Reconfiguring the Old South: "Solving" the Problem of Slavery, 1787–1838

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The Civil War, emancipation, and Confederate defeat stand among the pivotal moments in American history, moments that gave the nation, "conceived in liberty" yet marred by slavery, an elusive "new birth of freedom." For many years, the importance of those events fostered an understandable historiographical preoccupation with the configuration and posture of southern society on the eve of the American Civil War. The scholarly fascination with the Old South at its antebellum maturity often slighted the earlier formation of that society, the making of the Old South. In recent years, however, the creation of the Old South through a unique set of choices, accommodations, and compromises made in the face of unpredictable historical contingencies has received increasing attention from historians. They are intrigued as much by the twists and turns of the Old South's evolution as by the undeniable drama of the late antebellum journey to secession and war. Building on his own work and that of other scholars, Ira Berlin has produced an impressive reinterpretation of American slavery that emphasizes its creation and evolution, not just its flourishing as a regional institution in the era of well-established cotton plantations and sectional conflict. Berlin and others have begun to restore a strong sense of chronology and variety to the study of the enslaved in the Old South. They have looked at generational change and regional variation in the slave population and in slavery as an institution, highlighting patterns of slave demography, work, and culture. Berlin's synthesis, with the earlier seminal scholarship on which it was built, has allowed historians to recapture dynamism and diversity in the experience of the enslaved in the United States.[1]

[1] See Lacy Ford, "Introduction: A Civil War in the Age of Capital," in *A Companion to Civil War and Reconstruction,* ed. Lacy Ford (Malden, 2005), 1–22. For the highlights of Ira Berlin's contributions, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 1–14, 358–65; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 246–270; and Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society in British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review,* 85 (Feb. 1980), 44–78. For another view that also emphasizes the evolution of slavery over time, see Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York, 1993). For an example of a work expanding on the insights of Ira Berlin and Peter Kolchin, see Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in*

Similarly, a recent flurry of important and pioneering work has restored balance to our study of white society in the Old South, helping shift the region's historiography from its traditional tilt toward the mature, late antebellum Old South to the formation of the Old South. Those studies have renewed scholars' understanding of the complexity and nuance of the Old South's historical evolution and internal diversity. Yet scholars still lack a unifying interpretation of the creation of white society in the Old South and the relationship of that society with slavery, an interpretation sensitive to the change over time and internal diversity highlighted in recent literature and to the creative tensions generated by internal differences and disagreements, an integrated interpretation comparable to the one Berlin offered for the history of slavery in the region.[2]

This essay attempts to sketch a broad outline for such an interpretative synthesis by focusing on one issue: the evolving efforts of the South's white politicians, intellectuals, and opinion makers to grapple with the problem of slavery in ways acceptable to white southerners. It traces those inadequate and tortured efforts and the conflicts they spawned from the drafting of the Constitution to the emergence of the full-scale abolitionist attack on slavery in the mid-1830s. This examination suggests ways to round out what Berlin called the story of "making slavery, making race" in the pre–Civil War American South.[3]

Representatives of the collection of slaveholding states that would become the Old South hardly arrived of one mind at the grand convention of 1787. At that convention the white South's internal differences never appeared more distinctly than in discussions of the international slave trade. During the era of the Articles of Confederation, Joseph Clay, a Savannah merchant, had advised the prominent Georgia politician James Jackson that "the Negro business is a great object with us, both with a View to our Interest individually, and the general prosperity of this State and its commerce, it is to the trade of this Country, as Soul to the Body." Clay's depiction of the centrality of the foreign slave trade to the commerce of Confederation-era Savannah highlighted the south Atlantic region's lingering hunger for slave imports. So it is hardly surprising that South Carolina and Georgia delegates to the Philadelphia convention made keeping the international slave trade legal, at least for a time, a *sine qua non* of joining the new Union. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, later a prominent Charleston Federalist, told the Philadelphia convention that "South Carolina and Georgia cannot do without slaves," and he implied that without protection for the right to import slaves, those two southernmost states of the

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the American South (Chapel Hill, 1997).

[2] On the formation of the Old South from the perspective of particular issues, locales, or subregions, see, for example, Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge, 2006); Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2006); Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790–1860* (Baton Rouge, 2006); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005); Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, 2003); Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800–1840* (Baton Rouge, 1997); and Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (New York, 1995). For a major step toward examining change over time, see Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810–1860* (2 vols., New York, 2004).

[3] Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 1, 358–65.

Confederation would not join the new Union. A second South Carolina delegate, former governor John Rutledge, warned his fellow delegates that "if the Convention thinks that North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia will ever agree to the plan, unless their right to import slaves be untouched, the expectation is vain. The people of those states will never be such fools as to give up so important an interest." The Georgia delegate Abraham Baldwin claimed that his state too was "decided on this point," adding that Georgia viewed the slave trade question as of a "local nature," not a "national" matter. James Madison later confirmed the intransigence of the lower South at the convention, confiding to Thomas Jefferson that "South Carolina and Georgia were inflexible on the point" of the slave trade.[4]

To secure a window of opportunity for reopening the foreign slave trade, prohibited by every state at the time of the convention, South Carolina and Georgia delegates formed a momentary but momentous alliance with New England shipping interests. The south Atlantic delegates agreed to allow Congress to approve navigation laws by a simple majority rather than a two-thirds vote, sacrificing the de facto southern veto over national maritime policy. The right to block such legislation, which the South would have enjoyed under proposals advanced at the convention that required a two-thirds vote to tax exports, had long been widely held as crucial to the protection of a regional economy driven by the sale of staple crops on the world market. New England delegates reciprocated by accepting a twenty-year constitutional moratorium on any federal prohibition of the slave trade.[5]

Slaveholders in the Chesapeake Bay region joined other commercial interests in the middle Atlantic states to denounce the Constitutional Convention's willingness to tolerate the international slave trade.[6] "Twenty years will produce all the mischief that can be

[4] Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York, 1996), 35–93; James H. Hutson, "Riddles of the Federal Constitutional Convention," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 44 (July 1987), 411–23; William E. Nelson, "Reason and Compromise in the Establishment of the Federal Constitution, 1787–1801," *ibid.*, 458–84; Jack N. Rakove, "The Great Compromise: Ideas, Interests, and the Politics of Constitution Making," *ibid.*, 424–57. Joseph Clay to James Jackson, Feb. 16, 1784, in *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America,* ed. Elizabeth Donnan (4 vols., Washington, 1935), IV, 630. For Charles Cotesworth Pinckney's statement, see Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (3 vols., New Haven, 1911), II, 371; for that of John Rutledge, see *ibid.,* 373; and for that of Abraham Baldwin, see *ibid.,* 372. See also Marvin R. Zahniser, *Charles Cotesworth Pinckney: Founding Father* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 87–101. James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 24, 1787, in *The Papers of James Madison,* ed. W. T. Hutchinson et al. (17 vols., Chicago, 1962–1991), X, 206–19, esp. 214.

[5] On the politics of the foreign slave trade, see Paul Finkelman, "Slavery and the Constitutional Convention: Making a Covenant with Death," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity,* ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill, 1987), 188–225; and Rakove, *Original Meanings,* 83–93. For a portrayal of the Constitution as series of sectional compromises that presents the compromise on the foreign slave trade as only one among many, see Don E. Fehrenbacher with Ward M. McAfee, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York, 2001), 15–47, esp. 43–44.

[6] William W. Freehling has labeled Chesapeake planters as supporters of the "conditional termination" of slavery through such policies as gradual emancipation and colonization. He also characterized the Low Country planters of South Carolina and Georgia as advocates of "perpetual slavery" with no interest in planning for the demise of slavery. See William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (2 vols., New York, 1990–2007), I, 120–31, and esp. 152, 150. In this essay I often use spokesmen from Virginia and South Carolina to represent the dominant, but not uncontested, views of whites in the upper and lower South, respectively. The two states' regional preeminence justifies that use. By far the most heavily populated state in the South, Virginia, with the largest number of slaves in the nation (in 1800 more slaves than in all other states of the upper South combined) and a relatively stagnant tobacco economy, embodied the predicament of the upper South regarding slavery. On the population of slaves in Virginia, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), 23, 46–47, 136–37, 396–403. To judge the mood and direction of upper South whites, politicians in the lower South looked to Virginia. South Carolina, with its emerging slave majority, its early and eager embrace of cotton as a cash crop, its intellectual

apprehended from the liberty to import slaves," James Madison complained, and so "long a term will be more dishonorable to the American character than to say nothing in the Constitution." George Mason, a less nationalist Virginian than Madison, also denounced the convention's failure to ban the foreign slave trade, believing the delay rendered the expansion of slavery, which he saw as a threat to the safety of a fragile republic, inevitable. "The Western people are already calling out for slaves for their new lands, and will fill that country with slaves if they can be got thro' S. Carolina and Georgia," Mason complained. Despite their differences over the appropriate level of federal power embedded in the new constitution, both Madison and Mason stood among those Virginia slaveholders who viewed the institution of slavery as an evil that they desired to phase out whenever doing so would not create an even greater threat to white safety and prosperity than the one slavery itself posed. Of course, lower South delegates exposed the large measure of self-interest interlaced with republican idealism in the upper South slaveholders' opposition to the international trade (Virginia slaveholders hoped to supply lower South demand with slaves from their surplus). At convention's end, the south Atlantic delegates left Philadelphia well pleased with the compromise they had extracted, while the otherwise-influential Virginia delegation returned home feeling outflanked on this issue by resolute delegates from South Carolina and Georgia.[7]

For all the document's enduring power, the Constitution emerged not only by negotiation and compromise on specific issues but also by sectional understandings, including an accommodation never put to the floor of the convention for formal vote that evolved into an informal gentlemen's understanding. The unwritten constitutional understanding went something like this. Delegates troubled by the existence of slavery in the new republic gained assurance from representatives of states heavily involved with slavery that they saw it as a problem and would work toward its eventual elimination. In return, northern delegates agreed to allow the political leaders of the states most involved with slavery to guide its future course, which most northern and many southern delegates saw as a journey toward ultimate elimination. Compromises over representation, taxation, and the future of the international slave trade addressed issues formally considered by the sitting convention. But the scope of the sectional agreement stretched further, into understandings that delegates were making a common commitment to the new nation as a union of equal sections and that slavery would exist without interference until the very white southerners whose safety and fortunes hinged so heavily on the institution gradually phased it out.[8]

and cultural center in Charleston, and its premature radicalism, often anticipated the course of other lower South states. Both states took pride in a tradition of political leadership growing out of the Revolution and founding era.
    [7] Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787,* II, esp. 415–16; Adrienne Koch, ed., *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 Reported by James Madison* (New York, 1987), esp. 503–4; Clinton Lawrence Rossiter, *1787: The Grand Convention* (New York, 1966), 217. On James Madison's thinking at the convention, see Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca, 1995); Jack N. Rakove, *James Madison and the Creation of the American Republic* (Glenview, 1990), 53–69; Lance Banning, "The Practicable Sphere of a Republic: James Madison, the Constitutional Convention, and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Federalism," in *Beyond Confederation,* ed. Beeman, Botein, and Carter, 162–87; and Drew R. McCoy, "James Madison and Visions of Nationality in the Confederation Period: A Regional Perspective," *ibid.,* 226–58.
    [8] See Koch, ed., *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787,* 181–87; Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787,* I, 398, 400; Mark Kaplanoff, "Charles Pinckney and the American Republican Tradition," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston,* ed. Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville, 1986), 85–122, 397–408; Rakove, *James Madison and the Creation of the American Republic,* 53–69; and Drew R. McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy* (New York, 1989), 39–83.

A sense of obligation to the perceived terms of the tacit compromise that created the Union spurred upper South politicians to look for paths to the gradual elimination of slavery. Such an effort came naturally to at least some of them. The emancipationist strain among early national Virginia slaveholders ran deep and predated the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson's passionate denunciation of slavery in *Notes on the State of Virginia* revealed the depth of white concern in the upper South. "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other," Jefferson famously lamented. "The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances." Scholars now know that Jefferson was not such a prodigy. In the face of seemingly incontrovertible deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) evidence that Jefferson fathered at least one child (and possibly more) by his slave Sally Hemings, historians can now read Jefferson's reference to the "boisterous passions" encouraged by the master-slave relationship as indirect personal confession as well as social commentary. Still, despite its personal dimension, Jefferson's sweeping indictment of slavery as antirepublican contained almost all of the criticisms of slavery that reverberated throughout the upper South for the next fifty years. For Jefferson, slaveholding inculcated in white Virginians a most unrepublican character. Masters and all whites in a slaveholding society were "daily exercised in tyranny" and transformed into "despots" by the power of mastery, and the potential, indeed, the inevitability, of its abuse. Good republicans feared nothing as much as encroaching despotism, a threat that could emerge from overbearing slaveholders within as well as from enemies without. Moreover, Jefferson also worried that given Virginia's large slave population, either "a revolution of the wheel of fortune" or a divine justice that "could not sleep forever" would ignite a widespread rebellion that would lead to a bloody civil war between whites and slaves. To avoid such a cataclysm, Jefferson yearned "for a total emancipation" carried out "with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation."[9]

Jefferson modified the views outlined in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* slightly once the end of the foreign slave trade in 1808 limited the growth of the nation's slave population, but he remained an advocate of gradual emancipation, although a very tentative one, until his death in 1826. He believed slavery was an evil that must be eliminated, but he also believed the elimination must be a gradual one, guided and paced by the very planter elite whose members would have to sacrifice their wealth and patrimony to achieve emancipation. As he neared death in the 1820s, an otherwise impatient Jefferson still believed that a full-scale emancipation in Virginia must await the "revolution in public opinion which the cause requires." Yet if Jefferson counseled patience to advocates of emancipation, he also urged reluctant slaveholders to initiate the emancipation process sooner rather than later. "Nothing is written more certainly in the book of fate than that these people are to be free," Jefferson insisted, and "the South needs to act soon if It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation peaceably." Even as he neared

    [9] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* ed. William Harwood Peden (Chapel Hill, 1954), 155–56, 162–63. On Thomas Jefferson's views and actions on slavery, see Paul Finkelman, "Jefferson and Slavery: 'Treason against the Hopes of the World,'" in *Jeffersonian Legacies,* ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville, 1993), 181–224. On the vast literature on Jefferson and slavery, see Peter S. Onuf, "The Scholars' Jefferson," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 50 (Oct. 1993), 671–99; Joseph J. Ellis, "Jefferson: Post DNA," *ibid.*, 57 (Jan. 2000), 125–38; Peter S. Onuf, "Every Generation Is an 'Independent Nation': Colonization, Miscegenation, and the Fate of Jefferson's Children," *ibid.*, 153–70; and Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville, 1997).

death, however, Jefferson possessed a vision of a slaveless Virginia rather than a strategy for gradual emancipation.[10]

Jefferson's friend St. George Tucker, a young professor of law at the College of William and Mary, privately drafted a plan for general emancipation in 1795. But Tucker, like the Sage of Monticello, recognized that although many whites in early national Virginia viewed slavery as an evil, they were nevertheless reluctant to give it up. "The malady has proceeded so far," Tucker acknowledged, "as to render it doubtful whether any specific plan can be found to eradicate, or even palliate the disease." Tucker saw this reluctance as the toxic by-product of generations of slaveholding experience. Again echoing Jefferson, he argued that white Virginians had little appetite for general emancipation because "every white man felt himself born to tyrannize" and viewed blacks as "of no more importance than . . . brute cattle." Tucker finally submitted his detailed plan for general emancipation to the legislature in 1797, but the General Assembly politely ignored his proposal. Aware of the violent 1791 slave revolution in Saint Domingue that later ended slavery there and led to Haitian independence, a chagrined Tucker worried that only "actual suffering" by slaveholders would open the ears of white Virginians to the "voice of reason" on emancipation.[11]

Just three years later, in 1800, white Virginians narrowly escaped experiencing such "actual suffering" when civil authorities, acting on a tip from slave informants, scotched an alleged insurrection plot in Richmond. The subsequent investigation identified the slave Gabriel Prosser as the leader of the aborted rebellion and discovered an elaborate plan for seizing Richmond, murdering the sitting governor, James Monroe, and fighting the "White People for freedom." Prompt and vigorous reprisal against the alleged insurrectionists ensued. White authorities executed twenty slaves in Richmond during the fall of 1800, and after a protracted search, Gabriel was captured aboard a ship in Norfolk, tried, and put to death. Governor Monroe increased the militia's presence in Richmond, but he still worried that plans for an extensive insurrection "may occur again at any time, with more fatal consequences, unless suitable measures be taken to prevent it."[12]

The appropriate scope and content of such "suitable measures," however, remained a disputed subject in Virginia and elsewhere. Possible measures included closer monitoring of slave worship, new restrictions on private manumissions, tighter regulation of the region's free black population, and colonization. Indeed, Gabriel's rebellion lent an unexpected impetus to the colonization movement in the Old Dominion. In reaction to the insurrection scare, the 1801 Virginia House of Delegates urged Governor Monroe to find a location for colonizing blacks deemed "obnoxious to the peace or dangerous to society." Monroe in turn urged the newly inaugurated president, Thomas Jefferson, to use federal

[10] Jefferson to James Heaton, May 20, 1826, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Merrill Peterson (New York, 1984), 1516; Thomas Jefferson, "Autobiography," *ibid.*, 44.

[11] St. George Tucker to Jeremy Belknap, Jan. 24, 1795, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (90 vols., Boston, 1792–), III, 191–92. On St. George Tucker's efforts on behalf of emancipation, see Robert McColley, *Slavery in Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana, 1964), 132–36; and Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831–1832* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 90–96. Tucker to Belknap, Aug. 13, 1797, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society,* III, 427–28.

[12] Testimony of Ben Woolfolk at "Trial of Nicholas King," in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers . . . Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond,* ed. William Pitt Palmer et al. (11 vols., Richmond, 1875–1893), IX, 161–62; James Monroe to the speakers of the General Assembly, Dec. 15, 1800, in *The Writings of James Monroe*, ed. Stanislaus Hamilton (7 vols., New York, 1898–1903), III, 234–43, esp. 243. On Gabriel's rebellion and its aftermath, see Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800–1802* (Chapel Hill, 1993), esp. 69–178; and James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (New York, 1997), esp. 55–147.

resources to locate and procure land for a colony of troublesome slaves and unwelcome free blacks. In his request, Monroe called slavery "an existing evil" but complained of "the extreme difficulty in remedying it." While recently stirred fears of insurrection drove Virginia's interest in colonization, Monroe and Jefferson both recognized in colonization a means for gradually ridding Virginia of free blacks and reducing its slave population. Jefferson ultimately rejected the idea of placing a free black colony within the existing territory of the United States due to the potential dangers it involved (and the political opposition it provoked) and instead pondered Saint Domingue as an option, noting coyly that its "present ruler [Toussaint Louverture] might be . . . willing to receive . . . [those] deemed criminal by us, but meritorious perhaps by him." If lower South slaveholders objected to Saint Domingue or any other West Indian location for fear that it might become a staging ground for efforts to incite insurrection in the American South, as Jefferson surmised they might, "Africa would offer a last and undoubted resort." Within a few years, however, the well-publicized problems of the British colony of former slaves in Sierra Leone and deepening tensions between the young American republic and both of the major European powers, Britain and France, delayed the active pursuit of colonization for more than a decade because of the foreign policy quandaries it posed.[13]

The Virginia legislature's post-Gabriel consideration of colonization produced more rhetoric than action. But the idea of a gradual emancipation accompanied by colonization remained appealing to many Old Dominion slaveholders, especially those with strongly nationalist sentiments. The colonization of gradually manumitted slaves combined with the profitable selling of slaves further south where they would satisfy the demand for labor generated by the first cotton boom promised to diminish the importance of slavery in Virginia's economy. To the many white Virginians, whether slaveholders or nonslaveholders, who held lingering reservations about slavery but feared a biracial republic, such a carefully calibrated "whitening" of the state appeared a near-perfect solution to the state's most vexing problems. But it was a near-perfect solution so laden with complexities that it defied implementation.[14]

In addition to prompting reconsideration of slavery in the Old Dominion, the Gabriel insurrection scare enjoyed coastal reach. As accounts of Gabriel's revolt reverberated through the South Carolina Low Country, whites there discovered a presumed insurrection plot in their midst. In 1802 in the heavily black Georgetown area, the sighting of one slave whose absence from his home plantation was not readily explained prompted the rapid spread of rumors that an armed brigade of French-speaking Caribbean insurrectionists loomed off the coast, ready to come ashore in Winyah Bay and lead a revolt. South Carolina governor John Drayton mobilized the state militia to defend against an invasion that never occurred. Embarrassed by his hasty overreaction, Drayton cited the specter of Saint Domingue and his fear of the arrival of "French Brigands Incendiary persons of colour."[15]

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[13] Monroe to Jefferson, June 15, 1801, in *Writings of James Monroe,* ed. Hamilton, III, 292–95; Jefferson to Monroe, Nov. 24, 1801, in *The Virginian History of African Colonization,* ed. Philip Slaughter (Richmond, 1855), 3–4; Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion,* 147–78.

[14] My use of the term "whitening" here follows the insight of Freehling, *Road to Disunion,* I, 150–62. On the emerging cotton boom in the lower South, see Joyce E. Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760–1815," *Journal of Southern History,* 57 (May 1991), 171–200; Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York, 1988), 1–43; and Rothman, *Slave Country,* 37–70.

[15] Mark D. Kaplanoff, "Making the South Solid: Politics and the Structure of Society in South Carolina,

This engraving of a slave auction in Charleston, South Carolina, shows a scene familiar to Charlestonians throughout the antebellum era. Such sights may have reminded them—both during the 1804–1807 era, when the state reopened the international slave trade, and in later years, when a domestic, interregional trade flourished—of the links between southern prosperity and the threat of slave uprisings. Illustrated London News, *Nov. 29, 1856. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-49867.*

Yet even in 1802, as insurrection rumors filled the air in Georgetown and thoughts of Haiti remained vivid in the minds of Low Country whites, white landowners in South Carolina's interior cotton belt demanded more slaves. That year, an Edgefield district grand jury complained that the state's ban on the importation of slaves stood as an "insurmountable Bar in the way of men of Property moving into this state, and in this way . . . the growing wealth and population of the upper Country [is] obstructed." By 1802 the cotton boom was nearly a decade old in some areas and the desire for more and cheaper slaves had intensified where cotton was grown, but the fear of Haitian-style insurrection lingered, waxing and waning in concert with the tenor of the latest news from the Caribbean. In weighing fear of a larger slave population and the possibility of declining slave values, on the one hand, against the ambitions of interior cotton growers, on the other, a wary South Carolina legislature, still dominated by Low Country interests and skittish in the aftermath of the Gabriel and Georgetown scares, voted overwhelmingly (11–86 in

1790–1815" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1979), 50–75; Henry William DeSaussure to John Rutledge Jr., Feb. 17, 1802, July 12, 1803, folder 13, box 1, John Rutledge Jr. Papers (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); Howard A. Ohline, "Georgetown, South Carolina: Racial Anxieties and Militant Behavior, 1802," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 73 (July 1972), 130–40; Message 2 of Governor John Drayton, Dec. 3, 1802, no. 0846, Governor's Messages, Records of the South Carolina General Assembly, 1802, Record Group S165009 (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia).

the house and by voice vote in the state senate) in 1802 to keep the international trade closed.[16]

But the balance of fear and greed against ambition and opportunity shifted dramatically the next year when a coincidence of luck and vision brought the Louisiana territory into American possession. In 1803, just one year after a decisive rejection of inland cotton growers' pleas for a reopened external slave trade, the South Carolina legislature, undoubtedly prompted by the prospect of supplying slaves to Louisiana, suddenly reconsidered the issue. Alone among slaveholding states, the Palmetto State decided to take advantage of the Constitution's remaining window of forbearance and reopen the international slave trade. According to recent estimates, South Carolina's reopening of the trade, effective in 1804 and continuing through 1807, brought at least fifty thousand new Africans into the United States.[17]

Touted as an empire for liberty, Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase actually opened an eager new American market for slaves, foreign or domestic. Sustained in part by the reopened African trade, this market supplied the slave labor that kept the staple boom flourishing across the lower South. In the new Louisiana territory, voices demanding more slaves drowned out voices warning of the dangers of a growing slave population as the booms in cotton and sugar stimulated white landowner ambitions. As he traveled through Louisiana, territorial governor William Claiborne, a Virginia-born Republican with close ties to Jefferson, marveled at the wealth generated by the staple boom. "It is not uncommon with 20 working hands to make from 10 to 14 thousand Dollars," Claiborne exclaimed, "and there are several Planters whose field negroes do not exceed forty who make more than 20,000 Dollars each year." Yet almost as soon as he assumed office in Louisiana in 1804, Claiborne, who thought the African slave trade "barbarous," threw the full weight of his office behind efforts to keep West Indian slaves out of Louisiana for security reasons. But the people of Louisiana, Claiborne conceded, remained "impressed with the opinion that a great, very great, supply of slaves is essential to the prosperity of Louisiana." New Orleans mayor John Watkins agreed with Claiborne in 1805, declaring it beyond "all the vigilance of man to prevent the introduction of [foreign] slaves by some means or another" unless a significant federal troop presence was committed to enforcing laws against the slave trade. "The people ask for new Negroes," Watkins held, "you refuse them, they say they must have Slaves of some kind and will and do procure such as they can get."[18]

The lower Mississippi region's cotton bonanza combined with the area's spectacular sugar profits to keep demand for slaves high. The North Carolina native William Hamilton boasted in 1811 that in Louisiana "one good Negroe can make 5 bales of Cotton"

[16] Presentment of the Edgefield District Grand Jury, c. 1802, no. 00006, Grand Jury Presentments, Records of the South Carolina General Assembly, 1802, Record Group S165010; Patrick S. Brady, "The Slave Trade and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1787–1808," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 73 (Nov. 1972), 601–20.

[17] Defenders of the trade barely managed to defeat legislative efforts to reimpose the ban in 1804, 1805, and 1806. Jed Handelsman Shugerman, "The Louisiana Purchase and South Carolina's Reopening of the Slave Trade in 1803," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 22 (Summer 2002), 263–90. See also Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760–1808* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 246–57. For the estimate of the number of slaves imported through South Carolina, 1804–1807, see James A. McMillin, *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783–1810* (Columbia, S.C., 2004), 30–48, esp. 32 and 48.

[18] William Claiborne to Jefferson, July 10, 1806, in *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801–1816,* ed. Dunbar Rowland (6 vols., Jackson, Miss., 1917), III, 361–65, esp. 363; Claiborne to Madison, May 8, 1804, *ibid.,* II, 134; John Watkins to John Graham, Sept. 6, 1805, in *The Territorial Papers of the United States,* ed. Clarence Edwin Carter et al. (28 vols., Washington, 1934–1975), IX, 500–504.

worth $500, while forty prime field hands could tend two hundred acres and produce $10,000 worth of cotton annually. A few years earlier, when the cotton boom first ignited and spread like wildfire through the Natchez region, John Steele, a migrant from the Valley of Virginia, wanted to "loose no time" in getting his slaves sent from Virginia so he could share in the bounty that allowed eighteen Mississippi slaves to produce thirty thousand pounds of cotton, which Steele described as "like the driving Snow as it comes from the Gin," to sell for $.25 per pound. Some years later, a South Carolina–born overseer working in the Natchez region claimed that "good field hands sell for $650–$800" in the area and that "it is supposed a hand will pay for himself nearly in one year by making cotton." The promise of such staple profits lured many whites to the western portion of the lower South, and it explains why dampening the demand for slaves in that region was not easy.[19]

When President Jefferson and Congress moved quickly in 1806–1807 to ensure that a law banning the international slave trade would be in place at the earliest moment possible, South Carolina yielded quietly to federal action. But even with the end of the African slave trade at hand, fear of slave unrest ran deep among whites in the Carolina Low Country. The Charleston Federalist Jacob Read sounded the alarm, predicting that white evangelicals who insisted on spreading the gospel among slaves would soon breed a spirit of insurrection. "It is vain to conceal from ourselves," Read warned South Carolina governor Charles Pinckney in 1807, "the fact that there are spread every where through the state the religious and other enthusiasts who are preaching very dangerous doctrines and inciting in our black population sentiments that must lead to fatal results which nothing but their want of a common head & someone daring enough to make the attempt and in a degree capable of directing their measures prevents their carrying into a most sanguinary execution." Such fear of slave insurrection, occasionally confirmed by actual rebellions, remained part of life in the slaveholding South. Yet if fears of a repeat of the Saint Domingue rebellion never receded far from the minds of Low Country planters, politicians from the interior often downplayed such fears. As a young war hawk attempting to prepare the southern mind for a war to defend the exporting of staples, up-country congressman John C. Calhoun questioned the impact of "the disorganizing effects of French principles" on the southern slave population. "I cannot think our ignorant blacks have felt much of their baneful influence," Calhoun opined late in 1811, "I dare say not more than one-half of them ever heard of the French Revolution." Whether those whites living in black-majority parishes or districts in the lower portion of his home state found Calhoun's claim that no more than half of their slaves had heard of the French Revolution reassuring or alarming remains unknown. But Wade Hampton I, an interior cotton planter serving as commander of the U.S. military in Louisiana, had seen rebellion firsthand earlier that year when he was called on by territorial governor Claiborne to quell the slave insurrection that erupted in Louisiana's German Coast parishes. Though effectively put down by Hampton and local officials, the German Coast insurrection involved more participants than any other slave rebellion in U.S. history. Such episodes convinced whites in the lower South that the benefits of perpetual slavery required staying perpetu-

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[19] William S. Hamilton to John Hamilton, April 15, 1811, folder 5, box 1, William Hamilton Papers (Southern Historical Collection); John Steele to Samuel Steele, May 2, 24, 1799, Samuel Steele Papers (Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.); James Moore to David Hutchison, Sept. 8, 1816, folder 2, Hutchison Family Papers (Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia).

ally alert for the first hint of insurrection. Among whites in the lower South, slavery had indeed contorted the conventional Jeffersonian wisdom. Eternal vigilance became the price of slavery.[20]

In parts of the upper South, where staple booms that increased demand for slaves were fast becoming more a part of planter memory than of planter ambition, many whites judged that price too high. Instead, they pondered methods for reducing the region's dependence on slave labor without creating a large and menacing class of free blacks in their midst. The 1808 federal ban on foreign slave imports opened new possibilities for making the upper South whiter, and the British threat to free slaves during the nearly disastrous War of 1812 reminded the region's whites of the dangers involved in retaining so many slaves. Thus politicians across the upper South touted both the diffusion of the existing slave population across space, through sale to the lower South, and the colonization of free blacks (including any newly emancipated slaves) across seas as ways to lessen the region's dependence on slave labor and its vulnerability to slave revolt. As policy ideas, diffusion and colonization gained new salience after the closing of the foreign slave trade in 1808 and remained at the core of the thinking of upper South whites interested in reducing the influence of slavery on the region until well into the 1830s and beyond.[21]

Many upper South politicians had long advocated "diffusion," the idea that as slavery expanded geographically the institution weakened because it was spread more thinly across a larger area. Diffusionists advanced the seemingly anomalous argument that while slavery remained an evil, its consequences proved less deleterious when it was allowed to expand (and hence was diluted) and more harmful when it was confined (and hence was concentrated). The diffusion argument appeared as early as the 1798 congressional debate over the expansion of slavery into the Mississippi Territory. At that time, the Virginian John Nicholas, who termed slavery a "misfortune," argued against excluding slavery from the southwest territory on the grounds that allowing slavery to expand westward would "spread the blacks over a larger space, so that in time it might be safe to carry into effect the plan which certain philanthropists have so much at heart [emancipation]." Nicholas's fellow Virginian and Jeffersonian William Branch Giles agreed that diffusion diluted the evils of slavery. Many of slavery's harsher aspects, Giles contended, resulted from slaves being "crowded together" in only a few states. Thus Giles concluded that diffusion of the slave population across space would yield an "amelioration" in the overall condition of slaves by "spreading them over a large surface of country." John Breckinridge of Kentucky echoed these sentiments a few years later in discussions of slavery in the Louisiana territory. "I wish our negroes were scattered more equally not only through the United States but through our territories," the Bluegrass State senator observed. Breckinridge worried that "our slaves at the South will produce another St. Domingo," and he argued that diffusion would "disperse and weaken the race—and free the southern states from a part of its black population, and of its danger." Another persuasive argument for diffusion emanated from Louisiana itself in 1804, where Sheriff Lewis Kerr of New Orleans opposed

[20] Matthew Mason, "Slavery Overshadowed: Congress Debates Prohibiting the Atlantic Slave Trade to the United States, 1806–07," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 20 (Spring 2000), 59–81; Jacob Read to Charles Pinckney, June 18, 1807, folder 3, Charles Pinckney Papers (Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library); *Annals of Congress,* 12 Cong., 1 sess., Dec. 12, 1811, col. 476–95, esp. 480. On the German Coast rebellion, see Rothman, *Slave Country,* 107–17. On the role of Wade Hampton I, see Ronald E. Bridwell, "The South's Wealthiest Planter: Wade Hampton I of South Carolina, 1754–1835" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1980), 575–79.

[21] Matthew Mason, "The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, the United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 59 (May 2002), 665–96.

the territory's involvement in the foreign slave trade because "a considerable share" of slaves imported would come "from the french islands" and "consist principally of such negroes as cannot be retained there with safety to their owners or the public peace." Participation in the domestic slave trade, however, would allow white Louisianians "to draw off the slaves now in the eastern states, and thereby at least extenuate the general evil" of slavery while providing Louisiana with "a race of servants already acquainted with our habits and attached to our country." In such arguments, proponents of diffusion openly conceded the perennial threat of insurrection but seized on proposals to spread the slave population over a larger area as a way to reduce the danger.[22]

The case for beneficent diffusion, however, gained its greatest prominence when Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other leading Virginia politicians endorsed the idea during the Missouri crisis of 1820–1821. Two Virginia congressmen, Philip P. Barbour and the future president John Tyler, spoke energetically on behalf of diffusion during the Missouri debates. Barbour argued that the "condition of slaves would be greatly improved by their being spread over a greater surface" because diminishing the density of the slave population lessened fears of insurrection and encouraged slaveholders to adopt less draconian regimens of slave control. Tyler agreed that diffusion not only enriched slave sellers but also served to "ameliorate the condition of the black man." From retirement, Jefferson declared that the "diffusion" of slaves "over a greater surface would make them individually happier." The former president argued that diffusion would "proportionally facilitate the accomplishment of their [slaves'] emancipation by dividing the burthen on a greater number of coadjutors." In Jefferson's view, the spread of slaves across a broad southern space would promote eventual emancipation by thinning the concentration of slaves and by dispersing the financial sacrifice and social risks involved. Once the foreign slave trade closed in 1808, James Madison agreed with Jefferson that "an uncontrouled dispersion of slaves now in the U.S. was not only best for the nation, but most favorable to slaves, both as to their prospects for emancipation, and as to their condition in the meantime." With the importation of African slaves finally prohibited, Madison reasoned, "a diffusion of those in the Country, tends at once to meliorate the actual condition [of the slaves], and to facilitate their eventual emancipation." As Jefferson and Madison saw it, diffusion left whites in slaveholding areas safer and slaves both better treated and easier to free.[23]

While public arguments for diffusion focused on how expansion would benefit slaves by improving their treatment, living conditions, and prospects for future emancipation, the policy of diffusion also served the financial interests of the upper South's slaveholders. By encouraging the westward expansion of slavery, diffusion ensured a market for the "surplus" slaves from old tobacco states. It offered upper South slave owners a means of both divesting themselves of expensive and redundant labor and recouping the capital they had invested in slaves. Moreover, by creating additional slaveholding states, the

[22] On the concept of diffusion, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion,* I, 150–57; McColley, *Slavery in Jeffersonian Virginia,* 173–75; and McCoy, *Last of the Fathers,* 265–74. *Annals of Congress,* 5 Cong., 2 sess., March 23, 1798, col. 1310, 1309–10; Everett S. Brown, ed., "Documents: The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill for the Government of Louisiana, 1804," *American Historical Review,* 22 (Jan. 1917), 340–64. For John Breckinridge's statements, see *ibid.*, 354, 345. Rothman, *Slave Country,* 25–31; Lewis Kerr to Isaac Briggs, March 24,1804, folder 14, box 4, Briggs-Stabler Papers (Maryland Historical Society, Baldwin Library, Baltimore).
[23] *Annals of Congress,* 15 Cong., 2 sess., Feb. 15, 1819, col. 1188–91; *ibid.*, 16 Cong., 1 sess., Feb. 17, 1820, col. 1391; Jefferson to John Holmes, April 22, 1820, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Paul Leicester Ford (10 vols., New York, 1892–1899), X, 157–58; Madison to Monroe, Feb. 23, 1820, in *The Writings of James Madison,* ed. Gaillard Hunt (9 vols., New York, 1900–1910), IX, 25; Madison to marquis de Lafayette, Nov. 25, 1820, *ibid.*, 36–37. For Madison's views on diffusion, see McCoy, *Last of the Fathers,* 265–76.

expansion of slavery helped protect, at least for a time, the political clout of slaveholding states in Congress.[24]

Diffusion represented a thoroughly Jeffersonian remedy for the problem of slavery in the early republic. It purchased security for the expansive republican vision of the Jeffersonians at the expense of ideological purity. Just as the movement of the white population into the Louisiana Purchase supposedly nurtured American liberty by expanding possibilities for yeoman independence (not to mention planter acquisitiveness), although acquiring the territory irritated Jefferson's constitutional scruples, diffusion allegedly reduced the danger of insurrection and promoted humane treatment by sending slaves to new territories even as it broadened the geographical reach of an institution Jefferson yearned to banish from the Republic. Through diffusion, slaveholders in the upper South collectively, like the Sage of Monticello individually, could advocate the eventual end of slavery while insisting that any steps toward that end, however tentative, be taken under the direction of slaveholders, almost entirely in their self-interest, and at their preferred pace.[25]

But not all white Virginians who wanted to weaken the grip of slavery on the state were content to address the problem by allowing the market to do its quiet work of diffusing slaves across the South through slaveholder-initiated out-migration and an active interstate slave trade. To some white critics of slavery from the upper South, the gradual diffusion of a national evil across space hardly seemed a sufficient remedy to the problems posed by the presence of large numbers of slaves and free blacks. Instead, those critics sought government aid for a more active solution: African colonization. Buoyed by the brief nationalist moment that followed the War of 1812, the colonization movement gained renewed momentum with the founding of a national benevolent organization committed to the cause, the American Colonization Society (ACS), in 1816. Among upper South politicians and thinkers, enthusiasm for colonization bridged partisan chasms. The old-line Federalist Charles Fenton Mercer predicted that colonization would wipe "from the character of our institutions the only 'blot' which stains them," while the Old Republican John Taylor of Caroline declared that if the United States "would erect and foster a settlement of free negroes in some fertile part of Africa," then "slavery might then be gradually re-exported, and philanthropy gratified." The former Republican president James Madison and the sitting Federalist chief justice John Marshall both joined the ACS, and when the society held its first national meeting in Washington in 1817, the names of many prominent Virginians, including James Monroe and John Tyler, joined those of Madison and Marshall in garnishing the membership rolls. The society even elected Bushrod Washington of Virginia, nephew of the nation's first president, as its first president. The Lynchburg colonizationist Jesse Burton Harrison doubtless overstated the case when he later asserted that almost "all masters in Virginia assent to the proposition that when the slaves can be liberated without danger to ourselves, and to their own advantage, it ought to be done." But his comment expressed a sentiment common enough among upper South slaveholders to worry many slaveholders in the lower South about the commitment to the institution among their counterparts to the north.[26]

[24] On the importance of the three-fifths clause of the Constitution to the political balance of power, see Matthew Mason, "'Nothing Is Better Calculated to Excite Divisions': Federalist Agitation against Slave Representation during the War of 1812," *New England Quarterly,* 75 (Dec. 2002), 531–61.

[25] Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 196–208; Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven, 2004), 19–58. For a judicious analysis, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, I, esp. 150–61.

[26] Charles Fenton Mercer to John Hartwell Cocke, April 19, 1818, John Hartwell Cocke Papers (Alderman Li-

Yet even with significant political sentiment and the prevailing economic trends in the upper South favoring colonization, the movement's champions faced seemingly insurmountable practical difficulties. The chief obstacles faced by advocates of gradual emancipation and colonization were succinctly expressed by William Brodnax in the Virginia debates on the subject that followed the 1831 slave uprising led by Nat Turner. Any plan of gradual emancipation must be followed by the immediate removal of the newly freed ex-slaves, Brodnax insisted, and any plan must neither weaken the "security of private property" nor "affect its value." Brodnax conceded that many white Virginians wanted something done about slavery, but he warned other members of the Virginia House of Delegates that voters "have not called on you to tear all their property away from them; or manumit their slaves without indemnity or compensation." Such principles set a high bar for any plan of gradual emancipation. Even modest plans for colonization required raising money to pay for the transportation of former slaves, finding funds to subsidize the operation of the colonies in their critical early years, and persuading reluctant free blacks to go voluntarily. Upper South colonizationists who advocated compensated emancipation faced the more daunting task of raising funds to compensate masters. The colonizationists understood the complexity of these problems, but they nonetheless championed the cause, less as an efficient and decisive method for ending slavery than as a prudent means of gradually whitening the upper South by ridding the region of the nuisance of free blacks and providing masters an outlet for surplus slaves.[27]

In the first quarter century after the closing of the foreign slave trade, upper South politicians sought not so much decisive action against slavery as a gradual but significant demographic reconfiguration of slavery in their region. The preferred reconfiguration would include a reduction in both the importance of slave labor to the upper South economy and the number and proportion of slaves and free blacks in the region's population. Despite significant internal disagreements over how the demographic reconfiguration should occur and how dramatic it should be, the prevailing opinion among political leaders in the upper South, and especially among those outside the Southside area of Virginia, was that the region should be gradually weaned from excessive reliance on slave labor. Over time, a position in favor of reducing the importance of slavery gradually through manumission coupled with colonization and, more significant, through the sale of slaves to other parts of the South (diffusion) emerged as the political center of gravity, albeit an unstable one, in the upper South. To achieve this desired whitening of their region, upper South slaveholders overwhelmingly supported the geographic expansion of slavery accompanied by an active interstate slave trade to diffuse slaves and the colonization of as many willing free blacks as possible along with any newly manumitted slaves. Together, diffusion and colonization constituted the core of upper South whites' tentative answer

brary, University of Virginia, Charlottesville); John Taylor, *Arator; Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political, in Sixty-four Numbers* (Petersburg, 1818), 48. On the society's formation, see Douglas B. Egerton, "'Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 5 (Winter 1985), 463–80. On the American Colonization Society (ACS) at the national level, see P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816–1865* (New York, 1961), esp. 23–35. On the role of local activists and the response of slaves, see Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, 2005), 34–56. "Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society," *African Repository and Colonial Journal,* 3 (Jan. 1828), 331–37. For Jesse Burton Harrison's statement, see *ibid.*, 335.

[27] *Richmond Enquirer,* Jan. 14, 1832; *The Speech of William H. Brodnax, (of Dinwiddie) in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Policy of the State with Respect to Its Colored Population* (Richmond, 1832), 3–21. On the colonization movement in the upper South, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion,* I, 121–210; and Freehling, *Drift toward Dissolution,* 82–288.

to the problem of slavery. Support for these policies even convinced many whites in the upper South that they stood as opponents of slavery and fulfillers of the Founders' hopes. In fact, diffusion and colonization served more as fig leaves behind which white Virginians could hide their interest in sustaining slavery while still proclaiming their fidelity to the perceived constitutional understanding than as an actual plan to eliminate slavery in the United States. Through such guises many upper South slaveholders disowned slavery ideologically even as they continued to own slaves, to benefit immensely from the sale of their slaves to profit-hungry planters in the Southwest, and hence to control slavery's future in their region.[28]

In the lower South, the closing of the foreign slave trade accelerated regional interest in a very different, but equally fundamental, reconfiguration of slavery. After 1808, a persuasive cohort of Christian slaveholders and Protestant clergy working in slaveholding areas sought, not a demographic, but an ideological reconfiguration, aimed at rendering slaveholding consistent with existing republican and emerging humanitarian ideals while accepting and even embracing the region's growing dependence on slave labor. The dramatic and contested ideological reconfiguration of slavery advocated by a growing phalanx of influential white southerners centered on the transformation of southern slavery into a "domestic" institution. As Willie Lee Rose argued in her seminal essay on the subject, white southern thinkers "engaged in a process of rationalizing slavery" during the first three decades of the nineteenth century by "domesticating" it. In Rose's summary, for slavery to become a "domestic" institution, the master had to "preside" as benevolent patriarch (or matriarch) over "three interlocking domesticities—his blood family, the slave families, and the plantation community family." Thus the "domestication of domestic slavery" involved inculcating "familial" attitudes and practices into masters (and other whites) and depended on the emergence of paternalism as the prism through which both masters and slaves perceived slavery.[29]

Fleshing out Rose's idea, the historian Jeffrey Robert Young has recently and convincingly argued that the idea of viewing slavery through the lens of paternalism and domesticity "had been foreign to the vast majority of eighteenth century planters." Those planters had both "despised and feared" their slaves and never regarded plantation domesticity as an appropriate ideological mooring for their society. Yet during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, paternalism gained increasing acceptance among slaveholders and clergymen as the preferred organizing principle for a slaveholding society. To be sure, the paternalistic ideal was hardly the reality of plantation and farm life in the early nineteenth-century South. In the lower South, the cotton boom and the concomitant expansion of slavery produced as much cruelty, at least as much disruption of slave family and community life, and as much tension between masters and slaves as ever. But as the cotton revolution spread across much of the lower South, paternalism advanced as a trope more and more slaveholders used to understand their world. Between 1800 and 1815, southern masters increasingly conceived of themselves and explained themselves to the rest of the world through the idioms of paternalism and domesticity.[30]

[28] See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, 1998), 1–10.

[29] See Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1800–1840* (Athens, Ga., 1987), 286–362. Willie Lee Rose, "The Domestication of Domestic Slavery," in *Slavery and Freedom,* ed. William W. Freehling (New York, 1982), 18–36.

[30] Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670–1837* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 123–60, esp. 124. My thoughts on paternalism are influenced by George M. Fredrickson,

Coupled with the end of the foreign slave trade, this ideology of paternalism figuratively transformed slavery into a "domestic institution," as Jacksonian and late antebellum southerners frequently styled it, and enshrined domesticity at the core of the region's justification for slaveholding. The ideology empowered the slaveholder, making him master not only of exterior worlds large or small, depending on the scope of his property ownership, but also of his own household, where all dependents, white as well as black, looked to the head of the household for protection in return for loyalty and obedience.[31]

Though historiographical squabbles have erupted over the use of the word "paternalism," white southerners who advocated the domestication of slavery unquestionably described their desired ideological reconfiguration of slavery and the practical revolution in the management of slaves they hoped would accompany it in terms best subsumed under that rubric. The emerging paternalistic ideal, as understood by white southern slaveholders in the early nineteenth century, involved three main conventions. First, slaves must be recognized as fellow human beings, regardless of their assumed inferiority, the presumed "uncivilized" condition of their native African society, and perceived limitations on their potential. It was incumbent on southern whites, and especially on Christian and republican whites, to recognize the humanity of slaves and treat them accordingly. Second, because of the common humanity of master and slave, the day-to-day governance of a slave population should be conducted along the lines that male household heads followed in governing their white families, that is, with a combination of fairness and firmness, a balance of affection and discipline. Such familial treatment would ultimately produce the masters' preferred form of subordination among slaves: willful obedience. Paternalism, its advocates maintained, would render slaves more manageable, slave labor more efficient, and slave unrest less common. Finally, paternalism required stewardship, most commonly Christian stewardship, which included not only practicing the Golden Rule in the treatment of slaves but also making regular and systematic efforts to teach slaves Christianity and to improve their morals. The failure of even the most fervent advocates of the paternalist ideal to fulfill it proved only that paternalism set the bar of slave management high, and not that claims for paternalism's advantages were false.[32]

The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914 (New York, 1971), 56–66; and David Brion Davis, _The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823_ (Ithaca, 1975), 523–64.

[31] Stephanie McCurry, _Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Lowcountry_ (New York, 1995), 171–207. On earlier iterations of paternalism and their limited influence, see Alan Gallay, "The Origins of Slaveholders' Paternalism: George Whitfield, the Bryan Family, and the Great Awakening in the South," _Journal of Southern History,_ 53 (Aug. 1987), 369–94; and Joyce E. Chaplin, "Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South," _Journal of Social History,_ 24 (Dec. 1990), 299–315.

[32] For a modern historiographical articulation of paternalism as an ideology and a social system, see Eugene D. Genovese, _The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Society and Economy of the Slave South_ (New York, 1965); Eugene D. Genovese, _The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation_ (New York, 1969); Eugene D. Genovese, _Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made_ (New York, 1974); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, _Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism_ (New York, 1983); and, most recently, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, _The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview_ (New York, 2005). For important disagreements with the Genoveses' interpretation, see James Oakes, _The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders_ (New York, 1982), 192–224; and James Oakes, _Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South_ (New York, 1990), 129–34, 174–81. For assessments placing paternalism in historiographical context, see Mark M. Smith, _Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum South_ (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), 20–28; Kolchin, _American Slavery,_ 111–35; and Peter J. Parish, _Slavery: History and Historians_ (New York, 1989), 7–9, 142–44. On humanitarianism, see Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," _American Historical Review,_ 90 (April 1985), 339–61; and Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," _ibid._ (June

Just as diffusing slaves across space or colonizing them across seas stood to have little impact on the racial demography of the upper South as long as the slave trade constantly replenished the nation's stock of slaves, the closing of the foreign slave trade made domesticating the institution of slavery possible in a way previously unthinkable. Once large numbers of imported blacks were no longer regularly added to the mix of slaves in the areas of the early nineteenth-century staple booms, slaveholders who embraced paternalism could try to reshape the master-slave relationship without the near-constant reinvigoration of African and Caribbean cultural influences. Slaveholders believed those influences undermined white efforts to cultivate domesticity among slaves.[33]

Moreover, once the congressional ban on the foreign slave trade took effect in 1808, few slaveholders doubted the need to cultivate a family atmosphere that encouraged longevity and reproduction among slaves. This desire for capital gains from the increase of the existing slave population hastened the rise of paternalism as a popular construct for understanding slavery in the South. The South Carolinian William Johnson, a United States Supreme Court justice, summed up these views well in an 1815 address to an agricultural reform organization in the Low Country, arguing that the "interest of the owner is to obtain from his slaves labor and increase." Intelligent owners, Johnson held, knew that neither could "be expected without due attention to their health and comfort, or without bestowing upon their offspring the care which infancy and childhood" required. Johnson deemed "sufficient food and clothing" a minimal requirement and insisted that paternalistic masters go further, offering not just the necessities but also "just treatment, a kind word, and a little extra indulgence or gratification." Such paternalistic practices, Johnson maintained, "produce wonderful effects" including the "return of affection and fidelity [from slaves]." Where the slave "is treated indeed as a bondsman but still as a man—where, whilst respect and a faithful discharge of the duties assigned him are exacted in the one hand, on the other he is treated with kindness, humanity and encouraging benevolence," Johnson explained, paternalism found fulfillment.[34]

In the years immediately following the federal ban on the foreign slave trade, paternalism's advocates knew theirs was an insurgent movement. It confronted doubt, suspicion, and even open hostility, chiefly from black belt planters and slaveholders who doubted that paternalism as a social system could prove tough enough to manage slaves and to protect often-outnumbered whites. But the early champions of paternalism took comfort from their sense that the insurgency's influence was expanding. Writing in 1812, the South Carolina Baptist pastor Edmund Botsford admitted that harshness had character-

1985), 547–66. On the role of evangelical religion in shaping the southern understanding of humanitarianism and paternalism, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York, 1997), 206–52; and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770–1810* (New York, 1998), 119–45. On the challenges of implementing a paternalist ideal, see Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven, 2005); David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, 2006), 193–204; Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 16–36; Christopher Morris, "The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered," *Journal of American History,* 85 (Dec. 1998), 982–1007; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review,* 93 (Dec. 1988), 1228–52.

[33] Adam Rothman, "The Domestication of the Slave Trade in the United States," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trade in the Americas,* ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven, 2004), 32–54; Steven Deyle, "The Irony of Liberty: The Origins of the Domestic Slave Trade," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 12 (Spring 1993), 37–62; Allen Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790–1820," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution,* ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Huffman (Charlottesville, 1983), 143–71.

[34] William Johnson, *Nugae Georgicae: An Essay Delivered to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Charleston, South Carolina, October 14, 1815* (Charleston, 1815).

ized eighteenth-century slavery but pointed to the meliorating effect of Christian pater-nalism on early nineteenth-century slavery. "[Slavery] was much worse forty or fifty years ago than at the present time," Botsford contended, precisely because the increased piety of both masters and slaves had mitigated the worst features of the institution. "Of late years," Botsford maintained, "a great number of slaves have become serious and are unit-ed with religious societies & & many of them are to all appearance truly pious." Pious slaves, he thought, served as a "restraint" on slaves "of a bad character." Botsford readily admitted that the practices of slave management too often fell far short of the paternalist ideal, but the Baptist divine believed that Christian paternalism "would continue to me-liorate" the treatment and condition of slaves until "some way and means shall be fallen on for their emancipation." As an advocate of paternalism, Botsford sounded more like a gradual emancipationist from the upper South than the handful of Low Country rice planters who regularly joined much larger numbers of slaves to listen to his sermons. But Botsford expressed confidence that slaves' situation was steadily improving under the ap-plication of Christian paternalism.[35]

By the time congressional debates over the admission of Missouri as a state erupted in 1820, leading politicians from the lower South had become well versed in the rhetoric of paternalism. For the most part, southern politicians still pulled up short of calling slavery a positive good in those debates, but they did not hesitate to describe the master-slave relationship in paternalistic terms. The ready rhetorical use of paternalism as an ideologi-cal defense of slavery in the American South in 1820 did not reflect a consensus among southern slaveholders around the paternalist ideal, much less that slaveholders system-atically practiced the paternalism they preached. But it did reveal the growing centrality of paternalism to lower South slaveholders' evolving understanding of themselves, their society, and its place in the world. Comments from northern senators concerning the inhumanity of slavery drove the Georgia senator Freeman Walker to reply that slaves in the South were "far from being in that state of intolerable vassalage which some gentle-men seem to believe," but rather were "well clothed, well fed, and treated with kindness and humanity." Yet Walker remained careful not to claim that slavery was anything other than a long-standing problem that white southerners tried their best to meliorate. Senator William Smith of South Carolina, the redoubtable champion of his state's movement to reopen the African slave trade in 1803, was more aggressive in expounding the domestic metaphor as a defense of slavery. Smith reformulated Jefferson's lament that "the whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous pas-sions" into a paternalist claim that "the whole commerce between master and slave is pa-triarchal." In fact, Smith argued with apparent sincerity, southern slaves were "so domes-ticated, so kindly treated by their masters" that southerners, rather than living in a state of "constant alarm," worried little about insurrection. Smith maintained that abolitionists could not "excite one among twenty [slaves] to insurrection." Nor, in Smith's view, did slavery breed arrogance and despotism in young whites as Jefferson feared. With black

[35] On paternalism as an insurgent movement, see Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa, 1996), 105–21, 165–81; Young, *Domesticating Slavery,* 123–60; and Lacy K. Ford, "A Paternalist's Progress: Insurgency, Orthodoxy and Reversal in the Old South; Review of Erskine Clarke's *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic,*" *Reviews in American History,* 35 (March 2007), 46–56. [Edmund Bots-ford], "On Slavery," manuscript, n.d., Botsford Papers (Special Collections, James B. Duke Library, Furman Uni-versity, Greenville, S.C.). The cited manuscript was almost certainly written by Edmund Botsford early in 1812 in answer to an inquiry about life and working conditions on Low Country rice plantations. See Edmund Botsford to John Roberts, Feb. 28, 1812, *ibid.* On Botsford, see O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order,* I, 412–14.

children as "constant associates," Smith argued, young whites developed such affection for young slaves that "in thousands of instances there is nothing but the shadow of slavery left" when whites and their youthful slave companions reached adulthood. Offering a sweeping contradiction of Jefferson's contention that slavery was unrepublican, Smith insisted that a robust application of paternalism, a "patriarchal" commerce between master and slave, effectively mitigated whatever "evil" was inherent in slavery and left "nothing but the shadow" of bondage behind.[36]

Yet as soon as the ideology of paternalism received systematic elaboration, it came under sharp attack in the lower South's intellectual and cultural capital: Charleston, South Carolina. Just two years after Smith's espousal of paternalism in Congress, Charleston's savage and systematic response to rumors of a slave insurrection allegedly organized by Denmark Vesey, a free black, and a handful of trusted lieutenants threatened to strangle the ascendant paternalist movement in its adolescence. Both city authorities and the bulk of the Low Country's white population blamed the indulgences of paternalism for the insurrection plot. A lengthy memorial from the citizens of Charleston summed up the litany of popular complaints: the "advantages" offered by paternalism had failed to produce "satisfaction and affection" among slaves. The petitioners noted that whites had been repaid for their kindness with the creation of an insurrection plot "comparable to the worst West Indian atrocities." The citizens called for tighter restrictions on slaves who hired out away from their masters, legislation banning blacks from the "mechanical arts," an end to the importation of slaves from the upper South, and severe penalties for anyone who taught slaves to read and write. Indicting paternalism, the petitioners insisted that force was "the only principle that can maintain slavery."[37]

In his own report on the alleged insurrection, the Charleston intendant (mayor) and chief investigator James Hamilton Jr. identified paternalistic "misguided benevolence" and the increase in literacy fostered by Christian efforts to teach slaves to read the Bible as the chief causes of the planned rebellion. Hamilton argued that the slaves identified as "ringleaders" in the conspiracy "had no individual hardship to complain of" but rather ranked among the "most humanely treated negroes in our city." Moreover, Hamilton pointed out with dismay, the "facilities for combining and confederating in such a scheme" were "amply afforded" by "the extreme indulgence and kindness, which characterizes the domestic treatment of our slaves." Hamilton reserved his sharpest rebuke for those whites who supported teaching slaves to read and write, complaining that many masters, "not satisfied with ministering to the wants of their domestics, by all the comforts of abundant food and excellent clothing," had not only "permitted their instruction, but lent to such efforts their approbation and applause." Post-Vesey sentiment in the Low

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[36] *Annals of Congress,* 16 Cong., 1 sess., Jan. 19, 1820, col. 163–64. See also Richard H. Brown, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 65 (Winter 1966), 55–72. *Annals of Congress,* 16 Cong., 1 sess., Jan. 26, 1820, col. 259–75, esp. 268–69.

[37] For a new, provocative, and impressive argument on the nature and scope of the aborted Vesey insurrection, see Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators, Part I," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 58 (Oct. 2001), 915–76. See the response in Robert Gross, ed., "Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy II," *ibid.*, 59 (Jan. 2002), 135–202. For the most persistent and methodical criticisms of Michael P. Johnson's interpretation, see Douglas R. Egerton, "'Why They Did Not Preach Up This Thing': Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 100 (Oct. 1999), 298–318; Robert L. Paquette and Douglas R. Egerton, "Of Facts and Fables: New Light on the Denmark Vesey Affair," *ibid.*, 105 (Jan. 2004), 8–35; and Robert L. Paquette, "From Rebellion to Revisionism: The Continuing Debate about the Denmark Vesey Affair," *Journal of the Historical Society,* 4 (Fall 2004), 291–334. "Memorial of the Citizens of Charleston to the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina, 1822," in *Plantation and Frontier Documents,* ed. U. B. Phillips (2 vols., Cleveland, 1909), II, 103–16.

James Hamilton Jr., was elected intendant (mayor) of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1821, and he served as the chief investigator of the Denmark Vesey insurrection in 1822. Blaming the insurrection on masters' supposedly benevolent treatment of slaves and on rising rates of slave literacy, Hamilton emerged as a staunch critic of paternalism. *Courtesy South Carolina Federation of Republican Women.*

Country suggested agreement with Hamilton's assertion that the only way to sustain slavery was to show slaves that "anything you are bad enough to do, we are powerful enough to punish." Even if Charleston whites exaggerated the scope and danger of the alleged plot, the Vesey scare prompted a frontal assault on paternalism.[38]

Almost immediately, lower South champions of paternalism, led by the increasingly influential evangelical clergy, mounted a cautious but systematic rebuttal. Richard Furman of Charleston, leader of South Carolina's Baptists, vigorously countered civil authorities' claims that slave religion and paternalistic treatment of slaves were key factors in the development of slave unrest. Slaves who received their religious instruction "from right sources," Furman argued, were not "in danger of having their minds corrupted by sentiments unfriendly to the domestic and civil peace of the community." Furman also offered

[38] [James Hamilton Jr.], *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of Our City* (Charleston, 1822), 28–30. For James Hamilton Jr.'s threat about "power" and "punishment," see *ibid.*, inside front cover. See Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes Charged With an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina, Preceded by An Introduction and Narrative* (Charleston, 1822). See Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators, Part I," 915–76; and Robert Tinkler, *James Hamilton of South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 2004), 42–49. On slaveholders' concern with the presentation of slavery to the larger white population, see Michael Wayne, "An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of the Proslavery Ideology," *Journal of American History,* 77 (Dec. 1990), 838–63.
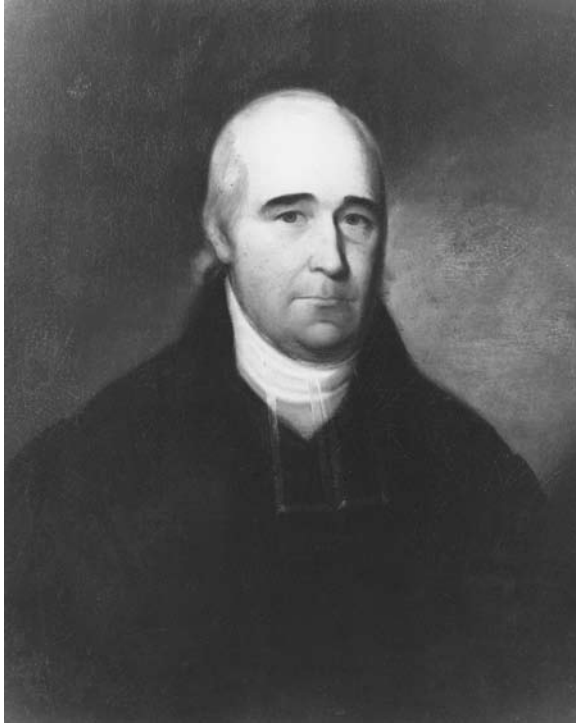
As the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, from 1787 to 1825, Richard Furman led the state's evangelical clergy in defending paternalism after the Denmark Vesey insurrection. Furman advocated religious instruction of slaves and championed the paternalist model of slave management. *Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Furman University.*

a concise explanation of paternalism. A paternalistic master, Furman insisted, served as "the guardian and even father of his slaves," and "[slaves] become part of his family, (the whole, forming under him a little community) and the care of ordering it, and of providing for its welfare, devolves on him." Thus, Furman explained, "what is effected, and often at a great public expense, in a free community, by taxes, benevolent institutions, bettering houses, and penitentiaries, lies here on the master." Furman's succinct defense of paternalism, circulated widely by 1823, fully domesticated slaves, rendering them a part of the master's family and entitled not only to the master's protection, but that of the community.[39]

Despite Furman's plea for moderation, however, the South Carolina Low Country emerged as a hotbed of anticolonization, antiabolition, antifederal, and antipaternalist sentiment in the years following the Denmark Vesey scare. The region created its own extralegal organization, the South Carolina Association, to enforce unconstitutional restrictions on the movement of black seamen visiting the port of Charleston and to otherwise flout all authority other than that of local slaveholders in matters related to slavery. The association drew its leadership heavily from the ranks of the same prominent Low Country slaveholders who had participated in the Vesey investigation or served on the

[39] Richard Furman, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists relative to the Colored Population of the United States in A Communication to the Governor of South Carolina* (Charleston, 1823).

court that meted out punishment to the alleged insurrectionists. In addition to their efforts to turn Charleston and its environs into a garrison safe from incendiary interlopers, these Low Country radicals denounced the American Colonization Society for seeking federal aid for their cause. In the post-Vesey environment, more and more Low Country whites agreed with the caustic sentiments expressed by the Sea Island cotton planter Whitemarsh Seabrook, who accused colonizationists of encouraging slaves to revolt with predictions that "God, in his righteous judgment, will raise up a Touissant, or a Spartacus, or an African Tecumseh, to demand by what authority we hold them in subjugation." Seabrook charged that the ACS rallied "the pulpit and the bar, the press and the legislative hall" behind a thinly disguised crusade to end slavery. Colonization, Seabrook insisted, would immediately undermine the discipline and loyalty of those who remained enslaved. The practical impact of colonization would be the "extinguishment of the relations between master and servant," and this disintegration would be "the work of a day."[40]

Within a few years, a preponderance of slaveholders in the rest of the lower South began to share the Low Country's suspicion of the colonization movement, seeing it increasingly as a veiled threat to slavery rather than simply a mechanism for removing free blacks. As the Georgia legislature later explained, whatever support the ACS had initially enjoyed in the lower South resulted "from the general impression in the Southern states" that its object "was limited to removal" of the "free people of color and their descendants and none others." In the Pearl River cotton belt of southwestern Mississippi, planters complained in the late 1820s that if Congress established a precedent by legislating on a matter so closely related to slavery, it could soon consider calls for a general emancipation. Similarly, colonization made little headway in the new cotton-growing regions of Alabama, where the usually indefatigable James G. Birney, a Kentucky native who moved to Huntsville to start a colonization newspaper, conceded a "deadness to the subject of African Colonization" despite his months of effort.[41]

Moreover, by the middle of the 1820s, colonization attracted sharp criticism from slaveholders in the blacker areas of the upper South. In August 1825 John White Nash, a planter from a slave-majority county in the Old Dominion's eastern Piedmont, denounced the ACS as a "repository of all the fanatical spirits in the country," which intended to promote a full-scale emancipation. Expressing a growing concern among many black belt slaveholders, Nash claimed that slaves "goaded up to state of frenzy" by the ACS's "fanatical inspirations," might "throw the whole country in a flame." The "ravages" of that "conflagration," Nash warned his fellow Virginians, would reach "our fields, our kitchens, and even the sacred retreat of our chambers." Taking his cue from lower South apologists, Nash argued that the colonization movement also threatened to undermine the emerging

[40] Alan F. January, "The South Carolina Association: An Agency for Race Control in Antebellum Charleston," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 78 (July 1977), 191–201; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement,* 71–75. Whitemarsh Seabrook, *A Concise View of the Critical Situation And Future Prospects of the Slave-holding States in Relation to the Coloured Population, Read Before the Agricultural Society of St. Johns, Colleton on the 14th of September, 1825* (Charleston, 1825). On Whitemarsh Seabrook, see *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776–1985,* ed. N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor (3 vols., Columbia, S.C., 1986), II, 1434–36. On the radical defense of slavery in the South Carolina Low Country, see Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 9–32.
[41] Res. 157, 1827 Gen. Assem., Ann. Sess. (Ga. 1827), 1827 Ga. Laws 194–203 at 199; Ruth Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery in Georgia Prior to 1860* (1933; New York, 1968), 218; *Woodville (Miss.) Republican,* Aug. 4, 11, 18, 1827; Charles Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York, 1933), 203–38; James G. Birney to Ralph Gurley, Dec. 1832, in *The Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831–1857,* ed. Dwight L. Dumond (2 vols., New York, 1938), I, 20–21.

system of paternalism—which expressed itself in the "love which most masters entertain for their slaves" and enabled slaves to enjoy "every delicacy that parental kindness could lavish" on them—just as slaveholders were embracing paternalism in ever-larger numbers. As slaveholders in the lower South came to suspect colonization as a harbinger of abolition and planters from the upper South's black belts echoed the dominant lower South critique, the leading politicians in the upper South realized that diffusing its slave population further south through the internal slave trade remained the most viable means of whitening its demography. The interstate slave trade, as Thomas Dew later touted it in his widely circulated commentary on the Virginia slavery debates of 1831–1832, provided both a vital safety valve for the upper South's burgeoning surplus slave population and the key element in the region's popular whitening strategy.[42]

But if the sale of slaves to the cotton South emerged as the most practical strategy for weakening the grip of slavery on the upper South, whites in the lower South grew increasingly wary of the interstate slave trade. Lower South whites and the politicians who represented them questioned the motives of upper South sellers, worrying that they too often wanted to dump troublesome and even incendiary slaves into the lower South. Lower South buyers and commercial interests also worried about steadily sending their precious capital north through regular slave purchases. As a result, in the 1820s states in the lower South at times passed legislation restricting and even prohibiting the interstate slave trade. In fact, in the aftermath of the Vesey scare, virtually every lower South state debated proposals for increased regulation of the interstate slave trade, and at various points in that era, the deep South cotton states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana all either closed or sharply restricted the importation of slaves. The planter J. S. Johnston applauded Louisiana's efforts to restrict the domestic slave trade, pointing out that the state was "every year drained of our Capital for the purchase of mere Negroes." If the internal trade was restricted, Johnston believed, slaves would "be brought by actual settlers and our money returned to the country." Johnston predicted that, if tight restrictions on the importation of slaves for sale were passed and enforced, Virginia would soon "feel the difference between selling slaves for money and having them carried away by her own people." The result, Johnston declared, "will be as beneficial to us as it will be injurious to her." But white fears of slave imports generally subsided as insurrection scares faded, and popular pressure for more slaves forced the repeal of the laws within a few years.[43]

The decade-long controversy over the internal slave trade revealed that fundamental contradictions in the attitudes of lower South whites toward slavery lingered into the 1830s. With the cotton economy expanding westward at a furious pace, lower South

[42] *Richmond Enquirer,* Aug. 19, 16, 1825. John White Nash attacked the colonization movement under the pseudonym "Caius Gracchus" in the *Richmond Enquirer,* August 1825–April 1826. The nineteenth-century Virginia historian Hugh Blair Grigsby identified Caius Gracchus as Nash in a note on the cover of a pamphlet collection he owned. See *Controversy Between Caius Gracchus and Opimius in Reference to the American Society for the Colonization of the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Georgetown, D.C., 1827), pamphlet collection (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond). For the suggestion that, although the national ACS was conservative, local ACS activists used manumission and colonization to hasten emancipation, as the society's southern critics then charged, see Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution,* 34–57. *Richmond Enquirer,* Aug. 26, 1825; Thomas Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery," *American Quarterly Review* (no. 12, 1832), 189–265.

[43] J. S. Johnston to Thomas Butler, March 12, 1832, Butler Family Papers (Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge). On the lower South movement to restrict or prohibit the importation of slaves, see Lacy K. Ford, "Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade: Paternalism, Markets, and the Character of the Old South," in *Chattel Principle,* ed. Johnson, 143–64. On the centrality of the domestic slave trade to everyday life in the Old South, see Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York, 2005), 40–62; and Gudmestad, *Troublesome Commerce,* 62–117.

whites found the perennial tension between greed and fear, between opportunity and anxiety, embodied in a tangible public policy dilemma: the question of regulating the domestic slave trade. When the fear generated by the occasional insurrection or insurrection scare ebbed, the lure of cotton profits usually prevailed, and the region reluctantly reduced or abandoned its efforts to regulate the slave trade. Yet the regulatory movement in the lower South had aroused concern in an upper South where slaveholders needed the trade as an outlet for surplus slaves. The eventual abandonment of restrictions on the interstate slave trade relieved upper South whitening strategists. The desire of most whites in the upper South for a geographic reconfiguration of slavery hinged on the willingness of planters and farmers in the lower South to import more domestic slaves. But if the upper South's effort to reconfigure slavery demographically brought an influx of troublesome slaves into the lower South and a drain of the region's capital through the internal slave trade, the trade threatened to undermine the efforts of lower South paternalists to achieve an ideological reconfiguration of slavery through domestication. Many whites in the upper South still shared the underlying reservations about slavery that had spawned the geographic reconfiguration strategy. The movement of political leaders, clergy and other intellectuals, and slaveholders generally toward a full-blown ideological embrace of the peculiar institution, even on paternalist grounds, gave them pause.

The lower South paternalists' new approach to defending slavery became most visible when northern abolitionists launched their petition and mail campaigns against slavery in 1835. Prominent politicians and intellectuals from the lower South, especially the radical hotbed of postnullification South Carolina, responded with an affirmative defense, presenting a full ideological reconfiguration that pronounced slavery the firmest possible foundation for republican liberty. Predictably, John C. Calhoun took a leading role in advancing that position. Calhoun's speeches revealed that the proslavery argument had moved beyond a defense of the conduct of slaveholders and their treatment of slaves to an assertion that slavery served as the strongest social foundation for white independence—the great aim of the American experiment in republicanism as Calhoun and many other white southerners understood it. Speaking against the reception of abolition petitions presented to Congress in 1838, Calhoun stunned the Senate by praising slavery as "a great political institution, essential to the peace and existence of one-half this Union." Calhoun credited the abolitionist movement with having produced "one happy effect at least," that of encouraging the ideological reconfiguration of slavery in the minds of white southerners. The movement, Calhoun claimed, had "compelled the South to look at the nature and character" of slavery and "correct many of the false impressions that even we had entertained in relation to it." "Many in the South," Calhoun admitted, "once believed that it [slavery] was a moral and political evil," but now such "folly and delusion" were "gone," as whites in the cotton South increasingly saw slavery as "the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world."[44]

[44] Susan Wyly-Jones, "The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign," *Civil War History,* 47 (Dec. 2001), 289–309; Freehling, *Road to Disunion,* I, 308–52. On the emergence of the "positive good" school of proslavery argument after 1830, see Drew Gilpin Faust, "Introduction: The Proslavery Argument in History," in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860,* ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge, 1981), 1–20. Lacy Ford, "Inventing the Concurrent Majority: Madison, Calhoun, and the Problem of Majoritarianism in American Political Thought," *Journal of Southern History,* 60 (Feb. 1994), 19–58; John C. Calhoun, "Further Remarks in Debate of His Fifth Resolution," in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun,* ed. Robert L. Meriwether, W. Edwin Hemphill, and Clyde N. Wilson (28 vols., Columbia, S.C., 1958–2003), XIV, 80–86, esp. 85–86.

Calhoun proceeded to explain the utility of slavery as a solution to the related problems of race and labor in a prosperous, staple-growing, republican society. A "mysterious Providence had brought together two races, from different portions of the globe, and placed them in nearly equal numbers in the Southern portion of this Union," Calhoun asserted, and there they "were inseparably united, beyond the possibility of separation." Under slavery, Calhoun insisted, the "inferior" race had "improved" and "attained a degree of civilization never before attained by the black race in any age or country." In the South Carolina planter's view, slavery had solved the race problem by establishing the proper relationship of black subordination and white responsibility and putting it at the heart of the region's social system.[45]

Slavery also solved the labor problem, Calhoun asserted with more originality, by facilitating the expansion of the productive household beyond the nuclear family without introducing the potentially explosive division between labor and capital into southern society. "Every plantation is a little community with the master at its head, who concentrates in himself the united interests of capital and labor, of which he is the common representative," Calhoun told the Senate in 1838. For Calhoun, the plantation stood not only as an extended household (a metaphor often used by paternalists) but also as a "little community." And the master served not merely as head of the household, but as steward of the larger community, as rural patriarch, as local notable. As the "common representative" of all household dependents, the master shouldered much responsibility, providing the economic, moral, and familial organization that held the little community together. Calhoun's particular presentation of paternalism included no overt reference to spiritual responsibility or bonds of piety, but his portrait of the slaveholding community was very much a domestic one. The responsibilities of the family patriarch or community elder rested with the slave master. In Calhoun's model, paternalism became a vital lubricant that rendered the friction in master-slave relations less than that generated by the rub between labor and capital in free-labor societies. Thus paternalism provided the larger community a domestic refuge from capitalist class conflict. Extending his model further, Calhoun portrayed the entire South as an "aggregate" of these little communities. These "small communities aggregated," Calhoun maintained, "make the State in all, in whose action, labor and capital is equally represented and perfectly harmonized." Calhoun's South stood as a loose-knit collection of independent communities serving as surrogate extended households. Collectively, the paternalism governing the extended households effectively domesticated not only slavery, but the entire South. Thus slavery, properly understood, was a bastion of domestic defense against both labor strife and capitalist depredation, a large gain, in Calhoun's view, when purchased at the small price of vigilance against slave revolt.[46]

With his metaphor of plantations as little communities, Calhoun completed the process of linking the defense of slavery to the emerging concept of domesticity. Though expressed differently, the concept gained influence in both North and South during the market revolution. Domesticity protected the republican household from the intrusions of a disruptive market economy. The historian John Ashworth has argued that in the North the concept of the family as a haven in a heartless world gained ground in direct proportion to the spread of wage labor. Wage labor not only removed production from

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[45] Calhoun, "Further Remarks in Debate of His Fifth Resolution," 84.
[46] *Ibid.*, 84–85.

the household but also forced household members to sell their labor power in the market as a commodity, making them vulnerable to market fluctuations. Wage labor had long been suspect among vigilant republicans because of its tendency to foster dependence, but they found an antidote to that dependence in the rise of domesticity. Although a nurturing family could never prevent dependence as property ownership did, it could rekindle or restore virtues eroded by the workplace grind or market competition and thus counter the corruption dependence fostered. According to Ashworth, the household, and especially the immediate family, emerged as a source of respite from and reinforcement against the corruptions of the market and the stump as well as the temptations of the tavern and bawdy house. Thus the incipient free-labor ideology gradually gained popularity in the North during the late antebellum era precisely because it portrayed slavery, and particularly the family-breaking slave trade, as the enemy of the family and domestic virtue.[47]

In the South, advocates of paternalism fashioned a justification of slavery that rendered it a domestic institution, one largely defined and managed within the household and governed (in theory if not in practice) by a familial or domestic ethos. Calhoun's speeches in Congress ranged beyond religious sentiments celebrating the family to place the domestic labor system at the center of the defense of slavery. Slavery, in Calhoun's view, kept the potentially volatile management of labor inside the paternalistic household, which served as a bulwark for republican liberty against the growing strife between labor and capital. Calhoun thought domestic values progressed in inverse proportion to a society's reliance on wage labor. For Calhoun and other paternalistic republican proslavery thinkers of his ilk, slavery, an institution dating from antiquity and resting on racial difference, offered a solution not only to that ancient republican anxiety, dependence, but also to the most modern of social problems, class conflict.[48]

But even in the late 1830s, such affirmative defenses of slavery still made skin crawl among gradual emancipationists in the upper South. There the venerable tradition of apologetic defenses of a necessary evil yielded only glacially, if at all, to bold assertions of slavery as a positive good. In an impromptu exchange on the floor of the United States Senate, the Virginia senator William Cabell Rives, a self-styled Madisonian and carrier of the upper South's tradition of gradual emancipation and colonization, challenged Calhoun, the self-appointed political strategist for the lower South. As the Senate debated the handling of the abolition petitions, Rives averred that while he accepted slavery as an "existing institution," he differed from Calhoun over the issue of "slavery in the abstract." Calhoun quickly interrupted, denying that he had ever "pronounced slavery in the abstract a good." He defended it only as "a good where a civilized race and a race of a different description are brought together." Calhoun then asked Rives if he considered slavery a "good." The Virginian replied that he believed slavery "a misfortune and an evil in all circumstances, though in some, it might be the lesser evil." Rives insisted that "it never entered" the minds of the Founders to contend that "domestic slavery was a positive good—a great good," and he denounced Calhoun's argument as a "new school" of pro-

[47] John Ashworth, "The Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism," *American Historical Review,* 92 (Oct. 1987), 813–28; John Ashworth, "Free Labor, Wage Labor, and the Slave Power: Republicanism and the Republican Party in the 1850s," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880,* ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville, 1996), 128–46.

[48] See Harry L. Watson, "Slavery and Development in a Dual Economy: The South and the Market Revolution," in *Market Revolution in America,* ed. Stokes and Conway, 43–73; and Douglas R. Egerton, "Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 16 (Summer 1996), 237–56.

slavery thought. Claiming the great tradition of "Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, the brightest names of my own state" in "lamenting the existence of slavery as a misfortune and evil," Rives rejected Calhoun's contention "that slavery is a positive good; . . . and that it is even an essential ingredient in republican government."[49]

Rives stood in 1837 as a latter-day exemplar of the upper South's legitimate if truncated antislavery tradition, a Jeffersonian tradition that declined to defend slavery as anything but the lesser of many evils but that proved unable to find a viable remedy for the evil. Jefferson and others following in his footsteps saw racial separation, to be achieved in North America by colonization, as the key to self-rule for both races. Whites could enjoy republican government on the new American continent, and repatriated blacks could help establish self-government for blacks on African soil. Diffusion would facilitate gradual emancipation and colonization by spreading slavery thin to make its elimination easier.[50] In contrast, Calhoun articulated the position rapidly gaining popularity among whites in the lower South: racially defined slavery for blacks was the best guarantor of republicanism for whites. Like the many similar proslavery arguments that followed, Calhoun's reversed the Jeffersonian formulation of slavery as a threat to republican values. Speaking more than a decade after Jefferson's death and with a longer and closer view of the impact of the cotton revolution on the lower South, Calhoun saw the enslavement of blacks as the lasting foundation for the freedom of whites. For Calhoun and for many other politicians across the lower South racial slavery replaced racial separation as the key to the future of republican liberty. Moreover, where Jefferson thought slavery corrupted the republican character by imbuing whites with a penchant for aristocratic mastery, Calhoun believed slavery protected republican society by instilling in masters a sense of domestic responsibility for the larger society and by freeing common whites from the fear of abject dependency generated by free-labor capitalism. Slavery insulated propertied whites, yeoman as well as planter, from the threat of proletarian revolution and reprisal.

By the late 1830s, the ideological reconfiguration of slavery by white leaders in the lower South neared completion. Once seen as the root of corruption and hypocrisy in republican society, racial slavery was acclaimed the surest foundation of an egalitarian republicanism crafted for whites only. Yet Calhoun's defense of slavery as a positive good still alarmed upper South moderates, like Rives, who continued to hope that their region could gradually whiten itself through manumission, colonization, and the sale of slaves to the lower South. As late as 1857, Rives believed that slavery would gradually disappear "under the influence of a humane and enlightened public opinion" in the South if, and only if, "national agitation" of the issue "could be made to cease." Yet just as Rives, the colonizationist and ever-so-gradual emancipator, joined Calhoun, the bold defender of slavery as a positive good, in defending the white South against the abolition petitions and pamphlets emanating from proliferating antislavery enclaves in the North, upper South political leaders shared the desire of lower South whites to control the future of

[49] For the full exchange, see *Register of Debates,* 24 Cong., 2 sess., Feb. 6, 1837, pp. 717–24, esp. 717, 718, and 722. On William Cabell Rives's career, see McCoy, *Last of the Fathers,* 323–69. On the larger context of this exchange, see William Lee Miller, *Arguing about Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York, 1996), esp. 133–49.

[50] Peter S. Onuf, "'To Declare Them a Free and Independent People': Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 18 (Spring 1998), 1–46.

slavery in the face of mounting abolition criticism from outside the region.[51]

Only the Civil War itself, as Drew McCoy has noted, persuaded Rives to reconsider Calhoun's position and find it plausible. In 1863, with the carnage of war swirling around him in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Rives wrote a local newspaper and admitted that, after observing the "operation of what is called free society" in the North for twenty years, it would be "a blind and unreflecting man, indeed, who has not been brought to the question of the practicability of maintaining Republican Government, with universal suffrage, in any community where domestic servitude does not exist." When President Abraham Lincoln called for troops to subdue the rebellion of lower South states in the spring of 1861, the white citizens of the upper South states of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina followed Rives on his tortured journey toward risking all on behalf of slavery, though their sister slaveholding states of Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri declined to join. Perpetually unable to find a solution to the problem of slavery, whites in three upper South states finally threw their weight behind a lower South already committed by popular vote to the cause of secession and to the formation of a slaveholding Confederacy only when forced to choose sides in a bloody civil war. With this decision, the long-divided mind of the Old South came belatedly and tenuously together, in the new Confederacy, on this one question, though sharp dissent from a minority of whites remained evident in key portions of newly Confederate states in the upper South. Within four years the new nation-state the Old South tried to create succumbed to the ringing battle cry of freedom raised by enslaved blacks and blue-clad Union soldiers of both races. The American problem of slavery was solved, neither by demographic or ideological reconfiguration, but as John Quincy Adams had predicted decades earlier, "at the cannon's mouth."[52]

[51] Lacy K. Ford Jr., "Republican Ideology in a Slave Society: The Political Economy of John C. Calhoun," *Journal of Southern History,* 54 (Aug. 1988), 405–24; O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order,* II, 848–66, 914–37; William Rives to John Winthrop, March 5, 1857, quoted in McCoy, *Last of the Fathers,* 355.

[52] Rives to Editor, *Richmond Whig,* Jan. 26, 1863, Rives Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). See also McCoy, *Last of the Fathers,* 352. The best accounts of the upper South states' decisions, first to reject and then to join the Confederacy, are Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1989); and Freehling, *Road to Disunion,* II. The four states of the upper South that remained in the Union all, to different degrees, clung to slavery throughout much of the war. For the prediction, see John Quincy Adams to Henry Clay, Sept. 7, 1831, in *The Private Correspondence of Henry Clay,* ed. Calvin Colton (Cincinnati, 1856), 311–14, esp. 313.