

# Those People

## (The Yankees)

By Dr. Clyde Wilson

*The flag which he [my grandfather, Francis Scott Key] had then so proudly hailed, I saw waving at the same place over the victims of as vulgar and brutal despotism as modern times have witnessed. — Francis Key Howard, a prisoner of Lincoln at Fort McHenry, 1861*

*Slavery is no more the cause of this war than gold is the cause of robbery. — Governor Joel Parker of New Jersey, 1863*

*It always makes me proud of my country to see all those fine young men in the U.S. Army. — Crooked Yankee banker in the classic film Stagecoach*

Continued from the previous issue  
of *Confederate Veteran*

In my previous article on "Those People," as General Lee called the invading Yankees, I pointed out the antislavery sentiment of some Northerners was never in itself sufficient to support the election of a Republican president, much less a war of invasion and conquest of the Southern people by the federal government. Other and more powerful interests lay behind the rise of the Republican party. The most important of these interests were capitalists who wished to use the federal government in numerous ways to enhance their wealth (which they pre-

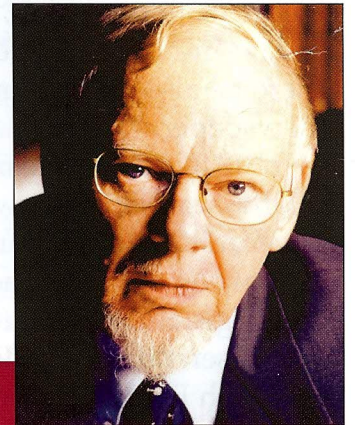
sented as necessary to the prosperity and progress of the whole country). Their schemes had long been hamstrung by the Constitutional scruples and small government principles of the majority of Southern congressmen who held to the Jeffersonian preference for a small, inexpensive, and unobtrusive government.

The most fundamental American political division had been revealed in the conflict of Jefferson and Hamilton in the first days of the US government. Jeffersonians, largely though not entirely Southern, believed that the "consent of the governed" found its bottom

line in the will of the people of each State, that the federal govern-

ment was one of specific and limited authority explicit in the Constitution, and in general that government governed best when it governed least and, unlike the monarchies of the Old World, left the people to peacefully enjoy the fruits of their labor.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning Hamiltonians, largely affluent Northerners, had seen the federal government as a tool, the powers and activities of which



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were to be stretched and expanded at every opportunity, and the Constitution as a springboard of power which was to be reinterpreted at will. The government should be used to develop the American Union into a great and rich *nation* by encouragement of profitable business enterprise in the manner of the British Empire. Such a government would, in their view, strengthen the country and increase general prosperity through policies that would, not incidentally, further empower and enrich influential Northern-centered interests.<sup>2</sup>

Fundamental to these conflicts was a basic regional division in the American economy. The South produced the immense majority of foreign exports — tobacco, cotton, rice, sugar — without which there could have been no foreign trade. Part of the Northern economy was mercantile — involved with the carrying trade in Southern products. But after the War of 1812 the Northern economy was increasingly industrialized as an outlet for surplus capital and population. That economy could produce nothing which was not produced by the more advanced British industry. Northern industrialists thought they needed tariffs (taxes) on imports so the price of British goods would be raised and Northern goods could be sold at great profit for just a little less than the taxed imports. This was presented as the “American System,” a boon to the whole country, purportedly increasing the wealth and strength of the *nation*.

Thoughtful Southerners quickly perceived the tariff forced them to pay higher than market prices for manufactured goods and, by discouraging reciprocal trade, depressed the European market for Southern produce. Why should Northerners sell their products in a home market artificially protected by the government, while the price of cotton, on which so much of the national economy depended, was decided in a completely open world market over which the pro-

ducers had no control? “Why should the government pay the expenses of one set of men and not of another?” asked John C. Calhoun. He further pointed out that the benefits of the “American System” went entirely to the wealthy class of the North and not to Americans in general. Besides, the Constitution allowed the federal government to levy tariffs in order to support itself, not to provide unconstitutional favours to some people at the expense of others.<sup>3</sup>

New Englanders, with their customary arrogance, attempted to disguise their greed by claiming the South was poor and backward, low prices for its products being due entirely to its own laziness and ignorance. This absurdity has been repeated endlessly by historians. In fact the South was prosperous and produced the greater part of the wealth of the country. Southerners did not go in for industry in a big way because their agricultural life was more profitable and congenial. The most important innovation of the pre-war period, the McCormick reaper, though manufactured in the Midwest where it was needed, was invented by a Southerner, as were other important items. Through the leadership of scientific farmers like Edmund Ruffin, the worn-out lands of the older Southern states had been restored to productivity before the War. When it became necessary to repel invasion, Confederate scientists and engineers, professional and amateur, performed miracles of industrial production and technological innovation. The “backwardness” of the South was entirely in the eye of the hostile beholder.<sup>4</sup>

From the War of 1812 up to the Polk administration of 1844-1849, US politics had consisted largely of conflict between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian policies, as indicated by continuing inconclusive struggles over the national bank, national debt, federal expenditures, the tariff, sub-

sidized “internal improvements,” and the disposition of the vast public domain of Western lands. By the later 1840s Polk and the Democratic party had seemingly settled many of these questions. In the Walker Tariff of 1846, taxes on imports had been brought down to a level which did not force Americans to pay higher prices to politically favored Northeastern manufacturers. Polk’s independent treasury had seemed to kill off the “national bank” project for good, establishing the long-desired Jeffersonian goal of separating the control of the currency from the power and profit of private banking interests. And the president had vetoed as unconstitutional a multi-million dollar “Rivers and Harbors” bill which had contemplated federal subsidy of hundreds of local “improvement” boondoggles, largely for the Great Lakes states.

Polk’s Democrats were a little more prone to rely on the manipulation of political machinery and more ready to go to war than Jefferson had been; but, as in the Louisiana Purchase and Florida acquisition, Jeffersonians had always been alert to expanding American borders where there were potential foreign threats. The successful Mexican War was acquiring vast new undeveloped and sparsely settled territory for homes for future generations of Americans, and had canceled the threat that any European imperial power could occupy the Pacific coast. Calhoun, the most farseeing and fair minded leader of the time, warned Americans to settle for these gains and not take the road to further conquest and imperialism, to the “Manifest Destiny” which many were touting. More territory was forbidden fruit which would poison American republicanism.

Alas, the Democratic party triumph over Hamiltonianism in the 1840s was to be short-lived. Towards the end of the war, David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced into the

House of Representatives what was to become known as "the Wilmot Proviso." Wilmot had supported the administration's tariff reductions, to the disfavor of his iron-industry state, and was anxious to regain some favor at home. The Wilmot Proviso said slavery would not be legal in any of the huge territory to be acquired by the ongoing war with the Mexican dictator Santa Anna. The ground had been prepared by Northern anger over the blocked rent-seeking agenda and by a furor a few years earlier against the admission of the independent Republic of Texas to the Union. This furor had persuaded much of the Northern public, especially the fourth made up of the foreign-born, that when Northerners moved west it was a mission to settle a continent, and when Southerners moved west it was a diabolical conspiracy to spread slavery.

The measure, which President Polk decried as politically motivated, unnecessary, and dangerous,<sup>5</sup> was quickly passed in the House by a resentful Northern majority, failed in the Senate, and was passed again by the House the next year. The measure clearly violated the Missouri Compromise line, widely regarded as sacred, which had heretofore been applied to all new territory. A few years later, the proponents of the Proviso policy would dishonestly erupt in hysteria, claiming that Southerners had overthrown the sacred Missouri Compromise by the Kansas-Nebraska acts which allowed the people of any territory to vote to legalize slavery if they chose. (Even though the Kansas-Nebraska acts resulted not from Southern demands but from the machinations of Northern politicians.)

For Southerners, the passage of the Proviso by a Northern majority meant the long tacit agreement to share new territory between the North and South would soon be abrogated. There would be no more Southern States and the South would become a permanent minority to be governed by hostile interests — in

the Union which had been founded by their fathers and grandfathers for their protection and well-being. This in fact was exactly what the predominant interests of the North wanted. It was particularly galling to the South since everyone was well aware it was Southern statesmanship and Southern military courage which had been responsible for almost all the expansion of American territory.

When the Wilmot Proviso broke upon the country, Southerners had been going about their daily lives, those who were not in Mexico exhibiting their American patriotism in arms. Southerners had no agenda for "spreading slavery." But they deeply resented the implied offense to their honor and apprehended the effects of an obviously hostile Northern majority. And in their view of the Constitution, the legality or prohibition of slavery was to be decided by the American peoples who would create new sovereign states in the acquired region, when (or after) those sovereign states came into being.

The crisis created by the Wilmot Proviso was supposedly settled by a hobbled-together politicians' creation known as "the Compromise of 1850," which most Southerners accepted hopefully in the interest of peace. The two great national leaders Henry Clay and Daniel Webster denounced abolitionists and urged Northerners to settle on a compromise and save the Union, the latter sacrificing his Northern popularity by his plea for moderation. In a last great speech, a few weeks before his death, the other great national elder statesman, Calhoun, told the Senate and the country that this compromise was useless because it did not touch the basic issue. While the South considered it a settlement in good faith, he said, for the now dominant forces in the North it was only as a steppingstone to further demands and concessions. The Union to which he had devoted his life would frightfully dissolve in the near future, probably in the wake of a presidential election.

A furor over "the extension of

slavery" had arisen which, coupled with strengthening Northern resentment at the Southern obstruction of capitalist-favored legislation, would end a little more than a decade later in the seizure of the White House by a new party, the Republicans, elected entirely by Northern votes and boastfully and forthrightly dedicated to Northern economic interests and to making sure that all new territory would be "Free Soil," the exclusive domain of white men — black people, slave or free, forever excluded. Thus the years before Lincoln's election were embroiled in controversy over the question of the status of future states. The hysterical political style of the North (as described in my previous article), encouraged by the cynical propaganda of ambitious politicians, converted Southern insistence on equality in the territories into a diabolical campaign by a ruthless "Slave Power" or "Slavocracy" to dominate the country and even to enslave Northern whites.

While the War was not "about" slavery, it is true that heated conflict over the "extension" or "expansion" of slavery marked American politics in the years leading up to secession. This issue, and the relative behavior of North and South in regard to it, is complicated and has more often than not been misrepresented by historians. Let us try to make sense of what led up to the Wilmot Proviso, and then, without too much complicated legislative detail, what happened after.

In 1785 the Continental Congress adopted a measure preventing slavery in the huge Northwest Territory which had been conquered by Virginia and given for the use of the citizens of all the states. The measure was drafted by Jefferson and had the support of most of the South. This was before the Constitution was ratified and at a time when the possibility of bringing in many thousands more African slaves to work new lands was wide open. For many reasons, almost nobody wanted that.



A SOUTHERN PLANTER ARMING HIS SLAVES TO RESIST INVASION.

The further importation of slaves into the United States was forbidden in 1808, with Southern approval. The issues and conditions had changed in 1819 when Missouri, settled largely by people from Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky, wrote its constitution and applied for admission to the Union. A Northern majority in Congress attempted to bar the admission of Missouri on the grounds that its constitution allowed slavery. (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi, along with Louisiana from the Louisiana Purchase, had already been admitted with slavery. The treaty with France had required that private property of the French inhabitants in the Purchase be respected.)

President Monroe and his cabinet and the elder statesmen Jefferson and Madison immediately recognized for what it was this attempt to bar the sovereign people of Missouri from the Union under the constitution they had written. It was a cynical play for power, to rally elements of the North

against the Southern Jeffersonians who had ruled for two decades and to dilute future Southern influence.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually there was a compromise, carried by the South and a few friendly Northerners, that admitted Missouri with a constitution drawn up by its citizens, but stipulated that a line would be drawn through the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase above which slavery would not be legal during territorial status. There was no active emancipation involved in either the Northwest Ordinance or the Missouri Compromise, and many people visited and even remained considerable periods in the upper region with their slaves. In the 1820s Illinois seriously considered the legalization of slaveholding.

The Missouri controversy darkened Jefferson's last years. Jefferson had always thought slavery a bad thing and wished something could be done about it. But the sovereignty of the people of the states was more

vital than the intractable matter of the black slaves. Jefferson said the conflict was "a fire-bell in the night" that was "the death-knell" of the American Union. He was not referring to slavery as the danger that would destroy the Union, contrary to what has often been asserted. The danger to the Union was not slavery, which had long existed, but the attempt of the North to dictate to the people of a sovereign state the nature of its society. A few years later, in the last months of his life, Jefferson recommended that Virginia once more assert sovereignty and nullify unconstitutional federal "internal improvements" legislation.<sup>7</sup>

And Jefferson pointed out an important consideration which was conveniently forgotten in later controversies and overlooked by historians. The Northern attempt to forbid slavery in Missouri did not result in the freedom of one single slave. The issue was where the slaves would be located. In fact, the Northern attempt

to control "the expansion of slavery" was counterproductive and hostile to black people because de-concentrating the slave population over a larger territory would encourage ameliorated conditions and eventual emancipation.

When Thomas Jefferson looked westward he saw succeeding generations of Americans creating new self-governing commonwealths. If the future generations wanted to go off on their own and form new confederacies, which he expected to happen in the West, that was not a problem — they would still be Americans. He compared the new states to younger sons who were free to decide things for themselves. It was not the force of the federal government which held Americans together — it was their common blood and fellow feeling. The highest value was not a "sacred Union" but "consent of the governed."

When Lincoln's backers looked Westward they had a very different vision. They saw natural resources to be exploited for private profit with government encouragement, new markets to be developed, more political offices to be filled, and a lure for thousands of immigrants to increase the value of the lands bestowed on the capitalists by the government — all enhancing the growing power of the "nation." For them the West was not a source of new self-governing States for Americans but a vast opportunity for wealth for those who knew how to grab the opportunity. And not a few Northerners were regarding the South in the same way. Southerners were not fellow Americans, they were troublesome obstacles to be got out of the way so that their territory could be properly exploited by "the nation." The War made this attitude widespread and respectable. From here it was only a short step to exterminating the obstacle. The same people who had tried to prevent the admission of Texas to the Union now regarded it not as a sister State worthy of respect but as a territory to be conquered and used.

"Preserving the Union" now meant something very different from what it had before.<sup>8</sup>

Neither white nor black Southerners had any role to play in the new version of "the Union." One of the many ignored Northern realities of the time is that some Yankees expected the black population to die out when removed from the protection of slavery, and the white population to be exterminated or driven out. Then the South would be repopulated by New Englanders who knew how to make maximum profit, using immigrants who were less expensive and more efficient workers than blacks. Some brilliant Yankee entrepreneurs thought they could take over plantations and produce the immensely valuable crops of the South more profitably than it was being done. A number followed in the wake of Union armies with the hope of getting rich on confiscated Southern plantations, and even more tried it during Reconstruction. Lots of Yankees got rich off the South during Reconstruction, but not from growing cotton.

A circular reportedly passed among Wall Street insiders in late 1861 is most illuminating:

*Slavery is likely to be abolished by the war power and this I and my friends are in favor of, for slavery is but the owning of labor and carries with it the care of the laborers, while the European plan, led on by England, is that capital shall control labor by controlling wages. The great debt that capitalists will see to it is made out of the war must be used as a means to control the volume of money.*

Wall Street was already a major force in behalf of domestic operators and international bankers, all eager to "support" Lincoln's war. Any 21st century American who has not been asleep for the last few years is well aware how bankers thrive on government spending and debt.

In 1853 the Kansas-Nebraska acts were passed, killing the 1850

Compromise by allowing the question of slavery to be decided by the people of a Territory rather than by a geographic line, and raising a very slight possibility that there might be slavery above the Missouri Compromise Line. This was not done at the demand of Southerners, who indeed believed that only a sovereign State and not the people of a territory could decide this issue. The new and needless laws had to do with the schemes of Northern capitalists and politicians to expedite the construction of a transcontinental railroad from Chicago.

The Kansas-Nebraska acts created a backlash that brought together the agendas of many disparate elements of the North. They could all agree on an urgent need to prevent "the extension of slavery." Those who wanted to strike a blow at slavery, those who resented Southern political power that retarded Northern profits, New Englanders long bred on vicious hatred of everything Southern, people for whom the American Union must become a powerful unified "nation" with a unique holy mission, and those Northerners, numerous in every State, who feared having any black people near them, now all had a common platform. It was an issue which by his clever manipulation was to vault to prominence a seemingly washed-up but very clever and ambitious politician named Lincoln.

The resulting agitation fueled the rise of a new party, the Republicans. The Republicans made much of the Northwest Ordinance and the Missouri Compromise to suggest that their stand against "the extension of slavery" was a sacred policy of the Founding Fathers which vile Southerners were trying to overturn to spread their evil institution. They even named their party "Republican" after Jefferson's party. But their construction of the issue was pure dishonest demagoguery to arouse in the Northern public the belief that a diabolical "slave power conspiracy" was out to destroy the hallowed prin-

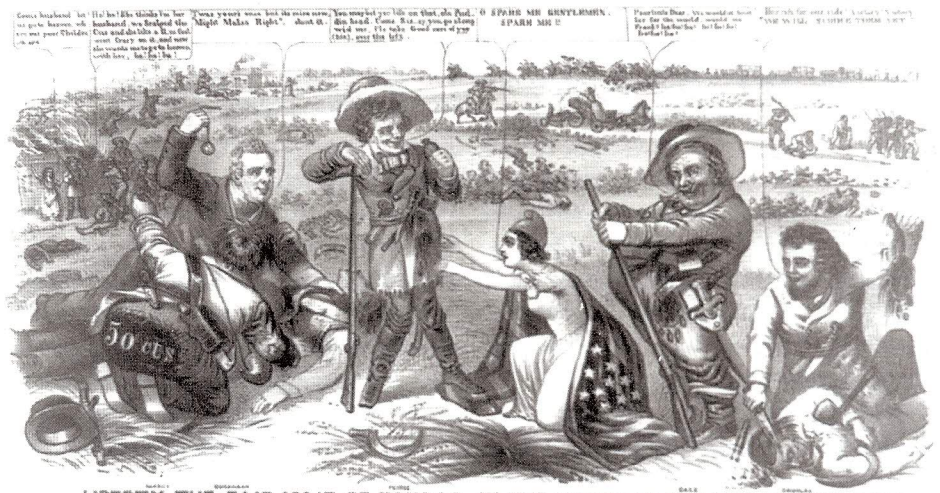
ciples of the Founders. They were not copying Jefferson, the critic of slavery, they were denying the Jefferson who had warned against raising a furor over "the extension of slavery." Not to mention that the Republicans stood for economic policies that were the polar opposite of Jeffersonian. The Republicans actually gave little thought to the effect of their propaganda on the South. Their goal was to embarrass and displace the Democratic party in the North. That was Lincoln's strategy in his celebrated debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858.

A point that is nearly always hidden in discussions of the conflict over slavery: No Southerner ever insisted that any state, new or old, had to be a slave state. That was a matter that could only be settled by the sovereign people of a state itself. No Southern leader ever denied that a state could decide for itself whether to permit slavery. The Confederate Constitution allowed for the admission of non-slave states. The question was over the territories, not yet states, that were under the control of Congress and were the common inheritance of all citizens. The restriction of Southern settlement in new lands was an insult and a portent that the South faced an increasingly vulnerable status within the Union. As it became ever more evident that the North intended to dominate and rule in its own interests, Southerners began to insist increasingly that the North show good faith in obeying the Constitutional provisions in regard to slavery, about the only provisions left that favored the South.

During the overheated politics of the 1850s, Presidents Pierce and Buchanan and the Supreme Court all tried to encourage moderation and keep an even hand. But the aggressive new face of the North sensed triumph and would not be satisfied.

It is in this sense that the conflict leading up to secession was "about" slavery.

It is now established with almost Soviet rigour that the War to Prevent



LIBERTY, THE FAIR MAID OF KANSAS, IN THE HANDS OF THE "BORDER RUFFIANS"

*A Northern cartoon blaming Democrats for the bloodshed in Kansas.*

Southern Independence was "caused by" or "about" slavery. It is, in fact, absurd to attribute such an immense and revolutionary event to one cause. Earlier generations of historians, more objective and learned than the current crop, wrote about clashing economic interests and cultures and political ambitions and agitations as among the causes. The emphasis on slavery these days is not the result of some new historical wisdom or newly discovered truth. Rather, it is the result of Americans today being obsessed with race and victimology, of the unfortunate tendency of many Americans to sugarcoat acts of aggression with idealistic rationalizations, and an intensification of the "blame the South" theme that has been chronic throughout American history.

Those who tout slavery as the whole and only cause of The War always cite the secession ordinances of the seven Deep South States that seceded first. Indeed, these did mention interference with slavery as one of the causes of separating from the Union. The current crop of historians have converted this one aspect into a blanket claim that the War was all about slavery, leaving an impression that it was entirely the South's fault for defending an evil institution against the benevolent agenda of the North for freedom. This makes the

gigantic hidden assumption that the federal government had no choice about invading and destroying the South and that it did so to free the slaves.

Nothing could be more obvious than that the conflict over "the extension of slavery" was a contest of political power between the North and the South which had grown steadily apart in economics, religion, customs, values, and ways of life. According to a recent British historian, Marc Egnal: "For most Republicans non-extension [of slavery] was more an economic policy designed to secure Northern domination of Western lands than the initial step in a broad plan to end slavery." Though historians like to cite Lincoln's few pretty words about the immorality of slavery, the status and welfare of the African-American population carried no significant weight in the Republican agenda. As Frederick Douglass, the leading black American of the 19th century, was later to observe, "Mr. Lincoln was pre-eminently the white man's president."<sup>9</sup>

The writer Ambrose Bierce, who was a hard-fighting Union soldier throughout the war, wrote that he had never met an abolitionist in the Union army and that the only black people he had seen were the concubines and servants of Union officers.

To assert that slavery was the sole "cause" of The War while ignoring the powerful driving force of the capitalists who adopted the Republican party as their instrument, is superficial historianship and verges upon dishonesty. No serious observer can ignore this aspect. No honest thinker can accept any monocausal explanation for an event as huge and complex as the war of 1861-1865. Life is more complicated than that, and proper history teaches us about life.

Even if slavery in a sense was a cause of secession, that does not make it a cause of the War, for a war of conquest to prevent secession was a choice. And not an obvious one to many Northerners as well as Southerners. A choice made even more questionable by the fact of Lincoln's unprecedented election by only two-fifths of the people and the seceded States' declared willingness to negotiate in good faith. The South had no need to fight to "preserve slavery," which had long existed and was in no immediate peril. When the States declared that hostility to slavery was their reason for secession, they meant that they did not accept the right of ill-disposed, irresponsible outsiders to carry out an endless program of hateful slander and petty interferences with their daily life in a Union which their fathers and grandfathers had created for their liberty and well-being.

The "causes" of the war were many, but strictly speaking what the war was "about" was the nature of the Union. Black slaves had been an integral part of American (not just Southern) society for well over two centuries and nobody had gone to war either to keep them or to emancipate them. Indeed, Lincoln declared that he had neither the desire nor the power to interfere with slavery, and he would not know how to go about it even if he had the intent and the power. (Illinois did not admit black people to citizenship and sharply discouraged them from living there.) Lincoln would not and could not in-

augurate war to free the slaves. He could and did, however, inaugurate war.

As described in my previous article, a number of new developments were responsible for a hardening Northern attitude through the 1850s: One was the growing emotion of "national greatness," sometimes seen as a divine mission of a chosen people, the Americans. (Look at the lyrics of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.) Nationalism, the desirability of one territory unified under one strong government, was a major idea in all the Western world in the 19th century and provided major support for the war against the South. To this day it fuels the emotions of people who fervently but erroneously regard secession as "treason."

The influence of industrialists and bankers, which had been somewhat restrained by the interests of Northern traders and shippers, was now predominant. Industry was strong and growing stronger. Chicago and Detroit had grown in barely a decade from hamlets to mighty industrial centers. The new balance of power was revealed in 1860-1861 when the Southern-oriented free-traders of New York were vanquished by the Republicans. Industry created a Northern proletariat of dependent workers for the first time in America, many of them foreign-born, who, among other things, could be persuaded to vote as their employers dictated and forced by unemployment or bribed by bounties to fill up the ranks of the Union armies.

Lincoln's party paid little attention to the status or welfare of African-Americans. They did, however, as soon as they controlled Congress, pass: 1) the highest tariff on imports in American history; 2) a national banking system by which favored institutions were entitled to create money out of the air and virtually control the credit and currency of the country (predecessor to the Federal Reserve). 3) a massive giveaway of

public lands, which previously had been sold at modest prices to genuine settlers. (A popular plank of Lincoln's platform was "Vote Yourself a Farm," meaning a Homestead Law by which those who settled 160 acres of public land could own it. But the real purpose of this law was to give away millions of acres of land to favored railroad and mining interests. It never occurred to the emancipators to allow a single square inch of land in the great empty spaces of the Midwest to the freed slaves. That would be allowing them into Northern territory, to prevent which was a high priority for nearly all Northerners, including the most avid opponents of slavery.) 4) a contract labor law by which virtually enslaved gangs of foreign workers could be brought in — to keep down the wages of native American labor. 5) a Morrill Act for "land-grant colleges" which inserted the federal government into education for the first time. (Morrill, the Vermont Senator who was responsible for this legislation also gave his name to the "Morrill Tariff.")

Not much to do with slavery, except that slavery helped to produce the immense crops of the South which made up the vast majority of America's foreign trade, which the ruling interests of the North were not about to relinquish. Chronology here is important, as it is, indeed, in achieving clarity about any historical event. Large segments of Northern opinion at first received secession calmly. "Let the erring sisters go in peace." Southerners, however rashly and unwisely, were simply invoking the good old American founding principle of "consent of the governed." Abolitionists felt freed of contamination. But then the capitalists began to collar the editors and the politicians. The North could not afford to let the highly productive Southern economy get beyond its grasp. Lincoln announced that he would initiate no hostilities but he would collect the tariff at the ports.<sup>10</sup>

*Continued on page 56*

# Those People

Quite true that Lincoln posed no immediate threat to slavery. That does not mean that he posed no threat to the South, however. Historians comb through every word uttered or written by Southerners at the time to identify evil and unworthy motives and are ingenious in explanations of why Southerners really meant something else more evil and devious than what they actually said. At the same time, Northern motives and actions are assumed as righteous on the basis of Lincoln's occasional pieties. On the one hand, Lincoln was the farseeing and humane statesman who said that "a house divided against itself could not stand" and the nation must become all slave or all free. On the other hand, the South was hysterical in regarding this benevolent and moderate statesman as a threat. Lincoln is always allowed to have it both ways, as in the Gettysburg Address, where he simulatenously claims credit for preserving the hallowed heritage of the founding fathers AND launching a revolutionay "new birth of freedom." Meanwhile, historians, most of them not even aware that they are doing so, always start with the assumption that Southerners are bad people who should not be viewed as having a single point on their side of the argument and whose words and acts must be reinterpreted to be seen in a negative light.

It is easy to believe in the honesty of Lincoln's position if you are already certain that Lincoln had been picked by God to lead the "nation" on to a higher plane. But very poor historianship to take Lincoln's words as conclusive without paying attention to the situation of the time. Abe was in fact covering his posterior and making things look good for European public opinion. Plenty of spokes-

men for his party were at the same time boasting and crowing with delight that a Northern party was taking power that would serve Northern and only Northern interests.

Lincoln and respectable Republicans of course disclaimed John Brown. Brown, an obvious psychopath, in 1859 led a raid on a Virginia town and murdered a number of its citizens, including a respectable free black man and a grandnephew of George Washington. (Brown wanted Washington's sword as a talisman.) He had pikes to arm the slaves and a constitution naming himself president. It is emblematic that Brown's raid is still celebrated as a "slave revolt," when in fact no slave had anything to do with it. Southerners understood perfectly that Brown's expedition was an attack by Northerners, that it was financed and graced by some of the richest and most respectable Yankees, and that in some quarters Brown's execution was proclaimed to be a noble martyrdom. A ludicrously false and sentimental painting showing Brown blessing a black baby on his way to the gallows shows how delusional much of Northern thinking about the South was.<sup>11</sup>

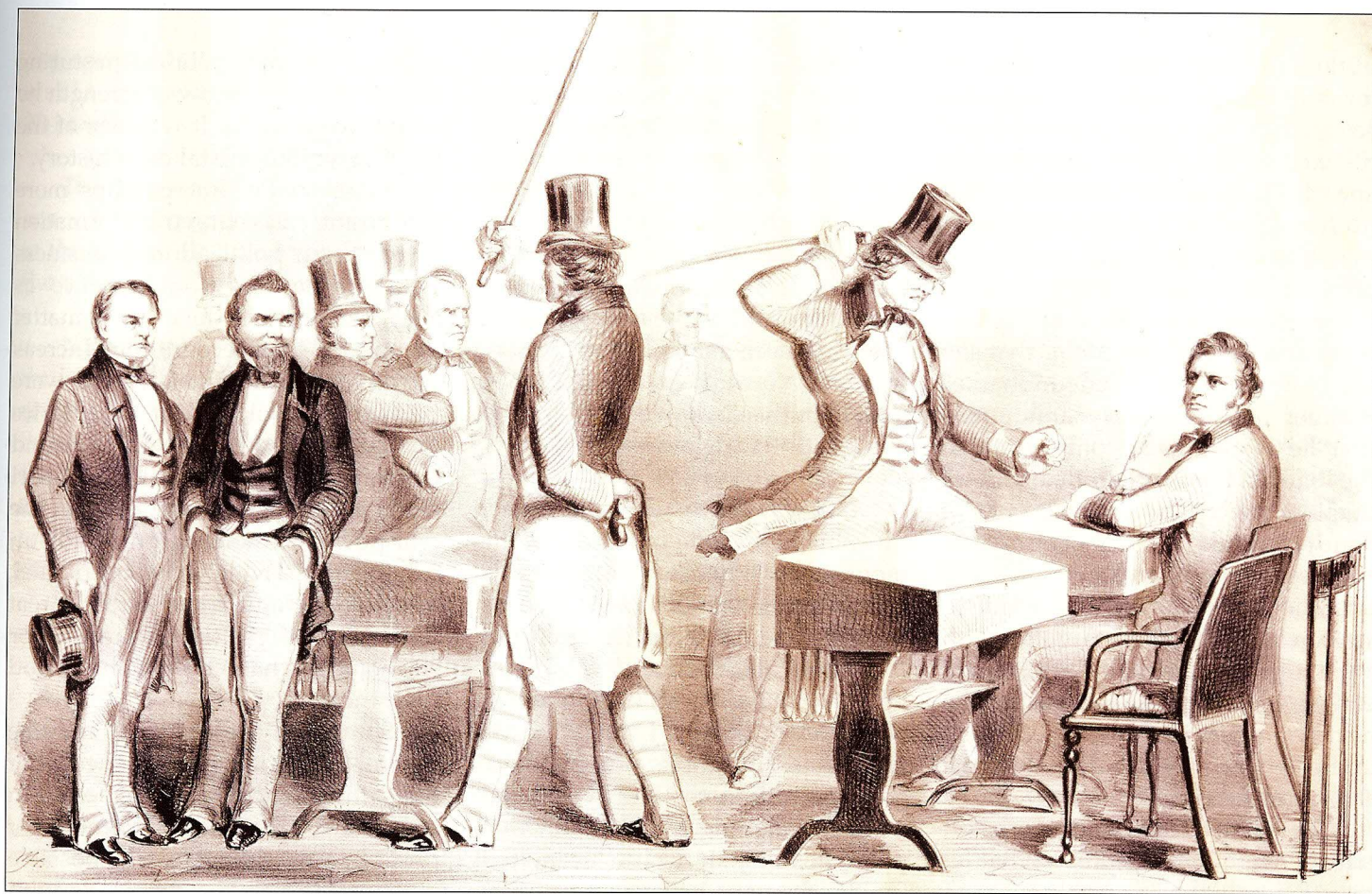
For the Republicans, widely regarded as radical troublemakers, to succeed to power Northerners had to be led to believe that the South was an actual threat to their way of life and values as well as to their economic interests. This impression Lincoln's party worked hard to implant. Relentless propaganda portrayed the South as a benighted land ruled by a few tyrannical aristocrats who lorded it over the slaves and a mass of degraded whites and conspired with Northern Democrats to rule or ruin the Union and reduce the Northern

working man to slavery. This slander was a false picture of the South, where democratic rule and rough social equality was as prevalent as in the North, if not more so. But the idea that Southern actions were explained by "a slave power," a conspiracy of a few aristocrats who completely dominated the South, was deeply implanted and is still invoked by historians who should know better. This false picture is essential to the moral justification of the Union cause. If the South was a democratic society in which the majority of the citizens made a free choice to separate from the North, their ruthless conquest seems far less righteous.

The Republican campaign against the non-existent "slave power conspiracy" reflects a common defense mechanism. Accuse others of the evil designs which you yourself entertain. And the false Republican claim that the South was dominated by a small aristocracy disguised the growing power of the wealthiest bankers and industrialists in New York, a power that, unlike that of Southern leaders, was wielded behind the scenes, then and now. True, Southerners of all classes aspired to an aristocratic ideal of honorable behavior, unlike pragmatic Yankees, but the South was as democratic as the North, and many ways more so. True, the South's democracy was only for white men, but in that respect it did not differ from the North.<sup>12</sup>

Thoughtful leaders of the South and eventually a large majority of the people saw secession as a way to avoid permanent economic exploitation and constant interference in their day-to-day life, which was likely to grow worse with the federal machinery in the hands of the first avowedly sectional party in American history.





*A Northern cartoon showing Preston Brooks of South Carolina caning Charles Sumner of Massachusetts.*

Northerners were determined to slander and harass the South relentlessly and replace the Union with a "nation" in their own image. All most Southerners wanted was to be left alone and for their one-time brethren of the North to stop abusing them at home and abroad. Further, thoughtful Southerners understood fully in 1860 that they had the strength of character, unique culture, and economic power to justify independence. Secession was no hysterical reaction and no conspiracy. Secession was openly and vigorously debated. The farewell speeches of Southern Senators in early 1861 are grave, calm, and sad.<sup>13</sup>

Republican rhetoric grew more heated and insulting as the 1850s moved on. Some Southerners replied in kind but most hoped that the uproar would die down as other mass enthusiasms in the North had. A few Southerners talked of re-opening the

importation of slaves from Africa, but this was mostly a desire to tweak the Yankees' beaks. The idea never got any purchase and was quickly quashed by mainstream opinion. This same opinion ruled when the foreign slave trade was absolutely forbidden by the Confederate Constitution. A few Southerners talked of finding new slave states in the Caribbean or Central America. Most notably, a soldier of fortune from Tennessee, William Walker, conducted a brief government in Nicaragua until the Yankee mogul Cornelius Vanderbilt had him murdered for interfering with his business.

These were ephemeral phenomenon that were frowned down by mainstream Southern opinion, but they provided "proof" to Republicans then and to historians later that there was a conspiracy underway by the leaders of the South to spread slavery.

Things reached critical propor-

tions when men from Missouri and armed "settlers" from New England clashed over control of the territorial government of Kansas. Much of the violence was the usual frontier disorder and dispute over land claims, but some had to do with the sectional conflict. As far as the Northern press and subsequent historians are concerned, the whole thing was a question of Missouri ruffians beating up on saintly New England pioneers. This is very far from the truth. There was violence from both sides including Yankee atrocities against civilians in Missouri (which continued throughout the War and Reconstruction) and the stealing and mass murder endeavours of one of those saintly New Englanders, John Brown. Young William Quantrill, who came from Ohio to assist the antislavery forces, was so disgusted by their violence, greed, and hypocrisy that he joined the Southern side.<sup>14</sup>

"Bleeding Kansas" was the cause

of the Brooks-Sumner incident. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, a pompous pseudo-intellectual disliked even by his allies, made a speech blaming Kansas' troubles entirely on Southerners, a violent, criminal, unredeemable people unworthy of civilised company. He used such obscene language against South Carolina and her Senator Butler that several Northern Senators cried "Shame!" Sumner had previously announced that he would never participate in the barbarous Southern custom of dueling. So Representative Brooks of South Carolina, Butler's nephew and a veteran of the Mexican War, walked into the Senate when it was not in session and thrashed Sumner with a gutta-percha cane. Sumner feigned serious injury and spent most of the next two years in Europe, returning to the Senate only one day — to cast a vote for the tariff.<sup>15</sup>

The incident did not prove Southerners were barbarians. What it proved was America was now men-

tally and emotionally two different countries. Southerners, old-fashioned and serious people largely governed by a code of honor, believed a man was responsible for his words. For many Northern leaders, politics was now a game. You said various things for various audiences to manipulate the voters and maneuver for advantage. Southerners did not understand this and Northerners did not understand Southerners were serious men and not political gamesters.

This was proved decisively when Lincoln said from one side of his mouth that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" and the country must become all slave or all free. From the other side of his mouth he assured the South and moderate Northerners that he had not hostile intentions. His ambiguous stand was good politics in the North but even more threatening to the South than overt hostility. It would seem that in 1861 Lincoln believed that seces-

sion was merely political posturing and with a little show of strength he could overcome it. It was one of the most egregious mistakes in history.

More subtle, but perhaps more important, was the transformation of Northern politics into a business. Southern leaders sought office as they had always done, as a matter of honour and recognition. Increasingly Northern office-holders were party men, looking out for salaries and contracts. And generally second-class men subservient to the industrialists and bankers who wielded the real power without deigning to run for office. Historians have been quick to recognise and criticise the "Great Barbecue" of political/financial corruption that characterised the period after the war.

Somehow, they seem to assume, this all mysteriously happened after the saintly Lincoln left the scene. In fact, the use of the government for profit in any and every way possible was intrinsic to the whole Republi-

can agenda, Lincoln's war started it, and Lincoln was deeply involved in its practices.

The philosopher Orestes Brownson, a loyal but perceptive supporter of the Union, observed not long after the war.

*Nothing was more striking during the late civil war than the very general absence of loyalty or feeling of duty, on the part of the adherents of the Union .... The administration never dared confide in the loyalty of the federal people. The appeals were made to interest, to the democracy of the North against the aristocracy of the South; to anti-slavery fanaticism; or to the value and utility of the Union, rarely to the obligation in conscience to support the legitimate or legal authority; prominent civilians were bribed by high military commissions; others, by advantageous contracts for themselves or their friends for supplies to the army; and the rank and file by large bounties and high wages. There were exceptions, but such was the rule.<sup>16</sup>*

There is another aspect of the history of "those people" of the North that historians have noted but avoided acknowledging the full significance of. Lincoln could not have won his election without foreigners and would have had a harder time winning his war if every fourth Union soldier had not been an immigrant. In the period before the war the South received some immigrants. It is a fact that almost every foreigner (and every Northerner too) who had lived in the South for any period of time before the War was a loyal Confederate. This tells us much about the hospitality and congeniality of Southern society, as does that fact that many Northern army officers who had married into Southern families resigned and joined the Confederacy.

By 1860 a fourth of the Northern population was made up of recent immigrants. Unlike the peaceful farmers who had come from Germa-

ny in the colonial period, those who came after 1848 were infected with Napoleonic militarism and revolutionary zeal. Between 1840 and 1860 the American population increased by one-third from immigrants alone — including at least a million and a half Germans. They settled mainly in Lincoln's Midwest and made up from eight to 17 per cent of the population of every Midwestern State in 1860. Lincoln recognised early the importance of this constituency to his ambitions by secretly purchasing a German language newspaper and subsidising several others. Recent German immigrants were prominent in the convention that nominated Lincoln and as Republican campaign orators. It appears that these immigrants tipped the balance, swinging the traditionally Democratic and Southern-oriented Midwest into the Republican column and making Lincoln's election possible. The civil war that broke out in Missouri at the beginning of The War resembled a fight between Confederate Americans and recently-arrived German Unionists.

The German revolutionaries brought with them an aggressive drive to realise in America the goals that had been defeated in their homeland with the failure of the revolutions of 1848. Their drive was towards "revolution and national unification," the slogan of the revolutionary Frankfurt Convention. The most prominent among them, Carl Schurz, shortly after his arrival, expressed disappointment at the non-ideological nature of American politics and vowed to change that. The Germans brought into the American regional conflict and into Republican rhetoric a diagnosis of class conflict (crusade to overthrow the "slave-drivers") and a spirit of militarism. This subverted the traditional moderate party politics of the Union.<sup>17</sup>

In January 1865 Karl Marx wrote an address in praise of Lincoln for an International Conference of Workers. Marx described the American war as a conflict between "the labor of the

emigrant" and the aggression of the "slave driver." An evil rebellion, he said, had sprung up in the "one great democratic republic whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued." Marx knew nothing about America and even less about American labor and was applying abstract categories without meaning except to ideologues. But Marx took his cue from Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address in misrepresenting the Declaration of Independence as kin to the French Revolution's "Rights of Man." Marx's bank roller Friedrich Engels remarked: "Had it not been for the experienced soldiers who entered America after the European revolution, especially from Germany, the organization of the Union Army would have taken much longer than it did."<sup>18</sup>

Consider the enormity that Southern men, sons and grandsons of the founders of the country, fighting for their cherished self-government, are killed by foreigners in blue preaching an alien doctrine. Lincoln was not "preserving the Union" as he sometimes claimed, he was establishing an empire on a different model.

One of the best of Confederate memoirs is General Richard Taylor's *Destruction and Reconstruction*. In May 1865 Taylor went with one aide in a railroad handcar to find a ranking Union general and surrender the last few thousand Confederate soldiers in the vicinity of Mobile. Formalities concluded, the federal officers invited Taylor to join them for a meal (which he badly needed). Most of the federals behaved politely and avoided any conversation that would create hard feelings in their recently surrendered foe. However, as Taylor relates:

*There was, as ever, a skeleton at the feast, in the person of a general officer who had recently left Germany to become a citizen and soldier of the United States. This person, with the strong accent and idioms of the Fatherland, comforted me*

by assurances that we of the South would speedily recognise our ignorance and errors, especially about slavery and the rights of the States, and rejoice in the results of the war ... I apologized meekly for my ignorance, on the ground that my ancestors had come from England to Virginia in 1608, and in the short intervening period of two hundred and fifty-odd years, had found no time to transmit to me correct ideas of the duties of American citizenship. Moreover, my grandfather, commanding the 9th Virginia regiment in our Revolutionary army, had assisted in the defeat and capture of the Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, and I lamented that he had not, by association with these worthies, enlightened his understanding. My friend smiled blandly, and assured me of his willingness to instruct me.<sup>19</sup>

Taylor did not mention that he was the son of a president of the United States. "Those people" were triumphant, but they were a different people in a very different country from that of its Founders.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See Jefferson's *Kentucky Resolutions of 1798* and 1st inaugural address of 1801.

<sup>2</sup>The writings of the Virginian John Taylor of Caroline in the early 1800s are a comprehensive analysis of the Northern capitalist agenda and the inequities, deceptions, Constitutional distortions, and economic fallacies involved.

Americans of the 21st century, suffering under catastrophic government debt and multibillion dollar bailouts of bankers and speculators, could learn a lot from Taylor.

<sup>3</sup>For the tariff see *The Essential Calhoun*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson, (New Brunswick, NJ: 1992), pp. 189-218.

<sup>4</sup>A Southerner invented the Gatling gun, and the Colt revolver was designed by Texas Rangers. Confederate innovations in mines, artillery, ironclads, and submersibles are well-known. The Tar Heel genius Colonel George W. Rains at the Augusta Arsenal made sure the South-

ern army never lacked for gunpowder and small arms. The Italian historian Raimondo Luraghi has written the best history of Confederate industry, though not all of his works have been translated. Just before the 1860 election, a Yankee named Frederick Law Olmsted travelled through the South and published his observations in the Northern press. He is still cited by historians as evidence that the Southern population was ignorant, impoverished, surly, and backward, even though it is now known that Olmsted doctored his findings to make Republican party propaganda.

<sup>5</sup>Polk: *The Diary of a President*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: 1968), pp. 34--59.

<sup>6</sup>Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819-1821* (Lexington KY: 1953).

<sup>7</sup>Jefferson letters to John Holmes, April 22, 1820; to William Branch Giles, December 26, 1825

<sup>8</sup>Though unanimously hostile to the South, a number of historians have recently written candidly about Northern history in the period before and during the War to Prevent Southern Independence: Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South*; Harlow W. Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism*; Richard F. Bense, *Yankee Leviathan*; Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*; Marc Egnal, *Clash of Extremes*; William Marvel, *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*.

<sup>9</sup>Frederick Douglass, *Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln*, Washington, April 14, 1876.

<sup>10</sup>Kenneth M. Stamp, *And the War Came* (Baton Rouge: 1950); Charles Adams, *For Good and Evil* (New York: 1992); and works cited in Note 8.

<sup>11</sup>James C. Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia: 1942); Otto J. Scott, *The Secret Six* (several editions).

<sup>12</sup>Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, is the classic description of the democratic society of the Old South. Though historians constantly repeat each other in stating that Owsley has been refuted, they can cite no substantial work that has

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done this, and recent historians, not sympathetic to the South but seeking a more complex picture, have supported Owsley.

<sup>13</sup>*The Politics of Dissolution*, ed. Marshall L. DeRosa (New Brunswick NJ: 1998).

<sup>14</sup>Paul R. Peterson, *Quantrill of Missouri: The Making of a Guerilla Warrior* (2003).

<sup>15</sup>David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: 1960). Donald's biography of Charles Sumner is an illustration of how American historians are affected by current events. In the first volume, cited above, Sumner is portrayed as a destructive figure. In the second volume, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man*, published in 1970, Sumner is a hero. Charles Sumner had not changed at all between 1960 and 1970, but the Civil Rights Revolution had got underway.

<sup>16</sup>*Orestes Brownson: Selected Political Essays*, ed. Russell Kirk (New Brunswick NJ: 1989), pp. 204-205

<sup>17</sup>Charlotte L. Brancaforte, ed., *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States* (New York: 1989); A.E. Zucker, ed., *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (New York: 1950); Hans L. Treffousse, Carl Schurz (Knoxville: 1982); Al Benson and Walter D. Kennedy, *Red Republicans and Lincoln's Marxists* (Gretna, LA: 2011).

<sup>18</sup>Marx's manifesto is in *Abraham Lincoln: Selections from His Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner, a Communist pamphlet published in New York in 1944.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction: Personal Reminiscences of the Civil War* (1879); pp. 230-231 in the 1998 J.S. Sanders edition. ❏