turned into Alabama and Mississippi, that would have cut off an essential inducement to immigrants, who gave the Northern factories cheap labor.

In reality, the lure was usually just a tease. A fraction of the immigrants to Northern mill towns eventually made it west and set up as farmers. The rest cycled from one row of tenements to another, from Lowell to Montreal to Pittsburgh to Albany, dragging families and debt with them.

The wrangling over slavery in the territories, like the tariff, was part of the bigger picture of one region trying to break out of the original partnership compact and impose its will, its might, and its values on the whole of America. This seems a natural development to us, now, but only because it has been so effectively done. What comes to pass always seems foreordained.

View From the South

In the 1820s and '30s, using money from the export trade and tariffs, Eastern states aggressively built railroads, canals and conventional roads -- extensively aided by the national government in the form of land grants and stock subscriptions -- to capture the Midwestern trade away from New Orleans (and each other).

And as her share of the national bargain, the South got what? She got John Brown. Murderous psychopaths armed and outfitted by the industrialists of the North, sent South to incite race war. Abolitionists gloating about the likelihood of how many white families would be wiped out in a slave rebellion.

The people of the South were aware that, at the time of the Revolution, the upper South and Virginia especially was the wealthiest region of North America. And long before the Civil War, this region had sadly declined. The Virginia state convention of 1829 estimated the state's lands were worth only half what they had been in 1817. The landed gentry economy that produced Washington, Jefferson, and Madison was all but extinct. The North saw this decline, too, and piously blamed it on the baleful influences of slavery. Yet these had been slaveholding regions long before the decline, and in fact slavery was, in part, what built up that early prosperity.

The South looked at that decline and saw it in large part as a product of a defect in the American union, which distributed political power too much on the basis of population. (When I call this a "defect," I'm trying to elucidate the thinking of many Southerners in 1860, not the thinking of me today.) The Southerner looked at the decline of Southern prosperity and the rapid rise of fortunes among what had been in 1787 shabby communities of fish oil merchants in New England. And he looked at the fact that, in the first House of Representatives, Virginia had 10 members and New York six. And that, after the census of 1860, the proportion would be Virginia 11, New York 30.

And he thought about all the tariff bills his state had been asked to support, to protect the infant woolen mills of Connecticut, the rum distilleries of Massachusetts, the iron and paper mills of Pennsylvania. He thought how in some cases the Southern representatives had objected to these tariffs, which forced them to pay more for certain goods, but in many other cases his representatives had voted for the good of the whole country.

And he thought how the Northern powers, whenever possible (as it seemed to him, and as he was told by his newspapers and his political leaders), had used their hegemony in Washington to not only line their own pockets, but to weaken and undermine the South's economy, including the slavery that was intimately woven into it.

And he saw the speeches and pamphlets of the Republicans printed in his newspapers. And he heard the certain claims of what their election would mean, in accelerating what had already been happening.

And he decided he had had enough.

You don't have to agree with it, but you have to try to see it.

1. Ronald G. Walters, **American Reformers 1815-1860** (revised ed.), Hill & Wang Pub., 1997.

LINCOLN as a WRITER

I differ with some of my Southern friends in that I see Abraham Lincoln as a literary genius, one of the great American prose stylists and certainly the greatest ever to occupy the Presidency.

He could have written a Greek tragedy. Instead, he starred in one; and his abilities as a writer were accessories to his acts in office. They also gave his hagiographers ample material from which to build the myth of the patient, tolerant, humble Lincoln. That man is Lincoln's great fictional triumph; a character as enduring as Huck Finn and about as authentic. Herndon is the antidote, the man who knew him like a brother and described the struggles for self-control, the ambition, the intellectual arrogance, the bouts of rage and depression. The Lincoln worshippers in the History Departments were embarrassed by Herndon and tried to bury him in footnotes.

Those lulled by the music of Lincoln's words tend to miss the facts and the deeds. Perhaps it's not a coincidence that my deaf fiancée, who has no ear for the music of Lincoln's prose, finds him despicable. All the better to see the rocks that his siren words disguised.

Sometimes, he can make me laugh out loud. Lincoln, in a letter from his youth, describes meeting the girl he had agreed to court in Illinois:

"I knew she was over-size, but she now appeared a fair match for Falstaff; I knew she was called an 'old maid,' and I felt no doubt of the truth of at least half of the appellation."

You have to take a second to unravel that "half of the appellation" to get the joke, and it's a mean one. That's typical of him, though. I don't know if it's true, as some say, that Lincoln never lies; but you have to read him very carefully. When in the congressional election of 1846 he was accused (more or less correctly) of being an infidel, he replied that he could never support "a man for office, whom I knew to be an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion."

The key word, of course, is "open." But the letter had the desired effect, and the Protestant objection died down. Just so, during the Mexican War, in 1848, he had eloquently staked out the moral high ground for rebellion: "Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better." If Lincoln had been asked to explain these words in 1862, Gore Vidal pointed out, "Lawyer Lincoln would probably have said, rather bleakly, that the key phrase here was 'and having the power.' "

"*Macbeth*" was his favorite play. That's ominous. In his **Springfield Lyceum speech of 1838** -- one of the key documents to understanding Lincoln's character -- he tells how an ambitious man, under the guise of fighting slavery, might re-order a republican nation in his own image.

That speech is available online, so I'm not going to take up space with it here. But there's another document that is not to be found among the reams of Lincoln material posted on the Web. And to me, it's one of the most crucial: the letter he wrote in June 1863 to Erastus Corning and others in New York state who had petitioned against Lincoln's trampling of civil liberties in the name of war for the Union.

He took the petition as an opportunity to reply with a public letter explaining his view of these things. And, to me, it's repressive and paranoid. Makes me think of Terrill, the Red Legs captain, in "*Outlaw Josie Wales*."

"...[A]rrests are made, not so much for what has been done, as for what probably would be done. ... The man who stands by and says nothing when the peril of his Government is discussed, cannot be misunderstood. If not hindered, he is sure to help the enemy; much more, if he talks ambiguously -- talks for his country with 'buts' and 'ifs' and 'ands.' "

Ye gods! It's not only the active traitors who should be arrested, in other words, but anyone who fails to cheer loud enough at the government pep rally. Because that's a sure sign of a traitor waiting to happen. You were either with him all the way, or against him. To simply decry the war effort was enough to brand you a traitor:

"... [H]e who dissuades one man from volunteering, or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle. Yet this dissuasion or inducement may be so conducted as to be no defined crime of which any civil court would take cognizance."

I've just been reading of the trial of Aaron Burr, where it was a serious legal question whether a man could be convicted of "treason" until he had actually physically made war on the government of the United States. Lincoln would extend that definition, in the face of centuries of law and custom and constitutional safeguard, into the very thoughts and words of his citizens. Now, here's the paranoia:

"The insurrectionists had been preparing for it more than thirty years, while the Government had taken no steps to resist them. The formerly had carefully considered all the means which could be turned to their account. It undoubtedly was a well-pondered reliance with them that, in their own unrestricted efforts to destroy Union, Constitution, and law, all together, the Government would, in great degree, be restrained by the same Constitution and law from arresting their progress. Their sympathizers pervaded all departments of the Government and nearly all communities of the people."

I'm unaware of any active, continuous conspiracy that began in 1830 and drove onward with a single-minded purpose to Fort Sumter. But Lincoln seems to believe in one. And any public objection to the government stripping away basic rights from tens of thousands of people? That, too, is the work of the supple tools of the traitors, the wolves among the herds, the fifth column:

"From this material, under cover of 'liberty of speech,' 'liberty of the press,' and 'habeas corpus,' they hoped to keep on foot among us a most efficient corps of spies, informers, suppliers, and aiders and abettors of their cause in a thousand ways. They knew that in times such as they were inaugurating, by the Constitution itself, the 'habeas corpus' might be suspended; but they also knew they had friends who would make a question as to who was to suspend it; meanwhile, their spies and others might remain at large to help their cause. Or, if, as has happened, the Executive should suspend the writ, without ruinous waste of time, instances of arresting innocent persons might occur, as are always likely to occur in such cases; and then a clamour could be raised in regard to this, which might be, at least, of some service to the insurgent cause.

"It needed no very keen perception to discover this part of the enemy's programme, so soon as, by open hostilities, their machinery was fairly put in motion. Yet, thoroughly imbued with a reverence for the guaranteed rights of individuals, I was slow to adopt the strong measures which by degrees I had been forced to regard as being within the exceptions of the Constitution, and as indispensable to the public safety."

Read it like Lincoln has to be read -- with an eye to the key phrase, which likely will be a subtle one: "... strong measures which by degrees *I had been forced to regard as being within* the exceptions of the Constitution ..."

If you want an image of what he would have done had he, not Buchanan, been in power during the secession winter, he spells it out for you:

"Of how little value the constitutional provisions I have quoted will be rendered, if arrests shall never be made until defined crimes shall have been committed, may be illustrated by a few notable examples. Gen. John C. Breckenridge, Gen. Robert E. Lee, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Gen. John B. Magruder, Gen. William B. Preston, Gen. Simon B. Buckner, and Commodore Franklin Buchanan, now occupying the very highest places in the Rebel war service, were all within the power of the Government since the Rebellion began, and were nearly as well known to be traitors then as now.

"Unquestionably if we had seized and held them, the insurgent cause would be much weaker. But no one of them had then committed any crime defined in the law. Every one of them, if arrested, would have been discharged on habeas corpus were the writ allowed to operate. In view of these and similar cases, I think the time not unlikely to come when I shall be blamed for having made too few arrests rather than too many."

That time has not yet come. Unless, perhaps, it has arrived in the private ruminations of a John Ashcroft or a Richard Nixon.*

** In light of what has since transpired, this was unfair to Ashcroft.*

This afternoon the President of the United States gave audience to a Committee of colored men at the White House. They were introduced by the Rev. J. Mitchell, Commissioner of Emigration. E. M. Thomas, the Chairman, remarked that they were there by invitation to hear what the Executive had to say to them.

Having all been seated, the President, after a few preliminary observations, informed them that a sum of money had been appropriated by Congress, and placed at his disposition for the purpose of aiding the colonization in some country of the people, or a portion of them, of African descent, thereby making it his duty, as it had for a long time been his inclination, to favor that cause; and why, he asked, should the people of your race be colonized, and where? Why should they leave this country? This is, perhaps, the first question for proper consideration.

You and we are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffer very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side. If this is admitted, it affords a reason at least why we should be separated. You here are freemen I suppose.

A Voice: Yes, sir.

The President---Perhaps you have long been free, or all your lives. Your race are suffering, in my judgment, the greatest wrong inflicted on any people. But even when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. You are cut off from many of the advantages which the other race enjoy. The aspiration of men is to enjoy equality with the best when free, but on this broad continent, not a single man of your race is made the equal of a single man of ours. Go where you are treated the best, and the ban is still upon you.

I do not propose to discuss this, but to present it as a fact with which we have to deal. I cannot alter it if I would. It is a fact, about which we all think and feel alike, I and you. We look to our condition, owing to the existence of the two races on this continent. I need not recount to you the effects upon white men, growing out of the institution of Slavery. I believe in its general evil effects on the white race. See our present condition---the country engaged in war!---our white men cutting one another's throats, none knowing how far it will extend; and then consider what we know to be the truth. But for your race among us there could not be war, although many men engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other. Nevertheless, I repeat, without the institution of Slavery and the colored race as a basis, the war could not have an existence.

It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated. I know that there are free men among you, who even if they could better their condition are not as much inclined to go out of the country as those, who being slaves could obtain their freedom on this condition. I suppose one of the principal difficulties in the way of colonization is that the free colored man cannot see that his comfort would be advanced by it. You may believe you can live in Washington or elsewhere in the United States the remainder of your life, perhaps more so than you can in any foreign country, and hence you may come to the conclusion that you have nothing to do with the idea of going to a foreign country. This is (I speak in no unkind sense) an extremely selfish view of the case. But you ought to do something to help those who are not so fortunate as yourselves.

There is an unwillingness on the part of our people, harsh as it may be, for you free colored people to remain with us. Now, if you could give a start to white people, you would open a wide door for many to be made free. If we deal with those who are not free at the beginning, and whose intellects are clouded by Slavery, we have very poor materials to start with. If intelligent colored men, such as are before me, would move in this matter, much might be accomplished. It is exceedingly important that we have men at the beginning capable of thinking as white men, and not those who have been systematically oppressed.

There is much to encourage you. For the sake of your race you should sacrifice something of your present comfort for the purpose of being as grand in that respect as the white people. It is a cheering thought throughout life that something can be done to ameliorate the condition of those who have been subject to the hard usage of the world. It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself, and claims kindred to the great God who made him. In the American Revolutionary war sacrifices were made by men engaged in it; but they were cheered by the future. Gen. Washington himself endured greater physical hardships than if he had remained a British subject. Yet he was a happy man, because he was engaged in benefiting his race--- something for the children of his neighbors, having none of his own.

The colony of Liberia has been in existence a long time. In a certain sense it is a success. The old President of Liberia, Roberts, has just been with me--- the first time I ever saw him. He says they have within the bounds of that colony between 300,000 and 400,000 people, or more than in some of our old States, such as Rhode Island

or Delaware, or in some of our newer States, and less than in some of our larger ones. They are not all American colonists, or their descendants. Something less than 12,000 have been sent thither from this country. Many of the original settlers have died, yet, like people elsewhere, their offspring outnumber those deceased.

The question is if the colored people are persuaded to go anywhere, why not there? One reason for an unwillingness to do so is that some of you would rather remain within reach of the country of your nativity. I do not know how much attachment you may have toward our race. It does not strike me that you have the greatest reason to love them. But still you are attached to them at all events.

The place I am thinking about having for a colony is in Central America. It is nearer to us than Liberia---not much more than one-fourth as far as Liberia, and within seven days'--- run by steamers. Unlike Liberia it is on a great line of travel---it is a highway. The country is a very excellent one for any people, and with great natural resources and advantages, and especially because of the similarity of climate with your native land---thus being suited to your physical condition.

The particular place I have in view is to be a great highway from the Atlantic or Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and this particular place has all the advantages for a colony. On both sides there are harbors among the finest in the world. Again, there is evidence of very rich coal mines. A certain amount of coal is valuable in any country, and there may be more than enough for the wants of the country. Why I attach so much importance to coal is, it will afford an opportunity to the inhabitants for immediate employment till they get ready to settle permanently in their homes. If you take colonists where there is no good landing, there is a bad show; and so where there is nothing to cultivate, and of which to make a farm. But if something is started so that you can get your daily bread as soon as you reach there, it is a great advantage. Coal land is the best thing I know of with which to commence an enterprise.

To return, you have been talked to upon this subject, and told that a speculation is intended by gentlemen, who have an interest in the country, including the coal mines. We have been mistaken all our lives if we do not know whites as well as blacks look to their self-interest. Unless among those deficient of intellect everybody you trade with makes something. You meet with these things here as elsewhere. If such persons have what will be an advantage to them, the question is whether it cannot be made of advantage to you. You are intelligent, and know that success does not as much depend on external help as on self-reliance.

Much, therefore, depends upon yourselves. As to the coal mines, I think I see the means available for your self reliance. I shall, if I get a sufficient number of you engaged, have provisions made that you shall not be wronged. If you will engage in the enterprise I will spend some of the money intrusted to me. I am not sure you will succeed. The Government may lose the money, but we cannot succeed unless we try; but we think, with care, we can succeed. The political affairs in Central America are not in quite as satisfactory condition as I wish. There are contending factions in that quarter; but it is true all the factions are agreed alike on the subject of colonization, and want it, and are more generous than we are here. To your colored race they have no objection.

Besides, I would endeavor to have you made equals, and have the best assurance that you should be the equals of the best. The practical thing I want to ascertain is whether I can get a number of able-bodied men, with their wives and children, who are willing to go, when I present evidence of encouragement and protection. Could I get a hundred tolerably intelligent men, with their wives and children, to "cut their own fodder," so to speak? Can I have fifty? If I could find twenty-five able-bodied men, with a mixture of women and children, good things in the family relation, I think I could make a successful commencement.

I want you to let me know whether this can be done or not. This is the practical part of my wish to see you. There are subjects of very great importance, worthy of a month's study, instead of a speech delivered in an hour. I ask you then to consider seriously not pertaining to yourselves merely, not for your race, and ours, for the present time, but as one of the things, if successfully managed, for the good of mankind---not confined to the present generation, but as

"From age to age descends the lay,
To millions yet to be,
Till far its echoes roll away,
Into eternity."

The above is merely given as the substance of the President's remarks. The Chairman of the delegation briefly replied that "they would hold a consultation and in a short time give an answer."

The President said: "Take your full time---no hurry at all." The delegation then withdrew.

THADDEUS STEVENS

Thaddeus Stevens, at first glance, looks like God's gift to Lancaster, Pennsylvania's, quest to be a mecca for 21st century historical tourism.

Unstained by race prejudice, he shines bright against the dismal background of 19th century white America. He connects our collective past with a future we still yearn for, when a diverse United States will fairly share her national blessings. His mulatto housekeeper, Lydia Smith, was an object of rumor and scandal during her life, and speculation by historians. Whatever the truth of it, Stevens' relationship with his employee seems to be a model of mutual respect in an age when black women got scant dignity in Northern white households.

Besides, Thad's old home and office sit smack in the bootprint of revitalization, on the half-block of downtown Lancaster that was marked for demolition to make way for the new convention center. The guardians of local history stepped in, and that plan changed.

His house and office offer an ugly and uninspired example of 19th century architecture, which is wholly in step with the character of the man. Stevens wore a wig cut the same way all around, so he wouldn't have to bother about which side was the front. He pursued his political visions with vindictive force, reckless of the consequence. He brought a tangled, bullying personality to his work as a legislator. I think it's worthy to memorialize him. Any American as powerful and influential as Stevens was ought to be remembered, whether you like him or not.

But if you're going to raise up a statue, it pays to think first about how you'll pose the man. My question is, do we intend to treat Thaddeus Stevens as a full-blooded figure from a complex and turbulent history, or as a cardboard god of civil rights?

Start with another question: Did he hate slavery more than he hated the South? I have studied his works and writings for years, and I confess I cannot decide. Stevens was born and raised in Vermont. He had a deformed foot, and his father was a drunk who couldn't hold a job and eventually abandoned his family. Thaddeus' mother worked as a maid and housekeeper to support her children. He left no autobiography, but it is difficult not to see his early struggles as the force that shaped his lifelong resentment of privilege.

"He sympathized with the poor, the perpetually downtrodden, and the outcaste [sic];" according to one local account, "and was willing that there be retribution for them at the expense of others. ... His interest in the Negro was largely resultant from the fact that they were poor; and Stevens knew, from his own youth, the meaning of poverty." A fellow Congressman said of Stevens, "He seemed to feel that every wrong inflicted upon the human race was a blow struck against him."

Stevens put himself through Dartmouth College, studied law in York and opened a law practice in Gettysburg. By 1821 he was prosperous enough to invest in real estate and iron foundries. He rose to prominence in Pennsylvania when ignorant popular suspicion of the Masonic order erupted into a bizarre conspiracy-theory movement. Since Masons were typically a fraternity of the privileged, Stevens eagerly joined the crusade against them, and it propelled him into the Pennsylvania legislature.

His tenure there showcased the best and the worst of the man. He helped lead a witch hunt against the Masons and other secret societies. He used his position to benefit his business, may have manipulated elections, and certainly bribed newspaper editors. Yet while in Harrisburg he also delivered a brilliant speech that single-handedly saved the state's infant public school system from an attempt to abolish it by the wealthy and devout. And he fought the state Constitution of 1838, which took away from black males the right to vote.

When the political tide in Pennsylvania turned against the Anti-Masonics, Stevens refused to yield power and the governor had to call in armed militia to bring order in the state Legislature. By 1839, he was out of power and almost broke. His iron mill was failing, and the Anti-Masons had been absorbed into the elitist Whig Party.

Stevens was past 50 and had evidently failed in life when he came to Lancaster in 1842 and moved into the property that local folks came to call "Old Thad's House," just past the northeast corner of South Queen and East Vine streets. He bought the lot and the two houses at sheriff's sale April 21, 1843, for \$4,000. He lived in the north-most one, except when he was in Washington, until his death in 1868, and he was buried from it.

Stevens probably saw the move as a fresh start in the last bastion of Anti-Masonic power in the state, as well as a chance to put his finances in order by practicing law in a wealthy county. An outsider, politically at odds with the powers, Stevens characteristically bulled his way through the local social strata.

Stevens "cared nothing for social life," in the words of one local authority, and as a self-described "impious" man, he made no attempt to win over deeply religious Lancaster County. Instead, within six months he cowed the local lawyers with his intellect, command of the law and unerring nose for the crucial legal points of a case.

Stevens had boarded at a hotel when he lived in Gettysburg. But when he moved to a house in Lancaster, he had to find a housekeeper. There was a class of unmarried or widowed women who managed the cooking, cleaning, laundry and household concerns of bachelor professional men like Stevens. Stevens' search eventually led him to Lydia Hamilton Smith, a mulatto widow in Gettysburg with two small children. Smith took the job in 1848, moved with her family to Lancaster, and stayed with Stevens until his death.

Smith and her two boys lived in "a one-story frame house on the rear of Mr. Stevens' lot, fronting on South Christian street," according to a 1924 article in the Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society. Stevens lived in the main house with his two nephews, both of whom also worked as lawyers in the city.

Smith was "assumed by gossips and the press to be his mistress." Historians are divided on the issue. Nothing has been proven, but when asked about the rumors, Stevens only denied being the father of Smith's sons. The innuendos were printed and reprinted, and Stevens, veteran of dozens of libel suits, never brought action.

In July 1866, the "*Lancaster Intelligencer*," a Democratic party organ, wrote, "Nobody doubts that Thaddeus Stevens has always been in favor of negro equality, and here, where his domestic arrangements are so well known, his practical recognition of his pet theory is perfectly well understood. ... There are few men who have not given to the world such open and notorious evidence of a belief in negro equality as Thaddeus Stevens. A personage, not of his race, a female of dusky hue, daily walks the streets of Lancaster when Mr. Stevens is at home. She has presided over his house for years. Even by his own party friends, she is constantly spoken of as Mrs. Stevens. ..." Stevens had brought a libel action against the "*Intelligencer*" in 1858 when it called him a gambler. This time, he was silent.

He insisted that she be called "Mrs. Smith," not "Lydia;" he hired Jacob Eichholtz to paint her portrait; and he left her \$5,000 in his will -- all unusual signs of respect for a white lawyer to show a black housekeeper, but Stevens was not typical of his times or his class.

Through the 1840s, Stevens took in many law students, who eventually became a loyal cadre of young political allies. He paid down his debts and made trouble in the local Whig Party.

He was execrated by the pro-Whig "*Lancaster Examiner*" newspaper as a "pestilent demagogue." The "*Intelligencer*" went the "*Examiner*" one better a few years later and called him "a pestiferous political demagogue."

In the chaotic election year 1848 Stevens won the county's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, perhaps in exchange for his faction's support of the Whig candidate for governor.

In Washington, when he took his seat in Congress, Stevens found a new focus for his contempt for elites: the Southern slaveholders. Growing up, he would have absorbed the New England Puritan's deep-grained hatred of the Cavalier society of the old South. His baiting nature loved to get under their skins, and twist their codes of honor and old-fashioned politeness. After his first term, Howell Cobb, the Georgian who was Speaker of the House, summed him up: "Our enemy has a general now."

Stevens owed his political success, such as it was throughout his life, to his skill at playing the game -- the wire-pulling and dirty tricks that characterized politics in those days. But ultimately he succeeded because he could inflame the electorate's resentments. First he rallied them against the benign Masonic lodges, then, more powerfully, against the South.

Most Pennsylvanians had no love for abolitionists, whom they regarded as meddling and immoral. Pennsylvanians were deeply prejudiced against blacks and had no humanitarian love of slaves. In fact, they were busy petitioning the Legislature to pass laws that would bar blacks from entering Pennsylvania. In 1851, Stevens ran the defense of the Christiana Rioters from behind the scene and helped win their acquittals. But the anti-slavery violence in Christiana helped spark a backlash against him and within a year he was out of Congress and back in Lancaster.

When the new, anti-slavery Republican Party formed in the mid-1850s, Stevens helped organize it in Pennsylvania. The Republican Party in Pennsylvania in the 1850s played down its abolitionist leanings to win votes. For a time, it even avoided the name "Republican," which was too tainted with abolitionism. Instead, Stevens and the fledgling Republicans convinced Northern voters that they were in danger of political subjugation to "slave power" and that their very rights and freedoms were at risk from Southern aristocrats. What was worse, he told them their economic security was at risk. Men in the South, seeking advantage, were telling their own people similar stories about the North. Secession and disunion were murmured in both sections, and the politicians of division, of fear, of hatred, fanned it.

Stevens rode the Republican Party into Congress again in 1858. He was unanimously renominated every two years thereafter through 1866, often running unopposed or against mere token Democratic competition.

After the Southern states left the union, but before the shooting started, many people on both sides worked hard for a compromise. But Stevens, who held a powerful committee position, opposed any concession to the South. He frustrated even President Lincoln, who had staked his career and destiny on union at all costs. Lincoln wanted to keep the Southern stars on the flag. Stevens wanted to let them go so he could punish them. Little more a year and a half into the war, Stevens wrote in a private letter that he hoped the leadership in Washington had "a sufficient grasp of mind, and sufficient moral courage, to treat this as a radical revolution, and remodel our institutions It would involve the desolation of the South as well as emancipation; and a re:peopling of half the Continent. This ought to be done but it startles most men."

He became the House leader of the faction of his party known as the Radicals, who "were primarily responsible for turning the struggle into a war not only to preserve the Union but also to extinguish slavery," in one historical judgment. On March 28, 1864, Stevens proposed a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery, with no mention of compensation to slave-owners. That fall, after Lincoln's re-election and a string of Northern battlefield victories, it was taken up again and ultimately passed, in basically the form Stevens wrote it, to become the 13th Amendment.

After Appomattox, the Radicals opposed President Lincoln's plan for quickly re-uniting and healing the broken nation. When Lincoln's assassination brought Andrew Johnson to power, the new president tried to continue the reconciliation. But Stevens wanted to crush the institutions and culture that had upheld the Confederacy. His faction led the impeachment of Johnson in trumped-up charges. Stevens would have impeached Lincoln himself if he thought he could have gotten away with it. The Radicals nullified Johnson's program and unleashed the hounds of "Reconstruction" on the South.

Thomas Dixon made Stevens the basis for the character "Stoneman," the malevolent Northerner, in 1905 when he published *"The Clansman,"* the book which formed the basis of the film *"Birth of a Nation."*

We were, and to some extent still are, two nations under one flag, and Stevens simply hated the other one. He advocated what now would be called ethnic cleansing.

You cannot sanctify Stevens without involving the whole man.

In the past year, local voices have pumped up the circumstantial evidence that Stevens may have taken a hand in the "Underground Railroad." Making out that Stevens directly helped runaway slaves escape to Canada pushes him into the pantheon of liberators and emancipators. And that certainly is a good thing if you want to market your history based on civil rights alone. Stevens well may have helped runaway slaves flee. But there's no unambiguous evidence of it. In fact, since it was an illegal activity, a clever and controversial Congressman who was breaking the law would likely not leave a paper trail for subsequent generations to discover. The truth probably will never be known.

What we do know is that, in addition to his progressive attitudes about race, he was an uncompromising man bent on narrow political goals that bled into his personal traumas. And he often practiced a brand of politics stoked by fear and hatred. That succeeds today as it did in 1860, and, now as then, it often gets innocent people killed.

Stevens died in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 11, 1868, less than three months after the acquittal of Johnson on impeachment charges that Stevens had largely engineered. Stevens was buried in Shreiner's Cemetery, at Chestnut and Mulberry streets in Lancaster, four days later.

Lancaster Cemetery and Woodward Hill Cemetery, the city's prominent burial grounds, were restricted to whites. Stevens' grave lies, according to the wish engraved on his tomb, in Shreiner's small cemetery, "that I might be enabled to illustrate in my death the principles which I have advocated throughout a long life."

Lydia Smith died in a hospital in Washington on Feb. 14, 1884. Her funeral was held from the old Stevens home, then owned by George Heiss, a prominent tobacco dealer and city councilman. She was buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, at the church where she long had been a member.

ASPECTS of the CHRISTIANA RIOT

The "Christiana Riot" is one of the better-known stories from the days of the Underground Railroad and runaway slave resistance, in part because of the subsequent trial and in part because William Parker published his story in the *"Atlantic Monthly"* in 1866.

The tale is set on a farm outside the town of Christiana, Pennsylvania, near the Lancaster-Chester county boundary and not far from the Mason-Dixon Line. There was a lawlessness in the region that predated slavery disputes: it was a haven for horse thieves and chicken thieves. The landscape of steep wooded hills and scrubby ravines made ideal hideouts and perfect terrain for stealthy movement. The intersection of three states and five counties within a few miles made this a legal shadowland, ideal for outlaws. Taverns, like the Line House between Pennsylvania and Delaware, were deliberately built to straddle boundaries; if the sheriff from one county walked into the tavern, all the criminal element simply shuffled down to the far end of the bar -- out of his jurisdiction. The 1980s movie *"At Close Range"* was based on a modern story from this region, though the setting was shifted to Tennessee.

The path of Eastern Shore Maryland runaways naturally led up through this area, and the borderlands offered a haven to both runaways and kidnappers. Despite the intermittent danger from kidnappers, many free blacks settled in the area, lured in part by a population of sympathetic whites, including Quakers and plenty of farmers willing to hire runaways because they worked hard and worked cheap.

Parker had lived there since he ran off from slavery in Maryland in 1839. He claimed to have set up a protective league among local blacks in the early 1840s, and to have instigated riots to free fugitives from as early as 1841.

Later events can be corroborated. One incident, probably from 1850, involved slave-catchers taking a woman named Elizabeth. They stopped at a tavern, which gave Parker and his gang time to catch up to them and set a trap. One of Parker's men, mounted on a conspicuous white horse, rode behind the wagon with the captured slave. This signaled the others, in hiding on Gap Hill, which wagon to attack. They did, the woman escaped, and Parker claimed the slave-catchers were so badly beaten that up to three of them later died.

Parker also arranged the barn-burning of a tavernkeeper who had said he would welcome slave-catchers, and he and his confederates attacked blacks they believed to be informers. One was badly beaten, in "an appeal to the Lynch Code," and the other had his house burned down around him, although he escaped to a neighbor's, rather than being shot to death as he ran out, as Parker had planned.

Four slaves of Marylander Edward Gorsuch had escaped late in 1849, and they took refuge in the Christiana area. An informer told Gorsuch where they were in August 1851, and the Methodist deacon, known as a kind master, decided to retrieve his property. He went to Philadelphia for the proper papers, along with his son, cousin, nephew, and two neighbors. Joined by U.S. Marshal Henry Kline and two officers, they took the train to Christiana.

Also on the train was a black Philadelphian, Samuel Williams, who knew that this was a posse. His purpose was twofold: to inform the refugees that they were being sought, and to let the posse see him and know that their plans were exposed. The implicit threat of violence intimidated Kline's two men, who returned to Philadelphia, leaving Gorsuch and his party of five and a reluctant Kline.

Kline dragged his feet and the party lost a day, which gave Williams' warning time to circulate in the community. But it also seems that the slaves mistook the delay, and thought Gorsuch had given up. So when the posse arrived at Parker's house at dawn on Sept. 11, it took them by surprise.

Kline and Gorsuch went into the house and told the slaves they wouldn't be punished if they returned with him peacefully. But the blacks on the second floor responded by hurling things at the men in the yard, injuring some of them. Kline then announced his official position and threatened to come upstairs. Gorsuch started up the stairs, but the blacks threw an axe and a pronged fish spear at him, so he retreated out of range. Kline read the warrant and both men then left the house into the yard. A shot was fired, but each side claimed the other had fired it.

A couple of hours passed. Parker said he engaged in a scriptural debate with Gorsuch. There were seven whites against seven blacks, two of the latter women. The stone house was an excellent fort. Kline probably was simply seeing things in a practical way when he said there was no way to take the fugitives with the force on hand, and he advised leaving. But Gorsuch seemed to think time was on his side. If Parker's account is accurate, Gorsuch was right, as some of the band in the house, including Parker's brother and sister-in-law, wanted to give up.

But the delay proved deadly. Some white neighbors, aroused by one of Parker's confederates, arrived at the same time as a large number of local blacks, well armed. The mix of motives of the white neighbors -- Quakers Elijah Lewis and Joseph Scarlett and miller Castner Hanway -- is hard to determine. One theory, plausible to me in the light of Quaker ways, is that they were mainly there to intimidate by their presence, as Williams had attempted to do on the train.

But the effect on the blacks in the Parker house was to galvanize them into resistance. Kline requested aid from Hanway, who warned him he had better leave quickly or blood would be shed. Kline seemed to find this a good idea, but Gorsuch moved toward the house. The blacks attacked, and Gorsuch was killed, possibly "finished off by the women," as Parker later boasted. Gorsuch's son ran to his aid, but was badly wounded himself. The cousin and nephew, during the retreat, suffered buckshot wounds.

The blacks most obviously involved in the fight -- Parker, the men in his house, the other Gorsuch fugitives, and two who were wounded -- set off for Canada that night. Parker was hidden for a time in upstate New York by Frederick Douglass. Parker's wife and sister-in-law were left behind to be arrested, only to be released when the prosecution decided it would damage its case to try women.

Because of the violence, blacks were rounded up in the area and as many as six were remanded to slavery, including Parker's mother-in-law. Parker also left behind a large packet of letters from fugitives and resisters that would have incriminated many in the area had it come into the hands of the law, but a local Quaker found it first and burned it.

Twenty-seven blacks and three whites were arrested and charged with treason. Lewis pretended he had acted only until he found out it was not an illegal kidnapping. Hanway pretended to be just observing. The trial for treason, rather than some more appropriate charge, was an attempt to placate Southern anger, for a slaveholder had been murdered in the course of a legal action while the North, figuratively, looked on.

1860 ELECTION

Some writers blame the Democrats, and especially the Southern Democrats, for Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860. The split in the Democratic Party that summer is said to have opened the door for the new Republican Party. Because the divided Democrats could not agree on a candidate, this theory goes, the split in the party allowed Lincoln to capture the White House with a mere 39 percent of the popular vote.

This is provably false. Lincoln would have won even if all the non-Lincoln votes had gone to a single candidate. Yet the "divided Democrats" myth persists. So here's the math.

Lincoln got 180 electoral votes and 1,865,593 popular votes.

Breckenridge got 72 electoral votes and 848,356 popular votes.

Douglas got 12 electoral votes and 1,382,713 popular votes.

Bell got 39 electoral votes and 592,906 popular votes.

Even if you take all the Democratic electors into one pool, they only have 123 electoral votes. Lincoln still wins. But what about the popular vote? As Americans learned again in 2000, elections can hinge on the distribution of votes among the states, and a candidate can win without a majority of the popular vote, so long as he has majorities in key places. So the thing to do is look at the vote by states in 1860. Surely 39 percent of the popular vote couldn't have carried Lincoln into the White House.

Amazingly, it could at that moment in American history. Here is the breakdown of the vote in the 33 states that then comprised the Union. Slightly different numbers are given in different sources, but they do not vary by more than a dozen or so in most cases, and never by enough to change the outcomes:

STATE	ELECTORS	LINCOLN	DOUGLAS	BRECKENRIDGE	BELL
ALABAMA	9	0	13,618	48,669	27,875
ARKANSAS	4	0	5,357	28,732	20,063
CALIFORNIA	4	38,733	37,999	33,969	9,111
CONNECTICUT	6	43,488	15,431	14,372	1,528
DELAWARE	3	3,822	1,066	7,339	3,888
FLORIDA	3	0	223	8,277	4,801
GEORGIA	10	0	11,581	52,176	42,960
ILLINOIS	11	172,171	160,215	2,331	4,914

INDIANA	13	139,033	115,509	12,295	5,306
IOWA	4	70,302	55,639	1,035	1,763
KENTUCKY	12	1,364	25,651	53,143	66,058
LOUISIANA	6	0	7,625	22,681	20,204
MAINE	8	62,811	29,693	6,368	2,046
MARYLAND	8	2,294	5,966	42,482	41,760
MASSACHUSETTS	13	106,684	34,370	6,163	22,331
MICHIGAN	6	88,481	65,057	805	415
MINNESOTA	4	22,069	11,920	748	50
MISSISSIPPI	7	0	3,282	40,768	25,045
MISSOURI	9	17,028	58,801	31,362	58,372
NEW HAMPSHIRE	5	37,519	25,887	2,125	412
NEW JERSEY	7*	58,346	62,869	0	0
NEW YORK	35	362,646	312,510	0	0
N. CAROLINA	10	0	2,737	48,846	45,129
OHIO	23	231,709	187,421	11,406	12,194
OREGON	3	5,329	4,136	5,075	218
PENNSYLVANIA	27	268,030	16,765	178,871	12,776
RHODE ISLAND	4	12,244	7,707	0	0
S. CAROLINA	8**	--	--	--	--
TENNESSEE	12	0	11,281	65,097	69,728
TEXAS	4	0	18	47,454	15,383
VERMONT	5	33,808	8,649	218	1,969
VIRGINIA	15	1,887	16,198	74,325	74,481
WISCONSIN	5	86,110	65,021	887	161

*New Jersey's electoral votes were split, four for Lincoln, three for Douglas.

**South Carolina still did not hold popular votes for presidential electors. The state's electors backed Breckenridge.

It's interesting to compare the electoral votes from today and see the relative importance of certain states, especially the enormous importance of New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The seven deep south states had 47 electoral votes, but were outnumbered by Pennsylvania and Ohio alone. Vermont had more electors than Texas.

To make Lincoln lose this election, obviously, the states that have to shift columns are the ones where he got electoral votes. Assume all the non-Lincoln voters would vote for one candidate. In fact there was such a fusion ticket in New York, Rhode Island, and a few other Northern places. It wasn't enough.

In other states, a fusion was unlikely. In places like Baltimore, the Constitutional Union Party vote for Bell represented local interests, or die-hard Know-Nothingism which likely would have gone for Lincoln if it had no other option. But allow that every non-Lincoln vote in 1860 could have gone to a single candidate, to give the "divided Democrats" argument every advantage. Here's what you get:

STATE	ELECTORS	LINCOLN	non-LINCOLN
CALIFORNIA	4	38,733	81,079
CONNECTICUT	6	43,488	31,331
ILLINOIS	11	172,171	167,460
INDIANA	13	139,033	133,110
IOWA	4	70,302	58,437
MAINE	8	62,811	38,107
MASSACHUSETTS	13	106,684	62,864
MICHIGAN	6	88,481	66,277
MINNESOTA	4	22,069	12,718
NEW HAMPSHIRE	5	37,519	28,424
NEW JERSEY	7	58,346	62,869
NEW YORK	35	362,646	312,510
OHIO	23	231,709	211,021
OREGON	3	5,329	9,429
PENNSYLVANIA	27	268,030	208,412
RHODE ISLAND	4	12,244	7,707
VERMONT	5	33,808	10,836
WISCONSIN	5	86,110	66,069

Only California's 4 electoral votes and Oregon's 3 switch into the Democrat category. Lincoln's margin of victory narrows, especially in states like Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. But he still wins in those places. The "fusion" vote in New Jersey is unchanged. The electors there still split 4-3.

Lincoln has 173 electoral votes; his imaginary opponent has 130.

The Republican party had pored over election returns for six years, and it knew what it had to do to win. It had a regional strategy to win the election by playing the electoral college numbers game. It did

so splendidly. The South was cut out of the political equation. The divided Democratic Party was a non-issue.

It's not as though the split Democratic ticket discouraged voters. The voter turnout rate in 1860 was the second-highest on record (81.2 percent, after only 1876, with 81.8 percent).

Choosing Lincoln as the candidate was all part of the strategy -- as was keeping him quiet until after the election so that the carefully constructed Republican platform of 1860, with a plank for each interest group, stood as the real candidate. Seward was the most famous Republican, but Seward, no matter how he tempered his rhetoric, was seen as a radical. And the Republicans -- not just the party bosses, but the rank and file -- had been studying this one hard since 1856, and they knew how many votes they needed to swing in three crucial Northern border states that cared little for abolitionists.

Lincoln's great virtue in 1860 was that he had not been nationally prominent long enough to have powerful enemies or a real reputation. He could be the anti-slavery candidate in Massachusetts, and the tariff protection candidate in Pennsylvania, and the genial rail-splitter in places where neither issue aroused much heat.

He could appeal to the important Know-Nothing element in the patchwork Republican Party, which rejected Seward. Former Know-Nothings supported him. "We cannot elect extreme men," said one of them, Richard M. Corwine. "Moderation in their past life & present views, must mark them or we cannot elect them." Corwine was one of the lower North delegates who blocked Seward early in the convention and opened the door for Lincoln.

Politics are strange. Lincoln and Seward both opposed Nativism, but as historian Tyler Anbinder has shown (in *"Nativism and Slavery"*), the Republicans needed those Fillmore votes. The old Know-Nothings had a conservative tendency that rejected Seward out of hand. And Lincoln did reward them with patronage, Simon Cameron being a notorious example, though that was a double-dip patronage: it rewarded Pennsylvania as well.

SECESSION

In the special session of the Georgia legislature that was called in November 1860 to consider secession, Robert Toombs, future Confederate Secretary of State, gave a forceful speech outlining the wrongs the South had endured.

He recounted Northern political efforts to forever exclude slavery from Missouri, most of the Louisiana Purchase territory, California, and New Mexico.

"The South at all times demanded nothing but equality in the common territories, equal enjoyment of them with their property, to that extended to Northern citizens and their property -- nothing more. They said, we pay our part in all the blood and treasure expended in their acquisition. Give us equality of enjoyment, equal right to expansion -- it is as necessary to our prosperity as yours."

But at every turn they met resistance. And this was not because free men didn't want to compete with slave labor -- they didn't, but these were almost entirely agricultural territories. It was not because settlers from free states were bent on excluding all blacks, free and slave, from the territories -- even though they were.

Instead, as Toombs told it, this amounted to a policy, and the policy was explicit in the Republican Party platforms. The target of the policy was not the West, but the South. From 800,000 slaves in the South in 1790, there were more than 4 million in 1860.

"The country has expanded to meet this growing want, and Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri, have received this increasing tide of African labor; before the end of this century, at precisely the same rate of increase, the Africans among us in a subordinate condition will amount to eleven millions of persons.

"What shall be done with them? We must expand or perish. We are constrained by an inexorable necessity to accept expansion or extermination. Those who tell you that the territorial question is an abstraction ... are both deaf and blind to the history of the last sixty years. ...

"The North understand it better -- they have told us for twenty years that their object was to pen up slavery within its present limits -- surround it with a border of free States, and like the scorpion surrounded with fire, they will make it sting itself to death."

Sen. Toombs and a great many other men of the times knew that African slavery presented the South with a complex burden. It couldn't just be dropped, and in fact to cut it off and hem it in, as the Republicans proclaimed they would do, would have caused a crisis and could have brought on open war between blacks and whites.

Marx realized this when he wrote his dictum that the American Civil War was fought over slavery. He wrote that a "strict confinement of slavery within its old terrain," cut off from any possibility of expansion, would cause it to reach a crisis and collapse the entire social system of that region of America. Of course to Marx, with his class consciousness, this meant the "so-called poor whites" would rise against the planter class. And as a European and a socialist, he approved.

The Southerners saw the same case, but the outcome in their minds was Haiti; slave rebellion that would wipe one or the other race clean off the earth of the Deep South. It was openly discussed in North and South whether white or black would triumph in what was to come.

The wire-pulling over the Morrill tariff bill in 1860 showed the party of the abolitionists cynically using a legitimate government mechanism to gain power in a presidential election. It indicated to the South what this party would do once it got its hands on the U.S. military and on the financial machinery of the nation.

Legality

My reading in the Founders (Jefferson, Madison, Adams, Washington), not just in excerpts but in entire correspondences and publications, makes me think they would have regarded the dissolution of the United States, under any circumstances, as a great tragedy, and the undoing of all they had worked and sacrificed to create.

Yet they did not forbid it. They had the opportunity to do so, when they wrote the Constitution in 1787, and they let it pass. They had the opportunity throughout the next two generations, when America was essentially governed by the men who had crafted the Constitution. Adams, Madison, Jefferson certainly during their presidencies did not shy from attempts to modify the government they had created. (I get the feeling they regarded the Constitution as a lot more organic and fluid than we do today, open to rewriting and evolution, but that's a topic for another place).

In Washington's "Farewell Address," he told the citizens of the United States that union was "a main Pillar in the Edifice of your real independence," and something to be carefully guarded. But if he had thought it was inviolable, he would have simply said so, and not spent so much time pleading with Americans to think of themselves as a single nation and to foster good relations between the regions. The union, Washington wrote, was an experiment, albeit one that should be given time to prove itself. " 'Tis well worth a fair and full experiment. With such powerful and obvious motives to Union [he's

just listed some of them], affecting all parts of our country, while experience shall not have demonstrated its impracticability, there will always be reason, to distrust the patriotism of those, who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bonds."

In 1803, Federalists objected to the Louisiana Purchase because it would make the nation too large. True democracies must be small, according to received wisdom, and a nation so large as the United States were becoming would either lose its institutions or split. The idea did not bother Thomas Jefferson. "Whether we remain in one confederacy, or form into Atlantic and Mississippi confederacies, I believe not very important to the happiness of either part. Those of the Western confederacy will be as much our children & descendants as those of the Eastern." He wrote that if those of the Mississippi valley should "see their interest in separation, why should we take side with our Atlantic rather than our Mississippi descendants? It is the elder and the younger son differing. God bless them both, & keep them in Union, if it be for their good, but separate them, if it be better." [1]

During the War of 1812, when New England was making a serious bid to separate from the Union, Adams and Jefferson, as retired presidents, corresponded about this effort, and the personalities behind it. Both men thought it a foolish bid by petty minds who put selfish and regional interests over national good. Jefferson wrote as much, too, in a letter to Lafayette in France. But nowhere did either man write anything like, "The states can't secede because it's not constitutional to do so." They did not call it illegal, in public or private. They did not claim the union of states was legally unbreakable.

During the South Carolina nullification crisis of the early 1830s, I see the same thing in the public and private writing of Madison (Jefferson and Adams both being dead by then, of course). He deplores the drift toward disunion; he says the crisis at hand does not rise to the level of anything that would justify secession -- but he does not deny the right to secede.

I think the Founders left that door unlocked, and prayed (to a non-denominational "providence") that it would never be needed or used. The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, often cited to show the Founders' support for the right to secede, read like a desperate bid to hold the country together in the face of a deplorable drift toward federal tyranny over the states.

MORE on the CONSTITUTIONALITY of SECESSION

1. Letter to Joseph Priestley, Jan. 29, 1804; Ford, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 8:295.

LEGALITY of SECESSION

"The compound government of the United States is without a model, and to be explained by itself, not by similitudes or analogies," James Madison said late in his life.

For all the truth of that, the Founders had models and ideas in mind as they hashed things out in Philadelphia in 1787, and the notes taken that summer by Madison and others are full of them. The Founders were practical men, almost all of whom had had some experience in government. But they also were keen readers and alert to history, as it was known in their day.

Among the models or theories they often brought up in debate or correspondence are the writings of John Locke and Charles Montesquieu; the works of Hume and other writers of the Scottish Enlightenment; British history; and the accounts then available of the confederacies, democracies and republics of ancient Greece and Rome and the Germanic tribes.

All these sources tended toward common conclusions:

1. The laws should rule the government, not the other way around.
2. The government should be the servant of the people, not the other way around.
3. The best defense against danger of monarchial and democratic excesses was a "mixed government" of clearly prescribed spheres and balanced authorities.

The Federalists built the notion of mixed government into the U.S. Constitution. In many details, they strove for a balance between the one president, the few Senators and the Representatives of the many. Something that is lost and forgotten today is the pivotal role of the States in all this.

The conceptual breakthrough that allowed the United States to build a Constitution on the model of Britain's was the one that saw American states as the equivalent of hereditary baronies in the British system. That allowed the Senate -- whose members were appointed by the states under the original Constitution -- to form on the model of the British House of Lords. The power and independent authority of the states were essential elements in the mixed, balanced government formed in 1787.

The respect for them extended even to non-coercion. In the Convention that framed the Constitution it was proposed to give the government power to call out the army to force a wayward state to fulfill its duty. Madison said: "The more he reflected on the use of force the more he doubted the practicability, the justice and efficacy of it when applied the people collectively and not individually. -- A union of the States containing such an ingredient seemed to provide for its own destruction. The use of force against a State would look more like a declaration of war than an infliction of punishment, and would probably be considered by the party attacked as a dissolution of all previous compacts by which it might be bound." [1]

There is a misleading delicacy in the word "balance." The balance of powers in the original Constitution of the United States was like the balance of an engine made for hard, fast work. The essence of that Constitution was this: The laws rule the government, the constitution embodies those laws, and the people -- in part on their own agency, in part through the states -- tune and drive the Constitution.

"The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government," Washington said in his "Farewell Address." "But the Constitution which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all."

And that includes the president who is elected under it and sworn to uphold it. It was built to stand the test of a crisis, and it did so; in 1814 the capital itself was burnt, American armies suffered defeat in the field and a populous section of the nation met to consider secession. Yet the Constitution still ruled.

So far from envisioning powers of government beyond the Constitution, even in times of "necessity," Hamilton went so far as to say that a Bill of Rights was unnecessary, "For why declare that things shall not be done which there is no power to do? Why, for instance, should it be said that the liberty of the press shall not be restrained, when no power is given by which restrictions may be imposed?" [2]

The presidency in particular, as the most "monarchical" aspect of the Constitution, was given extremely limited direct power. Where the "life, liberty or property" of a private citizen is concerned, the president's only power is that prescribed in the third section of the second article, which requires, "that he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

"It is important, likewise," Washington wrote, "that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism."

The Founders all knew war first-hand; war on American soil, with a full third of their own countrymen against them, often in arms alongside the enemy. They built into their work machinery to handle treason and rebellion. But they also knew that crisis and war were favorite tools of demagogues. Hamilton reminded his readers of "the celebrated Pericles," leader of Athens, motivated by fear and personal pique, who led his nation into a bloody and ruinous war to save his own political skin and to escape the economic damage he had helped visit upon the state.[3]

Hamilton saw that a leader who took America into war could use the circumstance to rob her of cherished liberties: "The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free." [4]

"If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong," Washington wrote, "let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit, which the use can at any time yield."

In Washington's "Farewell Address," the connection between perpetual voluntary union, and obedience to the Constitution, is explicit. His prayer for the country, he said, was, "that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained."

The cult of the union, as it evolved in the Civil War era, identified "liberty" and "union" as essentially identical. But to the Founders, "liberty" was tied to the balance of powers they had carefully woven into the Constitution: "Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian," Washington wrote. "It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property." [5]

A little-known fact of the Constitution is that two of the largest states -- Virginia and New York -- made the right to withdraw from the union explicit in their acceptance of the Constitution. And in such an agreement between parties as is represented by the Constitution, a right claimed by one is allowed to all.

The procedure of the articles of ratification of the Constitution in Virginia is described in depth, in original documents, in *"The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution,"* a wonderful work in progress from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, volume X, p.1512 and after.

The Virginia convention ended its clause-by-clause consideration of the proposed Constitution on June 23, 1788, and the next day George Wythe proposed that the Committee of the Whole ratify the document. He also recommended amendments to be considered by the new Congress, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution.

This took the form of two resolutions, prefaced by a preamble expressing the belief that all powers not granted to the government by the Constitution were retained by the people and that the government

could neither cancel, abridge, restrain, nor modify the people's rights except where the Constitution gave it such power.

Patrick Henry, who led the opposition to ratification, moved that it was premature to do so and he proposed a resolution "to refer a declaration of rights, with certain amendments to the most exceptionable parts of the Constitution, for the other states in the Confederacy, for their consideration, previous to ratification." Henry also presented at the same time a declaration of rights and structural amendments.

The next day (June 25) the convention sat as a Committee of the Whole. Both Wythe's proposal and Henry's were read again, and debated at length. Early in the afternoon, the matter came to a vote. The antifederalist proposal that a declaration of rights and amendments be submitted to the other states "previous to the ratification of the new Constitution" was voted down, 88 to 80. Then the delegates voted 89 to 79 to ratify the Constitution.

[The two-vote difference is because David Patten of Chesterfield voted with the Antifederalists on amendments, but with the Federalists on ratification.]

The convention then appointed a committee of five to prepare the form of ratification. This "engrossed" ratification was read before the convention and accepted. On June 26, the engrossed Form of Ratification was read again, signed by President Edmund Pendleton, and transmitted to the Confederation Congress. The opening reads like this:

We the Delegates of the People of Virginia duly elected in pursuance of a recommendation from the General Assembly and now met in Convention having fully and freely investigated and discussed the proceedings of the Federal Convention and being prepared as well as the most mature deliberation hath enabled us to decide thereon Do in the name and in behalf of the People of Virginia declare and make known that the powers granted under the Constitution being derived from the People of the United States may be resumed by them whensoever the same shall be perverted to their injury or oppression and that every power not granted thereby remains with them and at their will: that therefore no right of any denomination can be cancelled abridged restrained or modified by the Congress by the Senate or House of Representatives acting in any Capacity by the President or any Department or Officer of the United States except in those instances in which power is given by the Constitution for those purposes ...

The committee of five that wrote the ratification was Edmund Randolph, George Nicholas, James Madison, John Marshall, and Francis Corbin -- all of them Federalists and Madison and Randolph, of course, members of the Constitutional Convention that had met in Philadelphia in 1787.

But was this binding? Or was the Constitution merely a "take it as-is or leave it" proposition when put to the states?

Five states (Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Georgia) ratified the Constitution without a word about a bill of rights. The rest, following Massachusetts, advocated for one, and it became a major subject of contention as the antifederalists adjusted their tactics.

States went so far as to attach proposed bills of rights to their ratifications in some cases, and they urged their members in the new government to tirelessly advocate for them. Yet these were not "conditions" of their ratification. And it was made clear, in convention after convention, that a state's "conditional" ratification of the Constitution would not be accepted by Congress.

In New York's convention, for instance, on July 24, 1788, Antifederalist John Lansing Jr. moved that a resolution be adopted giving New York the right to secede from the Union if certain amendments were not adopted within a certain number of years. Alexander Hamilton, who had anticipated such a proposal, had written to James Madison several days earlier and posed the question to him. Madison, in his capacity as a Congressman, had replied, indicating that Congress would not consider a conditional ratification to be valid. Hamilton read the letter to the convention, and Lansing's motion was defeated on the 25th by a vote of 31 to 28.[6]

So the right of secession claimed by Virginia and New York cannot be seen as "conditions" or amendments to the Constitutional proposal. If they were, those states' ratifications would have been rejected, as per Madison's letter. The other conditions listed as presumed in the preamble to the Virginia ratification -- the inability of the federal government to interfere in free exercise of religion and the press -- were agreed by all, federalists included, to be beyond the power of the federal government.

The question was not whether such rights would exist under the new government, but whether the rights, specifically those of individuals, needed to be made explicit in a bill of rights.[7] Their being claimed in Virginia's ratification presented no obstacle to Virginia being accepted by Congress as the 10th state in the new union, because the powers claimed were consistent with the Constitution, as understood by those who drew it up and those who recommended it to the states for ratification. The right to secede claimed in the Virginia ratification has to be regarded in the same light.

In the 1787 debates in the constitutional ratification conventions of the various states, even those that did not make right of withdrawal explicit or implied in their articles of ratification were presented with a union that was anything but "inviolable." They looked to a union so well-made and so obviously mutually beneficial that it would prove inviolable. They did not make it so by threat of force.

In Pennsylvania, James Wilson, as the only member of the ratification convention who had also been a delegate at the Constitutional Convention, did the bulk of explaining and defending the new document. He equated the American states with the individuals in Locke's theory, giving up a part of their natural liberty in the expectation of more good and happiness in the community than they would have alone. "The states should resign to the national government that part, and that part only, of their political liberty, which, placed in that government, will produce more good to the whole than if it had remained in the several states."

And this implied the ability to take it back again. In the proposed Constitution, the citizens of the various states "appear dispensing a part of their original power in what manner and what proportion they think fit. They never part with the whole; and they retain the right of recalling what they part with."

A Lockean principle, that any power given can be reclaimed again, echoes throughout the speeches. "If (the people) choose to indulge a part of their sovereign power to be exercised by the state government, they may. If they have done it, the states were right in exercising it; but if they think it no longer safe or convenient they will resume it, or make a new distribution, more likely to be productive of that good which ought to be our constant aim." Power resides in the people, divided into distinct communities of sovereign states.

Wilson told them again and again that, by accepting the Constitution, they were entering into an "experiment." "... I am sure that our interests, as citizens, as states, and as a nation, depend essentially upon a union. This Constitution is proposed to accomplish that great and desirable end. Let the

experiment be made; let the system be fairly and candidly tried, before it is determined that it cannot be executed."

Consider the following as an insight into how the Founders would have regarded Lincoln's vision of a perpetual union of the American states, held together by the strong arm of the federal government.

The scene is the ratification debate in New York state in the summer of 1788. Alexander Hamilton is defending, against anti-federalist objections, the power granted to the federal government, under the proposed system, to levy taxes directly on the citizens rather than making requisitions from the states. This is one of the Constitution's specially enumerated powers. It is a defined path for the federal government to override state authority. Hamilton points out the obvious necessity for a government to be able to pay its bills: "if we have national objects to pursue, we must have national revenues."

Remember, this is the arch-Federalist speaking, the man whose name is associated more than any other in the Constitutional Convention with the authority of the federal government. He paints the picture of the country without this power, and of a state refusing a federal requisition:

"It has been observed, to coerce the states is one of the maddest projects that was ever devised. A failure of compliance will never be confined to a single state. This being the case, can we suppose it wise to hazard a civil war?"

"Suppose Massachusetts, or any large state, should refuse, and Congress should attempt to compel them, would they not have influence to procure assistance, especially from those states which are in the same situation as themselves? What picture does this idea present to our view? A complying state at war with a non-complying state; Congress marching the troops of one state into the bosom of another; this state collecting auxiliaries, and forming, perhaps, a majority against the federal head.

"Here is a nation at war with itself. Can any reasonable man be well disposed towards a government which makes war and carnage the only means of supporting itself -- a government that can exist only by the sword? Every such war must involve the innocent with the guilty. This single consideration should be sufficient to dispose every peaceable citizen against such a government. But can we believe that one state will ever suffer itself to be used as an instrument of coercion? The thing is a dream; it is impossible."[8]

The Constitution enumerated the powers of the federal government, not those of the states or the people. It gave the federal government just such powers as, the Founders understood, would prevent this kind of conflict. The power to tax citizens directly was among them. It did not give the federal government broad, unspecified powers of coercion to do the very thing Hamilton abhorred here.

"It is the due [external] restraint and not the moderation of rulers that constitutes a state of liberty; as the power to oppress, though never exercised, does a state of slavery." [St. George Tucker]

St. George Tucker, who in 1803 wrote *"View of the Constitution of the United States,"* a long essay attached to a Philadelphia publication of Blackstone meant to be used in the new nation. Since Blackstone was based on a monarchy, Tucker's commentary looked at the role and rule of law in a constitutional republic. It was, thus, as historian Clyde N. Wilson writes in a forward to Tucker's work, "the first extended systematic commentary on the Constitution after it had been ratified by the people of the several states and amended by the Bill of Rights." [9]

Tucker's work was widely circulated in the Mid-Atlantic, the South and the West, and "it was for much of the first half of the nineteenth century an important handbook for American law students, lawyers, judges, and statesmen," in addition to being "a key document of Jeffersonian republicanism." [10]

Tucker's view is the old one, decidedly federal, of a national government balanced from taking on dangerous powers by the independent judiciary and the power of the states. States rights, in his writing, is not a special pleading for slavery rights -- Tucker was opposed to slavery and devised a plan to end slavery in Virginia. The routine dismissal of any states rights argument on this ground won't apply to him.

Nonetheless, as Wilson points out in his introduction, Tucker's writing has languished in obscurity for a long time now, in part because "his view of the federal government as an agent of the sovereign people of the several states, and not as the judge of the extent of its own powers, was buried by the outcome of the Civil War."

Tucker takes for granted the right of secession, but he knows it is a step not lightly to be taken. The people of the several states consented to the Constitution not as a once-and-for-all commitment to eternal obedience, but with a right of withdrawal that is their right as the true sovereign of the nation. That view is affirmed by the nature of the Constitution itself and in the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.

"The federal government, then, appears to be the organ through which the united republics communicate with foreign nations, and with each other. Their submission to its operation is voluntary: its councils, its sovereignty is an emanation from theirs, not a flame by which they have been consumed, nor a vortex in which they are swallowed up. Each is still a perfect state, still sovereign, still independent, and still capable, should the occasion require, to resume the exercise of its functions, as such, in the most unlimited extent.

"But until the time shall arrive when the occasion requires a resumption of the rights of sovereignty by the several states (and far be that period removed when it should happen) the exercise of the rights of sovereignty by the states, individually, is wholly suspended, or discontinued, in the cases before mentioned: nor can that suspension ever be removed, so long as the present constitution remains unchanged, but by the dissolution of the bonds of union. An event which no good citizen can wish, and which no good, or wise administration will ever hazard." [11]

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1. *"Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention,"* p.45.
 2. *"Federalist"* No. 84.
 3. *"Federalist"* No. 6.
 4. *"Federalist"* No. 8.
 5. *"Farewell Address."*
 6. *"Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution,"* vol. 18, p.295.
 7. *"Federalist"* No. 84.
 8. Jonathan Elliot, *"The Debates of the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution."* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1876, vol. II, p.232-233.
 9. Clyde N. Wilson, forward to St. George Tucker, *"View of the Constitution of the United States, with Selected Writings."* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999, p.vii.
 10. *ibid.*
 11. *ibid.*, p.136.

CORNERSTONE SPEECH

It is a common assertion nowadays that the Confederacy had no purpose or justification but perpetuating racist slavery.

That argument can be made intelligently, and has been made, but the lazy debater wants to treat it as a settled proposition above discussion. Any objection to it, or any suggestion of Southern legitimacy, is automatically dismissable because it amounts to a defense of the Confederacy, and even if someone who is not an outright racist or slavery-apologist would defend the Confederacy, the debater on the other side has the option to not be bothered with that distinction. Far easier to dismiss the opposition as crypto-racist.

It's the old fallacy of arguing in a circle. Yet people choose this tactic, perhaps in part because they find it frustratingly difficult to pin down American history or any part of it to such a simplistic idea as "it was all about slavery."

Naturally, some people do want to regard all this as settled before they plow into their opponents. The easy expedient is to go in search of one zinger of a quote that will seem to prove the case. In Internet debates, those willing to be convinced will look no further, and those who disagree will be required to build up the cathedral of context, a tedious process. By the time they finish, the audience will have wandered off with the zinger lodged in their heads.

So they pick through the sources. Any quote will do, by anyone remotely prominent in the Confederacy, saying, more or less, "it was all about slavery." **Jeff. Davis's inaugural speech?** No, it makes nary a mention of slaves or slavery. **Robert Toombs' report** to the Georgia legislature in 1860? No, that outlines how anti-slavery agitation in the North was exploited by political powers there to disguise economic motives.

The "**Cornerstone Speech**" by Alexander Stephens is the usual bludgeon of choice. Stephens, a Georgian who had served in Congress, was the new vice president of the CSA in the spring of 1861, and in this speech he explained the new Confederate constitution and the prospects of the new nation, as he saw them, to an audience in Savannah. Here is how one commentator cherry-picks the usual cherries from it:

Stephens said that the American Revolution had been based on a premise that was "fundamentally wrong." That premise was, as Stephens defined it, "the assumption of equality of the races." Stephens insisted that, instead, "our new [Confederate] government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea. Its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man. Slavery — subordination to the superior race — is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great and moral truth."

Stephens's post-war writings downplayed the importance of slavery in the sectional conflict, and they formed much of the foundation of the first generation of defense of the Southern nation -- the so-called "Lost Cause" view of the war. That reasonably can be dismissed as a convenient revisionism.

The Savannah speech exists in transcripts. There is no original version of Stephens's speech, because he spoke extemporaneously. His words were jotted down and printed in the Savannah newspapers. Stephens sometimes complained of the inaccuracy of such reporting, and singled out Savannah reporters in at least one instance, "who very often make me say things which I never did" [speech to the Georgia Legislature, Nov. 14, 1860]. But I have not found that he said at any time after the Cornerstone Speech that they got any part of it fundamentally wrong.

Stephens was educating the people of his state and preparing them for a fight he had tried to keep them out of. In the state legislature in July 1860, he fought hard against Georgia's call for a secession convention, then at that convention Stephens spoke out against secession so vehemently that the North circulated copies of his speech as propaganda during the Civil War.

The "Cornerstone Speech," in its praise of slavery, is a personal justification of Stephens's career. His post-bellum history book that downplays slavery's role ("Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States") is another. They both are public, political rhetoric. Yet commentators tend to treat the one as an utter lie and the other as absolute truth. To see the offhand paragraph in the speech as some defining Genesis moment of the Confederacy, out of the mouth of the eternal spirit of the nation instead of one political man, is a gross exaggeration.

A brief glance at Stephens's life and career shows how far this remarkable man stood from being representative of the leaders, or the common citizens, of the Confederacy. Even his position as the Confederate vice president was a matter of old-fashioned ticket-balancing, not a proof of his centrality in the Southern cause. He was, in most ways, an eccentric.

Stephens was a small, sickly, prickly, brilliant man, perhaps impotent, in a time and place where leaders were expected to be strong, handsome and virile. He stood barely 5 feet tall and never reached 100 pounds weight in his life. He was a poor orphan in a time and place where wealth and family mattered.

From the start of his career, he identified himself with the Whig party, and their platform was his natural ideology. But this set him apart from most Southerners, who were Democrats. By nature and necessity he partook of the values of the people in his community, and he had to wrestle his broad ideology into alignment with the local realities.

Yet as far and as long as he was capable of it, he kept his political convictions. Stephens "defended slavery apologetically where it already existed, in much the same manner as [Henry] Clay" [Daniel Walker Howe, "Political Culture of the American Whigs," p.244]. Clay was Lincoln's ideal, too, and they shared the same view of American slavery. Stephens also vehemently opposed the war on Mexico, which most Southern slavery-advocates supported, and denounced it as illegal and unjust.

In the 1850s, as North and South grew increasingly bitter toward each other, the bridges between Stephens's ideals and the South's realities stretched and broke. The Whigs fell apart over sectional issues, and many of Stephens's party friends from the North, including Lincoln, gravitated into the new, radical, sectional Republican Party. The Southern Whigs were hopeless, paralyzed by the limp, drifting quality that always seems to infect a party that has accepted its minoritarian status. Stephens refused to drift with them. He cast his lot with the Democrats.

One result of the sectional rift was that the South gradually hardened in its defense of slavery. Stephens followed it, and became, for a time, among the most strident proclaimers of slavery as ordained by nature and a "positive good" to both races. In this he outran the bulk of Southerners. This is the face he showed in the Savannah speech. And his digression into slavery apologetics there was the result of his need to reconcile his embrace of slavery with his essential Whig ideology.

That moral contortion required him to fit slavery into a social context based on order and philanthropy. The "cornerstone" passage is a reflection of his internal struggle to maintain consistency of social thought. He spoke extemporaneously, as the words flowed, and the tumult in the lecture hall must have been matched by inner turmoil. Here was a man who had publicly reversed

most of his earlier political positions. He seemed to be talking of himself, primarily, when after justifying slavery he said, "Many who hear me, perhaps, can recollect well, that this truth was not generally admitted, even within their day. The errors of the past generation still clung to many as late as twenty years ago."

The "cornerstone" image is hardly original to Stephens. "Corner-stones" (as it generally was spelled then), are sprinkled like Greek ruins throughout slavery and anti-slavery rhetoric between 1835 and 1860. The National Anti-Slavery Society convention in Philadelphia on Dec. 4, 1833, declared: "More than fifty seven years have elapsed since a band of patriots convened in this place, to devise measures for the deliverance of this country from a foreign yoke. The corner-stone which they founded the TEMPLE OF FREEDOM was broadly this -- 'that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness.' "

But it was most common as a trope in defense-of-slavery rhetoric. New York lawyer and abolitionist Alvan Stewart called it the slavery defenders' "favorite maxim" in an 1838 speech to the Vermont Legislature. ["Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart on Slavery," 1860, p.167]. In 1845, James M. Hammond wrote, "I endorse without reserve the much abused sentiment of Governor M'Duffie, that 'Slavery is the corner-stone of our republican edifice' " ["Letter to an English Abolitionist"]. M'Duffie, governor of South Carolina, a true secessionist fire-eater in his day, had said in a message to his legislature in 1835:

"Domestic slavery, therefore, instead of being a political evil, is the corner-stone of our republican edifice.

Most of the printed references to slavery as a "corner-stone" between 1835 and 1860 directly cite M'Duffie, but he is forgotten today.

Of course, Hammond and M'Duffie, and the others who used the phrase between 1835 and 1860 meant the American republic.

They were writing and speaking in both economic and social terms; slavery was widely understood to be a necessary adjunct of a republican form of government, as it had been in Greece and Rome, because it freed a class of men from pursuit of money by labor or commerce and allowed them to devote time and energy to political life and, as Hammond put it, to "preserving a reasonable and well ordered government. ... Hence, Slavery is truly the 'corner-stone' and foundation of every well-designed and durable 'republican edifice.' " As appalling as that is now, Hammond, at the time, had the partial evidence of history on his side.

After the Revolution, one of the images foremost in the minds of the Founders was how republics die. All the classical republics, then knew, had come to an end in anarchy and then tyranny. Classical and modern writers had taken up the theme of the death of a republic so often and so minutely that by the 18th century the process could be described in almost clinical terms. The Founders knew it from their classical educations, and the common people knew it from the popular plays of the day, such as "Julius Caesar" and Addison's "Cato" (which Washington had ordered performed for the troops at Valley Forge, notwithstanding a Congressional ban on theaters).

The vital principle in keeping a republic alive was public virtue. This was virtue in the classical, not the Christian, definition. The Christian, seeking to be not of this world in Roman times, turned pagan virtue on its head. Classical virtue was not in the least bit meek, but it strove to be first in doing good

for one's country and coveted the glory that comes with unrelenting devotion to the good of the people. It expressed itself in endurance, industry, frugality, and probity -- many of which were consistent with Christianity. Gertrude Himmelfarb has ably condensed the classical idea of virtue as "the will and capacity to put the public interest over the private."

This was the pulse and ichor of a republic. Washington said it plainly in his Farewell Address, "It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government." His successor, John Adams, wrote, "There must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honour, Power and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real liberty."

It was obvious to the Founders that public virtue could be the province of free men only. One who was bound by debt or loyalty to other men was not free to give himself totally to the good of the public. That accounts for the Founders' general horror of debts, banks, lenders, and mortgages. It accounts for the requirement in many states that voters or office-holders be men of a certain income or property. That was at heart a republican, not an aristocratic, principle.

But North and South diverged on how best to keep the tree of public virtue well-watered and flowering. The puritan republicans upheld personal morality as the solution: A virtuous people could not help but be a virtuous republic. The agrarians looked to the structure of a limited government and to an ordered, hierarchic society to keep the republic healthy.

Historians' views of the political philosophy of the South during the Revolution tend to miss the mark because the writers are dazzled by the twin stars of Jefferson and Madison. The two friends had a potent impact on America, but as Southern men they were exotics. A more typical Southern view of the republican problem is represented by John Taylor of Caroline, who wrote, "The more a nation depends for its liberty on the qualities of individuals, the less likely it is to retain it. By expecting publick good from private virtue, we expose ourselves to publick evils from private vices."

Like the puritans, the agrarians had a battery of writers at their fingertips, such as Bolingbroke and the authors who published under the title "Cato's Letters." To them, the ownership of property, unencumbered by debt, was the rock foundation of republican independence, virtue, and liberty. New Englanders believed in this, too, but the Southerners made it a dogma.

This led them to see the hierarchy which already existed among them as a bulwark of the republic: In their vision, the masses of slaves did the labor, and the citizens -- by definition free white males -- thus stood on a republican equality. As DeBow wrote, "No white man at the South serves another as a body servant, to clean his boots, wait on his table, and perform the menial services of his household. ... He is a companion and an equal."

At least ideally, and socially. But there was a class of men at the top of the social order whose plantations gave them such independence and leisure that they could devote themselves wholly to public virtue without regard for keeping food on the family table. John C. Calhoun was the epitome of such a man. One reason Southerners so dominated the republic in its early generations was that the leading Northern men in Congress frequently had to drop government business or retire from office for a time and go home to make money or plow their fields. The Southern senators did not.

As odious as much of the old South is to modern attitudes, it had the approval of history. The Spartan, Athenian, and Roman republics -- the principal examples available to the Founders -- were built on essentially the same social and economic model, with a mass of slaves at the bottom. Indeed, the very fact of slavery among them made the Southern men more zealous about protecting liberty. Edmund

Burke, looking to the Southern colonies, guessed it right in 1775, answering the question that puzzled so many Englishmen: Why the love of liberty was so strong among those who held slaves.

Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege. Not seeing there, that freedom, as in countries where it is a common blessing and as broad and general as the air, may be united with much abject toil, with great misery, with all the exterior of servitude; liberty looks, amongst them, like something that is more noble and liberal.

As in the Athenian democracy, the people were to be consulted directly only upon the most dangerous and important questions -- such as secession. South Carolina still chose its presidential electors in the state government in 1860. Rigorous private moral virtue was not necessary in the agrarian republican model -- and was little esteemed among men in the South. Instead, jealousy of power and careful attention to governance would keep the flame of public virtue alive. Govern well, put men of pure virtues and total leisure in power, guard against demagogues and tyrants, and live as well as you please. Instead of the New England ideal of a government that put its thumb down on every amusement and vice, the Southerners favored a minimal government on every level, with few restrictions and coercions.

In light of all that, Hammond's "cornerstone" passage is worth quoting at some length:

It will scarcely be disputed that the very poor have less leisure to prepare themselves for the proper discharge of public duties than the rich; and that the ignorant are wholly unfit for them at all. In all countries save ours, these two classes, or the poor rather, who are presumed to be necessarily ignorant, are by law expressly excluded from participation in the management of public affairs. In a Republican Government this cannot be done. Universal suffrage, though not essential in theory, seems to be in fact a necessary appendage to a republican system. Where universal suffrage obtains, it is obvious that the government is in the hands of a numerical majority; and it is hardly necessary to say that in every part of the world more than half the people are ignorant and poor. Though no one can look upon poverty as a crime, and we do not here generally regard it as any objection to a man in his individual capacity, still it must be admitted that it is a wretched and insecure government which is administered by its most ignorant citizens, and those who have the least at stake under it. Though intelligence and wealth have great influence here, as everywhere, in keeping in check reckless and unenlightened numbers, yet it is evident to close observers, if not to all, that these are rapidly usurping all power in the non-slaveholding States, and threaten a fearful crisis in republican institutions there at no remote period. In the slaveholding States, however, nearly one-half of the whole population, and those the poorest and most ignorant, have no political influence whatever, because they are slaves. Of the other half, a large proportion are both educated and independent in their circumstances, while those who unfortunately are not so, being still elevated far above the mass, are higher toned and more deeply interested in preserving a stable and well ordered government, than the same class in any other country. Hence, Slavery is truly the "cornerstone" and foundation of every well-designed and durable "republican edifice." [Hammond, reprinted in Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., "The Ideology of Slavery," 1981, LSU Press, pp. 176-7]

Stephens gave the trope a particular twist. He took it one step further and put it into the Biblical image of "The stone which the builders refused" which "is become the head stone of the corner" [Psalms CXVII:22]. Stephens's friend and rival, Toombs, in urging secession on Georgia in November 1860, **had placed the national "cornerstone" elsewhere:** In states' rights. "The basis, the corner-stone of this Government," he said, "was the perfect equality of the free, sovereign, and independent States which made it." But, we are told, states' rights was a smokescreen for racism. Evidently some cornerstones are more important than others.

As late as the 1860 election, Stephens had backed the moderate Douglas, not the South's hard-line choice, Breckenridge. He considered secessionists "demagogues," and he defended Lincoln, with whom he had served in the House. Lincoln, he wrote, "is not a bad man. He will make as good a president as Fillmore did and better too in my opinion." Lincoln, still trying to pretend he led a national government, considered inviting Stephens to join his cabinet.

But Stephens cast his loyalty with his section, not his principles. If he could not correct the South, he would try to guide it and, by compromising some, attempt to save the rest. He failed, and the South failed.

The Savannah speech is a sad affair, not just because of the blunt racism of that one passage -- the racism itself, it ought to be noted, would hardly have offended any white audience in 1861 America, North, South, or West, outside a few abolitionist circles. But sad because it shows a politician who has so twisted himself to try to hold the reins of a revolution that he has got tangled in them and they now rule him. He embraces what he once scorned, and he mocks positions he once held. He has thrown away his ideals, and the "cornerstone" passage, to me, reads so much more accurately as an odd eruption of a warped and very personal ideological struggle.

It has no place in the overall speech, which is essentially a practical laying-out of the political and military situation the Deep South faced in March 1861. The "cornerstone" rhetoric doesn't deserve such prominence in a treatment of the Confederate Constitution, which pretty much was a carbon copy of the U.S. Constitution except that it stipulated the government could not impose protective tariffs, grant subsidies, or finance internal improvements. On the matter of slavery, it specifically asserted the inviolability of that institution. This was more clear than the U.S. Constitution, but not at odds with it, and Lincoln and many in his camp publicly declared they were willing to amend the U.S. Constitution to make it say the same, if doing so would end the rebellion.

Other than that, you can read the two constitutions side by side for long stretches and not be sure which is which. The CSA Constitution banned slave imports from Africa, proscribed international traffic in slaves, kept the three-fifths clause, and even allowed non-slave states the option of joining the new nation.

No one can deny the importance of slavery to the feud that split the United States, or that the CSA states made protection of slavery one of its central purposes. But the secession of 1860-61 and the shooting war that followed were the climax of a long interplay. Like a couple heading into divorce, the regions fought often, in the open and in secret. But they nursed grudges, and what they argued out loud was not always the real issue. During the 1840s, slavery became the symbol and character of all sectional differences. It was the emotional gasoline on the sectional fires. Its moral and social implications colored every issue in terms of right and rights. William Seward, the Republican leader, recognized the fact: "Every question, political, civil, or ecclesiastical, however foreign to the subject of slavery, brings up slavery as an incident, and the incident supplants the principal question."

So far from slavery being the cause of secession, the fact is many thinking men in the South knew that secession would be the doom of slavery. Slavery could not be economically viable or legally enforceable where freedom was just a river away. They had pushed the North so hard to enforce the Fugitive Slave Laws for just this reason. Stephens was among those who judged "slavery much more secure in the union than out of it."

The UPPER SOUTH

The secession of 1860-61 and the shooting war that followed were the climax of a long interplay. Like a couple heading into divorce, the regions fought often, in the open and in secret. But they nursed grudges, and what they argued out loud was not always the real issue.

That the North fought the war as a crusade for the rights of black folks, to free the slaves from their chains, is easily exploded and nobody would seriously maintain it nowadays. However, the modern prevailing view is that the Southern Confederacy was a nation based on, and fighting for, slavery. This view allows no other reason for secession, and thus equates Confederate heritage with racism and slavery.

Making out that the Civil War was "about" slavery also has the advantage of being quick, clean, and easy to write. Get a hatful of quotes and you're done. The Confederate leaders and documents supply them in abundance. Taking this position also seems to show an awareness of the slaves' realities, and it adequately reflects the indignation we know we ought to feel at institutionalized human bondage. Economic history, on the other hand, tends to bog down in a turgid tangle of language. And who would want to peel back the easy answers to probe the complexities of the past, when the easy answers feel so good and absolve so much? A small class of bad guys: an aberration in the great American history.

Compare the Southern revolt of 1860 to the colonial uprising of 1776. What moved the colonists to break the ties with the "mother country?" Taxes? Tea? George William Brown, mayor of Baltimore in 1861, was a non-partisan politician and an opponent of secession (Lincoln jailed him anyhow). Yet like many people in his day he understood the move, in the light of the American Revolution, and how small points of disagreement can be the flashpoints of broader conflicts:

"The men of '76 did not fight to get rid of the petty tax of three pence a pound on tea, which was the only tax left to quarrel about. They were determined to pay no taxes, large or small, then or thereafter. Whether the tax was lawful or not was a doubtful question, about which there was a wide difference of opinion, but they did not care for that. Nothing would satisfy them but the relinquishment of any claim of right to tax the colonies, and this they could not obtain. They maintained that their rights were violated. They were, moreover, embittered by a long series of disputes with the mother country, and they wanted to be independent and to have a country of their own. They thought they were strong enough to maintain that position."^[1]

No one can deny the importance of slavery to the feud that split the United States, or that the CSA states made protection of slavery one of their central purposes. But the Southern confederacy -- that is, the national government of the CSA -- was no more built on slavery than was the Northern Union. The Confederate Constitution was pretty much a carbon copy of the U.S. Constitution, except that it stipulated that the government could not impose protective tariffs, grant subsidies, or finance internal improvements. (But then, we are constantly told that the South was "all about slavery," so economic points like that don't matter).

On the matter of slavery, it specifically asserted the inviolability of that institution. This was more clear than the U.S. Constitution, but not at odds with it, and Lincoln and many in his camp publicly declared they were willing to amend the U.S. Constitution to make it say the same, if doing so would end the rebellion.

Other than that, you can read the two constitutions side by side for long stretches and not be sure which is which. The CSA Constitution banned slave imports from Africa, proscribed international traffic in slaves, kept the three-fifths clause, and even allowed non-slave states the option of joining the new nation.

Yet the weakness of the "it was all about slavery" argument seems most apparent when you consider that when the shooting began, four future CSA states, with 1.2 million slaves, remained in the Union. The state with the single largest number of slaves of any state, Virginia, was among them. Together, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas represented half the future CSA's population and resources and held key military installations and armories.

If the entire South was going to be a minority force in the government after 1860, consider how much more so, and how much more vulnerable, the Upper South alone would have been. Yet it was willing to stay, till it saw the course of the Lincoln Administration with regard to force, not to slavery.

The secession of the Upper South, when it came, was hardly a bid to protect slave property. Virginia, Tennessee, even North Carolina, with a hostile anti-slavery United States on their frontier, could never hope to maintain slavery as a viable economic and social institution. Their pre-war complaints about fugitives prove they knew it. The mere presence of "free" states nearby in the 1850s exerted an economic pressure that was rapidly draining slavery out of the Border States.

National union, with slavery intact, was the only guarantee for slavery's continuance in the Upper South. And if you insist that every slave-holder, or slave-holding state, must make choices solely on the basis of interest in slavery, then I will argue that the Border State that remained in the Union did so to protect their slaves. Why else would slaveholders fight for the Union?

As John B. Henderson, the Unionist senator from Missouri, reminded his colleagues, "there are numbers of loyal slaveholders in that state [Missouri], men who have been carrying the flag of their country from the earliest beginning of this rebellion, who have left their homes for the battle-field, leaving their slaves behind them, many of whom are in the service of the country today, and will continue there until the rebellion is over." [2]

I think of Basil L. Gildersleeve, Virginia cavalry veteran and professor (author of a Latin textbook I still use for reference), describing his beloved home state's awkward position in the winter of 1860-61:

Submission is slavery, and the bitterest taunt in the vocabulary of those who advocated secession was "submissionist." But where does submission begin? Who is to mark the point of encroachment? That is a matter which must be decided by the sovereign; and on the theory that the States are sovereign, each State must be the judge.

The extreme Southern States considered their rights menaced by the issue of the presidential election. Virginia and the Border States were more deliberate; and Virginia's "pausing" was the theme of much mockery in the State and out of it, from friend and from foe alike. Her love of peace, her love of the Union, were set down now to cowardice, now to cunning. The Mother of States and Queller of Tyrants was caricatured as Mrs. Facing-both-ways; and the great commonwealth ... was charged with trading on her neutrality. Her solemn protest was unheeded. The "serried phalanx of her gallant sons" that should "prevent the passage of the United States forces" was an expression that amused Northern critics of style as a bit of antiquated Southern rodomontade. But the call for troops showed that the rodomontade meant something. Virginia had made her decision; and if the United States forces did not find a serried phalanx barring their way, -- a serried phalanx is somewhat out of date, -- they found something that answered the purpose as well. [3]

What was different about the situation of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, after April 14, 1861? Was slavery any more threatened after Ft. Sumter than before? Nothing in word or deed, with regard to slavery, had changed in the Lincoln Administration between the months of 1861 when Virginia was in the Union and the day she stepped out of it.

How slavery got to be the only acceptable explanation for everything done in the South in the Civil War is a matter of modern historical scholarship going overboard in a horrified attempt to right its old wrongs. I'm convinced future generations will read the tunnel-vision and decide we're all batty.

Gildersleeve, in his essay, describes some of his memories of the war. What he writes is typical; only his expression is more elevated than a hundred other testimonies.

As he's writing, he has before him "The University Memorial, which records the names and lives of the alumni of the University of Virginia who fell in the Confederate war," some 200 of them.

"[A]nd some of the noblest men who figure in its pages were Union men; and the Memorial of the Virginia Military Institute tells the same story with the same eloquence. The State was imperiled, and parties disappeared; and of the combatants in the field, some of the bravest and the most conspicuous belonged to those whose love of the old Union was warm and strong, to whom the severance of the tie that bound the States together was a personal grief. But even those who prophesied the worst, who predicted a long and bloody struggle and a doubtful result, had no question about the duty of the citizen. ... The most intimate friend I ever had, who fell after heroic services, was known by all our circle to be utterly at variance with the prevalent Southern view of the quarrel, and died upholding a right which was not a right to him except so far as the mandate of his State made it a right; and while he would have preferred to see "the old flag" floating over a united people, he restored the new banner to its place time after time when it had been cut down by shot and shell."

...

"Scant allusion has been made in this paper to the subject of slavery, which bulks so large in almost every study of the war. A similar scantiness of allusion to slavery is noticeable in the Memorial volume, to which I have already referred; a volume which was prepared, not to produce an impression on the Northern mind, but to indulge a natural desire to honor the fallen soldiers of the Confederacy; a book written by friends for friends.

"The rights of the State and the defense of the country are mentioned at every turn; 'the peculiar institution' is merely touched on here and there, except in one passage in which a Virginian speaker maintains that as a matter of dollars and cents it would be better for Virginia to give up her slaves than to set up a separate government, with all the cost of a standing army which the conservation of slavery would make necessary.

"This silence, which might be misunderstood, is plain enough to a Southern man. Slavery was simply a test case Except as a test case it is impossible to speak of the Southern view of the institution, for we were not all of the same mind." [4]

The Republicans in the 36th Congress made it clear where the interest lay. Their private correspondence shows them interested in only the appearance of being open to compromise and discussion with the South, for the sake of public opinion. Crittenden's proposal was postponed again and again while the Republicans rushed off to take up the revived Morrill Tariff that had been the promise in exchange for Pennsylvania's votes in 1860, and which was brought up on the second day of the session, despite the secession crisis. The higher duties affected iron, cotton bagging, gunny cloth -- the kind of things that would dip directly into the pockets of Southern planters, big and small. The border state and upper South Congressmen who were risking their careers to keep their states in the union would get no help from that quarter.

"Our national property, our citizens, public officers, and rights must be protected in all the States, and our men-of-war must be stationed off the southern ports to collect the revenue." [5] Bingham of Ohio

introduced a bill to authorize collection of U.S. customs from the decks of warships. To the Senate naval appropriations bill, introduced Feb. 11, the Republicans added money for seven new steam warships, light, fast, and heavily armed. Everyone knew what that was about. "It must not be forgotten," the New York Times wrote, "that the 'coercion' by which the Federal Government will seek to preserve the integrity of the Union and the supremacy of the Constitution, must be coercion by sea. It must be mainly a matter of blockades." [Feb. 8, 1861]. After much contention, the amendment passed, 27-17.

At the same time they were striving to enforce the onerous laws on the South, they were cutting off the beneficial services; the same Congress that was insisting the tariff continue to be paid was voting to authorize the U.S. postmaster general to cut off mail service in the South.

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1. George W. Brown, *"Baltimore & the Nineteenth of April, 1861,"* N. Murray, for Johns Hopkins University, 1887, reprinted with an introduction by Kevin Conley Ruffner, Johns Hopkins, 2001.
 2. *Congressional Globe*, July 10, 1862, p.3231.
 3. "The Creed of the Old South," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 69, issue 411, January 1892.
 4. *ibid.*
 5. Isaac N. Morris, Jan. 16, 1861.

The Cost of Union

We know what America is today, and has been in the last century. And we can look at what America was in the generation of the founders, and we can read their vision for it. And we can see the wrenching turn in the nation's destiny that stands between us and them.

By the mid-1800s the North was boosting its population and aggressively asserting state power in the interest of its own industrial capitalism. The South was not. The two sections were diverging, and it was the North that had evolved a new culture since 1787, one that sought to control the national destiny.

Before the seats vacated in 1861 by the Southern congressmen were cold, the economic order of the United States had been turned on its head: the tariff had taken off on an upward trajectory that would leave even industrialists breathless. The nation's resources were thrown open to private profit; and the whole banking and monetary system was revamped to suit investors and creditors. A tax scheme was created that weighed against the small consumers, the North's factories (and even its army) were thrown open to immigrant contract labor, and the federal government was using the U.S. military to put down labor strikes. Congress and the President gave another 100 million acres to various railroads, free of charge.

After the war, Reconstruction had far more to do with reordering the South as a section and reducing it to the status of a financial-industrial colony than with black people. Fear, vengeance, love of union, and interest in civil rights may have played a part in Reconstruction, but it seems clear, especially after the 1876 election, that what the South suffered had much more to do with the establishment of permanent Republican party control, tariff protection, and rigging the nation's financial arrangements to suit bankers, creditors, and New England industrialists.

In the 1870s, when the North debated within itself topics like the black vote and delaying the readmission of Southern states, the argument in favor was frankly presented as being good for the

tariff and government bonds and New England "ideas of business, industry, money-making, spindles and looms."

Midwestern farmers, the same men who swelled Sherman's army that broke the South, bore the brunt of the new order and soon found themselves being herded into the same colonial status the South had resisted, in vain. By the time William Jennings Bryan and others rose up to defend them, in rhetoric reminiscent of John C. Calhoun, it was too late. The country had been turned over to foreclosing banks and greedy railroads so thoroughly that Missourians were ready by 1880 to make a hero of a murderous ex-Confederate named Jesse James.

After the war, state legislatures trying to protect their people against predatory trusts and capitalists were thwarted by the Supreme Court, which swept away state laws to regulate corporations (230 in 1886 alone), using the argument that corporations were "persons," and thus protected by the due process clause of the 14th amendment. Between 1890 and 1910, of all the 14th amendment cases brought before the Supreme Court, 19 dealt with black people, and 228 with corporations.

That's what America bought with four years of hell and 10 years of civil enslavement of the South. Even in New York City in the 1850s a respectable fortune was a few hundred thousand dollars. In the next generation, of "Robber Barons," of big fortunes and big depressions, men like Rockefeller and Carnegie were able to amass countless millions. The culture that gave birth to Washington and Jefferson was branded as backwards and immoral. The sectional balance cherished in the vision of Madison and Hamilton was swept away in the name of greed.

Whatever else it was besides, the South had been the brake on these forces, which were pent up in New England and itching for dominance. The region's distinct economy and social values blocked this "progress." The South favored restricted central government, purely local financial agents, and a leisurely way of life. The South was pulling hard after 1850 to avoid becoming a backwards dependent of a North that was now opposed to everything about the South except its cotton and its money.

Greed hid behind anti-slavery morality. Practical selfishness and pious abstraction merged beautifully. The Lord's "terrible swift sword" that smote the South was made in some Connecticut mill whose owner piled up millions in the process. It is important to remember that outright anti-slavery work -- as opposed to a sense of sectional rivalry and resentment -- was limited to a very small class in the North. Prominent among that class were a great many leading capitalists.

In New York City during the war girls sewed umbrellas from 6 a.m. to midnight, earning \$3 a week, from which their employers deducted the cost of needles and thread. Girls who made cotton shirts received 24 cents for a 12-hour day. One historian, after studying in intimate detail a cluster of Northern cotton factories, summed up the owners' abolitionism like this:

"By making chattel slavery the uniquely immoral form of human exploitation, abolitionism undercut the mounting working-class complaints about wage-slavery and beatified the capitalist order. These abolitionists hated slavery not just for its inhumanity but also for impeding their vision of a capitalist society of free individuals whose labor could be freely exploited."[1]

The Republican Party's conviction that it has the God-given right to legislate the morality of all Americans runs right back to Civil War. The GOP has never quite forgotten it was the party that God anointed with victory. Henry Wilson, the dedicated abolitionist who headed the important Senate committee on military affairs during the war and was later vice president under Grant, declared the Republican Party had been "created by no man or set of men but brought into being by almighty God himself ... and endowed by the creator with all political power and every office under Heaven."

The Republicans committed themselves to being the "Party of Piety," and gave us Anthony Comstock, the original national censor. The first act regulating U.S. mail content was passed in March 1865, spawned by complaints that boys in blue were getting obscene *carte de visites* and dirty novels. Congress made mailing such material a crime. One of Comstock's most illustrious victims was Ezra Heywood, the veteran abolitionist who had mailed pamphlets that criticized marriage and advocated birth control. The old man (well into his 60s) served two years at hard labor.

Lysander Spooner was an influential and ardent abolitionist and a true American radical humanitarian in the mold of Thoreau. By 1867, he had come to understand that the war was a defeat for men like him. The North had fought for the principle that "men may rightfully be compelled to submit to, and support a government they do not want; and that resistance, on their part, makes them traitors and criminals."

Southerners saw this sooner. They saw the victory of Lincoln in 1860 as defeat after a long struggle, the final reduction to helplessness in the face of a majority determined to force its social and economic values on the whole nation.

You can love your homeland and still lament the place it might have been. Is 20th century America -- with its Babbitry, its rotten bureaucracies and its destructive disregard for natural resources and human lives -- really the best we could have done? Or did we take an unbalanced, headlong tumble into modernity because the Northeast, child of industrial capitalism and Puritan morality, became "America" by grinding an economic and political rival under its heel?

1. Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale.* New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1972.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Harper is a graduate of Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa., with a degree in history and English. He has been featured in a BBC production on the Welsh settlements in America, and has been interviewed as a source for historical articles by the Philadelphia Inquirer, Washington Post and many magazines. He was arguably the second-most-famous assistant city editor ever to work at the West Chester, Pa., "Daily Local News." The other was Dave Barry. The newspaper was affectionately known by its readers as the "Daily Lack of News."]

Carl Sandburg writes that Abe Lincoln, in his law office in Springfield, kept an envelope marked, "If you can't find it anywhere else, look here." Everyone should have such an envelope. This is mine.

This began as a site where I could share some books and writers I've loved. But since I put together the etymology dictionary, it's becoming a site for people who are curious about what sort of no-life obsessive-compulsive would do something like that. And I've also opened it up to include my stands in ongoing discussions and brawls about topics such as religion, linguistics, and the American Civil War. That's three topics, by the way; not one.

In 1960, when I was born, my parents lived in a place in Pennsylvania called Exton, a village given that name, for all anyone can remember, because it was just a crossroads "X" on the map. For those of you who know the area, their house sat across the Swedesford Road from what is now the sprawling mothership of Exton Mall, but was, in 1960, a bog.

Later we lived between Exton and West Chester, in a small development in the "suburbs" though that word conjures up a wrong image, one of Levittowns and asphalt avenues of identical families in pre-fab houses cut from one of three cookie-cutter designs. This was the older style of suburbs. They drilled two roads down into the old farm, staked off 20 or so quarter-acre lots, then the individual builders or families built on them according to their needs and abilities. Simple split-level ranchers, some of them little more than mobile homes, sat alongside upper-middle-class salt boxes. All these homes grew and changed over time, some getting seedier, some more posh. Older couples lived there along with the young families.

Some lots sat undeveloped -- chunks of wooded ridge or field too swampy or steep to build on. We kids roamed the woods and fields, discovering box turtles, gourds, and ruins of old spring houses and root cellars. We spent hours mucking around in old farm ponds for fat frogs and tadpoles.

In the few years we lived there, the balance of development and nature changed. The construction crews came and backfilled the ponds, buried the creek in a culvert, clear-cut the woods, and hacked a highway bypass through the cornfield. They built a road to connect the two streets of our little development, then built another one below that, and lined both with houses. All this seemed like more

fun to us kids: a four-year orgy of bulldozers and raw earth, and we couldn't see what we were losing till it was gone.

Most of the years leading up to puberty I spent out in the woods with the other neighborhood kids, getting stung by hornets, building tree forts, hiding from the local bully (now an evangelist in Virginia, I'm told). I spent summers snorkeling coral reefs in the Atlantic at my grandparents' house in Boca Raton, and winters sledding down the rough ridge back of the old farm.

When we moved out, I was 11. We landed on The Main Line: that old, wealthy and sophisticated Philadelphia suburb. I entered sixth grade woefully behind all my peers in social development. I went from a place where the boys still ran away from the girls on the schoolyard to one where established "couples" had been "dating" for a year or more. One or two of each gender had even experimented with sex. I made no friends, despite the teacher assigning kids to befriend me. I really never tried to. In shyness and anxiety, I retreated into books.

In part, I sought a public identity, in that competitive environment, as a master of arcane knowledge. I memorized all the flags of the world, and was probably the only 6th grader in America to answer an assignment to write a famous person's biography with a paper on Boris III, King of Bulgaria during the Second World War. It made me an object of curiosity to the other kids, but only mildly interesting and occasionally useful. The next year, when my elementary school and four others dumped into a junior high school, and the hormones of puberty raged, I lapsed into a welcomed obscurity. Too shy for sports or girls, I made myself as invisible as a tall guy could be.

I got along reasonably well with most kids, but had no friends after school. I came home and read. Just so you don't get the wrong idea, I eventually did make friends, and good ones. I was a varsity swimming captain and got a lush and lovely half-Armenian girlfriend, played in bands, etc. But it took a couple of years, and even after I started adjusting I never stopped reading for pleasure.

The books I remember from this time were historical adventures like "The Man in the Iron Mask" and "Ivanhoe." And, of course, "The Lord of the Rings." The Main Line was dotted with hospital thrift shops, and in each one was a wall of shelves where you could pick out, for a quarter or 50 cents each, hardcover novels that had been printed in the late 1800s for Victorian families eager to load their homes with the best literature. As the old Main Line estates broke up, these books found their way into the thrift shops, and, from there, into my hands.

I landed in journalism after college without having taken a single course in it or worked a day on a student newspaper (except briefly for an underground high school publication). I learned on the job, and my first teachers were editors who tended to have a crusading streak. They taught me, sometimes by negative example, that a newspaper should never think itself bigger than, better than, or somehow aloof from its community. But they also taught me that newspapers should provide a voice for the voiceless in that community, and that they should not hesitate to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Since then, I've been a reporter, copy editor, editorial page editor, and entertainment editor in various papers in southeastern Pennsylvania. Got married 1988, son born 1990, divorced 1996 (best thing for all concerned, financially ruinous). Remarried in 2004 to the prettiest gal in town (that's her in the photo at the foot of the right column); lovely daughter born 2006.

Two local history books that I wrote were published by Chester County Historical Society, one a Civil War history of that county, the other a history of West Chester, the county seat, up to 1865. I've also tried my hand at poetry, usually when under the influence of some powerful emotion and some

powerful scotch. Some of these, through editorial accident or oversight, have been published in microscopic literary journals over the years.

I've owned so many that at times I feared structural collapse in the houses I inhabited. I've used stacks of books as furniture.

I was raised on novels -- great, sprawling books like "War and Peace," Scott, Stendhal, Joyce, Dumas, Dickens, Faulkner, "Moby Dick." I was laid up with a double hernia the summer I turned 22, and couldn't do my usual summer break job on the assembly line. I used the time to read "Two Years Before the Mast" and everything written by Joseph Conrad. It wasn't just classics, though; I read Ray Bradbury, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, too. Stendhal taught me about life; Tolkien about language. Kipling, Bradbury and Chandler taught me how to tell a story.

My reading friends mostly have been post-modernists and new historicists, lovers of hard bop and William Burroughs. When I'd mention a weakness for Thornton Wilder, they'd get this sad look on their faces and change the subject. I learned to not mention it. Like I learned not to mention that I was moved by "Appalachian Spring" and the "Adagio For Strings." These pieces were modern, but backward-looking, like Wilder's novels and plays. And they were "romantic." The whole 20th century has swerved determinedly away from romanticism, and especially from any whiff of sentimentality.

Wilder, like Wyeth and Copland and Barber -- and John Coltrane, by the way -- could distinguish sentiment from sentimentality, and they didn't have to flee from both for fear of not knowing the difference. Sentimentality is a shoddy imitation of a fine human feeling, but in the determined avoidance of mush, many writers have abandoned valid emotions and high human feelings. Wilder was one of the few authors in the last century who attempted that dangerous ground, who walked toward sentiment with open eyes. And he did so with a craft as solid as Ezra Pound or James Joyce, the great writers who led the swerve away from Victorian pap.

In 8th grade, I didn't know any of this. I was a sullen, obnoxious kid who tended to ignore reading assignments. My English teacher, Mrs. Siler, a loud, proud daughter of Dixie, assigned us to read a play, and if we couldn't find a suitable play, she'd pick one for us. If I had been my teacher then, I probably would have assigned myself something by O'Neill. But she told me to read Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth." I read it and was amazed. I date my adult interest in reading (and in writing) from that year, which was when I also read "Lord of the Rings." Over the years, I've enjoyed Wilder's novels more than his plays: "The Bridge of San Luis Rey," and then "The Ides of March," which fixed in my mind the persons of Caesar, Catullus and Cleopatra so well that, though I've encountered them in a dozen other fictions and films, if they don't match the Wilder version, I don't quite buy it.

"Heaven's My Destination" is a brilliant comedy centered on the kind of earnest, polite young Christian fundamentalist that grows so thick in this corner of the world you can't toss a Bible without hitting one on the head. But it's all done with genuine affection, and fictional George Brush [!] remains my favorite fundamentalist. But "The Eighth Day" is Wilder's masterpiece, weaving beautiful symphonic music out of the vaudeville of "Skin of Our Teeth." It's as hard-headed as Ayn Rand and as hopeful as a first love.

Wilder served in both World Wars; he suffered an ambivalent sexuality in an America that was intolerant of such things. And he wrote not with the grim "cold eye" of the mature Yeats (who never went to war), but with a warm, loving affirmation of the beauty in the big messy world. That's the concept Mrs. Siler, I suspect, was trying to whisper to the sullen big kid who sat in the back row of Ardmore Junior High School.

Stendhal is the most amazing observer of human nature I've ever read. In his youth, Marie-Henri Beyle campaigned with Napoleon in Italy, Germany, Russia and Austria, and after the final defeat of the French he retired to Italy, took the name Stendhal, and began to write. He eventually returned to Paris and wrote novels -- first "Le Rouge et le Noir" and then "La Chartreuse de Parme," completed in an astonishing 52 days. For Stendhal, Napoleon and his career were a brilliant meteor that blazed, never forgotten, never fully understood. Balzac appreciated his work, and Byron enjoyed his company, but for the most part Stendhal was ignored by his contemporaries -- a sure mark of genius.

Anyone who has ever been in love should spend some time with "De l'Amour," Stendhal's attempts to sort out his own feelings in the midst of a hopeless passion as he offers "a detailed account of all the phases of that disease of the soul called love." In a tribute to the book, the critic Michael Wood wrote,

"De l'Amour is a notebook, a collection of thoughts, memories, anecdotes, epigrams, patches of analysis. It is almost always delicate, often brilliant, a book to keep quoting from. ... He knew that truth is often fragmentary, that De l'Amour ... may ultimately say more for being less composed, less like a well-rounded essay, for being drastically unfaithful to its stiff intentions."

Modern readers may be delighted by the frank feminism of many of Stendhal's digressions.

I also find Stendhal smiling from the shadows of some of my favorite modern fiction, such as W.G. Sebald's "The Emigrants," which blends fiction, memory, and history in just the way Stendhal does. Critics compared Sebald to Ingmar Bergman, Kafka and Proust. But "The Emigrants'" true antecedent is Stendhal's unfinished autobiographical "Life of Henri Brulard." The evocation of memory throughout the Sebald book recalls Stendhal's image, in trying to recall his own childhood, of ancient frescos in ruins. Here's an arm, precisely and vividly painted on plaster. And next to it is bare brick. Whatever it once attached to is gone beyond recall.

And poetry. Oceans and oceans of poetry. Most of it pre-1950. Why the old stuff? I think here is an answer:

"What we term Indo-European poetry was rather a society's sum of knowledge, which was orally transmitted. The features which our western tradition ascribes to poetry (feeling, inspiration, individualism, participation, etc.), and which the aesthetics of romanticism has particularly underscored, were for Indo-European poetry only a side issue, although they were present. The main thing was to preserve and increase cultural elements which presented something essential to the well-being, collectivity, and stability of the society. We are speaking of the magic spells which heal the sick, the legal formulas which settle disputes, the prayers which extort worldly goods from the gods, the genealogies which give to people consciousness of their past and pride in it; the eulogies which legitimize rulers by the celebration of their greatness. He who fulfilled such important functions held a position of the first rank in his society, but his traffic with the Muses was neither particularly frequent nor particularly necessary. For this kind of poetry one could prepare oneself only by years of study; what the Middle Irish Metrics texts tell us about the training of the Early Irish poet is basically valid for the Indo-European one as well." [Enrico Campanile, "*Indogermanische Dichtersprache*," 1987, Innsbruck, p.26]

The clues from the Vedic texts, older than Homer, match the Irish poetic system, ancient by the time it emerges into the light of writing in the 7th century and stunningly stable for the next thousand years. Poets were a hereditary caste and closely associated with priests.

Five thousand years of tradition comes unglued relatively quickly; Wordsworth turns to natural language. Romantics chafe at rhyme and meter, the artificial aids to remembrance in an oral culture. Stendhal or someone like him says rhyme was fit for cavalry orders, not for great thoughts. A modern poet is not doing what Homer did. Would Homer contribute to a "Poets Against the War" anthology?

If they wonder why he was the basis of a national education system for a millenia, and they seem as ephemeral as crickets on the lawn, consider what, or whom, is served in the verse.

My friend Peter and I started out with Keats when we were 17, and from there we roamed everywhere. In college, I noticed that the literature offerings skipped right from Pope to Wordsworth, omitting 50 years. So I dug up Cowper, Collins, Gray, Swift, Kit Smart, and Goldsmith and read them and thought they were great fun. The reason for their modern unpopularity jump right off the page: strict rules and a fully developed convention. Yet that's what makes this poetry so surreal. And what does it say about poetry that, from that age that wrote such controlled verse, four of the names on my list died insane?

From that infatuation I retain whole chunks of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" by heart, along with much of Collins and a few other pieces by Gray. And I have an old four-volume set of Cowper's letters. Cowper was the most timid, refined old-ladyish poet imaginable, yet he wrestled with a crushing depression that would have killed most of us. And out of it all he wrote the most charming, erudite, self-effacing letters to his friends. They are not great poets, but every reader is entitled to choose a few favorites from the second tier. Or, as Samuel Johnson said, "Parnassus has its flowers of transient fragrance, as well as its oaks of towering height, and laurels of eternal verdure."

My literary love in my college years was Yeats. I found in him then a romantic intensity that matched my own, but he had wings to soar in words. I find in him now a matchless excellence as a writer. Anyone who wrote poetry in the 20th century, or who read modern poetry seriously, had to confront Yeats. Every serious writer was aware of him, either flowing through channels he cut or else trying to scramble out of them. Yeats was in many ways a bridge for the best of the 19th century to cross into the 20th, and that's a formidable legacy.

Kant knew that philosophy thrived when it was deemed trivial by priests and bankers and social reformers and prime ministers. If those people had thought philosophy important, they would have sought to control it or repress it or buy it or pervert it. The quest for truth can only occur in the autonomy known by the scorned and neglected. Yeats knew the same thing about poetry when he wrote "Adam's Curse." In a modern, commercial society, unless poets and philosophers are deemed dreamers and fools, no human thought will be free.

He is, I admit, a man's poet, with all the folly and foolish nobility that implies. Lately I've been reading the later Yeats: "The Winding Stair and Other Poems." I see these poems that I've known since I was 18 with fresh poignancy and power. I had read then, but never felt till now, his bitterness at leaving youth just when he'd finally mastered its arts. The powers I feel now: to please a young woman's heart, to lead her to the well of her sensual self and clear the rushes and clarify the water so that she may drink deeply and long -- all these attained powers arrive at the same time I begin to find gray hairs and my hip hurts.

As a man, however, I find very little that engages or attracts me in "Jane Eyre." *Emily* Brontë, on the other hand: Now there's a stone-cold goddess of sadistic fiction. She out-Burroughs Burroughs. I never read a more sadistic, sexual and disturbed novel than "Wuthering Heights," and Juliet Barker's excellent biography of the Brontë sisters confirms my notion that Emily was the weirdest, most fascinating woman in literature.

Anyone who's serious about American poetry, or about poetry, or about America, has to read "Leaves of Grass." But be careful what you get. The 1855 original version doesn't have some of the better-known pieces, which were added over a lifetime of revising and expanding, but it crackles with wild lightning as Whitman surveys a new reality like some Blake titan.

In each subsequent reprinting, he trimmed his vision to the unmoved world. In altering his poems to fit the (mostly negative) critical reception, Whitman marred their original angelic stride. He became a poet of causes, rather than a poet who contained causes. There's nothing necessarily wrong with that, but fortunately the 1855 original is still printed, and often sold more cheaply than the revised anthology of Whitman's work.

The more I think about it, the more impressed I am that I grew up beside a city that actually has a "Walt Whitman Bridge" as a major artery -- given that name only after an end-run around the blinder sort of Christians and patriots who despised his morals, but named that nonetheless. America surprises you in unexpected places.

I've long been a champion of Robinson Jeffers. Though he's not the most popular American poet, he seems to have gained ground in recent years. He is probably the best heir of Whitman's long-line style. He's also an embodiment of whatever California used to be in the '20s and '30s: the magical, wild place before half of America moved there and trampled it to fragments. California when California was a refuge from America's vulgarities rather than their factory. Trawlers coasting slowly through the fog, heron-cries, wild horses, hawks on the headland and cruel, cruel fires.

His father was a professor of Old Testament studies. He began learning Greek at age 5. Unlike many poets of his generation (Pound, Williams, Eliot), Jeffers turned his back on the cosmopolitan culture and sought the primeval, which he found on the (then) desolate California coast around Carmel. There, he felt, "for the first time in my life I could see people living -- amid magnificent unspoiled scenery -- essentially as they did in the Sagas or in Homer's Ithaca. ... Here was contemporary life that was also permanent life."

An excellent book about poets, by the way, is "Their Ancient Glittering Eyes," by Donald Hall. Hall, himself a poet of some repute (I confess, I never got into his work) is a wonderful interviewer. As a young man, he did "Paris Review" style interviews with the grand old men of American poetry: Frost, Eliot, and Pound, along with the melifluous train wreck that was Dylan Thomas. What's published here are more than just interviews, however. What makes the book resound are the anecdotes about what it took to get into the presence of these men and what it felt like to be there.

The book also includes Yvor Winters, Marianne Moore, and Archibald MacLeish, though they feel like something of an afterthought beside the big four. Hall writes eloquently of the down-home poet Robert Frost that the real Robert Frost wore for much of his career. Readers who only know the "Best-Loved Poems" Frost can read Hall's stories of him and better understand the nihilism of "Acquainted With the Night," the suicide musings of "Come In," or the sensuality of "Putting In the Seed."

He was vain, he could be cruel, he was rivalrous with all other men; but he could also be generous and warm -- when he could satisfy himself that his motives were dubious. He was a man possessed by guilt, by knowledge that he was bad, by the craving for love and the necessity to reject love offered.

Hall also writes of the anguish of the elder Pound, who saw his whole world go to hell, twice.

Form is important in poetry. It's unfortunate that the very idea of form has become associated, in academic literary circles and somewhat in the common mind, with reactionary patriarchy. Take Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "powerful emotion recollected in solitude," or Frost's tighter version, "enthusiasm tamed by metaphor," and you see that form, or at least the awareness of it, is half of what allows poetry to be poetry. It is the magic ritual that allows us to approach the most terrifying aspects of our selves and our lives.

Form also allows you to approach important topics that might easily slip into sentimentality. Wordsworth's "Surprised by Joy" is one of the most moving things I've ever read: a tightly controlled

little sonnet by a father about his child who has died. Once again, the tight lacing of the form allows the power of the content. Poetry shares this with music, and one of my favorite albums is the set of standard ballads that John Coltrane's quartet cut with Johnny Hartman on vocals in 1963. Coltrane was already pushing the boundaries of tonality, and his foursome was forging a style of "hard, unfaltering attack and furiously intense, extended improvisations that bordered on free-jazz." But he deliberately chose Hartman, a smooth-baritone crooner, and came out of the studio with a breathtakingly beautiful set of sides ("Lush Life" may be the most perfect thing ever recorded) that was elegant, respectful, and not a bit sentimental. McCoy Tyner's rich piano fills and the thirteen tenor notes Coltrane blows at the end of "Lush Life" are as thrilling for their restraint as for the intensity beneath it.

Anyway, poetry. As you can see, I can still get carried away.

Such non-fiction as I first read -- Bruce Catton, for instance -- had the feel of fiction. It was books by people who are obviously in love with their discipline and fairly falling over themselves to share their enthusiasm for it, like George Gamow's books on physics.

But my reading history underwent a polar shift right around the time of 9-11, and I keep waiting for it to shift back again, but it hasn't happened. I found I got restless reading any length of text -- fiction or poetry -- that didn't expand my factual knowledge. There was so much I didn't know that I needed to know. I needed to soak up more, to understand the modern world.

It wasn't entirely a casualty of 9/11. It had begun a little before that. I think more than anything it was the Internet. The first thing I looked for when I went online in the late '90s (after slinky pictures of Alyssa Milano) were people who shared my love of literature. I spent an unfortunate week as a member of a Yahoo! club dedicated to "literary criticism," where I got to watch a couple of people expertly mock anyone who didn't toe the marxist-feminist line. Nobody seemed to have the slightest interest in literature. But how they loved to bicker about critical theories, and about what one critic said about another critic!

It made my head spin, and I said so, and I got called a pompous middle-aged male ass or something like that, and I dropped out of it, telling them I'd rather spend an hour reading Shelley than a lifetime among their ideological duels. The passion for writing and the argument about it never seem to dwell together. It was the difference between writing love letters and collecting postage stamps. The sad thing is, the bullies in that club are all professors of literature somewhere or another.

But all over the Internet, polemical debates rage like hellfires. And to navigate that landscape, you have to master great mounds of facts. After literature, my online friend and I wandered into Civil War discussions, and instantly got pinned down by withering crossfire (we were on the Southern side) that sent me scurrying for ammunition from bigger and more obscure books. Soon I had a whole shelf full of them handy (I had sold off my Civil War library after finishing my own book about it).

I still understand the importance of fiction and poetry. Believe me, I preached from that pulpit for most of my life. But that flame went out in me, and I don't know if it will ever catch again.